'Mad about the boy': mythological models and Victorian painting

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The beautiful boy has fascinated both artist and viewer throughout the history of western art. From Greek vases, to the high Renaissance, from the eighteenth century to the classical revival in Victorian painting, his image remains a distinctive presence. No longer a subject which dominates the canvas in the twentieth century, he still occupies a recognizable role in modern popular culture. In the Victorian period the beautiful boy was represented, above all, in a mythological role – as a Hylas, a Narcissus, an Icarus.[1]

Nineteenth-century Britain witnessed both a growth and a reorientation of interest in all things Greek. In the wake of Winckelmann's sculptural ideal of the calm and noble, Hellenism was equated with the sublime. In the same spirit, Matthew Arnold invested the Greek temperament with 'sweetness and light', and John Ruskin asserted that the Greeks 'never have ugly dreams'.[2] This Hellenic ideal was also presented to the public on the Victorian canvas. For many painters, ancient Greece was an idyllic world peopled with beautiful figures who rested languorously in flower-starred fields and sun-kissed seascapes. In such paintings as Frederic Leighton's *Idyll* (c.1880–81: private collection) and *Flaming June* (1895: Museo de Arte de Ponce, Puerto Rico), Greece becomes an eternal sunny afternoon.

While serenity, grace and repose remained the dominant nineteenth-century reading of (or into) Greek culture, other sides of Hellenism could not be altogether overlooked. The dark and irrational nature of Dionysiac myth and ritual is hinted at in a few paintings of ecstatic maenadic worship,[3] and a bawdy humour emerges in Beardsley's illustrations to Aristophanes.[4] And, perhaps most surprisingly, there is an acknowledgement by some painters of the homosocial nature of Greek culture and its recognition of the relationship between an older man (*erastês*) and a younger man or boy (*erômenos*).

It was through representations of myth that images of the beautiful and sexually desirable boy were reconciled with the Greek ideal and also with the accepted moral codes of Victorian society. Such reconciliations are apparent in

the visual sphere and even more pronounced in works of literature. From roughly the 1870s onwards, homoerotic English poetry begins to surface in the art periodical, *The Artist and Journal of Home Culture*, and in various privately printed volumes. Some poems are loose translations of Greek originals, such as William Cory's *Ionica* and Edward Cracroft Lefroy's *Echoes of Theocritus*.[5] Others make a still freer use of Greek mythological allusion as an acceptable expression of homosexual desire.[6]

Whereas many of these poets implicitly identify themselves with a homosexual subculture, painters of classical subjects, for the most part, display their respectability by a public allegiance to the norms of the traditionally conservative, and immensely prestigious, Royal Academy of Arts. And yet, among a wide range of classical and other points of reference, we do find even leading Academicians – William Blake Richmond is the clearest example – showing a specific interest in mythological homoerotic themes. Their institutional credentials ensure that the appeal of the beautiful boy is never merely marginal, but is embraced by a general, educated art-viewing public.

One of the first scholars to address Greek homosexuality was the German polymath, Karl Otfried Müller, whose *The Dorians* (1824), discussed what he viewed as a non-sexual form of pederasty in early Greek culture.[7] Much later the Anglo-Irish scholar, J.P. Mahaffy, touched on pederasty in the later age of Greece in his *Social Life in Greece from Homer to Menander* (1874), in which he too described pederasty as a non-sexual and ideal attachment.[8]

In 1883 John Addington Symonds, Victorian classical scholar and poet, privately published an apologia for Greek homosexuality, which may be regarded as the first serious discussion of the subject, entitled *A Problem in Greek Ethics*. Symonds cited Plato's *Phaedrus* and *Symposium* to provide a model for idealized pederasty, which subsequently, in *A Problem in Modern Ethics* (privately printed in 1891), he argued could be applied to modern sexuality. In 1871, meanwhile, Benjamin Jowett's translation of the *Symposium* had made the dialogue accessible to many without Greek, and Plato was thereafter used to help define male homosexuality in a modern world lacking suitable literary role models for relationships between males.

After reading Plato in his youth, Symonds himself embarks on a series of sentimental attachments to boys.[9] In E. M. Forster's *Maurice*, Clive Durham could not forget 'his emotion at first reading the *Phaedrus*',[10] and Maurice and Clive begin their unconsummated love affair after the former reads the *Symposium* during his summer vacation from Oxford. In Oscar Wilde's impassioned speech from the dock, in which he defines 'the Love that dare not

speak its name', he refers specifically to 'such a great affection of an elder for a younger man as there was between David and Jonathan, such as Plato made the very basis of his philosophy'.[11]

Many less specific literary allusions to Greece also hinted at homosexuality. In Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Basil Hallward asks Dorian, 'Why is your friendship so fatal to young men?', and lists a number of such men whose lives had ended in disgrace, exile or suicide.[12] The implication that Dorian is involved in homosexual scandal is surely strengthened by the choice of his name and its clear allusion to Greek homosexuality,[13] given that, in the wake of Müller's book, the theory that pederasty had originated with Dorian civilization was generally accepted.[14]

Even soft pornography was mediated through the respectability of the Hellenic ideal. Photographs of nude youths set against antique studio props and Grecian-style accessories were very much in vogue in the 1890s. Baron von Gloeden and his nephew, Guglielmo Plüschow, were two photographers who settled at Taormina in Sicily to make a lucrative living out of photographing the local boys.[15] Gloeden's photographs were published in the first issue of the respectable art magazine, the *Studio*, in 1890 and were collected by, among others, Lawrence Alma-Tadema: they remain in the artist's photographic archive of ancient architecture and statuary.[16]

Towards the end of the century the life of a practising homosexual became increasingly precarious. In 1885, Section 11 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act made all homosexual acts in public and private illegal. The law was tested in a few prominent cases. The Cleveland Street Scandal of 1889 involved a brothel, telegraph boys and the Earl of Euston. Euston brought a libel case against the editor of the *North London Press* which had carried an exposé of the case and named him as being involved. The editor was found guilty and Euston vindicated.[17] Six years later Oscar Wilde was less fortunate; losing his libel action against the Marquess of Queensberry, he was tried for homosexual acts and sentenced to two years' hard labour. On the eve of the verdict it was said that droves of English bachelors were found boarding the night train to France. Apocryphal or not, the story illustrates the understandable panic generated by Wilde's public condemnation.

The art world could not be unaffected by a climate of increasing homophobia. Critics charged a number of paintings with excessive male effeminacy. Although effeminacy was not viewed solely as a correlate of homosexuality and was also connected, for example, with decadent aestheticism, it had, at any rate, undesirable and negative associations.[18] Briton Riviere's *Apollo with the Herds of Admetus* (1874: untraced) was criticized by

the *Art Journal* for showing a youthful, full-faced and long-haired Apollo rather than a more heroic figure.[19] Riviere's next painting of the god, *Phoebus Apollo* (1895: Birmingham Art Gallery and Museum) represents, in contrast, a dashing, lean and muscular figure racing in a chariot driven by angry lions. Nevertheless, some painters found a way of hinting at an acceptable visual form of homosexuality by recourse to the tradition of idealized Greek pederasty. With Plato and Greek mythology as precedents, the beautiful boy thus became a legitimate subject.

Pederastic relationships are hinted at in Frederic Leighton's *Jonathan's Token to David* (c.1868: private collection) and *Hit* (c.1893: private collection), intimate scenes in which an older man and a youth or a boy are juxtaposed.[20] In Lawrence Alma-Tadema's *A Pyrrhic Dance* (1869: Guildhall Art Gallery, London) mature bearded men and clean-shaven youths watch the performance of a military dance side by side. Two seated figures on the right of the canvas, in particular, present a sharp juxtaposition: a middle-aged man with a grey beard and sagging chest and his young companion, sporting styled hair and pastel costume.[21]

Alma-Tadema elaborates on the same configuration in *The Siesta* (1868: Prado, Madrid) where two reclining men, one older and the other younger (though bearded), doze after dinner to the sound of a flute girl playing the *aulos*. The artist produced a number of similar paintings on the theme of Greek dining customs, but in this example we find a clear allusion to the homosocial nature of Greek culture in the lines inscribed on the frame:

> In the cool shade rest thee now,
> Fair Bathyllus, in this tree;
> Through its foliage to and fro,
> Zephyr wanders dreamily.

The verses form part of *Anacreontea* 18, in which the poet seeks to ward off the heat of love.[22] The *Anacreontea* is a collection of Greek poems long attributed to the late-archaic poet Anacreon, but by the nineteenth century recognized as later and of unknown authorship. The poems of both Anacreon and the *Anacreontea* take as their subject wine, love and beautiful boys, and by the nineteenth century the risqué nature of Anacreontean verse was a commonplace. It is conjured up, for instance, in a decadent novel of 1894, Matthew Shiel's *Prince Zaleski*, in which the hero is introduced to the reader in an exotic chamber filled with curious and expensive objects, underneath a cloud of cannabis smoke, a 'gemmed chibouque' in one hand and 'an old

vellum reprint of Anacreon' in the other.[23] Furthermore, the 'Bathyllus' who figures in Alma-Tadema's chosen lines is cited by a number of writers (including the *Anacreontea* itself) as the youthful male lover of Anacreon.[24]

In 1889, *The Artist and Journal of Home Culture* carried an article entitled 'Subjects for Pictures', which offered a list of Greek, mainly mythological subjects, of a distinctly homosexual slant, including Plato and Agathon, Hyacinthus and Apollo, and Narcissus.[25] Mythological themes had dominated the painter's oeuvre from the Renaissance, and Victorian culture, rich in literary and visual mythological allusion, guaranteed a reading and viewing public familiar with the narratives and characters of Greek myth. Most Victorian mythological paintings, certainly, represent heterosexual love interests: Pygmalion and Galatea, Bacchus and Ariadne, Perseus and Andromeda, Apollo and Daphne. Nevertheless, a few striking canvases illustrate homosexual themes.

Artists were particularly attracted to the transience of youthful beauty through the figure of the tragic youth: the beautiful boy doomed to die at the height of his beauty. In the Greek world a boy's most desirable age was at the cusp of manhood. Poem XII.4 in the *Palatine Anthology* lists the attractions of the adolescent years:

> I delight in the prime of a boy of twelve, but one of thirteen is much more desirable. He who is fourteen is a still sweeter flower of the Loves, and one who is just beginning his fifteenth year is yet more delightful. The sixteenth year is that of the gods, and as for the seventeenth it is not for me, but for Zeus, to seek it.[26]

The pathos of an early death also held a special appeal for the Victorian artist.[27] While Renaissance artists produced many-figured canvases depicting battles and triumphs, ardent lovers and exhausted revellers, Victorian painters, imbued with Romantic notions of melancholy beauty, selected personal and intimate mythological scenes of reflective and often regretful individuals. Wordsworth's 'marvellous boy', Thomas Chatterton, forger of fifteenth-century poems, who was exposed and, at the age of seventeen, committed suicide in a Holborn garret, was claimed by the Romantic poets as a tragic genius. Henry Wallis' painting, *Chatterton* (1871: Tate Britain, London) shows a young poet of arresting beauty with clear skin, soft features and flowing red hair. Evidently inspired by Wallis' painting, John Addington Symonds' poem, 'For a Picture of the Dead Chatterton', forges a connection between Chatterton and the mythological tradition:

> Fair he lies, like sculptured marble
> Fashioned from some Grecian's brain
> For a young Adonis sleeping
> Till the zephyrs wake again.[28]

The stories of Ganymede, abducted by Zeus – of Hyacinthus the young lover of Apollo killed by a quoit – of Hylas, the favourite of Heracles, drowned by water nymphs whilst fetching water from a pool – of Narcissus, who spurned male and female admirers to fall in love with his own reflection and pine away for the love of it – and of Icarus, who flew too near the sun, which melted his wings of wax and sent him to his death in the ocean: all these are, like Chatterton's story, bitter-sweet tales.

In both ancient and Victorian literature these stories form a familiar group whose names evoke the desirability and fragility of boyhood beauty. In Propertius 1.20, Hylas, instead of fetching water, gazes at his own reflection, like Narcissus, in the pool. In Lucian's *Vera Historia* (2.17), Hylas, Narcissus and Hyacinthus are placed together in the Elysian fields. In Petronius' *Satyricon* (83), the boy-loving Encolpius visits an art gallery and admires paintings of Ganymede, Hylas and Hyacinthus.

Symonds' poem, 'Midnight at Baiae: A Dream Fragment of Imperial Rome', envisions the poet stealing into a villa at night in which he sees paintings described as:

> Hylas, Hyacinth,
> And heaven-rapt Ganymede: I know them: crowned
> With lilies dew-bedrenched.[29]

While Hyacinthus and, more often, Ganymede appear in the iconography of the Renaissance, they are, however, rarely chosen by Victorian painters. Perhaps their tales are too unmistakably pederastic: the word 'ganymede', after all, was in usage from the medieval world to the seventeenth century, in the sense of an object of homosexual desire.[30] By contrast, the stories of the other boys merely carry homosexual undertones. Although Hylas is the lover of Heracles, his is a female seduction; the homosexual motif in Narcissus' story is merely incidental; and Icarus' untimely death alone connects him with the homosexual tradition of the tragic youth. And in all Victorian visual representations of these myths the homoeroticism of the subject remains tantalizingly latent.

The story of Hylas appears in Apollonius' *Argonautica* (1.1207–1357), Theocritus' *Idylls* (13), Propertius (1.20) and Virgil's *Eclogues* (6.43–4).

Theocritus and Propertius stress the love relationship between Heracles and the boy. In William Morris' retelling of the *Argonautica*, *The Life and Death of Jason*, there is no mention of this relationship. Yet the homosexual Hylas is celebrated in Edward Cracroft Lefroy's *Echoes of Theocritus* and Oscar Wilde's 'Charmides' (170) and 'The Garden of Eros' (22). Francis Burdett Thomas Coutts-Nevill's poem, 'Hercules and Hylas', written in 1896, emphasizes the pederastic nature of their relationship. Once Hylas is lost, Hercules searches:

> For in his mind a vision will not cease
> Of locks as golden as the Golden Fleece,
> That oft were wont upon his breast to spread
> When there the happy child would lay his head.[31]

In the same year John William Waterhouse exhibited *Hylas and the Nymphs* [Figure 1]. Hylas kneels on the bank, a water-jar in one hand, while seven girlish nymphs emerge from the water to encircle him. Andrew Lang published a popular translation of Theocritus in 1880 which may have influenced the artist's choice of source, as Waterhouse follows both Theocritus' description of a pond surrounded by lush vegetation and the abduction itself:

> And now the boy was holding out the wide-mouthed pitcher to the water, intent on dipping it, but the nymphs all clung to his hand, for the love of the Argive lad had fluttered the soft hearts of all of them.[32]

Waterhouse paints one nymph holding out pearls to entice Hylas, one pulling at his clothing, and another grasping his arm and wrist. However, there is no allusion to Heracles, the lover Hylas will leave behind, and the artist invites us to enjoy the beauty of the nymphs rather than the youth whose face remains in shadowy profile.

In 1833 William Etty had exhibited his own *Hylas and the Nymphs* (untraced) showing an entanglement of naked flesh, as the nymphs grapple with the unfortunate Hylas. In 1910 Henrietta Rae's *Hylas and the Water-Nymphs* (untraced) followed Etty with a display of flirtatious, simpering nudes. Once again seven nymphs emerge from a lily pond to encircle Hylas. Rae is also influenced by Waterhouse's *Hylas and the Nymphs*, but her version loses the almost sinister stillness and strange beauty of his painting.

There is one other Hylas painting, *Stray'd Hylas* (1908) by an American artist, George Faulkner Wetherbee. Although now untraced, we can judge its

FIGURE 1
JOHN WILLIAM WATERHOUSE, *HYLAS AND THE NYMPHS*
(1896: Manchester City Art Gallery)

appearance from original reproductions of Wetherbee's other works such as *Orpheus* (1901: untraced), depicting a lithe youth playing the lyre, and *Adventurers* (untraced), painted in the same year as *Stray'd Hylas*, showing three nude youths running into the sea to greet the sunrise. Wetherbee's preference for the youthful male nude leads one to imagine that his *Stray'd Hylas* is likely to have been the most homoerotic Victorian representation of the myth.

Narcissus is loved by both boys and girls, but spurns all of them until he spies his own reflection in a pool and pines away for the love of it. Roman representations of Narcissus, on over fifty wall paintings found at Pompeii, all show him as an effeminate youth alone with his reflection. Ovid (*Metamorphoses* 3.339–510) connects two unrequited passions by linking the story of Narcissus with that of Echo. The two most successful Victorian paintings of the subject, Solomon J. Solomon's *Echo and Narcissus* (1895: untraced) and John William Waterhouse's *Echo and Narcissus* [Figure 2], follow Ovid's version of the myth in representing Narcissus as the object of Echo's heterosexual passion.

Solomon depicts a feverish Echo clasping a heedless Narcissus; she gazes longingly into his face as he looks at himself in the pool below. In Waterhouse's painting the two figures are separated from each other by a stream. Echo glances wistfully at Narcissus while he leans over the water enchanted by his own reflection. Narcissus' passion, not Echo's, is the more desperate; he strains forward as if to grasp at the boy in the pond. While the nudity of Solomon's Echo serves to heighten her fervour, the semi-nudity of Waterhouse's Echo emphasizes her vulnerability. Two narcissi grow in the right-hand corner of the canvas, reminding us of Narcissus' poignant death, and the whole painting captures the intense pathos of Ovid's telling of the story.

An earlier painting, Helen Thornycroft's watercolour, *Narcissus* [Figure 3] excludes Echo to show Narcissus alone. Lying dead amongst the flowers to which he gives his name, this Narcissus is the archetype of boyish beauty. A wispy moustache indicates that he is an adolescent on the verge of maturity, and that his beauty is preserved in death before it is lost to manhood. In Greek pederastic poetry, facial hair becomes an erotic emblem signifying that the boy has reached the height of his appeal as a youth but is approaching the maturity which will extinguish his desirability and availability as he moves into a heterosexual sphere. Book Twelve of the *Palatine Anthology* deals almost exclusively with pederastic love and many of the epigrams refer to the onset of facial hair. For example, XII.31 reads:

FIGURE 2
JOHN WILLIAM WATERHOUSE, *ECHO AND NARCISSUS*
(1903: Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool)

FIGURE 3
HELEN THORNYCROFT, *NARCISSUS*
(1876: Private collection)

> By Themis and the bowl of wine that made me totter, thy love, Pamphilus, has but a little time to last. Already thy thigh has hair on it and thy cheeks are downy, and Desire leads thee henceforth to another kind of passion.[33]

While Icarus is rarely associated with homosexuality, even in the poetry of the later nineteenth century, he too is a tragic youth who dies in the bloom of his beauty; and he is painted in much the same manner as Hylas and Narcissus. In Frederic Leighton's *Daedalus and Icarus* [Figure 4] we see Icarus about to set off, full of youthful confidence. Exhilarated with the anticipation of flight, his drapery, already airborne, billows impatiently behind him. The body of the ageing Daedalus, strapping the wings to his son, makes a marked contrast with Icarus' young body; the weathered, dark skin of the father is juxtaposed to the soft pale flesh of the son. The usual contrast between dark and pale flesh, found in representational traditions from Greek vase painting onwards, is a contrast between the male and the female. Icarus here, then, assumes the iconographic role of the female.

In Leighton's painting, Icarus' slender body forms a softly sensuous 'S'-shaped curve, a shape based on Greek sculptural forms associated with the fourth-century sculptor, Praxiteles.[34] In antiquity, Praxiteles' work had already invited sensual interpretation, as is shown by the numerous anecdotes relating to his Cnidian Aphrodite's powerful and realistic eroticism. In the nineteenth century, given a climate that venerated the art of the fifth century and Phidias, Praxiteles' reputation had acquired decadent associations. In 1864 Richard Westmacott contrasted the 'passionless majesty' of Phidias with the 'voluptuous form' of Praxiteles, and concluded that Praxiteles' work induced 'a lower standard of taste and fancy in the public'.[35] By allying himself with the sensual allure of Praxiteles, Leighton, too, exposed himself to accusations of over-sensuousness. *The Times* duly criticized Icarus for being too effeminate: 'this is not the flat, springy fold of well-developed muscle, but the soft rounded contour of a feminine breast'.[36]

Perhaps the most striking representation of Icarus and a painting which also evokes the strongest pederastic appeal, is William Blake Richmond's *Icarus* [Figure 5]. Here a lithe young boy stretches his huge wings out to the sky. This Icarus is decidedly pretty; he gazes out of the canvas with large dreamy eyes, and he is naked apart from a wisp of drapery covering his genitalia. Reviews were, on the whole, favourable and after a celebrated female-nude-versus-social-purity debate which raged in the letter pages of *The Times* in the summer of 1885,[37] perhaps a male nude was, for the critics at least, more than welcome. Nevertheless, at least one society hostess, Mrs Douglas Freshfield, was not

FIGURE 4
FREDERIC LEIGHTON, *DAEDALUS AND ICARUS*
(c.1869: The Faringdon Collection)

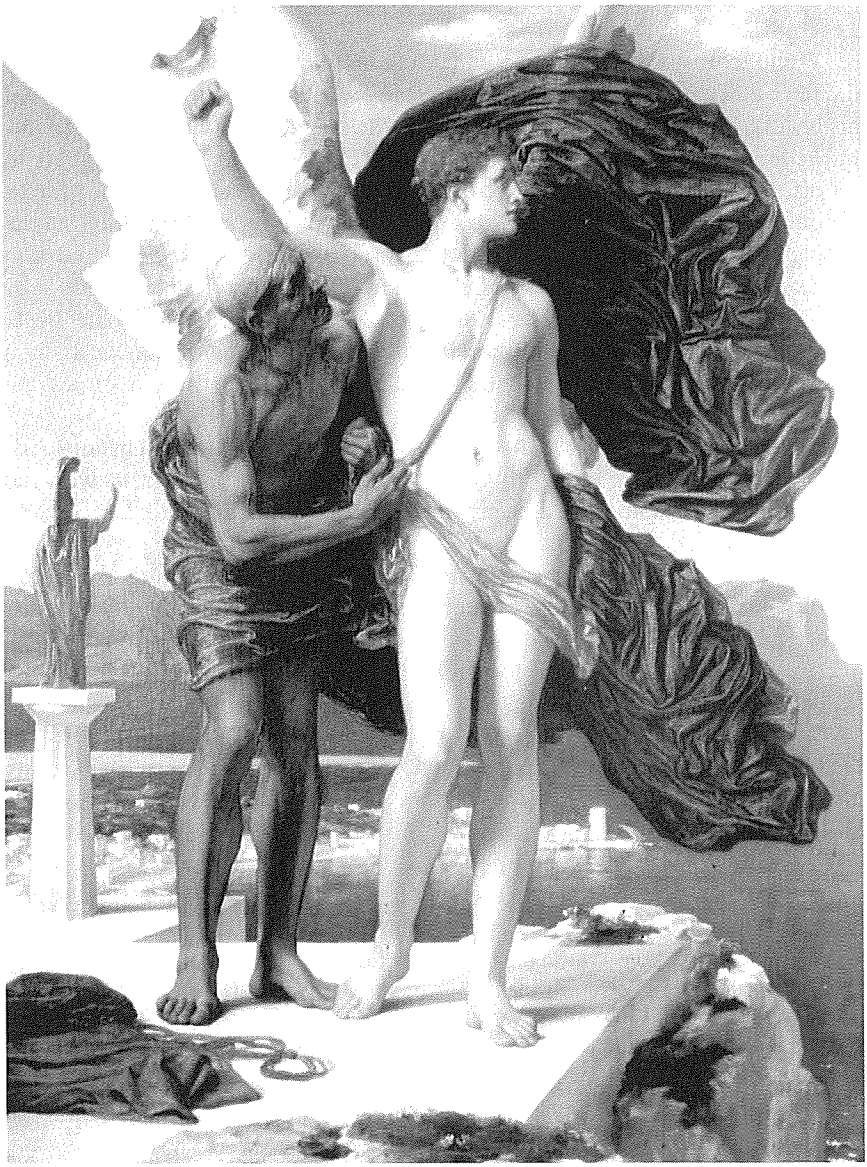

FIGURE 5
WILLIAM BLAKE RICHMOND, *ICARUS*
(1887: Private collection)

amused. An entry in her diary reads: 'went to the Grosvenor, thought *Icarus* most vile'.[38] Such an unabashed image of a young male nude was, therefore, not readily acceptable to the usual art-going public.

In Victorian painting, the gaze within and without the canvas is traditionally male: men look at women within the painting, and the viewer, prospective buyer or owner – who, in a society in which men held virtually all economic power, can be assumed to be male – directs his gaze at the female form from outside the canvas. In paintings of the tragic youth these roles are reversed; women within the canvas occupy the traditional roles of men and *vice versa*, while the spectator is invited to view both the female and the male alike. In Waterhouse's *Hylas and the Nymphs*, Hylas' face is obscured while the nymphs all gaze intently at him. Likewise, in the Echo and Narcissus paintings by both Solomon and Waterhouse, Echo's gaze is on Narcissus while in Thornycroft's *Narcissus* it is the (male) viewer who discovers the dead youth. In familiar Victorian images such as the gallery of beauties who look out of the paintings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti through heavy-lidded eyes, women can be assumed to be addressing a male audience. By comparison, Richmond's *Icarus*, – a boy in the traditional role of a woman gazing out at a male spectator – becomes even more arresting in this perspective of gender relations.

One common theme in the original myths of Hylas, Icarus and Narcissus is the danger of water. Hylas falls into the pond; Icarus plunges from the sky into the sea; and the cause of Narcissus' death is the sight of his own reflection in water. In the same vein, Leander drowns in the Hellespont and in Theocritus, *Idyll* 2, Daphnis goes to the stream and dies.[39] In many mythological traditions, water is a spiritual place, the realm of deities and in particular, the home of the fatal women – the Lorelei, the kelpie and the siren. Sirens, the formless creatures of *Odyssey* XII, described by later writers as half-bird, half-human, in form,[40] had, by the nineteenth century, been transformed into mermaids or fully human *femmes fatales* who emerge from the water to lure hapless men to their deaths.[41]

For the most part, siren scenes evoke a mixture of horror and fascination, implicitly associating water with danger, yet also with erotic allure. But the erotic connotations of water are not confined to a heterosexual mythological world of sirens, mermaids and water nymphs. Many Victorian painters and writers also seized on the aesthetic possibilities of homosocial bonding between youths swimming in the nude.

Swimming became a recreational pastime around 1800, and the first swimming society was founded in 1828. As a collective activity, however, it was almost exclusively male. By the 1880s the Serpentine in Hyde Park and

Victoria Swimming Baths had become favoured gay cruising grounds.[42] Frederick Walker's *The Bathers* (1867: Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool) is the first painting to show an all-male bathing-party. Youths display an affectionate comradeship as they dress and undress for a swim. Although the few items of clothing place it in a contemporary setting, the vague, idyllic landscape and the sculpture-like positions of the boys recall a classical ideal. Thomas Eakins, the American photographer and painter, produced photographs of athletes in classical-type poses which recall his own painting of boys bathing, *The Swimming Hole* (c.1883–85: Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas). By the 1890s Henry Scott Tuke was to make a successful career from representing boys swimming and sun-bathing in contemporary settings.[43]

Boys bathing was also a favoured subject in a number of homoerotic poems including Frederick Rolfe's 'Ballad of Boys Bathing', Charles Kains-Jackson's 'Sonnet of a Picture by Tuke', and Alan Stanley's 'August Blue', again after a painting by Tuke.[44] The association of boys and water, two elements in all the Hylas, Narcissus and Icarus paintings, now carries at least three meanings: the menace of water, as in the original myths; water as the source of the erotic and deadly attentions of the femme fatale; and bathing as a context and stimulant for homosexual desire.[45]

Another victim of water, and perhaps the archetypal tragic youth, was Antinous, young lover of the Emperor Hadrian, who was drowned in the Nile on an imperial visit to Egypt in AD 130. Following Symonds' poem, 'The Lotos Garland of Antinous', and his chapter devoted to the youth in *Sketches and Studies in Italy*,[46] Antinous was appropriated, in the later nineteenth century, as a homosexual icon.[47] His story has all the hallmarks of the mythological tragic youth: he is young, beautiful, beloved by an older man, and meets an untimely death through water. In Victorian literature, furthermore, Antinous is represented as an honorary mythological figure. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Basil thinks of painting Dorian as Adonis, Narcissus – and Antinous. Marc-André Raffalovich's poem, 'Ganymede of Ida', alludes to Adonis, Hyacinthus, Narcissus, Hylas – and again Antinous:

> But ah! For Syrian Adonis slain
> Blood-red anemones we twine indeed;
> And hyacinths narcissus-like mean pain.
> Such flowers should never fade for Ganymede,
> But where the ancient waters close and smile,
> For Hylas and the Darling of the Nile.[48]

Antinous, 'the Darling of the Nile', acquires a cloak of respectability by virtue of his place in the canon of mythological boys; he is hardly counted as an actual youth. Mythology, then, becomes a convenient way of conveying homoeroticism to a knowing audience. Closer to our own time, Noel Coward used a reference to A.E. Housman to suggest a homoerotic subtext in a song written to be performed by a woman, and ostensibly an expression of 'respectable' desire across the sexual divide:

> Mad about the boy,
> It's simply scrumptious to be mad about the boy
> I know that quite sincerely
> Housman really
> Wrote *The Shropshire Lad* about the boy.[49]

Like Coward's witty lyric, the classical-subject canvas aims for a wide appeal. While hinting at an aspect of the ancient world which remained largely undiscussed and unvisualized, paintings of the beautiful boy, infused with a uniquely Victorian brand of Romanticism, capture and articulate the poignant melancholy of the passing of youthful beauty and, as such, reach out to homoerotic taste, while still satisfying the less specific expectations of the general viewing public.

NOTES

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1 In this sentence, as in many others, it is convenient to use the label 'Victorian': although some paintings cited in this discussion were completed after 1901, the artists in question were all brought up, and their attitudes formed, in the Victorian period.

2 Ruskin, 'The Queen of the Air', in E.T. Cook and A. Wedderburn (eds.), *The Works of John Ruskin* (London 1903–12), 19. 418.

3 For example, Lawrence Alma-Tadema's *A Dedication to Bacchus*; see *Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema* (Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam and Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool 1996), cat.72.

4 *The Lysistrata of Aristophanes: Now first wholly translated into English and illustrated with eight full-page drawings by Aubrey Beardsley* (London 1896).

5 William Cory (formerly Johnson), *Ionica* (London 1858) (which in turn inspired the Greek poet Cavafy's 'Ionic'); Edward Cracroft Lefroy, *Echoes from Theocritus. A Cycle of Sonnets* (London 1883).

6 For a full discussion see T. D'Arch Smith, *Love in Earnest: Some Notes on the Lives and Writings of English Uranian Poets from 1889 to 1930* (London 1970) and B. Reade, *Sexual Heretics: Male Homosexuality in English Literature 1850-1900* (London 1970).

7 Müller, *Die Dorier* (Breslau 1824).

8 In the second edition (1875), the pages on homosexuality were, however, excluded. Mahaffy was Wilde's tutor at Trinity College, Dublin and acknowledged his former pupil in the preface to the first edition of *Social Life in Greece from Homer to Menander*. Wilde was later to draw on Mahaffy's ideas; for example, the arguments against the idealization of Greece found in *Social Life* appear in Wilde's *The Decay of Lying* (1889).
9 P. Grosskurth, *John Addington Symonds: a Biography* (London 1964). For a detailed account of Symonds' 'Hellenic fantasies' see the article of that title by Alastair Blanshard in the present volume of *Dialogos*.
10 E.M. Forster, *Maurice* (Harmondsworth 1972) 67 (wr. 1914).
11 Quoted in R. Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (Harmondsworth 1988) 435.
12 'There was that wretched boy in the Guards who committed suicide. You were his great friend. There was Sir Henry Ashton, who had to leave England, with a tarnished name. You and he were inseparable. What about Adrian Singleton, and his dreadful end? What about Lord Kent's only son, and his career?', *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Harmondsworth 1970) 167 (first published 1891).
13 See P.A. Cartledge, 'The importance of being Dorian: an onomastic gloss on the Hellenism of Oscar Wilde', *Hermathena* 147 (1989-90) 7-15.
14 W.A. Percy, *Pederasty and Pedagogy in Archaic Greece* (Illinois 1996) 31.
15 See U. Pohlmann, *Wilhelm von Gloeden; Sehnsucht nach Arkadien* (Berlin 1987); Pohlmann, *Guglielmo Plüschow 1852–1930* (Berlin 1995).
16 Housed in the Heslop Room, main library, University of Birmingham.
17 Although Euston evaded punishment, others (for example, Lord Arthur Somerset) were forced to flee abroad and their reputations ruined; see H. Montgomery Hyde, *The Cleveland Street Scandal* (London 1976).
18 See A. Sinfield, *The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde and the Queer Moment* (London 1994).
19 J. Kestner, *Mythology and Misogyny: The Social Discourse of Nineteenth-Century British Classical-Subject Painting* (Madison, Wisconsin 1989) 76.
20 Hints of homoeroticism in *Jonathan's Token to David* were acknowledged by Swinburne (*Essays and Studies*): 'The majestic figure and noble head of Jonathan are worthy of the warrior whose love was wonderful passing the love of woman, the features resolute, solicitous, heroic', quoted in E. Cooper, *The Sexual Perspective: Homosexuality and Art in the Last One Hundred Years in the West* (London 1994) 28.
21 See *Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema*, cat.16.
22 *Carmina Anacreontea*, ed. M.L. West (Stuttgart 1993).
23 Quoted in M. Sturgis, *Passionate Attitudes: The English Decadence of the 1890s* (London 1995) 204.
24 Maximus of Tyre, *Orations* (18.9), Horace, *Epodes* (14.9), *Anacreontea* 10, 15, 17. Bathyllus is also a name suggestive of sexual deviance in the Roman world. In Juvenal (*Sat.* 6. 63), it is the name given to an effeminate youth who acts the part of Leda in a ballet. This Roman Bathyllus is the subject of a poem by Jean Lorrain, published in *Le Chat Noir* in 1883, and two obscene drawings by Aubrey Beardsley published in *An Issue of Fine Drawings Illustrative of Juvenal and Lucian* (London 1896).
25 *The Artist and Journal of Home Culture*, July 1889 (vol.10, no.116) 194–6.
26 *Greek Anthology*, tr. W.M. Paton (London 1918) vol.4, 285.
27 The theme of the tragic youth also resonates painfully in late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century English poetry from A.E. Housman's 'To an Athlete Dying Young' (*A Shropshire Lad* [1887] 19) to Wilfred Owen's 'Anthem for Doomed Youth' (1917).
28 J.A. Symonds, *Fragilia Labilia* (London 1894).
29 J.A. Symonds, *Lyra Viginti Chordarum* (privately printed, Bristol, c.1875).
30 See J.M. Saslow, *Ganymede in the Renaissance: Homosexuality in Art and Society* (London 1986).
31 F. Burdett Thomas Coutts-Nevill, *Poems* (London 1896).

32 *Theocritus, Bion and Moschus*, tr. Andrew Lang (London 1880).
33 *Greek Anthology*, tr. Paton, vol.4, 297. A slight moustache was also an erotic focus of Egyptian mummy portraits (see D. Montserrat, 'The representation of young males in Fayum portraits', *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, 79 [1993] 215–25) and after their excavation and exhibition in the 1880s, mummy portraits of young men, in particular, were the subject of eroticization (see D. Montserrat, 'Unidentified human remains: mummies and the erotics of biography', 176–80, in D. Montserrat, ed., *Changing Bodies, Changing Meanings: Studies on the Human Body in Antiquity*, London 1998).
34 See R. Barrow, 'Sculpture, drapery and the Praxitelean ideal', in T. Barringer and E. Prettejohn (eds.), *Frederic Leighton: Antiquity, Renaissance, Modernity* (New Haven 1999) 49–65.
35 R. Westmacott, *The Schools of Sculpture Ancient and Modern* (Edinburgh 1864) 177.
36 *The Times*, 1 May 1869, 12.
37 See A. Smith, *The Victorian Nude: Sexuality, Morality and Art* (Manchester 1996) 227–37.
38 S. Reynolds , *William Blake Richmond: An Artist's Life 1842-1921* (Norwich 1995) 195.
39 On Hellenic associations of sea and spring water, see R. Buxton, *Imaginary Greece* (Cambridge 1994) 97–104, 109–13.
40 Apollonius of Rhodes (*Argonautica*, 4.898), Apollodorus (*Biblioteca*, 1.3.4; *Epitome*, 7.18–19), Ovid (*Metamorphosis*, 5.552–562) and Hyginus (*Fabulae* 125, 141).
41 For example, Frederic Leighton, *The Fisherman and the Syren* (1856–8: Bristol City Art Gallery); J.W. Waterhouse, *The Siren* (1901: private collection); Herbert Draper, *Ulysses and the Sirens* (1909: Ferens Art Gallery, Hull).
42 See C. Sprawson, *Haunts of the Black Masseur: The Swimmer as Hero* (London 1992).
43 E. Cooper, *The Life and Work of Henry Scott Tuke 1858–1929* (London 1987).
44 Frederick Rolfe (the self-styled Baron Corvo), 'Ballad of Boys Bathing', *Art Review* 1 (April 1890); Charles Kains-Jackson 'Sonnet of a Picture by Tuke', *The Artist and Journal of Home Culture*, 1 May 1889; Alan Stanley, *Love's Lyrics* (London 1894). Earlier Walt Whitman recalled a similar image: 'Twenty-eight young men bathe by the shore' ('Song of Myself', *Leaves of Grass* [1855]).
45 In 1896 the drowning of the homosexual writer Hubert Crackenthorpe, whose body was found in the Seine, could be viewed as a symbol of the archetypal homosexual death. See J. Stokes, *In the Nineties* (Hemel Hempstead 1989) 131–3.
46 J.A. Symonds, *Many Moods: A Volume of Verse* (London 1878); Symonds, *Sketches and Studies in Italy* (London 1879).
47 See S. Waters, 'The Most Famous Fairy in History: Antinous and Homosexual Fantasy', *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 6 (1995–6) 194–230. Coded references to Antinous also figure on an international scale from the *Alexandrian Songs* of the Russian poet Mikhail Kuzmin to the work of Cavafy.
48 Marc-André Raffalovich, *In Fancy Dress* (London 1886).
49 *The Lyrics of Noel Coward* (London 1965) 130. Originally sung in *Words and Music* (1932).