

Michael Field in Their Time and Ours

Joseph Bristow
University of California, Los Angeles

THE FOWL AND THE PUSSYCAT: LOVE LETTERS OF MICHAEL FIELD, 1876-1909, edited by Sharon Bickle. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008. 268 pp. \$49.50.

MICHAEL FIELD AND THEIR WORLD, edited by Margaret D. Stetz and Cheryl A. Wilson. High Wycombe: Rivendale Press, 2007. 255 pp. \$55.00.

"MICHAEL FIELD": POETRY, AESTHETICISM AND THE FIN DE SIÈCLE, by Marion Thain. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. 270 pp. \$90.39 cloth; \$39.99 paper.

MICHAEL FIELD, THE POET: PUBLISHED AND MANUSCRIPT MATERIALS, by Michael Field, edited by Marion Thain and Ana Parejo Vardillo. Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2009. 384 pp. \$26.95.

I

Hardly any well-published Victorian women writers died in such obscurity as Katharine Harris Bradley (b. 1846-d. 1914) and Edith Emma Cooper (b. 1862-d. 1913): the intimately connected aunt and niece who put into print, mainly at their own expense, no less than eight collections of poetry and twenty-five volumes of verse-drama, most of which appeared under the name of Michael Field. Even fewer, as current scholarship suggests, have been the subject of such concerted reclamation during the past two decades. The recent appearance of four noteworthy volumes—an impressive edition of Bradley and Cooper's love letters, a fine collection of critical essays, a major monograph on their poetry, and a comprehensive selection of their shorter and longer poems—is a sure indication that a fresh generation of readers has found much to admire in the at times outspoken, though often outmoded, works of two women whose legacy went by and large unnoticed after their deaths. What, then, is the contemporary appeal of these coauthors whose long careers involved the almost uninterrupted production of countless writings that attracted decreasing critical attention from their contemporaries? Does recent criticism realize that in many respects Bradley and Cooper, who boldly declared in a brilliant lyric they were "Poets and lovers evermore," were mistakenly ignored in their own age?¹ Does their extensive oeuvre help us pinpoint some of the

exclusionary mechanisms that traditionally served to marginalize from the canon many talented English women poets—such as Alice Meynell (b. 1847-d. 1922), Dollie Radford (b. 1858-d. 1920), and Rosamund Marriott Watson (b. 1860-d. 1911)—whose careers developed during the fin-de-siècle and early twentieth century?

Answers to such naturally arising questions can prove difficult to entertain for at least two reasons. First, even though recent scholarship continues to advance our understanding of why Michael Field is an exceptional author whose writings need to be recovered from obscurity, the lack of a sufficiently detailed biography means that it remains hard to understand the complicated shape of Bradley and Cooper's three-decade career, which began in the 1880s by attracting critical praise, involved moving in the 1890s within the social literary world of London, and proceeded in the early 1900s to their growing isolation from everyone except a small circle of loyal friends.² Secondly, the tendency in recent criticism to focus on Michael Field's poetry rather than their verse-plays has produced a skewed understanding of their considerable achievements. More than two-thirds of the works they published during their lifetimes took the form of closet dramas, a genre to which they had an enduring commitment, even though it was—as some of their contemporaries went out of their way to observe—obsolescent. Further, one might go so far as to say that the larger proportion of their poetry that interests modern scholars is both formally and stylistically out of sync with its time, although recent critics seldom comment at length on the noticeably old-fashioned idiom that characterizes much of Michael Field's work.

This neglect is surprising because the complete scope of Bradley and Cooper's poetry and verse-drama bears the marks of a studied antiquarianism that resists what they perceived as the decidedly unaesthetic perils of modernity. Little wonder that they chose to pen fine lyrics about their intimacy in phrasing that sounds transplanted from a much earlier age; one of the best poems in their third collection, *Underneath the Bough* (1893), begins: "Methinks my love to thee doth grow / And this the sign: / I see the Spirit claim thee" (p. 125). More than twenty years later, Bradley (having survived Cooper's death the year before) writes touchingly in "A Cradle-Song": "Yea, thou retest—dost thou rest? / Yea, thou sighest, as one opprest: / In the shadows blue and gray" (p. 226). No matter how much one might see this style as part of a larger Decadent fascination with superannuated locutions, it is still the case that the poetry of Michael Field does not always fit easily into models of literary history that insist on the ways in which fin-de-siècle writing looks forward to early modernism. Just at the very moment when Ezra Pound's *Des Imagistes* anthology appeared in 1914, Bradley's lullaby appears to have retreated to a literary past that resounds more with the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries than the

earlier part of the twentieth. Since, in my view, the coauthors maintained a deliberately vexed relationship with contemporaneity, it is perhaps not surprising that their later volumes of poetry at times sound even more out of date than earlier ones, such as *Underneath the Bough*, which they modeled on the Elizabethan song-books that A. H. Bullen brought to light in the 1880s. Yet, as recent research shows, in turning to the idioms, forms, and subject matter of the past, Bradley and Cooper were not entirely retreating from a modern age that offended their artistic sensibilities. To be sure, their lyric poetry can be exquisitely tender. However, in the verse-dramas that comparatively few researchers seem willing to study, Michael Field was hardly tame in writing about scenes of rape, homicide, sedition, revolution, and commercial exploitation of the most violent kinds. Their interest in the hideousness of the past bore an oblique but critical perspective on their present: a time whose cultural trends and political upheavals they knew it would be impossible for them, as antimodern aesthetes, to address directly.

How, then, did Michael Field come into being? Why did their relationship endure so long? And why did they end their joint career in obscurity? To begin with, they were in large part able to launch their prolific career because Bradley had independent wealth. The daughter of a tobacco merchant who died when she was two, she enjoyed financial and intellectual autonomy from an early age. After her mother's death in 1868, she advanced her education by attending the Collège de France and Newnham College at Cambridge. A year before she was orphaned, Bradley had moved with her mother into her older sister Emma Cooper's marital home. Since Emma had been an invalid after the birth of her second child, Bradley took responsibility for running the household at Kenilworth, Warwickshire, where her affection for her eldest niece, Edith, grew rapidly. As Sharon Bickle writes, Bradley "seems far from the preconceived model of the Victorian spinster aunt" (p. xvii). By the 1880s, when the family moved close to Bristol, Bradley and her two nieces studied at the local University College, where Cooper took first-class honors in philosophy. Together with Cooper's sister, Amy, the coauthors belonged to a generation of academically adept women whose aspirations were not in keeping with the rather solemn religious ethos of their family home. What is more, Bradley and Cooper wanted to join their lives in loving unison, which meant confronting, in particular, Emma's objections to the ways in which her sister was married—if not yet in body, then in writing—to her daughter Edith.

Even though Bradley, who had astounding lyric gifts, published a volume of poetry under the pseudonym "Arran Leigh" at the age of twenty-six, everything else that she brought into print was with her niece, beginning with the verse-drama, *Bellerophôn*, which she paid to have published with Kegan Paul in 1881; this early volume, which modern scholars have largely

forgotten, carried the pseudonyms “Arran and Isla Leigh.” As Ivor C. Treby has observed, the name may “derive from Leigh woods” or a “visit to Arran,” as well as Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s feminist epic, *Aurora Leigh* (1856).³ Later, the coauthors began developing alternative authorial identities including the name of “John Cooley” (an amalgam of Cooper and Bradley). By 1884 they had settled on Michael Field, the precise origins of which remain somewhat open to debate, even if we know that Bradley and Cooper nicknamed each other “Michael” and “Field” respectively.

Although the coauthors, especially toward the end of their lives, hardly won the fame they felt should have been theirs, they went out of their way to maintain an exacting record of the innumerable personal and professional events that informed their partnership. Between 1888 and 1914, Bradley and Cooper kept a meticulous journal that is widely acknowledged to elucidate noteworthy aspects of the fin-de-siècle literary culture from which they found themselves gradually excluded. The significance of these twenty-eight bound volumes became apparent when in 1933 their literary executor T. Sturge Moore and his spouse issued a selection from their contents.⁴ Moore bequeathed these documents, which the poets called *Works and Days*, to the British Library in 1942. In 2003, Adam Matthew reproduced the journals in a thirteen-reel microfilm set that has provided a broader audience the opportunity to comprehend Bradley and Cooper’s unstinting commitment to their literary career. Besides Moore, who edited a selection of their poems in 1923, the only advocates who published their works posthumously were their associates in the Roman Catholic Church, to which they converted in 1907 after many years of writing about pagan topics.

Bradley and Cooper’s tense relationship with literary modernity is evident in their first volume, *Callirrhoe: A Drama and Fair Rosamund* (printed together in 1884), which received some positive reviews. Their preface to *Callirrhoe* reveals that this drama does not have a classical precursor; the story of the naiad, they observe, “has never been raised from obscurity by ancient bard or dramatist.”⁵ Michael Field’s interest lies in retrieving a disregarded figure from what they call the “dateless vistas of legend.” Thus they plead “guilty to anachronism” in their attempt to reclaim the glories of a “Bacchanalian” era when the ancient Greeks, long before there was “a refined and even skeptical Hellas,” enjoyed the heady “worship of Dionysus” (p. iii). In other words, in this verse-drama they stage for modern readers a history that has otherwise never been written. They conduct this project with remarkable fidelity to classical sources to which they had—unlike most generations of educated women before them—access in the original.

When we start reading this fervent, as well as scholarly, drama about the naiad’s formerly untold tale, the sense of anachronism connects not

so much with their revisionary perspective on classical myth as the style in which Bradley and Cooper tell Callirrhoe's story. *Callirrhoe* unfolds in an idiom that appears, even for the 1880s, rather out of date: "Snatch not up / The thyrsus with so tremulous a grasp!" commands Coresus, the Priest of Bacchus, where he presides at Calydon. "To-night there is high revel in the hills, / Mystic assembly in the deep recess / Of cloven altitudes" (pp. 8-9). Even if, in some respects, such lines emulate Algernon Charles Swinburne's sexually controversial *Atalanta in Calydon*, which won him much attention in 1865, Michael Field's dramatic language is strenuously quaint: "O Anaitis," declaims Coresus in blank verse, "there / Is the true Maenad! The wide difference / 'Twixt love and love, and oh! the wider room / 'Twixt pieties!" (p. 9).

By no means do these apostrophes and archaisms count as embarrassing anomalies in Michael Field's large oeuvre. These antique locutions, as we can see from the earliest and latest poems, characterize much of Bradley and Cooper's canon. To be sure, many 1890s poets, such as those linked with the all-male Rhymers' Club, placed a strong emphasis on venerating these aspects of literary tradition. (The Rhymers self-consciously imitated the roistering tavern poetry of the Elizabethans.) Yet Michael Field's outmoded style appears so deliberate that one can see why they objected to other avant-garde women writers who placed, as they did, volumes with trendsetting publishers Elkin Mathews and John Lane. They had little time for the kind of literary impressionism that drew much critical attention to George Egerton's first collection of short fiction, *Keynotes* (1893), which featured Aubrey Beardsley's sexually provocative designs. "George Egerton [Mary Chavelita Dunne]," they recorded, "does not even deserve damnation, but something weightier—crushing-out silence" (p. 262). Taken together, Egerton's unapologetic portrayal of modern women's infidelity and Beardsley's striking "Bookplate" for *Keynotes* (featuring a phallic geisha figure) made 1890s writing appear as if it had been cultivated in "some exotic house of ill-fame." "We think," they added, with mordant humor, "of changing our name to Messalina Garden to escape from the company of George Egerton" (p. 262). Egerton's *Keynotes* of course became a best-seller—precisely the kind of literary product whose mass-market success Michael Field spurned.

Michael Field's aversion to literary modernity hardly worked in their favor. Their tireless interest in blank-verse closet drama struck at least one of their contemporaries as preposterous. In his somewhat mocking 1925 memoir of Bradley and Cooper's partnership, American essayist Logan Pearsall Smith—brother of the poets' friend, Mary Berenson—recalls that the aunt and niece dedicated themselves to a genre he decries as "that deadest, to my mind, of all dead forms of art."⁶ As Smith sees it, the coauthors, undaunted by their diminishing significance among their peers,

continued “[s]teadily, year after year, for almost thirty years . . . writing tragedies in verse . . . full of grandiose passions, dreadful deeds of lust and horror, incest and assassination, hells of jealousy, and great empires tottering to their fall” (p. 117). Scarcely anyone among Michael Field’s closer acquaintances, Smith observes, actually read these works, whose intense narratives hurtle their protagonists toward extremes of passion. As his deliberately overstated rhetoric suggests, it is poignant to think that critics’ lessening responsiveness to Michael Field’s torrent of violent verse-dramas encouraged Bradley and Cooper to conclude that they were “the victims of a conspiracy and boycott.” However, as Smith also remarks, it was the “deepening gloom of non-appreciation” that “served to increase their belief in themselves” (p. 117).

At the end of 1901, for example, when they received barely a single notice of their exquisitely printed *Race of Leaves* (issued by Charles Ricketts’s Vale Press), Cooper confidently recorded in their journal: “In poetic strength, remorselessness & beauty we have grown like eagles.”⁷ It remains the case that scholars have yet to assess adequately whether Cooper, who had by any account a brilliant mind, was not deluded when she believed that Michael Field—if largely ignored by readers—had by that point reached unforeseen artistic heights through their dramatic works. Then again, even if Cooper’s 1901 remark might sound unduly boastful, it is worth bearing in mind that by pooling immense energy into a supposedly “dead” genre as the unperformed play, she and Bradley were following in the tradition of several Victorian women poets (such as Augusta Webster, b. 1837-d. 1894) who explored verse-drama to depict otherwise unspeakable desires that were banished from the nineteenth-century stage. Few scholars have examined Victorian women writers’ interest in this little-understood form.

It is not just Bradley and Cooper’s unwavering faith in verse-drama that made them seem out of step with their time. Intriguingly, they chose not to put the name of Michael Field to the final seven works of this type that they published during their lifetimes. They decided to publish plays such as *Borgia* (1905) and *Queen Mariamne* (1908) anonymously. (Their books of poetry retained the stamp of their authorial identity.) It is almost as if in their concluding set of verse-dramas, Bradley and Cooper ultimately wished to be invisibly present in a literary market that had long paid scant respect to their commitment to this genre. As Holly Laird shows in “Michael Field as ‘the Author of *Borgia*,’” her contribution to *Michael Field and Their World*, there is evidence to suggest that Bradley and Cooper’s elective anonymity relates to their fresh interest in coming before the public in a “stealthy” guise, such as the male one that “Michael Field” was originally supposed to provide until their cover was unfortunately blown in 1884 by Robert Browning, who admired *Callirrhoë* greatly.⁸ (Browning, Bradley

discovered, had encouraged the major literary review, the *Athenæum*, to use “the feminine pronoun” when writing about Michael Field. Up to that point, they had succeeded in convincing critics that this author should be addressed as “Mr”; see Bickle, p. xxv). Katharine (J. J.) Pionke reminds us in her chapter, “Michael Field: Gender Knot,” that Bradley informed “the Old”—as the coauthors nicknamed the elderly Browning—that he had done them a disservice by revealing their true identities: “we have many things to say that the world will not tolerate from a woman’s lips” (qtd. in Pionke, p. 24). By the time they published *Borgia* they were two years away from their religious conversion, and since much of their later poetry is doctrinal in content where the verse-drama is not, one can begin to see why they might prefer to preserve the identity of Michael Field for their mainly religious lyrics rather than their volatile closet plays. Their shifting authorial choices, however, make one thing clear. As poets, Bradley and Cooper ended their lives by presenting Michael Field as a Catholic writer. As dramatists, they wanted the authorship of their concluding closet plays to remain deliberately obscure.

Even if, after their deaths in the mid 1910s, Smith could not comprehend why they pursued such an eccentric-looking career, he fortunately did not have the last word among his contemporaries on Michael Field’s obscurity. In 1922 Mary Sturgeon published a respectable book-length biographical and critical study that to this day provides the most comprehensive account of the countless tragedies that the coauthors adamantly put into print, even if sales remained very poor. (In their journal for 1900, for example, when Cooper learns that their verse-play *Anna Ruina* has sold just nineteen copies, she declares, “We have no readers.” She quickly adds, however, some words that imply that this might be no loss: “before our work a beautiful desert swims golden,” p. 267). Sturgeon devotes more than half of her discussion to the verse-dramas, only one of which made its way (to little acclaim) on stage: “All the plays are tragedies, some of them in Elizabethan form, of five-act length.”⁹ This large body of writing, as Sturgeon says, can be roughly divided into three groups: the earliest works deal “with themes from Scottish chronicles and English history,” the middle ones “are mainly drawn from Roman history,” and the final ones contain “two plays of a projected trilogy from Josephus” (pp. 118-19). In other words, throughout their verse-dramas Michael Field ran the whole gamut of Western time; they do so largely by using blank verse and an unfashionable style to depict terrifying scenes. None of these works, importantly, is set in the contemporary moment that absorbs, for example, Egerton’s uncompromising sexual imagination.¹⁰

As one of their most loyal readers, however, Sturgeon stood pretty much alone in paying serious attention to the “dead” genre in which Bradley and Cooper invested great energy. By and large, whenever the name of

Michael Field came to notice in later years, it was mainly for their poetry. Especially noteworthy in this context is W. B. Yeats's observation in the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* (1936) that his own work belongs to a school that includes his Irish peers, J. M. Synge and James Stephens, as well as two English authors, T. Sturge Moore and Michael Field.¹¹ Yeats is right to acknowledge the affiliations between his own poetry and dramas and those of his close contemporaries, Bradley and Cooper, who moved—at least in the 1890s—in overlapping literary circles. His “Leda and the Swan” may, in part, stand as a response to an important poem in Michael Field’s *Sight and Song*: the volume of ekphrastic poems based on Great Masters housed in major European galleries that he reviewed, not uncritically, in 1892.¹² Yeats, perhaps because he expressed disappointment in *Sight and Song*, did not particularly impress Michael Field; Cooper observed in 1901, “Yeats may have some quality of metrical movement, but his words are hollow.” Far more impressive, for them, was Moore: “The Coming Man,” as they called him, “of the 20th Cen[tury]” (p. 271). History, given their idiosyncratic tastes, proved them wrong.

Even though, more than twenty years after Bradley and Cooper’s deaths, Yeats credited Michael Field as a figure to whom he had at one time some professional allegiance, barely a critical word was published about the coauthors for another half century. And, then, when scholars eventually turned their attention to Michael Field’s career, there were signs of unease not so much about what they wrote as the private insights that one might glean from their writings about their intimacy. As Rachel Morley shows in her essay, “Talking Collaboratively: Conversations with Michael Field” in *Michael Field and Their World*, this is the case with Ursula Bridge, who at the time of her death in 1966 was working on a draft of a full-length biography of the coauthors that Moore had commissioned many years before. In the incomplete manuscript housed at the Bodleian Library, Oxford, Bridge goes out of her way to disavow that Bradley and Cooper were lovers, no matter how much they liked calling each other “My Wife” and “my Own husband” (*The Fowl and the Pussycat*, pp. 151, 162): “They were devoted to each other,” Bridge states, “but many of their poems are love poems to be properly interpreted only in the light of the characters of the men who inspired them” (qtd. in Morley, p. 16). While it is correct to state that both women had affairs of the heart with men (a topic on which Martha Vicinus has written instructively), Bradley, in a much-quoted comment, asserted that the two of them were “*closer married*” than the most famous poetic partners, Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning.¹³ The intensity of Bridge’s disavowal points to what is possibly most innovative, if not experimental, in the unique intimacy enshrined in the name of Michael Field.

Only by the 1990s, when there was a more openly legitimated type

of lesbian criticism, did critics feel able to revisit the career of two close women relatives who, six years after *Callirrhoe*, emerged as gifted lyric poets with a book *Long Ago* (1889), which adapts Sappho's fragments. Several of the finely crafted poems in this volume are hardly timid in their homoeroticism: "Come, Gorgo," Sappho sings in poem "XXXV," "put the rug in place, / And passionate recline" (p. 70). Such lush lines imply that *Long Ago* may well amount to a defense of the intimacy that Bradley and Cooper's family sought to banish from the home, yet it has proved hard for modern researchers to gauge exactly whether the coauthors saw their relationship as perceptibly lesbian, in the sense that same-sex desire had a recognizable, insubordinate identity. This question has preoccupied several critics, including Virginia Blain, who observes, "The question of how to be a lesbian when lesbians did not exist does not appear to have troubled them. Although they played husband-wife games modeled on heterosexual marriage, it was only one of a range of intimacies available to them."¹⁴ There has been much subsequent debate about the degree to which we might employ post-Victorian concepts of lesbian identity to construe the closeness that Bradley and Cooper enjoyed both in plighting their troth to each other and establishing the name of Michael Field. These two activities were scarcely unrelated since they began at roughly the same time.

In the late twentieth century, Christine White's and Yopie Prins's fine explorations of Michael Field's Sapphic poetics paved the way for broader inquiries into the coauthors' achievements in eight volumes of mainly lyric verse that begin with *Long Ago* and conclude with *Whym Chow*, *Flame of Love* (1914) and *Dedicated* (1914).¹⁵ These two last volumes reveal some of the cardinal shifts and changes that took place in their career. *Whym Chow*, which Lucien Pissarro issued from his Eragny Press in a limited color-printed edition of fifteen copies, celebrates the poets' ostensibly bizarre belief that their deceased chow dog, which they euthanized (to relieve his paralysis) in 1906, embodied the Holy Ghost. Meanwhile, *Dedicated*, which Cooper presented in manuscript as a gift to Bradley in 1900, contains sexually striking poems on pagan themes. These include the poignant "Sylvanus Cupressifer," in which Cooper's narrator tells the moving story of the "wood-bearing" god's passionate love for the young boy Cyparissus, whom he accidentally shoots during a chase. As Ruth Vanita observes, the homosexual subject-matter of this fine poem significantly resonates with Oscar Wilde's *Ballad of Reading Gaol* (1898), in which the memorable line—"all men kill the thing they love"—addresses Wilde's horror at the state execution of a soldier who murdered his spouse in a state of sexual rage.¹⁶ (The execution, of course, took place in the jail where Wilde was imprisoned for having committed acts of "gross indecency" with other men.) The fact that Bradley brought these earlier, largely Dionysian poems to light seven years after both members of Michael Field

converted to Rome says much about her willingness to acknowledge their former enthusiasm for the sexual transgressions that had fascinated them in classical literature. As a consequence, studies have emerged that look at some of the more unorthodox aspects of their Catholic theology in the poetry they composed from 1907 onward, which absorbs and modifies their previous pagan interests. Scholars have observed the links between their devotion to paganism and their turn to Catholicism in relation not only to the poetry that sanctifies Whym Chow but also their noticeable interest in feminizing Christ's body and eroticizing Mary's virginity. This trend is evident in Frederick S. Roden's contribution to *Michael Field and Their World*, "Michael Field and the Challenges of Writing a Lesbian Catholicism," where he remarks that the coauthors' "Marian homoeroticism was a transformation—a Transubstantiation, if you will—of their earlier 'pagan' Sapphism" (p. 157).

By the end of Michael Field's lengthy career, it is probable that only a handful of Bradley and Cooper's loyal friends had much or any idea why these largely unread poets should have had intensely personal reasons for linking the Virgin Mary with the lesbian head of the lyric tradition. Only a select group, it seems, understood what they had tried to achieve. This point becomes clear when we look at the final weeks of Bradley's life, when she moved, in August 1914, to the Catholic community at Hawkesyard Hall, Rugeley, Staffordshire. In need of spiritual support while she was suffering from breast cancer, Bradley was tended by Prior Vincent McNabb. Eight months earlier, the fifty-two-year-old Cooper had passed away (also from cancer) at their home, The Paragon, Richmond, where they had for fifteen years enjoyed independence from family members—especially Cooper's father and sister—who previously exerted domestic pressure on their intimacy. Aware that her days were numbered when World War I was turning into a catastrophe, Bradley refused to lapse into depression. "I am striving now to write a bit," she wrote, valiantly, a week before her death (p. 297). In particular, she took joy in having "Father Prior to tea" because they could share their delight in *Dedicated*: "Dedicated! I read to him—then he to me how beautifully! . . . Oh that I may be come here to die!" (*Binary Star*, p. 205). McNabb, like Moore and Ricketts, numbered among the few friends who could see why the largely pagan *Dedicated* bore witness to the triumph of an intimate partnership that had found its final resting-place in the Church of Rome.

The exceptional delay in uncovering such insights into Michael Field's career suggests that, even if Bradley and Cooper were largely misunderstood in their own time, the coauthors' literary significance can be redeemed in ours. In their highly impressive selection of the poetry, Marion Thain and Ana Parejo Vadillo insist that there are many excellent reasons to see why Michael Field's "place in the literary canon now seems

assured" (p. 44). They claim, "Critics are now using Michael Field's work to rewrite the narratives of many different themes within *fin-de-siècle* culture: whether in relation to *ekphrasis*, the revival of Sappho and classical literature, aestheticism, Catholic conversion, or dual authorship (to mention but a few)" (p. 44). Although one can understand the interest that modern scholars have in the ways in which Michael Field's substantial body of poetry complicates our knowledge of late-Victorian and premodernist literary history, the fact that Bradley and Cooper (as Thain and Vadillo admit) "thought of themselves first and foremost as dramatists" raises important questions about the preferential manner in which modern researchers wish to establish an unassailable canonical place for Michael Field (p. 45). "[I]t is the lyric poetry that has left the stronger legacy," Thain and Vadillo assert; "[t]he story of the formation of Michael Field as a playwright," they add, "must be left for another occasion" (p. 33). As I see it, it is quite difficult to grasp the larger context of Michael Field's poetry without knowing the full scope of the verse-plays in which many of their lyrics first appeared. Emily Harrington has recently explored the manner in which Bradley and Cooper treated what she calls the "detachable lyric" (namely, the lyric that the coauthors took out of a closet drama and placed in the fresh context of a collection of poems).¹⁷ Researchers need to follow Harrington's lead by thinking carefully about the interconnections between the lyric poetry and the unperformed dramas. But, even if—as the studies under review indicate—Michael Field's verse-plays still require much more concentrated scholarly attention, it is certainly the case that critics have come to know much more than before about these remarkable dual authors.

II

Sharon Bickle's noteworthy edition, *The Fowl and the Pussycat: Love Letters of Michael Field, 1876-1909*, is the first volume of its kind devoted to the coauthors' correspondence; it illuminates not only the nature of Bradley and Cooper's intimacy but also the ways in which they "had no static or singular model of collaborative practice to which they worked" (p. xxix). Bickle remarks that each and every volume Michael Field produced was "subject to continual, and often passionate, negotiation," and she reminds us that their writing practices varied considerably depending on the particular work they were developing (p. xxix). Thus in 1886 Bradley informed her friend Havelock Ellis—the radical thinker who later published *Sexual Inversion* (1898)—that where "*The Father's Tragedy* [1885] . . . is indeed Edith's work," in other writings "we cross and interlace like a company of dancing summer flies" (p. xxviii). By comparison, toward the end of their careers two of their volumes of devotional verse—*Poems of Adoration* (1912) and *Mystic Trees* (1914)—were (for the most part)

by Cooper and Bradley respectively. Such information certainly complicates how critics might approach Michael Field's coauthorship, which, as Bickle's edition shows, sometimes meant that they worked independently on different verse-dramas according to their predilections. In 1885, for example, Cooper told Bradley that she had to continue with *Brutus Ultor* (1886), even though her "Own husband"—as she at times called her lover—wanted to make strides with *Canute the Great* (1887). At the same time, it is also clear that they concurred on the style in which they fashioned their early dramas, since it was during this year that their volume containing *The Father's Tragedy*, *William Rufus*, and *Loyalty or Love?* struck one prominent reviewer as uniformly outdated.

Bickle's edition draws attention to William Archer's unforgiving commentary in the influential *Pall Mall Gazette*. Archer, who later became a champion of both naturalistic "serious drama" and the removal of theater censorship, appears bewildered by Michael Field's efforts: "What has the modern world to do with plays constructed, or rather huddled together, after the fashion of a minor Elizabethan?"¹⁸ Besides complaining that Michael Field mistakenly emulates the early Elizabethan "heavy, strictly decasyllabic type verse" that Shakespeare managed to shake off, Archer scorns Bradley and Cooper's "unflagging adherence to the theory that poetical personages must speak a jargon as unlike as possible to ordinary human speech" (p. 28).

Bradley did not take such criticisms lightly. She informed Cooper that she had dwelt on all of the charges that Archer laid against Michael Field:

I want to say some grave words to you. Do not desert Shakespeare and the Elizabethans. Those with the sobering influence of the great Greek dramatists, whom you ought to resolve at once to study, are the only Masters for us. Every dramatic writer must be full of his Shakespeare, as every religious writer Must be full of his Bible. We Must give up the tricks, the externalities, the archaisms,—to copy these is imitation, but we must seek to study and touch life as he—Shakespeare studied and touched it, and our speech Must always be utterly different from ordinary speech; because ordinary speech is not transfigured by emotion, and the ordinary speech of an Age like ours is base with the exceeding Vulgarity of Materialism. God shall give our thought a body as it pleaseth him. (*The Fowl and the Pussycat*, p. 149)

This significant passage shows that Bradley, even if she is willing to concede that Michael Field looks dangerously close to producing pastiches of Elizabethan tragedies, remained committed to affiliating their verse-drama with that of the national Bard. More to the point, Bradley's language—especially her paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 15:38—reveals her desire to have Biblical authority on her side against the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Further, her aversion to literary realism—the type of writing that for Bradley embodies the "Vulgarity of Materialism"—says much about her distaste for a specific aspect of modernity.

Other letters in Bickle's edition reveal the extraordinary ways in which Bradley and Cooper's intimacy developed in the face of family opposition. These frequently exuberant letters show that Bradley and Cooper drew on a broad repertoire of affectionate terms when expressing their love: "May you kiss me as I Kiss you," Cooper enthuses in 1880, "my dearly loved sister-friend" (p. 39). Six years later, Bradley confides her thoughts to Cooper on *Canute the Great*, the drama that contains a scene that David Moriarty believes is explicitly lesbian. "[W]omen Can give joy to women," Bradley writes, "They can rejoice to see the bridegroom with the bride, and depart uncaressed" (p. 177). Women's nonheterosexual desires, from Bradley's perspective, are borne out through the polemical work of sexual radical James Hinton, whose critique of other-sex marriage and advocacy of free love had a decisive impact on Ellis's intellectual development.

Bradley's interest in figures such as Ellis and Hinton stemmed from her early involvement with John Ruskin's Guild of St. George (founded 1871) and the Fellowship of the New Life (established 1883). In her essay, "Katharine Bradley and Ethical Socialism" in *Michael Field and Their World*, Diana Maltz reveals that Bradley's involvement in both of these movements arose from the writer's early wish, in the 1860s, to "do charity work in the East End" (p. 191). Bradley, as several critics have observed, alienated the authoritarian Ruskin in 1877 by divulging that she had "lost God and found a Skye Terrier."¹⁹ (Over twenty years later, this pattern would recur when her nieces gave her Whym Chow.) Yet in retrospect Bradley had few regrets about her involvement with Ruskin; she thought, as Maltz states, "belonging to the Guild had done her much good" (p. 193). By 1889, Bradley joined the New Life, whose radical membership sponsored pacifism, socialism, vegetarianism, and alternative modes of sexual intimacy. Even if, as Maltz observes, Bradley remained a "marginal figure" in this movement, whose figureheads such as Percival Chubb and Edward Carpenter advanced principles of ethical socialism, it nonetheless shows that Bradley had a strong sense of social conscience (p. 196). Such information suggests that scholars need to exert caution when assuming they readily retreated into the world of art, recoiling from the "Vulgarity of Materialism" that appalled them in everyday life. Maltz observes that Ellis's sister, Louie, visited Bradley and Cooper in 1893, informing them of the fame attached to Olive Schreiner, author of the remarkable feminist novel *The Story of an African Farm* (1883). Bradley's journal *Works and Days* records, admiringly, that Schreiner had "handled politics" while she herself had not. "I have lived at Durdans [her and Cooper's home at Reigate, Surrey]," Bradley observes, "neither breathing nor being breathed upon" like Schreiner (qtd. in Maltz, p. 196). Such comments perhaps indicate that Bradley to some extent bemoaned her eventual lack of political engagement.

Even if Bradley divulges her sense of failure to mingle with the atmosphere of a political world, it is still the case, as Ana Parejo Vadillo shows, that Michael Field's dramas engage, if indirectly, with the modernity they appear to have spurned. In the twenty-three chapters that comprise *Michael Field and Their World*, Vadillo's "Outmoded Dramas: History and Modernity in Michael Field's Aesthetic Plays" stands almost alone in tackling the defiantly outmoded style of their verse-drama *The World at Auction* (1898), which is set in ancient Rome. This vehement critique of consumerism seemed to one of their readers to be the product of a very out-of-touch imagination. "Michael Field," an anonymous review in *The Academy* somewhat patronizingly remarked, "are two clever ladies" who "will not do much until they get into the open air, and out of this hothouse of decadent chronicle" (qtd. in Vadillo, p. 237). Vadillo's point is that, while one might be persuaded by negative reviews of this kind, the coauthors' "extravagant and remote use of history" in fact amounts to a "screen upon which to discuss the contemporaneous" (p. 237). Furthermore, their "use of history responded to a very clear rejection of materialism" (p. 238).

Nothing could be truer of *The World at Auction*, in which, after assassinating the emperor, the Praetorian Guard decide to put his empty throne up for sale to the highest bidder; the merchant, Didius Julianus, who has amassed many costly treasures, buys the empire. Vadillo comments that as the "perfect consumer" Didius represents a terrifying modernity in which the highest forms of beauty are thought to lie in the exotic commodities that he yearns to display in a "golden palace" (p. 245). Meanwhile, the drama contrasts Didius's rapacious acquisition of goods with the plight of the much-abused dancer, Pylades, who embodies the endangered spirit of art. Exploited by Didius's heartless daughter, Clara, who demands complete control of the dancer's body, Pylades has no option but to sell himself to her. No sooner has she possessed Pylades than Clara reveals that what she really wants is not so much sexual intimacy with him but the use of his physique as a model for prized marble statuary. In other words, Clara literally turns Pylades's inspired dancing to stone. One might conclude that Michael Field's commitment to such a superannuated genre as verse-drama is an essential part of their highly critical historicism, which involves performing scholarly raids on Western history to show how the horrors of the past have serious bearing on modernity—a modernity whose vulgarity they refuse to depict through the realism that Archer demanded.

Equally attentive in *Michael Field and Their World* to the historical intensity of these verse-dramas is Chris Snodgrass, who provides a wide-ranging analysis of why Michael Field's tortured plots concentrate on violent paradoxes in his chapter "Keeping Faith: Consistency and Paradox in the World View of Michael Field." *Julia Domna* (1903), for example, revolves around an irresolvable predicament in ancient Rome: "Out of a

deep love for both her sons, Julia—a powerful, beautiful woman of rare intelligence and ostensibly consummate skill—succeeds in thwarting a plan to divide the Empire, which ironically only ends up precipitating the cruelest fratricidal betrayal” (p. 177). Nonetheless, Snodgrass’s far-reaching account of the agonizing contradictions that frequently feature in Michael Field’s plays is surrounded by chapters that focus mostly on *Long Ago*, *Sight and Song*, and—in the case of my own contribution to this volume—*Underneath the Bough*, the collection that Bradley and Cooper first published in 1893, only to revise it drastically in the same year and then expand it in 1898.

Ed Madden’s essay, “Penetrating Matthew Arnold,” for example, provides a thoughtful analysis of a poem in *Long Ago*, where Bradley, mindful of Matthew Arnold’s recent decease, drafted her “Sapphic Tiresias” (later to become poem “LII” in that collection), which “revises Arnold’s classical poetics of penetration by installing (homo)sexual difference at the heart of a classical poetic project” (p. 84). By comparison, in her chapter, “‘Where Twilight Touches Ripeness Amorously’: The Gaze in Michael Field’s *Sight and Song*,” Brooke Cameron reveals that in *Sight and Song*—where Michael Field states their aim is to make “certain chosen pictures” (by such artists as Antoine Watteau and Antonio da Correggio) “sing in themselves”²⁰—the poets reveal that the “gaze, or the relationship between the observer and the observed, is . . . gendered” (p. 149). Here, too, Julie Wise in “Michael Field’s Translations into Verse” explores the ways in which Michael Field’s ekphrasis remains mindful of Arnold’s dictum that translators, in the name of producing accurate work, must suppress their “arbitrary spirit” (p. 204). Meanwhile, Nicholas Frankel considers in “The Concrete Poetics of Michael Field’s *Sight and Song*” some of the difficulties that arise in Bradley and Cooper’s avowed aim to fend off entirely “the inevitable force of individuality” when depicting visual art in the medium of poetry (p. 219). As Frankel sees it, from beginning to end the collection contains verse-translations that emphasize the “primacy of sight” in ways that maintain “the object’s enigmatic silence” (p. 220). He senses that this prominent aspect of Michael Field’s ekphrasis anticipates the modernist avant-garde. Certainly, the poetics that Frankel calls “sculptured objectivism” appears noticeably throughout *Sight and Song* (p. 220). Yet, on occasion, the language and form that incarnate the art-object comprise an odd mix of the archaic and experimental. “Apollo and Marsyas: Perugino,” for instance, opens with the following syntactic inversions: “Fair stands Apollo, / Magnanimous his figure sways” (*Sight and Song*, p. 87). This mannered phrasing affiliates Michael Field’s poetry with early modern lyric, even as it develops an aesthetic that looks forward to innovations by H. D. (Imagism) and Louis Zukofsky (Objectivism).

Thain and Vadillo give plenty of space to *Sight and Song* in *Michael Field*,

the *Poet*, reprinting fifteen out of the collection's forty impressive poems, and the ample contents of their anthology give equal prominence to the lyrics in *Long Ago*, *Underneath the Bough*, and the volume that is arguably Michael Field's finest poetic achievement, *Wild Honey from Various Thyme* (1908), which combines their earlier pagan and much more recent Catholic interests. *Wild Honey*, which features Ricketts's exquisite design of bees and honeycombs on the binding, contains an epigraph that pays homage to St. John the Baptist's time in the wilderness: "Wild was the honey thou did'st eat; / The rocks and the free bees / Entombed thy honeycomb" (p. 140). Dated 14 July 1907, this poem was composed two months after Bradley and Cooper's conversion. No sooner have we read this tribute to St. John ("Take thou our gifts, take these") than we find that the first poem in this collection is the fine sonnet "Pan Asleep," which features the apian motif that binds together these Catholic and pagan poems: "while he sleeps the bees are numbering / The fox-glove flowers from base to sealed tip." As Pan slumbers, the bees produce so much honey that they "smear" it on "his wide, smiling lip" (p. 141).

Like many of the finest lyrics in *Wild Honey*, here we see that amid this sweetness there is a threat of violence; even if Pan's music poured forth from the "unfrighted reed" and "half unearthed the Titans," he still proves to be—as we know from Theocritus—a difficult god to worship. That is why "Pan Asleep" ends with the "Arcadian hunter, baffled, hot," who, having failed to win the chase, "Scourges" the god's "statue in the ivy-grot," reminding us that Pan is the only deity in Greek mythology who ultimately dies for his gifts (p. 141). In a helpful head-note, Thain and Vadillo suggest persuasively that Bradley and Cooper arranged the poems in *Wild Honey* to reveal the complicated shifts in their lives that took them away from Pan and led them toward pressing their "lips" against "the deep-blood crucifix," as we see in the final poem in the collection, "Good Friday" (p. 159). As they chart this journey, the coauthors disclose that they fully understand their "life must be a palimpsest:" "Let us write it over," the poetic voice declares, "For the far Time to discover" ("A Palimpsest," pp. 156-57). It would not be unreasonable to say that "A Palimpsest" contains a prescient understanding that only in the "far Time" of the early twenty-first century could scholars appreciate more fully why the coauthors chose not to disregard their pre-conversion life together but "write it over" instead. In *Wild Honey*, they acknowledge both the breaks and continuities between their earlier pagan yearnings ("Come to us, O Dionysus, / From the Alcyonian water," in "Reveille," p. 147) and their enduring devotion to each other through their Catholicism: "If she should die," the poetic voice writes of her beloved, she would, if "sorrowing," nonetheless remain "As Christ intact before the infidel" ("Constancy," p. 156).

In the later exclusively devotional collections of poetry, however,

Michael Field seldom evinces the demanding struggle to treat the coauthors' lives together as a palimpsest that requires thoughtful reappraisal. Neither Cooper's *Poems of Adoration* nor Bradley's *Mystic Trees* discloses such poetic self-awareness and inventiveness. Thain and Vadillo suggest the fact that these volumes were produced independently by each of the coauthors possibly accounts for the evident lack of "creative tension that is fundamental to the success and energy of Michael Field's poetry" (p. 161). On most occasions, the diction falls flat, even if it attempts to express religious awe: "I approach Thy Altar . . . Stay! / Let me break away!" ("Real Presence," p. 163). Similarly, Cooper's pronouncement that the Sacred Heart is "my Way and all / My wayfaring's Desire" is rather conventional in its passionate expression of love for the Savior "who died for me" ("Viaticum," p. 173). This rather predictable religious idiom is also evident in *Mystic Trees*. "We love Thy ruddy Wounds," the poetic voice effuses in "The Captain Jewel," "We love them pout by pout" (p. 175). Vanita contends that the significance of this volume lies in Bradley's celebration of Mary's spiritual strength, which creates links between "Sapphic and Marian virginity." She finds evidence for this link in "She Is One," and she claims that in "The Stillness in Paradise," Michael Field "attributes to Mary an assertive opposition to Christ" because she "is the real mediator" of the incarnation of the divine within the human (p. 133). Neither of these poems appears in *Michael Field, The Poet*. Instead, we see the coauthors' Marianism in "Praises": "O Mary, Wisdom of the early lands, / O Mary, joy of the Creative Hands!— / Behold where on the serpent's head she stands!" (p. 178). As far as I can tell, there is nothing particularly unconventional in the spiritual joy Michael Field attaches to Mary as the "Child to the Heavenly Father by submission, / Spouse to the Holy Spirit in fruition," and "Mother to all who seek Christ of contrition" (p. 178).

It can prove even hard to find much to value in *Poems of Adoration* and *Mystic Trees*, and this difficulty is compounded in *Whym Chow, Flame of Love*. This volume was mostly written by Cooper in 1906 in an attempt to advance the belief that their pet, whose death precipitated their turn to Rome, spiritually brought her and Bradley's souls together in holy trinity. The problem with *Whym Chow*, Thain and Vadillo observe, lies in its "ludicrous sentimentality," which is evident in such works as poem "VI," where the speaker petitions the spirit of the departed dog: "O little Love, O Little Chow! / O Answer! What is Love's most answering bliss?" (pp. 184, 186). More interesting is "Trinity," where the poetic voice envisions the red-haired pet as "a thing of fire, / Of seraph-plumèd limbs" (p. 185). The dog, which was not "white" like the "Dove" associated in Scripture with the Paraclete, bears similarities to the Holy Spirit in that he was Bradley and Cooper's "symbol" of their "perfect union, strange / Unconscious Bearer of Love's interchange" (p. 185). Thain and Vadillo indicate that the

inspiring spirituality of this “thing of fire” derives from the coauthors’ reading of a mystical poem, *The Living Flame of Love*, by St. John of the Cross. Bradley and Cooper obtained this work through the former Decadent poet, John Gray, who intimately understood the challenges that they faced as they transformed: they shifted from poets who at first saw Whym Chow as their “Bacchic Cub . . . / So often touched with ivy-coronal” to (as Thain and Vadillo remark) Roman Catholic writers who reoriented their lives around “a metaphor for the purgatorial ‘flame’ that would cleanse [them] of blame for their previous blasphemy” (pp. 184, 183). Besides further selections from *Dedicated* and the posthumous *Wattlefold* (a volume of Catholic devotional poems published in 1930), *Michael Field, The Poet* contains a generous selection from *Works and Days*, samples of the correspondence with significant contacts (including Ruskin, Browning, Bernard Berenson, Ricketts, and Gray), and a handful of reviews. In sum, this exceptionally well-edited anthology helpfully provides an informative critical context in which readers can reassess Michael Field’s (admittedly varied) career as a poet.

Thain’s brilliant monograph, “*Michael Field*”: *Poetry, Aestheticism and the Fin de Siècle*, provides not only a helpful guide to many of the poems that appear in *Michael Field, The Poet* but also the most sustained discussion we have to date of the eight volumes of the coauthors’ poetry that appeared between 1889 and 1914. In her introduction, Thain contends that modern criticism must advance beyond viewing Bradley and Cooper’s coauthorship as potentially titillating: “The focus on the eccentric cross-dressed, lesbian, incestuous identity of Michael Field risks leaving them where we—through our fascination with ‘otherness’—have found them: the ‘odd couple’ on the horizon who embody our perversions *du jour*” (p. 11). Her interest lies instead in the ways in which Bradley and Cooper’s writings “embody to such an extreme the paradigms of aestheticism” (p. 12); thus, she concentrates on the very issues—such as ekphrasis, paganism and Catholicism, lyric history, and literary historicism—that she and Vadillo draw to our attention in *Michael Field, The Poet*. But Thain’s study does something more. She frames her chapters on the poetry by commenting on the ways in which an understanding of both *Works and Days* and the verse-drama helps contextualize our appreciation of Bradley and Cooper’s large canon of lyrics. Thain’s leading argument about the twenty-eight volumes of journals is that they show the intricate manner in which Michael Field used this highly self-reflective form of life writing as a source for recognizing evolving historical patterns in their shared lives; these patterns enabled them to reinterpret their past in order to comprehend developments that had important bearing on their unfolding future.

In many ways, Thain’s thoughtful study of the journals helps us comprehend why Bradley and Cooper treated their conversion not so much

as a decisive rupture as an event that belonged to “a pattern which seems to have already existed, and which neatly accommodates this new religious conviction” (p. 29). She proceeds to show that in their verse-play, *In the Name of Time* (published posthumously by Moore in 1919), King Carloman undergoes several transformations—from abandoning his role as head of state to pledging himself to a life of spiritual devotion in a monastery—that dramatize Bradley and Cooper’s constant awareness of the competing forces that inform not only all historical experiences but also, with great specificity, their own. Carloman, like all of Michael Field’s protagonists, dies tragically, gaining belated insight into the need to exist, as Thain puts it, “in time”—by which she means a present that can acknowledge patterns in the past that may structure the future (p. 38). As Thain suggests, perhaps the greatest significance in Michael Field’s career lies in their sophisticated historical consciousness—best seen in their independent-minded engagement with and production of antiquated writing—that had good reason to recoil from a modern world in which art is alienated. In the end, if we are to do justice to Bradley and Cooper’s intricate sense of history, we must turn to the large number of seemingly outmoded and unread verse-dramas in which they rehearsed, until the end of their days, their tireless reckonings with temporality.²¹ That way, I think, scholars will be able to acknowledge more accurately why these extraordinary writers’ commitment to facing up to the ferocity of the past should command our attention in the present.

NOTES

¹ “It was deep April,” *Michael Field, The Poet*, p. 128. Unless otherwise noted page references to works by Michael Field are from Thain and Vadillo’s edition.

² The most substantial critical and biographical study to appear in the past two decades is Emma Donoghue’s *We Are Michael Field* (Bath: Absolute Press, 1998).

³ Ivor C. Treby, *The Michael Field Catalogue: A Book of Lists* (London: De Blackland Press, 1998), p. 29. Treby’s volume is the closest thing we have to a fully annotated bibliography of Michael Field. Moreover, this volume itemizes all of Bradley and Cooper’s known manuscripts. Extremely useful is Treby’s “Days and Work—a Calendar, 1846-1914,” which provides a list of events and dates that enables scholars to trace important developments in the coauthors’ career (pp. 27-54).

⁴ Michael Field, *Works and Days: From the Journal of Michael Field*, ed. T. and D. C. Sturge Moore (London: John Murray, 1933); some of the transcriptions in this valuable volume are not accurate. Ana Parejo Vadillo is preparing an annotated edition of Michael Field’s journals.

⁵ Michael Field, *Callirrhoë and Fair Rosamund* (London: George Bell, 1884), p. iii. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

⁶ Logan Pearsall Smith, “Michael Field,” *The Dial* (February 1925), p. 120.

Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

⁷ Michael Field, *Binary Star: Leaves from the Journal and Letters of Michael Field, 1846-1914*, ed. Treby (London: De Blackland Press, 2006), p. 154. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

⁸ Laird quotes a sentence from the preface to *The Accuser* (1905), which appeared anonymously: "The author was so secret in all his ways, almost stealthy" (p. 33). Laird's discussion seriously complicates our understanding of the ways in which Bradley and Cooper thought about their decision to withdraw their authorial identity, Michael Field, from their unstinting production of verse-dramas in the years immediately leading up to and then following their conversion.

⁹ Mary Sturgeon, *Michael Field* (London: George Harrap, 1922), p. 115. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

¹⁰ The exception to this emphatic aversion to setting their dramas in a modern context is the sole work by Michael Field that went onto the stage, *A Question of Memory*, whose first and only performance took place at the Independent Theatre, London, on 27 October 1891. The play, which is set at the time of the 1848 Hungarian Revolution, fared poorly with critics. For an account of *A Question of Memory*, see Jill R. Ehnenn, *Women's Literary Collaboration, Queerness, and Late-Victorian Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 105-44.

¹¹ W. B. Yeats, ed., *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), p. xlii.

¹² Thain and Vadillo reprint Yeats's review of *Sight and Song* in Michael Field, *The Poet*, pp. 361-63.

¹³ See Martha Vicinus, "'Sister Souls': Bernard Berenson and Michael Field (Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper)," *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 60, No. 3 (2005), 326-54; Bradley comments, "those two poets, man and wife, write alone; each wrote, but did not bless and quicken one another at their work" (*Works and Days*, p. 16). Bradley's remark appears in a journal entry where she records her and Cooper's visit to Robert Browning's home at Warwick Crescent, where he shared some of his literary treasures with them.

¹⁴ Virginia Blain, "'Michael Field, the Two-Headed Nightingale': Lesbian Text as Palimpsest," *Women's History Review*, 5, No. 2 (1996), 252.

¹⁵ Christine White, "'Poets and Lovers Evermore': Interpreting Female Love in the Poetry and Journals of Michael Field," *Textual Practice*, 4, No. 2 (1990), 197-212; and Yopie Prins, *Victorian Sappho* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

¹⁶ Ruth Vanita, *Sappho and the Virgin Mary: Same-Sex Love and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 130; Oscar Wilde, *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, in *Poems and Poems in Prose*, ed. Bobby Fong and Karl Beckson, vol. 1 of *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 216. Subsequent references to Vanita will be cited parenthetically in the text.

¹⁷ Emily Harrington, "Michael Field and the Detachable Lyric," *Victorian Studies*, 50, No. 2 (2008), 221-32.

¹⁸ William Archer, "A Pre-Shakespearean Playwright," review of *Canute the Great* and *The Cup of Water*, by Michael Field, *Pall Mall Budget*, 27 August 1885, p. 28. This article is a reprint from the gentlemen's afternoon newspaper, the *Pall Mall*

Gazette. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

¹⁹ This statement has become very well known in writings about Michael Field. Bradley's comment is reported back to her in a letter from John Ruskin dating from 25 December 1877, which Thain and Vadillo reprint in *Michael Field, The Poet*, p. 306.

²⁰ Michael Field, *Sight and Song* (London: Elkin Mathews and John Lane, 1893), p. v. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

²¹ The turn to the question of time in Michael Field's writing is evident not only in Thain's monograph but also in an important essay by Kate Thomas, "What Time We Kiss': Michael Field's Queer Temporalities," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 13, No. 2/3 (2007), 328-51.

