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SIR EDMUND GOSSE AS A CRITICAL BIOGRAPHER

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Master of Arts
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by

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The Faculty of Graduate Studies
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We, the undersigned members of the Committee appointed by you to examine the Thesis submitted by Margaret Jane Allen, B.A. in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts, beg to report that we consider the thesis satisfactory both in form and content.

Subject of Thesis: "Sir Edmund Gosse as a Critical Biographer".

We also report that she has successfully passed an oral examination on the general field of the subject of the thesis.
The term 'critical biography' demands definition. For the purpose of this thesis the term does not mean a critical estimate of the subject of the biography. It rather implies the bringing together of two different worlds into one work—the world of literature and the world of life. The biographer is 'critical' in that he deals not only with what Gosse calls "the faithful portrait of a soul in its adventures through life", but also with "the imaginative attempt on the part of man to structure his total experience" which is literature—at its best more real than life, yet also inferior to life: "no matter how complex the vision which it offers, it can never be as complex as life itself."

The critical biographer, dealing with a literary figure, is both artist and critic. He is an artist in the selecting and shaping of his biographical material, and he is a critic in the perceptive discussion of his subject's works. The temptation of the critical biographer, of course, is to illuminate the works by the light of the life, and to fill in gaps in the life by 'internal evidence' in the works. This union of life and works is a delicate and sometimes a dangerous business; the biographer could read into works material from life that is either unnecessary or
distorting, and could take for real life experience that which was originally an imaginative concept. This thesis will examine in part whether Gosse was tempted into these errors.

Creative, imaginative literature is regarded by many modern critics as belonging to a world of its own—the world of modes, genres, myths, symbols and archetypes. 'Peripheral explanation' is unnecessary for a true work of literature, which should be complete in itself. Northrop Frye, in *The Anatomy of Criticism*, says, "We think of literature at first as a commentary on an external 'life' or 'reality'. But...we have to go from literature as reflection of life to literature as autonomous language...—pure literature, like pure mathematics, contains its own meaning." So the ideal critical biographer to-day should be able to give a perceptive analysis of the work of art as "pure literature" as well as a "commentary on an external 'life'".

Although the critical biographies of Gosse would be less than satisfactory to critics of the "pure" and "autonomous" school of literature, they will be studied here mainly within Gosse's tradition. This thesis will examine the nature and scope of Gosse's contributions to critical biography, as seen especially in his studies of Gray, Congreve, Donne, Taylor, Patmore, Ibsen and Swinburne.

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For Edmund Gosse, the main purpose of biographical writing was to present "the faithful portrait of a soul in its adventures through life." He contributed many biographies and biographical studies to the literary world; an examination of these will follow the introductory life sketch. As anyone who has read Father and Son and Charteris' Life and Letters of Sir Edmund Gosse will know, Gosse himself has been a rewarding subject for study; his soul is interesting to examine, and his adventures through life were in many ways unique.

Edmund Gosse was born on September 21, 1849, in Hackney, England. His parents were poor gentlefolk of the middle class, not young, solitary, sensitive and proud. His mother had been brought up in the Anglican tradition, his father in the Wesleyan. Both became extreme Calvinists, gradually finding themselves apart from all Protestant communions, toward which they developed the same attitude, that of detached and unbiased contemplation. Their strict religious views involved them in the sect called "The Brethren", or "Plymouth Brethren", a group negative in form, (it had no priests, no ritual, no festivals, no ornament
of any kind), and very positive in the central core of its belief. Every attitude was developed from and every action based on interpretation of the Scriptures, and from the guidance of the Divine Will as revealed by direct answer to prayer. Every problem was 'cast before the Lord'. "They lived in an intellectual cell, bounded at its sides by the walls of their own house, but open above to the very heart of the uttermost heavens."2

Gosse's mother, Emily Bowes, was of American descent, well-educated in Greek, Latin, and some Hebrew. Her mind was trained to self-reliance and she was the author of many religious tracts and verses. In her diary she noted, "I cannot recollect the time when I did not love religion." Philip Henry Gosse, Edmund's father, was a zoologist, lecturer, and writer of books on natural history. Both parents believed in perfect purity, intrepidity and abnegation. This was reflected in their lives as a certain narrowness, isolation and an absence of perspective and humanity. They were, says Gosse in Father and Son, a "curious mixture of humbleness and arrogance."3 Current literature meant nothing to them. "Pleasure was found nowhere but in the Word of God, and to the endless discussion of Scriptures each hurried when the day's work was over."4 Edmund Gosse, their only child, was 'dedicated' in infancy to the religious life as they knew it.
When Edmund was four, the family moved to Islington in the north of London. He was educated by his parents in reading, arithmetic, natural history and the elements of geography. No fiction or story-books were allowed. "I was told about missionaries, but never about pirates; I was familiar with humming-birds, but I had never heard of fairies. Jack the Giant-Killer, Rupelstiltskin and Robin Hood were not of my acquaintance, and though I understood about wolves, Little Red Ridinghood was a stranger even by name." His reading was restricted to natural history, scientific books of travel, geography, astronomy, much theology, and the "Penny Cyclopaedia". But in spite of having no young companions, story-books, outdoor amusement or any of the many employments provided for other children in more conventional homes, Gosse did not become discontented or fretful, because he did not know of the existence of such entertainments. He had no curiosity about other children and his dreams were entirely of grownup people and animals. He understood from his earliest years that he was going to be a minister of the gospel. He was much alone and experienced some ferment of mind, particularly as he grew older and began to see that his father and God were not the same being, and even that his father was not infallible in his interpretation and understanding of God. But in spite of restrictions and isolation Gosse's home life was not stiff and dreary; his
parents' beliefs made them "always cheerful and often gay." Gosse's mother died in 1857. The painful months preceding her death, which they knew was inevitable, were unhappy ones for young Edmund and his father. His education in suffering and his perception of the healing powers of faith came at a very early age; they remained with him and later gave him insight into and understanding of similar crises which many of the subjects of his biographies underwent.

My early experiences, I confess, made me singularly conscious, at an age when one should know nothing about these things, of that torrent of sorrow and anguish and terror which flows under all the footsteps of man. Within my childish conscience, already some dim inquiry was awake as to the meaning of this mystery of pain. But what must be recorded was the extraordinary tranquillity, the severe and sensible resignation, with which at length my parents faced the awful hour. Language cannot utter what they suffered, but there was no rebellion, no repining; in their case even an atheist might admit that the overpowering miracle of grace was mightily efficient.

Gosse was dedicated to the Lord again at his mother's deathbed. Later he observed, "What a weight, intolerable as the burden of Atlas, to lay on the shoulders of a little fragile child!"

Gosse and his father were separated for a while after the death of his mother. Because of their poverty, Philip Gosse accepted an engagement to deliver a long series of lectures on marine natural history throughout the north and centre of England. Young Edmund was sent to stay with a large family of cousins in Clifton, Bristol. He thrived in
the wholesome family life and the society of young people he found there, enjoyed a brief interval of healthy, happy child-life, and learned to look out on the world around him with a curiosity about human life.

When he returned to his home in Islington, Gosse became very close to his father. He sat in his father's study, watched and reported the habits of animals in the aquaria, and received incessant religious instruction, almost exclusively doctrinal. An occasional walk was their sole recreation. Then Philip Gosse bought a house in St. Marychurch, South Devon. "On my eighth birthday, with bag and baggage complete, we all made the toilful journey down into Devonshire, and I was a town child no longer."10

Gosse's new home was near the sea, which fascinated him. He attended his father as an acolyte when his father's work as a naturalist eventually took him to investigate the rock-pools on the shore. As a collector of facts and marshaller of observations, his father had no rival; his very absence of imagination aided him in his work. But he was not a philosopher, and could not accept theories of the mutability of species or the doctrine of natural selection. He held to the fixity of species and felt that he alone knew the mind of God. Sublime humility, which is the crown of genius, he did not have. "With all his faith in the Word of God, he had no confidence in the Divine Benevolence;
and with all his passionate piety, he habitually mistook fear for love."

Philip Gosse assumed administration of the "Saints" ("Brethren") in their "Public Room", and he and his son divided their time between religious duties and the collecting and describing of marine creatures from the seashore. Edmund, trained to examine specimens, discovered a new genus in British fauna, *Phellia murocineta*, or the walled corklet.

To his father, Edmund Gosse was an *âme d'élite*, one to whom the mysteries of salvation had been revealed and by whom they had been accepted. "The paradox between this unquestionable sanctification by faith and my equally unquestionable naughtiness, occupied my Father greatly at this time." His father's friendship with Charles Kingsley was a refreshment to their seriousness during these years.

Edmund was kept hard at work. He studied zoology, botany, astronomy, copied a great many maps, and read as many books of travel as he could find. Although there were no mathematics, languages or history in his program, his father began to teach him Virgil, the most evangelical of the classical writers. As his father read Virgil aloud, the beauty of the sound of the verses awakened Gosse's instinct for prosody, and "the magic of it took hold of my heart for ever." The central event of Gosse's tenth year, and of his
whole childhood, was his public baptism and acceptance into communion. "Everything, since the earliest dawn of consciousness, seemed to have been leading up to it. Everything, afterwards, seemed to be leading down and away from it."

Although Gosse was sincere in his desire to follow in his father's footsteps, his reaction to the life of grace was only that of intellectual surrender. He often felt like a small bird in a huge cage, and deep within his nature was a hard core of individuality, to which he clung through everything. That year he read his first book of fiction, *Tom Cringle's Log*, by Michael Scott. This was a revelation and a stimulant and it gave, more than anything else, a great fortitude to his individuality. His horizons were further broadened also that year by his being sent to a day school for the sons of gentlemen.

When his father married Miss Brightwen, Gosse found himself with a new friend and great ally. She encouraged friendship with boys his own age, and her books—Scott's poetry and Dickens' novels—were made available to him and very much enjoyed. She also introduced him to art through her collection of water colours. Edmund was left more to himself, and although he did not lose his faith, other things took a more prominent place in his mind and he began more and more to keep his religion for use on Sundays. His father
forgot to remind him to talk about the Blood of Jesus, "and I, young coward that I was, let sleeping dogmas lie."\textsuperscript{15}

Gosse's father gradually became worried about his son's new interests, and in particular his interest in the Greeks, their statues, and their mythology. Gosse could not accept his father's condemnation of the Greeks although he bowed to it. The pagan notion that beauty palliates evil budded in his mind and took him even further away from the faith in which he had been trained. He was "like a plant on which a pot has been placed, with the effect that the centre is crushed and arrested, while shoots are straggling up to the light on all sides."\textsuperscript{16} His father was aware of this and tried to regulate Gosse's thoughts by straightening the shoots instead of removing the pot. When his parents sent Gosse, gawky and homesick, to boarding school, the rift between his soul and that of his father widened a little more.

Gosse found boarding school lonely and dull. He made no friends and was hindered in his learning by a myopic haze that was not discovered by a teacher until he was fifteen. However, "in my school-days, without possessing thoughts, I yet prepared my mind for thinking, and learned how to think."\textsuperscript{17} He became greatly interested in words as instruments of expression, and was indefatigable in adding to his vocabulary. "As the inevitable word seized hold of me, with it out of the darkness...came the image
and the idea. He became acquainted with Shakespeare and began to follow the tempting paths of literature which went at right angles to the straight way which leadeth to salvation. In his last year at school his brain awoke and he was able to study with application. He read voraciously in many directions—Shakespeare, Keats, Shelley, Wordsworth and Southey.

He perceived without animosity the strange narrowness of his father's religion, felt drawn to the wider Christian community, and could not sympathize with rigid conceptions of the Divine mercy. He desired to have communion with the outer world of Christianity, still holding to the pure and simple principles of faith. The climax of religious longings came in an attempt to be 'taken-up' to Jesus. When this did not happen, his artificial edifice of extravagant faith began to totter and crumble. From that moment on, Gosse and his father walked in different paths of the soul, separated by the world. But he had had intense personal experience of what is meant by a living faith, and, although he could no longer adhere to the strict principles of the sect in which he had been brought up, his experience enabled him later to understand and appreciate the wholesome core of faith that was so much a part of the lives of such men as Donne, Taylor and Patmore.

In 1865 Charles Kingsley secured for Gosse an appointment in the cataloguing section of the British Museum. London
became his home, and there at first he kept up the religious traditions he had learned. He went to Church, taught Sunday School and later for a time worked in the slums. But daily letters from his father became a burden to him, in their unceasing demands that he maintain beliefs which he no longer felt. Gradually the tension between father and son became unbearable to Gosse.

There is something horrible, if we will bring ourselves to face it, in the fanaticism which can do nothing with this pathetic and fugitive existence of ours but treat it as if it were the uncomfortable ante-chamber to a palace which no one has explored and of the plan of which we know absolutely nothing.  

Finally, although alienation was progressive, a break of some kind had to come.

It was a case of "Everything or Nothing"; and thus desperately challenged, the young man's conscience threw off once for all the yoke of his "dedication", and as respectfully as he could, without parade or remonstrance, he took a human being's privilege to fashion his inner life for himself.  

Different as their ways of life became, father and son kept up their correspondence and often thrashed out religious disagreements, but to the end of his father's life Gosse always wrote to him and mentioned him in affectionate terms and with devotion.

Removed from the direct influence of his father, Gosse began to cultivate new areas of thought. He gave himself up to the study of literature and read "here, there and everywhere with an insatiable appetite, an exceptional memory, and an inborn discriminating taste."  

He studied
Danish and Swedish during lunch hours at the office, preparing himself unwittingly for his later study of Ibsen. He rejoiced in life and asked for it more abundantly. The friendship of the world assumed an entirely new importance, and he felt it must be capable of being combined with an inner and spiritual life.

As time went on his social life expanded rapidly. He even made the acquaintance of leading writers, often introducing himself to an author by a letter expressing admiration for his work. In this way in 1870 he met William Bell Scott, and through him became associated with the Pre-Raphaelites and Swinburne, who was to be the subject of a later critical biography. He dressed with elegance and care, and his "youth and animation, his engaging eagerness to learn, and his natural deference..., ensured him a recognized place."22

Also in 1870 he made a trip to the Hebrides where he met Robert Louis Stevenson. The same year he published his first volume of poems, Madrigals, Songs and Sonnets, with John Blaikie as joint author. His poems showed mastery of form and the influence of Tennyson and Wordsworth, but the book had little sale and was scarcely noticed in the press.

In 1871 Gosse went abroad to the Lofoden Islands, about which he wrote an article in Fraser's Magazine that introduced him to the public as a writer of prose. He began
to study Ibsen, and subsequently in articles and reviews became the first writer to bring him to the attention of the English public.

For one only twenty-three years of age his progress had been remarkable. He had come unknown to London and lived for five years in an obscure lodging in Tottenham, working as a clerk in the British Museum. But he had managed to make friends with many of the literary leaders of the day and by his own writings had acquired a certain recognition. His literary activities became more extensive; he wrote for *The Spectator*, *Fraser's Magazine*, *The Academy*, and in 1873 he published his first independent volume of verse, *On Viol and Flute*. This was well received by the critics, and a letter of praise from Browning set a seal on Gosse's claim to be regarded as a poet. And "it was among thinkers and writers that now, as always, he was most vivacious, most effective, and most at home."23

In August, 1875, Gosse married Miss Nellie Epps, daughter of George Napoleon Epps, and entered a life of domestic happiness that was unbroken until his death. To his father he wrote, "Nellie's nature is one that soothes, sustains and perfects mine in a manner indescribable."24 They lived at 29 Delamere Terrace. The same year he left the British Museum and started to work as a translator at the Board of Trade, where he stayed for twenty-nine years.
During the next decade Gosse continued to strengthen his place in the literary world by forming strong and lasting friendships with other writers and by increasing his work as a writer and critic. He set himself to know everyone of note, and entertained his many friends at home,—poets, critics, artists, editors and publishers. His friends included Robert Browning, Swinburne, Robert Louis Stevenson, and later such men as Thomas Hardy, W. D. Howells, Henry James, Lord de Tabley, Austin Dobson, Watts-Dunton, Walter Pater, Theophile Marzials, Andrew Lang, Robert Bridges and George Saintsbury. Sir Hamo Thornycroft, the sculptor, became his particular friend, to whom he wrote, "You are the inestimable treasure for which I was waiting nearly thirty years, and which, God knows, I long ago thought would never come at all."25 He was an omnivorous reader, and his immense industry, his clear and vivid style and his discriminating taste soon earned him the reputation of a sound critic. He wrote for the Academy, Athenaeum, Saturday Review, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Examiner and various magazines. Criticism to Gosse was to "spread the love of literature, to intensify interest, steady judgment, and broaden appreciation."26

In 1879 Studies in the Literature of Northern Europe was published, establishing Gosse as one of the leading authorities on Scandinavian and Dutch literature. The Life of Gray, one of his most popular books, was published in 1882,
the first in a series of biographies. He was now a prominent literary figure, widely sought after as a contributor and lecturer.

In 1884 Gosse accepted an invitation to go on a lecturing tour in the United States. For the tour he prepared a series of lectures. The lectures were very well received, and he was "feasted and fêted, tossed hither and thither on the wave of publicity and exhausted by the calls of hospitality and the claims of acquaintances."27 He was offered, but declined, the professorship of English literature at Harvard.

When he returned to England Gosse succeeded Sir Leslie Stephen as Clark lecturer in English literature at Trinity College, Cambridge, a position he held until 1890. He repeated his American tour lectures at Cambridge, and subsequently had them published in the book titled From Shakespeare to Pope.

The next year the blow came. In October, 1886, in the Quarterly Review, the critic and scholar John Churton Collins attacked From Shakespeare to Pope in an article called English Literature at the Universities, and denounced Gosse's errors in scholarship. Gosse replied in the Academy, but was unable to dispose of many of the charges of inaccuracy which Churton Collins had brought against him. In the London Mercury D. S. MacColl said, "If Gosse prevailed in width of
knowledge and interest in languages and letters, Collins was more solidly based in depth of scholarship and had a prodigious and exact memory for facts and sources. Gosse had a retentive memory for what attracted him, and had browsed on the classics for the pleasure of it." Charteris sums up Gosse's position at this time:

At this period of his career the main cause of these unfortunate blunders was that he was educating himself and teaching at the same time. He was acquiring ad hoc knowledge as he proceeded, without leisure, to saturate himself in any branch of learning. He never had the discipline of examinations and "schools", no don had drilled his mind, he was pitchforked into the world; he awoke at a bound, he careered at his own will in the fields of literature. His knowledge was wide and stimulating but it was not minute. His mind was vividly alert but not meticulous.

Gosse's reputation suffered, and the controversy deeply affected him, leaving a lasting scar. What particularly hurt him was that Churton Collins had for years before been a more or less intimate friend. "But Gosse was still what he was always to remain, a fine man of letters, pre-eminent in the service of literature." To W. D. Howells he wrote,

I have been too easily successful, I suppose; I have glided on and I can see that I have been too negligent and have taken for granted that everything will come right. I think that so long as one is not absolutely crushed out of competition, a blow of this kind is very useful.

The biographies Gosse wrote after Collins' attack show more care for accuracy in scholarship and research.

Gosse was now the father of three children, Tessa (b. 1877), Philip (b. 1879), and Sylvia (b. 1881). As they grew up he found great pleasure in their companionship and
their artistic and literary successes. All three played a large part in his life, and, although he displayed occasional sarcasm or disapproval, he made his home an abiding refuge for his children with the opulence of his affection and solicitude.

For Gosse, "life was always more entrancing than literature," and this preference revealed itself in his intense interest in biography. He belonged to the National Club, the Marlborough Club, and also the Seville Club, where he held Saturday luncheons. On Sundays his home was open to visitors; he had as many as eighty-seven visitors one Sunday and there were often over sixty. A selected few were always invited to stay for supper. As he grew older, he gave encouragement to young writers by letter and in person at his home. He was a bright and witty conversationalist, able to listen, draw others out and mould discussion, as well as expert in dropping the right word in the right place. He valued the thing said, first and foremost, for the light it cast on the character, temperament and controlling impulse of the man who said it. Re the Life of Gray he said, "I fear I have said too much about the man and not enough about the works. I like the man best." He was by nature created to be a writer of biography, and Robert Louis Stevenson once encouraged him in this by saying, "See as many people as you can, and make a book of them before you die. That will
be a living book, upon my word."


He was fitted by temperament to notice 'the little fireside ways that distinguish men from one another'. And through his volumes of criticism lie scattered vivid and intimate records of leading literary figures of his time, forming a lasting contribution to the history of the period.

In 1904 Gosse was appointed Librarian at the House of Lords, a position which he held for ten years and which brought him independence and financial security. "By degrees, and by rather rapid degrees, he grew to dominate the scene; the Library became his personal domain, with its code of conduct and etiquette as the subject-matter of his autocracy."

Gosse's readers, though not his critics, had long forgotten the Churton Collins episode. He had resumed his position in public favour.... Periodicals in America were clamouring for his contributions. He was in demand as a lecturer, and no public dinner where literature was involved was complete without Gosse to propose or return thanks for the cause.

The turning point in Gosse's career came in 1907, with
the anonymous publication of *Father and Son*, the story of the early relationships between himself and his father. This was his most notable contribution to English literature, written with a creative power and insight which surprised his warmest admirers and raised his reputation to a high level. *Father and Son* called for "a fresh estimate of Gosse's place in English literature. He was no longer assembling facts and valuing the ideas of others, but calling into existence a work of art deep in its humanity, humour, and emotion. At a bound by the publication of the book he placed himself on another plane of literary accomplishment."37 When in 1918 he began a series of weekly articles in the *Sunday Times* which continued until his death, he wrote with a prestige enjoyed by scarcely any critic of the day.

Gosse quickly caught the ear of the public, and was listened to week by week with delighted attention. His taste in literature permitted few exclusions. "I ask that literature should give me pleasure; I do not dictate to writers by what route they shall approach me."38 The range of his information was enormous; he felt he should know everything about periods, authors, literary movements, past and present, native and foreign. His prominent gifts, however, were rarer ones than those of the learned. As a critic in the *Literary Digest* said, "He was a painter of portraits, an interpreter of literary epochs, and a definer of 'atmospheres'. He had an
exquisite vivacity of imagination; the artist in him was stronger than the scholar." His reviews from his Sunday 'pulpit' were "affable without condescension, well-informed and informative without treating his readers as capons to be crammed, and "elegantly" written without being painted and bedizened in words."40

With Sainte-Beuve as his model, Gosse's light from his 'pulpit' in the Sunday Times was diffused rather than penetrating. He was a master of humour and delicate irony, with a style of conspicuous lucidity and charm, smooth as silk, shot with wit and iridescent with fancy. His articles were eminently readable and enlightening, and he wrote to please rather than to instruct, to spread abroad his own enjoyment of reading. His articles and reviews were collected and published in Books on the Table, More Books on the Table, Aspects and Impressions, and Silhouettes.

Gosse was of benevolent disposition and generous in his help to others. His conversation shone with quick wit, high spirits and love of companionship. "In talk his wide knowledge of literature was used with a deft and easy mastery, and then only to lighten and enliven the occasion."41 A. Waugh in the Fortnightly Review said,

He picked up stray remarks and turned them into entertaining channels; he told anecdotes, and evoked others; he was a good listener as a talker, and he inspired the company by his example. He fostered new poets and his capacity for new enthusiasm never really abated.42
In his nature there was also an element of sparkling malice and proneness to take offence. He was easily checked and too ready to fancy slights. Friendships were sometimes broken because of this, but Gosse never overlooked an opportunity of restoring a friendship once it had been damaged.

Lady Gosse, with her beneficent tact, often soothed out an awkward moment.

Young men were quick to appreciate the humanity and the interpretive intuition which had always been the mainsprings of his work. They flocked around, paid him the respect and admiration due to his unabated vigour and zest, and under their encouragement he flowered into a second blooming which kept alive the colours and ardours of his youth.43

Edmund Gosse received the C.B. in 1912 and was knighted in 1925. He was given Honorary degrees from the Universities of St. Andrews (1899), Cambridge (1920), Strasburg (1923), Gothenburg (1923), and the Sorbonne (1925). He also received the Order of St. Olaf in Norway (1901), the Order of the Polar Star in Sweden (1908), the Order of the Dannebrog in Denmark (1912) and the Legion of Honour in France (1925). Portraits of Gosse by Sargent and Rothenstein were hung in the National Portrait Gallery. He was a trustee of the National Portrait Gallery, a member of the Committee of the London Library for nearly fifty years, and a member of the Royal Literary Fund. In 1920 he received the tribute of a bust of himself in bronze from more than two hundred of his friends, including many of the leading men of the day.

The last phase of Sir Edmund Gosse's adventures through life was the crown of his career, and few men in any
generation have had a happier old age. Although a greater effort was needed to maintain his high level of energy, he lost neither his elastic gaiety of spirits nor his intellectual keenness. "Able to enjoy the love which has accompanied me through such long years and surrounds me still," he died on May 16, 1928, in London, in his eightieth year.
CHAPTER II
CRITICAL BIOGRAPHY

Gosse's emphasis in the study of literature was on the "continuity of literature", the "chronological system", and the "historic attitude towards literature". He felt that the generalizing metaphysicians of his time and the critics obsessed with detail did not go far enough; some others were hindered by a taste for the extremely modern. For Gosse there was a deep unity of purpose running through all manifestations of literature, and he agreed with Fontenelle that it is one and the same intelligence which has been cultivated all down the centuries.... What criticism has to do, in the historical sphere, is to take in the whole field of poetry and prose from the earliest times, and discover where the particular object of its attention fits into the prodigious scheme.... The Literature of Europe is an immense stretch of country which retains and will always retain its individual and relative characteristics, its streams flowing through champaigns, its hills lifted, by slow degrees, out of the surrounding plains. But although it is the same country, the sky above it shifts incessantly, and the taste of successive generations looks at it under different lights.... This is the effect of conditions of life upon literature, but literature itself remains unchanged, and disinterested historical curiosity will continue to reveal its perennial power and charm.

The "power and charm" of literature held Gosse in thrall all his life, and 'criticism' for him was the revelation and communication of such power and charm to others.
"I ask that literature should give me pleasure; I do not dictate to writers by what route they shall approach me."5

He was one of the tasters of literature rather than its strenuous vintagers and bottlers, and his tastes had few exclusions: they were "as catholic as the wide world itself".6

As his biographer Charteris remarked, "He neglected no means by which his pleasure could be transmitted to his readers. That was one of his functions as a critic, to excite curiosity and interest, to rouse the reader by delectable visions, and persuade him of the enjoyment to be derived from a cultivated understanding of literature." And again, "Criticism to Gosse was not the diffusion of accurate knowledge or the imposition of an aesthetic: to him...its principal purpose was to spread the love of literature, to intensify interest, steady judgment, and broaden appreciation."7

Some found the scope of Gosse's interest too large. A reviewer in the Literary Digest, 1928, commented, "He has been shunned sometimes because his critical writings have demanded of their readers more than they had to give, even a sympathetic understanding of and a deep acquaintance with the literature of all time.... He felt it was his duty to know everything about periods, authors, literary movements, past and present, native and foreign."8

The range of his information was enormous; his prominent gifts, however, were not those of the learned man, but rarer ones. "He was a painter of portraits, an interpreter
of literary epochs, and a definer of 'atmospheres'. He had an exquisite vivacity of imagination; the artist in him was stronger than the scholar. He was a master of the art of pen-portraiture. How vividly he made us see those whom he described; how deftly he could place their work in the perspective of literature!" Virginia Woolf asserted, "If we want to hold a candle to some dark face in the long portrait gallery of literature there is no better illuminant than Edmund Gosse." He loved literature both as literature and as a product of the human spirit.

He was not a fearless critic. Virginia Woolf suggests "how much better Gosse would have been as a writer, how much more important he would have been as a man if only he had given freer reign to his impulses, if only his pagan and sensual joy had not been dashed by perpetual caution!"

But, says Charteris, "he never dogmatized, he never dogmatized, he never claimed finality even for his most cherished convictions. He revealed the strength of his preferences, but he banged no doors and brandished no sledgehammers." To Robert Louis Stevenson in 1886 he wrote, "Don't give way to being too didactic in literature. It is the curse of the age, everybody from Ruskin and Matthew Arnold down to Vernon Lee scolding and preaching away. If you also take to preaching I shall sit down and howl."

Gosse belonged to a different school of criticism and to another tradition from Matthew Arnold. He admired
Arnold, and when his own *Life of Gray* was published he wrote to Swinburne,—"Your kind words about my *Gray* and some of a similar tenour which I just received from Matthew Arnold are inexpressibly encouraging. With such suffrages I am quite careless what the critics may say."¹⁴ He would probably have agreed whole-heartedly with Arnold that "we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us."¹⁵ But Gosse did not share Arnold's interest in searching out criteria of distinction, in classifying triumphs and failures, in ranking poets according to set standards. For Arnold only the 'best' poetry, such as that of Sophocles, Shakespeare, Milton and Keats, could form, sustain and delight us, since it revealed truth and high seriousness in matter and substance, and a superiority of diction and movement in style and manner. The qualities of the best prose, seen clearly in Dryden and Pope, were regularity, uniformity, precision and balance. The Greek and English classics provided the 'touchstones' against which all literature must be measured. In contrast Gosse's catholic tastes permitted few exclusions, and his studies ranged over all periods and 'levels' of literary creation.

To Gosse, as to his friend Walter Pater, all periods, types, schools of taste, were in themselves equal. For Pater, a creative work of art was the receptacle of so many powers or forces. Criticism should ask,
What effect does it really produce on me? Does it give me pleasure? How is my nature modified by its presence, and under its influence?... One must realize such primary data for one's self, or not at all. There is no need of abstract questions of what beauty is in itself, or its exact relation to truth or experience—metaphysical questions, as unprofitable as metaphysical questions elsewhere. He may pass them all by as being, answerable or not, of no interest to him.... The critic should possess, not an abstract definition of beauty for the intellect, but a certain kind of temperament, the power of being deeply moved by the presence of beautiful objects.16

But Gosse found a conflict in Pater: "He was not all for Apollo, nor all for Christ, but each deity swayed in him, and neither had that perfect homage that brings peace behind it.... When he tried, as he bade us try, 'to burn always with the hard, gem-like flame' of aesthetic observation, the flame of another altar mingled with the fire and darkened it."17 There was also the danger in Pater's approach of degenerating into art for art's sake.

Gosse's guiding light in fields of criticism was neither Arnold nor Pater. To Professor Roe he wrote, "I am the disciple of one man, and of one man only—Sainte-Beuve. No one else has been my master."18 Sainte-Beuve was a psychologist, and above all a man of unceasing curiosity. As a critic he was between Arnold and Pater. Arnold admired Sainte-Beuve, and although he felt Sainte-Beuve "stopped at curiosity" and lacked moral seriousness and the urge to inoculate immortal truth, he also felt that Sainte-Beuve was full of much sweetness and light. "To our scientific age Sainte-Beuve may not qualify as an exceptionally original or
penetrating critic but assuredly he was among the most accomplished men of letters that any civilization had produced."  

The literary portrait of which Sainte-Beuve was both the inventor and the supreme exponent aimed rather at delineating a given character than at expounding principles of style. The most valuable of his portraits are to be found in *Causeries du Lundi* and *Nouveaux Lundis*, sixty per cent of which are biographical. He introduced lesser known contemporaries and afforded some knowledge of the background against which they wrote and of the general climate of ideas. His work showed infinite variety. He was interested in minor poets, the lives of the obscure, and had a sensitive compassion for the unsuccessful. He had insight into the mentality of others and ability to interpret past centuries and former ways of life and thought in their correct proportion. Although his work was occasionally coloured with personal affection or prejudice, he was on the whole astoundingly impartial.

As a critic Sainte-Beuve distrusted all rules and dogmas, believing in tolerance and flexibility. He had a passion for truth and a hatred of all forms of fraud. "What I wanted to achieve in criticism was to introduce into it a certain charm, and at the same time a greater reality than it had hitherto possessed." Sainte-Beuve's contributions to French literature were a reconciliation of novelty with tradition and the teaching of his generation to become less
reliant on rules and principles and more interested in individual psychology. Gosse had chosen a versatile master.

As a critical biographer, Sainte-Beuve was stimulated to interest in the biographies of literary men through their works, the two being interrelated. "Literature, literary creation," he said, "is not distinct or separable, for me, from the rest of man.... I may taste a work, but it is difficult for me to judge it independently of my knowledge of the man himself; and I will say willingly, tel arbre, tel fruit. Literary study leads me thus quite naturally to the study of the mind." This is what some critics regard as the "biographical fallacy".

Gosse shared Sainte-Beuve's view and some of his critical-biographical work was in his shorter essays, the articles collected in such books as *Aspects and Impressions*, *Silhouettes*, *Books on the Table*, *Gossip in a Library*, *More Books on the Table*, and others. *Critical Kit-Kats* is the best example of these.

'Kit-kat' was a term used in photography which Gosse borrowed for his own purposes; it meant the picture of a person which included both the head and the hands. In Gosse's literary application head and hands represented the life and the works:

We are familiar with pure criticism and with pure biography, but what I have here tried to produce is a combination of the two, the life illustrated by the work, the work relieved by the life. Such criticism as is here attempted is not of
the polemical order; the biography excludes that. We cease to be savage and caustic when we are acquainted with the inner existence of a man, for the relentlessness of satire is only possible to those who neither sympathise nor comprehend. What is here essayed is of the analytical, comparative, and descriptive order; it hopes to add something to historical knowledge and something to aesthetic appreciation. It aims, in short, at presenting a little gallery of contemporary kit-kats, modest in proportion, but large enough to show the head and the hand.... That I have secured the fine flower of any of these delicate spirits is more than I dare hope, but to do so has at least been my aim and my design.22

Gosse's kit-kat of Christina Rossetti is perhaps the most delicate and complete study, but his portraits of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, T. L. Beddoes and others show that the 'life and work' approach can be very valuable and illuminating.

In the chapter "Sonnets from the Portuguese" Gosse gives a sensitive and understanding picture of how Elizabeth Barrett Browning's new-found personal happiness in marriage resulted in a rare poetical achievement.

The little harp or lyre she had laboriously taught herself to perform upon, had just become familiar to her fingers, when it was called upon to record emotions the most keen, and imaginations the most subtle, which had ever crossed the creative brain of its possessor.

Great technical beauty, therefore, is the mark of these wonderful poems. Not merely are the rhymes arranged with a rare science and with a precision which few other English poets have had the patience to preserve, but the tiresome faults of Miss Barrett's prosody, those little foxes which habitually spoil her grapes, are here marvelously absent. Her very ear...here seems to be quickened and strung into acuteness. There is a marked absence, in the "Sonnets from the Portuguese", of all slovenly false rhymes, of all careless half-meaningless locutions, of all practical jokes played upon the parts of speech. The cycle opens with a noble dignity, and it is, on the whole, preserved at that high ethical level of poetic utterance.23
But this cycle of admirable sonnets, one of the acknowledged glories of our literature, is built patently and unquestionably on the union in stainless harmony of two of the most distinguished spirits which our century has produced.  

In his study of Beddoes, Gosse shows how Beddoes' medical training resulted in a somewhat grim, and even abnormal, mental outlook.

He dedicates himself to the service of Death, not with a brooding sense of the terror and shame of mortality, but from a love of the picturesque pageantry of it, the majesty and sombre beauty, the swift, theatrical transitions, the combined elegance and horror that wait upon the sudden decease of monarchs. His medical taste and training encouraged this tendency to dwell on the physical aspects of death, and gave him a sort of ghastly familiarity with images drawn from the bier and the charnel-house. His attitude, however, though cold and cynical, was always distinguished, and in his wildest flights of humour he commonly escapes vulgarity. In this he shows himself a true poet.  

...Those readers who are able to take pleasure in poetry so grim, austere, and abnormal, may safely be left to discover his specific charms for themselves.  

In the chapter on Keats, Gosse shows how Keats' temperament, with its passion for beauty, ruled all aspects of his art.

If he makes use of modes which are already familiar to us, in their broad outlines, as the modes invented by earlier masters, it is mainly because his temperament was one which imperatively led him to select the best of all possible forms of expression. His excursions into other people's provinces were always undertaken with a view to the annexation of the richest and most fertile acres.  

For Robert Louis Stevenson, a close friend, Gosse had the greatest admiration.

He learned that which he desired, and he gained more than he hoped for. He became the most exquisite English writer of his generation; yet those who lived close to him are apt to think less of this than of the fact that he was the most unselfish and the most lovable of human beings.
Elements of the kit-kat persisted in much of Gosse's most successful work. His essays brought him unequivocal fame as a man of letters because of their erudition, balanced judgment, and slightly malicious wit. Many of the studies in *Aspects and Impressions* show Gosse at his best, for example the studies of George Eliot and Henry James. *Portraits and Sketches* deals with Swinburne, Aubrey de Vere, Andrew Lang and André Gide. *Books on the Table* includes chapters on "A Frenchman of the Fourth Century", "Pascal and the Jesuits", "Edgar Poe and his Detractors", "Miss Mitford", "Wine and Mr. Saintsbury", "The Psychology of the Blind" and "The Fairy in the Garden". Gosse's curiosity and catholicity entranced his readers.

Gosse was also interested in biography as an end in itself, a pure art, and did not confine his biographical work to literary men. He became an expert both in the theory and the practice of biography; the clearest statements of his theories on the subject are found in his article on biography written for the *EncyclopaediaBritannica*: biography is "that form of history which is applied, not to races or masses of men, but to an individual."29 Some of the first biographies, such as those of Plutarch, were not seen as independent branches of literature, but rather as an opportunity for celebrating certain definite moral qualities; the interest was not in the individual characteristics of the man:
the true conception of biography, therefore, as the faithful portrait of a soul in its adventures through life, is very modern. We may question whether it existed, save in rare and accidental instances, until the seventeenth century. The personage described was, in earlier times, treated either from the philosophical or from the historical point of view. In the former case rhetoric inevitably clouded the definiteness of the picture; the object was to produce a grandiose moral effect, to clothe the subject with all the virtues or with all the vices; to make his career a splendid example or else a solemn warning. The consequence is that we have to piece together unconsidered incidents and the accidental record of features in order to obtain an approximate estimate.

Biography is not a philosophical treatise or a polemical pamphlet; neither is it a portion of the human contemporary chronicle.

Broad views are entirely out of place in biography, and there is perhaps no greater literary mistake than to attempt what is called the 'Life and Times' of a man.

History deals with fragments of the vast role of events; must always begin abruptly and close in the middle of affairs; it must always deal, impartially, with a vast number of persons. Biography is a study sharply defined by two definite events, birth and death. It fills its canvas with one figure, and other personages, however great in themselves, must always be subsidiary to the central hero. The only remnant of the old rhetorical purpose of 'lives' which clearer modern purpose can afford to retain is the relative light thrown on military or intellectual or social genius by the achievements of the selected subject. Even this must be watched with great care, lest the desire to illuminate that genius, and make it consistent, should lead the biographer to gloss over frailties or obscure irregularities. In the old 'lives' of great men, this is precisely what was done. If the facts did not lend themselves to the great initial thesis, so much the worse for them. They must be ignored or falsified, since the whole object of the work was to 'teach a lesson', to magnify a certain tendency of conduct. It was very difficult to persuade the literary world that, whatever biography is, it is not an opportunity for panegyric or invective, and the lack of this perception destroys our faith in most of the record of personal life in ancient and mediaeval times.... As long as it was a pious merit to deform truth, biography could not hope to flourish. It appears to have asserted itself when the
primitive instinct of sympathy began to have free play, that is to say, not much or often before the seventeenth century. Moreover, the peculiar curiosity which legitimate biography satisfies is essentially a modern thing; and presupposes our observation of life not unduly clouded by moral passion or prejudice....

As soon as the model of Boswell became familiar to biographers, it could no longer be said that any secret in the art was left unknown to them, and the biographies of the nineteenth century are all more or less founded upon the magnificent type of the Life of Johnson. But few have even approached it in courage, picturesqueness or mastery of portraiture. 31

Virginia Woolf compares Gosse with Boswell. Both are irresistibly attracted by genius, and have "a medium-like" power of drawing other people's confidences into the open. They also are astonishingly adept at reporting the talk and describing the appearance of their friends. "But where Boswell is drawn headlong by the momentum of his hero and his own veneration beyond discretion, beyond vanity, beyond his fear of what people will say, Gosse is kept by his respect for decorum, by his decency and his timidity, dipping and ducking, fingering and faltering upon the surface." 32 In the following chapters we will investigate the justice of this criticism.
CHAPTER III

GOSSE'S CRITICAL BIOGRAPHIES OF THE PAST

Gosse's seven full length critical biographies fall into two groups: the subjects of his last three biographies, Patmore, Ibsen and Swinburne, were contemporaries of Gosse, personally known by him; the subjects of his first four biographies belonged to the past, to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

John A. Garraty, in *The Nature of Biography*, suggests that "a man's character is always so complex and variable that it can be understood only imperfectly, and that with great effort." The best biographies, he says, are not those produced to order, but those that are the "result of mutual interest", revealing a sympathetic union of writer and subject. Edmund Gosse's first biography, *The Life of Gray* (1882), was "produced to order"; he was asked by John Morley to write it for the Men of Letters series. But Gosse also had a personal interest in Gray, and his biography shows great understanding and sympathy, as well as careful research and scholarship. To Swinburne he wrote, "the little book represents a great labour of compilation and even of discovery. I hope the story, told now for the first time, is not unamusing."
The Life of Gray was reprinted five times, passed through various cheap editions, and became one of Gosse's most popular writings. It was not, however, without error. His amanuensis copied from the already published Mitford edition of Gray's letters to Thomas Warton, instead of from the original letters in the Egerton MSS, and the errors of the Mitford edition were reproduced in Gosse's edition. The amusing story of the practical joke played on Gray at Cambridge, involving cries of 'fire', a rope-ladder, a tub of water, and a kindly watchman's greatcoat, which Gosse tells so well, has been discarded as untrue by Ketton-Cremer, the most recent biographer of Gray. "But those who seek a living portrait of Gray, and who wish to know the man, and his relation to his environment and epoch, will continue to read Gosse's Life," said Charteris in 1931. Charteris sees Gosse as a definer of atmospheres, an interpreter of literary epochs, a painter of vivid portraits—more an artist than a scholar.

One of Gosse's most felicitous definitions of atmosphere concerns Gray's reactions to Paris, which he visited with Horace Walpole in 1739 on their three-year tour of the continent.

It was a charming world of fancy and caprice; a world of milky clouds floating in an infinite azure, and bearing a mundane Venus to her throne on a Frenchified Cythera. And what strange figures were bound to the golden car; generals and abbés, and elderly academicians, laughing philosophers, gliding down a stream of elegance and cheerfulness and tolerance that was by no means wholly ignoble.
Gosse claims that this discovery of Paris had a lasting effect upon Gray. "He, for one, then, and to the end of his days, would cast in his lot with what was refined and ingenious, and would temper the robustness of his race with a little Gallic brightness."\(^6\)

As an interpreter of literary epochs, Gosse considers the conditions of English poetry when Gray began to write seriously, in 1742. Pope and Swift were nearing the close of their careers, while Goldsmith, Churchill and Cowper were still children. Gray's actual competitors were Young, Thomson, Johnson and Collins, and, among the lesser stars, Armstrong, Dyer, Shenstone and Akenside. The apparent advantage of stepping on an uncrowded stage was in reality a great disadvantage. "His genius pined away for want of movement in the atmosphere; the wells of poetry were stagnant, and there was no angel to strike the waters."\(^7\) "It is much to be deplored that the chilly air of the 18th century prevented the 'mutual admiration' of such men as Gray and Fielding."\(^8\)

As a critical biographer, Gosse has much to say about Gray's poetry. The *Ode to Spring*, with all its imperfections, was "the first note of protest against the hard versification which had reigned in England for more than sixty years.... His view of a poem was that it should have a vertebrate form, which should respond, if not absolutely to its subject, at least to its mood."\(^9\) The *Elegy in a Country Churchyard*
possessed "the charm of incomparable felicity, of a melody that is not too subtle to charm every ear, of a moral persuasiveness that appeals to every generation, and of metrical skill that in each line proclaims the master." Gosse sums up Gray's poetic development in the introduction to his study of the Pindaric Odes; "in the early odes he had written for his contemporaries; in the Elegy in a Country Churchyard he had written for all the world; in the Pindaric Odes he was now to write for poets." With the free and ringing music of the Pindaric Odes, Gray placed himself at one leap at the head of the living English poets. But "Gray seems to have felt that his genius...was trying to breathe in a vacuum; and from this time forward he made even less and less effort to concentrate his powers." "

The most memorable impression of Gosse's book is of Gray himself; like Gosse, we like the man best. Gosse, with sensitivity and intuition, understands Gray so well that we are left with a beautiful, finely-made portrait of him. We come to love that gentle, religious, melancholy man, who learned to live with his low spirits as one learns to live with a companion. We appreciate the light manner with which he concealed deep emotion. Gosse describes Gray's physical appearance, strangely enough, in his final chapter entitled "Posthumous": "Gray was rather short in stature, of graceful build in early life, but too plump in later
years. Gosse often adds a touch of humour to his portrait. When Gray, in 1768, tried to escape the Cambridge festivities for Christian VII, King of Denmark, he "fell into the jaws of the King of Denmark, was presented to him by the Vice-chancellor and the Orator, and was brought back to Cambridge by them, captive, in a chaise."

Although Gray was a retiring man and "never spoke out", he was surrounded all his life with friends. In his youth there were Walpole and West. Later, Nicholls, Bonstetten, Robinson, Warton, Stonehewer, and Brown were undistinguished names of unheroic men who are interesting to posterity only because, with that unselfish care which only a great character and sweetness of soul have power to rouse, they loved, honoured, cherished this silent and melancholy anchorite. Dearer friends, better and more devoted companions through a slow and unexhilarating career, no man famous in literature had possessed, and we feel that not to recognize this magnetic power of attracting good souls around him would be to lose sight of Gray's peculiar and signal charm.

Gosse's second major biography, The Life of William Congreve, appeared in 1888, was revised in 1924, and was not superseded until 1931. In a preface to the biography, Gosse points out the difficulties in his task. A "full and picturesque" life of Congreve could only have been written 200 years ago, by someone who had known Congreve personally. This was not done because the art of biography was not well understood at that time and because Congreve himself was a neutral human being, lacking the interesting personal qualities of Swift and Pope. Gosse did not attempt to make a hero of Congreve: "I am very far from pretending that he
was one of those whom, in the phrase so persistently and falsely attributed to him, 'to love is a liberal education.'\textsuperscript{16} Gosse's biography was written as a rather minute survey of "a little province of our literary history which had been neglected", a small contribution to the materials of criticism. The \textit{Spectator} rated the \textit{Life of Congreve} as "a masterpiece of fine prose and of sound comprehensive and conscientious criticism."\textsuperscript{18}

As a definer of atmospheres and an interpreter of literary epochs, Gosse approaches Congreve's world with a scholar's balance, judgment and detachment, accompanied with the inevitable Victorian refinement. "There is one criticism which must be ever present with the reader of Restoration and Orange comedy,—that the language is coarse and the sentiment cynical to an exceedingly reprehensible degree."\textsuperscript{20}

This coarseness, of course, was the reaction to Puritanism.

The Puritans, unhappily for our civilization, had condemned the innocent with the guilty pleasures of life—poetry, painting and music. The Royalists, in returning to power, had taken these enjoyments into favour, together with others which more legitimately fell under the lash of religious ardour and led to an obliquity of moral visions.\textsuperscript{21} ...The drama had steadily grown more incongruous, and the need to spice plays with what would be agreeable to the small and very cautious class by which the theatre was supported, tempted each author of a fresh work to risk a still stronger situation, to adopt a still more brazen diction, than his predecessor.\textsuperscript{22} Even Voltaire was shocked by such coarseness. Congreve, who was attacked so savagely by Jeremy Collier in 1698, was praised by Voltaire; it seemed to Voltaire that Congreve
had striven to introduce a greater moderation and decency of speech. Congreve was even brought forward by Blackmore as a model of chastity for others to follow. Gosse sees Collier's defence of literary decency as severe but reasonable, and Congreve's heated reply as injudicious. "It was a serious disaster for comedy in this country that its greatest living representative would meet so serious an attack as that of Collier's in a spirit so frivolous and so violent, and in a manner so thoroughly inadequate."23

"Neither on Collier's side nor on the side of the playwrights was the full truth told; it was certainly not told in love by Collier, nor in wisdom by Congreve."24 But the resultant purge of the stage at the close of the 17th century brought something unique in the history of our literature. "In 1680 the literary world was torn with envy and jealousy; in 1715 the elements of discord had broken out again. But Collier's attack seemed, while it lasted, to have the effect of silencing petty discords and of sealing among the poets themselves the bonds of personal affection."25

Gosse, as literary critic, describes Congreve's main works with enthusiasm, taste and discrimination, but without minute analysis or detailed references to texts; he also evaluates Congreve's occasional pieces, with an eye for content, sincerity, and grace and beauty of diction. The Old Bachelor (1690), written for Congreve's own amusement during recovery from illness, was a great success in the theatre,
"the most rousing event in our literary history between the Revolution and the accession of Anne."\textsuperscript{26} "Seldom has a new luminary appeared so vast and so splendid as its orb first emerged above the horizon."\textsuperscript{27} But in comparison with his later works, \textit{The Old Bachelor} appeared old-fashioned and thin, and "it has to be admitted...that the fragments of the play do not coalesce, that the perfection of the language very imperfectly conceals or clothes the roughness of the sentiments."\textsuperscript{28} \textit{The Double Dealer} (1693) was a comparative failure on stage because, as Dryden observed, "the gentlemen were offended with him for the discovery of their follies." Also, says Gosse, the heartless treachery of Maskwell was overdone. \textit{Love for Love} (1694), says Gosse, "is not so uniformly brilliant in style as \textit{The Way of the World}, but it has the advantage of possessing a much wholesomer relation to humanity than that play, which is almost undiluted satire, and a more theatrical arrangement of scenes."\textsuperscript{29} All elements of Congreve's previous plays had been heightened—picturesque language, vitality of character, crudity of illusion and indecency of phrase. "We are looking through the same telescope as before, but the sight is better adjusted, the outlines are more definite, and the colours more intense."\textsuperscript{30} Congreve's tragedy, \textit{The Mourning Bride}, appeared in 1697. "Compared with what England and even France produced from 1650 to the revival of romantic taste, \textit{The Mourning Bride}
will probably take a place close after what is best in Otway and Racine. It would bear comparison with Southerne’s *Fatal Marriage* or with Crébillon’s *Rhadamiste et Zénobie*, and will not be pronounced inferior to these famous tragedies in dramatic interest, or genuine grandeur of sentiment, or beauty of language."31 Influenced by Young and with Milton as his model, Congreve achieved a blank verse in *The Mourning Bride* which seems to Gosse to be the model on which most 18th century unrhymed iambics were formed; it was "more conservative than any which had been seen since the beginning of the 17th century." *The Way of the World* (1700), Congreve’s last comedy, was "the best written, the most dazzling, the most intellectually accomplished of all English comedies, perhaps of all comedies of the world."32 "But it has the defects of the very qualities which make it so brilliant,—it needs to advance, to develop.... In no play of Congreve’s is the literature so consummate, in none is the human interest in movement and surprise so utterly neglected."33 Congreve’s air of careless superiority was decidedly annoying to audiences, says Gosse. Congreve’s personality, Gosse feels, can never really be known. He was an agreeable man, with humour and great friendliness; "we have no record of his falling out with anyone, and he had the art to remain on intimate terms with those who could not speak to one another."34 He showed off most to advantage at the chimney-
corner, with "sympathy, urbanity, witty talk, a gentlemanly acquiescence, an ear at everybody's service." "His person was singularly beautiful, he was an athlete until fast living consumed his constitution, and although indolent, he was so gracious and so sympathetic that he pleased without effort, and conquered the esteem of those who might have envied a popularity less indifferently borne." "He passes through the literary life of his time as if in felt slippers, noiseless, unupbraiding, without personal adventures."

In summation, Gosse sees Congreve's work as the complement of both Etherege, who was flimsy and weak, and Wycherley, who was rough, hard, and unfinished; he was fine and strong, patient to finish as well as spirited to sketch. He added much from Moliere and owed much to his trained and active fancy. With all his limitations, says Gosse, he remained the principal figure in English comedy of manners and one of the secondary glories of our language and literature.

In the comedies of Congreve we breathe an atmosphere of the most exquisite artificial refinement, an air of literary frangipan or millefleur-water. What we have to admire in them is the polish, the grace, the extreme technical finish, the spectacle of an intellect of rare cultivation and power concentrating itself on the creation of a microcosm swarming with human volvox and vibrion. If we are prepared to accept this, and to ask no more than this from Congreve, we shall not grudge him his permanent station among the great writers of this country.

Although Malcolm Elwin, in Old Gods Falling, has said that Gosse utterly failed to present an adequate portrait of Congreve's character, a more recent student of Congreve has
found Gosse's biography lacking in accuracy and completeness, but invaluable.

Gosse's *Life and Letters of John Donne* (1899) heralded the revival of Donne's fame which began at the end of the 19th century, and has, as lately as 1956, been regarded as the standard and definitive biography of Donne. Gosse began this imposing task about 1879. Dr. Augustus Jessop also wished to write Donne's biography and had been collecting material for many years, but, since Gosse had a better grasp of Donne as a poet, Dr. Jessop suddenly transferred the whole responsibility to Gosse's shoulders in 1897. Gosse's primary aim was to arrange Donne's correspondence, verses and prose chronologically, to illustrate the biography. But "my object has not been confined to the collection of all the documents which I could find which illustrated the biography of Donne. I have desired, also, to present a portrait of him as a man and an author."39

The difficulties of the subject were tremendous. Yet it was a happy chance for Gosse to vindicate himself (after Churton Collins' attack) by showing capability for painstaking work and accurate scholarship. There was no question this time of slackness in original research; the *Life and Letters of John Donne* is weighted with heavy cargo and abundance of information. So much is this so that the excess of fact often outweighs Gosse's natural wit, vivacity and lightness of touch. The two-volume work was received
with a chorus of praise, and a few slips were all that a critic could point to by way of censure. Some later critics have been more conservative. T. Redpath suggests that it "be treated with great caution, both on account of its imaginative character, and in the light of subsequent research."40

"Subsequent research" revealed that Gosse made one rather serious error. Near the close of 1612, Frances Howard, Countess of Essex, tried to obtain a divorce from her husband, the Earl of Essex, by a declaration of the nullity of their 1609 marriage. Her purpose was to be free to marry Lord Rochester, a friend of Donne. Gosse says that Donne aided the nullity suit with his legal knowledge and afterwards wrote a marriage epithalamium to celebrate the "shocking story". Gosse explains this by agreeing with Dean Church that "all the Jacobean churchmen were subjected to a sort of fate, which obliged them to become base at least once in their lives."41 Donne's part in the nullity suit, however, was in reality taken by a "Danell Dunn, Doctor of the Civil Law." Gosse's error, greatly exaggerated by his detractors, did small injustice to Donne, and could not cover the fact that he "expressed willingness to help, and subsequently wrote an elaborate epithalamium for the second wedding. Donne was therefore at the least,...an accessory after the fact."42 As with other biographies by Gosse, despite the errors, the portrait drawn was nevertheless true.
Part of the "imaginative character" of Gosse's biography of Donne lies in his interpretation of amatory adventure in verse as real adventure in life. Gosse realizes the dangers of such conjectural reconstruction of biography, but believes it to be legitimate in this case. Donne, says Gosse, was sincere in his writings, with no affectation; he was Elizabethan in his absolute straightforwardness of character.

If, therefore, we can but comprehend what Donne is saying, and realize what his character is, if we can but appreciate the curious alternations of cautious reserve and bold confession in which he indulges, if we can but discover how to stand on his own level, there is hardly a piece of his genuine verse which, cryptic though it may seem, cannot be prevailed upon to deliver up some secret of his life and character.... When Donne speaks of his personal experience, there is something so convincing in his accent, poignant and rude at once, that it is impossible not to believe it the accurate record of a genuine emotional event.43

Donne's later statement that he did his "best" when he had least "truth" for his subjects is interpreted by Gosse to refer to the metaphysical extravagances, where conceit after conceit is embroidered upon a false or trivial first idea. For Gosse, the majority of Donne's poems recount the adventures of his body and soul. Walton did not go far enough by saying that Donne "was by nature highly passionate".

Later biographers have had less excuse for attempting to conceal those tenebrous and fiery evidences, which but add a more splendid majesty to the career rising out of them into peace and light. To pretend that Donne was a saint in his youth is to nullify the very process of divine grace in the evolution of a complex soul, in the reduction of a magnificent rebel to a still more brilliant and powerful servant.44
Some scholars disagree with an autobiographical interpretation of the more outrageous of Donne's early poems; Gosse would probably agree with them if the "outrages" referred to were the "metaphysical extravagances" which he deplored. It is largely a case for personal preference and decision, since it is very difficult to know in poetry of this kind where the dividing line is between real experience and dramatic imagination.

The earliest of Donne's poems, the satires, revealed Donne as bold and independent, in isolation from accepted modes of style, says Gosse. "The satires of Donne are not general invectives... nor fantastic libels..., but a series of humorous and sardonic portraits of types." The Third Satire was a diatribe against the extravagance and hypocrisy of the Religious Man; this first appearance of the theologian in Donne revealed skepticism towards Rome and love for the truth of doubt. The Geographical Adventurer figure in the Fourth Satire showed that "in the bosom of John Donne, though he was doomed to a life of little personal adventure, there leaped the heart of a circumnavigator." Of "The Storm" and "The Calm" Gosse says,

here we find ourselves at the very starting-point of a new spirit in literature, the love of precise notation of prosaic fact in the forms and languages of poetry. The exquisite Elizabethan idealism was undermined at last; here was the beginning of decadence; here opened the invasion of the Visigoths.

"Songs and Sonnets" and the "Elegies" belonged to the
second period of Donne's life, 1593-1600, and, says Gosse, should be treated together. They expressed three stages of experience. The first stage was the "butterfly of the court... indulging his curiosity and his sensuousness wherever satisfaction is offered to him", and was most interesting when most frankly sensual. The second stage, that of fascination by the beauty of a married lady, revealed the tyranny of love. J. B. Leishman, in *The Monarch of Wit*, suggests that Donne was merely dramatizing the situation found in Ovid's *Amores*. Gosse, however, says that "it was from these agonies and errors, bleeding as from rods with the wounds of passion, that Donne rose slowly to those spiritual heights in which he so glorified the grace of God."\(^4\) The third stage rested between an affair and marriage; he became the sudden victim of beauty but was made cautious and skeptical by his previous adventures.

In 1601 came *The Progress of the Soul or Metempsychosis*. Arrogant worldliness and intellectual pride, says Gosse, made the entire tone and character un-Christian. Without his traditional faith as a Catholic and without any light from the Anglican Church, Donne was held by the mocking, sensuous scepticism of the Renaissance. *Pseudo-Martyr*, *Conclave Ignatii* and *Biathanatos*, were written between 1609 and 1611 at Mitcham, when Donne's powers seem to have been most closely centred on literature. *Pseudo-Martyr* held the obligations of the law of the land paramount to those of the Roman religion.
Conclave Ignatii was an "unseemly, but very vivacious and original, piece of Lucianic satire". Biathanatos, not printed in Donne's lifetime, declared that suicide is not always a crime.

In prosody, Gosse sees Donne as an innovator of great influence. Scoring conventional imagery, diction, and order of ideas, he revelled in subtlety, variety and abundance of mental movement. As a realist he had no interest in Greek or Latin legend and drew his illustrations from chemistry, medicine, law, mechanics, astrology, religious ritual and daily human business of every sort. Gosse says that Donne's influence was "wide and deep, though almost entirely malign." Gosse divides Donne's Divine Poems into two kinds--those which breathe a fervid spirit of faith and a genuine humility, and those which are ingenious exercises in metrical theology, where the intellectual element outweighs the religious, as in "A Litany". "In all his poems written after 1615 we find a change of prosody, an abandonment of the harsh and eccentric inversions of his earlier manner." An intellectual curiosity concerning theology preceded any subjection of his brain or heart to the faith, until crisis after crisis, and at last the death of his wife, brought about the final process of sanctification and illumination. In the Holy Sonnets the voice of personal emotion is more clearly audible than anywhere else in Donne's religious poetry, says Gosse.
"The accent is that of a man who has discovered the truth so late, and has such a sense of the passage of time and of the nearness of his dissolution, that he hardly dares to hope that he may yet work for God."52

Donne's excellent sermon writing and oratory rose to their zenith in 1626 and remained there until his death in 1631.

His hearers, borne along upon the flow of his sinuous melody, now soft and winning, now vehement in storm, now piercing like a clarion, now rolling in the meditative music of an organ, felt themselves lifted up to heaven itself. In those early days of Charles I a sermon delivered by the Dean of St. Paul's was the most brilliant public entertainment which London had to offer.53

The Second Prebend Sermon, a long poem of victory over death, was one of the most magnificent pieces of religious writing in English literature, Gosse says. **A Hymn to God, My God, In My Sickness**, composed eight days before his death, gave wonderful evidence of the vigour of his mind at that time.

Gosse's impressions of the development of Donne's religious life, character and personality are very convincing and well-founded. Gosse's early observations and experiences of Plymouth Brethren religion and his later studies in larger fields of faith gave him an admirable background, untinged by prejudice, for a deep understanding and appreciation of men of God as different as Donne, Taylor and Patmore. One of the most interesting of Gosse's contributions to the study of Donne is his theory, perhaps not entirely imaginary, that Donne experienced "conversion" after what had been merely
an intellectual commitment to God.

Those who are in the habit of observing the religious life of others with attention are familiar, in whatever temper they may regard it, with the spiritual phenomenon which is known as "conversion". It is not a matter of conviction or works, though the first may produce and the second result from it; nor is it in any degree universal among those who are eminent for piety and unction. It may come to the most and to the least instructed; it is a state of soul, a psychological condition abruptly reached by some, and not reached at all by many. Some pass into it who afterwards pass out again into indifferentism; some never experience the sudden advent of it, although their fidelity to the faith persists unshaken. There is abundant evidence to show that this condition or crisis was passed through by Donne in the winter of 1617; that at that time he became "converted" in the intense and incandescent sense. At that juncture, under special conditions, and at the age of forty-four, he dedicated himself anew to God with a peculiar violence of devotion, and witnessed the dayspring of a sudden light in his soul.54

But there is still something in Donne which escapes even the most astute and sensitive critical biographer. Gosse describes this in his final summation of Donne's character.

No one, in the history of English literature, as it seems to me, is so difficult to realize, so impossible to measure, in the vast curves of his extraordinary and contradictory features.... He was not the crystal-hearted saint that Walton adored and exalted. He was not the crafty and redoubtable courtier whom the recusants suspected. He was not the prophet of the intricacies of fleshly feeling whom the younger poets looked up to and worshipped. He was none of these, or all of these, or more. What was he? It is impossible to say, for, with all his superficial expansion, his secret died with him. We are tempted to declare that of all great men he is the one of whom least is essentially known. Is not this, perhaps, the secret of his perennial fascination?55

Edmund Gosse's next biography was that of Jeremy Taylor, 1613-1667, written for the English Men of Letters Series in 1904. Not a popular figure now, or in 1904, Jeremy Taylor had been 'discovered' for literature by Coleridge, Lamb and Hazlitt. Several biographies of Taylor have been
written, the best of which, according to Logan Pearsall Smith, the author of *Jeremy Taylor, Selected Passages*, 1930, was Eden's edition of Heber's life of Taylor, 1851. But "Sir Edmund Gosse, his latest biographer, ... has not only made considerable addition to our knowledge of Jeremy Taylor's life, but, treating him as a man of letters as well as a theologian, has attempted for the first time to define his place in our literary history." 56

Like Coleridge, Gosse places Taylor in our literary history with Shakespeare, Bacon and Milton—one of the four principal masters of the English language in the first half of the 17th century. General readers have neglected Taylor because he was a divine, and divines have neglected him because he was an artist. "The theologian who is also a man of letters suffers from severe disadvantages which criticism finds it easier to state than to remove." 57 To discover the man of letters in Taylor, says Gosse, much must be cleared away which is said solely for the purpose of instruction, and a great deal which is not the substance of his own mind. His influence as a pure divine has been damaged by his astonishing brilliance, copious use of ornaments of speech and a certain forbidding sense of moral ineffectiveness. For Taylor, the value of words was in the effect of their harmonious and telling arrangement. He was neither a pure theologian nor a pure grammarian. The influence of Donne showed in the
sonorous majesty of organ-sentences, but Taylor went beyond Donne in suppleness and variety, and even in splendour. His only rival or happy contrast was Fuller; Fuller shone in wit, Taylor in sublime music.

As "the Shakespeare of English Prose", so called by Mason because of the extraordinary vitality of his writing and the organic growth of his metaphors, Taylor possessed great beauty and simplicity, in the former only touched by Browne in richness of imaginative ornament, in the latter lifted above all prose-writers of the 17th century. Sincere and vivid emotion shone forth below the image. He was extremely sensitive to the effects of light and water, to odours, and like all his contemporaries he examined nature with near-sighted eyes, describing such creatures as glow-worms, grasshoppers and butterflies. "With the solitary exception of Shakespeare, there is no writer in all our early literature who has made so fresh and copious and effective a use of metaphor taken directly from the observation of natural objects."58 Taylor referred incessantly to the classics and his style was sometimes spoiled by the crude transference of classic poetry into his own prose. His long sentences were often merely printer's errors. "If we leave out the needless 'ands' some of his longest sentences will be broken up into intelligible and completely effective modern prose."59 The main quality of Taylor's prose, says Gosse, was its splendour.
He never lost his balance and often redeemed emotion by a phrase of extreme simplicity. "Sudden, pathetic felicities are always at his command." 60

Gosse traces with sympathy and understanding the development of Jeremy Taylor from a precocious child to a popular young student, an austere but friendly bishop in middle life, and finally to a solitary old man in Ireland. We see how he gradually developed his literary skill until between 1650 and 1655 he produced nearly all of his first-rate work.

The finest works of this period were The Rules and Exercises of Holy Dying, 1651, and Twenty-five Sermons preached at Golden Grove, 1653. Holy Dying was a product of vehement inspiration, "one of the most beautiful prose compositions of the 17th century, a threnody palpitating with enthusiasm and emotion." 61 Fascinated and exalted by death, Taylor determined to use his experience for a purpose at once creative and sedative. Gosse describes the 17th century view of death and the modernity of Taylor's opinions.

In literature, this sentiment of death as the skeleton that hides to take his victim unawares, because, if met in front, he might be parleyed with and even tricked, had produced some magnificent apologies and outbursts. It had lent a wing to the heavy, historic muse of Ralegh; it had spread its velvet over the sermons of Donne; it had inspired a choir of doleful lyrists. But it was cast out of court, and relegated to a place among things childish and outworn, by the Holy Dying of Jeremy Taylor, and never again could this conception of death, as a gymnastic skeleton with a dart springing from the tomb, be put forward without danger of awakening a smile of disgust. 62
This book, with its miraculous profusion of images, had a
direct and durable popularity. Its view of death as a nega-
tion, and its stress on the importance of life, helped humanize
the piety of English readers; its brooding tenderness and
healthy sweetness was "a balm to spiritual wounds."63

The Twenty-five Sermons, a magnificent collection
of sermons, was the most important of Taylor's books from a
purely literary point of view. Here, with lucidity, harmony,
and sublimity of tone, with simplicity and force and delicate
precision, he "maps the path of conduct and enlightens it
with all the colour and radiance of his luminous experience."65

There is, however, almost no allusion to the life of the poor.
As Gosse says, we wish he had been attracted by the democratic
aspect of life "like Bossuet who ten years later bid the
Christian world listen to the 'cri de misère à l'entour de
nous, qui devrait nous fondre le coeur'."66 But Jeremy Taylor
had become the greatest prose writer in England and his genius
"spread its branches and flowered like a magnolia under the
shadow of a southern wall in a quiet courtyard."67
CHAPTER IV
GOSSE'S CRITICAL BIOGRAPHIES OF CONTEMPORARIES

Edmund Gosse's biography of Coventry Patmore was published in 1905 in the Literary Lives series, the first of three studies of the lives and works of poets who were personally known to him. In these three books Gosse's judgment is not marred by personal relationship and his estimates are unprejudiced; he retains a balance of sympathy and detachment, as in Father and Son, which makes his critical biographies of these men extremely valuable and of the highest order. Whereas Gosse had worked from insight and intuition in his earlier biographies, he now writes directly from observation and memory. Such intimate knowledge of character is very helpful to the critical biographer.

Rarely has a knowledge of the man been more essential to the comprehension of his writings than was the case with Coventry Patmore. To understand the poems, some vision of the angular, vivid, discordant, and yet exquisitely fascinating person who composed them is necessary.¹

When Gosse was first acquainted with Patmore, "the solitary specimen of an unrelated species", ² he found him disagreeable. But after visiting Patmore, Gosse was surprised and enchanted with that psychologist of human and divine love; those visits became the most stimulating experiences of Gosse's social life.
And so sitting, sloped to the fire, he would talk for hours of the highest things, of thoughts and passions above a mortal guise, descending every now and then to earth in some fierce, eccentric jest, always to be punctuated by a loud, crackling laugh, ending in a dry cough.... He initiated me into the ardent and sublime mysticism which filled his imagination. That I quite comprehended would be to say too much, but I sympathized and admired.³

Gosse's central impression of Patmore as a man is that he was an example of the intellectual and moral aristocrat, with a very strong sense of inequality. A militant hermit of the soul, Patmore had a certain hauteur, and his moral independence "enabled him to believe that he was never driven along paths which seemed those of obedience and renunciation, but that his spirit leaped ahead to obey before the order was given and to renounce in joy before the temptation was formulated."⁴ In religious matters he was of steady and humble faith, convinced of the rightness of his central orthodoxy in the Roman Catholic religion. He did not hold that all priests are immaculate or that the Pope is infallible, except in principle. "He was in nothing more original and daring than in his glorification of the Body."⁵ Not ascetic in the Puritan sense, "he stood up against the world, secure in his faith in God, and in poetry which is the handmaiden of God."⁶ In spite of a certain narrowness and hardness, says Gosse, Patmore will be preserved by his intensity, and by the sincerity and economy with which he employed his art.

As a youth, Patmore was remarkably proficient in general science and mathematics. His literary training was
eclectic; "he was taught to prefer a collection of specimens
to a general system of knowledge and his notion of a poetic
garden became a posy of rare flowers.... All his critical
judgment, from first to last, bore the stamp of his eclecti-
cism".7

But "Love and Religion were the two masters which
led the spirit of Patmore through the whole of his earthly
journey."8 Patmore was an agnostic until he was eleven,
when "it struck me what an exceedingly fine thing it would
be if there really was a God."9 This feeling lay dormant
until he was in Paris at eighteen, and then his religious
life began to blossom and flower until 1864, when he went
to Rome and placed himself under the regular instruction of
a Jesuit, that he might get the great question of religion
settled once and for all. His will was more and more power-
fully attracted, and he finally decided to submit to the
Roman Catholic faith; he became radiant with spiritual com-
placency and joy and during the rest of his life no shadow
of religious doubt ever crossed his understanding or his
conscience again.

For Patmore, Love was the great experience which
received its consecration and fulfilment in marriage. "He
differed from other poets in his desire to hug and gild the
bonds of custom—not the poet of passion in the abstract,
but of love made a willing captive by the marriage tie."10
His conception of love as a fit matter for imaginative
contemplation when legalized by the Church and the State came from his earliest Protestant days when he had unconsciously regarded marriage as a sacrament--some dim conception of a ritual.

His transcendental adoration of wedded love was originally neither a rule of theology nor an argument of morals, but was a symptom of purely individual lyricism--a fierce expression of personal instinct.... He saw no difference between marriage and poetry; the one was the subject of the other, the second a necessary interpretation of the first. 11

Patmore's first book, Poems by Coventry Patmore (1844), in spite of lapses of taste and lack of finish, revealed a new voice; the influence of the Pre-Raphaelites was very strong, ("Patmore writes as the young Millais painted"), but the main value of the volume was in "its fine realism, in its determination to see natural objects through eyes that were clear and unclouded, and in its consistent study of nuptial love, more and more distinctly concentrated on its sacramental aspect." 12 In 1854 the first part of The Angel in the House was published. Gosse says that Patmore felt that the writing of this poem, which he had long meditated and finally brought into being under the inspiration of the happiness of his first marriage, was a task of deep social and moral importance which he was called upon to fulfil. The ideal of nuptial love was described with the purity of a saint and the passion of a flaming lover. The critics gave a kindly reception to The Angel in the House, and it soon became the most popular poem of the day. "Readers discovered that the instincts which
they had experienced in silence, with an abashed acquiescence in the conviction that they could never be put into words, were here actually interpreted in language of great sweetness and melody, and treated as matters of high public importance. Patmore's ministry was not to treat marriage as either the enemy or the conclusion of love, but rather as its very object and summit. Marriage is not merely a compromise with frailty but a consecration of the highest human virtue, said the "consecrated laureate of wedded love." Later he became more intellectually arrogant and haughty in his attitude to the world. In his political odes his "cup of scorn and anger overflows without an aim, merely covering the whole scheme of things with a spatter of contumely." Some non-political odes dealt with profound and subtle questions of sex, mystically encountered; others were purely human, enchanting memories of past suffering nobly borne, jewels fashioned in the furnace of bereavement...like Rosicrucian symbols, wholly unintelligible to the multitude, but discovered with a panic of delight by a few elect souls in every generation.

Amelia (1878), which interpreted homely emotions in dignified language, Gosse regards as the most human and most inspired of all Coventry Patmore's writings; Patmore showed delicate and subtle insights into the female heart, and his style was at its highest level of nervous vigour. One of Patmore's prose works was a translation from St. Bernard, on The Love of God. This delightful work, Gosse feels, is far too little known. In 1883 Patmore completed Sponsa Dei, which he had
been working on for two years. In 1888 he burned it, unpublished, having decided the world was not ready for so mystical an interpretation of physical love in religion. Gosse feels that this work was the most delicate and possessed the highest charm of style of all Patmore's prose works. "The scruple which destroyed it was simply deplorable; the burning of *Sponsa Dei* involved a distinct loss to literature."16

Patmore's religious odes treated of human passion as a symbol of the divine. The metaphor of sex was developed most clearly in the three Psyche odes of *The Unknown Eros* (1876), in which Patmore's genius may be said to have culminated. His idea that pagan myths contain pure elements of living Christian doctrine in symbol was not welcomed by a majority of English Catholics, but Gosse says "I see little in later Victorian literature which bears the stamp of so much originality, combined with such absolute distinction of form, as the best of Patmore's religious odes."17

Some critics regard Patmore's poetry as a mixture of uxoriousness and religiosity. But Gosse's knowledge of Patmore's fine sincerity helps to reveal the true inner spirit of the poetry, and excludes cynical evaluation. "Like Gray he knew the confines of his strength--he strove not to be copious but to be uniformly exquisite."

Patmore wrote, with extreme and conscientious care, and with impassioned joy, a comparatively small body of poetry, the least successful portions of which are yet curiously his own, while the most successful fill those who are attuned to them with an exquisite and durable pleasure.18
Edmund Gosse, one of the few men of letters in England who had any knowledge of the Scandinavian languages, was the first literary critic to introduce the works of Ibsen to the English public. "In all of Gosse's brilliant career as a critic, surely fortune never smiled on him as kindly as she did in his twenty-second year, when she sent him to Norway and introduced him to the works of Norway's greatest poet at a time when Ibsen's very name was unknown to England." Over a long period, through translations and laudatory criticism published in various periodicals, Gosse made Ibsen a name familiar to discriminating lovers of literature and paved the way for William Archer's active campaign for the popularization of Ibsen in England. Gosse prophesied that Ibsen would be a "world-poet" and would win "the homage of Europe". This came to pass, and in 1907, the year of Father and Son, Gosse published the first English biography of Henrik Ibsen.

Gosse's account of Ibsen's childhood and youth helps in the understanding of his mature genius. A life of moral isolation began early; he was out of sympathy with the rest of his family and did not excel at school. "Ibsen's earliest flight of fancy seems to have been the association of womanhood with the shriek of the sawmill." At fifteen he was apprenticed to an apothecary at Grimstad and here during the next five years the peculiar colour and tone of his temperament were developed and he became a poet. All the events of
1848 which symbolized the stir of revolution in Europe smote like hammers on the door of Ibsen's brain, till it quivered with enthusiasm and excitement.... The old clouds vanished, and though the social difficulties which hemmed in his career were as gross as ever, he himself no longer doubted what was to be his aim in life. The cry of revolution came to him...just at the moment when his young spirit was prepared to receive it with faith and joy. The effect on Ibsen's character was sudden and it was final.21

Ibsen's medium, the stage, was not highly developed in Norway when he first began to write for it. The patriotic party was suspicious of the stage, as likely to undermine the purity of national feeling; the cultivated classes looked to Copenhagen and authors followed humbly in the footsteps of their Danish brethren. Interest in poetry was warm and general, but uncritical. As Ibsen developed, his main rival in Norway was Björnson; a typical patriot, Björnson aimed to stir the depths of the local conscience. Ibsen was European, if anything—a citizen of the world. "He belonged, in a very remarkable degree, to the small class of men whose intelligence lifts them above the narrowness of local conditions, who belong to civilization at large, not the system of one particular nation."22 Near the close of his life Ibsen had become the prophet and father of the Scandinavian countries. The three northern countries, in their long stagnation, had become clogged and deadened with spiritual humbug, which had sealed the sources of emotion. Ibsen had blown the clarion of the West Wind and heralded the emancipation.23

The result was an ever widening circle of youthful admirers and the rise of vigorous and wholesome intellectual independence.
By 1850 Ibsen had sounded the note which distinguished him from all previous writers in the North: "less about the glaciers and the pine-forests, less about the dusty legends of the past, and more about what is going on in the silent hearts of your brethren!" He continued in poverty to study drama and write many works which now are not counted in the recognized canon of his writings but were remarkable as showing the vigour of the effort by which he attempted to create an independent style for himself. At a low and miserable moment his talent suddenly took wings, and in 1858 he published his first masterpiece, The Pretenders, which Gosse feels was the most finished of all his writings. With the publication of Brand in 1865 Ibsen was placed at a bound among the greatest European poets of his age. Gosse praises its "manifold emotion", its "melodious versification", and its "unchallenged originality", while also noting some incoherency and want of clearness in the symbolism.

It is an appeal against moral apathy which arouses the languid. It is a clear and full embodiment of the gospel of energy which awakens and upbraids the weak.... In the solemn mountain air, with vague bells ringing high up among the glaciers, none asks exactly what Brand expounds, nor whether it is perfectly coherent. Witnessed on the living stage, it takes the citadel of the soul by storm. When it is read, the critical judgment becomes cooler. Gosse feels that Ibsen threw much of himself into his hero, and yet was careful to remain outside. Brand was like a character of the 12th century transferred to the 19th--the presentation of a harsh priestly figure against a satirical
portrayal of contemporary Scandinavian life. Gosse does not mention Brand as a picture of the tyrannical and murderous effects of 'idealism', as Shaw later did, but he predicts that "endless generations of critics will investigate its purpose and analyze its forms."26

Peer Gynt (1867) arouses conflicting reactions in Gosse.

This obsession of the critic to discover "problems" in the works of Ibsen has been one of the main causes of that impatience and even downright injustice with which his writings have been received by a large section of those readers who should naturally have enjoyed them. He is a poet, of fantastic wit and often reckless imagination, and he has been travestied in a long black coat and white choker, as though he were an embodiment of the Nonconformist conscience.27

What appeals most to Gosse in the "merry and mundane" drama of Peer Gynt is its fun and picturesqueness. The spirits of the author were high and "physical beauty of the most enchanting order is liberally provided to temper the excess of irony."28 Shaw sees Peer Gynt in pursuit of unconditional self-realization; Gosse calls him the apotheosis of selfish vanity.

The nearest approach to a justification of the moral or "problem" purpose, which Ibsen's graver prophets attribute to him, is found in the sixth scene of the fifth act, where, quite in the manner of Goethe, thoughts and watchwords and songs and tears take corporeal form and assail the aged Peer Gynt with their reproaches.29

Then Gosse leaves a little room for more problems to develop. "But in Ibsen, unquestionably, time will create profundities, as it has in Shakespeare. The greatest works grow in importance, as trees do after the death of the mortal man who planted
Ibsen's series of realistic prose plays began with *Pillars of Society* (1877) and *A Doll's House* (1879). He had long determined on the abandonment of poetic form; "speaking generally, the style must conform to the degree of ideality which pervades the representation." Gosse sees this revolt against dramatic verse as a feature of the epoch. *A Doll's House*, the most widely famous of all Ibsen's works, was his first unqualified success, and excited universal discussion. "It was an engineer's experiment at turning out and draining a corner of the moral swamp which Norwegian society seemed to be to his violent and ironic spirit." The problems of his time were very real to Ibsen.

Everything that I have written has the closest possible connection with what I have lived through, even if it has not been my own personal experience; in every new poem or play I have aimed at my own spiritual emancipation and purification—for a man shares the responsibility and the guilt of the society to which he belongs.

*Ghosts* (1881), with its discussion of hereditary disease, caused a great turmoil. Shaw calls it an outspoken attack on marriage as a useless sacrifice of human beings to an ideal; reviewers called it disgusting, loathsome and vulgar; Gosse says that although it was original, vivid and stimulating, the dialogue was stilted and uniform and the characters seemed types rather than persons. "There are more convincing plays than *Ghosts* in Ibsen's repertory," says Gosse.

In *The Enemy of the People* (1882) Ibsen left the area of
domestic and social ideals and touched commercial and political ideals. It was to be a "placable" play, written to amuse and stimulate, calculated to wound nobody's feelings. This problem of the "moral water-supply" became a success, one of Ibsen's most popular writings; faultless in construction and evolution, it riveted attention and awakened sympathy and humour. Ibsen always spoke of *The Wild Duck* (1884) with irony. It was received with bewilderment, says Gosse, because Ibsen seemed to be laughing at himself as he showed the danger in revealing the truth of the past and the value of illusion. Gosse sees *Rosmersholm* as a step backward. "In his eagerness to work out a certain sequence of philosophical ideas, the playwright for once neglected to be plausible."35 Gosse does not see the point of Rebecca's transfiguration, nor, as Shaw pointed out, the evolution of her passion into the "higher love". *The Lady from the Sea* (1888) was one of the most popular of Ibsen's works, never dull nor didactic, full of mystery, beauty and pure comedy—a defence of individuality and the necessity of developing it. For Gosse it showed the sweetness of emancipated and gratified individuality, leading to health and peace. *Hedda Gabler* (1890) was an objective and unromantic play, which Gosse sees as a return to the prosaic ideal of Ibsen's central period. "The stains on the portrait are the impact of accidental conditions on a nature which might otherwise have been useful and fleckless."36
With The Master Builder (1892) came the end to the purely realistic and prosaic social dramas of Ibsen, and the return to the strange and haunting beauty of the old imaginative pieces. This objective study of the self-made man dealt with Nemesis; "those who enjoy exceptional advantages in life shall pay for them by not less exceptional, but perhaps less obvious, disadvantages." Little Eyolf (1894) was stormily received. Gosse considers it a dreadful play, illuminated only by the twinkling sweetness of Asa. For Gosse, Rita, jealousy incarnate, is the most repulsive of Ibsen's feminine creations, even though at the end of the play she and her husband are delivered from their evil dream by philanthropy. John Gabriel Borkman (1896) is for Gosse a work of lofty originality and of poignant human interest.

It was a prominent example of the 19th century type of criminous speculator, in whom the vastness of view and the splendidly altruistic audacity present themselves as elements which render it exceedingly difficult to say how far the malefactor is morally responsible for his crime. The moral was that all the errors of humanity spring from cold-heartedness. Gosse sees When We Dead Awaken, the last of Ibsen's plays, as the product of a very tired old man, whose physical powers were declining. The theme of the waste of physical life in concentration on art was perhaps what Ibsen felt himself. Did he regret the complete sacrifice of his life to his work? Gosse feels that When We Dead Awaken,
though technically clever and often very sage and penetrating, was marred by cloudiness of conception.

Although Gosse may seem to some to rejoice chiefly in the dramatic art of Ibsen's works and fail to expound much their revolutionary spirit which critics such as Shaw delighted in, his biography gives an excellent account of the development of Ibsen's somewhat grim genius in a hostile environment.

He had in him that source of anger, against which all argument is useless, which bubbles up in the heart of a youth who vaguely feels himself possessed of great native energy and knows not how to stir a hand or even formulate a wish.

Ibsen was savage in manners, unprepossessing in appearance, and did not seem to progress in grace as he advanced in years. Through the unusual darkness of his youth in a remote and imperfectly civilized country, beset by poverty and isolation, he dreamed of fighting at the centre of the world, instead of being lost on its extreme circumference. He came to feel that his task was to see and record, not to reflect, and he left to others the task of removing a disease which his business was solely to diagnose.

Indifferent to music, limited in reading, Ibsen remained isolated and self-contained, regular in all his habits, dependent on his devoted wife, yet a poetical psychologist of the first order.

We see before us Ibsen with his hands clenched, his mouth tightly shut, rigid with determination not to "let himself go", the eyes alone blazing behind the gleaming spectacles.
His bitterness in dealing with human frailty stemmed from his theory that love of self is the fundamental principle of all activity. He doubted the final success of intelligence. But Gosse notes that the effect of Ibsen's influence was beneficial; he let fresh air and light into the national life, thoroughly awakened the national conscience, and left a richer and healthier atmosphere behind him.

Gosse's *Henrik Ibsen* is the most interesting of his biographies, perhaps because of the unusual nature of its subject. Gosse does not ignore Ibsen's iconoclasm and revolutionary ideas, but he does not systematize or present us with a group of thoughts that could be classified as "Ibsenism". Shaw's *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* (1891) attempts to do this; "it is not a critical essay on the poetic beauties of Ibsen, but simply an exposition of Ibsenism." Shaw also points out that "the existence of a discoverable and perfectly definite thesis in a poet's work by no means depends on the completeness of his own intellectual consciousness of it." According to Shaw, Ibsen's thesis is that "the real slavery of to-day is slavery to ideals of goodness."

The statement that Ibsen's plays have an immoral tendency, is, in the sense in which it is used, quite true. Immorality does not necessarily imply mischievous conduct; it implies conduct, mischievous or not, which does not conform to current ideals. All religions begin with a revolt against morality, and perish when morality conquers them and stamps out such words as grace and sin, substituting for them morality and immorality.

"The plain working truth is that it is not only good for people
to be shocked occasionally, but absolutely necessary to the progress of society that they should be shocked pretty often."45 "Suffice it that among those who are not ridden by current ideals no question as to the ethical soundness of Ibsen's plays will ever arise; and among those who are so ridden his plays will be denounced as immoral, and cannot be defended against the accusation."46 Shaw says that the quintessence of Ibsenism is that there is no formula. Gosse also agrees that there is no formula and he does not attempt to state Ibsen's attitude as forcefully as Shaw. Gosse is more interested in Ibsen's personal development, with all the struggles and alienations which were involved. His account is full of sympathy and he leaves room for further development in the interpretation of Ibsen's works by the comment, "time will create profundities"

Gosse's Life of Algernon Charles Swinburne, 1917, the last of his full-length critical biographies, is a masterpiece of research, analysis and interpretation. He spent eight years collecting material and checking the accuracy of his data. Gosse's forty years' friendship with Swinburne and his friends was an invaluable asset. T. Earle Welby, in A Study of Swinburne, says that the resulting biography is a work of art "which, as an official induction of a great poet to his place among his peers, is without
rival in critical tact."47

From his father's family, an ancient Border clan in Northumberland county, Swinburne inherited his republicanism, his impatience of restraint, and his love of violent exercise; from both parental families came his elaborate and ceremonious courtesy. Gosse also shows the importance of nature in Swinburne's early environment: "the rough and manly aspect of Northumberland...gave an element of strength to Swinburne's genius, just as the rich southward boskage of the Isle of Wight gave it sweetness and melody."48 From his early childhood also came his deep and intense love of the sea, in all its moods and caprices.

Swinburne's voice was a new one in the literary and intellectual life of his day. He became intimate with the Pre-Raphaelites, especially Burne-Jones, Morris and Rossetti. He visited Tennyson, met Ruskin, and attended lectures by Arnold. But the sixties, when Swinburne began to publish, was the "most quiescent, sedate, least effective and efficient period in our national poetry."49

Philistia seemed to have prevailed; it was the epoch of the crinoline and the pointed shawl, when not merely could a spade never be called a spade in the most restricted circles, but the existence of that or any other such domestic utensil was strenuously denied.... British poetry had become a beautifully guarded park, in which, over smoothly shaven lawns, where gentle herds of fallow-deer were grazing, thrushes sang very discreetly from the boughs of ancestral trees, and where there was not a single object to be seen or heard which could offer the very smallest discomfort to the feelings of the most refined gentlewoman. Into this quiet park, to the infinite alarm of the fallow-deer, a young Bacchus was now preparing to burst, in the company of a troop of Maenads, and to the accompaniment of cymbals and clattering kettle-drums.50
The book which caused this alarm was *Poems and Ballads* of 1866. This was not the first of Swinburne's published works. *Atalanta in Calydon* (1865) had pleased both the critics and the public, and remained for the ordinary reader the best known and most enjoyed of Swinburne's books. "Swinburne shot like a rocket into celebrity."51

"The legend is clear and romantic, of a great simplicity, and yet full of the element of passion. The blank verse is astonishing in its lucidity and dignity and music."52

"Swinburne's mind and memory were more deeply immersed in the poetry of the ancients than that of any other English poet, more than that of Milton, or even of Landor."53 Next came the drama *Chastelard*, the earliest of three studies of the character and life of Mary Queen of Scots. "His study of her character and adventures was so close and so clairvoyant that it has received the grudging praise of professional historians, who are never ready to believe that poets can know anything definite about history."54 *Chastelard* was never favoured by the critics nor much appreciated by the public, because its whole tone was out of sympathy with the prevailing sentimental conception of love. Then *Poems and Ballads* roused a storm of censure and the antagonism of the *Saturday Review*, which, says Gosse, created a prejudiced conception of Swinburne from which he suffered until the end of his life. Critics deplored Swinburne's "hundred lurid horrors", his "libidinousness", his "mad intoxicated sensuality" and his
"feverish carnality". But Lord Lytton confessed with naiveté that "the beauty of diction and mastership of craft in melodies really so dazzled me that I did not see the naughtiness till pointed out." Swinburne wrote a prose defence of Poems and Ballads, called Notes on Poems and Reviews, sublime in its defiance and saved from being ridiculous by a deft adroitness and remarkable purity of style.

It is notoriously difficult to reply with grace to a charge of indecency, which, in our chilly climate, is equivalent to a charge of want of good sense and good manners. The victim may bow the head, like Dryden, or attack the plain-tiff's attorney, like Byron; Swinburne adopted an attitude which more closely resembles that of Congreve under the lash of Jeremy Collier. He denied the truth of his critics' animadversions, questioned their good faith, and lavished contempt on their pretensions to purity, learning, and taste. His passionate appeal for a reasonable and manly liberty of utterance, his indignation...struck a new note, or revived a forgotten note, of wholesome freedom.

Swinburne's interest in freedom and republicanism led to A Song of Italy, not well received by the public; its principal charm now lies in the exquisite vignettes of little Tuscan towns. Ave Atque Vale, written for the supposed death of Baudelaire, Gosse regards as the most highly finished of all his elegiac poems, as great as Lycidas, Adonais and Thyris. In 1867 Swinburne published Appeal to England, a pamphlet in verse against the execution of the Manchester Fenians, "a political poem of great merit—direct, intelligible and brief, in language of high simplicity." The reviewers were scandalized but the Reform League offered Swinburne a seat in parliament, which he refused. Ode on the Proclamation
of the French Republic, published in 1870, lacked continuity
and plan, says Gosse, and showed little knowledge of the real
political condition of Europe.

_Songs Before Sunrise_ (1871) Gosse regards as Swinburne's
cardinal and crowning work as a lyrist. It was "uniformly
rapid in movement, rich in thought, sumptuous in language,
and uplifted in tone."58 "He conceived the Republic, not
merely as a convenient method of democratic government, but
as being the tangible embodiment of freedom in the action of
society at its very highest development."59

The emotion of the poet in presence of the supreme and eternal
characteristics of the universe gave to the noblest part of
_Songs Before Sunrise_ an intensity unique in English literature,
and probably to be compared with nothing else written since
the Greeks produced cosmological hymns in the fifth century
B.C.60

In 1874 Swinburne published _Bothwell_, the second in
his series on Mary Queen of Scots, a drama of portentous
length which was accepted favourably by the critics and pleased
the public more than anything he had published since _Poems
and Ballads_.

It is not, of course, the best play, but it is the finest
dramatic romance produced in England throughout the nineteenth
century, and among the myriad blank-verse imitations of the
Elizabethans beloved of Charles Lamb, _Bothwell_ floats supreme,
a leviathan.61

_Erechtheus_ (1876) Gosse regards as the most organic of
Swinburne's works, though not the most interesting; its only
blemish was a too marmoreal uniformity of diction. "It
combines a tender and thrilling treatment of emotion with
an appeal to civic patriotism in the truest spirit of
antiquity." Poems and Ballads, Second Series (1878)
exhibited Swinburne's purely lyrical genius in its most
amiable and melodious form. The tender, sincere and inspired
elegies of this volume combined elegiac regret with a formal
and considered analysis of work and character; "the critical
elegy may be said to be a form of verse which he practically
invented." In a different key, this volume presented "At
a Month's End", the gem of all Swinburne's lyrics of experience,
unequalled as a parallel between storm on the sea and passion
in the soul. The Heptalgie; or, The Seven Against Sense
(1880) combines parodies of Tennyson, Robert and Elizabeth
Browning, Coventry Patmore, Robert Lord Lytton, Rossetti and
Swinburne himself. "The imitation of Mrs. Browning is perhaps
the very best parody in existence, because it does not merely
reproduce the material form and the verbiage of a mannered
writer, but it enters into her very brain."64

Songs of the Spring Tides and Studies in Spring (1880)
were not well received. Song For the Centenary of Landor
Gosse sees as one of the most tiresome of Swinburne's works,
displaying his failing sense of proportion and failing power
of logical expression. In 1881 Swinburne completed his
trilogy on Queen Mary with Mary Stuart, shorter than Bothwell
but much less interesting. The critics were cold and the
public indifferent. In 1882 Swinburne finished Tristram of
Lyonessé, his epic. Generally there was a lack of vital interest; "the reader is put off with pages upon pages of amorous hyperbolical conversation between lovers, who howl in melodious couplets to the accompaniment of winds and waves." The great exception in this work is the Prelude, which Gosse rates as a magnificent performance, "as learned and brilliant a piece of studied versification as we meet with in the whole of English literature." A Century of Roundels, dedicated to Christina Rossetti, written in 1883, develops the rondeau, with "a marvelous aptitude in combining variety with an exact observance of the essential laws."

Of Swinburne's remaining works, Gosse selects for special notice Locrine (1886), the only one of Swinburne's plays to be acted in his lifetime; Poems and Ballads: Third Series (1889), which contains nine Border ballads of great value; Astrophel (1892), the lyrical harvest of six years; and The Tale of Balen (1895), an Arthurian story of the Border country, "in many respects a very remarkable performance."

Of Swinburne's prose works, Gosse chooses the volume on William Blake (1862) for special study. As a critic in this work of high enthusiasm and solid erudition, Swinburne was the first to refrain from apologizing for Blake as an eccentric or lunatic person with flashes of genius. Swinburne gave an analysis of Blake's mysticism and a laborious and illuminating examination of the Prophetic Books, hitherto rejected as impenetrable. Swinburne also wrote about Matthew

Gosse's biographical outlines in *The Life of Algernon Charles Swinburne* are woven into the texture of the work with great skill. We learn much of the influence of Swinburne's family and the varying effects of home and town life upon his temperament. Gosse shows the independence of Swinburne's mind, and also the dependence in every day life upon such friends as Jowett, Burton, Mazzini, Rossetti and Watts-Dunton. Gosse depicts the influence of such idols as Baudelaire, Landor and Victor Hugo, and also Swinburne's dislike of Ruskin and Browning. Swinburne's fragile frame, compatible with outstanding physical courage, is carefully described. Impressions of him are heaped up in the book, all startling and some slightly humorous, until a picture of him is printed indelibly on the memory: we see a slight form, five feet, four and one half inches, topped by an immense head with an aureole of bright red hair and sparkling grey-green eyes; we notice the nervous fluttering of the hands and the tendency to jump quickly up and down when excited. Perhaps Mr. Adam's impression of 1862 is the most colourful: "a tropical bird, high-crested, long-beaked, quick-moving, with rapid utterance and screams of humour."68 This blend of sweetness and fierceness developed into paganism from a training that was rigorously devout. As Gosse puts it, "the poet is not a lotus-eater who has never known the Gospel,
but an evangelist turned inside out."\(^{69}\)

Harold Nicolson, in his 1926 volume on Swinburne, says, Swinburne has hitherto been fortunate in his biographers.... In Edmund Gosse, Swinburne found a historian such as the fates accord but rarely to the inheritors of fulfilled renown. An intimate friend for over forty years, Sir Edmund Gosse was able to enrich the Life of Swinburne with that wide literary science and that velvet style which have rendered him an unchallenged master of critical biography; not only does the official life of Swinburne display with delicacy and not without frankness the many facets of this elusive subject, but, what is infinitely more important, Sir Edmund Gosse has once and for all set the key or tone for all future study of the poet--for all study, that is, which may lay claim to any seriousness.\(^{70}\)
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In conclusion we may say that Sir Edmund Gosse is a master in the field of critical biography. Within this sphere of criticism, he makes few slips in the judicial bringing together of the life and the works of his subjects. With the exception perhaps of Donne, he does not distort his portraits or their works by any 'biographical fallacy'. His chameleon-like "intuition kindled into life by the deep contact of personalities"\(^1\) enables him to excel\(^1\) in that difficult art of entering into another person's mind and experiences. Several of Gosse's writings are first-class contributions to our literary history. His *Life of William Congreve* was considered a masterpiece of fine prose and sound criticism. Shaw paid tribute to Gosse's work in the field of 17th century literature: "you surprised the world (and me) by actually finding out all about the post-Shakespearian poets...before writing about them."\(^2\) In his biography of Jeremy Taylor, Gosse was the first to define Taylor's place in our literary history. Gosse was the first literary critic to introduce the works of Ibsen to the English public. Gosse's biography of Swinburne has been considered without rival in critical tact.

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The charge that Gosse is lacking in psychological depth, that he is too 'delicate', 'refined' and 'elegant', has little foundation. As a literary artist, Gosse has a secure place in English literature; some of his poetry may be found in *The Oxford Book of Victorian Verse* and there is a selection from *Father and Son* in *The Oxford Book of English Prose*. If a new estimate of his place in English literature is undertaken, an examination of his contribution as a critical biographer may form a large part of the re-evaluation.

However, very recent criticism suggests that critical biography is not a valid form of criticism at all. The presupposition is that the life of a literary man has nothing to do with his works; when one refers to "Shakespeare" or "Arnold", one means only the body of literature created by these men. To this school of critics Gosse's impressionism would be found to be most inadequate. He excels in his own tradition, but not in the modern trend to delve into the secrets of an autonomous literature.

At present Gosse's position has been defined historically along with Saintsbury, Raleigh, Strachey, Ker, Grierson, Brooks, Clutton-Brock, J. Middleton Murray, Quiller-Couch, Symons and Squire. "They have raised literary appreciation to the status of an art which tends to re-create, under a clearer form, the human characteristics of their subjects; theirs is an impressionism strengthened by a very sure and constant sense of moral qualities, and which, far from excluding knowledge, seeks rather, of set purpose, to fertilize it."
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