

This explains the tone of the poetry found in this volume: its mysterious eroticism which is teasingly vague, but inviting. In erotic art the knowledge gained through pleasure must remain secret' – 'not because of an element of infamy that might attach to its object, but because of the need to hold it in the greatest reserve, since, according to tradition, it would lose its effectiveness and its virtue by being divulged'.²⁰ This explanation helps us to see that Michael Field's erotic song in *Underneath the Bough* is inexplicit, not because it is prudish, but rather because the truths of sex are only potent if they remain hidden within a poetry of reserve. Bradley and Cooper assert the eroticism of mystery in opposition to science. Pleasure is all that is exposed to the reader in this erotic art, while truth must remain secret and divorced from the knowledge to which sexology would reduce it. Much of Michael Field's poetic language resonates with the *Rubáiyát*, although it would be overstating the case to argue in all instances for the overt intertextual reference we find in this volume.²¹ This allegiance to the erotic art tradition is severely challenged when the women convert to Catholicism and they do seem to shift a little more towards a *scientia sexualis* mode of understanding sexuality: they are absorbed into the tradition of the confession in which they admit to 'fleshy sins' and seem to operate more in relation to sexual encodings.²²

On the other hand, perhaps another reason why Bradley and Cooper were attracted to Catholicism was that it was one of the elements of our civilisation which retained traces of the *ars erotica* within it, and the mystery of the Trinity quickly became for them – as I will show in Chapter 6 – synonymous with the mystery of erotic art.

Within contemporaneous scholarship on Shakespeare, as well as in verse twelve of the *Rubáiyát*, Bradley and Cooper find a suitable context for their shared erotic song. The ambiguity gathering around the persona of the Elizabethan playwright, along with the mystery of *ars erotica*, are harnessed to express the mystery they inculcate around the dual identity of Michael Field. The women's dual authorship is, without doubt, itself a kind of erotic secret, the true meaning of which can only be learned through the reader's initiation, through close reading, into the poetry.

BERRY AND BLOOM: DESIRE AND DIFFERENCE
IN MICHAEL FIELD'S DUALITY

The co-authorship was without doubt a reflection of Bradley and Cooper's personal intimacy. David J. Moriarty has claimed that the reason for the poet's obscurity was ultimately not the pseudonym or the

collaboration per se, but 'that these poets of liberty never succeeded in breaking through the confines of their passionate devotion to each other'.²³ The women's close relationship was a framework and a motivation for their art which may have seemed rather eccentric to some, but it is worth remembering that literary collaboration between women was not by any means without precedent in the nineteenth century. As well as the more familiar examples such as Edith Somerville and Martin Ross (distant cousins who lived and wrote together), there was 'Pansy' (Isabella M. Alden), who wrote novels in collaboration with other women,²⁴ and the sisters Emily and Dorothea Geary, who collaborated on novels under the name E. D. Gerard (*My Neighbour* in 1882, and *A Sensitive Plant* in 1891).²⁵

Bradley and Cooper claimed that their work could not be separated in the way that they, themselves, were inseparable: 'Spinoza, with his fine grasp of unity, says: "if two [insert] individuals of exactly the same nature [end insert] ~~partures~~ are joined together, they make up a single individual, double stronger than each alone", i.e. Edith & I make veritable Michael'.²⁶ In another letter to Browning, dated 30 May 1884, Cooper describes her collaboration with her aunt as follows:

My Aunt & I work together after the fashion of Beaumont & Fletcher. 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. [...] I think if our contributions were disentangled & [insert] one [end insert] subtracted [insert] from the other [end insert], 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.²⁷

A couple of years later (in a letter dated 1886), Cooper offers Browning an artistic manifesto in rather different, but equally personal terms. Cooper writes that Bradley designed the bramble-bough drawn on the cover of *Bruno Ullor* as an 'emblem of our united life', and she quotes some lines Bradley wrote to her:

My poet-bridge, sweet song-mate, do I doom
Thy youth to age's dull society?
On the same bramble-bough the pale-checked bloom
{?}Fondling by purple berry loves to lie;
Fed by one sap & sunshine, there is room
For fruit & flower in living unity.²⁸

Indeed, we see the same thing in another letter to Browning (29 May 1886), only this time it is Bradley who writes explaining their unity:

I cannot help remembering that you know to the full the mystery & significance of companionship with a fellow-poet, & therefore will gently suffer me to speak a little of the comfort I have in the 'Better-half' of 'Callirhoe'. Indeed it is rather as a poet-rearer than a poet that I ask for fame. Of Edith & me it is literally true that in Cecilia's pretty phrase 'she & I am one'. I am proud that I have cherished & guarded her, & given her a climate of genial spring. Don't think of us as aunt & niece: all that we are to each other is expressed in some lines I wrote to her from which I venture to quote.

X X

'By time set a space apart
We are bound by such close ties
None can tell of either breast
The native sigh

Who try

To learn with whom the muse is guest.

How sovereignly I'm blest

To see & smell the rose of my own youth

In thee, how pleasant lies

My life, at rest

From dream; its hope express

Before mine eyes!¹⁹

All these statements attempt to articulate how bodies interact within space and time – 'By time set a space apart / We are bound by such close ties' – and all depict a harmonious dance between the two poetic voices. But what about the reality of the collaboration? In the letter cited above, Bradley explains how the collaboration works in practice:

You may be amused to hear that I have such absolute confidence in my song-mate's dramatic instincts that I have quietly suffered her to cut from Callirhoe act I, scene III, 150 lines; & from the last scene of the same play 200! I laugh to come back to my m.s. when she has been pruning it, & find a third of my work gone.

Bradley goes on to say who wrote which portions of the play. The same point is made in more rhetorical terms in a letter to Havetock Ellis in May 1886, where they write:

the work is perfect mosaic: we cross and interlace like a company of dancing summer flies; if one begins a character, his companion seizes and possesses it; if one conceives a scene or situation, the other corrects, completes, or murderously cuts away.²⁰

This process of collaboration is further explained by Charles Rickerts in his short biography, where he explains how the two women sketched out plans for the work to be done, worked separately on different scenes of a play and then compared work, edited it together, 'till finally amended and made smooth by Henry'.²¹ This evidence points to a division of labour in the drama, but the genre of lyric poetry must surely have presented more problems for such collaborative practice.²² Were the poems written solely by one or the other of the women, even if they swapped work for editing? Or was real collaboration possible on the writing of a lyric poem? We have the example of Baron Corvo (pen-name of Frederick Rolfe) and John Holden composing rondeaux together by pinning up manuscript pages and working in tandem, and perhaps something similar happened, on occasion, with Bradley and Cooper.²⁴ Turning to the manuscript copy of Michael Field's poetry is of little help. In the diaries we can often see a poem written in the hand of one woman (sometimes with editorial markings by the other), but if they were composing jointly aloud and one was acting as scribe the written evidence would be the same and so can tell us little for certain.

Many critics (including one reviewer from the nineteenth century)²⁵ have nonetheless turned to one particular poem to argue for evidence of the inscription of the dual authorship within it. In 'A girl', the writer of the poem describes her muse/beloved in sensuous terms but makes it clear that the poem written by one alone is not a complete poem, and that the 'girl' herself must take up the pen and finish the draft:

A girl,
Her soul a deep-wave pearl
Dim, lucent of all lovely mysteries;
A face flowered for heart's ease,
A brow's grace soft as seas
Scen through faint forest-trees:
A mouth, the lips apart,
Like aspen-leafflets trembling in the breeze
From her tempestuous heart.
Such: and our souls so knit,
I leave a page half-writ –
The work begun
Will be to heaven's conception done,
If she come to it. (pp. 68–9)

Angela Leighton, in *Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart*, situates the poem in a tradition of Sapphic lyrics of love between women. The final invitation to 'come to it', she writes, remains an 'open-ended *double entendre* of love and poetry together'.³⁶ Leighton describes it as 'Half a love poem', and half a poem of 'verbally giving birth'. The poem is left, half finished, waiting for the other author to leave her mark and so declare it as the product of two who write as one. 'A girl' appears to figure the premise of its own collaborative poetic composition, offering a radical challenge to the solitary voice of the Romantic lyric. But this half-poem is more unstable than Leighton recognises.

It is impossible not to notice that 'A girl' fails in its attempt to invoke reciprocal dialogue. While taken as emblematic of the women's collaborative poetic practice, it in fact only inscribes a possibility that is left hanging tantalisingly. The tension between sameness and difference, Bradley and Cooper's aesthetic if we look closely and don't simply believe their own rhetoric of natural unity. As demonstrated in Chapter 2, it is a mistake to tie Michael Field too closely into a tradition of 'likeness' because the masculinity of the pseudonym inscribes the importance of difference. It is a need for both sameness and difference that characterises Michael Field's fetishistic strategy. Cooper writes above of being 'two individuals of exactly the same nature, yet their difference, in age, appearance and temperament, is acknowledged in the image of 'pale-checked bloom' and 'purple berry' existing on the same bramble-bough. Bradley maintains in another letter cited above that Cooper's difference is as much a part of her as her own youth: 'How sovereignly I'm blest / To see & smell the rose of my own youth / In thee'. There is an instability in these claims for simultaneous identity and difference which shows the strain of collaboration, barely hidden in Bradley's claim, above, to laugh it off and suffer it quietly, when she returns to her manuscript and finds a third of it cut by her niece's pen. The result is, as noted by Wayne Koestenbaum, a mix of protestations of intricate mosaic-like intermingling, with scenes of 'murderous editing'.³⁷

Recent critical debate about the dual authorship of Michael Field settles into two parallel tramlines: one arguing for a theoretical unification of voice, while the other traces the inevitably fissured material act of composition. Virginia Blain has been the most thorough advocate of the latter. In clearing off 'the tarnish of surface unity in order to "restore" some more dynamic account of the relationship', she notes how the aunt and niece found difference within similarity: both competing for the

masculine role.³⁸ She also draws attention to the struggles within the relationship, undercutting Bradley and Cooper's own rhetoric about their unity as well as their critics', and claiming that the univocal pseudonym was consciously produced and inscribed over a discourse of separateness which 'is never entirely erased from the text'.³⁹ On a very literal level, this defence that some poems were clearly written by one woman or the other, even though they were published as joint compositions. Yopie Prins, meanwhile, has most notably argued for Bradley and Cooper's poetic 'chorus'. (Prins has expounded this argument in relation to *Long Ago*, but it is wholly relevant here to my analysis of *Underneath the Bough* and its articulation of 'singing together'.) Prins writes about Michael Field's and implications that ensue from the double signature operating within the single lyric voice. She argues that they 'turn to Sappho [...] in order to develop a model of lyric authorship in which voice is the effect of an eroticized textual mediation between the two of them rather than the representation of an unmediated solitary utterance'.⁴⁰ Prins describes this challenge to the solitary lyric as consisting in a preference for 'a chorus of voices', which 'pluralizes and textualizes lyric voice'.⁴¹ Elsewhere, Prins figures this dual vocality through the work of Luce Irigaray. Irigaray's utopian impossibility of two lips speaking together, 'each touching the other without distinguishing what touches from what is touched', is what Prins finds imagined in Bradley and Cooper's work: figuring a 'place where "I" can address "you" as a figure of feminine self-doubling'.⁴²

In her review of Prins's *Victorian Sappho* (a book whose chapter on Michael Field is based on the two journal papers already cited), Blain inevitably questions this supposed challenge to the single 'I' of the lyric poem, arguing that collaboration in writing can never be a chorus, and only ever a series of 'cunning alterations'.⁴³ Moreover, Blain claims that it makes no difference to the lyric 'I' of the poem whether that poem was penned by two or three or more writers because the illusion of singleness remains.⁴⁴ This debate about how the dual authorship functions poetically is the crux of Michael Field's lyric construction, and, I will suggest, eloquently posed by critical debate thus far – that I hope to answer by the end of this chapter. In order to resolve the dialectic between ideal and real collaborative practice, I will focus on its inscription within the lyric and its textual effect. There are specifically textual answers to these questions of dual vocality, contained within the workings of the poems themselves.

hands and not evil? Send me word clearly what has happened to you – then perhaps I'll let you talk of your dogs and books.

Ever faithfully yours,
J. R.¹⁴

Indeed, Katharine was only half joking when she claimed to have swapped her religion for a pet dog. The acquisition of this animal inaugurated a new phase of the poets' life, in which they found their way towards a sensual, pagan and erotic faith, which was very far from Ruskin's pety and puritanical doctrine.

While there is lots of evidence that Christian faith was not banished from their lives as comprehensively as they might claim, Bradley and Cooper do present their lives as structured around a dichotomy between what they described as pagan and Christian modes of being. Both seem in key part to be expressions of the women's spirituality, which is a constant throughout their lives. The term 'pagan' had a multiplicity of connotations at this time, but it does accurately signify the various facets of Michael Field's life between 1877 and 1907. As a matter of historical accuracy, then, I will use the term 'pagan' throughout this book to cover not only the Graeco-Roman non-Christian realm – and its pantheistic religion – which so fascinated the two women, but also those reneis central to Walter Pater's aestheticism (itself so connected to the ancient world) which structured Bradley and Cooper's experience at this time, and the 'perverse' sexuality (liberal heterosexuality and any homosexually inclined behaviour) which was connected with this lifestyle. Many contemporaneous sources – as well as Michael Field's own writings – show this particular diversity of usage to be entirely of its age.¹⁵

'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. 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*, which 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', and Edith was 'Field' or 'Henry'. 'Michael' seems to have carried connotations of the archangel, while 'Field' has a less obvious significance.¹⁶ Clearly, 'Michael Field' is a bipartite name signifying not just the name of single, male author, but also two

nicknames

Robert → Browning

names of two women authors – and it is for this reason that throughout this book I refer consistently to 'Michael Field', rather than simply 'Field'.¹⁷ *Callirrhoe*, which was an instant success, brought the couple to the attention of Robert Browning, and secured his support.¹⁸ He took Ruskin's place as their new literary mentor, and this friendship was to last until Browning's death, but after the generally very successful reception of *Callirrhoe*, in 1884, Michael Field 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 who seemed to be looking for intimacy of a kind only made possible by a belief in their masculinity. André Raffalovich wore with an enthusiasm which, on his discovery of their true identity, he retracts with a stiff apology: 'I thought I was writing to a boy, to a young man of my age whose world I appreciated'.¹⁹ From A. Mary F. Robinson, 'Michael Field Esqre' received, care of their publishers, a flirtatious little missive (postmarked 1885) containing directions to her house and an invitation to call. '[N]ext Tuesday afternoon' is singled out as particularly appropriate because 'you would find me singularly alone as my mother & sister are gone for a few days to Wales; & no callers generally arrive till after four'. The postscript acknowledges the unorthodoxy of this suggestion, adding: 'If you think it risky too much to come here, I am not making (am I?) any very American suggestion in proposing to meet you some morning (not Monday) at the National Gallery alone'.²⁰ Some knew, at this stage, that Michael Field was a pseudonym, but didn't know the identity of the writer; a guessing game ensued, involving some of the great sexological figures of the age and, in turn, linking concerns about the pseudonym with issues of gender and sexuality. Bradley wrote to Cooper:

Such a nice letter from Ellis [Havelock Ellis] this morning [...]. An acquaintance of his, from careful examination of internal evidence, is confident that the book is written by a man & a woman. Ellis has another theory – I believe that of single female authorship; but he does not say [...].²¹

This quasi-phenomenological reading of the contours of Michael Field's verse is seen to yield very specific conclusions – both wrong.

Bradley and Cooper left Bristol in 1888 to move, with their families, to Reigate. Their time at Reigate was both one of exploration and emergence into the public world, but also one in which they devoted themselves more and more to each other and their private realm.²² It was during this

phase of their lives that they travelled in Europe, mainly with the purpose of seeing art of various kinds (during these trips they were sometimes accompanied by friends such as Bernhard Berenson). It was also during this period that they got to know Meredith (who sent them a letter of praise on the publication of *Long Ago* on 13 June 1889), A. Mary F. Robinson, Richard Garnett, Lionel Johnson, D. G. Rossetti, Oscar Wilde, Herbert Spencer and many other influential figures of the age. But it was the private environment they created for themselves at Reigate that was the focus of their lives. The house saw very few visitors, except for the artists Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon, with whom the women gradually became extremely close friends. Bradley and Cooper'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 the women at this time were their bad literary reviews and the death of Cooper's father in 1897 in a mountaineering incident.²³

The close friendship 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, and decorated nearly all of their subsequent books. Michael Field's books were largely published privately. They were briefly published by Mathews and Lane, but they believed this lost them prestige and they returned to paying for publication.²⁴ Their desire for their books to be beautiful objects was no doubt one of the forces motivating this decision. 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). It was here they set up home with a rather special flame-coloured chow dog named Whym Chow.²⁵

Whym Chow was the most important being on earth for Bradley and Cooper. Just as the Skye terrier became symbolic of a move away from institutionalised Christian faith, so their love for Whym Chow enabled him to symbolise a complicated nexus of factors which prompted their entry into the Roman Catholic Church in 1907. While undoubtedly in key part a response to Cooper's ill-health, aspects of their changing relationship with each other, and historical events, the women attribute their conversion entirely to the death of the beloved Whym Chow (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').²⁶ Bradley and Cooper were quite typical of a certain type of Roman convert at the end of the century, being educated, articulate, fairly wealthy and well connected, they were of the type who were able to 'wield influence in their new community'.²⁶ The women certainly did throw themselves into the Catholic world. Their conversion distanced them from many of their old friends (even Ricketts and Shannon), but opened up important new 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 were, it would have hurt them enormously to read the entry on their work which appeared in the *Cambridge History of English Literature* just after their death, 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.²⁷

In this book, my engagement with Bradley and Cooper's work is circumscribed by the name 'Michael Field', and so I will not be looking at the work of Arran and Isla Leigh. Although this early work merits investigation, it is not within my remit. It is only under the 'Michael Field' name that Bradley and Cooper began to write with authority and maturity, and, perhaps more importantly, the body of work composed under this name has an integrity granted by the self-conscious authorial construction that should not be ignored.

Under the name 'Michael Field', Bradley and Cooper published twenty-eight dramas (mostly historical verse-dramas) during their lifetime, with an extra three religious plays appearing posthumously. There is evidence in the diaries of at least twenty-six further unpublished (and unfinished) dramas.²⁸ Only *A Question of Memory* was actually staged (on 27 October 1893 at Jack Grein's Independent Theatre in London), and it was not well received.²⁹ It is the most performable of Michael Field's plays, being set in the fairly recent historical past, and requiring a

relatively small cast; most of the others are rather more grandiose in their gestures and infinitely less stageable. It was, nonetheless, Michael Field's goal to get their plays performed. On 28 November 1891, for example, the women write in their diary of Arthur Symonds: 'It is horrible! Little Arthur has written a play accepted by the Independent Theatre. One may well hold one's eyes waking – asking why, & how, & if one is failing – the air round us is chill. It is bitter & very dark.'³⁰ Yet the plays were often received well as printed texts. Callirhoë, the first published play, inspired great praise, and in 1893 *Harper's Bazar* carried a laudatory review of the published drama to date by T. W. Higginson.³¹ Higginson begins by suggesting that Bradley and Cooper should hold the title of poet laureate, if that award were to be made 'on the ground of pure strength of genius'. He goes on to compare the plays with those of Shakespeare, and it is clear that – on page, if not on stage – the drama was what made Michael Field's reputation. Lionel Johnson, in his introduction to the selection of *the Poetry of the Century* which appears in Alfred H. Miles's *The Poets and her tragedes* that Michael Field can most justly rest a claim to distinction.³² Johnson goes on to sing magnificent praises of Michael Field, comparing their 'imagination', 'ardour' and 'magnificence' to, inevitably, those qualities in the work of Shakespeare.³³ These accolades did not, however, stop Michael Field feeling that, after the initial enthusiastic reception of *Callirhoë*, the plays were not as well received as they would have liked. Indeed, the obituary of Cooper in *The Athenaeum* states that, 'After the discovery in the nineties that the work of two women had been taken for a man's, the issue of their books was for many years passed over in silence. But, new voices coming to the front, "Wild Honey" (1908) was better received'.³⁴

This critical celebration of the poetry in *Wild Honey* in 1908 is evidence of more than just the existence of a new generation of critics, less offended by the dual authorship. Although Bradley and Cooper originally saw themselves primarily as dramatists – and were caught up in the Victorian fervour for discovering a new Shakespeare – in the later years poetry seemed to become much more the dominant concern, and their prolific writing of verse was matched by its greater prominence in the diaries. Indeed, later in life 'Michael Field' would disown many of the plays. Bradley writes to John Gray (in an undated letter sometime between 1906 and 1914, but probably around 1908) of 'the Borgia series', stating 'These are not by Michael Field', and asking him to pass 'from the last signed work – by Vale Press – Julia Domna (?) – to "Wild Honey"'.³⁵ Those

disowned plays include not only *Borgia*, but also *Queen Marianne*, *The Actress*, and all the other 1911 plays: *The Tragedy of Pardon*, *Tristan De Lenois*, *A Messiah*, *Diana: A Phantasy*.³⁶ This decision was no doubt motivated by issues of quality as well as worries about how the women's new Catholic acquaintances might view those plays. After all, none of the poetry is ever renounced – even though they blush at its paganism after the conversion.

The diaries, which give us so much information about the literary lives of Bradley and Cooper, demonstrate that 'Michael Field' was equally prolific in the arena of life-writing. In the twenty-nine volumes of Michael Field diaries, from 1888 to 1914, people, places and events are described with an insight and a curating wit which makes them powerful documentary evidence of the age. It is this aspect of the diaries which comes to the fore particularly in T. and D. C. Sturge Moore's edited selection from the volumes, published in 1933. Here D. C. Rossetti is reported as having a 'constraining fascination' which leaves his sister 'striving to work out his redemption by prayer and denial'.³⁷ An account of a meeting with Lionel Johnson ends with the stand-alone paragraph: 'We looked down at Lionel's feet; they were fabulous: tiny in girlish shoes and blue silk stockings'.³⁸ Of Oscar Wilde we hear that 'His body is too well tended and looks like a well-kept garden; his spirit, one would say, was only used to irrigate it'.³⁹ Yet the diaries are much more than reprints for the amusing anecdotes that give such a powerful flavour of the age to Sturge Moore's edited volume. The diaries are well-written and carefully crafted literary works which have not received the attention they deserve as part of the Michael Field canon.

It is Michael Field's poetry that has been at the centre of the recent revival. Interest has focused particularly around the first three volumes of poetry published under the Michael Field name in the nineteenth century: *Long Ago* (1889), *Sighs and Song* (1892) and *Underneath the Bough* (1893). Each volume has a strong rationale, with the first based around the Sapphic fragments, the second taking paintings as the inspiration for each poem, and the third taking *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* to frame its sensuous lyrical project. Yet in this study I suggest that the volumes published in the twentieth century are just as, if not more, interesting: from the mysterious and, I will argue, central *Wild Honey from Various Thyme* (1908), to the later religious verse in *Poems of Adoration* (1912), *Mystic Trees* (1913) and *Whyam Chow* (1914), these volumes develop the most profound of Michael Field's concerns. *Dedicated* was published in 1914, but features poetry published mostly between 1899 and 1902 and so

CHAPTER 2

Long Ago: the male pseudonym, fin-de-siècle sexualities and Sappho's historical leap

Within the body of Michael Field criticism it is the operation of the male pseudonym, in the sociosexual realm and the textual domain, that has attracted the most attention. Such discussion has taken place almost entirely in relation to the Sapphic lyrics of *Long Ago* (1889). This chapter is therefore well placed to introduce the major part of the critical debate. The pseudonym raises issues of number as well as gender – and these are dealt with, albeit to a lesser extent, in the critical literature I will survey – but my exploration of the *duality* of Michael Field's authorship will be saved for Chapter 4, where I suggest that *Underneath the Bough* addresses such issues more specifically. This may seem a slightly artificial separation of two aspects of the pseudonym, but it is a necessary one, and one that is justified by Michael Field's conception of each volume of poetry as based around a quite distinct set of concerns, and, usually, one overriding conceit.

After introducing current critical thinking on the workings of the pseudonym, I situate Bradley and Cooper's use of the male name more tightly within late nineteenth-century debates about sexuality. In so doing, I will suggest a new 'fetishistic' understanding of its operation which will bring together the main concerns of this chapter and enable a reading of *Long Ago* in their light. Finally, I will briefly return to the issues of time and history that were so important to the narrative of the diaries, to suggest that a rethinking of the volume within this framework uncovers a significance usually obscured by the critical focus on gender and sexuality.

SEX AND THE PSEUDONYM

Long Ago was the first volume of poetry published under the 'Michael Field' name and is inevitably concerned, in part, with the effect of this

decision on lyric identity. Textually, the pseudonym has a very important role; Cooper asks Browning to alert them, 'If you should find any tricks of style, any individual mannerisms, [] that break the unity of our work'.¹ Its use was probably driven initially more by the needs of their drama than their poetry. (It was the drama they hoped would sell to a bigger audience and bring them fame.) But, when used for their publication of lyric poetry, it set the stage for some challenging experiments with the genre. It is no coincidence that the first volume of poetry published under the name 'Michael Field' was instantly complicated by being mediated also through the voice of Sappho.

The true identity of Michael Field was known long before 1889. The feminine aspect of Michael Field's identity was revealed almost immediately. In 1884, Bradley (in her own name) wrote to Robert Browning, whom she had already sworn to secrecy on the issue, begging him not to reveal their deeper secret – their duality:

we humbly fear you are destroying this philosophic truth: it is said The Athenaeum was taught by you to use the feminine pronoun. [. . .] 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.²

The duality of their authorship was, nonetheless, common knowledge not long after. In her biography, Mary Sturgeon attributes the neglect of the women's work, from the 1890s to the end of their lives, to the fact that their collaboration, once known, was 'obscurely repellent' to the public.³ Angela Leighton notes that it is not clear whether this objection is purely textual, or whether it has a sexual significance also, but she does point to Walter Besant's 'On Literary Collaboration' for corroboration that collaboration threatened 'some notional sanctity of authorship'. While not accepting Sturgeon's sense of a deliberate plot to undermine anything published under the name of Michael Field, Leighton does concede that knowledge of their collaboration probably did play a role in hampering their poetic reputation.⁴ This sentiment is echoed and developed by Holly Laird in her discussion of the importance for poetry of 'single, identifiable authorship' in the nineteenth century.⁵

It may be clear why Bradley and Cooper felt the need to hide their collaboration behind a single name, but the impetus behind choosing a *male* pseudonym has been much debated. The fact that Victorian women poets had problems to contend with when they tried to inhabit

Notes 1-28 - recent

post-Romantic poetic conventions is undeniable. Yet nineteenth-century women writers seem to have had little trouble actually getting work printed, and there is some evidence that certain kinds of fictional publication may have been easier under a woman's name.⁶ In fact it is this case which is more likely to present a problem for the serious literary woman. Bradley and Cooper are not unusual in claiming to use the male pseudonym to escape the meaningless flattery given to female authors.⁷ Bradley writes to Robert Browning that by letting out the secret of their identity '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.'⁸ In the same letter they also claim the male name enables them to access certain discourses uncontroversially:

the report of lady-authorship will dwarf & enfeeble our work at every turn. [...] 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 stilled in drawing-room conventionalities.⁹

A subsequent letter glosses this claim, making it clear, crucially, that they do not feel the need to shock or to break society's taboos, they simply feel, 'we could not be scared away as ladies from the tragic elements of life.'¹⁰ John Ruskin's strict instructions as to what Bradley and Cooper should and shouldn't read and write no doubt laid the foundations for a particularly conservative idea of the proper sphere of women's work.¹¹

Catherine A. Judd writes that nineteenth-century women writers who wrote under a male pseudonym often used it to separate off the public self from the private self to keep the feminine identity pure and free from tarnish by the market.¹² At this time the male pseudonym is not necessarily associated with the 'mannish woman' or the woman who wanted to pretend to be a man in any thoroughgoing way. The pseudonym was in many ways a conservative force for enabling women to write, while not challenging the idea that there were areas of commerce and expression that 'ladies' could not enter without a veil. This is one way of interpreting Bradley and Cooper's claims: they want to be able to access areas not readily open to women writers, but without having to shock society, and without having to fight the political battle necessary to claim these areas as suitable for their sex. This is perhaps even more true when the sobriquet continues to be used after the true authorial identity is known. At this stage the name

ceases to be a pseudonym as such, and it takes on a dual and contradictory significance. As Kathy Psomiades has noted, on the one hand it seems to reinforce the ideology of this conservative gender politics, as the women continue to demur to the male name after any practical benefit has gone, but on the other hand retaining the name could be interpreted as an audacious declaration of the women's ability to occupy both masculine and feminine spheres.¹³ It is also the case that the continued use of the pseudonym strangely combines the public writerly persona of the women with an expression of their intimacy. The shared pseudonym was a close reflection of a particular erotic discourse created by the two women to figure their relationship with one another, and it is almost as if it provides a closer bond than the sharing of the name through marriage. This dual significance of the exposed pseudonym, both conservative and radical, is typical of the Michael Field aesthetic, and is consciously a foundation stone in the conception of Long Ago.

Critics have often related questions concerning the role of the pseudonym to issues surrounding Bradley and Cooper's sexuality, and I will continue to do so. However, rather than seeing the masculinity of the name as playing a role in the construction of a proto-lesbian identity, I argue that the *ambivalence* of the workings of the exposed pseudonym should be carried over into our reading of Bradley and Cooper's construction of their erotic identity. Much debate has ensued about whether we can legitimately think of Bradley and Cooper as homosexual, or whether they constitute, rather, a prime example of what Lillian Faderman calls 'romantic friendship'.¹⁴ In other words, could Bradley and Cooper have figured their relationship in lesbian terms when that category was only just beginning to be recognised? This is a particularly important question in relation to the perceived Sapphicism of *Long Ago*, but one which, as I will show after exploring recent criticism on this issue, misses the point of Bradley and Cooper's deliberately amorphous sexual identity.

Virginia Blain writes of Bradley and Cooper that 'The question of how to be a lesbian when lesbians did not exist does not appear to have troubled them'.¹⁵ Blain's assertion is based on a thorough familiarity with the manuscript materials and she quotes from the correspondence between the two women held in the Bodleian Library to trace the development of their relationship. Blain places the start of their physical intimacy in 1885, when Edith was twenty-three. By 1885, she notes, they were addressing each other in letters in terms such as 'Sweet Wife' and 'my own husband'.¹⁶ The discourses of desire in such letters, Blain argues, tell us in the clearest possible terms available, without resorting to a

discourse that would have been considered pornographic, that their passion is the same as that on which marriage is based.¹⁷

It is true that Bradley even writes to Cooper of the hardships of 'early married life' at one point; Cooper affirms that 'I have given myself to you as your spouse for ever' on another occasion; and the letters also contain a good deal of the kind of 'baby talk' that seems so unmistakably a language of romantic love (the wooing 'stock dove' (Bradley) and the fragile 'kitten' (Cooper) 'Coo, coo' and 'mew, mew' to each other on the page).¹⁸ In the diaries there is plenty of evidence to suggest that when the women describe themselves as 'lovers' they mean more than just each other's carers. Late in 1912, when Bradley has been looking after Cooper in her cancerous sickness, she describes how they love one another 'as if there were none else in the world'. She goes on: 'Officially this night I abandon my quality of nurse. I take off my white apron. I become again her master & her lover'.¹⁹ Yet if we are to accept Blain's argument that these private discourses between the two women express sexual desire, then we have to ask how, at a time of dawning sexological investigation, such an unconcerned voicing of homosexual desire could exist – particularly given what I described earlier as the quasi-public status of the published poetry. Lillian these personal discourses to underpin their published poetry. Lillian Faderman writes: 'If they saw something unorthodox about their relationship, they would have been more reticent in their poems to each other'.²⁰ Isn't Bradley and Cooper's lack of shame and their overt display of their relationship itself proof that their relationship should be classed a 'romantic friendship'?

Not necessarily. Foucault suggests that the creation of the category 'homosexuality' brought into being a specific 'type' of person where before there had simply been certain sexual acts which could be identified without reference to the type of person practising them. Of course Foucault's thesis has not gone uncontested, but this shift from 'doing' and 'being' is still a key one in the history of sexuality. Yet, because of the rather different history of *female* intimacy, the sexological revolution concentrated on the female homosexual 'type' as a question somewhat divorced from 'doing'. Intimate acts between women were considered so natural and so much a part of Victorian womanhood that these acts had to be allowed to continue separate from the new lesbian type that was being recognised. For this reason, as Richard Dellamora and others have noted, Havelock Ellis defined the lesbian 'not on the basis of sexual inversion but on the basis of gender inversion'.²¹ In his study, *Sexual Inversion* (first published in English in 1897), Ellis includes only women of a particularly masculine

disposition – some of whom had had no sexual contact with other women. This leads one to suspect that other 'types' of women, whatever their practice, may have been above suspicion of perversion.

While other sexologists theorised female inversion, Ellis was, without a doubt, the most direct influence on Michael Field. Bradley and Cooper were corresponding with Havelock Ellis long before he published this book and were familiar with his work. They would have recognised that they were clearly not of the inverted type he describes as possessing a 'more or less distinct trace of masculinity'.²² This trace, even when not obvious, can be detected in

all sorts of insinivative gestures and habits [...] The brusque, energetic movements, the attitude of the arms, the direct speech, the inflexions of the voice, the masculine straightforwardness and sense of honor, and especially the attitude toward men, free from any suggestion either of shyness or audacity, will often suggest the underlying principle abnormality to a keen observer.²³

Nothing ever reported of Bradley and Cooper suggests this type. Their flirtatious and coy behaviour with men, as well as their feminine wiles and aesthetic feminine dress, denote nothing of this sort. Ellis does connect the invert with a politics with which Bradley and Cooper were allied – 'the modern movement of emancipation – the movement to obtain the same rights and duties, the same freedom and responsibility, the same education and the same work' – but the 'true invert' was an aberration.²⁴

Ellis notes that the lesbian 'may not be, and frequently is not, what would be called a "mannish" woman', because some women imitate men on grounds of 'taste and habit unconnected with sexual perversion'.²⁵ For the inverted woman, on the other hand, masculine traits are unwitting and inherent. Thus Bradley and Cooper's 'mannish' pseudonym does not in any way display the unconscious masculine qualities which define the invert. Indeed, their own sexual identity seems to have been quite at odds with that masculine type. When Katharine and Edith visit Vernon Lee and Kir Anstruther-Thompson, for example, they are repelled by their severe tailoring and their lack of feminine delicacy. Bradley describes them succinctly: 'Anstruther tall – & big-jointed, Verona an untidy mess of ~~oddly~~ perversion' (it is here that Cooper identifies Lee as an 'intellectual Vampire' and comments on her 'ghastly good-breed').²⁶ The sexological language of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*, for example, could not be more removed from Michael Field's textual universe.

However, the matter is not quite so clear cut. In his more personal writing about his lesbian wife, Edith, Ellis changes tack slightly – she was

cases it carries a sexual charge. At the start of the book it is Pan's lips smeared with honey which represent a peculiarly pagan state of grace and peace:

He half unearthed the Titans with his voice;
The stars are leaves before his windy riot;
The spheres a little shaken; but, see, of choice
How closely he wraps up in hazel quiet!
And while he sleeps the bees are numbing
The fox-glove flowers from base to scaled tip,
Till fond they doze upon his slumbering,
And smear with honey his wide, smiling lip,
He shall not be disturbed: it is the hour
That to his deepest solitude belongs;
The unfrighted reed opens to noontide flower,
And poets hear him sing their lyric songs,
While the Arcadian hunter, baffled, hot,
Scourges his statue in the ivy-grot. (p. 1)

By the end of the book it is the narrator's lips which kiss the 'deep-blooded crucifix' which beauty:

There is wild shower and winter on the main,
Foreign and hostile, as the flood of Sora,
The rumbling water: and the clouds that mix
And drop across the land, and drive again
Whelm as they pass. And yet the bitter rain,
The fierce exclusion hurt me not; I fix
My thought on the deep-blooded crucifix
My lips adore, and there is no more pain.
A Power is with me that can love, can die,
That loves, and is deserted, and abides;
A loneliness that craves me and enthals:
And I am one with that extremity,
One with that strength. I hear the alien tides
No more, no more the universe appals. (p. 194)

The focus on the lips renders both experiences deeply sensual and it is impossible not to read Pan's honey-smeared lustful sleep into the narrator's peace-giving bloodied kiss of the final poem. The very words 'Wild Honey' on the title page are in vermilion ink, hinting at the transubstantiation of honey into blood that we will see performed between the start and the end of the book. In a perverse interpretation of the mass,

honey is the substance which signifies the blood of Christ, and it is this transmogrification which ensures the continued existence of the pagan within the Christian in this volume. It is almost as if Pan's ecstatic dream insight brought by Christianity. Pan may have escaped to a better world temporarily, but Christ enables a vision which reconciles the narrator to the universe more fundamentally. Michael Field's 'Honey-book' is indeed that which is sweet as the honey of pagan delights, but it is also, ultimately, that honey which, when ingested, leads to ecstatic religious vision. Here the progressive conversion narrative is artfully combined with the concurrency afforded by the bee discourse which frames the book.

This combination of temporal modes is crucial in that it allows the life-narrative to be presented in a way which both acknowledges the changes Bradley and Cooper have gone through over the past fifteen years, while making sense of this microcosmic flux by appeal to unifying images which seem to promise an underlying larger-scale coherence. This movement from pagan to Catholic is presented within a framework which unites the two in order to connect Bradley and Cooper's own individual conversion with the much greater cycles of time which were so important to the Victorians at what was clearly not only the end of the century but also the end of the Victorian era. 'Various thyme/time' is, indeed, central to the concerns of this volume whose wild, or passionate, honey enables a peculiarly aestheticist – and distinctly artful – temporal paradox to be crafted.

THE LYRIC BOOK OBJECT: BEE AESTHETICS AND BEE ECONOMICS

Apian Aestheticism, then, ensures a synchronic presence where we might otherwise find only diachronic structures, and represents an aesthetic unification of the various potentially contradictory terms which made up the identity of Michael Field. As well as operating across time and history, Apian Aestheticism is also active in ensuring a paradoxical reconciliation in another aspect of the book's production.

I noted at the beginning of this chapter that the fine covers of Michael Field's books invite questions as to the relationship between that whole aesthetic realm of the book and the economic forces which inevitably framed it as a saleable object. Such questions have been recognised and discussed in relation to Michael Field's drama,¹² but it is in *Wild Honey*, particularly, that they impact upon the poetic oeuvre. Four of Michael

Field's plays were published by Charles Ricketts, covered with his own fine designs,⁴³ and he also decorated *Wild Honey*, *Poems of Adoration*, *Mystic Trees* and *Dedicated*. Bradley and Cooper had, of course, sought out fine book design long before they met Ricketts, and George Bell and Sons (who published many of their works) had sent out *Long Ago* in very fine attire, with a gold design on vellum covers. Elkin Mathews and John Lane published three of Michael Field's volumes under the imprint of the Bodley Head,⁴⁴ with *Sighs and Song* marking the first phase of the notorious publishing partnership, and clearly reflecting its ideals in the fine title page.⁴⁵ The women continued to publish with Mathews after the partnership dissolved.⁴⁶ Various other publishers and designers feature over the course of their career, including Sidgwick and Jackson, Eveleigh Nash, Sands, Selwyn Image (who produced the beautiful ornamentation for *The Tragic Mary* and *Stephanie*), and The Eragny Press (who published *Wlynn Chau* clothed in Lucien Pissarro's exotic suede jacket). The relationship between the women and the people who produced their books was often intense. They cared deeply how the books looked and it had to be right. Yet no relationship rivals the one they built up with Charles Ricketts, which is why it is in relation to *Wild Honey* that I turn to the issue of book design. This book, published by T. Fisher Unwin, who features particularly prominently in the publishing careers of women poets, represents the apotheosis of Michael Field's textual liaison with Ricketts. To be sure, the dramatic texts published by the Vale Press were more ornate. Cooper did not initially take to Ricketts' design for *Fair Rosamund*, finding the doves too round and sentimental, yet even she was thrilled when she finally saw the book in its cover.⁴⁷ The trilogy of plays also decorated by Ricketts (*The World At Auction*, *The Race of Leaves* and *Julia Donna*) was even more splendid. The elaborate borders and covers are far more eye-catching than the simple, although very fine, cover of *Wild Honey*. Yet *Wild Honey* has, woven into its fabric, the most intricate and personal story of all.

The rest of this chapter will suggest that the most fascinating dance of bees in *Wild Honey* is that surrounding textual production and consumption itself. Such tensions accrete around this volume and become a defining feature of it. Bees and honey, after all, are archetypal emblems of economics of production (the busy worker bee) and consumption (the gift of sweet honey). Theodor Adorno famously positioned late nineteenth-century aestheticism as the moment at which art simultaneously becomes autonomous and decontextualised, separate from everyday life, yet increasingly involved with commodity culture and consumerism. *L'art*

pour l'art is to some extent the opposite of what it claims to be.⁴⁸ The various recent critical narratives of aestheticism – most notably those by Freedman, Gagner, Schaffer and Psomades – all recognise its ambivalent relationship with the marketplace. 'Whether aestheticism is seen as a claim for the absolute autonomy of art, a critique of that claim, or the moment at which art abandons itself wholeheartedly to the world of commodities while pretending not to'.⁴⁹

This theme was taken up in Michael Field's 1898 verse-drama, *The World at Auction*, part of a trilogy of plays dealing with the idea of the state in the declining Roman empire. Paralleling the decline of the Victorian age, the questions asked in this play are as pertinent to the women's own time as they are to its historical parallel. The message of the trilogy is that, while successive dynasties rise and fall, it is the Bacchic spirit of dance and entertainment, embodied by Pyades, who is handed on from one regime to the next, that is constant. *The World at Auction* explores the relationship between the aesthetic (in the form of Pyades) and the economic affairs of the state. Indeed, in this play the affairs of state have been reduced to a parody of late nineteenth-century consumer culture as Rome is auctioned off to he who will offer the Praetorian Guard the highest bribe: Didius Julianus. As Ana Parejo Vadillo comments, for Michael Field only beauty can offer an alternative to this consumer culture gone mad, and only Pyades (or, rather, what he represents) has the potential to save Didius and stop his consumerist craving.⁵⁰ Vadillo points out that, although Didius's daughter, Clara, manages to buy Pyades' love with money, taking him into the sphere of commerce, he breaks the agreement when her demands become too much. Bacchic beauty is the only effective counter to the culture of consumption embodied by the state, yet it is simultaneously debased through its contact with the state. The play ends, uneasily, with Pyades' too willing allegiance to the new regime after Didius's downfall.

It is in this context that I want to situate *Wild Honey*: drawing as it does on a period spanning the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it is formed both by concerns associated with literary modernism and by those of Victorian bourgeois culture. The tensions between economic and aesthetic forces so dramatically laid out in *The World at Auction* reach a subtle and lyrical solution in *Wild Honey*. The turn-of-the-century book of poetry represents a particularly complex and interesting intersection of the aesthetic and the fiscal, which means that *Wild Honey* is dealing with much more focused questions than those we see in the large-scale allegory of the play. Critics have told us that, due to the increasing viability of

mass print circulation, by the late nineteenth century poetry had become a marginal form economically. In this difficult climate both male and female writers turned to self-consciously antiquated print formats. The attraction of the finely made, often limited edition, and certainly expensive, lyric volume at the end of the century was that it allowed the necessarily small sales of poetic texts to bring in a reasonable amount of money.⁵¹ This form of publication also appealed to those many Victorians who liked poetry more as an object or an idea than as a text to be read. These editions also allowed their authors to appear in print while preserving a sense of their aesthetic integrity. The finely bound limited book of verse, like *Wild Honey*, was, then, itself a product of a double narrative which satisfied both economic and aesthetic imperatives. The attempt to court an audience by self-conscious exclusivity sums up the economic/aesthetic dialectic of the fine limited edition, and demonstrates the avant-garde strategies used, of necessity, in poetry before they became common in modernist prose. It is worth remembering that Charles Ricketts's designs were central to this process with his new, beautifully designed, cover for Wilde's volume *Poems* (first published in 1881) allowing the book to be presented to the public afresh in 1892, and confirming the power of the book designer in the reception and formation of poetic text.⁵²

One of the ironies for both *The World at Auction* and *Wild Honey* is that, with their beautiful covers, designed by Ricketts, both books are a part of the commodity culture they criticise. In a letter to her friend and mentor John Gray, Bradley writes how, having seen Ricketts's design for the cover of *Wild Honey*, 'The cover is all my joy now - I want to cut the inside out [...] because I should like the hidden honey to remain hidden. A Lyric Poet shd. be put on the pyre the day he is published'.⁵³ In this quotation Bradley sets up a dichotomy between the insides and the outsides of the book which expresses very succinctly the pressures Adorno identifies as forming this turn-of-the-century cultural moment. The beautifully decorated covers enclose the honeycomb which is there to be consumed, yet Bradley and Cooper are unsure about offering up their work in this way. Such beautiful covers, as Bradley recognises, make the book part of a commodity culture which puts their poetry, if not at the mercy of a mass audience, then certainly within economic structures. I will suggest that in the physical object of this book we see that thoroughly aestheticist anxiety about the relationship between the otherworldliness of high art, which appears in fine editions and limited print runs, and the economic realities of a burgeoning commodity culture which was precisely the motivation behind the sale of such beautiful objects. Bradley and Cooper themselves

are torn between a desire for publicity and a readership, and a belief in the private 'hidden honey' that the true lyric poet should keep hidden. It is through Apian Aestheticism that this text achieves a paradoxical reconciliation between the two.

In her groundbreaking study *Beauty's Body*, Kathy Psoniades traces aestheticism's negotiation between the aesthetic and the economic through the icon of the beautiful female body. For Psoniades, femininity - a concept itself fissured, for the Victorians, beneath, the surface into multiple dichotomies - 'allows for the difficult and vexed relation between the categories of the aesthetic and the economic in bourgeois culture to be represented and covered over by erotic relations'.⁵⁴ Psoniades acknowledges in this study that certain writers of the fin de siècle, including Michael Field, refused to commodify female beauty in this way,⁵⁵ yet in comparison with figures such as Swinburne, Bradley and Cooper's intense interest in that turn-of-the-century transaction between the aesthetic and the economic has received little attention. In the rest of this chapter I will argue that in *Wild Honey* they offer a radical alternative figure to manage the contradictory imperatives of aesthetic and economic at the end of the century. It is the bees which, for Michael Field, act as arbitrators of aesthetic and commodity experience, as well as signifying all those other, more readily apparent, narrative paradoxes outlined in the first half of this chapter. Through this trope Michael Field refuse the objectification of the female body attendant on the strategy used by other aesthetes.

Since the ancient world bees have held an important place in signifying the aesthetic. What has not been recognised is that bees had gained a new, topical, currency at the end of the nineteenth century. When, in 1873, Tennyson characterised the emergence in Britain of aestheticist poetry as 'Art with poisonous honey stolen from France', this was one of the first signs of the updating of the apian for a specifically fin-de-siècle usage.⁵⁶ Laurence Hope's 'Life of the Bee' confirms the appearance of a newly depraved bee. Based on the bee's propensity to die at the moment it releases its sting, the poem transfigures the busy hum of the Attic poet into a Decadent trope-of-the-most-purple-kind:

Oh for the death of a beautiful purple bee,
Sailing away to the blue of a limpid sky;
To have yielded up one's life in an ecstasy,
And then, in the very climax of love, to die!

To give oneself completely, once and for ever;
Drink life at its utmost height as one laid it down.

*Wild Honey from Various Thyme:
apian aestheticism and the lyric
book collection*

The fin de siècle is notorious for its fascination with the beautifully presented book, and one of the glorious aspects of reading Michael Field's poetry is the contact with the book objects themselves. Whether it's the vellum cover of *Long Ago*, the russet suede cover of *Whyim Chour: Flame of Love* or the gilt-embossed green silk of *Wild Honey*, there is overwhelming evidence that the presentation of their poetry was of the utmost importance to Bradley and Cooper. Any study of the poetry must engage, at some point, with the book object: the qualities of its physical production (the cover design, for example), as well as its production history and the arrangement of poems within the collection.¹ All of these aspects inform my study of a volume usually neglected by critics: *Wild Honey from Various Thyme*.

A glance at this book will explain immediately why I have married this approach with this particular text. The cover design is striking, with a dark-green silk embossed with a simple repeated gilt bee and honeycomb woodcut, designed by Charles Ricketts, with a corresponding motif of bees and flower-bells on the spine. Bradley and Cooper's letters to Charles Ricketts and John Gray, as well as their diaries, are full of their plans for this book, and particularly its name and cover. The design was completed not without some trouble. Ricketts had great difficulty drawing the bees that Bradley and Cooper so desired:

Your request for a book cover also fills me with grief and consternation [...] Not only do I object to drawing all the little cells in the honeycomb (the proper word is sells) but I find that I must go to the Natural History Museum to ascertain what a bee looks like. So far I can only draw what looks like butterflies or wasps.²

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Wild Honey from Various Thyme

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This, it seems, was not originally what Bradley and Cooper had in mind. They had asked Ricketts to design a cover for them after seeing his cover for D. G. Rossetti's *Poems* (1870):

Seriously, dear Painter, draw me your wildest bees, in swarm, or settling on St John, or in stormy wrangle with locusts, or meditating with deliberate feet the camel hair. O draw me the dear dead bumblebee – eternal among the years – that you gave me in another century than this.³

What Ricketts eventually produced could not be further from an angry swarm around St John: it looked more like the stylised art that was being rediscovered in the excavation of classical sites.

In this negotiation over the cover design we can already find the two central themes of my chapter. The issues of the commodification of literature raised by this opulent presentation of text, and the relationship between text and cover design (and writer and book designer), will be addressed in the second half of this chapter. But in the first I will turn to issues which connect more directly and obviously with the internal construction of the narrative of this lyric collection. In the negotiation between Ricketts and Michael Field over the cover design we also see the potential for the bee image to be pulled between significations of Michael Field's new Catholic beliefs and emblems of their old pagan world. Much of Bradley and Cooper's interaction with Ricketts around the design of the book is loaded with the significance of the tension, and unity, between the pagan and the Christian: Michael Field's life in the old century and the author's reconfigured identity in the new. Bradley's reference to the 'dear dead bumblebee – eternal among the years – that you gave me in another century than this' recalls the bunch of flowers with which Ricketts had presented them, which deliberately contained a dead bee.⁴ That the women stress the location of this event in an earlier century indicates clearly the role the bee plays in linking together what they conceive of as two very different and distant, temporal worlds. That the quest for a bee took Ricketts to the Natural History Museum also seems appropriate to this sense of the bee as occupying a mediating role in history, and ensuring simultaneous diachronic and synchronic structures for the volume. Just as the museum is able to run several different ages in parallel, so too the bees manage to take through the volume several different meanings which inhabit every poem simultaneously.

In the first half of this chapter I will trace, through the construction of *Wild Honey*, this idea of the book as an object that reflects, within its very

arrangement, the concerns with time and history that came to a head over the turn of the century. The title, *Wild Honey from Various Thyme*, was almost certainly a corrupted reference to Sicily (the bread basket of Rome, before it conquered Spain and North Africa), and its famous honey gathered from bees fed on wild thyme. That, for Michael Field, it is the honey that is 'wild' rather than the thyme, is a crafty way of conveying the sense of 'mad' or 'boiling' honey which Bradley told John Gray was contained within the volume. This book contains passionate honey – or a statement of the intense desire the women had for one another and for others. Once they have shifted the adjective 'wild' to partner 'honey' instead of 'thyme', they give us instead 'various thyme'. In a pun on 'various time', Bradley and Cooper gesture towards the historical juxtaposition – and tension – which brings us in this volume poems from Michael Field's pagan past as well as poems from their new religious era: influences from the classical, archaeological past, in tandem with Michael Field's new sense of modernity. This playful title tells us clearly, if we care to look, that this book is a turning point, a crashing together of the temporal tectonic plates of history (at least in individual history), and a passionate response to it which tries to find a harmonious accommodation between past and present bringing 'various time' together in the one volume.

In this chapter as a whole, I identify what I call Michael Field's 'Apian Aestheticism': a distinctively fin-de-siècle aesthetic worked out through the image of the bee which holds pagan and Catholic, aesthetic and economic, in a fine balance, reflecting a fetishistic desire to have it all. Apian Aestheticism is a strategy which represents a culmination of Bradley and Cooper's attempts to deal with certain concerns in their poetic output up to this point. It is a way of resolving potential contradictions within their life and work which threatened the artistic unity and form of the poetry. The bee discourse frames the book and enables it to provide the most comprehensive solution to Michael Field's lifelong artistic challenge: the attempt to hold multiple terms (and unreconcilable aspects of their lives) in a fine suspension that both recognises opposition while creating apparent harmony and reconciliation. It is through these oppositions that *Wild Honey* can be seen to be enmeshed in the paradoxes of the turn of the century out of which modern literature was born. As one might expect with Michael Field, the aesthetic of *Wild Honey* is powered by desire, of a manifold, hetero- and homoerotic, nature – a significance also carried at all times by the bee.

THE NARRATIVE STRUCTURE OF THE LYRIC COLLECTION:
pagan bees and christian bees

Wild Honey from Various Thyme was published in 1908 after 'a whole silent decade',⁵ and was received well by critics who celebrated it as 'one of the most delightful books that the last ten years have given us, and should be read by every lover of poetry'.⁶ The diaries show that Bradley and Cooper conceived of this volume, and were writing poems for it, as soon as *Underneath the Bough* was published in 1893 – and this writing continued prolifically throughout this period. Yet *Wild Honey* did not appear until fifteen years later, in 1908. Granted, Michael Field published two other versions of *Underneath the Bough* in that period (1893 and 1898), but, given how prolific Bradley and Cooper were during this period, it is surprising that they didn't publish a new volume sooner. The publishing gap was, I have no doubt, a result partly of the struggle to resolve the problem of narrative encountered in *Underneath the Bough* which I described in my previous chapter. *Wild Honey* is a great aesthetic achievement, born of long silence and a desire both to tell a biographical narrative while presenting volumes which were concurrent as well as progressive in their structure. I suggest it was this working on arrangement, construction and narrative which took the time, not the writing of individual poems. It is in this volume that Michael Field most comprehensively solves the problem, managing simultaneously to organise the collection with synchronic and diachronic structures.

Questions of narrative and history were more pressing than ever when Bradley and Cooper came to write *Wild Honey*. The turn of the century, an event centrally positioned within the period of time during which *Wild Honey* was written – had intensified these concerns, and its effects, which were felt by Michael Field long before 1899, cannot be separated from the momentous period of change experienced by Bradley and Cooper within the fifteen years they were writing the volume. Their transition from a pagan to a Catholic phase of personal history, and their entry into the Roman Catholic Church in 1907, was closely connected with the death of their third beloved pet dog, *Whym Chow*, in 1906. The chow had signified for them their pagan sensuality, and his demise drew that era to a close. This moment seems inevitably connected with the continuing sense of threat to homosexuals who were brought to new visibility by various events at the turn of the century, and also the turn of the century itself: an event not to be underestimated in the women's lives, as I have argued already, in relation to the diaries, in Chapter 1. There is

no doubt that Bradley and Cooper self-consciously engaged with the movement from the nineteenth century into the twentieth. The women seem to have deliberately styled themselves as of the new world. As early as 1892 they announce that Tennyson's funeral represented for them the end of the Victorian era: the Victorian era is 'an epoch already yesterday'. They disown the Victorian age and proclaim:

it is for us, England's living & yet unspent poets to make all things new. We are for the morning – the nineteenth century thinks it has no poets – nothing to lose – verily it has nothing: for we are not of it – we shake the dust of our feet from it, & pass on into the 20th century.⁷

The dust of archaeology, the dust of the past, is shaken from their feet as they move into the new century and swear their allegiance to the modern. Even in 1892, then, Michael Field is claiming to 'make all things new'. But this does not mean that Michael Field has a confident manifesto of the new. The poets are rather feeling their way forward in the dark. In 1893 Cooper writes in the journal: 'I still do not [insert] yet [end insert] realise where modernity is taking me; I am moving with it as if down a stream, not using it enough ~~as~~ [insert] for [end insert] a motive force like a ~~mill-wheel~~ water fall turning a mill'.⁸ Again, in the 1894 journal, they feel 'in the midst of conflict, & all winter I've been in the state of Keats' Lamia when she was changing from a serpent into a human being – a state of torrid-transition. I don't know what I am or what I shall become. The Modern. The frustration of this state of flux is clearly shown in the appended comment: 'I wish I could get my change over, for it's not pleasant, or, more positively speaking, it's almost unendurable – a mortal strife.'⁹ Talk of 'modernism' in the diaries refers to theological, not literary, modernism,¹⁰ and the desire to write in a 'modern' fashion cannot be assimilated with the particular style we now call literary modernism, either.¹¹ The 'modern' seems to be, above all else, the result of a historical dynamic that has been gaining momentum over the course of the nineteenth century and that sees the turn of the century as a gateway to the new. Bradley and Cooper believed that 'modernity reaches to all facts & includes them: classic antiquity ignored many; but the new art & literature is great enough to bear all truth'.¹² Stepping over the temporal boundary was in itself as traumatic a transition as was their religious conversion a few years later, and the two were not unrelated.

As described in Chapter 1, Bradley and Cooper's life narratives show an attempt to make sense of their position as one in between the old century

and the new; the pagan and the Catholic; their sexual identity and their religious identity; homoeroticism and heteroeroticism. They self-consciously existed on these fault-lines within their personal history, and there are close connections between these structures and the large-scale tensions which were thought to shape global history at this time. *Wild Honey*, more than any other volume, emblematises this process. Indeed it is the only book which contains both wild pagan poetry, and some new overtly religious poetry. It is clear that in this volume Michael Field are keen to unite the binaries which have structured their past decade and to find a way forward which renounces nothing. On the eve of 1901, Bradley and Cooper celebrate the end of the century by dining with Ricketts and Shannon. Commenting on this event afterwards in their diary, they declare that while 'Shannon asserts that he belongs to the new century & savours the opportunities it gives him: the Fairyman [Ricketts] declares he remains with Beethoven'; they, on the other hand, 'protest that we trust to unite a rationale behind it (more obvious, perhaps, in the case of *Sigis and Song and Long Ago*, but equally true of *Underneath the Bough* – the song book). I propose that the rationale behind *Wild Honey* was their transition to 'the modern'. When Bradley and Cooper first started thinking about this volume in 1893, they characterised themselves as 'the knights of the modern'.¹⁴ Here they reflect that they sometimes think they should call the book 'The Call of Years' – a title which again stresses the temporal concerns of the volume – but they discard it because they are still of the future rather than the past ('a single tooth between us might justify us in adopting the beautiful phrase').¹⁵ This book, reaching out to embrace the future, is primarily about being on the edge, between one thing and another; it is their comment on the turning of the century as much as it is a reflection on the personal changes they underwent during this fifteen-year period. Ordering and arrangement still mattered as much, if not more, with *Wild Honey* as with *Underneath the Bough*. In a letter to Ricketts, copied into the diary by Cooper, Bradley stresses Cooper's careful attention to the ordering and arrangement of this volume:

And, Painter, remember! This book is Henry's; what is excellent in its ordering & distribution is Henry's. Attribute also to Henry all that's comfortable in the art; kindly also attribute to Henry all that you do not approve in the range or chequer of the emotions.¹⁶

I suggest that the contours of this volume, so carefully shaped by Cooper, record the story of momentous transition and the specific dialectics that

I suggest that in *Wild Honey* we see both the desired union between cover image and text, but also the struggle that inevitably ensues. In his manifesto of design - 'The Unwritten Book in the second issue of *The Dial* (1892)'⁷⁵ - Ricketts himself declares his illustrations of text were designed both to express something of himself as well as to enhance the expressive qualities of the text. But above all he felt that design and text worked together to form part of 'a whole in which each portion is exquisite in itself yet co-ordinate'.⁷⁶ His cover image for *Wild Honey* is a fairly quiet and faithful, and beautiful, representation of the main theme of the book. In his design Ricketts took pains to depict a real bee and did not allow himself to give full rein to his own interpretative and imaginative freedom. The cover image is certainly a part of the whole, and it does not threaten the identity of the text in any way. However, there is no doubt that the cover design of *Wild Honey* commodifies the text, in a manner analogous to the nineteenth-century commodification of women.⁷⁷ What we see in *Wild Honey* can be read in one of two ways: either Bradley and Cooper are carefully distancing the process of commodification from themselves by preserving an aesthetic space within the book which is kept at a distance from, whilst being mediated through, Ricketts' cover (here the designer is the one who dirties his hands with public transaction), or we can see the designer effectively pimping the poetry. These are perhaps two sides of the same coin, and that coin is the double nature of the lyric book: the difference between the purchasable object and the object of aesthetic contemplation ('what you can buy and what you cannot', in Psomiades terms).⁷⁸ In *Wild Honey* it is the bee that negotiates this relationship between the cover and the text, and is crucial to this simultaneous holding together and apart of the economic and aesthetic: Michael Field's aestheticist bees are ultimately mediated through Ricketts's saleable gilt bees on the cover.

Yet this dynamic can be complicated if we look more at the personal relationship between writer and cover designer. A long series of letters between the women and Ricketts charts the negotiation and collaboration over the book, and suggests we should find a strong bond between the poems and the cover that encloses them. Ricketts was intimately involved in all aspects of the book production, and the correspondence was punctuated with sketches of bees and the rumination over the title:

I do not care for Various Thyme, it suggests nothing to me, nor does it roll on the lips. [...] I think Honey of the Woods the best on the whole, and I should advise it: Honey of the Rocks might perplex people who might not expect to find it cultivated there.⁷⁹

Cooper exclaims in the diary on first sight of the cover, 'A lovely thing it is! Bees among ~~parallel~~ parallelograms [sic] of their combs, & on the back single bees & several honey-bells'.⁸⁰ On receiving the volume, John Gray remarks that 'The decoration is rightness materialised'.⁸¹ This collaboration clearly led to a very pleasing marriage between text and book design.

Moreover, Michael Field's letters testify to the fact that some of the poems in the book were written specifically for Ricketts, forging a very explicit connection between insides and outsiders: between writer and designer. In a letter to John Gray, Bradley writes of 'Tommy's' (Thomas Sturge Moore's) attempt to ascertain the external presences behind some of the lyrics in the volume. After identifying a couple of influential personages, he concludes, she quotes, 'No, after another hunt, I decidedly cannot find Ricketts behind the rhymes, still less myself'.⁸² Bradley writes to Gray in a panic because she thinks Sturge Moore may have already shared his findings with Ricketts and left him feeling betrayed by the collaboration: 'It may be already the poet has assumed the Palace, of its master there is no thought. What worlds may be ruined by the blindness of this bosom-friend'. Bradley turns to Gray's help, begging him to hint to Ricketts in his letters of the poems in which his presence may be found. This intimate, and passionate, connection between poet and cover designer, which Bradley clearly thought would be apparent to her friends within the text, is a driving force behind Michael Field's Apian Aestheticism. Reading the presence of Ricketts into the heart of this volume, as well as the bindings that surround it, gives us an important insight as to its conception and a clearer sense of how the economic reality of the worker bee, and the beautiful consumable honey, are held synchronically with the bees which signify the faint hum of Michael Field's finely tuned, and barely audible, aesthetic voice.

The need for secrecy has been recognised in Michael Field's work by critics who tend to attribute it to the authors' desire to hide their 'perverse' sexuality, or their dual authorship.⁸³ Yet, primarily, this desire for 'hidden honey' to 'remain hidden' is an aestheticist urge for a rarefied voice. Doubtless, it did allow Michael Field to benefit, politically, from the suggestiveness and obscurity of its style, but this doesn't seem a primary motivation for Bradley and Cooper. Certainly, Bradley and Cooper's close friends and recipients of this book recognise their desire for secrecy as an aestheticist impulse. Cooper copies into the diary a letter from John Gray who comments that 'The Wild Honey is full of enchantment.... There is a glorious busy hum like the sound of invisible things in the Italian

summer'.⁸⁴ Similarly, Berenson writes from *I Tarti* that the volume is so rich and concentrated that this volume, like any honey, 'is not to be gulped down in gallon-measure by any person of my years'. As he 'sips' at this volume, he finds only one thing to criticise, which seems a result of the intensity he admires: 'you unconsciously fall into a certain Donne-ishness, a certain obscurity'.⁸⁵ Whether it is a positive feature or not, both correspondents find this need for secrecy a part of an aestheticist mode of writing, rather than a political necessity.

The desire to 'cut the insides out' – to separate their poetry from the world of the commodity in which it must necessarily exist – is the theme which recurs throughout the volume. 'The Poet' (p. 98) presents a figure who is 'a work of some strange passion / Life has conceived apart from Time's harsh drill, / A thing it hides and cherishes to fashion, and uses imagery which connects the poet with the Romantic solitary visionary ('Within his eyes are hung lamps of the sanctuary'; he is 'Holy and foolish'; 'ever set apart'). Ironically, this reaching back to the past is at this time connecting Bradley and Cooper with the impending cultural rift, and the modernist exponent of 'high art' who also eschews 'Time's harsh drill'.

'A Palimpsest' goes on to explore a model for writing which will preserve the sanctity imagined above:

... The rest
Of our life must be a palimpsest –
The old writing written there the best.
[...]
Let us write it over,
O my lover,
For the far Time to discover [...]. (p. 180)

This poem has multiple significances, drawing together many of the major themes in their lives. At its most explicit, it acknowledges, and simultaneously closes, the rift between their earlier pagan writing, and their later, Catholic, work, celebrating the continuation of their lives together and their ability to write the future over the past. It also voices their conviction that 'they are a Great Poet – unappreciated at present, but certain to be famous and adored in the next generation'.⁸⁶ However, the poem also reveals a peculiarly aestheticist desire to hide the lyric from the public gaze even as it is exposed in the published volume. Michael Field's poetry is imagined as the obscured text of the palimpsest: something

deeply buried but detectable by the finest of sensitivities. This need for a voice which is almost silent, a poetry almost invisible, draws Bradley and Cooper to an imaginative covering over of their work: they do not obliterate it, but veil it in an effort to maintain it at one remove from commerce and daily life.

Perhaps the second-best thing to Ada Levenson's parodic volume consisting entirely of margin (a poetry of such obscurity that it tested even the finest sensibility) is Michael Field's palimpsest, which preserves a poetics of secrecy and liminality by insisting that the perfect lyric should be voiceless. Indeed, in her parody Levenson insists on a tension between the secretive, blank, insides of her volume, full of 'beautiful unwritten thoughts', and the commodified outsides – an elaborate cover of 'Mile-green skin powdered with gilt nappahars and smoothed with hard ivory, decorated with gold by Ricketts (if not Shannon) and printed on Japanese paper'. In response to her satiric vision, Wilde promised to produce the volume (with Beardsley doing the unwritten text), adding, 'There must be five hundred signed copies for particular friends, six for the general public, and one for America'.⁸⁷ One wonders whether it was entirely an accident that Michael Field's *Wild Honey from Various Thyme*, with its gilt design by Ricketts on a dark-green cover, bears such a close resemblance.

Yet this attempt, within *Wild Honey*, to disconnect the space of art from the space of the market is deliberately troubled by the fact that the near-silent aesthetic voice within the volume is figured through the same bee imagery which also signifies the consumable book object. This tension between cover and text is brought into the poetry itself, through the presence of Ricketts within the poems. 'Penetration' is one very interesting example:

I love thee; never dream that I am dumb:
By day, by night, my tongue besiegeth thee,
As a bat's voice, set in too fine a key,
Too tender in its circumstance to come
To ears beset by havoc and harsh hum
Of the arraigning world; yet secretly
I may attain: lo, even a dead bee
Dropt sudden from thy open hand by some
Too careless wind is laid among thy flowers,
Dear to thee as the bees that sing and roam:
Thou watchest when the angry moon drops foam;
Thou answerest the faun's soft-footed stare;

organisation of this society, with the kind of Decadent mediation on the beany and pain of the bee life more reminiscent of Hope's poem. As a result, observations such as those of the hive at its most richly endowed moment, just before the swarm leave it behind, are presented in economic terms – in a dry discourse of facts and figures:

For this is the royal domain of the brood-cells, set apart for the queen and her acolytes; about 10,000 cells wherein the eggs repose, 15 or 16,000 chambers tenanted by larvae, 40,000 dwellings inhabited by white nymphs to whom thousands of nurses minister.⁶⁵

But they are also endowed with a poetry of a deeply aestheticist hue:

From the height of a dome more colossal than that of St. Peter's at Rome, waxen walls descent to the ground [...]. Here, lodged in transparent cells, are the pollens, love-ferment of every flower of spring, making brilliant splashes of red and yellow, of black and mauve. Close by, sealed with a seal to be broken only in days of supreme distress, the honey of April is stored, most limpid and perfumed of all, in twenty thousand reservoirs that form a long and magnificent embroidery of gold, whose borders hang stiff and rigid.⁶⁶

The propagation of the bee is given an equally dual treatment. Towards the end of the book we see things from an evolutionary perspective, which places the bee within a rational economy of survival and sacrifice, while, earlier, bee-coupling is described in the following, rather Decadent, terms:

Prodigious nuptials these, the most fairy-like that can be conceived, azure and tragic, raised high above life by the impetus of desire; imperishable and terrible, unique and bewildering, solitary and infinite. An admirable ecstasy, wherein death, supervening in all that our sphere has of most limpid and loveliest, in virginal, limitless space, stamps the instant of happiness on the sublime transience of the great sky; purifying in that immaculate light the something of wretchedness that always hovers around love, rendering the kiss one that can never be forgotten [...].⁶⁷

The combination of aesthetic, economic and political significances clustered around the bee here – but also the simple fact of the publication of a 350-page book devoted entirely to the bee – demonstrates the currency and multiplicity of the bee image at this time.

In relation to *Wild Honey*, it should first be noted that this book *looks* very similar to Maeterlinck's 1901 English edition. Both are covered in green, and decorated with a repeated, stylised, gilt bee motif. While

Michael Field's bees are arranged around a simple golden honeycomb structure, Maeterlinck's bees are punctuated with golden pollen grains. Since Michael Field were well acquainted with this famous playwright and poet, it is impossible not to read their book in light of the concerns identified in this predecessor.⁷⁰

Within *Wild Honey*, it is the relationship between the bee cover and the honeycomb insides which is crucial to this simultaneous holding together and apart of the economic and aesthetic. When Bradley writes that 'A Lyric Poet shd. be put on the pyre the day he is published', she captures very succinctly the misfit between the lyric and the economics of publishing which are so central to the finely rooted cover. The bindings of the book act for Bradley and Cooper like the dramatic stage, which, when the curtains open, reveals the lyric performance which was never meant for such public display. The disjunction between the framing cover and the 'insides' is not missed by the recipients of Michael Field's books. On receipt of *Sight and Song*, Berenson writes of the 'daintily bound' and 'prettily finished' book that he 'wanted to see what was inside' before he thanked them for it.⁷¹ Similarly, Havelock Ellis writes on receipt of *Long Ago* that it is 'very fair to look upon, so much so that one is almost content to gaze upon the article'. He adds, 'I have scarcely yet looked into the inside but I can see that there is a great deal I shall enjoy'.⁷² The very seductiveness of the cover risks either prostituting or obscuring the private poetry within. It is through Apian Aestheticism that this text imagines a paradoxical fusion between what were acknowledged to be contradictory imperuses.

This relationship between text and cover must be described in terms which echo influential studies that have situated the meaning of a literary text at the interface of its linguistic and bibliographic structures. Gérard Genette has given us the term 'paratext' to denote those bibliographical frames – such as the cover, the title page, the preface – which mediate between the work and its audience.⁷³ In the 1890s the bibliographical aspects of the text had, of course, gained a new importance as Lorraine Janzen Kooistra has documented in her claims that 'the page was reconceived as a unit of two-dimensional design and the book as a three-dimensional art object that had the potential to be a thing of beauty as well as utility'.⁷⁴ Kooistra has a very particular model of interaction between text and paratext, which she explores through the idea of a 'bixtural' relationship between text and image in fin-de-siècle books which acknowledges their new equality and the union, or power struggle, which can result from it.