

MICHAEL FIELD, THE POET

Published and Manuscript Materials

“Michael Field”
(Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper)

edited by Marion Thain and Ana Parejo Vadillo

2009



broadview editions

Introduction

“To reveal art and conceal the artist is art’s aim.”
Oscar Wilde

Becoming “Michael Field”

Oscar Wilde’s playful aphorism illuminates Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper’s decision to enter the public world of letters in 1884 under the joint pseudonym of “Michael Field.” It also explains the women’s distress when news of the dual and female authorship was leaked to the press. The creative ferment that was “Michael Field” stemmed from an aesthetic programme that proclaimed the primacy of art over life. They thought of the world aesthetically, and consciously made their lives subservient to art—to Michael Field. “This happy union of two in work & aspiration,” as Cooper and Bradley defined the entity “Michael Field,” was endowed with the power to transfigure the world through the primacy of language, of poetry.¹ Thus, the revelation of their pseudonym, as they wrote to Robert Browning, “would indeed be utter ruin.” “[T]he report of lady-authorship will dwarf & enfeeble our work at every turn. [...] [W]e have many things to say 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.”² For Katharine Bradley and her sixteen years younger niece, Edith Cooper, to be “Michael Field” was to be reborn into language, into poetry.

But the sharing of one complete name reflected as much about their aesthetics as about their own literary and personal relationship, of which they often spoke as a “marriage.”³ The women were keen readers of Spinoza and adopted the metaphysical

- 1 EC to Robert Browning (30 May 1884). See “Letters” Section, p. 310.
- 2 KB to Robert Browning (23 November 1884). See “Letters” Section, p. 311.
- 3 See, for instance, KB to EC (August 1885). See “Letters” Section, p. 304. Of Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s marriage they observed: “those two poets, man and wife, wrote alone; each wrote, but did not bless or quicken one another at their work; *we are closer married*” (Michael Field, *Works and Days. From the Journal of Michael Field*, ed. T. & D.C. Sturge Moore [London: John Murray, 1933], 16).

monism of his *Foundations of the Moral Life* (1632), the idea that there is one basic substance whose attribute is thought, as the philosophical foundation of their being. As they explained to Browning, quoting verbatim from Spinoza: “if two natures [<] individuals of exactly the same nature [>] are joined together, they make up a single individual, doubly stronger than each alone.”¹ On the basis of their decision to create a world of poetry, they began privately to close the gap between the real Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper and their ideal “Michael Field” with the writing of a journal, aptly entitled *Works and Days*, which the women began in 1888 and continued to write until the end of their lives. This intricate and exceptional text unveils a powerful narrative of how this writing entity became their everyday reality; of how, to paraphrase Wilde’s axiom in *The Decay of Lying*, their joint lives came to imitate the art of Michael Field.

From Michael Field’s early biographers, Mary Sturgeon and Ursula Bridges, we know that Katharine Harris Bradley was born in Birmingham to a tobacco-manufacturer in 1846 and that her father died when she was only two years old. She had one sister, Emma, eleven years her elder. When Emma married James Robert Cooper they went to live in Kenilworth. It was here that Emma’s daughter, Edith Emma Cooper, was born in 1862. The absence of Katharine’s father and the persistent frailty of Emma provided the impetus for Katharine and her mother to move to Kenilworth to live with the Coopers around the time of Edith’s birth. But Katharine was soon to play a far more central role within her sister’s family than she could have expected. When Emma Cooper became a permanent invalid after the birth of her second daughter, Amy (in 1864), Katharine, at the age of eighteen, took the responsibility of caring for her niece Edith. In spite of Emma, who saw with great anxiety and uneasiness her daughter’s admiration and affection for her sister (and tried in all sorts of ways to stop it), Bradley and Cooper were soon inseparable.²

The women were of independent means and had a good education. Bradley followed the path of many aesthetes and decadents of the later part of the nineteenth century and in 1868 travelled to Paris to pursue her literary interests at the prestigious *Collège de France*. During this period, not only did she learn French language and literature, but she was instructed on subjects such as Latin, the Woman Question, and the history of the

1 KB to Robert Browning (23 November 1884). See “Letters” Section, p. 311.

2 See, for example, KB to EC (April 1885). “Letters” Section, p. 300.

Roman Empire. She also fell in love with Alfred Gérente, twenty-five years her elder and the brother of her Parisian companion Eliza. His sudden death weeks after their first meeting meant that she never told him of her love. She returned to England broken-hearted, with the conviction that she would be a spinster for life. Her enthusiasm for literature and writing, however, continued to grow, and in 1874 she attended a summer course in Newnham College, Cambridge, recently founded to promote academic excellence for women. She would later reflect on the importance of her period at Cambridge: “I came to Newnham empty-headed, with vague ambition, vague sentiment—the pulpy lyrics of the N. M. in my brain.”¹ A year later, in 1875, Longman published Bradley’s first book of poems, *The New Minnesinger and Other Poems*, under the pseudonym of “Arran Leigh.”

Bradley completed her education at University College, Bristol, where the family moved in 1879. Aged seventeen, Cooper could now join her aunt. Publicly, and for the next five years, Bradley and Cooper were day students at University College, attending courses on classics and philosophy.² Secretly, as Sturgeon says, “they were already dedicated to poetry, and sworn in fellowship.” She also notes that it was an era when “Higher Education and Women’s Rights and Anti-Vivisection were being indignantly championed, and when ‘aesthetic dress’ was being very consciously worn—all by the same kind of people. Katharine and Edith were of that kind.”³ The next volume of poems to be published marked the beginning of the women’s literary partnership, which was to last for the rest of their lives. *Bellerophon* (1881) was presented as the work of two people: “Arran and Isla Leigh.”⁴ Yet there were also pronounced differences between the women: Cooper was passionate about philosophy, Bradley about Greek language and literature. Although they presented themselves in their writing as a seamless whole, the women were in fact very different in appearance and character.

1 Entry for 13 February 1891. See “Diaries” Section, p. 245.

2 See Ivor C. Treby, *The Michael Field Catalogue* (n.p.: De Blackland Press, 1998), 29; Mary Sturgeon, *Michael Field* (London: George G. Harrap, 1921), 18.

3 Sturgeon, 21, 20.

4 Yopie Prins notes that this pair of names also blurs genders and “suggests various possible relationships between the two names: a pair of siblings, a parent and child, a married couple,” an ambiguity utterly appropriate for an aunt and niece who were also mother and daughter, sisters, lovers (“Greek Maenads, Victorian Spinsters,” in *Victorian Sexual Desire*, ed. Richard Dellamora [Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1999], 43–81, 55).



Figure 2. Edith Cooper's *Carte de Visite* as "Field," c.1885.

Bradley was robust, forthright, and plumper, while Cooper was less confident in public and more fragile and feminine in appearance. By the time the women began writing together, their relationship was, in Sturgeon's words, a friendship "clearly on the grand scale and in the romantic manner."¹ Textually and sexually the women were becoming closer, an erotic bond developing to supplement and complicate their familial ties.

This budding literary career was positively discouraged by John Ruskin, Bradley's mentor at this stage in her life (1875–80), who at one point bluntly told her to stop writing poetry.² She became a "companion" of his Guild of St George³ for a while, but a series of letters between the two charts the rift that developed around Christmas 1877 over Bradley's acquisition of a pet dog, which inaugurated a new phase of the poets' lives. Ruskin's much quoted letter is a testament to Bradley's increasing disaffection with Victorian culture:

I don't care how much pain you are in—but that you should be such a fool as coolly to write to me that you had ceased to believe in God—and had found some comfort in a dog—this is deadly. And of course I have at once to put you out of the St. George's Guild—which primarily refuses atheists—not because they are wicked, but because they are fools.⁴

Gradually the two women were finding their way towards a sensual, pagan, and erotic mode of being, which was very far from Ruskin's petty and puritanical doctrine. The term "pagan" had a multiplicity of connotations at this time that accurately signify the various facets of Michael Field's life between 1877 and 1907: the Graeco-Roman non-Christian realm—and its pantheistic religion—that so fascinated the two women, but also those tenets central to Pater's aestheticism (itself so connected to the ancient world) that structured Bradley and Cooper's experience at this time, and the "perverse" sexuality (liberal heterosexuality and any homosexually inclined behaviour) that was connected with this lifestyle. Their commitment to this pagan existence was translated into their everyday life in many ways. For

1 Sturgeon, 23.

2 "I *should* like you to give up dreaming, and writing verses as far as you possibly can" (Michael Field, *Works and Days*, 154).

3 Ruskin's philanthropic society. Bradley contributed financially to the Guild but did not live according to its laws.

4 John Ruskin to KB (30 December 1877). See "Letters" Section, p. 308.

example, they erected a Bacchic altar in their garden and often celebrated good reviews of their work by dancing madly like Bacchic satyrs.¹ They were also engaged in building up a large library collection of Dionysian works.

The Faun "Michael Field" was born out of this pagan mode of experience, and came into existence with the publication of the verse-drama *Callirrhoe* in 1884. ("John Cooley"—a combination of Cooper and Bradley—had also been experimented with as the signature for the first draft of *Callirrhoe*.²) It was at this time that the women's literary career began in earnest. "Michael Field" was the name under which they were to establish their literary reputation, and which they used for all subsequent publications (except for those dramas, such as *Borgia*, that were published anonymously). Bradley even continued to publish under this name after Cooper's death. The pseudonym came directly from the women's private articulation of their identity. Fond of nicknames, Katharine was known amongst her friends as "Michael" or "Sim," and Edith was "Field" or "Puss." "Michael" seems to have carried connotations of the archangel, while "Field" has a less obvious significance.³ *Callirrhoe*, which was an instant success, brought the couple to the attention of Robert Browning and secured his enthusiastic support. He took Ruskin's place as their new literary mentor, and this friendship was to last until Browning's death. However, after the generally very successful reception of *Callirrhoe* in 1884, Michael Field's dramatic work was never to be so joyously received again.

It was only for a very short while that Michael Field was thought to be a single male author. During that time the women received some intense personal interest from other writers (such as André Raffalovich and A. Mary F. Robinson) who seemed to be looking for intimacy of a kind only made possible by a belief in their masculinity.⁴ Some knew, at this stage, that Michael Field

- 1 Entry for 10 September 1893. See "Diaries" Section, p. 259.
- 2 Bod.ms: Ms.Eng.poet.d.74 (a partial draft of the play in manuscript form).
- 3 Treby argues that the name Field comes from the earlier pseudonym "Arran Leigh," because Field and "lea" have the same meaning, which links Michael Field firmly back to a tradition that contained "Aurora Leigh." In this case, the name is both a means of situating the women within a particular female literary heritage, while also protecting and demarcating the androgynous textual space they want to occupy (*The Michael Field Catalogue*, 30).
- 4 See A. Mary F. Robinson to "Michael Field Esqre" (16 May 1884) and KB to Robert Browning (23 November 1884). "Letters" Section, pp. 348 and 311.

was a pseudonym, but didn't know the identity of the writer; a game of divination ensued, involving Havelock Ellis, one of the great sexological figures of the age, and whose sister would later design clothes for the women.

Bradley and Cooper left Bristol in 1888 to move, with their remaining family members, to Reigate. Reigate's closeness to London ensured the women's involvement in London's budding literary and artistic world. The British Museum, The National Gallery, literary "at homes," musical soirées, lectures at Bernard's Inn, and visits to the theatre now became commonplace.¹ They also became lyric poets with the publication in 1889 of their first volume of verse, *Long Ago*, widely acclaimed as one of the most important lyrical collections of the *fin de siècle*. It was also during this phase of their lives that they travelled in Europe, mainly with the purpose of seeing art of various kinds. In the course of a trip to Dresden, where the women hoped to hear Wagner's opera cycle *The Ring*² and to feast their eyes on their favourite painting, Giorgione's *Sleeping Venus*, Cooper suffered an attack of scarlet fever. Her hospital treatment involved cutting off her hair. With her new boyish looks she was renamed "Heinrich" by a female nurse who showered her with mad kisses and hungry embraces. Though "jealous" of the nurse's advances and "stormily tearful," Bradley joyfully celebrated the birth of the androgynous "Henry," as Bradley would address Cooper from now on.³

During these trips abroad they were sometimes accompanied by friends, and one, in particular, was much sought out for this purpose: Bernard Berenson, the well-known art critic, was a subject of fascination for the women. They first met him at the Parisian "at home" of the American poet and woman of letters Mrs. Chandler Moulton. Cooper's feelings for the man caught her unaware. Her relationship with Berenson turned out to be as personally tempestuous as it was professionally productive. Painfully recognising that she "should sicken of very passion for him,"⁴ their frisson soon turned sour, resulting in a long period of estrangement. Angst-ridden about the future of "Michael Field," Cooper calmed Bradley's anxiety by confiding to her in

- 1 See Ana Parejo Vadillo, *Women Poets and Urban Aestheticism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005), 163–75.
- 2 *The Ring* explores a number of incestuous relationships, including the love between Siegfried and his aunt Brünnhilde.
- 3 Entry for December 1891. See "Diaries" Section, p. 251.
- 4 Entry for 22 June 1892. See "Diaries" Section, p. 254.

their diary: "I love my art & will not dare to injure it—I love my own Love & could not do violence to her or myself—so let her not fear."¹

During this time, their friendship with John Miller Gray—the curator of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery—blossomed both in personal and professional terms. Impressed with their first volumes, he was a loyal supporter, and, as a critic and reviewer of the arts he was generous with his advice on their subsequent works. This advice was sought avidly by the women, who both respected his opinion and recognised their own need for input from outside their own tightly knit authorial dyad. It helped a great deal that Gray's criticism was always tactfully given, with sensitivity to the women's foibles. He was, in fact, appointed as their literary executor, until his early death (in 1894) prompted a change of plan. Their success during the 1880s and early 1890s put them in touch with many in the literary world, including George Meredith (who sent them a letter of praise on the publication of *Long Ago* on 13 June 1889), A. Mary F. Robinson, Arthur Symons, Richard Garnett, Lionel Johnson, D.G. Rossetti, Oscar Wilde, Herbert Spencer, and many other influential figures of the age. Their passion for beautiful objects led them to contact book designers, painters, and illustrators. During a visit to the studio of Herbert Horne and Selwyn Image, the designer of many of Michael Field's books during the 1880s and early 1890s in London's Fitzroy Street, they could not resist this comment: "Here lives Herbert Horne, editor of the Century Guild Hobby Horse, here Selwyn Image has his studio, & other artists & artmen dwell in unity."² Michael and Field were keen to meet other kindred spirits living and working as one, such as Berenson and his lover (later his wife), Mary Costelloe, or the artists Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon, who gradually became fixtures in the women's lives. The women's devotion to each other and to their work meant that Michael Field flourished, publishing prolifically. This does not, however, mean that their books were well received. The two great sadnesses for Michael Field at this time were their bad literary reviews and the death of Cooper's father in 1897 in a mountaineering incident. The staging of their drama *A Question of Memory* in 1893 was the only time in their lives any of their plays was performed,³ and while the process introduced

1 Entry for 1892. See "Diaries" Section, p. 256.

2 Entry for 5 March 1890. See "Diaries" Section, p. 237.

3 This was once again performed, this time in New York by the Airmid Theatre, in 2008.



Figure 3. Katharine Bradley with Whym Chow, c.1897-1906.

the women to a whole new world of contacts and critics—some of whom spent a good deal of time and energy helping them—nothing could have prepared them for the negative reviews they received after the audience found the play's scenario too gruesome to comprehend.

The close friendship formed during this period with Ricketts and Shannon was to last for twenty years. The poets contributed to the artists' journal *The Dial*, and Ricketts published four of the poets' plays at his own Vale Press (many of Michael Field's books were published privately) and decorated nearly all of their subsequent books. Indeed, their friendship with Ricketts and Shannon was based around a shared love of handsome objects. Bradley and Cooper showered Ricketts with gifts, while he made finely wrought jewellery for them (now held in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge). It was at the suggestion of Charles Ricketts that, in 1899, Bradley and Cooper moved from Reigate to a small Georgian house at 1, The Paragon, Richmond (the first house they were to occupy without other members of their family), and inhabited it with Whym Chow, their pet dog, who was to become an obsessively important figure in the next phase of Bradley and Cooper's life.

In 1907, the women entered into the Roman Catholic Church. This conversion was undoubtedly partly the result of Cooper's ill-health, but the women insist that the primary cause was the death of the beloved Whym Chow in 1906 (it is on this occasion that Cooper writes that it was "the worst loss of my life—yes, worse than that of beloved Mother or the tragic father"¹). Their conversion distanced them from many of their old friends (even Ricketts and Shannon) but opened up a whole array of new ecclesiastical personalities in their lives and important new literary opportunities with spiritual advisers such as John Gray (himself a Decadent poet turned priest).

In February 1911 it was discovered that Cooper had cancer; she died on 13 December 1913. Bradley also died of cancer just under a year later on 26 September 1914. The last few years of their lives were spent reading and learning about theological doctrine, and writing continuously. *Poems of Adoration*, Cooper's last work, was published in 1912. Bradley's companion volume of religious lyrics, *Mystic Trees* (also her last work), emerged in print the following year. Both appeared under the joint pseudonym and the two were designed to be bound together by a strap to form one complete work. Sensitive to criticism as the women

1 Entry for 28 January 1906. See "Diaries" Section, p. 281.

were, it would have hurt them enormously to read the entry on their work that appeared in the *Cambridge History of English Literature* just after their deaths, in 1916. The author writes of the "curious fancy" of two women writing in collaboration under one masculine name, and the assessment of their work is damning.¹

Although Michael Field was first celebrated as a dramatist, it is the lyric poetry that has left the stronger legacy, and so that is what we represent in this book. The story of the formation of Michael Field as a playwright must be left for another occasion.

Poetic Beginnings

Like other women of her generation, Bradley began her poetic career ostensibly within the nineteenth-century female poetic tradition.² As Bradley's pseudonym suggests, the model for *The New Minnesinger and Other Poems* (1875) was *Aurora Leigh* (1857), Elizabeth Barrett Browning's fictional narrative poem about a woman poet. It is notable, for example, that the poem that gives the title to the volume, "The New Minnesinger," is, among other things, a defence of women's rights to a poetic career and to the title of poet. But, if the volume invoked Barrett Browning by name, Bradley's poetry evoked the democratic poetics of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1855). The quotation that introduced the title poem, "Think of womanhood; and thou to be a woman," was lines taken from Whitman's "Think of the Soul."³ By aligning "The New Minnesinger" with Whitman's poetics, Bradley was not simply defending women's authority as poets; she was also effectively declaring that a more democratic fellowship between the sexes ("[S]he must be / Full woman: lifted to a free / And fellow-life with man" [12]) would bring about a "free-growing womanhood" (13).

Yet, what is striking about the volume is not its overt emphasis on "woman's speech" (12) or its firm support for a feminist nineteenth-century poetics, but its engagement with nineteenth-century German poetry, since one third of the volume is dedicated to translations from the works of Schiller, Heine, and

1 *Cambridge History of English Literature*, ed. A.W. Ward and A.R. Waller (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1916), Vol. 13: *The Nineteenth Century*, 181.

2 See for example Alice Meynell, *Preludes* (London: H.S. King & Co.), also published in 1875.

3 Walt Whitman, "Think of the Soul," in *Leaves of Grass* (New York, 1855).

the question of 'How to Live,'¹ Michael Field's reply was to live as Sappho did, so long ago. The volume was sparked by Pater's theorisation of modern poetry in two key pieces, "Aesthetic Poetry" and "Dante Gabriel Rossetti," both republished by Pater in his infamous 1889 collection of essays *Appreciations; with an Essay on Style*.² "[A]esthetic poetry," Pater claimed, "is neither a mere reproduction of Greek or medieval poetry, nor only an idealisation of modern life and sentiment." "It is a finer ideal," he continued, "extracted from what in relation to any actual world is already an ideal. Like some strange second flowering after date, it renews on a more delicate type the poetry of a past age, but must not be confounded with it."³ Pater's definition of aesthetic poetry defines quite precisely *Long Ago*, a volume that was not a "mere reproduction of Greek" poetry, but a "finer ideal," a "strange second flowering" of Sappho's words that "renew[ed] on a more delicate type the poetry of a past age." In doing so, Bradley and Cooper created a volume that was read by their contemporaries just as the Greeks read Sappho.

Sight and Song (1892), by contrast, engaged not with an aesthetic sentiment but with the seizing of sensation. The writing of the book and the bound object showed the poets' indebtedness to the cosmopolitan aesthetics of the period—for example, to Verlaine's recreations of Watteau's paintings in *Fêtes galantes* (1869), to Flaubert's realism, and to Gautier's *l'art pour l'art* philosophy. However, the thinking behind the book's composition lies in Pater's famous last lines: "art comes to you professing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake."⁴ Pater's explanation of that statement appears in his essay "Dante Gabriel Rossetti."

1 Holbrook, 27.

2 "Aesthetic poetry" was another version of his 1868 review of Morris's poems, which he had published in another format in 1873 as the "Conclusion" to *The Renaissance*. Because the *Spectator* reviewer had linked it to degeneracy, Pater removed it from the second (1890) edition. In their diary Michael Field noted, "He has struck out the *Essay on Aesthetic Poetry* in *Appreciations* because it gave offence to some pious person—he is getting hopelessly prudish in literature and defers to the moral weaknesses of everybody. Deplorable!" (*Works and Days*, 119). "Dante Gabriel Rossetti" was first published in 1883 in the second edition of T.H. Ward, *The English Poets* (London: Macmillan).

3 Pater, "Aesthetic Poetry," in Bloom, 190.

4 Walter Pater, "Conclusion," in *The Renaissance. Studies in Art and Poetry*, ed. Donald H. Hill (Berkeley: U of California P, 1980), 190.

Here he argues that "For Rossetti [...] the first condition of the poetic way of seeing and presenting things is particularisation."¹ Or as he had previously stated in the "Preface" to *The Renaissance*: "What is this song or picture ... to me?"² In *Sight and Song*, Michael Field explores and challenges the individualisation of "sight" and its translation into "song." Unlike Rossetti's "poems for pictures" (see his *Poems* [1870; rpt. 1881]), their double subjectivity and interest in the art object for its own sake complicated the impressionistic tendencies of the period by suggesting that an intellectualisation and objectification of the aesthetic would lead to a refinement of sensations. More recently, Isobel Armstrong has singled out the black and white quality of some of these poems, defining them as "noir poems."³ These poems replicate the effect of art photographs, bought and collected by art connoisseurs to complement the Continental art tourism industry of the late nineteenth century.

Underneath the Bough (of which three different editions were published, two in 1893 and the third, the American version, in 1898) corresponds to another key aspect of "aesthetic poetry": pagan spirit. Pater writes: "[o]ne characteristic of the pagan spirit the aesthetic poetry has, which is on its surface—the continual suggestion, pensive or passionate, of the shortness of life." Ecstasy and death, Dionysus and Thanatos, are central to the women's volume, which exemplifies Pater's dictum that aesthetic poetry heightens "the sense of death and the desire of beauty: the desire of beauty quickened by the sense of death."⁴ This pagan spirit was not new of course in Michael Field's work. It appears in *Long Ago* and also in *Sight and Song* in their treatment of Fauns, Venus, and other Greek mythological characters. However, what is different in *Underneath the Bough* is that the volume's pagan spirit is predicated on the two central principles of Greek culture, the Apollonian and the Dionysian, as defined by Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872). The Apollonian, represented by the sun-god, signifies light and form and the principle of oneness. The Dionysian is represented by drunkenness and ecstasy: it is that which annihilates one's individual character, enabling him or her to "merge" with the world. Indeed, the volume celebrates both the dissolved individualism of Michael

1 Pater, "Dante Gabriel Rossetti," in Bloom, 200.

2 Pater, "Preface," in *The Renaissance*, xix–xx.

3 Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds. Glass Culture and the Imagination 1830–1880* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), 353.

4 Pater, "Aesthetic Poetry," in Bloom, 198.

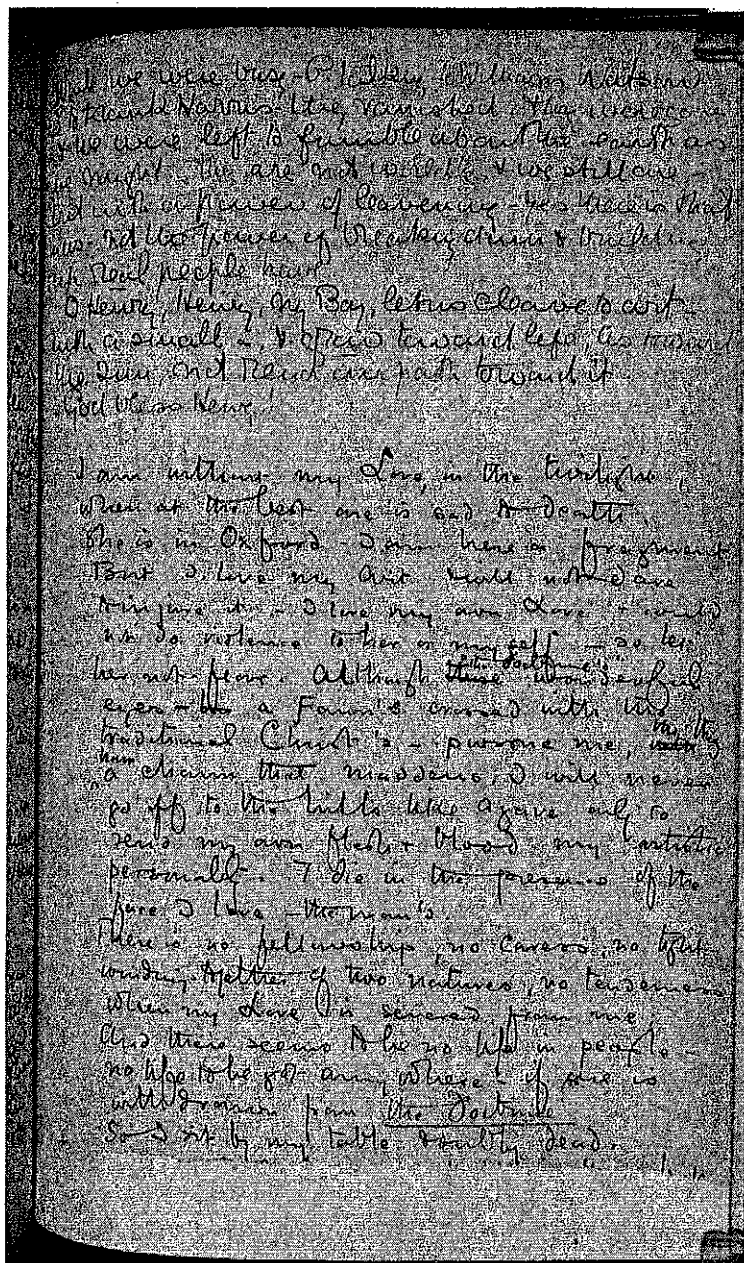


Figure 6. Michael Field's Diaries, *Works and Days*, 1892.
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1. Diaries

From *Works and Days: The Diaries of Michael Field, 1888–1914*

[Katharine Bradley and Edith Emma Cooper's joint 28-volume journal, *Works and Days*, dates from Saturday 14 April 1888, when the poets started their journal, to 18 September 1914 (Bradley's last entry four days before her death). Left to T. Sturge Moore with "instructions to open, at the end of 1929" and to "publish" it, this journal is an extraordinary text. It is a public account of their life as "Michael Field." But the journal is more than an autobiographical narrative. It is a riveting dialogue between "Michael" and "Field" as well as a captivating palimpsest of letters to and from Robert Browning, George Meredith, Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde, John M. Gray, and W.B. Yeats, amongst many others; it includes reviews of their work, drafts of their poetry, and travel writing narratives (the volume for the year 1890, for instance, is devoted to their journey to Dresden via Paris). Thoughts on the aesthetic are articulated side by side with large extracts from Friedrich Nietzsche's writings (copied by hand by Edith Cooper). The journal is a montage of descriptions of their journeys across London in omnibuses and underground trains; critical discussions of lectures by Verlaine and Pater; narratives of their talks with Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon; detailed critical studies of works of art, including Whistler's *Nocturnes*; press cuttings; and notes on thoughts for drafts of poems and new plays. We hear from "Michael Field" first-hand accounts of the art world of the turn of the century, as the journal discloses the world of male and female aesthetes (including Vernon Lee, Dollie Radford, Oscar Wilde, Arthur Symons, Amy Levy, A. Mary F. Robinson, Louise Chandler Moulton, Algernon Swinburne, Ernest Radford, and Andre Raffalovich), whilst still offering Michael Field's own assessment of British aestheticism, nineteenth-century gender ideology, and their position within the different aesthetic and intellectual bohemian circles of *fin-de-siècle* London.

When reading *Works and Days*, it is important to appreciate that the writer of the entry might not actually be writing her own words. For example, Cooper often copied Bradley's extracts into *Works and Days*, and vice versa. For clarity, we have included in square brackets the initials of the woman in whose hand the entry appears. Whilst written by both women, Bradley and Cooper, the diary also contains a few annotations by Edith's sister, Amy

(some of whose letters are attached or glued to the pages of the diary). However, none of Amy's extracts are transcribed here.]

1888

[K.B., May]

The time drew toward [Robert] Browning's birthday & I wrote to him:

"How absolutely the simple greeting—many happy returns of your birthday, expresses my wish for you it is difficult to say. Yet to the Poet of Prospice¹ I cannot give words that ignore death, & what parting—parting that I often feel one of us will be the first to begin—maybe. It is an undeveloped creed of mine that the dead live on—in & with us—influencing us as they never have before, if we will let them; & if in this life only, dear Mr. Browning, we had hope in you, we should be of all poets most miserable. But we will never lose you. We are confident you will be bounteous & friendly to us always. Still it is getting lonely singing in England now that the voices of [Dante Gabriel] Rossetti & Matthew Arnold are hushed. & we beg that you will stay with us & help us through the harsh, draughty bit of century remaining to us. We send you 18 more fragments, 8 of which are the work of Erinna.² I am sorry they are not so good as the others. It will be time, I think, to put in the sickle, & bind them in the sheaves for the printer, after they shall have received your corrections, &, I trust, additions. We love to have in & out among our verses a golden line from you. Please give my dear love to Miss Browning,³ & tell her how we esteem "blessedest Wednesday"—not "Thursday"—"the fat of the week."

Affectionately yours.

K. H. Bradley.

- 1 Browning's poem "Prospice" (1861) was written shortly after the death of his wife, the poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning. It begins "Fear death?"
- 2 The Greek poetess, and another nickname for Cooper. These poems were part of *Long Ago* (1889).
- 3 Sarianna Browning, Browning's sister.

[K.B.]

On Wednesday May 9th we were asked to visit Mr. Browning. [...] We found the drawing-room at Palace Gate¹ full of flowers. Under one of Pen's statues,² in a pale blue roc's egg were our carnations. Mr. Browning came in greeting us as his "two dear, Greek women." He opened *ὄ τέκνον*³ a feint of kisses. Ardently then & afterwards he spoke of the Sapphics, expressing especial interest in Tiresias⁴ wh. he had once himself thought of treating. When I remarked I wished he had treated it—he said "No: it ought to be treated by a woman.["] He said to Edith he liked the 2nd series of poems even better than the first, & prophesied they would make their mark. But he refuses to write a preface. We must remember we are Michael Field. Again he said:—Wait fifty years.

1889

[K.B.]

On Tuesday Feb. 12th. We went to lunch at De Vere Gardens. The poet was restless, dissatisfied with his own moods, & the psychic entertainment he could give us. But he was infinitely sympathetic over Long Ago. He spoke to me of "the tragic largeness" of the lyrics. As he tore us down to lunch he stopped before Penn's Dryope & said it had been worthily sung, referring to Edith's "There was laughter soft & free."⁵ He seemed to regret that ~~Edith~~ [$<$] Pen [$>$] could not embody the 2 moments—the tortoise—& the serpent. We showed him the archaic head of Sappho.⁶ Miss Browning could not forgive the smirk; but the Old Gentleman looked at it with thoughtful consideration—"If I were an artist I should like to paint what the artist strove to express—

- 1 The poet's house at De Vere Gardens, Kensington (London).
- 2 A pupil of Rodin, Pen Browning was Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's son.
- 3 "O child!" It could also be translated as "Oh dear!"
- 4 See Poetry Section, *Long Ago*, poem LII, p. 72.
- 5 Pen's 1883 sculpture "Dryope Fascinated by Apollo in the Form of a Serpent" shows a nude woman wrestling with a serpent. Browning is linking the statue's subject matter (Dryope's seduction by Apollo, disguised as a serpent) to poem LXI from *Long Ago*, "There is laughter soft and free," which shows Apollo's cunning transformation from tortoise to serpent. The entry identifies Cooper as the sole author of the poem.
- 6 The cover illustration for *Long Ago*.

of brightness & freedom, without which no combination of lines will live & combine into symbolism or beauty. His complexion is parchment, his hair cropped, his grasp of hand assured & frank—his age above 38—I should fancy. As we gave him clue to our conception of Queen Mary, the flame in his eyes grew intent.¹ He was set down every suggestive point—& made a special note as to the Carnation as the Stuart Flower. His business will be difficult—to draw a design imaginatively symbolic of our conception—yet without trite Scottish Emblems.

[E.C., 14 May]

Miss Heaton also knew & knows the Rossettis. To Dante Gabriel she gave five or six commissions. The first picture he painted for her was Paolo & Francesca. Ruskin said “it was not suitable for a lady,” & Miss Heaton weakly made an exchange with him. There is to me a speckled silliness in Ruskin’s dealings with women—spite of his chivalry & exaggerated estimate of our sex as Queens.² Rossetti had a constraining fascination. His sister³ is striving to work out his redemption by prayer & denial. She is bent on being Love’s martyr for his sake. There is a small chance we may be able to call on her. I should like to see her once.

[E.C. Account of their trip to Paris]

Pictures in the Louvre⁴

[...] Leonardo da Vinci

Mona Lisa—Treachery in its utmost loveliness. Sea, Rocks, Atmosphere—Sidelong, historical, implicating eyes, smile that

- 1 Their 1890 play *The Tragic Mary*. Image’s stunning cover and book design for the play is a masterpiece in bookbinding. He also designed the book cover of their 1892 play *Stephania*.
- 2 Ruskin’s 1865 essay “Of Queen’s Gardens” offered a conservative view of Victorian womanhood: “Her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering,” he wrote. Ellen Heaton was one of Rossetti’s early patrons. Ruskin offered in exchange for *Paolo and Francesca* 35 guineas and Rossetti’s 1855 watercolour *Dante’s Vision of Rachel and Leah*.
- 3 Poet Christina Rossetti.
- 4 On 5 June 1890 they travelled to France and Italy, visiting Paris, Verona, Florence, Bologna, Pisa, and Genoa among other cities. The women left space within the diary to be filled in afterwards. A diary of their trip, reproduced here, appears on pages 243–44.

makes velvet cushions of the cheeks, & leads the calm lips upward, skin of ripe tone with shadows dusky as a bat’s dusk, soft, glowing hands with the patience of cruelty in their rest—all are infamously, perfectly treacherous to the point of infatuation—& with to the extent [<] measure [>] of universality. It is no portrait, it is a dream of power and occult influence. Rocks & Seas in nature are the ~~power~~ types of the inconstant & perilous—they are the chosen background with Da Vinci of his concave smiles on the lips of woman, & the full space between their lids & eyebrows which is bewitched by subtlety of Expression.

[E.C., entry in red ink]

Wednesday, 23 of July

Father came back from London this evening with the news that Durdans was bought for us. That we had a home on the earth—a sacred acre our very own.

[K.B.]

English souvenirs

Yesterday, Monday July 21, we were suddenly summoned to Mrs Chandler Moulton’s¹ last “at home” in Weymouth Street. The first moments were misery and humiliation. Mrs. Moulton introduced us as a poet, as Michael Field, & we stood, our wings vibrating in revolt, while hollow, fashionable women lisped their enchantment at meeting with us. A moment came when this could be borne no longer, I laid a master-hand on the hostess, & told her to introduce us by our Christian names. After that George Moore² was brought to us. He had heard our names across the room; but he is a brother-one of the guild of letters. His admiration for William Rufus³ is unbounded.... By Jove it’s fine ... ma foi it’s good. That old fellow with one eye & the passion of the hunting. The scenes in the forest—I have only read the play 5 or 6 years ago—the moment it came out—& once—I never read a book twice—yet I see it before me now. (?) He has even

- 1 The American poet (1835–1908).
- 2 George Moore (1852–1933), influential Anglo-Irish writer. He was a friend of Manet and Zola.
- 3 Michael Field’s 1885 play.

proposed it to the theatre libre¹ as one of the English plays to be acted. / Long Ago had disappointed him. We were engaged on an impossible task. It had not the versification of Keats, still there were some fine things in it.

Edith continued the conversation for I from far recognised Oscar Wilde, &, desiring to make his better acquaintance, found him by my side talking easily.

He has a brown skin & coarse texture, insensitive surface, & no volcanic blood fructifying it from within—powerful features, a firm jaw, & fine head—with hair that one feels was much more beautiful some years ago. It is pathetic when bright hair simply glows dull, instead of turning grey. The whole face wears an aspect of stubborn sense, & the aesthete is discovered simply by the look of well-being in the body (soul take thine ease!) the soft comfort of the mouth, & a lurking kindly laziness in the eyes. But the dominant trait of that face is humour, humour that ridicules & gently restrains the wilfulness, the hobby-horse passion, the tendency to individualism of the rest of the man. There is an Oscar Wilde smiling ironically at his namesake the aesthete, smiling with almost Socratic doubt.

“There is only [<] one [>] man in this century who can write prose.” “You mean Mr. Pater.” Yes—take Marius the Epicurean[,] any page.² We spoke of the difficulties of writing prose, no good tradition—he had almost quarrelled with Watts³ because he wanted to write the language of the gods—& Watts sought to win him to prose....

“French is wonderfully rich in colour words.”

We agreed English was poor in such—I instanced bluish-grey as a miserable effort, & he dwelt on the full pleasantness & charm of the French [<] colour [>] words ending in *âtre bleuâtre* &c. But we should grapple with this colour difficulty. It should bear faith that everything in the world could be expressed in words. I spoke of L'embarquement pour Cythère⁴—of the impossibility of expressing what was happening at that fairy-water. [...]

- 1 Parisian theatre company founded by André Antoine in 1885. An international playhouse, it was a showcase for experimental naturalist theatre.
- 2 Pater's novel *Marius the Epicurean* (1885) was the “Bible” for aesthetes and decadents. It is the story of a young man's spiritual and aesthetic awakening in ancient Rome from paganism and stoicism to Christianity.
- 3 Theodore Watts (1832–1914), poet and principal reviewer of poetry for the journal *The Athenaeum*.
- 4 Watteau's painting, poeticised in their 1892 volume of verse *Sight and Song*. See poem “L' Embarquement pour Cythère” in *Sight and Song*, p. 107.

We agreed—the whole problem of life turns on pleasure. Pater shows that the hedonist—the perfected hedonist is the saint. * “One is not always happy when one is good; but one is always good when one is happy[.]” [...]

[H]e is determined to write in a language that will only be understood by minds artistically-trained. The writing shall not be obscure—quite clear, but its meaning will be seized only by artists. He once wrote a story of Spain—a story in black & silver—in wh. he had endeavoured to give something of the dignity & gloom of Spanish life—like heavy, black velvet cushions—& this story when translated into French came out [<] blue [>] pink & blue. It taught him that after all there were certain colour forces in English—a power of rendering gloom not in French.

He has a theory[,] it is often genius that spoils a work of art—a work of art that should be so intensely self-conscious. He classed the Brontes, Jane Austen[,] George Sand,¹ under the head genius. This was when I said to him there was one sentence of Mr. Pater's wh: I would not say I could never forgive, because I recognised its justice; but from wh. I suffered—a[nd] wh. was hard to bear—that in wh. he speaks of the scholarly conscience as male—adding I did not remember where the passage occurred. “Yes” he said “it is in *Appreciations*, in the essay on *Style*, page 7—left-hand side—at the bottom—& in all this memory the one tiny error was that the page is page 8 ... Genius, he continued, killed the Brontes. Consider the difference between *Jane Eyre* & *Esmond*.² Owing to their imperfect education the only only works we have had from women are works of genius.

[E.C.]

Monday—24th [November].

In heavy mist Sim & I stepped into a cab & reached the station, two bundles of shawls—but a great pleasure drew us on through the weather to town—Pater's lecture at the London Institution on Prosper Mérimée.³ Till the appointed hour we took refuge in the National Gallery, simply guessing at the outlines of the new pictures, & divining the new ones by memory.

- 1 Pseudonym of the French novelist Amadine-Lucile-Aurore Dupin (1804–76).
- 2 Thackeray's eponymous novel *The History of Henry Esmond* (1852).
- 3 French writer (1803–70), famous for his 1845 novel *Carmen*.

Yet so perversely human were we that we started to Finsbury Circus a little after four, though we had come to town early ~~only to be in time~~ & knew that the doors opened at 4.30. To gain time we drove for some distance by the Embankment—the merest block of building, the commonest trailing barge were a soft wonders in the mist. After all we had good seats—at first beside Mrs. Barrington. Selwyn Image came up & told us there was a great opportunity we must not miss—Orfeo at the Italian Opera—he had spent all his money on it—Horne sat by Lionel Johnson¹—a learned snow-drop, (his friends say he is so old he has become a child again)[.] He is quite young, quite pale, drooping under book-love, with curved ~~lips~~ lids, nearly as fine as Keats' Hyperion's.² Oscar Wilde ~~to~~ on our left gave to the tiers of faces ~~the~~ [$<$] his [$>$] lambent eyes. A. S[ymons]. was the last to enter. He was charming to watch, with the crossness of isolation on his brows & mouth. His colour dazzles, even from a far distance..... "but I love his beauty passing well"!!³

Pater ~~entered~~ [$<$] came forward [$>$] without looking anywhere, & immediately read his "slips" with no preface & into the midst of movements & coughs ~~that had not settled~~. He never gave his pleasant blue eyes to his audience—there was a weight of shyness athwart them—Above his eye-brows the light so fell as to throw up two ridges ~~above~~ [$<$] over [$>$] them, with strange effect. What determination—almost brutality (in French sense) there is about the lower part of his face; yet it is under complete, urbane control. His voice is low, & has a singular sensitive resonance in it—an audible capacity for suffering. I always feel that, like every Epicurean, his courteous exterior hides a strong nature, not innocent of barbarism. There is something of Prosper in him—a strain of "Denys l'Auxerrois"⁴ wh: he has expressed in the creation of that northern Zagreus.⁵ Would'nt [sic] one give much to surprise The Bacchant in Walter Pater! The even flow of his reading went

- 1 1867–1902, decadent poet and a member, with W.B. Yeats, of the Rhymers' Club. He introduced Lord Alfred Douglas to Oscar Wilde.
- 2 "Hyperion arose, and on the stars / Lifted his curved lids, and kept them wide." John Keats's "Hyperion. A Fragment. Book I" (1820).
- 3 Cooper is quoting from Alfred Tennyson's poem "Sisters" (*The Lady of Shalott, and Other Poems*, 1833). The poem speaks of a sister's revenge against the lover who caused her sister's death.
- 4 The title of Pater's 1886 essay, which recreated a medieval myth of the return of Dionysus (Denys). It was first published in *Macmillan's Magazine* and reprinted as the second portrait in his *Imaginary Portraits* (1887).
- 5 Dionysus Zagreus. See poem "Dionysus Zagreus" in *Dedicated*, p. 194.

on—save for a break when the same voice asked if all could hear. Oscar was "visibly delighted" ~~when~~ [$<$] to find [$>$] that Mérimée regretted the decay of assassination. ~~in~~ The lecture ended, as it began, abruptly through disregard for any popular ~~customage~~ customariness.

[E.C.]

Paris

June 5. Arrived at Hôtel St. Peterbourg.

June 6. Friday. First glimpse at Notre [sic] Dame. Breakfasted with Symons at Céline's. Visited Miss Gérente.¹ Afternoon with the Pictures at the Louvre. Settle comfortably at 20, Avenue Victoria. An evening visit from M[r]. Symons.

June 7. Sculptures of the Louvre. Visit to Hôtel Corneille & the Book-stalls of the Odéon. Abortive call on Rodin.² [...]

June 8. [...] Visit to Mrs. Chander [sic] Moulton. Miss Gérente to afternoon-tea—delicious on ~~Bernard~~ [$<$] Bonnard [$>$] & Impressionism.³ [...]

June 9. Bought Verlaine & some nos. of "Les Hommes d'Aujourd'hui [sic]"⁴ at Vanier's; went to Symons's Hotel Corneille & saw his collection of photographs from the works of Gustave Moreau:⁵ then to the Odéon bookstalls & bought Rabelais, Flaubert—indeed a dozen books. [...]

June 10 The Louvre (Venus, Bacchus, the head of Theseus & the Antique Sculptures—then the Room VII of Early Italian pictures, where we met Mr. Berenson, a young Russian, qualifying to become an Art-historian, introduced to us by Mrs. Moulton⁶—the Drawings)—then a visit to ~~of~~ Marie Bashkirtseff's pictures,⁷ shown to us by Rosalie [...] with A. Symons to see Redon's wonderful, almost unknown drawings.⁸ In the Evening a visit to Mrs. Moulton with exciting intimate conversation.

- 1 Bradley's companion during her first trip to Paris in 1868–69. Sister of Bradley's first platonic love, Alfred Gérente.
- 2 The French sculptor (1840–1917).
- 3 French impressionist painter Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947).
- 4 Verlaine's literary magazine, *Les Hommes d'Aujourd'hui*.
- 5 French symbolist painter (1826–98).
- 6 The women first met Berenson at a Mrs. Chandler Moulton's "at home" in Paris.
- 7 The Russian painter and diarist (1858–84).
- 8 Odilon Redon (1840–1916), French symbolist painter.

June 11. A long morning with the Italian Pictures in the Louvre, instructed by Mr Berenson. [...]

June 13 A long morning at the Louvre with Berenson. The Visitation of Piombo & the works of Ribera & Zurbaran. After breakfast with him, we returned to receive Mrs. Moulton & A. Symons. We met the latter at Céline's for dinner & returned to his hotel to hear & discuss his article on Rodin for the last no. of the Art Magazine.¹

[...]

June 15 Sunday. [<] A walk down to Tuilleries' Gardens— [>] A short visit to our beloved Sculpture & pictures at the Louvre, where we met Berenson & Mrs. Moulton. The mid day all spent with A. Symons at the river up & down—breeze & grey light. A long talk on the drama, its forms & future at a Café near the Palais Royal—a visit by ourselves to Mrs. Moulton: she read some lines on Amy Levy, & some of Marston's poems with a deliberation of voice that gives strange emphasis to passion.² We dined with A. [rthur] S. [ymons] for the last time at Céline's.

June 16 [...] Lunch with Madame Darmesteter³—full of tidal interests: she was genuinely friendly & most anxious we should meet her in Savoy. Prof. Darmesteter proffered us his book on Shakspeare [sic]. In the Luxembourg Gardens we met A. [rthur] who looked literally like the angel of that garden with bright bluets in his button-hole & beaming a feast of "grosses fraises," an offering, a fête Champêtre for Michael ere the moment of departure.

1891

[K.B., Cambridge]

A sudden invitation from Miss Clough;⁴—on Friday Feb. 13th I start.

1 Edited by poet W.E. Henley (1849–1903).

2 Aestheticist poets Amy Levy (1861–89), who committed suicide in 1889, and Philip Bourke Marston (1850–87), admired by D.G. Rossetti and Swinburne.

3 Married name of poet A. Mary F. Robinson (1857–1944). Her first husband, James Darmesteter, was an influential Oriental scholar.

4 Anne Jemmina Clough (1820–92), first principal of Newnham College and sister of poet A.H. Clough.

The green scum of the ditches affects me as I drive to Newnham. Beholding it, I feel how vain it is to try to belong to Oxford. The stones of my heart grow moist with tears. And yonder is the Cam:—& King's; but it is not these great things that draw me;— it is the dear green scum.

I pass a long range of rosy buildings—I pass & am almost thankful. It would be too formidable to go under that gate of honour. But lo! the cabman in his stupidity has passed. He turns the horse's head. We are in Newnham.

And that night I lie in my strait college bed &, watching the firelight flicker on the walls, muse on many things. Sixteen years ago I came to Newnham empty-headed, with vague ambition, vague sentiment—the pulpy lyrics of the N.M. in my brain.¹ I return a poet & possessing a Poet. I look forth on the stars, kneel down, & give God thanks.

[E.C.]

April 8. Wednesday. Arthur's [Symons] first Tea-Party in his [?]attic. Daffodils crossed in the mantel-shelf, and embossing two pots on the book-case. Tea poured out in face of the old roofs by May Morris (she will never be called by her spousal name!)² Her features are harsh, demure—her complexion old parchment, her eyes cold blue—her hair suggests the hereditary power that in the mother's held Rossetti. The child-wife, Mrs. Radford,³ looked up to the guests, like a dove with its soft little head aside. Her husband held me long in talk—he has a slow voice, aquiline features, & fixed eyes, curiously pied. He converses in the "middle Voice"—hearing himself all the time; but he says individual things, ~~that~~ it is worth one's while to wait for. [...] I ~~went~~ was aware while talking that some-one passed into the tea-room—I did not see, but I had instant knowledge, who it was. As I was handling some of our host's books, Sim stood by me & George [Moore] smiled with a smile of milk & honey. I found myself seated & talking to him.

1 *The New Minnesinger*, Katharine Bradley's first book of poems.

2 1862–1920. Daughter of pre-Raphaelite poet William Morris and Jane Burden Morris, lover of D.G. Rossetti. She was married to Harry Sparling, secretary of the Socialist League.

3 Socialist poet and aesthete Dollie Radford (1858–1920), wife of poet Ernest Radford (1857–1919).

[E.C.]

Tuesday—June 17

We visit Oscar Wilde—being received by Mrs. Oscar in turquoise blue, white frills & amber stockings. The afternoon goes on in a dull fashion till Oscar enters. He wears a lilac shirt, a heliotrope tie, a great primrose pink—very Celtic combination, ma foi!

His large presence beams, with the heiterkeit¹ of a Greek God [<] that has [>] descended on a fat man of literary habits.

He sat down & told us that in his belief our Tragic Mary (Zaehnsdorf [sic] vol.) & Rossetti's Poems were the two beautiful books (in appearance) of the century²—but he was going to surpass us, & wd. send us an early copy of his Tales to make us “very unhappy”[.] He was delicious on the illustrations, that are not taken from anything in the book, only suggested by it—for he holds that literature is more graphic than art & should therefore never be illustrated in itself, only by what it evokes.

[K.B.]

Yesterday (July 21st) Amy & I went to Mrs Chandler Moulton's. I saw [Thomas] Hardy, kind & austere[.] Near him was Theodore Watts. At the name of Michael he leapt into the air & glittered[.] Both these men found it inscrutable, incomprehensible that 2 people could write poetry together. Hardy seemed apprehensive & said the Eckman-Chartrions had remained united too long.

The Miss Hepworth Dixons³ give me the delicious flow of their free, rippling [<] bubbling [>] nonsense. One of them is in the very hey-day of pessimism[.]—“So delightful to be free—to have no fear of shocking any one—to enter into the joy of the moment. To have broken with convention, to live.”

1 German for “mirth,” “jocularity.”

2 Zaehnsdorf produced sixty exquisite copies of *The Tragic Mary*. Wilde is presumably referring to Rossetti's 1870 collection of poems. Wilde's book of fairy tales *A House of Pomegranates* (London: McIlvaine & Co., 1891) was designed by Rickerts and Shannon.

3 Ella (1857–1932) and Marion, daughters of William Hepworth Dixon, a former editor of the journal the *Athenaeum*. Ella distinguished herself as a journalist and novelist. She is best known for her celebrated 1894 New Woman novel *The Story of a Modern Woman*.

[E.C. August–October. In Dresden, Germany, visiting galleries. Edith is unwell.]

Monday, August 10

In feebleness of body and pallor of soul we take a cab for the Gallery.

A poor Zurbaran, a passage of Dutch pictures—little things that the eye cannot sift, a turn into a square room, and there she is—Giorgione's Venus!¹ This is perfect womanhood; the Earth is holy ground about her, it has itself the round, unconscious curves of her sex. There is in the picture that ideal sympathy between woman and the land, which the nations have divined when they made their countries feminine.

She lies asleep: her chestnut, braided hair only a little brighter than the bank above, which is shaggy as a wolf-skin; from the outer edge of this bank a brown, light spray throws its leaves against the sky. Her pillow is a heap of pomegranate-red—that fertile red that is the right bond of colour, between the solemn flesh and the grave slopes. She lies on white linen, somewhat black in the shadows. Her right arm is bent back over her head, & the curve from the elbows to the knee has the extensive softness of undulating land.....

[E.C.]

Of the Venus she writes:²

She lies pure, bare, in deep unconsciousness; and this unguarded beauty is without spot. She rests against a deep red cushion, under a russet bank; she lies on soft undulating Earth. To the right there are houses and sheds—for she is Goddess of the Earth—the Earth is her temple, she is no foreigner, no visitant—but of long, quiet summer afternoons and restful skies, of swelling lands and sacred country-life. There is nothing rustic in this picture. It is only Italian landscape that could thus take flesh in a Venus. There is about her nothing bitter or barren—everything is of harvest—silent ripening, fulfilment.

1 Giorgione's Venus is underlined twice, in red and black ink. The red symbolises Greek eroticism.

2 Venus is underlined in red and black ink. The excerpt is by Katharine Bradley, but Edith Cooper copied it into the diary.

[E.C.]

I continue my impressions of the Venus—Giorgione.

Her face is oval, the tint olive, with the scarce rose that stays on olive cheeks; the brows restfully crescent-shaped; the lids in their profound slumberousness wrinkle a little where they begin to orb over the eyes. The nose is long & Grecian; the lips have a steady red, the upper one so short that the shadow of the nose meets its lovely curves. The mouth expresses unconscious, dreamless rest: all is asleep in this face—the brain, the sweet blood as well as the features. Other painters give us a mask of sleep. The breasts are almost invisibly veined, firm, unseductive in their holy loveliness; the left arm follows the lower heaves of the body & the hand lies over the thigh, the fingers bent inward with unashamed simpleness—that profound universal pleasure of sex that sleep itself will not, dare not[,] invalidate. The right leg after forming a divine little bay above the knee, bends under the left which is [$<$] lo [$>$] stretched in one downward line to the foot. The ~~feet~~ instep makes another divine little bay. The Earth is shadowed under & round her, then it passes into olive-green light on the near slope—beyond this is a brown hillside on which is a castle, very severe & simple roofs & sheds. A round olive-green tree on the steepest descent toward the uneven plain of hedge-banded fields—grassy, with the after-harvest breadth. In their midst is a single slight tree of olive-yellow, & intensely blue & definite mountains close the horizon, against a basking stretch of almost level cloud, that at the right side foams up into white cumuli. The sky itself is of intact blue. There is a small nick of hay on the nearer slope. A few violets and yellow flowers bloom in the long grass by her side. Here we have beauty with us, by our home-steads—no stranger from the sea, no apparition, no enchantress, but simple as our fields, as nobly-lighted as are our harvests, pure as the things man needs for his life that use cannot violate. No-one watches her; there is no figure to be seen: she is closed from the sense of her perfection....

Here Sim becomes too ill to stay longer in the Gallery. It is painful with noise & figures, & straining faces. We find the fountain playing outside & the sky quite grey. I have a ~~burn~~ hot sense of regret in leaving the Zwinger,¹ a kind of malaise & disappointment. My throat is fearfully swollen & gives me continuous [$<$]al[$>$] pangs.

1 The Dresden museum was housed at the Zwinger Palace.

Afternoon

I lie on my bed, I gargle with Eau de Cologne that increases the atrocious pain in my throat, we have an early tea & start for Tannhäuser [sic]¹ at the Opera House.

[E.C.]

Wednesday—Aug. 19th

Again a long waiting for the Doctor. I lie almost voiceless. At last he comes, looks at my feet, & says that I have got scarlet fever.... There is a pause & I feel that a sentence is gathering against me—I know what it is—You must go to the Hospital[.] Dismay scatters our fortitude. [...] We make a vow, we neither speak, that nothing but death shall sever us.

[E.C.]

Saturday, Aug. 30th.²

At last this morning even the Herr Geheimrath says there is no danger from the fever—only she must lie in bed. She looks very pretty in her short boy's hair & fresh cotton jacket.

(On Friday I must have had the locks cut off. Sim asked the H.G. if nurse should do it or should I have "un Barbier"³—Little Waggie & his companion Dr. Millar, broke out into laughter they could not hide. I was very grave & depressed at the thought of being clipped. While Sim was in the Garden, I got sister to do it, while I held a glass & directed her scissors from tuft to tuft.—The little white cotton jacket with black & red spots was chosen by Bernie [Berenson], bought by Mrs. C[ostelloe]. & brought on Thursday)

This morning I brought in for P. from the garden 2 dove-feathers, some wild-strawberry leaves, a fresh spring of delicate mountain-ash & plane-leaves (with the strong drawing of Botticelli, she says)[.] Again & again her soul is swept with agony that she has missed so much that would have the very highest experience.

- 1 Wagner's opera.
- 2 The author of the entry is Bradley ("Sim"), who presumably wrote this episode in a notebook in Dresden. On their return to London, Cooper ("P." or "Puss") copied it into their *Works and Days* diary. Note in particular how she responds and adds to Bradley's account of these events in the brackets.
- 3 "A barber" (French).

Letters

10. E.C. to Robert Browning: envelope dated 30 May 1884

Stoke Green,
Stoke Bishop,
Bristol

Dear Mr. Browning,

I cannot thank you for the words you have written. I have all Duncan's sense of the poverty & slenderness of thanks. You must forgive "the sin of my ingratitude" which is heavy on me. Such words as yours give more abundant life: to expend it in higher, more reverent effort is the only true gratitude possible.

As to myself & my part in the book—to make all clear to you I must ask for strict secrecy. My Aunt & I work together after the fashion of Beaumont & Fletcher.¹ She is my senior by but 15 yrs. She has lived with me, taught me, encouraged me & joined me to her poetic life. She was the enthusiastic student of the Bacchae. Some of the scenes of our plays are like mosaic-work—the mingled, various product of our two brains. The faun scene is mine. ~~At~~ I was just nineteen when with joy, mixed with a dreamy sense of woe, the conception came to me. Emathion also is almost wholly mine & much of Margery. I think if our contributions were disentangled & [~~one~~] [~~subtracted~~] [~~from~~] the other [~~the~~], the amount would be nearly even. This happy union of two in work & aspiration is sheltered & expressed by "Michael Field." Please regard him as the author.

If we are united in our poetic work, so are we also in our true admiration & earnest study of your works. The book was really sent by both. Though a kind letter of last year from you to me gave me, it was judged, the privilege of writing to you.

Still hoping, doubting, that I can make you feel what your letter has been to me, I remain, dear Mr. Browning,

Yours, with deep respect,

Edith Cooper.

¹ Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher were well-known collaborative dramatists who wrote during the early part of the reign of James I.

2

11. K.B. to Robert Browning: 23 November 1884

Sunday even.
Nov 23rd

Stoke Green,
Stoke Bishop,
Bristol

Spinoza, with his fine grasp of unity, says: "If two ~~natures~~ [~~two~~] individuals of exactly the same nature [~~two~~] are joined together, they make up a single individual, doubly stronger than each alone," i.e. Edith & I make veritable Michael.

And we humbly fear you are destroying this philosophic truth: it is said The Athenaeum was taught by you to use the feminine pronoun. Again some one named André Raffalovich, whose earnest young praise & frank criticism gave me genuine pleasure, now writes in ruffled distress he "thought he was writing to a boy—a young man ... he has learnt on the best authority it is not so." I am writing to him to assure him the best authority is my work. But I write to you to beg you to set the critics on a wrong track. We each know that you mean good to us; & are persuaded you thought by "our secret" we meant the dual authorship. The revelation of that would indeed be utter ruin to us; but the report of lady-authorship will dwarf & enfeeble our work at every turn. Like the poet Gray (M. Arnold) we shall never "speak out." And we have many things to say 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. In Clifton we have made a desperate fight for the freedom of our privacy; &, to my joy, yesterday Edith was asked by a friend to read a sonnet in The Spectator I wrote a fortnight ago on Fawcett—"by Michael Field—a Bristol man"!! That is victory here ... meanwhile in London? Oh, with a word you can persuade the critics you have been tricking them: the heart of the mystery is not plucked out!

Besides, you are robbing us of real criticism—such as man gives man. The gods learn little from the stupid words addressed to them at shrines: they disguise; meet mortals unsuspecting in the market place, & enjoy wholesome intercourse.

We want to listen like that old poet of yours who sat quite still, & knew all that happened.

But you will divine all this & more. As women we trust to lead a quiet life, deepening in seclusion as the years roll on.

That deep nook in Michael's nature where the Faun plays—
you, our Father Poet, will help us to keep free of tourists' prying
feet?

In respectful entreaty

I am,

Faithfully yours,

Katharine H. Bradley.

12. K.B. to Robert Browning: 27 November 1884

Stoke Green,
Stoke Bishop,

Nov. 27

Dear Mr. Browning,

I seem to remember that I wrote to you in my own name—as
a woman. I trust you overlooked that in your reply.

I do not care to speak to you again of our relations to our
work:—on one point however your mis-apprehension is so
serious that I cannot keep silent.

I did not speak of combating "social conventions." 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
& literature to reveal—as far as maybe—the beauty of the high
feminine standard of the ought to be.

What I wrote was:

"we cannot be stifled in drawing-room conventionalities." By that
I meant we could not be scared away as ladies from the tragic ele-
ments of life.

I am sorry I should have to explain this to you.

Faithfully yours,

Katharine H. Bradley.

13. E.C. to Robert Browning: 1885

Christchurch Vicarage,
Westcombe Park,
Blackheath,
S. E.

Dear Mr. Browning,

We ask leave to tell you—for we could not speak at all on Sat-
urday—of the happiness it gave us to be with you. Your belief in
us will go on literally all our days through, goading us & yet
keeping us patient in our labour. We shall always 'remember &
understand'. If you should find any tricks of style, any individual
mannerisms that break the unity of our work, will you be a critic
as stern as you have been disinterested? We love our work too
earnestly to be hurt by any educating severity. This you will know.

Hoping that we may some day meet again,

Very sincerely yours,

Edith Cooper

d. To John Miller Gray, 1893

14. K.B. to John Miller Gray: 1893

Private
Durdans

Monday
1893

Dear Mr. Gray

No word of response even this morning to my note—
addressed Sunday—you must therefore be home again at Gay-
field¹—I am very sorry.

This morning I have been to my publisher discussing the
"decreased" edition.²

—The publisher is loath to begin before a single review has
appeared.³ So—if you care that the "gnomic verse" shd. not dis-

1 Gayfield Square.

2 The second edition of *Underneath the Bough*.

3 Of the first edition.

discipline which it affords—to its more imperious demand for the utmost possible refinement of expression, rhythm, and melody; to the facilities for balance and rounded completion afforded by brief poems, each of which, from the first, can be clearly kept in view in its entirety—as a whole possessing a definite beginning, middle, and end, with mutual bearings one upon the other.

Accordingly, the present book is by far the most perfect and thoroughly satisfying that its author has yet produced. It shows all her old force and fire. One has only to turn its pages to cull, in plenty, examples of that vivid magic of unforgettable phrase which has been a characteristic of all this poet's work, to find lines like the following—

“To give us temper of eternal youth,”

or this other—

“Full of the sap and pressure of the year.”

But, in addition to the old qualities that delighted us, we have here an artistic finish, we have an ease, precision, and restraint, such as has not hitherto been visible in the work of Michael Field.

To my mind, almost the only blemish in the book, the only point that calls—and it does call rather loudly—for revision, is its final poem, one distinctly unfortunate in the minor key in which it is set, and forming no satisfying or effectively dramatic culmination to the lyrical sequence which it closes. It does not leave one tingling with excitement; it is too quietly meditative in tone; neither in its measure nor in its words does it suggest the moment that preceded the wild flashing of the white form from the Leucadian cliff.

In spite, however, of this defect—this all but solitary defect, as I hold it—the volume is one for which we may well be right grateful, one to which many readers will turn, and turn again.

It becomes the wary critic to be sparing of prognostication—to avoid, as far as may be, “the gratuitous folly of prophesying”; for experience has taught him how blindly oblivion “scattereth her poppy,” and how many lovely things have had but their moment of praise and now lie unregarded in the world. But there are times when even the most cautious must grow bold; and perhaps such a critic would not greatly err on the side of temerity if he were to assert his conviction that the present book will

take a permanent place in our English literature, as one of the most exquisite lyrical productions of the latter half of the nineteenth century.

2. Review of *Sight and Song* by W.B. Yeats, *The Bookman*, July 1892

This interesting, suggestive, and thoroughly unsatisfactory book is a new instance of the growing tendency to make the critical faculty do the work of the creative. “The aim of this little volume is, as far as may be,” says the preface, “to translate into verse what the lines and colours of certain chosen pictures sing in themselves; to express not so much what these pictures are to the poet, but rather what poetry they objectively incarnate.” That is to say, the two ladies who hide themselves behind the pen-name of Michael Field have set to work to observe and interpret a number of pictures, instead of singing out of their own hearts and setting to music their own souls. They have poetic feeling and imagination in abundance, and yet they have preferred to work with the studious and interpretive side of the mind and write a guide-book to the picture galleries of Europe, instead of giving us a book full of the emotions and fancies which must be crowding in upon their minds perpetually. They seem to have thought it incumbent upon them to do something serious, something worthy of an age of text-books, something that would have uniformity and deliberate intention, and be in no wise given over to that unprincipled daughter of whim and desire whom we call imagination.

We open the book at a venture, and come to a poem on Benozzo Gozzoli's “Treading the Press.”

“From the trellis hang the grapes
Purple deep;
Maidens with white, curving napes
And coiled hair backward leap,
As they catch the fruit, mid laughter,
Cut from every silvan rafter.

Baskets, over-filled with fruit,
From their heads
Down into the press they shoot
A white-clad peasant treads,

Firmly crimson circles smashing
Into must with his feet's thrashing.

Wild and rich the ooziings pour
From the press;
Leaner grows the tangled store
Of vintage, ever less:
Wine that kindles and entrances
Thus is made by one who dances."

The last couplet has some faint shadow of poetry, perhaps, but as for the rest—well, it is neither more nor less than 'The Spanish Gypsey' again. It is impossible not to respect it, impossible not to admire the careful massing of detail, but no man will ever feel his eyes suffuse with tears or his heart leap with joy when he reads it. There are scores of other verses in the book which are as like it as one pea is to another. None of them have any sustained music, for music is the garment of emotion and passion, but all are well put together with carefully chosen rhymes, out of the way adjectives and phrases full of minute observation. Having looked in vain for anything conspicuously better or worse than the lines we have quoted, we open the book again at a venture, and find a poem on Cosimo Tura's 'St. Jerome.' We quote the first two stanzas:—

"Saint Jerome kneels within the wilderness;
Along the cavern's sandy channels press
The flowings of deep water. On one knee,
On one foot he rests his weight—
A foot that rather seems to be
The clawed base of a pillar past all date
Than prop of flesh and bone;
About his fallow, osseous frame
A cinder-coloured cloak is thrown
For ample emblem of his shame.

Grey are the hollowed rocks, grey is his head
And grey his beard, formal and as dread
As some Assyrian's on a monument,
From the chin is sloping down.
O'er his tonsure heaven has bent
A solid disc of unillumined brown;
His scarlet hat is flung

Low on the pebbles by a shoot
Of tiny nightshade that among
The pebbles has maintained a root."

These stanzas do not contain a single commonplace simile or trite adjective, the authors even prefer "osseous" to "bony" in their search for the unexpected. There is intellectual agility in every sentence, and yet of what account are these verses, or any number like them? What new thing do they bring into the world? They are simply unmitigated guide-book.

One regrets the faults of this book the more because they are faults which have for some time been growing on "Michael Field." 'Callirhoë' [sic] had imagination and fancy in plenty, and we hoped its authors would in time get more music and less crudity and at last create a poem of genius. A few years later 'Brutus Ultor' came and almost crowned our hopes, but now we have watched and waited for a long time in vain. 'Sight and Song,' following as it does 'The Tragic Mary,' is enough to make us turn our eyes for ever from the "false dawn" we believed to be the coming day.

3. "Women and Men: Women Laureates" by T.W.H. [T.W. Higginson], *Harper's Bazar*: New York, 17 June 1893

The colleges for women have been discussing the vexed question who should be poet-laureate of England. It is a curious fact, which perhaps has not occurred to any of the fair disputants, that if the award were made on the ground of pure strength of genius, and what may be called the Elizabethan quality, it would doubtless go to a woman. Or it would go, more awkwardly, to two women—that unnamed aunt and niece who jointly hide themselves under the masculine title of Michael Field. This general recognition of their superiority does not rest with the present writer alone, but with the *Saturday Review*, which said of "Callirhoë" [sic], "It is many years since we have read a new poem so instinct with the immutable attributes of poetry"; with the *Spectator*, which said, "It is the ring of a new voice, which is likely to be heard far and wide"; with the *Athenaeum*, which said of "The Father's Tragedy," "The dramatic expression not infrequently rises to almost the strength of the Elizabeth men"; with the *Academy*, which found in "Brutus Ultor" passages that "suggest the work of our old dramatists, and would not disgrace the great-