ALL OVER ALL OVER AGAIN: SPLIT ENDS IN VICTORIAN LITERATURE

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Ending up, winding down; embering out, turning in; tying off, passing on. So the story goes. Sadder but wiser, revisiting the scene with wandering steps and slow, love among the ruins knows the old place at last, recovers the origin, fronts the trauma and backs the dream. Try it like this:

> I took her hand in mine, and we went out of the ruined place; and, as the morning mists had risen long ago when I first left the forge, so, the evening mists were rising now, and in all the broad expanse of tranquil light they showed to me, I saw no shadow of another parting from her.

This familiar passage quintessentialises post-Miltonic narrative closure for a plurality of reasons; the reason that concerns me here has to do with plurality as such. As most novel-readers in the anglophone world probably know by now, the ending Dickens gave *Great Expectations* was a replacement part, a second thought. It was an alternative to the ending found in his original manuscript, which is more austere and less greatly expectant. Moreover, as most earnest Victorianists probably know by now, Dickens's second thought was a fourth thought at least. At Bulwer Lytton's urging he substituted for his first version a revised ending that ended in manuscript: "I saw the shadow of no parting from her but one," which ending he revised on the proof sheet to read: "I saw the shadow of no parting from her," which ending he revised anew between the editions of 1861 and 1862 to read as given above: "I saw no shadow of another parting from her" (1996, 440-41). This ambiguous formulation Dickens decided to stick with, and critics have agreed to disagree in interpreting its ambiguity: for some, Pip foresees no parting because none is in store; for others, there must be another parting out there somewhere to which Pip remains characteristically blind; and so on. I, who have no stake in Pip's late expectations one way or the other, would like to finesse Dickens's finale instead, by reading its ambiguity as a metatextual thing—as an author's performative, not to say intentional, act of bibliographical self-reference.

The edition of *Great Expectations* that we really need is going to be printed on onion-skin paper of a nearly translucent thinness. The final paragraph will occupy the top half of a right-hand page; and through the blank space that follows its last line you will just be able to make out, strategically positioned on the bottom half of the next right-hand page (pinching the two leaves together, if you like, before a broad expanse of tranquil light), each ghostly predecessor line that Dickens tried out first. You will see, that is, in black and white the misty shadow of each other parting that Dickens wrote before writing the one in which his alter ego Pip denies that the shadow of another parting can be seen. You will also see how the two changes Dickens's 1862 version introduced exist in a mutual tension that surely bears on critical controversies about what the famous last words of this novel mean. In replacing "I saw the shadow" with "I

saw no shadow" the novelist told himself, and Bulwer Lytton too I suspect, "That's it, enough already, final cut." But then some imp of conscience, or rhythmic impulse, made him introduce the new adjective "another," and so smuggle into the final version a trace of the alterity, the difference from itself, that constituted its textual prehistory.

We can't read such an obliging edition at present alas (though Janice Carlyle's recent Bedford edition points in the right direction). But if we can readily imagine one it is because such an edition would be a material embodiment of the text that we have been reading for some time already, for the end of *Great Expectations* is one of those texts that we know not only in its versions, but *as* those versions. A text whose sense of an ending has been multiplied, diversified, split and forked into a plurality that is not only profoundly suited to this particular novel but also broadly pertinent, I shall argue, to the Victorian epoch that produced it. Anny Sadrin backtracks *Great Expectations* from the textual delta of its last words up into the mainstream narrative proper, only to find half a dozen eligible "endings" there too (169-70; Meisel 327): Pip's giving up his expectations, and his forgiving Miss Havisham; Magwitch's reappearance, and his death; Pip's discovery of Estella's humble origins, and his return to his own at the forge. At each of these points the plot keeps a long-standing promise, and a knot of narrative energy is released into satisfying resolution. It is as if the bibliographical plurality at the close brings forth from the text—causes to stand out from it with new clarity—an antecedent narratological plurality to match. Each moment of partial completion is apprehended as such because it fulfills a narrative expectation, until the succession of fulfillments precipitates in us a larger realisation: namely that a plurality of endings has been virtually entailed on the reading experience all along by Dickens's title whose significant plural form can escape our attention because of its familiarity. Great expectations call for great conclusions, and lots of them apparently, each one the shadow of another parting, each a repartee or answer whose arrival is a summons to depart.

In the reader whom a great narrative engrosses the imminence of an ending provokes a crisis correspondingly great, fraught with anxieties of separation. These anxieties can mount to traumatic pitch when the reader finds the end of the book symbolising the end of an experience, or a vision, or a life; something similar can happen collectively to the reading public, on a different order of magnitude and urgency, when the end of a great writer's book is felt to portend that of his career. I think such considerations came home vividly to Dickens during the 1860s, the last decade of his life, when the obligatory parting of the ways at a novel's end cast the shadow of another obligatory parting that lay ahead of him, in a light where he could not but see it. This may be why the final sentence of his next and last complete novel *Our Mutual Friend* (1865) no sooner records a handshake "at parting" (Book the Fourth, Chapter the Last) than the author's pen underscores "THE END"—and then proceeds to undermine that end's finality with the addition of a "Postscript. In Lieu of Preface." And it may be why, in republishing *Martin Chuzzlewit* in 1868 two decades after its first appearance and within two years of his death, Dickens followed the last-sentence image of "the grosser prospect of an earthly parting" (ch. 54) with a newly written postscript ("May, 1868") deferring the textual end and diffusing its symbolic threat. In each instance, as in *Great Expectations*, Dickens performs his rite of "parting" by parting the end formally,

dividing closure and spreading it out over two parts, or four, or more. This formal preemption of the punctual endedness of the end, this rehearsal and echo of endings in the plural, serves to rescue the text from the fatal fixity of the stark single instance, that implacable stop sign which Robert Browning singularly troped as "Death's lean lifted forefinger" ("Up at a Villa—Down in the City" [1855], l. 32). When George Eliot quits *The Mill on the Floss* with the assurance "In their death they were not divided" ("Conclusion"), she frames a general hope about human mortality, one that her contemporaries desperately wished to sustain against mounting odds. The peculiarity I mean to highlight is the frequency with which Victorians upheld their hopes by holding up their texts and staving off, with the formal end, the vaguer terminal menace it portended. By long division of formal structures they multiplied their options.

However this divide-and-conquer strategy served Charles Dickens nearing his end it was certainly welcomed by his contemporaries, and it was inventively and like-spiritedly deployed by many an author among them. The appeal of split ends—of multiple, redundant and to that extent optionalised literary closure—had cultural causes that I shall only touch on, not because they don't matter but because they are the usual suspects: Death and its herald the shock-trooper Change; vital Innovation and its dull domestic uncle Order; continent Integrity and illimitable Desire. Such were the antinomies the Victorians lived by, and with an ambivalence to which the literary device of split ends faithfully and variously ministered. An era that identified personal and national identity with incessant individual and global development, an era that prolonged the hour of death more erotically the more plainly it apprehended in that hour not a spiritual threshold but a brute wall, was an era of divided aims. We know the Victorians' ambivalence over last things intimately because it is ours to this day.

Witness the name of this very conference. "Endings": you can almost hear the inflectional suffix thicken into a gerundive progressive plural that is amply accommodating, a conference rubric unerringly chosen for its capacity to license inquiry: a sign, face it, of the academic times. Whether or not our disciplinary portfolio in Victorian studies is bigger or better now than a generation ago, it has without question lately undergone diversification. Multidisciplinary and polyvalent and multicultural are words to conjure with and their magic operates in, appropriately, a multitude of ways. In a crucial social sense these words and their polysyllabic siblings facilitate coexistence through mutual toleration, and not just within the contemporary literature department or university. They also do admissions work that has a more intellectual focus. Admitting more light, they widen the professor's lens and dilate the pupil; at the same time they constitute a self-respecting admission of how much we have to ignore. We coin and spend an unlovely neologism like postcolonialities or feminisms partly to keep out of trouble, yes, but also partly to honor the mystery of all we do not, cannot know. What we do know better than ever is our ignorance which can seldom have been so much on the scholarly mind as in this instant-information age, and whose borders our academic shop-terms patrol like so many pluralist cherubim.

Pluralist and not just plural, an academic term like "Endings" expresses a sort of liberal reverence before the unknown that the Victorian imagination would have found congenial. That is because the Victorian imagination practically invented it at the same time that it went about performing obsequies, observing last rites, paying final respects.

(Might polyphemism be the form euphemism takes when repelling the great Cyclops of the single idea?) Our conference title maps a high road between Victorian-liberal and contemporary-postmodern cultural formations. The common thread is the idea of liberty which Victorian minds no less than ours could wield only by putting it into dialectical relation with the idea of constraint. Putting it there, and keeping it there too, in a tension of the ultimate with the optional, the disposable with the indispensable, the overdetermined with the unclaimed: that is what Victorian writers undertook when they pluralised literary closure, and it is what piques our sense of an "Endings" today. What gave this conference a call-for-papers we couldn't help rising to is the way its title taps, like an unprotected kneecap, a complex of desire and taboo that we share with the Victorians. Despite substantial and irreversible change between their time and ours—and despite the schizophrenic zeal with which our culture seeks by turns to coopt theirs and to repudiate it—we still yearn for freedom as the Victorians did once, and for security too, just as we discern prospects of modern bondage and of modern chaos that they knew first, and indeed first taught us to shiver at. The split ends of Victorian literature were shivering lessons in which the remainder of this paper offers hints for practice. I shall for convenience's sake distinguish between two chief means of pluralising closure—the variorum and the serial—with an eye on particular effects achieved by each means in more and less distinct instances, yet always holding in view their shared Victorian task: to honor alike fate and the will, to mediate between the rage for order and the hunger to be free.

What I call variorum endings appear in textual space and are grasped in simultaneity as layered structures. One tends to see them, or I do anyway, like that diaphanous dream text of *Great Expectations* I asked you to hold in your mind's eye: inasmuch as one reads Dickens's versions in co-present overlap rather than sequence—as differences rather than compositional changes—one is reading in a variorum mode. Any work that exists in versions is a variorum candidate and almost every technological and marketing trend in the nineteenth-century book trade ensured that such variorum candidacies should be legion, albeit in most cases trivial. The versioned texts of this kind that make the strongest call are the ones that exhibit significant turbulence on or around the last page: FitzGerald's *Rubaiyat* (1859, 1868, 1872, 1879) and D. G. Rossetti's *House of Life* (1870, 1881), for example, insistent as each is on the interdependence of desire with destiny; or that technically Victorian publication *The Fall of Hyperion* by John Keats (1857, composed 1819), where the final phrase "On he flared" highlights in retrospect, and so problematises, the Elgin-marmoreal titanism of the earlier *Hyperion: A Fragment* (1818). Of *Festus* (1837)—the bestselling melodramatic epic that Philip James Bailey publicly force-fed in successive editions for half a century with every spasmodic tidbit he could imagine—it might be observed that its grand finale became increasingly ridiculous the more the poem bulked up into the indiscriminate sum of its many versions and the more Bailey's gospel of no-fault redemption seemed a plenary indulgence he devised for himself.

A more appetising prospect for interpretation is presented by works that embrace the relativism of variorum structure not as an accidental opportunity but as a governing principle. When narratives like Tennyson's *The Princess* (1847), Collins's *The Woman in White* (1860), or Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) share the rights and duties of storytelling

among several participants, even the pretty smooth baton-transfer effected by all three works repeatedly discloses within the mechanics of the narrative a threat of disruption which bears in interesting ways on the disruption that the antagonist aristocrat (Princess or Count) has made in the flow of normal bourgeois living. All three of these works compensate abundantly for the risks posed by their multiple internal closures: each ends in full endorsement of a social and narrative order that has been reinforced many times over, the redundancy of the reinforcement arising from the recurrence of the threat. Such aggressively stabilising orderliness was not, however, an inherent feature of the variorum mode, as may be seen from Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* (1847). Here again narratorial diversification enables an interwoven and nested plot, but this one famously refuses to stay put. Its loose ends and asymmetrical emphases remain that way rocking the narrative with an elemental, perpetual passion that virtually guarantees the "unquiet slumbers" so meekly forfended—and in the plural, too—by Lockwood's last incontinent sentence (ch. 34). And then there's *The Ring and the Book* (1869) where the variorum principle grows all in all: the versioned counterpoint of view is Browning's whole point, if there is a whole and if there is a point given a poem whose last book opens with the line "Here were the end, had anything an end" (12.1). That texts don't have ends but make them, and make them over and over and over, is a principle that Browning extracts with exhaustive ostentation from the economy of the Victorian variorum.

Ordinarily we associate variorum work with editors rather than authors, and indeed for our purposes as students of Victorian endings the distinction between these two classes of literary producer turns out not to matter much. We get the forked last word on *Great Expectations* only through an edition, and the structure of multiple authorship within *The Princess* or *Wuthering Heights* implies the hand of an editor in fact if not in name. It is this implication that creates the liberating effect of multiple possibility wherein the work comes to us as one version among others that might have been. The same pluralist implication we find in these versional fictions, emancipated as they are into the alibi of their latent options, also attends the real thing, the edition proper. No matter how proper an Authoritative Edition declares itself to be, its very claim to privilege betrays it, for in conceding the possible existence of other less privileged editions it squanders its monopoly and dwindles into a version in spite of itself. One can, for practice, apply this reasoning to that magnificently Victorian monument of the Higher Criticism, the Revised Standard Version, of the Old and New Testaments—so denominated, on its publication in the 1880s, without a trace of irony.

During the nineteenth century editorial apparatus as such became a veritable machine for the manufacture of many-ply closure. Where does an edition of a work end or the work of an edition begin? When all is said and done, when *is* all said and done? If it's not over till it's over, and if we approach the edition itself as a literary genre, then the appendices, notes, afterwords, indices, annexes, and tables that swathed a Victorian edited text ought to count as "text" too. These text-legitimating supplements were legitimate parts of a larger whole, their layered circumscription a part of what had been written and was to be read. None of this, surely, would have come as news to the generation of Macpherson, Chatterton, and Sterne, although it was the next generation, the first Romantics, who as a group seized on the generic opportunities of the edition to divide themselves into author and editor, and to partition accordingly the text of

imaginative works like Southey's *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801) and Moore's *Lalla Rookh* (1817), Scott's *Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805) and *Waverley* (1814). The interplay of narrative with notes that constitutes the works of Walter Scott was, above all others, a formative calisthenic for the readers who went on to become Victorian writers. This Romantic textuality was threadbare already—in the puff upholstery of back matter furnishing, say, Bulwer Lytton's self-edited novels—when Carlyle pulled the generic fabric inside out in *Sartor Resartus* (1834) and sported, with dandy bravado, the seamy side of the edition genre, pockets, plackets, slashes, and all. Carlyle's style of riddling a narrative with editorial shears had a marked impact in the next generation on works as different as the Brownings' *Sordello* (1840) and *Aurora Leigh* (1856), in each of which the narrative habit of editorialising self-interruption makes consciousness itself a nonstop traffic junction, and an *ipso facto* refutation of conclusiveness.

As the century attained its Victorian majority, high jinks like these tended to fall into the keeping of comic or children's literature, and the variorum apparatus of the edition resumed its old respectability. Yet the very persistence of the editorial format as a hallmark of earnestness set up interference patterns that diffused literary closure across an ambiguous ultimacy, a drafty endzone. The author of *Sartor Resartus*, having sobered up to write the life of Oliver Cromwell (1845), concludes his biographical labors with 32 numbered appendices and never cracks a single smile. *Frederick the Great* (1865) gets off with only one appendix, yet Carlyle more than makes up for that deficiency with a hundred pages or so of contents and index (each of these scholarly conveniences being, in addition, a thumbnail version of the work whose conclusion they at once bring about and put off). Ruskin takes so many curtain calls at the end of *The Stones of Venice* (1853, revised 1867) that he exasperatedly labels his latest farewell "Final Appendix," even as he tops it off with nearly a hundred pages of quadripartite index. And for Newman in the *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (1864, revised repeatedly until 1886) parting is such sweet sorrow that the triumph of belonging which ends his narrative, centres him at home in the true Church and itemises a loving network of Catholic fellowship, is not valedictory enough by a long chalk. Before the book is over, in the last of its editions there are seven ample Notes, four sections of Supplemental Matter (the last alone comprising nine Letters of Approbation and Encouragement), and then eight Additional Notes—all in support of a testimony that has evidently gone into documentary overdrive and can't be stopped.

Chronic appendicitis? It sounds like a medical impossibility, but it was manifestly a Victorian literary condition. The landmarks of nonfiction prose just mentioned are works which are the reverse of humorous; yet something funny is at play in their grotesquely protracted endings. The logistical support that documents give to arguments in accordance with editorial protocols of scholarly verification has been overtaken in this sage writing by another species of support, or rather of occult levitation. That sage waving goodbye was really weaving a spell. Furthermore, his trick of self-authorisation was not just a tough act to follow, but an even tougher one to quit once begun. Sustaining transcendental uplift and authority in a post-metaphysical age meant spinning glamour out of thin air; and this performance meant, in turn, forgoing any sanction or any conclusive repose that had its origin anywhere but in the conjuror's very improvisation. The sage's medicine show must go on, and on. Even the staunchly

dogmatical Newman found it so when the topic he took up was his own experience as a modern English self. When he came to end the *Apologia*, the archfoe of Liberalism presented symptoms of that cultural malaise which Arnold called "confused multitudinousness" (1848 letter to Clough, ed. Lang 128), and which was at once the Victorian sage's opportunity, predicament, and inevitable theme: What are we coming to? Where will it all end? These questions about the Condition of England had to be grappled with at the last as matters of literary form.

Suspicion on this score deepens when we consider in how self-editorial a way the sagest among Victorian novelists habitually turned over her last, sibylline leaf. By the time George Eliot came to the novel, the fussy framing devices Scott had bequeathed to Bulwer Lytton were long since passé. But she who began the end of *Middlemarch* (1872) with the motto "Every limit is a beginning as well as an ending" ("Finale") remained a tireless confecter, not only of introductory epigraphs, but also of supplements to the narrative proper, generically distinct codas tied to the novel's tale. Eliot even seems to have lightened the double duty of end-splitting by indulging a certain whimsical variation in nomenclature: having conferred an "Epilogue" on *Adam Bede* (1859), she turned with *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) to a "Conclusion," then reverted to "Epilogues" for *Romola* (1863) and *Felix Holt* (1866). *Middlemarch* winds up with a "Finale," perhaps in token of the author's looking forward, like her Dorothea, to renouncing an habitual affection. For in *Daniel Deronda* (1876), at long last, there is no paranarrative extension of Eliot's usual sort: here apparently it was sufficient to conclude a final chapter, scripturally numbered threescore and ten, with a eulogistic quatrain from *Samson Agonistes*: an epigraph in form, an epitaph in content, and surely an epilogue in effect—a splitting of ends by other means.

Epilogue, conclusion, finale, appendix, note, coda, index, reprise, cadenza, frame, postscript, by whatever name it is called the pluralising extra that differentiates and defers Victorian closure performs its cardinal variorum function not by anything it says but by simply being there. At a pinch even publishers' advertisements might serve, filling as they so often do the redundant last pages of a nineteenth-century book with the visual promise that reading need never end. Indeed, the welcoming interpellation of the advertisement makes gratifyingly plain the terms on which novels circulated among the Victorian public—which were also, now that our consideration of their isomorphic endings brings it up, the terms on which self-authorising sages like Carlyle (and pioneering poetry anthologists, for that matter, as different as F. T. Palgrave and William Morris) brought their panaceas to market.

The split-ended add-ons of the Victorian variorum addressed principally the eye, as I introduced this topic by saying. To that claim let me now append another: that the variably inflatable space these extras inserted between the reader and the end struck a highly desirable compromise between the Victorians' claustrophobia and their need for inclusiveness. Not to worry, say these endings again and again to the reader: we won't fence you in, but we won't shut you out either. The compromise thus struck had the psychological appeal it did because it played out a crisis that had strong political determinants. As the generations reeled from one Reform Bill to the next, effecting along with steady gains in popular literacy a gradual but unmistakable expansion in what a Victorian meant by "the public," the process of political liberalisation needed all

the cultural reinforcements it could get, and conventions of literary and bibliographic ending were drafted in the cause. Cross the conclusive with the inclusive and expect the inconclusive; yet, under the long regime of Victorian compromise, inconclusiveness seemed a hybrid well worth the fostering. It sent out the message that everyone had a seat at the table: the Arthurian Round Table, as the designers of the rebuilt Houses of Parliament fancied, along with Tennyson, whose *Idylls of the King* is, in its almost endlessly decadent structure as in its publication history (1842-1885), a variorum work of the distinctest kind. Laureate Tennyson no less than Cardinal Newman believed in the need of hierarchies where people knew their place, yet he too saw the wisdom of entrusting even conservative and reactionary views to a format whose pluralist way of ending repeatedly implied that there was room for all. So it goes, within the liberal cultural polity which now as then obviates decisiveness by incessantly proffering a menu of choices.

Let me then proffer my own, by turning from the variorum to the serial. If the variorum is a spatial and juxtapositive mode of plurality, the serial is a temporal and dialectical one. Variorum endings contain alternatives latitudinally, declaring in effect that "We're all in this together," and "See, we can get along." Serial endings instead postpone conflict in deference to a narrative resolution that is yet to come, declaring in effect "Wait, there's more" and "Listen, we'll see you later." I am still speaking politically here as well as psychologically: what variorum endings did for the status quo of the Victorian liberal state, serial endings did for the Victorian liberal history that underwrote it, including that Whig history of the future which guaranteed the present by the complacency with which it scouted out more of the same, as far as the eye could see. Serials play out in temporal anticipation (normally, anticipation of a happy ending) much the same Victorian cultural contraries that variora include in coexistence (normally, peaceful coexistence).

You would need more faith than I have in the political coherence of the nineteenth-century imagination to assert that it systematically called on seriality only where variation would not work, as a sort of closural method of last resort. There was, however, probably a gravitational tendency that way. Consider the ending of the most broadly influential narrative any of Victoria's subjects produced: the final paragraph of Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859). The *Origin* is neither a serial nor a variorum work, but a look at its ending can show us something about the difference between the two modalities and why that difference mattered to the Victorian mind:

> It is interesting to contemplate a tangled bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth, and to reflect that these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent upon each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around us. These laws, taken in the largest sense, being Growth with Reproduction; Inheritance which is almost implied by reproduction; Variability from the indirect and direct action of the conditions of life, and from use and disuse: a Ratio of Increase so high as to lead to a

> Struggle for Life, and as a consequence to Natural Selection, entailing Divergence of Character and the Extinction of less-improved forms. Thus, from the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object which we are capable of conceiving, namely, the production of the higher animals, directly follows. There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being evolved.

It was Darwin's achievement to convert modern knowledge about species differentiation from a classificatory table into a genealogical narrative and thereby from a variorum-style inventory into an explanatory series. This conversion is recapitulated here in Darwin's rhetorical conversion of a "tangled bank" (a synchronic snapshot phenomenon) into a "production" (at once a diachronic process and its result). Darwin untangles the bank by combing it out into the regularity of a factory production line, a process facilitated perhaps by an elided intermediate reorganisation of that "bank" as a counting house. Conceiving the biosphere thus as a mill that never shuts down reconciles the Darwinian mind to all that wastage of "famine and death" which fuels "the war of nature." And the power of reconciliation inheres in the power of narrative continuity to subsume a myriad episodic tragedies within a comic plot of overall improvement—a plot, furthermore, that has the distinct form of a never-ending serial: ". . . have been, and are being evolved." The book of Nature according to Darwin is no variorum: the "Variability" of life forms invites not additive inclusion but the very opposite; not peaceful coexistence but the lethal, eliminative struggle for existence. Nature does not make room but makes choices—stopping life lines cold is what Natural Selection is all about—and yet the stingy elitism of Darwin's personified terminator works for the best of ends.

An impressive theory, and a tough one; yet its now-you-see-it-now-you-don't teleology could not be more Victorian. That is what let it prevail: the temporal imagination and narrative suspension that it demanded took hard work, but it was work for which by 1859 one development after another in literate public culture had prepared the Victorian mind. It was a crucial part of this preparation to practise modes of serial sequencing that exercised the protention and retention that produce continuity. The industrial division of labour depended on it, as Darwin understood; the increasingly rationalised Victorian educational system depended on it too. So did railway travel, and so did the enjoyment of novels published in periodical or part-issue formats. In innumerable ways Victorian people had to be able to stop, and start again (like Darwin's Nature); and such interruption and resumption, in order to proceed without a hitch, had to proceed in the faith that the stop was not a full stop but a comma, that the working or learning or travelling or reading was not over but held over. What was "to be continued" had, in a functionally crucial sense, not been discontinued at all.

How prose fiction inculcated this gospel, by practising in format what it preached in substance, is a story well known by now; and the scholarship of Linda Hughes and

Michael Lund bristles with ideas about how serial periodicity enabled and affected work in poetry and nonfiction prose argument as well. Given the Victorians' saturation by sequential, progressive, developmental thought, the serialist argument of Hughes and Lund seems worth pursuing further, from effects of publication format into effects of literary form itself. If time and space permitted it, our ramble over Darwin's tangled bank of prose might open on the tracts of seriality that are so superbly irrigated, from chapter down to clause, by Walter Pater's writing in *The Renaissance* (1873). But we may as well turn now to where any formalist pursuit of Victorian serial closure would have to prove itself sooner or later: to the fortified nutrient medium that is form's richest literary habitat, poetry. How did the turnings of Victorian verse reflect, and reinforce, the seriality of the age? Taking prosody to be a patterned interpretation of time, how did Victorian poets approach finality as a formal matter possessing cultural implications? How did the conspiracy of metrical stress, rhyming recurrence, and stanzaic design let poets refigure the closural tactics of their age as they reached the end of the line?

Poetry puts language under constraints that seem almost designed to maximise opportunities for ending and thus to exercise the ambivalence that the notion of endings arouses. Poetic texts are, in this sense, tissues of finality. The anthology or collected-poems is a book-length form that keeps running down and starting up afresh as one lyric ends and the next begins; and this resourcefulness arguably underlay the revival during Victoria's reign of the sonnet sequence as practised by Barrett Browning, the Rossettis, George Meredith and George Eliot, Augusta Webster and several others, not to mention the sonnetlike sequentiality that Tennyson accurately claimed for his *In Memoriam*. Descending in scale from the book to the sequence to the single poem we might pause over Browning's epistolary dramatic monologue of Karshish, the Arab physician. That is certainly what Karshish does time and again within the poem—pause; stop with a start. Having examined the risen Lazarus as a medical curiosity and remaining fascinated by the evidence of a miracle that exceeds his training, Karshish can neither understand what he has beheld nor stop trying; and the proof lies in the spontaneous seriality of his punctual attempts to put a halt to written speculation and end the letter he is composing, each attempt overrun by a ballooning, unstoppable, self-serialising P.S.

Browning's dramatic monologue is an especially stagey case, of course, but it is a special case of a serial condition that is surprisingly widespread among Victorian poems. The age abounds in longer poems that are composed from modular stanzas, each of which must arrange to toe the bottom line in compliance with other, micromodular determinants of structure like meter and rhyme. And even these molecular units of prosody have, at least in the Victorian context, a markedly serial character, albeit at a level so miniaturised that we are likely to apprehend its structural effects as matters of texture instead. Thus rhyme in one respect highlights finality yet in another suspends and subverts it, since for every syllable that clinches a rhyme there has been a mate waiting somewhere up the line with open arms (and drumming fingers?). To recall Arthur Hallam's virtually Derridean definition of rhyme as "the recurrence of termination" (Ricks 314)—which is to say, the endlessness of endings—is to see how rhyme puts our split-ends theme in a nutshell and then scatters it over the poetic text like a Darwinian spore-sac. Even in unrhymed blank verse, the least determinate form for which Victorian poets could take out a license, the metrical effects that Gerard Manley

Hopkins called the "mounting of a new rhythm upon the old" and lines "rove over" (46-48) are found to rehearse, by a kind of aural symbolism, measures of human time.

Witness, or rather hear, a famous passage from Arnold's "Dover Beach" (1867), where the fourth line presents a very paradigm of seriality:

> Listen! you hear the grating roar
> Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,
> At their return, up the high strand,
> Begin, and cease, and then again begin,
> With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
> The eternal note of sadness in.

It was apt of the poet to frame the strictly iambic "Begin, and cease, and then again begin" with the spondaic pause of "high strand" on one side, and on the other side the anapestic flutter of "tremulous cadence slow." Apt, too, of the poet who could write that antepenultimate line, to finish off another mid-century poem with the thunderously terminal phrase "The unplumbed, salt, estranging sea," only to endow the poem in 1869 with the most conspicuously serial title in the lyric canon, "To Marguerite—Continued." In either instance we credit Arnold's signature melancholy, but we also have to wonder whether to attach this affect to his demonstration that things must end (like poems), or that (like poems) they must, having ended, then again begin, as each of those last three words must do after the internally if hesitantly rhyming n sound that precedes it—"then again begin"—precedes, and then at stanza's end also closes, the large arc of rhyme expectancy with the wee particle "in," an all but orphaned wrack of sound.

Do these acoustical undulations of rhymed meter constitute a standing wave or a breaking one? And which answer takes us closer to the cellular mysteries of Victorian seriality? You would be disappointed by now if I chose anything but both. Besides, it's too late in this paper for any but a forked conclusion: in Victorian seriality the standing and the breaking wave are one. Let the standing wave be the abstract inevitability of Arnold's rhyme scheme and of the iambic metrical paradigm back behind his words. Let the breaking wave then be the Bergsonian durée of those words as they escape from the perfection of meter into rhythmic caprice (especially when naming "The eternal" like that, with a barely anapestic flick of the tongue), and as they keep just missing the final rhyme so as to fine-tune it with each break (in for ing, then ing for in, then in tucked in at last). Victorian serial closure, I have said, partakes of the predominantly liberal dialectic of its era. That dialectic enacts itself here in the smallest, most intimately disturbing and reassuring elements of literary art that our analytics can discern. In 1850 or thereabouts—some time between the Continental revolutions, let us surmise with the poet's editors, and the Great Exhibition that was to beach the world's wares on England's shore—Matthew Arnold peered at France and wrote here into "Dover Beach" a formal reconciliation of order with change, of time's process with its result, of phenomenal drift with historical purpose: a reconciliation that can epitomise for us the kind of cultural work that his contemporaries were undertaking in serial forms up and down the literary scale.

If ever the standing and the breaking wave have been not merely heard but imaged as one, it is in the lyric that Victoria's master poet earmarked for his own ending in "Crossing the Bar":

> Sunset and evening star,
> And one clear call for me!
> And may there be no moaning of the bar,
> When I put out to sea,
>
> But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
> Too full for sound and foam,
> When that which drew from out the boundless deep
> Turns again home.

The breathtaking self-sufficiency of the second stanza owes part of its perfection to the first, whose syntax it completes. Much is due, that is, to the relation line five bears metrically to line one with whose three-beat pattern the later line both does and does not keep faith. Like the leftflush lines three and seven above and below it, line five taken alone scans firmly into pentameter. But the trimeter expectation we carry over from the first stanza prompts, in the reading of line five, a remarkable accelerando effect (quick, we can skip it in three). But this accelerando then yields to a sudden, invincible retard enforced by the thick consonant cushions of "moving seems asleep" which defy brisk pronunciation. "But such a tide as moving seems asleep": counting three thus against five, Tennyson manages to make the line run fast and slow at once, which is just what the "tide" it images does. Its current flows so quietly and seems so sleepily motionless precisely because of the volume and speed of its draft. To catch the turning of that two-timing tide, patiently yet promptly, is Tennyson's mission both as a mortal and as a poet, and the way the syntax carries over from stanza one nicely balances his dual responsibilities in one clear call. "May there be. . . such a tide" navigates between a traveller's prayer and a creator's fiat, as in the biblical text toward which the poet here returns, up past the first Genesis "Let there be" by one verse, into the amniotic boundlessness of those waters on which the spirit primally moved, without firmament or bar.

The ending of Tennyson's stanza may be even better than its beginning: in the stateliness of keel that lets four syllables carry three stresses without listing in line eight ("Turns again home"); in the witty grace that throws the first of these stresses on "Turns," which means in English what "verse" does in Latin; and in the sheer athleticism that poises, right between that nice twist of craft and the sublimity of "the boundless deep," the first of Tennyson's crucial enjambments. Enjambed lineation is of course another micromeasure of prosodic seriality, transpiring where the poetic verse stops but the poetic syntax does not; right at the unpunctuated end of the line, then, we once again reach a Victorian conclusion that continues. As a mode of serial ending, enjambment in fact matters more to "Crossing the Bar" than rhyme does, and with excellent reason. Not only does each enjambment the reader executes cross the submerged horizontal bar that a line of type implies—and in a textually homeward

direction, too, right-to-left—but Tennyson also coordinates these crossings with syntactical crisis points, suspending the reader momentarily over the "boundless deep" (7), then beyond the "bourne of Time and Place" (13), and finally at the point of crucial encounter with the great "Pilot face to face" (15). Tennyson's bar of life and death is one that is to be crossed only by a leap of faith, and for such a crossing his enjambed versification is positively calisthenic.

At least it is a leap of faith in the perfect stanza two, which I can find it in myself to regret is not where the poem ends. My own argument, however, should teach me better here. Tennyson's would not be the superbly Victorian valediction it is did it not prize the leap of hope more than the leap of faith, and did it not, to that end, see fit to pluralise and optionalise its closure. For if faith is the substance of things hoped for, then in order for hope itself to survive it must contrive to insubstantialise faith and give it a shake. Hope can hardly coexist with so "full," so substantially imagined an end as the second stanza's harmonic standing wave. Accordingly, and ever so slightly discordantly, our former scene resumes. Later that same evening:

> Twilight and evening bell,
> And after that the dark!
> And may there be no sadness of farewell,
> When I embark;
>
> For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place
> The flood may bear me far,
> I hope to see my Pilot face to face
> When I have crost the bar.

A Keatsian bell at vesper time awakens the soul from sleeplike drift; upon the hypnosis of mere currency there supervenes a personal agency, and with it a summons to the moral consciousness. The Pilot's very office as steersman faces up to the need of choosing between better and worse courses; the Pilot's very name plants an "I" or ego in the "plot" of sensuous being. The pun is almost certainly adventitious, but the point is not: Tennyson's second ending installs a governing soul in the vessel of the body, whereas stanza two made soul and body indistinguishable. There "That which drew from out the boundless deep" merged in one easeful breath a soul, a vehicle, and a medium—because all three were there engulfed in one personal-pronoun-less fusion of mere process. Stanza four, however, puts the first-person in every line, as if to preserve and lift the self over the flood it rides. Having in stanza two favored Victorian readers with what they were already calling euthanasia—death imagined as consummately tender, darkly handsome, narcotically fulfilling—Tennyson went on to cross, upon his aesthetic offer of the beautiful, an evangelical offer of the good.

And in providing both he provided Victorian readers with something they may have held dearer than either the beautiful or the good: the optative. Their choice was not whether to die, of course, or even really whether to finish the poem, but *how*: how in reading to affirm closural satisfaction, and *which* closural satisfaction; how in imagination to rehearse death, and *which* death, the one that absorbs or the one that

releases. Tennyson entitled his goodbye poem not "The Bar" or "When I Have Crost the Bar," but "Crossing the Bar," a gerundive of process like our conference rubric. Yet the process which the poem as a whole enacts is more than the fusion of life with flux that its first half so seductively imagines. What the reader performs at the lyric midpoint is, rather, the process of choosing between process and its other, purpose. In traversing the divide between matched alternative versions of the same structure, in crossing the bar between medial stanzas, the reader's quest for single closure doubles back. At that Victorian shadow of a parting, faith turns again hope. The Laureate's poem of bequest thus rehearses for one last time the choice of necessities, the necessity of choices, which has been our cloven, reciprocating theme.

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