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The Poetic Plays of Michael Field

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THE POETIC PLAYS OF MICHAEL FIELD

by

Joan E. Biederstedt

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

November

1963
VITA

Joan Biederstedt was born in Chicago, Illinois, February 6, 1930. She completed her elementary and secondary education in Chicago schools and attended Alverno College, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, from 1948 to 1952, from which she holds the degree of Bachelor of Arts.

Between 1952 and 1956 she taught English at Pius XI High School, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, during which time she took supplementary courses at Marquette University. She began teaching English at Saint Scholastica Academy, Chicago, in September, 1956. Two years later she was named Chairman of the Drama Department at Senn High School in Chicago. She joined the faculty of the Department of English at Barat College, Lake Forest, Illinois, in 1959, with the rank of Instructor. In September, 1963, she was appointed an Assistant Professor.

She began her graduate studies at Loyola University in September, 1956, and was awarded the Master of Arts degree in English Literature in August, 1958. In September of that same year she began her graduate studies toward the Ph.D. degree and was accepted as a candidate for that degree in 1962.
For they who hear our music, they possess
Our very selves, our substance, all we are
And all we have . . . .

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INTRODUCTION

The period from 1890 to 1900 needs no introduction. Whatever adjective is used to qualify the decade — "yellow," "mauve," "naughty," "gay," or "decadent" — the transitional character of the period is clearly established. The Nineties witnessed the last novels of Thomas Hardy, the deaths of Robert Browning and Alfred Lord Tennyson, the Oscar Wilde debacle, the beginning of the "Irish revival," and the short-lived literary careers of Aubrey Beardsley, Ernest Dowson, John Davidson, and a score of minor writers who also need no introduction.

There is, however, one writer, associated, at least to some extent, with the Nineties, who does need an introduction today. And that is Michael Field. Two ladies, Katherine Bradley and her niece Edith Cooper, assumed the masculine pseudonym in the Eighties in order to insure greater freedom of expression. Sometime in the early Nineties, the identity was revealed. The collaborative effort did not cease but continued until the partnership was dissolved by death.

Michael Field was known to contemporaries through the efforts of Robert Browning, who prided himself on the discovery of the poets, corresponded with and encouraged them until his death. George Meredith, George Moore, Oscar Wilde, Arthur Symons, Lionel Johnson, and the artists Charles Ricketts and
Charles Shannon were also faithful friends and appreciators who did not abandon the poets when the myth of Michael Field's identity was dispelled and a consequent lack of interest in their work ensued.

Virtually recluses, Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper were dedicated to art and beauty. In combined authorship they wrote twenty-seven poetic plays, one of which was produced by J. T. Grein at the Independent Theatre. Their lack of popularity and the small number of devotees that their works attracted apparently did not trouble them, and certainly it did not hinder their efforts in the drama. In each play there is evidence of the times of which they were and yet were not a part. Legendary and occult historical subject matter, strains of neo-paganism, a dedication to art and beauty, and themes of romantic love are present in their dramas. The authors' feminine characters, particularly, give evidence of a more dramatic and fatal dedication to love than Ibsen's Nora, whose slammed door raised the hue and cry of London audiences for years. Traditional in character, the plays of Michael Field demonstrate the strengths and weaknesses of the age and also foreshadow innovations which occur at the end of the century.

Viewing the plays of Michael Field after more than forty years of virtual silence requires a comprehensive survey not only of the personal history of the authors but also an analysis of their work in terms of the basic elements of structure, character delineation, theme, and style against the background of the major currents of Victorian drama.

The personal history of the playwrights will be related through three significant stages in their development, which span the years 1878 to 1907.
The Bristol period includes the educational and literary influences which
generated the experimental early work of the poets. The Reigate period
illustrates the impact of the spirit of the Nineties on the poets' life
and art. The Richmond period concludes the authors' preoccupation with
the tragic form and directs attention to their religious conversion. Each
of the three significant stages reaffirms the collaborative effort and
Michael Field's dedication to literature and art.

Because the twenty-seven plays balance precariously between the "old
drama" and the "new," the literary context for the poetic plays of Michael
Field is as broad as the span of Victorian drama and as narrow as the scope
of J. T. Grein's Independent Theatre. The transitional character of late
Victorian drama necessitates the expanded chapter on context in order to see
Michael Field's poetic dramas as reflections of "tradition and change."

The uneven quality and the number of the dramas establishes the necessary
procedure for the study of Michael Field's plays. A detailed consideration
of structure, character delineation, theme, and style indicates characteristics
which at times are shown most effectively by several examples from several
plays and at other times by a single illustrative work and even, on occasion,
by juxtaposition with another author's work. The plays are not equally in-
spired or inspiring, and, consequently, certain plays illustrate a particular
facet of Michael Field's dramatic power more forcefully than others. Selectiv-
ity, therefore, is both necessary and advisable.
The paradox of the virtually unestablished literary reputation of Michael Field today and the poets' literary stature in their own period prompted the present study of their plays. The conclusions of the study, though tentative, introduce Michael Field anew and bring the poets' plays into focus against the background of the developing dramatic world of the Nineties.
CHAPTER I
PERSONAL HISTORY

In 1885 at a dinner party given in honor of Robert Browning, the aged but vigorous poet announced that he had discovered a new poet of considerable promise. Before Browning could say who it was, Michael Field was named by many of the cultural and critical gathering. The honored guest of the evening was not alone in his discovery. In the slender volume containing two tragedies, Callirrhoe and Fair Rosamund, which had recently appeared, the ring of a new voice was too clear and too true to pass unheeded.

When the first two poetic plays of Michael Field were published in 1884, the laudatory reviewers stated that they knew nothing of the author's personal life, and for a long time the mystery was unsolved. New works appeared bearing the same name on the title page, confirming the initial enthusiasm of the critics and justifying the hopes that were formed; however, no one came forward to acknowledge himself as the author.

The playwright remained Michael Field and wished to be known as Michael Field to insure freedom of expression.¹ At length, in the Nineties, the

¹ This idea is expanded in a letter written by Katherine Bradley to Robert Browning on November 23, 1884, "The revelation of dual authorship would indeed be utter ruin to us; but the report of lady authorship will dwarf and enfeeble our work at every turn. Like the poet Gray we shall never 'speak out.' And we have many things to say that the world will not tolerate from a woman's lips. We must be free as dramatists to work out in the open air of nature — exposed to her vicissitudes, witnessing her terrors; we cannot be stifled in drawing-room conventionalities. — — — Besides, you are robbing us of real criticism, such as man gives man." Found in Michael Field, Works and Days, eds. T. and D. C. Sturge Moore (London, 1933), p. 6.
Identity was discovered. Michael Field was the pseudonym adopted by two ladies, Katherine Bradley and her niece Edith Cooper, who collaborated in so perfect a manner that their literary history is unique. To their great personal disappointment, the myth of Michael Field was dispelled, and their work was treated with ever-increasing coldness by the coterie which gathered around the newest authors in London.²

Nevertheless, Michael Field's poetry was not completely unacclaimed. Sturge Moore, their literary executor, records faithfully the encouraging correspondence of Robert Browning, George Meredith, Oscar Wilde, Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon, Theodore Watts Dunton, Arthur Symons and George Moore. Particularly was Michael Field indebted to the criticism of Lionel Johnson, "who alone ever wrote words about our work that our souls counter-signed."³ These were the litterateurs and personal friends who encouraged the two dedicated authors to write twenty-seven plays, eight volumes of lyric poetry, and Works and Days, a record of their thoughts and actions. Spanning the years 1888 to 1914, the journal consists of twenty-six vellum-bound folios, confirming the authors' interest in the world of art and letters.

Virtually recluses in life and obscurities in literary history, these two writers, paradoxically, inspire recognition in biographical and critical

³ Works and Days, p. 240.
literature. They were as dedicated to life as they were to poetry, and it is not difficult to understand why the latter necessarily stemmed from the former. Speaking of this essential harmony, Gordon Bottomley reflected that the way in which their lives and their work were one was a marvellous thing to him. "Life was one of their arts — they gave it a consistency and texture that made its quality a sheer delight."\(^4\) They possessed the faculty of identifying being with doing. This beauty of life was reflected in their devotion to each other. "There was a bloom and a light on that which made it incomparable."\(^5\) Also it was seen in the flawless rhythm and balance that each managed to maintain in her own individual life. Their collaboration in art was unique, and their dedication to life was all-consuming. Both originated and developed in a strong family relationship.

Katherine Bradley and her niece Edith Cooper descended from a prosperous Derbyshire merchant family which settled at Ashbourne. As early as 1749, the Bradley family, represented by Joseph Bradley, gave ample evidence of the fact that they were "merchants of substance and culture."\(^6\)

\(^4\) Quoted by Mary Sturgeon in *Michael Field* (New York, 1922), p. 36.


More significantly, in the family genealogy there is a Charles Bradley, who was "a prolific and meditative writer both of prose and song." Whether this Charles Bradley was the Charles who married Emma Harris of Birmingham after his father had migrated there from Ashbourne is uncertain. There is proof, however, of the fact that Charles Bradley, a tobacco manufacturer, married Emma Harris in 1834. In 1835 their first child Emma was born, and eleven years later, on October 27, 1846, their second daughter Katherine was born.

When Katherine was two years old, her father, struck down by cancer, died. Mrs. Bradley moved her small family to a suburb of Birmingham and devoted her time and energies to the education of her daughters. She also took great care to supplement the lessons she gave her girls with other and more advanced teaching. Consequently instruction in painting, and studies in French and Italian, were pursued. There is evidence, too, of extensive social activity with a lively group of cousins. One of them has related the imaginative and playful personality of the child Katherine. She delighted in poetry and frequently spoke and wrote letters in rhyme. Scott's *Lady of the Lake* was a favorite work, and as a child she read and reread it. She also enjoyed participating in dramatic ventures. These were, for the most part, impromptu representations at holiday festivities such as Christmas and New Year's Day. Growing up in such an environment was obviously ideal for a child of many natural gifts and buoyant temperament.8

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7 Ibid., p. 14.
8 Ibid., p. 16.
By the time Katherine's elder sister, Emma, married J. R. Cooper in 1860, Katherine was vitally interested in the classics and in the mastery of the German language as well as the appreciation of German literature. Emma moved to Kenilworth, where her husband was an established merchant. Two years later Edith Cooper was born on January 12. In 1864, Mrs. Cooper had a second daughter, Amy, an event which left her a permanent invalid and necessitated the assistance of Katherine and her widowed mother. Both moved to Kenilworth in order to look after the little family. Naturally a strong bond grew between aunt and niece. Also quite naturally in the ensuing years, Katherine would lead Edith along the same intellectual and artistic pathways she herself had traveled and would continue to tread.

Katherine's educational experiences, spanning many disciplines and many universities, were varied and vital. Literature both ancient and modern fascinated her, and Greek became a major field of endeavor. Records indicate that she went to Newnham, Cambridge, for a summer vacation course. Katherine also attended the Collège de France at Paris. During her sojourn in France, she reportedly fell in love with the brother of one of her French friends. He was considerably older than she, and before their romance was fulfilled, he died. There is every indication that Katherine viewed the experience as a great tragedy and never forgot it.9

Ardent for knowledge and direction in her intellectual pursuits,

9 Though this event was long past when the authors began their journal in 1888, there is an entry every year on the anniversary of Katherine Bradley's friend's death. *Works and Days*, p. xvi.
Katherine corresponded with Ruskin during the years 1875 to 1878. He personally recommended areas of study and suggested certain authors while rejecting others. "I should like you to give up all metaphysical reading at present, be content with history -- poetry (suppose you try to understand the Wars of the Roses? as relating to the religion of England -- and indicating its corruption.) Have you read George Herbert's works -- Miss Edgeworth's? or Goldsmith's?" Ruskin also recommended Plato and Emerson but continued to discourage metaphysics or any reading which would profess to account for or explain things. Katherine was apparently strongly influenced by Ruskin in moral and artistic questions. She also was a companion of the Guild of St. George for a time, though that was as far as she ever went in Ruskinian economics.

Vivacious and immensely alert intellectually, Katherine radiated a glowing enthusiasm for knowledge. Warm and kind in her relationships, she quite naturally fostered Edith as a mother, lavishing attention and affection on her niece. In 1878, when Edith was sixteen and the family moved to Stoke Bishop, Bristol, both aunt and niece entered into the life of the University College with great zest. Though the classics and philosophy occupied most of their time and effort, they enthusiastically supported the more advanced ideas -- women's suffrage, anti-vivisection, and higher


11 Brantwood, February 9, 1878, in Ibid.

12 The following passage from a letter to Miss Louie Ellis elucidates this attitude: "I speak as a mother; mother of some sort we must all become. I have just been watching Edith stripping the garden of all its roses and then piling them in a barrel for me. . . ." Sturgeon, p. 75.
education — at debating societies. They continued to explore the world of literature and art. They worked at water painting and even wore flowing garments in "art" colors. Consciously and deliberately, they adopted "aesthetic dress," wore blue and, more particularly, green,\(^{13}\) and styled their hair in a loose knot at the nape of the neck. Their friends knew them as the two eager girls who walked over the downs every morning to attend lectures. Despite their careless hair and ingenious dress, they had a certain distinction and were fascinating conversationalists.

Both young women were absorbed in the world of poetry; yet they were companionable souls in a sympathetic circle, Katherine with abounding vitality and love of fun and keen joy in life, expansive and forthcoming despite an occasional haughtiness of manner, and Edith crystalline and fragile, sensitive and withdrawn by nature. In addition to writing poetry, they continued to read avidly. "Evidence is clear that they appreciated genius so widely diverse as Flaubert and Walt Whitman, Hegel and Bourget, Ibsen and Heine, Dante, Tolstoi, and Saint Augustine."\(^{14}\)

Educationally the ten-year Bristol period was important. However, because experimentation in poetry was stimulated during that time, the

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\(^{14}\) Sturgeon, p. 30. Further, there is a salient letter from W. B. Yeats to Katherine Tynan. "There is a society at whose meetings Michael Field [Miss Bradley] is to be seen sometimes. It is called the 'Society of the New Life' and seeks to carry out some of the ideas of Thoreau and Whitman. They live together in a Surrey village. Rhys is to bring me to a meeting. Michael Field is a bird of another feather from the London littérateurs, whom I cannot but rather despise." The Letters of W. B. Yeats, ed. Allan Wade (London, 1954), pp. 39 - 40.
literary implications of the period are even more significant. In 1875 Katherine had initiated the venture by publishing a volume of verse, The New Minnesinger, under the pseudonym, Arran Leigh. Evidence that Edith also became interested in writing poetry is clearly established in the 1881 publication of Bellerophon by Arran and Isla Leigh. The leisure and serenity of life at Bristol inspired the early lyrics, which the authors later considered experimental and immature. The lyrics did, however, indicate one important fact -- collaboration was the most effective mode of expression for the aunt and niece. Bellerophon further indicated a tendency, particularly on the part of Edith, toward dramatic movement and a sense of tragedy as well as interest in classical subject matter.

The publication of Callirrhoe and Fair Rosamund in 1884 was both a logical development of their former endeavors and the beginning of Michael Field's career. The two poets relegated their two previously published volumes to the past, and emphasizing the importance of the new work, they assumed a different pseudonym. Michael Field was chosen somewhat arbitrarily, "Michael because they liked the name and its associations, Field because it went well with Michael. But it is true also that they had a great admiration for the work of William Michael Rossetti, whom, Katherine

15 John Ruskin refers to it in a letter to Katherine Bradley dated January 20, 1876. "I did accidentally open the Minnesinger and liked a bit or two of it — and I don't think I threw it into the waste basket [sic] — generally the receptacle without so much as opening, of all books of poetry sent me by the authors." Works and Days, p. 146.

16 See the poem "Jason" written by Edith Cooper at the age of seventeen and reprinted in Dedicated (London, 1914).
says in one of her letters, they regarded as a 'kind of god-father'; and it had been true, too, that Field had been an old nick-name of Edith.\textsuperscript{17} Mas-culine pseudonyms were not uncommon in a period seeking greater freedom of expression for women.\textsuperscript{18} In this particular case, the pen name also cloaked the collaboration.

Press reaction to the plays was favorable, and Callirrhoe went into a second edition in November of the same year. Encouraged, the poets completed three tragedies the following year. \textit{The Father's Tragedy}, William Rufus, and \textit{Loyalty or Love} were published in 1885. In 1886 they completed \textit{Brutus Ulter}, and in 1887, \textit{Canute the Great} and \textit{The Cup of Water}. These early works also attracted the attention of well-known literary figures, and their interest proved more durable and helpful than the rather fickle praise of the \textit{Athenaeum}, \textit{Pall Mall Gazette}, and the \textit{Academy}. Robert Browning, especially, was impressed with their work, and his letters to them were congratulatory and encouraging. Edith, in a letter to Browning, captured the tone of their friendship and voiced as well the involvement of the aunt and niece in literary activities:

\begin{quote}
Such words as yours give more abundant life: to expend it in higher, more reverent efforts is the only true gratitude possible. As to myself and my part in the book -- to make all clear to you, I must ask for strict secrecy. My Aunt and I work together after the fashion of Beaumont and Fletcher. She is my senior, by but sixteen years. She has lived with me, taught me, encouraged me and joined me to her poetic life. She was the enthusiastic student of Bacchae.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{17} Sturgeon, p. 27.

\textsuperscript{18} Katherine Lyon Mix, \textit{A Study in Yellow} (Lawrence, Kan., 1960), pp. 16 - 17.
Some of the scenes of our play are like mosaic work -- the mingled, various product of our two brains. The Faun scene is mine. I was just nineteen when, with joy mixed with a dreary sense of woe, the conception came to me. Emathion is also almost wholly mine and much of Margery. I think if our contributions were disentangled and one subtracted from the other, the amount would be almost even. This happy union of two in work and aspiration is sheltered and expressed by 'Michael Field.' Please regard him as the author. 19

The Bristol decade had been a period of intense development in the literary career of aunt and niece, but it was also a time of great personal loss. Katherine's mother, Mrs. Bradley, had died of cancer; and her daughter, the invalid mother of Edith, had also died. The remaining members of the family -- Mr. Cooper, his daughters Edith and Amy, and their aunt, Katherine -- moved to Reigate in 1888. There they remained until Mr. Cooper's death in 1898. This second decade, located at Reigate, confirmed the poets' artistic career and introduced the poets to George Meredith and George Moore and the men of the Nineties -- Oscar Wilde, Arthur Symons, Lionel Johnson -- and the French writers au courant, particularly Verlaine. 20 Old friendships and interests were left behind with the old environment. Their circle of friends by this time was composed of people with interests similar to theirs, and their activities were restricted in order to better serve their work.

19 Edith Cooper to Robert Browning, May 29, 1884, Works and Days, p. 3.

20 A fascinating account is given of Verlaine's reading of Sagesse at Barnard's Inn on November 22, 1893, in Works and Days, p. 188.
They traveled frequently to the Continent, but their trips were more meaningful than their earlier jaunts in France and Germany, which were made for the pure pleasure of seeing masterpieces. Now that they were embarked upon a literary career, each trip was undertaken with a purpose. If they went to Edinburgh, it was for the Marian legend; to the New Forest, it was for some faint sound of Rufus' hunting-horn; to Italy, it was for innumerable haunting echoes of Imperial Rome, of the Borgias, of the Church; to areas of old France, for memories of Frankish kings; to Ireland, for a vanishing glimpse of Deirdre; to Cornwall, for the inspiration of Tristan and Iseult. This, however, does not mean that their journeys were austere and unsociable. They visited Sarianna and Pen Browning at Asolo and toured Italy with the art collectors, Mr. and Mrs. Bernard Berenson. Arthur Symons escorted them through Paris and showed them the woods of Fontainebleau. 21

Nevertheless, despite the many friends and a genuine interest in affairs, the two authors unconsciously gave a sense of seclusion from life, of natures dedicated or, at least, set apart. This became increasingly apparent, particularly in the life of Edith, where there is strong evidence of the rejection of romance in order to pursue her artistic career. The love story was never directly revealed, but the lyrics and a few scattered remarks in the journals indicate that the relationship developed from the companionship

21 Sturgeon, p. 34.
of kindred spirits. It was the experience "of friendship growing to passion, of love declared and reciprocated, but not fulfilled because of some other tie which bound both lover and beloved." 

Though there were only five plays actually published during this time, there is every indication that plays published years later were actually composed at Reigate. A very important event happened in 1893 which might explain the scant amount of published material and indicate the preoccupation of the poets. Michael Field's prose play, *A Question of Memory*, was accepted and produced by J. T. Grein and his Independent Theatre on October 27, 1893. Albert Fleming lent the aunt and niece his rooms at Gray's Inn.

22 The identity of Edith's friend is uncertain. It may have been Charles Ricketts. "There was an especially intimate bond of friendship between him and the younger lady, Miss Edith Cooper, which lasted until her death about 1912." Gordon Bottomley, "Charles Ricketts," *Durham University Journal* (June, 1940), 182.

23 Sturgeon, p. 84.


25 There are at least two other indications that the poets were greatly interested in producing their work at this time. George Moore greatly admired *William Rufus* and proposed it to the Théâtre Libre as one of the English plays to be acted. [*Works and Days*, p. 134, and George Moore, * Impressions and Opinions* (London, 1913), p. 180.] And Michael Field sent the play *Deirdre* to W. B. Yeats in 1903. He rejected the play in the name of the Irish National Theatre Society for two reasons: "It would need a far bigger stage than we are likely to command for a long time to come," and "I do not like it as well as your other work." *Letters of W. B. Yeats*, p. 407.
in order that they might comfortably follow the rehearsals of the play. From October 13 to the actual presentation on October 27, the writers observed living theatre. Edith noted in her journal, "I learn an infinite amount of stage technique from him (DeLange, the stage manager) -- his foreign reasonableness appealing to me as an artist who wishes to work with comprehension of my means." Unfortunately, the play was preceded by a short play by Coppée, "Le Pater," which contained an hysterical heroine, soldiers, and two volleys. As Katherine aptly predicted, "The evening will be called shooting night -- comedy will be let loose." The reviews were scathing; but more significant, the poets themselves realized that the audience was gripped until the fourth act. They became increasingly aware of faulty plot structure, rewrote the play in three acts, and republished it years later. The immediacy of actual production yielded rich rewards in terms of dramatic structuring, but it did little to promote Michael Field's popularity.

Of paramount concern to the poets was not only the quality of their writing but also the actual appearance of each of their books. Great care was taken with format, decoration, binding, paper, and type. In every detail of color, arrangement, appearance of title page, and design of cover, there was discrimination, experimentation, and exacting directions. This

26 Works and Days, p. 173.
27 Ibid., p. 180.
preoccupation brought them in contact with the "artist printers," who were carrying on the tradition established by Morris in the Kelmscott Press. They corresponded with Elkin Mathews and John Lane of the Bodley Head, and their initial acquaintance with Ricketts and Shannon, editors of The Dial, became a close friendship. Ricketts personally supervised the artwork of their plays, many of which were printed at the Vale Press.

Ricketts and Shannon, who were always referred to as "The Artists" by Katherine and Edith, are responsible for many facts about the poets during the Reigate and later Richmond periods. Charles Ricketts' first impression of them is interesting and contains one of the most vivid descriptions of the poets:

Katherine was then immensely vivacious, full of vitality and curiosity. When young she had doubtless been very pretty, and for years kept traces of colour in her white hair. But if Katherine was small, ruddy, gay, buoyant and quick in word and temper, Edith was tall, pallid, singularly beautiful in a way not appreciated by common people, that is, white with gray eyes, thin in face, shoulders and hands, as if touched throughout with gray long before the graying of her temples. Sudden shadows would flit over the face at some inner perception or memory. Always of fragile health, she was very quiet and restrained in voice and manner, a singularly alive and avid spectator and questioner, occasionally speaking with force and vivacity, but instinctively

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28 "The Kelmscott Press set a new standard with the fineness of its paper and the beauty of its decoration. Ricketts and Shannon at the Vale produced fastidiously bound volumes -- collector's items." Mix, p. 20.

29 "Oscar Wilde sat down and told us that in his belief our Tragic Mary and Rossetti's Poems were the two beautiful books [in appearance] of the century -- but he was going to surpass us, and would send us an early copy of his Tales (A House of Pomegranates - Designed and dec. by Ricketts and Shannon, 1891) to make us very unhappy." Works and Days, p. 139.
Ricketts later tried to capture this ethereal spirit of Edith Cooper in a miniature portrait set in a jewelled pendant. These and other attempts to project the unique personalities of the two ladies were always interesting but never quite satisfactory.

The aunt and niece continued to write and also frequented the theatre and the opera. When Pater lectured, they were in the audience. When Will Rothenstein had a studio-warming at Chelsea, they were present conversing with George Moore and Oscar Wilde. Their life was at once meaningful yet leisurely, exciting yet composed.

The spirit of life at Reigate was pleasant and casual, and each member of the small family pursued life in his own fashion. In the spring of 1897, Mr. Cooper, Edith's father, was vacationing at Zermatt, Switzerland, with his younger daughter Amy. On June 24, he went out from the hotel and never returned. From June until the discovery of the body in the Wittiwald on October 25, the family was oppressed by the fear that Mr. Cooper had been murdered. When the body was found and all evidence indicated an accidental death, they returned to Switzerland, arranged and attended his proper burial. Edith brought Alpine roses back to plant on

30 Sturgeon, p. 38.

31 The drawing and setting are the work of Charles Ricketts and are in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.
her mother's grave. In her journal she writes, "The Alpine rose presses close to the English mound. How blessed is piety toward the dead! The ancients understood to the depths that virtue, composed of justice and tenderness to those who are no longer living." 32

To escape the burden of sorrow for a time, the poets visited Oxford. The beauty of the place brought them peace, and the kindness of friends there lightened their sadness. The artistic interests of Mr. and Mrs. Daniel, particularly, comforted them. They finished a masque, Noontide Branches, on which they had been working. Two years later it was published under Daniel's supervision from the Daniel Press at Oxford.

Katherine and Edith returned to Reigate, but the place was filled with the memories of the past. Edith wrote:

It is impossible to realise here in the home round which he has twined his whole life in love for us, thought for our future, toil for our pleasure, that he will never see the plants we had set in the beds for his eyes, the melons reared for him, the noble roses he gave. With all his faults of mood, his tenderness, affection, simplicity, sweet paternity, chivalry, poetic temperament and beautifully grained ripeness, his trust in God and his loved ones, made him dear and irreparably precious. 33

Constant memories of the past and the engagement of Edith's younger sister Amy to John Ryan precipitated the poets' next move. At Ricketts' suggestion, they purchased the small Georgian house at 1 The Paragon, Richmond, which overlooked the Thames from its balconies and sloping garden, and it

32 Works and Days, p. 227.
33 Ibid., p. 224.
remained their home until their death.

That the house was exquisite in every detail can readily be seen in
the numerous descriptions of it. Moreover, the Paragon actually became
a symbol of Michael Field’s dedication to art and beauty. Ricketts had
selected the house and had supervised the decor. The Paragon was an
eighteenth-century house seemingly of two stories; actually, above the
sloping garden it had six levels. The doors and woodwork were painted
white. The walls in the small room where Edith worked were silver. On
them two Hiroshigi prints and several lithographs by Shannon were hung.
In a slightly larger room, which opened through folding doors out of
Edith’s room, they received guests. The walls were papered with a white
and silver stripe. Framed in gilt, Shannon’s lithographs were also present
in this room along with two of Ricketts’ Hero and Leander woodcuts. The
severely elegant furniture was eighteenth-century satinwood. On the
polished table-tops stood several pieces of white porcelain and rare glass,
or old plate. A tangle of necklaces or other jewels were displayed with
artful carelessness. The rooms were always scented with fresh flowers,
which Edith arranged with care and genius.

The wainscoting of the stairs and of the tiny downstairs dining room
was apple green. The walls were covered with gilded canvas on which hung

34 Sturge Moore, "Editor's Preface," Works and Days; William Rothenstein,
The preoccupation with external beauty in dress, architecture, and household
furnishings was held by the "Aesthetes" to be the outward and visible sign
of an inward and spiritual grace and intensity. Walter Hamilton, The
a small round mirror and the sketch for Ricketts' Tobit and the Angel and Jacob and the Angel. Persian plates glowed on the table like rich, large petals reflecting the subtle colored pictures on the walls. There was a small alcove to this room which supported a small glass house above. Katherine worked in this alcove.

In this atmosphere of beauty and serenity — sun-filled rooms, ceilings alive with reflections from the Thames, doves cooing in the glass house, and rolling meadows with huge elms and cedars opposite the river — the poets worked daily in silence and solitude between nine o'clock in the morning and one o'clock in the afternoon. At the Paragon they were gay and busy, and they entertained frequently. Socializing with writers whose interests were their own, the poets discussed various aspects of their dramatic art, always seeking deeper insight into the tragic form.35

However, the times took on an austere and somber tone as the poets learned of the deaths of many of their fellow writers — Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson, Oscar Wilde. "One by one these young men who were about our way, when we began as Michael, have drifted down the hollow gusts of Fate to piteous graves."36 Finally on January 22, 1901, Queen Victoria died. Katherine wrote in her diary:

35 Edith records a conversation between Katherine and George Meredith concerning the morality of the character Raoul in the play Anna Ruina (1899). "Raoul was quite right — there is no law — I acknowledge that can make a man live with a vile woman or a woman with a vile man. The story is most interesting and possesses dramatic merit." Works and Days, p. 102.

36 Ibid., p. 240.
Our Great Queen is dead. I have no tears. She sweeps away with her into the looked land, my life, my youth, my breathing. I have no allegiance to any other. I love her. She is simply my Queen, as God is my God... 37

However, the poet's loyalty was to the person of the Queen; she had no illusions about the Victorian age:

The great illusion of the Victorian age is the illusion of progress. Because at the beginning of her reign our streets were paved with cobbles -- therefore ... Growth of suburbs, growth of education among the poor, an unmitigated evil-extension of franchise and growth of free trade, unmitigated disasters -- the growth of Trades Unions, the damnation of the future.
The growth of sentimentality towards crime; and of science-craft (the priest-craft of the Victorian age), insidious, berating influence.
The synthesis of the reign -- imperialism.
The great virtue to be cultivated -- "hardiness" and the love of beauty. 38

Old age and death continually reminded the poets of the passage of time and sharpened their sense of tragedy. Their Roman trilogy was completed with the publication of The Race of Leaves in 1901 and Julia Domna in 1903. The authors had undoubtedly also completed the "Herod" plays 39 and several other tragedies which would be published much later. The events of London still drew their attention and enthusiastic support. When Oscar Wilde's Salome was produced in 1906, they were in the audience along with Hardy, "a waste pansy of a man, grimacing from a heap of rubbish," George Moore,

37 Ibid., p. 237.
38 Ibid., pp. 237 - 238.
39 Queen Marianne (1908) and The Accuser (1911).
"white as a tree of silverallows by the streams of Innisfree," Max Beerbohm, "his face of an angel-sheep turned into a kid's and gray with its baby old age," Arthur Symons, "with the snows on his juvenility," and the gigantic Bernard Shaw, "really grown stately and aloof from pettiness, like a mountain under snows." "All our contemporaries — and all parched by the wind that drives away what it touches, all gray — except Selwyn Image who never had or has any hair on his spirited rosiness."40

They dined with Yeats, and found him shy at first, then doctrinaire and "causy." "Yeats is not of us — he is a preacher. He preaches some excellent things and some foolish things."41 The poets were surprised to find Yeats conversant with their plays and learned that Dowden had inspired interest in them at the time that Yeats was writing for the Dublin University Review. In fact, Yeats had written a review of The Father's Tragedy, William Rufus, and Loyalty or Love in which he maintained that Michael Field did not dream or saunter enough.42

The years at Paragon continued, fruitful and mellowing as they were; however, there was an undercurrent gaining momentum which changed the direction of both the life and art of Michael Field. In 1907 both poets entered the Roman Catholic Church. Edith Cooper was received into the

40 Works and Days, p. 249.
41 Ibid., p. 262.
42 Letters of W. B. Yeats, p. 407n. (The place of publication, if any, of the review is unknown.)
Church at St. Elizabeth's, Richmond, on April 19, and Katherine Bradley went to Edinburgh on May 8, to be received by their old friend, the poet Father John Gray. The reasons for their conversion were many. Edith's sister Amy had married John Ryan, a Catholic, in 1900. Though Amy was not baptized in the Church until 1907, this close contact with a Catholic circle undoubtedly influenced their decision to enter the Church. Also, letters indicate that the poets were always appreciative of religious beliefs and impressed with the beauty of the Church's liturgy. On the subject of religion, Katherine wrote to Mr. Havelock Ellis in 1889:

> If I may say so, I am glad of what you feel about the Son of Man, the divineness of His love and purposes towards the world. There is an atrocious superstition about me that I am orthodox -- whereas I am Christian, pagan, pantheist, and other things the name of which I do not know; and the only people with whom I cannot be in sympathy are those who fail to recognize the beauty of Christ's life, and do not care to make their own lives in temper like His.

The poets' work, also, was in part responsible for their conversion. Ricketts maintained that the play Borgia particularly affected their thought. "It is a curious fact that the reading the work entailed, was the direct cause of their conversion to Catholicism. The singularly humane and vivid picture they have given of Pope Alexander, had been intensely lived by them." The seven plays they published from Borgia in 1905

43 Sturgeon, p. 53.

44 Amy and John Ryan married in Dublin in 1900. They were visited at least once a year by Edith and Katherine.

45 Sturgeon, p. 47.

46 Works and Days, p. 271.
to Diane in 1911 appeared anonymously. The plays were all composed prior to Michael Field's conversion, and they contain a philosophy and vision of life which is unrelentingly tragic. With conversion the flow of poetry did not cease; its quality was unchanged; the subject matter was new. Abandoning the dramatic form, the poets concentrated on lyrics. *Wild Honey*, published in 1908, symbolized the turning point from paganism to Catholicism. The first lyric is "Pan Asleep" and the last is "Good Friday." Poems of Adoration in 1912 was the gathering of the first fruits of Catholic life, as the title indicates.

It would be a mistake to fail to see the conversion of Michael Field as a logical and probable development. As Father Vincent McNabb, Katherine's spiritual director, indicated, it was inevitable:

For some years before their fellowship ended, as it could only end by death, life's brightest unity had come to make them fully one. The neo-paganism which, without their knowing it, they cherished not mainly for its culture but for its cult of sacrifice, had turned their dramatic souls toward the Sacrifice of Calvary. Once the vision of the Cross had been vouchsafed to


48 Three additional tragedies -- Deirdre, Ras Byzance, and In the Name of Time -- were published posthumously by the Poetry Bookshop in 1918 and 1919.

49 "A Power is with me that can love, can die, That loves, and is deserted, and abides; A loneliness that craves me and enthralles; And I am one with that extremity, One with that strength. I hear the alien tides No more, no more the universe appals." "Good Friday," p. 194.
them they knew that it was the Mass that mattered. The step forward from neo-paganism to the Church of the Mass was but the inevitable Envoi to all they had thought and lived and sung. They themselves had written, 'A golden aim I follow to its truth.'

In addition to the profound effect conversion had on their art, it also deeply affected their daily lives. In Katherine Bradley, particularly, certain traces of bitterness and disappointment over the silence with which their work was received disappeared. She became less quick-tempered and imperious in mood and manner. In their new-found religion, both aunt and niece gathered strength to meet the crises which were not long in coming. Edith's sister died in Dublin in 1910. Only one year later Edith's illness was diagnosed as cancer. She wrote to the Rothensteins, "Of course the shock was great and the struggle very hard at first. I write this that you may both understand our silence --- We had to go into Arabian deserts to repossess our souls."

Katherine Bradley nursed her niece through almost three years of suffering. They journeyed to Ireland to visit and make retreats in the country whenever the illness abated and travel was possible. Hawkesyard Priory was a favorite refuge, and they frequently rented a cottage nearby in the village of Armitage in Staffordshire. Katherine also encouraged Edith to write her poems in order to distract her from pain and to continue the dedication she had never forsaken.


51 Sturgeon, p. 54.
In addition to the spiritual anguish of Edith's prolonged and painful illness, Katherine herself was attacked by cancer six months before Edith's death. She concealed her own illness in order to spare her niece and free her mind from worry; however, the necessity of an operation became more and more imminent. Finally the ever-increasing pain and suffering of Edith came to an end on December 13, 1913.\textsuperscript{52} By this time Katherine's endurance was at an end. A hemorrhage, suffered on the day of her niece's funeral, hastened the belated surgery. She recovered slightly and in March, 1914, was again working with poetry. She collected the early poems of Edith and published them in a volume called \textit{Dedicated}. As spring grew into summer, her illness, which was not cured by the operation, gained mastery over her vital spirit. Knowing the proximity of death, she moved to a small house on the grounds of Hawkesyard Priory in order to be near her friend and confessor, Father Vincent McNabb, a Dominican priest who was Prior at Hawkesyard at that time. The weeks of her dying were the weeks of the beginning of the Great War. To this lover of life and beauty, the thought of killing, suffering, and destruction was an overwhelming sorrow. She followed anxiously the calamitous events in Belgium and, concerning Louvain, noted, "Father Prior mourns Louvain even worse than Bernard -- the destruction of the precious beauty."\textsuperscript{53} After September 19,\textsuperscript{52} Charles Ricketts comments on Edith's death. "When the younger Michael Field was on the point of death, her last words were, 'Not yet, not yet!' -- there seemed to her just a frail chance of life. Certain events are too unpleasant to be faced, and the mind reacts subconsciously." Charles Ricketts, \textit{Self-Portrait, Taken from the Letters and Journals of Charles Ricketts}, ed. Cecil Lewis (London, 1939), p. 244.\textsuperscript{53} Sturgeon, p. 60.
she grew increasingly weak and at utmost effort was wheeled to the Priory chapel for morning Mass. On September 26, 1914, she did not appear at her usual time. The exertion of dressing fatigued her, and she died peacefully in her nurse's arms. Thus the lives of Edith Cooper and Katherine Bradley and the career of Michael Field were over.

Through this brief outline of their existence, it is possible to follow the poets' many phases of development -- rationalists in 1887, declared pagans in 1897, and confirmed Catholics in 1907. "It might seem that gulfs were fixed between their grave, austere, studious girlhood, the joyous blossoming of their maturity with its pagan joy of beauty, and the mysticism of their last years." But to an age which valued experience and gloried in "the aesthetic adventure," there was no inconsistency in a life dedicated to beauty; rather, a dominating theme was manifested. "To burn always with this hard, gemlike flame, to maintain the ecstasy, is success in life."  

54 Ibid., p. 63.  
CHAPTER II
LITERARY CONTEXT

The first appearance of the poetic plays of Michael Field evoked praise; to many critics it was the "ring of a new voice," "a fresh gift of song," the appearance of a "poet of notable endowments and distinguished powers." Browning, George Moore, Meredith, and Wilde each praised and encouraged the poets' efforts, but "Time's fickle glass" reversed attention to neglect, acclaim to silence. Michael Field's plays came to be considered "closet dramas," heavily derived from Elizabethan models, and undistinguishable from many other Victorian "still-born poetic plays." The poets were considered "ivory tower artists," wealthy, secluded, and dedicated to "art for art's sake." Twenty-seven poetic plays were relegated to obscurity, and the name Michael Field became virtually unknown. To be obscure in an age of notoriety and unknown in a period of individualism poses many interesting problems which only literary history can define and only a proper dramatic context can solve.

Victorian drama, the broadest context of the poetic plays of Michael Field, represents a varied and complex development in the theatre. In one sweep, as Clement Scott says, "we travel from the time of the patent theatres, special monopolies and protectionist privileges, to the heroic and heart-
breaking struggle for better things at Covent Garden and Drury Lane.\(^1\)

In a very definite way progress was evidenced in the growth from two theatres in London in 1843 to sixty-one theatres in 1899.\(^2\) The potential of the picture-frame stage was realized with the availability of gas illumination in 1870,\(^3\) and the concept of stage-manager, producer, and director was actualized through the efforts of Robertson, Gilbert, and the Bancrofts. The theatre became respectable;\(^4\) the audiences, coming to the theatre at eight o'clock rather than six-thirty, were more sophisticated and demanding than the lower-class music-hall devotees. The declamatory style of the actor and actress of the large theatre became the refined technique of "simulating real life"; Mrs. Siddons and J. P. Kemble were replaced by Ellen Terry and Henry Irving. The establishment of the "long run" play gradually necessitated the introduction of the single-performance experimental theatre. Dramatic criticism, being a veritable battleground characteristic of the split among the theatrical audience, came into its own as a

\(^1\) Clement Scott, Drama of Yesterday and Today (London, 1899), pp. vii - viii.


\(^3\) "The picture-frame stage is the last achievement of a desire at which we have seen men vaguely grasping for two centuries, and the realistic problem-play is the ultimate realization of something which has similarly been adumbrated for generations." Ibid., p. 3.

\(^4\) "Toward the end of the year 1848, Charles Kean was appointed [by Queen Victoria] to supervise what soon came to be known as the 'Windsor theatricals' -- performances at court of successful plays taken from the London theatres. Three years later the young queen engaged a special box at the Princess Theatre." Ibid., p. 5.
journalistic form and was an additional force in the renewed interest in the drama. However, the drama itself was the most vivid evidence of the great change. The domestic melodrama, typified in *Pure as Driven Snow*, or, *Tempted in Vain*, was transformed into realistic domestic tragedy in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. The romantic tragedy, exemplified in Browning's *Luria*, was transformed from closet drama to actable poetic drama in Synge's *Deirdre of the Sorrows*. The comedy-farce, found in Tom Taylor's *Victims*, was transformed from a series of ridiculous situations involving ridiculous characters to bantering social comment in Shaw's *Man and Superman*. By 1895 it was with genuine conviction that *The Era* could pronounce its judgment:

The drama in England never was in a better condition than at the present time. The tone of criticism, the ideals of the actor and the actress, and the aims of the dramatist, have all been evaluated. . . . The drama is taking its proper place amongst the arts; and we may expect in the next ten or twenty years to find our progress even more gratifying and astonishing than that which we have made since the fifties.6

The theatre of the first half of the nineteenth century was characterized

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5 The two schools of thought were described as "The Ancients and the Moderns. The description is apt, for one represented the great mass of stolid, respectable, middle class opinion and the other reflected the tastes of the younger intellectuals who, sensing the change in the theatre, had come to look upon it was a place where high aspirations and daring thought might find scope." *Ibid.*, pp. 21 - 22.

6 *Dramatic Progress*, LVII (Jan. 26, 1895), 17.
by farce, extravaganza, melodrama, and comic opera, and the mid-century afforded no considerable change, despite the efforts of Boucicault and Taylor.

Perhaps prevailing conditions can best be viewed in a skit written for Alfred Wigan when he took over the Olympic Theatre in 1853. In the skit, Fancy, dressed as a jester, magically creates a scene -- the Camp of the Combined British Dramatic Forces -- Tragedy, who is retired, enters first and is joined by dull-spirited Comedy:

"Wit! oh, my dear, don't mention such a thing!
Wit on the stage what wit away would fling?
There are so few who know it when they hear it,
And half of those don't like so much as fear it.

Dramatic taste is both low and fickle:

0 mercy! Tell me, pray.
What house will win the Derby, sir? You may,
I'm sure, as easily as I tell you
What the dear British public will come to!
Just what they like -- whatever that may be --
Not much to hear, and something strange to see.

Popular are Burlesque -- 'a vice of kings! a King of shreds and patches!' -- English Opera ' with a foreign band,' Ballet, Melodrama, Pantomine, Hippo-Drame and Spectacle. 'Immortal Shakespeare!' cries the last ironically, echoing a remark made by Tragedy,

Immortal Shakespeare! come, the less you say
The better on that head. There's not a play
Of his for many a year the town has taken,
If I've not buttered preciously his bacon."

The playlet ends on a characteristic note. "I am completely bothered," confesses Wigan, "that's a fact, And, like some actors, don't know how to act!" Nicoll, pp. 82 - 83. From J. R. Planche's The Camp at the Olympic (1853).
In fact, the state to which the theatre had fallen prior to Robertson's Society (1865) was generally uninspired. "It was a theatre, as far as the higher aims of drama were concerned, of faded, outworn tradition." 8 Shakespeare was acted regularly in a plodding manner. The rhetoric of James Sheridan Knowles and Edward Bulwer Lytton was undistinguished. Dion Boucicault's work was quite sensational, exploring the romantic possibilities of adventurous and supernatural action. 9 Tom Taylor, more than his other contemporaries, distinguished himself by his acute understanding of the exigencies of theatre in his own time. He recognized the desirability of mingling freely his humor and his pathos. 10 In the next decade H. J. Byron and his compeers contented themselves with rapidly written burlesques and extravaganzas, which were judged amusing in proportion to the number of puns they contained, and with domestic dramas which bore little or no semblance to life. Theme was given some attention in H. J. Byron's dramas; however, "there can be no doubt that Robertson it was who first in the modern English drama realised the desirability of introducing a central purpose into his comedy dramas." 11 His titles give ample evidence of this fact--

8 Harley Granville-Barker, The Eighteen-Seventies (Cambridge, Eng., 1929), pp. 139 - 140.

9 The titles of his plays indicate this preoccupation: The Corsican Brothers (1852), The Vampire (1852), The Reign of Terror (1853), etc.

10 In Our American Cousin (1858), Victims (1857), and Masks and Faces (1852), one sees the domestic drama become roaring farce.

11 Nicoll, p. 126.
Society, Caste, Play, School, and War. "It was Robertson's virtue that he
endeavored to present a view of the whole life of his time -- its complete
Society." Not only Robertson's plays but also the detailed set and stage
directions found in his scripts introduced an unmistakable realism to the
performance of his plays at the Prince of Wales Theatre. The "New Drama,"
as William Archer called it, had been born on the threshold of the Seventies.
It was confirmed in the dramas of Henry Arthur Jones and Arthur Pinero,
and it reached its apex in the genius of Ibsen.

Henry Arthur Jones was influenced both by Robertson's plays and by
contemporary melodrama. His early works, such as *Hearts of Oak* (1879) and
*Home Again* (1881), are quite commonplace in subject and style. However, *The
Silver King* (1882) foreshadows his later dramatic development. In this play
is seen the desire to treat seriously certain social problems, particularly
evil companionship and poverty, and the tendency to infuse a melodramatic
and artificial tone into this treatment. The question not only of man's
relation to man but man's relation to God became the focus of *Saints and
Sinners* (1884). In this play, Jones showed that religious convention, if
not religious conviction, could be as effective a theme as the traditional
wooing and marriage themes. To that extent *Saints and Sinners, The Tempter,*

12 Ibid.

13 "In a very real sense, Ibsen may be said to have consummated the
movement begun in England by T. W. Robertson. ... That movement was not
confined to England. Indeed, its actual origin may be traced to Eugène
and *Michael and His Lost Angel* are important in the development of realism.\(^\text{14}\)

Pinero, unlike Jones, was trained in the farce, but reached his highest development in the kind of tragic drama of which *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* is the most illustrious example. "His theatrical skill is as assured as Jones'; and he brings to his themes some of the best of these qualities which make for tragedy -- conviction, deeper thought, and fine sympathy."\(^\text{15}\) In his plays the love theme predominates -- love which is at times faithful and true and love which is at other times tortured, weak, and misled. He worked for skillful plot development and convincing stage speech in his early works -- *The Schoolmistress* (1886) and *Dandy Dick* (1887). In *The Hobby Horse* (1886) he lampooned philanthropy; while in the *Weaker Sex* (1888) he satirized the movement for women's rights. *The Times* (1891) ridiculed social aspiration; *Sweet Lavender* (1888) exploited sentimentality. However, it is not the quality of seriousness and the absence of ridicule alone that distinguished *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* (1893) from all its predecessors. It was a good play, artistically well-wrought, and critics agree that "in this play the English drama at the close of the nineteenth century first found itself."\(^\text{16}\)

Realism triumphed irrevocably on June 7, 1889, when Charles Charrington produced Ibsen's *A Doll's House* at the Novelty Theatre with Janet Achurch

\(^{14}\) Nicoll, p. 164.  
\(^{15}\) Ibid., p. 182.  
\(^{16}\) Ibid., p. 181.
in the part of Nora. "The play had been called the Hernani of the new
dramatic movement in England, and the title had been justified to the full."\textsuperscript{17}

The interest stimulated by the event was as active and diverse as the re-
action to the first showing of the Impressionist painters in 1867 and to the
first performance of Wagner's operas in the 1850's.\textsuperscript{18} However, the interest
soon became either wild acclaim or bitter indignation when Ghosts and Hedda
Gabler were staged in 1891. Undaunted, the cult of Ibsen devotees revived
A Doll's House in 1892, and Oscar Wilde's Lady Windemere's Fan\textsuperscript{19} and George
Bernard Shaw's Widowers' Houses were staged that same year. The men of the
theatre, encouraged by or in reaction to both the critics and the audience,
were caught up in tremendous activity. In 1893 six of Ibsen's plays were
produced by various small theatrical companies. In addition to these came
The Second Mrs. Tanqueray by Pinero, A Woman of No Importance by Wilde, and
The Bauble Shop by Jones. Grein's Independent Theatre, established two
years earlier, produced five modern plays, one adaptation and one translation.

"But of still greater importance, there were three plays by modern British
playwrights: The Strike at Arlingford by George Moore, The Black Cat by

\textsuperscript{17} Holbrook Jackson, The Eighteen Nineties (London, 1913), p. 252.

\textsuperscript{18} It is interesting to note that G. B. Shaw defended all three
artistic endeavors -- the art of French Impressionism, Richard Wagner,

\textsuperscript{19} "Wilde takes delight in choosing a contemporary theme reminiscent
of Pinero, namely, the good woman, which may be likely to interest con-
temporary audiences, but in the moral implications of the theme he has no
interest." Nicoll, p. 191.
John Todhunter, and a Question of Memory\textsuperscript{20} by Michael Field ... all of which were in the modern movement and contributing to the newly awakened intelligent interest in the theatre."\textsuperscript{21}

However, the interest was irregular and uneven, and the great critical controversy continued to be waged over Ibsen. Shaw was, of course, his vigorous champion in \textit{The Quintessence of Ibsenism}, but Ibsen's direct influence on the current popular dramatists was difficult to estimate. According to Archer, "the leading dramatists of the Nineties -- Grundy, Pinero and Jones -- knew their business too well to despise him, but loved him not at all. Mr. Jones even lifted up his voice once or twice in the chorus of commination; while James Barrie perpetrated a burlesque called Ibsen's \textit{Ghost}."\textsuperscript{22}

The "New Drama" was, in the main, an occasional affair, highly experimental and limited in its appeal. Plays penned by Continental innovators as important as Bjornstjerne Bjornson, Maurice Maeterlinck, Sudermann, Strindberg, and, of course, Ibsen, managed to get produced with difficulty, and George Bernard Shaw could find only occasional chances of production for

\textsuperscript{20} This play was the only attempt by Michael Field to write a prose drama. It is indicative of the poets' interest in experimentation and staging but not typical of the body of Michael Field's dramatic work. See infra, p. 59, n. 88.

\textsuperscript{21} Jackson, pp. 253 - 254.

\textsuperscript{22} Archer, \textit{Old Drama}, p. 307.
his own plays. The drama of the last half of the decade remained varied and highly individual in character. Pinero contributed The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith, Trelawny of the "Wells" and The Gay Lord Quex, and Jones wrote The Masqueraders and The Liars. All of Oscar Wilde's brilliant comedies were produced and climaxed in The Importance of Being Earnest in 1895. Unfortunately, the same year witnessed his trial and dismissal from the artistic life of London; the plays as well as the author were in disfavor. Barrie had not reached dramatic maturity, but he had begun his ventures into the world of romance with Becky Sharp and The Little Minister. Shaw's Arms and the Man, Candida, The Devil's Disciple, and Caesar and Cleopatra were staged. Chagrined at his own unpopularity and the lack of selectivity on the part of theatrical audiences, Shaw wrote elaborate prefaces to his own plays. Out of the controversies and discussions of plays and ideas, the "New Drama" ultimately came, but the triumph did not occur in the Nineties.

The decade of the Nineties did not solve or synthesize the Victorian

23 "If the Shaw drama had been forced from the first to pay its way, as were the Robertson drama and the Pinero drama, it would long ago have died of starvation." Ibid., p. 338.

24 "It was still an age of transition, so that the poor dramatist stood . . . bewildered . . . certain of execration from one side or the other, sure that if he secures the approval of Mr. Bernard Shaw he will earn the contempt of Mr. Clement Scott." Nicoll, p. 189.

25 The early years of the twentieth century witnessed the Vedrenne-Barker success at the Court Theatre, Miss Horniman's repertory theatre at Manchester, and the Irish National Theatre in Dublin.
dramatic dilemma; the years merely defined it\textsuperscript{26} and provided an atmosphere for experimentation. Allardyce Nicoll states that any dispassionate survey of the Victorian drama confirms the triumph of realism which was manifested in Robertson and climaxed in Ibsen. In view of this triumph, however, certain truths must be recognized. "The first is that realism can never be enough. To discuss the implications of this and show why that naturalism which was life and health and inspiration in 1900 could not serve a later generation would reach outside the confines of the late nineteenth century; but the second thing worthy of notice definitely belongs within these confines. It is the fact that, even in the midst of this naturalistic development, there were many attempts to escape."\textsuperscript{27}

The most obvious of these attempts was the cultivation of poetic drama,\textsuperscript{28} and it is here that a much narrower context is found for the plays of Michael

\textsuperscript{26} "The destination, the goal, or, in other words, the ideal of the drama, is a subject of unceasing controversy. Shall we steer for Realism or for Idealism, for culture or merely for amusement? Some would have us reverse the engines, put on full speed astern, and try back to the spacious times of great Elizabeth. Others are for ploughing steadily forward in the good old course laid down by Scribe. Some would put the helm a-starboard and make for rhythmic regions of Neo-Shakespeareanism; others would fain deviate in the opposite direction, eschewing poetry for photography. Browningism has its adherents; so has Zolaism; even Ibsen, in these latter days, is the god of a few fanatics. The great majority, bound to no sect or clique, is ready to dash off towards any point of the compass which promises pastime -- Zeitvertreib -- whether in the form of laughter or of excitement." William Archer, \textit{About the Theatre} (London, 1886), pp. 2 - 3.

\textsuperscript{27} Nicoll, p. 208.

\textsuperscript{28} This comment is in no way an attempt to minimize the cult of wit and humor found in the plays of Oscar Wilde and Bernard Shaw in the last decade of the Victorian period.
Field. Romanticized history, Elizabethan conventions, lyrical stress and the search for poetic diction characterized the Victorian poetic effort and subsequently were mirrored in the dramas of Michael Field. Although these plays were not always theatrically orientated, the playwrights were intense in their efforts to achieve fine poetry as well as drama.

If realism had French antecedents in the *bien fait* plays of Scribe and Sardou, poetic drama was influenced by Victor Hugo, whose production of *Hernani* in 1830 symbolized the struggle of romantic drama for survival. Scribe elaborated a technique adopted by the "New Drama"; Hugo, a master of verbal harmonies, invented a dialect which, admittedly, was limited to the French language, but was later to indicate a necessary procedure for poets to follow in order to escape the tired patterns of Victorian rhetoric. Yeats, in his Preface to Synge's *The Well of the Saints*, gave evidence of this fact:

> Literature decays when it no longer makes more beautiful, or more vivid, the language which unites it to all life, and when one finds the criticism of the student, and the purpose of the reformer, and the logic of the men of science, where there should have been the reveries of the common heart, emboled into some raving Lear or unabashed Don Quixote, one must not forget the death of language, the substitution of phrases as nearly impersonal as algebra for words and rhythms varying from man to man, is but a part of the tyranny of impersonal things.

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29 "The historical drama remained for two generations the chief battleground of the romantic army; and the experiment of Goethe and Schiller was repeated by Shelley, Byron, Manzoni, and Hugo." C. E. Vaughan, *Types of Tragic Drama* (London, 1936), p. 198.

30 Archer, *About the Theatre*, p. 298.

The cult of poetic drama from 1830 to 1900, from Hugo to Synge, is complex. Yet, paradoxically, its theatrical history involved few authors.\textsuperscript{32} In England the problem was essentially literary in nature rather than theatrical. "Throughout the nineteenth century such alliance as there was between the English theatre and English letters, was spasmodic, uneasy, unprofitable. Neither, it seemed, had much to bring to the other."\textsuperscript{33}

At the beginning of the century, dramatic poetry was, for the most part, in the hands of the Romantic poets. Occasionally they wrote with the stage in view; more often than not, with no thought but the publisher. Coleridge's \textit{Remorse} (1813) and Walter Scott's \textit{House of Aspen} (1829), \textit{Doom of Devergoil} (1830), and \textit{Auchindrane} (1830) evidenced a great Germanic influence and were rather didactic in tone. The second generation Romantics escaped some of the didacticism of their elders and seemed to be more concerned with lyrical expression in their plays. Byron, an active member of the board of directors at Drury Lane, wrote \textit{Manfred} (1817), \textit{Cain} (1817) and \textit{Sardanapalus} (1822); Keats turned his attention to the dramatic form and composed \textit{Otho the Great} in 1819. Shelley completed one of the better known

\textsuperscript{32} In \textit{History of English Drama}, Allardyce Nicoll comments on only three major figures — "During the forties Browning, encouraged by Macready, had sought to win theatrical success . . . but failed. He, in turn, was followed by the majestic solemnity of Tennyson . . . Not one \textit{[play]} has any theatrical value. . . . After Tennyson came Stephen Phillips." pp. 208 - 211.

\textsuperscript{33} Granville-Barker, p. 161.
Romantic poetic dramas, The Cenci, in the same year. Although some of these dramas were, at least, directed toward theatrical production, Romantic drama, nevertheless, remained the province of the littérateur.

While Victor Hugo was championing the cause of romantic tragedy in the "Preface" to Cromwell (1827) and breaking with tradition by recognizing Shakespeare as dieu du théâtre, James Sheridan Knowles, Edward Bulwer Lytton, and Thomas Talfourd endeavored to stage their poetic dramas in England. However, each play — Alfred the Great, Caius Gracchus, and Virginius by Knowles, Richelieu by Lytton, The Athenian Captive and Ion by Talfourd — was imitative in essence, not of life, but of past literary models.

It is in the work of Walter Savage Landor, Robert Browning, Alfred Lord Tennyson, and Algernon Charles Swinburne that distinction, slight as it may be, in dramatic poetry is found. Significantly, the influence of these authors in terms of subject matter, theme, and style is reflected in the works of Michael Field. From the dual point of view of distinction in poetic drama and influence on Michael Field, Landor's affinity for the

34 When Oscar Wilde lectured in New York in February, 1882, he said, "The drama is the meeting-place of art and life; it is the product of a period of great united energy. It is impossible without a noble public. Shelley felt how incompetent the movement was in this direction, and has shown in one great tragedy by what terror and pity he would have purified our age. He has had no worthy imitators." Hamilton, Aesthetic Movement in England, p. 106.


36 Vaughan, pp. 232 - 235.
classics, Browning's interest in the psychological development of character, Tennyson's advocacy of chronicles as source material, and Swinburne's preoccupation with the cadences of poetry become more meaningful. Each poet, of course, is unique and highly individual, but there is in each an approach to art in which certain similarities can be detected.

Landor, convinced of the contemporaneous quality of Latin, frequently wrote in that foreign language and then translated his own Latin into English. His dramatic idyls, the Hellenics and the Idyllia Heroica, echo Latin cadences and are indicative of his interest in the dramatic form. More often than not, these poems resemble dramatic monologues rather than dialogues; however, they initiate the actual dramatic work of Landor. In a more precise way than in the lyric poetry and in the prose, in Landor's dramatic work "we see the point beyond which he could not go, though nowhere else in his work do we see more clearly his nobility of attitude and his command of grave and splendid verse. Landor's method in dialogue is a logical method; the speeches are linked by a too definite and a too visible chain." Almost completely lacking the quality of spontaneity, Landor excels in the quality of restraint, using frequently terse epigrammatic expression. Count Julian (1812), one of his earliest plays, is eclipsed in the style and more mature dramatic method of The Siege of Ancona (1846) and


38 Symons, p. 182.
Beatrice Cenci (1857). Landor's most ambitious dramatic work is the Neapolitan trilogy (1839-40) -- Andrea of Hungary, Giovanna of Naples and Fra Rupert. The Elizabethan overtones are unmistakable -- court intrigue, murder, and suicide executed with Machiavellian motivation. Except for certain eloquent passages, the plays are frequently uninspired. The significant actions are generally narrated rather than performed, and the dialogue is not always suited to character. It is in terms of single lines, single speeches, and precise indications of character that a scene and even an entire play are memorable. The poet has aptly described his own work and its limitations, "Here terminates my park of poetry. / Look out no longer for extensive woods." 39

Landor was one of the first notable voices to praise the early work of Robert Browning. Significantly, in 1846 Browning dedicated Luria to Walter Savage Landor -- "I dedicate this last attempt for the present at dramatic poetry to a great dramatic poet." 40 In all, Browning wrote six tragedies. 41 Strafford, requested by Macready, was written and performed in 1837. Having only five performances, it was considered somewhat of a failure by its producer, who at the time was on the verge of bankruptcy and


40 Luria (Cambridge, 1887), p. 361.

41 Strafford (1837), King Victor and King Charles (1842), The Return of the Druses (1843), A Blot in the 'Scutcheon' (1843), A Soul's Tragedy (1846), Luria (1846) -- are named tragedies by Browning. Pippa Passes is called a drama by Browning and a tragedy by some critics.
had lost an actor from the cast of the play. Critically, the initial venture in the theatre won some degree of praise. A *Blot on the Scutcheon* was delayed in production and accompanied by several misunderstandings between poet and manager. This uneasy relationship between Browning and the manager was related to Michael Field several years later in a letter written to the poets by Browning's sister, Sarianna. Browning, disenchanted with the exigencies of the theatre as such, experimented more freely with the dramatic form. Instead of traditional plot structure with a central climax toward which the action rises and from which it falls to a final catastrophe, he invented plots which seemed rather to rise to the final climax by a series of climaxes, each new climax rising in intensity and emotional suspense until the final climax was reached. He uses a double plot movement in *The Return of the Druses*. But possibly the most experimental of Browning's plays is *Pippa Passes*. It is composed of four episodes, each of which is a one-act play in itself. Thematically and climactically each of these episodes is only intelligible in the framework idea of the whole. More significantly, it is in his methods of characterization that Browning actually differed most from his contemporaries. *Bells and Pomegranates*, in addition to containing his important plays, contains "Dramatic Romances and Lyrics."

42 Robert Browning's sister wrote the following to Michael Field on May 30, 1893: "You asked me of Robert's experience of the stage. He was fond of the drama . . . but his experience of the actual realities of the stage of his day was utterly distasteful and disenchancing. He was naturally very pleased at the production of *Strafford* -- the play of a very young man, brought out by Macready at Drury Lane, was considered an exploit -- but the Blot was nothing from first to last except a vexation of spirit -- he would not allow me to be present at the first night . . . . The incessant asking for alterations chafed him." *Works and Days*, pp. 42 - 43.
examples of the distinct form which culminated his dramatic efforts, the
dramatic monologue.\textsuperscript{43} In this form, the examination of inner motives and
the emphasis on character analysis rather than objective action becomes the
focus of attention. Reaction rather than action is cultivated for its own
sake. Lengthy speeches are utilized with great subtlety instead of operating
against the successful presentation of the traditional dramatic form. After
Luria, Browning abandoned his long effort to write for the stage; however,
it can be said that it was largely through the composition of his early
plays that he discovered a distinctive manner of dramatizing a lyric.

Tennyson, established as both an eminent lyric and narrative poet,
was viewed by his contemporaries "as a man who might if he desired, bring
back the glories of Elizabeth's reign in the age of Victoria. Tennyson
certainly desired it; of that there is no doubt, and infinite trouble he
expended on his dramatic works."\textsuperscript{44} He composed seven poetic dramas, and
four implicitly illustrate his theory that "the State, or the municipalities,
as well as the public schools, should produce our great English historical

\textsuperscript{43} "A play opens with its situation exposed in space, its actors
seen in one and the same moment amidst all the circumstances of their
environment. But in the monologue, detail of setting and hints of
character can only come separately one after the other in momentary
succession. Everything turns on the particular detail chosen and the
order of its occurrence, so that as the tale tells itself the scene is
being built in the right perspective and the clues have their right
direction and momentum. Only thus will the reader 'produce' the
implied play rightly, and cast its person as the sort of man he is meant
to be. The reader must grasp as soon as he can what sort of a person is
speaking and under what circumstances he speaks." H. B. Charlton, "Browning
as Dramatist," \textit{Bulletin of the John Rylands Library}, \textbf{XXIII} (Manchester,
1939), 49.

\textsuperscript{44} Nicoll, p. 208.
plays so that they might form part of the Englishman's ordinary educational curriculum." He chose three great periods of history for his trilogy -- Harold, Becket, and Queen Mary -- "to portray the making of England."

Harold (1877) is based on the conflict of the Danes, Saxons, and Normans for supremacy and the patriotic awakening which ensued. Becket (1879), which also includes the episodes involving Henry II, Rosamond, and Eleanor, portrays the struggle of Crown versus Church for supremacy. Queen Mary (1876) indicates the resolution of the conflict posed in Becket by showing the downfall of Roman Catholicism in England and the dawn of a new age in the queenship of Elizabeth. In addition to the trilogy, The Foresters (1892), which is based on the Robin Hood ballad tradition, dramatizes another transitional historical period which culminated in the Magna Carta. The remaining three plays -- The Falcon (1879), The Cup (1881), and The Promise of May (1883) -- are non-historical but faithful to source material and accurate in detail. The Falcon is based on a tale by Boccaccio found in the Decamerone. The Cup is founded on a story by Plutarch. The feminine lead Camma was portrayed by Ellen Terry, and the entire production was considered Tennyson's most beautifully staged play. In contrast, The Promise


47 See Landor's Imaginary Conversations, XIII, "Princess Mary and Princess Elizabeth."

48 "Irving inserted most of the stage-directions, and devised the magnificent scenery, and the drama was produced by him with signal success at the Lyceum, and played to crowded houses." Works ... Tennyson, V, 620 (Notes).
of May was almost a complete failure in production. The acting version of the play, which was in prose, was changed considerably by Tennyson. When the play was revised four years later, much of it appeared in poetry. Becket, considered by most critics Tennyson's finest play, was written in 1879, published in 1884, and not actually staged until 1893. It was a triumph for the Poet Laureate, even though he did not see it, but Becket was also a great triumph for Henry Irving, who played the role three hundred and eighty times. "To those who saw the performance, Becket will forever unite the names of Alfred Tennyson and Henry Irving."  

From a dramatic standpoint Tennyson's plays do not completely satisfy the demands of the stage; however, they were not intended to be "performed without adaptation" by actors. Frequently the poet's interest is too divided by psychological and historical details to produce unified dramatic action. Intriguing characters, incidents of tense emotional tone, lyric songs and purely poetic passages enhance the dramas, but, for Tennyson, do not cohere into drama. The elaboration of action, which interested him greatly, was alien to the diversity of the Elizabethan structure he adopted.

49 "The actors had announced that it was an attack on Socialism so that the purpose of the author had been misrepresented to the public," Japikse, p. 73. Tennyson stated that "Edgar is a surface man of theories true to none." Works ... Tennyson, V, 623 (Notes).

50 Tennyson died October 6, 1892, and Becket was staged February 6, 1893.

51 Japikse, p. 83.

52 Ibid., p. 155.
He wrote reflectively and analytically, but too frequently the narrative elements outweigh the dramatic. "Tennyson had neither the practical experience of the theatre nor the gift of delineating characters and making them interact upon one another without which plays cannot live." 53

Swinburne in his rejection of the theatre is far more the dramatist than Tennyson. 54 He is instinctively a rhetorician. His verse both echoes and sings. In all, Swinburne wrote eleven verse tragedies. 55 The earliest works are The Queen Mother, which culminates in the massacre of St. Bartholomew, and Rosamond (1860), 56 a dramatic sketch alternating between Henry II's hidden love bower at Woodstock and the palace at Shene where his jealous Queen, Eleanor, plotted revenge. However, Swinburne's chief dramatic work is the trilogy which has for its central figure Mary Stuart, the ill-starred Queen of Scots. Chastelard (1865) centers in the Queen's imaginary discovery of her poet-lover Chastelard's unfaithfulness and her consequent marriage to Darnley. In a sense the motivation of the entire trilogy is provided in this first play. Because of Mary Beaton's unrequited love of Chastelard and her desire to avenge his death, Mary Stuart is eventually brought to her death on the scaffold at Fotheringay. Bothwell (1874), the second section of the trilogy, includes the following incidents --

53 Chew, p. 1390.
54 Granville-Barker, p. 175.
55 Of these eleven works the two Greek studies -- Atalanta in Calydon and Erechtheus -- being essentially lyrical in spirit, are grouped with the Poems in the author's classification of his work (1904).
56 See Tennyson's Becket, in which the same theme receives episodic treatment.
the murder of Rizzio, the birth of Mary's child who will eventually reign as James I of England, the love affair of Mary and Bothwell, the plot against and death of Darnley, the escape of Bothwell, and the forced abdication of Mary in exile. The five acts are divided into sixty scenes and comprise almost fifteen thousand lines of blank verse. In proportion and scope Bothwell is more accurately called an epic drama. The trilogy is completed in Mary Stuart (1881). In length the last play is almost one-third the length of Bothwell and the action covers only the last months of Mary's life -- the plots against Elizabeth, the capture of the conspirators and the trial of Mary, her conviction, the letter sent by Mary Beaton to Elizabeth that motivated the signing of the death-warrant, and the execution at Fotheringay.

Swinburne's full-length portrait of the Queen of Scots is accurate as well as monumental; certain scenes and certain characters, especially Mary Stuart and John Knox, are memorable. After the Scottish trilogy, Swinburne turned his attention to a subject already used by Byron and wrote the five-act tragedy Marino Faliero in 1885. In Locrine (1887) Swinburne abandoned the blank verse form and experimented with a variety of meters: the heroic couplet, ottava rima, terza rima, and even successions of sonnets. In theme the play resembles the early work Rosamond; however, the story is that of Locrine, the mythical king of Britain, and his secret love of Estrild, his Scythian concubine. In form the play is filled with innovations.

57 Swinburne's conscientiousness as a historian may be seen in his article on Mary Stuart in the Encyclopedia Britannica, in which he has obviously weighed carefully the conflicting evidence concerning her life and reign.
The Sisters (1892) also gives evidence of experimentation. Using a play within a play, Swinburne reinforces the tragic elements. The last completed play in the series of Swinburne's tragedies is Rosamund, Queen of the Lombards (1899), a grim tale of vengeance. With the exception of the fragment, Duke of Gandia, Rosamund is the poet's last dramatic work. Perfectly aware of the situation of Victorian drama and the increasing interest in and success of realistic drama, Swinburne in the "Dedicatorily Epistle" to his works defined his own position as a poet and dramatist. "Charles Lamb, as I need not remind you, wrote for antiquity; nor need you be assured that when I write plays it is with a view to their being acted at the Globe, the Red Bull, or the Black Friars." Surely, this statement cannot be dismissed as naive Elizabethan idolatry, but rather it suggests a concern regarding poetic excellence in drama. Swinburne continues:

The fifth act of 'Marino Faliero,' hopelessly impossible as it is from the point of view of modern stagecraft, could hardly have been found too untheatrical, too utterly given over to talk without action, by the audience which endured and applauded the magnificent monotony of Chapman's eloquence -- the fervent and inexhaustible declamation which was offered and accepted as a substitute for study of character and interest of action when his two finest plays,

58 Arthur Symons writes, "I saw Swinburne for the last time in the winter of 1907. He told me that he long had the intention of writing a five-act drama on Cesare Borgia. Had he done so it would have been a great drama. It would have been moral in its presentation of the most ignobly splendid vices that have swayed the world." Studies in Strange Souls (London, 1929), p. 72. Only a remnant was completed called the Duke of Gandia.

59 The Poems of Algernon Charles Swinburne (London, 1904), I, p. xxv.
if plays they can be called, found favor with an incredibly intelligent and an inconceivably tolerant audience. 60

Forced as the comparison may be and questionable as it is because of Chapman's heavy reliance on melodrama, Swinburne's protest against the narrowness of "modern stagecraft" is, nevertheless, a refusal to make terms with a dramaturgy dominated by the requirements of mere stagecraft. Landor, Browning, and Tennyson took a similar position as Michael Field was later to do after the production of A Question of Memory. 61

Having adopted this attitude, the dramatic poet frequently found it necessary to justify the raison d'être of the form he chose as well as the actual poetic plays he wrote. Dumas fils in the preface to Pere Prodigue stated that "a dramatic work should always be written as though it was only to be read. The performance is only a reading aloud by several persons for the benefit of those who will not or cannot read. It is through those who go to the theatre that the work succeeds; and it is by those who do not go that it subsists. The spectator gives it vogue, and the reader makes it durable." 62 Drama only survives its contemporary setting when the quality of great literature enters into it. The dramatist Gordon Bottomley maintains that poetic drama is not so much a representation of a theme as a

60 Ibid., p. xxvi.

61 See infra, pp. 84 - 85.

meditation upon it or a distillation from it. This implies far less the simulation of life than the evocation and isolation of the elements of beauty. It also implies a spiritual illumination in the perhaps terrible and always serious theme chosen. 63

Literary history supports the belief that the supreme achievements of dramatic poetry have been reached with themes universally known. "When everyone knew beforehand -- as in the Greek theatre -- what was going to happen, attention was set free for the imageries and reverberations of verse; and the possibilities of tragic irony were sharpened and deepened." 64

The dramatic poet, lacking the myths and legends of the Ancients, naturally turned to history and the classics as well as his own literary heritage for subject matter for his plays. Yeats says, "It is what is old and far off that stirs us the most deeply." 65

The Italian Renaissance inspired Beatrice Cenci, Fra Rupert, and Luria. The chronicles of Scotland and England provided rich material for Strafford, Becket, and Bothwell. The antiquity of Greece and Rome inspired the Hellenics and Erechtheus. However, the advocates of realism saw little value in subject matter which was not contemporary. Brander Matthews questioned the praise critics gave Swinburne's Atalanta in Calydon. "Why should an Englishman pride himself on having

64 Ibid., pp. 145 - 146.
65 Yeats, "Discoveries," Cutting of an Agate, p. 90.
written a Greek play? At best he has but accomplished a feat of main strength, a tour de force, an exercise in literary gymnastics! A pastiche, a paste jewel, is not a precious possession. A Greek play written by a modern Englishman remains absolutely outside the current of contemporary literature."66 In effect the poet was advised to let the dead bury their dead.67

Realistic staging also contributed to the dilemma of the poetic dramatist. Historical subject matter presented on the picture-frame stage sharpened the problem of versimilitude. Shakespeare did not attempt archeological and historical accuracy in his portrayal of Romans, Scots, and Danes. Rather, he gave all his characters the vocabularies, laws, usages, and costumes which were familiar to the audience. His interest in the "far away" imposed no restriction on him. Nor did preoccupation with the remote necessarily carry the label Romantic. This was not the situation, however, in the nineteenth century when Wagner maintained that "a realistic historical drama is impossible because historical character can only be understood by the aid of an exact and careful delineation of its circumstances and surroundings, which is precisely what the very conditions of his art debar the

66 Matthews, pp. 16 - 17.

67 In this issue Yeats says, "We cannot discover our subject matter by deliberate intellect, for when a subject matter ceases to move us we must go elsewhere, and when it moves us, even though it be 'that old ballad material of Shakespeare' or even 'the morbid terror of death,' we can laugh at reason. We must not ask is the world interested in this or that, for nothing is in question but our own interest, and we can understand no other." Yeats, "Discoveries," Cutting of an Agate, p. 101.
dramatist from attempting. The romance alone can deal with history." 68 Consequently, poetic drama was associated with romance or idealism; it was relegated to the "closet" rather than staged; it was read rather than performed. What the critics, who called each experiment in poetic drama an Elizabethan imitation, did not realize was the gradual movement toward a shift in emphasis from action to character, from character to "the dream of the impossible life." Yeats says, "In tragic art one distinguishes devices to exclude or lessen character, to diminish the power of that daily mood, to cheat or blind its too clear perception. If the real world is not altogether rejected, it is but touched here and there, and into the places we have left empty we summon rhythms, balance, pattern, images that remind us of vast passions, the vagueness of past times, all the chimeras that haunt the edge of trance." 69 Therefore, it was infinitely more than historical and legendary prominence that made Lucrezia Borgia, 70

68 Quoted in Archer, About the Theatre, p. 325. Wagner would also "confine the drama of the future to the sphere of pure imagination, where typical, symbolic, spiritual truths can alone be presented, truths cognizable by the feelings rather than by the senses and the intellect."

69 Yeats, Cutting of an Agate, p. 204. Further, "Suddenly it strikes us that character is continuously present in comedy alone, and that there is much tragedy, that of Corneille, that of Racine, that of Greece and Rome, where its place is taken by passions and motives, one person being jealous, another full of love or remorse or pride or anger." p. 199.

70 Victor Hugo Lucrece Borgia (1833), A. C. Swinburne The Duke of Gandia (1908), Michael Field Borgia (1905), Arthur Symons Cesare Borgia (1920).
Honoria, Mary Stuart, Rosamond, Mariamne, Salome, Cleopatra, Deirdre, and Iseult intriguing subjects for the tragic poet. In some measure the characters had a latent potential to become more than individuals, to greater until they became humanity itself.

Landor aptly stated in his Preface to Beatrice Cenci that "Poetry is not History. In features they may resemble; in particulars, in combinations, in sequences, they must differ. History should tell the truth. Poetry, like all the fine arts, is eclectic. Where she does not wholly invent, she at one time amplifies and elevates; at another, with equal power, she simplifies, she softens, she suppresses." The dramatic poet could justify his subject matter. But there were other problem areas which could not as easily be solved.

71 Michael Field Attila, My Attila! (1896), Laurence Binyon Attila (1907).

72 A. C. Swinburne Mary Stuart (1881), Michael Field The Tragic Mary (1890).

73 Alfred Lord Tennyson Becket (1879), A. C. Swinburne Rosamond (1860), Michael Field Fair Rosamund (1884).

74 Oscar Wilde Salome (1893), Stephen Phillips Herod (1900), Michael Field Mariamne (1905), The Accuser (1907), Arthur Symons Cleopatra in Judaea (n.d.), Thomas Sturge Moore Mariamne (1911).

75 George Russel Deirdre (1902), Michael Field Deirdre (1903), W. B. Yeats Deirdre (1906), J. M. Synge Deirdre of the Sorrows (1910).

76 Michael Field Tristan de Léonais (1911), The Tragedy of Pardon (1911), Arthur Symons Tristan and Iseult (1917), Iseult of Brittany (1920).

77 Landor, II, p. 6.
In addition to subject matter the poetic dramatist was criticized for certain conventions, chiefly Elizabethan, from which he did not sufficiently free himself. The disregard of time, the facile shifting from place to place, the frequent reliance on the soliloquy and the aside, the use of disguise to originate or stimulate situation, the free employment of horror as a vehicle for tragic effect, and the five-act structure all militated against the power of the poetic dramatist and made him the easy target of the critic.

However, the greatest problem of the nineteenth-century poetic drama was diction. When attention centered more and more on action rather than utterance, the necessity for beautiful expression was seriously reduced. The results were inevitably disastrous. Language, which assumed a secondary role, was not the master-force on the stage but merely an accompaniment of action. Shakespeare's dramatic dialect after two and a half centuries of vain repetition, needless to say, was not vital on the Victorian stage. Since language is a living thing, this situation produced commonplace dialogue or an adherence to sterile conventions. The critic William Archer carefully explained that blank verse should not be excluded from the stage, but he also maintained that its use should be restricted to certain types of plays; namely, fantasies, "plays of Fairyland or of Cloud-Cuckoo-Land."

78 "The theme of our later survey of the poetic drama must be once more the failure of the dramatists to escape from the trammels of Elizabethan idolization. It is not too much to say that Shakespeare cast a blight upon the would-be higher drama of the time." Nicoll, IV, p. 89.
or certain types of historical plays.79

The tension between actualism and idealism was more evident in the problem of language than any other area. The dramatic poet was continually attacked on the grounds of improvising on Elizabethan models. Shaw's voice was unmistakable, "Their rhetoric is insane and hideous."80 The poet retreated, became less and less interested in staging his plays, and retained the attitude voiced by Swinburne, "I do not think that the life of human character or the lifelikeness of dramatic dialogue has suffered from the bondage of rhyme or has been sacrificed to the exigence of metre."81 This statement, highly individualistic as it is, depended solely on the merits of a particular poet for its validity. It did not provide the antithesis for "our scientific dramatists, our naturalists of the stage . . . who write in the impersonal language that has come, not out of individual life, nor out of life at all, but out of necessities of commerce, of parliament, of board schools, of hurried journeys by rail."82 Language remained the

79 Archer, Old Drama and New, p. 132.

80 "Inexplicable is Shaw's dislike of the Elizabethans. His lips curl with scorn when their names are mentioned. He forgives Shakespeare many extravagances; Marlowe, Ford, Massinger, Beaumont and Fletcher, Middleton, Dekker, none. Their rhetoric is insane and hideous; they are a crew of insufferable bunglers and dullards; the Renaissance was an orgie . . . all these plays are full of murder, lust, obscenity, cruelty; no ray of noble feeling, no touch of faith, beauty, nor even common kindliness is to be discovered in them, says critic Shaw." James Huneker, "Introduction," in George Bernard Shaw, Dramatic Opinions and Essays (New York, 1906), pp. xiv - xv.

81 Swinburne, p. xxvi.

82 Yeats, p. 41.
bête noir of Victorian drama, and of poetic drama specifically.

The modest success of Browning's *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon* and Tennyson's *Becket* gives evidence that poetic drama may have been something more than merely tolerated by theatre audiences. Minor works such as Milman's *Fazio* and Talfourd's *Ion* on occasion were greeted with acclaim. Stephen Phillips' *Paola* and *Francesca* was hailed for its genuine dramatic qualities. However, a public was not found for Shelley's *The Cenci*, Landor's *Count Julian*, Browning's *Luria*, Tennyson's *Harold* or even for Swinburne's *Mary Stuart*. Poetic drama, despite a certain romantic enthusiasm which manifested itself particularly in the Nineties, did not come into its own but simply told the tale of an increasing dissatisfaction with the prevailing tendency toward realism.

The decade of the Nineties, the "final flare-up of the great Victorian compromise," "the vanguard of progress," "fin de siècle," and the "seedtime of the new century," created, among other things, a new art consciousness, and encouraged many "minor" writers. In all probability, the decade was the period of greatest dramatic endeavor for Michael Field, and the Nineties narrow still further the context in which the poets wrote. The disinterested and sometimes fantastic pursuit of art from the time of the Pre-Raphaelites had been intensified by an abhorrence of industrial society.

83 Mix, *Study in Yellow*, p. 2.

The cult of the exquisite was manifested by a preoccupation with paganism, aestheticism, and eccentricity, which is seen to a marked degree in Michael Field. However, the last phase of Romanticism, after a brilliant and energetic display in which the beautiful was cultivated for its own sake, passed into the shadows at the turn of the century, leaving behind an art of fine shades.85

The Yellow Book, The Savoy, The Dial, The Butterfly, the Pageant, and the Dome were attractive incentives to shorter works. Consequently, the literary genres which were predominantly the vehicles for fin de siècle expression were lyric poetry, essay, short stories and occasionally short novels. The acted drama, as a direct expression of the decadence, was almost a nullity. Aubrey Beardsley, collaborating with Brandon Thomas, started but never completed a play. Ernest Dowson wrote what Beardsley called a "tiresome" playlet. John Davidson wrote Bruce (1886), Smith, a tragic farce (1888), and Scaramouch in Naxos (1889). He also translated some plays of François Coppee and Victor Hugo's Ruy Blas. Theodore Wratislaw's poetic play The Pity of Love was without distinction. Despite these attempts, incentive to dramatic experiment was not present. The London

85 "Is it unreasonable to say that, whatever its limitations, the movement of the nineties made for greater subtlety, greater delicacy? The sixties had forged an art of muscles, but the nineties produced an art of nerves; and whereas Morris and Swinburne, Tennyson, Millais and Watts, were all chiefly concerned with fairly broad and obvious effect, the men of the subsequent age showed themselves capable of real fineness of sensation and observation. Theirs was an art of moods and movements, and many of these young workers far transcended their immediate predecessors in gift for shaping the shades of thought and emotion into words, or for transmuting them to graphic form." W. G. Blaikie Murdoch, The Renaissance of the Nineties (London, 1911), p. 26.
theatrical world, long entrenched in the "big star" curse and the financial expediency of the large theatre, was almost completely lacking in the "little theatre" which had become so much a part of the night life of large continental cities and consequently was so well suited to the works of new dramatists. 86

Attempts, however, were made to break with the long established theatrical patterns. George Moore, completely in sympathy with M. Antoine's Théâtre Libre, wrote articles in English journals as early as 1884 deploring the state of the drama and advocating an English Théâtre Libre to free the drama from the fetters of convention and prejudice. Since he believed that the experimental theatre should not be the stage for conventional plays, good or bad, Moore favored a completely bizarre representation. "To get the fine fleur of society, literature, and art, the Théâtre Libre must offer a supremacy of sensation—the strange, the unknown, the unexpected. The plays need not be great plays -- great plays are out of question. That the play should be RARE is the first and almost the only qualification necessary to secure for it the right of representation." 87

Moore, following the example of M. Antoine, proposed several foreign plays -- The Dominion of Darkness by Tolstoi, Ghosts by Ibsen, La Mort du Duc d'Enghien by Léon Hennique, and En Famille by Oscar Méténier -- to inaugurate the English Théâtre Libre. After this projected initiation,

87 Moore, Impressions and Opinions, pp. 177 - 178.
however, the one year's program necessitated plays by English writers.

Moore envisioned the works of certain novelists -- Meredith, Hardy, Stevenson, and Henley -- dramatized on the stage and also suggested Swinburne's Chastelard, Frank Danby's (Mrs. Julia Frankau) A Babe in Bohemia, and Michael Field's William Rufus. Referring to this early play by Michael Field, Moore wrote:

> Of all Michael Field's works what I most admire is William Rufus. It is many years since I read it, but I cannot think without a thrill of those splendid forest scenes. I see the endless colonnades touched with the setting light. I hear miles and miles of silence broken at last by the sound of a distant chase, and then comes the startled deer and then the swish of the arrow. I cannot say now whether it would be possible to act this play, but it would surely not be impossible to induce the talented authoress to rearrange her work so as to bring it within the scope of the unconventional stage. 88

This was a plan, elaborate in design and far-reaching in scope, which at least alerted the public and paved the way for a more audacious and vigorous experiment -- the Independent Theatre Society.

In 1891 a group of drama enthusiasts, 89 led by J. T. Grein, established the controversial Independent Theatre. To some critics any play produced under its auspices, rated the comment, "amateurish in construction and unpleasant in theme." Beerbohm Tree was one of the early dissenting voices:

> We have heard a good deal about an Independent Theatre, which was established, I believe, for the purpose of sweeping from the

88 Ibid., p. 180.

stage that usurping intruder the actor-manager, to whose baneful and withering influence have been attributed all the ills which dramatic flesh is heir to. What has been the outcome of this agitation? What has become of the maternal Muse, so pregnant in promise, so abortive in performance? What has been the result of this magnificent machinery? In this mind's eye the potenti of this artistic Utopia saw the little dramatic fledglings nesting fondly round their parent incubator. Everything was perfect — only the eggs were missing.90

Whatever its shortcomings, the Independent Theatre Society was a substantial beginning. George Bernard Shaw praised it because of the very fact of its independence from commercial success. In 1895, he wrote, "The real history of the drama for the last ten years is not the history of the prosperous enterprises of Mr. Hare, Mr. Irving, and the established West-end theatres, but of the forlorn hopes led by Mr. Vernon, Mr. Charrington, Mr. Grein, Messrs. Henley and Stevenson, Miss Achurch, Miss Robins and Miss Lea, Miss Farr and the rest of the Impossibilists."91 Later, in a preface to a volume of Grein’s dramatic criticism edited in 1921, Shaw wrote, "It is now very close on thirty years since you madly began an apparently hopeless attempt to bring the English theatre into some sort of relation with contemporary culture. Matthew Arnold had suggested that step; but nobody in the theatre took the slightest notice of him, because nobody in the theatre knew of the existence of such a person as Matthew Arnold."92 Shaw also acknowledged his own debt to the Independent Theatre Society. Its members

90 Herbert Beerbohm Tree, Some Interesting Fallacies of the Modern Stage (London, 1892), p. 31.

91 Nicoll, V, p. 61.

not only sponsored his first play, Widowers' Houses, but their encouragement actually enabled him to complete the play rather than abandon it. The same acknowledgment could be made regarding George Moore's The Strike at Arlingford and Michael Field's A Question of Memory. Not only in terms of individual playwrights but more important in terms of influence, the Independent Theatre Society contributed to the history of drama.93 The London stage of 1898 was far more vital than that of 1891 because of the efforts of Grein and his associates.

Paradoxically, the theatrical context for the poetic plays of Michael Field is as broad as the span of Victorian drama and as narrow as the scope of J. T. Grein's Independent Theatre. In a very real sense the plays balance precariously between the "old drama" and the "new." The influence of Scribe and Sardou and the English theatrical development, inspired by both French writers, is undeniably present in Michael Field's plays,94 and the

93 "Other societies were being formed on similar lines to the one founded by J. T. Grein. There was the New Century Theatre, sponsored by Elizabeth Robins in the middle 'nineties,' and which flourished for a time upon Ibsen, with occasional excursions to Robert Louis Stevenson and elsewhere. The torch of the Independent Theatre was handed to Frederick Whelen, and, some months after Blanchett, came the Incorporated Stage Society founded by him with the help of Charles Charrington and others of the Independents. Out of the Stage Society sprang the Vedrenne-Barker management at the Court Theatre, which established Bernard Shaw as a paying dramatist and revealed the genius of Granville-Barker as a producer, and, more than any management, organized a modern public for modern plays. The Stage Society has carried on ever since 1899, a long-lived child of its parent, the Independent Theatre, and with a lengthy list of achievements." Orme, p. 149.

94 "This very strong situation[re. A Question of Memory] has the flavor of Sardou, yet for pure tragedy it exceeds anything invented by the French dramatist." Ibid., p. 135.
presentation of contemporary Ibsenite themes is also found in them. Yet magnificent characters and intriguing situations sought in works on Greece, Rome, Renaissance Italy, Medieval France, and Tudor England as well as the Romantic subject matter used by Landor, Browning, Tennyson, and Swinburne were freely adopted by the poets. Their plays give evidence of the tensions between realism and idealism found in the Victorian period, and particularly reflect the strengths and weaknesses of Victorian poetic drama. Perhaps these reflections are sharper because the poets are "minor" and, as such, illustrate general tendencies and trends rather than startling innovations. The Nineties provide the proper milieu for the plays of Michael Field and render compatible both the poets' fascination for occult sources, preciosity, obsession with objects of art, and their enthusiastic experiment at the Independent Theatre. Caught between two traditions, the old and the new, the twenty-seven plays actually convey the attitude Michael Field expressed in the following "Introduction":

The evils of an age of decline cannot be compared with the pangs of a new era; for neither the race nor the individual possess in the term of decrepitude that vitality that gives poignancy to

95 "To be vitally stirred, yet go blindly on the way of death; to be urged by nature, and yet outrage her through very obedience is a tragedy of tragedies, and one not remote; for Honoria is the New Woman of the fifth century." Michael Field, Attila, My Attila! (London, 1896), Preface.

96 "Beguiled by their passion for the Elizabethans, they conceived that the essence of drama lay, not in the nicely adjusted interplay of action and character, but in the copious effusion of highly figurative rhetoric." William Archer, The Theatrical 'World' for 1893 (London, 1894), p. 252. (Archer's review of A Question of Memory, November 1, 1893).
regret. In the evolutionary struggle the survivor is himself a tragic figure. Every sunrise brings him into sharper antagonism with the beliefs and habits that beset while they revolt him. He is alienated from his gods, his forefathers, his very dreams. His hopes are not founded on experience, nor his ideals on memory.97

The context of the poetical plays of Michael Field, in the final analysis, is the Victorian dilemma -- realism versus idealism.

97 Michael Field, Camote the Great and The Cup of Water (London, 1887), pp. 4 - 5.
CHAPTER III
STRUCTURE

Considering the possibility of poetic drama, T. S. Eliot says, "The nineteenth century had a good many fresh impressions; but it had no form in which to confine them." The dramatic poet, who circumvented the exigencies of outer structure by adopting mixed genres suited to the revelation of a philosophy rather than a "presentation of thought, or a presentation of feeling by a statement of events in human action or objects in the external world," was actually attempting to compensate the defect of true structure by effecting an elaborate inner philosophical structure. However, in drama "most important of all is the structure of the incidents. For tragedy is an imitation, not of men, but of an action and of life, and life consists in action, and its end is a mode of action, not a quality." The opposite extreme of this situation was seen in the nineteenth-century dramatic poet's adaptation of conventional structure -- either Athenian or Elizabethan. This solution, also, proved inadequate because the specific

1 Thomas Stearns Eliot, The Sacred Wood (London, 1920), p. 56. Eliot elaborates this idea by stating that Wordsworth and Browning actually created forms for their poetic expression, "but no man can invent a form, create a taste for it, and perfect it too." Ibid.

2 Ibid., p. 58.

"temper of the age," which was responsible for each distinctive mode of structuring, could not be recreated in the nineteenth century. The dilemma was obvious -- the poet was either chained to models of the past or the poet was forced to substitute other considerations for the primary claim of his genre; namely, structure. Only a few individual poets, by reason of their own particular genius, could penetrate and then solve the dilemma. But what of the minor poet? "In a formless age there is very little hope for the minor poet to do anything worth doing; and when I say minor I mean very good poets indeed: such as filled the Greek anthology and the Elizabethan song-books. . . . When everything is set out for the minor poet to do, he may quite frequently come upon some trouvaille, even in the drama: Peele and Brome are examples. Under the present conditions, the minor poet has too much to do." Viewed in this light, therefore, the criticism, in many instances fully justified, leveled against the dramas of the minor poet Michael Field with regard to plot structure indicates a contemporary literary problem as well as a weakness in the work of a specific author.

That Michael Field was concerned with plot structure is evident in the poets' journals and works. Edith Cooper recorded a conversation with George Moore on the subject. "We talked much of the construction of plays

4 "The framework which was provided for the Elizabethan dramatist was not merely blank verse and the five-act play and the Elizabethan playhouse; it was not merely the plot -- for the poets incorporated, remodelled, adapted or invented, as occasion suggested. It was also the half-formed 'temper of the age,' a preparedness, a habit on the part of the public, to respond to particular stimuli." Eliot, pp. 57 - 58.

5 Ibid., p. 58.
for the stage: he made me realise the leading fault of our work -- its want of rhythmical progression -- the haphazard development of plot which has contented us. The firm yet pliant structure of a work is one of the requirements of style. And preparation for events and entrances is the true forethought that gives dramatic art integrity and musical movement."6

A glance at the uneven act structuring in Michael Field's twenty-seven plays, however, testifies more convincingly to the poets' attempts to realize a form which would uniquely express their poetic vision. The poets approximated the "one-act play" structure and also wrote a play in six acts. The most commonly used, comprising eighteen of their twenty-seven plays, were the three and five act structures.7 In the light of this diversity, the question of refinement and progression in the dramatic technique of Michael Field is, of course, of paramount interest. Fortunately, in the body of plays by Michael Field, there are significant instances of attention to the problem of structure. Because these examples are germane to the present study, special attention will be given to illustrative key works. A Question of Memory was completely revised by the authors in the light of contemporary criticism of the work when it was staged in 1893. A careful structural analysis of both the original and the revision will, therefore, be profitable.

6 Works and Days, p. 198.

7 No act division -- Noontide Branches; Two acts -- Fair Rosamund; Three acts -- Callirrhoe, Camute the Great, The Cup of Water, Stephania, Julia Donna, Tristan de Leonois, A Messiah; Five acts -- Attila, My Attila!, The World at Auction, Anna Ruina, The Race of Leaves, The Accuser, A Question of Memory (revised to three acts); Five acts -- The Father's Tragedy, William Rufus, Loyalty or Love, Brutus Ulto, The Tragic Mary, Queen Marianne, The Tragedy of Pardon, Deirdre, In the Name of Time; Six acts -- Borgia.
The direct source of *The Cup of Water* can be found in "Stories and Schemes of Poems" by Dante Gabriel Rossetti. A comparative study will indicate precisely the poets' structuring of story material. Finally, some general conclusions will be reached regarding those plays by Michael Field which indicate original power rather than imitative method in plot structure.

However, it would seem that before any conclusions can be drawn in this area, some pertinent questions must be posed and answered -- In defining a tragedy as "an imitation of an action that is complete, and whole, and of a certain magnitude,"\(^8\) are the "qualitative"\(^9\) parts of the plot more significant than the "quantitative"\(^10\) parts of the plot? To what extent is a play's inner or organic structure shaped and determined by the act-structure chosen by the dramatist? Or is act division one thing (usually a matter of convention), and plot construction quite another? Has the technical perfection of the *pièce bien faîte* tinged the notion of plot-making with meaningless virtuosity? Or, finally, as Aristotle clearly states, is the plot "the first principle, and, as it were, the soul of a tragedy;"\(^11\) and,

\(^8\) *Poetics*, VII. 2.


\(^10\) *Ibid.*, XII. 1. "We now come to the quantitative parts -- the separate parts into which Tragedy is divided - namely, Prologue, Episode, Exode, Choric song; this last being divided into Parode and Stasimon."

consequently, the most important consideration in the critical evaluation of a play?

The answers, at least in part, were formulated and substantiated centuries ago by Aristotle. An examination of the Poetics indicates the importance he attached to plot. Plot is the basic form of the play, or the formative principle of a work of art; however, through character delineation and the arts of language the play is given the final form which is read, seen, or heard. Aristotle's primary conception of plot is basic. "Plot is the imitation of the action; for by plot I here mean the arrangement of the incident." Aristotle's definition distinguishes the plot both from the story the poet wishes to dramatize, and from the action he wishes to represent. This distinction between story and plot applies to all dramas whether the story is legendary, historical, or original. The dramatist selects only a few incidents for presentation, and he arranges them in such a way as to show only a few crucial moments directly. These incidents, furthermore, represent one "complete action," which is the purpose of plot construction, and the incidents fall into a significant arrangement only after the dramatist has viewed the action as tragic, as eventuating in destruction and suffering. Thus the plot is distinct from the story dramatized and the action represented.

12 Ibid., VI. 6.

13 See infra, pp. 91 - 92.
"A complete action" passes through the modes of purpose and pathos to the final perception. The plot, therefore, has parts -- types of incidents in the beginning, middle, and end of the play -- resulting from the various modes of action.\textsuperscript{14} Aristotle stresses particularly those parts of the plot which represent the action of the moment when it is reaching its catastrophic end: Reversal of the Situation, Recognition, and Scenes of Suffering.\textsuperscript{15} These three parts, in the best tragedies, are inherent in the basic conception of the plot, depend on one another, and serve most efficiently to produce a specific tragic effect. Frequently the Reversal of the Situation, or irony, occurs simultaneously with the action of perceiving, passing from ignorance to knowledge. What is recognized is the reversal, and the discovery occurs in the "cause to effect" ordering of the plot. Because it includes both reversal and recognition, the plot is "Complex," but there are also "Simple" plots which do not include these elements.\textsuperscript{16}

The Poetics includes very specific aspects of plot construction, "Every Tragedy falls into two parts -- Complication and Unraveling or Dénouement.\textsuperscript{17} Incidents extraneous to the action are frequently combined with a portion of

\textsuperscript{14} Poetics, VII. 3. Special mention should be made of the specific nature of these "parts."

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., XV.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., X.

\textsuperscript{17} Other suggested translations -- desis, tying of the knot; lusis, untying.
the action proper, to form the Complication; the rest of the action is the Unraveling. By the Complication I mean all that extends from the beginning of the action to the part which marks the turning point to good or bad fortune. The Unraveling is that which extends from the beginning of the change to the end. . . . Many poets tie the knot well, but unravel it ill."18

The poet should aim at the necessary or the probable; one event should follow another in sequence. The unraveling of the plot, no less than the complication of it, should arise out of the plot itself and not be effected by a deus ex machina.19 Episodes or acts which succeed one another without probable or necessary sequence stretch the plot beyond its capacity, overemphasize the element of chance, and diminish the concept of possibility.20

In the plots of most plays, there seems to be inherent a fundamental scheme of exposition, complication, and solution; or of introduction, rising action, and falling action. Aristotle created the original metaphor -- desis or tying the knot, and lusis or untying; however, the former intangible idea could only be expressed in figurative language. By that mysterious process in which theory becomes convention, the terms expressed by Aristotle

18 Postica, XVIII. 1-3.

19 "The Deus ex Machina should be employed only for events external to the drama -- for antecedent or subsequent events, which lie beyond the range of human knowledge, and which require to be reported or foretold; for to the gods we ascribe the power of seeing all things. Ibid., XV. 7.

20 Ibid., IX. 10.
became quite explicit in meaning and considerably reduced in scope. His desis led to the term "complication"; his lusis to the terms "solution" and "dénouement." Prominent, also, were the terms "rising action" and "falling action," which altered the original metaphor considerably. These terms are perhaps due to the influence of Freytag's pyramid metaphor. Using this analogy, Freytag said that a dramatic plot rises from the introduction with the entrance of exciting forces to the climax, and falls to the catastrophe. The three major parts are the Introduction, Climax, and Catastrophe; each part is separated by the Rise and Fall. And three major exciting moments are strategically placed between the Introduction and Rise, between the Climax and Fall, and between Fall and Catastrophe. With varying choice of terms many expositors of dramatic plot have retained Freytag's scheme. William T. Price employed the usual five: introduction, development, climax, dénouement, and catastrophe, and also suggested how the five movements could be incorporated into the acts of a play. "In the three-act drama they would be

21 "In the course of their transmission to the eighteenth century, however -- as a result partly of the influence of Horace and partly of a complex of more general causes operative from the beginnings of Aristotelian commentary in the Renaissance -- the analytical significance of the scheme has undergone a radical change. For Aristotle was concerned with the construction of poetic wholes." R. S. Crane, "The Concept of Plot and the Plot of Tom Jones," in Critics and Criticism, Ancient and Modern, ed. R. S. Crane (Chicago, 1952), p. 617n.


23 It must be noted that the Greek theatre was characterized by the continuous nature of the dramatic performances. Critics also maintain that the dramatic effect and meaning of Shakespeare's plays were communicated by continuous, rapid, uninterrupted action and not by five units or stages of plot. In the modern theatre, "act" suggests a part of a play followed by a pause or by the end of the performance. The stage is empty and void of action and dialogue. The lapse in action constitutes a major difference between Athenian and Elizabethan and modern theatre.
thus associated: 1, Exposition, or introduction, and beginning (of action); 2, development and climax; 3, dénouement and catastrophe or end. In five acts they follow in this order: 1, Introduction and beginning; 2, development; 3, climax; 4, dénouement; 5, catastrophe or end. Each of these divisions has its peculiar structure. Thus it became possible to criticize not only the isolated plot but even the structure of Act II or Act IV on the grounds that the particular act did not fulfill its traditional function.

In the Victorian age, which did not create a distinctive mode of dramatic expression, "no form in which to confine [impressions]," the framework, introduced by Scribe and perfected by Sardou, not only was imitated in its external features; but it also limited considerably the poet's vision. Plot, the actual formative principle of a tragic drama, was reduced to clever construction, "a preparation for events and entrances." The structuring of a plot became a tour de force.


25 See supra, p. 64.

26 The "well-made play" is characterized by certain definite features: "There is not a single useless phrase or word; everything foreshadows and prepares for something else. The dénouement is prepared for in Act I. No one speaks or acts haphazardly; everything is accounted for, foreseen, and prepared. The end of each act is intensely dramatic, even tragic," and "As in most tragedies and romantic dramas, the culmen of the dramatic interest is reached in Act IV." Neil Cole Arvin, Eugene Scribe and the French Theatre, 1815 - 1860 (Cambridge, 1924), pp. 161 - 164.

27 See supra, p. 56, n. 6. It is interesting to note that Michael Field became more interested in conventional plot structure in conjunction with "staging plays."
The extent of the influence of this narrow concept of plot is readily seen in the dramatic criticism of Michael Field's *A Question of Memory*, which, undoubtedly, initiated and affected the revision of the play by the authors some years later.\(^{28}\) Ironically, the revision, which conforms more clearly to the tenets of the *pièce bien faîte*, lacks the dramatic power and vision of the original version of the play. Viewed in contrast, the two plays indicate Michael Field's concept of plot in terms of direct stage representation, which, in this case, proved detrimental to the authors' poetic vision.

The play is based on an incident of the Hungarian uprising in 1848. A staunch Hungarian schoolmaster is captured by the Austrians near his native village. He is brought before the Austrian general, who threatens to shoot his mother, sister, and sweetheart unless he betrays the hiding place of his regiment. The schoolmaster at first refuses, but under the strain of the threatened deaths he agrees to supply the information. At the moment of the revelation, his memory fails. As a result his dear ones are shot and he goes mad.\(^{29}\) In a note to the 1893 edition of the play, Michael Field states, "We copied in haste our hero's story from an old newspaper extract."\(^{30}\)

\(^{28}\) "In the first, second, and fourth acts there is scarcely a single natural sequence of thought, feeling, and expression." Archer, *Theatrical World* for 1893, p. 253; and "Bond [actor] says, 'Cut off Act IV -- let me have the play in three acts, and I'll always hold to it, for it is one of the grandest things that has ever been done.'" Works and Days, p. 183; and "The play, finely conceived, was written in well-phrased dialogue which, by not following a natural sequence of thought, led away from, and all round, as well as towards the dramatic climax. The directness of a Sardou, allied with the literary grace of the authors, would have made a great play of the subject." Orme, J. T. Grein, p. 136.

\(^{29}\) *Works and Days*, p. 173.

\(^{30}\) Michael Field, *A Question of Memory* (London, 1893), Note.
A Question of Memory is structured in four acts. Act I includes the exposition, introduces the political situation, indicates the basic personalities of the characters as well as their relationship to each other, and suggests the complicating action. Dialogue between the Hungarian schoolmaster Ferencz and his friend Stanislaus centers on the ball of the previous evening. The conversation reveals many things: the imminence of the Hungarian insurrection, the engagement of Ferencz to the sixteen-year-old Thekla, and the secret love of Stanislaus for Thekla's elder sister, Elizabeth. The gaiety and pleasure of the dance contrast with the grim reality of the revolt when marching orders reach the young men of the Hungarian village in the morning. It is in terms of the impending order that the characters and their relationships to the other characters of the play are revealed. Ferencz is dreamy and reckless, and Stanislaus is practical and "the better soldier." Bitter because of the Austrian treatment of the Hungarian peasants, the mother of Ferencz welcomes the planned revolt. In contrast, Thekla, the immature and vain fiancée of Ferencz, cries when she learns of the young men's marching orders. Fina, Ferencz's sister and the object of the attentions of the Austrian officers, Mansflett and Meyerhofe, scorns the traditional role of womanhood and is vigorously interested in the campaign for freedom.

From the beginning, the first act is static and slow moving because of the ponderous dialogue. As various characters arrive, the pace of the act accelerates. The school children enter the school room and demand

31 "She teaches the young men to sing, she teaches them to be patriots. I meet them in troops with her spirit on their faces. They go away from her ready to die for their country, ready to die for her." Ibid., p. 5.
Ferencz's attention. Thekla's sister, Elizabeth, who helps Ferencz with the instruction of the children, arrives. When Ferencz tells her of Stanislaus' love, she is indignant and scornful. Unknown to Ferencz, Elizabeth's whole life has been motivated by her secret love for him. As Ferencz is playing a song of farewell to the dancing children, Thekla rushes into the classroom and pleads with him to remain with her and not join the band of young men who are now assembled outside the classroom. Ferencz's mother and Elizabeth try to comfort Thekla, and the young men go off "to deliver Hungary" at the end of the act.

Structurally, the first act, which is filled with statements foreshadowing further action and the conclusion of the play, is long and involved. At one point, Fina recalls being told at the dance by the jealous Austrian officer Meyerhofe that she will "pay dear for insulting him." This, of course, proves true when she and her mother are shot in Act III. There is also foreshadowing in Elizabeth's comment to Ferencz when he tells her of Stanislaus' love for her, "My life will not be determined by the people who love me, but by the people I love." Elizabeth's futile selfish love collapses when she agrees to marry Stanislaus in the fourth act, and the irony of her statement becomes apparent as she prepares to care for Ferencz. Her life is not determined by people who love her, but directed by people she loves. Elizabeth is not loved, but loving, at the end of the play.

The second act is brief and contains the most significant complicating action -- Fina, Thekla, Elizabeth, and the mother of Ferencz are working in the hayfield in the absence of the young men of the village. Mansfelt, an
Austrian officer known to the villagers, enters the hayfield and announces to the women that Ferencz has been captured by the Austrians and that his mother, sister, and betrothed have been ordered by General Haynau to accompany him to the Austrian headquarters. As the three women and Mansfelt depart, Elizabeth envisions her idealized Ferencz dying heroically for his country. Fearing that Thekla will persuade Ferencz to betray the Hungarian cause, Elizabeth soliloquizes, "Everyone conspires to thwart nobility. Women hate it, and comrades hope it may be avoided. How grand the hurtle of these thunderclouds and the bright distance under them! Ferencz, she [Thekla] said that she loved you, and could not bear to miss you. May I never see you again, my dearest, on earth."\(^32\)

The Austrian headquarters is the setting of the third act. General Haynau, in charge of the Austrian troops, is primarily concerned with his career, duty, and advantage. Ferencz has been taken captive in order to discover the hiding place of the band of insurrectionists. The first part of the act is a series of verbal maneuvers to obtain the information. When Ferencz continues to refuse to divulge it, his mother and sister are brought into the room to persuade him. Instead, both women encourage his silence and bravery. Then General Haynau threatens to take both of their lives if Ferencz does not supply the information. He continues to refuse to name the defile, and the two women are shot. General Haynau's master move is the summoning of Thekla. As she pleads with Ferencz for her life and their marriage and happiness, Ferencz weakens, becomes confused, and then is unable to remember the name of the defile where the troops are hidden. In anger, General Haynau

\(^{32}\) Ibid., p. 27.
issues the order to shoot Thekla. The triple deaths, the decision to inform, and the loss of memory form the climactic action of the play and illustrate an Aristotelian reversal and recognition -- the course of the "heroic" action is reversed when Ferencz decides to reveal the name of the defile in the recognition of the immediacy of saving the object of his love, Thekla. The irony is sharpened by the fact that Ferencz, the village's intellectual, is a hero only because his memory fails and he cannot remember the name of the hiding place. General Haynau concludes the act with the statement, "Send him away; he is of no use to us. I think he was crazy from the first." 33

The fourth act, in many respects, parallels the third. Stanislaus becomes a traitor by divulging the name of the defile in order to spare Elizabeth's life. "That may not be acting like a patriot, it is acting like a man of sense." However, the dialogue in Elizabeth's garden substitutes

33 Regarding Act III of A Question of Memory (1893). "Your third act was quite admirable -- a really fine piece of work -- with the touch of terror that our stage lacks so much -- and I think the theatre should belong to the furies." Oscar Wilde to Michael Field [November, 1893] in The Collected Letters of Oscar Wilde, ed. Rupert Hart-Davis (London, 1962), p. 346. And, "Where, then, be the merit and interest of the play? Chiefly in the great situation of the third act. There is no novelty, indeed, in the mere idea of extorting a confession by applying torture, not to the holder of the secret, but to some one whom he loves. Sardou and others have exploited this theme; but 'Michael Field' has imagined an ingenious and really tragic refinement upon it. When Ferencz's mother and sister are led out to execution, the name of the defile where his comrades are hidden is ringing so loudly in his ears that he is in agony of terror lest he should utter it in spite of himself, or even lest some Austrian thought-reader should hear the unuttered sound that is echoing through his brain. Then, when it comes to his sweetheart's turn to suffer, his resolution breaks down, and, in his frenzy, he is ready to speak the fateful word; but, behold! his tongue cannot shape it, it has vanished from his mind, it has been utterly swept away in the whirlwind of anguish! Here is a conceivable, a natural, a terribly tragic conjecture. If only the scene were as well written as it is finely conceived, it would be one of the most moving in English drama." Archer, pp. 254 - 255.
for direct action in this act. The potentially dramatic incidents are narrated by the characters rather than performed by them. The returning Ferencz incoherently tells Elizabeth about the triple deaths and his own loss of memory. Soon after, Stanislaus returns and relates his decision to save Elizabeth's life by naming the hiding place. Instead of considering Stanislaus a traitor, Ferencz and Elizabeth ironically become more and more dependent on him. Ferencz says, "We have gone through the same experience, and we understand each other. You are my only friend and you alone can be my friend, and you desert me." In an effort to keep Stanislaus from leaving Ferencz, Elizabeth agrees to marry Stanislaus, but he refuses, knowing that finally she, too, would betray herself for her love. He says, "I have brought you to my point of view. In a moment of crisis one must put away love of country, love of principle, all abstract nonsense -- everything, and think first of the creature one loves." In a significant way each character is freed from his illusions at the conclusion of the play. Elizabeth, who has concealed her selfish love for Ferencz under a mask of patriotic idealism, is capable of an altruistic love at the end of Act IV. Stanislaus ceases to pose as her lover, and he devotes himself to his friend. Ferencz realizes his heroism was only a lapse of memory and, consequently, not a reality at all. He has lost all he loved. Stanislaus' words echo ironically, "Life has remarkably few crises if one stops posing and pressing one's claims."

34 A Question of Memory, p. 46.
35 Ibid., p. 47.
36 Ibid.
The Sophoclean "wisdom through suffering" idea permeates the end of the play.

The "complete action" is Ferencz's idealistic search for heroism in the Hungarian insurrection, which culminates not only in the destruction of his mother, sister, and fiancée but also in his own intended betrayal of his friends that ironically is not actualized because he loses his memory. To this end, the incidents are arranged to produce an action which "passes through the modes of purpose and pathos to the final perception." The movement of the complicating action to the climax is especially noteworthy; however, the action which is narrated and discussed, instead of presented in integrated dramatic incidents, in Acts I and IV is unfortunate. The inherent weakness of the play is not a lack of poetic vision nor the number of acts nor the length of each act, but rather a failure to achieve balance and harmony in unifying action and dialogue and a certain artificiality of exposition.

The revision of A Question of Memory was published posthumously in 1918, but the play, undoubtedly, was rewritten before 1907. The plot structure is three acts rather than the four-act structure of the original, and the character of Fina, Ferencz's sister, is deleted from the second version.

37 "He[George Moore] said that it was said everywhere that we made no use of our first act[A Question of Memory] that our third act was splendid and our fourth act an anti-climax." Works and Days, pp. 199 - 200.

38 The poets were converted to Catholicism in 1907, and concentrated their poetic efforts in the lyric rather than dramatic form. See supra, p. 22.
The names of Ferencz's friend, his betrothed, and her sister are changed. Act I begins with Ferencz's musings about Laszlo's secret love for Erzsi. The schoolmistress, Erzsi, enters immediately; and before the school children arrive, she begins discussing the dance of the previous night with Ferencz. He tells her of Laszlo's love for her, which she considers an impossible burden but uses as a means to stimulate patriotism in him. Laszlo enters the school house with the long-awaited marching orders and the additional news that Ferencz has been chosen as captain of the men. He then leaves to summon the band of young insurrectionists. Erzsi greets the assembled children and begins the day's lessons with them. Excited by the news of the imminent revolt, Ferencz's mother returns home. She proceeds to tell Ferencz a secret she has withheld from him through the long years of his childhood and youth. It is the story of her mistreatment by the Austrian officer Haynau when a Hungarian fugitive, seeking refuge, was discovered in her home. "I can tell you this now you are a soldier -- I said to myself, 'I will die; this is not a world in which it is possible for women to live." The tale has its calculated effect on the young soldier. Ferencz is not only motivated by patriotism, but now he is seeking revenge. The gathered young men prepare to leave the village. Secrecy regarding their hiding place receives special attention. Irma, the sixteen-year-old fiancee of Ferencz, tells him, "It is hateful of you not to tell me where you are going."

39 Stanislaus, Thekla, Elizabeth are changed to Laszlo Palfi, Irma Szemere, Erzsi Szemere.

Ferencz concludes the act with the statement, "No, boys, we must not tell our sweethearts the secret. We are going to deliver Hungary."41

In essence, the first act is the microcosm of the entire play. The villainous role of General Haynau is established, the mother's secret has been revealed only to be replaced by another secret — the hiding place. Irma's plea to know where her lover is going is a direct foreshadowing of her plea to Ferencz to reveal the hiding place in order to spare her life in Act III. Erzsi's secret love for Ferencz is established. At the conclusion of the play, Ferencz repeats the name Erzsi as he searches for her. The elements of the pièce bien faîte are unmistakable.42

The setting of Act II is a vineyard near Ferencz's home. Irma and Ferencz's mother, who are gathering the grapes, discuss the work of the day and express alarm at the proximity of the Austrian troops to their village. Laszlo, who is engaged in spying activities, brings news of Ferencz's extraordinary bravery in the Hungarian encounters with the Austrian troops. Hoping to see Erzsi, he offers to wait for Irma's note to Ferencz. He notices that Erzsi is absorbed in the story of Ferencz's heroism; he also is fully aware of her scornful attitude toward his spying efforts, which she considers far inferior to Ferencz's bravery in battle. As they converse, Mansfelt and a band of Austrian troops appear, arrest Laszlo, and tell Irma that Ferencz has been arrested. They inform her that she and his mother

41 Ibid., p. 103.
42 See supra, p. 72, n. 26.
have been summoned to accompany the Austrian leader. When the soldiers leave in search of Ferencz's mother, Erzsi tries to persuade Irma not to urge Ferencz to inform the Austrians but rather to die bravely for his secret. Irma, who cannot comprehend life without Ferencz, challenges her sister's statement. Erzsi tells her sister of her own great love for Ferencz and bitterly resents her inability to inspire his heroism. Ferencz's mother, trying to calm Irma, leaves with the Austrian soldiers at the end of the act.

The third and final act is in the Austrian headquarters. When Ferencz refuses to give the location of the Hungarian soldiers' hiding place to General Haynau, he is told that his mother and sweetheart are held by the Austrians. Proud and defiant, Ferencz's mother urges her son to heroic silence. When it becomes obvious that it is her death and not her son's which is intended, she accepts it triumphantly. Irma is summoned next. She pleads with Ferencz to save her life. However, because he cannot remember the name of the defile, Irma is shot also. As General Haynau is about to dismiss Ferencz as a madman, Laszlo is brought in and the information about the hiding place is demanded from him. Ferencz pleads with the adamant Laszlo to name the defile. Threatened with Erzsi's death, Laszlo finally reveals the secret. Ferencz's memory slowly returns as he

43 "Because the time for me to help him is come and I am not wanted; because they are asking for those who love him best and you[ Irma] are sent for. But go to him, do your utmost, you will not have your way." A Question of Memory (1918), p. 115.

44 "Erzsi, to die, that we may be safe —. Impossible! My brave young comrades would lay down their lives for her. I hear them shout 'Let us be sacrificed, let us be sacrificed.' She is the saint of our village — we cannot betray her." Ibid., p. 128.
recognizes the name. General Haynau orders the hidden troops captured, the traitor László shot, and the madman freed. Ferencz departs, calling the name Erzsi as he goes along.

In the revision of A Question of Memory, the foreshadowings are heightened and the incidents are more dramatically conceived than in the original play. However, the play has lost its inner form; the "complete action" is confused and undiscernible. The characters are seemingly involved in a meaningless series of catastrophes. The secret of Ferencz's mother adds additional motivation for her son's role in the Hungarian insurrection, but in Act III, when she is brought into the presence of her abductor, her previously-told story is forgotten. The selfish passive love of the village's "saint," Erzsi, is apparently triumphant in the end because her sister, and rival in love, has been shot. Reduced to an empty portrayal of heroics, the survival of the self-centered idealists, Erzsi and Ferencz, at the end of the play is virtually meaningless. If the end is conceived as a stroke of supreme irony -- namely, the fact that people who love deeply, and, therefore, live life fully, die; and people who are selfish and, consequently, are incapable of love or living, live -- then the entire movement of the play does not substantiate the irony.

The revision of the play is devoid of the subtleties and nuances of the original version. Fina, who provided an interesting contrast to both Elizabeth and Thekla, and whose death strengthened the climax, is an unfortunate omission. However, of greater importance is the fact that in their effort to improve the basic structure of the play, the poets failed
to provide a "recognition" scene, the perception which should have evolved from the pathos. Without this movement from "ignorance to knowledge," the terrifying action of the play is meaningless or, more accurately, melodramatic.

Both versions of A Question of Memory indicate the strengths and weaknesses of Michael Field's method of structuring material specifically for stage presentation. The poets' dramatic potential is most effectively actualized in short climactic scenes, which the power of Act III in the original version of the play clearly manifests. However, the poetic vision of the authors tends to be dispersed in the structuring of corollary action. This tendency is apparent in both versions of the play primarily because the intensity of the action cannot be sustained in a maze of details, which are introduced and are not structurally functional, and secondarily, because the immediacy of the subject matter (Hungarian revolt, 1848) does not permit penetration into "that happy land where imagination realises itself as it travels," but rather demands a logical "cause to effect" concentration of action.

That A Question of Memory was Michael Field's only venture into actual stage production is understandable. The poets were not sufficiently attuned to the exigencies of the theatrical world of the Nineties. On the other hand, the world of the theatre did little to create an environment in which Michael

45 A Question of Memory (1893), Preface.

46 "The evening ended with cheers not unmixed with hisses, and the next day came the first reviews, some good, others the reverse. Poor, sensitive Miss Cooper shrank before them. . . . Neither she nor Miss Bradley were concerned in writing another play for the stage." Orme, p. 136.
Field could mature in dramatic technique. The formula of the "well-made play" was clearly not the mode of expression which Michael Field could adopt, nor the clever construction the authors could imitate as the revision of the play proved. In a very perceptive statement, Oscar Wilde indicated the possibilities of Michael Field's theatrical attempts when he wrote, "I look forward to listening to your lovely play recited on a rush-strewn platform, before a tapestry, by graceful things in antique robes, and, if you can manage it, in gilded masks." The highly-stylized production which was suggested by Wilde naturally focused attention on the themes and ideational values of the play rather than on the realistic elements of the military action. In effect, Wilde was actually diverting attention from the structure of the play, and he was emphasizing Michael Field's imaginative vision. Wilde had, without a doubt, assessed the values and liabilities of A Question of Memory.

The Cup of Water, in contrast to the staged play, A Question of Memory, provides a significant example of Michael Field's structuring of plot when theatrical production and the conventions of the "well-made play" were not considered. Imaginative in source and treatment, the play demonstrates the poet's vision achieving expression in a unique form. Because the play is based directly on a literary sketch, Dante Gabriel Rossetti's "The Cup of Water,"

47 Letters of Oscar Wilde, p. 345.

48 "The Cup of Water" is a simple theme, untouched by the peculiar magic of the author's style, -- a ballad in outline, yet full of suggestion of the 'inner whispers' and struggles of the heart. I have taken it reluctantly from the dead hands of the poet whom, as artist, I so profoundly revere, not, let me once for all assure my readers, with the thought of continuing work he has begun, but rather of modifying for dramatic purposes material he has left unused." Michael Field, Camute the Great and The Cup of Water, Preface, p. 117.
the comparison of the source and the play indicates Michael Field's ability to create drama from narrative material. 49

49

"The Cup of Water"

The young King of a country is hunting on a day with a young Knight, his friend; when, feeling thirsty, he stops at a Forester's cottage, and the Forester's daughter brings him a cup of water to drink. Both of them are equally enamoured at once of her unequalled beauty. The King, however, has been affianced from boyhood to a Princess, worthy of all love, and whom he has always believed he loved until undeceived by his new absorbing passion; but the Knight, resolved to sacrifice all other considerations to his love, goes again to the Forester's cottage and asks his daughter's hand. He finds that the girl has fixed her thoughts on the King, whose rank she does not know. On hearing it she tells her suitor humbly that she must die if such be her fate, but cannot love another. The Knight goes to the King to tell him all and beg his help; and the two friends then come to an explanation. Ultimately the King goes to the girl and pleads his friend's cause, not disguising his own passion, but saying that as he sacrifices himself to honour, so should she, at his prayer, accept a noble man whom he loves better than all men and whom she will love too. This she does at last; and the King makes his friend an Earl and gives him a grant of the forest and surrounding country as a marriage gift, with the annexed condition, that the Earl's wife shall bring the King a cup of water at the same spot on every anniversary of their first meeting when he rides a-hunting with her husband. At no other time will he see her, loving her too much. He weds the Princess, and thus two years pass, the condition being always fulfilled. But before the third anniversary the lady dies in childbirth, leaving a daughter. The King's life wears on, and still he and his friend pursue their practice of hunting on that day, for sixteen years. When the anniversary comes round for the sixteenth time since the lady's death, the Earl tells his daughter, who has grown to her mother's perfect likeness (but whom the King has never seen), to meet them on the old spot with the cup of water, as her mother first did when of the same age. The King, on seeing her, is deeply moved; but on her being presented to him by the Earl, he is about to take the cup from her hand, when he is aware of a second figure in her exact likeness, but dressed in peasant's clothes, who steps to her side as he bends from his horse to take the cup, looks in his face with solemn words of love and welcome, and kisses him on the mouth. He falls forward on his horse's neck, and is lifted up dead." The Collected Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, ed. William M. Rossetti (London, 1890), I, 437 - 438.
The Rossetti sketch in tone and form is a fairy tale. The King, the
Princess, the Knight, and the peasant girl who becomes a lady are not in-
dividualized characters but rather the inhabitants of "the Land of Heart's
Desire." In the same manner, the ritual of the hunt, the knightly code of
honor, the granted boon, and the hidden child sustain the illusion of an
imaginary world. Viewed in contrast, The Cup of Water by Michael Field re-
tains the idyllic tone of the original but also assumes a dimension of credi-
bility by infusing into the imaginary world a touch of reality. In the play
the young king is identified as Almund, who is betrothed to the Princess
Millicent. He rides in the woods surrounding his castle with his friend
Hubert, whom later he makes an Earl. Both Almund and Hubert fall in love
with Cara, a woodland girl, who plays in the woods near her father's hut.
The characters are designated, realized, and developed emotionally. Tension
between renunciation and fulfillment informs the sequence of tragic events
which occur in an imaginary world.

The first act of the play begins in the woods in early spring. Almund
and Hubert, friends since childhood, ride leisurely through the woods.
Hubert points out the "even tenor" of Almund's disposition, while in his own
"There's novelty in every change of day." Following the flow of the brook,
they suddenly come to its source near a peasant's hut. Almund sees a young
girl playing by the brook, "Yonder stoops / A maiden with her cup, -- and
I am thirsty, Although I did not know it." Almund asks for a drink of
water, and Cara fetches it. In courtesy, Almund offers the first cup of water

50 Michael Field, The Cup of Water, p. 120.
to Hubert, but Cara insists that the king drink first. Almund replies, "My friend before me! Take the cup to him." But the "cup of water" though not tasted has an unavoidable effect on the king.\(^{51}\) Hubert realizes that Almund is deeply in love with the woodland girl: "It is a miracle one fears to greet." Almund's deference to Hubert regarding the cup of water foreshadows the successive stages of the King's renunciation of Cara until he entrusts her to Hubert's care at the end of Act II.\(^{52}\)

In the second scene of the first act, which occurs on the following day, Hubert returns to the woods to win Cara's love. She tells him, "My lover is a man / Who tells me he is thirsty." When she learns that Almund is the king and that he is betrothed to Millicent, she continues to believe -- "He is mine." Unable to convince her of the futility of loving the king, Hubert accuses her of vanity and folly. In reply she simply says, "It is so dreadful to make anything / That springs up in the heart seem black and wicked. / And it is such a lie."\(^{53}\) Knowing his efforts to win Cara for himself have failed, Hubert gives her the ring that Almund gave to him and goes away. Cara knows the king loves her and will come to the woods again.

\(^{51}\) "What passion in the hazel eyes! O God, I am betrothed; I know it like a curse That has begun to work. She turns away With piteous submission; as a blast I bend her spirit." \textit{Ibid.}, p. 121.

\(^{52}\) "Thus God/Severs, without the clemency of death." \textit{Ibid.}, p. 125.

\(^{53}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. 129.
Hubert begs Almund to intercede with Cara on his behalf in the first scene of Act II. The king agrees to go to the woods the following day. However, mistrustful of himself, Almund sends a note to Millicent to arrange to meet with her. He explains the necessity of an immediate marriage in order to leave his kingdom secure when he campaigns in the north. He also tells her of his decision to make Hubert an earl and to give him a large portion of the wooded land for his estate when Cara marries him. With all arrangements made, Almund sees Cara the following day. In the second scene of the act, Almund explains to Cara, "There is a lady, who for many years / Has loved me, not like you, but with affection / As strong as the unswerving confidence / She places in my honour." He further states that even though he does not love Millicent, she will be his wife, and he asks Cara to let Hubert "take your hand, / And shelter you from loneliness." Cara, "dead to the spring, and hope, and mating-time," promises to obey Almund and marry Hubert if the king will vow to come to the rill for a cup of water each year. Cara is entrusted to Hubert's love, and the king departs.

The first scene of Act III occurs two years later. During that time, in which both the king and Hubert are absent, Cara's child, christened Almund, dies. When the king returns, Millicent tells him of Cara and her

54 Ibid., p. 146.
dead son. Knowing his deep love for the woodland girl,\textsuperscript{55} she also frees him from his vows, "I loose the fetters / That make your home a prison."

Deeply grateful, Almund goes to the woods in search of Cara. When he finds her by the brook, he tells her, "I am not married to the queen. I'm free." And she replies, "And I am Hubert's wife! -- a wise king knows better than make believe." She continues, "I will give you back to her." Distracted, Cara begins to call to her dead child across the fields and then, exhausted, falls dead herself. Death triumphs over life in the same measure that passion or the love of love triumphs over desire. However, it is a questionable victory, which the irony of Almund's words indicates, "I refused her love, / And must cohabit now with lust forever.\textsuperscript{56} When Hubert, searching for Cara, finds her dead in Almund's arms, he hears the king repeating over and over, "Oh, she had drink / For a man's deepest thirst." And \textit{The Cup of Water} concludes.

Though considerably expanded, the narrative changes from the Rossetti sketch to the Michael Field play are slight. However, in essence, the ballad material is transformed into tragedy. In "The Cup of Water" by Rossetti, the oath to return to the bubbling brook is kept faithfully every year for sixteen years. When the peasant girl dies in childbirth, her

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{... You have loved
This cottage-girl as God would have a man
To love a woman; you fulfilled His dream.
I have upheld you in your covenant
To me, and made you break the holy law
Of perfect, human passion.} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 158.

\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 166.
child mirrors her likeness. And finally, the King's passion becomes ob-
jectified in the ghost of his love, who "looks in his face with solemn words
of love and welcome, and kisses him on the mouth." For the King, the
obstruction of love must ultimately mean death and a renunciation of terres-
trial goods. He falls forward, "and is lifted up dead." In Michael Field's
play, the king's vow to return to the woods is kept only once, and the
meeting is fatal for Cara. Also, Cara's son, who is named Almund, dies
an infant. The two deaths parallel — the son's death defines the reality
of Cara's motherhood, and Cara's death defines the unreality of Almund's love.

A more significant consideration, though, is the arrangement of the
tragic elements in Michael Field's *The Cup of Water*. The action glimpsed
in the Rossetti sketch is only potentially a tragedy; the poets' plot
structuring forms it into an actual tragedy. The element of fate is im-
mediately introduced in the play. The cup of water, like the love of Almund
and Cara, is fated and fatal.57 "I know it like a curse / That has begun
to work."58 Bound by a code of honor, Almund seeks to avert fate by marrying
a woman he does not love and by giving Cara to a man she does not love.
This error in judgment leads to the destruction of Cara and her son, a
symbol of the real and yet unreal nature of their love.59 The action of the

57 For an elaboration of thematic similarities to "Tristan and Iseult"
see infra, pp. 137 ff.
58 Michael Field, *The Cup of Water*, p. 121.
59 The boy is Hubert's son and represents the consummation of his love
for Cara. Yet the boy resembles Almund and is called by that name. That he
cannot live in the real world symbolically represents the sterility of Almund's
love as well as its potential to destroy rather than create.
play moves directly to the moment of catastrophe, which incorporates the reversal -- Almund's statement, "I'm free," ironically balanced by Cara's words, "And I am Hubert's wife," that are substantiated by her frantic calls to her dead son -- and the recognition -- Almund's perception expressed in the words, "Oh God, she is a mother. / The small, bleak spirit shrills out in the air / A cry for love, and I am starving here. / 'Tis death's strange irony ... I refused her love,"60 -- and the obvious pathos of Cara's death and Almund's suffering. The hubris, which initially drove the king to circumvent fate by idealizing the reality of love, actually destroys the loved one, the love itself, and the love in him, which is now reduced to lust. In the conclusion of the play, Almund has journeyed from ignorance to knowledge; however, the knowledge is poignant: "we must learn / To drink life's pleasures if we would be pure, / Deep, holy draughts, and the girl-cup bearer / Must not be set aside."61

The Cup of Water proves Michael Field's ability to effect a complete and plausible change in the situation of a tragic hero by utilizing the moral qualities of the characters and the operations of their thoughts to form a "complete action." Though the validity of the subject matter was questioned by some,62 the play further indicates that the realms of the imaginative and

60 Michael Field, The Cup of Water, p. 165.
61 Ibid., p. 170.
62 "Watts Dunton told us at once he was deeply interested in our work, but there was one of our plays with which he quarrelled -- The Cup of Water ... he objected that we had taken a lyric subject and forced it into drama. He added, 'Not that there is not beautiful writing in The Cup.'" Works and Days, p. 125.
the occult provided material which Michael Field was able to organize most
effectively. These considerations, therefore, establish the basis for
some general conclusions regarding Michael Field and plot structure.

Discussing Michael Field's development in the tragic form, Mary Sturgeon,
the poets' early biographer, states,"[In the Nineties] the cumbrous
Elizabethan machinery has been scrapped; and with a more careful economy
of means, the plays are compressed into smaller compass. The wearisome
and often redundant fifth act has disappeared. Three acts are the rule,
with a fourth as an occasional exception. There is no subdivision into
scenes, the movement of each act thus flowing uninterrupted. . . . Action
goes forward at its proper pace, pushed by the emotion of the moment, and
freighted only by its just weight of reflection."63 However, examination
reveals that Callirrhoë (1884), Michael Field's first published play, was
structured in three acts and that Fair Rosamund, found in the same volume,
contains only two acts. Borgia, printed in 1905, and presumably one of
the last plays written by Michael Field, has six acts and is subdivided

63 Sturgeon, Michael Field, p. 165. The plays Sturgeon cites under-
mine her observations: Stephania (1892) - 3 acts; A Question of Memory
(1893) - 4 acts; Attila, My Attila! (1896) - 4 acts; The World at Auction
(1898) - 4 acts; Anna Ruina (1899) - 4 acts; Noontide Branches (1899) -
no acts; In the Name of Time [1890's] (1919) - 5 acts.
into thirty-six scenes. 64 According to Sturgeon, Queen Mariamne, completed in 1905 and published in 1908, is "a good example of the poet's dramatic art in its final manner." 65 The play has a five-act structure. It would seem, therefore, that it is not only an oversimplification but also an inaccuracy to state that the poets attained perfection of structure through the chronological development of their dramatic writing.

Michael Field was, in truth, a part of the age that had "a good many fresh impressions . . . but no form in which to confine them."

"The large canvas, the five-act play, the long novel were démodé for the period. The age demanded the climactic moments only when the passions of the personae of the drama were at white heat, so to speak, and life was lived intensely. Could not the great scene up to which the five long acts led be structured into one? " 66 In a sense this is a more precise statement of the search for form than that which is indicated in the diverse character of Michael Field's plot structuring. But it demonstrates the same intense desire to objectify the inner form of the dramatic work in the structure most aptly

64 See supra, pp. 21-22.
65 Sturgeon, p. 199.
66 Muddiman, The Men of the Nineties, p. 60.
suited for this purpose. The form suggested -- the one-act play -- might possibly have expressed Michael Field's tragic vision most effectively. However, by the time this form was gaining popularity and acclaim, the poets' dramatic efforts were almost completed. The fleeting nuances of Michael Field's poetic vision, essentially imaginative in nature, are most effectively expressed in the shorter plays. Noontide Branches, Fair Rosamund, Stephanie, Julia Domna, and The Cup of Water are indications that the poets' finest structuring was in the general movement toward the one-act play. Caught between convention and innovation, Michael Field's structuring of plot gives evidence of transition.

67 "Did you ever try your hand in a one act play? They are far easier to construct than a long play. I have myself as you know been writing one act plays in prose lately. I have done this chiefly as a discipline, because logic (and stage success is entirely a matter of logic) works itself out most obviously and simply in a short action with no change of scene. If anything goes wrong one discovers it at once and either puts it right or starts on a new theme, and no bones are broken. But I suppose every playwright finds out the method that suits him best." Letters of W. B. Yeats, p. 408. (Dated July 27[?1903].)
CHAPTER IV
CHARACTER DELINEATION

In the strange alchemy of dramatic composition men and women become kings, queens, emperors, peasants, villains, fools and even indefinable inhabitants of a world of fantasy under the caption *dramatis personae*. To consider the dramatic characters of an author means a complex involvement in the individual creative process which gives literary life and existence to certain heroes and heroines and denies it to others. The study of character means, therefore, a penetration into the unique thoughts and emotions of the dramatist himself.

In the concluding scene of Michael Field's play *Callirrhoe*, in which "Greek men and women are approached, not from the center of nationality, but from the circumference of humanity,"¹ Machaon, a former sceptic, says to a group of assembled Maenads:

Believe me, I have looked,  
Looked deep into your secret things, and own  
The rustic deity who pressed the grape  
A god that makes humanity august,  
Fulfilling it with mystery and joy.  

(*Callirrhoe*, p. 127)

Finding at last the meaning of life, the character Machaon becomes a priest of Bacchus. The Bacchanalian spirit, so evident in the play *Callirrhoe*, is

¹ Michael Field, *Callirrhoe and Fair Rosamund* (London, 1884), Preface.
clearly recognized in the author Michael Field. In the play's preface the poets wrote, "The myth of Dionysus is the glorification of enthusiasm, which the poet believes to be the sap of the Tree of Life, the spring and origin of all good fruit." The poets found in Greek drama a mode of thought and expression which substantiated their own convictions concerning the dignity and majesty of humanity. It is significant, therefore, that Michael Field's first play, in subject matter and in mood, voiced the basic notion of heroism inherent in Greek tragedy.

Callirrhoe, however, is not an isolated example of Michael Field's affinity to the classical tradition. The tragedy Deirdre bears the inscription, "Nothing that is vast enters into the life of man without a curse," from Sophocles' Antigone. In the preface to The Tragic Mary, Michael Field visualizes Mary Stuart as a Helen of Troy. "Edinburgh is to us what Troy would be could we move now among her streets and palaces, could we learn where Helen stood forth upon the walls, or pace the rooms that Helen made beautiful by habitation. In the apartments of Holyrood we can touch the very silks that Queen Mary handled..." In the Name of Time, a play which is based on the spiritual struggles of Carolman, the son of Charles Martel, is prefaced with the following lines from Sophocles' Ajax:

2 Ibid., Preface.
3 Michael Field, Deirdre, A Question of Memory, and Ras Byzance. Title page of Deirdre.
All things the long and countless lapse of time
Brings forth, displays, then hides once more in gloom.
Naught is too strong to look for; But the event
May mock the sternest oath, the firmest will.\(^5\)

Moreover, this predisposition for the classics of Greece and Rome was not an ephemeral stylistic device but rather a deep conviction of Michael Field. It was frequently voiced in a play's prologue;\(^6\) but it found fullest expression in character delineation and theme. Kenneth Burke says, "Tragedy is based upon the firm acceptance of an ideology (an author can most ably arouse our grief over the death of a hero when he and we are in complete agreement as to what qualities are heroic.)"\(^7\) Greek drama suggests a frame of reference for the consideration of the heroic character in the dramas of Michael Field.

Greek plays present a view of the universe, of man's destiny, and his relations with his fellow men and himself, in which evil, though not total and overwhelming, is very real, ever threatening, and ineluctable. The dramas portray the facts of cruelty, failure, frustration and loss, and

\(^5\) Michael Field, *In the Name of Time* (London, 1919), Title page.

\(^6\) "They who would lift the heavy tragic pall
Upon the groaning shoulders of their Muse
Have ever warned the light and easy-soul'd,
Who shun the joyless truth in human things,
To fly her pitiful, dread company,
And seek some sister with leaf-knotted lyre,
And garments gaily dancing in the wind.
So be they warned; for on the sheer descent
And downward of this father's destiny
Is scarce a ledge for Hope the climber's foot

\(^7\) Kenneth Burke, *Counter-Statement* (New York, 1931), p. 205.
analyze suffering with thoroughness. They affirm the absolutes of justice and order, but reveal a universe which promises neither and often metes out the reverse. In short, they present in a unified work of art not only all that harasses man and bears him down but also much that enobles and exalts him.

In dramatic action, the Greeks found the clue to the paradox of man because only man in action begins to reveal the possibilities of his nature for good and bad and for both at once. Only in the most pressing kinds of action, which involve the ultimate risk and push man to the very limits, are the fullest possibilities of his nature revealed. It is action entered into by choice which is not that of definite good or of definite evil. Rather, it is choice which involves both good and evil in an unclean mixture and, consequently, presents a dilemma.

The action also leads to suffering, which is not so much that of physical ordeal (although this can be present) but of mental or spiritual anguish. The character acts in the knowledge that what he feels he must do is in some sense wrong; he sees himself at once both good and bad, justified yet unjustified. This kind of suffering presupposes man's ability to understand the full context and implications of his action, and so it is suffering beyond the reach of the immature or insensitive, the confirmed optimist or pessimist, or the merely indifferent. To the Greek tragedian, only the strongest characters could endure this kind of suffering which required persistence in their purpose in spite of doubts, fears, advice of friends, and a sense of guilt. This suffering becomes the mark of the hero because
only the hero suffers in the peculiar, ultimate way described. Other persons remain passive, make their escape, or belatedly rally to the hero's point of view. Strangely enough, even murderesses like Clytemnestra and Medea, who have committed monstrous crimes which make them anything but heroic in the romantic and moral sense, are dignified by their capacity for suffering. Medea, by the conclusion of the action, has (like Clytemnestra) displayed qualities of a great nature in error, and the play as a whole asserts values that transcend her wickedness. However, the issues of good and evil are considerably sharpened.8

In the Aristotelian tradition, which was deduced from Greek drama, a poet works on characterization after the action has been plotted in a tragic sequence of incidents. However, characters are, of course, implicit in the initial conception of the tragedy because all actions are actions of individuals. A poet sees the action of the play-to-be first; then he visualizes its tragic form (or plot), and then he selects the characters best fitted to carry it out with variety and depth.9


9 The principle of selectivity, therefore, negates a character who is completely virtuous and a character who is utterly villainous. "There remains, then, the character between these two extremes -- that of a man who is not eminently good and just, yet whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity, but by some error or frailty." Poetics, XIII. 3. The character, furthermore, should be "one who is highly renowned and prosperous." To complete these suggestions for character portrayal, Aristotle considers four additional qualities: goodness, propriety, trueness to life, and consistency. Ibid., XV. 1 - 4. The insistence on "probability" and consistency in characterization and the notion of a ruler-protagonist are essentially practical rules of thumb based on the observation of the theatre which Aristotle knew. The application of these ideas to the drama of another age remains conjecturable; however, in the analysis of characters in a drama as well as in the discussion of plots, Aristotle's theory forms a firm foundation.
The form for which Michael Field had a natural affinity, therefore, narrowed considerably the range of suitable characters which the poets could portray. According to the bounds of the tragic frame of reference, it was imperative that the persons of the drama have vision, persistence in purpose, and a great capacity for suffering; in short, they had to be heroic.

Chronicles, legends, and myths were consulted by Michael Field as naturally as Aeschylus gathered crumbs from the banquet of Homer. Exploring the wealth to be found in myths, Yeats says, "The great virtues, the great joys, the great privations, come in the myths, and, as it were, take mankind between their naked arms, and without putting off their dignity. Poets have chosen their themes more often from stories that are all, or half, mythological, than from history, or stories that give one the sensation of history, understanding, as I think, that the imagination which remembers the proportions of life is but a long wooing, and that it has to forget them before it becomes the torch and the marriage-bed." Although Michael Field uses Pausanias, Wyntoun, Josephus, Yriarte, and Gibbon as sources for the plays, the characters which the poets develop are not closely drawn historical figures. On the contrary, the mythical tradition of Greece, especially, is always evident. The heroines, particularly, have classical prototypes. Callirrhoe is not only a Greek maiden of Calydon, but she is also selected by a priest of Dionysus, in the manner of Zeus, to be a bride and Maenad. In *Fair Rosamund* Eleanor, the heroine Rosamund's jealous rival, is a wronged Dian, and she rages and seeks revenge on the king's mistress with the fury of

10 Yeats, *Cutting of An Agate*, pp. 7 - 8.
a Clytemnestra. The regal and beautiful Mary Stuart is Helen and Edinburgh becomes Troy. The Roman princess Honoria dreams that she is Europa, riding without peril through the waves of the sea to a mysterious encounter with a god. And the Irish Deirdre, like Antigone, enters the world under the spell of a curse. Thus the most illustrative characters of Michael Field assume legendary and mythical dimensions.

In the creation of characters, the playwright, of necessity, reveals more of himself than in the other elements of the drama. T. S. Eliot observed:

The creation of a character in a drama, consists in the process of transfusion of the personality, or, in a deeper sense, the life of the author into the character. This is a very different matter from the orthodox creation in one’s own image. The ways in which the passions and desires of the creator may be satisfied in the work of art are complex and devious. In a painter they may take the form of a predilection for certain colors, tones, or lightings; in a writer the original impulse may be even more strangely transmuted.  

Perhaps the recurrence of the same dominating motives, of similar patterns of contrast, and of identical inner conflicts indicates, if not a predilection, at least a tendency in a specific playwright. A consideration of the characters created by Michael Field should reveal not only the poets' method of characterization, but sustain the Yeatsian theory, "that the imagination uses precisely those passions, moods and faculties that are inhibited by daily life."  

Finally, the degree of the poets' self-revelation should be


made more significantly evident when the characterization of Michael Field is juxtaposed with the characterization of other nineteenth-century dramatists than when their characters are viewed outside the bounds of a literary context.

The character Callirrhoë, as drawn by Michael Field, is a Calydonian maiden whom Coresus, the priest of Bacchus, wants to win for himself and join to his band of Maenads. Callirrhoë is intrigued with the spirit of the Bacchic cult:

"Can it be meant," I often ask myself,
'Callirrhoë, that thou shouldst simply spin,
Be borne of torches to the bridal-bed,
Still a babe's hunger, and then simply die,
Or wither at the distaff, who has felt
A longing for the hills and ecstasy?" (Callirrhoë, p. 19)

Her father Cephalus does not approve of the priest Coresus or the chaotic fury of the ritual at which he officiates. When Coresus pleads with Callirrhoë to "love humanly" and set her spirit free, she refuses him because she has been "trained in the old pieties." She tells him, furthermore, that she cannot believe in a god who would set a "child against the parent."

Coresus scornfully regards her as an "apathetic slave of commonplace," and he curses her city:

Let the whole city be one house of death,
The gates its threshold, and humanity
Its single corpse. (Callirrhoë, p. 32)

Tormented by the deaths of the people she loves, Callirrhoë begs her father's permission to yield to Coresus and save the city. Cephalus, who attributes the plague to the prevalent state of irreligion, refuses to believe that his daughter is responsible for the sickness and death in Calydon. Finally, advice
is sought from the oracle at Dodona. The gods decree that Callirrhoë must atone for the rejection of the Bacchic priest by death unless another person gives his life in her stead. Knowing that her uncle and her brother will not save her, Callirrhoë goes to the sacrificial altar. Coresus saves her by stabbing himself instead of her. This action convinces the Greek maiden of the priest's love for her and the validity of his religion. Looking at his lifeless body, Callirrhoë says:

I looked down on thee and drank thy love.  
I am a Maenad; I must have love's wine,  
Coresus, and you die before my face,  
Leaving me here to thirst.  

(Callirrhoë, p. 103)

She abandons the city and roams the hills. Realizing the truth that those "who dwell but with themselves grow impotent," she kills herself with Coresus' knife as an offering to his god, "to touch our morrows with the mystery of hope."

It is in her rejection of Coresus and his religion that Callirrhoë upholds a traditional value, "a tiny world of perfect order." This decision brings disaster to Calydon, sorrow and grief to her friends, and death to her father, her lover, and herself. Although she cannot view her choice as an evil one, she, nevertheless, "suffers the piteous and terrible sense of the mystery of the human situation.""13 She says:

Had I done evil deeds, I might atone;  
The gods are gracious, and make clean from guilt.  
But simply to have lived my summer through  
And borne no roses! Nothing compensates  
For dearth, for failure, when the season's past.  

(Callirrhoë, p. 119)

"From this suffering or passion, with its shifting visions, a new perception of the situation emerges." Callirrhoe asserts the values of love, self-sacrifice, and enthusiasm against the inherited dogma of her community. Considering the possible conversion of Calydon to the strange worship of Bacchus, Machaon says to her, "Men acclimatize / To new emotion rapidly; it takes / Time to develop custom," (Callirrhoe, p. 121). By her death Callirrhoe, like Antigone created centuries earlier, forces the community to reassess its own position, and the scope of the tragedy is considerably enlarged. Calydon, like Thebes, has become the world.

Michael Field's character differs considerably from the earlier sketch of Callirrhoe by Landor. In "Coresus and Callirrhoe" the Greek maiden stumbles in the dance, celebrated in honor of the god Bacchus. The young priest Coresus pities her embarrassment and comes forward to help her. Callirrhoe is both fascinated by his attention and determined to punish him for his love, "Vainglory caught and made a plaything of an empty heart." Landor describes the inability of Coresus' love to effect a change in the Greek maiden:

Flexible is the coral branch beneath
The Erythraean sea; to air exposed
It stiffens, no strong hand can bend it back:
Such was her nature.

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14 Ibid.
15 The Poetical Works of Walter Savage Landor, II, 524 - 528.
16 Ibid., p. 525.
17 Ibid.
To punish Callihroë's wanton spirit, Bacchus sends pestilence and plague to the city. When the citizens learn that Callihroë is responsible for their plight, they demand her life to appease the offended gods. Instead of sacrificing her, Coresus kills himself; however, rumor attests the fact that "both were smitten by the wrathful Gods." 18

The Landor sketch suggests a more subtle feminine character than Michael Field's Callirrhoë. However, his proud maiden is incapable of any response which is not fickle and vainglorious, and she is, therefore, a static character. In contrast, the character created by Michael Field develops and acquires wisdom through anguish and physical suffering. She is a tragic heroine.

Unfortunately Michael Field unnecessarily obscured Callirrhoë's tragic portrayal by introducing too many minor characters into the action of the play. The sub-plots involving the heroine's brother Emathion and the Priestesses at Dodona, the young wife Hylia and Astynous, and Machaon and the Faun divert attention from Callirrhoë. But of greater significance, the actions of the minor characters undermine the form of the tragedy. The heroine, therefore, despite the skill with which she is drawn, cannot develop fully because of the structural deficiencies.

Fair Rosamund, the second play in Michael Field's first published volume, indicates the authors' awareness of this deficiency in character portrayal and demonstrates the poets' adaptation of chivalric material to

18 Ibid., p. 528.
their tragic vision. Michael Field was preceded by the dramatic characterizations of Swinburne and Tennyson in creating the character of Rosamund:

She whom our first Plantagenet too well
Loved, and for whom he built the marble maze,
Was no rich crimson beauty of old line,
As fabled in proud histories and lays;
No Clifford, as 'tis boasted; but in fine,
A girl of the country, delicately made
Of blushes and simplicity and pure,
Free ardor. (Fair Rosamund, p. 135)

Though the Woodstock bower and jealous queen are common to all three authors, each one assigns a different importance to the character of Rosamund in the triangle completed by King Henry and Queen Eleanor, and each of the authors differs in the basic interpretation of the character of Rosamund. Swinburne's Rosamond is a sophisticated, passionate woman who identifies herself with "the woman in all tales / Helen, Cressida, Guenevere." Because she places the highest value on love, she believes herself "scorned unworthily" in the role of Henry's mistress. Therefore, when she dies from the poison which the queen forces her to drink, she is consoled by the fact that in death her love for Henry will remain immutable.

Although Rosamund is not a major character in Tennyson's Becket, nevertheless, she is distinctly portrayed as a simple-minded, pure, but not clever country-gentlewoman. She is ignorant of the fact that she is the king's mistress and not his legal wife. Henry confides to Becket, "She is ignorant of all but that I love her." In the scenes in Rosamund's


20 Alfred Lord Tennyson, Becket (Leipzig, 1885), p. 16.
bower Henry's gentler disposition is seen. He is tender and loving to both her and their son Geoffrey. Rosamund assumes importance in the play as an intercessor. She asks Henry to be kind and friendly to Becket, and later she pleads with Becket to withhold Henry's excommunication. When Rosamund finally discovers that the king is married to Eleanor of Aquitaine, she becomes completely confused. When Becket prevents the jealous queen from murdering Rosamund and Geoffrey, they seek and obtain admission to the Gadstow nunnery. Disguised in religious clothing, Rosamund witnesses Becket's death, and she is the only one to mourn over his dead body at the conclusion of the play.

Michael Field's characterization of Rosamund is a mean between the extremely different interpretations of her character by Swinburne and Tennyson. Rejecting in part the notion of Swinburne's passionate woman, Michael Field emphasizes the youth and innocence of Rosamund when Henry takes her to his bower of bliss. The poets also emphasize the chivalric troth which Henry pledges to Rosamund:

Oh, brave, unwedded hands, that wear the kiss
Of troth-plight for their pledge - a pretty band!
You have the royal seal of a King's lips
At your free service ever. (Fair Rosamund, p. 166)

However, Michael Field also rejects the artless naivete of the Tennysonian character. After Rosamund has become Henry's mistress in the labyrinth at Woodstock, she says to her guardian Sir Topaz:

Oh, I'm his leman, and I know not how
Bad women feel; I cannot act the part.
I am his Lady and his love; it were
A mistress's part to meet him with reproach
I'll be a rose for fragrance, not for thorn.

(Fair Rosamund, p. 189)

The knowledgeable position of Rosamund indicates her fatal dedication to love that, like the natural rose which is symbolic of her character in the play, blossoms magnificently and must inevitably die. It would seem that this particular conception of the character presupposes attributing certain heroic qualities to both lovers. These qualities, in addition to creating an aura of credibility, also establish the motivation for the characters' choices. King Henry assumes heroic proportions as a royal lover rather than a vigorous Plantaganet ruler of men. Speaking of Rosamund, he says:

... To her I was
No king of men - only the great Lord Love,
To whom she gave, as she was born to it,
Unthinking loyalty. I've never known
Such homage, only sullen tolerance
And darkest-featured hate.  (Fair Rosamund, p. 141)

Because Henry "embraced" Eleanor's lands and not her, his all-consuming love of Rosamund is the noblest expression of his character. Grieving over her dead body at the end of the play, the king says, "Without thee I had plunged for solitude / In the murk of hell," (Fair Rosamund, p. 206). Similarly, Rosamund is an idealization of the beloved; she tells Henry, "I give you of myself / All, all there is -- and for the rest, my love," (Fair Rosamund, p. 159).

In Fair Rosamund the idealized characterization is sustained, and in this play Michael Field utilizes minor characters effectively. Margery, Rosamund's foster sister, and the knight Wilfred parallel Rosamund and the king. Used as a pawn by Queen Eleanor, Wilfred seduces Margery to obtain
information and eventual access to Rosamund. When Rosamund initially tries to prevent Margery from going to London with Wilfred, she is ironically reminded, "he's making love to me; / It's like you and the king," (Fair Rosamund, p. 168). However, Margery soon becomes disenchanted with her knight and designates herself as a "harlot." Living in the forest once more, she visits Rosamund at the labyrinth. Wilfred returns to her there and tricks her into believing that the disguised queen is Rosamund’s lost mother. When Eleanor confronts Rosamund and demands her death, she stabs herself. Discovering her part in the ruse, Margery frantically attempts to kill Wilfred and finally kills herself. Henry returns to the bower of love and finds death instead of life, hate instead of love. Wilfred reminds him, "You've your paramour / To answer for; I mine." And he tells him that Eleanor commanded Rosamund to kill herself and that he killed Margery "for slashing at" him. Henry's answer highlights the contrast in character:

What lips God sets
To his chalice - cups of love! What drink
He gives foul mouths! Is there comparison
Betwixt our deeds? From this slain innocence
I wince not; for I worshipped. You -- I swear
By the lost childhood of that cheek -- defiled.
(Fair Rosamund, p. 205)

Thus the idealized love of Rosamund and Henry remains singularly free from disillusionment and becomes everlasting in the promise of eternity. Within the context of "this sad tale of lovers' destiny," the characters of Rosamund and Henry are developed.

In this romanticized world, however, Michael Field seems to imply that order must be defined and maintained. From this point of view,
Rosamund's love, distinctly differentiated from Margery's infatuation, and Henry's love, differentiated from Wilfred's lust, are destined for death, not life. Rosamund, particularly, sees herself as both justified and unjustified. The contrasting characters support the justification effectively; however, there is a distinct undertone which establishes the fact that Rosamund views her own position as both good and bad. She feels that her life in the bower is a "captivity" and prefers the open spaces of the forest. She has a premonition of death before the queen comes to the Labyrinth, and in this state of confusion she says, "what is it I want -- / God, or the King?" (Fair Rosamund, p. 199) Though this inner conflict intentionally is not sharpened in the play, it supplies sufficient motivation for Rosamund's suicidal death. In the end "love's purple robes" are tragic.

Probing the unlimited possibilities of woman's love inevitably led Michael Field to the tragic figure of Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots.21 "The wife of Darnley and of Bothwell will be various to various natures throughout the ages: for like Helen she never grows old; her allure consists only with an immortal being, her peerless value is that of a daughter of the gods." (The Tragic Mary, p. vii). Her character and personality have been interpreted with great diversity because the sources supply few facts about her life: a murder, an abduction, a marriage, and eventually exile and execution. "We may believe that Clytemnestra-like she was a woman of

21 The poets selected their title from a phrase in Pater's essay on Dante Gabriel Rossetti, "Old Scotch history, perhaps beyond any other, is strong in the matter of heroic and vehement hatreds and love, the tragic Mary herself being but the perfect blossom of them." Walter Pater, Appreciations (London, 1920), p. 216.
haughty counsels and blood-stained career, or that her fame and nobleness were dragged down under a ringnet of conspiracies and detractions, or again that laxity of protest was the basis of her whole tragedy. These beliefs are but conjectures," (The Tragic Mary, p. viii).

Without a doubt, the femininity of Mary is the focus of Michael Field's tragic portrayal of her character, "My father sighed to hear I was a lass, / And felt the land was doomed," (The Tragic Mary, p. 131). She is conceived as a beautiful queen, a public figure who is precariously enthroned among enemies and false friends. Her tragedy is not the result of external forces, but rather is precipitated by her own complex nature, which is capable of intense love and fierce anger, tenderness and indiscretion. Thinking of Bothwell's infatuation with her and her own growing love for him, she realizes keenly the possibilities for good and for evil choice or for both at once:

I never shall grow holy among men,
And yet I wish them ever good, not evil,
And long to give them pleasure of such portion
Of wit or beauty as were made my dower.
(The Tragic Mary, p. 131)

Mary Stuart's clear knowledge of her own instinctive love of loving and of being loved is a complex and subtle power which Michael Field views paradoxically as both the source of her greatness and the cause of her downfall.

Because the queen is the center of the drama, she evokes a specific response from the other characters in the play. The three Maries, ladies in waiting at the court, are her confidantes, and they comment (in the manner of a chorus) on her moods and feelings. "Terrible in love: no compromise
between ecstasy and death," says Mary Fleming. And speaking of her manner
with those she deems her friends, Mary Seton declares that "she is as fond
and familiar as in her teens." Mary Livingstone describes her sympathy and
insight, "There is not a balmy nook of one's soul undiscovered of her."

It is in her relationship with her Secretary of State Lethington, the
King Consort Darnley, and the Earl of Bothwell, however, that her character
is revealed most completely. Lethington is a statesman, cynic, and wit, who,
de spite his politic maneuvering, remains faithful to Mary. He aptly des-
cribes himself and his position in the play when he says, "she (the queen)
has covered me, the chameleon, with the very hue of her misfortune," (The
Tragic Mary, p. 181). He is Mary's confidant in matters of state, and by his
elocution he frequently persuades her to change her course of action. In
their last interview Mary tells him:

How many years
You were my mother's counsellor; how oft
By luring sagesse you have drawn me back
From folly: you can aid me now no more.
Wide ruin overhangs. (The Tragic Mary, p. 217)

When they part, Lethington promises the queen that he will protect her
name and her titles because it is impossible to lie "in the blank pardon of
oblivion."

Referring to Darnley and Bothwell in the introduction to his trilogy on
Mary Stuart, Swinburne says, "Her life admits one interpretation -- Simply
that she hated Darnley with a passionate but justifiable hatred, and loved
Bothwell with a passionate and pardonable love." In Michael Field's play,

22 The Tragedies of . . . Swinburne, I, xxv.
Darnley's character is weak and ineffectual, but Mary's attitude toward him is considerably different from Swinburne's "passionate but justifiable hatred." Perhaps the key to her attitude is motherhood, a specific manifestation of her femininity emphasized by Michael Field. Darnley, who is unsure of himself, insecure, and unloved, is an easy pawn in the hands of the conspiring nobles. When he becomes an outcast because of his role in the murder of the Queen's favorite entertainer Riccio, he begs the queen for forgiveness in the manner of a "truant boy." Mary offers to forgive his treason, but she explains that she can never forget the danger in which he placed the state. Deeply offended, he retreats to Glasgow. When he returns for the christening of their son, the queen realizes his deterioration. "You continue every day from evil / To worse," but she continues to "keep his portrait, lodging in my breast." When he is ill, she hastens to nurse him and continues to hope for a reconciliation. She is completely ignorant of the plot which murders him at Kirk O'Fields.

If Darnley appeals to Mary's maternal heart, Bothwell appeals to her keen and passionate nature. The ambitious earl refers to the queen as "My prize, my love, my crown." As Michael Field has created Bothwell's character, the crown is his goal from the beginning of the play until the eve of his exile. He is ruthless in affairs of state and aggressive in matters of love. He divorces Jane Gordon after less than a year of marriage, and he holds Mary Stuart captive at Dunbar until she yields to him. One of the most touching scenes in the play is when the queen, the victim of scandalous rumors, tells Lethington that the version of the Helen of Troy legend
which she prefers is the one in which the queen is sheltered in Egypt:

I love the legend that she never swerved
From wifely faith, that Paris' capture was
A spectre that dislimned into thin air
When Proteus from the shadow in the rocks
Rose, and restored his guarded fugitive
Unblemished to her husband.  (The Tragic Mary, pp. 215-216)

Her regal character deteriorates after her marriage to Bothwell; her son is taken from her custody; she is persuaded to sign the Protestant pledges by Bothwell; and, finally, she is defeated by her own nobles. When Bothwell tries to force her to escape to Dunbar with him, she exerts her will with difficulty:

How the worst of wrong
Is the new wrong one does to set it right!
Even God, our God, must make a hell to chasten
The evil He permits: O heart, this voice
Will break me into ruin!  (The Tragic Mary, p. 253)

After she has signed the agreement which frees Bothwell and joined the ranks of her conspiring nobles, the shock of their hypocrisy, her own religious betrayal, and her separation from Bothwell cause temporary insanity in the queen. She concludes the play saying:

We pay for truth by madness.

I have still myself
To set within myself and crown, the true
Religion to give faith to, a lost love
To weep for through the long captivity
Of unenjoying years, and the whole earth
To gain, when I have repossessed my soul.
(The Tragic Mary, p. 260)

In order to portray Mary Stuart convincingly and sensitively in this play, Michael Field effectively uses other characters without sacrificing their individualities. The Maries, Lethington, Darnley, Bothwell, Jane
Gordon and the various nobles at court contribute to the complex characterization of the queen as a woman of force and passion. Oscar Wilde praised the play, emphasizing specifically the poets' characterization of Mary: "Your Queen is a splendid creature, a live woman to her finger-tips. I feel the warmth of her breath as I listen to her. She is closer to flesh and blood than the Mary of Swinburne's Bothwell, who seems to me less real than the Mary of his Chastelard." George Meredith, also, found the portrayal of Mary, "an arresting study," and, in general, admired this particular play of Michael Field.

The Tragic Mary evidences a continuous refinement in characterization in the plays of Michael Field. Unlike the earlier heroines, Callirrhoë and Rosamund, Mary Stuart at all times is the center of interest in the drama. Her involvement with Bothwell makes her love fatal, her femininity makes her downfall poignant, her regal stature makes her tragedy heart-rending because she is not a Greek maiden, or a simple country girl; Mary Stuart is a queen.

If Mary Stuart's choices affected in some measure the realm of Scotland, Honoria's decisions had repercussions on the rapidly changing Empire of

23 The Letters of Oscar Wilde, p. 272.

24 "Your Mary, who feels 'the hailstorm rushing through her blood,' and who 'never can grow holy among men,' is the possible Mary, an arresting study. Bothwell has in his look and language the rocky brine of the Scottish pirates (toned by lunar brains of the woman) that he was. Maitland is excellent. The Darnley seems to me too closely sketched from the tapestry figure of him woven by recent historians. But the presentation accords with Lallant's for Mary's feelings." Letter from George Meredith, October 4, 1890, Works and Days, p. 70.
the West. Honoria's fatal love for Attila, the leader of the Huns, potentially placed Rome in his control. Referring to their heroine as the "New Woman" of the fifth century, Michael Field says, "Little Honoria, whose yielding 'to the impulse of nature' Gibbon chronicles with such sympathy — a sympathy pregnant with the feelings of our age that was to follow — sought to give freedom to her womanhood by unwomanly audacities; and although the importunate desire to be herself was fair and natural, its perversion was revenged by the blight with which nature curses."  

The sixteen-year-old Honoria thwarts her mother's politically-motivated plans for her childless future by engaging in an illicit affair with Eugenius, a young chamberlain of the palace. Defying prudence and convention in this manner, the young princess believes that it is "fate to love." In further justification, she says, "Shall I own / A sin, when nothing but the purest impulse / Of nature called." When Eugenius is confronted with the guilt of his partnership in the affair, he chooses to go into exile rather than to jeopardize his life by his silence. Appalled at the "counterfeit" quality of Eugenius' "golden love," Honoria's romantic world crumbles. With only the reality of her unborn child to console her, she takes comfort in the thought of her motherhood. However, the child, too, is destroyed to maintain the supremacy of Valentinian III, the Emperor of the West.

Exiled at Byzantium for fourteen years, Honoria spends her days in enforced seclusion. Instead of tempering her rebellious nature, the isolation in the East effects a more subtle rebellion in the princess than the

25 Michael Field, Attila, My Attila!, Preface.
earlier illicit affair. She idolizes the conqueror Attila, and she believes that the passionate love, which she desires, as well as the deliverance, for which she longs, will be accomplished by him. If Attila conquers Rome and claims her, Honoria will have both the revenge and the love of her dreams:

My land has been a prison,
My mother is the murderess of my child,
My lover was -- a traitor. I desire
Nothing but retribution on them all. (Attila, p. 66)

Honoria persuades a servant to carry a message and her ring to Attila. When he returns and says that Attila's fingers are too large for the ring and relates the coarseness and vulgarity of the barbarian leader, her image of her "deliverer" is not shaken. Describing her love for him, she believes, "it is the vigil, / The fasting, and the ecstasy in one." When Honoria's audacity is discovered, she is immediately sent to her family at Ravenna. Her mother, realizing the necessity of placing her beyond Attila's claim, recalls Eugenius and forces Honoria to marry her former lover. When a messenger announces Attila's death, these precautions are rendered meaningless, the imminent threat of conquest by the Hun is dissipated, and Honoria's fate is madness. Listening to the messenger's account of Attila's murder, she cannot believe that the leader of the Huns forced the captured Ildico to marry him after he had accepted Honoria's ring and the promise of Rome. The messenger replies:

Yes, every one
Knew that the girl was forced, but no one dreamed
That such a deed (murder) was trembling at her heart. (Attila, p. 106)

After hearing the account of Attila's murder, committed by his captive bride, Honoria screams for her "sister" Ildico and falls to the floor.
Laurence Binyon's *Attila*, a later play, presents an interesting variation in the characters of Honoria and Ildico. In this play Attila, motivated by ambition, is tempted by Honoria's promise of Rome, and he considers using her as a means of obtaining his goal:

If this be she Fate points her finger at,
Not Ildico but she? A Roman girl,
Essenced and puny, and that has no shame,
To cast herself before an unknown man!
Such women please me not at all. And yet
Rome on my finger.26

Ildico sees the princess' ring on Attila's finger. She murders him because she is jealous of Honoria and afraid that she herself will be cast off by the Hun. Attila's downfall, the focus of the play, is caused, therefore, by his ambition. His death is motivated by jealousy.

In Michael Field's play, which is a concentrated portrayal of Honoria not Attila, the difference in Ildico's motivation for murdering Attila skillfully balances the heroine's tragedy. Ildico's grasp of reality and honor as well as her loyalty to her people directs her action. Honoria rebels against the status quo, her people, her family, and her destiny. Although the strong desire to love fully gives life and vigor to her initial rebellion, the illusory quality of her love for Attila necessarily renders it abortive.

By contrasting Ildico and Honoria, Michael Field characterizes the heroine effectively in the play. In order to escape the "nuptial couch" of the barbarian leader, Ildico stabs him with his own sword. The violence of the deed shatters her, and the soldiers find her, "white, with malicious

and abandoned eyes." Honoria, on the other hand, desperately seeks to escape her own destiny by envisioning a glorious love affair with Attila. When she learns that he has chosen Ildico and, consequently, rejected her, she becomes demented. Ildico's retreat from reality is the result of violence; Honoria's insanity is the result of frustration. Her self-identified dreams of Europa, who was carried off to Crete by Zeus, never achieve reality. Honoria's world is a world of illusion and self-inflicted suffering; it is a world of tragedy.

Turning from Edward Gibbon to The Book of Leinster, Michael Field discovered in the story of Deirdre, "the Iseult of Irish legend," another heroine fatally dedicated to love. In the prologue of the play which tells of the birth of Deirdre, a Druid prophesies, "Ruin is born tonight." The assembled people call for the life of the child, but Conchobar the King of Ulster says:

Beauty shall not leave us while we are:  
Its fiery being owns us, and our ashes  
Fall gray when it departs. (Deirdre, p. 6)

He further decides that the child shall be raised in a "silent, strict enclosure" for sixteen years. At that time he shall marry her, "to myself I take this child / Of sorrow -- for my sorrow; and her doom / Be on me as my doom," (Deirdre, p. 7).

When the action of the play begins, Deirdre is sixteen, and the time of her marriage to the king is near. Her nurse Medv and the wise woman Lebarcham discuss her willfulness and her beauty:

27 Richard Ellmann uses this descriptive phrase in Yeats, the Man and the Mask (New York, 1948), p. 170.
... she is not ours, 
Nor fate's, nor any man's; for she will choose, 
Close prisoner as she is, her destiny, 
Choose for herself the havoc she will make, 
The tears that she will draw from other eyes, 
Delights that she will ravish from the world. She knows 
So definitely all she wants: such souls 
Attain. (Deirdre, p. 9)

Deirdre visualizes the color of the man whom she will love in a drop of blood upon the snow and in the black plumage of a raven. When Lebarcham describes Naisi, one of the valiant sons of Uisnech, Deirdre remembers her vision and begs the old woman to bring him to the enclosure. She says:

But if you think that one so marvellous 
As Naisi is will take me a cup 
To drink from, just a gold and silver cup. 
Then I will pour him wine; he will forget 
All else in drinking, if he stoops to drink. 
(Deirdre, pp. 13 – 14)

The idea of marriage to Conchobar is "chill like the evening" to Deirdre. The thought of Naisi is as close as springtime. She refuses the king's love and escapes to Alba with Naisi and his brothers.

During the period of their exile, Naisi is unfaithful to Deirdre. But he repents and remains steadfast when she attempts to leave him. Haunted by dreams foreshadowing the death of Naisi and his brothers, Deirdre rejects Conchobar's message of pardon to the sons of Uisnech. Determined to return to a life of service to the king, Naisi ignores Deirdre's pleas:

For you I was a traitor to my king, 
Conchobar, king of men; and he remembers 
Only my loyalty. I tell you, woman, 
His message is more poignant to my ear 
Than any call of love. (Deirdre, p. 41)

Faced with the alternative of parting from Naisi, Deirdre, knowing that they
are already separated in heart, leaves Alba with the sons of Uisnech.

When they return to Eri, they discover the treachery of Eogan, an ally of Conchobar. Naisi's men sink and drown in swampy soil, and Naisi himself is murdered by Eogan. Silent and reproachful, Deirdre refuses to leave Naisi's grave. Eogan promises Conchobar that he will teach Deirdre submission if the king permits him to master her for a year. Out of hatred for Naisi's murderer and the king, Deirdre leaps to her death from the chariot in which she is riding to Eogan's palace. The king, realizing his folly at last, orders her broken body buried with Naisi. The lovers thereby achieve immortality.

George Russell, Yeats, and Synge also transformed the Deirdre legend into drama. The variations in the heroine's portrayal define the interpretation of Deirdre by Michael Field.

In Russell's play, Conchobar believes that the loss of Deirdre and his downfall are punishments for his youthful offense against the Sidhe. Therefore, the prophecies of doom regarding Deirdre are minimized. Rather than a believer in dreams and omens, Deirdre is "the priestess of tears" who wills to go "through life or to death" with Naisi. It is primarily her womanly love for Naisi which attempts to prevent his return to Eri. She says, "Are we not enough for each other, for surely to me thou art hearth and home, and where thou art there the dream ends, and beyond it there is no other dream."28 Because Deirdre is a queenly woman throughout the play, Naisi

urges her to meet death calmly, not with sighs and tears. Trapped by the
treachery of Conchobar, she tells Naisi, "O warrior, I was no mate for you.
I am only a woman, who has given her life into your hands, and you chide
me for my love." When Naisi dies from a spear-thrust, Deirdre lays her
head on his body and dies. Seeing both lovers dead, Conchobar says, "I
do pay homage to thee, O Queen, who will rule being dead." In this way,
Russell's heroine becomes an immortal queen.

In Yeats's Deirdre the background of the heroine is ambiguous:

Nobody can say
If she were human, or of those begot
By an invisible king of the air in a storm
On a king's daughter.

And she is raised in obscurity by a witch. One fact about her, though, is
clearly known. Deirdre has been beloved from childhood by an old king whose
love she cannot return. When Deirdre and young Naisi escape, Conchubar
is deceived a month before his marriage day. He, therefore, plans to win
back Deirdre by treachery. Yeats's Deirdre is a woman who loves deeply and
intensely. She is, however, unable in the face of death to play chess with
the coldness of the fabled wife of Lagaidh Redstripe. Deirdre says:

My veins are hot.
But though I have loved better than that queen,
I'll have as quiet fingers on the board.
Oh, singing Wollen, set it down in a book
That love is all we need.

29 Ibid., p. 248.
30 Ibid., p. 255.
31 William Butler Yeats, Deirdre (Dublin, 1907), p. 2.
32 Ibid., p. 29.
Yeats's Deirdre is placed in the position of giving herself to the king in order to save Naisi's life. And after her loved one has been killed, she has to persuade Conchubar to permit her to attend Naisi's body. Instead of performing the last rites, she commits suicide in order to be with him, and thus, Conchubar is deceived by the lovers in life and in death. According to Ellmann, the characters in Deirdre "are either dreamers or realists, either other-worldly or worldly in their desires and actions." Deirdre, particularly as she is drawn by Yeats, is of heroic stature.

The character of Deirdre is significantly changed in Synge's play. When she comes inside the dwelling to speak to Conchubar, she is poorly dressed, and she carries a bag of nuts and some twigs. Deirdre is a peasant girl whom the king wishes to make a queen. She has a proud and self-willed spirit, and, as Synge has developed her character, she initiates much of the action of the play. Naisi rejects the idea of returning to Emain. It is Deirdre who decides to return because it is better to die deeply in love than "see one day a blight showing upon love where it is sweet and tender." She also feels that "it's a lonesome thing to be away from Ireland always." When they return to Emain, they discover the king's treachery in the open grave which has been dug for Naisi and his brothers. Ironically, despite the effort "to die deeply in love," Naisi parts from Deirdre in bitterness. She

33 Ellmann, p. 104.
34 John M. Synge, Deirdre of the Sorrows (Churchtown, 1910), p. 45.
35 Ibid., p. 50.
tells him, "We've had a dream, but this night has waked us surely. In a little while we've loved too long, Naisi, and isn't it a poor thing we should miss the safety of the grave, and we trampling its edge?" In order to join Naisi in the grave, Deirdre stabs herself. Synge's Deirdre is a strong-willed peasant girl who precipitates much of the tragedy which surrounds her. She is convincing and appealing.

Michael Field's Deirdre differs considerably from the "Irish" writers' characterizations of the heroine. She is a visionary who rejects Conchobar and accepts Naisi because he is the fulfillment of her dreams. Deirdre's love for Naisi, which is actually weakened twice, is strengthened in his death and confirmed in Deirdre's suicide. Naisi stands in contrast to Conchobar. He is a soldier to whom battle, loyalty to friends and king, and homeland is as important as life itself. Conchobar is a man with a vision of beauty, which he can never possess and which leads him to sorrow. Naisi is youth; Conchobar is maturity and age. Deirdre chooses Naisi deliberately and willfully. However, it is a choice of love for the sake of love rather than love of Naisi which prompts her choice. Living in Alba, she retells her ominous dreams. She responds to Conchobar's messenger in silence and then recounts the warnings of the voices of doom. When Naisi is slain, she mourns at his tomb in a trance. When she finally calls down doom on Naisi's murderer, Conchobar angrily punishes her by ordering her to live with her enemy. There is a definite likeness to the classical

36 Ibid., p. 66.
Antigone in Michael Field's portrait of Deirdre. The likeness is substantiated in Deirdre's mourning and her choice of suicide rather than punishment. Conchobar, like Creon, learns wisdom by suffering. At the end of the play his world has collapsed, and he is a figure of sorrow.

When Michael Field's indebtedness to the classical tradition is clearly established, when the poets' steady development in character delineation is assessed, when it becomes evident that the heroines rather than the heroes stimulate the authors' imagination, and, finally, when the persons of their dramas are juxtaposed with the same characters created by other dramatists -- what is the final evaluation of Michael Field as a creator of character?

Although Michael Field uses diverse historical works and chronicles as sources for plays as Landor, Tennyson, Swinburne and the "Irish" writers did, the characters which the poets develop are not closely drawn historical figures but rather they are characters that assume legendary and mythical dimensions. The heroines, particularly, have classical prototypes. Maenads in spirit, these characters move through the plays in search of ecstasy and love. In some measure these characters have a latent potential to become more than intriguing dramatic heroines. At times they seem to develop until they become humanity itself. However, their heroic stature is not always consistent; and frequently their tragic delineation is obscured by the poets' failure to project with equal consistency the character's humanity and universality.
As alchemists cherish and guard their occult secrets of transformation, so too the dramatic poet retains the cipher to the mysterious life-giving process of his art — characterization. It is possible to see, hear, study, and contrast his characters, but in their humanity, they will never be void of mystery; they will never be fully understood; they will always remain as inscrutable as life itself. In so far as they have power to fascinate, fill with awe, or inspire terror, they will remind man of himself, his loved one or his enemy. Because a poet's characters are an extension of himself, they dream through his imagination; they feel with his heart; they think with his mind; and they act through his will. Consequently, they are irrevocably linked with their creator. His destiny is theirs, and their destiny is his.

Because Michael Field is virtually an unknown dramatist today, the same fate obscures the characters the poets created. Yet, in the final analysis, both the characters portrayed and the manner of their portrayal help to establish the literary significance of Michael Field.
CHAPTER V

THEME

As the ages roll on, we find no grim inhuman shapes by the wheel of Destiny. The feeding of the spindle, the snapping of the threads, does not indeed belong to man; but to his hands a great formative power has been given, and with this self-determination, if he has lost the misery of being the plaything of the gods, he has gained access to the deepest sources of pain in increased capacity for humiliation and remorse.¹

Michael Field's introductory statement to Canute the Great is both evocative and provocative. It evokes the spirit of tragic drama and the imperious role of destiny in the Attic theatre, and it provokes the dilemma of the "wanton gods" in the Elizabethan world of Lear. It also emphasizes the concept of man's free will and his consequent capacity for "humiliation and remorse." And, finally, it indicates that the actions, characters, and words of the drama reflect man's ideas to the histrionic sensibility.

The real, but very intangible, relation between dramatic literature and ideas can be conceived in diverse ways. The tendency to view the work of art as a philosophical tract is one extreme; the denial of any philosophical relevance to literature is another. The conviction that literature is not philosophical knowledge translated into imagery and verse, and that literature expresses a general attitude toward life achieves a synthesis of

¹ Canute the Great, p. 5.
the two extreme views. It also suggests that writers usually answer, unsystematically, questions which are also themes of philosophy although the literary mode of answering differs in various ages and situations.\(^2\) A dramatic presentation, specifically, conveys ideas which are, at one and the same time, reflections of a given culture and of universal human nature.\(^3\) These ideas concern fate or destiny, and they essentially involve questions of freedom and necessity, myths and belief, responsibility and immortality. The ideas also concern man and his relation to death and love, and, finally, his relation to society, family, and state.

Drama is made from actions and ideas. When these actions and ideas focus on problems of suffering and evil, drama enters the realm of the tragic. As Werner Jaeger says in his study of Greek tragedy, "Tragedy was the first type of poetry to apply to mythical tradition a regular

\(^2\) "In the Discussion Play a species of drama has been invented in which this element (idea) becomes supreme. We can watch the same process recurring over and over again, from the mysticism of Aeschylus to the logic-chopping of Euripides; from the ruthless will of Corneille to the sceptical propaganda of Voltaire; from the thunders of Marlowe to the wit -- last breath of a dying drama -- of Congreve, Vanbrugh, and Sheridan." Frank Laurence Lucas, Tragedy; Serious Drama in Relation to Aristotle's Poetics (London, 1957), p. 146.

\(^3\) Considering Oedipus at the beginning of the dramatic tradition and Hamlet at the end of that tradition and near the beginning of modern drama, Francis Fergusson states, "The themes of Oedipus are, from many points of view, strikingly similar to those of Hamlet. In both plays a royal sufferer is associated with pollution, in its very sources, of an entire social order. Both plays open with an invocation of the well-being of the endangered body politic. In both, the destiny of the individual and of society are closely intertwined, and in both the suffering of the royal victims seems to be necessary before purgation and renewal can be achieved." Idea of a Theater, p. 130.
structural principle -- the conception of the inevitable rise and fall of human destiny, with its sudden reversals and its final catastrophe." The most elemental, and frequently contradictory, forces in human nature become the province of tragedy because that specific dramatic form addresses itself to the expression and the probing of the mystery of good and evil deep in the roots of human suffering. Each expression of the tragic vision is, paradoxically, universal and particular at the same time. It is universal because regardless of time and place the basic humanity of man does not change. It is particular because the creative imagination of the poet is individual.

Lionel Johnson, "who alone ever wrote words about our work that our souls counter-signed," said that in tragedy Michael Field found the one form most congenial to the poets' imagination. And the testimony of twenty-seven plays as well as a formulated definition of tragedy supports Johnson's critical judgment. Michael Field wrote:

Tragedy is the conflict of man with the indifference of nature. For all forces of life sweep on their regenerating way, and disregard obstruction or break it down; yet mortals strive presumptuously to withstand this impetus, and to subject it to their own thought and need. Then there is a death-struggle, and the human combatant disappears, sometimes recognising his schism, sometimes unconscious of it to the end.


5 Works and Days, p. 240.

Our interest in each case is due to the very vitality that a
man turns against life when he fights it in vain with its own
weapon, as Prometheus fought Zeus, as Satan fought Jehovah, as
Lear withstood Cordelia, and Hedda Gabler her own motherhood.
What indeed is necessity but the unaltering energy of
existence to which even the strongest and most rebellious of
living creatures must bow, so that the triumph of life, and not
the triumph of death, becomes the proper subject of all tragedy.

When, in spite of his overthrow, a sinner repents, and in his
contrition worships the power he has withstood in its own might,
then his tragedy has tonic virtue. If, on the contrary, he
remain impenitent and blind, his fate prostrates us with terror.
Yet since there are such tragedies, it is well sometimes to
face them, and learn how they came to be so desolate, and why
the sorrow in them has no life. 7

This definition of tragedy provides many interesting insights into both
the thought and tragic art of Michael Field. It asserts the notion of
conflict, the autonomy of man's will, the perception of good and evil or
obvious lack of it, the phenomenon of human vitality, and the ultimate
affirmation of life even in the midst of death. In defining the form which
the poets utilized, Michael Field demonstrates the fact that drama requires
an intellectual hold upon life, upon nature, and upon human passions.

From this sympathy of the mind with the passions, the variations
of one basic theme are expressed in the early works of Michael Field. The
theme was not doom as the Greeks perceived it, but rather it was the idea of
inherited necessities imposed upon a man's nature by ancestry, or by nation-
ality, or even by the soil itself. The earliest play Callirrhoe indicates
the vanity of resisting nature's impulses. Within the development of the

7 Attila, My Attila!, Preface.
play the excitement of orgy and frenzy, justified by nature, becomes the ritualistic service of Dionysus. The play also illustrates the perennial struggle between old and new ideals of conduct, the inevitable struggle of tradition and change. In *Fair Rosamund* love like the natural flower has its roots in the soil of nature. The simile does not change in its extension. Just as the flower blossoms magnificently and then wilts and eventually dies, the love of the maid at Woodstock is short-lived. In *The Father's Tragedy*, the sins of the father are visited in crime and agony upon the son. Because David Rothsay was wanton, he was condemned to die in soul; because of his prearranged marriage, to die in heart; for his undeserved punishment, to die in body: a triple death, a threefold starvation. The gay child of nature perishes, but it is also the father's tragedy because he has consented to his son's punishment on the grounds of expediency. "When parents err / Nothing avails; there is no comforter." 8

William Rufus, a tyrannical English king, is overcome by nature itself in the tragedy which bears his name. When he is killed by an arrow glancing from an oak tree in the New Forest, the peasants whose lands he has unjustly appropriated speak the following words over his dead body:

> Earth, Earth, O Earth! the tyrant is struck down.  
> Thou drew the arrow from Fate's sluggish hand;  
> Thou sped it mortally. Though thy blind sons  
> Dishonour thee, seeking the younger love  
> Of country, swayed by her caprice, to strive  
> For law or liberty, while thou art bond,  
> Far off thou hearest Freedom's cry,  
> Orphaned, necessitous; thy motherhood,  
> O Earth, is prophecy! Thou wilt prevail. 9

8 *The Father's Tragedy*, p. 5.

9 *William Rufus*, p. 223.
In addition to William Rufus, Michael Field portrays other rulers who violated and, in consequence, are overcome by forces other than the elemental Earth. In *Brutus Ultor* the poets depict the contest between the genius of Roman supremacy and the spirit of family affection.\(^{10}\) Using Sextus' rape of Lucretia as the reason for the Tarquins' exile from Rome, Brutus assumes the Roman rule. When his own sons are caught in a conspiracy against him, Brutus upholds justice and denies his paternity by sentencing them to death. Wise men at the Forum agree that "The gods abhor such crime," and Brutus dies "with a wound / That Lethe could not heal."\(^{11}\) In *Canute the Great*, the Danish king is caught in the struggle for mastery of two claims: the primitive claim of race and the refined claim of Christian culture. Canute expresses the conflict when he says:

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... When I leap
On board my dragon-vessel, loose my soul
To the dark blast, scent the accustomed foam,
I call on Odin; when the sea grows calm,
I think of those still churches, their grey priests,
With gracious, learned faces. They rebuke
My lawless blood, yet satisfy a want
That lurks within my brain.\(^{12}\)
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The struggle is further intensified when the conflicting forces are symbolized: Emma, the mature woman whom Canute loves, represents culture and beauty, and the Scandinavian prophetess Gunhild symbolizes Canute's pagan ancestry. She speaks to Canute when he is thinking of Emma:

\(^{10}\) This theme is further developed in the Roman trilogy: *The Race of Leaves*, *The World at Auction*, and *Julia Domna*.

\(^{11}\) Michael Field, *Brutus Ultor* (London, 1886), p. 64.

\(^{12}\) *Canute the Great*, p. 10.
Renouncing his own past and betrayed by the civilization he tries to adopt, the person of Canute is invested with a singular and mournful majesty. The play ends not with his bodily death but with his vows of penance and his will to expiate his wrongs. In the idyll The Cup of Water the young king struggles with the demands of honor and the demands of love. By choosing honor rather than love, Almund destroys his loved one and ultimately himself. The tragedy proves that it is vain to withstand the impulse of nature.

In addition to the themes demonstrating Michael Field's preoccupation with the inherited necessities of man's nature in their various manifestations, the early plays contain specific corollary themes which are almost indigenous to the history play; namely, the dangers of unspecified royal inheritance, the evils of civil dissension, the folly of rebellion, and the politically destructive nature of ambition. Fair Rosamund, The Father's Tragedy, William Rufus, and The Tragic Mary indicate the chaos of civil strife and rebellion. The Sicilian insurrection is the central action of Loyalty or Love as the Hungarian revolt is the context of A Question of Memory. The expulsion of the Tarquins dominates Brutus Ulter as the wresting of power from Mary Stuart by the dissenting Scottish nobles concludes The Tragic Mary. Ambition is the direct cause of the downfall of Edric in Canute the Great, William Rufus, Brutus, and Bothwell respectively. However, it is the Roman trilogy that actually projects the former themes most succinctly. The three
plays are based on a rapidly changing period of Roman history from A.D. 180 to 212, and the tragedies span the disastrous reigns of Commodus, Didius Julianus, and the co-emperors Caracalla and Geta. In The Race of Leaves the sins of the father are visited upon his children in terms of family strife and a contest for power which ends in fratricide. The theme is stated by Commodus' sister:

... our father poisoned life
In each of us from childhood, for his voice
Withered illusion, and our urgent youth
To him was nothingness, to us a lie
That could not prove the truth it made us feel.
He spoke of us as leaves within a wind,
Leaves shaken diversely; and so we are,
Unhappy children!  

In the second play of the trilogy, The World at Auction, one of the themes of Brutus Ultor is repeated. After Didius Julianus literally purchases Rome for his daughter, he is berated by her and estranged from his family and all affection. The eventual banishment of his daughter parallels Brutus's condemnation of his sons. The main theme of the play, however, is the folly of purchasing Rome with gold and the disaster which results when permanent values are reduced to items of traffic. The beheading of Didius Julianus, ordered by the new ruler Severus, indicates the inevitable destruction wrought by greed and ambition. In Julia Domna the sons of Severus, Caracalla and Geta, are joint emperors of Rome. Each son seeks additional power and views the inherited arrangement established by his father as "the curse of dual empire." Julia Domna, the mother of the co-emperors, tries to prevent the projected division of the empire which would make Geta emperor of the East

at Antioch and Caracalla emperor of the West at Rome. Motivated by jealousy and ambition, Caracalla murders his brother and his brother's devoted followers. At the end of the play he realizes that he has not destroyed the rival for his mother's affections but merely strengthened her love for Geta. He collapses under the weight of the evil he has committed and the horror he has unleashed. In the Roman trilogy the natural claims of familial affection and the drive for personal power and aggrandizement struggle for supremacy. When a basic value is deliberately ignored or denied, the result is always tragic. Love, beauty, freedom, and sovereignty are never purchased or conquered by force and violence. While the demands of nature must be heeded, the will of man is "Fate's only weapon."\(^{14}\)

Few forces are more elemental in the make-up of man than love and violence;\(^{15}\) few divinities of the ancients more familiar than Venus and Mars. In the reactions to these forces in human experience, few men have been able to avoid suffering. Because love and violence, together with the suffering they inevitably entail, have always provided fruitful themes for tragedy, it is no wonder that they form the central thematic core of the tragedies


\(^{15}\) "It is well known that ever since man began to philosophize -- i.e. to reflect on the motive-forces of his own activity -- nothing has ever been found to exist without its opposite, whether the thing be material or spiritual; there is no thesis without its antithesis, no heat without cold, no black without white, no repulsion without attraction, no sympathy without antipathy, no love without hatred." Jean Lharmite, "Are Sympathy and Aggressiveness Matters of Instinct?" in Love and Violence, ed. P. Bruno de Jesus-Marie (New York, 1954), p. 69.
of Michael Field. But the emphasis shifts from familial love and the subsequent themes of father against child and brother against brother, so reminiscent of the classical "family curse" motif in the earlier plays, to romantic love in the later tragedies.

The romance of Tristan and Iseult,16 twice dramatized by Michael Field, begins in this way. "My lord, if you would hear a high tale of love and death..."17 Love and death, or a fatal love, according to Denis de Rougemont, sums up "if not the whole of poetry, at least whatever is popular, whatever is universally moving in European literature, alike as regards the oldest legends and the sweetest songs. Happy love has no history. Romance only comes into existence where love is fatal, frowned upon, and doomed by life itself. What stirs lyrical poets to their finest flights is neither the delight of senses nor the fruitful contentment of the settled couple; not the satisfaction of love, but its passion. And passion means suffering.

16 This particular myth became the subject for several nineteenth and early twentieth century works: Matthew Arnold's Tristram and Iseult, Alfred Lord Tennyson's The Last Tournament, Algernon Swinburne's Tristram of Lyonesse, Joseph Carr's Tristram and Iseult, Arthur Symons' Tristan and Iseult, Thomas Hardy's The Queen of Cornwall, and John Masefield's Tristan and Isolt.

There we have the fundamental fact. "18 Therefore, the partings and reunions, the summoning of new perils, and the fatal love potion itself, all vital aspects of the myth, demonstrate the ambivalence of the apparently contrary tendencies in human affectivity. In the Tristan romance the lovers are in a thrillingly contradictory position. They love but have not deliberately chosen each other. They have sinned; Isseult against her husband Mark and Tristan against his knightly code of honor. But the lovers cannot repent because they are not to blame. They make a confession to the hermit of the woods, but wish neither to reform nor even to beg forgiveness. Tristan and Isseult imagine, as de Rougemont says, "that like all other great lovers, they have been ravished 'beyond good and evil' into a kind of transcendental state outside ordinary human experience, into an ineffable absolute irreconcilable with the world, but that they feel to be more real than the world. Their oppressive fate, even though they yield to it with wailings, obliterates the antithesis of good and evil, and carries them away beyond the source of moral values, beyond pleasure and pain, beyond the realm of distinctions -- into a realm where opposites cancel out."19

18 And he further states, "There is no need to have read Béroul's Tristan or M. Bedier's, and no need to have heard Wagner's opera, in order to undergo in the course of everyday life the nostalgic dominion of such a myth. . . . It operates wherever passion is dreamed of as an ideal instead of being feared like a malignant fever; wherever its fatal character is welcomed, invoked, or imagined as a magnificent and desirable disaster instead of as simply a disaster. It lives upon the lives of people who think that love is their fate (and as unavoidable as the effect of the love-potion is in the Romance); that it swoops upon powerless and ravished men and women in order to consume them in a pure flame; or that it is stronger and more real than happiness, society, or morality. It lives upon the very life of the romanticism within us; it is the great mystery of that religion of which the poets of the nineteenth century made themselves the priests and prophets." Denis de Rougemont, Love in the Western World, trans. Montgomery Belgion (New York, 1956), pp. 15 - 24.

19 Ibid., p. 39.
This "transcendental state" can most effectively be presented by means of magic. Michael Field's *The Tragedy of Pardon*, which dramatizes the Tristan myth in five acts, begins with a prologue that draws attention to the magical mixing of the love potion by Iseult's mother, the Queen of Ireland. When she has gathered the ingredients and transformed them into the fatal wine, she says:

> My child, who, loses all, shall lose not love,  
> Or she will walk the earth of men a shade.  
> A shade is woman if she may not love,  
> And silent are the deeps from birth to death,  
> If love move not with widely ruling stroke  
> The billows of the heart of woman's breast.  

When Tristan and Iseult accidentally drink the wine intended for Iseult's wedding night, the magic substance assumes an additional dimension. It is not merely "love's nativity" for the Queen's daughter, but it becomes love which is inextricably bound to death. After she has tasted the wine, Iseult looks at Tristan and says, "My life, my death!" The separations and reunions, often at the risk of danger and discovery, which occur frequently in the action

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20 "Magic persuades without giving reasons, and is perhaps persuasive to precisely the extent that it withholds reasons. Magic comes into the myth because the passion which has to be depicted has a fascinating violence not to be accepted without qualms. Passion appears uncouth in its effects. The Church prescribes it as sinful, and common sense looks upon it as a morbid excess. It is thus not open to admiration till it has been freed from every kind of visible connexion with human responsibility. That is why it was indispensable to bring in the love potion . . . which is drunk by mistake." *Ibid.*, pp. 47 - 48.

of the play serve to substantiate the fatality of the lovers' dedication to passion. In the final act of the play, when Iseult is summoned to the dying Tristan in Brittany, she goes to both her love and to her death. Learning the secret of the love potion, King Mark orders a tomb for the lovers at Tintagel in the epilogue of the play. Thus the love of Tristan and Iseult is immortalized in death.

Although the action of the play Tristan de Léonoi spans only the last years of the lives of Tristan and Iseult and not the earlier episodes involving the journey to Cornwall, the compelling force of the love potion is never understated. In order to emphasize the timeless and magical qualities of the "cup of love," Michael Field again introduces the theme in the prologue of the play. It is spoken by Amor, who stands in the archway of an old chapel with the goblet in his hand:

Up from the sea-depths I have brought
This my cup in which was wrought
My spell long years afar—
Years that now are. . . .

At the play's conclusion Iseult journeys to the dying Tristan in Brittany. However, before the actual arrival of the ship bearing her, she appears to Tristan in a vision and offers the fatal cup to him once more saying:

22 Iseult says: "There is no Paradise
To woman, till her Paradise is lost.
It is so sweet to fall into temptation,
And to draw down, to lead
Down to the edges of the precipice.
You see — it is the charm!" Ibid., pp. 84 - 85.

Do you know our bourne
When we have drunk this potion?

Tristan: O, my Death,
But you are gripping me in tighter bonds
Than any I have known.

Iseult: I am come to fetch you,
Tristan, to me -- it is your Hell or Heaven.

(Tristan de Léonos, pp. 148 - 149)

They both drink from the cup and the vision fades. The separated lovers die. When the boat finally reaches the shore, the dead body of Iseult is laid beside Tristan's body.

Iseult's second journey on the sea to Tristan, a symbolic journey through life to death, parallels the earlier sea voyage to Cornwall. Both sea crossings comprise Iseult's destiny. She says:

I found myself a captive,
Snared on the sea and destined
Then for King Mark, as now for Tristan - destined!
And now again a ship, and now the sea. (Tristan de Léonos, p. 108)

Love leads ultimately to death, and both lovers realize its fatality. Iseult tells her faithful nurse that there was no waking into love, "it was all thrust on me." Equally aware of the precarious nature of their mutual love, Tristan reproaches Iseult when she fails to recognize him in the Fool's disguise, "You knew me as the death-in-life / Of love, even as a leper." Love like death must be endured. It is sorrowful, unkind, and unhappy. In short, this vision of love is tragic. Neither Tristan nor Iseult love each other; instead what they love is love and being in love. Absence, therefore, is more conducive to the awareness of love than the presence of one another.
Death, the final separation, becomes the ultimate transformation of love itself.

The major motifs of the Tristan myth -- the love of love, the love of death, and the magic love potion -- are found in the two tragedies derived from the romance. However, these themes also recur in the other "love" tragedies written by Michael Field and indicate the prominence of these ideas in the plays. The repetition admits variation, but the pattern is clearly evident. As early as 1884, there are foreshadowings of the theme in Fair Rosamund when King Henry refers to the "chalice-cups of love."

It is interesting to note that the love of Henry and Rosamund is inextricably linked with death although this fate is not an inherent quality of their love. In this play, death is the result of an external force, the revenge of Henry's jealous Queen. In The Cup of Water, published only three years later, love is fatal in its essence. Almund feels love work in his soul "like a curse" when he accepts the cup of water from the woodland girl Cara, who "had drink / For a man's deepest thirst."

It is in The Tragic Mary, however, that the love - violence antithesis is significantly developed for the first time in Michael Field's works. 24

24 It is interesting to note the scientific investigation which this dualism has prompted in the twentieth century. "It is a fact that psychological observation regularly reveals that in the most unexpected ways violence accompanies love, and often precedes love in human relationships; that love can be transformed into aggressiveness, and vice versa." George Parcheminey, "The Problem of Ambivalence," in Love and Violence, p. 83.
The abduction of the Queen by Bothwell is sufficiently vague to underscore the ambivalence of the theme. Referring to Bothwell, Mary Stuart says:

Can love be terror? I am almost sure
That hate can love . . . . I feel it in myself.

The man,
I loathe and wed, is growing dear as sin, and beloved as are Mere passions in their transit.25

Bothwell, by his own admission, is ambitious and equally desirous of the crown and the Queen, but he is not a Machiavellian caricature. He realizes the inevitable loss of all that he values in his acquisition of Mary Stuart. He voices the fatality of his passion when he sees its analogue in the "love potion:"

This woman! Somewhere she has pledged my soul;
We have drunk wine together on some bare,
Brown hill of chaos, while the wanton lights,
Young meteors flaming lawless through the heaven,
Peered at our rampant revel. (The Tragic Mary, pp. 178-179)

The destiny of the lovers is determined by the very nature of their passion, which is more effectively sustained in separation than in union. After Mary has signed the truce exiling Bothwell from Scotland, she says, "I would follow him / Across the world." The absence of the lover induces suffering, which in turn makes love itself more desirable.

Imaginative in tone and spirit, Noontide Branches projects an unusual development of the theme of fatal love. In this play the protagonist views the destructive nature of love but does not experience it herself. Genifer, the lady of the Sylvan woods and observer of the tragedy which occurs there,
states the play's theme when she says, "There is no want / That Love and Death can fail to satisfy, / And these desert us never."26 Directly involved in the tragic action of the play is Lysithoë, a nymph of Artemis, who is loved by both a satyr of the woods named Dryaspis and a knight. Because the nymph "cannot waste time trifling with love," she rejects the two suitors. When the satyr tries to capture her by force, he is mortally wounded by the knight, who, in turn, tells the nymph of his passion. The knight is thwarted, in turn, when Artemis saves her nymph. Love and desire become hate. Roaming the woods, the knight seeks the death of Lysithoë. But the dying satyr tells him:

You have been much to blame
Seeking to kill her, if you hate her so:
That will never stop your sighing;
You must die as I am dying;
And it is so soft to die. (Noontide Branches, p. 35)

Although the knight does not die, he knows he must leave the woods. Turning to Genifer, he seeks to forget the "elfin sounds" of the woods, peopled with nymphs and satyrs, in the regenerating power of her love.

Anna Ruina, published the same year as Noontide Branches, indicates not only Michael Field's interest in the variations of the love theme explored in the former play but also the poets' predilection for the woods as an appropriate setting in which to penetrate the mystery of love.27


27 This fact may also be related to the Tristan romance. The lovers live together for a time in the Forest of Morrois. But the lack of obstacles to their love does not draw them together. As their passion declines, they realize that they have everything to gain from separation. Iseult returns to Mark and Tristan journeys to Brittany.
In the Woods of Senlis, Anna Ruina, daughter of a Russian duke and widow of the French King Henry I, declares her love for Raoul, Count of Valois. Because his separation from Aliénor is not sanctioned by Rome, their mutual love places the lovers in opposition to both civil and ecclesiastical law. Raoul reminds Anna of the "bondage of love" and says, "We have no hopes, / No goal but in each other, and 0 love, / Death is upon us." To which Anna replies:

But you mistake,
To play sweet music we must catch a lyre,
And we must love with Love. (Anna Ruina, p. 30.)

The outside world intrudes into the halcyon woods of the lovers, and the inevitable partings occur. Anna leaves Raoul in order to save him from the sentence of excommunication issued by the Church. However, the news of his approaching death summons her, in the manner of Iseult, to his bedside. She defies her son, the archbishop, and the religious servant of Raoul. To all who attempt to keep her from her lover, she says:

I am most absolute. If it be death
For him to look on me, then I am Death.
Leave us, each one of you.

I plunge into his dark; I take his curse.
Oh, this is happiness! my lord, my life!

(Anna Ruina, pp. 99-100)

Believing that the dead must travel over a wide sea or across deserted plains, the lovers plan a tryst deep in the Russian forest, "mid the great fir-boughs, where the dark / Begins and has no end." And Raoul dies. In this rather stark tragedy, Michael Field directly introduces the notion of darkness into the theme of fatal love. The lovers have chosen their fate,

28 Michael Field, Anna Ruina (London, 1899), p. 27.
willed and welcomed it together with the darkness into which they will
go beyond any possible repentance. The passion that pursues darkness and
triumps in transfiguring death is essentially unreal and serves to demon-
strate that kind of tragedy which is "desolate and devoid of life." 29

In the tragedy Diane, Michael Field explores the fatal love story of
Diane de Poytiers, the mistress of King Henry II of France. The king states
the theme of the play and the motivation for his final action, which results
in death, when he says, "I must do something infinite, immense, / Before
these formal lovers, to transcend!" (Diane, p. 229) The play is essentially
an attempt to immortalize love; the theme of being in love with love echoes
through it. Henry says that loneliness "is more precious to me than her
love," and asks, "Is it thus with lovers?" When the king is summoned away
from his tryst with Diane, she repeats the idea:

There is no death in love, except this death,
And stopping of Love's breath by lovers' hands
This parting . . . . How I love him,
So wild and royal; it is like a curse
To bear his shining eyes. (Diane, p. 167)

Knowing that Diane will never be his Queen, Henry seeks to champion her
queenship symbolically by wearing her colors in a joust. He wills to
achieve in death a feat impossible in life, "Beloved, my life in all its
flow / Is yours: now in a symbol take my death," (Diane, p. 215). When
the King is mortally wounded in the encounter, he proves the validity of the
astrologer's prediction, "The King is willing for his death, he loves you; /

29 See supra, p. 131.
They all are willing for their death who love," (Diane, p. 215). The symbolism of the play, for the most part mythological, enforces the love theme. Henry believes himself Endymion, beloved by Diane, the moon goddess. The colors which he wears in the list are her colors, silver and black, the colors of night and darkness. However, Diane is also a huntress; therefore, Henry's dream of a wounded stag foreshadows the suffering and eventual death inherent in his passion. Gazing at the light of the celestial moon, Henry dies under the domination of the myth.

The Deirdre legend actually parallels the Tristan romance very closely. The three principal characters -- Deirdre, Naisi, and Conchobar -- bear close resemblance to Iseult, Tristan, and King Mark. Nevertheless, within the context of similarities, the characters and their actions can be variously interpreted. Michael Field's Deirdre, significantly, incorporates the major themes of the Tristan myth. When Deirdre is musing over the description of Naisi supplied by her nurse, she says:

But if you think that one so marvellous
As Naisi is will take me as a cup
To drink from, just a gold and silver cup,
Then . . . I will pour him wine; he will forget
All else in drinking, if he stoop to drink.30

The cup, the love potion, and the all-consuming fatal love are woven into the texture of the play along with the Druid's prophetic curse. Naisi initially refuses the proffered love of Deirdre by saying, "Love is the hardest bondage in the world." To which Deirdre replies, "Bondage or

30 Deirdre, pp. 13 - 14.
freedom, I should still be happy," and the lovers depart over the narrow sea. There are partings and reunions. Naisi is unfaithful to Deirdre, which is reminiscent of Tristan's wooing of Iseult of the White Hands, but the lovers are united again in Deirdre's forgiveness. They quarrel and almost separate once more because Naisi is determined to return to Ireland. When Naisi dies in the treacherous trap planned by Conchobar, Deirdre cries out, "Until to-day / I never was alone." She grows lovelier in grief and sorrow, and her own suicide finally unites the lovers in death. Concluding the play, Conchobar says, "They have passed the borders, / Passed from my realm."

Michael Field inscribed the tragedy of Deirdre with the following line from Antigone, "Nothing that is vast enters into the life of man without a curse." Considering not only the Irish lovers' fate but also the other victims of love's passion portrayed in the poets' major tragedies, the inevitable pursuance of love to death constitutes a fatal curse. The fatality of love is not characteristic of Sophocles' tragedies. It is more characteristic of Sappho's lyrics, "which indicate that Eros was a passion which shook its victim's whole being, and held the senses no less firmly than the soul. . . . Love is woman's whole existence, and she alone welcomes it

31 "The character-drawing of Sophocles is consciously inspired by that ideal of human conduct which was the peculiar creation of Periclean society and civilization. . . . The ideal was inspired by a clear and delicate perception of correct and appropriate behavior in every situation. This meant an abandonment of the exaggerated violence of emotion and expression that characterized Aeschylus. . . . Dramatic action is for Sophocles the process by which the true nature of a suffering human being is unfolded, by which he fulfills his destiny, and through it fulfills himself." Werner Jaeger, pp. 271 - 281.
with her whole nature undivided and unfaltering." Though it would be
anachronistic to interpret Sapphic emotion as the love of woman for man in a
society which did not base marriage on love but stressed instead Platonic
Eros, the idea of an all-consuming feminine love was present in Greek
thought but not particularly in Greek tragedy.

That the history of Western Civilization tempered classic ideas is
commonly accepted. In the tradition of literature ancient myths and tales
have attracted almost all the major English poets, and a considerable number
of minor ones, from Chaucer to the present. The Grecian gods and mortals and
their tales have enduring vitality; but the faces of Helen are many.

In his essay on paganism, Francis Thompson states that the English
poetry of paganism "was born in the days of Elizabeth, and entered on its
inheritance in the days of Keats." The movement, which gave the classic

32 Ibid., pp. 131 - 132.
33 Ibid., pp. 193 - 195.
34 He expands the idea, saying, "In the hands of the pagans themselves
it was not even developed to its full capabilities. The gods of Homer are
braggarts and gluttons; and the gods of Virgil are cold and unreal. The
kiss of Dian was a frigid kiss till it glowed in the fancy of the barbarian
Fletcher; there was little halo around Latmos' top, till it was thrown
around it by the modern Keats. No pagan eye ever visioned the nymphs of
Shelley. . . . To the heathen mind its divinities were graceful, handsome,
noble gods; powerful, and therefore to be propitiated with worship; cold in
their sublime selfishness, and therefore unlovable. No pagan ever loved his
god. Love he might, perhaps, some humble rustic or domestic deity, --
but no Olympian." Francis Thompson, "Paganism: Old and New," in A Renegade
Poet and Other Essays (Boston, 1910), pp. 52 - 70.
myth a rebirth in the Elizabethan era, as in later centuries, was, according to Douglas Bush, a slow, almost imperceptible process. The Renaissance poets took many liberties in reworking ancient material, but they were more or less controlled by a learned and international tradition. Later writers were inclined to handle myth either with the same freedom, or, on occasion, with a more stringent classical purism. The Hellenic revival which directly or indirectly touched the romantic poets and most of the poets of the nineteenth century was part of a "tidal wave of primitivistic and idealistic sentiment which infiltrated England via Europe." The movement was not without problems. Within the context of a Christian tradition, the poets of the Renaissance had been troubled by their own instinctive response to pagan allurements. The nineteenth century, as well, was conscious of the conflicting claims between Christian and antique subjects and between the Christian and antique (usually Dionysian) way of life. In addition, the nineteenth-century writer, a witness to the ugliness of the industrial revolution, was increasingly conscious of the actual present and the "ideal" past with its cult of beauty. Needless to say, the compromises were highly individual. However, in their various ways Keats and Shelley, Tennyson and Browning, Arnold and Landor, the Pre-Raphaelites and the

Douglas Bush has comprehensively covered the use of mythology from the Renaissance to the twentieth century in Mythology and the Renaissance Tradition in English Poetry (Minneapolis, 1932), and Mythology and the Romantic Tradition in English Poetry (Cambridge, Mass., 1937).

Ibid., pp. xi - xvi.
Decadents not only used antique themes but, on occasion, made a formal critical plea for them.\textsuperscript{37} Within the framework of the myth, certain dominant ideas were formulated and expressed. One of the major themes of Swinburne and his followers; namely, that Love is the mother of Death, together with the assertion that the advent of Love is always calamitous, was expressed in \textit{Atalanta in Calydon}.\textsuperscript{38} a work viewed by some as the "sun in the firmament of Victorian Hellenism."\textsuperscript{39}

The question of influence is problematic. Michael Field's preoccupation with the theme of fatal love, emphasized by the repetition of words, \textit{curse},

\textsuperscript{37} Consider Oscar Wilde's lecture in New York, 1882. "This renaissance [nineteenth century] has been described as a mere revival of Greek modes of thought; and again as a mere revival of mediaeval feeling. It is really from the union of Hellenism in its breadth; its sanity of purpose; its calm possession of beauty, with the intensified individualism, the passionate colours of the romantic spirit that springs the art of the nineteenth century in England, as from the marriage of Faust and Helen of Troy sprang the beautiful boy Euphorion. I trace the first tendencies of the modern renaissance to the French Revolution, and the desire for perfection which lay at the base of that revolution found in a young English poet its most complete and flawless realisation. Phidias and the achievements of Greek art are foreshadowed in Homer; Dante prefigures for us the passion and colour and intensity of Italian painting; the modern love of landscape dates from Rousseau; and it is in Keats that one discerns the beginning of the artistic renaissance of England. He was the pure and serene artist, the forerunner of the Pre-Raphaelite school, and so of the great romantic movement of which I am to speak... This revolution was not only one of ideas, but of creations. The poetry of Morris, Swinburne, and Rossetti shows a style flawless and fearless, a sustaining consciousness of the musical value of each word, a distinct advance in technique, which is the characteristic of all great eras." in Hamilton, \textit{Aesthetic Movement in England}, pp. 105 - 106.

\textsuperscript{38} See specifically the chorus "We have seen thee, O Love, thou are fair." Algernon Charles Swinburne, \textit{Atalanta in Calydon} (Boston, 1866), p. 45.

\textsuperscript{39} Bush, p. 338.
bondage, darkness, and death in the major tragedies poses the possibility of a nineteenth-century affinity rather than the Hellenic point of view.

When the theme of fatal love is juxtaposed with the poets' concept of tragedy, "the triumph of life not the triumph of death," the theme indicates the bleakest type of tragedy, which negates life in desolation and remorse. The recurrence of the theme, which reduces love to death, lightness to darkness, further illustrates Michael Field's endeavor to reconcile the claims of pagan fate with the claims of "tragedy that has tonic virtue." It is a restatement of the conflict between the cult of Agape and Eros, between the Christian and antique way of life. W. H. Auden observed, "at the end of a Greek tragedy we say, 'What a pity it had to be this way;' at the end of a Christian tragedy, 'What a pity it had to be this way when it might have been otherwise.'" Despite Michael Field's Dionysian dedication, the rendering of certain prominent themes in their dramas indicates that Hellas frequently was the poets' setting rather than their home.

Because tragedy demands qualities of vision which almost transcend time and place, it, of necessity, admits wide variations and degrees. It is, at the same time, universal and particular, objective and subjective. The tragic sense of life reaches deep down into temperament and also evokes experience. Michael Field lived in an age of divergent thought patterns which found expression in the poets' plays. The contemporary interest in the Ibsen

"New Woman" occasionally appears. 41 The "cult of beauty," stemming from the Pre-Raphaelite writers, also preoccupied the poets. 42 However, the predominant themes expressed in their plays are essentially more timeless than timely. Paradoxically, it almost seems, as Lionel Johnson says, "These tragedies, so full of this vehement and vigorous spirit, could only proceed from this age, an age in which history is concerned with the social combinations of men; science, with organic life, and studies of every kind, with origins, with development, and with vital forces." 43 It is understandable that the same critic bases his literary estimate of Michael Field, for the most part, on the striking themes developed by the poets:

The palmyr virtue of her (Michael Field's) tragedies we take to be their conception, and their treatment of the ruling passions, and the dominant ideas of men and women. Many tragedians labour to express that in human nature, which is uncommon; and that in human fortunes, which is unusual. And this they do, not because by such means they can best bring to light the deep and radical passions, or ideas, of men, but for the sake of strangeness and of novelty. No one acquainted with the great Greek and English masterpieces of tragedy can condemn the tragic usage of what is uncommon or unusual; but he perceives that Sophocles and Shakespeare, each after his kind, concluded all under law; the sorrows of Oedipus and of Lear bear witness to something more lasting, and more universal, than themselves. It is the peculiar note or mark of Michael Field, that her tragedies have a profound spirit of this sort; yet a spirit very peculiar to themselves. In all her plays there is an

41 Honoria in Attila, My Attila! is called a "New Woman of the Fifth Century," and in A Question of Memory Fina describes a typical married woman in this fashion, "Bounded on the north by my husband, on the south by my children, on the east by my cooking range, on the west by my religion," p.1.

42 The only play in which this theme is dominant is The World at Auction. Didius Julianus says, "Lovely things / Are made for their own universe, / and these (the works of art he has collected) / Are gods in exile, for this narrow house / Seems a mere prison," p. 9.

43 Lionel Johnson, p. 397.
appeal to man's ruling passions and to his dominant ideas; but to passions and to ideas of one special kind. The appeal is always made to those human instincts, which are traditional, or inherited, or innate; not to passions from without, creatures of circumstance, or of chance. The motherhood of earth, with its deep and personal appeal; the claims of patriotism, with its holiness and its commanding sanction; the necessities of a man's nature struggling to work out its destiny in fulfillment of inherited desires; all passions, instincts, and ideas which come from sources far off in the past history of a man, a race, a country, or which come from sources deeply rooted in one human soul; these are the materials of Michael Field.44

And, perhaps, it might be added, the poets' claim to recognition and esteem.

44 Ibid., pp. 396 - 397.
CHAPTER VI

STYLE

"There is a book to be written on the commonplaces of any great
dramatic period, the handling of Fate or Death, the recurrence of mood, tone,
situation. We should see then just how little each poet had to do; only
so much as would make a play his, only what was essential to make it differ­
et from anyone else's."¹ Although T. S. Eliot's initial phrase, "great
dramatic period," has very little relevance to the "temper of the times" of
the Victorian period in which Michael Field wrote, his critical commentary,
which emphasizes the artistry required of every writer to sufficiently
individuate his work, "to make it different from anyone else's," applies
to any age and includes minor as well as major writers. The statement
applies, moreover, to the work in the final form designated by the poet.
In the case of Michael Field, the form is the result of collaboration.
Therefore, the individuating style of the poet must be considered from two
points of view; namely, the result of the collaborative effort and, if
possible, the distinctive contribution of each poet.

Because language may be defined as representation through thought and
sound, a poet's use of language is the distinctive expression of the writer --
his style. Language is also the chief means for the dramatic representa­

¹ Eliot, The Sacred Wood, p. 64.
of suffering (excluding the variable capabilities of actors themselves). The skillful dramatist is able to build his emotional effects by means of imagery, descriptive diction, prosodic variation, and irony of statement or context. In these four definite expressions of language, therefore, the evaluation of the defects and limitations as well as the distinctive and laudable characteristics of a dramatic poet’s style is made possible.

"The gift for metaphor," says Aristotle, "is the greatest of all. This alone cannot be taught, but is a mark of natural genius, for it implies an inborn eye for likenesses."\(^2\) A natural propensity for metaphorical expression is easily detected in the work of Michael Field. In fact, reviewing the poets’ work, Arthur Symons says, "There is in their verse too careful a search after metaphor and elaborate speech."\(^3\) In the early plays, particularly, the images tend to be studied and, at times, highly contrived. It is not unlikely to note both images of extraordinary perception and strained, forced similes in the same play. The following examples will serve as illustrations:

A victim may be passive as a sheep,
Baa-minded, or he’ll irritate. (Callirrhoë, p. 87)

and

Let the whole city be one house of death,
The gates its threshold, and humanity
Its single corpse. (Callirrhoë, p. 32)

\(^2\) Poetics, XXII. 9.

\(^3\) Arthur Symons, "Michael Field," Forum LXIX (June, 1923), 1587.
When the former example is compared with the perceptive description of the Dionysian priest's curse on the city of Calydon, it is obviously inferior in imaginative quality as well as in statement. The same play also contains the following notable simile which compares the unresponsive, insensitive soul to lumber which cannot be ignited:

As unseasoned wood
That smokes and will not kindle is flung by
For any refuse purpose, while the train
Of torchlight sinuous winds among the hills,
A starry serpent, so art thou cast out,
An apathetic slave of commonplace,
Sluggish and irreceptive of true life,
From all high company of heavenly things.

(Callirrhoe, pp. 27 - 28)

The same uneven quality is found in the texture of the later plays as well as in the earlier work. It is frequently difficult to understand how an image of this inferior quality --

There is a glorious Betterness at work
Amid the highways and the solitudes. (In the Name of Time, p.1)

-- can be followed almost immediately by the more felicitous expression --

I came as those
Great nobles of the East, and all my service
Is adoration. (In the Name of Time, p. 3)

in which Michael Field captures in a precise statement the mood and enthusiasm of the hero Carloman. The poets' tendency is toward vividness and vigor in metaphoric speech, and this tendency never wavers. In the later plays it is expressed with greater simplicity and restraint and, consequently, more artistry than the extravagances of the early plays demonstrate. The following image from Callirrhoe, "Counsel is hydra-headed, 'tis authority alone hath unity of brainpower," (p. 47), is decidedly contrived and
awkward when compared to the simple image of ennui found in *Anna Ruina*:

> I climb
> Wave after crested wave -- all that is left
> Is weariness of storm. (*Anna Ruina*, p. 21)

or compared to the subtle distinction in the modes of love expressed in this simile:

> But the joy
> Is mine of living to you as the grape
> Lives to the sun, not to the gatherer. (*The Race of Leaves*, p. 59)

In general, the variation in the quality of the images is sufficiently marked to be considered characteristic of Michael Field's style; however, despite this limitation, development and progression in metaphoric speech are continually manifested in the poets' work.

The early plays abound in personifications of abstract terms; namely, "I'll marry Seclusion for the sake of getting famous progeny -- Meditation -- Peace," (*Fair Rosamund*, p. 142), and:

> Not yet have Time and Circumstance
> Engendered their love-child Occasion. (*Fair Rosamund*, p. 173)

However, when Beauty is personified in the later play *Deirdre*,

> Beauty shall not leave us while we are:
> Its fiery being owns us, and our ashes
> Fall gray when it departs, (*Deirdre*, p. 6),

the development in imagery becomes increasingly evident and the interest and care which the poets devoted to imagery becomes apparent.

Although the range of plays offers innumerable examples of isolated images, of greater importance, in the light of the number of plays written by Michael Field, is the persistent recurrence of certain images which become
Symbols may be considered simply as traditional metaphors used with special emphasis. Once the dominance of a metaphor is established, the reasons which prompted the emphasis become worthy of investigation.

Throughout the poetic plays of Michael Field, four dominant symbols recur. They are the forest, water, jewels, and the rose. In addition to these major symbols, figures from classical mythology are adapted to the characters of specific plays in order to extend the intended symbolic meaning. For example, the story of Endymion and Diana is not merely an analogy in the play Diane, but the myth is a representation which, in turn, becomes a presentation in the specified context.

The forest is a symbolic image, universal and common to man. Therefore it is not unusual that this primeval setting dominates fourteen of Michael Field's plays as a major symbol. The forest encourages a halcyon existence because its location is isolated from the pedestrian world of men. The forest is the setting for love and for lovers -- the reveling Maenads in Callirrhoe, Henry and his mistress in Fair Rosamund. The forest glade of Morois is the brief sojourn of Tristan and Iseult in The Tragedy of Pardon. Henry II and Diane de Poytiers hunt and escape the monotony of their lives at court in the forest surrounding Les Tourelles. The meaning of both

4 "In literary theory, how does 'symbolic' differ from 'image' and metaphor'? Primarily in the recurrence and persistence of the 'symbol.' An 'image' may be invoked once as a metaphor, but if it persistently recurs, both as presentation and representation, it becomes a symbol, may even become part of a symbolic (or mythic) system." Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, Theory of Literature (New York, 1942), p. 193.
The Cup of Water and Noontide Branches is greatly enhanced by the developed symbolism of the forest in each play. In The Cup of Water, which is the story of an innocent woodland girl's love for the King, the forest assumes some of the attributes of Eden. In Noontide Branches, the wooded land echoes with the sounds of nymphs and satyrs. In this play, the forest imparts her secrets to those who have the sensitivity to listen to and to love the hidden essences of things. It is in the play Anna Ruina, however, that the Eden metaphor is actually formulated and expressed. Defending his love for Anna against the negative pronouncement of the Church, Raoul chooses Anna and, in consequence, excommunication. Kissing her before the Bishop, Raoul says: "It is thus that lovers love, / And in the woods is Eden," (Anna Ruina, p. 38). Indeed the forest is the only place the love of Anna and Raoul can exist. In the forest of Senlis the oppression of court life is temporarily lightened. The queen and her lover can walk "under the cracking elms" without intrusion from the outside world. Anna says:

I have never loved
Save in the woods of Senlis; all I know
Of love is breathing it. (Anna Ruina, p. 26)

And Raoul says:

I think this forest is a labyrinth
With you for center. I have tried all paths,
And all conduct me here. (Anna Ruina, p. 19)

Even death does not dispel the necessity of the forest as a trysting place for the lovers. Anna and Raoul agree to meet in the Russian forest after death:

In the forest
Of the black firs and snow. There will be freedom
And silence there. (Anna Ruina, p. 101)
This fondness for an idealized state under the guise of Eden is not original with Michael Field. Nor is the association of the isolation and privacy of the woods with the exclusive nature of love a striking observation. The notion of an area without bounds, of a silence unbroken by the ordinary realities of life, and of a natural seclusion, seems to necessitate the symbolic pattern, however. The setting of the forest is as essential to romantic love as water is to life.

Water is one of the basic elements, and it both destroys and nurtures life. It alleviates man's physical thirst, and its power and form appeal to man's inner search for the beautiful. In Noontide Branches, the water of the river is the natural boundary separating the chapel and manor of Genifer from the woods of the satyrs and nymphs. Speaking to Genifer of the freedom of her life, the nymph Lysithoe says:

I have followed your own iris-river
Where its earliest reed-beds quiver,
Would you learn to meditate.
You must be content to wait
Empty-hearted on a great, vague shore.

(Noontide Branches, p. 17)

In effect, the "iris-river" separates two worlds, the world of imagination and beauty and the mundane world of everyday cares and strife. It is with reluctance that Genifer and her knight row back to that world. The river also is the boundary between two different kinds of love, Eros and Agape. The love experience of the forest is linked with passion and death. While across the river, love is sacramentalized by the presence of the priest in the chapel. At the end of the play, the lovers must cross the river, journey from love into Love.
In both Deirdre and the "Tristan" plays there are journeys over water. In both legends, the water is a boundary between the native land of the lovers and the land to which they journey. Sailing to the dying Tristan in Brittany, Iseult says:

I found myself a captive,
Snared on the sea and destined
Then for King Mark, as now for Tristan -- destined!

(Tristan de Léonois, p. 108)

The sea also becomes a symbol of destiny. Deirdre and Naisi journey away from Ireland, the jealousy of Conchobar, and the prophecy of doom. At Naisi's insistence, they return over the sea from Alba to Ireland. The sea becomes the link with destiny because the decision to return proves fatal to the lovers. The sea also symbolizes destiny for Tristan and Iseult. It is on the voyage to Cornwall that the lovers drink the cup of wine which pledges them to each other for life. Love, which is unalterably their destiny, is linked with the sea.

Water symbolism receives its fullest expression in the play The Cup of Water. The water from the woodland brook is love, and to drink deep draughts of it is to penetrate the depths of human existence. Almund, the young king who has received a cup of water from Cara, describes the experience:

To be beloved
Even from the very fountain of the heart,
To touch the well-head of a maiden-passion,
The bright spring from the rock; in the cool draught
To feel the virgin, solitary years,
And win access to the deep flow and current
Of the dark water-bed among the hills; --
It is a miracle one fears to greet. (The Cup of Water, p. 124)
As natural as thirst for spring water, is the desire for love. When thirst is not satisfied, disaster and death occurs. It is evident, therefore, that in the plays of Michael Field water, which symbolizes life, by extension also symbolizes love or becomes a boundary separating a life of love from some other existence.

Jewels have long symbolized wealth and beauty. Unlike the flower, which is directly linked with nature, gems are cultivated and refined. They are the products of man's art as well as nature's resources. For this reason a woman adorned with jewels significantly enhances her own appearance and also reflects the esteem in which she is held. Opulent and colorful, jewel images appear in the plays of Michael Field. The poets favor, particularly, the amethyst and the pearl. In the "period play" Borgia, Pope Alexander VI presents pearls to his daughter Lucrezia:

My pearls! --
You watch them through my fingers -- lucent lumps;
This pear-shaped ovule heavy with its light;
The pearls and pearlets dropping
With patters loud and soft together -- listen!
My daughter will have more and lovelier pearls
Than any woman in the greedy world.5

Pearls, together with diamonds, help to create the splendor of Renaissance wealth in the play. In The World at Auction the wealth of the Roman Senator Didius Julianus, who buys the Roman rule with his gold, is further demonstrated in the jewel imagery. When the forces opposing him gather momentum, his treasurer gathers the jewels together saying, "We must wait on fortune! / Gems are for flight," (The World at Auction, p. 95). In Queen Mariamne, the

5 Michael Field, Borgia (London, 1905), p. 3.
wealth of Herod is symbolized in the ropes of pearls and amethysts which enhance the natural beauty of Mariamne. In the same play Cleopatra's wealth is also depicted in terms of precious stones which she compares to flowers. She refers to her rubies as "red roses" and her pearls as "lilies in this basket."

Jewels also symbolize a bond of love between lovers. The jasper ring given to Tristan by Iseult in Tristan de Léonoi converges Iseult of the validity of the dying Tristan's message. After the courtesan Stephania has avenged the murder of her husband by effecting the death of Otho III, she removes the rich clothing and jewels given to her by Otho and dressed in a shroud, she places Crescentius' marriage ring on her finger once more. Jewels are another manifestation of the qualities of love: namely, its preciousness and beauty. However, jewels are external, and the romantic nature of love developed by Michael Field sought an extension of meaning in an organic symbol: namely, the rose.

Appearing in the majority of the plays, the rose symbolizes the fullest development of womanhood through love. In Fair Rosamund, the King refers to the dead maid as a "tender sweet-briar rose... all thy balmy leaves / Lie crushed against my heart," (p. 206). The young Princess Honoria receives a gift of roses from her lover in Attila. My Attila! and muses over them in this fashion:

6 It is interesting to note the presence of rose imagery in Alfred Lord Tennyson's play Becket. King Henry repeatedly refers to Rosamund as "The Rosebud of my rose."
But I can pluck them,
Can blow the stiff buds open if I choose,
And crush them in my fingers. (Attila, My Attila!, p. 25)

In addition to symbolizing Honoria's imminent love affair, the crushed rose also foreshadows the tragic ending of the play. In The Tragic Mary, the Queen sings a song about the innate beauty and attraction of the rose which the inclement weather cannot alter. And Conchobar refers to the youthful Deirdre as, "O rose, unfolding / First of all roses -- Deirdre," (p. 17). The notion that woman is a flower echoes throughout the play. In Queen Mariamne, Herod says, "Children should run to greet you; but a woman / Should wait upon your coming as a flower." The rose symbol is

The entire lyric is quoted here because the play is, for the most part, inaccessible.

"Ah, I, if I grew sweet to man.
It was but as a rose that can
No longer keep the sweet that heaves
And swells among its fluttering leaves.

The pressing fragrance would unclose
The flower, and I became a rose,
That, unimpeachable and fair,
Planted an odour in the air.

No art I used men's love to draw;
I lived but by my being's law,
As roses are by heaven designed
To bring the honey to the wind.

I found there is scant sun in spring;
I found the blast a riving thing;
And yet even ruined roses can
No other than be sweet to man." The Tragic Mary, pp. 94 - 95.

Michael Field, Queen Mariamne (London, 1908), p. 87.
expressed most vividly, however, in Tristan de Léonois. Outside the old chapel at Tintagel, a rose tree grows from one tomb and plunges its shoots into another tomb. In death Tristan and Iseult are united, and "This rose is swept along by the power / Of his fragrance as by a soul," (p. 81).

A rose, which is exquisite in line and color, is one of the mysteries of nature. For Michael Field, "There is within the rose / A mystery that I behold and weep," (Noontide Branches, p. 18). That mystery is the very essence of womanhood which only love can penetrate. Involved as the poets are with the themes of love and its tragic culmination in death, the use of the rose symbol conveys the idea of the fierce beauty and transient quality of mortal love. In fact, each of the major symbols effectively contributes to the total projection of the themes intended by Michael Field. The forest establishes the proper setting for love and provides seclusion for the lovers. Water either further isolates the lovers from the rest of the world or it actually nourishes love itself. Jewels make more valuable and desirable the beloved. And in the unfolding of the rose, the nature of woman blossoms flower-like into the beauty of love.

In addition to the imagery and symbolism of Michael Field, the quality of the poets' descriptive diction must be considered. Again, the characteristic pattern is uneven, as the examination of any single play indicates. It would seem that no one has an absolute right to say of anything in an author's work, "This is wrong"; but anyone may question the aptness of expressions which spoil for him the general excellence of effect.
Lionel Johnson says, "It is the prevalence of certain blemishes, as we think, which keeps Michael Field below the front rank in contemporary literature. They indicate, not careless workmanship, but a dangerous love of daring phrases, a confusion of Elizabethan extravagance with Elizabethan excellence."

The play *The Tragic Mary* illustrates the glaring flaws as well as the definite merits in their poetic diction. The following lines are simple and unpretentious. They exemplify what the poets can achieve when so minded.

The widowed Mary is considering her state:

I fall into disuse; behind me lies
A ghost, a din of music; and before
An army of afflictions with no aim
But to descend on me. (The *Tragic Mary*, p. 124)

Later in the play, when the afflictions foretold earlier actually have occurred, Mary says:

I were content
To lie and let the waves fall over me,
As a wrecked barque that, when the storm is spent,
Suffers the soft mishandling of the tides.
(The *Tragic Mary*, p. 218)

It is almost inexplicable that the writer of such strong direct poetry can also write the following lines which refer to Mary's cooking skills. When Mary and her retinue arrive at Bothwell's castle, the Queen prepares the meal. The poets describe her breaking eggs in the following lines:

And is it verily such art
To pass from shell to broken shell the yoke,
Nor mar the spherai yellow in the change?
(The *Tragic Mary*, p. 34)

"Spherical yellow" is gauche word choice in this poetic context. Another instance of an unfortunate phrase marring a fine poetic passage is the following speech of Mary Stuart:

I do not urge
My claims, a racial importunity
Leaves me no peace until its suit be stayed.
Does there not grow in kings a royal gift,
Tradition of the conscience? (The Tragic Mary, p. 58)

It is regrettable that the phrase "a racial importunity" should appear. It is the language of anthropology rather than of poetry. Bothwell's reference to his intended proposal of marriage as "The elemental question to the sex" is also illustrative of the strained word choice which, at times, characterizes the diction of Michael Field.

Frequently Michael Field relies on epigrammatic expressions. The quality of the poets' style in this area is also unpredictable. The epigrams are frequently stilted and contrived as the following examples illustrate:

Brevity but cuts the flesh / Of our anxieties; prolixity / Tears it. (Callirrhoë, p. 109)

Courage is constant industry for happiness. (In the Name of Time, p. 10)

Women glow / Their arms round sovereignty. (Queen Marianne, p. 29)

Comfort is never with futurity. (Attila, My Attila! p. 15)

People always are adorable when they are determined to be happy. (A Question of Memory, p. 43)

Although the plays of Michael Field did not attract the attention which the works of Wilde and his followers received, the stylistic devices of the writers of the Nineties were clearly seen in the poets' work. Regarding the use of the epigram, Muddiman says, "Epigram opened a new career with Oscar Wilde." Bernard Muddiman, The Men of the Nineties (London, 1920), p. 9.
However, at times isolated epigrams are notable, and the poets' control of words is more than sufficiently evidenced:

- Lovely things are made for their own universe. (The World at Auction, p. 9)
- Power discarded brings a great revenge. (The Race of Leaves, p. 18)
- A shade is a woman if she may not love. (The Tragedy of Pardon, p. 2)
- Everyone conspires to thwart nobility, women hate it, and comrades hope it may be avoided. (A Question of Memory, p. 27)

The tendency toward terse, pointed statement is most artistically realized in the lines of certain cynical characters, whom Michael Field admirably creates. Two noteworthy examples are Machaon in Callirrhoë and Lethington in The Tragic Mary. In these instances the suitability of dialogue and character encourages epigrammatic treatment, and the quality of the diction is, for the most part, high. In a scene from The Tragic Mary Lethington advises Moray, the brother of Mary, in this manner:

Show yourself hurt, yet patient to endure
Unjust suspicion; then abide her coming
As confident and lowly as the just
Await the day of judgment. Morals, Moray,
Are your peculiar portion. (The Tragic Mary, p. 48)

Earlier in the play, he describes the unpredictability of the Queen in these words: "There is but one thing I trust in a woman, and that is the certainty of her unreason." (p. 42). Spoken by characters who are witty and clever, Michael Field's epigrams are highly effective. Contrived and frequently isolated in the texture of a play, the epigrams tend to illustrate the "extravagancies" of Michael Field's style.
The reasons for the occasional failures in verbal expression found in the works of Michael Field have been considered by Lionel Johnson:

The very faults or vices of Michael Field's manner proceed from a laudable impulse; every phrase must be characteristic, there must be no commonplace, no sign of flagging. Hence come certain violences of expression, audacities and extravagancies, Elizabethan in style, but without the justification of Elizabethan dramatists. They had no traditions of English tragedy behind them; tragic verse was new, the classics were new, life itself was new; and all the romance and adventurous spirit of the world. Their extravagance, whether of careful Euphuism or of careless energy, was in equal measure an extravagance of ignorance, of inexperience. But in Michael Field, there is too often a deliberate style of ingenuity and force. Yet no reader, in whatever degree he felt this effect, could feel that it vitiated an entire play; the extravagance is merely verbal, never one of conception. It may also be, that this less happy style is the result of the peculiar spirit of these plays, and not only of Elizabethan influence. The cumbrous magnificence of Aeschylus, ridiculed by Aristophanes, came of his vast and mysterious conceptions; the singular difficulty of Sophocles came of his subtle and quick conceptions. Just so may this occasional infelicity of Michael Field come of her love for, of her occupation with, those primitive or radical conceptions, the strength of which is expressed in struggle and in conflict. 11

However, as the same critic was careful to add, the pastoral and delicate scenes found in the plays have all the grace and charm with which the poets' lyrical imagination could imbue them. The scenes of the faun in Callirrhoe and of the fairies in Fair Rosamund are instances of a quaint and pathetic beauty. The imaginative texture of the entire play The Cup of Water is another example of balanced and harmonious lyric treatment. Noon-tide Branches, a "sylvan" drama, contains examples of rich descriptive diction. For this reason, the play easily illustrates Michael Field's imaginative vision. The woods are described by two contrasting characters,

Artemis and Genifer. The goddess of the hunt sees the woods in terms of motion:

The silver tide, fretted by summer leaves,  
Sails past the woodlands, ebbing to the sea:  
But soon the joyous current will return  
To the last bridge that sucks the ocean-flow;  
Soon will the morning swell to noontide, sooner  
Than ocean reach the freshets. Time and waves  
And light are moving. (Noontide Branches, p. 1)

On the other hand, the Lady Genifer describes the woods less perceptively. Because she is mortal, her awareness of the woods is hazy, and its secret is, therefore, revealed in muted tones:

Is it the deep-withdrawn  
And underswelling chorus of the bees,  
Absorbed in their response to the appeal  
Of all its whites and roses and ripe stains  
And tremulous shadows, petal after petal  
Stealing adown the air, that is too rich  
And forces me to tears. (Noontide Branches, p. 8)

This range of descriptive power clearly indicates the command Michael Field possesses over words and the ability the poets have to achieve a simple and imaginative poetic diction. That the command was not consistent is lamentable; however, the inconsistency does not negate the ability.

In the midst of the critical controversy regarding rhythm in dramatic speech and the artistic experimentation in dramatic

12 See supra, pp. 54 - 55.
poetry\textsuperscript{13} which marked the end of the nineteenth century, Michael Field never ostensibly broke with the rhythmic verse of dramatic poetry used in the past but employed the traditional form of prosody.\textsuperscript{14} Accepting the common view that "metaphorical diction is best suited to the iambic verse of drama for this is the metre closest to the prose of ordinary life,"\textsuperscript{15} the poets, for the most part, used the blank verse form. However, the iambic pentameter of Michael Field is frequently neither iambic meter nor a pentameter line, as select illustrations will indicate. The following lines from the play \textit{Deirdre} attest to the irregularity of the metric line:

\begin{quote}
\begin{center}
The penalty be mine; upon my head,
I take it; to myself I take this child,
Of sorrow - for my sorrow; and her doom,
Be on me as my doom. \textit{(Deirdre, p. 7)}
\end{center}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{13} Referring to plays by Maeterlinck, D'Annunzio, Synge and Wilde [\textit{Salome}], Lucas says, "After that go back and read the blank verse of Tennyson's \textit{Queen Mary} or Browning's \textit{Blot on the Scutcheon}; they seem written in butter. The thing to note about these four passages [cited from the works of the above authors] is the similarity of their solutions of the same problem -- how to find a serious dramatic diction free from the dead hand of verse, yet not too close to life for art. They differ in many ways; and many other varying solutions can no doubt be found; but these four have in common a certain simplicity, a patterned repetition of phrases to replace the patterned repetition of metre, and a pronounced rhythm." Lucas, \textit{Tragedy; Serious Drama in Relation to Aristotle's Poetics}, p. 161n.

\textsuperscript{14} Prosody, the theory and principle of versification, specifically with reference to rhythm, accent, and stanzas, naturally lends itself to extensive treatment. The scope of this study, founded as it is on all the dramatic works of Michael Field, makes an intensive investigation of each of these various aspects of prosody impossible. At best, only the general characteristics that seem to manifest themselves in the poets' plays can be considered.

\textsuperscript{15} Lucas, p. 148.
The melodic sound is achieved by the repetition of the words: "take," "sorrow," and "doom." The meter varies considerably from the iambic meter because of the poets' use of monosyllabic words requiring equal or major stress. Hence many spondaic feet are in evidence. The marked use of the spondaic foot rather than the iambic foot is also seen in this example:

Ay me! the greatest sorrow of all sorrows!
In sleep, the toasting slumber of last night,
I saw three birds fly hither from Emain;
They brought us sips of honey, and from us
Bore in their cruel bills three drops of blood.

(Deirdre, p. 31)

The poets' verse is, indeed, a variable line, often changing in unit as much as will consist with a regular form. The pauses are vocal as the death speech of Rothsay in the fourth act of The Father's Tragedy illustrates:

I ever thought
Death was a shadow. — I myself am Death.
I fed and never knew it: now I starve.
Here is the skeleton I've seen in books!
'Tis I — the knarled and empty bones. Here —
Here —
The grinning dints! I thought Death anywhere
But near my life; and it is in the pith
And centre of my body. Horrible! (The Father's Tragedy, p.110)

The blank verse line of Michael Field is characteristically a flexible, sinewy, and "nervous" line. It is not Elizabethan in either regularity or musical quality. Although it departs from iambic pentameter, the departure does not break with tradition nor indicate a distinctive mode of expression. In referring to the dramatic verse of Michael Field, George Meredith says, "Your verse is abused. I should pronounce it a singularly dramatic, nervous line, credibly uttered to the ear by the speaker, as one reads."16

16 Works and Days, p. 70.
Although the plays are, for the most part, written in blank verse, prose passages occur as well as graceful lyrics. The prose is sparse and, again, its use is traditional. It is the dialogue of servants, peasants, and, usually, minor characters. Occasionally it is used in those scenes which precede climactic and highly emotional scenes in order to emphasize the poetry of the latter. Only once did the poets write an entire play in prose, A Question of Memory. The dialogue was sharply criticized by William Archer, who said, "... the authors have deserted blank verse and write a curious short-winded prose, which has somewhat the air of a correct but rather stiff translation from a foreign language. In addition, the dialogue is always flying off at unexpected tangents, and trying to attain subtlety by means of incoherence."  

Without doubt, the lyrics, which appear in the plays from time to time, display a considerable amount of poetic grace. In Fair Rosamund, the Woodstock maid, waiting for the arrival of her lover Henry, sings her song:

Love doth never know
Why it is beloved,
And to ask were treason:
Let the wonder grow!
Were its hopes removed,
Were itself disproved
By cold reason,
Still in happy season
Love would be beloved. (Fair Rosamund, pp. 199-200)

And in The Tragic Mary, the lyric "I could wish to be dead," in the opinion of Sturge Moore, "is hard to match outside a few of Shelley's finest lyrics."  

17 Archer, Theatrical 'World' for 1893, p. 253.
18 Thomas Sturge Moore, Selection from the Poems of Michael Field, p. 15.
Mary Stuart sings the song after Darnley has deserted her at Holyrood:

I could wish to be dead!
Too quick with life were the tears I shed,
Too sweet for tears is the life I led;
And ah, too lonesome my marriage-bed!
I could wish to be dead.
I could wish to be dead,
For just a word that rings in my head;
 Too dear, too dear are the words he said,
They must never be remembered.
I could wish to be dead.
I could wish to be dead;
The wish to be loved is all mis-read,
And to love, one learns when one is wed,
Is to suffer bitter shame; instead
I could wish to be dead. (The Tragic Mary, pp. 100-101)

The songs enhance the plays and indicate further the poetic power of Michael Field. Frequently the songs are in rhyming couplets and the ease and charm of the poets' lyric expression is evidenced. In the "Faun song" from Callirrhoë, Michael Field delicately states the tragic theme of the play. In this song, the tragic element of life is seen as life's inescapable shadow from which the faun is trying to escape:

I dance and dance! Another faun,
A black one, dances on the lawn.
He moves with me, and when I lift
My heels his feet directly shift;
I can't outdance him though I try:
He dances nimble-er than I.
I toss my head, and so does he;
What tricks he dares to play on me!
I touch the ivy in my hair;
Ivy he has and finger there.
The spiteful thing to mock me so!
I will outdance him! Ho, ho, ho! (Callirrhoë, p. 105)

There is no evidence of striking innovation in the prosody of Michael Field, but there is considerable evidence of skill and occasionally flashes of poetic genius. Although the quality of the verse is uneven, and frequently
within the context of a single play the poetic line is both striking and awkward, it must be concluded that the poets strove always for a unique poetic expression. Meredith affirms this observation in a letter to Michael Field: "Your noble stand for pure poetic literature will have its reward, but evidently you will have to wait. If only for the beauty of the verse, dramatic and lyric, it should meet with cordial greeting, and even that, as far as I can see, is unrecognized. Nevertheless, though you are sensitive, you have courage; sustainment as well in the perpetual springs of verse within you."19

Although the prosodic power of Michael Field was not fully recognized, the ironic intention expressed by the poets was perceived by all who knew their plays. Irony of statement and, more particularly, irony of context, is an important consideration and one to which Michael Field attached great value. Because tragedy, more often than not, portrays the persistent dimension of irony in human aspiration and destruction, the tragedies from Callirrhoë (1884) to In the Name of Time (1919) contain this literary device in varying degrees of stress and presentation. However, in the range of plays, some tragedies are obviously more illustrative of specific ironic intent than others are.

In The Father's Tragedy, the King decides to release his son David, whom he has imprisoned in Falkland Castle, at the same moment in which his son starves to death there. A poignant sense of tragedy arises out of the

19 Works and Days, p. 109.
father's ill-timed forgiveness. Ironically, the realization of the treachery of his nobles and the realization of his own injustice to his favorite son come too late to save what he treasured most on earth. The irony is intensified when it becomes evident that the death of the son literally annihilates the father. "When parents err / Nothing avails; there is no comforter," (The Father's Tragedy, p. 5).

Brutus Ultor projects a closely-knit pattern of ironies. Tarquin's rape of Lucretia parallels the besieging of the town of Ardea and its eventual conquest. Ironically the town's conquest secured the young Prince's rule of Rome, whereas the rape of Lucretia became the cause of his expulsion from Rome and his eventual military downfall. It is in terms of the protagonist Brutus, however, that the central irony occurs. Endeavoring to fulfill the Delphic prophecy, "Who kisses his mother shall be king," (Brutus Ultor, p. 1), Brutus kisses his mother, the earth. Interpreting the oracular pronouncement in this manner, Brutus hopes to achieve the rule of Rome. When he finally accomplishes his goal, his reign is filled with discord, and it brings destruction to his home and family. As he is dying on the battlefield, the surviving Aruns comments:

He lies with lips to earth, as when I turned
And looked on him at Delphi. Thou didst well,
Thou some-time Lord of Rome, to kiss the ground
Back to thy mother's arms! (Brutus Ultor, p. 74)

His fidelity to the maternal earth forces him literally to deprive his wife Publia of her maternity. He commands the death of his sons because they have plotted against his rule. When Brutus finds his half-crazed wife dead, he is finally convinced of the hopelessness of his position:
Shall I hope
To found a state upon a rifled home,
A murdered matron, a polluted house? (Brutus Ulter, p. 70)

The words of the first act, "May the gods / Look kindly on our household peace," (Brutus Ulter, p. 14), echo ironically in the silence of disaster.

Many of Michael Field's plays contain a love — hate antithesis; Queen Mariamne starkly illustrates the basic irony involved in this emotional duality. Herod establishes the fact of his overwhelming passion for Mariamne at the beginning of the play by saying, "I love her / The way I hate a foe I cannot strike," (Queen Mariamne, p. 2). Mariamne rejects both Herod and his love and continues to regard him as the murderer of her grandfather and her brother. Even Cleopatra reminds Herod of Mariamne's hatred for him when she attempts to detain the King of Judea in Egypt. Slowly, in the course of the play's action, Herod's passion for Mariamne wins her love in response. However, it is a love which is inextricably linked with death. Before starting a dangerous expedition, Herod twice gives a secret command to kill Mariamne instantly in the event of his death. Finally, caught in a web of treachery woven by his mother and sister, Herod is persuaded to sentence Mariamne to death for a suspected plot to poison him. Herod, therefore, kills the person whom he loves most, and his victim's newly-won love becomes the all-consuming hate which is expressed in Mariamne's contemptuous silence in death.

Julia Domna, the third play of the Roman trilogy, also reveals a striking example of irony. In an effort to retain the affection of both her sons,
Julia Domna, the mother of the co-emperors of Rome, unwittingly precipitates the fratricide which concludes the play. Unable to bear the division of power which would establish one son supreme at Antioch and the other son supreme at Rome, the mother persuades her quarreling sons to rule together at Rome. Caracalla voices the futility of the proposed arrangement when he says:

If we oppose the unendurable
With that which cannot be endured, the gods
Must hide their eyes.20

At last, driven by jealousy to desperate action, Caracalla murders Geta. After this outrage against the gods and nature, he realizes the fact that death, ironically, invests his rival with additional power over Julia Domna's affections and that he is, in effect, further from his goal.

It is in the play, Attila, My Attila!, however, that Michael Field intentionally specifies ironic intent. In the "Preface" the poets state:

Little Honoria, whose yielding 'to the impulse of nature' Gibbon chronicles with such sympathy -- a sympathy pregnant with the feeling of our age that was to follow -- sought to give freedom to her womanhood by unwomanly audacities; and although the importunate desire to be herself was fair and natural; its perversion was revenged by the blight with which nature curses. To be vitally stirred, yet go blindly on the way of death; to be urged by nature, and yet outrage her through very obedience is a tragedy of tragedies, and one not remote, for Honoria is the New Woman of the fifth century; and to any who shall read her story in these pages the author says, as clearly as a certain Prologue when it declared --

'This man with lantern, dog, and bush of thorn,
Presenteth Moonshine.'

that this play presents Irony. (Attila, My Attila!, Preface)

In her intense longing for love and motherhood, the Princess Honoria dreams of the day when a "mighty conqueror / Should take me captive," (p. 23). For political reasons, her early marriage to the Chamberlain Eugenius is dissolved. Living in forced seclusion, Honoria hopes for deliverance by Attila. She finally seizes an opportunity to send a ring and a message to the leader of the Huns by which she offers herself and her kingdom to him. The master stroke of irony is contained in the conclusion of the play when the news of Attila's murder is brought to Ravenna. Deliberately ignoring Honoria's pledge and ring, Attila forces his captive bride Ildico to his tent. The next morning his soldiers find him murdered:

The bride was seated,
White, with malicious and abandoned eyes,
Nursing a laugh, her veil wrung round her chin,
And Attila lay prostrate in a mass
Of frozen blood. (Attila, My Attila!, p. 106)

Honoria's realization of Attila's sensual nature, stripped of all the romantic qualities with which she had invested it, completely shatters the Roman princess. Honoria, like her seeming-rival Ildico, goes mad at the end of the play. 21

21 The following quotation taken from a letter to Michael Field from George Meredith in 1895 interjects an interesting note into the discussion of irony. "Bear with me, I have little praise for the line or the character of your Attila. If you had irony in aim you should not have made drama. You could of course produce keenest irony through clashes of your personae. But poor Honoria is hardly a subject for it. Perhaps you meant the reflecting of grim light on the sex-mania current. That would be satire, quite enough to kill your poetry. . . . It seems to me that your present failure comes of the design to do too much. Your naturally splendid dramatic line sinks broken under the burden of satire and stage contractions." Works and Days, p. 90.
The examples of irony found in the plays of Michael Field are multiple. Irony of context, however, more frequently prevails than irony of statement. In certain instances, verbal irony is combined with situational irony, and the entire play, dependent on sharp reversal, progresses to its tragic conclusion. In the play The Cup of Water, the King, referring to his wife's understanding of his great and suppressed love for Cara, says to the woodland girl, "I'm free." To which Cara quickly answers, "And I am Hubert's wife."22 Because the King honored his truth to Millicent, his wife, he initially promises Cara to Hubert. At the end of the play Cara, ironically, is more conscious of honor than the King.

In some plays the ironic development of the plot is a series of minor reversals. The play In the Name of Time, which is based on Carloman's renunciation of his kingdom and the world for the monastic life, illustrates a gradual unfolding of irony. At the beginning of the play Carloman renounces his birthright to the Frankish rule in favor of his brother Pepin, whom he contrasts with himself in this statement:

He is short-sighted, politic,  
External in his bent. I lead the charge  
In battle, I foresee the combinations  
Of foreign forces. (In the Name of Time, p. 11)

In effect, it is Carloman who consistently displays a lack of vision in the play. He incurs papal disapproval and eventual excommunication by leaving the monastery without permission. His idealized concept of religious life, expressed early in the play —

22 See supra, p. 92.
I will make escape
At once, in silence, without taking leave:
My joy is in the consciousness that Time
Will never draw me back to any wish
To any fondness I am flinging off. (In The Name of Time, p. 11)

changes, and when the Pope sentences Carloman to prison at Vienna, the
former monk can only say:

I have no God
To curse you with. I cannot do you harm.
I have no God, no friend, no glowing hate:
You all will pass before me in procession
Day after day as shadows. (In the Name of Time, p. 82)

He refuses to repent and dies praising not the eternal joys of a life
of sacrifice but the simple joys of mortal life — wine, fellowship, and
love. Carloman's foresight regarding alliances fails to penetrate the
Papal designs regarding France. He, rather than his brother, is "short-
sighted." In his desire for contemplation and the seclusion of monastic
life, he abandons his wife, who turns to a life of adultery; and he deserts
his infant son. In addition, his quest for immortality in time, ironically,
becomes a meaningless pursuit because time and the world are seen by him
as the highest values at the play's conclusion:

... I for myself
Drink deep to life here in my prison cell
Fellowship, pleasure,
These are the treasure —
So, I believe, so, in the name of Time.
(In the Name of Time, p. 93)

Whether a sharp single reversal produces irony or a series of lesser
occurrences culminates in an ironic tone, Michael Field realized the necessity
of the literary technique for the effectiveness of tragic drama. For the
entire period of their dramatic writing the poets consistently strove for
greater facility in refining this device. In fact, the entire play-making
career of Michael Field is a record of constant endeavor to perfect dramatic
expression. Whether this is evident in terms of greater power in imagery,
precise diction, facility in prosody or ironic development, is not as sig-
nificant as the fact that there is a definite progression in the poets' style.

In his final evaluation of Michael Field, Arthur Symons says, "Now,
what shall be said in favor of the Michael Fields? Strongly gifted, had
they the creative power of the born Dramatist? Had they any individual
genius, any startling originality? Are their characters in any sense vitally
alive? It seems to me certain that the younger one who wrote The Father's
Tragedy assuredly had touches or flashes of genius. . . . The curious
thing is that two women of such different temperaments could have done such
an immense amount of work; that they were always themselves -- self-contained;
and that only one of them, the younger, could weave spider's webs in some
Ariadne's loom, colored and fragile, fragrant and scented." In this con-
text the questions posed by Arthur Symons and the conclusions reached by him
are germane and lead to a further important consideration regarding the poets' style -- collaboration.

Collaboration in the drama is not new or original with Michael Field.

23 Edith Cooper, herself, substantiated this fact in a letter to Robert
Browning which she wrote on June 7, 1885. "The Father's Tragedy is all
my own with the exception of Emmelino's song." Works and Days, p. 8.

In fact, that literary genre has frequently attracted dual authorship.25 A lifetime of close and consistently combined literary effort, however, is an uncommon occurrence. The close association of Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper, resulting from established family ties and a similar love and dedication to art, is more than a partnership in writing; it is a way of life. In the words of Spinoza, which Katherine Bradley felt obliged to quote, the poets found a philosophical basis for their collaboration. Writing to Browning, she said, "Spinoza with his fine grasp of unity says: 'If two individuals of exactly the same nature are joined together, they make up a single individual, doubly stronger than each alone, 'i.e., Edith and I make a veritable Michael."26

The reasons for collaboration grew out of similar interests. Edith writes, "She [Katherine] has lived with me, taught me, encouraged me and joined me to her poetic life."27 But more important, the collaboration grew out of common goals, "It is not in our power or desire to treat irreverently customs or beliefs that have been, or are, sacred to men. We hold ourselves bound in life and in literature to reveal -- as far as may be -- the beauty of the high feminine standard, the ought to be."28

25 See the "Art and Mystery in Collaboration" in Matthews, The Historical Novel and Other Essays, pp. 301 - 310.
26 Works and Days, p. 6.
27 Ibid., p. 2.
28 Ibid., p. 7.
The general manner of collaboration was revealed by Edith; "My Aunt and I work together after the fashion of Beaumont and Fletcher. . . . Some of the scenes of our play are like mosaic-work -- the mingled, various product of our two brains. . . . I think if our contributions were disentangled and one subtracted from the other, the amount would be almost even."29 The poets were convinced that each one made a unique and necessary contribution to their joint literary endeavor,30 and they struggled to maintain the secrecy of authorship.

Occasionally light is thrown on each poet's contribution. Based on limited evidence, some insight into the collaborative effort is possible. Writing to Browning about the play Callirrhoe, Edith states, "The Faun scene is mine. . . . Emathion [a character] is also almost wholly mine and much of Margery [a character from Fair Rosamund] "31 And, of course, The Father's Tragedy is, for the most part, the work of Edith.32 Of the later plays, all is silence. If the contributions of each poet are differentiated, Edith

29 Ibid., pp. 2 and 3.
30 The individual poetic contribution of each poet is imaginatively expressed in Michael Field's lyric, "Stream and Pool."

"Mine is the eddying foam and the broken current,
Thine the serene-flowing tide, the unshattered rhythm;
Light touches me on the surface with glints of sunshine,
Dives in thy bosom, disclosing a mystic river;
Ruffling, the wind takes the crest of my waves resurgent,
Stretches his pinions at poise on thy even ripples;
What is my song but the tumult of chafing force,
What is thy silence, Beloved, but enchanted music?"

Selection from the Poems of Michael Field, p. 20.

31 Works and Days, p. 3.
32 See supra, p. 182, 23n.
Cooper, generally, is credited with the delicate lyric strain in the work. According to Symons, there is little doubt that the younger poet is the superior talent in the collaboration.

The collaborative effort itself illustrates a lengthy fellowship matched only by the Goncourts and Erckmann-Chatrian. That the poets could create poetry and express their ideas in a union which lasted for thirty years is indicative of both an extraordinary dedication to literature and a seemingly identical perception of life.

In the final analysis, the poets lay claim to individuality in two ways — as poets in their own right and as "Michael Field." On the basis of their flaws as well as their excellencies in style they succeed in "making their play different from anyone else's." "At their finest there is in them something fierce, subtle, strange, singular — which can become sinister; there is nothing in them which is primitive or elemental, nothing which conveys a sense of that extreme and vehement and violent passion without which no actual tragedy can exist. They have some sense of style, some individuality of their own; they have no vision of great events, no enthralling emotion; but, in the younger one, a rare kind of spirituality which can become exquisite, morbid, intense. Do not look for construction, nor for that 'infinite variety' which only great drama must possess."33

33 Symons, p. 1587.
But, in an age which did not witness the mature works of Sturge Moore and Yeats and in an age which did not follow the innovations in speech effectively used by Synge and Maeterlinck, Michael Field was, in a private and limited capacity, an advocate of "pure poetry."
CHAPTER VII
CONCLUSION

As has been stated earlier in the study, the plays of Michael Field balance precariously between the "old drama" and the "new." Writing in a period of transition in the drama, the poets reflect the traditions of the past, and they also foreshadow some of the innovations brought to fruition in the twentieth century. The tenets of the *pie7e bien faite* and the English theatrical development influenced by Scribe are undeniably present in Michael Field's approach to plot structure. A Hellenistic spirit and a fascination for the legendary and colorful figures of history and romance are continually manifested in their choice of subject matter. The themes of their plays give evidence of the tensions between realism and idealism found in the Victorian period, and particularly reflect the thought of "tradition and change." Finally, the poets' style reflects the tradition which produced Landor, Browning, Tennyson, and Swinburne; and, paradoxically, it also gives evidence of the ferment which gave rise to the distinctive style of Synge, Yeats, and Sturge Moore and stimulated the general renewal of interest in poetic drama.

The contrivances of the "well-made play" and certain dramatic conventions, for the most part Elizabethan: the disregard of time, the facile shifting from place to place, the prologue, the use of disguise to originate or
stimulate situation, the free employment of horror as a vehicle for tragic effect, and the five-act structure were the inheritance of the Victorian poetic dramatist. And the inheritance proved unprofitable. The range of shifting forms found in the twenty-seven dramas of Michael Field indicates the poets' dilemma in play construction. The five-act play posed problems for the playwrights because they frequently do not make use of their first act and occasionally clutter acts four and five with anti-climactic action. The fleeting nuances of Michael Field's poetic vision and the poets' ability to create a moving tragic situation are undermined in the traditional lengthy structure. In time it became increasingly evident to them that a shorter form more effectively suited their tragic plots, and some of Michael Field's shorter plays indicate that the poets' most effective structuring is in the general movement toward the "one-act" play. Unfortunately, by the time this form gained popularity and acclaim, the poets' dramatic efforts were almost completed. Yeats played a key role in experimenting with the shorter form, and Synge explored the possibilities of his adopted theory of "continuous action." Caught between convention and innovation, Michael Field's structural difficulties could not be completely resolved. However, the presence of the problem gives further evidence of the period of transition in which the poets wrote.

Although Michael Field uses diverse historical works and chronicles as sources for plays, as Landor, Browning, Tennyson, and Swinburne did, the characters which the poets develop are not closely drawn historical figures but rather they are characters that assume legendary and mythical dimensions.
The heroines in particular have classical prototypes. A Greek born out of
time, Michael Field's Bacchanalian affinity is evident in the characters the
poets create. Juxtaposed with identical characters delineated by other
playwrights, Michael Field's characters illustrate the poets' imaginative
rather than realistic orientation, and, more significantly, they reveal a
resemblance to certain Greek heroines. Maenads in spirit, these feminine
characters move through the poets' plays in search of ecstasy and that love
which is inevitably fatal. It is the feminine characters who arrest the
reader's attention even in the earlier plays. But the poets' skill develops
and, significantly, the characters assume lifelike proportions, which are
at one and the same time credible and yet imaginative. Deft handling of
minor characters, emphasis by means of contrasting characters and greater
psychological penetration into character become evident in the later plays.
Also evident is the pattern established by the recurrence of identical
dominating motives and similar inner conflicts which unintentionally reveals
something of the life and personality of the author. In some measure the
characters created by Michael Field have a latent potential to become more
than individuals. At times they seem to greateren until they become humanity
itself. However, their heroic stature is not always consistent, and at times
their tragedy is muted by the poets' failure to project the character's
humanity and universality with equal consistency.

The role of fate, the claims of destiny, responsibility and immortality
are universal and elemental themes, but an author's specific presentation of
each idea is highly individual. The nineteenth-century writer, witnessing
the vast changes wrought by the industrial revolution, was increasingly conscious of the realities of the present and the cult of beauty found in the "ideal" past. The conflicting claims between Christian and antique subjects and between Christian and Dionysian thought are easily discernible in the themes expressed by the writers of the period. Asserting the fundamental ideas of the autonomy of man's will, the essential distinction between good and evil, the affirmation of life, and the phenomenon of human vitality, Michael Field defines tragedy and also creates tragic drama. The poets are primarily interested in "the conflict of man with the indifference of nature." Whether the specific theme be parental or political tyranny, the struggle between old and new ideals of conduct, or the folly of ignoring the demands of nature, the poets see man in conflict and the resultant tragedy which arises from the struggle. It is the idea of fatal love, however, that dominates the tragedies of Michael Field and forms the central thematic core of the poets' plays. And in the presentation of this concept the poets reflect one of the major themes of Swinburne and his followers as well as of the writers of the Nineties. The recurrence of the "fatal love" theme, the concept that irrevocably united the idea of love and death, illustrates not only Michael Field's endeavor to reconcile the claims of pagan fate with the weaknesses of human nature, but it also establishes the universal character of Michael Field's thought. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that the predominant themes expressed in their plays are essentially more timeless than timely and, of necessity, reflect the ideas of the past as well as project the trends of the future.
Because Michael Field did not write in a distinctive dramatic period but rather in an age of transition, the stylistic strengths and weaknesses of the period tend to be easily recognized in the poets' work. One of the nineteenth-century dramatist's greatest problems was the problem of diction, and the tension between realism and idealism was quite evident in the problem of language. Elizabethanisms, anachronistic word choice, and the "language of everyday speech" used by the advocates of the "new drama" failed to provide a suitable medium for the dramatic poet and exposed the minor writer to innumerable pitfalls. The first noteworthy solution to the Victorian problem of diction came only in the innovations of Synge and the poets of the "Irish Revival" at the end of the century. Michael Field, who was conscious of the pitfalls, did not escape them as the uneven character and occasionally strained elaborate qualities of the poets' diction indicate. The poets are, for the most part, conventional in their use of imagery. The forest, water, precious jewels, and the rose — traditional symbols of Landor, Swinburne and his followers — have a dominant place in the metaphoric language of their dramas and aptly express the romantic and imaginative qualities inherent in the poets' plays. Although the too careful search for striking imagery, on occasion, results in gaucheries, the poets frequently exhibit noteworthy perception and deft expression. Michael Field employs the accepted rhythm of dramatic poetry. As a result, the poets' blank verse is indistinguishable from the conventional rhythmic line of the period. Although their iambic pentameter line is frequently irregular, it does not break with tradition nor indicate unusual prosodic variation. While Michael Field's
occasional use of prose as a dramatic medium is without distinction, the
lyrics which appear from time to time in the plays are examples both of the
poets' lyric power and the high quality of poetry they are capable of creating
when so minded. There is no evidence of striking innovation, but merely
of convention in the prosody of Michael Field, but there is considerable
evidence of skill and, furthermore, flashes of poetic genius. The style
of Michael Field, despite its conventional character, is not a static style
but rather a developing style. Whether the poets' use of language, creation
of metaphor, refinements in prosody, or effective ironic intent is considered,
the conclusion is reaffirmed. Within the context of conventionality, Michael
Field developed in poetic technique.

Michael Field did not solve the Victorian dilemma, nor did the poets
achieve greatness in spite of it. As minor poets, they were unable to rise
above the limitations of the late Victorian drama. Their conviction that
tragic poetic drama should not be relegated to the drawing room but "live"
in the theatre precedes the renewal of interest in poetic drama that the
plays of Yeats, Sturge Moore, and Gordon Bottomley stimulated. Their fas-
cination with the figures of myths and legends predates Yeats's affinity
for "images that remind us of vast passions, the vagueness of past times,
all the chimeras that haunt the edge of trance." And their search for form
foreshadows the extended use of the "one-act" play and the experiments with
Nō-drama which occurred in the early twentieth century. Michael Field's
plays are tangible evidence of the unhappy coexistence of realism and
idealism. The strengths and weaknesses of the plays help define more precisely
the ramifications of the dilemma. Although the echoes of the past are con-
tained in them and trends which point to the future are seen in them, Michael
Field's plays state the present and as such are worthy of attention.

However, the statement of the present is a minimal claim to literary
significance and a slight foundation for literary acclaim. The work of the
poet itself must bear the mark of excellence. And that excellence is dis-
tinct from the considerations of time, place, and person; it is permanent.
For the works of an author to be heralded as "the ring of a new voice, which
is likely to be heard far and wide among the English-speaking peoples" by
the Spectator and then be dismissed as "standard nineteenth-century closet
drama" by The Cambridge History of English Literature emphasizes the problem
of the reputation of Michael Field. The irony of the fame of that poet is
the irony of instant critical acclaim, even comparison to Shakespeare, and
then silence and obscurity. Apart from the considerations of collaboration
and feminine authorship, which are interesting but rather peripheral con-
siderations, the works of Michael Field must contain the intrinsic and valid
reasons for not only attention but esteem. Viewed by the poets' contempo-
raries, the plays obviously did.

To the prominent writers of the late Victorian era -- Browning, Meredith,
Wilde, and George Moore -- Michael Field was a contemporary in the pursuit
of literary excellence. The correspondence and the journals of the writers
indicate the free exchange of ideas and the valuable critical commentary
which only close association and mutual respect are able to produce.
Browning enjoyed the poets' deep classical affinity and found their imagery touched by genius. Meredith criticized several plays individually and considered Michael Field's characterization generally admirable and their verse particularly good. Oscar Wilde offered valuable suggestions for the staging of *A Question of Memory* and urged production of the poets' plays. And George Moore selected Michael Field's play for actual presentation at Grein's Independent Theatre. In the light of this encouragement, the poets' lack of popular acclaim is less significant.

To the contemporary critics -- Arthur Symons and Lionel Johnson -- Michael Field was both worthy of critical evaluation and a distinctive poet. In summarizing the playwrights' contribution to dramatic literature, Johnson wrote:

It is reasonable to think that England will never give birth to a second Shakespeare; it is unreasonable to hold that no one can possibly catch anything of his spirit. Michael Field, at her highest point of excellence, writes with an imagination, an ardour, a magnificence, in degree far lower, in kind not other, than the imagination, the ardour, the magnificence of Shakespeare. In witness of this great claim, let us point to such passages as the last scene of *William Rufus*, with the speeches of Beowulf, the blinded Saxon peasant; to the third scene of *Fair Rosamund*, with the speeches of Queen Elinor; to the fourth scene of *Camul*, where Gunhild the Norse prophetess, confronts the king; to the scene of Coreus' death in *Callirrhoë*; to the fourth act of *The Father's Tragedy* with the speech of starving Rothsay. And these passages are not brilliant, chance felicities, purple patches of composition; they are central, or final passages, in which the writer's imagination becomes intense, and quickens into its most perfect form. ("Michael Field" in *Poets and Poetry of the Century*, pp. 398-399)

Specifying exact passages in the poets' plays, Lionel Johnson emphasized the necessity of analyzing the literary work itself, and he also realized the need to perceive the inherent literary values which permeated the entire
The texture of the poets' work. However, Lionel Johnson did more. He recognized in Michael Field a rare quality of the imagination, which combined with the poets' individual tragic vision, produced poetic plays of esteem. Examined closely, can these same poetic plays fail to yield a similar judgment today?

Michael Field is a poet worthy of recognition. Strongly gifted and highly imaginative, Edith Cooper and Katherine Bradley create tragic worlds in their plays and people them with sensitive soulful characters who experience keenly the conflict between the dream and the reality and claim kinship with Antigone, Phaedra, and Clytemnestra. In a limited way, the poets achieve a style which transcends the commonplace and at moments reaches brilliance, a style which is distinctly their own. That the plays are little known is unfortunate; that Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper are little praised by the present contemporary literary world is regrettable.

The paradox of Michael Field was being "by circumstance and choice decadents of the decadents," without ever really proclaiming the doctrine of "art for art's sake" under the aegis of Oscar Wilde. Like Aubrey Beardsley, "who went straight to the great gifts of classical literature," the poets studied and loved the classics but never published in The Yellow Book or The Savoy. Like Arthur Symons, who wrote appreciatively of the French Impressionists and Symbolists, they proclaimed the freedom "to work out in the open air of nature" but remained aloof from the meetings of the Rhymers' Club. And like Ernest Dowson, who penned his undying love for Cynara, they wrote of the fatality of love but were not consumed in its passion. Linked in spirit with the men of the Nineties, Michael Field is seldom mentioned in the
literature of the period. Perhaps the prophecy of Maurice Baring remains to be fulfilled. "There was one poet's name which was sometimes mentioned then. The name has gone on being mentioned since, and will one day, I think, reach the safe harbor of lasting fame, and this was Michael Field."
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APPROVAL SHEET

The dissertation submitted by Joan E. Biederstedt has been read and approved by five members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the dissertation is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

1/16/64
Date

Signature of Adviser