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CONTENTS

Max Beerbohm and The Mirror of the Past
by Lawrence Danson 77

Library Notes
“Relicks of Infamy”: An Exhibition, by Alfred L. Bush 154

New and Notable
Recent Acquisitions. Behrman Gift of Defoe and Burns, by Louis A. Landa. “Isherwood and His Friends”: Drawings by Don Bachardy, by Nancy Finlay 158

Friends of the Princeton University Library
The Council 168
ILLUSTRATIONS

Genus Beerbohmiense: Herbert Beerbohm Tree and Max Beerbohm, page 81
Max Beerbohm as Pierrot, page 83
Sketch of Sylvester Herringham, c. 1896, page 85
Sylvester Herringham at the time of his “Mondays,” page 93
Sir Frederic Leighton, from Vanity Fair Album, page 104
Pablo de Sarasate, George Moore, and the Carlyle anecdote, page 105
James McNeill Whistler’s first letter to Sylvester Herringham, page 106
Sylvester Herringham and his “evenings,” page 107
Max Beerbohm sketch after D. G. Rossetti’s Launcelot, page 111
The sole remark likely to have been made by Benjamin Jowett, page 112
Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s pen and ink study for “Sir Launcelot’s Vision of the Sanc Grae,” page 113
Max Beerbohm sketch of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and his friends, page 114
Rossetti insistently exhorted by George Meredith, page 117
S. H. vainly endeavoring to enlist D. G. R.’s interest, page 119
Calendar of years from The Mirror of the Past, page 132
Chronology of Sylvester Herringham’s life from The Mirror of the Past, page 133
Dante Gabriel Rossetti, in his back garden, page 136
Blue China: James McNeill Whistler and Thomas Carlyle, page 140
Quis Custodiet Ipsum Custodem?, page 144
Max Beerbohm self-portrait, 1946, page 145
Lord Runcorn—sketched from life, page 147
Forged letter from William Shakespeare to Ann Hathaway, page 156
Title page and frontispiece from Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe, page 159
Christopher Isherwood by Don Bachardy, page 165
Igor Stravinsky by Don Bachardy, page 166
E. M. Forster by Don Bachardy, page 167

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L. D.
Max Beerbohm and  
The Mirror of the Past  

BY LAWRENCE DANSO

Max Beerbohm was an elusive—I would say "author" if that were not to beg the question. Was he essentially a writer or a visual artist? He won't stay put. His essays turn into fiction as we read them, his fiction turns into parody, his parody into criticism, his criticism into caricature, his caricature into essays. Yet all this shifting takes place against the ground of as seemingly immutable a shape as ever an artist assumed. He is Beerbohm the dandy, the incomparable, impeccable Max. The dandy's dress of the nineties phase—top hat and tails—is less important to the overall effect of that self-created image than the arresting impassivity of the face. The unresponsive eyes under their heavy, sloping lids are in surprising contrast to the round playfulness of the high forehead, small chin, and infantile button-mouth. In later years Beerbohm gave Max a mustache and gray hair, but the face remained essentially unchanged, its composure still hard to distinguish from terminal bemusement. Unchanging, too, is the delicate body with its tiny feet, mere points tenuously connected to the ground on which the figure stands. It is always a small figure, elegant in its first appearances and tidy later, making up in self-contained perfection what it lacks in muscle or mobility. The reader or the viewer may not always recall precisely what this figure did, but we know he did it well, and suspect that he never sweated or grimaced while he did it. The work fades into the image of its author. Of all his literary caricatures, this one of Max, which fixes its subject in our minds while it contributes to the conundrum of his definition, is Beerbohm's most ingenious misrepresentation.

In the merest matters of chronology he is elusive. He is inescapably associated with the Yellow Book and the 1890s; but the book that established that association—the very slim volume mockingly called The Works of Max Beerbohm (1896), with its essays on King George the Fourth and the dandies of the Regency—
begins a career of relentless retrospection. *The Works* concludes with its 24-year-old author slipping back in time, aging himself, disappearing:

Already I feel myself to be a trifle outmoded. I belong to the Beardsley period. Younger men, with months of activity before them, with fresher schemes and notions, with newer enthusiasm, have pressed forward since then. *Cedo junioribus.* Indeed, I stand aside with no regret. For to be outmoded is to be a classic, if one has written well. I have acceded to the hierarchy of good scribes and rather like my niche.\(^3\)

The joke cuts both ways. On the one hand it flaunts Beerbohm's precociousness. This is lower-school disguising, in which the little boy dressed in his father's clothes is that much more the little boy, tripping on the tails of his outsized jacket. On the other hand, the idea of old age clings to him: we imagine Beerbohm to have been from his infancy one of the ancients of literature, a satirist of an older period and therefore safely *hors de combat.*

That his best work is very much of this century may therefore seem surprising. He was George Bernard Shaw's successor as the *Saturday Review*'s drama critic for the 12 years till 1910. *Zuleika Dobson* was published in 1911, *A Christmas Garland* in 1912, *Seven Men* in 1919; volumes of caricatures appeared as late as the *Observations* of 1925. That Beerbohm was broadcasting on the BBC in the 1950s seems uncanny; that he lived until 1956 defies belief. And at the end of his career, as at its beginning, he was making ironic capital out of his self-willed belatedness. The radio audience that heard his "Music Halls of My Youth" in 1942 was hearing a still-precocious infant addressing it from an age long past:

Ladies and Gentlemen, or—if you prefer that mode of address—G'deving.

It is past my bed-time; for when one is very old one reverts to the habits of childhood, and goes to bed quite early—though not quite so early as one went to one's night-nursery; and not by command, but just of one's own accord, without any kicking or screaming. I always hear the nine o'clock news and the postscript; but soon after these I am in bed and asleep. I take it that my few elders and most of my contemporaries will have switched off and retired ere now, and that you who are listening to me are either in the prime of life or in the flush of enviable youth, and will therefore know little of the subject on which I am going to dilate with senile garrulity.\(^2\)

Geographically as well as chronologically he made himself elusive. The most externally dramatic event of his life was literally a slipping away. In 1910, when he was one of London's most prominent drama critics, he married an American actress and left England for a life of quiet domesticity in a small Italian villa. It created a wonderful effect: the elegant immobility of his long expatriation in Rapallo made him, on the rare occasions of his reappearance, as striking a personality as he had been in the socially dandified days of the 1890s.

To have become so vividly a personality may seem an odd fate for one who carried tactfulness to the point of apparent self-effacement. But self-effacement can be a powerful imposition when what is effaced is sufficiently interesting. Beerbohm's management of this little paradox was brilliant. It was a necessary strategy for the creation of his art, and it makes Beerbohm, for all his uniqueness, exemplary. He is the type of the artist as egotistical enigma, enticing with his absence, puzzling in his presence. He practiced the chameleon arts of parody and satire, as well as other less easily defined forms of disguise—forms that require (as Beerbohm used them) the ostensible erasure of self for the presentation of the parodied or satirized other. The self-caricature of Max, whether literally in the drawings or more covertly as a voice in his writing, served the ends of this aggressive self-effacement. The drawing called "Genus Beerbohmiense" (n.d.) is a good example. He poses himself next to his older half-brother, the actor-manager Herbert Beerbohm Tree ("Species Herbetrica Arborealis"); Herbert is a towering, pompous figure, and "Species Maximiliana," who barely reaches Herbert's enormous chest, seems even smaller and less significant because of his awkward imitation of the larger man's imperious posture. Max's face is hard to read: embarrassment, perhaps—but if so, as much for Herbert as for himself; and if embarrassment, then also self-consciousness, self-restraint, and a kind of decency that is also dignity. The caricature idea of Max is present in the drawing, but so too is Beerbohm who created him—the sophisticated artist whose presence is manifest also in all his writing. What Oscar Wilde wrote of the poisoner Thomas Waine-wright may be applied to the satirical Beerbohm: "A mask tells us more than a face. These disguises intensified his personality."\(^3\)
Where then does Max Beerbohm, the author of Max, belong? The Department of Rare Books and Manuscripts is the inevitable answer, for reasons both punning and practical. It is the exceedingly rare book that plays as cunningly with the relationship between creator and creation, or between author and audience, as Beerbohm’s books do. The parodies in A Christmas Garland, for instance, disturb our standards for originality in art, and complicate the notion that what art should imitate is life. His fictions cloud our categories by posing as autobiography: in them “a riter ov th time, naimd Max Beerbohm, hoo woz stil alive in th twentieth senchri,” may inhabit the same fantastic space as “an immajnari karrakter kauld ‘Enoch Soames.’” And his autobiographies pose as fiction, in the way that Max is his own caricature. The lapidary perfection of his essays seems to assure the reader that here he will stumble over no embarrassing outcroppings of idiosyncrasy, that the way has been smoothed by an author who “seems still to be saying, before all things, from first to last, ‘I am utterly purposed that I will not offend.’” Then suddenly there will come, in a comic fit of authorial bad manners, an acknowledgment of our readerly presence: “Here I am trying to entertain you, and you will not be entertained... Very well. For my part, I would rather read than write, any day. You shall write this essay for me.” The elegant book threatens, for a finely controlled moment, to dissolve into the confusions of life.

Never, by his own choice, a mass taste, his books have all become collectors’ items. For that more practical reason too they belong among the Rare Books. Indeed he could make any book rare: by “improving” other writers’ books with forged frontispieces and comic interpolations he imposed himself in the most literal way on the world of literature and made whatever he touched a potentially collectible Beerbohm. His unpublished or variant caricatures, his letters, manuscripts—all extend and challenge the collector’s categories, as his published work extends and challenges the common reader’s.

And in Robert H. Taylor, whose collection is housed in the Princeton University Library, Beerbohm has one of his most intelligent and loyal collectors. The Library Chronicle has described aspects of the Taylor Collection generally, from its medieval manuscripts through its modern books, as well as highlights of its Beerbohm section.” Mr. Taylor’s copy of Caricatures of Twenty-
Five Gentlemen (1896) has been discussed by John Felstiner. The book's original owner, Mark Hyam (whose greatest claim to fame this is), sent it to Beerbohm to be autographed. Beerbohm kept it, adding a self-caricature in 1903, another as he saw himself (apologetically) in 1909, and yet another as he had become (more apologetically still) in 1920. This last time he also redrew, with critical commentaries, many of the book's original caricatures as he now believed they ought originally to have been done. The Taylor-Hyam copy is therefore the unique second edition, revised, of a book that had officially only one edition. Its successive self-caricatures show Beerbohm's fascination with the potentially uncanny relationship between art's supposedly unchanging images and the images of life that change with time.

Mr. Taylor's manuscripts of Zuleika Dobson have been described with great care by Robert Viscusi. They show how much Beerbohm the writer was simultaneously, even in the act of writing, Beerbohm the caricaturist; how intensely, sometimes competitively, the visual and the verbal senses were united in him. This union suggests one reason for Beerbohm's interest in James McNeill Whistler—who happens, incidentally, to figure in the story that, shortly, I will help Beerbohm tell. Whistler was, Beerbohm wrote,

great not merely in painting, not merely as a wit and dandy in social life. He had, also, an extraordinary talent for writing [. . .] He projected through printed words the clean-cut image and clear-ringing echo of himself. He was a born writer, achieving perfection through pains which must have been infinite for that we see at first sight no trace of them at all.

The passage on Whistler could pass for autobiography. The manuscripts in the Taylor Collection reveal the extraordinary effort that produced Beerbohm's own shows of artistic ease. For "a wit and dandy in social life"—Beerbohm now, not Whistler—to have projected himself successfully in his art is, in Virginia Woolf's phrase, "the triumph of style"; it is the art, she writes, "possessed to perfection by Mr. Beerbohm."

Robert Taylor is still collecting Beerbohm. His latest acquisition is a carefully hand-lettered mock "examination paper by Max Beerbohm" on the subject of Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray. The examination is dated "Heddon term '94." In 1894 Beerbohm was in the process of not taking his degree at Oxford;
and Wilde was one of the objects of his deepest study. This slight undergraduate joke is suggestive of Beardsley's relationship to the literature of the 1890s: he is simultaneously of it and detached, its ironic examiner. It predicts a long career of parodic examining.

*

Also in the Taylor Collection is a much more extensive manuscript, called The Mirror of the Past. It consists of approximately 100 unbound leaves of very heavy, cream-colored paper measuring 13 inches by eight inches. Like its author, the manuscript eludes easy description; but it signal lack of its author's characteristically tidy finish. In its present order it begins clearly enough, with a 12-page holograph letter addressed "For the Editor of 'The Century'" and marked "Private and confidential." This letter is exactly what it purports to be in its further heading, "A very brief and arbitrary account of a book I am writing, entitled 'The Mirror of the Past.'" Beardsley must have written it with the hope of interesting a publisher in a work that, as it turned out, remained indefinitely in progress. Apparently the letter was never sent. It is written on the same heavy paper as the rest of the manuscript, and it is an invaluable aid in piecing out what follows. Next in order come three pages from the work-in-progress itself, reasonably clear and with Beardsley's instructions to a printer, but also bearing his revisions and deletions, the latter made in heavy black India ink. After that the going gets rough. There is a group of pages numbered consecutively 1 through 64, but with pages 7 through 16 missing. Some of these pages are marked on both sides or have annexes; some contain drawings; some contain calendars or other schematic designs for the book's elaborate narrative chronology; some contain only a few words, while others are bewilderingly crowded with tiny notes linked by cross-referencing marks and criss-crossing arrows. The handwriting is for the most part clear, but the pages must be deciphered rather than merely read. Next come 18 more pages, variously numbered. This group seems to come from the earliest stage of composition, but while some of its contents are found in revised form in the previous group of pages, other parts exist only here. Finally there are two
typescript pages transcribing brief passages from the manuscript, with corrections in Beerbohm's hand. The manuscript's peculiar difficulty begins, for the reader, simply in trying to decide what ought to come where in this fantastic jumble of words, pictures, dates, quotations, lists of facts and names, dialogue, narration.

It is, with a vengeance, an unfinished work, but nonetheless intriguing for that. ("I have often wondered," Beerbohm once wrote, "that no one has set himself to collect unfinished works of art [...] Mr. Pickwick and the Ancient Mariner are valued friends of ours, but they do not preoccupy us like Edwin Drood or Khubla Khan.") And it is unfinished in a peculiar way—more like an unfinished painting for which we have both a partially colored canvas and some preliminary studies than like a novel which simply did not reach its last chapter. Beerbohm apparently "saw" his work-in-progress with a visual artist's eye as much as with a writer's feeling for the syntax of beginning, middle, and end. Thus he will put on one page a quick verbal sketch—sometimes the merest notes—for an entire scene or episode; on another page (which may appear anywhere in the manuscript's present order) he sketches a part of that scene in greater detail; and on another page he breaks that detail down into its constituent parts and further elaborates it. To read the scene one has to refer to all three stages of composition and sometimes more. To make matters worse, the story that emerges from this palimpsest moves simultaneously forward and backward in narrative time; and because Beerbohm did not compose it sequentially, the reader of the manuscript (like its author) must make frequent use of its several calendars. The page numbered 18 is headed "Ending" while page 27 is headed "His story": page 19 is "His death" and page 28 "First sight of him"; but none of these pages contains all the details that make up even those parts of the narrative.

I have tried to do something unusual with this fascinating hodgepodge. What follows is not an edition of it (which would be unreadable), but a reconstruction of the story that was never fully constructed in the first place. As much as possible I have used the words of the manuscript itself; occasionally I have had to provide narrative links, and in this I have been helped especially by Beerbohm's letter to the Editor of the Century. And I have taken the opportunity, especially at the beginning and end, to interpolate my own observations about the nature of Beerbohm's art. Most of what appears here has not been published before, although late in his life Beerbohm did stitch together several paragraphs from the manuscript to make his radio broadcast "Hethway Speaking" (1955). Ostensibly quoting there his deceased friend Sylvester Hethway (called in the Taylor manuscript Sylvester Herringham), Beerbohm gave first-person accounts of how Carlyle sat for his portrait to Whistler, of the sedentary Rossetti's troubles with the indefatigable walker George Meredith, of William Morris's manic plan to redecorate Sylvester's gracious old sitting room, of Meredith's opinions about Swinburne, and of Sylvester's own teasing of Walter Pater. The broadcast concluded with Beerbohm's confession that his memoirist existed only in my imagination and in the intention I had many years ago to write a book around him—a book to be entitled The Mirror of the Past, a mirror which, hanging in his drawing-room, gradually ceased to reflect present things and began to reflect things long past. I had made many notes for such a book; and among them were those notes of Hethway's conversation which I have just been reading to you. Please don't be vexed with me for having let you suppose Sylvester was a real person. I thought that he as a real person would be likelier than I as a fabricator to impress and please you.

In my version I have included some of these previously published imaginary anecdotes about the writers and artists of the 1860s through the 1880s. But I have also put back Sylvester's own story, and the story of how Beerbohm came to share with him the sight of those long-dead artists.

In the conclusion to "Hethway Speaking" Beerbohm plays on the opposition between a fictitiously "real person" and his own less substantial reality as "fabricator." In his unpublished letter to the Editor of the Century he confesses, "Purely apocryphal these memoirs are—founded only on my rather full knowledge of the actual memoirs of the period, on my instinct for character, and on my rather dreadful little talent for 'parody.'" In that letter he reverses but does not unperplex the relation of fabricator and fabrication:

The book is written in the first person; and the "I" is not a fictitious I, but I myself.

The principal character in the book is a (fictitious) friend of mine, Mr. Sylvester Herringham, now deceased.
We cannot fault either assertion, but neither can we entirely believe them, since a real person who converses with fictitious friends must either be crazy or be himself a kind of fiction. The first alternative is in this case impossible, but the second is not: it purposefully complicates the relations of life and art in order to surprise us into an awareness of the roles the self plays and of the self-creation that art entails. Much of Beerbohm’s art, both in drawing and in writing, contains such surprises. They remind us that Beerbohm’s artistic affinities stretch not only back to Oscar Wilde but forward to writers like Borges (who as a young man translated some of Beerbohm’s stories) and Nabokov.

*The Mirror of the Past* and my comments about it will demonstrate these points. Unintentionally I may also demonstrate how to make oneself into a “Savonarola” Brown or Enoch Soames—a ghost caught in a fiction solemnly protesting his reality: Kinbote to Nabokov’s John Shade or a Borgesian Pierre Menard, author of the *Quixote*. I have risked entering the world of spectral artists and imaginary memoirists because *The Mirror of the Past* turns out to be quintessential Beerbohm, and therefore worth the effort of sorting and recovering. It plays with several genres and narrative forms, simultaneously exploiting them and commenting satirically on them. It is a mystery story and a historical novel, the two forms linked by their participation in the time-travel variety of science-fantasy. It is a variant on that 19th-century form, the doppelgänger tale: the narrator Max finds his double—both complement and opposite—in Sylvester Herringham, “an interesting link with the past,” as years later Beerbohm would call himself.14 It explores the narrative possibilities of limited perspectives. Herringham, who participated in the story-within-the-story, is a scientist among artists, a man of self-restraint in the midst of raging eccentrics. Max, who inherits the tale, is an ostensible naive. And the mirror into which both are looking is silent. Like Henry James’s doppelgänger tales, it merges with “the lesson of the master” form, the story, that is, of art’s disturbing interventions in life. Like Beerbohm’s additions to the Taylor-Hyam copy of *Caricatures of Twenty-Five Gentlemen* and like the series called “The Old and the Young Self” (in *Observations*) it opposes the changes of a life that has been lived against the ostensible fixedness of the artistic image.

He seems to have worked on *The Mirror of the Past* from 1913 to 1916. The war, which drove him back to England from his expatriation in Rapallo, may in part account for its incomplete-

ness and the various layers of its composition. Its ironically tinged nostalgia—the product of Beerbohm’s filtering of Sylvester Herringham’s sentimental vision—may also owe something to his double deracination. Its position in his career suggests the nature of the work. It follows *A Christmas Garland* and shares that book’s parodic impulse. It precedes *Seven Men*, a collection of five stories about six men, each of whom happened to cross paths with the unassuming seventh, Max Beerbohm. *Seven Men* reminds us that Beerbohm always manages to keep his own image at the covert center of his fictions. The characters in *Seven Men* are not quite parodies nor quite realistic portraiture; the stories blur the lines between fact and fiction with sometimes uncanny effect. They are stories about spectral figures: insubstantial writers whose tenuous images exist only insofar as they are perceived to exist. *The Mirror of the Past* is also a book of tenuous images. Some of them were fixed by Beerbohm in drawings done in 1916 and published as *Rossetti and His Circle* in 1922. In the preface to that collection, explaining the sources of his knowledge of the Pre-Raphaelites, Beerbohm writes that, in addition to old drawings, paintings, and photographs, “I have had another and surer aid, of the most curious kind imaginable. And someday I will tell you all about it, if you would care to hear.” That aid was, of course, Sylvester Herringham’s mirror, so that he would seem still to have intended *The Mirror of the Past* for publication at least as late as 1922.

* Here is the manuscript’s revised opening: three pages of reasonably clean copy, marked for the printer.17

From
Max Beerbohm
Villino Chiaro
Rapallo
Italy

The Mirror of the Past

I.

In the Spring of 1896 appeared a little book of which I was author and (for it was my first book) proud. It contained seven
essays. One of these was a mock-archaeological discourse on 1886—the year in which, with results amusing and touching, the Aesthetic Movement was made known to Mayfair. By reason of that essay I was, in the hallowed phrase of the publicist, “inundated with correspondence.” In other words, I received one letter.

Bell House, Cheyne Walk, S. W. July 22, 1896.

Sirs—I am an old man, & you are a very young one. I have moreover had the pleasure of knowing several members of your family. I trust you will take these three facts as sufficient excuse for my informality in addressing you.

I have read with no small amusement your whimsical paper “1886.” That is a period which may well seem remote to yourself. Not so to me who celebrated in 1886 my 51st birthday & had thus already reached an age when (as you yourself will find later on) times flies with ever-increasing celerity. To me the “Aesthetes” & “Professional Beauties” & other folk of whom you write with not unkindly malice seem no more remote than the persons of today—indeed considerably less so, for during the past years I have become something of a recluse. I am the more amused therefore to find that these persons have as it were “passed into history”!

Perhaps 1886 & the two or three years subsequent really were, as you seem to think, a definite & important era in our social history. I am too near to them to give them their due. But it has occurred to me that as you are so much interested in them, you might care to come in contact with one of the poor old survivors. If ever you are in this quarter of the town you might possibly care to come in and see me. I go out (in fine weather) between 11 & 12 in the morning and 3 & 4 in the afternoon. At all other hours I am at home.

Believe me to be
Yours faithfully
Sylvester Herringham

To how many people in 1916 is that signature significant of anything, I wonder? It would not have meant much to many people even in 1896. But to me it meant rather much.

In 1880 I had been eight years old. Every child needs and must somehow have some sort of imaginary life. I was not a strongly imaginative child. I could not create out of my own heart a world for my habitation. I disbelieved in fairies. I was not at all sure about knights errant. I was glad to hear that the sea had been swept clear of pirates, and that Red Indians were dying out; for I was a timid child, always on the side of law and order—a predilection which perhaps accounts for my having chosen to imagine myself a policeman, usually. But even this prosaic office I filled only in the day-time. Night-beats, as tending to the possibility of conflict with ferocious burglars, I eschewed. After dark I was simply a man of the world, with a large blond moustache and a pair of those small side-whiskers which lingered as a relic of the so very hirsute ’sixties. In my eye was a monocle, in my buttonhole a gardenia, in my shirt-front a jewelled solitaire. I dined at my Club, on chicken and cherry tart, and then went to a Party. I had a great contempt for the Professional Beauties, and for the Aesthetes; and also for the Maskers, because, though I looked like one of them, I was tremendously clever. Indeed, I hardly know why I went to the Party: I suppose I had nothing better to do. As I have said, I was not a strongly imaginative child. . . Unequal to the task of inventing anything for myself to do after the Party, I always stayed late there—was still there when I fell asleep in my crib. I never invented even the name of my host or hostess. Always I was the guest of some one about whom I had fragmentary knowledge from the talk of my grown-up brothers and sisters. Sometimes the Party was at Mr. Hamilton Aidé’s, sometimes at Mrs. Ionides’ or at Lady Freke’s; on Mondays it was always at Mr. Sylvester Herringham’s. “Herringham’s Mondays” were famous in the London of that era. They were almost as famous as Ste. Beuve’s had been elsewhere.

II.

And I had forgotten to bring them into my essay! This was my first thought when I read that letter.

And Herringham was still alive! This was my second thought. And it really was very nice of him to write to me. That was the third of my thoughts, and the only one, of course, expressed in my reply to him.

I was leaving London within a few days, and was going to be away for two months. I wrote that I looked keenly forward to the privilege of visiting him as soon as I came back.

*]

The receding dates—a narration in 1916, looking back to 1896 and the publication of the essay “1886”—begins the movement
into the past that the novel will, in its startlingly literal way, fulfill. The introduction also economically recreates the typical Beerbohm persona. He is the dandiacal boy-man fossilized in a state of perpetual preciosity; a worldly innocent who knows all there is to know about the world and is eternally amazed by it. In this guise, Beerbohm as satirist and caricaturist habitually assumed the privileges and self-preserving frailties of both infancy and old age. His writing until about 1910 tends to emphasize the amazingly youthful side of his composite figure. Later—indeed, almost overnight—he emphasized the age. Throughout, he let the chronologically amphibious Max play havoc with our ordinary notions of how an artist stands in relation to his own times and to times past. There is in all this an element of elegant practical joking. Preparing the show of drawings that were to be published as Things New and Old (1923) he wrote to the owner of the Leicester Galleries (the letter is in the Taylor Collection) that one "series (16 drawings) gives a conspectus of the eighteen-seventies; gentlemen (imaginary but typical) of that not-as-yet-much-explored, but charming, period. These drawings profess to have been done by me at the time. I was born in 1872. The dates on them show that they were done when I was very young indeed." The gallery-goer is doubly illuded (to use one of Beerbohm’s key words): the caricatures of imaginary gentlemen will seem to have the same status as the caricatures of real men, and the real Max Beerbohm will become one of his own caricatures of imaginary gentlemen long dead. If “the past is a work of art” (as he said in his Rede Lecture on Lytton Strachey), it is, in Beerbohm’s version, a kinetic, unstable art. The past comes unmoored in his writing and caricature; it floats into the present and lets the present penetrate it.

The heading “Charm of the Past” occurs several times in the Mirror manuscript. Once there is this explanation under it, though whether spoken by Beerbohm or Herringham is unclear: “From moral standpoint—One isn’t responsible—Every decent man hates his own time in proportion to his decency. If one can only regard the present as an ‘advance-copy’ of the past. It is filtered—has style.” But this is true of only a special, small slice of the past: an entry elsewhere under “Charm of the Past” records the “inferiority of remote past.” Quoting Rossetti’s poem “The Burden of Nineveh” (“One of his most ‘amusing,’” Herringham calls it), the speaker says, “One gets more thrill out of [Sighing I turned
at last to win / Once more the London dirt and din’] than out of Semiramis— One is real to us, the other not— Had you your choice you would choose to see R[ossetti] or even Sir Henry Layard” rather than ancient Nineveh with its “glossiness—drink—_smell—cruelit to animals.” In a letter to Holbrook Jackson (October 30, 1913, in the Taylor Collection) Beerbohm was more specific about his interest in the past: “It is the period that one didn’t quite know, the period just before oneself, the period of which in earliest days one knew the actual survivors, that lays a really strong hold on one’s heart. The magic of the past begins for me at the ‘eighties and stretches as far back as the ‘sixties.” This prenatal nostalgia no doubt filled a psychological need, but its practical uses too. The time’s remains were sufficiently clear to give his imagination a foothold in fact while still allowing room for his creative interventions. This is the period that is seen in The Mirror of the Past.

In its present order the manuscript continues with an anticipatory biographical account of Sylvester Herringham:

He was the only son of that Alfred Herringham of whom, when he was appointed Painter Extraordinary to William IV, it was said by Charles Lamb that “he would be a very extraordinary painter to any one.” But Charles Lamb was a rather fastidious critic; and Sir Alfred (he was knighted in 1834) was much admired in his day by the simple many as well as by the simple Sailor King. His colossal “Ajax Defying the Lightning” drew crowds to Brandon’s Hall of Wonder, Regent Street, throughout the winter of 1831. His vast “Re-Union of Ulysses and Penelope” and “Hector Taking Farewell-Leave of his Wife Andromache and the Child Astyanax” were displaced from their wall in Windsor Castle only when the royal collections were re-arranged after the death of Queen Victoria. They exist, I suppose, as disowned rolls of canvas in one of the royal attics or cellars; but this is better for them, poor things, than being thrown on the market. Two years ago I saw with my own eyes their creator’s almost infinite “Juno Upbraiding Jupiter in the Presence of Mars, Neptune, and Minerva” in the saleroom of Christie’s. It fetched seventeen guineas. Though I am no expert I am bound to say that the price seemed to me rather excessive. Luckily for his son and heir, Sir Alfred did not invest in the purchase of his own paintings the money he made out of selling them. With that money, instead, he bought railway stock, right and left, in the early ’forties, and in the seventh year of that decade died, leaving in trust a comfortable fortune for Sylvester, who had just been transferred from Harrow to Oxford. Lady Herringham was no more—had lived, indeed, only just long enough not to die Mrs. It might have been feared that the orphan would misuse the wealth in store for him. But he was not as other orphans. He celebrated his majority by selling the bequeathed house in Cavendish Square and buying Bell House, a place more suited to the life of a student. His bent was to Chemistry, and he caused a room at the top of the house to be fitted up as a laboratory. There he spent most of his time; and it was said of him by Faraday, whom he delighted to entertain, that were he not rich he might rise to high eminence. He was also a lover of music and (rather a blow, this, to believers in heredity) a shrewd connoisseur in the graphic arts. He bought and treasured Blake’s drawings at a time when it was generally regretted that Blake could not draw. He was one of the earliest patrons of Rossetti, and one of the stoutest abstainers from Holman Hunt. Some time in the ’sixties he had married, and some time later, but still in the ’sixties, his wife had left him. She was said to have been beautiful, and to have become famous, under a pseudonym, in Paris, during the last two or three years of the Empire. It was not known what became of her after Sedan. Frederick Sandys had painted her in the first year of her marriage, but the portrait had disappeared from its place in the drawing-room at about the time of her disappearance. It was certainly not there in [1896].

Beerbohm’s account of his first meeting with Herringham appears on one of the manuscript’s unreviewed pages. It is more fully written out than the sketchy notes that make up many of the pages, but it still contains queries to himself and directions for future elaboration. At this stage Beerbohm tends to punctuate with a delicate little stroke somewhere between a dash and a period. It is impossible, in printing, to duplicate that mark, so I have chosen a short dash followed by a space as its closest approximation, except where the manuscript clearly intends something else. I have been cautious of further standardizing the punctuation on two grounds. One is the warning Beerbohm gives in a letter to the Editor of the Century (March 6, 1916, in the Taylor Collection).
He is returning a set of corrected proofs, and he protests the printers' and proofreaders' "crude and asinine interference with my punctuation, with my division of paragraphs, and with other details. . . . Details? No, these are not details with me. My choice of stops is as important to me—as important for the purpose of conveying easily to the reader my exact shades of meaning—as my choice of words." In particular he complains that "in a vast number of cases, my 'strokes' were replaced by commas. These 'strokes' I have religiously replaced." In the case of this unfinished manuscript there is another reason, besides Beerbohm's stern preference, for trying to duplicate his "strokes" even at the expense of some typographical elegance. These little marks, along with the author's queries and sets of alternative readings (indicated here by { })), give the feeling of an authentic diary, written in haste, caught in the flow of thought. In this unreviewed stage, the manuscript, with its occasional disregard for the rules of ordinary prose, its directness and quirky immediacy, brings to mind some of Lamb's essays and letters, with which, at their best, Beerbohm's are most nearly comparable. The idiosyncratic punctuation, in Beerbohm as in Lamb, should become part of the reader's pleasure rather than an impediment. Only the briefest of pauses is intended by the dash:

Describe room—Shown into a large drawing-room—panelled all round to ceiling—with 4 tall square-paned windows looking to river—This was the scene of the famous, forgotten Mondays! no pictures—china—? flowers—? Parquet—? Aubusson—? Hepplewhite.

Between second and third window—small writing-table—And now, after a gaze at the river, I leaned back against this table and surveyed the room—the great, low-ceilinged room that was to become so familiar to me and (though I haven't been in it for —— years, {and know not what havoc the present tenants of the house may have made of it}) still is, in a queer way, {always open to my inspection seen by me daily very often surveyed by me}. It seemed to me—it seems to me now—one of the loveliest of rooms; restful, as only a low-ceilinged room can be; noble, and yet homely; austere, without pedantry. The dark unpolished oak of the panelling might, by itself, have cast a gloom, but was prevented by the expanse of well-polished and highly reflecting parquet, and by the flood of light from the four windows. It was a double room. The back part was just half the width of the front, and the front was square. As I stood surveying it from between the two middle windows, the point at which the two rooms joined each other was therefore exactly opposite to me. The back room was to the left of my vision. To the right, in the middle of the short wall facing me, was the door by which I had entered—a double door delightfully low in proportion to its width, and with a carved arch above it. . . . These details are arid and tiresome? Bear with me. I want you to see the room just as I saw it—just as I am still privileged to see it. It is the background and setting of nearly all that I have to record tell you in these pages, and (assuming you will do me the honour to read on) I {think you will need want you} to visualise {the scene it}. With this apology, and promising to write as little like a house-agent as may be, I proceed to say that the fire-place was in the middle of the side-wall to my left. At right angles to the fire-place stood a slim-legged sofa, facing me—a formal and elegant thing of satin-wood. It and the chairs that stood about were, I judged, of Queen Anne's day; so too the narrow tables against the side-walls, and the very many silver candelabra ranged along these tables. I conjectured—rightly—that by plenteous candle-light, with the very dark-red silk window-curtains drawn, the room would {look even finer than by day. positively excels the distinction it had by daylight.} On the short wall opposite to me hung an oval mirror that reflected one of the windows and the river beyond. The back-room had two windows, through which the trees of a garden were visible.

He came in, apologising—

Describe him—Light quick step—smaller than I expected—below m[iddle] height (whatever that may be) such words as ask—glass—past he pronounced with a narrow a—Scotch-American finicking and chilling—present-present travel-trav'l Silver hair parted in middle and brushed down toward ears—Very fine in texture—thin white silk cap—Ivory skin—large thin high-bridged nose—deep-set grey eyes—sunken but very clear—hollowed temples—jutting pointed beard—John Bel- lini, Procession of Holy Cross—looked as if he took great care of himself and caused great care to be taken of himself by others—absence of magnetism—
Shared quality with Shakespeare—thought him frigid—disappointed after letter—Shy—recluse—Did not speak of essay—Spoke of weather—I admired his house—

"To you seems a long time ago—Fourteen years—Nothing at my age—You will find that out—You are 24—Does not time seem to pass quicker already?" (Yes—term-time)—"It will pass quicker and quicker—Fewer and less deep impressions, I suppose—For me it rushes—And I am glad of it—"" (This seemed to me odd—Many years later I knew—) "Only yesterday—hardly yesterday—more to-day—" (He paused) "Especially natural in me—You see, I have no to-day—Solitary—People have changed—manners—everything. Bound to be so—But I only see a few old friends— I take in The Times newspaper" (so he called it)—"Hardly look at it—Never did—art and science—New books, yes—Mudie sends me them— I read when I go to bed—" (Rather froisó—) "I read '1880' with much amusement—Seemed to me very droll—Pâstl 1880!" (I explain '79—89 or so) "Ah, you go back so far as '79—" (Oh, yes) "To me these people have no fascination—But I understand your feeling—What one has just missed."26

Another day Beerbohm returns to luncheon, "first of many—suited to house—"; he describes "His dinner—"

Oyster broth—of great purity and strength—or dear turtle—steamed "fowl"—Very particular—slightly irritable—provoking—"You will tell the cook—"omlette—prunes and custard—nutritious (a great word of his) He drank nothing during meal— I claret—it was the wine for the house—exquisite—Claret of which a glass was like a letter from Madame de Sévigné—But a glass of port—"a glass of port—wine—Doctor's orders—sustaining"—afterwards—port that had the flavour of Dr. Johnson's talk—and would that my palate had Boswell's {perpetuative} genius {for perpetuation!} Never smoked—never asked me—the retarded pleasure—

His intense care for his health—"You will consult the barometer, Pelham—" "thermometer—" Slightly old—maidish—fastidious—A man whom it was as hard to imagine married as it would have been to imagine him without private means—.[. . .]"

Talks of Praeraphaelites—Says they owed much to Philistinism—Spencer and Mill—Utilitarianism—driven in on themselves—not spoilt—

Of Paris— I had just returned, said how lovely Second Empire must have been— "Very vulgar—Haussmann, the Emperor—Not been there since—Horrible—" Spoke with strange passion—Talks of Italy—I had never been—Enthusiastic for Liberty—But acknowledges charm of Papal Rome—Hates modern Italy—Talk of the past—Rossetti—But still mainly '80—26

Then, "one morning at 10.30—Dec. '96" a letter arrives from Herringham inviting Beerbohm to come see "something that may interest you as an historian—a sort of document—discretion—" Upstairs, in a locked room that used to be his laboratory, Herringham takes from a cupboard "a large circular box of leather—Padlock—Interior quilted with black silk—"

Carefully drew out a round gilt frame—with a round black space in the middle—He carried it by frame (deeply bevelled) to wall and hung it by a chain that was on the back to a nail—about 2 ft. from floor. Low leather arm-chair—bade me be seated—He took small chair—My face came about middle of framed black space—apparently a convex mirror—gilt woodkey-pattern—and black wood except that where the mirror itself would be there was blackness—

"What do you make of it?"

"Like a mirror—only with black felt stretched over the glass."

"Black felt? No. Lay your hand on it." A moment's hesitation—Hard and cold to my palm, which I quickly withdrew. "What do you make of it?"

"Feels like glass."

"Quite right. It is glass."

"But it has no highlight on it."

"No; no highlight, just now. Glass, nevertheless—ordinary transparent glass. What should you say is behind it?"

I looked. "Black felt?" I hazarded.

He laughed. "You must get rid of the black felt theory. Hark back to your first impression—a convex mirror. What is behind this glass is ordinary quicksilver. It is just a looking-glass."

I accordingly looked at it. Was he mad? I wished I hadn't come. "Well, why isn't it reflecting anything?"

"It is reflecting something. Do you see nothing?"

"I see darkness."
“Exactly. Darkness is what it is reflecting.”
I looked around with a smile. “I don’t see the darkness.”
“No. It passed away more than 14 years ago—Bygone darkness—
not very interesting, is it? However, I didn’t bring you merely to see that. Have patience.” He looked at his
watch. “You’ll be seeing something very soon. At almost any
moment now.”
I was sure he was mad. But I was in no danger. I humoured
him. I sat comfortably back in my chair silently watching the
large dull black disc. The minutes passed. I don’t know how
long I had sat motionless when I became aware of a change in
the disc—a sudden faint suffusion of its surface. There was a
tiny point of light on the glass, and now—I had sat forward—
there were two such points, three. And something was mov-
ing—moving and growing. It was a little human figure, mov-
ing backward and growing bigger. It paused, it nodded its
head twice, three other points of light appeared. And they
were candle-flames: I saw the candles, the silver sconces that
held them, standing on a long table adown one side of the
mirror—of the room that now discernibly filled the mirror.
And the man in the room—still stepped backwards into the
foreground of the mirror—a growing silhouette in the candle-
light. Three more nods, three more lit candles. Ah!—I had
pushed back my chair violently, I stared vacantly aside at him
whose own semblance I had just beheld. I was aware of his
hand laid quickly on my arm, and of his voice:
“It’s all right. No witch-craft— I’ll explain later— It is rather
novel and curious— But nothing to fear.”

In the mirror Beerbohm now watches (as he described the
scene in his letter to the Editor of the Century):
a younger Herringham, in evening dress, mysteriously walk-
ing backwards around the room, lighting innumerable candles
by merely puffing his cheeks at them. He walks backwards to
a sofa, he reclines on it, a little white thing springs from the
hearth and lodges between his fingers: he is smoking the end
of a cigarette. The cigarette gradually lengthens. He rises, at
length, from the sofa, walks backwards to a candle, bends over
it, and then places the cigarette in a case which he draws from
his pocket. . .!! I now grasp the fact that everything in the
mirror is reversed—not merely, as in other mirrors, reversed

in point of space, but in point of time also. But how—what
—why? Herringham promises to explain later, bids me watch
the mirror: “it will be more interesting directly.” In the
open door of the drawing-room comes backwards a small
figure, somehow familiar. It turns—I recognize the profile of
Whistler—a younger Whistler gesticulating to this younger
Herringham. In some others—some of whom also I recognize
—Walter Sickert, Lady Archibald Campbell, Oscar Wilde,
Lord Lytton ("Owen Meredith"), Sir Frederic Leighton,
Cecil Lawson, etc., etc. The room is gradually full of 1880
figures. I am evidently present, as it were, at one of the famous
Mondays. . .

After luncheon, sitting in the drawing-room that was the
background to the unimaginable scene that I have beheld,
Herringham explains—

He tells Beerbohm about a visit paid him by “poor Alfred
Tennyson” in 1877: “Friend of my father— Sometimes saw him
in London”: 29

“He’d come here [. . .] to consult me about some current sci-
entific theory that he wanted to seem to know all about in a
poem he was writing. I came in late. He was looking at him-
self [in the mirror], and he said to excuse himself, ‘I was think-
ing how many things that old mirror must have reflected.’ It
was like him to be looking at himself, it was like him to be
anxious not to be supposed to be looking at himself, and it
was like him to say what he said. He had a great command of
platitudes—greater even, I always thought, in his conversation
than in his poems. But he had a splendid sonorous voice, a
noble utterance, a noble head and bearing. He was kingly.
One was apt to remember his platitudes. I remembered this
one. When Tennyson was gone, I thought how many things,
even in my time, this mirror had reflected . . . how many people.
. . “

Tennyson’s remark eventually led Herringham to undertake his
great experiment with mirrors and their images, the amazing
results of which Beerbohm has just seen in the mirror of the past.
But valuable time was lost in the process, and it is that lost time
that Herringham now laments:
“If only I had begun sooner! If only A[lfred] T[ennyson] had had more vision! Not a mere platitude of fancy, but grasping a fact—the fact that it had not only seen, but conserved! and that all that was needed was to induce it to [disgorge!] [reveal its hoard!] If he had fired me to set to then and there! Those precious years! It wasn’t till 6 years after A[lfred] T[ennyson] that I began—”

The immediate impetus for Herringham’s experiments with the mirror came from a “French book on reflectents.” In it he learned that an image “is not an illusion—That is certain—it is something—In other words it has substance—that was the Frenchman’s great discovery—Infinitely tenuous perhaps—but substantial—while it lasts.” A mirror, then, “is just the receiver,” but “you are the source—the headquarters—from which the images of yourself come.”

“In fact [Herringham continued] you are all the time giving out images of yourself Mr. Beerbohm—innumerable images—And not merely that: you are giving out from every angle a constant, unbroken series of images. They are invisible—but they become visible for a fraction of an instant as they go on to the polished surface—you are diffusing them all the time, as a flower diffuses its scent.”

Images, which we emit like rays, can pass through glass. Herringham wondered whether they could pass through quicksilver: “Suppose they were stopped, then every mirror might hold in itself, between the glass and the quicksilver, all the films it had ever received. That was the great thought.” He reasoned further that “it is the nature of rays to travel. Unnatural for them to be stationary. Coming sharp against impenetrable surface, their nature is to travel—rebound—ricochet—straight back at exactly the velocity they came and along the same plane—What makes stacked films stationary is the pressure of the oncoming films—Once remove this pressure, out come stacked rays—”

Herringham began experimenting in 1883 and succeeded in 1889, “at 6.0 A.M. (after working all through the night and the small hours). Thus it is [Beerbohm explained to the Editor of the Century] that it is in the morning that I see the end of his evening party. At 7.0 A.M., July 2nd, 1889, the mirror had reached back to 5.0 A.M. of that morning. At noon it has reached back to midnight.

And so on, continuously.” This progressively regressive mirror-time accounts for the nature of the mirror image: “As thus: Whistler said good-night to his host and walked out of the room in the usual manner. But in the mirror the first that you see of him is the last that the mirror reflected of him. His receding and disappearing back-view is now an appearing and proceeding rear-view. And so on. It is really quite simple. There is no cause for alarm.”

After this first view of the mirror and the subsequent explanation, Beerbohm became Herringham’s frequent guest, especially when it was time for the mirror to show one of “Herringham’s Mondays.” On those evenings they might see Hamilton Aidé, cosmopolitan socialite and poetaster, to whom Beerbohm had attributed the epigraph to his essay “1880”:

_Say, shall these things be forgotten_  
_In the Row that men call Rotten,  
_Beauty Clare?_

There would be “Leighton—leaning in door-way”: Sir Frederic Leighton, from 1878 president of the Royal Academy. Sometimes there was music: Pablo de Sarasate playing his violin—but, in the mirror, silently—looking as he does in Whistler’s portrait “Arrangement in Black” (1884). They see Browning, and Beerbohm is reminded of Browning’s poem “A Toccata of Galuppi’s”—but “reversed: B[rowning] heard tune, imagined scene—I see scene, imagine tune—All the stranger because B[rowning] here—Eupletic and of the present—little imagining himself romantic and past—Browning—opening mouth—laughing—rubincud—someone says ’sh.’” Herringham explains that Browning was “always everywhere as often as possible—always behaved as if never been anywhere.” Beerbohm catches a glimpse of Sarasate’s accompanist:

Pale—red-bearded—marked face—quick-shifting light-grey eyes—nervous buoyancy of gait—arms strained behind him—springy nervous step—seemed to know few—Surely! Shaw! [. . .] H[erringham] did not remember—People sometimes brought friends—At that moment, looked in glass—combed beard—

“It is!”

“George Bernard S[haw]? Oh yes, an anarchist, I heard— I remember now he talked to me—Scotch accent—Said that
The Mirror of the Past, ms. page 56, verso
Drawing of Pablo de Sarasate, after Whistler’s “Arrangement in Black” (1884); faint sketch of George Moore; and final three lines of Carlyle anecdote
The Robert H. Taylor Collection

Sir Frederic Leighton—leaning in door-way
Drawing from Vanity Fair Album, 1872
The Robert H. Taylor Collection
The Mirror of the Past, Ms, page 18
James McNeill Whistler's first letter to Sylvester Herringham
The Robert H. Taylor Collection

The Mirror of the Past, Ms, page 19
Sylvester Herringham and his "evenings"
The Robert H. Taylor Collection
Sarasate ought to play second fiddle in a theatre orchestra for 2 years—Then he would be a good deal less 'wonderful' and a good deal better. Non, je ne m'en souviens plus."36

Usually Herringham's memory and ear for accents serve them better. To help them they have Herringham's album-diary to read. In it, for instance, they find an exchange of letters, written in 1882, between Whistler and Herringham. Apparently Herringham had commented on Whistler's notorious inability to complete commissions on time, or at all. That is what I derive from Whistler's 'first furious but amusing letter':

_Fi donc_, my old droll! Stick to your test-tubes, and not again let your proboscis impinge upon my palette.

Is perfection to be timed by the stop-watch, and must the painter in his wisdom compete with the perspiring fleet ones of Lily Bridge?37

Was it between the fish and the soup that your Darwin knew Man a Monkey? And shall I prove myself a greater savant than he because I did—tout nettement—in all delicacy know Herringham an Ass from the moment of my meeting him? _Hein?_

[Butterfly mark]
Then there is Herringham's reply:

Dear Mr. Whistler,

Your note has reached me. In so far as I can extract any meaning from its polyglot and illiterate verbiage, I deduce (i) that you are angry, and (2) that you are, at the same time, attempting to be funny. As to the reason for your anger I am as profoundly indifferent as I am depressed by your efforts to be funny.

Faithfully yours,

Sylvester Herringham

And, finally, "Whistler's rather baffled but more than spirited rejoinder":

Had it occurred to me that you had any dignity to stand on, I would have warned you to keep off it, _mon bon_. "By your efforts" _not_ "to be funny"—just for once—in my eyes, you were foredoomed to tumble, with all hoofs in the air, of course, rather uncouthly. _Alors, tais-toi, pauvre bête!_ and cease to grieve with your despairing bray the ears of the humane.

[Butterfly mark]

So ended the correspondence and the friendship. But "after Whistler's death, '03, Herringham [became] more tender about him." He reminisced. He had felt in his quarrelsome friend

"Dinness—lack of specific form— as in work— One often didn't know what he was talking about, but the ejaculations held one— 'Well, you know . . . one did or one didn't, ha, ha! . . . So there it was, anyhow . . . What! Amazing! Rather like a summer night in Italy, with fire-flies sailing and darting, not casting much light— but very 'amazing.' "38

Herringham had recollections of other notable men—of the sociable Browning, for instance, and of Tennyson whose chance remark had had such strange consequences. He compared them once this way:

They were as unlike their own work as they were unlike each other. When I think of them I am tempted to say that a man's work is rather the needful supplement to himself than the mere outcome of it—or at any rate that the smoothness of a man's art is in inverse ratio to his own. The smoother Tennyson's verse became, the more rugged and tangled was he to look at. The more tangled and rugged Browning made his poetry, the more surely would anyone meeting him for the first time have taken him for a banker, or a fashionable physician. The greater the exactions he made, as he grew older, on the intellect and the patience of his readers, the easier was it to understand what he said—and even to foretell what he would say—at a dinner-table. And Tennyson's manners—ah, they were the very least of all adapted to courteously circles at the very time when he had finally purged his art of anything that might conceivably vex the ghost of the Prince Consort.39

Mostly though it is of Rosetti that Herringham talks: "'the best man I have ever known,'" Herringham calls him, "'the noblest and best.'"40 They met first in Oxford in the Long Vac of 1857. Herringham was an undergraduate, and Rosetti had come with his enthusiastic disciples Morris and Burne-Jones to
paint Arthurian frescoes in the Debating Hall of the Oxford Union. "H[erringham], coming up for second year, member of Union, finds work in full progress—knew something about frescoes—'My dear father had always wished'—and I thought I saw in Herringham's eyes a look of relief that Fate had not fulfilled smiling on} {his father's the} aspiration—to decorate a hall in one of the great public buildings--" With his knowledge of frescoes, seeing them all at work on "walls newly built—mortal still damp—coat of whitewash—" immediately Herringham pronounces, "'It can't last.'"\textsuperscript{41}

Of course he was right. The Union frescoes are "gone as surely as speeches by undergraduates—the work he [Rossetti] will be most remembered by." To this observation about the invisible masterpiece, Beerbohm adds a note: "H[erringham] does not seem to have been aware, and I have only learnt since, that a copy was made by Dunn—This a pity—A copy, however, always leaves us pleasantly free to believe that it gives us no idea of the beauty of the original."\textsuperscript{42} In the manuscript of \textit{The Mirror of the Past} Beerbohm sketched his own copy of H. Treffry Dunn's copy of Rossetti's "Sir Launcelot's Vision of the Sanc Graal." And in \textit{Rossetti and His Circle} he imagined the vanished Oxford frescoes with their paint still wet, being examined by the master of Balliol College, Benjamin Jowett ("And what were they going to do with the Grail when they found it, Mr. Rossetti?"). Beerbohm himself seems not to have been aware that preliminary drawings of Launcelot, in Rossetti's own hand, actually do exist. One is now in the Taylor Collection, serendipitously united with \textit{The Mirror of the Past}. In that manuscript there are also sketches of Rossetti's portrait of Swinburne, Legros's portrait of William Michael Rossetti; sketches of Ford Madox Brown, William Bell Scott, Ruskin; and several versions of Rossetti's models Elizabeth Siddal and Fanny Cornforth. Missing, but described, is the portrait of the one Rossetti "stunner" unknown to art historians, the one Sylvester Herringham destroyed in a jealous rage—the portrait of Mrs. Herringham, entitled "Lilies that Fester."

The fastidious Herringham was an odd companion for Rossetti, but then Rossetti made a habit of collecting oddities. He became Herringham's neighbor at 16 Cheyne Walk, in 1862, after Lizzie Siddal's death. There he lived with his brother William ("like a Newfoundland dog—affectionate—trusty—a guardian"), with Swinburne, occasionally with George Meredith, and with

\textit{The Mirror of the Past, ms, page 58a}
Drawing after Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Launcelot
The Robert H. Taylor Collection

110
Dante Gabriel Rossetti, pen and ink study for
"Sir Launcelot's Vision of the Sanc Graal"
The Robert H. Taylor Collection

The sole remark likely to have been made by Benjamin Jowett about the mural paintings at the Oxford Union, 1916

"And what were they going to do with the Grail when they found it, Mr. Rosseti?"
The Tate Gallery
his menagerie: “kangaroo, laughing jackass, small Brahmin bull, zebu, owls, wombats, a deer, armadilloes, a marmot, wallabies, salamanders, a racoon.” Herringham told Beerbohm many anecdotes of those days, glad that he had known Rossetti “only in his best days—unblurred,” before Rossetti’s long decline. “He buried more than his poems with his wife,” is Herringham’s comment on Rossetti’s career. The judgment is elaborated: “There was a quick transition from a cold clear poignant early Spring to a late Autumn, still and sultry, full of over-richness and dreary.” One anecdote from the good days appears both in the manuscript and on an accompanying typescript page, as though Beerbohm might once have intended it to join other anecdotes of this period in “Hethway Speaking.” It involves the fantastic Portuguese rogue—forger, swindler, double-dealer, and companion to artists—Charles Augustus Howell. Herringham recalls:

“I once said to Rossetti, ‘If I were you, I wouldn’t see so much of that man. I don’t think he’s to be trusted.’ Rossetti laughed. ‘Sylvester,’ he said, ‘whenever a man says to me If I were you, I pay no attention, because I know that what he means is If you were I; and because I happen to be myself. If I happened to be you, I daresay I should forbid Howell the door, and live in terror of him, and surround myself with a loyal bodyguard of dreadful dullards. You’re young, Sylvester. When you’re as old as I am, you’ll realise it’s the dull friends that one has to avoid, not the untrustworthy ones. You’ll come to me and say in a hollow voice, If I were you, I wouldn’t see so much of So-and-So: he’s dull. And I shall look up and say, Is he? Why, I do believe you’re right! Yes, I’m conscious that he’s been exhausting me all this time. Many thanks for your warning.—A man who’s got work to do, Sylvester, can’t afford not to have amusing people about him. Charles Howell is the most amusing fellow I know. He gives me something all the time. As for the off-chance of his doing me a mischief round the corner—why, that’s all the more reason for not letting him out of my sight. I must see more of Howell.”

And from “Hethway Speaking” here is the revised version of Rossetti’s account of his troubles with George Meredith, as Sylvester (an accomplished mimic, it turns out) gave it to Beerbohm:

“Rossetti, the very sedentary Rossetti, found Meredith, with his great love of wind and weather, rather a trial. Ros-
setti had said one day dolefully, 'He's always coming in early in the afternoon, just as I'm beginning to paint well.—"Glorious weather, Rossetti!" he cries. "Come out for a stretch with me—do you all the good in the world!' He always seems to be going to Hendon, and he always brings out the name as though it were a name to conjure with—something sacred, irresistible; Mecca; the Promised Land.—I say to him, Meredith, if you brought Hendon to me in your hand, I wouldn't look at it.—Or I say, Look here, my dear fellow: this is an easel, this is a canvas, this is a palette, and this is me—just getting into my stride. Go and get into yours, by all means. I don't ask you to sit down and help me paint this picture. Why should you want me to assist you in trapezing to Hendon? Once and for all, Meredith, Hendon be damned!—For a moment he has a puzzled look, then he throws back his head, laughs that great laugh of his, and swings out of the studio, banging the door behind him. I never dare ask him not to bang the door, because then he'd tell me that if I took exercise I shouldn't have nerves. And I should have to explain that I'd much rather jump an inch or two off my chair than walk ten miles or whatever the confounded distance to Hendon is.' "

In Rossetti and His Circle, Beerbohm recorded, in a different medium, another version of this scene.

The artist Rossetti and the scientist Herringham had one thing in common: "Rossetti (unlike Morris) loved mirror." Because of its convexity, Herringham's mirror was (said Rossetti) "the only artist among mirrors—emphasising and attenuating—always a composition—Rondure—the aim of all art." Rossetti "said all paintings ought to be round—(or oval)," and Swinburne "used to speak of him as the dear great cyclostatist." But Morris hated mirrors: "They lie—you can see a thing straight for yourself." Sandys, like Rossetti, loved the mirror and often put it in his paintings:

"Wanted to paint me sitting in front of it [Herringham recalls]—back of head reflected—and room—[Rossetti] said 'Don't you—it won't end there—endless business—I know Sandys—he'll insist on the round mirror's reflection of the oval mirror's reflection of your face—And then the pupil of each of your eyes reflecting the oval mirror's reflection of the round mirror's reflection of the back of your head.'"
Beerbohm watches in Herringham's own mirror, from 1890 to 1905, as his host's image grows gradually younger while at his side he grows in person daily older. With the album to guide them to important occasions, they watch as the mirror releases its images—as the 'eighties turn into the 'seventies, and as Sylvester Herringham, growing "brown of hair" in his drawing room in Cheyne Walk, becomes "older, more frail himself" in the old laboratory at the top of that same house. In 1905 Herringham falls ill, and the mirror, for its own reasons, grows dark. It is the occasion for Herringham to confide to Beerbohm his great secret, the reason for his gazing into the mirror of the past:

He tells me his story one day when he is convalescent from first serious illness.

"Trust to your absolute discretion.

"I have never spoken to you of my wife. We were together for 2 years. Then—we parted. I never saw her again. She is dead. She died many years ago. I have never spoken of her to any one. It seems strange that I should wish to speak to you. But I do wish to—for a certain reason. It is very difficult to me. I am, I have always been a rather reserved man. But if I speak at all, it is just as well that I should tell you all. It isn't so much that I want you to understand me, as that I want you to understand her.... Perhaps you know something about her."

I told him that I had always known he had been married—that she was beautiful—that she had been painted by R[ossetti], that he and she had "parted."

"Yes, painted by R[ossetti]. It was through him that I met her. I doubt if but for him I should ever have married her—or any one. I have told you what an influence he was for all men who knew him—Consciously or unconsciously every one was affected by him—True, no interest in Science; and I continued mine—Meant to devote my life to it—My interest in art had begun at his Launcelot—and was entirely shaped by his talk—Tho' here again I kept some independence—Same in literature—"

"R[ossetti] and women—Women always there—Kind of religion—Mysticism—R[ossetti]'s very religious nature—Dead Rossettis and Polidoris telling their beads—Christian and pagan—Spiritual and sensual moved together—[...]"

"I myself not romantic by nature—My Work—by nature a bachelor—But troubled vaguely—One or two light adventures—wished I could—Had had mild attractions to young ladies—daughters of families we knew—"

"R. scoffed at these—[...] 'Bread and butter misses—thin slices—swallow a dozen of them, unsatisfied'—'Miss Clara'—playing a few pieces—dancing polka—croquet—He said women of humble class alone could inspire passion—they were natural—they had mystery—they inspire pity—King Clopinot—I imagine Lizzie a young lady! Or Janie! Not that they didn't beat ladies at their own game—Easy thing to pick up at any moment at right age—But to teach it—that and nothing else—was to wreck charm—"

"I did despise Miss Clara—At the same time no desire for 'misalliance'—no desire for any kind of matrimony—And yet,
as I say, vaguely troubled— But I went on with my work—

"So I lived— Then came a change."  

A Pre-Raphaelite painting, Rossetti's "Lilies that Fester," brought the change. Rossetti began work on it in 1864. It did not go well at first; the model was inadequate, and the lilies in the garden did not thrive: "the mongoose bit them." But in the "first week of March, '65, R[ossetti] dining with H[erringham] greatly excited about 'stunner', who has been sitting for Lilies." He had found his new model—"the Lady Mildred," he calls her—while "prowl[ing] about 7 o'clock, in a curio shop, side-street off Brompton Road." Herringham goes to see the work in progress, and then goes again—impressed with the picture (in Rossetti's "earlier, simpler manner") and with the model, Mildred Crump, "a girl of the 'lower-middle-class,' extremely beautiful."  

 Talks to her during rests— Smell of lilies— Fifth day or so, she faints— (Afterwards— Was it a faint?) R[ossetti] puts her on sofa— rushes for water— 'I believe she's hungry—' Revives— eats sandwiches— H[erringham] in turmoil— His big house— Why not marry? Next day, R[ossetti] arranges drapery caressingly— H[erringham] proposes— she shies— accepts— H[erringham] afterwards amazed— Wants to hurry— so as not to change mind.  

Thus Sylvester Herringham bought a painting and, with Dante Gabriel Rossetti as his best man, in the presence of William Rossetti and Algernon Swinburne, became for a brief period the husband of Mildred Crump.  

Ruskin sent a present. William Bell Scott composed a limerick:  

  There was a y. m. named Sylvester  
  Who said he liked lilies that fester,  
  But Mr. Bell Scott  
  Said, "Ah, this is not  
  A hobby I share with Sylvester."  

Mildred continued sitting for Rossetti. (Even in that there were danger signals. He "gave her a distaff— embroidery-frame— but she wouldn't work." She was "silent at the Joneses and Browns— patronised or cut Alexa [Wilding].") Herringham continued to be immersed in his scientific research. In 1867 he went to Paris "to see a savant." Mildred, accompanying him, was delighted with Paris; but Herringham found Haussmann's new boulevards "in-  

expressibly vulgar." Paris was the scene of their disaster—though even now, in 1905, Herringham believes "she was not to blame— Scoundrel who marked her down as his prey— He and I were the guilty men— and Howell."  

The "scoundrel" was a "young man of 25— sprig of nobility— or rather a monstrous bulb—'great hulking fellow'—'heavy swell'— quite stupid— so he seemed." They were introduced by Charles Augustus Howell, who was "showing the young man Paris no doubt for a consideration," and who "therefore showed him Mildred." Herringham tells Beerbohm:  

"The fellow tacked himself on to us— Asked to see Véfour— Tortoni—? Offenbach— M[ildred] always accepted— Took us and Howell driving in the Bois— I was bored by him— H[owell] was most amusing— always talked to me— irresistible— He took me away to see some furniture— I believe on purpose, for R[uncorn] to be with M[ildred]— a precious pair of villains—"  

"Runcorn?"  

"Runcorn, yes— This is the first time his name has passed my lips for 30 years—"  

"Runcorn. Lord Runcorn. Isn't that the title of Lord Bostingdale's eldest son?"  

"Yes. This was the eldest surviving son of the late Lord Bostingdale."  

"The— late? Then ... You don't mean that the present Lord—the Lord Bostingdale— was the man who—"  

"Yes, I mean the present Lord."  

Shocks quicken our faculties, and in that moment all that since boyhood I had read about Lord Bostingdale in newspapers—all the Tenniel cartoons in which I had seen him limned so respectfully— seemed to pass in a rush before my eyes. I felt as one who sees a pillar {of the State} topple, crumble, collapse in dust—  

You, my reader, suffer no such shock. The name of Bostingdale suggests nothing to you. You look it up in Debrett, and it isn't there; nor is Runcorn. Exactly. Both these names are inventions of my own. Why did I invent them? Because I prefer not to give the real ones. The nobleman who in '67 came into the lives of Sylvester and Mildred Herringham is still, in 1916, living, full of years and honours, and still, despite his age, an influence for good in our public life. I will
not revive against him now an inconspicuous scandal which he lived down—
H[erringham] seemed to read something of what was passing. “Yes—honoured and respected, I believe? Never read papers—”
“Oh, yes—immense influence.”
“I too live—She died miserably—victim—”
He pursued his story—
“Had been younger son—elder brother had died a year before—had then retired from Guards— in those days bad form for eldest son to do anything—except H[ouse] of C[ommitters]. He was just hanging around—This young man going to stand for the family borough next Election—Hung around us.”

Back in London, Runcorn “calls constantly—jealousy grew—”

Then came the crisis: Herringham’s discovery of Mildred reading Runcorn’s love letter. To help himself imagine it, Beerbohm recorded the scene twice in the manuscript. First, it appears in numbered sequence as its images would have lodged in the mirror:

28 Closed door
27 She stands empty-handed
26 Hand goes to pocket
25 Letter appears
24 She holds it with each hand to face, reading it.
23 She raises it to lips—
22 She kisses it
21 Lowers it, continues to read—
20 Looks sharply towards door, putting hands behind her—
Pause—Door opens—
19 Enter husband, facing, takes off hat, puts it on table
18 He holds out hands to her—
17 She advances slowly, puts up face to be kissed—she kisses her—
16 He takes her hands—
15 Sees letter in one—
14 Speaks to her—laughing—
13 She answers—holding letter—retreats—
12 He speaks, frowning—
11 reads—
10 looks at her—
9 crumples—

8 throws down—
7 makes as tho’ to strike
6 fist on palm
5 seizes hat
4 slams it on, as he goes to door—she follows him—
3 disappears shutting door in her face
2 She gazes after him with clasped hands
1 faints—closed door

Then he records it in reversed sequence as it would appear, years later, when the mirror gave up its stacked films. The first time through it was melodrama; in mirror-time, it becomes a comedy of disconnection:

1 Closed door—crumpled ball of paper on hearth-rug to left—woman supine, left of door—profile—rises with strange quickness—leaping—incredible—
{gazes at door with clasped hands} door remains closed for a few moments
3 Door opens, disclosing man’s back—snatching off hat—coming—turning to her—
5 Hat flashes down on table—must be smashed, you think—
6 Fist goes into palm—raises it quickly
7 Makes to strike her—hand comes down and relaxes
8 Curious. Ball of paper flies up into hand—
9 He clutches it
10 Looks at her
11 Curious. Ball becomes letter—He is reading it—
12 He thrusts it into her hand, with marvellous celerity—speaks, frowning
13 She holds it—speaking to him—advances to him very quick—
14 He (calmer) is speaking to her—
15 He looks at letter in her hand—
16 He takes her hands—
17 She puts up face to be kissed—he kisses her—she retreats slowly—
18 He holds out his hands to her—
19 But quickly takes hat off table, puts it on head, retreats facing—
20 Door flies open, then slams—Pause—
21 She looks sharply at it, with hands behind her—
Hands spring out with strange quickness and she devours letter.

She kisses it—raising it.

Continues to read it—

Puts hand down to pocket—

Letter seen no more—

She stands empty-handed.

Between the event (1867) and its reappearance in the mirror (1911) comes Herringham's narration, in 1905. Anger and outraged pride still war in him with self-reproach and regret: "I was furious—told her to go—ought to have implored forgiveness."

He wanted to strike out—at Mildred, at Runcorn. Instead, he took the only revenge he could find: he destroyed Mildred's image, that is, Rossetti's paintings of her, including the prophetically entitled “Lilies that Fester.” And in losing a wife he also lost a friend: Rossetti, seeing the empty walls, asks after his paintings. Herringham says to the artist who once had buried his poems with his dead wife: “I should have thought you of all men would understand.” And Rossetti: “No. A man may...sacrifice his work for a woman. Not another man's, Sylvester. And the sacrifice must be made in love, in sorrow, in remorse. Not in spite.”

He never came to Bell House again.

In his loneliness, hoping to forget, Herringham closed his house and became a traveller. And the mirror, reflecting the dark and empty drawing room, went black:

He did not return until the end of 1872. He came back with a mind healed, he thought. But presently, in the old house—no matter how much he immersed himself in his scientific hobbies—the thought of his wife more than ever haunted him. He had ceased now to feel any anger against her: the fault was all his. He made up his mind to seek her out and implore her to come back to him. He found that she had died, in London, a few months before. He could not bring himself to speak of the depths to which she had sunk.

As I have said [Beerbohm continues in his account to the Editor of the Century], it was not until 1877 that Herringham conceived the possibility of seeing Mildred once again in the mirror. Meanwhile, in 1876, in the attempt to lighten his mind of the load of memory, he had begun to resume a mundane life; and a part of this effort was his famous “Mondays.” These he discontinued when, in the later eighteen-eighties, his chance of succeeding in his experiment seemed to grow likelier. He ceased to think of anything but the possibility of this spectral meeting-again.

Not “spectral” to him, in 1906 this re-union. For him, as he brooded over it, it appeared now as something real. Night and day, moment by moment, the mirror was shedding off its innumerable films. And there, in the mirror, waiting—or rather, coming, actually on the way—was the very Mildred. “She is on the way,” was a phrase that Herringham used often to me in the last years of his life; and his one thought was whether he would be spared to be there to meet her. It was because of the maddening thought that he might die too soon, and because he could not bear to think of her coming and finding no one to meet her, that he confined to me the story of his life with her. In case he died, he wanted me to meet her.

Sylvester Herringham died in 1909. In 1910 Max Beerbohm married and moved to Rapallo, “taking of course my old friend’s bequest with me.” The mirror remained dark, reflecting the period of Herringham’s travels, until January 1911, by which time it had reached back to December 1867, “the date of his departure from England”:

In due time I saw again in the mirror the familiar drawing-room. Strange to see in the bright Italian sunshine that old Chelsea room, and to see there housemaids in crinolines making the room ready (one might almost have thought) for my old friend’s return (whereas, of course, what they were really doing was to cover up the furniture after his departure to the Continent). There the garnished room was. The sight of it was strangely moving to me, who knew that now I had not long to wait before Herringham would stand before me.

At the appointed time—the mirror’s 9:00 A.M., which in Beerbohm’s villino was 3:00 A.M.—he sat up to wait:

Chianti and sandwiches—Drawing-room empty—Watched open door—Mouth full when sudden quick figure in a thick ulster backed into door—turned and looked around— for a
few moments—then retreated quickly—was gone—Who? Clean-shaven—longish hair—sad—young—quite young—a boy! Shock— I realised much younger than I—he 30, I 37! Made me feel strangely old—When last I saw him in mirror (1905), he was 35; I, 33. (1906—equinoxe—coevals)—Rather an anti-climax, my sight of him—had just seen the parting look—round—Not yet used to mirror; had thought of him returning, as he did into my life—returning gladly, coming close to mirror and facing me—I was slightly froissé, as at my first meeting.65

The shock comes in finding that even if the past can be recovered—by science, magic, or art—it remains, still, absolutely past. The mirror image stays disappointingly sealed in its perfect rondeur, utterly indifferent to the world of “Chianti and sandwiches” and people who can only grow older.

After that first disappointment Beerbohm could look forward to the excitement of seeing Herringham’s wife. He felt “rather shy—told off to meet at a terminus some lady I have never set eyes on.”66 Because he had never set eyes on her, Mildred’s appearance in the mirror was unlikely to disappoint him, as Herringham’s had done. But what the mirror showed him first was not, in fact, Sylvester’s Mildred but Rossetti’s—the portrait of “the Lady Mildred” in “Lilies that Fester.” And thus it set him up for his next lesson in the disappointing difference between image and substance:

I see [the portrait] and other Rossetti’s Oct. 1911—H[erringham] taking it down—Go to side of mirror—magnifying glass—Flat gold frame—Return to austere manner—modern dress—Lilies tall—she fighting her way—browned—grey—perpendicularly drooping—(crumpled shrivelled) “The shadows where the cheeks are thin, And pure wide curve from ear to chin”—hands lovely—as R[ossetti] loved them, and early renaissance men—those very long slim supple spatulate fingers, every one with a separate life.67

Life, according to Oscar Wilde, imitates art. Herringham thought otherwise: “Herringham had told me that Rossetti had not at all idealised her face—that her beauty was of a higher type than Miss Siddal’s, even, or Mrs. Morris’, and infinitely finer than Miss Herbert’s or Miss Alexa Wilding’s or Miss Fanny Cornforth’s.” But when in time Beerbohm saw in the mirror the veritable Mrs. Herringham—the woman now, not her portrait—“it seemed to [him] that Rossetti had idealised her. She seemed to [him] splendid but coarse.”68 He noticed especially her “terrible hands—White plump of the kind admired—dimpled—smallish—fingers thick at base.”69 Herringham had seen in life a Rossetti woman; the mirror presents her to Beerbohm as mere Mildred Crump, a living caricature.

Mildred was to disappoint him further. “But this scenario [he wrote to the Editor of the Century], bald though it is, is already over long, and therefore I will skip all details as to how it came about that presently, as I watched the mirror, hour by hour, and day by day, I found absolute evidence that Mrs. Herringham was not, as her husband in later years thought her, a sweet-natured and pathetic being who had gone astray by reason of his failure to appreciate her, and that Lord Runcorn was not by any means the villain I had supposed him to be.” He is glad that Herringham “was spared a disillusion that would have hurt him more than he could have been consoled by the knowledge that he need have felt no remorse.”70

For Beerbohm the mirror goes on, showing now the old drawing room in happier days: “There it is, strangely far away from our modern world. Rossetti is very often there—and oh if I could but hear what he says as he lounges there on the sofa!”71 The manuscript sketches the scene, which resembles scenes in Rossetti and His Circle: “See Rossetti sitting on sofa—in the evenings—lethargic—gazing at ‘the Lady Mildred’—wonderful eyes—sometimes talking, laughing—everyone laughs before he speaks—maddening not to hear—Swinburne on one leg—noble head once—great emotion—Meredith—chaffing ‘Crumpisa’—roaring [. . .] In Italian sunshine, these Chelsea evenings of early ‘sixties.’72 ‘Crumpisa’ was one of George Meredith’s pet names for Mildred. Herringham had once given Beerbohm the following elaborate account of Meredith’s improvisatory storytelling:

“George Meredith often used to come and dine with us whenever he was in London. He was a great tease, as perhaps you know, and Mildred was one of his favorite butts. He used to call her ‘Lady of the great stature and of the greater silences.’ He had all manner of names for her—Colossa, I remember, and Obelisca. He was always improvising the most
and You wicked story-tellers, it’s me he loves! Sylveschar {clapped 
put} his hands to his ears and was about to run away. But he was a man of honour; and besides, the laws 
against breach of promise were extraordinarily strict in Bag-
dad. So he held up one hand for silence, and presently said, 
Damsel, I will wed thee on one condition. Swear by the hear-
of the Prophet that thou wilt never, so long as thou livest, 
utter another word!—After a pause of a few moments, the 
damsel bowed her splendid head, and there came from her 
great lips a soft sweet chorus of I swear it by the hear of the 
Prophet. So Sylveschar wedded her and took her home with 
him to Balsora. And Allah prospered them. In all Balsora 
there was no happier pair. Sometimes the friends of Sylveschar 
would ask him why his wife was so silent. Always he bade 
them ask her. But when they did so she made no reply.—Thus 
closes the {curious and entrancing} adventure known to all 
Arabia under the title of Sylveschar and the Baker’s Dozen.

“I laughed, and Swinburne—who was also dining with us 
crowed with joy. But dear Mildred merely said, in her im-
passive way, ‘Oh go along, Mr. Meredith!’”

“‘Yes, I forgot,’ {cried} Meredith exclaimed. ‘Once did 
one of the dozen break her oath, bidding Meredac, the friend 
of Sylveschar, begone to the highway—But the others kept 
faith and silence, and Allah continued to [prosper] them.’”

The young Swinburne was another figure in the mirror. 
Herringham recalled him, and he recalled Meredith’s opinion 
of him. Their first-person accounts make an interesting comparison 
with the portrait of an old, named Swinburne that Beerbohm 
himself drew in the essay “No. 2 The Pines”:

“Ah, Swinburne, yes. Strange little creature. He had the 
prettiest, funniest ways. He was wonderfully endearing. Apart 
from his genius, he was the most childlike of little children. 
One did so want no harm to come to him. And he was so 
anxious to be good and obedient. But he hadn’t will-power 

enough for that. He caused us all the greatest anxiety. What 
could be done? It wasn’t that he drank much wine, but that 
so very little of it went to his head—and that he did always 
want a little. I fancy that somehow he needed it, too. It wasn’t 
good for his body; but then, you see, his body was such an 
infinitiesimal part of him: the rest was all spirit; and the spirit
Perhaps required a special diet. It was all very odd. Everything about Swinburne was odd. Meredith used to call him Algernon the Incalculable. 'It's maddening,' he would say, 'to find anyone making so much out of—nothing. How does he do it? We other fellows have to go through a long process of doing and being, and then of thinking hard about what we've done and what we are. We have to go to and fro, gathering faggots for tinder; laboriously and cunningly we stack them—and then, as likely as not, they won't burn. But Swinburne can always make a blaze without a speck of fuel. There's nothing in him but inspiration. Our main difficulty is how to make a beginning: his only problem is how to leave off.'

'Another time, Meredith said, 'It's all very well to say that Algernon gets his motive-power from books, not from life. It's true, but it's not the whole truth. If all the books in the world were burnt tomorrow, and nothing left of them but one charred corner of a page from an old French chronicle, Algernon would find enough in that to enable him to go on creating for ever.'”

Bebohm is telling the story in 1916, when the mirror has reached back to 1862. In 1918 it will begin reflecting its first English home, in Cavendish Square, where Sir Alfred Herringham brought it from France. Eventually it will show

The 'thirties—Sylvester coming down to dinner—In 1950, if I live, shall see him as an infant in arms— I shall be 78! I who was 24 when I first saw him— he 58! Then lose him altogether— I hope I shall not— Let me die before he was born.”

Then the mirror will show Paris, where it was made, in the ancien régime; and so "on and on":

Giving off— up its dead— without hasting, without resting— day and night— till the day when all shall be done, and it becomes again a normal mirror. An inanimate Ariel obeying the commands of a dead Prospero.”

There are two alternative endings sketched in the manuscript, of which the briefer is the better:

Bequeath to South Kensington [Museum]— furniture depart-

ment— if they will accept— In 1978 (?) open— will reflect Curator's face— Thereafter the visitors to that rather depressing place— Ordinary mirror— But romantic because they will think of all it has reflected— twice.”


When he had, in fact, become an old man, Beerbohm told S. N. Behrman that he gave up work on The Mirror of the Past because "'it became too involved, you know, too complicated. I couldn't understand it myself.'” The manuscript abounds in small chronological inconsistencies despite the several calendars and schemes he constructed to guide him. The physical appearance of the pages shows that his basic narrative idea tempted him to keep on inventing, filling in times past, creating more apocryphal incidents— losing the typically fine Beerbohm control, as Beerbohm (always his own most stringent censor) must have known. In my recreation I have left out several of the looser strands: the story, for instance, of Herringham's servant Javes, and what they discovered about him in the mirror; and the story, murkier still, of how Mildred did not die, but became, all unbeknown to her old Chelsea friends, the famous entertainer Kate Carisbrooke. There were other problems. Rossetti is at the center of Beerbohm's interest, but the exfoliating chronology makes Rossetti's appearance come late in the story— so that while the mirror is showing the 'seventies, for instance, anecdotes about the Rossetti circle in the 'sixties would have to be supplied, out of order, from Herringham's memories and his album-diary. The greatest problem, though, is one Beerbohm mentions in his letter to the Editor of the Century: "The book consists, to some extent, of what [Herringham] told me about his friends. These apocryphal memoirs are an integral and important part of this book about the past; but I must be careful that they don't overweigh the actual dramatic side of the story—the personal, sentimental side of Herringham's life." He needed to balance the latter narrative with the opportunities for parody, satire, and caricature it provided. Only at moments in the manuscript is the attempt wholly successful.

I have already given a few such moments. I have reserved a few
The Mirror of the Past, ms, page 21
Calendar of years
The Robert H. Taylor Collection

The Mirror of the Past, ms, page 22
Chronology of Sylvester Herringham's life and Max Beerbohm's intersection with it
The Robert H. Taylor Collection
more for my conclusion. They show what Beerbohm was trying to achieve through his multiple narrative perspectives: not just the perspective of the mirror, but of its interpreters, the genteel old Sylvester Herringham and his younger, ostensibly silent partner—in many ways, his double—the ironic Max. Here, for instance, is the story of Herringham’s encounter with his Chelsea neighbor Carlyle shortly after Mildred’s elopement with Lord Runcorn. It is recorded first from Herringham’s sentimental perspective:

After elopement—[Herringham] began to miss her—He tried to hide his grief—Pride—hated sympathy—No one spoke to him of Mildred—

“Yes—one, strangely enough—The last man I should have expected.” He was moved, for a moment he said nothing.

“It was one of the beautiful things that have happened to me.”

A walk along Cheyne Walk at night—September—Dark night—but in light of a lamp saw familiar figure coming, leaning on stick—it was C[arlyle].

“I had been used to go there in days of dear Mrs. C[arlyle]. It was more for her that I used to go. She was always very civil. And he—well, he was not. When she died—April ’66—I gave up going—though I wrote to him—She had been dead—years. As you know, he was much broken by her death. He never ceased to mourn her—poor old rugged, tender-hearted man! I raised my hat and was passing on—but he stopped, peered at me out of his wonderful old eyes—the saddest, tenderest eyes I have ever known—and laid a hand on my shoulder—

‘And so ye’ve lost y’r woman,’ I could say nothing. ‘They’re given to us, and they’re taken from us; that’s the way of it. And we’ve to plod on as we may.’ Pause. ‘Come in and see me sometimes.’ Passed on into the night—”

“Did you go?”

“Yes, several times.”

“Did he ever speak again to you of your wife—or of his own?”

“No. But now there was always something between us. There was the bond of bereavement.”

Immediately after this Beerbohm adds a note about an “imaginary recent book, containing ‘Talks with C[arlyle]’”:

I was distressed to find he spoke of H[erringham] as “a feeble, pernickety infinitesimal man—one H, a dabbler with numerals and the like, who comes and pester me with his kickle-kackle”—But this sort of thing was a mannerism, after all. And as we learn from many sources, he always finished his invectives with a laugh, thus robbing them of their sting and turning the laugh against himself.

The revelation of the short-tempered Carlyle’s opinion of Herringham, directly after Herringham’s recollection of that “poor old rugged, tender-hearted man,” creates two characters—Herringham and Carlyle—and a joke. Part of the joke is Beerbohm’s own retreat to the limited perspective of his self-caricature—for in that version of himself Beerbohm, too, softens and sentimentalizes Chelsea’s angry sage. The “talks with C[arlyle]” give an image, as the mirror gives its images; but every image demands an interpreter, and in Beerbohm’s narrative the gap between image and interpretation is never closed. Always there is the comic frustration of watching life as in a mirror: composed, perhaps, with the roundure to which (Rossetti said) all art aspires, but silent, deceptive, ungraspable. Beerbohm’s joke on himself as limited perceiver is as important as the joke on Herringham. And there is an edge to it, of the sort to be found in the artist stories of Seven Men. There is the intimation that, for all our incessant giving off of images, we are each threatened with invisibility. In The Mirror of the Past, to be perceived is to exist—but tenuously.

The comedy of limited perspectives is allied to a comedy produced by clashing personalities and incompatible styles. This is the comedy we find in Beerbohm’s drawing, in The Poet’s Corner (1904), of Rossetti’s back garden, where Whistler strikes a dandy’s pose while Swinburne mischievously pulls Whistler’s lock of white hair and Theodore Watts-Dunton wags an admonitory finger; where Meredith gazes off into visionary spaces, Burne-Jones lugubriously offers a flower to a kangaroo, William Morris declaims a poem, and Rossetti in total absorption paints. The Pre-Raphaelites and their circle were, in fact, the most improbably unstable compound of vividly unassimilable personalities. Beer-
bohm's ironic vision of them took in the human comedy, which he recorded also as a manic clash of various art-historical styles—not only, that is, a clash of ways of being, but of ways of seeing and recording, a clash of images and image making. There are notes in the manuscript of The Mirror of the Past suggesting that the contrast between Rossetti and William Morris would have been a subject for further elaboration. Morris is a "North wind—no humour—only jocular—high spirits and slang," while Rossetti is a "South wind—contrary—at Oxford much stronger." Morris gave Rossetti "not the poetical adoration of Sw[inburne] or Ned [Burne-Jones]—brisk deference of bosun to skipper, or foreman to superintendent—" Morris is "very inconsiderate and impersonal—interested in things only—concrete eyesight, not vision—Rossetti saw their souls—also of men and women." Morris, according to these notes, is "like a dynamo—you could not imagine him sitting down and gossiping. And in a sentence that sounds as if it were to have been spoken by Rossetti, "For a man who doesn't like machinery, Top [Morris's nickname] is surprisingly like a steam-engine," Morris is a "Puffing Billy—Sailor-like-handy-man—Steam, noise, driver invisible."

Though the clash between Morris and Rossetti is only suggested in the manuscript, that between Morris and Herringham became a little masterpiece of comic incongruities. Morris is personally incongruous: his hearty schoolboy personality contrasts with the pseudomedievalism of his art, his estheticism with its commercialization in the firm of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. And in the scene Beerbohm wrote there is the amazing incompatibility of Morris's zeal for "good honest rough oaken boards with bulrushes" and Herringham's equally (if more quietly) intractable fondness for parquet. Here is the way the scene appears in "Hethway Speaking":

"One morning Pringle, my butler, came up to my study and said that Mr. Faulkner and another gentleman were in the drawing-room. He said, 'I told Mr. Faulkner you were not at home, sir, but the other gentleman said that then they'd come in and wait.' I asked Pringle who the other gentleman was. 'I don't know, sir,' he said. 'A seafaring gentleman, I think.' I wondered what Morris could want with me.

"As I went downstairs I heard his voice raised in great enthusiasm about something, and, as I entered, the sturdy and
rosy fellow rushed at me and clapped me on the shoulders. 'Splendid,' he cried, stepping back, 'grandiose, scrumptious.'

"What is?" I asked.

"'Why, this,' he answered, spinning round on his heel, with his right arm extended, and radiantly facing me again.

"'You like the room?" I asked.

"'Like it? Why, it's the most beautiful room in London.'

'I turned to Faulkner (who was standing in the background—looking, I noticed, rather uncomfortable) and 'Well,' I said, 'this is praise indeed from Sir Hubert! I was afraid Morris wouldn't approve of my taste at all. This sofa, for instance—very different from that famous wooden settle of his in Red Lion Square.'

"'Sofa?" cried Morris. 'Call that a sofa? Why it's only a—a perch for canary-birds. But the room—Golly!' and he spun ecstatically round on his heel, upsetting this time a slim Sheraton stand on which was a silver vase with a rose in it. 'Sorry,' he exclaimed, picked up the stand, replaced the vase and the rose, and—he was always extraordinarily handy—mopped the wet floor dry with his huge handkerchief; all in an instant of time. 'Sorry,' he said again, 'but it's the gin-crack's own fault, you know. And it clinches our scheme, by Jove, doesn't it?'

"'What scheme?' I inquired.

"'Oh, I forgot: you weren't in the room. The scheme. To make a clean sweep of all these folderols and really furnish the room. Moment I came in, I swore we'd do this for you—didn't I, Faulkner? We'd been round to see Gabriel Rossetti, on business. As we came away Faulkner pointed out this house to me—told me you lived here. Confess I'd quite forgotten you, old chap. Liked the look of your house, though. Thought you might want some things. Besides: pleasure to see you again. Wasn't prepared for this room, though. Felt the challenge of it at once. I've got half the designs in my head already, and I'll put 'em in hand today. All you've got to do is to get your things carted off to Christie's or somewhere and pocket what they fetch. I and Faulkner and Co. will do the rest.'

"'I said, 'Your idea is that I should sell all that I have and follow you?'

"'Right!—you've hit it,' he cried. 'And what's more, we'll let you have everything at two per cent above cost of production, by Jiminy, because we're blooming beginners and you're our friend. Hooray! I've got all the designs in my head now,' and he struck his forehead a violent blow with his fist. 'I see your whole blessed room for you, all clear before me. You shall have a great cedar chair—there, in the middle—like Odin's throne; and a settle—all along this wall—to seat a regiment. And Ned Burne-Jones will do the stained glass for your windows—Life of La Belle Isidell; and Ford Madox Brown shall do the panels of the settle—Boyhood of Chaucer; and—he strode up and down, brandishing his arms—'there's a young chap named William De Morgan who'll do the tiles for the hearth; and my wife shall embroider the edges of the window-curtains—you know that green serge we've got, Faulkner—glorious. And by Jove we'll—but here he slipped and sat with a terrific crash on the parquet. 'That's just what I was going to speak about,' he continued, sitting; 'this isn't a floor, it's a sheet of ice: it won't do; we must have good honest rough oaken boards with bulrushes,' he cried, bounding to his feet, —strewn bulrushes. And we'll have a—'

"'One moment, Morris,' I begged. 'When you say we, do you mean simply yourself and Faulkner and the Company, or do you include me?'

"'But of course I include you,' he said. 'Why, hang it all, the room's yours.'

"'That's just what I was beginning to doubt,' I said.

"'He stared hard at me, and I at him. Rather a dog-and-cat effect, I suppose. It lasted some seconds. Morris saw that I wouldn't waver. One of his great qualities was that he never wasted time. He always concentrated his energies on things that could be done, he never repined over things that couldn't. Here was a thing that couldn't. He looked at his watch, whisked (he always whisked whenever he looked at his watch), snatched his hat—Come along, Faulkner!' he cried. 'No offence, Hethway!'—and was gone.

"'He was a queer fellow—a great character; quite apart. And as good as gold. But I hadn't much in common with him.'"

Another pair who hadn't much in common were Carlyle and Whistler. Beerbohm put them together in his drawing "Blue China" (Rossetti and His Circle), where the dandified little
painter points out the charms of porcelain to the unimpressed and very dour Scotsman. Art history puts them together by virtue of Whistler's portrait of Carlyle. It was painted shortly after the portrait of Whistler's mother, and looks remarkably like it. Sylvester Herringham had the opportunity to ask Carlyle how this "odd conjunction" of Whistler and Carlyle came about. This is what he told Beerbohm, whose revised version of it appears in "Fetherway Speaking":

"He [Carlyle] said it was through Madame Venturi. I dare-say you've heard of her. She had lived for many years in Chelsea. She was a great friend of dear Mrs. Carlyle. Both these ladies had an immense esteem for Mazzini, whom Carlyle thought a poor crittur—not because Mazzini was so, but because Carlyle was so unvarying in his judgment of men. . . . Since Mrs. Carlyle's death he had formed the habit of going often to Madame Venturi's house. He may have thought her a poor crittur, but she loved Janie's memory, and that sufficed. 'And one day,' he told me, 'there was a wee young man with a mop of black ringlets and a quizzing-glass—a sor-rd of pocket D'Israeli by the looks of him, but American in his talk, of which there was much. When he was gone, Mrs. Venturi asked me what I thought of him; and I told her without cir-r-cumlocution. Said she, But he's going to be a verra great painter, and he wants to paint you; and he's verra poor, she said: and he's verra guid to his Mither-r. She's a most per-rinaceous crittur, is Mrs. Venturi, and next day I found myself with her at a house alongside the river, there to see this Mr. Whistler's paintings. The Mither-r received us—a dainty-sad little auld silvery dame, gentle of speech and shy-authoritative. Presently in comes son, and we all go into his wor-rk-room, and there, propped up on a bit of wooden stand, is a picture of the Mither-r, with a frame to it. There she sat, side-face, a sad figure, all in black, lonesome and shy-authoritative, against a plain grey wall of parlour. I canna count how many sittings I gave that slow-working son. One day he said finis and showed me his handiwork. There I sat, side-face, all in black, lonesome and meditative-gentle, against pale grey wall of parlour. Painter stood by me sharp-expectant. "Well, young man," I said at last, "ye're verra filial, verra filial indeed.""
thinking of all that he had been to me. I stood there with a heart full of love and reverence and sorrow— I don't know what he felt; perhaps he was past all feeling. But I know he knew what was in me. And I think he would have spoken of—of things; but you see, we were not alone. There was the small man— I forget his name, but I gathered he was acting as a sort of companion or nurse— bright red hair— and I remember hearing later that he became a very popular novelist. I spoke of ‘Ballads and Sonnets’. Small man— he had a particularly sonorous voice— said it must be gratifying to all his old friends to note the magnificent reception accorded this volume by the press. He said something about Mr. R's work now appealing to a wider and ever wider public. He said something about "phenomenal sales" and something about "the heart of every man and every woman in the English-speaking world."

I caught Rossetti's eye, and I thought I saw there for an instant a gleam of the great old laughter— "Well, good night, Sylvester," he said— I never saw him again."

The small man with the bright red hair did indeed become a popular novelist. He is Hall Caine, one of Beerbohm's favorite objects for satire and caricature; and he was one of the first of Rossetti's self-seeking hagiographers. Hall Caine's huckster version of Rossetti is another instance of interpretation failing image. In this vignette, Hall Caine is the keeper of Rossetti's image— which may be all of him there is. In Rossetti and His Circle, Beerbohm makes the massive Rossetti eerily passive, the still center for the more wildly eccentric performances of his keepers and copyists, Hall Caine and Theodore Watts, and for the more vociferously projective Swinburne, Morris, and Meredith. Rossetti, the image maker, had become in his lifetime a prisoner of his art's images. Literally he was copied by well-intentioned disciples like Treffry Dunn and by outright forgers like Howell; more pathetically, he became his own forger, creating Rossetti pastiches "for Howell to sell to merchant princes." Anyone, it seems, even Mildred Crump, could become a Rossetti woman. In Beerbohm's vignette, Rossetti himself is becoming stuff for a best seller.

Artists must devise strategies to keep themselves free in a world that would thus appropriate them and manipulate their images. I began by calling Max Beerbohm elusive. His strategy was preemptive. Max is his own caricature, who exists in a landscape
Quis Custodiet Ipsum Custodeam, 1918
Theodore Watts: "Mr. Caine, a word with you! Shield and I have been talking matters over, and we agreed that to-night and henceforth you must not and shall not read any more of your literary efforts to our friend. They are too—what shall I say?—too luridly arresting and are allies of insomnia."

The Tate Gallery

Me as I was a few years ago.
Certainly an older and possibly a wiser man.

Max Beerbohm, self-portrait, 1946
Me as I move or less am nowadays.
Certainly an older and possibly wiser man.
The Robert H. Taylor Collection
made up of all his rivals' art-images, reduced to his scale. He could make anything into "a Beerbohm," while he kept Beerbohm himself unassimilable. He embraced the tenuousness of the artist's existence and made it his strength. His self-awareness protected him from the fate (as it also kept him from the greatness) he attributed to Rossetti: you cannot consume an artist who refuses to become substantial.

From The Mirror of the Past here, finally, is more about Lord Runcorn who eloped with Herringham's wife. Or, rather, here is more about Lord Runcorn's image as it was seen once by the youthful Beerbohm in imaginary old copies of Punch. (Runcorn succeeded to the title Bostingdale; why he is here called "Lord Staplehurst" is one of the manuscript's minor mysteries):

He had been a great figure to me in my childhood. Tenniel's cartoon in Punch was a weekly excitement to me, and Lord Staplehurst was so frequently, in one way and another, the hero of that cartoon. He appeared for the most part in the guise of an Homeric warrior, with great muscular development of calf and biceps. I remember him intervening to knock up the crossed swords of two lesser and evil-visaged warriors one of whom had a breastplate labelled Revolutionary, the other a shield labelled Reactionary. I remember him as Perseus rescuing Britannia-Andromeda from a squamous monster whose tentacles were labelled {Anarchy and Prejudice and Sedition and Vested Interests} and any number of awful other things. On one occasion he himself was shown writhing in chains on a rock; and a vulture was hovering near him. He had been adversely criticised by some newspaper or some Member of Parliament, thus reminding Mr. Punch of Prometheus. But this, I think, was the only time he {appeared was presented} in what might be called a pathetic light. {Usually one saw him dominant and triumphal.} After any crisis in our foreign or domestic affairs, Tenniel showed him haughty in a toga, or in his coronet and robes, with short Mr. Punch bowing and scraping before him and saying, "My Lord, you 'have done the State some service'", or "Once more, my Lord, you have deserved right well of Queen and Country", or "Although your Lordship's motto has ever been Moderate, the regard in which your countrymen continue to hold you is extreme."

At last, in Sylvester Herringham's mirror, Beerbohm sees Lord Runcorn again, younger now, the lover not the statesman. And not just a cartoon in Punch, but the real man—another version:

Here he stood, the future hero of so many now-long-bygone cartoons—the Perseus and Prometheus, Achilles, the Prospero and Hercules Prometheus and Cincinnatus, of Mr. Punch's obsequious fancy and of Mr. Tenniel's Graeco-Roman line; imprescibent of greatness; a prey to merely private and personal embarrassment; and assuredly not foreseeing

Lord Runcorn—sketched from life, [n. d.]
The Rupert Hart-Davis Collection

146
that fifty-four years later he was going to be here {envisaged seen} {in this innocent mirror} by one who would snatch pencil and paper and make a rough but (I think) faithful sketch of him from the life—a sketch {that which,} when he shall have been gathered to his fathers, I shall perhaps offer to his biographer for reproduction in the first of the two monumental volumes.

NOTES

5. Epigraph to The Works.
10. “Whistler’s Writing,” Yet Again (London: Chapman and Hall, 1906), pp. 108, 116. Here and elsewhere my deletions are indicated by ellipsis points in brackets; when ellipsis points appear without brackets, they are Beerbohm’s.
17. I have tried throughout to be accurate in my transcription, but I have made selections in the interest of readability. I have corrected obvious slips, regularized spelling, and expanded abbreviations. On the other hand, where an orthographical oddity seemed intentional, I have left it.
18. Sylvester misstates his age here. He was born in 1838, and should therefore have reached his 42nd birthday in 1880. When Beerbohm met him, he was 58.

19. Beerbohm has scratched out the last digit in the date which I supply as 1916.


22. MS, p. 20.

23. MS, p. 48. The occasion of Rossetti’s poem (1870) was the installation in the British Museum of ancient Assyrian monuments excavated by Sir Henry Layard (1817-1894).

24. MS, pp. 46.

25. MS, p. 28.

26. MS, p. 29.

27. MS, p. 27.

28. Letter, pp. 2-3

29. MS, p. 34A.

30. MS, unnumbered additional page.

31. MS, p. 34A. In MS, p. 20, Beerbohm describes seeing Tennyson’s visit in the mirror.

32. MS, p. 34B.

33. MS, p. 34C.

34. Letter, p. 12.

35. A drawing in Vanity Fair Album, 1872, shows Sir Frederic Leighton in this posture. Beerbohm’s copy of the Vanity Fair drawing, along with his appreciative comments on the verso, is now in the Robert H. Taylor Collection. Beerbohm has this to say: “A lovely portrait—so full of appreciation, and of irony! Evidently by J. J. Tissot, who at that time was in England and did some work for Vanity Fair. How perfect the shape on the page. And this summing up [meaning the prose sketch] is a worthy pendant to the picture: so just, and so amusing. I fancy it was by Laurence Oliphant, also a worker for V. F. But all the ‘Jehu Junior’ things in that periodical were remarkable for wit, and penetration, and connaissance de cause, and sheer good writing. They were written for a few by a few. Whereas nowadays weekly journalism—but I have no space to continue! Max, Rapallo, 1948.”

36. MS, p. 19. In Shaw’s advice that the virtuoso Sarasate ought “to play second fiddle in a theatre orchestra,” Beerbohm may be recalling the kind of teasing advice he himself had been given by Shaw. “Ten minutes on the Drainage Sub-Committee of the St. Pancras Borough Council . . . would shatter [your] academicism forever,” Shaw wrote Beerbohm in 1903. See Bernard Shaw, Collected Letters 1898-1910, ed. Dan H. Laurence (London: Max Reinhardt, 1972), p. 374. See also p. 43: “You must go on a vestry at the first opportunity. You have been badly brought up, & can only taste life when it is fried in fine art.”

37. Whistler refers to the pedestrians and bicyclists at the Lillie Bridge Running-ground, which stood then in the vicinity of the present Earl’s Court Exhibition. These letters are, of course, in imitation of the letters Whistler included in his The Gentle Art of Making Enemies (1890). They appear in MS, additional p. 1B, and are described by Beerbohm on p. 5 of his Letter to the Editor of the Century.

38. MS, p. 56.


40. MS, p. 37. Beerbohm writes in the preface to Rossetti and His Circle, “In London, in the great days of a deep, smug, thick, rich, drab industrial complacency, Rossetti shone, for the men and women who knew him, with the ambiguous light of a red torch somewhere in a dense fog. And so he still shines for me” (p. vi).

41. MS, p. 36.

42. MS, p. 36.

43. MS, p. 37.

44. MS, p. 47.

45. MS, p. 50.

46. Typescript page, with Beerbohm’s corrections.


48. MS, p. 37.

49. MS, p. 37.

50. MS, p. 25.

51. MS, p. 17.

52. MS, p. 40.

53. Letter, p. 5.

54. MS, p. 40.

55. MS, p. 40.

56. MS, p. 17.

57. MS, p. 23.

58. MS, p. 23.

59. MS, p. 23.

60. MS, p. 24.
more vital London, to live incessantly apart for almost two years with a man of genius who suffered from agoraphobia in an acute form. It was thought that Hall Caine lost too little time after Rossetti's death in bringing out a book about him. Poor young man!—I think it was natural that he should desire to lose not a moment. Light! air! publicity at any price and at once!—such was the quite inevitable and excusable reaction" (Mainly on the Air [1958], pp. 76-77). Recollections of Dante Gabriel Rossetti by T. Hall Caine appeared in 1882, less than a year after Rossetti's death.

86. ms, p. 50.
87. ms, p. 59.
"RELICKS OF INFAMY": AN EXHIBITION


From the title case, which juxtaposed an Ellis forgery of a document “signed” by Queen Elizabeth and the “bellow portrait” of Shakespeare which modern scholars believe to have been created from an 18th-century Dutch painting of an unidentified woman, the exhibition proceeded through the great literary fabrications of the age of Johnson and Boswell to the obscure productions of our own time.

Dr. Johnson’s underground literary efforts failed to save Dr. William Dodd from execution for forging Lord Chesterfield’s name on a bond for £4,200. But they reaffirm to modern minds not only Johnson’s literary skills, but his political ones as well. If Johnson’s hand was the highlight of the materials presenting Dr. Dodd’s sad end, it was original printings of books that recalled the more influential work of Thomas Chatterton, who fabricated a body of work purporting to be that of a 15th-century Bristol poet and monk named Thomas Rowley, and James Macpherson, who invented a poet named Ossian, whose Gaelic texts were supposedly the basis of Macpherson’s “translations” of the works that brought the name “Morven” to the Princeton residence of Richard Stockton, a signer of the Declaration of Independence. Fingal (1762) and Temora (1763) were much admired for their romantic flair even after Dr. Johnson challenged their authenticity and Macpherson had to fabricate the “ originals” of the Ossian texts.

But the dominant presence in the exhibition was William Henry Ireland. The Four Oaks Library is rich in Ireland’s Shakespearean inventions. Everything was concocted to please his Shakespeare-obsessed father, Samuel Ireland. The father seems never to have fully accepted the fact that the Shakespeare signatures, the Earl of Southampton letter, the legal documents involving the poet, the John Hemynghe autograph, the fragments of poems, the acrostics, the genealogies connecting the Ireland and Shakespeare families, the complete holograph manuscript of King Lear, seven pages of Hamlet in Shakespeare’s “hand,” and finally the manuscript of an entirely unknown play by Shakespeare titled Vortigern, were successively bolder attempts on the part of the young Ireland to please his gullible father. For reasons quite different from those of the 18th-century visitors to Samuel Ireland’s exhibition of these “relics” in his own home, visitors to the Firestone Library’s gallery were delighted by such “rarities” as a love letter from Shakespeare to Ann Hathaway (enclosing a lock of his hair!), additional lines intended to improve upon Lear and Hamlet as we know them, and the flat cadences and hollow ideas of Vortigern. Modern audiences are as taken by the audacity of the manuscripts (William was only 19 when he began his deception) as 18th-century audiences were by the excitement of the new discoveries.

In fact the 18th century saw many distinguished believers among the literati. Charles Lamb knelt to kiss the very portrait of Shakespeare that opened this exhibition; and Boswell knelt to kiss one of the volumes of Ireland’s “Shakespeare.” Even Richard Brinsley Sheridan voiced no doubts as he looked upon the same forgeries with many another eminent author at their initial exhibition. What is more, he produced Vortigern at the Drury Lane Theatre on 2 April 1796 with John Philip Kemble in the leading role. The original audience venerated longingly until closer and more critical inspection, particularly Edmund Malone’s, finally aroused the appropriate scholarly skepticism. The partisan reactions of these believing and unbelieving schools are in themselves instruction in literary history.

Thomas J. Wise’s distinguished position in Edwardian England made it just as difficult in the 20th century for partisans to accept the fact that he was the greatest forger of printed books since the invention of the press. His forgeries of Swinburne, Arnold, Tennyson, and Browning are now among the genuine rarities of the book world, and the exhibition presented an unusually large collection of them from the Four Oaks Library as well as the fascinating detective literature that led to their exposure.

Outside the mainstream of literary forgery, whose motivation was never simply money, there has always been the commercial fabricator of the random manuscript. Mrs. Hyde loaned forged items by authors as diverse as Michelangelo, Swift, Hobbes, John-
son, and Smollett and as sustained as an extensive group of love poems purporting to be from George Bernard Shaw to Ellen Terry that are probably the productions of a purely commercial intent.

But not everything in the exhibition was fraudulent. Mrs. Hyde gave us the privilege of showing the only genuine copy of the 1611 quarto of Hamlet in private hands in America, as well as quite genuine drawings by Thomas Rowlandson (of the hanging of Dr. Dodd) and Max Beerbohm (of Shakespeare and Bacon), commenting on the world of the forger. It is a world that touches everyone’s desire to believe, and our equally peculiar fascination with that which was once believed and is now revealed as unbelievable.

—ALFRED L. BUSH

A love letter from William Shakespeare to Ann Hathaway forged by William Henry Ireland in 1795.
The Four Oaks Library of Donald and Mary Hyde
New & Notable

RECENT ACQUISITIONS

Behrman Gift of Defoe and Burns

Among the recent additions to the Princeton rare book collections of English literature are two titles from the library of Dr. Howard T. Behrman whose notable collection of American literature was on exhibit in the Firestone Library during the autumn of 1979. The Robert Burns Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect, Kilmarnock, 1786, is a first edition bound in full red morocco, a fine wide-margined copy. The Daniel Defoe Robinson Crusoe, 1719-1720, in three volumes, is the Huth copy, first issue, with the two advertisement leaves present, plus a second issue of Volume II. All four volumes, bound in contemporary leather, are in superb condition.

The full title of Daniel Defoe’s masterpiece (Part 1), almost invariably referred to as Robinson Crusoe, is The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner: Who lived Eight and Twenty Years, all alone in an uninhabited Island on the Coast of America, near the Mouth of the Great River of Oronoque; Having been cast on Shore by Shipwreck, wherein all the Men perished but himself. With an Account how he was at last as strangely deliver’d by Pyrates. Written by Himself. Published April 25, 1719, it was quickly followed by three other editions in less than four months, one of these being not only pirated but also abridged. Defoe’s publisher was W. Taylor at the Ship in Paternoster Row, who apparently worked in conjunction with four other publishers. On August 20, Taylor also published a sequel, generally referred to as Part II of Robinson Crusoe. This title page reads: The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, Being the Second and Last Part of His Life, and of the Strange Surprising Accounts of his Travels Round three Parts of the Globe. Written by Himself. To which is added a Map of the World, in which is Delineated the Voyages of Robinson Crusoe. London: Printed for W. Taylor at the Ship in Pater-Noster-Row. MDCCXIX. And finally, on August 8, 1720, appeared Serious Reflec-

Only Defoe specialists are likely to be aware that the work has three distinct parts. Parts II and III are rarely read these days; and in fact even Part I, now a classic for children, is often read in abridged form. Any literate contemporary of Defoe would have immediately recognized Part I as an imaginary voyage, a fictional genre widely prevalent in the 17th and 18th centuries. Although it contains a few hints of earlier travel literature, *Robinson Crusoe* is the product of a highly original mind, a mind well stored with geographical and nautical facts and the talent to use them inventively in creating a tale of seafaring adventure and of a mariner marooned on an island in what was then called the South Seas, off the coast of South America. The universal appeal of the narrative results primarily from Crusoe’s ingenious adaptation to what his contemporary readers considered the life of nature. But there is another aspect of the narrative, pervasively present, which transcends in some respects the merely adventurous and adds complexity to the novel. Defoe depicts Crusoe as a prototype of Adam and Eve, a sinner whose “original sin” is similarly disobedience, disobedience to his father which leads Crusoe into a life of “seafaring wickedness,” to alienation from God, from family, from mankind. And so Crusoe is subjected to afflictive Providence, and must work out his salvation on a remote island. In a sense then the novel becomes a spiritual autobiography, an instance of fallen man making an intense scrutiny of his sinful nature and eventually, with appropriate signs from Providence, resigning his will to the will of God, a true penitence shored up by the realization that Providence has guided his every act and thought. Thus we have a narrative of sin, of expiation, and a return to God and symbolically to home, Crusoe spiritually reborn and also enriched materially. At the end Crusoe remarks: “And thus I have given the first part of a life of fortune and adventure, a life of Providence’s chequerwork.”

As Crusoe realizes, he was “possessed by a wandering spirit,” “Rambling was his element”; and after the death of his wife he began to feel strongly the urge to take another voyage, some inner intimations which struck him as coming from Providence. Unwilling to resist Providence he responds to the urge. The result is

Part II, *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, a narrative ranging in time over ten years and in space from England to Brazil and his lonely island, thence to the Cape of Good Hope, and on to Madagascar, the Persian Gulf, to the East Indies, China, Siberia and other places in Muscovy, and eventually to Germany. He finally returned to England at the age of 72, resolved at last to retire and end his days in peace. Although Part II lacks the verve and concentrated appeal of the first part of the novel, it is nevertheless a narrative of considerable appeal, a pleasing example of the geographical imagination at work. Defoe’s fascination with nautical matters, with faraway lands, his zest for strange peoples, civilized and barbarian, the vitality with which he endows them by massive realistic details—these are virtues of Part II as well as of Part I. Nor does Part II lack intellectual enrichment. Crusoe reflects Defoe’s own interest in the workings of particular Providence, in the relationship of Christians to heathens, in the controversies between Catholicism and Protestantism, in the nature of salvation, in theories of government, and in commerce and colonization. It is possible that *The Farther Adventures* has been unduly neglected.

Part III, *Serious Reflections During the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, consists of very brief and casual comments on varied topics, mainly ethical and religious. These reflect aspects of Defoe’s thought, but the connection to the preceding parts of the novel is tenuous. Robinson Crusoe makes an appearance; and the claim is made that the story of Robinson Crusoe is an allegorical autobiography. Commentators on Defoe have not taken this interpretation seriously. In “Crusoe’s Vision of the Angelick World,” one can see an affinity with the spiritual struggles Crusoe underwent on his lonely island in Part I; and two of the Reflections—“Of Solitude” and “Of Listening to the Voice of Providence”—have some obvious application to Part I. Others, such as the remarks on atheistical and profane discourse and on the present state of religion in the world, may serve to gloss passages in Parts I and II; but *Serious Reflections* is a part of the moral and ethical musings of the period, not, except by courtesy, akin to the novel *Robinson Crusoe*.

It is perhaps worthy of mention that Defoe’s first novel came out as he approached the age of 60. In the following four years he wrote five more novels, as well as other works. Before the publication of *Robinson Crusoe*, Defoe had been extensively involved.
in journalism and political affairs. He had published some verse
and his famous satire, *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters*. He
had been a merchant and an importer of hosiery, wine, and to-
tabacco. He had served as a secret political agent for a powerful
minister in the Cabinet; and for ten years he edited a journal,
*The Review*, for which he wrote extensively on commerce, poli-
tics, and religion. He also found the time and energy to manufac-
ture tiles and bricks. This same remarkable breadth of experience
and impressive literary productivity continued until his death in
1731. Scores of tracts and books came from his pen on scores of
subjects. For indefatigability and productivity it may be that he
has had no equal in the annals of English literature.

—LOUIS A. LANDA

"Isherwood and His Friends":
*A Collection of Drawings by Don Bachardy*

The Graphic Arts Collection has recently received a gift from
the Mildred Andrews Foundation of 25 portrait drawings by Cali-
ifornia artist Don Bachardy. Signed by the sitters as well as the
artist, the drawings represent a group of prominent literary and
musical figures centering on Bachardy's long-time friend Chris-
topher Isherwood.

In the 1930s, Isherwood's name had become, for the reading
public, indissolubly associated with Berlin through his best-selling
novels documenting the last years of the Weimar Republic, *Mr.
Norris Changes Trains* (1935) and *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939). Isher-
wood had moved to California in 1939 to become the disciple
of Swami Prabhavananda, whose spiritual teachings were deeply
influential to his later work. Their relationship, and also the rela-
tionship of Isherwood and Bachardy, are recounted in Isherwood's
most recent book *My Guru and His Disciple* (1980). This record
of his spiritual development provides a wealth of autobiographical
detail and affords rare insight into many of his friendships of this
period. Some of these friendships, with W. H. Auden, Stephen
Spender, E. M. Forster, and Gerald Heard, date from a time be-
fore he left his native England for the United States. Others
reflect his early days in Hollywood, where he met Aldous and
Maria Huxley, Garbo, Chaplin, Max Reinhardt, Anita Loos, and
Tennessee Williams. The young Bachardy was eventually drawn
into this illustrious circle, and as he developed as artist and por-
traitist, many of his subjects were chosen from it. While still in

art school, Bachardy did portraits to accompany interviews in the
*Paris Review*. Later he studied with Sir William Coldstream in
London, and still later his friendship with David Hockney was a
factor in his shift to a more realistic and linear and less impres-
sionistic and painterly style.

The 25 drawings listed below are a remarkable document of
Isherwood's friends and acquaintances in the 1960s and 1970s:
English friends from his youth, spiritual and literary mentors,
Hollywood neighbors, visitors, and collaborators. All of the draw-
ings are handsomely framed and several now hang in offices in the
Firestone Library. The portraits of Igor and Vera Stravinsky
adorn the Music Library, at the special request of the music
librarian.

J. R. ACKERLEY, [1961], pencil, ink, and ink wash drawing.
W. H. AUDEN, [1961], pen and ink drawing.
DON BACHARDY, 30 July 1981, brush and ink wash drawing.
TRUMAN CAPOTE, October 14, 1964, pencil and ink wash drawing,
signed by the sitter.
ROBERT CRAFT, December 23, 1962, pen, ink, and ink wash draw-
ing, signed by the sitter.
E. M. FORSTER, [1961], pencil and ink wash drawing.
GERALD HEARD, Michaelmas Day, 1964, pencil and ink wash draw-
ing, signed by the sitter.
ALDOUS HUXLEY, August 2, 1962, pen and ink drawing, signed by
the sitter.
CHRISTOPHER ISHERWOOD, December 2 1979, pencil and ink wash
drawing, signed by the sitter.
CHRISTOPHER ISHERWOOD, September 27, 1976, pencil and ink wash
drawing, signed by the sitter.
CHRISTOPHER ISHERWOOD, June 17, 1979, pencil and wash drawing,
signed by the sitter.
GAVIN LAMBERT, 8 May 1967, pencil and ink wash drawing, signed by
the sitter.
JOHN LEHMANN, 16 III 69, pencil and ink wash drawing, signed by
the sitter.
anita loos, Nov. 4, 1973, pencil and ink wash drawing, signed by the sitter.

anaïs nin, 1 October 1973, pencil and ink wash drawing, signed by the sitter.

swami prabhavananda, [1961], pen and ink drawing.

dodie smith, [1961], pen, ink, and ink wash drawing.

stephen spender, Jan 21st 64, New York, pencil and ink wash drawing, signed by the sitter.

igor stravinsky, July 11/67, Hollywood, Calif., pencil and ink wash drawing, signed by the sitter.

vera stravinsky, July 14, 1967, pencil and ink wash drawing, signed by the sitter.

virgil thomson, 8 November 1964, pencil and ink wash drawing, signed by the sitter.

edward upward, 28th June 1976, pencil and ink wash drawing, signed by the sitter.

gore vidal, 5 February 1977, pencil and ink wash drawing, signed by the sitter.

glenway wescott, 9 April 1975, pencil and ink wash drawing, signed by the sitter.

tennesssee williams, March 27, 1973, pencil and ink wash drawing, signed by the sitter.

—nancy Finlay
The Winter meeting of the Council was held in the Friends Room in Firestone Library on November 7, 1981.

The Treasurer had an encouraging report on our current financial status: a cash balance of $41,556 as opposed to $32,857 a year previous, and a free balance of $12,202, thanks to a generous gift from one of the Council members. The Council, however, deferred the normal transfer of money to the Acquisition Committee Fund until our April meeting.

Mr. Huber, Chairman of the Membership Committee, reported a current membership of 1,068 and plans for a drive for new members during the winter of 1981-1982. Some of the administrative problems of this drive have been solved, but our expenses have also increased since we set aside the allocation. The scope of the drive may have to be reduced or a larger allocation requested to complete the work.

Mr. Bentley, Chairman of the Publications Committee, reported continued good sales of Robert H. Taylor’s Certain Small Works and the recent reprinting of New Jersey Road Maps of the 18th Century, edited by Howard C. Rice, Jr., first published in 1964 and now available again in paper binding.

Mr. Ludwig commented on the successful opening on October 30 of the fall exhibition in the Gould Gallery: “Relicks of Infamy: Literary Forgeries from the Four Oaks Library of Donald and Mary Hyde,” installed by Alfred L. Bush, Curator of Western Americana. It will be followed in February by a composite exhibition: “Recent Acquisitions: Rare Books, Manuscripts, Maps, Theatre, and Graphic Arts,” which will run until late April. Mr. Ludwig also reported that the Winter issue of the Chronicle will be devoted to one long article by Professor Lawrence Danson on an unpublished manuscript by Max Beerbohm, The Mirror of the Past, owned by Robert H. Taylor. It will also appear as a hardcover book in the spring, published under the aegis of the Library.

Mr. Ludwig reviewed, for the pleasure of the Council, the variety of gifts received during the fall of 1981, ranging from Spenser, Milton, Newton, and Defoe to Aldous Huxley, T. S. Eliot, Albert Einstein, a rare 19th-century American print, and a Rodin bronze of Balzac, soon to arrive from Paris.

Mr. Koepp, the University Librarian, spoke briefly on the major alteration in Firestone Library now in progress (the rebuilding of the lobby security system) and the implications of this method of controlling access to the stacks, the reference room, and the card catalogue. He also reported on the meeting on November 6 of the Advisory Council of the Library.

The business meeting was followed by a preview of an exhibition of Virgil books and manuscripts in the Graphic Arts Collection and a tour of the newly installed Hyde exhibition in the Gould Gallery on the first floor. Dinner was served later at Prospect.
NEW JERSEY ROAD MAPS
OF THE 18TH CENTURY
ed. Howard C. Rice, Jr.
Facsimiles of eighteen maps
dating from 1762 to 1804
4 pp. text 36 pp. illus.
Third printing, 1981. $5.00

AMERICAN GRAPHIC ARTS:
THREE CENTURIES OF ILLUSTRATED BOOKS,
PRINTS AND DRAWINGS
Exhibition catalogue and articles
by Dale Roylance and Nancy Finlay
56 pp. 24 plates. 1981. $5.00

CERTAIN SMALL WORKS
Robert H. Taylor
Of Collectors and Collecting;
The Writer’s Craft; Anthony Trollope
164 pp. 9 illus. 1980. $10.00

F. SCOTT FITZGERALD’S
ST. PAUL PLAYS, 1911-1914
Four plays written for the
Elizabethan Club of St. Paul, Minnesota
Edited with an introduction by Alan Margolies
166 pp. 8 plates. 1978. $12.00

FINE BINDINGS: GOTHIC TO MODERN
Jamie Kleinberg Shalleck
European Handbound Books in the
Princeton University Library
32 pp. 8 plates. 1978. $2.00

HARPSICHORD MUSIC OF HANDEL
Opera Overtures: Amadigi, Scipione, and Admeto
Oratorio Overtures: Samson and Athalia
Two Fugues: G minor and A minor
Performed by Edward Parmentier
Explanatory notes by J. Merrill Knapp
Stereo LP 1976. $7.50

SMYTH REPORT ON THE ATOMIC BOMB
Offprint of three Chronicle articles
about the publishing history and
bibliography of the official report
on the first atomic bomb
(Printing and the Mind of Man, 422)
45 pp. 13 illus. 1976. $2.00

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Nassau Hall in 1770 by Phillip Freneau ’71
and Hugh Henry Brackenridge ’71
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Stanley Corngold, Victor Lange, and
Theodore Ziolkowski
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ed. Richard M. Ludwig
151 pp. 8 plates. 1974. $10.00
Princeton University Library Publications

GEORGE CRUIKSHANK: A REVALUATION
   ed. Robert L. Patten
   258 pp. 44 plates. 1974. $10.00

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   ed. Robert S. Fraser
   117 pp. 11 illus. 1972. $10.00

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON: A CATALOGUE OF
   COLLECTIONS IN THE DEPARTMENT OF
   RARE BOOKS
   Alexander D. Wainwright
   142 pp. 8 plates. 1971. $12.50

WILLIAM BLAKE, ENGRAVER
   Charles Ryskamp
   intro. Geoffrey Keynes
   A Descriptive Catalogue of an Exhibition
   61 pp. 12 plates. 1969. $3.50

AN OTOMI CATECHISM AT PRINCETON
   intro. Gillett G. Griffin
   76 pp. 1968. $3.00

SELECTED MANUSCRIPTS
   FROM THE CHESTER BEATTY LIBRARY
   62 pp. 8 illus. 1967. $1.25

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   75 pp. 12 illus. 1966. $3.50

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   John R. Martin
   42 pp. 24 illus. 1961. $7.50

ON PLAYS, PLAYWRIGHTS, AND PLAYGOERS:
   SELECTIONS FROM THE LETTERS OF
   BOOTH TARKINGTON
   ed. Alan S. Downer
   110 pp. 12 plates. 1959. $3.00

A LETTER FROM BENJAMIN FRANKLIN TO
   BENJAMIN VAUGHAN CONTAINING SOME
   OBSERVATIONS ON THE PRODIGAL
   PRACTICES OF PUBLISHERS
   intro. Carl Van Doren
   14 pp. facsimile. 1949. $4.00

Address:
Princeton University Library, Department of Publications,
Princeton, New Jersey, 08544. Checks payable to Princeton
University Library.
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The Friends of the Princeton University Library, founded in 1930, is an association of individuals interested in book collecting and the graphic arts and in increasing and making better known the resources of the Princeton University Library. It has secured gifts and bequests and has provided funds for the purchase of rare books, manuscripts, and other material which could not otherwise have been acquired by the Library.

Membership is open to those subscribing annually twenty-five dollars or more. Students may join for five dollars. Checks payable to Princeton University Library should be addressed to the Treasurer.

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