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RHYME AND HISTORY IN VICTORIAN POETICS

by

NAOMI GRIERSON LEVINE

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

### Rhyme and History in Victorian Poetics

By NAOMI GRIERSON LEVINE

Dissertation Director:

Carolyn Williams

This dissertation argues that Victorian experiments with rhyme grew out of a broader cultural fascination with the literary historical myths found in contemporary aesthetics and historiography. Although rhyme has come to be regarded as an unsophisticated sound effect, for Victorians it provoked urgent questions about the relationship between past and present, the importance of national and ethnic identity, and even the nature of human experience. In nineteenth-century literary historical prose, the advent of rhyme signaled the beginning of the modern European literary tradition and, by extension, the emergence of modern subjectivity. Its origins were consequently a matter of passionate dispute. Through a range of formal techniques from stanzaic patterning to assonance to blank verse, poets entered live debates about rhyme: whether it began in the East or West, how it moved into English literature, whether it signified spiritual achievement or cultural decline, and how it registered in the mind and body. Drawing on a rich archive of prose written and read by Victorian poets but largely neglected now, I show that nineteenth-century conceptions of literary history were not identical with our own. To understand Victorian poetic forms, this dissertation proposes, we need to think less about literary history as a stable category and more about a proliferation of competing literary historiographies. Thus, “Rhyme and History in Victorian Poetics” takes up recent

challenges to think historically about literary form, but it does so by recovering the nineteenth-century assumption that forms and histories are necessarily entwined.

This study engages with current scholarship on prosody, the history of literary criticism and aesthetics, Victorian transnationalism, and literary formalisms as it reconstructs a nineteenth-century canon of rhyme theories. Individual chapters show Arthur Hallam mining Arabist historiography for evidence of rhyme's affective powers; Alfred Tennyson using Provençal poetics to reinvent the lyric stanza; Elizabeth Barrett Browning devising a capacious "rhymatology" that encompasses even epic blank verse; and Coventry Patmore building a new form of ode out of a historiographic theory of pauses.

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## Introduction

This dissertation is about the shaping power of origin stories, about the ways that Romantic and Victorian theories of literary history influenced the forms of Victorian poems. My study embraces a variety of nineteenth-century genres and forms—lyric, ode, blank verse, the sonnet, the stanza, the metrical line, the pause—but at its heart is rhyme. Indeed, I argue that all of these genres and forms, and many more, were drawn into the surprisingly rich imaginary of Victorian rhyme.

Efforts to reconcile formalist and historicist reading practices have tended to emphasize either the immediate cultural contexts in which literary forms circulated or the relationships of individual works to prior models. “Rhyme and History in Victorian Poetics” presents a different vision of forms in historical time. I argue that Victorian poets’ ways of thinking about form were shaped not simply by literary history (e.g. an awareness of early modern ballads or Petrarchan sonnets; an engagement with Wordsworth or Milton), but by *literary historiography*: the origin stories about poetic forms that constituted a nineteenth-century mythology of poetry. These narratives were mediated through a wide range of popular and erudite genres—public lectures, critical essays, poetry anthologies, book reviews—but they emerged most forcefully in dedicated works of literary historiography, the multivolume studies that attempted to synthesize the literary traditions of nations, continents, or the world. Such works are now rarely read; literary scholarship turned away long ago from the totalizing aspirations they appeared to represent. Yet they provide extraordinary insight into the intellectual conditions in which Victorian poems were made. “Rhyme and History in Victorian Poetics” measures the

reverberations of literary historical thinking in nineteenth-century poetic theory and the poetry to which it gave rise. Thus, it offers not only a prosodic history of the nineteenth century but also a study of the historical fantasies *about* form that informed Victorian poems.

Although rhyme has been strikingly undertheorized in contemporary poetics, it held a privileged place in nineteenth-century histories of poetry.<sup>1</sup> Its particular story was also the story of literary historical development writ large. For Romantic historiography, the medieval invention of rhyme marked an unbreachable division between classical and modern poetics; rhymed forms such as the Arabic and Persian ghazale, the Provençal canzone, and the Italian sonnet brought with them new modes of identity and relationship that changed the course of literary and human history. In the English context, the shifting fortunes of rhyme helped account for the shifting tastes and practices that differentiated

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<sup>1</sup> There is a small canon of theoretical work on rhyme, and it has mostly revolved around Alexander Pope and the intellectual operations of the eighteenth-century couplet. See for example, William K. Wimsatt's "One Relation of Rhyme to Reason" (1944) and Hugh Kenner's "Pope's Reasonable Rhymes" (1974). For more recent treatments of the couplet, see J. Paul Hunter's "Formalism and History: Binarism and the Anglophone Couplet" (2006) and Simon Jarvis's "Why Rhyme Pleases" (2011). In Victorian studies, where meter has received a great deal of attention in recent years, rhyme has been surprisingly neglected. Adela Pinch's "Rhyme's End" (2011), which uses Giorgio Agamben's "The End of the Poem" to think about fin-de-siècle rhymed form, is a notable exception. A recent book-length study of Victorian rhyme, Peter McDonald's *Sound Intentions: The Workings of Rhyme in Nineteenth-Century Poetry* (2012), takes a deliberately *untheoretical* and *unhistoricist* approach to the subject. In his introduction, McDonald makes the following case for a study of rhyme based on "judgement" and "appreciation": "A comprehensive catalogue of nineteenth-century rhyme words, and a collection of everything put into writing on the subject in the period, would not go very far towards answering any of the questions which rhyme posed to the poets themselves. Theories of rhyme, likewise, do not in this sense constitute primary critical evidence, just as they *cannot explain the major poems in any useful ways*—ways, that is, that allow us to deepen an appreciation of the actual poems, rather than of the theory by which they are encompassed. *Sound Intentions* is conceived as a series of studies, centred on a small number of poets in the nineteenth century, which pays special attention to the ways in which rhyme works through their writings" (14, my emphasis).

one literary era from the next: medieval from Renaissance, Renaissance from Restoration, Restoration from Romantic. My dissertation argues that because theories of rhyme were inextricable from theories of literary history, transmission, and periodization, Victorians saw in rhyme the intrinsic historicism of poetic forms. Consequently, Victorian poets working with rhyme had a sensitive historiographic instrument: rhyme activated ideas about love, loss, poetry, and modernity that were understood to originate in a vividly imagined cosmopolitan past.

## II.

The germ of this project was an essay I wrote several years ago about William Morris's rhymes in "The Defence of Guenevere" (1858). It seemed to me at the time that Morris had a strangely historical view of rhyme. In his adaptation of Dante's *terza rima* for a poem about adultery, he was evincing a medievalist orientation toward rhyming form. I understood that orientation to be allegorical: instead of the Trinity, a love triangle. But the poem's rhymes are also expressive, with its erotic energy appearing to come out of the rhymes themselves. Might this be another aspect of the poem's Victorian medievalism? I began the essay wondering if I could write a whole essay about a rhyme scheme. I ended the essay wanting to learn a lot more about what Victorians knew and believed about rhyme. I had become convinced that an expressive reading of the poem's form—always such a temptation for the close reader—might be justified, even demanded, by a larger Victorian rhyme culture just out of my view.

"Rhyme and History in Victorian Poetics" is an effort toward recovering that rhyme culture, with the aim of making the complex and beautiful formal work in

Victorian poems easier to see. I draw on recent scholarship in historical poetics, which has shown how urgently we need history to understand poetic forms.<sup>2</sup> I share with historical poetics the assumption that twentieth-century critical norms have obscured what is most alien in nineteenth-century poetics; that something has been lost in translation that is in some measure retrievable through archival work.

But I am also concerned with Victorian poets' imaginative thinking about their own literary pasts, and from that perspective history looks somewhat different. It is an aesthetic and affective experience, and a fundamentally narrative and narrated one.<sup>3</sup> For these Victorians, literary history is necessarily a fantasy and can never completely be reconstructed – and that sensibility bears on my study too. As the figure of rhyme shows us, literary history was in the nineteenth century and still is about our own wish for a coherent story that helps us read better. I have tried hard to know the historical Arthur Hallam, Alfred Tennyson, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and Coventry Patmore, and to understand what their traces on the page and in the archive mean. But inevitably they are my Hallam, my Tennyson, my EBB, and my Patmore. It is daunting to confront, during the researching and writing of a dissertation, the possibility that literary history is a set of unprovable theories. But there is also something enabling about that very Romantic

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<sup>2</sup> Yopie Prins's "Historical Poetics, Dysprosody, and 'The Science of English Verse'" (2008) presents an early articulation of the historical poetics method. See Meredith Martin's 2012 *The Rise and Fall of Meter* for a more recent account of "historical prosody" and its goals (14-15; 203-6).

<sup>3</sup> For this view of Victorian historicism, I am particularly indebted to the work (and conversation) of Carolyn Williams and Jonah Siegel. See Williams, *Transfigured World: Walter Pater's Aesthetic Historicism* (1989) and Siegel, *Haunted Museum: Longing, Travel, and the Art Romance Tradition* (2005). On the poetics of historiographic writing, see Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (1973).

realization: the idea that history, like poetry, is made through acts of imagination and desire as well as through work.

### III.

Insofar as this dissertation makes the case for a Victorian historiographic poetics, it is also an origin story about the kinds of scholarly work that we do today. It traces the beginnings of twentieth-century formalism in Victorian literary historiography, and the means by which historical thinking gave rise to its apparent opposite: the practice of close reading. The dominant story, which conditions a great deal of methodological argument in the discipline, goes like this. In the nineteenth century, literary scholarship was predominantly concerned with externalities—history, context, philology, biography. In the twentieth century, as Modernism rose and English literature gained institutional prestige, there was a concerted drive toward the practice of close reading and a turn away from historical scholarship. This meant that the poem (and it was usually a poem) was suddenly enough: the poem presented a unified system of figuration and significance that was now the primary object of study. In many of the New Critical texts that are invoked to authorize this origin story, things are a little less schematic and a little more complicated, but the story persists as a rationale for new scholarly directions—whether toward or away from aesthetic form.

There is plenty of data to support this historical description—at least the twentieth-century part of the description. In René Wellek and Austin Warren's *Theory of Literature* (1942) and in Cleanth Brooks's *The Well-Wrought Urn* (1947), the origin story

is already in place.<sup>4</sup> But the nineteenth-century historical work that New Criticism defined itself against has remained largely unexamined. Historians of literary study have generally assented to the origin that Modernists appointed: first there was the fact-muddled darkness of nineteenth-century literary historiography, and then there was the light of twentieth-century literary criticism. If this kind of criticism came to be seen as ideologically suspect, it was nonetheless the beginning of what critics now do. In other words, we take it as a given that modern literary criticism started with the reaction against literary history, and that nineteenth-century literary histories were as unconcerned with form as the twentieth-century polemicists insisted they were. One reason we take it as a given is because the New Critical manifesto and the Victorian literary history are such unequal opponents. For all the delightful compression of a Wimsatt and Beardsley essay, a Victorian literary history may be thousands of pages long.

My intention is not to argue for the enduring importance of social or political history to formalist criticism, or even to insist that New Criticism cared more about

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<sup>4</sup>Introducing the section of their book called “The Intrinsic Study of Literature,” Wellek and Warren tell the story I’ve been describing: “The natural and sensible starting-point for work in literary scholarship is the interpretation and analysis of the works of literature themselves.... But, curiously enough, literary history has been so preoccupied with the setting of a work of literature that its attempts at an analysis of the works themselves have been slight in comparison with the enormous efforts expended on the study of environment... The result of a lack of clarity on questions of poetics has been the astonishing helplessness of most scholars when confronted with the task of actually analyzing and evaluating a work of art. *In recent years a healthy reaction has taken place* which recognizes that the study of literature should, first and foremost, concentrate on the actual works of art themselves” (139, my emphasis). For Cleanth Brooks, the break with historicism has the quality (if not of a cure) of an experiment: “If literary history has not been emphasized in these pages, it is not because I discount its importance, or because I have failed to take it into account. It is rather that I have been anxious to see what residuum, if any, is left after we have referred the poem to its cultural matrix” (x).

historical context than we tend to think.<sup>5</sup> Critics like Brooks, Wellek, and Warren weren't holding the method of close reading up against history, broadly construed; they were holding it up against the scholarly tradition of literary historiography.<sup>6</sup> I demonstrate that some basic assumptions about poetry's apparently intrinsic, aesthetic effects emerged from this scholarly tradition.

Consider Ezra Pound's *The Spirit of Romance* (1910), a telling document in the value shift from literary historiography to close reading. Pound's first prose work was adapted from a lecture series he delivered at the London Polytechnic on "The Development of Literature in Southern Europe." Its chronological scheme begins with the corruption of Latin at the start of the millennium and then moves through a series of subjects related to southern European poetry: the Provençal troubadours (with a focus on Arnaut Daniel), early French romances, Tuscan poetry before Dante, Dante's poetry, Villon, Lope de Vega and Spanish poetry, Camoens and Portuguese poetry, and the revival of Latin poetry at the Renaissance.<sup>7</sup>

If a century were a poem, you would hear a rhyme between Pound's book and another published almost a hundred years earlier. That work, which I discuss at length in

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<sup>5</sup> See the opening pages of Susan Wolfson's *Formal Charges: The Shaping of Poetry in British Romanticism* (1997) and Caroline Levine's "Strategic Formalism" (2006) for versions of these arguments. Levine's essay introduced the premises of her book *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (2015).

<sup>6</sup> I should note that Wellek was probably the most important historian of literary historiography in the twentieth century and spent much of his career writing about that tradition. Nevertheless, he saw nineteenth-century literary history writing as either unliterary or unhistorical: "Most leading histories of literature are either histories of civilization or collections of critical essays. One type is not a history of *art*; the other, not a *history* of art" (253).

<sup>7</sup> Pound had been working toward a graduate degree in Romance Languages at the University of Pennsylvania, and he acknowledges in a 1968 "post-postscript" that he based his book on notes he took in the seminars of Professor Hugo Rennert. For more on Pound's study of Romance languages and literatures, see Ira Nadel 44-6.

chapters one and two, was by J. C. L. Simonde de Sismondi, a Swiss-Italian Romantic historian. Sismondi's literary history was called *De la littérature du Midi de l'Europe* (1813) and was translated as *Historical View of the Literature of the South of Europe* (1823). It was four volumes long, with sections on Arabic, Provençal, early French (Langue d'Oc), Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese poetry. Like Pound's, it had been a lecture series first, and like Pound's it offered many examples of medieval verse forms, as well as observations on various prosodic cultures and reflections on the enigmatic operations of poetic form.

Despite Pound's obvious debts to nineteenth-century historiographers such as Sismondi and Henry Hallam (whom he cites on Portuguese literature), he heartily disavows literary historical scholarship. His preface begins, "This is not a philological work. Only by courtesy can it be said to be a study in comparative literature. I am interested in poetry" (5), and it proceeds with similar refusals: "There is no attempt at historical completeness" (6); "contrary to the custom of literary historians... all critical statements are based on a direct study of the texts themselves and not upon commentaries" (7); "the scholars have not known anything about poetry" (23). Pound sees philology and literary historiography as already outmoded and looks eagerly toward "a time when it will be possible for the lover of poetry to study poetry—even the poetry of recondite times and places—without burdening himself with the rags of morphology, epigraphy, *privatleben* and the kindred delights of the archaeological or 'scholarly' mind" (5).



Yet Pound has an unmistakable affinity for those kindred delights.<sup>8</sup> His style oscillates between the sweeping historiographic proclamation (“The Troubadours, Dante and Apuleius, all attempt to refine or to ornament the common speech”) and the sweeping formalist aphorism (“Poetry is a sort of inspired mathematics, which gives us equations, not for abstract figures, triangles, spheres, and the like, but equations for the emotions”) (13-4). And even the formalist aphorism has a distinctly historical character. When he describes poetry as a set of equations for feelings, Pound is making a point about the old historiographic categories of “classic” and “romantic” art. Bringing the grand narrative into contact with the math and magic of poetry, he enters the scholarly tradition he claims to leave behind.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Pound articulates his formalist aesthetic just as the Victorians did: historiographically.

#### IV.

My chapters describe a network of personal and intellectual affinities among historicist poets and poetical historians. Arthur Hallam and Alfred Tennyson were loving friends. Arthur Hallam was the mourned son of Henry Hallam. Henry Hallam was a friend of Simonde de Sismondi. Elizabeth Barrett Browning lived a few doors down from Henry Hallam on Wimpole Street and, later on, socialized with Alfred Tennyson. Coventry Patmore read and wrote about Arthur Hallam, reviewed Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s

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<sup>8</sup> Of Dante he writes, “Ignorance of most of the data of Dante’s life is no bar to the understanding of his works. The life is, however, most interesting....” (118). Two pages of biographical summary follow.

<sup>9</sup> Pound’s postscript from 1929 characterizes *The Spirit of Romance* as predominantly historical work: “A good deal of what immediately follows can not be taken as criticism, but simply as information for those wanting a shortish account of the period. The mode of statement, its idiom or jargon, will have to stand as partial confession of where I was in the year 1910” (8).

poems, named his son Tennyson, and was connected to Henry Hallam through his librarian job at the British Museum. As my dissertation shows, Victorian rhyme was a shared project undertaken by a cohort of people thinking together about poetry and the past.

My first chapter centers on Arthur Hallam, who is now best known as the subject of Alfred Tennyson's elegiac masterpiece *In Memoriam* (1850), but who was a significant poet and essayist in his own right. I argue that Hallam's criticism makes a bridge between the Romantic philosophy of history and Victorian poetry, and establishes the theoretical background for many of the innovations in rhyme craft that follow. The chapter, "Arthur Hallam and the Origin of Rhyme," explores his use of Romantic literary historiography to think about rhyme as a technology for feeling. I show that Hallam was drawing on the historical work of Sismondi when he famously proclaimed that rhyme "contain[s] in itself a constant appeal to Memory and Hope." Hallam's statement has become a cliché of Victorianist close reading, but in its original context it described a set of literary historical phenomena: the migration of rhyme from Arabic to Provençal poetry, and the development of rhyme's emotional capacities by the troubadours. I contend that this borrowed historiography is the crucial intertext for Hallam's important review of Tennyson's early poems. By turning literary history into an interpretive—and creative—method, Hallam sets a precedent for Victorian historiographic poetics.

Chapter two, "Tennyson's Lyric Forms," tracks Hallam's historical thought into Alfred Tennyson's career, which spanned the remainder of the nineteenth century and yielded some of its most canonical poems. Focusing on *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* (1830), the book written during Tennyson's collaboration with Hallam, I demonstrate the Poet

Laureate's continued engagement with Hallam's idea of expressive prosody. In the stunning technical and tonal variety of *Poems*, we find Tennyson thinking, along with Hallam, about the roots of modern lyric: the medieval ideal of matching form to feeling, and the burst of stanzaic invention that resulted from it. The famously melancholic rhymes of *In Memoriam* (1850) represent a more mature, if less transparently historical, development of expressive form. I argue that Tennyson's work prompts us to consider *lyric* as a compositional principle, the imperative to adapt a poem's prosody to its emotional content.

If Arthur Hallam was a minor Victorian historiographer who is nonetheless remembered for his impact on Victorian poetry, his father, Henry Hallam, was a major one whose contribution has been forgotten. My third chapter, "Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Unblank Verse," reads her idiosyncratic prosody as a stylistic response to her study of the elder Hallam's *Introduction to the Literature of Europe* (1837-9). Looking to Barrett Browning's literary history writing and marginalia, I demonstrate that Hallam's transnational historiography—and particularly his account of the historical convergences of epic and sonnet in Renaissance Europe—allowed her to see blank verse as, paradoxically, a subspecies of rhyme. Although Barrett Browning rejected Hallam's neoclassical taste, she used his historiographic plots to authorize her own poetic experiments.

My final chapter, "Coventry Patmore and the Idea of Ode" turns to the prosodic theory and poetry of an important later Victorian. Patmore's 1857 "Essay on English Metrical Law" was published in modified versions throughout his career, as he considered it to be his definitive statement on poetic form. Scholarship on the "Metrical

Law” has shared the emphases of prosody studies more broadly. In the same way that scholars have tended to favor meter over other aspects of prosody, work on Patmore’s essay has focused largely on his account of the metrical line—despite the fact that a substantial portion of the essay is devoted to the history and theory of rhyme. This chapter shifts the focus to rhyme, in order to uncover the historiographic dimensions of Patmore’s thought. In the irregular rhymes of *The Unknown Eros* (1877), which I read in the context of late Victorian debates about the meaning of *ode*, I see Patmore staking a claim for the present as also literary history—indeed, as a new stage in the larger literary historical processes that the previous chapters describe.

In sum, my dissertation demonstrates that many recurrent questions in poetic theory—about the nature of lyric, about the agency of poetic forms, about their affective and representational operations—were understood in the nineteenth century to be questions about literary history and cultural change. These questions and their Victorian answers evoked narratives about the rhyme cultures of medieval Arabia and Provence, the genius of Dante, the rise of Elizabethan prosody and its decline in a neoclassical age; and they were pursued in interdisciplinary conversations between poets and historians. While the questions have persisted, their literary historical provenance has disappeared from view. In recovering the submerged affiliations between prosody and literary historiography, this dissertation identifies a nineteenth-century formalism that opens onto the world.

## Chapter One: Arthur Hallam and the Origin of Rhyme

In the summer of 1882, a person with the initials V. M. R. sent a question about poetry to a London magazine called *The Oracle: A Weekly Journal of Response, Research, & Reference*. V. M. R.'s question followed one about bankruptcy and preceded one about shoe polish. The question read, "RHYME'S APPEAL TO MEMORY AND HOPE. – *Arthur Hallam said that 'Rhyme has been said to contain in itself a constant appeal to the memory and hope.' From whom did he quote?*" Hallam's comment on rhyme, now a touchstone of Tennyson studies, obviously held a mysterious charm for nineteenth-century readers, too.

V. M. R. must have found *The Oracle's* answer deeply unsatisfying. It begins by throwing up its hands: "No authority is given for the words attributed to Arthur Hallam. He is probably reciting the purport, not the exact terms, of what has been said." *The Oracle* then offers a few quotes from Dryden on rhyme's use as a mnemonic device and refers the reader to all the English literary critics in whose writing more answers might be sought -- Sidney, Puttenham, Gascoigne, Harington, Campion, Daniel, Guest -- concluding, "The exact words said to be used by Hallam, however, occur in none of the writers on rhyme" (108). The limits of *The Oracle's* omniscience and – it must be said -- research, are nowhere more apparent than in this haughty remark: "We have assumed that in saying Arthur Hallam you mean Arthur Hallam, not his brother Henry, author of "An Introduction to the Literature of Europe." (108).

*The Oracle* got so much wrong -- including the basic biographical facts. Henry Hallam was Arthur's father, not his brother, and Arthur hated Dryden's attitude toward

poetic form (Dryden “led up the death-dance of Parisian foppery and wickedness” [“Oration” 230]). If for Dryden, memory was a faculty, for Hallam it was closer to a feeling. But the biggest problem with *The Oracle*’s answer is that it looks no further than the English poets and the English critics for insight into Hallam’s theory of rhyme.

This chapter restores Hallam’s sentence to its two most important contexts: the now little-read essay in which it first appeared, “Oration, on the Influence of Italian Works of Imagination on the Same Class of Compositions in England” (1832); and the larger intellectual milieu to which that essay belongs. As I will demonstrate, the answer to V. M. R.’s question opens on a wide vista of Romantic and Victorian thinking about the transnational history and affective power of poetic forms. It involves Henry Hallam’s *Introduction to the Literature of Europe* (1837-9), and it involves Dryden’s “Parisian foppery.” But it also involves Petrarch, and Dante, and the songs of Provence, and the love lyrics of the medieval Middle East. It involves the literary historians Thomas Warton, August Schlegel, and J. C. L. Simonde de Sismondi, and all the varieties of medievalism and Orientalism that those historians helped produce. In short, Hallam’s microcosmic little sentence reveals the history – indeed, the many histories – folded into the Victorian aesthetics of rhyme.

### **Hallam’s Oration**

As its title suggests, the Oration was a talk before it was printed as an essay by W. Metcalfe in 1832, and then reprinted posthumously by Henry Hallam in the *Remains in Verse and Prose* (1834), as well as in T. H. Vail Motter’s near-comprehensive 1943

collection, *The Writings of Arthur Hallam*.<sup>10</sup> Arthur delivered the talk at Trinity College Chapel in December 1831 to an end-of-term audience that included his father and Alfred Tennyson, as part of the reward for having won the previous year's college declamation contest.<sup>11</sup> The subject he chose for the prize oration combined, in Motter's words, "his chief intellectual and spiritual interests: a philosophy of love and beauty, Italian and English literature, and the 'vital light' of a 'true spiritual Christianity'" (213). Hallam had mixed feelings, or at least professed to, about the essay he produced; he dismissed it as a "hasty composition" and a "little performance" in his letters.<sup>12</sup>

Hallam's modesty has been more or less matched by posterity's indifference. His reputation rests less on this essay than on two other contributions to Victorian literature: a review of Tennyson's early poems entitled "On Some Characteristics of Modern Poetry, and on the Lyrical Poems of Alfred Tennyson" (1831), which brilliantly interpreted their artistry to a reading public that might not otherwise have taken notice; and, of course, his grander but less agentive role as the lost muse of *In Memoriam* (1850). The importance of Hallam's review is unquestioned, both in Tennyson studies and in the larger field of Victorian studies. Indeed, it is difficult to read or think or write about Tennyson's work without confronting this seminal text. We tend to agree that it helped create the taste by which Tennyson, and much of the poetry of his period, would be appreciated.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The 1834 edition was a private printing. The *Remains* was subsequently reprinted many times throughout the century, including in an 1863 edition published by John Murray and widely reviewed.

<sup>11</sup> For a fuller account of these circumstances, see Martin Blocksidge, whose 2011 biography of Hallam I follow here (169-70).

<sup>12</sup> See letters 512 and 498 in *The Letters of Arthur Henry Hallam*, ed. Jack Kolb.

<sup>13</sup> Eileen Tess Johnston makes this Wordsworthian point explicitly, but it is a basic assumption of Tennyson studies (6). As many critics have observed, Tennyson -- unlike Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, and others -- has no critical writing of his own;

At first blush, the Oration makes no such claims. It is less obviously tethered to Tennyson's career, and although Hallam's prose is enormously important within Tennyson's orbit, much of what lies outside that orbit has been forgotten. This includes several philosophical and critical essays – on the subject of sympathy, on Cicero, on Christianity, on Dante scholarship – and over a hundred poems, many of which were intended for joint publication with Tennyson's 1830 poetry, before Hallam's father intervened. But although the Oration is barely remembered now, it was known to Victorian readers, particularly in the wake of *In Memoriam*.<sup>14</sup> And there is much to recommend the Oration to readers of Victorian poetry now, including what it can tell us about the richly medievalist and Italophilic culture into which that literature was born. The Oration has, moreover, a larger scene in its sights: world literature. In its account of the global movement of literary forms -- particularly from the Arab world into Europe -- it anticipates conversations that are only now beginning to be had about the cosmopolitan investments of nineteenth-century poetry.<sup>15</sup> Finally, as I've suggested, it discloses the

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he left the theorizing and manifesto writing to others (see J. Hillis Miller 277; Lang and Shannon, xxvi; Douglas-Fairhurst, *Tennyson Among the Poets*).

<sup>14</sup> There were several more additions to the Oration's historiographic microgenre later in the nineteenth century. An 1859 essay by J. M. Stuart, entitled "England's Literary Debt to Italy," for instance, was printed in *Fraser's Magazine*, and John Addington Symonds published "The Debt of English to Italian Literature" in his *Sketches and Studies in Italy* (1879). The Stuart essay is especially enthusiastic about Hallam's Oration. (I'll discuss Coventry Patmore's influential response to the Oration below.) As for twentieth-century criticism, Isobel Armstrong's chapter on Hallam in *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics* (1993) takes a wide-ranging approach to his prose and poetry, but she doesn't address this particular essay. Some more recent work on the Victorian reception of Dante and Victorian nationalism (e.g. Milbank's *Dante and the Victorians* [1998] and Matthew Reynolds's *The Realms of Verse 1830-1870: English Poetry in a Time of Nation-Building* [2005]) has referred glancingly to the Oration – but it has otherwise received little attention.

<sup>15</sup> See, again, Reynolds's *The Realms of Verse*; the *Victorian Cosmopolitanisms* special issue of *Victorian Literature and Culture* edited by Tanya Agathocleous and Jason Rudy



rigorously historicist machinery behind a great deal of Victorian thinking about poetic form.

Hallam's Oration is an undergraduate effort, but it nonetheless participates in the literary historical lecture genre popular in continental Europe (and practiced in England by Germanophiles like Coleridge and Carlyle) in the early nineteenth century. These lectures are remarkable for their cosmopolitan understanding of the history of poetry, as well as their own cosmopolitan and collaborative aesthetics; in a period when originality was highly valued, they embodied a method of diffused authorship.<sup>16</sup> In Romantic literary histories, poetic forms are seen to develop over time and across national borders. Romantic literary history writing followed a similar model of making: historians would borrow, translate, and modify the work of their colleagues and forebears, sharing in the production of a grand transnational, translinguistic historiographic opus. In treating the relationship between Italian and English literature, the Oration assimilates this transnational historiographic tradition.

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The Oration followed Hallam's review of *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* by only five months, and it clearly reads as a continuation and expansion of that argument. Hallam

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in 2010; and Christopher Kierstead's *Victorian Poetry, Europe, and the Challenge of Cosmopolitanism* (2011). Aamir Mufti's "Orientalism and the Institution of World Literatures" (2010) argues for the importance of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century philological Orientalism to the project of Romanticism and to our own theorization of world literature. See also Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and Raymond Schwab's *The Oriental Renaissance* (1950) for the canonical works on this subject. It will become clear in this chapter that Arthur Hallam's essay is both a product of and a participant in nineteenth-century Orientalist discourse.

<sup>16</sup> Overlapping material appeared in the literary historical lectures of August Schlegel (1809-11), J.C.L. Simonde de Sismondi (1811), Friedrich Schlegel (1815), Coleridge (1818), and Hegel (1823-9); Carlyle would lecture on the history of literature in 1838.

had ended his Tennyson review with a move outward from the poet himself to a more general point about the assimilative nature of the English language. In his final “word of praise,” Hallam commends Tennyson for his use of “thorough and sterling English,” by which he means Tennyson’s use of the full spectrum of English words – not just those with Saxon roots, but Latinate words, too. This leads Hallam to the claim, adapted from Hugh Blair, that “ours is necessarily a compound language; as such alone it can flourish and increase; nor will the author of the poems we have extracted be likely to barter for a barren appearance of symmetrical structure that fertility of expression and variety of harmony which ‘the speech that Shakespeare spoke’ derived from the sources of Southern phraseology” (198).<sup>17</sup> Beginning from the idea that “pure English” is always an oxymoron, Hallam concludes by suggesting that the greatest English literature is that which most willingly embraces the diversity of its linguistic heritage – which involves Southern European as well as Northern European influences; moreover, the future of the English language depends upon its continued openness to languages and literatures outside of itself. Hallam’s comparison of the relatively unknown Tennyson with Shakespeare – whom he himself would describe in the Oration as “the most universal mind that ever existed” (229) -- is surely a risky note to end on, and it seems to invite the “general guffaw” with which John Wilson and other critics responded to the review.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> See Blair’s 1783 *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*: “But these disadvantages [of irregularity], if they be such, of a compound Language, are balanced by other advantages that attend it; particularly, by the number and variety of words with which such a Language is likely to be enriched. Few Languages are, in fact, more copious than the English” (93). Isobel Armstrong sees connections to Herder and Schiller in this passage. For her discussion of Hallam’s engagement with language theory and the field of comparative philology, see *Victorian Poetry* (65-6).

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Motter 183. Wilson’s review of *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* (published under the pseudonym of “Christopher North”) was even more critical of Hallam’s review than of

But it is also a clever way to account for some of the idiosyncrasies of Tennyson's style that might otherwise be attributed to his juvenility. Instead of being an amateur, Tennyson is represented as *already a master*, since he understands – as his critics might not, but as Shakespeare did – the real nature and potential of his own complex language.<sup>19</sup>

With the Oration, Hallam shifts from a literary critical to a historical and theoretical mode; with no specific reference to Tennyson this time, he retrieves the thread he dropped in the review and proceeds to tease out its broader implications. “There is in the human mind a remarkable habit,” he begins, “which leads it to prefer in most cases the simple to the composite, and to despise a power acquired by combination in comparison with one original, and produced from unmixed elements.” He continues,

Doubtless some good motives have had a share in forming this habit, but I suspect pride is answerable for nine tenths of this formation; especially when anything belonging to ourselves is the circumstance for which our curiosity requires an origin. Wherever we trace a continued series of ascending causes, we can hardly escape the conviction of our insignificance and entire dependence: but if by any accident the chain is broken, if we see darkness beyond a particular link, we find it easy, and think it fine, to flatter ourselves into a belief of having found a beginning, and the nearer we bring it down to ourselves the better satisfied we remain.

From the outset, this is a polemic against origin stories – or at least the conventional ones. Instead of searching for absolute “beginnings” and insisting on teleologies that lead to *us*, we should be imagining alternative models of historical development. The model Hallam proposes is “a continued series of ascending causes” – which means, essentially, a

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Tennyson's poems; Wilson suggested that the “pomposity” of Hallam's writing had been responsible for the folding of *Englishman's Magazine* (Jump 51). Tennyson retaliated with a satirical poem entitled “Christopher North.”

<sup>19</sup> In “Style” (1889), Walter Pater characterized Tennyson as “eclectic,” referring to his “scholarly” use of English words (13).

cumulative sequence that reaches deeper than the past we know and proceeds farther than the present moment. In such a sequence, origins and culminations are virtually indistinguishable from one another.

The penchant for origin hunting, Hallam suggests, is both strongest and most absurd when applied to the subject of national literature. There, historians “less honest than patriotic” will bend over backwards to demonstrate “the aboriginal distinctness of their national literature, and its complete independence of the provision of any other languages.” In this case, the teleological prejudice is worsened by another kind of chauvinism – a refusal to credit other cultures with influence over one’s own. Once again, Shakespeare serves as Hallam’s positive example. Providing a randomly selected excerpt from a random volume of the poet’s work (the impression of randomness is important, of course, because the excerpt is meant to be representative), Hallam presents quantitative proof for a point he could only glance at in the conclusion to the Tennyson review: the etymological richness of Shakespearean English. In his sixteen-line sample from *Henry IV, Pt. II*, he counts “twenty-two words of Roman[ce] formation, and but twenty-one of Teutonic. Of the former, again, five are proper to French; the rest having probably passed through the medium of that language, but derived from a classical source. Among these last, one only is Greek; the others bear the imperial stamp of Rome. The whole is a beautiful specimen of pure English, and falls with complete, easy, uniform effect on the ear and mind” (215). As he does in the Tennyson review, Hallam takes this opportunity to celebrate the English language – and, by extension, its literature -- as the meeting place of Northern and Southern influences.

Despite its prominence in the title, then, the idea of direct, one-to-one influence has a relatively minor place in Hallam's argument. Instead of a closed circuit between a poet and his predecessor, he imagines a more profound kind of assimilation process, a "universal and always progressive movement" whose dominant metaphor is chemical – even alchemical (214).<sup>20</sup> Modern cultures are forged, Hallam says, in a "sublime...process by which the few original elements of society are dashed and mingled with one another, severing forever and coalescing within a crucible of incessant operation, and producing at each successive point new combinations, which again, as simple substances, are made subservient to the prospective direction of the Great observant Mind" (214). This hybridity is markedly the condition of European literature, whose four constituent elements are, in varying proportions, Christian, Teutonic (from the North), Roman (from the South), and "Oriental" or "Arabian" (from the East) (218). The geographical absolutes have temperamental corollaries too, and as history moves forward, the elements combine in various ways to produce the variegated personalities of each national identity. Hallam's stereotypes are the familiar climatological clichés popularized by Montesquieu and de Staël: "the fervid meditations of the East"; the "rapid reason of the West, the stormy Northern temper" and "the voluptuous languors of the Meridian" (214).<sup>21</sup> The "romantic spirit" that animates medieval European literature is

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<sup>20</sup> Coleridge, in his *Notebooks*, used an even more explicit version of this chemistry metaphor to describe the formation of early European culture: "The Gothic Tribes fought their way down Southward; the Romans upward North – met in collision – which ended in a chemical Union" (entry 4379; January 1818).

<sup>21</sup> See Roberto Dainotto's 2007 *Europe, In Theory* (especially chapters two and four) for a history of climatological discourse.

made up of all four.<sup>22</sup>

So, although the professed aim of the Oration is to explore the relationship between Italian and English literatures, Hallam's essay is more ambitious than this thesis suggests. From its first sentences, Hallam disposes with the concept of fixed national identity; "English" and "Italian" cease to be stable terms interacting with one another and the principle of combination takes precedence. Just as English is a hybrid language and Italian is an amalgam of older languages (it was "the last and most complete among the several tongues that arose out of the confusion of Northern barbarians with their captives of the conquered empire" [216]), Italian literature is a compound thing. Its superiority does not rest on the originality of its writers, even if Hallam holds Dante up as an unparalleled genius. Dante is a genius partly because of the ways in which he *isn't* original. More valuable than originality is the kind of perfection that medieval Italian literature achieved by "taking into itself, into its own young and creative vigor, the whole height, breadth, and depth of human knowledge as it then stood" (233).<sup>23</sup> Apart from its Christian example, the most important bequest of Italian to English literature, Hallam argues, is this geohistoricist attitude.

In the same way that Dante and Petrarch drew on their antecedents – Plato and Virgil, and the troubadour poets Sordel and Arnaud to Marveil -- to create a love poetry "which dwells 'like a star apart'" (224), Chaucer and the Elizabethan poets learned from Dante and Petrarch. They adopted not only their poetic forms – "canzones, madrigals,

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<sup>22</sup> Throughout this dissertation, I will use the capitalized "Romantic" to refer to European Romanticism, and I will follow Hallam in using the lower-case "romantic" to refer to the medieval Romance-language cultural formation.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Friedrich Schlegel, 1815: "Of the three early Italian poets, Dante was, unquestionably, at once the most copious, dignified, and inventive: his work embraces the whole compass of knowledge open to that age..." (*History of Literature* 198).

devises, sonnets and epithalamiums” – but also the “mode of sentiment” and the “melodious repose in which are held together all the emotions [they] delineate” (228-9). After Shakespeare, Hallam describes a progressive “extinction of the Italian influence” and its replacement (thanks to Dryden) with the “death-dance of Parisian foppery” (230). But even though the essay traces a general decline in the literature of the previous two hundred years, it doesn’t close with the disappointing present. Instead, its historical narrative reaches into the future for a utopian poet who might revive the romantic spirit of Dantean Europe. Thus, Hallam’s literary history is descriptive, but it is also prescriptive -- of an aesthetic that is attainable and reproducible through spiritual exertion and literary study. This isn’t simply a matter of reconstituting a purely Christian age; it involves a contemporary poet assuming the appropriate relationship to the cultural productions of the global past. If such a poet immerses himself in the historicist poetic culture of medieval Europe, he may be able to produce a correspondent poetry. Hallam ends his essay with the hope for an “English mind that has drank deep at the sources of Southern inspiration, and especially that is imbibed with the spirit of the mighty Florentine” (234).<sup>24</sup>

Strangely enough, this ending sends us back to the review of Tennyson’s poetry, for which the Oration now seems to be a belated preparation – a prequel as well as a sequel. Hallam has, after all, already aligned Tennyson with Dante and Petrarch, who “produce two-thirds of their effect by sound.” And he has already identified Tennyson with the precise model of poetic historicism that the Oration so meticulously expounds. Of Tennyson’s poem “Oriana,” Hallam had written, “We know no more happy seizure of the

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<sup>24</sup> For nineteenth-century ideas of Italy (and the European South more generally) as a desired origin of culture and “the natural home of genius” (6), see Siegel.

antique spirit in the whole compass of our literature.... The author is well aware that the art of one generation cannot become that of another by any will or skill; but the artist may transfer the spirit of the past, making it a temporary form for his own spirit, and so effect, by idealizing power, a new and legitimate *combination* ("Characteristics" 194; emphasis mine). As Dante did before him, Tennyson has absorbed the lessons of literary history into his own idiosyncratic poetic practice. The Oration urges us to reread the relationship between Tennyson and Dante as *formal*, in more ways than one. Tennyson's appropriation of Dante's specific poetic style (his Tuscan sound effects) is secondary to Tennyson's paralleling of the hybridized, historicist, *weltliterary* aesthetic that Dante himself exemplified.<sup>25</sup>

### The Origins of Rhyme

Inside the framework of Hallam's assimilative theory of influence is a well-worn story of medieval European literature: it moves from the literary vacuum of the "period of utter darkness" at the beginning of the millennium through to the Italian Renaissance.<sup>26</sup> The turning point in this story is the consolidation of crude Mediterranean vernaculars into literary languages and the consequent big-bang explosion of lyric poetry in medieval

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<sup>25</sup> The characterization of Tennyson as an "assimilative" poet – for better or for worse -- followed him for his whole career. See J. C. Collins's "Tennyson's Assimilative Skill" (1891) in *Jump* (447) and Douglas-Fairhurst's introduction to *Tennyson Among the Poets* (2009).

<sup>26</sup> This narrative of the dark ages is one that Henry Hallam offers more fully in *View of the State of Europe During the Middle Ages* (1818). "We begin in darkness and calamity; and though the shadows grow fainter as we advance, yet we are to break off our pursuit as the morning breathes upon us, and the twilight reddens into the lustre of day." In elaborating on the spiritual and cultural darkness of this period, he writes, "In the shadows of this universal ignorance, a thousand superstitions, like foul animals of night, were propagated and nourished" (338).



Provence. Hallam illustrates these events with dynamic metaphors that range from natal to apocalyptic to supernatural.

[T]hese forms of speech...were soon to arise from their illiterate and base condition, to express in voices of thunder and music the wants and tendencies of a new civilization, and to animate with everlasting vigour the intellect of mankind.... [A]fter five centuries of preparatory ignorance, the flame burst from beneath the ashes, never again to be overcome....The [Provençal language, or *Lange d'Oc*] especially began to offer the phenomenon of a new literature, dependent for nothing on monastic erudition, but fresh from the workings of untaught nature, impressed with the stamp of existing manners, and reacting upon them by exciting the imagination and directing the feelings of the people. A thousand poets sprang up, as at an enchanter's call. (217)

In positioning Southern France as the cradle of modern literature and Provençal poetry as the spontaneous expression of modern personhood, Hallam appears to rehearse a platitude of Eurocentric historiography.<sup>27</sup> *New* is the watchword of this episode of literary history: new languages are born, and with them a new civilization and “a new literature” that seems to come out of nowhere and owe nothing to the civilizations that preceded it. The only dimension in this story is time: there is an old literature, and then the Western Roman Empire falls and there is almost nothing, and then something new comes into being.

But this newness effect, Hallam is quick to show, is really just a spectacular new compound, one whose elements are geographically as well as historically derived. Even the features that look newest of all, like the theme of chivalry in the new literature, are a product of Hallam's cultural crucible and are traceable to a synthesis of Christian mariology, Gothic domesticity, and, above all, the passionate “Arabic imagination,”

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<sup>27</sup> Hallam and many other historians of his period use *Provençal* and *Lange d'Oc* interchangeably. *Occitan* is the less geographically specific term that is used most commonly now to denote the endangered language group to which Provençal belongs. I will be using “Provençal” here for the sake of consistency.

where “the first pattern of that amorous mysticism” appears. If Hallam seems to puncture a Eurocentric myth of literary history by attributing chivalry -- a defining characteristic of medieval European literature – to a civilization outside of Europe, his next move is even more deflating. It isn’t just the *themes* of this literature that are borrowed from the Islamic world, he points out, but also “the outward forms of literary composition”: narrative genres like the fable and the novel, poetic forms of rhymed verse, and elaborate figurative conceits. Islamic values and art forms were introduced into Europe through the period of sustained cultural exchange that began with the Islamic golden age of the Abbassides (a.k.a. the Abbassid Caliphate, around the eighth century) and continued with the Crusades. Predominantly through a combination of “itinerant Eastern reciters” and European crusaders returning from the East, Europe was infused with the attitudes, styles, and forms of Islamic culture (220).

Hallam’s treatment of literary form thus tracks a huge swath of the Western canon back to Eastern sources. But the most significant contribution of Eastern to Western culture, in his view, is rhyme, the introduction of which from the Arab world “decided the whole bent of modern poetry” (221-2).<sup>28</sup> His definition of rhyme is both broad and

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<sup>28</sup> Dainotto has written extensively on the relationship between geography and history in European thought. My understanding of the ideological underpinnings of Hallam’s argument has been aided enormously by his scholarship on European historiography in general and Arabist theories of rhyme in particular (even though Arthur Hallam isn’t in his sights). See “Of the Arab Origin of Modern Europe: Giammaria Barbieri, Juan Andrés, and the Origin of Rhyme”; “The Discreet Charm of the Arabist Theory: Juan Andrés, Historicism, and the De-Centering of Montesquieu’s Europe”; and *Europe (In Theory)* (2007). Dainotto traces the Arabist theory even further back than Hallam does, to Barbieri’s *Rimario* (ca. 1560). In Dainotto’s view, the theory remains convincing: “It seems frankly implausible to me that three centuries of Islam in Europe, and of Arabic—or better, Semitic—sciences developed between Sicily and Al-Andalus, would have been of no consequence for European versification” (“Arab Origin” 274). The 2012 edition of the *Princeton Encyclopedia* describes the two main positions in this debate more broadly,

precise. He isn't referring only to the sonic pairing of two words at the ends of lines; he means "the extensive and varied use of rhyme" -- a whole poetic architectonic organized as much around assonantal resemblances and stanzaic patterning as metrical duration or stress.

This theory of rhyme involves two essentialist premises, one that is geographical and one that is historical. The geographical essentialism doesn't assign rhyme to a particular kind of national character so much as a particular location. It is "the creation of Southern climates: for the Southern languages abound in vowels, and rhyme is the resonance of vowels, while the Northern overflow with consonants and naturally fall into alliteration."<sup>29</sup> So strong is Hallam's conviction of this climatological-linguistic-prosodic nexus that he can include Northern European poetry only by affirming the Southern heritage of ostensibly Northern people: "Thus, although it is a great mistake which some writers have fallen into, the considering rhyme as almost unknown to the poetry of the Gothic races, we may fairly consider it as transported with them in their original migration from their Asiatic birth-place, while the alliteration, so common among them, appears a natural product of their new locality." Hallam isn't willing -- as other historians

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as *derivationist* versus *natural/linguistic*, with Sharon Turner arguing for the former (on behalf of Chinese and Sanscrit) in 1808 and Theophilus Swift arguing for the latter in 1803 (Brogan et al., "Rhyme"). See Wellek's *The Rise of English Literary History* (1941) for rhyme theories up to Thomas Warton.

<sup>29</sup> Hallam makes a similar point in his 1832 review of an Italian translation of *Paradise Lost*, in addressing the problem of translating English blank verse into Italian. In this instance, Hallam seems to emphasize the robustness of Northern languages: "[The languages] of the South, however uniformly pleasing in the language of common life, and however exquisitely beautiful their mellifluous expression of simple feeling, have not that range of power, that variety of resources, that flexure, and, as it were, muscularity of sound, which seem to belong exclusively to dialects more rich in consonants" (237).

of Mediterranean literature were<sup>30</sup> -- to exclude the Goths from the glorious history of rhyme, but neither will he concede an organic relationship between rhyme and Northern Europe.<sup>31</sup>

For Hallam, the Arab world is the true birthplace of rhymed poetry, and it is thence that the new literature of Provence derived its forms. "No poetry... in the world," he writes, "was so founded on rhyme as the Arabian; and some of its most complicated [rhyme patterns] were transferred without alteration to the Langue d'Oc, previous to their obtaining immortality in the hands of Dante and Petrarca." At this point in the essay, it becomes even clearer that Hallam is thinking about the process of assimilation in two interlocking ways. There is Dante's classicism, his "full and joyous reception of former knowledge into [his] own very different habits of knowing" (224); and there is Dante's cosmopolitanism, the way he is involved in the import and export of poetic forms from other parts of the world. The classicism is a question, partly, of direct heredity; because modern Italy occupies the same site as ancient Rome, medieval Italians feel a kinship

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<sup>30</sup> Dainotto reports Dante's suggestion that rhyme originated in Provence, and that Joachim Du Bellay (in *Deffence et Illustration de la Langue Francoyse*, 1549) made the same claim for France proper. For Du Bellay, as for many historians of rhyme who had a patriotic stake in the issue, national modernity and rhyme were simultaneously born ("Arab Origin" 279-80).

<sup>31</sup> On this point, Hallam adheres generally to Thomas Warton's Arabist-Nordic theory of literary development (from his *History of English Poetry* [1774-81]), which is itself a synthesis of arguments made by Warburton, Mallet, and Percy. Wellek summarizes Warton's thinking in the following way: "The supposedly 'oriental,' 'extravagant,' 'imaginative' cast of Nordic imagination is accounted for again by the Eastern or 'Georgian' origin of the Goths. The theory of the migration of Odin, conceived as a historical personage, from 'that part of Asia which is connected with Phrygia'...lent itself to exploitation by the theory of the Asiatic origin of all romantic fictions" (*Rise* 189). When the Oration was published, Hallam expressed some skepticism about Warton and Warburton's theories in a footnote, where he finally pleaded agnosticism regarding the original source of the "Saracen influence" -- which he nonetheless maintained as "an undoubted fact" (219).

with ancient people. They “recognize with an instinctive gladness the feelings of their ancestors when disclosed to them in books or other monuments.” Both of these influences are accounted for in “the whole height, breadth, and depth of human knowledge as it then stood.”

But as much as Italians have in common with their classical ancestors, there is a way in which they are nothing alike. The insuperable difference between the modern and the ancient person is marked by the figure of rhyme. In a long and dense footnote to Hallam's description of the transmission of rhyme from the East to the West, he reveals the larger historiographic contours of his argument. Rhyme, he says, is a machine for feeling that was perfected by the moderns for the moderns. It is a technology more sophisticated and more finely calibrated than poetic meter:

Rhyme has been said to contain in itself a constant appeal to Memory and Hope. This is true of all verse, of all harmonized sound; but it is certainly made more palpable by the recurrence of termination. The dullest senses can perceive an identity in that and be pleased with it: but the partial identity, latent in more diffused resemblances, requires, in order to be appreciated, a soul susceptible of musical impression. The ancients distained a mode of pleasure, in appearance so little elevated, so ill adapted for effects of art: but they knew not, and with their metrical harmonies, perfectly suited, as these were, to their habitual moods of feeling, they were not likely to know the real capacities of this apparently simple and vulgar combination. (222)

At the beginning of the footnote, Hallam sets up a hierarchy of sound effects. Meter makes the smallest demands on our faculties of “Memory and Hope”; it counts as “harmonized sound,” but its patterns are rhythmic rather than musical. Next is rhyme proper (either end rhyme or some other version of full rhyme), what Hallam calls the “recurrence of termination.” End rhyme, in its most basic form, is not a strictly modern invention. As Hallam knew, there were some isolated instances of rhymed couplets –

used at the service of meter -- even in ancient Latin poetry.<sup>32</sup> Although end rhyme introduces a sound texture more varied than metrical feet, it isn't in itself the utmost that rhyme can be. More subtle than symmetrical end rhymes were the kind of sound patterns that Hallam earlier described as "the extensive and varied use of rhyme" -- everything on the spectrum of assonance, from the melodious play of vowels across a line to the interlacement of a multirhyme stanza. These are the "diffused resemblances" that the ancients, in their insensitivity, were unable to perceive. They wrote their poetry in meter, Hallam suggests, because the austere classical sensibility was unfit for rhyme.

By invoking the ancients-versus-moderns quarrel, and representing the moderns and their rhyme as the winning team, Hallam contests a long tradition of metrocentrism in English poetic theory. Rhyme had had its defenders -- from Samuel Daniel to Alexander Pope -- but it was decidedly the underdog of poetic effects. Milton's statement on rhyme in his preface to *Paradise Lost* (1667) remained a powerful critical norm into the nineteenth century.<sup>33</sup> To explain his choice of blank verse for his epic poem, he too contrasted ancient and modern poetics, but in this case the ancients had the right idea:

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<sup>32</sup> The use of rhyme in pre-Christian Latin poetry (as well as Christian Latin poetry, to wit Leonine rhymes) was a well-known and oft-repeated fact. Ovid and Horace were frequently cited users of end rhyme in classical poetry (as they are for Campion, Henry Hallam, and Hegel).

<sup>33</sup> Simon Jarvis nicely summarizes eighteenth century criticism's prevailing attitudes toward rhyme in the following discussion of Edward Young and Thomas Sheridan: "Young's and Sheridan's verdicts [against rhyme] are only the most vehement deployments of a repertoire of rhyme-hating which expanded rapidly (though by no means uncontestedly) just in the epoch of rhyme's most complete domination of English verse-practice. The lexicon itself also carries the double character evident in Young. Rhyme is an idol, it is witchcraft, it is contemptible, it is depraved, it is a prostitute, it is a mercenary, it is a barbarian, it is stupefaction. Yet rhyme is also a toy, a bawble, a gewgaw, a trifle; it jingles, it tinkles, it rattles and babbles. In short, it is something of absolutely no importance whatever, which must therefore be destroyed without further delay, because it is so deeply evil." (Jarvis, "Why Rhyme Pleases" 2).

“The Measure is *English* Heroic Verse without Rime, as that of Homer in Greek, and of Virgil in Latin; Rime being no necessary Adjunct or true Ornament of Poem or good Verse, in longer Works especially, but the Invention of a barbarous Age, to set off wretched matter and lame meter” (2). Milton’s idea of rhyme follows Thomas Campion’s; it is like bad make-up covering a bad complexion -- and it is the sign of bad times. He takes the orthodox neoclassical view of the medieval period as an uncivilized and unpoetic interval between antiquity and the Renaissance. Against this background, Hallam’s Middle Ages -- the fertile period that produced for the first time a “soul susceptible of musical impression” -- appears all the more dazzling

Because his purview is world literature, not just English literature, Hallam is able to flip two orthodoxies: the one that privileges classical over modern poetics, and the one that privileges the English (and, more broadly, Europeans) over everyone else. In the historical narrative, rhyme represents a break; in the geopolitical narrative, rhyme represents a bridge. As I’ll show, Hallam wasn’t the only critic to think about poetics in these terms; but he helped transform what had been an abstruse debate in the philosophy of history into a pressing concern for poetry writers.

### **“Memory and Hope”: History, Form, Feeling**

“Rhyme has been said to contain in itself a constant appeal to Memory and Hope.” Even though this sentence is hidden away in a footnote of the barely read the Oration, it has since Hallam’s death become one of the utterances most closely identified with his myth. The sentence is usually abstracted from its context and turned into a powerful and flexible synecdoche – for Hallam’s tragic genius; or for Tennyson’s style; or for the

emotional capacities of poetry; or for the paradoxical work of elegy, the poetic genre whose most recognizable nineteenth-century face is Hallam himself. The mystique of the sentence is only heightened by the fact that it appears *already* to be a quotation when Hallam uses it -- “Rhyme *has been said* to contain in itself a constant appeal to Memory and Hope” – yet he gives no indication of its provenance. If there is a source for the quotation, it hasn’t mattered much. Its profundity, critics have always suggested, belongs to Hallam alone.

Coventry Patmore cited it twice, in an 1850 review of “In Memoriam” and in his 1857 “Essay on English Metrical Law”; both essays take the phrase seriously as the basis for a theory of prosody.<sup>34</sup> In the twentieth century, Christopher Ricks made poignant use of the quotation at the conclusion of his biographical study of Tennyson: “It is the perfect epitome of Tennyson’s essential movement,” he writes, “a progress outward which is yet a circling home.” (Ricks found Hallam’s comment on rhyme resonant enough to apply elsewhere, too – including in a book on Bob Dylan and an essay on Milton, where he invokes “Arthur Hallam’s profound restatement of the nature of rhyme” [*Force* 77]). After Ricks, the quotation returns to the task of explicating the dynamics of the ABBA “*In Memoriam*” stanza. A lovely example is Seamus Perry’s remark that the stanza is “one of the great formal responses to the occasion of elegy, recognizing the obligation to move on, while honestly registering a compulsion to retrogress.... ‘Rhyme has been said

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<sup>34</sup> In the “In Memoriam” review, Patmore suggests that Hallam’s line expresses a law that has *always* guided the best prosodists: “It has been excellently said that rhyme owes much of its charm to the fact of its containing a continual appeal to memory and expectation: and upon this saying we would found the rule that rhymes which occur at irregular and unexpected intervals ought always to be increased in number, in order to make up for the effect of their irregularity in weakening the force of that appeal. Great metrists have always felt and acted upon this principle” (545). In chapter four, I examine Patmore’s rule more closely.



to contain in itself a constant appeal to Memory and Hope,' Hallam wrote in an essay to which Christopher Ricks alerts us. If each *In Memoriam* stanza begins with hope, it soon relapses into sad memory" (136).<sup>35</sup>

Why has the memory-and-hope formulation been so useful for understanding how rhyme works in Victorian poetry and beyond? Part of the answer might be that it helps us describe a quality of prosody that we feel but find difficult to name. We can mark out a rhyme scheme, but that notation still fails somehow to account for the way that a rhyme tugs on us as we read and hear it. Hallam's phrase holds out a satisfyingly layered idea of rhyme: it acknowledges something literally true about its operations – that it works across (and helps produce) the past-present-future axis of poetic time as we experience it; but it also gestures at rhyme's less quantifiable, more ineffable effects. It promises something that poetic theory is still looking for: an affective theory of rhyme. As J. Paul Hunter has recently suggested, our theoretical vocabulary for this aspect of rhyme remains limited. In "Seven Reasons for Rhyme," he devotes his seventh "reason" to a function that he describes as "abstract and frankly speculative... as yet, in fact, almost language-less.... It involves creating a prevailing tone or mood through sound." Hunter's own "tentative" speculation isolates vowels as the agents of rhyme's most elusive effects, because although vowels "have of themselves no necessary relationship to meaning as such [they] do in fact set up tonal associations that come close to, almost anticipate, a meaning function" (190).<sup>36</sup> In Hunter's suggestions, we find some key components of Hallam's

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<sup>35</sup> Peter McDonald's recent study of Victorian rhyme uses the "Memory and Hope" construction in the same way. He also suggests that the phrase "contain in itself" "foreshadows, perhaps, the self-containments of Tennyson's stanza" (174).

<sup>36</sup> For another account of the relationships among rhyme, melody, and feeling, see Henry Lanz's *The Physical Basis of Rime* (1931). Lanz's background was in logic, and he

concept of rhyme: the identification of rhyme as “the resonance of vowels,” and the identification of vowels with emotional content. Hallam, however, goes farther than Hunter does in *naming* rhyme’s two primary experiences: memory and hope.

Of course, restored to the context of Hallam’s literary history, *memory* and *hope* have associations beyond poetry’s temporality on the page or in the ear, the way we remember and wait for recurring rhyme sounds. These terms also work as shorthand for the much larger forms of history and futurity that Hallam’s concept of rhyme encompasses. In his view, rhyme is not just a literary effect *with* a history, but a signifier for the processes of literary history: the disjunctions and continuities, the renovations and innovations that give rise to modernity. The terms *memory* and *hope* integrate these historical and affective connotations, suggesting that poetic forms might always arrive bearing the scars of where they have been.

But it’s worth remembering that Hallam doesn’t actually take credit for the expression that posterity would so insistently attribute to him. To read the sentence closely is to register not just the keywords *rhyme*, *memory*, and *hope*, but the connective tissue holding those terms together. If rhyme “has been said” to work in a particular way, somebody else, at some other point in time, must have said it. Thus, Hallam’s particular inflection doesn’t simply direct us to the history of rhyme, but to the history of histories of rhyme – that is, to the discourse of Romantic literary historiography that shaped “Oration.”

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approached these questions in a particularly unwhimsical way: “Musical emotions are all based on the psycho-physical fact that when we hear a harmonic deviation from a given tone we feel a peculiar tendency to go back to the original.” Lanz differentiates between the emotions produced by music and more familiar emotions, like love: “*No other ‘emotions’ are expressed by melodies except those which are produced by the tones themselves, owing to their ability to please or to offend the ear*” (35, Lanz’s emphasis).

## Hegel's Romantic Rhyme

In a section on versification in the roughly contemporaneous *Aesthetics*,<sup>37</sup> Hegel presents what looks at first like a similar vision of rhyme, with a similar complex of form, historicity, and feeling. The transition from quantitative meter to rhyme-based and accentual-syllabic prosody corresponds with his theory of the shift from classical to romantic art forms. Meter becomes an insufficient external representation of poetry's "inner message" as Christianity emerges, and "the more inward and spiritual the artistic imagination becomes." Romantic (i.e. postclassical) poetry "tries to find in sound the material most correspondent to this subjective life" – and "romantic rhyme" with its "soul-laden note of feeling" is the inevitable result. Like Hallam, Hegel is eloquent about the pleasure we take from rhyme – although he considers assonance and internal rhyme, Hallam's "diffused resemblances," inferior to the "complete accord" of perfect end rhyme (1030). The more complex a pattern of end rhymes is, the more likely it is to produce pleasure in the reader. In terms that anticipate Hallam's "constant appeal to Memory and Hope," and call to mind another meaning of "romantic rhyme," Hegel accounts for the way we experience the time between rhyme words:

[I]t is as if the rhymes now find one another immediately, now fly from one another and yet look for one another, with the result that in this way the ear's attentive expectation is now satisfied without more ado, now teased, deceived, or kept in suspense owing to the longer delay between

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<sup>37</sup> The *Aesthetics* lectures were delivered between 1820 and 1829 and printed in German in 1835 by H. G. Hotho. Hallam's general familiarity with Hegel's thought is evident in a footnote to his 1832 essay, "Remarks on Professor Rossetti's 'Disquisizioni Sullo Sprito Antipapale,'" where he writes, "Hegel, who died last year of Cholera at Berlin, has been for some years undoubted occupant of the philosophic throne, at least in the North of Germany" (n. 250). Although Hallam read German (well enough to translate several poems from Schiller), it isn't obvious from the Oration that he knew Hegel's work on rhyme; it is more likely that both writers were working from the same sources, especially the Schlegels and Sismondi.

the rhymes, but always contented again by the regular ordering and return of the same sounds. (1031)

But even if rhyme brings pleasure, Hegel still insists that its sound is “coarser” and more “thumping” than “the delicate movements of rhythmical harmony,” and that it “does not need so finely cultivated an ear as Greek versification necessitates” (1028).

Hegel’s view of rhyme is consequently more ambivalent than Hallam’s. Although rhyme in its spirituality transcends the “stuffiness” of meter, meter nonetheless belongs to a prelapsarian period of linguistic plenitude. Only with the destabilization of absolute “natural” quantities that resulted from the barbarian invasions did the need for another prosodic system arise. Hegel’s tone is particularly elegiac as he describes rhyme as a bittersweet recompense, “the one possible compensation offered for this loss” (1027). So when he echoes Goethe’s question -- “Do the wide folds (of classical metres) suit us as they did antiquity?” (1031) – he is making a rather different point from Hallam. Hallam’s ancients were misguided in distaining the joys of rhyme and preferring quantitative meter instead. They assumed rhyme was a blunt instrument and therefore missed its most delicate and melodious operations. In Hegel, there is even less choosing. The ancients couldn’t have chosen rhyme even if they could hear it properly, just as the moderns cannot revert to pure quantitative meter.

This apparently small distinction points to a significant difference of opinion between Hegel and Hallam. In a further subsection within the subsections of “Versification” and “Rhyme,” Hegel, too, deals explicitly with “the origin of rhyme” – which he sees as an unambiguously Western phenomenon. The source of rhyme is to be found in “the rhythmical system itself”; it appears in embryonic form in a classical language – Latin -- when it turns to Christian hymnody, and it develops through the

innovation of Leonine verse.<sup>38</sup> If a non-Latin origin is required, Hegel offers an alternative: the Germanic languages. Even though “the truly harmonious sound of rhyme in its complete development is absent” in Scandinavian poetry, the example of the alliterative *Edda* shows a versification approaching rhyme (1026). What Hegel rejects outright is the Arabist theory that Hallam embraces:

On the other hand, of course the origin of this new principle of versification has been sought amongst the Arabs, but, for one thing, the culture of their great poets falls in a period later than the occurrence of rhyme in the Christian West, while the range of pre-Mohammedan art had no effective influence on the West; for another thing, there is inherent in Arabic poetry from its first beginnings an echo of the romantic principle, so that the knights of the West at the time of the Crusades were quick enough to find in the Arabic poetry a mood that echoed their own. Consequently, just as the spiritual ground from which poetry arose in the Mohammedan East was akin to that from which it arose in the Christian West (although it was external to it and independent of it), so we may conjecture that a new sort of versification originally arose independently in both. (1025)

Whatever evidence we might find for an Eastern origin of rhyme, Hegel assiduously dismisses. If quasi-romantic rhyming is apparent in Arabic poetry, it is an “echo” of European poetry, rather than an influence on it; if Europeans did in fact borrow from Arabic versification, it is only because it “echoed” forms and feelings that were already theirs; if, finally, rhyme *has* to have originated in the East, it must have been a simultaneous and coincidental – an “external” and “independent” -- development alongside Western rhyme.

Why does Hegel pay so much attention to a genealogy of rhyme that he doesn’t accept? In Simon Jarvis’s reading of this part of the *Aesthetics*, Hegel entertains such

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<sup>38</sup> Hegel 1025. “Leonine verse” is the name for hexameter or hexameter-and-pentameter lines governed by internal rhyme (one rhyme at the middle of the line and one rhyme at its end). The form flourished in medieval Latin poetry (Brogan, “Leonine”).

origin stories only in order to prove the intrinsic historical correlation between rhyme and modern (European) subjectivity. These competing narratives “are offered and then set aside in favour of an explanation which will carry the right sense of necessity.... Since its origins are *necessary*, rather than external, we may view rhyme, even, as one aspect of the conditions of possibility of that interiority – and this because, as becomes clear, it can in a certain sense be said that the *subject* rhymes, for Hegel.” At the same time, “rhyme is part of what allows a subjectivity thus conceived to sustain itself” (“Musical Thinking” 61-64). So Hegel’s romantic rhyme, with its “soul-laden note of feeling” both produces and answers to the modern subject’s new spiritual needs. Isobel Armstrong’s recent response to Jarvis’s essay takes a second look at what she calls “Hegel’s epistemological myth” (“Hegel” 133). Building on Jarvis, she further explores the implications of the historical rupture between “the time of rhythm” and “the time of rhyme.” Armstrong argues, in particular, that the different uses of the caesura in metrical versus rhymed versification – its transition from a concrete unit of time to “an abstract, empty pause” – denote in Hegel “a catastrophic break in history.” This “caesural thinking” does not simply describe the historical difference between an unalienated and alienated time; it is itself a modern, alienated mode of thinking (135). Variations on Hegel’s caesural thinking can be found in Shelley, Marx, Freud, and Benjamin, she concludes, where “Meaning is made in and by the gap [and the] empty space is the marker of modernity” (136).

Hegel (and Jarvis and Armstrong) clarify precisely what Hallam *isn’t* doing. While Hallam’s history of rhyme also postulates a break between the ancients and the moderns, he doesn’t conceive of that break as a traumatic rupture; on the contrary, it signals a

softening and enlarging of sensibilities, a refinement of taste. Rhyme does not spring spontaneously from older forms of Western poetics but develops in early medieval Asia and then travels into Europe, deciding, as he says, “the whole bent of modern poetry.” The external source that Hegel so strenuously (and so patriotically) rejects is the linchpin of Hallam’s idea of European literature -- which becomes modern only as it moves through diverse cultural spaces, accumulating influences.

### **Henry Hallam and the History of Literature**

Henry Hallam attended Arthur’s Cambridge oration as his proud parent, but he also happened to be one of the greatest living authorities on the literature of medieval Europe. In 1818, at the age of forty, he had published *View of the State of Europe During the Middle Ages*, which immediately established him as a major nineteenth-century historian.<sup>39</sup> He was also likely in the early stages of his own ambitious work of literary history: *Introduction to the Literature of Europe in the Fifteenth, Sixteenth, and Seventeenth Centuries* (first published in 1837-9; I treat this work at greater length in chapter three). Both of these multivolume studies give serious attention to medieval European literature. Even in the ostensibly less literary historical *Middle Ages*, he devotes several sections to the development of romance poetry and its culmination in the career of Dante, whose *Divine Comedy* he treats at length. Although Henry didn’t quite share Arthur’s passionate attachment to Dante – Henry would later call the poet his son’s “favourite” and “the master mover of his spirit” – they did share a sense of his enormous

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<sup>39</sup> According to Henry Hallam’s biographer Peter Clark, *View* was “one of the first major historical works to use the phrase ‘the Middle Ages’” (34).

historical importance (*Remains* xxxvi; xii). “His appearance,” Henry Hallam writes vividly in *View*,

made an epoch in the intellectual history of modern nations, and banished the discouraging suspicion which long ages of lethargy tended to excite, that nature had exhausted her fertility in the great poets of Greece and Rome. It was as if, at some of the ancient games, a stranger had appeared up on the plain, and thrown his quoit among the marks of former casts which tradition had ascribed to the demigods. (3.563)

As this passage suggests, Henry held a lower opinion of the troubadour poets who preceded Dante’s arrival on the field. Where Arthur characterizes their advent as “a thousand poets [springing] up, as at an enchanter’s call” (217), Henry’s comparison is less generous: they suddenly appear “like a swarm of summer insects...in the southern provinces of France” (541). (In *Literature of Europe*, this simile would soften a little to “the gay insects of spring” [32].) Henry finds their poetry tedious and superficial, but at the same time he credits them with inventing modern versification and laying the foundation for Dante’s prosodic achievement. In words that seem to anticipate Arthur’s view of rhyme, both in the Oration and “Characteristics,” Henry observes that “their poetry was entirely of that class which is allied to music, and excites the fancy of feelings rather by the power of sound than any stimulancy of imagery and passion” (410).

Although Henry Hallam’s *Literature of Europe* is preoccupied mainly with the literature of the Renaissance, it begins with a chapter on “The General State of Literature in the Middle Ages to the End of the Fourteenth Century,” which covers very similar terrain to Arthur’s oration. In this work, the historian addresses another issue at the heart of Arthur’s argument: the origin of rhyme. On this point, the two Hallams disagree. As Hegel did, Henry emphatically dismisses the possibility of an Arab origin, but he presents a different rationale for a Latin one:



I have dwelt, perhaps tediously, on this subject, because vague notions of a derivation of modern metrical arrangements, even in the languages of Latin origin, from the Arabs or Scandinavians, have sometimes gained credit. It has been imagined also, that the peculiar characteristic of the new poetry, rhyme, was borrowed from the Saracens of Spain. But the Latin language abounds so much in consonance, that those who have been accustomed to write verses in it well know the difficulty of avoiding them, as much as an ear formed on classical models demands; and as this gingle [sic] is certainly pleasing in itself, it is not wonderful that the less fastidious vulgar should adopt it in their rhythmical songs. It has been proved by Muratori, Gray, and Turner, beyond the possibility of a doubt that rhymed Latin verse was in use from the end of the fourth century. (1.31)

In Henry Hallam's account, rhyme evolves directly out of consonance -- the repetition of consonant sounds at the end of words -- instead of assonance; he is foregrounding a different part of the rhyming syllable's anatomy, and, in this instance, its less "musical" component.<sup>40</sup> Partly because Hallam is a meticulous historian, and partly because his histories are composed as books rather than lectures, he assiduously documents his sources. The "vague notions" of rhyme originating with "the Saracens of Spain" he attributes primarily to the misguided nationalism of Spanish Jesuit historian Juan Andrés: "Andrés, with a partiality to the Saracens of Spain, whom, by a singular assumption, he takes for his countrymen, manifested in almost every page, does not fail to urge this. It had been said long before by Huet, and others who lived before these subjects had been thoroughly investigated.... He has been copied by Ginguené and Sismondi" (31n).

Here, Henry Hallam handily sketches out two axes of the rhyme debate as it stood in the 1830s, with the Latinists on one side and the Arabists on the other. The Arabist theory reaches back to the seventeenth-century literary historian Pierre Huet (passing through Thomas Warton's "On the Origin of Romantic Fiction in Europe" [1774], to

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<sup>40</sup> On this point, he takes a different tack from both Hegel and Arthur Hallam.

which Arthur refers in the Oration), is elaborated by Juan Andrés in his *Dell' Origine e de' Progressi d'ogni Letteratura* (1782-99), and then is then “copied” by two high-profile members of Germaine de Staël’s Coppet group, Pierre-Louis Ginguené (1811) and Simonde de Sismondi (1813). In 1818, the same year as Henry Hallam’s *View* was published, another associate of de Staël, A. W. Schlegel, published a strong rebuttal to the Arabist theory in *Observations sur la langue et la littérature Provençales*. Rejecting the positions of Ginguené and Sismondi, who simply “reproduced” the “doctrine” of Andrés, Schlegel insists that “les sectateurs de Mohamet n’ont jamais eu la moindre influence sur rien de ce qui constitue le génie original du moyen âge”; the sectarians of Muhammad had not the slightest influence on anything that constituted the original genius of the Middle Ages. The taste for rhyme, he continues, is in nature and rests on a musical principle. We find elements of these consonances more or less in all languages (67-8). Like Henry Hallam and Hegel, Schlegel refuses to imagine what Roberto Dainotto calls “the exogenous origin of modern European poetic tradition”—the theory that Arthur accepts as “an undoubted fact” (“Arab Origins” 287; “Oration” 219).

Henry Hallam was, of course, uniquely positioned to evaluate the merits of Arthur’s literary historiography. When Arthur was still alive, Henry didn’t hesitate to express his opinion that the Oration was weaker than some of Arthur’s other work -- but he was proud enough to send copies of Arthur’s compositions to his friends, with a mild disclaimer about “the cloudy state of new wine, which will not disguise from a connoisseur’s taste a racy flavour and a strong body” and the reminder that “he is not quite twenty-one.” At the same time, Henry writes, “I am not perhaps quite misled as a father in thinking his performances a little out of the common” (*Letters* 505). After

Arthur's death, Henry would offer a more serious assessment of "Oration." In his touching introduction to the *Remains*, he attempts an even-handed evaluation, one that further explicates both the "new wine" and the "out of the common" qualities of Arthur's intellectual efforts:

Although the bent of Arthur's mind by no means inclined him to strict research into facts, he was full as much conversant with the great features of ancient and modern History, as from the course of his other studies and the habits of his life, it was possible to expect. He reckoned them, as great minds always do, the ground-works of moral and political philosophy, and took no pains to acquire any knowledge of this sort, from which a principle could not be derived or illustrated. ... In the history of literary, and especially of philosophical and religious opinions, he was deeply versed, as much so as it is possible to apply that term at his age. (xxiv)

Henry's characterization of Arthur's historiographic method makes a distinction between his own professional approach – "strict research into facts" – and a more intuitive kind of erudition. Instead of details, Arthur is concerned with historical forms, "the great features of ancient and modern History." We can recognize this quality in Arthur's broad-stroke delineation of ancient and modern prosodic systems, and the consequent conclusions he draws about the modern "soul susceptible of musical impression." But even if Arthur's style is looser and more imaginative than his father's, it would be difficult to overstate Henry Hallam's influence on his son's thinking, writing, and research. Not only was Arthur working, with the Oration, in his father's signature genre – European history -- but he was also clearly drawing on materials in various languages that he had special access to as the son of a professional scholar.

Perhaps the most important source that Arthur Hallam used for the Oration was one that he never named, Sismondi's *Literature of the South*. It is from Sismondi that Hallam acquired his theory of rhyme.

## Sismondi's Memory and Hope

J. C. L. Simonde de Sismondi has no real profile in Victorian studies. He is now better remembered as an economist whose political theories influenced Hegel and Marx. But in the nineteenth century, his historiography was well known. In addition to his literary history, he wrote a history of the Italian Republics and a history of France, running dozens of volumes.

Sismondi published *De la littérature du Midi de l'Europe* in 1813 (*Historical View of the Literature of the South*, trans. Thomas Roscoe, 1823), based on a lecture series he delivered in Geneva in 1811.<sup>41</sup> Embedded in the book's comparative historical narrative are specimens and descriptions of a variety of verse patterns from Arabic, Provençal, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese poetry. This was a common enough practice in literary history writing and had obvious pedagogical benefits, but it also distinguished Sismondi's work from the universal literary history of his predecessor, Juan Andrés.<sup>42</sup> Despite the "wonderful erudition" of Andrés's *Dell'origine*, it suffered, according to Sismondi, from a paucity of examples; as a result, "he has not succeeded in giving a clear idea of the writers and works of which he has collected the names, nor does he enable his readers to form their own opinions" (1: 32). Sismondi's books, on the other hand, introduced a large

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<sup>41</sup> The manuscript notes for these lectures are held at the archives of the Associazione di Studi Sismondiani in Pescia, Italy. I am grateful to the staff at the Archivio di Stato di Pescia for their assistance, and to Letizia Pagliai and Jacqueline de Molo Veillon for their warm hospitality in Pescia, as well as their Sismondi expertise.

<sup>42</sup> Warton uses specimens, too. So much so, in fact, that Wellek writes, "Warton's *History* became less a work of history than, for instance, Gibbon's or Winckelmann's books, to mention only two of the great achievements of eighteenth-century historiography. It was, first of all, an accumulation of materials, a bibliography and anthology, and only secondarily a history.... Warton thus combines practically all the older forms of literary history: the catalogue, the anthology with explanatory notes, the biography (though there is least of this)" (*Rise* 174).

audience, learned and lay, to an archive of literary forms with which they might not otherwise be acquainted.

In relation to Andrés's work especially, Sismondi's historiography looks more synthetic than original. As both Dainotto and Guido Ettore Mazzeo have pointed out, Sismondi takes whole paragraphs directly from Andrés.<sup>43</sup> Mazzeo, writing in 1965, was happy to designate Sismondi a plagiarist as a result, but Dainotto disagrees. He sees Sismondi's history as a "total rewriting of Andrés's theory" (*Europe* 161). This newer and kinder assessment actually comes closer to Romantic notions of history writing. Henry Hallam, who admitted that Sismondi "copies" Andrés, makes room in the introduction to his own literary history for a range of historiographic styles, from the bibliographically transparent and exhaustive to the more opaque. "Without censuring those who suppress the immediate source of their quotations," he writes, "I may justly say that in nothing I have given to the public has it been practiced by myself" (xiv).

For his part, Sismondi explicitly identifies with opaque style. Indeed, he regards this style as the enabling condition of his project. He makes his position clear in a lengthy meditation on the problem of originality in scholarship:

In the execution of a design so extensive, and so much beyond the capacity of a single individual, I shall not have the presumption to affect originality. I shall eagerly avail myself of the labours of the critics and literary historians; and I shall, occasionally, be under the necessity of borrowing from them their opinions on works which I have not myself read, and which I can do no more than point out to the attention of my readers....I here beg to acknowledge generally my obligations to all these critics, because in a work from necessity of so condensed a character, and composed to be read as lectures, I have frequently availed myself of their labours, and sometimes even of their thoughts, without citing them. If I

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<sup>43</sup> For lengthy discussions of Sismondi's relationship to Andrés, see Dainotto, *Europe (In Theory)* and Guido Ettore Mazzeo's *Juan Andrés: A Literary Historian of the Eighteenth Century* (1965).

had wished, as in an historical work, to produce my authorities for every fact and opinion, it would have been necessary to have added notes to almost every line, and to have suspended, in a fatiguing manner, the delivery of the lecture, or the attention of the audience. In critical history it would be ridiculous to attempt never to repeat what has been said before; and to endeavour to separate, in every sentence, what belongs to ourselves from what is the property of others, would be little better than vanity and affectation. (32)

Sismondi obviates allegations of plagiarism by referring to the inherently collaborative nature of critical historiography. Not only are claims to historiographic originality unsavory, he argues, they are founded on a fallacy. The genre of history writing depends upon the progressive, collective labour of a sequence of historians, while the pleasure of reading histories and listening to historical lectures depends upon a light bibliographic touch. The most enjoyable histories, he suggests, are those that do not belabor their all-too-obvious debts.

Henry Hallam's approach is different; he frequently acknowledges his own scholarly obligations to his multitudinous sources, including Sismondi. But he nonetheless writes admiringly of Sismondi's work, applauding the accessibility of its "flowing and graceful style": it succeeds, he avers, "in all that it seeks to give, -- a pleasing and popular, yet not superficial or unsatisfactory, account of the best authors in the southern languages (*Literature* ix).<sup>44</sup>

While Henry Hallam is explicit about his debt to Sismondi, Arthur Hallam is not. And there is very little documentation -- anywhere -- of Sismondi's influence on Arthur Hallam. Hallam's 2011 biography only remarks that he stayed with Sismondi, a family

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<sup>44</sup> Hazlitt reviewed the first, French edition in 1815, before Roscoe's English translation was available. This review article is considered to be "one of the most penetrating assessments of Dante written by any early nineteenth-century British critic" (Cignatta 69).

friend, twice while traveling through Switzerland in 1822.<sup>45</sup> We also know from Hallam's letters that he was, in the spring of 1827, engrossed in reading Sismondi's *L'Histoire des republiques Italiennes du Moyen-Age*, which had just been translated into English (*Letters* 27, 31). And *The Literature of the South* was most certainly in the family library, as Henry Hallam's extensive citations confirm.

Many of the moments in the Oration when Arthur Hallam's rhetoric is most stylish and most polemical seem to be drawn with little alteration from Sismondi's work – and in these borrowings we can perceive both the historical material *and* the assimilative historiographic ethos of Sismondi. For example, Hallam's insistence on the fictional status of chivalry – “In truth,” he writes, “feudality and chivalry correspond as real and ideal” – seems a particularly self-assured claim for such a young historian. It appears founded, though, on Sismondi's famous discussion of the same subject, where the more seasoned historian cautions,

We must not confound chivalry with the feudal system. The feudal system may be called the *real life* of the period of which we are treating, possessing its advantages and inconveniences, its virtues and its vices. Chivalry, on the contrary, is the *ideal* world, such as it existed in the imaginations of the Romance writers.” (Sismondi 76-7, emphasis mine)

When Hallam's discussion of European chivalric poetry turns to its Eastern origins, the same source is echoed almost word for word. Arguing that “in the forms of Arabic imagination appeared most probably the first pattern of the *amorous mysticism* [of the troubadours] I have been describing,” Hallam echoes Sismondi's treatment of the same issue: “This delicacy of sentiment amongst the Troubadours, and this *mysticism of love*, have a more intimate connexion with the poetry of the Arabians and the manners of the

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<sup>45</sup> Blocksidge (18). Sismondi was the brother-in-law of Hallam's close friend, the historian and politician Sir James Mackintosh, through Sismondi's wife, Jessie Allen.

East than we should suspect, when we remember the ferocious jealousy of the Musulmans, and the cruel consequences of their system of polygamy” (Sismondi 80).<sup>46</sup> I will juxtapose below a few of the most striking similarities between Hallam’s and Sismondi’s brief accounts of Eastern chivalry, in order to show how closely Hallam studied Sismondi’s work.

	ARTHUR HALLAM	SISMONDI
<b>1. THE PARADOXICAL NATURE OF THE SERAGLIO</b>	Slavery, and that to our ideas most revolting, is the general condition of the sex in all Asiatic countries; yet within this coercive circle is another in which the relation is almost reversed; and <i>the Seraglio, which seems a prison without the walls, within might present the appearance of a temple.</i>	Amongst the Musulmans, woman is a divinity as well as a slave, and the <i>seraglio is at the same time a temple and a prison.</i>
<b>2. THE PLEASURES OF THE SERAGLIO</b>	The cares, sufferings, the dangers of common life, approach not the sacred precinct in which the Mussulman preserves the idol of his affections from vulgar gaze. Art and luxury are made to minister perpetually to her enjoyment.	The Musulman does not suffer any of the cares, or the pains, or the sufferings of life, to approach his wife. He bears these alone. His harem is consecrated to luxury, to art, and to pleasure.
<b>3. THE CONDITIONS OF THE SERAGLIO CONDUCTIVE TO POETRY</b>	Customs like these, however pernicious to society, are certainly not incapable of charming the imagination, and of giving it that peculiar turn which we find in the Gazeles of Persian poetry, the Cassides of Arabian, and the forms of which were early adopted by the congenial spirits of Provence and Castille.	The songs in which he celebrates his love, breathe the same spirit of adoration and of worship which we find in the poets of chivalry, and the most beautiful of the Persian <i>ghazeles</i> and the Arabian <i>cassides</i> seem to be translations of the verses or songs of the Provencals.

It seems as though Hallam is either directly transcribing (from the Roscoe translation) or translating for himself Sismondi’s work on the transmission of the chivalric aesthetic

<sup>46</sup> Hallam borrows here not just Sismondi’s language but also the characteristically Romantic ambivalence toward the Orient. Edward Said associates Friedrich Schlegel with this particular kind of Orientalist racism. In Schlegel’s case, the “bad” modern Orient is Semitic, while the “good” classical Orient is Aryan (98-9).



from the East to the West. The descriptions of the seraglio as both “a temple and a prison” and the relationship of that environment to the chivalric sensibility in Provençal verse take the same verbal and syntactic shape in both Hallam’s and Sismondi’s histories.

The most intriguing instance of Hallam’s reticence about the Sismondi source is in his comment on rhyme, which reproduces almost verbatim Sismondi’s words on the same subject: “La rime est un appel au souvenir et a l’espérance” (*Midi* 1.115). Hallam’s phrasing, “Rhyme has been said to contain in itself a constant appeal to Memory and Hope,” acknowledges a precedent for this idea, but he never discloses the source. When Patmore quotes Hallam in 1857, he seems to be unfamiliar with the derivation of both this quotation and another insight that he attributes to Hallam but that also appears in Sismondi: that Southern European languages, because they are vowel heavy, are conducive to rhyme while the consonants of Northern languages equip them for alliteration.<sup>47</sup> Patmore’s praise of Hallam is extravagant and seems to rest mainly on these two passages from “Oration.” He calls him “a young writer who, had he lived a few years longer, would probably have been famous without the monument of the most beautiful elegiac poem of modern times” (31). In the scholarly edition of Patmore’s essay, the source of the memory-and-hope quotation remains obscure. By way of clarification, the editor’s annotation only suggests, “Sidney...Webbe...and Daniel all had recognized in

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<sup>47</sup> “The consonants held a very important place in the languages of the North, which abound in them, as do the vowels in those of the South. Alliteration, therefore, which is but a repetition of the consonants, is the ornaments of the Northern tongues; while *assonance*, or the rhyming of the termination vowels, is peculiar to the popular verses of the nations of the South, although the practice has been reduced into a system only amongst the Spaniards” (Sismondi 85). I’ve come to wonder if Patmore might indeed have been aware of the Sismondi source. His earliest allusion to this idea of rhyme uses the word “expectations” – either a coincidence of paraphrase or a sign that he first read the sentence in Roscoe’s translation of Sismondi.

rhyme an aid to memory” (Roth 88). Without the benefit of the Sismondi context, Patmore’s editor can only imagine the most practical connection between rhyme and memory: that rhyme is a mnemonic device. “Memory” registers for her in the same way it does for the *Oracle* writer; she reads it – via a tradition of English poetic theory – as mechanical rather than affective.

In Sismondi, however, rhyme is a visceral, sensory, and emotional experience. It brings together two pleasurable kinds of desire – a yearning for the past and a yearning for the future. It becomes a mystical and musical conduit of passionate feeling between poet and reader. This is a distinctly troubadour achievement, Sismondi tells us. Those poets, adapting the virtuosic monorhymes of Arabic lyrics, “varied their rhymes in a thousand different ways. They crossed and intertwined their verses, so that the return of the rhyme was preserved throughout the whole stanza; and they relied on their harmonious language, and on the well exercised ears of their readers, for making the expectation of the rhyme, and its return after many verses, equally productive of pleasure. In this manner, they have always appeared to me to have been completely masters of rhyme, and to have treated it as their own peculiar property” (89). Here is the passage that proved so generative for Hallam:

*Rhyme is an appeal to our memory and to our expectations.*<sup>48</sup> It awakens the sensations we have already experienced, and it makes us wish for new ones. It increases the importance of sound, and gives, if I may so express myself, a colour to the words. In our modern poetry, the importance of the syllables is not measured solely by their duration, but by the associations

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<sup>48</sup> It’s noteworthy that Roscoe translates “l’espérance” as “expectations,” rather than the more spiritually inflected and emotionally resonant “hope.” Hallam’s choice of “hope” restores the connotations of the original, whose context – a discourse on the affective qualities of Provençal prosody – more than justifies them. This choice on the part of Hallam also suggests that perhaps he was familiar with Sismondi in French.

they afford; and vowels, by turns, slightly, perceptibly, or emphatically marked, are no longer unnoticed, when the rhyme announces their approach and determines their position. What would become of the Provençal poetry, if we perused it only to discover the sentiment [“la pensée,” the thought], such as it would appear in languid prose? It was not the ideas alone which gave delight, when the Troubadour adapted his beautiful language to the melodious tones of his harp; when, inspired by valour, he uttered his bold, nervous, and resounding rhymes; or, in tender and voluptuous strains, expressed the vehemence of his love. The rules of his art [“la prosodie”], even more than the words in which he expressed himself, were in accordance with his feelings. The rapid and recurring accentuation, which marked every second syllable in his iambic verses, seemed to correspond with the pulsations of his heart, and the very measure of the language answered to the movements of his own soul. It was by this *exquisite sensibility to musical impressions*, and by this delicate organization, that the Troubadours became the inventors of an art, which they themselves were unable to explain. They discovered the means of communicating, by this novel harmony, those emotions of the soul, which all poets have endeavoured to produce, but which they are now able to effect, only by following the steps of these inventors of our poetical measures. (1.116-17; my emphasis)

This passage teases out much that remains implicit in Hallam’s allusion to Sismondi.

“Memory” and “Hope” gain a physiological concretion – they correspond to former sensations and ones that are wished for – but they also gain historical texture. More strongly even than in the Oration, prosodic music (composed of rhyme and its corollary, accentual-syllabic meter) is allied to the ineffable experiences of romantic love and courtly longing that achieved a kind of expression in Provençal poetry. Indeed, so bound together are prosody and feeling that future iterations of troubadour form will continue to elicit a set of feelings that hearken back to troubadour passion.

Significantly, though, in Sismondi’s mythology Provence *isn’t* credited with the origin of rhyme, or with the origin of courtly love; the Arabic world is. Nor is Provence the place where rhymed poetry was polished: that’s Renaissance Italy. But Provence *is* the crucial middle step. Provence is responsible for two related features of European

prosody that have had a lasting impact. The first is the discovery of affective, or expressive, form – that is, the way that prosody can be used to convey feelings that elude direct description. The second Provençal innovation, which is the natural extension of affective prosody, is the wild proliferation of “poetical measures” to reflect the almost infinite range of feelings in need of expression. From this historical perspective, Provençal rhyme is Janus-faced. It looks back to its early medieval Arabic origins, and it looks forward to its European Renaissance codification.

What might all this mean for a modern practice? Sismondi’s chapter ends here, and he doesn’t say. Hallam, however, seems to have been haunted by the question. As he worked on his translation to Dante’s *Vita Nuova* – which would have been the first in English if he had lived to finish it – he was contemplating the pragmatics of medieval prosody. He wrote to Tennyson, “I expect to glean a good deal of knowledge from you concerning metres which may be serviceable, as well for my philosophy in the notes as for my actual handiwork in the text” (qtd. in Motter 115). Henry Hallam also noticed Arthur’s fixation on “harmony of versification” and intolerance for “metrical harshness,” which he considered “a defect rather in the soul than the ear of the poet” (*Remains* xxxv-i). Certainly, Arthur takes pains in “Characteristics” to describe the affective quality of Tennyson’s prosody – and to frame it in baldly Sismondian terms:

Just thus the meditative tenderness of Dante and Petrarch is embodied in the clear, searching notes of Tuscan song. These mighty masters produce two-thirds of their effect by sound. Not that they sacrifice sense to sound, but that sound conveys their meaning where words would not. There are innumerable shades of fine emotion in the human heart, especially when the senses are keen and vigilant, which are too subtle and too rapid to admit of corresponding phrases. The understanding takes no definite note of them; how then can they leave signatures in language? Yet they exist; in plenitude of being and beauty they exist; and in music they find a

medium through which they pass from heart to heart. The tone becomes the sign of the feeling; and they reciprocally suggest each other. (194-5)

In this reading of “Oriana’s” sonic effects -- to which I will return in chapter two -- Hallam makes a direct link between Tennyson and the Tuscan poets; and I suggested earlier that this rhetorical move also works to identify Tennyson with Dante’s assimilative relationship to his own literary historical past. I want to touch briefly now on another, stranger way in which Hallam makes Tennyson a kind of personification of literary history.

Stepping back from Hallam’s characterization of “Oriana” as an example of neo-Dantean poetics, we can see a pattern emerge across the series of close readings that Hallam performs in “Characteristics”: his selection and presentation of Tennyson’s poems more or less matches up with his origins-of-rhyme chronology. Hallam begins with “Recollections of the Arabian Nights” and comments especially on its fresh and lavish images – just the qualities that Hallam associates in the Oration with the first rhymed poems in Arabic. He then discusses “Oriana,” an example of affective prosody that he connects with medieval romantic lyric poetry. Then he examines the more “English” specimens – the Shakespearean “Mariana” and “Adeline” – before concluding, as he does in the Oration, that “ours is necessarily a compound language” (198). Thus, the order of Hallam’s close readings helps construe Tennyson as both the culmination and embodiment of the literary historical route that he describes in “Oration.” From this perspective, Tennyson’s so-called modernity is not at all in opposition to the past; it is instead a confirmation that he has encountered and assimilated the whole history of modern prosody.

By grafting Tennyson onto the historiography of rhyme, Hallam performs a deft

discursive slide between literary history and literary criticism; suddenly criticism looks a lot like applied history. Hallam's greatest contribution to Victorian poetics is not to be found, then, in either "Characteristics" or the Oration, but in the reaction between the two essays. What had been in Sismondi a description of a specifically historical phenomenon -- medieval Romance-language poetics -- becomes for Hallam a historical-formalist way of reading.

## Chapter Two: Tennyson's Lyric Forms

In chapter one, I situated Arthur Hallam's thinking about poetic form in a contemporaneous discourse of literary history writing. I argued that Hallam's influential idea of rhyme – that it “contain[s] in itself a constant appeal to Memory and Hope” -- derived from debates about poetic origins, and particularly from the romantic historiography of J. C. L. Simonde de Sismondi. Although chapter one focused on Hallam's explicitly literary historical essay “Oration,” it ended with the claim that his better-known and slightly earlier review of Tennyson's poems should be regarded as historiographic literary criticism insofar as it models the transformation of literary historical theories into tools for close reading.

This chapter pursues that claim further, showing how Hallam's “Characteristics” essay uses Sismondi's literary historical categories to validate Tennyson's style in *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*. The Sismondian figure of the “Poet of Sensation” in particular helps Hallam describe Tennyson's inventive approach to lyric poetry and stanzaic form. In the second half of the chapter, I look more closely at two poems that for Hallam exemplify Tennyson's sensation poetics, “Recollections of the Arabian Nights” and “The Ballad of Oriana”; and I identify the ways in which those poems materially engage with Hallam's and Sismondi's ideas about the roots of modern lyric. With “Arabian Nights” and “Oriana,” we can see Tennyson manipulating the form of the stanza to create poetic effects that are recognizable as historiographic. In the case of “Arabian Nights,” Tennyson's virtuoso stanzas evoke Orientalist fantasies about rhyme's original relationship to creativity. In “Oriana,” Tennyson turns his formalism toward the romantic

pathos of “Memory and Hope.” Both of these poems find Tennyson dreaming, with Hallam, the medievalist dream of an exquisitely responsive form. I suggest, ultimately, that Tennyson’s lyric forms – with their ongoing commitments to the principles of novelty, specificity, and expressiveness – retain the historiographic investments of these early poems.

### **Stanzaic Meaning, Stanzaic Feeling**

We have many ways of talking about how poetic forms mean things and move us. We use the terms “mimetic” or “representative” or “allegorical” or “expressive” when a poet has contrived a special correspondence between a poem’s form and content – or when readers perceive such correspondences, whether or not they were put there by the poet. Is *terza rima* about the Trinity in Dante but about the wind in Shelley? Does an especially irregular metrical line in Milton feel like stumbling into sin? Does a disintegrating stanza express psychic disintegration?<sup>49</sup> These questions usually come down to, as Alexander Pope suggested, the poet making sound ““seem an echo to the sense,”” or as Samuel Johnson replied, the reader’s “mind govern[ing] the ear” (Johnson, *Selected* 457).

But Arthur Hallam’s idea of rhyme is different. It puts the emphasis on the form itself, on something already contained *in* the form that acts on readers if properly

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<sup>49</sup> This last item refers specifically to Yvor Winters’s idea of “the fallacy of expressive form” (1937) which rejects this very correlation (536-7). Winters used “expressive” and “imitative” interchangeably, because he was addressing with the way prosodic forms express or imitate feelings (in which case, for him, expressing and imitating amount to the same thing). Winters’s expressive fallacy was further developed by R. P. Blackmur in the 1952 essay “D. H. Lawrence and Expressive Form.” For a different understanding of these concepts, and a less formalist approach to them, see M. H. Abrams, *Mirror*. According to Abrams, “expressive” and “mimetic” denote two distinct poetic orientations, where mimesis refers to the representation of the outside world and expression is identified with the poet-centered project of the Romantic lyric.



managed. What would it mean for a poet to believe that rhyme “contain[s] in itself” this ineffable power -- that it was already expressive before the feeling and thinking poet even arrived? One thing it might mean – as chapter one suggested – is that the poet is engaging with historiographic ideas about poetic form and its feelings. Whether or not historical rhyme developed in the manner in which Romantic historiographers described, their theories about rhyme’s beginning as a medieval language of feeling mattered to contemporary poets; these theories were an essential part of nineteenth-century conceptions of rhyme, of the stanza, and of lyric poetry.

Tennyson’s rhymes have been viewed as representative and expressive since the nineteenth century. This has been particularly true of *In Memoriam*: from its publication onward, readers have noticed a felicitous correspondence between the poem’s rhyme structure (ABBA) and the poet’s elegiac intention. “How exquisitely adapted the music of the poem is to its burden,” wrote an anonymous reviewer in the *Leader* in 1850, “the stanza chosen, with its mingling rhymes, and its slow, yet not imposing march, seems to us the very perfection of stanza for the purpose”; and Charles Kingsley, writing in *Fraser’s Magazine* the same year described the stanza as “so exquisitely chosen, that while the major rhyme in the second and third lines of each stanza gives the solidity and self-restraint required by such deep themes, the mournful minor rhyme of each first and fourth line leads the ear to expect something beyond, and enables the poet’s thought to wander sadly on, from stanza to stanza...” (qtd. in Shannon 116). In recent years, critics have been just as eager to hear significant feeling in *In Memoriam*’s form – and frequently, as I previously suggested, with an ear to the “Memory and Hope” dynamics

that Arthur Hallam described.<sup>50</sup>

It strikes me as important that Tennyson thought he invented the *In Memoriam* stanza when he began to use it in the 1830s.<sup>51</sup> This means that he was writing in a stanza form that was both “so exquisitely chosen” and, in his mind, *new*. In its deviation from previous elegiac forms – from classical elegiacs, from Milton’s pastoral elegy, from Gray’s ABAB elegiac stanza – it looks like an attempt to think from scratch about the formal needs of elegy, a very different enterprise from selecting a stanza form ready-made and already freighted with generic and literary historical associations. From this perspective, Tennyson’s “In Memoriam” stanza is something like Dante’s invention of *terza rima* for the *Divine Comedy*: an effort, apparently, to make stanzaic meaning ex nihilo.<sup>52</sup>

And yet, that is an oversimplification of what Tennyson likely believed he was doing and, from the Victorian perspective, what Dante had done. For representative or expressive potential to be found in the organization of a stanza, that potential would have to be understood to be latent in a stanza’s component parts (rather than simply a product of generic convention). In other words the combination of fit and novelty only works if stanzaic architecture is believed to be generally, as well as specifically, eloquent. An

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<sup>50</sup> See Ricks (*Tennyson* 296), Perry (136), Douglas-Fairhurst (179-80).

<sup>51</sup> As Denise Gigante and Erik Gray have pointed out, he didn’t: it had been used previously by Jonson, Sidney, and D. G. Rossetti; and many have argued that the ABBA stanza is just the quatrain of a Petrarchan sonnet, isolated from the rest of the scheme. Tennyson wrote *In Memoriam* over a period of seventeen years, which means that the form belongs as much to the beginning of his career as to its maturity. For more on this question, and Tennyson’s decision to reserve the ABBA stanza for his elegies, see Ricks (*Poems* 2: 311-2).

<sup>52</sup> The *Divine Comedy* wasn’t the model for the form of *In Memoriam*, but Tennyson cited its comedic structure it as a major influence on his poem (see Ricks, *Poems* 2: 312; see also Milbank 185).

early theorization of stanzaic eloquence can be found in Dante's *De Vulgari Eloquentia* (1304) and *Vita Nuova* (1293), both of which are preoccupied with parsing the language of stanzaic form.<sup>53</sup> In *De Vulgari Eloquentia* – an account of Provençal poetry as much as a manual for composition – Dante describes the canzone's stanza as a “spacious edifice, mansion, or receptacle....a unified structure of lines and syllables bound by a certain musical setting and the harmonious disposition of its parts” (82), or a “poetic fabric” that can “rejoice in being woven” (85). The component parts of a stanza are called “feet,” “head,” and “tail” (83). This mix of metaphors – from architecture, music, textiles, anatomy – does not offer instructions for generating particular meanings or effects, but it does present the stanza as a set of elements whose combinatorial possibilities are neither fixed nor arbitrary.<sup>54</sup> The stanza is a built thing and the poet is, as Dante says of the troubadour Arnaut Daniel, a *fabbro*: a craftsman. In the *Vita Nuova*, the prose interludes are concerned with minute formal exegeses of the sonnets and canzoni (e.g. “This sonnet has three parts. In the first...” [79]), or with meditations on the numerological significance that moves between the poet-speaker's world and text, especially regarding the number nine.

What is less explicit in Dante's own work but explicit everywhere in nineteenth-century Dante criticism is the idea that the form of his poetry was a language in itself, and not just a vehicle for (or even an allegorical mirroring of) his poetry's propositional content. For Arthur Hallam, H. F. Cary's benchmark blank verse translation of the *Divine*

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<sup>53</sup> Volumes of Dante in had passed between Tennyson and Hallam as early as 1828. On Tennyson's early familiarity with Dante in the original Italian, see Pattison 115-6 and Milbank 186. Hallam refers knowledgeably to *De Vulgari Eloquentia* in his prose (248).

<sup>54</sup> For more on the relationship between anatomy and stanzaic form in Dante and the troubadours, see Giorgio Agamben's “‘Corn’: From Anatomy to Poetics” in *The End of the Poem* (1999).

*Comedy* failed to translate the poem, because it missed this important register: “So important an integral part of every great poem is its musical structure, that an admirer of Dante, however much he is compelled to admire Mr. Cary’s excellent work, must feel the infinite difference produced by that single alteration” (237).<sup>55</sup> For Thomas Carlyle, too, *terza rima* was a language appropriate to the internal rhythm of the poem not because it resembled it but because it was identical with it. The rhyme language – again, “musical,” “architectural” – *is* the poem and is inseparable from its passionate feeling.<sup>56</sup> That Dante’s theory and practice of the stanza were of keen interest to Tennyson is evident in the letter alluded to in chapter one, where Hallam solicited “a good deal of knowledge from you concerning metres which may be serviceable, as well for my philosophy in the notes as for my actual handiwork in the text” (Mottet 115). Tennyson’s reply has been lost along with all the other letters he wrote to Hallam (see Lang and Shannon xxvi), but Hallam’s request for help with his *Vita Nuova* translation indicates that he considered Tennyson to be as invested as he was in the material and philosophical dimensions of stanzaic form.

Indeed, Tennyson’s poetic output reveals a career spent in the workshop of the stanza. In the warp and weft of “The Lady of Shalott” (1833, 1842), in the prosodic mood

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<sup>55</sup> In his Gabriele Rossetti essay, Hallam writes, “In Dante...the form and spirit perfectly correspond as if adapted to each other by preëstablished harmony” (278).

<sup>56</sup> Carlyle was explicitly drawing on Coleridge’s Dante criticism. Rather than an “Allegory,” Carlyle saw the *Divine Comedy* as a “sublime embodiment” (97). Here is Carlyle’s language in 1842: “I give Dante my highest praise when I say of his *Divine Comedy* that it is, in all senses, genuinely a Song. In the very sound of it there is a *canto fermo*; it proceeds as by a chant. The language, his simple *terza rima*, doubtless helped him in this. One reads along naturally with a sort of *lilt*. But I add, that it could not be otherwise; for the essence and material of the work are themselves rhythmic. Its depth, and rapt passion and sincerity, makes it musical; — go *deep* enough, there is music everywhere. A true inward symmetry, what one calls an architectural harmony, reigns in it, proportionates it all: architectural; which also partakes of the character of music” (91).

swings of *Maud* (1855), Tennyson keeps striving for “the very perfection of stanza for the purpose” (qtd. in Shannon 116). Even in the blank-verse landscapes of *The Princess* (1847) and *Idylls of the King* (1859-85), he makes room for rhymed stanzas; and even his last poems appear to be fresh experiments in stanzaic form. The valedictory “God and the Universe” (1892), with its two quiet stanzas of rhyming tercets, rings with Dantean music.<sup>57</sup> At the same time, it has its own distinctive architecture -- long lines of seventeen syllables -- and its own expressive force, bringing both the minimal and the vast into the same stanzaic compass:

Will my tiny spark of being wholly vanish in your deeps and heights?  
Must my day be dark by reason, O ye Heavens, of your boundless nights,  
Rush of Suns, and roll of systems, and your fiery clash of meteorites?

Spirit, nearing yon dark portal at the limit of thy human state,  
Fear not thou the hidden purpose of that Power which alone is great,  
Not the myriad world, His shadow, nor the silent Opener of the Gate. (1-6)

This brief lyric, written the year Tennyson died, shows an unexhausted interest in the eloquence of stanzaic form, and an unending quest for new poetic languages. Such commitments won Tennyson the praise of T. S. Eliot. In a retrospective summary of Tennyson’s career, Eliot observed that “His variety of metrical accomplishment is astonishing”; he “extended very widely the range of active metrical forms in English.” Even in the earliest poems, writes Eliot, Tennyson “was doing something new...something not derived from any of his predecessors.” And in the mid-career *In Memoriam* and *Maud*, Eliot finds Tennyson exhibiting “the greatest lyrical resourcefulness that a poet has ever shown” (621-3).

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<sup>57</sup> I use “valedictory” in the modal sense specified by Justin Sider: as a kind of inverted elegy, uttered by the departing figure (488). Tennyson figures prominently in Sider’s theorization of the valedictory mode.

I want to pursue the possibility that Tennyson's interest in building new poetic forms was closely allied to Hallam's interest in the affective element of rhyme, its "constant appeal to Memory and Hope." I will suggest that the newness Eliot noticed in Tennyson's early verse forms was a product of his and Hallam's literary historical thinking, and the "lyrical resourcefulness" Eliot noticed in *In Memoriam* and *Maud* – the exquisite adjustment of form to feeling -- was a natural extension of that historiographic thought.

### ***Poems, Chiefly Lyrical***

Reading through Tennyson's first volume of poetry, *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* (1830), can be a disorienting experience. Superficially it has almost no cohesion, racing over a dizzying number of poetic forms, both traditional and new. Each of the fifty-five poems seems to test a fresh combination of rhythms, rhymes, and line lengths, as if the young poet is feeling around for something that works -- or trying to prove, in the manner of an embroidery sampler, that he can make *any* stitch work.

At worst, Tennyson's early critics saw this formal variety as the ineptitude of an amateur. John Stuart Mill, for instance, complained that he "often seems to take his metres almost at random" (qtd. in Jump 96); and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, although he commended the "beauty" of Tennyson's first productions, was distressed to find that he "can scarcely scan his verses." The solution that Coleridge proposed was a rigorous program of metrical training that emphasized consistency above all:

What I would, with many wishes for success, prescribe to Tennyson,-- indeed without it he can never be a poet in act,--is to write for the next two or three years in none but one or two well-known and strictly defined metres, such as the heroic couplet, the octave stanza, or the octo-syllabic

measure of the Allegro and Penseroso. He would, probably, thus get imbued with a sensation, if not a sense, of metre without knowing it, just as Eton boys get to write such good Latin verses by conning Ovid and Tibullus" (*Table Talk*, qtd. in Jump [164-5]).

Coleridge assumes that meter is a skill that Tennyson has not yet acquired. The undisciplined versifier, he suggests, must imitate examples of metrical regularity until he internalizes and is able to reproduce their rhythms, almost despite himself. What the poet of *Christabel* seems strangely to miss is the technical discipline with which Tennyson has approached his craft. Although his lyrics resist accentual-syllabic regularity, they do so – as the self-consciously experimental *Christabel* does -- in a theoretically consistent way.

The coherence of Tennyson's first book is difficult to perceive if we think of his prosody, as many of his critics have, primarily in terms of the metrical line.<sup>58</sup> But despite his later iambic achievements -- from the metronomic tetrameters of *In Memoriam* to the supple pentameters of *The Princess* and *Idylls of the King – Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* is quite systematically unmetrical.<sup>59</sup> That is, the majority of its poems are governed less by meter than by rhyme. Most lyrics display audaciously challenging stanzaic patterns – whether that means a complex entanglement of multiple rhymes or the increasingly improbable repetition of a single rhyme sound. Tennyson later expressed embarrassment at many of these youthful experiments and declined to reprint some poems that had particularly intricate metrical and rhythmic patterns, but it's clear at this early stage in his

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<sup>58</sup> For more on Tennyson's metrical irregularity, see Pyre, Ostriker, and Nabi. Alicia Ostriker discerns three prosodic modes in Tennyson's early verse: "ode" or "irregular," "stanzaic," and "sustained." In proposing this system, she is refuting J. F. A. Pyre's previous claim that the early poems are "strangely and rashly anarchic" (273). In a recent article, Jason Nabi treats Tennyson's irregular forms in relation to both the ode and free verse.

<sup>59</sup> In "Tennyson's Dying Fall," Peter McDonald makes a related point, emphasizing "cadence" over meter: "Tennyson is less a metrical poet than a poet who stretches, twists, and shapes, metre" (37-8).

career that the stanza, rather than the line or the metrical foot, is his primary unit of composition.

One discerning critic, of course, immediately recognized this. In his review of *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*, Arthur Hallam lists fourth among “five distinctive excellencies” of Tennyson’s style “the variety of his lyrical measures, and exquisite modulation of harmonious words and cadences to the swell and fall of the feelings expressed” (192). Hallam was making two related points about Tennyson’s use of form. First, the eclecticism that feels scattershot to Coleridge and Mill is a virtue. Second, and more than that, it is a sign of absolute prosodic control; Hallam suggests that Tennyson is unusually attentive to the relationship between form and feeling (as Eliot will later say, “Tennyson’s surface, his technical accomplishment, is intimate with his depths” [627]), and that attention necessarily results in a multiplicity of finely calibrated -- and differentiated -- lyrical forms.<sup>60</sup>

Undergirding Hallam’s praise is a well-developed, if unfamiliar, definition of lyric that both poet and critic seemed to share. For Hallam and the young Tennyson, lyric was an *idea about form*; it was defined not so much by the slippery abstractions of temporality and subjectivity -- the post-Romantic commonplaces, and recurrent problems, of lyrical studies -- as by formal virtuosity and formal expressivity.<sup>61</sup> Instead of

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<sup>60</sup> Eliot’s use of “lyrical” seems very similar to Hallam’s, and his reading of Tennyson’s forms has much in common with Hallam’s reading of the same. The striking similarities between Eliot’s and Hallam’s poetic theory have been discussed at length by Carol Christ (1986).

<sup>61</sup> Eileen Tess Johnston also makes a distinction between the Wordsworth-Coleridgean idea of poetry (based on sincerity) and the Hallam-Tennysonian one (based on craft) (18-19). For another take on Tennyson’s early conception of lyric see Linda Peterson, who argues that Sappho was Tennyson’s main lyric model. Robert Pattison reports that toward the end of Tennyson’s career, when Francis Palgrave was compiling a selection of the



the classical voice of Sappho or the Romantic voice of Wordsworth, its models are the sensitive rhyme schemes and innovative stanzaic designs of medieval romantic poetry, as those were described and interpreted by scholars of literary history.<sup>62</sup> This medievalist idea of lyric informs both Hallam's account of the "Poet of Sensation" and Tennyson's stanzaic music.

### **Sismondi and the Poetry of Sensation**

Hallam's review of *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*, "On Some Characteristics of Modern Poetry, and on the Lyrical Poems of Alfred Tennyson" (1831) is best known for framing him as a "Poet of Sensation" in the vein of Keats and Shelley, rather than a Wordsworthian "Poet of Reflection." The poet of sensation, according to Hallam, is an exceptional person, more alive to sensory experiences than his fellow men and more able to translate those experiences into poetry than the majority of even his fellow poets. Shelley and Keats, for example, were "susceptible of the slightest impulse from external nature, their fine organs trembled into emotion as colors, and sounds, and movements, unperceived or unregarded by duller temperaments. Rich and clear were their perceptions of visible forms; full and deep their feelings of music" (186). Tennyson, says Hallam, shares the sensitivity of Shelley and Keats – like them, "He sees all the forms of nature with the 'eruditus oculus,' and his ear has a fairy fineness" – but he surpasses both of these precursors, because he

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poet's lyrics, the two disagreed about the meaning of "lyric." Palgrave wanted to exclude sonnets, because they did not fit a Greek idea of lyric; Tennyson objected to this criterion (17).

<sup>62</sup> My aim here is not to discount the importance to Tennyson of particular precedents (Sappho, Wordsworth) or poetic traditions (classicism, Romanticism), but to supplement our understanding of his influences with an account of the impact of literary historiography – and especially medievalist literary historiography -- on his forms.

avoids their greatest ideological and stylistic faults. Ultimately, Hallam insists that in Tennyson, “the features of original genius are clearly and strongly marked...we recognize the spirit of his age, but not the individual form of this or that writer. His thoughts bear no more resemblance to Byron or Scott, Shelley or Coleridge, than to Homer or Calderon, Firdusi or Calidasa” (191). In this list of nonresemblances, Hallam is making a perverse sort of claim: Tennyson is *unlike* everyone else, just like the geniuses whom he in no way resembles. Throughout the review, Hallam treads this fine line between identifying Tennyson with his best precedents – whether in English or Greek, Spanish, Persian, Sanscrit -- and always distinguishing him from them. This is the central paradox of the poet of sensation: he is both generic and completely new.

The most influential reading of “Characteristics” is Isobel Armstrong’s in *Victorian Poetry* (1993).<sup>63</sup> Her book put Hallam at the center of the field, using his charismatic personality and the text of his review to introduce her case for the political and aesthetic sophistication of Victorian poetry. In Hallam’s account of the “two-fold consciousness” of the poet of sensation, Armstrong sees an early articulation of the “double poem,” which she takes to be the defining form of Victorian poetry (67).

Demonstrating the essay’s ties to contemporary comparative philology, historiography, theology, mythography, and philosophy, and its various debts to Kant, Herder, Schiller,

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<sup>63</sup> Of course, there have been several other serious treatments of Hallam’s essay, both before and after Armstrong’s. See, for instance, Johnston’s “Hallam’s Review of Tennyson: Its Contexts and Significance” (1981), which considers Hallam’s debts to the prose work of Romantic poets (especially Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Shelley). Steven Dillon’s “Canonical and Sensational: Arthur Hallam and Tennyson’s 1830 *Poems*” (1992) argues that Hallam is borrowing the rhetoric of sensation and reflection from the philosophy of Hume and Berkeley – but that “neither would posit a mind that exhibited a single faculty; reflection and sensation are caught up in one another” (97) – so he sees Hallam’s division of faculties as an original move.

Grimm and Bopp, she views it as a composite work whose conclusions are nonetheless “dangerously” original. Though Hallam’s key terms “sensation” and “reflection” bear a strong resemblance to Schiller’s “naive” and “sentimental,” Armstrong finds that they don’t quite correspond to either Schiller or Kant. She writes,

In taking over, via Schiller, the Kantian aesthetic of disinterested free play and making an intransigent distinction between sensation and reflection Hallam never fully defined what he intended by those terms. Emotion, feeling, sensuous experience, sense data, intuition, are all rather different but all possible significations of “sensation.” Unlike Kant, for whom “reflection” might be glossed as epistemological ideas (in the third critique at least) and ‘sensation’ as the unique representations of the data of experience by consciousness, Hallam was not exact and left unquestioned a dichotomy between thought and sensation which was filtered through Schiller into categories which actually construct the division they describe. (66)

Without disputing Armstrong’s claims for the importance of these thinkers to the Cambridge group, I would characterize the review as a reformulation more than a synthesis. Hallam found in Sismondi’s work many of his big concepts ready-made. As Sismondi himself was drawing on contemporary philosophical and philological thought, his work already contained the synthesis of ideas and discourses that Armstrong finds Hallam performing. Sismondi’s historiography is a theory of language, a theory of aesthetics, and a theory of history all at once.

The opening pages of *Historical View of the Literature of the South of Europe*, which present the unifying thesis of Sismondi’s survey, provided Hallam with the concepts he used to approach Tennyson’s poems. From Sismondi, Hallam gets the poet of sensation and the poet of reflection; from Sismondi (1: 25-9), he gets the diagnosis of modern melancholy and what he calls the “return of the mind upon itself,” with its turning away from “community of interest.” Hallam may have assumed his use of

Sismondi was transparent to his contemporaries in a way that it has not been to us — that his allusions to poetics of sensation and reflection required limited explanation because the Sismondi background was already familiar. In any case, what is remarkable about Hallam's essay is less the invention or adoption of these terms than their canny repurposing.

In Sismondi's books, sensation and reflection are historical categories, with periods of sensation yielding to periods of reflection in the development of literary cultures. It is not so much that sensation belongs to one particular historical epoch versus another (ancient versus modern, for example, as is broadly the case for Schiller), but that sensation and reflection are two successive periods within a particular national literature. The early Greeks and the Troubadours both shared the sensitive and creative energy that Hallam assigns to Tennyson: "Feeling with them takes the lead of judgment, and may conduct them to the highest results," Sismondi writes, "Such was Greece in her infancy; such perhaps were the European nations, in their first development, during the middle ages; and such are all nations which by their native energy rise out of barbarism, and which have not suffered the spirit of imitation to extinguish their natural vigor" (1: 26).

Concrete examples strengthen the polemical force of this distinction. By incorporating a wide range of primary materials — specimens of Arabic, Persian, Provençal, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese poems — Sismondi can make his case for revaluing the verse forms of early Romance poetry, which French neoclassical taste has turned against. "[A]s I have proposed," he writes, "rather to make the reader acquainted with the masterpieces of foreign languages, than to pass a judgment upon them according to arbitrary rules...I have had recourse to the originals as often as it was in my

power...and it is my intention rather to extract and give translations than to detail the doubtful opinions of critics” (1: 32-3). Sismondi wanted his French readers to judge historical romantic literature on its own terms, rather than holding it up to alien standards of taste. Though he translates his extracts into modern French -- and Roscoe further translates them into English in the 1823 edition -- Sismondi always seems anguished by the limits of translation. In his closing paragraphs, he all but begs his readers to spend a few months studying Spanish and Italian, so that they might better hear the music in these poems (2: 603).

One might think that Sismondi’s examples would be useful models for the working poet; they gather, all into one place and to an unprecedented degree, so much stanzaic variety. And framing all of these forms are discussions of the prosodic systems that govern the poetry in each language, sometimes even with scansion marks. But Sismondi’s introduction makes clear the difference between masterpieces and models. He insists that poets at the origins of literary cultures do not rely on models; they invent the systems that they use. When a culture first begins to express itself in its own literary language — when it has not yet begun to reach for the rules derived from other cultures and other languages — its poets are prosodic innovators. However, Sismondi cautions, the spirit of imitation inevitably creeps in. “Reflection,” he says, “soon succeeds to this vehement effervescence... The mind feeds upon its own enthusiastic feelings, which withdraw themselves from the observations of others” and “the energy of the mind is seen to react continually upon itself” (1: 27-8). Sismondi offers several instances of this decline: the Romans eventually copied the Greeks, the Arabs began to worship Aristotle, the Italians in the sixteenth century and the French in the seventeenth began to imitate the

ancients, and then the Germans, Poles, and Russians began to imitate the French. For Sismondi, the reflective turn tells in prosody. Reflective poets “encumber themselves with the fetters of a refined versification” and resort mechanically to “the return of rhymes which restrict their thoughts” (1: 27). So rather than presenting his poetic extracts as models to be copied, they often stand as poignant reminders of what was possible before European literatures became reflective.

As a result, the chapters that treat the origins of modern lyric poetry emphasize the ideal of formal innovation, using their extracts to demonstrate what poetic forms can look and feel like when they are not being imitative. The two poetic cultures that developed rhyme – medieval Arabic and Provençal – both wrote poetry that was “entirely lyric”; both poetries were characterized by deep feeling, especially “the passion of love” (80); both cultures highly valued the production of new forms of poetic expression. Arabic and Persian poets, rejecting the “cold” poetry of the Greeks, invented “bold metaphors,” “extravagant allegories,” and “excessive hyperboles.” “They burdened their compositions with riches, under the idea that nothing which was beautiful could be superfluous. They were not contented with one comparison, but heaped them one upon another, not to assist the reader in catching their ideas, but to excite his admiration of their colouring” (1: 60). On the authority of William Jones, Sismondi points to the same spirit of artful “extravagance” in Arabic and Persian versification, which apparently married formal constraint with prosodic pyrotechnics, as when “the same rhyme, or rather the same terminating vowel is repeated in every other line for several pages” or when the

poet “regularly pursued in his rhymes all the letters of the alphabet” (61).<sup>64</sup> In Provençal poetry, as we’ve seen, Sismondi found the troubadours expanding the affective range of this prosodic system, “var[ying] their rhymes in a thousand different ways” to express the varied and ineffable “emotions of the soul” (89, 95).<sup>65</sup> Though the troubadours adopted the subtle mechanism of rhyme from the Arabians, they are nonetheless “the inventors of our poetical measures,” because they developed the rhymed stanza as we know it, with its infinite variability (95). Medieval Arabic and Provençal poetry both appear as examples, on the world-historical scale, of what Hallam will term sensation poetics.

As I suggested in chapter one, “Characteristics” is a work of criticism that metabolizes literary historiography, turning Sismondi’s historical theories into a way of reading, and instructions for writing, contemporary poetry. It makes of Sismondi’s historicism a kind of formalism -- though that risks being a clumsy characterization of both writers’ work, which always seems to move smoothly between the macro and the micro, the world-historical scene and the prosodic detail on the page. In Arthur Hallam’s review, Sismondi’s historical categories are dehistoricized to the extent that poets of sensation and poets of reflection can coexist in the same temporal register. Yet his account of sensation and reflection isn’t without historical resonance. Echoes of Sismondi’s argument can be heard throughout the review, as when Hallam remarks that

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<sup>64</sup> For these descriptions of the poetry of the medieval Middle East, Sismondi relies on Jones, confessing that he is unable to read the poems in the original languages.

<sup>65</sup> The Renaissance critic George Puttenham had also associated “more compasses and interweavings” in a stanza with more intense emotional effects, writing that “very large distances be more artificial than popularly pleasant, and yet do give great grace and gravity, and move passion and affections more vehemently, as it is well to be observed by Petrarch’s *canzoni*” (177). After Sismondi, Hegel, too, identified “a more ramified figuration of rhyme” and “variously articulated and interlaced rhyme-strophes” as the special property of modern lyric. For Hegel, even when complex rhyming happens in epic, it should be understood as a lyric element (1137).

“the age in which we live comes late in our national progress. That first raciness and juvenile vigor of literature...is gone, never to return. Since that day we have undergone a period of degradation” (189). And elsewhere, “Hence the melancholy which so evidently characterises the spirit of modern poetry; hence that return of the mind upon itself” (190). The framework, then, of Sismondi’s historiography provides a context for representing Tennyson as almost impossibly gifted – as a genius out of time.

When Hallam finally comes to the critique of Tennyson’s poems, Sismondi is everywhere. Like Sismondi’s vigorous poets, Tennyson “imitates nobody” (191). Many of the “distinctive excellencies” of Tennyson’s style are in fact values associated with Sismondi’s medieval lyric poets – not just the “exquisite modulation” of meters but also “his luxuriance of imagination, and at the same time his control over it” (191). Indeed, the poems that Hallam chooses to close read are striking experiments in stanzaic and figurative imagining. The two that he treats first and at the greatest length are “Recollections of the Arabian Nights” and “The Ballad of Oriana” – two poems that, as Hallam frames them, borrow the formal methods of medieval romantic poetry. They evoke historical sensation poetics without copying – indeed, *by not copying* -- any particular historical form.

At first glance, these poems couldn’t be more different from one another. “Recollections of the Arabian Nights” is an Orientalist fantasy apparently inspired by two tales in Galland’s translation of *Arabian Nights* (see Ricks *Poems* 1: 225). The narrative is a child’s dream vision of a boat ride down the Tigris river in “the golden prime / Of good Haroun Alraschid” – the historical period, in fact, that Sismondi associates with the



efflorescence of medieval Arabic poetry.<sup>66</sup> Each of the fourteen stanzas brings the entranced child deeper into an increasingly luxurious landscape, until he finds himself face to face with a beautiful Persian princess and, finally, King Haroun Alraschid himself. “The Ballad of Oriana,” based on a Scottish border ballad, tells the tragic story of woman who is killed when she accidentally intercepts an arrow shot by her lover. The poem is a first-person account of the lover’s grief and regret. Formally, “Oriana” is distinguished by an intensely repetitive and recursive ballad stanza. Although these poems look and sound nothing alike, together they measure out the extraordinary scope of Tennyson’s early lyric craftsmanship. “Oriana” is a bold display of prosodic redundancy, testing the limits of a single rhyme sound, whereas the special accomplishment of “Arabian Nights” is its diversity of rhyme scheme within a consistent stanzaic frame.

The poems also appear to engage with two completely different generic and literary historical traditions: on one hand, medieval Arabic fiction and its appropriation by European Orientalism; on the other hand, early modern British balladry and its antiquarian revival. If “The Ballad of Oriana” seems to gesture toward the domestic origins of English poetry in English and Scottish song, “Recollections of Arabian Nights” dramatizes an encounter with literary otherness. But as Hallam reads them, the two poems are part of a unified aesthetic project and address themselves to a coherent historiographic theory. In Hallam’s Sismondian reading of Tennyson, literary history

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<sup>66</sup> “The celebrated Haroun-al-Raschid, who reigned from 786 to 809, acquired a glorious name by the protection which he afforded to letters. The historian Elmacin assures us, that he never undertook a journey without carrying with him at least a hundred men of science in his train. The Arabians are indebted to him for the rapid progress which they made in science and literature; for Haroun never built a mosque without attaching to it a school” (Sismondi 1: 51).

appears less as a motley collection of sources and models (e.g. the tale, the ballad; Galland, Scott) than as one long story about the origins of literary forms.

Obviously Hallam's historiographic literary criticism doesn't account for everything that Tennyson is up to in *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*. But it does help us see the historical aspect of Tennyson's early formalism – and especially how his stanzas can cite ideas about literary history without necessarily citing specific literary historical precedents (e.g. the ghazale or the ruba'i; or some familiar version of a ballad stanza<sup>67</sup>). Neither poem uses a recognizable historical verse form, but – and partly because of this -- their verse forms can be viewed as historiographic. These poems interest me because their formal engagement with literary history is both extremely concrete and extremely abstract. Tennyson uses rhyme patterns and stanzaic shapes to think, with Hallam, about originality as a historical phenomenon, about a tradition of poetic newness that reaches back into the distant past.

### **Impressive Form: "Recollections of the Arabian Nights"**

In "Arabian Nights" Tennyson combines heavy-handed historical fiction with this strangely sophisticated approach to historical form. The poem has fourteen stanzas whose proportions are tightly controlled. All of the stanzas are made up of eleven rhyming lines, and each of them culminates in a refrain that repeats itself, with only the smallest of variations on the same formula ("For it was in the golden prime / Of good Haroun

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<sup>67</sup> Meredith Martin has shown that, although the familiar 4-3-4-3 structure was common in English and described by Scott as the dominant form, there were actually many nineteenth-century ballad stanzas: "Variable definitions of the ballad stanza persist throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and do not solidify into the notion we have now (a quatrain of alternating iambic tetrameter and trimeter) until the turn of the twentieth century" ("Imperfectly Civilized" 351).

Alrashid!”). Here is the first stanza:

When the breeze of a joyful dawn flew free  
 In the silken sail of infancy,  
 The tide of time flow’d back with me,  
     The forward-flowing tide of time;  
 And many a sheeny summer morn,  
 Adown the Tigris I was borne,  
 By Bagdat’s shrines of fretted gold,  
 High-walled gardens green and old;  
 True Musselman was I and sworn,  
     For it was in the golden prime  
     Of good Haroun Alraschid. (1.1-11)

Within the uniform stanzaic frame, Tennyson’s rhymes appear inconsistent almost to the point of randomness, but his ability to sustain the impression of arbitrary rhyming across the sequence of stanzas results in a virtuoso display of combinatorial possibilities. The challenge Tennyson has set himself with this poem is formidable: devising a fresh interpretation of an eleven-line rhyme pattern for each stanza. It is a problem of probability as much as poetics. Because of its extraordinary exertions to avoid repeating rhyme schemes, “Arabian Nights” allows us to see prosodic variety as design rather than accident.

As Hallam remarks, variety is the guiding aesthetic rule of “Arabian Nights.” He attributes his experience of the poem’s “freshness” to Tennyson’s inventive picture-making. “Originality of observation,” he enthuses, “seems to cost nothing to our author’s liberal genius; he lavishes images of exquisite accuracy and elaborate splendor, as a common writer throws about metaphorical truisms, and exhausted tropes.” And Hallam is right: every stanza delivers new and gorgeous images of “citronshadows,” “diamond rillels musical,” “varycoloured shells,” “tall orient shrubs, and obelisks / Graven with emblems of the time,” the Persian girl with “argendlidded eyes” and “many a dark

delicious curl.” Herbert Tucker notes the lush, synaesthetic quality of many of these descriptions, “as if in Haroun’s pleasure dome the senses are temporarily divided...for the sheer pleasure of reunion” (80) – but we also observe in Tennyson’s extravagant figuration the unapologetic heaping upon one another of “bold metaphors,” a performance, in poetry, of “the idea that nothing which [is] beautiful could be superfluous” (Sismondi 60).

In this dream vision the visual world naturally takes precedence, and the profusion of nonvisual sensations tend to work in service of the visual to intensify its effect. The overwhelming variety that proliferates in “Arabian Nights” is of a distinctly visual nature, with disparate images coalescing into densely geometrical motifs. More striking even than synaesthetic slippages between eye and ear is the blurring Tennyson achieves between natural and artificial kinds of beauty and order. There’s little formal difference, for example, between the artisanal fretwork on “Bagdat’s shrines of fretted gold” and the latticework shadows of “the long alley’s latticed shade” (11.2), or the “shadowcheckered lawn” (10.3), or the sudden shift in the angle of the sun that

Flushed all the leaves with rich goldgreen,  
And flowing rapidly between  
Their interspaces, counterchanged  
The level lake with diamondplots  
Of saffron light... (8.5-9)

There is also a kind of visual rhyme between the “spangled floors” of the pavilion and “the starstrown calm” of the reflective river (4.3). And between the floral needlework of the “broidered sophas” and of King Haroun’s golden cloth -- “Engarlanded and diapered / With inwrought flowers” (14.5-6) -- and the following figurative description of a flowering field:

The sloping of the moonlit sward  
 Was damaskwork, and deep inlay  
 Of breaded blossoms unmown, which crept  
 Adown to where the waters slept. (3.5-8)

In some images, the handicrafts are concrete, and objects like flowers and stars are the ornamental representations that give them beauty; in other images, flowers and stars are part of the natural world and the handicraft is a metaphor for their pleasing organizational design. But the frequent slippages between one kind of patterning and another make these distinctions hard to keep track of and finally irrelevant. Ultimately, all of “Arabian Nights” feels like one continuous and richly decorated tapestry.

In their obvious craftedness, Tennyson’s variegated stanzas join in this unifying artisanal design. The intricacy of the “Arabian Nights” stanza draws attention to two related but distinct aspects of stanzaic form: the shape of the poem on the page -- what John Hollander calls “graphic prosody” or “the poem in the eye” -- and the rhyme pattern that seems to generate the shape (an appeal to both the eye and the ear).<sup>68</sup> In many poems these aspects are almost indistinguishable. Consider, for example, the opening stanza of “Mariana,” another poem from *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*:

With blackest moss the flower-plots  
 Were thickly crusted, one and all:  
 The rusted nails fell from the knots  
 That held the pear to the garden-wall.  
 The broken sheds look’d sad and strange:  
 Unlifted was the clinking latch;  
 Weeded and worn the ancient thatch  
 Upon the lonely moated grange.  
 She only said, ‘My life is dreary,  
 He cometh not,’ she said;  
 She said, ‘I am aweary, aweary,  
 I would that I were dead!’ (1.1-12)

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<sup>68</sup> See Hollander (277). When Wellek and Warren used the term “graphic prosody,” they were referring to scansion, rather than the poem’s shape (166).

Each of “Mariana”’s seven stanzas is structured like all the others, and each follows the same rhyme scheme (ABABCDDCEFEF), so that the outer architecture of the stanza and its internal music appear mutually constitutive. In “Mariana” the rhyme scheme works with line length to build the poem’s material form, and the rhyme scheme that the first stanza establishes becomes the norm to which each successive stanza conforms. In “Arabian Nights,” these two aspects of stanzaic form are pried apart. The visible stanza constitutes one kind of design, while each rhyme pattern constitutes another: a design within a design. Tennyson’s procedure highlights the aesthetic and synaesthetic experiences of stanzaic reading – and the hard work a poet performs to both enable and mystify those experiences.

Against its ornamented mise-en-scene, the acute formalism of the “Arabian Nights” stanza becomes legible as another feature of the poem’s Orientalist and medievalist aesthetics, insofar as it participates in the poem’s historical fantasy about the Golden Age of Islamic art and craft – its fantasy about a whole world wrought over with exquisite arabesques.<sup>69</sup> One way to visualize Tennyson’s impressive rhyme work in “Arabian Nights” is to mark out the “bands” between corresponding rhymes, a notation system used by George Puttenham in his *Art of English Poesy* (1589) to illustrate the range of rhymed stanza forms available in English.<sup>70</sup> Here, Puttenham’s system renders

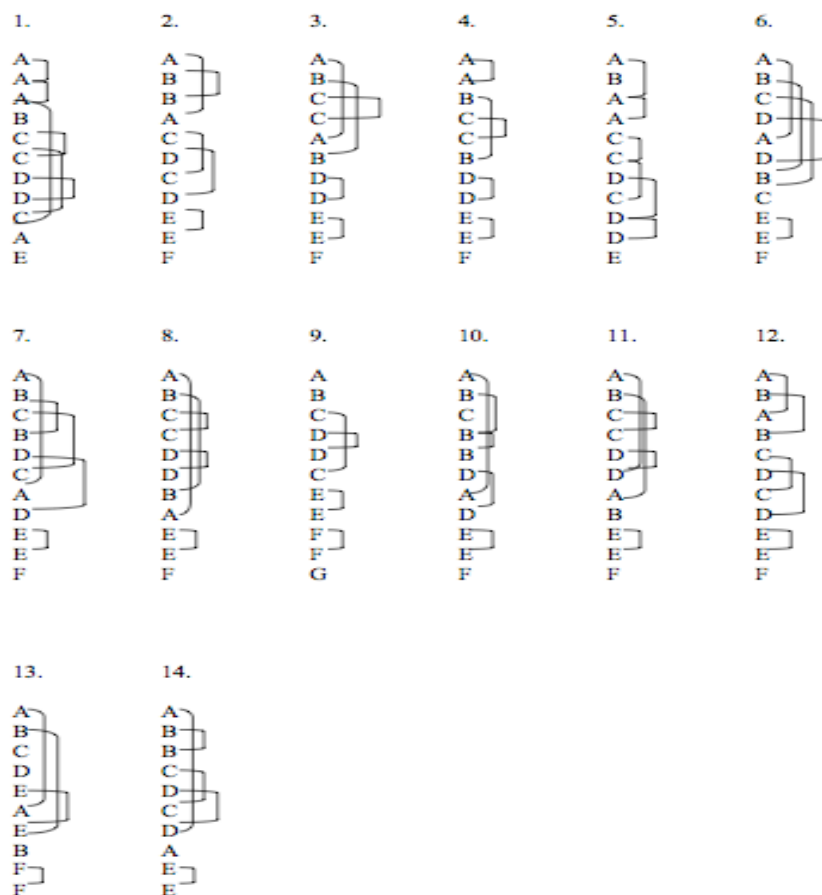
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<sup>69</sup> For the Arabic and Persian tradition of pattern poetry, and for Western associations of ornate surfaces (including textual surfaces) with “Eastern impulses,” see Hollander’s essay “The Poem in the Eye” (252). Hollander cites Puttenham’s treatment of pattern poetry here.

<sup>70</sup> The notation system I’m using is not from Puttenham’s discussion of pattern poetry; it is from his discussion of stave structure and its sound effects, and the visualization is merely “an ocular example” of what the ear hears. Puttenham justifies the visual representation of an auditory experience on the grounds of a “natural sympathy” between

visible the detailed prosodic “damaskwork, and deep inlay” of the “Arabian Nights”

stanza:



To the extent that these stanzas articulate the poem’s aesthetic fantasy in their rhyme patterns, they might be described as expressive: another instance of Tennyson using form to say more or better the particular thing he wants his poem to say. As I’ve been emphasizing, though, this is not a matter of finding in the archive of literary history a

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the senses: “I set you down an ocular example, because ye may the better conceive it. Likewise, it so falleth out most times, your ocular proportion doth declare the nature of the audible, for if it please the ear well, the same represented by delineation to the view pleaseth the eye well, and *e converso*. And this is by a natural sympathy between the ear and the eye, and between tunes and colors” (174-5). Arthur Hallam made the sensitivity of ear and eye a hallmark of the sensation poet: “Mr. Tennyson belongs decidedly to the class we have already described as Poets of Sensation. He sees all the forms of nature with the ‘eruditus oculus,’ and his ear has a fairy fineness” (191).

verse form that particularly matches the narrative or historical material of the poem. In fact, from the perspective of historical fidelity, the “Arabian Nights” stanza is an anachronism. It doesn’t look like Jones’s and Sismondi’s Arabic forms, with their elaborate systems of monorhyme or their pursuit, in rhyme, of “all the letters of the alphabet” (Sismondi 61). It looks more like Sismondi’s descriptions of the Provençal and Italian canzone, with its refrains and its interlaced stanzas and its acrobatic sestinas and its rhymes “varied...in a thousand different ways” (89). It looks less like a medieval Arabic poem, as that form was understood by European literary historians, than like the impact of medieval Arabic poetics on early European poetry: the effect of one culture of sensation poets learning from, but not exactly imitating, another. In other words, it is more a historiographic than a historical form. This poem represents literary history as a dream – or the *recollection* of a dream – in which, impossibly, “the tide of time flow[s] back with me, / The forward-flowing tide of time” (1.3-4). As each stanza circles back to its refrain, the poem reminds itself that “the golden prime” names a kind of desire – for perfection, for beginnings – rather than a historical time or place.

### **Expressive Form: “The Ballad of Oriana”**

While “Arabian Nights” is preoccupied with the seductive inaccessibility of origins, “The Ballad of Oriana” is – by Hallam’s lights – evidence that prosody archives the literary historical trace. In “Oriana,” Hallam finds the poetic technique of Romance lyric operative in ballad form, and this prompts him to elaborate the affective component of historiographic formalism: the idea that old forms carry the old feelings they were invented to express. Hallam’s reading of “Oriana” suggests that a poet’s deployment of



rhyme is always, in some fashion, medievalist -- and that a reader's experience of rhyme is always haunted by the literary past.

Hallam reads "The Ballad of Oriana" as an exemplary use of literary history. The title of the poem indicates that Tennyson is working within the ballad tradition, but Hallam maintains that "Oriana" is radically different from other "Modern Ballads" in its careful negotiation of the relationship between new and old. Tennyson's great achievement, according to Hallam, lies in his ability to differentiate between an imitative use of literary conventions and a creative application of literary historical lessons:

We know no more happy seizure of the antique spirit in the whole compass of our literature; yet there is no foolish self-desertion, no attempt at obliterating the present, but everywhere a full discrimination of how much ought to be yielded and how much retained. The author is well aware that the art of one generation cannot become that of another by any will or skill; but the artist may transfer the spirit of the past, making it a temporary form for his own spirit, and so effect, by idealizing power, a new and legitimate combination. If we were asked to name among the real antiques that which bears greatest resemblance to this gem, we should refer to the ballad of *Fair Helen of Kirkconnel Lea* in the *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*. It is a resemblance of mood, not of execution. They are both highly wrought lyrical expressions of pathos; and it is very remarkable with what intuitive art every expression and cadence in *Fair Helen* is accorded to the main feeling. (194)

Instead of naming the concrete narrative or generic materials that Tennyson borrows from the ballad tradition – and they are many: the trope of tragic love, for instance, or the form of the refrain – Hallam emphasizes the "spirit" of the old ballads that Tennyson has managed to distill into a new "form" that partakes of both the past and the present.<sup>71</sup> As a

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<sup>71</sup> Later in the century, Walter Pater described the "aesthetic poetry" of William Morris with a similar sense of the difference between an antiquarian and a more deeply historicist orientation toward literary history. Morris's poetry is "like some strange flowering after date, it renews on a more delicate type the poetry of a past age, but must not be confounded with it" (213). Morris's is not a "vain antiquarianism" but a "profounder medievalism," because his poetry takes account of the "composite

poet of sensation, it is important that Tennyson's procedure owes as much to his poetic feeling as it does to his poetic skill. "Oriana" is "highly wrought" in two different but involved ways: it is a masterfully executed artwork, and it is also an expression of passionate emotion. Through the same "intuitive art" that governs the "Fair Helen" ballad, Tennyson creates an original poem that operates in the same way that "Fair Helen" does: by establishing a correspondence between the poem's formal and affective registers.<sup>72</sup>

But Hallam insists that "Oriana" goes farther even than "Fair Helen" does in this kind of correspondence, and that it derives inspiration from a deeper literary source than Scottish balladry: the lyric poetry of medieval Italy. Hallam suggests that lyric poetry is in fact defined by an idea of expressive form:

The characters that distinguish the language of our lyrical from that of our epic ballads have never yet been examined with the accuracy they deserve. But, beyond question, the class of poems which in point of harmonious combination *Oriana* most resembles, is the Italian. Just thus the meditative tenderness of Dante and Petrarch is embodied in the clear, searching notes of Tuscan song. These mighty masters produce two-thirds of their effect by *sound*. Not that they sacrifice sense to sound, but that sound conveys their meaning where words would not. (194)

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experience of all the ages" that have passed since the medieval era. Pater writes, "It is one of the charming anachronisms of a poet, who, while he handles an ancient subject, never becomes antiquarian, but animates his subject by keeping it always close to himself" (222-3). Carolyn Williams's reading of this Pater essay offers a helpful gloss on Hallam's sense of history, too. Of Pater she writes, "The very quality that makes it 'aesthetic'... is its poetic involvement in the question of whether (and how) a past age can be represented in the present. Pater argues that aesthetic poetry imitates a former age and poetic style, not with the mimetic aim of reproducing the former age, but with the antithetical aim of differentiating it *from*, and the synthetic aim of comprehending it *within*, the present" (58).

<sup>72</sup> No one has disputed Hallam's claim that "Fair Helen of Kirkconnell Lea" is the immediate source for "The Ballad of Oriana." Ricks reports, "FitzGerald, in his copy of 1842 (*Trinity College*), says that the poem was 'in some measure inspired' by the ballad of Helen of Kirkconnell. T. knew it by heart (*Mem.* I 48), presumably in the version given in Scott's *Minstrelsy*" (*Poems* 1: 247).

Whereas “Fair Helen” uses “every expression and cadence” to shore up its atmospheric effects, Tuscan poetry works with smaller prosodic units: “notes” and “tones.” It uses a “harmonious combination” of individual sounds, and these combined sounds are expressive in ways that phrases, words, and larger rhythmic patterns are not.<sup>73</sup> Echoing Sismondi’s description of troubadour rhyme, Hallam remarks that “there are innumerable shades of fine emotion in the human heart... which are too subtle and too rapid to admit of corresponding phrases.... Yet they exist...and in music they find a medium through which they pass from heart to heart. The tone becomes the sign of the feeling; and they reciprocally suggest each other” (195). This is the musical and emotional language of form that Hallam and Carlyle heard in Dante’s *terza rima*, and that Sismondi traced to the troubadour lyric stanza. Hallam does not name outright the poetic effect that he is describing (as assonance or rhyme); he stays at the level of abstraction and more or less sustains the conceit of music. But if we follow his argument about the differences between “Oriana” and “Fair Helen” farther than he does, we can see how vowel tones and their rhymes might accumulate into feelings.

The most obvious connection between the two poems is the story, which turns on a tragic accident that leaves the heroine dead. In “Fair Helen,” Helen intercepts a shot meant for her lover and fired by his rival, and the lover’s consequent retaliation is

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<sup>73</sup> In the twentieth century, Ezra Pound made a remarkably similar observation about the expressiveness of “pure sound” in Dante’s verse: “Dante has the advantage [over Shakespeare] in points of pure sound; his onomatopoeia is not a mere trick of imitating the natural noises, but is mastery in fitting the inarticulate sound of a passage to the mood or to the quality of voice which expresses that mood or passion which the passage expresses” (*Spirit* 160). In the essay “How to Read,” he calls this condition “MELOPOEIA, wherein the words are charged, over and above their plain meaning, with some musical property, which directs the bearing or trend of that meaning” (*Polite* 170).

gruesome: “I hacked him in pieces sma,” he tells us in his capacity as speaker. In “Oriana,” the pathos is pitched higher still, as Oriana is shot by the lover himself when his target steps aside and leaves her in his arrow’s path. This is a significant revision, since it means that the speaker of “Oriana” is doubly burdened -- with the loss of his beloved as well as with the unbearable knowledge that he is himself responsible for her death. When he exclaims, “Oh cursed hand! oh cursed blow! / Oriana!” it is a cry of self-reproach for a starkly unredeemable loss. When Helen’s lover utters almost the same words, the effect is quite different: his affirmation of vengeance also pays tribute to a sacrifice that is not without its martyrly beauty:

Curst be the heart, that thought the thought,  
And curst the hand, that fired the shot,  
When in my arms burd Helen dropt,  
And died to succour me!      (2.5-8)

Just as Tennyson borrows the tragic outline of the ballad’s narrative only to magnify its tragic possibilities, he approaches the ballad’s form in the spirit of hyperbole. Scott’s “Fair Helen” stanza is made up of a monorhymed triplet and a fourth line whose rhyme remains consistent throughout the poem. In five of the ten stanzas, the fourth line acts as a refrain, establishing and circling back to the one central location of all of the narrative’s key events -- Helen’s death, the murder of her murderer, the place of her burial and grave, the place where the lover wishes to be buried in turn -- “On fair Kirkconnel Lea.” In the ballad’s first stanza, the narrative quality of this fourth-line refrain is immediately apparent.

I wish I were where Helen lies,  
Night and day on me she cries,  
O that I were where Helen lies,  
On fair Kirkconnel Lea!      (2.1-4)

In the remaining five stanzas, however, the fourth line only rhymes with this refrain (most frequently on the word “me”) and doesn’t restate it.

Tennyson references these elements of rhyme and refrain but presses them to extraordinary new lengths. Instead of using a rhyming triplet and a final refrain, his poem’s stanza monorhymes five times and obsessively rings its refrain – simply the word *Oriana* – a remarkable four times, between almost every narrative line. In the first stanza of Tennyson’s poem, the affective consequences of this sonic thickening are impossible to miss.

My heart is wasted with my woe,  
           Oriana.  
 There is no rest for me below,  
           Oriana.  
 When the long dun wolds are ribbed with snow,  
 And loud the Norland whirlwinds blow,  
           Oriana,  
 Alone I wander to and fro,  
           Oriana.                  (1.1-9)

Tennyson’s first line sounds a lot like the ballad’s first line; it has the same tone of desolation, the same iambic tetrameter rhythm, and it begins accumulating a similar sequence of *w* sounds – compare “My heart is **w**asted **w**ith my **w**oe” to “I wish I **w**ere **w**here Helen lies” --but very quickly the hard alliterative edges soften and the pattern of open-mouthed vowels emerges as dominant: *woe, Oriana, no, below, Oriana, long, wolds, snow, Oriana, loud, Norland, blow, alone, fro, Oriana*. The pain that the poem describes becomes an audible – almost a visible -- howl.

The most notable difference between Tennyson’s prosody and the ballad that inspired him, then, is the density of vowel sounds and the consequent intensification of the affective element – in Hallam’s terms, the Italianization of the ballad material. So

where the speaker of “Fair Helen” simply *describes* the experience of being haunted by the lost woman –

Night and day on me she cries;  
Out of my bed she bids me rise,  
Says, "haste, and come to me!" (2.26-8)

-- “Oriana” makes haunting an effect of form. The speaker’s subjective experience is not, as it is in “Fair Helen,” hygienically sealed in the poem’s diegesis; it has seeped outward to the very shape of the poem. “Oriana”’s persistent refrain performs the speaker’s stymied efforts at coming to terms with his loss in a series of increasingly urgent vocatives:

Oh! breaking heart that will not break,  
Oriana,  
Oh! pale, pale face so sweet and meek,  
Oriana,  
Thou smilest, but thou dost not speak,  
And then the tears run down my cheek,  
Oriana:  
What wantest thou? whom dost thou seek,  
Oriana? (8.1-9)

This refrain invokes ballad conventions but also – in its excesses -- defamiliarizes them. For Hallam, the excessiveness is the point; after entertaining the idea that “the name occurs once too often in every stanza,” he concludes that “the proportion of the melodious cadences to the pathetic parts of the narration could not be diminished without materially affecting the rich lyrical impression of the ballad” (195). And it is true that *Oriana* behaves strangely for a refrain. Unlike the phrase “On fair Kirkconnell Lea,” the repetition of *Oriana* does almost no contextualizing work. Once Tennyson has established that Oriana is the sole object of the speaker’s thoughts, the word can only be an index of the speaker’s unrelenting grief – his singularly heavy “burden.” Rhetorically,

it is pure apostrophe: the Petrarchan lyric address as ballad refrain. Sonically, it is as close to pure assonance as a multisyllabic word can come: the Petrarchan feminine rhyme on overdrive. As Anna Barton compellingly argues, “*Oriana*” “is so pervasive that the arrow can hit no other target”; in the repetition of the heroine’s name, the stanza offers a formal analogue for the fatal intercession of *Oriana*’s body “atween” the speaker and the arrow meant for him (24).

By reducing the ballad refrain to just one word, and by expanding the field of action of that one word to the entire stanza, Tennyson blurs the distinction between refrain and rhyme. If refrain creates continuity across stanzas, *Oriana* is a refrain, because all the stanzas share the recurrence of that word. But the sequence of *Orianas* also constitutes an internal structure within each stanza, one that plays against its system of monorhymes to become something both less and more than monorhyme: a scheme of identical rhymes. Identical rhyme is less of a rhyme than monorhyme, because it doesn’t fulfill what we think of as the basic requirement of rhyme: the combination of repetition and difference that is apparent in the shift from, say, “cheek” to “seek.” But for the same reason, identical rhyme is a stronger and more perfect rhyme than monorhyme, achieving the objectives of monorhyme more completely than monorhyme can. The feeling of melancholic inertia that the monorhymes already produce in “The Ballad of *Oriana*” is exacerbated by a contrapuntal rhyme scheme that *won’t* evolve with each new iteration in its sequence. Here, rhyme’s appeal to memory becomes traumatic: in Hallam’s Sismondian terms, the poem suffers from too much memory, and too little hope. Tennyson has isolated the most expressive elements of the medieval stanza, and he has made them the primary material of his poem. In doing so, he calls attention to the quiet

persistence of Romance poetics – its techniques, its effects -- in all modern European stanzaic forms.

### **Lyric Writing**

It is easy to see why Hallam chooses “The Ballad of Oriana” as a case study for Tennyson’s poetic method in *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*. It offers a vivid performance of the theory of sensation poetics. Tennyson’s form is not imitative; it seems to be brand new and, like the “Arabian Nights” stanza, developed precisely for its occasion. One could hardly imagine the same stanza being so appropriate to any other poem, or imagine the same poem with a different stanza. And Hallam insists that this particular fit of form to affective content – of “tone” to “feeling” -- makes the poem *lyrical*. That is, the extravagant quantity of sad and sonorous *Orianas* produces “the rich lyrical impression of the ballad.”

Hallam’s definition of the lyrical thus involves a form that is full of feeling, but the feeling in “Oriana” is of a special kind. It isn’t exactly Tennyson’s feeling – or if it is, it is Tennyson’s feeling for feeling and for affective form, rather than an expression of his own subjective experience. This idea of lyric is romantic and expressive, but not in the ways that are usually meant when “the Romantic lyric” is invoked. It is romantic in a historiographic sense: it derives from ideas like those of Sismondi, about what modern poetic forms were invented to do when the Romance languages were first coming into being. And it is expressive insofar as it reaches for an always subtler and more perfect correspondence between the poem’s feeling and its form.

This idea of lyric is less a set of generic conventions than a compositional



principle drawn from literary historiography, and I think it begins to explain many things about Tennyson and his era that I can only gesture at here: Why Tennyson's career was marked by such an incredible proliferation of new forms, with stanzaic invention characterizing his last poems as much as his first. Why, as George Saintsbury observed, the Victorian period in general saw such a "great multiplication of metres" (*Prosody* 508). Why Tennyson's long dramatic monologue project, already nascent in "Oriana," can be understood as a lyric project, too. Why the nineteenth-century ballad can be lyrical, and why the "lyrical ballad" is not necessarily a paradoxical, or even a hybrid, form (see Curran 182). Why, as recent poetic theorists have shown, the word *lyric* came to encompass so many diverse poetic genres in the nineteenth century. This wasn't only because "lyric" became a synonym for all poetry, because a "history of lyric reading" made the concept increasingly abstract (see Jackson and Prins 1-8). It was also because, for Victorians, lyric was so concrete: it was a quality to be found in the forms of poems, and in the very fact of formal heterogeneity. In addition to a theory of lyric reading, then, we might need a theory of lyric writing. Does the ghost of Arthur Hallam point the way?

### Chapter Three: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Unblank Verse

Is rhymelessness really the essence of blank verse? To ask this question in another way, consider two passages of verse by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, one published in 1850 and the other in 1856:

... 'Nay' is worse  
 From God than from all others, O my **friend**!  
 Men could not part us with their worldly jars,  
 Nor the seas change us, nor the tempests bend:  
 Our hands would touch for all the mountain-bars,-  
 And, heaven being rolled between us at the **end**,  
 We should but vow the faster for the stars.

*(Sonnets from the Portuguese 2.8-14)*

Of writing many books there is no **end**;  
 And I who have written much in prose and verse  
 For others' uses, will write now for mine,-  
 Will write my story for my better self  
 As when you paint your portrait for a **friend**,  
 Who keeps it in a drawer and looks at it  
 Long after he has ceased to love you, just  
 To hold together what he was and is.

*(Aurora Leigh 1.1-8)*

The first one is the closing sestet of the second sonnet of *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, and we can recognize immediately the Petrarchan sequence of end rhymes that bind the sestet together: friend, jars, bend, bars, end, stars. The second one is the opening octave of *Aurora Leigh*. The rhyme scheme is much looser, but it is apparent nonetheless. The strongest rhyme is a repetition from the sonnet, and it is a rhyme that shows up all over EBB's corpus: "end" and "friend." This rhyme helps define the octave as an octave, at the same time as it subdivides the octave into a pair of quatrains. That is, the symmetrical positioning of the rhyme words at the ends of lines 1 and 5 seems to mark out the verse as

a well-appointed (if minimalist) stanzaic room. And, once we realize that we're in such a room, we start to perceive its more modest decorations, like the half rhyme of "it" and "is" along the right-hand margin. If we keep looking and listening, resemblances are everywhere. The assonance of "end" and "friend" reverberates in "better," "self," "when," and "together." Within individual lines, there are other alliterative and assonantal echoes: "story for," "paint your portrait for," "he has ceased." Like the sonnet sestet, this stanza is limned by end rhyme, but it is also held together by a dense constellation of more subtle sound effects.

Why does it feel perverse to describe the opening lines of *Aurora Leigh* as a rhymed stanza rather than a verse paragraph? Perhaps because *Aurora Leigh* is EBB's masterpiece of blank verse, and literary history seems to tell us that blank verse is a triumphantly rhymeless form: it was adopted by Milton in 1667 as a reproach to the "barbarous" medieval culture that produced rhyme, and after Milton it evolved toward increasingly open forms. Milton's negative definition -- "English heroic verse without rhyme" -- has persisted through centuries of use (2). In 1705, Addison described the form as verse "where there is no rhyme" (41). The 1785 edition of Johnson's dictionary defined it as verse "without rhyme; where the rhyme is *blanched*, or missed," and the Victorian forerunner of the *OED* concurred (Murray 902). Blank verse is still basically understood as "unrhymed."<sup>74</sup> This opposition affects readings of many Victorian poets who wrote in both blank verse and stanzaic forms. Certainly, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Petrarchan sonnets are seen to represent her engagement with medieval

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<sup>74</sup> See the current entries on "blank verse" in M. H. Abrams's *Glossary of Literary Terms* (33) and the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Weismiller).

rhymed lyric, whereas her blank-verse *Aurora Leigh* apparently belongs to another canon altogether: an epic lineage reaching back through Milton, Virgil, and Homer.

Yet categories of rhyme and rhymelessness are an awkward fit for the poetry of Elizabeth Barrett Browning (EBB), who was notorious for rhymes that did not rhyme enough.<sup>75</sup> *Sonnets from the Portuguese* is full of off-rhymes (*move/strove*, *ways/grace*), while *Aurora Leigh* employs the range of rhyme effects I enumerated above -- from unusually dense patterns of internal rhyme, alliteration, assonance, and consonance to perfect end rhymes that turn verse paragraphs into stanzas. An early reviewer, struggling to identify the melody of *Aurora Leigh*, observed that it “has not the measured cathedral flow of the Miltonic blank verse”: “it catches the sound of the oak wrestling in the storm, but it listens to the song-bird also” (“Aurora Leigh” 182). There are compelling formal reasons, then, to suppose a continuous prosodic project across EBB’s varied body of work. Rather than two poles of rhyme and not-rhyme, her poetry suggests a spectrum of rhyme gradations.

There are historical reasons, too. EBB’s poetry owes much to her encounters with literary history; her extensive study of classical and modern literature is well documented both in the criticism and in her own letters. But her relationship to literary history went further. She was also deeply invested in the nineteenth-century discourse of literary historiography, those competing narratives that dramatized and interpreted the historical

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<sup>75</sup> Fred Manning Smith cites dozens of examples of Victorian critics complaining of EBB’s terrible rhymes. For extensive analyses of EBB’s “odd” rhymes, see Morlier and Hayter. See also Stone and Taylor (xi). In terms that seem to satirize Arthur Hallam’s *bon mot*, George Saintsbury wrote that the rhymes in “Lady Geraldine’s Courtship” “are horrible and heartrending. They make the process of reading Mrs. Browning something like that of eating with a raging tooth -- a process of alternate expectation and agony” (*Prosody* 3: 244).

relations of authors and forms. Live debates in literary historiography – about the origin and development of rhyme, the periodization of poetic history, the nature of aesthetic forms – powerfully shaped EBB’s prosody, and particularly her evolving understanding of the affinities between blank and rhymed verse. Evidence of EBB’s participation in these debates can be found in two barely explored places: the annotated margins of her copy of Henry Hallam’s *Introduction to the Literature of Europe in the Fifteenth, Sixteenth, and Seventeenth Centuries* (1837-9); and a literary historical essay called “The Book of the Poets” that she published anonymously in 1842. I trace her marginal annotations beyond the pages of *Literature of Europe*, showing how her charged responses to Hallam’s history registered in her own work, both her historiographic prose and her historiographic prosody.

This chapter advances two main claims about EBB. The first is, quite simply, that the literary histories that she read and wrote explain much of the formal strangeness of her poetry. Her manipulations of blank verse and rhyme derive from a serious engagement with contemporaneous literary historical scholarship, and revisiting that neglected scholarship promises a fuller picture of her life and work. The second is that EBB’s poetry itself articulates her Romantic vision of literary history. She treats poetic form as a uniquely powerful language for making – and settling -- historiographic arguments. As an essayist she merely contradicts Hallam, but as a poet she can prove him wrong.

In making these claims, I am also making a larger one about the vital bonds between formalism and historicism. In the historiographic nineteenth century, poetry’s connection to history was understood to be more intimate than our familiar relational

figures -- antagonism, analogy, even index -- allow.<sup>76</sup> If, following EBB's example, we can see literary history as a poetic theory, and prosody as a way to write history, then close attention to form already entails an encounter with the receding past.

## Two Literary Historians

Henry Hallam, now best known as the father of Tennyson's friend Arthur Hallam, was a Victorian intellectual celebrity. He was already one of England's preeminent historians when the dizzyingly wide-ranging *Literature of Europe* made him its preeminent historian of literature and the acknowledged pioneer of comparative literature in English. In 1904, George Saintsbury could still proclaim, "To the English student of literary history and literary criticism, Henry Hallam must always be a name *clarum et venerabile*" (*Criticism* 293). Hallam's name has since faded, as has his brand of totalizing historiography, which has come to be seen as methodologically unsophisticated when it is remembered at all.<sup>77</sup> Yet his long and wide view of literary history was enormously

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<sup>76</sup> It is now a commonplace that New Critics such as I. A. Richards, Cleanth Brooks, William Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley, and René Wellek and Austin Warren posited an opposition between the internal/intrinsic/aesthetic and external/extrinsic/historical understanding of a poem. Recent attempts to reintegrate history and form have suggested new models for thinking about their relationship. Caroline Levine uses close-reading strategies to think analogously about cultural "forms"; Marjorie Levinson favors an indexical model (see also Strier). For another version of the intimacy I am describing, see Meredith Martin's account of versified histories in *The Rise and Fall of Meter*.

<sup>77</sup> Austin Warren and René Wellek still credited Hallam -- with the Schlegels, Sismondi, and Bouterwek -- as a founder of literary history (49). In a recent essay on the history of literary histories, however, David Perkins downplays Hallam's contribution, arguing that his books were "essentially compendia. They rehearsed what was known about authors in the various fields of belles lettres, history, philosophy, classical philology, theology, and so forth, and if the authors were arranged in chronological series, this was what Hallam understood by 'history'" (338).

generative for EBB. In his poetic origin stories and transnational lineages, she found the material she needed to think expansively about poetic form.

Indeed, EBB's study of literary history initiated a fertile period in her poetic career. In the early 1840s, she began translating Petrarch and started to produce a voluminous body of sonnets. By 1844-5 she was also beginning to draft *Aurora Leigh* (Donaldson 3: xi). All the while, she was working hard at imperfecting rhyme, at loosening the fit of the end rhymes that structured stanzas. Her 1844 collection was criticized for its "paucity of rhyme," its "inadmissible" half rhymes (such as *islands/silence, desert/unmeasured*), and its rhyme-tending lines that were found to be "entirely rhymeless" (Poe 420). EBB's retort to such criticism is famous: "A great deal of attention, . . . far more than it wd. take to rhyme with conventional accuracy, . . . have I given to the subject of rhymes, -- & have determined in cold blood, to hazard some experiments." These experiments were founded, she maintained, on "much thoughtful study of the Elizabethan writers" and on the authority of Mediterranean poetics (*Brownings' Correspondence* 9: 26; 96).

EBB's assertion that the broad sweep of literary history helped her innovate rhyme is borne out in her own literary historical writings. While "The Book of the Poets" is not exactly a lost text, it has not been sufficiently mined for insight into her poetics. It is sometimes referenced in EBB scholarship, but it has mostly served critics as a store of information about her opinions of individual poets, rather than as an integral work of literary historiography and criticism.<sup>78</sup> But that is exactly what it was. When it was

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<sup>78</sup> A notable exception to the pattern of selective attention is Bina Freiwald, in an essay on EBB's critical prose. Robert Stark briefly but productively reads "Book of the Poets" in relation to EBB's metrical and rhythmic choices in *Aurora Leigh*.

commissioned to be a sequence of articles running in the *Athenaeum* in the summer of 1842, EBB's assignment was two-fold: to pretend to write a review of a new anthology of poetry -- *Book of the Poets: Chaucer to Beattie* (Scott, Webster & Geary, 1842) -- and actually to write a survey of English poetic history (see Donaldson 4: 443). By her own report, she found it "awkward" to "marry the two offices of reviewer and poetical historian," feeling much more invested in the historiographic part of the project (*Brownings' Correspondence* 6: 16-19). With impressive rhetorical skill, she therefore finesses the phrase "Book of the Poets" away from the denotation of a particular unexceptional volume, toward a more general conception of literary history and canonicity, to which the title of her own essay quickly comes to refer.

At this point, EBB settles into the more satisfying role of poetical historian. Instead of assessing the contents of an ephemeral anthology, she is commanding the widest possible view of English literature. "Our poetry has an heroic genealogy," she declares, before tracing its origins north, south, and ultimately, east: through Armorica (now northwestern France), to Spain, to the Arabian peninsula; and through Germany, to Scandinavia, to Georgia and Persia (4: 445). By the time poetry arrives in England as English poetry, a hybrid of the northern and southern strains, it is humming with the voices of half a dozen other cultures. Its specific prosodic attributes, its "intonation" and "cadence," represent both the residue of lost or distant poetries and the freshness of a new combination.

EBB is rehearsing here the great creation myth of eighteenth-century literary historiography, Thomas Warton's Arabist-Nordic theory of poetry (Donaldson 479n27). It is an account of the origins of what Warton calls "romantic fiction," a



“species...entirely unknown to the writers of Greece and Rome” (i). In a dissertation appended to his *History of English Poetry* (1774-81), Warton attributed the qualities of chivalric romance -- evident in eleventh-century tales of Arthur and Charlemagne; in the sixteenth-century poems of Spenser -- to the complex, multicontinental process of accretion and synthesis that EBB also describes. This narrative was part of a larger historiographic design that favored imagination over reason, and medieval and Renaissance invention over neoclassical sophistication.<sup>79</sup> Warton’s origin story was powerful and in the ensuing decades helped consolidate Romantic aesthetics, but it was not uncontroversial. At the time of EBB’s writing, Hallam had recently disputed it, arguing for a more exclusively Western European route between Latin and modern European poetry. “I cannot believe,” he wrote in 1837, “that so baseless a fabric [as the Armorican hypothesis] will endure much longer” (1: 48).<sup>80</sup> So EBB’s unleashing of this familiar historiographic theme at just this juncture is strategic: in addition to marking the move from reviewer to historian, it presents a challenge to Hallam’s renowned neoclassicism (see Wellek *Age* 90; Clark 95-6; Lang). In such moments -- and indeed, in the larger essay -- Henry Hallam is EBB’s chief interlocutor.<sup>81</sup> Hallam’s work was both a gift and a spur: it offered her a comprehensive view of European poetry and an aesthetic program against which to clarify her own.

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<sup>79</sup> Robert J. Griffin discusses the role of both Thomas and Joseph Warton in developing a lasting Romantic historiography predicated on the rejection of Pope. See also Brooks and Wimsatt (530). Warton saw his Arabist-Nordic theory as a synthesis of Warburton, Mallet, and Percy (Wellek, *Rise* 189).

<sup>80</sup> Hallam was vindicated in the 1840 edition of Warton, where the philologist Richard Garnett condemned the entire dissertation as “extremely illogical and unsatisfactory” (lvi).

<sup>81</sup> This is not to imply that Hallam was EBB’s only source of information about literary history. For instance, she owned the 1824 edition of Warton; she did not, however, write in the Warton margins (Research Services, Beinecke Library).

EBB names Hallam only once in “The Book of the Poets,” near the end. It is a moment of uncharacteristic candor. In general, she is decorously indirect about her adversaries -- she has argued with “certain critics”; “a chief critic”; “those ‘base, common, and popular’ critical voices...in and out of various ‘arts of poetry’” -- but she pulls no punches here (4: 446, 453, 467). “We will do anything but agree with Mr. Hallam,” she writes, “who, in his excellent and learned work on the Literature of Europe, has passed some singular judgments upon the poets.... [But] the crying truth is louder than Mr. Hallam, and cries, in spite of Fame” (468). Although she has to acknowledge the formidable quality of Hallam’s research, she strongly disagrees with his critical opinions, which are both “singular” and somehow orthodox. On one side of a divide stand Henry Hallam and “Fame,” and on the other side stand EBB and “truth.” In the contest that EBB imagines, Hallam and “Fame” are terribly loud; it is her challenge to be louder still.

The loudness EBB attributed to Henry Hallam was not entirely imagined. When she was writing “The Book of the Poets,” his *Literature of Europe* was still new, and very well respected. In the periodical press, reviewers were more apt to express awe than to register complaint. As one American reviewer soberly put it, “Any critic who can discover imperfections or errors in the work, is fully entitled to exercise his art upon it, for his labors are worthy of some reward, and as he is likely to receive no other, he may claim it in the privilege of fault-finding. We have no idea of criticising the work” (“Hallam’s Literature” a: 2). A reviewer at the *Quarterly Review* praised the volumes as “systematic, comprehensive, and trustworthy” and Hallam as a critic of “masculine good sense” (b: 340, 383).

Hallam's project did have an impressive scope. It extended from the medieval period to 1700 and covered the entire continent of Europe. Its definition of literature was also broad, including poetry and imaginative prose, as well as theological literature; speculative, moral, and political philosophy; aesthetic criticism; jurisprudence; math and science. There had been previous attempts to approach literary history from one angle or another -- biography, genre, nation -- but few so-called universal literary histories had been ventured. More comparative and broader than Warton's English history; more integrated than the collective universal history project of Eichhorn, Bouterwek, et al. (1796, 1799, 1805-11); more cosmopolitan than Sismondi's *Literature of the South of Europe* (1813, trans. 1823) or Tiraboschi's and Ginguené's Italian literary histories (1772-82; 1811-18); Hallam's *Literature of Europe* was unprecedented.<sup>82</sup>

So when EBB announces in "The Book of the Poets," "We will do anything but agree with Mr. Hallam," she is pitting her little essay against one of the most ambitious intellectual projects of the nineteenth century. In doing so, she makes enormous claims for the essay's generic aspirations. Daring to disagree with Henry Hallam, EBB confirms that she is not simply writing a review. She is writing an account of literary history that constitutes itself in relation to, and in its difference from, the authoritative historiography that the "trustworthy" Hallam personifies. Her antagonism toward such authority may have been related to her feeling of exclusion from it. No woman's name appeared in Hallam's catalogue of antecedents (even if he does defer to the late Germaine de Staël in his discussion of Shakespeare). EBB certainly had reason to suspect that Hallam would

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<sup>82</sup> Hallam addresses the contributions and limitations of many of these historians in his introduction. He also cites Juan Andrés's history of ancient and modern literature (1782-99) as an important precedent.

disapprove of her work should he ever discover its authorship. In an 1842 letter written just after “The Book of the Poets” was published, she recalls a particularly stinging passage on Beaumont and Fletcher where “Mr. Hallam observes in his learned work upon the Literature of Europe that ‘no woman of common respectability’ wd. read either. So we will hold our respectability to be *uncommon* -- like our reading” (6: 173). EBB’s revenge for this slight in “The Book of the Poets” is a masterful analysis of Beaumont and Fletcher’s “centauresque” style (465) -- proving not just that she could read them, but that she could read them exceedingly well.

### **EBB in the Margins**

The marginalia make EBB’s complex relationship to Hallam graphic. Her copies of *Literature of Europe*, now held at the Browning Armstrong Library in Waco, Texas, are the 1837-9 first editions of each volume. The many correlations between her marked-up books and “The Book of the Poets” suggest that her most studious engagement with Hallam’s work occurred in the first half of 1842, as she was preparing to write her own essay.<sup>83</sup> In the crowded margins of the Hallam volumes, EBB’s historical and critical arguments emerge as arguments with her predecessor, as EBB talking back – often very loudly – to Henry Hallam himself. The volumes are riddled with underlining, x’s, insertions, queries, and corrections in EBB’s hand. She seems to consider herself a better reader of poetry, a better translator, and a better judge of poetic merit than Hallam, and is

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<sup>83</sup> Volumes 2-4 have an inscription on the frontispiece with EBB’s name and a note that the volumes were a gift from her uncle Robert Hedley, Torquay 1839. Volume 1 has a different inscription -- Robert & Elizabeth Barrett Browning (item A1127) -- but this married inscription seems to postdate her acquisition of the volume by several years. I am grateful to the staff at the Armstrong Browning Library for their assistance in the archive.

happy to exercise what his American reviewer called “the privilege of fault-finding.” In the first volume, she offers a grammatical line edit on page 314 and fixes Latin translations on pages 323 and 394. She finds continuity errors (“Why ? – see the author’s own view p-489”). She makes factual corrections on subjects ranging from the Protestant Reformation to the emergence of accentual-syllabic meter to the proper referent in a Suckling poem. She makes note of Hallam’s expression of doubt “as to the Armorican origin of romantic fictions,” as well as his conviction that rhyme can be traced to the consonants of the Latin language rather than the vowels of the Saracens of Spain (1: 47; 40-2).

The moments of strongest disagreement involve Hallam’s evaluations of poets and their styles, which EBB finds either infuriatingly lukewarm or wrong. This is particularly true of the English Renaissance poets: EBB’s marginalia build a case, against Hallam, for the special poetic attainments of that cohort. To Hallam’s remarks about George Gascoigne’s “strength and sense,” she appends “& poetry,” and underlines his too-moderate phrase “respectable place among the Elizabethan versifiers”; this opinion receives a “! ! ! ! ??” in the margin (2: 306). Where Hallam suggests that Samuel Daniel ranks second to Edmund Spenser “due rather to the purity of his language than to its vigour,” EBB underlines the last word and counters, “Vigour is not his characteristic – but he was a true poet – not a mere purist. These remarks are all tepid, to say the best of them” (2: 314). Later, when Hallam is discussing Daniel’s awkward Italianate versification, she exclaims, “Did Hallam judge of Daniel simply and only from his historical poem? If he did, there is a reason tho ~~perhaps~~ no excuse, for this outrageous underestimate” (3: 496). And so on: Hallam finds Christopher Marlowe “energetic”; EBB

writes, “Not the right word” (2: 379). Hallam finds John Donne forgettable, obscene, and “the most inharmonious of our versifiers”; EBB replies with a baffled “???” (3: 493).

Her treatment of many of these figures in “The Book of the Poets” reveals a tacit incorporation of the marginal disputes. For EBB, Gascoigne holds a more than “respectable” place among the English versifiers; he is one of the architects of English blank verse, a poet of “beauty and light” (4: 458). Marlowe’s blank verse “cadence revolves like a wheel, progressively, if slowly and heavily” – rather than energetically (454-5). Daniel is “tender and noble,” not vigorous. Donne has “an instinct to beauty,” not licentiousness or noise (458).

EBB’s rejections of Hallam express an urgent philosophical difference about aesthetic value and the workings of poetic form. But they also speak to the special kind of engagement that marginalia involve. Both critical genre and intimate bibliophilic ritual, marginalia like EBB’s pay the homage of contradiction. EBB is very funny on this subject in *Aurora Leigh*, where she characterizes marginalia as “the scholar’s regal way / Of giving judgment on the parts of speech / As if he sate on all twelve thrones up-piled, / Arraigning Israel” (5.1224-7). Aurora’s list of stock marginal comments that her late father has made -- “conferenda hæc cum his - / Corruptè citat - lege potiùs” (compare these with those - / Cites corruptly - better read) -- evokes EBB’s own joyful disgust in the Hallam margins. Like Aurora’s father’s appreciation of his teachers, EBB’s appreciation of Hallam often takes the shape of an arraignment.

More favorable appreciation does appear in the Hallam books, too. On the back leaf of volume 3, for instance, EBB has made a running list of Hallam’s sources with page numbers where he has mentioned them, as if to retrace his scholarly steps. Hallam’s

guidance is also manifest in her less emphatic marginal markings, those quieter signs of learning from the books and trying to absorb the information they offer, her vertical and horizontal lines. These persist throughout the volumes, even on pages where EBB writes back. Often the lines mark out literary historical cruxes, such as moments of origin and transition: the plot points of literary history that captured her attention.

One such example is Hallam's account of "Consonant and assonant rhymes" in fifteenth-century Spanish poetry, which EBB marks up in the following way:

In their lighter poetry the Spaniards frequently contented themselves with *assonances*, that is, with the correspondence of final syllables, wherein the vowel alone was the same, though with different consonants, as *duro* and *humo*, *boca* and *cosa*. These were often intermingled with perfect or consonant rhymes. In themselves, unsatisfactory as they seem at first to our prejudices, there can be no doubt but that the assonances contained a musical principle, and would soon give pleasure to and be required by the ear. (1: 165)

These remarks about the satisfactions of the ear – both the medieval Spanish ear and the Victorian ear – find a rhyme in a letter that EBB wrote to Richard Hengist Horne in 1844. Defending her own assonances, she uses the same language to insist on the same point: that medieval Spanish poetry models a broader range of prosodic pleasures than modern prejudices allow. "You who are a reader of Spanish poetry," she writes, "must be aware how soon the ear may be satisfied, even by a recurring vowel. I mean to try it" (*Brownings' Correspondence* 9: 26). The permission to half-rhyme borrowed from Spanish poetry is also a borrowing from Hallam's books. Though EBB refuted Hallam's readings of the English poets, she held onto these observations about the historical conditioning of the prosodic ear.

## Rhyme and False Rhyme

For Romantic-era writers such as Hallam, Sismondi, the Schlegels, Hegel, and Henry Hallam's son Arthur, rhyme occupies a crucial place in European literary history, marking as it does the beginning of the modern poetic tradition. In some cases the origin of rhyme is characterized as a necessary but traumatic break from classical ways of being and knowing. In other cases, it represents the initiation of glorious new modes of intersubjectivity: new ways of feeling and communicating feeling.<sup>84</sup> In the historical account preferred by Sismondi and Arthur Hallam -- and derived, in part, from Warton -- rhyme was born in the medieval Middle East, and as it passed through Spain, Provence, and Italy, it was enriched by each of those poetic cultures. This progression, described and then dismissed by Henry Hallam, is clearly in the background of EBB's conception of English poetry, whose first "intonation" she describes as a Wartonian compound of eastern and western sounds. But the origin of rhyme, which is not by any account an English origin, lies outside the historical and geographical limits of her subject.

Despite her narrower focus, EBB retains rhyme as a powerful literary historical catalyst. Instead of denoting a break between the classical and modern periods (or pre-Christian and Christian man, as Hegel has it), it stands at another crossroads altogether. Rhyme is complicit in a disturbing change she observes in the post-Elizabethan poets: "The voices are eloquent enough, thoughtful enough, fanciful enough, but something is defective...What is so? And who dares to guess that it may be INSPIRATION?"

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<sup>84</sup> For an example of the former, see Hegel (1025-31), as well as two recent essays on Hegel by Simon Jarvis ("Musical Thinking") and Isobel Armstrong ("Hegel"). For examples of the latter, see Sismondi and Arthur Hallam. Because of Arthur Hallam's precocious output and his death at twenty-two, his literary historical work actually precedes his father's 1837-9 books. For background on the Arabist theory of rhyme, see Dainotto (2007).



Whereas Elizabethan poetry is characterized by a tuneful “sweetness,” EBB detects a “brackish” taste in the poetry of the next generation. In fact, she argues, “a deeper gulf than an Anno Domini yawns betwixt an Elizabethan man and a man of [the] era upon which we are entering” – and that gulf was produced by “the idol-worship of RHYME” (4: 466).

A reader familiar with EBB’s poetry might be momentarily confused by this argumentative turn, which echoes some of the eighteenth century’s most violent anti-rhyme rhetoric (see Jarvis, “Why Rhyme Pleases” 17-18). Confusion would be a fair response. The vast majority of her own poems are rhymed, and those that she had published before 1842 were predominantly stanzaic. The ones that were not strictly stanzaic – like her translation of Aeschylus’s *Prometheus Bound* (1833, 1850) and her Aeschylean “The Seraphim” (1838) – featured rhymed strophes or rhyming dialogue; or, in the case of her juvenile “The Battle of Marathon” (1820) and “Essay on Mind” (1826), Popean rhymed couplets.<sup>85</sup> The poems in the volume that followed “The Book of the Poets” were extraordinarily adventurous in their rhyming. *Poems of 1844* included almost thirty sonnets, a narrative poem in terza rima–inspired triplets, and the intricate medievalist ballad “Rhyme of the Duchess May.” All of which is to say that EBB cannot possibly be an enemy of rhyme.

Instead, she is proposing a distinction between two categories of rhyme, one good and one bad. By conflating the decline of poetry with a frenzy for rhyming, and by comparing that historical moment to the epoch-making birth of Christ, she is not simply

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<sup>85</sup> Later in life EBB looked back scornfully on her Pope imitations, dismissing them as “a girl’s exercise” and the product of “that disastrous monster a precocious child” (*Brownings’ Correspondence* 9: 52). For more on EBB’s early love and subsequent repudiation of Pope, see Morlier (101) and Tucker.

exaggerating. She is suggesting that the transition from classical, quantitative meter to modern, accentual-syllabic rhyme was a less monumental literary historical event than the break between the use of rhyme inspired by the Italians, and the systematic abuse of rhyme arising from the "pestilential influence of French literature." This new schism allowed wits to ascend to the place of poets and compromised the art of prosody:

Among the elder poets, the rhyme was only a felicitous adjunct, a musical accompaniment, the tinkling of a cymbal through the choral harmonies. You heard it across the changes of the pause, as an undertone of the chant, marking the time with an audible indistinctness, and catching occasionally and reflecting the full light of the emphasis of the sense in mutual elucidation. But the new practice endeavoured to identify in all possible cases the rhyme and rhyming syllable, and so dishonouring the emphasis of the sentiment into the base use of the marking of the time. And, not only by this natural provision did the emphasis minister to the rhyme, but the pause did also. "Away with all pauses," -- said the reformers, -- "except the legitimate pause at the tenth rhyming syllable. O rhyme, live for ever! Rhyme alone take the incense from our alters, -- tinkling cymbal alone be our music!" (4: 467)

The "idol-worship of rhyme," for EBB, is its perversion away from its proper usage as a richly melodic rather than bluntly percussive sound effect. The "elder poets," those closest to rhyme's Mediterranean origins, used it in subtler and more vital ways than the Francophile idol-worshippers did. Rhyme didn't just serve as the punch line to an end-stopped couplet. And caesura, likewise, was unpredictable. Rhyme and patterns of pause could play off one another so that their separate arabesques might sometimes miss and sometimes, all the more gratifyingly, meet.

This understanding of rhyme's double nature did not come out of nowhere. In the decade before EBB's writing, similar ideas about true rhyme and false rhyme -- "diffused resemblances" versus the dull "recurrence of termination" -- had been proposed by Thomas Carlyle and Arthur Hallam, both of whom upheld Dante and Shakespeare as

exemplars of the superior class. Carlyle, in particular, drew on the theories of organic form in A. W. Schlegel's and Coleridge's lectures on Shakespeare.<sup>86</sup> The organic idea was a rebuke to those who had disparaged Shakespeare's plays for their "barbarous Shapelessness & irregularity" (Coleridge 1: 494-5). Both Schlegel and Coleridge argued that these evaluations of Shakespeare resulted from the misguided application of classical and neoclassical theatrical standards to his plays: "The true ground of the mistake...lies in the confounding mechanical regularity with organic form," which, Coleridge writes, is "innate" and "shapes as it develops itself from within" (495). On this view, Shakespeare's strength lies in his resistance to external rules -- in his faithfulness to the internal logic of the artwork and to the natural correlation between content and form. What previous critics have taken for a failure of order in Shakespeare is in fact something quite wonderful: the efflorescence of, in Schlegel's terms, "new kinds of poetry" (340).

The new kind of poetry that Shakespeare represented was organic down to the smallest details of its prosody (as, indeed, the concept of organicism entails). In the same lecture series where he expounds the organic idea, Schlegel tells the story that EBB later rehearsed about the rough beauty and multiformity of Elizabethan rhyme, and then the lamentable standardization and mechanization of the couplet. It is, in fact, a story about the diverging histories of blank verse and rhyme:

In England, the manner of handling rhyming verse, and the opinion as to its harmony and elegance, have, in the course of two centuries, undergone

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<sup>86</sup> EBB was attracted to Schlegel's thought as early as 1832 (see *Brownings' Correspondence* 3: 70). Schlegel's Shakespeare lectures were first translated into English by John Black in 1815, and the 1840 reissue included an introduction by EBB's friend and collaborator, Richard Hengist Horne. Horne was the correspondent with whom she debated the limits of English rhyme, above. EBB greatly admired Carlyle; she wrote an essay on him for Horne's *A New Spirit of the Age* (1844), and she cites his *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (1841) in Book 5 of *Aurora Leigh*.

a much greater change than is the case with the rhymeless Iambic or blank verse. In the former, Dryden and Pope have become models; these writers have communicated the utmost smoothing to rhyme, but they have also tied it down to a harmonious uniformity.... We must not estimate the rhyme of Shakspeare by the mode of subsequent times, but by a comparison with his contemporaries.... Many of his rhymes...are faultless: ingenious with attractive ease, and rich without false brilliancy. The songs interspersed...are generally sweetly playful and altogether musical; in imagination, while we merely read them, we hear their melody. (377-8)

Schlegel's argument is not just about poetry; it is also about criticism -- the inability of contemporary commentators to properly hear Shakespearean prosody. This concern persisted from Schlegel's lectures in 1808, through Coleridge, Carlyle, and Arthur Hallam. As late as 1842, EBB was still fighting for this history of English prosody, and for the sweet aesthetic pleasures of organic rhyme.

Here, again, EBB was fighting against the historiographic vision of Henry Hallam. Although Hallam pays many compliments to Shakespeare and speaks highly of Coleridge's and Schlegel's Shakespeare criticism (3: 580), he nonetheless exhibits the neoclassical biases that these Romantics railed against. In Shakespeare's early work he finds a "redundance of blossoms" and "unbounded fertility" (2: 313). The little he has to say about the form of his plays amounts to a defense of their "regularity" against allegations of their "extraordinary rudeness and barbarism" (3: 575-6). Both of these evaluations of Shakespeare uncritically reinforce the value system that Schlegel and Coleridge found so flawed.<sup>87</sup> And as we have seen, Hallam's "tepid" assessments of other Renaissance poets rankled EBB the reader, who strongly preferred the jubilant birdsong of the Elizabethans to the "correctness" and regularity of Dryden and Pope (4: 457, 466; 473).

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<sup>87</sup> Of course, Hallam's best remembered remarks on Shakespeare are about the sonnets: "It is impossible not to wish that Shakspeare had never written them" (3: 291).

Indeed, Hallam's preference for Dryden could only have strengthened EBB's conviction of the historian's bad sympathies. In "The Book of the Poets," EBB holds Dryden responsible for "establish[ing] finally the despotism of the final emphasis" and all but silencing poetic music, but for Hallam the case is quite otherwise (4: 469-70). He suggests, in a confessional aside, that a taste for Dryden is a mark of critical maturity: "The admiration of Dryden gains upon us, if I may speak from my own experience, with advancing years, as we become more sensible of the difficulty of his style, and of the comparative facility of that which is merely imaginative" (4: 431-2). In coordinating Dryden's technical precision to his own well-developed critical faculty, Hallam appears to trivialize both organic form and the critics, like EBB, who love it.

Organic form, then, was a literary historical heuristic as much as it was a critical and theoretical concept. It was a way to understand Elizabethan style historically, as well as a model for thinking about the abstraction of literary form. As a historiographic theory, it presented a legitimate counternarrative to Hallam's history, which privileged neoclassical smoothness over the excesses he associated with Shakespeare. At the same time, the large contours of this debate offered EBB new ways to theorize poetic form -- that is, to think rhymingly about blank verse.

### **Unblank Verse**

EBB's most famous statement on poetic form is in Book 5 of *Aurora Leigh*, and it is in blank verse. Aurora is reflecting on the quasi-Virgilian development of her career, which has evolved through ballad, pastoral, and epic. Her pastoral "failed," she says, because it was too correct: "it was a book / Of surface-pictures - pretty, cold, and false / With literal

transcript, - the worse done, I think, / For being not ill-done" (5.130-3). The antidote to such frigid correctness is a studied turning away from correctness, a surrender to poetry's self-shaping life force. Here she adopts the verdant language of organicism, and her case study, like Schlegel's and Coleridge's, is Shakespearean drama:

What form is best for poems? Let me think  
 Of forms less, and the external. Trust the spirit,  
 As sovran nature does, to make the form;  
 For otherwise we only imprison spirit  
 And not embody. Inward evermore  
 To outward, - so in life, and so in art  
 Which still is life.  
                                     Five acts to make a play.  
 And why not fifteen? why not ten? or seven?  
 What matter for the number of the leaves,  
 Supposing the tree lives and grows? exact  
 The literal unities of time and place,  
 When 'tis the essence of passion to ignore  
 Both time and place? Absurd. Keep up the fire,  
 And leave the generous flames to shape themselves. (5.223-36)

Aurora's answer to the question "What form is best for poems?" is unequivocal: "Inward evermore / To outward." The references to life, growth, and dramatic form confirm the Romantic pedigree of these lines, but they cannot distract us from their self-referential quality. "What form is best for poems?" is, after all, a question that a poem is asking -- and, by example, answering. The lines reject "the despotism of the final emphasis," coiling smoothly around their enjambments and pausing at pointedly irregular intervals. Though they are anti-Augustan in their prosody they seem to harness all of Pope's formal wit. They are conscious of themselves as lines, flaunting line-ends even as they flout them (see Billington 90-2). Indeed, the stanza depends on a strong sense of its own insides and outsides to make its point about the insides and outsides of poems. In the second line, for example, the word "external" appears at the metrical halfway mark, the

inmost part of the line, while "spirit" takes the outer edge. Three lines down the spatial joke gathers momentum. "Inward evermore / To outward," EBB writes, with "Inward evermore" pushing outward to the margin and "To outward" moving in to the line's center. These chiastic motions might be too clever if they did not so seriously advance the stanza's metapoetic thesis.

The form that is best for poems appears here to be blank verse, as against fixed form -- especially given Aurora's generic progress from ballad to epic. The rhymelessness and enjambments of blank verse suggest an inward-to-outward and sense-to-style directionality, whereas fixed forms might be seen to "imprison, / Not embody." But we know from Schlegel and his heirs that there is no essential relationship between rhyme and confinement, and EBB's lines make no claims for such a relationship. They themselves seem to flicker between fixed and unfixed form. In fact, there is something uncanny about this verse paragraph: its compromised, but still palpable, sonnetness. Taking the shape of fourteen iambic pentameters, it has the exact proportions of a sonnet. Like the stanza that opens *Aurora Leigh*, this one also has the shadow of a rhyme scheme, starting strong (ABCBC) before fading away.<sup>88</sup> If this is the poem's most explicit

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<sup>88</sup> The *spirit/spirit* and *form/more* pairings are both controversial rhymes for opposite reasons: one rhymes too much, the other rhymes too little. The former is an identical rhyme, a variant (common in both blank verse and rhymed verse) that is considered either a non-rhyme or a more-than-perfect-rhyme, depending on the reader and verse culture (Brogan and Rettberg); the *form/more* pairing is a clear example of the assonantal rhyme that EBB champions. The scheme may continue into the subsequent line, too, if *spirit/art* is allowed as a consonant rhyme. Monique Morgan has also noted the sonnet structure apparent in this passage and catalogued several of its rhyme-like sound effects in her argument about lyric and narrative (151). Matthew Reynolds points to other moments of "virtual rhyme" and lines that "nearly rhyme" in *Aurora Leigh* to demonstrate how EBB's prosody adapts to Aurora's movement through English and Italian locations (119-21).

celebration of its blank verse body, why does the blank verse partake so much of the sonnet?

The strangeness of these lines is not due to a strange combination of a genre and a form (i.e. epic poem and rhymed stanza – a familiar pairing in European literature), or even, as many have argued of the larger work, a strange combination of two genres (i.e. epic poem and novel).<sup>89</sup> It is due, rather, to the interpenetration of two apparently incompatible verse forms: blank verse and the rhyming sonnet. Whereas blank verse is the form most strenuously dissociated from rhyme, the sonnet stanza remains a powerful index for rhyme. A sonnet's rhyme pattern orchestrates its mood and argument (through sestet, volta, and octave, or quatrains and couplet), its language of allusion (signaling Petrarchan, Shakespearean, or Spenserian traditions), and its production of the fruitfully finite poetic space of a stanza. The sonnet is exemplary of the closed poetic form (Howarth 11), while blank verse is just about as close as the midcentury gets to a form that is open.

But EBB offers a different reading altogether. By writing blank verse and the sonnet into one another, she makes a prosodic argument for their common ground; and by using this blank verse--sonnet hybrid as a vehicle for her baldest defense of organic form, she makes the argument explicit. *Aurora Leigh's* interstitial form insists that the rhyme of an Augustan couplet and the rhyme system of a sonnet are less alike than the rhyme system of a sonnet and the sound effects of blank verse. Whereas a heroic couplet's rhymes match, a sonnet's rhymes constellate -- not only through the arrangement of end

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<sup>89</sup> Dorothy Mermin describes EBB's "fusion of two apparently incompatible genres" as a "generic anomaly" (184-5). For more on the generic hybridity of *Aurora Leigh*, see Stone ("Genre" 101-27). EBB herself used the phrase "a sort of novel-poem" to describe her project (*Brownings' Correspondence* 10: 102-3).



rhymes but also in the way that end rhyme lights up smaller and more scattered details of assonance and consonance.<sup>90</sup> And although a sonnet loves its rhymes, the rhymes need not correspond to the syntactic period; the caesura can hit the terminal position, but it can just as easily break up a line.<sup>91</sup> In other words, a sonnet behaves a lot like blank verse. The important poetic coordinates are not, for EBB, rhymed and unrhymed verse: they are organic rhyme and organic blank verse versus mechanical rhyme.

Thus, in the same way that her rhyming tends toward sonic openness, EBB's blank verse tends toward rhymed and stanzaic form. These tendencies emerge in her literary historical research, are tested in the half rhymes of the 1840s, and find another expression in the organic melding of sonnet and blank-verse form in *Aurora Leigh*.<sup>92</sup> As the critical anxiety around EBB's rhyming indicates, imperfect rhyme presses at rhyme's limits, the places where rhyme threatens to dissolve into something else: blankness. Because of this, it troubles the difference between rhymed and unrhymed verse, showing that difference to be only a matter of degree.

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<sup>90</sup> Of course, there have been eloquent defenses of the couplet on just these grounds. See, for instance, Jarvis, who detects similar constellations of sound in Pope's verse ("Why Rhyme Pleases" 34-9). For more on the complex poetics of the couplet, see Wimsatt (1944), Kenner (1974), and Hunter (2000).

<sup>91</sup> The mobile pause is a striking feature of EBB's sonnets – one that Billington connects persuasively to Shakespearean form in particular (59, 98-1-4). Medial caesurae are also apparent in the sonnets of Petrarch, Milton, Wordsworth, and others. For the role of caesurae in the blank verse of *Aurora Leigh*, see Stark.

<sup>92</sup> Robert Browning recognized the organic quality of EBB's rhymes in 1843. Of "The Dead Pan," he observed, "The grand rhymes *pair* in virtue of their essential characteristics only, and the *accidents* (of a mute or a liquid) go for nothing: just as tree matches with tree in a great avenue, elm-bole with elm-bole, let the boughs lie how they may: in a spruce park ring-fence, knob-head-rail must needs go with knob-head, and spear-point with spear-point..." (*Brownings' Correspondence* 7: 137). EBB wrote to Horne that she loved "the beauty of the figure used to illustrate my *rhymatology*" (9: 26).

### Conclusion: Literary History as Poetic Form

I end by revisiting beginnings, by considering another way that poetic origin stories might have helped EBB reach these theoretical and prosodic ends. I especially want to look at three moments in her own history of poetry that allowed her to rearticulate the story of rhyme with the story of blank verse -- that let her make a persuasive historical case for the kinship of these forms.

The history of blank verse began, for EBB, before blank verse became English. Her marks in Hallam's books highlight the invention of *versi sciolti* (loosened verse) in sixteenth-century Italy and Spain, its importation into England by Surrey, and its English cultivation in the Elizabethan period and beyond.<sup>93</sup> Rhyme has a different history: it originates in the early medieval period and spreads through Europe before arriving at the sonnets of Dante and Petrarch, "the morning stars of our modern literature" (Hallam 1: 56). But when blank verse and the sonnet enter English poetry, their paths begin to cross, and they keep crossing.

EBB makes much of the poets under whose aegis the two forms meet. First there is Surrey, who brought to England "the [Italian] sonnet structure, the summer-bower for one fair thought." Following Hallam, EBB also credits Surrey with "the first English blank verse, in his translation of two books of the Aeneid" (4: 453-4). Although Surrey's prototype is "only heroic verse without rhyme," rather than "the arched cadence...and underflood of broad continuous sound" that Shakespeare and Milton achieved (454), his double contribution remains remarkable: he stands at the English origin of both the

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<sup>93</sup> Hallam's continental pioneers of blank verse – Boscan, Rucellai, Trissino – are likely among the "Spanish and Italian poets of prime note [who] have rejected rhyme in both shorter and longer works" referenced by Milton as models in "The Verse" (2).

quintessentially rhymed and the quintessentially unrhymed verse forms. His career is the conduit for their twin birth into English literature.

After Surrey comes the imperfect perfection of Shakespeare's organic rhyme. In "The Book of the Poets," he is one of the elder poets who preceded the corruption of versification, and EBB praises his "sonnets and songs" as "short sighs from [his] large poetic heart" (459). But he is also in that essay "the most wonderful artist in blank verse of all in England," an honor he earned by the same criteria that won him the epoch of beautiful rhymes: "Often when [his blank verse] is at the sweetest, his words are poor monosyllables, his pauses frequent to brokenness...but the whole results in an ineffable charming of the ear which we acquiesce in without seeing its cause, a happy mystery of music" (463-4). Like Shakespearean rhyme, Shakespearean blank verse is musical, irregular, and sweet. The small repertoire of qualities that EBB ascribes to both his rhyme and his blank verse portrays Shakespeare's blank verse as continuous with -- indeed, as one part of -- his rhyme practice.

Milton also represents the affinity between rhyme and blank verse. In EBB's words,

He stood in the midst of those whom we are forced to consider the corrupt versificators of his day, an iconoclast of their idol rhyme, and protesting practically against the sequestration of pauses. His lyrical poems, move they ever so softly, step loftily, and with something of an epic air. His sonnets are the first sonnets of a free rhythm. His epic is second to Homer's, and the first in sublime effects. (471)

This description of Milton's poetry suggests a subtle reading of his prosodic forms. His rebellion against the bad rhyming of his period -- its monotonous pentameter couplets and mandated pauses -- sends him pioneering in two directions: toward blank and unblank verse. Freed from the confines of false versification, Milton crafted both a blank

verse that is transcendently musical and a sonnet form that is grandly epic. The interchange that EBB notes between the sonic properties of the Miltonic sonnet and the Miltonic epic (against the defects of mechanical rhyme) presents a powerful literary historical rationale for her own iconoclastic prosody.

These three literary historical figures help concretize the relationship between historiographic narrative and poetic form. In Surrey, Shakespeare, and Milton, as EBB characterizes them, the genealogies of rhyme and blank verse converge – just as those forms converge on her page. Could a poet's loosened and off-kilter rhymes owe something to her transnational conception of blank verse? Might her blank verse epic organize sound in a deliberately stanzaic way? Thinking about prosody historiographically -- that is, alongside literary history writing like Hallam's and EBB's, and with an eye to the long and storied lives of poetic forms -- makes these strange questions feel a little less strange.

## Chapter Four: Coventry Patmore and the Idea of Ode

If for most of the twentieth century Coventry Patmore was remembered as the patriarchal poet of *The Angel in the House* (1854-6), to the twenty-first century he has been primarily a prosodist. Most recent work on Patmore has focused on his 1857 "Essay on English Metrical Law," which has been a favorite text of scholars working in historical poetics. Patmore the prosodist features in essays by Jason Hall, Isobel Armstrong, Yisrael Levin, Meredith Martin, Yopie Prins, and Jason Rudy in the recent collection *Meter Matters: Verse Cultures of the Long Nineteenth Century* (2011); and in another article that bridges the gap between *The Angel in the House* and the "Metrical Law," Adela Pinch describes Patmore's essay as "the most important nineteenth-century account of meter after Wordsworth" ("Love" 391). It is easy to see why the "Metrical Law" has acquired the status it has: it consolidates a huge amount of nineteenth-century thinking about prosody, at the same time as it advances a relatively idiosyncratic theory of its own -- one that directly influenced poets as diverse as Gerard Manley Hopkins, Alice Meynell, Francis Thompson, and Thomas Hardy. Scholarship on the "Metrical Law" has shared the emphases of prosody studies more broadly. In the same way that scholars of prosody have tended to favor meter over other aspects of prosody, work on Patmore's essay has focused largely on his account of the rhythmic line -- despite the fact that a substantial portion of Patmore's essay is devoted to the history and theory of rhyme.

This chapter begins by shifting the focus to rhyme, in order to uncover the historiographic dimensions of Patmore's thought. Among the writers this dissertation treats, Patmore is exceptional for the total integration of the philosophical, historical, and

practical aspects of his work. Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote literary history that became in her hands a kind of poetic theory, but she did not venture (despite a wealth of marginalia and correspondence on the subject) a systematic theory of prosody per se. Arthur Hallam wrote literary historiography and literary criticism that are interconnected, but – although he wrote many poems of his own – it would be left to Tennyson, a poet famously allergic to theorizing, to write poetry on the historiographic model of form that Hallam laid out. Patmore's "Metrical Law" is a historiographic theory of prosody that engages with both historians and philosophers of meter. What is more, Patmore set out to develop a poetic form that directly answered his theory of prosody, and he spent the last several decades of his career writing exclusively in that form. Patmore called the poems that embodied his prosodic theory *odes*. This chapter explores the significance of that word for Patmore: why the ode was a particularly generative idea from the perspective of literary history, and why the challenge posed by the historiographic ode represented an ideal poetic counterpart to his metrical theory.

### **The Metrical Law**

Patmore considered his "Essay on English Metrical Law" to be his definitive statement on poetic form, and he consequently published it (in slightly modified versions) throughout his career. By his own account, the essay was inspired by a deficiency in the field of prosody criticism. No theory, from the Renaissance onward, had sufficiently explained "the mechanism" of modern English verse. While metrical theorists had agreed that so-called accentual-syllabic English poetry is measured differently from so-called quantitative Greek poetry, the true quality of that difference had remained elusive. The fundamental problem, as Patmore saw it, was the nature of the accent. Was it a length? A

tonality? A weight? A loudness? A combination of one or the other of these attributes?

“The only tenable view,” Patmore concludes, is that accents correspond to regular periods of spoken time, what he calls “isochronous intervals.” We hear the progress from one isochronous interval to the next as “an ‘ictus’ or ‘beat,’ actual or mental, which, like the post in a chain railing, shall mark the end of one space and the commencement of another.” Many scholars have pointed out that Patmore’s big intervention here is the assertion that the ictus “has no material and external existence at all, but has its place in the mind, which craves measure in everything” (*Essay* 15). Rather than inhering in the line itself, the beat is something we bring to the line -- an “idea (or idealization)” of meter, as Prins explains it (“Patmore’s Law” 262).

Locating the beat in the mind rather than in the poetic syllable allows Patmore to imagine counterintuitive ways to scan a line. Most significantly, it lets pauses -- or catalexis -- count in the same way that so-called accents do: as “subjects” rather than “interruptions...of metrical law” (22). Even poems with irregular line lengths can be understood as existing in a grid of isochronous sections; the time that isn’t occupied by syllables is occupied by periods of rest. This makes sense when we think of a 3-3-4-3 ballad stanza (where the three-beat lines are the same as the four-beat lines; they just happen to end in an unvoiced beat) -- but its more extreme instances are harder to fathom. In an “irregular” iambic ode, Patmore’s limit case, there may be terminal pauses of durations up to fourteen syllables, and he insists that a sensitive reader will wait these pauses out. For example, in his own ode “To the Unknown Eros,” we can find a line of sixteen voiced syllables (“Through delicatest ether feathering soft their solitary beat” [8]) and another line of only two (“Is this?” [30]). Patmore would allot both of these lines the

same sixteen-syllable reading time, so that, from the perspective of isochrony, the latter would be understood thus:

Is this? (*dah-dah dah-dah dah-dah dah-dah dah-dah dah-dah*)<sup>94</sup>

The absurdity of this suggestion was noted by many of Patmore's readers. To one next-generation prosodist, this was "theorizing run mad" (Omond 84).

But the pause, for Patmore, is not only a metrical abstraction; it is a key to how poems register and elicit emotion. The longer the catalectic pause is in relation to the syllable count of the line, the more powerfully does the poem strike us as sad. Providing an example from his own early poetry, Patmore declares definitively that "the six-syllable 'iambic' is the most solemn of all our English measures. It is scarcely fit for anything but a dirge; the reason being, that the final pause in this measure is greater, when compared with the length of the line, than in any other verse" (27). Here are the lines from "Night and Sleep" that he uses to make his case:

How strange it is to wake  
And watch, while others sleep,  
Till sight and hearing ache  
For objects that may keep  
The awful inner sense  
Unroused, lest it should mark  
The life that haunts the emptiness  
And horror of the dark!       (27)

When reading a six-syllable iambic -- that is, with three accented syllables per line -- we understand that we are really reading a four-beat line, and we are invariably moved by the

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<sup>94</sup> Patmore's theory of isochrony is of course much more complicated than my simple syllabic notation suggests. He would consider a sixteen-syllable line to be made up of four "dipodic" sections of four syllables each, where each section has a stronger and weaker "iambic foot." The sixteen-voiced-syllables line referenced above would sound like this (assuming "feathering" is elided, as I think he means it to be): Through-**DEL**-i-CA | test-**E**-ther-**FEA** | th'ring **SOFT** their **SOL** | ....



pregnant pauses. And if the six-syllable iambic is a recipe, specifically, for solemnity, the irregular ode -- with its jagged line lengths and its correspondingly varied pauses -- is the most open to "the variations of the high and stately lyrical feeling which alone can justify the use of this measure" (28). In both of these cases -- in the short-lined catalectic stanza and in the irregular ode -- the affective content of the poem resides in the pauses that we feel and count but do not voice. Patmore's dogmatic claims for the correlation between form and feeling -- specifically pause and feeling -- were met with some friendly ridicule by Tennyson, who sent him a sprightly little jingle in the same six-syllable iambic that should only have been fit for a dirge. "How glad I am to walk," the poem chortles, "With Susan on the shore! / How glad I am to talk! / I kiss her o'er and o'er." "Is this C.P.'s most solemn?" he asks. Clearly, Tennyson felt that Patmore was asking the pause to bear too much affective weight.<sup>95</sup>

And one senses, in the "Metrical Law," that Patmore has his own doubts -- for as soon as he has established that the beat is in the mind, and that emotion is in the pause, and that the pause can and must tick out uncomfortably long, his essay abruptly switches tracks. Suddenly he is writing about rhyme, and in increasingly ecstatic terms. Rhyme is "no mere ornament of versification: it is a real and powerful metrical adjunct," he pronounces. In fact, it is "so far from being extra-metrical and merely 'ornamental,' as most persons imagine it to be, that it is the quality to which nearly all our metres owe their very existence" (41). Rhyme makes a stanza where no stanza could otherwise be, and rhyme designates the limit of the line. It is, finally, "the highest metrical power we have" and "the great means, in modern languages, of marking essential metrical pauses"

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<sup>95</sup> See Joshua King on this Tennyson-Patmore correspondence.

(31). Rhyme, to sum up, is a condition of possibility for the structure of the stanza, the meter, the line, and the pause.

Patmore's understanding of the regulating power of rhyme is gleaned from a long line of rhyme theorists before him. From Samuel Daniel, he takes the notion that rhyme is a binding principle. In one of the passages from "The Defence of Rhyme" (1603) that Patmore excerpts, Daniel writes that the "like-sounding accents" of rhyme "seeme as the jointure without which [verse] hangs loose and cannot subsist, but runs wildly on, like a tedious fancie without a close." So rhyme acts as a check on the incontinent metrical line, but it also --- significantly -- acts as "due stayes for the mind" (36-7). This idea of rhyme is nothing like Patmore's idealization of meter; rather than a projection coming out from the mind to organize the verse, it is a power that comes out of the verse to organize the mind. A historical analogue is supplied by Hegel, who argued that rhyme became a prosodic necessity when absolute classical quantity gave way to the more arbitrary accentual system. Rhyme came as "a new power, working ab extra," whose "very grossness, as compared with syllabic quantity, is a great advantage, inasmuch as the greater spirituality of modern thought and feeling demand a more forcible material contrast" (qtd. in Patmore 42). From their different perspectives, both Daniel and Hegel represent rhyme as a means of rescue from a metrical system that is otherwise too lawless or indefinite to hold.

It appears that the rhyme portion of Patmore's "Metrical Law" essay works in a structurally similar way. As his argument about meter unfurls, it reaches a point of no return, of too much abstraction: the fourteen-syllable pause that no reader would ever naturally want to (or know how to) read. Into this crisis of a prosodic theory that cannot

be applied, rhyme descends as a kind of *deus ex machina*. Rhyme is the crucial exception to the rule that the metrical accent has no inherent weight. We know exactly how to inflect a syllable when that syllable rhymes. And if we can't recognize the end of a line by the end of a long pause, we can recognize it by a resounding rhyme. The rhyme portion of the "Metrical Law," like Hegel's historical rhyme, offers a "more forcible material contrast" to the theory of isochronous intervals. Like Daniel's rhyme, it offers "stays for the mind."

More than this, Patmore's discussion of rhyme helps us think of it as a more positive, more concrete version of his pause. In addition to marking the end of a line in a more legible way than catalexis can, rhyme is also a vehicle of feeling. Patmore insists upon this point in both the "Metrical Law" and an earlier review of *In Memoriam*, where he repeats, as an article of faith, Arthur Hallam's statement that the structure of rhyme "appeal[s] to Memory and Hope." In fact, Patmore's idea of rhyme has so much in common with his idea of pause that one wonders if the pause argument is a bit of a sleight of hand. If we agree that we feel moved by his solemn six-syllable iambic, for instance, is it possible to say that the end-of-line pauses are affecting us more or less than the end-of-line rhymes, which call to their partners across the space of the page?

Patmore's later prose confirms a significant conceptual overlap between pause and rhyme. Having stated in the "Metrical Law" that rhyme is "the quality to which nearly all our metres owe their very existence" (40), he formulates it thus in an 1890 preface to his poems: "Nearly all English metres owe their existence as metres to 'catalexis,' or pause" (vi). The substitution of "pause" for "rhyme" seems to suggest that a refinement or change of opinion has occurred during the intervening years -- that

perhaps Patmore has revised his thinking about the importance of rhyme. But a subsequent sentence calls that supposition into question. In reference to the odes his preface is introducing, Patmore explains, “[T]he verse in which the volume is written is catalectic *par excellence*, employing the pause (as it does the rhyme) with freedom only limited by the exigencies of poetic passion” (vi). The grammar of this second sentence, where “rhyme” has a nearly appositive relationship to “pause,” indicates that Patmore has not at all changed his mind between the “Metrical Law” and the preface; rhyme and pause move in synchrony to what he calls “the exigencies of poetic passion.” At the end of the preface, Patmore refers his reader for further details about his catalectic meter “to the Essay printed as an appendix to the later editions of my collected poems” (vi) – i.e. to the “Metrical Law.” In his conflation of pause and rhyme, then, Patmore believes that he is simply stating the same principle for a second time.

Thus, although in the “Metrical Law” he acknowledges rare circumstances in which catalexis appears in modern poetry without rhyme (in a very few examples of unrhymed staves and in the very few examples of blank verse that, in Patmore’s opinion, are musical enough to *be* verse), Patmore’s ideas of rhyme and pause are generally linked phenomena. We might understand rhyme as the pressure and pause as the release; or, rhyme as the image and pause as the afterimage; or, rhyme as the wound and pause as the pain in a phantom limb.<sup>96</sup> Or, to put it yet another way, we might think of pause as the medium through which rhyme’s memory and hope are experienced.

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<sup>96</sup> On the interplay of presence and absence in Patmore’s pauses (and Alice Meynell’s reading of those pauses), see Prins’s “Patmore’s Law.” See J. C. Reid for a similar observation to mine about the way rhyme, in his words, “serves to attenuate the pause” (278).

My point here is that Patmore's interest in the effect of terminal pause in English verse is almost always identical with his interest in the effect of rhyme. This is because modern European poetry, as a historical formation, is basically unthinkable without rhyme. In Patmore's quest to discover the secret workings of English prosody, he is confronted with the historical entanglement of accentual-syllabic meter with rhyme. This history is not just a subtext of the "Metrical Law"; it is its explicit premise. At the outset of the essay, Patmore makes the point that classical meter is irreconcilable with modern European meter and ultimately unhearable by modern ears (4, 5, 16; such hearing is "a lost skill," as Isobel Armstrong puts it ["Meter" 33]), and he bemoans the neglect of rhyme in contemporary theories of English poetry. In particular, he praises the Renaissance critic George Puttenham for his "acknowledgement of the fact, so often lost sight of by his successors, that English verse is not properly measurable by the rules of Latin and Greek verse," and for a "much clearer discernment of the main importance of rhyme and accentual stress, in English verse, than is to be found among later writers" (4). When he discusses "accent," Patmore carefully negotiates the different meanings of that word in relation to classical versus modern prosody, concluding, "We are of course chiefly interested in its meaning as it is concerned in English and most modern European verse" (13).

So while some readers have found in Patmore's principle of isochrony the persistence of a classical model of prosody, I would characterize his argument somewhat differently.<sup>97</sup> For Patmore, the English line read right can be understood as borrowing an

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<sup>97</sup> See, for example, Jason Rudy: "Patmore's primary goal in the *Essay* is to understand how the classical approach to prosody, whereby meter is determined by duration (by the actual time it takes to speak or sing patterns of words), might be reconciled with English

element of time-measure from classical duration, yes, but isochrony is an incomplete description if it doesn't take into account the profoundly modern experience of rhyme and/or rest at the end of a line. This distinction is the motivation of the essay, the historiographic problem that demands a theory. Patmore does not want to find common ground between Greek and English meter. He wants to approach English meter on its own terms.

To think of Patmore's metrical theory as a theory of literary history is to recognize that his historical scale is large indeed. The relationship he draws between Greek and English meter is less comparative -- one prosodic system juxtaposed with another -- than narrative: the journey from classical Greece to Victorian England as a long process of change, loss, and emergence. If this narrative resonates with my earlier accounts of the prosodic historiography of Arthur Hallam and Hegel, it is because, as I have suggested in the foregoing remarks, these thinkers are Patmore's avowed sources. Patmore scrupulously observes the historical break that Hallam and Hegel describe, and he understands that break to condition the way we read and scan, or ought to read and scan, modern poems.

But the most interesting thing about Patmore's metrical theory is that it does not rest at theory, or even a reading practice; he means it to be applied to the writing of poetry, too. The odes of *The Unknown Eros* (1877), which Patmore began writing in the

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prosody, which tends to focus on patterns of stressed and unstressed syllables. As Derek Attridge has shown, British prosodists had long made gestures to such quantitative poetics, dating back to George Gascoigne's 1575 *Certayne Notes of Instruction* and William Webbe's *Discourse of English Poetrie*. A. A. Markely has suggested that Tennyson, too, experimented with meters that would 'approximate for the English reader the experience of reading Greek and Latin poetry.' Patmore's argument as elaborated in his *Essay*, is that the best poets never truly left behind the classical model..." (138).

early 1860s, were intended to demonstrate his idea of isochrony; Patmore advertised this fact on many occasions, including in the preface of 1890 mentioned above -- and critics have generally taken him at his word. I want to argue, though, that beyond simply showing what isochrony looks like, the odes present themselves as a literary historiographic *event*: a significant moment in the same prosodic drama that Patmore (after Hegel and Arthur Hallam) worked to theorize. In this regard, Patmore's poetic relationship to literary history is distinct from that of a poet like Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Whereas EBB uses poetic forms (blank verse, assonance, half rhyme) to present an argument about the literary historical past, Patmore's prosody makes a claim for the present *as also* literary history -- indeed, as a new stage in a larger literary historical process. He does this through the genre of the ode.

Patmore's ode is a fundamentally historiographic genre, a key to the interpretation of literary history. Against theories of the ode (now dominant) that chart the reverberations of classicism through the centuries, Patmore did not regard the ode as a stable transhistorical object. Rather, the ode expressed for him, through its continuously varying prosodic forms, historical and linguistic differentiae. Seen through this idea of the ode, borrowed from continental aesthetics, literary history becomes legible as a series of untranslatable cultural differences across space and time. Patmore's project is to develop a form of ode -- never yet achieved -- that expresses not the spirit of ancient Greece or Renaissance Europe but the distinctive character of modern English prosody, with its distinctive set of feelings.

## Ode and Canzone

Critics have long been skeptical about Patmore's choice of the word *ode* for the poems of *The Unknown Eros*. Frederick Page, writing a study of Patmore in 1933, took a rather literal approach to the issue, explaining, "Most of these poems are not, properly speaking, odes at all. For we may adopt a rough-and-ready test and say that an ode must begin with an O, actually or virtually." He points out that many of Patmore's odes fail that test, since they plunge immediately into narrative — e.g. "The Toys," which begins, "My little son, who look'd from thoughtful eyes" -- and consequently lack an actual or virtual "O." Poems that begin as this poem does, he concludes, "cannot be odes" (117-8). Page's "O" test, pedantic though it may be, hinges on the criterion of address associated with the performative odes of Pindar and of Pindar's many followers.<sup>98</sup> The "O" really stands in for this particular literary historical lineage.

Page suggests that Patmore's so-called odes might actually be modeled on the Italian canzone, derived through Milton and Spenser from Dante (150). At the turn of the century, Edmund Gosse had made a similar claim for an Italian rather than classical genealogy. Although he perceived some resemblances between Patmore's odes and Cowley's Pindarics (which Patmore had derided throughout his critical career), Gosse proposed that "the true analogy of his *Odes* is with the Italian lyric of the early Renaissance. It is in the writings of Petrarch and Dante, and especially the *Canzoniere* of the former, that we must look for examples of the source of Patmore's later poetic form"

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<sup>98</sup> Robert Shafer writes that "the ode is always an address" (3), while George Shuster explains that "the element of address is of no especial significance, being merely a reflection of the classical influence." For Shuster, an ode is "a lyric poem derived, either directly or indirectly, from Pindaric models" (qtd. in Jump 3). John Jump adheres to the same criteria, organizing his study around the legacies of Pindar and Horace.



(*Coventry Patmore* 128).<sup>99</sup> J. C. Reid, in *The Mind and Art of Coventry Patmore* (1957), found a way to reconcile what seemed to be Patmore's classical ambitions with the Italian lineage that Gosse and Page identified. Drawing on studies of Milton's prosody, he pointed to a form called the "liberated canzone," a *later* Italian Renaissance development that more directly influenced Milton and Spenser than Dante had (272-5). This form was less rigorously stanzaic than the medieval canzone and therefore closer to the shape of Patmore's long and irregular single-stanza poems.

Literary histories of the English ode that consider continental contexts often point to this historical moment when two distinct prosodic traditions converged. On one hand, there was the classical line originating with Pindar, and on the other hand, there was the medieval Romance-language line: the rhymed stanzaic verse that originated with the troubadours and was codified by Dante and Petrarch. Although differently derived, the Pindaric ode and the Italian canzone happen to look a bit alike, since both are characterized by irregularity within a frame of large structural echoes. The Pindaric ode has a repeating pattern of strophe, antistrophe, and epode (i.e. a triadic structure); the canzone has a repeating stanzaic pattern culminating in an envoy. In both cases, the

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<sup>99</sup> This wasn't exactly a preposterous claim. Like Dante's and Petrarch's canzoni, Patmore's odes are erotic, elegiac, and religious; and like theirs, they use intricate interlacings of rhyme. Patmore was very familiar with both of these poets' work, and had identified or been identified at various points in his life with each. A sonnet he wrote in the early forties begins in Dantean fashion, "At nine years old I was Love's willing Page: / Poets love earlier than other men" (qtd. in Gosse, *Patmore* 20); and shortly before Patmore began working on the *Unknown Eros*, he had read the manuscript of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Early Italian Poets*, which included a translation of Dante's *Vita Nuova* (full of commentary on the canzone), as well as translations of many diverse canzoni by poets in Dante's extended circle. Around the same time, Patmore was termed "the English Petrarch" in a review in *Fraser's Magazine* by Thomas Barnes. Moreover, Patmore's father had tried his hand at the translation of a Petrarch canzone for Blackwoods in 1817. That translation includes some very long, irregularly rhymed stanzas, which bear some family resemblance to Coventry's later verse.

internal prosody may vary from one poem to the next (patterns of line length; or in the canzone, line length and rhyme scheme) as long as the macro symmetry is maintained. In sixteenth-century Italy, the rhyming canzone tradition and the Pindaric ode tradition met, and according to John Heath-Stubbs, this generic marriage is “the real basis” of most English odes (13; see also Shafer 59-68 and Kirby-Smith 71). So the medieval Italian canzone might be an ancestor of the English ode, but it was not part of the Pindaric strain. If Patmore’s source for the form of his odes was indeed medieval Italy, Gosse and Page would be right to suggest that Patmore did not have the classical genre in mind.

But why would Patmore choose the word *ode* if it meant for him what it meant to Gosse and Page – and what it means to us? In the nineteenth century, *ode* was in fact a word in flux. By now, even if we agree with Stuart Curran that the genre’s literary history is confused and confusing (64), we have settled on a basic literary historical trajectory. Stephen Fogle and Paul Fry, writing in the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, connect the genre explicitly to classical sources: Pindar, Horace, and to a lesser degree, Anacreon; and they state explicitly that “[t]hroughout Europe the history of the ode commences with the rediscovery of the classic forms” – by sixteenth-century Italians and by the Pleiade in France. The tone is serious, the orientation is vocative, the form is usually polymetric. In nineteenth-century England, the models remain largely Pindar and Horace, even if, as with Keats and Shelley, sonnet form is sometimes brought in as an additional element (“Ode”). This history of the ode corresponds closely with the entry in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* from 1911. That essay, also written by Edmund Gosse, remains an authoritative definition of the genre. It is now the basis for the “Ode” entry on Wikipedia (in common with many nineteenth- and early twentieth-century *Encyclopedia*

*Britannica* articles now in the public domain). Yet, as I will explain, Gosse's perspective on the ode was far from disinterested.

### **Gosse's Grecian Ode**

Before Gosse's ode essay was enshrined as definitive in the encyclopedia, and before he wrote the important early study of Patmore cited above, his ode essay appeared in an earlier form as the introduction to an anthology called *English Odes* (1881). Gosse was just becoming acquainted with Patmore as he was editing the anthology, and since he wanted to include one of Patmore's poems the two had occasion to quibble about the meaning of *ode*. In a letter printed by his first biographer Basil Champneys, Patmore seems irritated by Gosse's narrow definition of the genre:

DEAR SIR,

The Ode called the "Unknown Eros" is at your service for your selection. Your volume is likely to be a valuable one, provided that you extend it so as to include such Odes as Spenser's 'Epithalamium' (the one on his own marriage); but if you limit it to Odes proper, according to the 'Pindarique' notion, I do not see where you are to get enough for even a small volume.

Trusting you will not think this remark obtrusive,

I remain,

Dear Sir,

Yours truly,

C. PATMORE (2: 252-3)

Perhaps Gosse felt obliged to accept Patmore's suggestion when he devoted the first several pages of his volume to Spenser's poem, because in the introduction he hedges: "It is difficult to say whether we owe this exquisite rhapsody to the Greek or to the Italian side of the genius of Edmund Spenser; the poem is unique and had no tolerable imitators" (xiii). Gosse makes it clear that Spenser is not part of his ode tradition: nobody follows Spenser, and Spenser's own antecedents are open to doubt. Moreover, Gosse maintains

that “the importer of the ode as we usually understand it was Ben Jonson” — a poet writing a full century after Spenser.<sup>100</sup>

The question of Greek versus Italian heritage was fundamental to Gosse’s historiography of the genre, because too strong a whiff of the Italian meant disqualification. As Patmore implied, Gosse’s ode history is really a history of Pindarism through the ages. It is a story of more or less faithful adherence to the model established by Pindar -- of classical poetry and a long legacy of neoclassicism. Although Gosse acknowledges that Pindar was not the original inventor of the Greek ode, he sees him as the first to “exercise it in all its grace and all its majesty” (x). When Renaissance Europe rediscovered the ode, “Pindar was recovered, indeed, but recovered in...confusion,” and those who attempted to imitate his style in Latin or Greek invariably failed due to their misunderstanding of Greek prosody. In Gosse’s account, French was the first modern language in which odes were written, with Ronsard in 1550 citing Pindar as a model. Because Italian literature already had its own “stately lyrical forms of verse” developed from earlier medieval forms, it did not participate in this early recovery of Pindar (xii). Italy, then, had something *analogous to* but different from an ode; it didn’t yet have what Gosse would consider, in Patmore’s phrase, “Odes proper.” The classical ode therefore bypasses Italy in its first European development. For this reason, Spenser’s poem is an ode if it draws on Greek sources, but it is less than an ode if it draws on Italian ones. This heavy editorial emphasis on the legacy of Pindar is confirmed by the book’s frontispiece, which shows two Grecian women framing a lyre emblazoned with the word *Pindar*.

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<sup>100</sup> Edmund Gosse did soften his position on Spenser for the encyclopedia. Gosse also had a fascinating role in the definition of the villanelle as a fixed form. See Amanda French’s “Edmund Gosse and the Stubborn Villanelle Blunder.”

Gosse's Pindaric model constrains not just his history of the genre but also its formal parameters. Officially, he describes the ode as "any strain of enthusiastic and exalted lyrical verse, directed to a fixed purpose, and dealing progressively with one dignified theme," but he discounts many dignified poems (even ones called odes by their authors) that do not attempt to replicate the shape of Pindar's Greek verse.<sup>101</sup> Indeed, the English ode is presented as a drama of typographical error and triumph: Cowley's copy of Pindar was printed without choral divisions, so that poet misunderstood the ode's structure and initiated a rash of outrageously irregular Pindarics. Congreve had a better edition of Pindar and set the tradition right, pointing English poets toward "for the first time, the metrical secret that had evaded Cowley" (xvii). When the Romantics inherited the genre, they irresponsibly let that secret slip away:

All attempt to restrain [the genre] within the exact bounds of Greek tradition was abandoned, and the odes of Wordsworth and Coleridge are as absolutely irregular as Cowley's own. When Shelley came to write his "Ode to Naples," the very meaning of the terminology had been so far forgotten, that he commenced with two epodes, passed on to two strophes, and then indulged in four successive antistrophes! (xx).

From the vantage of Pindaric purity, the generic and formal experiments of Romanticism become a scandal. Needless to say, Patmore's "Unknown Eros" is barely an ode at all – it is "constructed rather upon a musical than a metrical principle" (xxi) – but a paucity of Victorian examples seems to force Gosse's hand.

Gosse's unyielding position on the ode accorded with his more general thoughts about the uses of literary history. In an earlier essay, "A Plea for Certain Exotic Forms of Verse" (1877), Gosse had argued for a turn away from the "blustering blank verse" of

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<sup>101</sup> Gosse excludes "the elegy, or funeral ode" from his canon. This is an obvious divergence from Patmore's position, considering the elegiac tone of so many poems in *The Unknown Eros*.

spasmody and back toward historical fixed forms. Here, too, Gosse is surprisingly vehement, expressing disgust for any variation from the original pattern. His impatience for adaptation finds a scapegoat in Sidney Dobell, whom he describes as “the very helot of stylistic depravity,” partly because, in addition to spasmodic verse he “wrote sonnets of fifteen, sixteen, eighteen lines, and rhymed them as seemed good in his own eyes” (55). Remarkably, Gosse considers even the Shakespearean sonnet to be an unfortunate deviation from the “old pure” Italian form. He advocates fidelity to “the exact shape” of an original model, granting no concessions for linguistic or historical differences. “We have a right to demand,” he insists, “that if [poets decide to compose sonnets], they should follow in the time-honoured footsteps of Petrarch and Milton...that the rhymes of the octett must be two instead of four” (56). Gosse, in an anti-Romantic mode, feels that strict formal requirements deter bad poets and stimulate good ones, and he encourages the discovery of (and obedience to) more fixed forms from the past.

Like the Shakespearean sonnet, which reinterpreted the Italian form for a rhyme-poorer language, the English Pindaric has always confronted its linguistic and historical distance from its source. Even Cowley, as he translated Pindar into irregular rhymes explained that because of “the great difference of time betwixt his age and ours” and because “our Ears are strangers to the Musick of his *Numbers*,” exact translation is impossible. The best we can do is “supply the lost Excellencies of another *Language* with new ones in [our] own” (155-6). In fact, Gosse thought Cowley could have done better, by retaining Pindar’s triads (if he could see them), instead of finding a new music for the old poems.

For Gosse, genres and forms are transhistorical: they move through history impervious to history itself – or they should try to. It is not so much that Gosse denied changes in history and prosody; it is rather that he advocated a valiant perseverance in the face of inevitable decline. A poem of Gosse's own makes this point well. Called "Greece and England," it was published in his *New Poems* in 1879. The poem starts with a series of questions – in modern rhyme -- about the lost beauties of Ancient Greece:

Would this sunshine be completer,  
Or these violets smell sweeter,  
Or the birds sing more in metre,  
If it all were years ago,  
When the melted mountain-snow  
Heard in Enna all the woe  
Of the poor forlorn Demeter?           (1.1-7)

A few stanzas later, the answer is a resounding *Yes!* Yes, the sunshine would be completer and the birds sing more in metre, but we must make do with partial sunshine and less poetic birds:

Ah! it may be! Greece had leisure  
For a world of faded pleasure;  
We must tread a tamer measure,  
To a milder, homelier lyre;  
We must tend a paler fire,  
Lay less perfume on the pyre,  
Be content with poorer treasure!       (4.1-7)

When this poem was noticed in the *Spectator* in February 1880, the reviewer could only conclude that "Mr. Gosse has more poetical affinity with Greece and Rome, than with England....He sees the past more vividly than he sees the present" (240). This sensibility is apparent everywhere in Gosse's criticism of the ode. The classical ode remains for him an ideal to aspire toward. Even if its splendor can never exactly be recaptured, Pindar's prosody can at least be imitated in the "tamer measure" of our "homelier lyre."

I have treated Gosse's views on historical forms at some length, because his idea of the ode has remained dominant and has directed the reception of Patmore's poems. His views on the sonnet have not had the same lasting power, but they help us see the radical purism that shaped his attitude toward genres and their forms. It is worth remembering that Gosse's transhistorical ode was a reading of literary history before it acquired the status of a definition. I'll turn now to Patmore's radically different idea of the ode, and the radically different vision of literary history that it entails.

### **Patmore's English Ode**

One might think that by calling his later poems *odes*, Patmore was signaling a desire to insert himself into the august poetic lineage that Gosse describes. And yet, Patmore's prose and correspondence reveal that he felt he was doing something completely novel. In a letter from the period in which he was composing them, he writes of the odes, "I have hit upon the finest metre that was ever invented," a meter that "opens up quite a new prospect to me of the possibilities of poetry" (Champneys 1: 258). From the Gossean perspective, this seems like a contradiction. On one hand, Patmore claims for himself an antique genre, one with its own formal prerogatives; on the other hand, he claims an unprecedented metrical invention. Throughout the later part of his career, Patmore moved between generic and formal names for his new meter. It was an "irregular ode" (1850), an "iambic ode, erroneously called irregular" (1878); it was "catalectic verse" (1890), and "the iambic tetrameter with unlimited catalexis, which is commonly called the 'irregular ode,' though it is really as 'regular' as any other English metre, and even much more so,



if its subtle laws are truly considered and obeyed" (1894). In his effort to name this new thing, Patmore was clearly both attracted to and wary of the term *ode*.

Part of the problem for Patmore had to do with his own historical imagining of the genre. Like Gosse's Pindaric ode, Patmore's irregular ode was an ideal; unlike Gosse's Pindaric ode, it was an ideal that had never yet been attained. If Gosse's ode yearned backward toward the lost Greek past, Patmore's ode yearned forward into the English future. There is an early pang of this prospective yearning in Patmore's 1850 review of *In Memoriam*. As with the "Metrical Law," Patmore frames this essay historiographically, beginning with the observation that "There are certain great epochs in the history of poetry" (532). He then undertakes a lengthy, chronological survey of "established English metres" in order to justify his claim that Tennyson's is "the first poem of historical importance which has appeared since 'The Excursion'" (532). The historical claim for Tennyson's poem rests on the question of form: Tennyson's "complete metrical science and feeling," which exceeds most other English poets (545). Through minute descriptions of the ballad stanza, rhyme royal, the sonnet, the Spenserian stanza, the Augustan couplet, the "Pindarique Ode," Patmore illustrates the affective dynamics of rhyme, line length, and pause, as they have been used or squandered over the history of English poetry.<sup>102</sup> Patmore has nothing nice to say about the English "Pindarique Ode" – he thinks it is a clumsy forgery of feeling (541) – but he has high hopes for a better "irregular Ode," one that will operate on the isochronous principle found in music.

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<sup>102</sup> He sees this history as falling into three periods, shaped by greater and lesser degrees of metrical inventiveness. In the first period, "rhymed stanzas seem to have been constructed upon distinct and easily discoverable principles." The second "was characterized by an extreme barrenness in the invention of new metres." The third, he says, "is, as yet, young; but its youth is very promising" (535).

Wordsworth offers a glimpse of what is possible, even if his ode is less prosodically scientific than Patmore would wish – and less so than *In Memoriam*. “Good examples of the irregular ode are so scarce,” Patmore laments, “the ode of Wordsworth’s to which we have just alluded being the only generally satisfactory one in the language” (542).

Patmore knew exactly what he meant by *ode*, but no other poet had; his predecessors consequently failed to meet his expectations for the genre.

Thus, the irregular ode has a strange status in the review. It is one of “the established English metres,” and yet it has no real examples. It has an ideal form, but that form has never heretofore been used. It comes at the end of the historical sequence, but it has not yet arrived. In the context of the discussion of *In Memoriam*, it becomes clear that a perfect irregular ode would borrow some quality from *In Memoriam* that even Wordsworth’s magnificent ode lacks. This quality is not beauty, because Wordsworth’s ode is very beautiful. Instead, it is a “thorough knowledge and pure feeling for metre” (545) -- a deliberate rather than fortuitous conjunction between feeling and form.<sup>103</sup>

In 1850, Patmore could only dream. But by the time he wrote and then reissued the “Metrical Law” in 1878, he could describe the irregular ode by generalizing about poems he had already written. At that time, the connection between catalexis and emotion was essential to his idea of the irregular ode:

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<sup>103</sup> Just as important to Patmore as Hegel’s observations on the difference between ancient and modern versification were his ideas on “the nature of the relation between the poet’s peculiar mode of expression and the matter expressed.” Quoting Hegel, Patmore writes, “It is false...that versification offers any obstacle to the free outpouring of poetic thought. True genius disposes with ease of sensible materials, and moves therein as in a native element, which instead of depressing or hindering, exalts and supports its flight” (“Metrical Law” 7).

The iambic ode, erroneously called ‘irregular,’ of which there exist few legitimate examples in our language, is, if I mistake not, a tetrameter, with almost unlimited liberty of catalexis, to suit the variations of the high and stately lyrical feeling which can alone justify the use of this measure. The existence of an amount of catalectic pause from the time of two to fourteen syllables—for the line, in this kind of metre, may change at once to that extent—is justified by the analogy of the pauses, or stops, in a similar style of music; and the fact of this amount of catalexis being the essence of this metre, seems to have been unconsciously felt and acknowledged by almost all who have written or attempted to write in it; for almost all have tried to represent the varying pauses, and to prepare the ear for them, by printing the lines affected with catalexis with shorter or longer blank spaces at the beginning; a precaution which seems to me to be unnecessary; for, if the feeling justifies the metre, the ear will take naturally to its variations; but if there is not sufficient motive power of passionate thought, no typographical aids will make anything of this sort of verse but *metrical nonsense*—which it nearly always is, even in Cowley, whose brilliant wit and ingenuity are strangely out of harmony with most of his measures. (28)

In the “Metrical Law,” then, the irregular ode has found its prosodic principle. Whereas earlier English odes either followed their models too closely or indulged in irregularity for irregularity’s sake, Patmore sees each syllable and pause contributing to the poem’s orchestration of feeling. For this to be possible, the scientific approach he praises in the *In Memoriam* review is required. A poet needs to understand how a line, a pause, a rhyme might express emotion. The varying meter depends entirely on variations of “lyrical feeling”; the feeling has to “justif[y] the metre.” The poet, in short, must be motivated by “passionate thought,” and his verse must be organized in such a way as to convey that thought transparently.<sup>104</sup>

The trouble with previous irregular odes in English was that they leaned too heavily on unhelpful models. Obviously, Patmore did not subscribe to Gosse’s notion of

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<sup>104</sup> The requirement of a “motive power of passionate thought” for meter resembles Emerson’s “meter-making argument” in “The Poet.” Patmore’s debts to Emerson are well documented. See Reid for more on this subject.

strophic and triadic fidelity. Nor did he approve of Cowley's attempt to find an English translation for Pindaric irregularity. In Patmore's view, both of these approaches mistook the nature of the ode. The English ode is not a Greek melody played on a "homelier lyre"; it is an altogether different melody played on a different instrument. For Patmore, there had been no great ode "in the language," because there had never been an ode that engaged seriously enough with the special prosodic conditions of English. This had to be the case, because nobody had yet articulated those conditions in a satisfactory way. In believing that he was, with the "Metrical Law," explaining the mechanism of English verse "for the first time" (26), Patmore also believed that he was for the first time describing the materials out of which a true English ode might be made. Without a scientific knowledge of modern English's ways of conveying feeling – distinct from those of other languages and other times – the English ode has to be impossible.

### **"What is Ode?"**

Instead of one long line of deviations from Pindar, then, Patmore sees ode history as multiple: each poetic culture must have its own form of ode. Patmore's concept of the ode was not his alone. Before Gosse's late-century historiography became definitive, *ode* was used to denote a range of lyric forms, many of which had no clear causal connection to the poetry of antiquity. The Orientalist scholar William Jones in 1772 published a collection of translations of "odes" from a diverse set of literary cultures, with the aim of demonstrating parallels among them, despite their prosodic differences. Here, "The First Nemean Ode of Pindar" is not the ur-ode, but one ode among many more: "An Ode of

Petrarch” (Canzone 27); “An Ode of Jami in the Persian Form and Measure”; “A Chinese Ode Paraphrased”; “A Turkish Ode of Mesihi.”<sup>105</sup>

After Jones, a prevalent use of the word was as a synonym or English approximation for the Italian word *canzone*. Many late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century collections of Petrarch’s poems used the word “ode” for the poems that Petrarch had called *canzoni*, beginning with John Nott’s *Petrarch Translated; in a Selection of His Sonnets, and Odes* (1777; 1808) -- the preface of which refers to Petrarch’s “49 Odes (CANZONI, some of which are denominated SESTINE, BALLATE, or MADRIGALI)” (ix).<sup>106</sup> R. G. Macgregor’s 1851 collection of *canzoni* was called, simply, *Odes of Petrarch*. The same phenomenon could be observed in Petrarch criticism. Susannah Dobson’s *Life of Petrarch* (1775) opted for “ode” instead of “canzone,” while Ugo Foscolo, in his influential *Essays on Petrarch* (1823) was clearly torn between the two terms. He defines the Petrarchan canzone as “a species of composition partaking of the ode and the elegy, the character and form of which are exclusively Italian” (92), and then proceeds to use the two words interchangeably: he discusses Petrarch’s “political odes” in his text but reproduces one of them with the title “Canzone.”<sup>107</sup> In *Select Sonnets of Petrarch* (1822), James Caulfield uses “ode” to explain not the canzone but the sonnet: “Probably *suono*, among the early Italian poets, was taken nearly in the same sense as *eidos* or ode was among the Greeks and Romans; and thus *sonetto*, being a diminutive of *suono*, will probably signify a short ode” (xiv).

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<sup>105</sup> For more on Jones’s deliberate revision of “the bases of the neo-classic theory of poetry” in this collection, see Abrams, *Mirror* (84-8).

<sup>106</sup> See Fiske, *A Catalogue of Petrarch Books* (40-43) for a list of early Petrarch translations in English.

<sup>107</sup> Foscolo also includes odes by Sappho and Anacreon alongside Petrarch’s poems in an appendix at the back of the book.

The analogous thinking above points to the practical and conceptual difficulties involved in describing foreign prosodies. These difficulties were perhaps most acutely felt by comparative literary historiographers. For them, the substitution of *ode* for *canzone* was often an explanatory expedient, a means to help the reader understand an unfamiliar form or genre by way of reference to one that was known. So in Sismondi's effort, for instance, to bring together the various literatures of the South under a romantic banner, he is often tempted by the explanatory power of *ode* – e.g. the Persian ghazale “is an amatory ode” (1: 61). But this kind of explanation clearly troubles Sismondi, for it elicits a curious reflection on the limits of both analogy and translation. Of Petrarch Sismondi writes,

The other form of his lyrical compositions, the *canzone*, is not unknown to us, although we have no express word for it, in the French; that of *chanson*, derived from it, signifying a poem of a totally different kind. We have seen that, amongst the Troubadours and the Trouvères, the chansons were odes divided into regular stanzas, longer than those of the odes of antiquity.... This extraordinary length, which perhaps renders the harmony less perceptible to the ear, has given a peculiar character to the *canzoni*, and distinguishes the romantic from the classical ode.... The translation of a canzone of Petrarch could never be confounded with an ode of Horace. We are obliged to class them both under the head of lyrical poems; but we immediately perceive that such a division includes very different kinds of compositions. (437)

Here, Sismondi questions the catchall nature of the word *ode*, and addresses the danger of merging – as Jones pointedly did -- diverse poetic systems into the same genre for the sake of comparison.<sup>108</sup> (Sismondi's English translator, Thomas Roscoe, must have found this a particularly strange passage to translate.) Sismondi finally settles on a useful distinction: even if we must consider the canzone a kind of ode, we can acknowledge a

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<sup>108</sup> Jones is nonetheless an important and acknowledged source for Sismondi, especially in his chapters on Arabic poetry (see my chapter two).

basic difference between the “classical ode” and the “romantic ode.” Sismondi’s taxonomy offers another way around the genealogical question that has dogged the criticism of Patmore’s odes: the poems may be both Petrarchan canzoni and “odes” with no historical contradiction, if Patmore had in mind this *romantic* ode.

Although the word *ode* presents some linguistic obstacles to Sismondi, it also enables his comparative historiography: it allows him to make broad distinctions between classical and modern literatures, and fine distinctions among the modern ones. Not surprisingly, Hegel also conceived of two large categories of ode, writing in the *Aesthetics* of “those kinds of lyric poetry that may be called by the general name of ‘Odes’ in the newer sense of that word” (1141). It is a “new form” with a new “manner of expression.” In contrast to the classical ode, this ode takes as its subject the poet’s own subjectivity as it encounters some external theme. And while the classical ode has “a measure fixed by rule,” this new ode has a more expressive form. As the poet’s subjectivity wrestles with his topic, his poem acquires its shape: “the swing and boldness of language and images, the apparent absence of rule in the structure and course of the poem, the digressions, gaps, sudden transitions, etc.” (1142). In Hegel, the modern ode is not to be confused with the canzone, which gets its own treatment (it is not as elevated as the ode, and its form internalizes melody to a greater extent [1146]). But the ode nonetheless expresses Hegel’s conviction that lyric poetry, more than any other art form is materially shaped by “a particular period and nationality and the individuality of the poet’s genius” (1147).

Hegel’s theory of poetry was extremely important to Patmore. It was the philosophical basis of his “Metrical Law” essay, and Patmore continued writing about

Hegel through his prose-writing career. But the aesthetic historian whose vision of the ode was most in keeping with Patmore's own was Johann Gottfried Herder, who was in the background of Hegel's *Aesthetics*.<sup>109</sup> Herder was also interested in the organic relationship between a people and its poetry, and he saw the ode as key. It was not a subset of lyric but the original and essential literary form: "the fountainhead of poetic art, and the germ cell of its life" ("Fragments" 36). In Herder's theory, the ode had a crucial anthropological and historical function (see Menze and Menges 264). As a result, the hallmark of the genre was, perhaps counterintuitively, *difference*. In his "Fragments of a Treatise on the Ode" (1765), Herder describes the ode's special position in the literary history of the world: "If any genre of poetic art has become Proteus among nations, judged on the basis of sensibility, subject matter, and language, the ode has so altered its spirit and countenance and pace, that perhaps only the aesthetician's magic mirror will recognize the same living essence among such varied manifestations. Nevertheless, there is yet a certain general unity of sensibility, of expression, and of harmony, which makes possible the drawing of a parallel among them all" (37). Herder's ode is not recognizable by one form or one tone, and it is a genre only in the loosest sense of the word. It is more properly an idea about how poetry, culture, and history interact.

Because each of the varied manifestations of ode had its own formal and tonal characteristics, a special kind of openness and attention is demanded by the literary historian. In "An Essay on a History of Lyrical Poetry" (1766), Herder makes the question "what is ode?" a hermeneutic one:

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<sup>109</sup> Hegel mentions Herder's anthropological contribution to the study of folk-tales in the lyric poetry section of the *Aesthetics*, saying that he "did a great deal in this direction," along with Goethe. For more on Herder's formative influence on Hegel's thought, see Michael Forster's introduction to Herder's *Philosophical Writings*.



There have been efforts to determine a concept of the ode; but what is ode? The Greek, the Roman, the Middle Eastern, the Skaldic, the ode of more recent origin, they are not quite like one another; which of them is the finest, the others merely being deviations? I could easily demonstrate that most investigators have decided the question in accordance with their own favorite notions, because each one draws his concepts and standards from only *one* kind, manifested by *one* people, and declared the other ones deviations. The impartial investigator will consider all kinds equally worthy of his commentary, and he therefore will seek first to create for himself a totality of history, subsequently to render judgment upon everything individually. (71)

Herder objected not only to the privilege accorded the classical ode, but also to any reading of other odes with reference to that type. The Middle Eastern ode and the Skaldic ode should not be understood as approaching or departing from the aesthetics of the Greek or Latin ode. To answer the question “what is ode,” the historian must decenter the dominant model and look with fresh eyes.

For Herder, the ode is endemic to all peoples and therefore differentiated according to the temper, language, climate, history, tastes, and folk culture of each. An ode belonging to another culture should *feel* foreign and be untranslatable, because it emerges from that culture and not ours. In a section of “Fragments” called “Of Various Odic Rhythms,” Herder describes the prosodic differences that characterize each nation. The Hebrews’ ode melody was “splendid in its simplicity” with “frequent short pauses,” because their language was simple and drum-like. The Greeks’ odic cadences “were *more drawn out*,” because their “language was for the most part polymetric, their sound more protracted than ours, their tongue more flexible, and their melody the zither.” Horace’s cadences were different from Pindar’s, because “he wrote for the Roman ears” and the Roman lyre (42). The German ode should not be Horatian, because German folk poetry is “ingeniously and pleasingly monotonous”; its instrument is “the flute or the trumpet”; at

its best, it has “relatively sizable caesurae, the meter grows short, the rhyme [becomes] a beauty in its monotony, not explicable on the basis of any other source” (43). Herder bemoans the German obsession with Horace, at the expense of producing a true German ode -- one made from properly German feelings and rhythms, for “German ears” (38, 42).

Ultimately, it seems that Herder’s historiographic investigation into the nature of the ode is directed toward the problem of German poetry. Germans have understood the German ode to be a classical ode translated, rather than its own particular thing. By looking too closely at the form of the Horatian model, by trying too hard to imitate it, the German people have blocked all the sources of inspiration that lead to the true ode. They have failed to recognize that the basis of their favorite foreign models was “a *thread of passion*”; that classical odes were motivated by a “logic of affect” that eludes translation; and that “the driving motive of the true poet is *frenzy*, his words are arrows, his target the whole heart” (44-6). As Patmore would do, Herder yearns for a passionate modern ode in his own idiom.

Through Herder, we can see Patmore’s poetic intention with more clarity. In his wish to make a new form of ode, Patmore was not turning his back on literary history. On the contrary, his ode was profoundly historical. He knew that classical prosody was unavailable to the modern English poet and, with Herder, saw the ode as a tool for thinking about – and feeling -- literary historical change. He believed that writing a true ode involved not a mastery of older ode forms (though an anthropological study of these forms was desirable), but a sharp recognition of the difference between past and present, there and here. Instead of a relic of classical antiquity or the European Renaissance,

Patmore saw his ode as the best possible elaboration of the English prosodic law that he sought and believed he found.

### **“The Azalea”**

By way of closing, I want to examine the formal feeling in one of Patmore’s odes: what Herder called the “logic of affect,” what Patmore called the “complete metrical science and feeling,” what Ezra Pound called “equations for the human emotions.” Given Patmore’s admiration for *In Memoriam* and its acutely sensitive form, it is not surprising that Patmore’s odes are also often elegies. The emotional intensity of elegy offers him an opportunity to test his expressive prosodic system against Tennyson’s. It is this intensity, this Herderian “thread of passion,” that I track in the following pages.

Among Patmore’s odes is a set of elegies written about the death of his first wife Emily, the woman exalted in *The Angel in the House*. These poems also idealize Emily, but they are not sentimental in the same way. As the best elegies do, they make the loss felt as a visceral shock, by minutely investigating some all-too-real detail that seems to enfold a world of previously unrecorded pain. In “The Azalea,” the objects are few -- a potted plant, a bedroom, a widower, morning – but in the course of twenty-five lines Patmore produces the elegiac shock at least twice:

There, where the sun shines first  
Against our room,  
She train’d the gold Azalea, whose perfume  
She, Spring-like, from her breathing grace dispersed.  
Last night the delicate crests of saffron bloom,  
For this their dainty likeness watch’d and nurst,  
Were just at point to burst.  
At dawn I dream’d, O God, that she was dead,  
And groan’d aloud upon my wretched bed,  
And waked, ah, God, and did not waken her,

But lay, with eyes still closed,  
 Perfectly bless'd in the delicious sphere  
 By which I knew so well that she was near,  
 My heart to speechless thankfulness composed.  
 Till 'gan to stir  
 A dizzy somewhat in my troubled head—  
 It *was* the azalea's breath, and she *was* dead !  
 The warm night had the lingering buds disclosed,  
 And I had fall'n asleep with to my breast  
 A chance-found letter press'd  
 In which she said,  
 'So, till to-morrow eve, my Own, adieu !  
 Parting's well-paid with soon again to meet,  
 Soon in your arms to feel so small and sweet,  
 Sweet to myself that am so sweet to you !' (1-25)

It is certainly possible that there are readers who do not respond to this poem the way I do, but I imagine my reaction to be something like the kind of reaction that Patmore was trying to provoke. I have read "The Azalea" many times, and it always makes me feel the same way. Even typing it up, my breath catches in my throat and I notice my heart beating a little bit harder. The ending of the poem does not affect me much – Emily's ventriloquized voice sounds relatively artificial – but I will admit that the rest of it almost hurts. One of Patmore's favorite readers, the poet and essayist Alice Meynell, described the impact of the odes thus: "In *The Unknown Eros* the poet's intention, single, separate, strikes unique strokes against which the reader's human heart is all unarmed by custom" ("Coventry Patmore" 128). In the case of "The Azalea," I agree.

There are many narrative and semantic details that help generate pathos. The death is obviously recent enough to seem a perverse disturbance of reality rather than an integrated part of reality (it is still "our room"), and it is recent enough to have happened within the time-span of a particular flower's budding and blooming. It is also recent enough for the speaker to remember the sensory experience of his wife's nearness,

especially her smell. There is the wife's loss, too. She has tenderly cultivated the plant but has just missed its flowering – an elegant shorthand for everything else she will now miss. And of course, the poem's terrible voltas: the dream of her death, the relieved waking, and then the realization of her death more terrible than (and more terrible because of) the dream. Word choices also manipulate the reader. As the speaker lies "with eyes still closed / Perfectly bless'd in the delicious sphere / By which I knew so well that she was near," the reader accepts the verb "knew" as confirmation that the dream was wrong. As a result, the creeping insight of the lines that follow -- "Till 'gan to stir / A dizzy somewhat in my troubled head" – dawns on the reader in distressing real time.<sup>110</sup>

But this accounting of the poem's pathetic details fails to capture its total effect, because it misses the role of prosody. Patmore's prose suggests that a poet uses prosody to put feelings into poems. In a carefully written catalectic ode, a pause is at syllabic minimum "a long-drawn sigh" and at syllabic maximum a "passionate cataract" ("Francis" 161). Rhyme's appeal to memory and hope also becomes, for Patmore, an applicable formula. "[U]pon this saying," he writes, "we would found the rule that rhymes which recur at irregular and unexpected intervals ought always to be increased in number, in order to make up for the effect of their irregularity in weakening the force of that appeal" ("In Memoriam" 545). By Patmore's metric of pause, the most emotionally intense parts of the poem may be the shortest lines -- "Against our room" (1); "Till 'gan to stir" (15); and "In which she said" (21) -- and of these isochronous lines, the most intense one of all might be the one embedded in the densest network of rhymes: "In

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<sup>110</sup> John Maynard describes this real-time reading experience as "deregulating and physical" (221).

which she said.” This line is the fourth among four C rhymes that are distributed across the length of the poem, and presumably it is haunted by the memory of the other three: “dead,” “bed,” and “dead.” This moment at the edge of prosopopoeia, when the *now definitely dead* wife is about to speak but is not yet speaking (as the passionate cataract of pause roars on), may be the prosodic climax of the poem.

In Meynell’s opinion, Patmore’s law was imperfect, and imperfectly observed by even himself. Nonetheless, she writes, “A more lovely dignity of extension and restriction, a more touching sweetness of simple and frequent rhyme, a truer impetus of pulse and impulse, English verse could hardly yield than are to be found in his versification” (“Odes” 95). And whether or not the feelings of “The Azalea” are quantifiable in the ways that Patmore suggests, the poem certainly does make powerful use of pause and terminal rhyme. The first four lines demonstrate those effects undeniably at work:

There, where the sun shines first  
Against our room,  
She train’d the gold Azalea, whose perfume  
She, Spring-like, from her breathing grace dispersed.

Patmore’s lineation controls the way we encounter these lines. Were he not working deliberately with the experiences of terminal rhyme and pause, and against conventional ideas about metrical regularity, these lines would almost certainly appear like this:

There, where the sun shines first against our room,  
She train’d the gold Azalea, whose perfume  
She, Spring-like, from her breathing grace dispersed.

This arrangement throws the lines into something very like iambic pentameter, and the gravitational pull of that pattern noticeably coerces our reading. We are off to a galloping start with the first line, and by the fourth line the momentum is strong: the “She” at its

beginning is barely registered (despite the comma), and the beat falls heavily on “Spring” and “from,” and every other alternating syllable. Patmore is pushing against this rhythmic pull. By breaking up the first two lines, he slows them all the way down. The first line becomes heavily spondaic; the second line seems to demand, indeed, an extended pause. No longer compelled by iambic pentameter regularity, the fourth line falls differently, so that “She” weighs more heavily on the ear.<sup>111</sup>

Such lineal disruption might not immediately read as sad, but upon rereading, the lines’ slow and heavy beats seem to invite a mimetic interpretation. We can infer that Patmore wished it so, because it is precisely this lineal disruption that enables a familiar rhyme pattern to shape the poem’s opening lines: ABBA. This rhyme pattern, which also closes the poem, is Tennyson’s elegiac stanza – the form that Patmore helped identify in his 1850 review as uniquely moving, as a perfect instantiation of rhyme’s “memory and hope.” While Tennyson’s stanza fits the ABBA rhymes into extremely regular iambic tetrameter quatrains, Patmore does not. He extricates the rhymes from both the rhythmic and the stanzaic frame, sharpening the affective power of Tennyson’s rhymes with a motivated irregularity.<sup>112</sup>

By invoking the formal sorrows of *In Memoriam*, Patmore is also addressing that poem’s relationship to his own prosodic project. In 1850, Patmore saw *In Memoriam* as a “high water-mark” in the development of modern poetry, and he was just beginning to imagine an English form that might be more expressive still. By the time of “The

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<sup>111</sup> For an altogether different scansion of the same lines, see Pierson (510).

<sup>112</sup> Actually, Patmore thinks that Tennyson’s form is not really stanzaic: “The divisions are scarcely to be regarded as stanza, for the beauty of the measure mainly depends upon its adaptation to lengthy phrases. A stanza ought to contain a completed phrase: stanzas of any but the shortest lengths should terminate in a full stop...this metre has the continuity of Dante’s *terza rima*” (“In Memoriam” 546).

Azalea,” Patmore had found a meter of his own, one that combined the emotional rhyme science of Tennyson with the great pauses of Wordsworth’s yet imperfect ode.

Eschewing the old symmetries of the classical strophe and the romantic stanza, Patmore’s ode pointed forward into the twentieth century.<sup>113</sup> As Herder had, he saw in ode form the “germ cell” of a whole new kind of poetry. I’ll quote one more time from the 1868 letter in which Patmore describes the joy of finding his new meter. Here, he confesses the hope that one day his ode might burn away, leaving behind to future poets its consummately expressive form:

The beauty and incomparable variety of the metre opens up quite a new prospect to me of the possibilities of poetry. In the hands of a Goethe, for example, what might not be done with it. Fancy a drama full of power and tenderness in which the persons should speak their passions in that splendid and delicate torrent of music, instead of in stupid blank verse. But far be it for me to dream of such a work. I must content myself with ‘brief swallow-flights of song.’

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<sup>113</sup> Patmore’s ode form is frequently cited as a precursor to free verse. See H. T. Kirby-Smith’s *Origins of Free Verse*.



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