THE UNDERWATER ADVENTURE OF "ONLY A LITTLE BOY": EDMUND GOSSE'S JUVENILIA

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IN THE Gosse archive at Cambridge University Library, a grangerized copy of Evan Charteris's biography, *The Life and Letters of Sir Edmund Gosse* (1931), bulges with family memorabilia: photographs, letters, drawings, and keepsakes (Add. 7027).[1] At some point in the decade between 1931 when Charteris first published the volume, and 1941 when this uniquely transformed version of it was donated to the University Library, artefacts salvaged from Edmund Gosse's life (1849–1928) were carefully embedded into his narrative *Life*. Whether Edmund's son, Philip Gosse (1879–1959), carried out the act of grangerizing himself, or whether he arranged for it to be undertaken by another, is not known.[2] Philip seems to have regarded this as the safest way of curating the ephemera in his keeping, even though grangerism had been lately ridiculed by Holbrook Jackson as a form of bibliophilic eccentricity in his 1930 *Anatomy of Bibliomania* (737–40). Jackson's views notwithstanding, the grangerised Charteris has an undeniable charm. One of its opening references is to the diary entry made by Philip Gosse senior (1810–1888) on the birth of his son in 1849: "E[mily] delivered of a son. Received green swallow from Jamaica," and with appealing immediacy there follow two of Philip's watercolours, the first depicting a white-gowned and bonneted baby with blue shoes (8.7 x 6 cm), and the second, a lustrous image of *Hirundo euchrysea*, the aforesaid bird (19 x 14 cm). The delicate subtlety of both paintings evokes a tenderness that belies the blunt economy of the diary entry.

Although the grangerizer has tried to locate each artefact in relation to the appropriate stage in Charteris's narrative, some inserts are randomly positioned. One of the most puzzling and unanchored of these is a handwritten story entitled "Sleep in the Deep," a document that has not hitherto attracted any attention within the Gosse critical corpus, possibly due to its undated and unfinished condition. This piece of juvenilia may be viewed not only against the familial, social, and cultural matrix of Gosse's early life as narrated in *Father and Son* (1907), published when he was a 58-

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year-old man of letters, but also in light of the contemporary writings of his two author-parents, allowing us to consider how far he imitates, reworks, and resists their respective discourses. His father, Philip, was a self-taught marine-zoologist and populariser of the domestic aquarium, while his mother, Emily (1806–1857), was a tract-writer who also produced a manual, and occasional articles, on the principles of Christian parenting. Emily's strong conviction about the heinous nature of fiction meant that Edmund was never told fairy-tales or nursery rhymes during his infancy. Indeed, it was not until the age of eleven that he was exposed to fiction for the first time in the form of Michael Scott's *Tom Cringle's Log* (1834), a swashbuckling novel of heroism on the high seas (*F&S* 117–19).[3] I will, therefore, discuss "Sleep in the Deep" as an amalgam of three discourses that blends the Latinate precision of Philip's work in natural history; the sounds and spirit of Emily's biblical lexicon; and the impact of Gosse's belated and dramatic discovery of fiction.

Unlike such child writers as Jane Austen or the Brontës, Gosse lacked the richness of stimulation associated with sibling make-believe or peer-group play. Rather, in the spirit of Philip and Emily's "Great Scheme" that their son "should be exclusively and consecutively dedicated to the … uncompromised 'service of the Lord'," Edmund's childhood was carefully monitored to keep him "unspotted from the world" (*F&S* 153, 8).[4] These circumstances create unusual quasi-experimental conditions that permit the study of a child's response to the influences within a controlled environment. Given that the three influential discourses are so clearly delineated, it is conducive to read "Sleep in the Deep" as a case-study that explores the child-writer's acts of imitation, appropriation, reworking, and play, as well the impact of audience, all factors fundamental to the larger critical conversations about Victorian juvenilia.

The Manuscript

"Sleep in the Deep" is written on four sides of a single folded sheet of flimsy paper (24 x 19 cm), with sketched illustrations at the top of the second and the fourth sides. Margins have been drawn on all four edges in pencil, and the writing is in purplish-black ink. The story commences at chapter 2, but there is no indication of Gosse's intentions for chapter 1. It is notable that Gosse's novella, *Tristram Jones* (c. 1872), manifests the same practice of commencing at Chapter 2, and although that later narrative is a complete story, it too lacks an opening chapter, which Gosse presumably envisaged as a general introductory preamble (Rees and Alexander xxxiii). It is possible that Gosse had learned from his author-parents that an opening chapter should serve a prefatorial function and should therefore be composed at the end of the process. The reference to "Chapter 2" also reveals that this was conceived as an extended project, with multiple episodes.

What follows is a transcript of "Sleep in the Deep":

Chapter 2.
When ~~d~~ Dowley fell into the sea, he found himself in a magnificent grotto, edged by magnificent sea weeds; ~~o~~\i/n the furthest corner seven beautiful fishes reposed. All seemed afraid of him, but one, the larges~~es~~t, E~~sn~~\ns/imanus ~~,~~ by name, being armed with a sharp sword came up to him, and in a haughty tone, spoke thus to the affrighted Dowley; "O strange and shapeless being of earth, Who art thou? Are you one of our enemies, the Mermen of the upper world, for if you are, I will pierce you through.
Dowley frighte\ne/d dreadfully, meekly ~~pr~~ replied, that he "was only a little boy." Ensimanus had never heard of "little boys", but supposed that was all right; and so, patting him on the back with his sword, said pitifully in the Pisci~~al~~\ne/ language, ~~cried,~~ "Poor Peter, pat him on the back. Poor Peter, cheer ~~him~~ up Poor Peter."
Dowley, always stupid, ~~a~~immediately began to grumble; saying that his name was Dowley not Peter. Ensimanus, (who was very proud) was offended, and calling for a cane ~~v~~ made of seaweed, beat Dowley. He soon, however, recovered his equanimity, and taking Master Dowley by the hand, took him to the door of the grotto and led ~~into~~ through some more, till he came to one more than ordinarily beautiful; this, said Ensimanus, was the cave of \the/ Mermaids of the North; Ensimanus took Dowley and pushed ~~a~~ him into the room, telling him that he might not venture there; on our fr~~ei~~\ie/nd's entra\n/~~l~~ce, he saw ~~in the~~ opposite him, in a ~~ma~~ ~~spe~~ splendid apartment, four lovely Mermaids. Dowley was terribly afraid and hid his face with his hands; and when one of them swam up to him, and led him lo~~v~~vingly to the others, he began to sob; they however played with, and kissed him, till he began to gain

Most of the emendations appear to have been made synchronously with the composition, suggesting self-correction rather than adult intervention; Gosse's early spelling mistake with the invented name "Ensimanus" is, for example, not repeated in subsequent usage. The final unfinished line is two-thirds of the way down the page and, not being a natural end-of-page break, suggests that the author was interrupted by someone (his father?) or something (his own mounting emotion?) and that, consequently, the narrative was never completed.

Paternal Influence

GIVEN that Gosse claims to have grown up as "a satellite" in his parents' "atmosphere," with "no young companions, no story books, [and] no outdoor amusements," the question of influence is more straightforward than for many Victorian child-writers (*F&S* 19). Indeed, the underwater context of "Sleep in the Deep" is a natural element for a boy who was schooled in the divine wonders of God's Creation, particularly marine life, from birth. Occasionally, Philip mentions young Edmund in his published writing, presenting him as a "little naturalist in petticoats," an enthusiastic researcher into natural history (*A Naturalist's Rambles* 3). In his account of a seaside outing on the Welsh coast, Philip characterizes Edmund (known always by his middle name) as earnest and solemn:

> … our little Willie was embayed as he was intent on making a pool with his wooden spade for the reception of a colony of *Purpurea* [sea-snails] that he had gathered from the rocks; and he related very gravely his apprehensions of being drowned, when he had to wade through the water, which was actually over the soles of his shoes!" (*Tenby* 18)

Like most Victorian child-writers, Edmund is growing up in a middle-class family where reading and writing are integral components of daily life, but these skills were to be directed towards natural history and theology rather than anything imaginative or poetic.

We may assume that Philip imparts the same pedagogy to his son as he directs to his readers, lessons that combine the workings of natural history with the wisdom of the believer. Philip's typological approach is exemplified by his description in *The Aquarium* (1854) of the *Cystoseira ericoides,* a seaweed that is dull when removed from the water but brilliant when re-submerged: "thus it may be compared to some Christians, who are dull and profitless in prosperity, but whose graces shine out gloriously when they are plunged into the deep floods of affliction" (100). It is notable that Philip intensifies the biblical phrase, "the water of affliction" (Isaiah 30:20 and 2 Chronicles 18:26) to evoke "deep floods"; Edmund clearly grew up with such watery metaphors. These typological axioms were, furthermore, put to the test when "deep floods of affliction" threatened Philip in February 1857, when Emily died of breast cancer. This event precipitated the removal of father and son from London to the village of Marychurch, near Torquay, situating Edmund from the age of seven close to the seashore with its diurnal overspill of God's natural wonders; this is the setting for "Sleep in the Deep."

Grangerized in the Charteris volume are a few of Edmund's letters to Philip, written age eight to nine, during the period when Philip undertook lecturing work away from Marychurch, leaving the now motherless Edmund in the care of the housekeeper-cum-governess. The letters reveal the child's precocious knowledge of

fish and plants, attained by daily observation of the household aquarium. Inspecting the anemones on 6 February 1858, he writes "I send you Bolocera's[5] observations; he is quite splendid this morning," demonstrating his confidence in using scientific nomenclature related to sea-anemones (Add 7027/ 24). Again, on 3 April 1858 he notes: "Three Pipefishes[6] swimming this morning when we went to see the tanks. I have only seen the Eolis despecta [sea-slug] once after you left" (Add 7027/ 27). On 8 February 1859, he returns his focus to the anemones, exclaiming: "This morning a Cerianthus Lyodii[7] came (Oh! Such a monster) but I fear it is dead" (Add 7027/ 31). Charteris quotes some of these earnest missives, as does Ann Thwaite, as they manifest Gosse's trait of advanced knowledge combined with childish sentiment (Charteris 6–8, Thwaite 40–41). They provide, in addition, a notable parallel, for just as his parents monitor his moral and spiritual behaviour within a prescribed environment, so young Edmund superintends the creatures within the confines of the aquarium.

Imitating the World of the Aquarium

"Sleep in the Deep" includes a drawing (Fig. 1) in which Edmund depicts an underwater scene that resembles an aquarium in shape and arrangement. Each one of the seven fish that swims amidst the marine flora represents a different species, and this is in direct imitation of Philip's underwater scenes. Jonathan Smith argues that Philip's style of illustration is typological, presenting "a sort of aquatic peaceable kingdom, with different species coexisting in a benign setting, each with adequate resources," rather like "a millennial vision" of "the unfallen Garden of Eden" (257–58). Into such a scenario, Edmund introduces the naked and ungainly figure of Dowley who sits, straight-legged, on the ocean bed, waving his arms to fend off a large sword-fish that is bearing down upon him. Dowley is positioned at the edge of the picture frame, literally driven into a corner with no escape-route, and his unruly hair—which goes beyond the picture frame—increases his expression of fear and dread. Edmund encourages us to view Dowley from the perspective of the sea-creatures, as a "strange and shapeless being of earth."

To draw the inhabitants of an aquarium probably became second nature to Edmund, the fish-tanks having for so long been part of Gosse family life. In 1853, Philip had been responsible for sourcing over 5,000 specimens and plants to stock the first public aquarium, known as the Fish House or aquatic-vivarium at Regent's Park Zoo, and had thereafter popularized the domestic aquarium that frequented many Victorian drawing-rooms during the "aquarium mania" of the 1850s.[8] Indeed, the aquarium contributed to the development of new visual technologies that promoted a culture of constant surveillance in Victorian institutions, as illustrated by the influence of Jeremy Bentham's panopticon scheme on the design of prisons and factories.[9] Michel Foucault argues that Victorian prisoners and factory-workers never

knew whether they were being observed at any given moment, a visual discipline that "produces subjected and practised bodies, 'docile' bodies" (60). The figure of Dowley in the corner suggests that very docility; his vulnerability also evokes the hierarchy of nature, wherein the strong prey upon the weak.

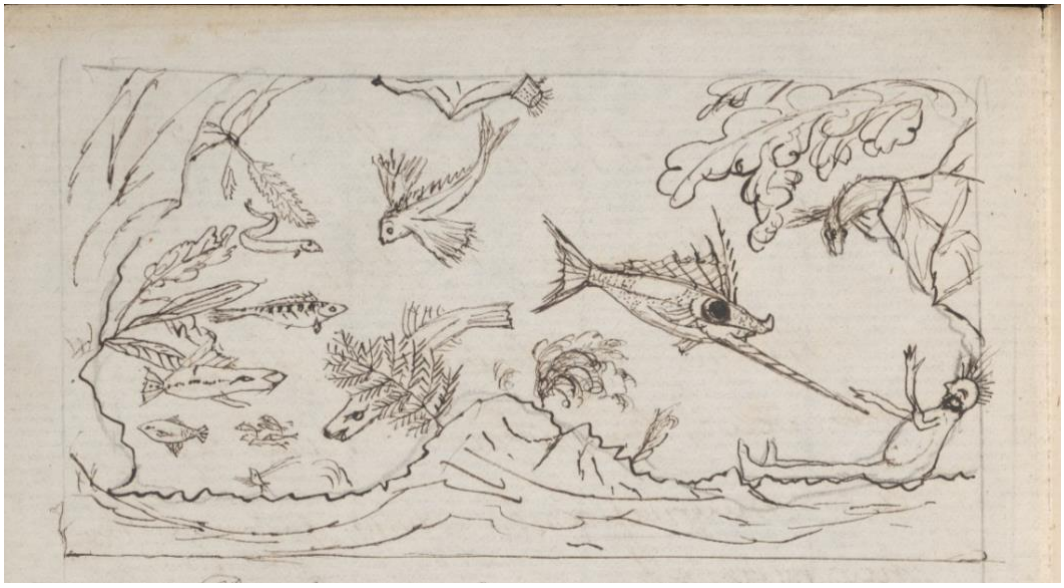

Fig. 1. Edmund Gosse, drawing in "Sleep in the Deep" (10.5 × 5.5 cm) (reproduced by kind permission of Miss Jennifer Gosse, and courtesy the Syndics of Cambridge University Library).

Having plunged the hapless Dowley to the ocean bed, Edmund stages a confrontation with Ensimanus, probably modelling the aggressive swordfish-character on Philip's description of that powerful predator in *The Ocean* (1844). The swordfish can "alarm even the leviathan of the deep" by attacking it from below with "the long and bony spear that projects from its snout" (*Ocean* 146). Philip emphasises that its habit of attack "is confirmed by the frequency with which ships are struck with great violence, most museums possessing fragments of the planking of ships in which the 'sword' of this finny tyrant is embedded" (*Ocean* 148). He also portrays the swordfish as "a very cautious fish" that, when preying on Albacore, will be found "lurking astern, awaiting a favourable opportunity to rush upon his prey when they should be unconscious of danger" (*Ocean* 301). Even with his limited understanding of fiction, Gosse recognizes the narrative potential of this "finny tyrant," giving him a temperament not only savage but also shrewd.

Appropriating Language

As Juliet McMaster observes, many child-writers "are in pursuit of language, and some savour and collect certain unfamiliar words as though they were precious

objects" ("What Daisy Knew" 52). Young Gosse clearly savours Philip's language in *The Romance of Natural History* (1861, 2nd series), from which he appropriates Philip's over-used adjective "magnificent" (employed twenty-four times in the pages of *Romance* to express the wonder of God's creation) as well as more distinctive words such as "piscine," used by Philip five times, and "mermen," appearing once, in his discussion of mermaids (this chapter to be addressed in more detail below).[10] Edmund's name for the swordfish—"Ensimanus" (lit. *sword-handed*)—merits particular attention, the word seemingly coined partly from examples of Latinate compound words that appear in Philip's chapter on Mermaids, such as "quadrumanous animals" (lit. *four-handed*) and the "natatorial type of the *Quadrumana*" (126, 127).[11] In the context of so circumscribed an existence, Edmund seems to seek power over words, and these borrowings and manipulations corroborate Gosse's later claim that as a child "I had the greatest curiosity about words" (*F&S* 94).

Instances of more polished prose in "Sleep in the Deep" are attributable to Philip's quotations in *Romance* from Walter Scott's notes to *The Lord of the Isles* (1815), where the novelist and poet describes how in "our own northern islands" he discovers an "extraordinary grotto" about which the "[i]magination can hardly conceive anything more beautiful" (134). Edmund's translation of Scott's generalised phrase, "northern islands," into the more definitive and assertive noun, "Mermaids of the North," suggests an ability as a storyteller to forge significance by wordsmithing. Edmund's description of the cave as "one more than ordinarily beautiful" shows a confident adaptation of Scott's comparative construction. Scott's novels provided "a strong impulse" to creativity among such child-writers as the Brontës, Mary Augusta Arnold, George Eliot, Thackeray, Byron, and Louisa May Alcott (Alexander 15, 18; Taylor 136; McMaster, "Choosing" 188–89). Such is the strength of Scott's prose that not only does the novel-starved Edmund respond to Scott's explanatory notes but he also singles out for direct emulation—among the many authorities cited by Philip in his chapter on mermaids—the only one who is a literary rather than a scientific writer.

Reworking Figures

FAR OUTSIDE Gosse's normal diet of religion and natural history is the mythological figure of the mermaid. Indeed, the presence of mermaids in this manuscript constitutes a pressing reason for dating it to 1860–61, as this was the time when Philip was preparing his chapter on Mermaids in *Romance*. Edmund's drawing of the mermaids (Fig. 2) shows them emerging from a dark cavern, with the partially hidden Dowley watching warily from the other side of a sea-channel. The configuration of the mermaids' tails and arms suggests a reworking of Philip's illustration of Dagon, god of the Philistines (Fig. 3), in his *Assyria: Her Manners and Customs* (1852), probably the only image of this hybrid creature available to Edmund (84).

The longevity and universality of the *Siren Canora* tradition made it a fascinating topic for the Victorians, and the publication of *Origin of the Species* (1859) and the dissemination of Darwinian theories of variation and natural selection re-energized that debate. A fixist conception of Creation, governed by taxonomies, laid down that animals should be grouped in families according to shared internal or external characteristics, while evolutionary theory argued that creatures like mermaids demonstrated the adaptation of life-forms from aquatic to terrestrial environments.[12] It seems strange that Philip, who clung tenaciously to his belief in the fixity of species, should interest himself in such controversial creatures as mermaids, but as Heather Brink-Roby argues, Philip's openness to wonders is "a religious imperative": an insistence on what was possible and what was not was considered "hubristic" (8).

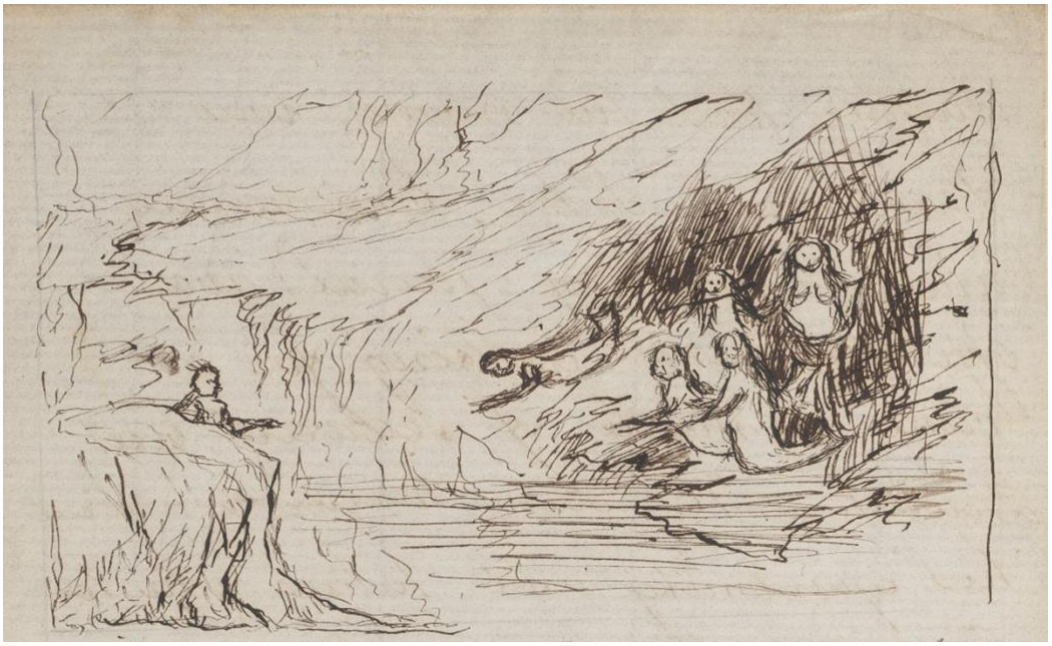

Fig. 2. Edmund Gosse, drawing in "Sleep in the Deep" (10 x 5.5 cm) (reproduced by kind permission of Miss Jennifer Gosse, and courtesy the Syndics of Cambridge University Library).

Philip's discussion of mermaids in *Romance* is wide-ranging and open-minded. He weighs his evidence and marshals his data with care, pointing out that the narratives he cites "are given by eye-witnesses of the facts they vouch for: men of honesty and probity, having no object to gain by deception, and whose accounts have been confirmed by other witnesses equally trustworthy" (127). He cites references to mermaids by ancient authors like Polyhistor and Apollodorus, by antiquarians like Erik Pontoppidan (*The Natural History of Norway*, 1752–53), by fellow-FRS's such as Samuel Hibbert-Ware (*A Description of the Shetland Islands*, 1822), Robert Hamilton ("History of the Whales and Seals" in the *Naturalist's Library,* 1843), and Sir Emerson Tennant (*Ceylon, Physical, Historical and Topographical*, 1859), as well as considering

accounts based on the statements of ordinary men such as "six Shetland fishermen" (*Romance* 144). Philip concludes that such evidences, taken together, "induce a strong suspicion that the northern seas may hold forms of life as yet uncatalogued by science" (*Romance* 145). And Philip was not unusual in this conviction: Harriet Ritvo observes that there were many attempts "to account for reported sightings of live mermaids … and thus to relocate potentially anomalous data inside the conventional confines of natural history" (181).

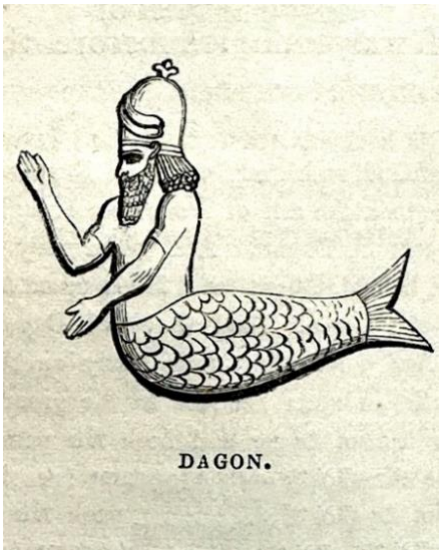

Figure 3. Philip Gosse, drawing of Dagon, God of the Philistines, from Assyria: Her Manners and Customs *(1852.)*

Philip's influence on Edmund was clearly very strong. Although we can often trace imagery and figures to specific books, we should not discount the impact of Philip's everyday oral interactions with his son in the transmission of facts, debates, and principles relating both to zoology and to religious belief. Gosse describes in *Father and Son* Philip's passion for disputation, illustrated by his animated recounting "evening after evening" of the "pros and cons" of evidence in the unsolved Thames Carpet-Bag Mystery of 1857 (67).[13] We can therefore envisage how in 1861 Philip might have rehearsed a similarly well-informed appraisal of data relating to the existence of mermaids, inadvertently kindling Edmund's imaginative response in "Sleep in the Deep."

Incorporating Personal Experience into Child-Writing

As PHILIP stated in a letter to his son of 21 January 1870, Emily had left Edmund to him "as a solemn charge … to bring you up in the nurture and admonition of the

Lord. That responsibility I have sought constantly to keep before me" (30). Impelled by that charge, Philip arranged for Edmund to undergo the ritual of baptism usually reserved for adults, being anxious to secure him in the faith before he was beset by the temptations of adolescence. Baptism in Brethren practice involved full immersion, an experience that Edmund seems to replicate by plunging Dowley into "the deep." Although Edmund recalls briefly enjoying being the centre of attention, he soon realised that his new status came with a price, for Gosse became the only child at the meeting who "broke bread as one of the Saints," and was therefore under pressure as "one so signally enlightened" to be always "an example to others" (*F&S* 110, 111). Philip, furthermore, allegedly drew "dreadful pictures of suppositious little boys who were secretly watching me from afar" and whose eternal salvation could be compromised by a failure to "keep my lamp burning" (*F&S* 110). Edmund could never escape his "curious history," especially at school where his baptismal status caused him to be "instinctively avoided, as an animal of a different species, not allied to the herd" (*F&S* 124). The naked figure of Dowley expresses not only difference, but also exposure, Edmund also feeling constantly under scrutiny with nowhere to hide.

Gosse's mother, anxious to keep her son pure by banishing all fiction from the household, explained her strategy to readers of *The Mother's Friend* in 1855:

> You may feed the young mind and infant imagination on these things [trite and foolish nursery ditties] and your child will like them. But if you make the mistake of thinking it is too soon to begin with spiritual teaching, and that you had better pave the way with nursery rhymes and other trash, you will find not only that you have lost the fairest and most favourable opportunity one human being ever has of influencing the mind of another … I was reminded of this yesterday morning, on being awakened by a little fellow at my side, who had crept out of his crib at daybreak, "Mamma," said he, "what is that about 'Heigh diddle diddle,' and the cow jumping over the moon?". I said, "Do you believe that story dear? Do you think that cows ever can jump over the moon?" "Yes, I do, ma" "And do you suppose that dishes can run away with spoons?" "Yes, mamma." "What a stupid child!" you will exclaim. Very well, your children may be wiser; but what I should think of great importance is—are you wiser than to teach your children all the nonsense you learned when you were a child? (29–30)

Since Emily's commitment to truth required her never to invent a fictional episode, we may assume that the "little fellow" in this anecdote is Edmund, who would have been six at the time. Although the epithet of the "stupid child" is attributed to the reader and not to the narrator, it is an ambivalent textual transition that a sensitive

child might take to heart; it may have fuelled Edmund's characterization of Dowley as "always stupid."

By regulating Gosse's contact with the world so rigorously, Emily could be said to have "interpellated" him into a "subject" (Althusser 115–24), one who in this case is *subjected* to God's commandments. Without any alternative language available to him, Gosse's religious discourse is precocious, and he remembers that before his baptism, "I testified my faith in the atonement with a fluency that surprised myself" (*F&S* 105). The absorption of the King James biblical lexis and figures into "Sleep in the Deep" should not therefore surprise us. Dowley is, for example, "affrighted," a word that Gosse would have heard regularly at the meeting-house: multiple references in Deuteronomy urge believers to "be not affrighted," and it is also the injunction that the angel makes to the disciples after Christ's resurrection (Mark 16:6). Similarly, Gosse would have been well-acquainted with biblical talking animals, such as the cunning serpent in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:1–5), the faithful donkey that revealed the angel to Balaam (Numbers 22:22–40), and the eagle that warns humanity of the ending of the world (Revelation 8:13). As Christine Alexander notes, there is in children's writing "no contradiction between the literal and the fantastic," and it may have seemed quite logical for Edmund to give his fictional swordfish, Ensimanus, a voice (18).

Certainly, that voice of Ensimanus is peculiarly resonant in relation to the symbolism of baptism. Ensimanus's inquiry of Dowley, "Who art thou?" echoes the question put to John the Baptist by the Jewish priests (John 1:22). In his reply, John the Baptist intimated that his identity was irrelevant other than as the herald of Jesus; in other words, he had already died to self and was now assimilated with Christ. The notion of sharing Christ's crucifixion is reiterated by Dowley's experience of being beaten, recalling Pilate's scourging of Christ (John 19:1), and of being intimidated by Ensimanus's threat to "pierce you through," a phrase that evokes the act of the soldier who pierced Jesus's side with his spear at Calvary (John 19:34). Edmund would have been well versed in the meaning of the rite of baptism, immersion symbolizing the believer's desire to share Christ's suffering, and emergence signifying new birth fired by the Holy Spirit. Nor would it have seemed far-fetched to situate Dowley's "baptism" in open sea, given that Philip had long conducted baptismal rites at the shoreline near Oddicombe (*F&S* 107). After Dowley's immersion and suffering, he emerges into a space that is "beautiful" and "splendid" to be greeted "lovingly" by mermaids, conceivably Edmund's notion of the new birth. However, there is something ominous about these "loving" mermaids. Just as for Edmund, the act of baptism was believed to fix his future for eternity, so Dowley seems to intuit that interaction with the mermaids may herald something irrevocable, and he becomes troubled.

In Figure 2, we see four mermaids in the grotto and a fifth diving into the pool to greet Dowley. In his text, Gosse mentions only four mermaids, and I suggest that his specificity may reflect his thinking of the four women who during his own lifetime

had been, or had attempted to be, in a loving relationship with his father. Juliet McMaster uses Henry James's fictional child, Maisie Farange, as "a paradigm for the epistemology of the child, especially the Victorian child, because her case epitomizes the crisis of the child's urgent need for knowledge," that is, the forbidden knowledge of such adult subjects as sex and death ("What Daisy Knew"). Emily, as the first of the four women in Philip's life, is associated with sleep and death. In *Father and Son* Gosse remembers how his night-time routine was suddenly changed as her death became imminent: "I no longer slept in her room, no longer sank to sleep under her kiss" (43). Death and the kiss thus become associated with displacement. The epitaph on Emily's grave at Abney Park Cemetery, moreover, insists—confusingly for a child—that she "*slept* in Jesus" and that her dust "*waits* here the morning of the first resurrection" (emphasis added).[14] Even if Philip had explained the doctrinal niceties of "sleeping in Jesus" as espoused in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–17, the close association of the kiss, sleep, and death may have long been troubling for the child.

As Gosse records in *Father and Son*, Philip the widower attracted the attentions of three aspirants to matrimony: the headmistress of a nearby boarding-school, Miss Wilkes; the housekeeper Sarah Andrews (a.k.a. "Miss Marks"); and a middle-aged Quaker lady, Eliza Brightwen. Now it is Edmund's turn to be a "jealous monitor," as he scrutinizes the behaviour of Miss Wilkes "with a suspicious watchfulness that was above my years" and expresses to Miss Marks his "horror" at the very idea of her becoming his "mamma" (*F&S* 128, 92, 127). Like Maisie Farange, young Gosse is aware of adult doings that he is supposed not to understand. Philip's marriage to Miss Brightwen in December 1860 (which Edmund did not attend) is marked by his "own possessions" being removed "to a private bed-room" (*F&S* 127). Just as on his mother's death, now on his father's re-marriage Edmund is ousted from the parental bedroom, abruptly expelled first by the prescience of death and second by the prospect of sex. Through all these changes, the boy is expected to remain innocent of and unquestioning about adult motives and conduct.

Experimenting with Genres

AMIDST this confusing world of adult obfuscation, Edmund was inadvertently introduced by his father to the genre of fiction in the form of Michael Scott's *Tom Cringle's Log*, the story of a thirteen-year-old midshipman in the Royal Navy who has various encounters with Napoleon's sailors, pirates, smugglers, and slave-owners. We must try to conceive the effects of Edmund having read only factual material for the first decade of life, and understand how, having never been told fairy-tales and the like, he had developed no sense of the protective devices that soften the impact of metaphor and style; he had no repertoire of frames and filters allowing him to understand irony and paradox; and he had no awareness of the fabrication of fiction, or the distortions of subjectivity, or the weight of inscribed cultural codes. Emily's

prohibition of fairy-tales would have contributed to Edmund's struggle not only with genre but also with emotion. Unlike other children who routinely engaged with Grimm's fairy-tales and the like, Edmund never learned to experience the threat of death, forests, witches, and giants in safe symbolic contexts. He could never take a break from parental "protection" and test the boundaries of autonomy. In retrospect, Gosse compares the impact of "Scott's wild masterpiece" on his psyche with "giving a glass of brandy neat to someone who had never been weaned from a milk diet," a bewildering and disorienting experience (*F&S* 118).

Through the eyes of his fellow-innocent, Tom Cringle, Edmund encountered in the *Log* scenes of violence, rape, and prostitution. Cringle sees a young woman who is mentally and physically traumatised by pirate assault, "blood on her bosom … gibbering an incoherent prayer," and he finds his friend in a brothel, "pinioned into a large easy-chair … by four beautiful young women, black hair and eyes, clear white skins, fine figures and little clothing" (Scott 50, 280). As Morris Mowbray warns in his introduction to the 1895 edition of the novel, "fastidious souls" might be "shocked," for "it was Scott's habit to paint with a full brush" (xvi). Critical interpretations of Edmund's response to *Tom Cringle's Log* have invariably accepted the adult Gosse's romantic view expressed in *Father and Son* that the book produced a "hope … that I should escape at last from the narrowness of the life we led at home" (119).[15] This reading accords with the book's thesis of Gosse's gradual emancipation from the bondage of religion through the boundlessness of literature. What has been overlooked, however, is Gosse's rather rueful remark that "certain scenes and images in *Tom Cringle's Log* made not merely a lasting impression upon my mind, but *tinged* my outlook upon life" (118 emphasis added). Even if the book *had* opened up a prospect of future escape, its more immediate effect seems to have been to mark the end of innocence and the threat of a world inhabited by menacing male figures (like the swordfish) and potentially treacherous females (like the mermaids). The sudden shift from a "milk diet" to neat brandy may appear intoxicating and liberating, but it is more likely to have been nauseating and numbing.

Philip's aquaria and Emily's legacy of baptismal immersion, as well as daily life by the seashore, accommodated Edmund to watery environments, and yet the reading of *Tom Cringle's Log* was like falling in at the deep end, never having been taught to swim; we might say he is "all at sea," that is, lost and confused. And Edmund expresses this in "Sleep in the Deep" by making Dowley emphatically *un*heroic. Not only does Dowley "fall" rather than dive into the sea but he is also "affrighted" by the swordfish, and he describes himself in the diminutive, as "only a little boy." Edmund highlights Dowley's timidity three times in this short piece, asserting also that he is "always stupid," conceivably the unfortunate echo of his mother's tract. Michael Scott bolsters his protagonist's marine identity by giving him a nautical name, a "cringle" being the hole in the corner of the sail through which a rope is passed, a small but crucial component of the ship's workings. Of the name Dowley, however, the nearest dictionary equivalent is *dowly*, a dialect word meaning "doleful, miserable,

and lonely" (*OED*). Ensimanus, furthermore, intimidates Dowley psychologically by challenging his identity, addressing him thrice as "Poor Peter." Given that most of Edmund's role-models were biblical, he may be identifying Dowley with Peter, the disciple who denied Christ three times. Certainly, denial was much on Gosse's mind during his schooldays: the duty of testifying his faith to fellow-pupils caused Gosse much anxiety and "prevented my forming any intimate friendships," rendering him lonely or *dowly* (*F&S* 123).

The Struggle to Invent

THOUGH Edmund is comfortable with reworking parental discourses, he has no model for the mermaid behaviour of playing and kissing, and it is at this point that the story falters. It is notable that in Figure 2 Edmund represents Dowley behind a rock, seemingly wary of approaching the mermaids. Having no siblings and no peer-group, play did not come naturally to Edmund: it was not until 1859 that "I was allowed, at last, to associate with a child of my own age," and what he learned from that experience was that "I had not the faintest idea how to 'play'" (*F&S* 91). The act of playing has long been paralleled with the act of child-writing because, as Leslie Robertson observes, it permits "the creation of model situations, of fictional worlds, of an invented reality, over which" the child "is master" (294). Edmund's inability to play makes it difficult for him to represent Dowley in that role, and inhibits the continuation of the story.

The introduction to the world of adults through *Tom Cringle's Log* "tinged" Edmund's outlook and darkened his perceptions. Not only are sex and death brutalized in that novel but Edmund's own experience of those events has also been shrouded by displacement (removal from the parental bedroom) and secrecy (no participation in Emily's funeral nor in Philip's remarriage). Kisses, therefore, may be even more disconcerting than play. As Joy Morse observes, the kiss is "both a performance of assertion (for the giver) and of submission (for the receiver)" and, as such, it conveys "a spectrum of power-positions" (282). Edmund would have been familiar with biblical models of kissing as routes to power and wealth: to usurp his brother's birthright, Jacob tricks blind Isaac into kissing him instead of Esau (Genesis 27:25–27), while Judas betrays Jesus to the Sanhedrin by a kiss (Matthew 26:48). Gosse seems to sense that the mermaids would gain a dangerous power over Dowley by their kisses, an uncanny anticipation of J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* (1906), where the "lost boys" have an ambivalent relationship with mermaids.

Conclusion

As SCHOLARSHIP in literary juvenilia has demonstrated, the imitation of sources by the child-writer involves complex acts of personalization and distancing, appropriation and reworking. "Sleep in the Deep" provides many nuanced insights into Gosse's adolescent psychology and situation, as well as his ability to transform and fuse three separate discourses—the realm of marine zoology; the spiritual significance of baptism; and the quest of the seafarer—combining their physical, symbolic, and fictional forms as watery domains. Though clearly envisaged as an extended project of several chapters, the first was never completed, possibly due to emotional inhibition but also audience disapproval. In the days of those bright and earnest letters to his father when all that mattered was how often the "Eolis despecta" was sighted in "the tanks," Edmund was confident that his "extremely precious Papa" would be a receptive audience (Add. 7027: 32).[16] However, with regard to "Sleep in the Deep," Edmund may have sensed Philip's disapproval; indeed, there is a hint of this in an anecdote in *Father and Son*.

In that memoir, Gosse claims that aged ten, he was "preparing little monographs on sea-side creatures" modelled "as exactly as possible on the pattern of those which my Father was composing for his *Actinologia Britannica*," a work published in 1860 (*F&S* 98). The theme that this anecdote illustrates is the Victorian debate about imitation versus originality, with Gosse criticising the emphasis on the latter, the fact that "in these days … children are not considered promising, unless they attempt things preposterous and unparalleled" (*F&S* 97). Gosse argues that a child should rather "imitate closely and carefully what is being said and done in the vicinity," then describes how he "emulated" his father's painstakingly-detailed illustrations (*F&S* 97–8). This sense of apprenticeship is important to our understanding of "Sleep in the Deep," for although Gosse became a man of letters—a classifier of literature, unlike Philip who was a classifier of fauna and flora—there is undoubtedly an acknowledgement here that Gosse learnt his craft in the paternal workshop.

However, as with many of Gosse's anecdotes in *Father and Son*, there is a twist in the tale, for he suggests that his imitations inadvertently parodied Philip's work: "If I had not been so innocent and solemn, he might have fancied I was mocking him" (*F&S* 98). Gosse alleges that he "invented new species, with sapphire spots and crimson tentacles … which were close enough to his [Philip's] real species to be disconcerting," but that because of his childlike "innocence" his father could not reprimand him, but only "good-humouredly, deprecate" his efforts (*F&S* 98). It is possible that, during his research for *Father and Son*, Gosse found the manuscript of "Sleep in the Deep" and recalibrated its content and tone to construct this anecdote foregrounding the sort of child-writer or incipient parodist he wished he had been, or desired his audience to imagine him being, at the age of ten. As Ann Thwaite observes, Gosse "changed things deliberately very often to make a better story" (3). In this retrospective version of events, then, Gosse suggests that as an adolescent, he could produce an allusive, playful, and confounding critique of the work of an

established author, evincing the traits requisite for his later role as a man of letters. He wants the world to believe that, despite the many parental prohibitions and prescriptions, young Edmund Gosse's essential nature as a witty, incisive, and shrewd commentator manifested itself against all odds. Manipulated by its own author, and overlooked for over one and a half centuries, "Sleep in the Deep" constitutes a moving testimony to a child's attempt to use all the resources at his disposal to make sense of his environment, his adolescence, and his emotions.

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NOTES

[1] The practice of grangerism takes its name from Rev. James Granger (1723–1776), whose *Biographical History of England, from Egbert to the Great Revolution* (1769) was physically expanded by Richard Bull (1721–1805) into thirty-six large folio volumes, containing over 14,500 prints. See Megan Becker-Leckrone, "Grangerism," in *The Microgenre: A Quick Look at Small Culture*, edited by Molly C. O'Donnell and Anne H. Stevens (2019), pp. 71–81.

[2] Philip Henry George Gosse was a medic, naturalist, and writer, and should not be confused with his grandfather, Philip Henry Gosse, who is the Philip discussed hereafter. For details of the former's life, see Fayette Gosse, *The Gosses: An Anglo-Australian Family* (1981), pp. 2–9, 141–45.

[3] In *Father and Son*, a work that alludes to well over one hundred titles, Gosse devotes more space (over one thousand words) to *Tom Cringle's Log* than to any other text: it was first published intermittently in *Blackwood's Magazine* (1829–34).

[4] Gosse uses the phrase "unspotted from the world" (from James 1: 26–27) three times in *Father and Son*, mostly with an ironic inflection, pp. 8, 118, 173.

[5] Philip discusses the genus *Bolocera* in his *Actinologia Briannica* (1860), pp. 351–52.

[6] In *A Naturalist's Rambles on the Devonshire Coast* (1853), Philip describes how a pipefish survives in his aquarium for a period of four weeks, pp. 178–85.

[7] *Cerianthus Lyodii* is a species of tube-dwelling anemone; see illustration in *Actinologia Briannica*: Plate VII, no 8, p. 228.

[8] Philip describes his involvement with that project in *The Aquarium,* Van Voorst, 1854, pp. 3–4. See also Henry Humphreys, *Ocean Gardens: The History of the Marine Aquarium,* Sampson Low, 1857, pp. 27–28. For a contemporary report on the popularity of the aquarium across all social classes, see "The Aquarium Mania," *Titan*, vol. 13, 1856, p. 323.

[9] Pentonville Prison, London, with its central surveillance tower, was opened in 1842.

[10] Philip produced *The Romance of Natural History* (first series) in 1860, and *The Romance of Natural History* (second series) in 1861. In *Father and Son*, Gosse described this second book as "the most picturesque, easy and graceful of all his writings," attributing Philip's "unusually humane mood" to his marriage to Eliza Brightwen in December 1860 (130).

[11] From the age of nine Gosse learnt Latin, albeit fitfully, with his father (*F&S* 95).

[12] See Béatrice Laurent, "Monster or Missing Link? The Mermaid and the Victorian Imagination," *Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens*, vol. 85, Spring 2017.

[13] This refers to the press sensation caused by the gruesome discovery of a carpet-bag, containing a headless and mutilated body, hanging on a rope beneath Waterloo Bridge. See Jeffrey Bloomfield, "The Bag that Nobody Claimed," *Medicine, Science, and the Law*, vol. 38, no. 4, 1998, pp. 335–40.

[14] "Grave of Emily Gosse, Abney Park Cemetery." *Brethren Archive*, www.Brethrenarchive.org/on-the-brethren-trail/grave-hunting/abney-park-cemetery/emily-gosse.

[15] See Francis O'Gorman, "Romance and Victorian Autobiography: Margaret Oliphant, Edmund Gosse, and John Ruskin's 'needle to the north.'" *A Companion to Romance: From Classical to Contemporary*, edited by Corinne Saunders, Blackwell, 2004, pp. 360–74 (369); Michael Newton, introduction to *Father and Son*, Oxford UP, 2004, pp. ix–xxviii (xxi–xxii); Samuel Clark, "Pleasure as Self-Discovery," *Ratio*, vol. 25, no.3, 2012, pp. 260–76 (272).

[16] Edmund's salutation to Philip in letter dated 16 Feb. 1859 (MS Add. 7027: 32)

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