

A PERSONAL RE-MEMBERING OF MICHAEL FIELD:
A CRITICAL DIS-MEMBERING OF
WORKS AND DAYS

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Abstract

'Michael Field' was the pseudonym of two women, the aunt and niece Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper, who lived and wrote together during the turn of the twentieth century. Recent years has seen an increased critical interest in their poetry, with particular attention paid to the dynamics of their pen-name within gender politics of the period. However, little attention has been paid to their most impressive creation – a twenty-eight volume journal of their 'Works and Days' as Michael Field.

By offering a close-reading of their strategies of self-representation, this thesis investigates the journal as a site where the women explored and performed their engagement with identity politics, and charted their own response to changing epistemologies of the subject during the nineteenth century. I situate their ideas of the autobiographical subject against a trajectory of self-representation that links the theory and practice of Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* to that of *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*. Using these texts to illuminate the ideas under investigation in *Works and Days*, I explore how the Michael Field diaries contribute an important interjection into both nineteenth century epistemologies of the subject and theories of autobiographical writing.

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A Note on the Text

The Michael Field diaries do not make for easy reading or referencing. Despite evidence that page numbers and index tables have been applied during archiving, revisions and omissions indicate that these have not achieved a clear system of reference.

Compounded by the women's own tendency to leave pages of text without a date, it is up to the reader to navigate their own way through its narrative. To do this, I have replicated the system used by the Microfilm Collection held at the University of Birmingham, which offers a succinct and clear method to corroborate the reels to the shelf location in the British Library, London. For clarity and brevity, all in-text citations from the journals will include the initials of the person who penned the entry in square brackets and the date (where possible) and reel number of the entry if not already stated in the surrounding sentence. In the absence of a date, 'c.' has been inserted to indicate an approximation has been made. For correspondence, the initials of the sender and recipient will be included, along with the date and reel number. When words are unclear in the manuscript, '[?]' has been inserted before the supplied word to indicate what follows is an estimate, and crossings out and spelling errors have been reproduced as they are in the text.

Microfilm Publication:

Thain, M (ed.) 2003. *'Michael Field' and Fin-de-Siecle Culture and Society: The Journals, 1868-1914, and Correspondence of Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper from the British Library, London*. (Add Mss 46776-46804, 45851-45856 & 46866-46897). Marlborough: Adam Matthew.

Contents of Reels

Michael Field diaries

REEL 1

Add Ms 46776	October 1868 – January 1869
Add Ms 46777	April 1888 – December 1889
Add Ms 46778	January 1890 – July 1891
Add Ms 46779	July – December 1891

REEL 2

Add Ms 46780	1892
Add Ms 46781	1893
Add Ms 46782	1894
Add Ms 46783	January – October 1895

REEL 3

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Michael Field Correspondence**REEL 10**

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Add Ms 45852	1893-1894, non-descript.

REEL 11

Add Ms 45853	1886-1895
Add Ms 45854	1886-1895

REEL 12

Add Ms 45855 1886-1893

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Add Ms 46866 1883-1889

Add Ms 46867 1875-1913

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INTRODUCTION

Who was ‘Michael Field’?

‘Michael Field’ was the pseudonym of Katharine Bradley (1846-1914) and Edith Cooper (1862-1913), aunt and niece who lived and wrote together during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Their relationship was far closer than simply aunt and niece; Katharine lived with the Cooper family from the time of Edith’s birth, and took over guardianship of the young Edith when her mother, Emma Cooper, became permanently disabled after the birth of her second daughter, Amy, in 1864. The relationship developed along intellectual lines as the women studied classics and philosophy together at University College in Bristol (Thain 2007, p.3), and with comfortable means to live on, it was unsurprising that the intelligent women turned their hand to writing.

Katharine led the way with *The New Minnesinger and Other Poems* (1875) under the pseudonym ‘Arran Leigh’ – a collection located through both its signature and its subject matter with the defence of women poets in Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s figure of ‘Aurora Leigh’. When this publication was followed six years later by *Bellerophôn*, the title page bore an additional name, ‘Isla Leigh’: and so began a lifelong literary partnership. Yopie Prins has remarked on the ambiguity of the construction of this pairing – held together with an ‘and’ – and looks at how it ‘suggests various possible relationships between the two names: a pair of siblings, a parent and child, a married couple’ (Prins 1999, p.55).

The ambiguity of the relationship between the women was only further exacerbated by the production of a further pseudonym, this time a synthesis of the two. ‘Michael Field’

was born in 1884, making his debut onto the literary scene with *Callirrhöe*, a slim book of verse-dramas that yielded a far better response than *Bellerophôn* had. It was with this publication, Marion Thain argues, that ‘the women’s literary career began in earnest’ (Thain 2007, p.4). As ‘Michael Field’, the women published eight collections of poetry and twenty-eight dramas, with their diaries evidencing a further twenty-six plays existing in draft form (Treby 1998). The women built connections with an impressive network of prominent literary figures, and themselves attracted the attention of the likes of Robert Browning and Bernard Berenson as mentors, Oscar Wilde and Mary Robinson as fans and artists Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon as lifelong close friends. They were well-travelled, well-connected and well-known figures in the literary circles of the European fin-de-siècle.

The Field of Field Studies

Despite their own interest in theatre, the women never received the attention they sought as a dramatist, with only one of their plays - *A Question of Memory* – reaching the stage on 27th October 1893, to an unfavourable reception. Instead, it is their poetry that has received the most attention – both by their own contemporaries and by critical scholarship today. Scholars have predominantly focused on the collections *Long Ago* (1889), a collection of re-constructed Sapphic fragments (White 1992 and Prins 1999); and *Sight and Song* (1892), which contains thirty-one ekphrasitic poems based on paintings they encountered during their travel around Europe (Vadillo 2000; Ehnenn 2005; Fraser 2006; Gray 2011). These collections of poetry provide interesting contributions to two popular interests of nineteenth century poetics: Sappho and her legacy; and ekphrasis as a mode of viewing and writing. These early collections, therefore, slot comfortably into well-established topics of

nineteenth century scholarship. Marion Thain's monograph (2007), the first – and, to this date, only – book-length study of Michael Field has sought to bring to the fore some of the less studied, later poetry, which, she argues, 'complicate our understanding of many of the distinctive aesthetic debates of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries' (2007, abstract).

Michael Field's presence within these critical debates is indebted to the 1970s' revival of 'Victorian women poets whose work was being exhumed as part of a feminist reconsideration of the nineteenth century' (Thain & Vadillo 2009, p.44). It is unsurprising, therefore, that a great deal of attention has been paid to the women's decision to appropriate a male pseudonym (Prins 1992; Blain 1996; Laird 2003; Morley 2004 & 2007a to name a few). The initial motivation for this choice is expressed clearly enough in their letter to Robert Browning that '[T]he report of lady-authorship will dwarf and enfeeble our work at every turn [...] [w]e have many things to say the world would not tolerate from a woman's lips [...] we cannot be stifled by drawing room conventionalities' ([KB] to RB, 23 November 1884, Reel 13). On the one hand, this declaration clearly states that a *male* pseudonym enables the women's work to escape the gender prejudices still shaping the literary marketplace. In light of this letter, Catherine Judd (1995) has appropriated Michael Field as evidence of how pseudonyms were used to protect women from the gender politics of the period, concluding the name acted as a 'veil' for the two women to protect their feminine identity (1995, p.252). However, such a conclusion fails to address the significance of the women's continued use of the name long after its true nature was revealed (which came only a few months after *Callirrhoe* was published [Thain 2007, p.5] – a loyalty continued by Katharine even after Edith's death in 1913 (*Whym Chow* 1914 and *Dedicated* 1914). As Kathy

Psomiades discusses, the pseudonym's ambiguity could represent either a conservative gender politics or a radical statement about gender within the literary marketplace (1990, p.233). This ambiguity has sent critics in search for the assumed significance of the specific choices of 'Michael' and 'Field', unsatisfied by Thain's evidence from *Works and Days* that 'Michael' was a nickname for Katharine, and 'Field' alike for Edith. The question of *why* these specific names still haunts critics, and had led to a vast set of theories – a few of which I summarise below to give a taste of the elusive character of Michael Field.

For Chris White (1996), Jill Ehnenn (2008) and Virginia Blain (1996), the pseudonym created a shared site of erotic desire; and has been interpreted in various ways to signify the sexual relationship between Katharine and Edith. Conversely, Ivor Treby remembered Katharine's early affinity with Elizabeth Barrett Browning's tradition to connect the connotations of 'Field' and 'lea' to 'Leigh'; and thus hopes to show the women's continued identification with a female literary tradition. These theories try to understand the pseudonym in terms of what it is or is not – believing it to either reflect or deflect aspects of the women's own personalities. However, the diversity of contradictory theories emerging from attempts to read *through* the pseudonym only point to its elusive and complicated relationship to the women.

Another line of criticism, (Thain, 2007; Prins, 1995; Vadillo, 2000; Ehnenn, 2005; Fraser, 2006), has sought to ask different questions of the pseudonym. Rather than attempting to define what it *is*, they turn their attention instead to what it *does* within the women's work. This approach has furnished some fascinating theories that I believe are ultimately more useful in terms of how we read Michael Field's work. By exploring how the

pseudonym enables a 'queer aesthetics' (Ehnenn 2005), a 'traiangulated gaze' (Fraser 2006) or a 'force field' (Thain 2007), these critics have viewed the persona as a creative and imaginative space, rather than as a representative label; 'a field indeed, of cultural encounter' (Fraser 2006, p.554).

It is within these new types of questions that I align this thesis, aiming to consistently return to the question of what the pseudonym *does* both within the writing and the reading of Michael Field's work. The work I specifically want to focus on is their largest, and arguably most challenging text, which has hereto received only fourteen pages of direct attention within Thain's monograph (2007, pp.21-35). The co-authored journal, *Works and Days*, spans an impressive twenty-eight hard-bound copies (with a twenty-ninth composed of loose leaf materials), and offers a fascinating insight into both the lives of the women and the experience of life amongst the fin de siècle literary circles. A formidable text in its entirety, it has conventionally been appropriated in snippets by critics who wish to elucidate their readings of the poetry or evidence the women's influences during particular moments in their lives. However, again it is only Marion Thain that has approached the text as 'well-written and carefully crafted literary works' with value in themselves – an oversight by other scholars which has meant they 'have not received the attention they deserve as part of the Michael Field canon' (Thain 2007, p.9). Her initial headway in correcting this negligence has produced an important and insightful reading of how the journals sit both within theories of autobiographical writing and within contemporary paradigms – specifically via a Carlyle-influenced understanding of history as both diachronic and synchronic. Thain's chapter illuminates how the structural devices of the diary 'links their own life events with much bigger temporal patterns and paradigms' (ibid, p.32), and her exploration of the women's

self-conscious patterning and strategies of writing ignites some key elements of *Works and Days* that begs further study.

My Project

Within the space of this thesis, I hope to take up the project Thain began by focusing specifically on the effect of these self-conscious structural devices employed by the women. I will consider how the form of their life-narrative draws attention to the very nature of their autobiographical project, and I consider what commentary this text subsequently provides upon the possibilities of self-representation. I remain indebted to Thain's initial elucidation of the diary's self-consciousness, and hope to build upon both her reading of their artificiality and her connection to Carlyle within a wider trajectory of both autobiographical writing and nineteenth century paradigms. My focus will remain firmly lodged in the effect of the literary strategies the women adopt to write this narrative, as I believe decisions to write this text under the pseudonym, and compose it in an episodic, multi-textured fashion, has significant ramifications upon how we, as readers, engage with the diaries. I will constantly be asking what these decisions do to our process of reading the narrative, our sense of what we can know of Katharine and Edith, and our understanding of how we can come to know it. I should make it clear here that the women envisaged these journals for publication from an early stage, leaving them to their literary executor, Thomas S. Moore, upon their death, with instructions to open and publish them in 1929 (Thain & Vadillo 2009, p.231). By envisaging these journals for a public audience, the women were producing a text that was to be consumed by their readership alongside the rest of their oeuvre. In light of

this, Thain states ‘this is no innocent record of their daily events’ (Thain 2007, p.32), and hence, I will not treat it as such.

Methodology

To inform and structure my focus on the *strategies* of life-writing taking place, I evoke Paul Jay’s important study of self-reflexive writing from Wordsworth to Barthes, *Being in the Text* (1984). The criteria for Jay’s selection of texts reflects a significant shift in autobiographical criticism within the postmodern era. I use the term ‘auto/biographical’ in recognition of autobiographical scholarship of the past forty years has realised that,

Writing a life in a number of forms – biography, autobiography ... entails a similar set of problematics solved, or at least approached, in similar ways; and that analytically understand and appreciating these requires a focus on the *how* of writing rather than only on *what* is written’ (Stanley 1995, p.127).

Jay, like Stanley, is not interested in engaging with debates over what does or doesn’t constitute an autobiographical text (acknowledging that theorists James Olney and Paul de Man highlight this exercise as endless and ultimately futile [Jay 1984, pp. 15-18]); and instead explores texts that demonstrate an interest in, engagement with and reflection upon, the autobiographical process. Michael Field’s *Works and Days*, like Wordsworth’s *Prelude*, Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus* and other texts Jay selects, is a text that looks at the process of turning an authorial subject into a fictional one, and one that, in doing so, is more usefully discussed not in terms of what it is, but in what it does. The journals fit within Jay’s approach because they too can be said to be ‘disrupting the smooth transposition of the psychological subject of an autobiographical text (the author) into its literary subject (its

protagonist)' (Jay 1984, p.29), whilst enacting an important engagement with paradigms of its historical moment.

I also evoke Jay's method as I share his interest in how the project of self-reflexive writing (to narrate the individual's experience of time) compounds issues of identity and history. His trajectory of texts traces 'the impact of changing ideas about both the psychological "self" and the literary subject on the forms of literary self-representation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries' (Jay 1984, p.13). As such, his analysis of Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* in 1838 provides a useful point of comparison for a reading of *Works and Days* because Jay considers Carlyle's strategies of self-representation within the context of nineteenth century epistemologies of the subject. His analysis of how *Sartor* reflects and reifies a challenge to the Enlightenment notions of the subject as unified and autonomous, he concludes 'by virtue of its form, [Sartor] moves much more decisively [than *The Prelude*] toward consciously questioning the efficacy and value of literary self-representation' (Jay 1984, p.98). Jay contextualises Carlyle's text as a literary enactment of a contemporaneous questioning of the subject which sees 'its clearest and most relevant philosophical articulation' later in Friedrich Nietzsche (ibid p.28). Placing Carlyle's literary strategies in close dialogue with Nietzsche's philosophy, Jay locates Carlyle within a trajectory of acutely self-conscious, fragmented strategies of self-representation that finds its most explicit articulation within the autobiographical text of Roland Barthes. Jay sees the disrupted form of Carlyle's text as an early representation of a self-consciousness that is fully realised and emphasised within postmodern theory and practice; a trajectory I intend to keep very much in mind as I read Michael Field's diaries. By paying close attention to the effects of *Works and Days* narrative composition, and using Carlyle and Nietzsche as points

of comparison and exposition, I hope to unpack how Michael Field's journal offers an important and unacknowledged contribution to this narrative stretching from the early nineteenth century to the 'postmodern' era. I use the term 'postmodern' to evoke the critical potential of the body of scholars that 'have focused on the analytical and experiential category of "the self" and the limits of its representation' (Ashley et al. 2004, p.5). Although varied in their approach, generally speaking the way that postmodern theorists 'reject representational and objective or rational concepts of knowledge and truth' (Flax 1990, p. 188) speaks directly to the preoccupations and effects emerging from Katharine and Edith's self-representational text. Therefore, my use of the term 'postmodern' follows the approach of *Autobiography and Postmodernism* (Ashley et al. 1994): 'the concern throughout is less with what postmodernism *is*, in any ultimate sense, than in what it *does*, and what can be done with it' (ibid, p.4).

Jay's reading of *Sartor Resartus* asserts that Carlyle's strategies of self-representation show his acute awareness of the historical environment within which he writes. Using Nietzsche's ideas as evidence, Jay asserts that two significant crises took place during the nineteenth century, and these were hugely influential upon Carlyle's strategies of writing. He argues,

During the nineteenth century, historiography's growing awareness of the literary and subjective nature of its enterprise led to a kind of epistemological and methodological crisis similar to one ... in the field of autobiography

(Jay 1984, p.109).

In simple terms, Jay argues that developments in philosophy, history and culture questioned the ontology of the subject and the authority of history, which translated into a realisation

that narratives of the subject and their history were ‘as much aesthetic and fictional ... as factual and objective’ (Jay 1984, p.109). He finds that self-reflexive writing compounds these issues of identity and history, and subsequently investigates the texts as important sites where changing ideas can be explored and enacted.

By using Nietzsche to elucidate the parallels between these two crises, Jay’s argument produces a useful model around which I shall structure my reading of how Michael Field’s journals contribute to these crises. In Chapter One, I look at how the women employ a fragmented and episodic narrative to re-present their lives, which, like *Sartor*, produces a ‘patchwork text’ that lets the seams show (Jay 1984, p.101). I ask what effect these visible seams have upon our understanding of Katharine and Edith’s text, and reflect upon how these literary decisions suggest particular ideas of the subject. To anchor these ideas within the particular historical moment Jay describes, I refer to his reading of *Sartor Resartus* to provide an explicit articulation of what I find implicitly emerging from the project of *Works and Days*.

In my second chapter I consider how the second of these nineteenth century crises is explored through *Works and Days*: ‘historiography’s growing awareness of the literary and subjective nature of its enterprise’ (Jay 1984, p.109). I continue to pay close attention to the role of *Works and Days* structural architecture to elucidate how its fragmented texture enables the narrative to oscillate between two levels – the personal and the public – and subsequently lay bare how an autobiographical process inherently involves subjectively creating both a personal and a public history. Consistent with Jay, I evoke Nietzsche’s ideas as a backdrop to contextualise how the women’s creation of their own histories contributes

to the conversations around them. Continuing to draw connections with postmodern autobiographical scholarship, I hope to elucidate, via Liz Stanley (1995), how these preoccupations are fully incorporated into our academic ideology in the wake of postmodern scholarship.

My third chapter moves outwards from the text to consider how these literary devices affect our experience of reading the text. I consider how the gaps in the journals' fragmented narrative perform a dual function. On the one hand, they lay bare the constructed and artificial nature of its autobiographical product – emphasising through juxtaposition that an identity is created from the interaction with, and sum of, its influences. On the other, I consider how these gaps in a life narrative invite the reader to engage with the autobiographical process – to fill the gaps with their own meaning. Building on Jay's focus on this shift to fictionality, I evoke Paul de Man's theory of autobiography as 'a way of reading' (1972, p.921) to explore how the journals implicate the reader as a determining force in the creation of meaning. I explore examples from the text alongside the trajectory of de Man's theory in order to elucidate how Katharine and Edith use the space of *Works and Days* to explore not what but *how* we create meaning about life.

CHAPTER ONE

The secret to the art of living lies not in antagonisms or criticisms; but in gliding into the interstices that exist everywhere.

([KB] Epigram to 1903, Reel 5)

At issue is how to read the name as a site of identification, a site where the dynamic of identification is at play, and to read the name as an occasion for the re-theorization of cross-identification or, rather, the crossing that is, it seems, at work in every identificatory practice.

(Butler 1993, p.143)

Introduction

This chapter focuses on how the narratorial devices of *Works and Days* constitute Michael Field as an autobiographical subject, and locates the effect of these literary strategies against changing epistemologies of the subject during the nineteenth century. I look specifically at how the fragmentary, collagic texture of the narrative constitutes a particular type of subject; one characterised by both the fragments we see and the ‘interstices’ that exist in-between. To contextualise the character of this subject against the first of the two nineteenth century crises Paul Jay discusses, I evoke his use of Friedrich Nietzsche’s ‘central and most crucial assertion’ as a particular response to the crises: ‘that the psychological subject is not an ontological given that exists before we invent and project it ... [but] a historically constituted set of ideas and assumptions whose referents are complexly dispersed within the very language we must use to think the self into being’ (1984, p.28). Nietzsche’s argument in *The Will to Power* dismantles the subject as an ontological given, and instead asserts “‘the subject’ is fiction that many similar states in us

are the effect of one substratum: but it is we who first created the ‘similarity’ of these states; our adjusting them and making them similar is the fact, not their similarity’ (Nietzsche 1901, cited in Jay 1984, p.28). Whilst I will not be using Nietzschean theory directly to attend to the details of my argument, I think his theories of the subject provide a useful introductory framework from which to launch my ideas. Jay’s interest, and mine, is specifically anchored in how these shifting notions of the subject were manifest and explored within self-reflexive writing, with particular attention paid to how an awareness of the subject’s fictional construction was reflected and reified through the structure and composition of self-reflexive writing. Jay places Thomas Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus* in dialogue with the ideas of the subject forwarded in *The Will to Power*, and concludes that the way Carlyle unravels the autobiographical project to expose its subject as a fictional construct provides a ‘prophetico-satiric’ prefiguration of Nietzsche’s notion of the subject as an imaginative, aesthetic creation (Jay 1984, p.113).

It is within this dialogue that I consider the strategies of self-representation appropriated by Katharine and Edith in *Works and Days*. By considering the nuanced effects of the journal’s composition alongside the more explicit statements about autobiography articulated in *Sartor*, I hope to elucidate how Edith and Katharine similarly produced the idea of the subject as a ‘patchwork identity, thatched together out of snippets of biographical data’ (Jay 1984, p.101), and subsequently how *Works and Days* is a literary exploration of the changing epistemology of the subject within a particular historical moment. Whilst contextualising Michael Field’s life-narrative against the backdrop of this emerging epistemology of the nineteenth century, I simultaneously hope to draw broader connections between these meditations on the subject and some key issues within autobiographical

conversations in the wake of postmodernism. It is now common to see ‘the radicalism of Nietzsche’s critique of the subject ... as a thread from the European fin-de-siècle to the global postmodernity of the 1970s and 1980s’ (Marcus 2002, p.200), with his deconstruction of the ontology of the subject and emphasis on the role of language in identity formation now central to deconstructionist and structuralist theories. I would like to extend this to consider how Katharine and Edith, and Carlyle’s, exploration of these same ideas within self-reflexive writing contributes an early manifestation of these ‘postmodern’ critiques of the subject. Liz Stanley’s monograph, *The Auto/Biographical “I”*, provides an important indication of how these critiques have been manifest within autobiographical criticism, and so I frequently evoke her text to elucidate this Nietzschean connection to postmodernism within the context of autobiographical theory.

What’s in a Name?: A Retheorization of Cross-Identification

When Katharine and Edith decided to co-author an autobiography of their life and work together as Michael Field, they constructed a text which raised questions about the referential connection between the author and the autobiographical subject. As Michael Field’s name relates to no ‘real’, physical person, the gap between the authors and their textual manifestation of themselves is immediately apparent. The issue of how to address this gap has forever been central to the autobiographical project (Marcus 2002, pp.5-9), and theorists have focused on ‘the author’s “intention” to tell the truth, as far as possible, [as] a sufficient guarantee of autobiographical veracity and sincerity’ (ibid, p.3). This ‘intention’ lends weight to the autobiographical project and is what distinguishes it from fiction; and critics uphold the author’s signature on the autobiography as indicative of this truth-telling

promise. Philip Lejeune famously emphasised this in his 'Autobiographical Pact' (1974) when he claimed,

The entire existence of the person we call the *author* is summed up by this name: the only mark in the text of an unquestionable world-beyond-the-text, referring to a real person....it is linked, by a social convention, to the pledge of responsibility of a *real person*

(Lejeune 1974, p. 11, italics his)

When applied to *Works and Days*, Katharine and Edith's life narrative would fail to be termed an autobiographical text, as 'Michael Field' doesn't uphold any direct connection to a 'real person' in the 'world-beyond the text'. Appropriating a pseudonym to narrate 'real' experiences immediately problematises this link and undermines this 'pledge of responsibility' which, in Lejeune's definition, reduces its ability to claim referential status, and subsequently relegates *Works and Days* to the realm of fiction. Although Lejeune's theory has been heavily criticised following the deconstruction of the 'realist ideology' by postmodern scholarship, (Stanley 1995, p.16; de Man, 1972; Olney, 1972 to name a few), it is worth noting that both *Works and Days* and *Sartor* pose the same questions to this 'realist ideology' as these scholars would almost a century later. By imposing the fictional name of Michael Field upon their life-narrative, Katharine and Edith refract the direct connection between author and subject that Lejeune seeks to affirm. The material of *Works and Days* – the recorded events, memories, travel logs, correspondence and images – are taken from Katharine and Edith's lives, but presented via 'Michael Field', 'allows this text to comment self-consciously on questions about the artificiality, or constructedness, of all life-narratives' (Thain 2007, p.23). Illuminating the ways the journals achieve this, as I hope to do, sheds

light on the problematic readings of those Field scholars I discussed in my introduction who understand the pseudonym as either reflective or purposefully deflective of Katharine and Edith. The very fact that theories about the pseudonym can provide such contradictory readings of the pseudonym confirms in my view that these critics pursue a misguided agenda when they view the pseudonym in terms of its mimetic or anti-mimetic function. Instead of reading it as a reflective identity, as I approach examples from the journals I pay attention to how the pseudonym's signature becomes a creative space where identity can be formed through the interaction of multiple subjects. At the end of this chapter, I offer an alternative way of understanding the pseudonym as a result of exploring the dynamics of the journals.

As I shed light on the nuanced commentary Katharine and Edith produce through their strategies of life-writing, Carlyle's characters provide an explicit commentary which elucidates what the women are doing. The production of multiple characters in *Sartor* articulates the commentary embedded within the structural decisions of *Works and Days*. Carlyle's text charts first the process and then the product of an Editor's attempt to compile a biography of an enigmatic Professor Teufelsdröckh, from whom the Editor had received a manifesto, 'The Philosophy of Clothes', which he wished to publish. Carlyle uses the Editor to explicitly articulate the process behind the autobiographical impulse, explaining that the 'Philosophy' will not be accepted nor understood by its readers 'until the Author's View of the World, and how he actively and passively came by such a view, are clear' (Carlyle 1838, p.176). However, despite this intention to enhance clarity and knowledge, the text actually destabilises any hope of achieving this through the imposition of the Editor's self-conscious commentary upon the futility of his own project. The ways in which *Works and Days*

achieves a similar result will become clear as I compare it to *Sartor*, but I want to make clear for now that both texts perform a similar challenge to Lejeune's belief in referentiality through its blurring of fact and fiction.

Jay includes *Sartor* within his selection of self-reflexive texts because it is 'reflects, or reflects on, the autobiographical act' (1984, p.14). It does not declare itself an autobiographical text, and yet in a letter to a London publisher, Mr. Fraser, Carlyle admits

I used to characterise it briefly as a kind of 'Satirical Extravaganza on Things in General'; it contains more of my opinions on Art, Politics, Religion, Heaven, Earth and Air, than all things I have written yet

(TC to Mr.F. 27th May 1833, cited in Tennyson 1984, p.121)

In the same way as *Works and Days* contains biographical data from Katharine and Edith's lives, so too does *Sartor* derive from Carlyle's own experiences: 'the essential ingredients of Teufelsdröckh's biography are based on Carlyle's life' (Spengemann 1980, p.115). The issue of whether to deem the text as Carlyle's autobiography has divided and frustrated critics in a comparable way to the ambiguity of Katharine and Edith's pseudonym. Whilst Charles Harrold's footnotes in his edition of the text point to the undeniably high number of parallels between Carlyle's life and that of his subject's (Jay 1984, p.93), other critics have cautioned 'we must ... avoid the all-too-widespread error of confusing ... Carlyle's own life' with Teufelsdröckh's biography (Tennyson 1965, p.189). Although Harrold's footnotes indicate the substance is autobiographical – just as the material of *Works and Days* comes from Katharine and Edith's lives – Tennyson emphasises that Carlyle purposefully displaces himself from being the main subject of the book in order to make the autobiographical process the subject (ibid). In the same way as Katharine and Edith create a text *about* the

process of converting life into art by refracting their lives via Michael Field, so too does Carlyle look at the process of constructing an autobiography via the mediation of the Editor and Autobiographer characters. As Linda Peterson concludes, 'if *Sartor Resartus* does not initially fit a conservative definition of autobiography, it is nonetheless a work of and about autobiography ... its self-consciousness entails a critical examination of autobiography' (Peterson 1986, p.34).

The fictional personas the women and Carlyle create simultaneously reveal and conceal their authorial identities within these self-reflexive texts. It is clear that the name of the autobiographical subject is far more 'a site where the dynamic of identification is at play' (Butler 1993, p.143) than a verifiable signifier of the 'world-beyond-the-text' (Lejeune 1974, p.11). Both these texts destabilise the referential connection of their author and subject, and thus draw attention to the very autobiographical impulse itself. By paying attention to how both texts 'disorder our sense of the ordering possibilities of any autobiographical narrative' (Jay 1984, p.97), I elucidate how the fragmentary, disrupted form of the texts constitute a fractured, elusive subject, and in doing so, question the possibilities of their project.

Fragmented Subjects

She is in Oxford. I am here a fragment.

([EC] 9th July 1892, Reel 2)

By constructing a literary persona with no fixed referential identity in the world-outside-the-text, Katharine and Edith are able to compose a life-narrative that isn't solely focused on one life, but rather displays snippets of the perspectives of multiple subjects who were influential in their life. What emerges, as editors Marion Thain and Ana Vadillo note, is

‘a riveting dialogue between “Michael” and “Field”’, ‘a captivating palimpsest of letters’, ‘a montage of descriptions of their journeys’, providing ‘first-hand accounts of the art world at the turn of the century’ (2009, p.231). The choice of adjectives here, ‘dialogue’, ‘palimpsest’ and ‘montage’, point to how crucial the journal’s texture is in what it creates: it is a space of conversation, of re-writing, of collating. It is these questions posed by the interplay between the signature and the text’s composition that produce an important and playful intersection into discussions of autobiography.

Unlike conventional autobiographical writing, which places the title individual in the spotlight, Katharine and Edith act not as the protagonists in their own play, but as the directors who move themselves and their extras in and out of the spotlight at different moments in the production. This multiplication of subjects calls into question the conventional ‘auto’ of autobiographical writing, in which we usually see ‘a cast of one under the limelight supported by a few bit-part players who come and then typically go in the relative darkness around the *star*’, which is, as Stanley comments, ‘unlike life and yet absolutely central to the auto/biographical project’ (Stanley 1995, p.131, italics hers). By unpacking some examples from the diary, I will show how the dexterity of *Works and Days*’ narrative, and its ability to appropriate a variety of subjectivities with seeming ease, undermines the conventional practice of privileging the autobiographer’s view as authoritative.

Edith’s entry dated 2nd December 1895 ([EC], Reel 3), demonstrates the text’s ability to convey multiple subjects at any one moment. The earlier part of the entry details a visit Katharine and Edith made to George Meredith, and includes a contemplation of the

differences between the women's aesthetic project and Meredith's: 'the difference between us & Meredith in aim is essentially this – that his art is defensive & ours aggressive. He fears conventionalism – and we defy it & attack it' (ibid). With no further explanation of this provocative assessment, the narrative shifts to transcribe a letter Edith transcribes from Katharine's original. In the below extract, we have Edith's hand, writing Katharine's voice in the letter, which is directed towards Amy (Edith's sister), but the topic of the letter, in part, is Edith, and in part, Meredith as looking at Katharine. She writes –

Dear Amy,

Edith is writing of wild creatures and craves the actual. My heart, Amy! – it is no fault of mine, it feels like a square, void chamber when I Wake. I am accustomed to a live thing inside and the hollow sickens me. But Meredith says I remind him of a [?]seek quivering after the breeze... ([EC] 2nd December 1895, Reel 5)

This entry creates layers of identity within Michael Field's life. Visually, we have Edith's hand transcribing a letter. The narrative voice – that which composes the letter – is, however, Katharine's – and the recipient, or inadvertent subject, is Amy. Then within the letter we have Edith, Katharine and Meredith as subjects, with a re-staged conversation between Meredith and Katharine. Not only does it seem strange to find Edith transcribing a letter that begins by talking about herself in the third person; but the description of Katharine's innermost experiences ('my heart...feels like a square, void chamber'), relayed via Edith's hand, seems to appropriate the re-telling, and hence re-living, of Katherine's feelings as a shared experience. The visual indication of the handwriting only serves to complicate further the understanding of who is the subject of this entry, and we can see how the narrative allows for subjects to eclipse each other as the differing voices move between the

foreground and the background. Our understanding of Edith's writing is influenced by its juxtaposition with how Katharine feels, with this contiguity causing us to wonder whether they are connected. Katharine's feelings are then reflected upon through the addition of Meredith's perspective, whilst all the while Amy, as recipient, acts as an eye looking over the entire letter, which provokes considerations of how this narration looks to her. What emerges from reading this entry is not one subject but many: the focus is not wholly Edith, Meredith, Katharine or Amy – but the product of their interaction.

The plurality of subjects and perspectives afforded by *Works and Days* collagic structure is evidenced more explicitly within Carlyle's text through the fictional strategy of characterisation. Lejeune maintains that consistency of character is what distinguishes autobiography from fiction, arguing that 'in fiction, one risks nothing; one can dissolve and recompose identity, allow oneself all points of view... but the autobiographer is faced with the constraints of a real situation and can neither renounce the unity of his "I" nor escape its limitations' (1977, p.33). *Works and Days* and *Sartor* together challenge this distinction and blur this apparent line between them; Field's journal expresses multiple perspectives whilst Carlyle infuses his fictional characters with material from his own life. The effect of both is to both destabilise the conventions of genre whilst looking at the possibilities of self-representation via both fictional and conventionally 'factual' literary strategies.

In *Sartor*, the distinction of the Editor from the Autobiographer becomes increasingly blurred as the narrative switches between the Editor's autobiographical research and Autobiographer's presentation of it, which results in multiple perspectives on the biographical material. As much as the Editor asks the reader to be ignored – 'Who or what

such Editor may be, must remain conjectural, and even insignificant' (Carlyle 1838, p.131); he frequently interrupts the text with his own thoughts ('Consider, thou foolish Teufelsdröckh..' [ibid, p.138], 'Or, cries the courteous reader ...' [ibid, p.165], "'thus nevertheless", writes our Autobiographer' [ibid, p.206]), and subsequently remains very much a presence throughout the text. As Spengemann notes, the portrayal of distinct characters

represent[s] the division between the knower and the object of his knowledge, they converge in the final pages...there is even a suggestion that the Editor and Teufelsdröckh are one person from the beginning

(Spengemann 1980, p.114)

As discussed earlier in this chapter, Carlyle's text both suggests and denies the connection between his textual subjects and himself. It explicitly 'represents both subject *and* autobiographer as "a botched mass of tailors' and cobblers' shreds" to undermine the notion that the self is a "homogenous little figure" that can be "tightly articulated"' (Carlyle cited in Jay 1984, p.104). The explicit sense of the autobiographer as a weaver of fragments draws out the implication of *Works and Days* collagic structure: that autobiographer is an artist, creating and fashioning their identity through the text.

The Spaces Inbetween

Certainly the gaps and silences speak volumes

(Morley 2007, p.18)

Edith's transcribed letter and Carlyle's embedded characters show how the texts can layer multiple subjects within one moment in the narrative; but another strategy employed is a layering of subjects through the juxtaposition of different textures or perspectives. This

can take place through a manipulation of space – by placing fragments next to each other – or a manipulation of time – by using the episodic nature of the text to allow a return to an event to re-view it. I turn first to examples of the importance of placement, before later considering how the episodic structure constitutes multiple perspectives.

After the River Thames flooded severely in February 1899 (Reel 4), Katharine pastes in images of Chertsey weir, Walton and a flooded towing path at Penton Hook, and introduces the pictures with the following heading:

Daily graphic for Works and Days. Henry has not pasted them in. Reading this, he will repent.

[[KB] c. February 1899, Reel 4)

This additional comment explicitly names the images as the ‘daily graphic’ for the text and openly chides Henry (Edith) for her failure to include them in the journals. These remarks draw attention to the self-consciousness of the text’s construction. They emphasise that Katharine selects and places these particular images as representative of the day; but in this very act, this commentary also points outwards towards a hypothetical collection of invisible images that were *not* selected for the privilege of being the ‘daily graphic’. By hinting at a criteria of selection taking place prior to the writing, Katharine’s comment points to the subjectivity of *Works and Days*’ ‘representativeness’: the women carefully select what they wish to reveal to the reader.

When examples like this are coupled with the many deletions that obliterate parts of the narrative, it becomes evident that this conscious selectivity doesn’t just take place prior to writing the text, but is a constant process of returning and revising to doctor what is

visible to the reader. Below is an image of one such entry, which abruptly obscures the rest of the discussion of Edith's sister's wedding. The entry, dated 17th September 1899, opens with a hint at the delicacy of the topic of Amy's marriage:

A fortnight of confusion + triviality. Amy may be married tomorrow week or she may not be married. ([EC] 17th September 1899, Reel 4)

The following six and a half lines are crossed through more than once, to ensure no reader can discern the original text. It picks up again saying,

So dresses are made, cake seems in the mind's eye + the bridegroom lets "I dare not wait upon I would like the poor Cat in the adage (?)". Michael, born of a decisive race, [overleaf – fig. 1.2] frets and grows thin.

([EC] 17th September 1899, Reel 4)

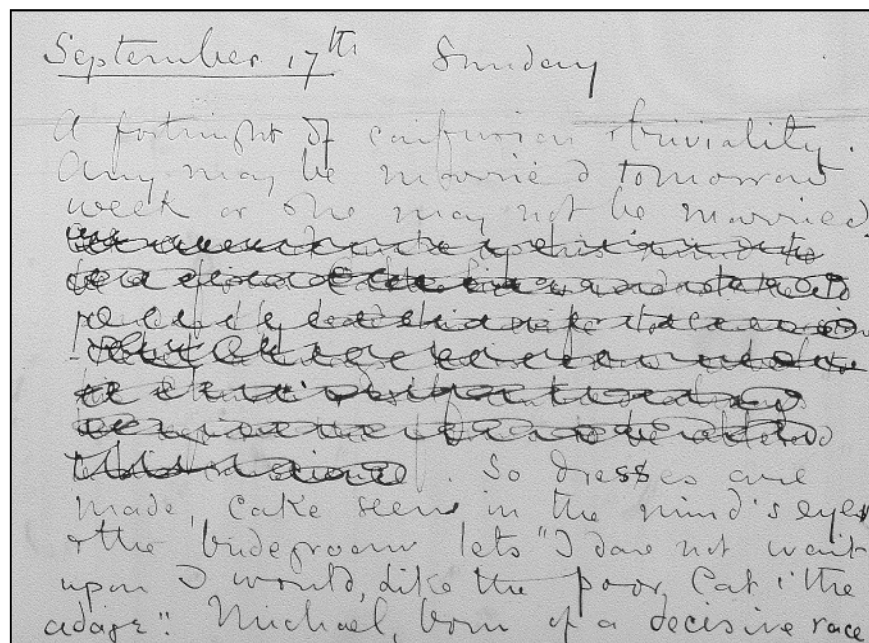


Figure 1.1. ([EC] 17th September 1899, Reel 4) (c) The British Library Board, Add Ms 46788

This omission invites the reader to speculate and to search through the scribbling in a vain attempt to uncover the original. Ultimately, however, the text withholds any explanation and evidence that could communicate its editorial decisions to the reader. What is evidenced by foregrounding these editorial effects is how the life-narrative is constructed with the reader in mind.

The importance of the reader has become the focus of much autobiographical criticism in the past three or four decades, and I will return to how *Works and Days* contributes to this trend in detail during my third chapter; but for now I emphasise how the visual effect of these edits implicitly acknowledge the selectivity of what the diaries display. Liz Stanley explains that these discourses have influenced our understanding of what autobiography can claim to represent:

Auto/biography is not, and cannot, be referential of a life....constructing a life – piecing together various kinds and forms of remembrances of a self’s past – is itself highly selective: selecting in what fits a framework, selecting out what appears not centrally relevant

(Stanley 1995 , p.128)

The ‘spatial’ decisions – by which I mean the choices over what to foreground and what to omit – have vital implications upon the construction of the autobiographical subject’s life. Katharine’s awareness of how she and Edith are ‘piecing together’ fragments to create their desired life narrative is further manifest in her rather disjointed naming of the text in which she is writing. Referring to the journal as *Works and Days*, the name they envisaged for its publication, emphasises its distance from her as a public narrative,

envisaged for consumption by a reader who hovers at the edge of its pages. Her use of the text's official title refers to these invisible readers; whilst her direct address to Henry (Edith) in the following sentence also points to each-other as the private audience, with the text offering a communication between the two of them. The presence of the public audience seems to impact in an undisclosed way her communication with Edith. Katharine's decision to transcribe this reprimand rather than vocalise it to Edith raises interesting questions about what role the text plays for the women. These first two sentences of the entry indicate that the text has its own structures and formula, and the commentary on the women's project points to the craftsmanship and planning involved in the text's production.

This craftsmanship, and the questions arising over the text's role for the women, is particularly evident in the way that public events are frequently narrated through a collection of textures and perspectives, rather than through the sole eyes of the narrator – which produces a visual map of the narratives that inform Katharine and Edith's view. The narration of Oscar Wilde's death on 30th November 1900 (Reel 4) provides a particularly representative example of how the narrative can situate multiple perspectives alongside one-another by manipulating the placement of different fragments.

The narration is framed by a newspaper cutting entitled 'The Late Oscar Wilde', which informs the reader through the official voice of the newspaper, that Oscar Wilde is dead. However, the actual article is so descriptive in its anecdote that it is not until the ninth line that we even hear Wilde's name; a delay replicated in Edith's subsequent narration of the women's discovery of the news. She writes,

Friday Evening – Nov. 30th

Effie is with us. By the late post I receive letters – one from Amy. She writes “I forgot to mention Oscar Wilde, yet he is continually in my thoughts, ~~and~~ ^the^ comfort to be able to pray for the dead when one thinks of him.” I read without understanding. Effie [faded] saw he was dead in the Monday paper - + the artists were here on Monday! We were all ignorant! I open my second letter from Miss Grenfell + find the paragraph I have pasted above.

([EC] ‘30th November’ / 5th December 1899, Reel 4)

Edith’s narration of their discovery disrupts the chronology of the text by attributing a false date to the entry. Wilde died on the Sunday, November 30th, and yet Edith writes on the following Friday evening, which would surely have been 5th December. She seems to date the entry to indicate its subject matter, rather than its actual connection to the ‘real’ time outside of the text, and subsequently makes it more important to situate her entry at the same time as the newspaper article than to remain strictly true to life. Perhaps this decision, though unexplained, is a way to close the gap between the event and her discovery of it – which clearly dismayed her (‘we were all ignorant!’). She not only narrates the moment she finds out, but points to when Effie, Amy, the artists, and overleaf – Katharine, discover the news, as if to contextualise her experience against those around her. She continues to change the focus of the entry as she describes Katharine’s reaction (‘withered ... as with the wind of ages’) before turning the event into a chance to comment on the public perception of Wilde.

What tragedy! The foolish punishment for an odious offense that sh’d never have been made public or lighted up by law, has killed Oscar’s mother, his wife, indirectly his Brother, + now himself; while leaving his children orphans branded outrageously.

([EC] ‘30th November’ / 5th December 1899, Reel 4)

Edith juxtaposes this condemnation with her personal perception of Wilde, the effect being an entirely different characterisation of Wilde than those who committed the 'odious offense' would have seen.

Now I can think of nothing but the quality that was in him – the pleasurable-ness. This is so rare a gift of personality in these days, + is almost the only one that matters in the social life of man as the art of living. In ~~his~~ work + in ~~his~~ life there was ... a breeziness of high places – yes, even a breath of thyme. I have met most of the 'moderns' – none of them blew a breeze, or had airy fragrance like Oscar at his best

([EC] '30th November' / 5th December 1899, Reel 4)

Producing this personal obituary of Wilde within their journals allows Katharine and Edith to project an alternative view of Wilde's life to that implied from the fame of his imprisonment. Edith's narration of Wilde's death is the perfect example of the tendency throughout the journals to consider the effect of an event on multiple people by juxtaposing different perspectives. Here, Wilde's death is viewed through both a personal reaction and a public significance as Edith appropriates Wilde's death as further evidence for her condemnation of society – producing a re-writing of an event through the lens of her own perceptions. Writing this account through Michael Field enables Edith to trace how we, as individuals, move through the process of creating a judgement: first, we are informed of an event via the authorised, public discourse; then we have our own, personal response to this information; and finally, we contextualise our reaction against those around us to inform and substantiate our judgement. Appropriating Michael Field's acentered gaze enables Edith to view Wilde's death from the position of his family, from Katharine's viewpoint, and through the lens of the public discourses surrounding him, before finally furnishing her own.

Equally as characteristic of this narrative is the use of its episodic structure to return back through time to re-view and re-write their representations; the effect of which is to destabilise any notion of the subject possessing fixed and enduring views. One example of how this is performed to great effect is seen when the women narrate the same event on Christmas Day, 1898. Separated by several pages, the women both recount the delivery of Charles Ricketts' engagement ring, made for Edith's sister Amy. Although describing the same object, the language appropriated by the women evidences entirely different experiences of this moment. Katharine's description, which is first in the chronology of the text, is infused with the sombre tone that characterises much of her writing during this time, as she is still heavily mourning the death of Edith's father, James Cooper, after missing in the mountains of Zermatt for much of 1897. She writes,

At breakfast-time there is a registered parcel, a choice of engagedship. Strangely does this little bond on the future drop down on us; it seems to us like a chain on the void; + Henry + I are fast hammered on the rock of our past. Life repeats itself.

([KB] 25th December 1898, Reel 4)

Rather than seeing the ring as an object of joy and love, Katherine invests it with her own emotions and converts it into a symbol – a 'little bond on the future'. Edith's entry, meanwhile, begins with the title 'Christmas Eve' but actually narrates the events of Christmas Day as well. Edith re-describes the event with more of the celebratory language suitable for what the ring represents to her sister:

Michael has said what Christmas is + always has been – a passing of phantoms.

But at breakfast came Dr. R's merry engagement ring – the merriest looking thing I have ever seen; + Amy no longer belongs to herself or us. This event in the midst of a mirage of memories makes the day still more curious + curdling underneath our affected blitheness – for we do try to flash back the glee of the sapphire, rubies and diamonds in spite of our deep private sorrow.

([EC] 'Christmas Eve' / c.26th December 1898, Reel 4)

It is interesting that Edith sees the arrival of the ring as worthy of a second description, and more importantly, as a brief sojourn amidst thoughts on the 'passing of phantoms' and the 'mirage of memories'. Edith is able to separate herself from these ghosts to see the ring's beauty and reflect on its significance for Amy before relating it back to her. Even when she does, she describes it as 'curious' against the context of the day – not negating it has an impact but equally not investing her context into the object. Michael Field, as an identity where contradictions can exist alongside each-other, enables these two different ways of viewing an object to be presented alongside each other. By allowing both of these perceptions to be included in the journal, the collagic narrative represents how there is no single way of looking at an object or experiencing a moment, but that experience is highly subjective. Just as Oscar Wilde's death was viewed from multiple angles, so too does this repeated description demonstrate an awareness that 'the past, like the present, is the result of competing, negotiated *versions* of what happened, why it happened, with what consequence' (Stanley 1995, p.7). This consciously subjective production of history will be the subject of my second chapter, but it is worth noting how the unfixed identity of Michael Field is what enables the women to constantly situate their individual perspectives not only against one-another's, but against their contemporaries as well.

The literary strategies I have explored produce a nuanced commentary upon the nature of their project in the same way that Carlyle's Editor provides an explicit questioning of what we can 'know' from autobiography. Whereas the placement of Katharine and Edith's fragments evidences their self-consciousness over how to compile a life-narrative, Carlyle's Editor becomes increasingly vocal about his views on Teufelsdröckh's life-narrative, inserting statements such as 'we reckon it more important to remark', and 'we see here significantly foreshadowed the spirit of much that was to befall our Autobiographer' (Carlyle 1838, pp.231 and 209). In the same way as the women's omissions control what the reader sees, so too does the Editor in his unequivocal assertion that 'Additional particulars: of his age, which was of that standing middle sort you could only guess at; of his wide surtout; the colour of his trousers, fashion of his broad-brimmed steeple hat, and so forth, we might report, but do not' (Carlyle 1838, 142). As *Sartor* progresses, instead of substantiating the reader's understanding of Professor Teufelsdröckh, the Editor's commentary upon his project calls attention to its fictional nature. It confirms the Editor's integral role in producing the textual subject, and highlights the subsequent impossibility of the reader actually 'knowing' anything verifiable about the Professor: 'wilt thou know a Man, above all a Mankind, by stringing-together bead-rolls of what thou namest Facts?' (Carlyle 1838, p.261).

The choppy, episodic nature of *Works and Days* provokes similar questions: is what we see the 'facts' of the event, or are they hidden behind the women's projection of these 'facts'? As Carlyle's editor asks, exasperated, 'WHAT IF MANY A SO-CALLED FACT WERE LITTLE BETTER THAN A FICTION?' (Carlyle 1838, p.264, capitals his). How do we piece them together to understand the autobiographical subject? The narrative's architecture all the

while points to the gaps *between* the visible fragments – begging the question of why this entry has been placed next to that newspaper cutting, why that image is the ‘graphic of the day’ and so on. It is the interaction between these fragments that speak most directly to the reader, beguiling and frustrating in their silence. What is produced is a narrative quest; ‘with the protagonist in full possession of what the narrator seeks to know, and the narrator in hot pursuit of this elusive quarry, the narrative becomes an action, rather than the report of an action’ (Spengemann (on Carlyle) 1980, p.115). Replace the word ‘protagonist’ with ‘author’, and ‘narrator’ with ‘reader’, and we have a summary of the dynamics at play in *Works and Days*. The effect of how both Carlyle and the women foreground the constructed nature of their narrative reminds us of Nietzsche’s assertion that the subject is an ‘aesthetic, imaginative creation’ (Jay 1984, p.113), and the factual basis of the subject is the individual’s self-fashioning.

Conclusion: Towards a Theory of Being in the Text

So what can we say about self-reflexive texts that make visible the autobiographical process and make invisible the autobiographical subject? How do we, as readers, understand a subject who emerges from the multiple, contradictory narratives running within the text? Paul Jay comments that the distinguishing feature of *Sartor* that connects it to the fully ‘shattered, decentered’ (1984, p.176) and fictional self in *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* (1997a) ‘is the wilfulness of [both author’s] efforts to create a discursive form that itself clearly registers, indeed, embodies, a “new knowledge” of the subject’ (ibid, p.180). Exploring Katharine and Edith’s text against this trajectory helps us to uncover how Michael Field’s life-narrative both embodies and enacts this ‘new knowledge’ of the subject.

As I return to questions of the pseudonym's role, I hope this reading of the journals has evidenced the need for a change in how we think about its relationship to Katharine and Edith. Rather than enacting either a mimetic or anti-mimetic function, I hope I have demonstrated how it exists as a site of interaction, where the dynamics of how identity is produced are enacted. To close, I would like to suggest an alternative way of reading the pseudonym that adopts a symbol Robert Browning used to refer to the women.

On 13th May, 1896, Browning wrote to Edith with the following invitation:

...I make haste to beg that you will mention any day next week when you can ... ("you being the 'binary star') come and take luncheon here at 1 o'clock

([RB] to EC, 13th May 1896, Reel 13)

When Browning referred to the women as a 'binary star', he evoked an astronomical concept whose character provides a useful visual depiction of the textual dynamics at play at the site of the pseudonym. Ivor Treby's entitles his selection from Field's journals as 'Binary Star', and in her review of the collection Rachel Morley notes that the term was first coined by the English astronomer Sir William Herschel to describe a single star system composed of two stars orbiting around a common central mass (Morley 2004, p.1). Often, the strength of one-another's gravitational pull causes the stars to exchange mass, resulting in each star changing shape and reforming into something new, something different: something neither could be on their own. Once this process has begun, it is impossible to distinguish one star from another, and the individual stars can only be referred to as the composite whole. If a binary star becomes visible to human eyes, we would be unable to distinguish one star from another, as they shift to eclipse and transit each-other, causing first one to shine brighter, then the other. When Browning used the concept to refer to both Edith and Katharine, he

recognises that his singular address to Edith naturally incorporates her companion, as they are as inextricable as a binary star. This is perhaps in response to a letter Katharine penned to him two years prior to this, in which she wrote

Spinoza, with his fine grasp of unity, says: “If two individuals of exactly the same nature are joined together, they make up a single individual, doubly stronger than each alone”, i.e. Edith and I make a veritable Michael.

([KB] to RB, 23 November 1884, Reel 13)

The crucial point that the binary star and Michael Field have in common is that to talk of either of them is to acknowledge they are the product a constant process of interaction and exchange. If we re-read Katharine’s letter which Edith transcribed with this in mind (on page 25), this acknowledgement would enable us to see Michael Field as an identity that absorbs and replicates the relations between subjects, with Field’s character emerging as a composite form that radiates the shared mass of its parts. The individual stars that constitute the binary, like Katharine and Edith who make Michael Field, may move in and out of focus, but what is always evident is the inextricability between the two.

CHAPTER TWO

Introduction

*O Century, with the end we may never reach – we shall be strange to her 100 years
off as the heroes of the French wars to us of the cycles + nerves!*

([EC] 31st December 1899, Reel 4)

Katharine and Edith's fear in the final moments of the nineteenth century express an awareness of the transience of their lives in the face of the unrelenting march of time. They acknowledge that, like the French heroes of the former century, they too will fade into the anonymity and unfamiliarity in another century's time. However, there is a paradox underlying the fact that this anxiety is being expressed via an autobiographical text; for the very function of *Works and Days* as a co-authored journal is to provide a written record of precisely that: their 'Works' and their 'Days' – to inscribe for all eternity the processes behind their aesthetic productions and life together. Thus, this comment expresses a self-consciousness about the insignificance of their life within the overarching development of time, whilst simultaneously engaging in a written practice that seeks to create an enduring record of that life that will outlive them. This self-consciousness about the relationship between their personal narrative and the public, historical context within which they write emerges again and again as we read the journals. They frequently shift the focus of their writing between their own, personal views and the wider perspective of the public, mediating between the two as they seek to chart their own personal history.

In this chapter I want to look at how Katharine and Edith use their autobiographical writing to explore and engage with their relationship to their historical moment. I continue to follow Paul Jay's method of reading a self-reflexive text as a site where changing concepts of the subject and of history can be put into practice. He asserts,

since an autobiographical narrative practice seeks to order, and reveal truth about, 'real' past events, it is of a kind with historical narrative per se, for the methodological decisions that an autobiographer makes are historiographic as well as literary, novelist and poetic ones

(Jay 1984, p.109)

He goes on to explain that these historiographic decisions are shaped in the nineteenth century by 'historiography's growing awareness of the literary and subjective nature of its enterprise [which] led to a kind of epistemological and methodological crisis similar to the one we have been charting in the field of autobiography' (ibid, p.109). Jay continues to use Nietzsche's theories as representative of these ideas of the 'literary and subjective nature' of history (Jay 1984, p.109), and I too find it useful to situate the ideas of history expressed by *Works and Days* against this trend. By way of clarity, I will use the term 'public narrative' to distinguish the social, cultural, historical and political concerns of the period from the two private lives of Katharine and Edith, which are projected through the persona of Michael Field – and thus called 'personal narrative' within this discussion. It is important to emphasise that the autobiography – the 'personal narrative' of the women's life together, appropriates these public narratives throughout, and by using distinct terms I can clearly indicate the relationship constructed between them.

Continuing from my argument in Chapter One, then, I divide my analysis into two parts. Firstly, I want to look at how the women's strategies of self-representation are structured by the acute self-awareness of the fin de siècle period as a poignant moment in England's history. I look at specific examples from around the turn of the century to consider how the diaries narrate the experience of this historical moment, and ask what these strategies of representation say about the relationship between the subject's experience and their representation of time. In the second half of this chapter I contextualise these strategies against wider aesthetic debates that Edith recreates within the journals. By exploring how the life-narrative houses a debate over the relationship between art and life, I consider how the ideas Edith expresses reflects back upon the autobiographical project. I hope to reveal how the text uses the autobiographic project as a site where issues of identity, art and history are compounded to reflect and reify the women's own contribution to historical and cultural concerns of the period.

The End is in Sight: Different Ways of Viewing History

As we saw in Chapter One, the pseudonym and episodic narrative structure enabled the focus to swop between different viewpoints. By remaining unfixed to any single subject outside of the text, the focus can slip smoothly between individual anecdotes or memories of the women (even if they contradict each other), conversations with contemporaries, transcriptions of other texts or commentaries on major historical or political events. This oscillating perspective enables the women to consider the effect of perspectives outside of their own upon the development of their own personal opinions. The pseudonym provides the space where these interactions can take place and reform into something new.

To illustrate how the narrative performs this oscillation, I turn to a pair of entries that articulate an acute self-consciousness from both women about the impending major epochal shift as the nineteenth century draws to a close. Katharine's assessment of this historical moment is prompted by an individual event – Tennyson's funeral on 12th October 1892 – whose significance she views through both a public and personal lens. She writes,

It is lovely autumn, when we come out [of Tennyson's funeral]. And so closes the Victorian epoch. ~~It is~~ an epoch already yesterday: it is for us, England's living, & yet unspent poets to make all things new. We are for the morning - the nineteenth century thinks it has no poets - nothing to lose - verily it has nothing: for we are not of it - we shake the dust of our feet from it, & pass on into the 20th Century.

([KB] 12th October 1892, Reel 2)

Katharine's description of the event turns imbues it with symbolic meaning as she appropriates it to signify the end of the era – 'and so closes the Victorian epoch'. Within this entry, Katharine articulates both her perception of the historical situation and her definition of the women's poetic identity against this context. She controls the narrative perspective to first construct the symbolism of the event within the wider historical narrative, and then turns the gaze of the entry upon how this affects the women's personal experience of this moment. Her description of the Victorian epoch as 'yesterday' is demarcated from her and Edith by the imposition of the colon on two occasions to assert their position: 'it is for us' and 'for we are not of it'. The entry seems to act as the transition from the epoch of 'yesterday' to 'the morning', to which Katharine and Edith apparently belong. The narrative charts the progression from 'when we come out' of the funeral to when the women 'pass on into the 20th century'. By removing 'it is' from the assertion that 'it is an epoch already yesterday', the statement is delivered with more of assertiveness, whilst the closing

description of shaking 'the dust from our feet' provides a visual image of the women leaving behind the former century. This single event becomes a structuring device for the narrative, against which she constructs the subject she wishes them to be perceived as: poets of the 20th Century.

Two months later, Edith records a very different perception of this period in history. Whereas Katharine comments on the grand, epochal narrative shift in order to demarcate and identify Michael Field's position against it; Edith's entry conveys none of Katharine's agency and autonomy in its description. Edith's entry contains none of the authoritative tone that Katharine adopts as she distinguishes them from the dusty nineteenth century. Instead of announcing their autonomy, she laments,

'the modern' claims me-I am bound to live among old-fashioned conditions; I long for all things to be made new, & have to ~~remain~~ keep old myself. I long for freedom. England's a prison! ... I do not care for my work as I used to do - It does not grow up in me like a quickened seed - it grows from node to node like a yew.

([EC] 31st December 1892, Reel 2)

In the same way that Katharine previously connects them to 'the morning', Edith articulates her affiliation with 'the modern'. However, unlike Katharine, there is no colon to demarcate Edith from the 'old-fashioned conditions' that still permeate England. Instead the dash indicates the desired connection between Edith and 'the modern', but the pronoun is contained within the same clause as the 'old-fashioned conditions', locating her firmly on the undesirable side of the sentence.

Characterising England as a prison provides a strong metaphor for Edith's sense of entrapment. She demarcates herself from the nature of the prison image by affiliating herself with the organic, natural metaphors of the 'quickened seed' and yew tree. Whether intentional or not, an added layer of intertextual reference is evoked by the image of the yew tree, which is famously repeated in the graveyards of Tennyson's *In Memoriam*. In Section 39, the narrator refers to the yew as the 'old warder of these buried bones' in reference to its common location within graveyards. The yew tree's symbolism is inherently paradoxical for both Tennyson and Edith; it is living and growing in a place of death, thus demonstrating the tension between renewed life and the closure of death. This language Edith uses to describe the painstakingly slow growth of the yew heavily suggests the influence of Tennyson's poem: the yew grows slowly 'from node to node' in Edith's entry, and the 'flower is feeding after flower; / But Sorrow-fixt upon the dead' in *In Memoriam* (Tennyson, A. 1850, p.162 l.1 and ll.7-8). England's prison-like nature could equally well be seen as the graveyard of the dead; cluttered with remnants of the past which hinder and stifle Edith's creativity. This directly contrasts Katharine's celebration that 'England's living' and it is a time for 'yet unspent poets to make new things' ([KB] 12th October 1892, Reel 2). Edith's entry is filled with a sense of oppression and stagnation, whilst Katharine uses the text to free herself from the old-fashioned restrictions.

These entries demonstrate the different experience Edith and Katherine have of the impending turn of the century. By allowing these contradictory historical accounts to exist without attempting to efface their differences by providing an 'authoritative' view, the journals showcase the subjectivity of experience, and demonstrate how different accounts of the same period can exist simultaneously. Housing this juxtaposition within an

autobiographical text continues to evidence how Katharine and Edith's strategies of self-representation contribute to emerging nineteenth century theories of the self and historiography. This effectually destabilises the assumption that an autobiographical text will be able to produce a unified perspective on the past, and reveals identity instead to be created out of conflicting views.

Paul Jay and Hayden White's exploration of these views within Nietzsche's writing further elucidates how *Works and Days* was engaging with contemporary paradigms of self and writing. White argues that Nietzsche's work initiated an important challenge to the belief 'in a historical past from which men might learn any one, single, substantial truth', and instead posits 'his own conception of the *relativity* of every vision of the real' (White 1973, p.332). Katharine and Edith's decisions to co-author their life narrative and appropriate a choppy, episodic texture to narrate their different experiences produce a literary example of the 'relativity' of these historical narratives. Placing different perceptions and experiences within an autobiographical text has fundamental implications for the project of autobiography, as explored in Chapter One. Instead of projecting a unified and consistent representation of a life history – which, in Nietzsche's terms, would be 'fictional', as we constantly refashion ourselves; *Works and Days* produces multiple perspectives on the events that constitute a life, and, like Nietzsche's argument in *The Will to Power*, the 'fictional' component of the autobiography is revealed to be the subject that emerges (1901). Expressing the relativity of Katharine and Edith's experiences, instead of privileging one perspective as authoritative, this self-reflexive text emphasises that both experience and the re-telling of experience is subjective, as well as constitutive. These ideas that

subjects are influenced and formed by their environment has become prominent, brought about in recent scholarship through the work of cultural theorists, who argue that

Ideas are not unique but socially produced even if individually expressed by members of particular historical, social, cultural and political milieu.

(Stanley 1995, p.7)

We can see how it is not only Nietzsche's ideas, but Katharine and Edith's textual practices that also consolidate the link between 'European fin de siècle [and] the global postmodernity of the 1970s and 1980s' (Marcus 2002, p.200).

'We're all in this together': Reading the Personal through the Public

Whilst the above examples evidenced the women's awareness of their 'historical' milieu, I will explore other instances in the text where the social, cultural and political context are brought to the fore to provide a variety of 'public' narratives against which, or through which, Katharine and Edith can define themselves. A particularly illuminating comparison is made during the closing moments of 1899, in which Edith parallels the struggles Michael Field will face in the coming year with those obstacles that England will face. She writes,

Like our Country we shall face the difficulties of Empire building; when circumstances are stubborn I believe both England and Michael Field will win. We have to conquer the pressure of detail on our lives, of constriction on our power of travelling – we have to be plastic as we have never been. (...) I do not feel 1900 will be a peaceful year – but the strain to us + England will be athletic not weakening.

([EC] 31st December 1899, Reel 4)

This juxtaposition of Katharine and Edith's poetic aspirations and the slightly larger-scale, Empire-building ambitions of England creates a somewhat grandiose and ostentatious connection. Edith compares the qualities they will need to overcome to accumulate literary territory – determination, a larger perspective and a physical toughness – to England's geographical expansion. Although this comparison may seem almost bathetic in effect by transitioning between these grossly different scaled examples, the transition illustrates how we, as human beings, look for shared narratives that relate to what we feel, and thus validate our personal lives. Thus, the entry evidences how the women moved the narrative between their personal lives and wider, historical narratives to provide frames of reference and transfer meaning across from one narrative to another in order to communicate the experience of their personal journey.

This attempt to justify their life via publically recognised examples is reminiscent of Nietzsche's argument in *The Birth of Tragedy*. He argues that life does not and cannot validate itself, for it has no need to; but it is man who feels he needs to provide this justification: 'art is not an imitation of nature, but its metaphysical supplement, raised up beside it to overcome it' (Nietzsche 1872, p.142). The way that Katharine and Edith simultaneously re-view their own lives through the lens of England's Imperialism, whilst also writing their own version of the problems England faces, displays the creative 'use' and 'abuse' of history for their own purposes (Nietzsche 1874, p.37). They have become 'like Carlyle's vision of the artist-as-tailor' and 'Nietzsche's metaphor of the historian as a kind of artist-weaver' that Jay compares in his analysis (Jay 1984, p.110).

The relationship between Katharine and Edith's private feelings and the public discourses works both ways: it provides a way of communicating publically what they feel personally to their readers; but also informs and shapes the development of Katharine and Edith's own, personal ideas. Throughout the journals, Edith in particular explores her ideas about art in relation to their contemporaries. By unpacking some of Edith's descriptions of how art can immortalise the transient, I hope to shed light on how journal could be interpreted within the women's concern over their own mortality – with which I began this chapter.

Edith frequently brings in other figures to help her articulate her own thoughts on a cultural debate. Both women transcribe conversations or texts in the other person's voice ([KB] on Canon Bell on 16th April 1888, Reel 1; [KB] on Wilde on 23rd July 1890, Reel 1; [EC] on Nietzsche in c.November 1895, Reel 3 to name a few). These recreations of their voices does more than just provide a faithful record; it allows the women to contextualise their ideas against those of their peers. Edith, for example, spent two days in bed during the summer of 1894, and when she remembers the time in 1895, she describes how she asked herself

as an ultimatum - what is beauty? And the answer was Nietzsche's ----+ my own, in my own words 'Those qualities in the world that attract emotion' & from this beginning I worked out a few of the problems of aesthetics by means of definitions and some positions ... Now having read N, I shall criticise him, as it were from his own standpoint

([EC], c.October 1895, Reel 4, underlining hers)

It is almost amusing to see Edith's hasty '---+my own' added as an afterthought to her initial answer, as if to validate that her own thoughts and voice are present as well. By stating Nietzsche's ideas 'in my own words', Edith overwrites her own voice onto his ideas, putting forth her own view that beauty is 'those qualities in the world that attract emotion'. She writes him and she *over*-writes him. She uses the journal to describe how Nietzsche may have been her starting point – but her ideas extended and contested some of his arguments. The text becomes a site of interaction between her ideas and Nietzsche, appropriating his arguments, via her re-telling, to stage a conversation and develop her own ideas out of their interaction: inserting her own voice into a historical debate.

At other points, Edith produces reviews of contemporary works of art, which provide the opportunity for her to offer her own contribution to debates the relationship of art to life. In a particularly damning review of Oscar Wilde's *Ballad of Reading Gaol*, Edith points out its failures in order to emphasise what it should have done. Again, it is through the imaginative interaction with another cultural figure that Edith is able to offer her own opinion. She writes,

Oscar's Ballad of Reading Gaol is not literature. To Experience Experience won't make art - it must be imagined. ^^as well as suffered.' 'but the subject of a work of art must be transmuted from the centre' ... 'So with Oscar; the real part of his work is ^mostly ^rearranged Experienced, not imaginatively translated Experience

([EC] 3rd April 1898, Reel 4)

This commentary is illuminating because it addresses the relationship between art and life, which is of course central to the autobiographical project. The criticism levelled at Wilde attacks his unimaginative replication of his experience in *Reading Gaol*, which doesn't make

use of artistic license to ‘imaginatively translate’ it into art. This posits an important distinction between the experience-as-lived and the experience-as-recorded, and emphasises the importance of *how* experience is communicated. Although this entry is rather elusive in its assertion that ‘the subject of a work of art must be transmuted from the centre’, with a few more examples we can begin to unravel how the journals express the role of art, and how it can help prevent individuals from becoming ‘strangers’ to those generations that follow.

On November 19th, 1898, Edith describes her and Katherine’s impression of Charles Shannon’s painting of himself and Charles Ricketts. Comparing this description to the criticism of Wilde’s work highlights the reoccurring interest in the relationship between work of art and the moment in time it seeks to capture. Edith explains,

Forlorn as the pined snow drops + is rightfully painted old – for Ricketts’ soul is full of age: + for the same reason, it is right for Shannon to paint himself young, because his soul is full of youth - if souls are to be translated into terms of Time these two souls must be as they are shown in the permanence of Art – one forever old, one forever young. It is very great of Shannon to have perceived this with his brush.

([EC] 19th November 1898, Reel 4)

Edith’s tone couldn’t be further from her disparaging discussion of Wilde’s poem. She praises Shannon’s success in translating the essence of the two men’s characters into the permanence of art. According to Edith, Shannon has detected the individual essence of each of them ‘transmuting from their centre’ (to paraphrase above), and immortalised this through his painting so that this essence will live on after the men die. The emphasis on Shannon’s perception and intervention – ‘it is very great of Shannon to have perceived this

with his brush' – contrasts with Wilde's apparent lack of creativity or insight as he simply rearranged his experiences without delving below the surface. We can begin to see a trend in how Edith views art: it has the capability to arrest the flow of time and produce a precise recapitulation of the essence of its subject matter, which can then live on. This is further evidenced when one of Edith's most fully-fledged discussions of art is prompted during a time when the women are struggling to understand the Christian notion of transubstantiation.

During Easter of 1898, Edith writes 'both Michael and I feel intensely the horror of resurrecting "the flesh" – bringing back the outworn + decayed, breaking the virtue of that pure word Farewell by desecrating its finalness' ([EC], Good Friday 1898, Reel 4). The entry asserts that the church has no argument to found this doctrine, and returns to the purity of the 'Farewell' as containing an irreversible finality: [the dead] 'are to us immortal forces, + it is only by entering in to the immortality of our own souls + shutting the door on the Flesh that we can for a little converse with those who once dwelt with us in the flesh' ([EC], Good Friday 1898, Reel 4). The notion of 'farewell' is defined as symbolic of a change of state. What changes through this rite of passage are not the emotions the living have for the dead, but the way in which they communicate. The entry indicates there is a means of communication possible between the living and the dead – that it is possible for the living to enter into a state of 'immortality' by 'shutting the door on the Flesh'. The way this can be achieved is outlined in the lines that follow,

The Greeks with their eternal farewell to the dead expressed the truth as it is here in this world of the transient subject to the great Change of death. That was why they left such noble monuments, calm with the inevitableness of Farewell – the beauty of

its holiness.

([EC], Good Friday 1898, Reel 4)

Evoking the cultural heritage and practices of the Greeks in a discussion of Christian doctrine creates an interesting juxtaposition of the religious and the aesthetic. Edith's description of Greek culture emphasises their acceptance of death as an irreversible change of state, but shows they can still honour the living by creating permanent images of them as they were before death. Edith constructs a binary between the 'world of the transient subject' and the 'eternal' realm of communication, enabled via cultural artefacts. The physical realm of the individual is characterised by its temporal restrictions: it will have a beginning and an end. However, their legacy can live on through the immortality of art, which provides an enduring manifestation of the individual within the world beyond their lifetime.

It is beautiful to us to feel we have said out eternal Farewell to the Mother + Father - that in the flesh they are not + will never be + like Greeks, we have before us only the images of them in their youth, beauty + full strength of life.

([EC], Good Friday 1898, Reel 4)

Both Shannon's painting and these images the women have of Edith's parents find a way, like the Greek monuments, to immortalise the living. Wilde's work, in contrast, lacks the artistic flair which would convert his experiences into something immortal. By engaging with other cultural figures and works, Edith uses the journal to articulate her own celebration that art can outlive the artist. Reading these opinions significantly influences our understanding of the role of this text plays within the women's self-consciousness over the transience of their lives.

Conclusion

As the examples explored in this chapter have demonstrated, Katharine and Edith's manipulation of historical narratives – both personal and public – into an aesthetic, fictional history of 'Michael Field' engages with shifting discourses of historiography in the nineteenth century. Remembering their concern in this chapter's opening quote that they would become 'strangers' in light of these discussions suggests that the attempt to convert their life into art through *Works and Days* attempts to perform this immortalisation. The way the journals situate the women's thoughts within historical and cultural discussions and paradigms infuses their personal life together with public significance. *Works and Days* creates a space where not only the subjectivities and experiences of Katharine and Edith can be recorded and placed in dialogue with one-another; but where these opinions can be situated with the historical, social, political and cultural milieu of the fin de siècle. Reading their lives through, and against, these public discourses has a two-fold effect. On the one hand, it uses the process of fashioning an autobiographical subject to highlight the inextricability between an individual and their environment, and characterises their autobiographical subject as produced by, and through, their engagement with the world. On the other hand, the appropriation of these public discourses – especially historical events – provides systems of reference to communicate and derive meaning from a personal life, and thus validate it within more significant and culturally recognised narratives. As evidenced in my previous chapter, the effect of placing 'Michael Field' as the autobiographical subject is that the women can explore *how* a subject is constituted, both within a text and – here – within their historical moment. Emerging from this episodic and co-authored composition is

a performance of a very Nietzschean concept of history; the multiple, often contradictory, ways of experiencing and defining an individual's relationship to the world are laid bare. Without an omniscient narrator to provide an authoritative commentary, the subject Michael Field is characterised by not a unified, fixed view, but through the constant negotiation of these external influences, suggesting that no unified, fixed position is ever possible.

When the journals are used to elucidate the women's contribution to contemporaneous ideas of the aesthetic, we, as readers, inevitably reflect upon how this carefully sculpted, self-reflexive text enacts the very ideas they project. The autobiographical subject of Michael Field's elusive character takes on new significance when re-viewed as an artistic product. He represents the 'fictional' nature of identity as the product of Katharine and Edith's 'adjusting...and making similar' (Nietzsche 1901, cited in Jay 1984, p.28) of the multiple facets of identity behind it.

As art, the autobiographical act always fixes that which is in process, making it a cultural artefact.

(Smith & Watson 2001, p.125)

As art, the cultural artefact of Michael Field produces an immortal way for Katharine and Edith to communicate their ideas to their readership; like Barthes, 'the "self" in this work is generated in a confrontation between the writer and his ideas' (Jay 1984, p.182). Thus, the elusive character and history of Michael Field's life, as the embodiment of a set of historically located ideas, can only be made into anything meaningful, like any cultural artefact, through its interaction with its viewer. It is to this viewer that I turn in my third and

final chapter to elucidate how *Works and Days* implicates its reader in the production of Michael Field's identity.

CHAPTER THREE

Autobiography, then, is not a genre or a mode, but a figure of reading ... the autobiographical moment happens as an alignment between the two subjects involved in the process of reading in which they determine each other by mutual reflexive substitution

(de Man 1972, p.921)

Introduction

What I hope I have established in these past two chapters is evidence of how the women appropriate a form that compounds issues of identity and history in order to address and explore their own response to paradigms of the nineteenth century.

I now want to consider what this evidence and argument does to our experience of reading the text, and in a broader sense, what *Works and Days* says more generally about reading an autobiographical text. To contextualise the effect of my argument, I evoke Paul de Man's important article 'Autobiography as De-facement' (1972). De Man's redefinition of autobiography is particularly relevant to Katharine and Edith's life-narrative because it offers a way to situate the problematics of self-representation their text explores within a critical context. As such, de Man's article offers a useful way to extend the implications of my reading into a period of critical history that destabilised established assumptions and 'focused on the analytical and experiential category of "the self" and the limits of its representation' (Ashley et al. 1994, p.5). De Man's article provides a useful toolkit for unpacking the parallels between the issues of self-representation raised by the Michael Field's diaries, and offers an approach for determining the *effect* of the strategies of self-representation I have been exploring in *Works and Days*. The trajectory of his article

subsequently moves his reader from an understanding of autobiography as a genre towards an appreciation of autobiography as a practice. By mapping examples from Katharine and Edith's autobiography against the trajectory of his article, I hope to evidence that in *Works and Days*, an 'autobiographical moment as an alignment between the two subjects involved in the process of reading' (de Man 1972, p.921).

Who Does 'The Males'?

On 2nd May 1892, Katharine and Edith were at George Meredith's house having lunch when the host asked 'wh: of us "does the Males?" (the highest compliment implied in any question asked of Michael).' ([EC] 2nd May 1892, Reel 2). Meredith is keen to unearth the dynamics behind the pseudonym, and to attribute the voices of 'male' characters within their work to a particular woman. Edith's decision to select this particular question to record in their diary is interesting in itself; it is a personal question about their intimate relationship dynamics behind the pseudonym. This decision is made even more intriguing by the editorial impositions: Edith underlines 'males' and provides a bracketed explanation of her / their (again, it is unclear) response to this question. Such additions indicate Edith has her audience in mind as she writes, as she would neither need to emphasise nor explain this question to herself and Katharine, for whom this 'highest compliment' must already be recognisable. These added effects also emphasise that this is a crafted re-telling of the event, a putting-into-words of how their body language would presumably communicate silently to Meredith that this was a compliment rather than an offense. These decisions of how to re-present the interaction, then, indicates that this aside is directed to an 'other' – a reader – who needs this further explication to understand the women's reaction to the question.

The nature of Meredith's question implies that Michael Field's authorial presence bears no clear or unambiguous relationship to the women behind it. It is, therefore, a question that implicitly reinforces the pseudonym's success in producing a new, aesthetic identity. The fact that this question is a compliment indicates that the women sought such a response, and therefore suggests that they *wanted* to elude referentiality – to create a literary persona that was not directly connectable to them.

Within one quote, therefore, there is both an implicit and explicit discussion of the relationship between appearance and reality: implicit in the strategies Edith adopts to make evident to the reader what is within her mind (the fact that it is 'the highest compliment'), and explicit in the nature of Meredith's question to expose the actor behind Michael Field's character. This entry is particularly interesting, therefore, not only because it suggests that the women wanted their persona to be enigmatic, but also because of the way Edith uses the autobiographical space to raise questions of what is knowable from an author's signature on a text. Embedding this question within an autobiographical text reflects back upon the text's own project: what, indeed, can we know of an author from their signature on their life-narrative? By labelling Meredith's question as a compliment, the women celebrate the ambiguous performance of their pseudonym within the very genre that claims to *reveal* the author. This inevitably raises questions of what role do these journals play within their construction of this persona; are they yet another ambiguous performance? Can we ever 'prove' which of the women does 'do the males'?

These questions points to much broader issues of autobiography as a mode of writing and as a genre. Since it was defined as a genre and submitted to the rigorous analysis

in the early days of Gusdorf (1956) and Lejeune (1974), it has been a genre treading on eggshells. Laura Marcus notes that with this elevation of autobiography's value to that of literary genre comes the associated problems of what the literary elements ('stylisation, literary conventionalism, and in Gusdorf's argument, commercialism' [Marcus 2006, p.6]) do to the text's claim to authenticity. Similar questions emerge from Katharine and Edith's intention to publish their journals, and are further manifest within the text at moments such as this when the reader is implied within its narrative. As soon as we view autobiography as a literary production, the line between autobiography and fiction becomes blurred, as the conscious effort to make something possess literary 'value' somewhat detracts from its claim at authenticity. Again, Paul de Man provides a useful summary of this question of authenticity:

Autobiography seems to depend on actual and potentially verifiable events in a less ambivalent way than fiction does. It seems to belong to a simpler mode of referentiality, of representation.

(de Man 1972, p.920)

In the above journal entry alone, we can see from the inclusion of brackets that this written version is not the direct replication of the event, but has added information to substantiate and explain what was taking place. Is this a 'simpler mode of referentiality'? Is there an agenda behind this expression – does Edith want the reader to know something? Can the journals answer that, or only further complicate it? These are the sorts of questions these journals raise, without ever answering explicitly – and thus provide the ideal case-in-point of so many of the issues beguiling and dividing autobiographical theory. When the possibilities of fabrication lean too close to fiction, autobiographical theorists reinforce the

authenticity of their texts through the presence of the author's signature – a crucial connection between the world-of-the-text and the world-of-the-reader (Lejeune 1974). Through this, even the 'unreal' aspects of the narrative (dreams, imaginings) escape relegating the text to the realm of fiction because they 'remain rooted in a single subject whose identity is defined by the uncontested readability of his proper name' (de Man 1972, p.920). However, as my first chapter investigated, the Michael Field signature is both fictional and very much a site of contestability – of inward contradictions, of multiple perspectives – and thus sustains the text's interest in exploring the relationship between appearance and reality. When asked 'who does the males?' Edith is thrilled that their pseudonym is undergoing the same critical reading as their work.

By producing a co-authored textual rendition of their life together as Michael Field, Katharine and Edith display both the construction and deconstruction of their 'aesthete' persona. Living and writing through this figure enabled them to playfully change their performance as they pleased. Field is no 'single subject' with an 'uncontested readability'; but a study of how we create a subject, and a collage of pieces that shape its development through time. The role of this autobiographical text, therefore, is not to simply reflect their life, but to explore how to re-present themselves as an aesthete. This change in autobiography's role chimes with Paul de Man's challenge to the notion of origin:

We assume that life *produces* the autobiography as an act produces its consequences, but can we not suggest, with equal justice, that the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life and that whatever the writer *does* is in fact governed by the technical demands of self-portraiture and thus determined,

in all its aspects, by the resources of his own medium?

(de Man 1972, p.920, italics his)

De Man's questions here provide a succinct summary of the position we have got to when reading the Michael Field journals in the way I have in Chapters One and Two. Can we say these journals are reflective of Katharine and Edith's life as Michael Field; or is there a more complicated process of self-fashioning taking place to convert their lives into an aesthetic product? These are questions I want to turn to now by considering how the women's strategies of self-representation perpetuate the ambiguity of its subject, Michael Field. I offer my own interpretation of an unexplained collage of quotes to evidence how the text implicates the reader within the autobiographical process.

Insert the reader

I spoke in Chapter One of the importance of the spaces between the episodes and textures in the narrative, and looked at how the unexplained juxtapositions of different texts invite the reader to interpret the significance of their relationship. In my second chapter, I looked at how this fragmented texture enabled the women to juxtapose public narratives of events (newspaper articles, reviews etc) alongside their own perspectives in a way that evidenced how a life-narrative was constructed very much out of the interaction of the two. Now I want to combine the two to look at the how unexplained juxtaposition of two historical quotes (one Roman, one Biblical) invites the reader to make their own judgement of Michael Field's response to these, and thus to create their own autobiographical subject through the reading process.

On the first page of the 1898 journal, Katharine writes the following preface:

“whatever happens I must be emerald”: that Aurelius said, is the emerald’s mentality

“Enlarge the place of thy tent, + let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations. Spare not, lengthen thy cords + strengthen thy stakes.”

Isaiah LIV

[[KB] epigram to 1898, Reel 4)

There is no further explanation of these quotes – no narratorial guidance to explain their selection, which immediately invites the reader to engage with the text as they actively seek to decipher the connotations and connections of the quotes, and thus create their own interpretation of why they are used to frame the coming year.

It is immediately striking that these quotes originate from two starkly different sources. The Aurelius quote, although uncited here, is lifted from his twelve-book Stoic text, written during a campaign in 170-180CE whilst he was Roman Emperor. The Isaiah quote is taken from the second half of the Book of Isaiah, which prophesises the restoration of Israel and the creation of a future kingdom. Interestingly, they both have become important self-guidance texts within Western culture, yet both are firmly the product of a culture, religion, people and time that are entirely removed from 1898. By evoking these texts as a preface to the next chapter of their own lives, Katharine and Edith are establishing a transhistorical conversation.

The significance of these selections becomes greater if we contextualise them against the preoccupations of writers during the late nineteenth century. Following George Lang’s translation of Aurelius’ *Meditations*, published in 1862, a proliferation of responses and debates were sparked amongst prominent literary figures around the implications and applicability of Aurelius’ stoicism for nineteenth century religious beliefs. Lee Behlman has

recently published a useful study of Matthew Arnold and J.S. Mill's responses to the issue, and demonstrates how Aurelius' writings became central to a comparison of Stoic ethics and Christian ethical practice (2011, pp.12-18). Aurelius' writings became a popular means for writers to either validate or deny the connection between Christian doctrine in the nineteenth century and Stoicism.

Knowing this, suddenly the juxtaposition takes on an even greater significance, as it actually enacts – structurally – the very crux of an issue of historical connection that was preoccupying contemporary religious discussions. Using the collagic texture of the narrative to bring these two quotes together enables Katharine to locate the women's personal lives within these wider paradigmatic concerns. However, by choosing not to explain this decision, she withholds the women's own interpretation of this debate, and thus invites the reader to analyse the possibilities emerging from the space between these quotes.

By unpacking the associations suggested simply from Katharine's positioning of these quotes, already I, as one of many readers of the diaries, have looked at contemporaneous debates to create one possible interpretation of the 'meanings' for this selection. As a preface to 1888, these quotes evoke the discourses of Stoic philosophy and Christianity, and the interaction between them, to structure the personal narrative that follows – and so infuses the character of Michael Field with the echo of these ideas. If we now turn to the content of the quotes, and the connotations they evoke, we find a conflict of metaphorical associations that only further complicates the possible 'meaning' of their selection.

The quote from Aurelius expresses a desire to be 'more emerald', suggests ideas of becoming more finite and crystallised, as gem stones are conventionally hard and pristine.

The biblical reference, however, suggests precisely the opposite: ‘enlarge’, ‘stretch’, ‘lengthen’, ‘strengthen’ all promote an inclusivity, indicate growth through numbers and an expansion through time and space (remembering this quote references the growth of the Jewish race). To have the mentality of being ‘emerald’ as a state, ‘whatever happens’, implies a resistance to influence or contamination that directly contrasts the biblical strategy of growth through expansion. Accommodating more – whether that be people, perspectives, ideas etc –inevitably alters the initial purity of one’s composition; thus offering entirely opposite advice to the Aurelius quote. Placing these quotes together, then, seems to provide contradictory instructions for the women: one voice tells them to be compressed and pure; the other encourages them to expand and reproduce.

The metaphor of the emerald is worth remarking upon for the echoes it contains of other cultural references. Unlike most gem stones, the worth of an emerald is judged not by machines, measurements, and scales, but by the eye. The clearer the composition, and the fewer signs of any residue, the more valuable it is deemed. Edith had expressed an earlier fascination in gem stones in 1894, when she dedicates pages of the journals to an itemised list of various stones and their properties ([EC] 27th October 1894, Reel 2). Already we can see the possibilities of connecting this image with, for example, Dorian Gray’s catalogue of gem stones in Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, (1890, pp.138-40) or Walter Pater’s iconic image of the individual’s aim ‘to burn always with this hard, gemlike flame’ (Pater 1893, p.250). These examples indicate the effect of placing this particular quote, unexplained, with the diaries: it invites the reader to make their own associations, and the examples I gave are only a very small sample of the multiple possibilities. It is important to emphasise at this point how crucial the narrative’s structure is: no precedence is given to

either quote, and no narrative guides the reader through them. Therefore, everything I have just explored results from my own interpretation, and use of personal knowledge, of the gap *between* them. As soon as I see their placement, I instantly ask why they are together, and then, finding only further questions and possibilities offered by the text, am forced to create my own theory.

At the end of the year, Edith recovers the same Isaiah quote as she looks back over the year. When the reader encounters this repetition, they inevitably evoke their former interpretation of its significance and consider this in light of this second instance. In the final entry of the year, Edith writes

“Enlarge the place of thy tent + let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations” – the artists have done this ... and Michael, “through whom all blessings flow” with the two sonnets.

The year ~~the~~ has accomplished itself.

([EC] 31st December 1989, Reel 4)

This entry evidences Edith’s self-conscious acknowledgement of, and reflection upon, structures of meaning they have previously put in place. She is mindful here that a particular narrative was introduced at the start of the year, and returns to it as if to offer closure or completion – or at the very least, progression. She uses the quote to re-read the lives of the artists and Michael (Katharine) within this context, and concluded that the cycle of the year has been achieved. This process enacts what I explored in Chapter Two in terms of how the narrative moves between a personal and public perspective in order to contextualise and communicate their private lives. On the one hand, Edith’s return to the Biblical metaphor

aligns the women's quest of literary expansion with that of the Jewish race in the Bible. Couching their poetic endeavour within biblical imagery enables the women to establish a connection between their personal experience and a publically-recognisable scenario, thus lending meaning and structure to their poetic journey. Equally, by aligning Michael (Katharine) with God through the appropriation of the phrase 'through whom all blessings flow', Edith elevates Katharine's role as a poet to a quasi-religious status, without pausing to unpack the significance or motivation behind this narration.

Katharine and Edith use the journals to interweave their personal lives with philosophical and religious significance by appropriating these discourses. The use of repetition not only continues to prove the self-consciousness of the textual construction – as Edith re-reads the past year through the structures of their autobiographical narrative; but also points to what *isn't* there: the Stoic philosophy has disappeared. Whether this is an oversight or an intentional omission is never addressed; leaving the reader to trawl through the rest of the volumes to detect any further repetitions of Aurelius, wondering whether Christianity triumphed over Stoicism, or whether Edith was simply forgetful.

Conclusion

These structural devices – both explicit juxtapositions and implicit discussions – display the process of creating patterns of meaning from life. The connections drawn between Katharine's poetry and God, and their relationship with the artists and the development of the Jewish race, are so hyperbolic that they seem to shout out the artificiality and arbitrariness of these meaning-making patterns. If anything, Edith is not expressing an innate truth about the year- that it has 'accomplished itself'; the very notion is

ridiculous as it implies the women had no agency in it. By making this claim she actually reinforces the opposite – that historical structures and patterns of meaning are constructed by those that perceive them (a very Nietzschean notion, as we saw in Chapter Two). Although structures are put in place, Edith demonstrates how arbitrary they are as she casually concludes that the year has accomplished itself on the basis of a rather contrived example of a friendship development as evidence of fulfilment of the Bible's instructions.

By exposing the artificiality of the meaning-making patterns in their autobiography, Katharine and Edith consistently use the text to re-read and re-write their own lives, as they move between their experience and the re-presentation of the experience to create patterns of meaning within both the text, and subsequently, within their own lives. The autobiographical text becomes the site where the possibilities of what their life *could* mean are explored, rather than conveying a pre-designed narrative. As we have seen throughout my analysis, the episodic, fragmented narrative plays a key role in how meaning is produced from *Works and Days*. As my discussion of the juxtaposed quotes conveys, the fragmented narrative produces 'parts' of a life, but to 'mean' anything, the patterns of meaning that shape them together and define their connection emerge *between* the pieces. It is in these spaces where the motivations and decisions of Katharine and Edith hover, beguiling and inviting the reader to infer their own meanings.

In Paul de Man's discussion of the linguistic structure of the autobiographical 'referent', he argues that the autobiographical moment 'is not primarily a situation or an event that can be located in history' (1972, p.922), but rather produced by the linguistic devices on the surface of the text – which are 'turning' in nature because of the endless

associations of language. Due to the fact that the 'subject' is constructed by and through these endlessly shifting linguistic devices, de Man concludes that, the interest of autobiography emerges from how 'it demonstrates in a striking way the impossibility of closure and of totalization (that is the impossibility of ever coming into being) of all textual systems made up of tropological substitutions' (1972, p.922). Michael Field's journals elucidate precisely this, and provide an example of what this theoretical awareness about autobiography would look like in practice. It is useful when considering de Man's theory in conjunction with the linguistic devices of Michael Field's journals to bring in a narrative strategy Liz Stanley evokes that looks specifically at how autobiographical writing tries to overcome the endless 'turning notion of tropes'. She unpacks how specific narrative structures are appropriated to imply that 'occurrences are directly related and meaningful' (1995, p.128), which can be seen here in the unspoken interaction between the Aurelius and Isiaah quotes. Stanley argues that these structures are, however, only there to perform the illusion of referentiality: 'these authorized facts are actually authorized *fictions*, the picking out of specifics related by the interpretative framework of the author' (Stanley 1995, p.129, *italics hers*). This interpretative framework is the crucial tool for unravelling the autobiographical project. It is the container of all manner of questions that would inform and influence your reading. Why is this autobiographical text being written? At what point in their life are they writing? What has changed over time to affect their perspective? The list is endless, but all these questions relate to how the autobiographer structures the text using their own interpretative framework and hopes that the reader will adopt that framework for their interpretation – here evident in how Katharine and Edith control what you do and don't see.

Those presumptions that it is possible to align the reader with the writer in their interaction with the text actually points to the further impossibilities of the very process of getting closer to the 'truth'. No matter how much a writer explains about their thought processes behind the work, it is impossible to ever completely get inside their head, and we could never perceive events in the exactly the same way as they do. This reveals that actually the communication between author and reader is never going to be exact; subjectivity always intervenes. To help us understand how conventional autobiographers try to reduce the degree of the reader's own interpretation, Stanley offers Tzvetan Todorov's model narrative. He defines two types of narrative that are combined by an autobiographer to substantiate the credibility of their depiction of their life. Todorov terms these two forms of writing a 'narrative of contiguity' and a 'narrative of substitution', which Stanley helpfully summarises as,

A narrative of contiguity is a representational narrative built up through the statement of facts, events, persons and so forth; it is linear ... and it links through contiguous placing in the text... A narrative of substitution ... is concerned with promoting interpretation and understanding; it uses figurative language to stand for a point of view established through contiguous narrative; it is circular in its argument, relying heavily on metaphor. (Stanley 1995, p. 129)

Within an autobiography, one cannot work without the other if credibility is desired. The text cannot simply document historical facts; but equally it can't rely too much on fanciful language and interpretation without the factual evidence if it is to avoid being fiction. In Michael Field's case, the women build up their contiguous narrative through the collage of texts from different people and events across time, only to frequently deconstruct any sense of orientation the reader might have gained by jumping back and forth in time or

providing a contradictory perspective. As Ivor Treby notes in his introduction to *Binary Star*: ‘often ten or more pages show no dates at all, or what – at best – appear to be wild guesses in the absence of a calendar’ (Treby 2006, p.25). As well as disorientating and frustrating for the reader, these omissions imply that precise and accurate documentation of their lives is perhaps not the overarching objective of *Works and Days*.

Meanwhile, the narrative of substitution, which should, in Todorov’s definition, perform the ‘weaving together of separate strands to make a fabric’ (Stanley 1995, p.130), is even more beguiling and frustrating in the Michael Field diaries. The instances where Katharine and Edith offer multiple re-tellings of events, or where they use repetition, reflection and juxtaposition to put structures of meaning in place that are then revealed as arbitrary, are examples of how the ‘substitutive’ narrative is both constructed and deconstructed throughout the text. At moments we, as readers, may detect consistencies, or deduce a sense of meaning from the text’s architecture – only for the women to shift the focus or destabilise the architecture moments later. The instability of this ‘weaving together of separate strands’ leaves the fragments held together merely by contiguity – touching, but not interlinked. As Stanley concludes, ‘if the author is fabricator, we as readers can unpick, re-stitch and re-fashion’ (1995, p.136); and indeed, if the author is exploring the process of fabrication, then the reader, inevitably, ends up aware of their own role within the crafting of the text. The role of joining up the pieces now lies with the reader; we have become the Editor in Carlyle’s *Sartor*; presented with our own bags of scraps to sort through – from a variety of sources – with no particular sense of this and that connecting.

Stanley argues that the effects of postmodernism on autobiographical theory has been to highlight the so-called facts of an autobiography are 'a result of temporally and structurally located epistemological changes which enable different things to be seen' (Stanley 1995, p.130). The autobiographical text emerges from *both* the writer and the reader's moment in history, bringing some things to the foreground and others relegated to the shadows. This is perfectly evidenced in the three biographies of Michael Field to date, as Rachel Morley's overview highlights. By comparing how Ursula Bridge, Mary Sturgeon and Emma Donoghue each address the issue of the nature of Katharine and Edith's relationship, she argues that their contradictory conclusions evidence the importance of the reader of a life in their construction of it. Whereas Mary Sturgeon's 1922 biography, *Michael Field*, hinted at 'an erotic charge', she still 'resists the possibility of a physical relationship' (Morley 2007a, p.16). Any hint of romance is stamped out by Ursula Bridge's unpublished manuscript, which concludes 'their romantic and familial bond [w]as an intellectual force' (cited in Morley 2007a, p.17). The most recent perspective on Michael Field, offered by lesbian scholar and writer Emma Donoghue, although based on the Bridge manuscript, completely contradicts Bridge's conclusions: 'it is clear from their diaries that Katharine and Edith were lovers in the highly sexualised sense for several decades' (Donoghue 1998, p.8).

Morley concludes from these disparities that 'biography is about how we from the present respond to these pasts, and the way in which we take certain aspects, particular memories, and illuminate them or allow them to fade to black' (Morley 2007a, p.18). Both Morley and Stanley come to the same conclusion:

We will never have access to all of the facts and, even if we do, we shall always write them, as did the biographers who have gone before us, in accordance with the influences claimed by our own subjectivities, of which we must always be aware.

(Morley 2007a, p.19)

Each time a reader reads one of these forms of life-writing, they place their own emphasises, make their own omissions, produce their own interpretations, draw their own conclusions. Each reader of written lives is a biographer.

(Stanley 1995, p.124)

The conclusions drawn by Stanley's overview of autobiographical theory today provide fascinating parallels with the effect of the Katharine and Edith's strategies of self-representation. Both these assertions hark back to the Paul de Man quote with which I started, in which he configures the autobiographical moment as a transaction between two parties involved in the process of reading – involving both 'a differentiation as well as similarity, since both depend on a substitutive exchange that constitutes the subject' (de Man 1972, p.921). I have brought these theories into my reading of Michael Field's journals to elucidate how their strategies of self-representation force the reader into the role of the biographer – approaching the text with their own historical and cultural situation and piecing together the fragments into their own version of Michael Field.

CONCLUSION

By co-authoring their life together as the aesthete ‘Michael Field’, Katharine and Edith produce a text that does far more than simply record their ‘Works and ‘Days’. It is, like Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus*, not just an autobiographical product, but also a story about the autobiographical process – one that appropriates the genre only to scrutinise and challenge the very possibility of achieving its supposed project. The journals provide a creative space where ideas of identity, history and art can be explored in relation to the author’s own experiences, and where experiences can be written and re-written in conjunction with the development of time.

I have focused on the importance of the form of *Works and Days* – both on how it is written and how it is subsequently read – to demonstrate how the conventional strategies autobiographies adopt to substantiate their claim to referentiality are unravelled by Katharine and Edith. I have considered how the form of the text poses broader questions about what we can know of a subject and how we can know it. By contextualising these strategies within the ideas offered by Carlyle and Nietzsche, we can see how the text engages with a particular response to nineteenth century paradigms of self and history through a shared valorisation of fictionality. There are interesting connections to be made between this textual response to critiques of the subject and those ideas expressed through both postmodern literary theory and practice.

As my first chapter demonstrated, the journals create a composite identity by drawing upon experiences and ideas from multiple subjects. ‘Michael Field’, as the public projection of all these fragments, is thus an identity characterised by the multiple influences

behind it. By choosing to write, and publish, a journal of their life together as Michael Field, the women seem to embark on the typical project of public figures – to reveal the person behind the work. However, by using the text to create a collage of people and ideas that influence them, what is evident in the text is the process that constitutes an identity. The figure of the aesthete, Michael Field, subsequently cannot be pinned down to any one view or idea, but moves among them, embracing and reflecting their paradoxicality without seeking to synthesise them into a unity.

The ideas of identity expressed chime with those that now dominate critical scholarship in the wake of cultural theorists. In the opening chapter of *Autobiography and Postmodernism* (Ashley et. al 1994), Leigh Gilmore explains that the volume aims to read ‘forms of self-representation through the lens of Postmodernism, as a site of identity production; as texts that both resist and produce cultural identities’ (ibid, p.4). This correlates with Paul Jay’s assertion that the postmodern era gave rise to the most explicit demonstration of how contemporary discussions of the subject are manifest on the form of self-representation: *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* (Barthes 1975). Barthes deconstructs his life into a collection of alphabetised fragments to evidence ‘what I write about myself is never *the last word* ... the latter is nothing but a *further* text ... *text upon text* (ibid, p.120, italics his). Written during a time when the ‘death of the author’ denounced the authority of the subject, Barthes’ autobiography extends his redistribution of who produces meaning from a text to the reader, seen elsewhere in ‘The Death of the Author’ (1968) and *S/Z* (1970).

The reason I explain the intersection of postmodern theory and practice is to elucidate how writers use the surface of their text to reify their challenge to ideas of the

subject, a practice at its most explicit in the wake of postmodern scholarship. Barthes's so-called autobiography provides particularly interesting parallels with Michael Field's *Works and Days* because both works interrogate the subject as a text. Neither Katharine and Edith nor Barthes attempt to fix their subject within their text; and instead, both show an awareness through the fragmented form that identity is the product of both the social, cultural and historical context, *and*, even more important, the context of its reader. Barthes' alphabetised fragments imply the same treatment of language and history as Michael Field's episodic structure: chronology is arbitrary, as each specific narration has a knock-on effect on all the others.

As I have explored in my third chapter, the structure and texture of Michael Field's journals implicates the reader within the text. Like in Barthes' text, the narrative can move forward or back in time to bring to the fore different facets of Katharine and Edith's lives. The reader who hopes to gain an understanding of what is behind the text is consistently eluded by the multiple re-presentations, people, and insertions and deletions. This structure places the process of reading autobiography under the spotlight, and demonstrates how any reader's 'knowledge' of Michael Field is equally the product of their own invention as it is of Katharine and Edith's. Reading *Works and Days* makes the reader behave like the Editor in *Sartor*, 'endeavouring to evolve printed Creation out of ... written Chaos ... gathering, clutching, piecing the Why to the far-distant Wherefore, his whole Faculty and Self are likely to be swallowed up' (Carlyle 1838, p.179).

This emphasis placed on the reader's role both explicitly in *Sartor* and implicitly in *Works and Days* finds its theoretical companion in a relatively recent movement within

autobiographical criticism. Coining the practice as ‘Personal Criticism’, Nancy K. Miller defines it as the ‘explicitly autobiographical performance within the act of criticism’ (1991, p.1). For her, ‘getting personal’ becomes an occasion for the reader to examine their relationship to the textual subject, and to acknowledge there is no universal critical ‘I’, but merely a subjective experience of the textual subject (ibid, pp.2-4). As a theoretical approach, this idea extends Paul de Man’s assertion that autobiography is ‘a way of reading’ (1972, p.921), whilst encouraging us, as readers, to re-examine our relationship to the subject we read. Rachel Morely has done precisely this in her quest to produce a biography of Katharine and Edith (2004; 2007a). By creating ‘a blend of creative and critical discourse’, Morley ‘attempts to work toward a circular theory of writing the self through the guise of the other’ (2007a, p.4). Her strategies of writing respond to the trend in Biographical criticism – ‘New Biography’ (ibid, p.3) – that absorbs Miller’s emphasis on the ‘personal’ in all reading experiences :

The New Biographer combines postmodernism (the mistrust of “truth”, “history” and the fragmentation of the “self”) with the apparatuses of fiction to construct new modes of telling and to provide a means through which to negotiate the self/other exchange.

(Morley, 2007a, p.3)

These ‘new modes of telling’ are the product of the ‘new modes of reading’ suggested by Paul de Man in my previous chapter. As Liz Stanley comments, ‘each reader of written lives is a biographer’ (1995, p.124), and so, in writing my own reading of the journals, I have inevitably located my own subjectivity, my own history – my self – in this text, and hence have fashioned my own personal re-membering of Michael Field.

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