

Twentieth-Century
Literary Criticism

TCLC

79

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

**Excerpts from Criticism of the
Works of Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,
Short Story Writers, and Other Creative Writers
Who Lived between 1900 and 1960,
from the First Published Critical
Appraisals to Current Evaluations**

Jennifer Gariepy

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Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

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Preface

Since its inception more than fifteen years ago, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* has been purchased and used by nearly 10,000 school, public, and college or university libraries. *TCLC* has covered more than 500 authors, representing 58 nationalities, and over 25,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical response to twentieth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as *TCLC*. In the words of one reviewer, "there is nothing comparable available." *TCLC* "is a gold mine of information—dates, pseudonyms, biographical information, and criticism from books and periodicals—which many libraries would have difficulty assembling on their own."

Scope of the Series

TCLC is designed to serve as an introduction to authors who died between 1900 and 1960 and to the most significant interpretations of these author's works. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of this period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. In organizing and excerpting the vast amount of critical material written on these authors, *TCLC* helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in *TCLC* presents a comprehensive survey of an author's career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Every fourth volume of *TCLC* is devoted to literary topics. These topic entries widen the focus of the series from individual authors to such broader subjects as literary movements, prominent themes in twentieth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers.

TCLC is designed as a companion series to Gale's *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, which reprints commentary on authors now living or who have died since 1960. Because of the different periods under consideration, there is no duplication of material between *CLC* and *TCLC*. For additional information about *CLC* and Gale's other criticism titles, users should consult the Guide to Gale Literary Criticism Series preceding the title page in this volume.

Coverage

Each volume of *TCLC* is carefully compiled to present:

- criticism of authors, or literary topics, representing a variety of genres and nationalities
- both major and lesser-known writers and literary works of the period
- 6-12 authors or 3-6 topics per volume
- individual entries that survey critical response to each author's work or each topic in literary history, including early criticism to reflect initial reactions; later criticism to represent any rise or decline in reputation; and current retrospective analyses.

Organization of This Book

An author entry consists of the following elements: author heading, biographical and critical introduction, list of principal works, excerpts of criticism (each preceded by an annotation and a bibliographic citation), and a bibliography of further reading.

- **The Author Heading** consists of the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. If an author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the real name given in parentheses on the first line of the biographical and critical introduction. Also located at

the beginning of the introduction to the author entry are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose languages use nonroman alphabets.

- The **Biographical and Critical Introduction** outlines the author's life and career, as well as the critical issues surrounding his or her work. References to past volumes of *TCLC* are provided at the beginning of the introduction. Additional sources of information in other biographical and critical reference series published by Gale, including *Short Story Criticism*, *Children's Literature Review*, *Contemporary Authors*, *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, and *Something about the Author*, are listed in a box at the end of the entry.
- Some *TCLC* entries include **Portraits** of the author. Entries also may contain reproductions of materials pertinent to an author's career, including manuscript pages, title pages, dust jackets, letters, and drawings, as well as photographs of important people, places, and events in an author's life.
- The **List of Principal Works** is chronological by date of first book publication and identifies the genre of each work. In the case of foreign authors with both foreign-language publications and English translations, the title and date of the first English-language edition are given in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication.
- Critical excerpts are prefaced by **Annotations** providing the reader with information about both the critic and the criticism that follows. Included are the critic's reputation, individual approach to literary criticism, and particular expertise in an author's works. Also noted are the relative importance of a work of criticism, the scope of the excerpt, and the growth of critical controversy or changes in critical trends regarding an author. In some cases, these annotations cross-reference excerpts by critics who discuss each other's commentary.
- A complete **Bibliographic Citation** designed to facilitate location of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism.
- Criticism is arranged chronologically in each author entry to provide a perspective on changes in critical evaluation over the years. All titles of works by the author featured in the entry are printed in boldface type to enable the user to easily locate discussion of particular works. Also for purposes of easier identification, the critic's name and the publication date of the essay are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the journal in which it appeared. Some of the excerpts in *TCLC* also contain translated material. Unless otherwise noted, translations in brackets are by the editors; translations in parentheses or continuous with the text are by the critic. Publication information (such as footnotes or page and line references to specific editions of works) have been deleted at the editor's discretion to provide smoother reading of the text.
- An annotated list of **Further Reading** appearing at the end of each author entry suggests secondary sources on the author. In some cases it includes essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights.

Cumulative Indexes

- Each volume of *TCLC* contains a cumulative **Author Index** listing all authors who have appeared in Gale's Literary Criticism Series, along with cross references to such biographical series as *Contemporary Authors* and *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. For readers' convenience, a complete list of Gale titles included appears on the first page of the author index. Useful for locating authors within the various series, this index is particularly valuable for those authors who are identified by a certain period but who, because of their death dates, are placed in another, or for those authors whose careers span two periods. For example, F. Scott Fitzgerald is found in *TCLC*, yet a writer often associated with him, Ernest Hemingway, is found in *CLC*.

- Each *TCLC* volume includes a cumulative **Nationality Index** which lists all authors who have appeared in *TCLC* volumes, arranged alphabetically under their respective nationalities, as well as Topics volume entries devoted to particular national literatures.
- Each new volume in Gale's Literary Criticism Series includes a cumulative **Topic Index**, which lists all literary topics treated in *NCLC*, *TCLC*, *LC 1400-1800*, and the *CLC* year-book.
- Each new volume of *TCLC*, with the exception of the Topics volumes, includes a **Title Index** listing the titles of all literary works discussed in the volume. In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Gale has also produced a **Special Paperbound Edition** of the *TCLC* title index. This annual cumulation lists all titles discussed in the series since its inception and is issued with the first volume of *TCLC* published each year. Additional copies of the index are available on request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the following year's cumulation. Titles discussed in the Topics volume entries are not included *TCLC* cumulative index.

Citing Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume in Gale's literary Criticism Series may use the following general forms to footnote reprinted criticism. The first example pertains to materials drawn from periodicals, the second to material reprinted from books.

¹William H. Slavick, "Going to School to DuBose Heyward," *The Harlem Renaissance Re-examined*, (AMS Press, 1987); excerpted and reprinted in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*, Vol. 59, ed. Jennifer Garipey (Detroit: Gale Research, 1995), pp. 94-105.

²George Orwell, "Reflections on Gandhi," *Partisan Review*, 6 (Winter 1949), pp. 85-92; excerpted and reprinted in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*, Vol. 59, ed. Jennifer Garipey (Detroit: Gale Research, 1995), pp. 40-3.

Suggestions Are Welcome

In response to suggestions, several features have been added to *TCLC* since the series began, including annotations to excerpted criticism, a cumulative index to authors in all Gale literary criticism series, entries devoted to criticism on a single work by a major author, more extensive illustrations, and a title index listing all literary works discussed in the series since its inception.

Readers who wish to suggest authors or topics to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to write the editors.

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Austin Dobson

1840-1921

(Full name Henry Austin Dobson) English poet, essayist, and biographer.

INTRODUCTION

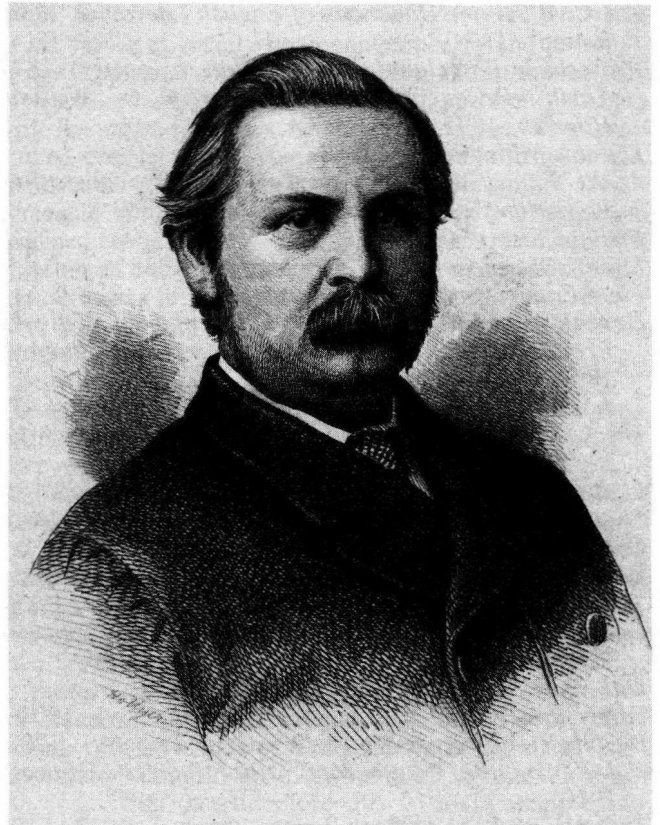
Dobson is best known for his volumes of mannered verse as well as his biographies of eighteenth-century English literary figures. A dedicated student of eighteenth-century life and literature, and a popular and acclaimed poet in his own right, Dobson in many respects exemplified the Victorian man of letters.

Biographical Information

Dobson was born in Plymouth, England, in 1840. His parents, George Clarisse and Augusta Harris Dobson, sent Dobson to private schools and later to the Gymnase in Strasbourg. Dobson returned to London at sixteen to work as a clerk in the Board of Trade, where he remained for forty-five years. At age twenty-eight he married Frances Mary Beardmore, eventually fathering ten children. After an attempt to develop his talents as a painter, Dobson turned to poetry, with his first poem published in *Temple Bar* in 1864. Dobson's verse gained popular and critical support, and was published in several well-known magazines, including Anthony Trollope's *St. Paul's*. Dobson was also successful in his employment at the Board of Trade, where he was promoted to first-class clerk in 1874 and principal clerk in 1884; he was able to retire comfortably in 1901 and continued writing verse and biographies until his death in 1921.

Major Works

Dobson's first volume of verse was *Vignettes in Rhyme and Vers de Société* (1873). Other poetry collections followed—*Proverbs in Porcelain* (1877) and *At the Sign of the Lyre* (1885)—and Dobson became known for the bucolic mood of his works, which were composed in traditional poetic forms and often influenced by French poetry. Dobson was unusual for a Victorian man of letters in that he was not a university professor but a clerk in the Board of Trade; however, his devotion to literature and his belief that study of literature was paramount in the education of all people were demonstrated in his *The Civil Service Handbook of English Literature* (1874), which he hoped would help to educate other nonscholars about the essential literature of their homeland. But it was in the genre of biography that Dobson earned the greatest respect. His *Hogarth* (1879), a profile of the eighteenth-century painter and engraver William Hogarth, won the admiration of historians and academics



for its precise evocation of its subject. This led to Dobson's further study of the life and art of the eighteenth century, and through his works on such luminaries as Henry Fielding, Richard Steele, Oliver Goldsmith, and Horace Walpole, Dobson became known as an authority on that period of English history. His input was sought on republications of many eighteenth-century works, and he both edited and contributed introductions to many such works.

Critical Reception

While Dobson's poetry is still considered by many to be a charming example of "vers de société," and is admired for its tightly-constructed prosody, Dobson is better remembered for his vast knowledge of the eighteenth century and his ability to capture the period in his writings. However, his penchant for arbitrarily ranking the historical figures documented in his biographies and his rejection of those he disapproved of have, in the opinion of latter-day commentators, lowered his stature as a critic and a biographer.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

- Vignettes in Rhyme and Vers de Société* (poetry) 1873; revised as *Vignettes in Rhyme, and Other Verses*, 1880; revised as *Old-World Idylls, and Other Verses*, 1883; republished as *Poems on Several Occasions*, Vol. 1, 1889
- The Civil Service Handbook of English Literature* (non-fiction) 1874
- Proverbs in Porcelain, and Other Verses* (poetry) 1877
- Hogarth* (biography) 1879; enlarged as *William Hogarth*, 1891
- Fielding* (biography) 1883
- At the Sign of the Lyre* (poetry) 1885; republished as *Poems on Several Occasions*, Vol. 2, 1889
- Richard Steele* (biography) 1886
- Life of Oliver Goldsmith* (biography) 1888
- Four Frenchwomen* (biography) 1890
- Horace Walpole: A Memoir, with an Appendix of Books Printed at the Strawberry Hill Press* (biography) 1890
- The Sun Dial: A Poem* (poetry) 1890
- The Ballade of Beau Brocade, and Other Poems of the XVIIIth Century* (poetry) 1892
- Eighteenth Century Vignettes*. 3 vols. (essays) 1892-96
- The Story of Rosina, and Other Verses* (poetry) 1895
- Collected Poems* (poetry) 1897
- Verses Read at the Dinner of the Omar Khayyám Club, on Thursday, 25th March 1897* (poetry) 1897
- Carmina Votiva, and Other Occasional Verses* (poetry) 1901
- Side-Walk Studies* (essays) 1902
- Fanny Burney (Madame d'Arblay)* (biography) 1903
- De Libris: Prose and Verse* (essays and poetry) 1908
- Old Kensington Palace, and Other Papers* (essays) 1910
- At Prior Park, and Other Papers* (essays) 1912
- Poems on the War* (poetry) 1915
- Later Essays, 1917-1920* (essays) 1921
- The Complete Poetical Works of Austin Dobson* (poetry) 1923

CRITICISM

John Addington Symonds (essay date 1885)

SOURCE: A review of *At the Sign of the Lyre*, in *The Academy*, No. 705, November 7, 1885, p. 299.

[In the following review, Symonds praises *At the Sign of the Lyre*, noting graceful lyricism of Dobson's poetry.]

Only a churl, or one indifferent to what is delicate in literature, could find words of censure for this collection of graceful lyrics [*At the Sign of the Lyre*], so exquisitely finished with accomplished art, so characteristic of

their author's genius in the subtle blending of gentle pathos and light humour, so just in criticism both of manners and of letters, so marked by solid English sense amid the refinements of highly studied versification and the quaintnesses of scholarly archaisms. We hail this volume, together with its elder brother, *Old-World Idylls*, as one of the most perfect products of that latest Anglo-Gallic culture, to which English literature is also indebted for Mr. Lang's *Ballades* and *Rhymes à la Mode*, as well as for some of Mr. Edmund Gosse's most artistic work.

Mr. Dobson is so well known as a poet wherever English is spoken that it would be superfluous to dwell at length upon the salient features of his style. Like Caldicott and Edwin Abbey, he has lived by imagination into the spirit of the eighteenth century. Of the manners and mental atmosphere of that period he reproduces in his verse all that is fanciful, urbane, capricious, omitting its grossness and passing with a genial toleration over its darker aspects. The London of Vauxhall and Grub Street, of the Mall and the Ridotto, has become familiar to him not so much in its prosaic reality as in a vision of delightful fairyland. This volume adds a dozen highly finished masterpieces, cabinet pictures of perfect tone and execution, to the gallery of Georgian studies in which our artist excels. The most enjoyable of these, to my mind, are "The Old Sedan Chair," "Molly Trefusis," "The Book-Plate's Petition," "A Familiar Epistle," "The Dilettant," "The Squire at Vauxhall," and "A New Song of Spring Gardens." If I mistake not, these are already so well known to American and English readers that any detailed analysis of their old-world graces would be an impertinence; yet I cannot refrain from calling attention to the consummate skill with which an empty-pated connoisseur of the last century is sketched in "The Dilettant."

Just then popped in a passing Beau,
Half Pertness, half Puerilio;
One of those Mushroom Growths that spring
From *Grand Tours* and from Tailoring;
And dealing much in terms of Art
Picked up at Sale and Auction Mart.

The fellow has at his fingers' ends all the cant phrases of a by-gone age of aesthetic affectation, which, though obsolete now, could easily be paralled by like ephemeral ineptitudes from the slang of South Kensington coteries:

That "Air of Head" is just divine;
That contour Guido, every line;
That forearm, too, has quite the *Gusto*
Of the third Manner of Robusto. . . .

He glibly hazards more technical criticisms:

The middle Distance, too, is placed
Quite in the best Italian Taste;
And nothing could be more effective
Than the *Ordonnance* and Perspective.

In short, he is a living epitome of what Mrs. Malaprop called "bigotry and virtue"; and since some incarnation

of the "bigotry and virtue" in fashion must be always with us, this admirable creation of the poet will last not only as the portrait of an extinct species of fop, but as the symbol of aesthetic humbug for all ages.

Mr. Dobson is so steeped in the atmosphere of his favourite period that he prefers to cast his didactic or genially satiric pieces in the form of that century. "The Two Painters," "The Claims of the Muse," and "The Successful Author," lose none of their point and application by the antiquated setting he has given them. Even that finely-edged piece of modern sarcasm, "The Poet and the Critics," while reproducing contemporary commonplaces of hack-criticism, is tricked out with the quaint use of capitals and the apt allusions to our classic age of Anne which betray its author's predilections.

Still, it must not be thought that the eighteenth century in England is the only paradise of Mr. Dobson's fancy. He is almost equally, almost as pleasurably, at home in old and modern France. "The Curé's Progress" is a gem of sympathetic portraiture, while "A Revolutionary Relic" transports us to the chateau life of Touraine and the tragedies of the Terror. If English song-books inspired the two evanescently suggestive opening lines of "A Madrigal"—

Before me careless lying,
Young Love his wares comes crying—

we may welcome an even rarer reproduction of French literary charm in "A Fancy from Fontenelle." There is, indeed, nothing in the book which takes my fancy by its masterly workmanship and restrained pathos more than this. Pity that a place was not found for it in Mrs. Boyle's anthology from the rose-garden of the poets, *Ros Rosarum!* On Italian things, Mr. Dobson's touch does not strike me as quite so unerringly true; and the one original sonnet in the collection, "Don Quixote," exhibits less command of form than his rondeaus do.

The motto on the title-page of *At the Sign of the Lyre* is *leviorem plectro*; and a pretty *jeu d'esprit*, entitled "A Roman Round-Robin," shows that the author is somewhat bored with Horace's moralisings. We look, indeed, in vain, for deep or serious matter in these lyrics, although a sound and wholesome philosophy of life, with much of shrewd world-wisdom, is conveyed in their subversive pleasantries. Yet one of the rondeaus strikes a deeper note. This little poem, besides being beautiful in form, reflects so fair a light upon the poet's aim that I am fain to transcribe it at length. Together with the "Fancy from Fontenelle," I feel sure that it will chain my attention whenever I chance to turn the leaves of this book.

In after days when grasses high
O'er-top the stone where I shall lie,
Though ill or well the world adjust
My slender claim to honoured dust,
I shall not question nor reply.

I shall not see the morning sky;
I shall not hear the night-wind sigh;

I shall be mute, as all men must,
In after days!

But yet, now living, fain were I
That someone then should testify,
Saying, 'He held his pen in trust
To Art, not serving shame or lust.'
Will none? Then let my memory die
In after days!

In his verses of society upon contemporary and personal or quasi-personal themes, Mr. Dobson shows that he has been an appreciative student of *Praed*, and not, perhaps, with the most felicitous results in all cases. The terse pruned couplets of Gay are surely more worthy of his genius than the jingle of which we have almost a disagreeable specimen in "Poor Miss Tox." There is a spavined canter in the rhythm, and not even Mr. Dobson's ingenuity in rhyming can reconcile the ear to a succession of stanzas ending in Tox. Why, oh, why, we keep saying, as we read, does he not make another set of stanzas on "frocks," "hocks," "rocks," and "pox," when he is about it?

The poems about little girls, which belong to this contemporary section of Mr. Dobson's verse, spring from a very real and amiable source of inspiration. Nothing can be imagined prettier than the portrait of "Little Blue-Ribbons," nothing more refreshingly anti-Philistine than "A Fairy Tale." The lines called "Household Art" seem to indicate that Mr. Dobson likes even little girls *à la mode du ci-devant*; for Ruskin's *Lectures* are scarcely less eulogistic of Miss Greenaway's artificial naturalism than are these verses. Ours is a singular age: so terribly in earnest, so utilitarian in its main energies; so fond of trifles and *rococo*, masquerade and *bric-à-brac*, day-dreams of a travestied past and castles in the air of half-assimilated antiquities, in its hours of leisure. To draw the conclusion that therefore this is not a creative age would be unjust. It is a learned and a scientific age, the inheritor of what remains of the whole culture of humanity to us wards. Those poets who breathe their own life-breath into puppets of the past, with adequate knowledge, intelligent sympathy, and just tact, are creative. It is not necessary to apply to Mr. Dobson's work Walt Whitman's austere dictum—"Poems distilled from other poems pass away." For he converts into living poetry a mood of sympathy with the past which is very real to him, and also to numbers of his contemporaries. Fine criticism, loving study, exquisite workmanship, and vivid vision are so subtly mingled here with sense, with fancy in its sphere not less alive than Keats's, and with a genuine droplet of what Mr. Dobson styles "The Lost Elixir," that some not all too friendly critic may safely prophecy a diuturnity in human memory for these light-winged things, *κουφά γίνα καὶ πγηνάς*, when heavier poets' wares are sunk in clay.

W. E. Henley (essay date 1890)

SOURCE: "Dobson: Method and Effect," in *Views and Reviews: Essays in Appreciation*, David Nutt, 1890, pp. 121-3.

[In the following essay, Henley compares Dobson to Horace and eighteenth-century English poets.]

His style has distinction, elegance, urbanity, precision, an exquisite clarity. Of its kind it is as nearly as possible perfect. You think of Horace as you read; and you think of those among our own eighteenth-century poets to whom Horace was an inspiration and an example. The epithet is usually so just that it seems to have come into being with the noun it qualifies; the metaphor is mostly so appropriate that it leaves you in doubt as to whether it suggested the poem or the poem suggested it; the verb is never in excess of the idea it would convey; the effect of it all is that 'something has here got itself uttered,' and for good. Could anything, for instance, be better, or less laboriously said, than this poet's remonstrance '*To an Intrusive Butterfly*'? The thing is instinct with delicate observation, so aptly and closely expressed as to seem natural and living as the facts observed:

I watch you through the garden walks,
I watch you float between
The avenues of dahliā stalks,
And flicker on the green;
You hover round the garden seat,
You mount, you waver.

.....

Across the room in loops of flight
I watch you wayward go:

.....

Before the bust you flaunt and flit—

.....

You pause, you poise, you circle up
Among my old Japan.

And all the rest of it. The theme is but the vagaries of a wandering insect; but how just and true is the literary instinct, how perfect the literary *savoir-faire*! The words I have italicised are the only words (it seems) in the language that are proper to the occasion; and yet how quietly they are produced, with what apparent unconsciousness they are set to do their work, how just and how sufficient is their effect! In writing of this sort there is a certain artistic good-breeding whose like is not common in these days. We have lost the secret of it: we are too eager to make the most of our little souls in art and too ignorant to do the best by them; too egoistic and 'individual,' too clever and skilful and well informed, to be content with the completeness of simplicity. Even the Laureate was once addicted to glitter for glitter's sake; and with him to keep them in countenance there are a thousand minor poets whose 'little life' is merely a giving way to the necessities of what is after all a condition of intellectual impotence but poorly redeemed by a habit of artistic swagger. The singer of Dorothy and Beau Brocade is of another race. He is 'the co-mate and brother in exile' of Matthew Arnold and the poet of *The Unknown*

Eros. Alone among modern English bards they stand upon that ancient way which is the best: attentive to the pleadings of the Classic Muse, heedful always to give such thoughts as they may breed no more than their due expression.

Brander Matthews (essay date 1902)

SOURCE: "Two Latter-Day Lyristis: II. Mr. Austin Dobson," in *Pen and Ink*, C. Scribner's Sons, 1902, pp. 109-39.

[In the following essay, Matthews provides a critical overview of Dobson's work and reputation as a poet.]

As Mr. Lang told us in his sympathetic paper on M. Théodore de Banville, some literary reputations are like the fairies in that they cannot cross running water. Others again, it seems to me, are rather like the misty genii of the Arabian Nights, which loom highest when seen from afar. Poe, for example, is more appreciated in England than at home; and Cooper is given a more lofty rank by French than by American critics. In much the same manner, we note, Carlyle gained the ear of an American audience when he was not listened to with attention in Great Britain; and the scattered verses of Praed were collected together for American admirers long before the appearance of an English edition. And so it is, I think, with Mr. Austin Dobson, whose position as a leader in one division of English poetry was recognized more immediately and more unhesitatingly in these United States than in his native Great Britain. To Mr. Dobson the young school of American writers of familiar verse—to use Cowper's admirable phrase—look up as to a master; and his poems are read and pondered and imitated by not a few of the more promising of our younger poets.

Mr. Austin Dobson was born at Plymouth, January 18, 1840. He comes of a family of civil engineers, and it was as an engineer that his grandfather, toward the end of the last century, went to France, where he settled, and married a French lady. Among the earliest recollections of Mr. Dobson's father was his arrival in Paris on one side of the Seine as the Russians arrived on the other. This must have been in 1814. But the French boy had long become an English man when the poet was born. At the age of eight or nine Austin Dobson was taken by his parents—so a biographer tells us—"to Holyhead, in the island of Anglesea; he was educated at Beaumaris, at Coventry, and finally at Strasburg, whence he returned, at the age of sixteen, with the intention of becoming a civil engineer." But in December, 1856, he accepted an appointment in the civil service, where he has remained ever since. Thus he has been able to act on the advice of Coleridge, often urged again by Dr. Holmes, to the effect "that a literary man should have another calling." Dr. Holmes adds the sly suggestion that he should confine himself to it; and this is what—for nearly ten years—Mr. Dobson did. He dabbled a little in art, having, like Théophile Gautier, the early ambition of becoming a

painter. He learned to draw a little on wood. He wrote a little, mostly in prose. In fact, there are only four poems in the first edition of *Vignettes in Rhyme* which were written before 1868. It was in this year that *St. Paul's* magazine was started by Anthony Trollope, an editor at once sympathetic and severe; he appreciated good work, and was unsparing in the kindly criticism which might make it better. In *St. Paul's*, therefore, between March, 1868, and March, 1874, appeared nearly twoscore of Mr. Dobson's pieces, including some of his very best: 'Tu Quoque,' 'A Dialogue from Plato,' 'Une Marquise,' 'An Autumn Idyll,' 'Dorothy,' 'A Gentleman of the Old School,' 'Avice,'—with its hazardous, bird-like effect, French in a way and in exquisite taste,—and the subtle and pathetic 'Drama of the Doctor's Window.' In October, 1873, there was published the first edition of *Vignettes in Rhyme*, and the poet received for the first time that general recognition which denies itself to the writer of verses scattered here and there, throughout magazines and newspapers. *Vignettes in Rhyme* passed into its third edition; and less than four years after its appearance Mr. Dobson made a second collection of his verses, published in May, 1877, as *Proverbs in Porcelain*. From these two volumes the author made a selection, adding a few poems written since the appearance of the second book, and thus prepared the collective American volume, called *Vignettes in Rhyme*, issued by Henry Holt & Co. in 1880, with a graceful and alluring introduction by Mr. Stedman. *Old-World Idylls*, published in London in the fall of 1883, is based on this American selection of 1880. It has been followed by *At the Sign of the Lyre*, which includes most of the poetry he wrote before 1885. Unfortunately we have not Mr. Dobson's complete poems even in these two collections, for his own fastidious taste has excluded poems which the less exacting reader had learned to like, and which the admirers of fine humorous verse will not willingly let die. Let us hope that there will be vouchsafed to us, in due time, a volume in which we may treasure Mr. Dobson's *Complete Poetical Works*. Akin to the fastidiousness which rejects certain poems altogether—and quite as annoying to many—is the fastidiousness with which the poet is continually going over his verses with a file, polishing until they shine again, smoothing an asperity here, and there rubbing out a blot. This is always a dangerous pastime, and the poet is rarely well advised who attempts it, as all students of Lord Tennyson will bear witness. If the poet is athirst for perfection, he may lay his poems by for the Horatian space of nine years, but when they are once printed and published, he had best keep his hands off them. Of course the most of Mr. Dobson's alterations are unexceptionable improvements, yet there are a few that we reject with abhorrence.

Mr. Aldrich has said that Mr. Dobson "has the grace of Suckling and the finish of Herrick, and is easily master of both in metrical art." The beauty of his poetry is due in great measure to its lyric lightness. He has many lines and many whole poems which sing themselves into the memory, and cannot be thrust thence. Who that has made acquaintance with the 'Ladies of St. James's' can forget "Phyllida, my Phyllida"? And who cannot at will call up

before him Autonoe and Rosina and Rose and all the other "damosels, blithe as the belted bees," whom the poet has set before us with so much breezy freshness? To know them is to love them, and to love the poet who has sung them into being. Next to the airy grace and the flowing and unfailing humor which inform all Mr. Dobson's poems, perhaps the quality which most deserves to be singled out is their frank and hearty wholesomeness. There is nothing sickly about them, or morbid, or perverse, as there is about so much contemporary British verse. Mr. Dobson is entirely free from the besetting sin of those minor poets who sing only in a minor key. He has no trace of affectation, and no taint of sentimentality. He is simple and sincere. His delicacy is manly, and not effeminate. There is a courtly dignity about all his work; and there is nowhere a hint of bad taste. Mr. Locker once spoke to me of the 'Unfinished Song,' and said that "the spirit is so beautiful"; and of a truth the spirit of all Mr. Dobson's work is beautiful. There is unfailing elevation. Mr. Dobson, in Joubert's phrase, never forgets that the lyre is a winged instrument. Here is a lyric, not one of his best known, and not in the style he most frequently attempts; but it is lifted out of commonplace, though the subject is hackneyed and worn; it soars, and sings as it soars, like the lark:

A Song of The Four Seasons

When Spring comes laughing
By vale and hill,
By wind-flower walking
And daffodil,—
Sing stars of morning,
Sing morning skies,
Sing blue of speedwell,
And my Love's eyes.

When comes the Summer,
Full-leaved and strong,
And gay birds gossip
The orchard long,—
Sing hid, sweet honey
That no bee sips;
Sing red, red roses,
And my Love's lips.

When Autumn scatters
The leaves again,
And piled sheaves bury
The broad-wheeled wain,—
Sing flutes of harvest
Where men rejoice;
Sing rounds of reapers,
And my Love's voice.

But when comes Winter
With hail and storm,
And red fire roaring
And ingle warm,—
Sing first sad going
Of friends that part;
Then sing glad meeting,
And my Love's heart.

And with all this elevation and lyric lightness there is no lack of true pathos and genuine feeling for the lowly and

the hopeless. More than once has Mr. Dobson expressed his sympathy for the striving, and especially for those strugglers who are handicapped in the race, and who eat their hearts in silent revolt against hard circumstances:

Ah, Reader, ere you turn the page,
I leave you this for moral:—
Remember those who tread life's stage
With weary feet and scantest wage,
And ne'er a leaf for laurel.

The best of Mr. Dobson's poems result from a happy mingling of a broad and genial humanity with an extraordinarily fine artistic instinct. Just as Chopin declared that there were paintings at the sight of which he heard music, so it may be said that there are poems the hearing of which calls up a whole gallery of pictures. Side by side with the purely lyric pieces are as many more as purely pictorial. The *'Curé's Progress,'* for example, is it not a like masterpiece of *genre*? And the ballade *'On a Fan, that Belonged to the Marquise de Pompadour,'* with its wonderful movement and spirit, and its apt suggestion of the courtiers and courtesans "thronging the *Œil-de-Bœuf* through," is it not a perfect picture of

The little great, the infinite small thing
That ruled the hour when Louis Quinze was king?

This is a Fragonard, as the other is a Meissonnier. It is not that the pathetic *'Story of Rosina'* has for its hero François Boucher, or that other poems abound in references to Watteau and Vanloo and Hogarth; it is not even that these references are never at random, and always reveal an exact knowledge and a nice appreciation; it is rather that Mr. Dobson is a painter at heart, in a degree far from common even in these days of so-called "word-painting." He excels in the art of calling up a scene before you by a few motions of his magic pen; and, once evoked, the scene abides with you alway. Mr. E. A. Abbey told me that once in a nook of rural England he happened suddenly on a sun-dial, and that lines from Mr. Dobson's poem with that title rose to his lips at once, and he felt as though nature had illustrated the poet.

This delightful effect is produced by no abuse of the customary devices of "word-painting," and by no squandering of "local color." On the contrary, Mr. Dobson is sober in his details, and rarely wastes time in description. He hits off a scene in a few happy strokes; there is no piling of a Pelion of adjectives on an Ossa of epithets. The picture is painted with the utmost economy of stroke. Mr. Dobson's method is like that of the etchers who work in the bath; his hand needs to be both swift and sure. Thus there is always a perfect unity of tone; there is always a shutting out of everything which is not essential to the picture. Consider the ballad of the Armada and the *'Ballad of Beau Brocade,'*—a great favorite with Dr. Holmes, by the way,—and see if one is not as truly seventeenth century in thought and feeling as the other is eighteenth century, while both are thoroughly and robustly English. And how captivatingly Chinese are the verses about the "little blue mandarin"!

Of the French pictures I have already spoken, but inadequately, since I omitted to cite the *Proverbs in Porcelain*, which I should ascribe to a French poet, if I knew any Frenchman who could have accomplished so winning a commingling of banter and of grace, of high breeding and of playfulness. How Roman are the various Horatian lyrics, and, above all, how Greek is *'Autonoë'!* "*Autonoë*," as a friend writes me, "is the most purely beautiful of all Mr. Dobson's work. It does not touch the heart, but it rests the spirit. Most so-called 'classicism' shows us only the white temple, the clear high sky, the outward beauty of form and color. This gives us the warm air of spring and the life that pulses in a girl's veins like the soft swelling of sap in a young tree. This is the same feeling that raises *As You Like It* above all pastoral poetry. Our nineteenth century sensibilities are so played on by the troubles, the sorrows, the little vital needs and anxieties of the world around us, that sometimes it does us good to get out into the woods and fields of another world entirely, if only the atmosphere is not chilled and rarefied by the lack of the breath of humanity. There are times when the *'Drama of the Doctor's Window'* would excite us, but when *'Autonoë'* would rest us—and not with a mere selfish intellectual rest."

About twelve years ago, early in 1876, Mr. Dobson began to turn his attention to what are generally known as the French forms of verse, although they are not all of them French. Oddly enough, it happens that the introduction, at Mr. Dobson's hands, of these French forms into English literature is due—indirectly at least—to an American. In criticising Mr. Dobson's earlier verses in *Victorian Poets*, Mr. Stedman amiably admonished him that "such a poet, to hold the hearts he has won, not only must maintain his quality, but strive to vary his style." This warning from the American critic, this particular Victorian poet, perhaps having some inner monitions of his own, took to heart, and he began at once to cast about for some new thing. His first find was the *'Odes Funambulesques'* of M. Theodore de Banville, the reviver of the triolet, the rondeau, and the ballade. Here was a new thing—a truly new thing, since it was avowedly an old thing. Mr. Dobson had written a set of triolets already, in 1874; it was in May, 1876, that he published the first original ballade ever written in English, the firm and vigorous *'Prodigals,'* slightly irregular in its repetition of rhymes, but none the less a most honorable beginning. Almost at the same time he attempted also the rondeau and the rondel. A year later, in May, 1877, he published his second volume of verse, *Proverbs in Porcelain*, and this, followed almost immediately by Mr. Gosse's easy and learned *'Plea for Certain Exotic Forms of Verse,'* in the *Cornhill Magazine* of July, 1877, drew general attention to the new weapons with which the poet's armory had been enriched.

It would be idle to maintain that they have met with universal acceptance. Mr. Stedman, when introducing the author to the American public, confesses that he is not certain whether to thank Mr. Dobson or to condole with him on bringing into fashion the ballade and the rondeau