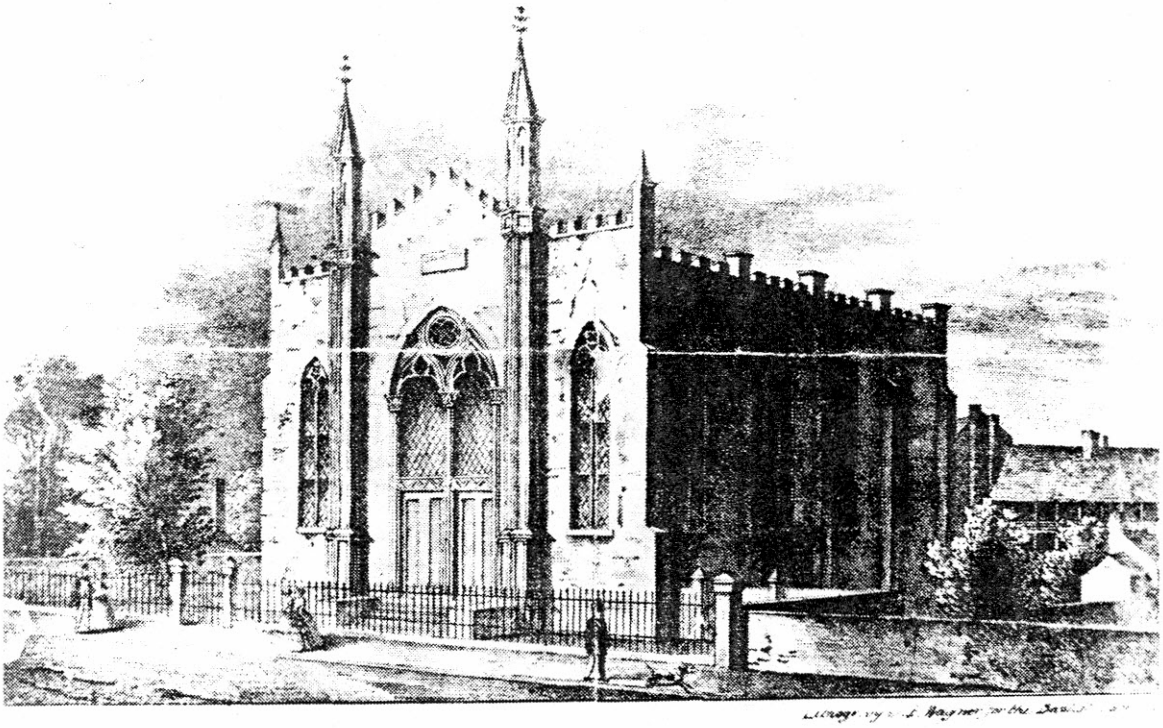
Part Four: OEDIPUS

Ah, race of mortal men
I count ye, though ye live.
. . . . . .
. . . Fix on Oedipus your eyes.
Who resolved the dark enigma.
noblest champion most wise.
Like a star his envied fortune
mounted beaming far and wide:
Now he sinks in seas of anguish.
whelmed beneath a raging tide

Sophocles. *Oedipus Rex.*

There must be something which makes a voice within us ready to recognize the compelling force of destiny in the *Oedipus*. . . . His destiny moves us only because it might have been ours -- because the oracle laid the same curse upon us before our birth as upon him.

Sigmund Freud. *The Interpretation of Dreams.*



FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF NASHVILLE IN 1848

10. Manfred Betrays Oedipus

In *The Unity of Art*, Billy considers poetry the most universal of the Fine Arts and compares two opposite and contending systems, two schools of poetry under the names of the Classical and the Romantic. For him, the clearest way of distinguishing the two schools is to say that one is lyrical, the other dramatic. To carry the distinction into details, he analyzes a specimen of each style. He takes Byron's *Manfred* and Shakespeare's *Lear*: "for although Manfred is a modern poem it is one of the finest productions of the Classical school."[1] In his analysis:

> Not only is Manfred antique in its plan — in its near approach to the preservation of the unities of time, place and action; but it is antique in its passions, its characters and its incidents.
>
> The strong and ruling passion of Manfred is the desire to know. So parching is his thirst for knowledge that it has led him to the commission of a crime which his lips refuse to utter even to himself. Driven on by a dark curiosity and a yet darker love, he has murdered the companion of his studies; and in order to quench the remorse that is burning up his soul, he flies to his books and his laboratory, attempting to divert his mind from the past by fixing it upon the present, or turning it to the future.
>
> In vain, however, he struggles to be free from the chain which he has wound about his spirit. A black mist tinged with blood constantly rises between him and truth; crime has darkened his per-

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[1] William Walker, *The Unity of Art*, p. 9.

> ceptions, and taken away from him the power of progressing in knowledge. Bound, then, within the iron circle of guilt, the spirits he has once controlled rebelling against his will, he thinks of suicide —the last resort of the too aspiring intellect when it has been degraded and demonized by passion.[2]

In Act I of the play, Count Manfred's suicide attempt on an Alpine cliff begins one of Byron's most poetic and speculative dramas. Prevented from killing himself by a chamois hunter, the count, overwhelmed by the crushing consciousness of guilt, summons the presence of witches and malignant spirits, pays a visit to Arimanes throne in the infernal regions, and finally leaves the world for good without the benefit of religious consolation.

Manfred is Byron's Faust, and hence he is a sort of wizard or magician, but his "strong and ruling passion" is not the desire to know, and the "iron circle of guilt" that drives him to suicide is not related to any murder or to any companion of his studies, as Billy erroneously states in *The Unity of Art*.

From the beginning to the end, the despair and guilt that ravage Manfred's soul in the poem are unmistakable aftermaths of incest. Incest is the strong and ruling passion that burns in his heart, and also in Lord Byron's, who created Manfred in 1816 when a forbidden love for his half-sister Augusta provoked the dissolution of his own marriage. How are we to explain, then, Billy's inaccurate perception?

Freudian psychology provides an explanation by way of the Oedipus complex, an emotional constellation of two components: (1) an intense conflict over erotic love for the parent of the opposite sex and (2) an intense conflict over jealous, rivalrous hatred for the parent of the same sex. The male child fears his father's vindictive retribution, fearing that his father will cut off his penis, giving rise to "Castration Anxiety." In this context, let's picture Billy reading *Manfred:*

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[2]Ibid.

. . . my blood! the pure warm stream
Which ran in the veins of my fathers, and in ours
When we were in our youth, and had one heart,
And loved each other as we should not love,
. . . . . .
She was like me in lineaments -- her eyes,
Her hair, her features, all, to the very tone
Even of her voice, they said were like to mine;
. . . I loved her, and destroy'd her!
-- with thy hand?
-- Not with my hand, but heart -- which broke her heart;
It gazed on mine, and wither'd . . .
. . . . . .
Hear me, hear me --
Astarte! my beloved! speak to me :
I have so much endured -- so much endure --
Look on me! . . .
. . . Thou lovedst me
Too much, as I loved thee : we were not made
To torture thus each other, though it were
The deadliest sin to love as we have loved.[3]

Manfred's "She was like me in lineaments" reminds us that "Billy was the spitting image of his mother" (p.16). My contention is that he unconsciously recognized his own incestuous fantasies reflected in Byron's creation. He identified himself with Manfred and saw his mother in Astarte. This rekindled deep internal anguish generated by the guilt and the pain of separation from the loved one. Defense barriers interposed to annul the unpleasant sensation. By utilizing *denial*, he refused to accept Manfred's obvious incest. By means of *projection*, he attributed his own inner sentiments to the characters created by Byron.

He unconsciously availed himself of collateral information contained in the poem to fabricate a "logical" account by which he could rationalize his distortion of the facts.

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[3]Byron *Manfred* II.i.24; II.ii.105; II.iv.116.

The following verses, far apart in the poem, furnished him the needed twine:

> *. . . Then I pass'd*
> *The nights of years in science . . .*
> *. . . and with my knowledge grew*
> *The thirst of knowledge . . .*
> *. . . . . .*
> *Count Manfred was, as now, within his tower,*
> *How occupied, we knew not, but with him*
> *The sole companion of his wanderings*
> *And watchings -- her, whom of all earthly things*
> *That lived, the only thing he seem'd to love.--*
> *As he, indeed, by blood was bound to do,*
> *The lady Astarte,*[4]

Billy's mother was the companion of his studies in childhood. The thirst for knowledge she inculcated in him led him to abandon the maternal hearth to "pass the nights of years in science," away from home, arousing in the child an anguish of separation equivalent to the death of the loved one.

Manfred's words "I loved her, and destroy'd her!" provide the needed last link to complete the chain of rationalization of Manfred's guilt in Billy's mind, distorting Astarte's death as *the murder of the companion of his studies*. This serves to obscure and dispose of Manfred's incest, thus abating the anxiety it produced in Billy. Although he reads attentively Byron's verses, Billy's conscious mind honestly but erroneously perceives that:

> The strong and ruling passion of Manfred is the desire to know. So parching is his thirst for knowledge that it has led him to the commission of a crime which his lips refuse to utter even to himself. Driven by a dark curiosity and a yet darker love, he has murdered the companion of his studies.

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[4]Ibid., II.ii.83; III.iii.41.

The *yet darker love* pays lip service to the truth, but is divested of sting when crammed in the context of the whole phrase.

The other face of Oedipus appears promptly, in King Lear. In Billy's own words, when the monarch "perceives that his daughters are altogether wanting in filial feeling, that he is a worn out tool whom all wish to get rid of, then his fury rises and inspires those fearful curses that freeze the blood even when we read them in the closet."[5]

What could be those fearful curses, to freeze Billy's blood in the solitude of his private chamber? None other than the paternal invectives accursing sterility on his offspring, which instantly rekindle his own Castration Anxiety. In Act I, Lear vehemently curses his daughter Goneril:

> *Hear, Nature! hear, dear goddess, hear!*
> *Suspend thy purpose, if thou didst intend*
> *To make this creature fruitful!*
> *Into her womb convey sterility!*
> *Dry up in her the organs of increase,*
> *And from her derogate body never spring*
> *A babe to honor her!*[6]

King Lear's curses descend upon filial ingratitude, echoing the anathemas of Billy's superego for his Oedipal hostility to his own father. Shame and guilt reinforce the terror of castration, and the resultant agonizing anxiety calls into play the interposition of defense barriers. *Reversal of affect*, an attitude directly opposite to the unconscious yearnings, abates anxiety by rejecting its cause.

Billy, in effect, utilized this defense mechanism, praising the love bonds between father and daughters and strongly condemning "that filial ingratitude which has crushed a father's intellect and burst a father's heart."[7] His ex-

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[5]Walker, *The Unity of Art*, p. 11.

[6]Shakespeare *King Lear* I.iv.277.

[7]Walker, *The Unity of Art*, p. 12.

tended and emotional dissertation on Lear centers entirely on the theme of paternal love and filial ungratefulness, which he enhances by blending in a short commentary on Hamlet featuring "the struggles which rend the breast of the much injured and too little avenging prince!"[8]

His posture carries him to the extreme of total identification with the old king:

> From first to last we feel that Lear is made of the same clay with ourselves. His faults and his foibles endear him to us, and even in the ravings of his insane wrath we seem to hear the echoes of our own souls.[9]

On the other hand, the horror of incest drives him to repeatedly deny any kinship or affinity with Manfred, repudiating even the remotest human ties with the count:

> We feel little sympathy for Manfred, . . . who seems not of the same race with the hardy and altogether human mountaineer . . . When the abbot attempts to bring Manfred to repentance, and furnish him with the consolations of religion, we know that his effort will be in vain. The priest can give peace and comfort to the soul of none but his fellows.[10]

Other portions of the speech suggest the presence of active Oedipal forces in Billy's mental processes at age 24. For example, here is the Junius Brutus episode he chose to narrate:

> Let us go, in the first place, to the Roman forum soon after the expulsion of the Tarquins and the

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[8] Ibid., p. 10.

[9] Ibid., p. 11.

[10] Ibid., p. 10.

> establishment of the consulate. Junius Brutus, with several other judges, is listening to a cause in which some young men, standing before him, and among these his own sons, are accused of conspiring with the view of bringing back the Tarquins.
>
> The youths stand in silence awaiting their doom; and though the judges associated with Brutus soften and relent, the father is as stern and unmoved as ever.
>
> "Have you an answer to make to these charges?" he asks the accused, scarce deigning to look on his unworthy and traitorous sons; and when they reply in the negative, he points without pity and without trembling to the rods and the axe.
>
> The attending crowd pity the youths and wish to sympathize with the injured father; but when they see the calmness and firmness of Junius, they are lost in admiration at the stoicism that sacrifices the dearest feelings of nature to the interests and rights of the country.[11]

Tell-tale signs of Oedipus also appear in Billy's previous writings, beginning with his letter to aunt Janet at age 6. In that letter, reproduced here on Page 258, the extra-large characters of "mother," "sweetheart," "Mary," and "mama," contrast with a much smaller "father" and "James."

The Oedipus complex accounts for Billy's strange reaction to the events in Nashville and for the matrimonial parable in his Feb. 25, 1846 letter to John (quoted in chapter 7). It also accounts for the poem in his May 17, 1844 letter from London:

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[11] Ibid., p. 18. In this instance, too, Billy resorted to *reversal of affect*, lavishing praises on the father. Moreover, hidden in this episode is the entire Oedipus complex. The oracle given to the Tarquins is well known: it prophesied that the conquest of Rome would fall to the son who first kissed his mother. This was interpreted by Brutus as referring to Mother Earth. Freud mentions it as an example of an undisguised Oedipus dream. Sigmund Freud. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. (New York: Avon Books, 1965), p. 434.

Methought, with a companion of my youth,
I walked 'mid Syria's sacred scenes. The day
Was fast declining: the slender palm-trees,
Like dial-hands, cast their lengthening shadows
O'er the sunny plain. Though their narrow leaves
Shaded but little the scorching herbage,
The view inspired with melancholy musings.

'Twas not that there was aught of gloom around;
But the mind oft sees the face of nature
Through a veil of its own weaving; thus making
Light appear dark and dark, light. Now we climb
The side of Calvary, and stand upon
The Martyr-mount where died the Son of God.

How sad and yet how joyful are we! Here
A God was murdered, but a race was saved!
We see the watery blood run down <u>His</u> limbs
Already stiffening; we hear the mock praise
Of pharisaic priests and fierce fanatics.

But hark! What sound was that which well might cause
The earth to quake and rend the rocks, as on
That dread day of death? Is it not the glad shout
Of those redeemed by <u>His</u> atoning blood?

Sometime entranced, we thought of things past:
Then turning, we viewed while the present.

On the mount's summit, there knelt an old man
Bare-headed: fasts long and watchings frequent
Had withered his flesh, and sunk yet brightened
His dark eyes. He wore a long robe of brown
Girt with a leathern belt; and on his feet were
No sandal-shown; and by his side there lay
A pilgrim-staff cut from an Alpine trunk.

His bony hands were locked convulsively:
His whole body trembled: while his wan face
Upturned to heaven, seemed seeking pardon.

Riding 'round the hill's base, we saw a youth
Of five and twenty summers: a long beard,
Coal-black, fell from his chin; 'bout his bronzed brow
Was wreathed an ample turban, and o'er his limbs
Were loose floating folds of finest linen.

A curved cimitar hung at his side, and
As he glanced upon the kneeling pilgrim,
With lip of scorn and angry eye, his hand
The jewelled hilt did menacingly grasp.

Hard by, a ploughman drove the sturdy ox,
And seemed intent on turning up the ground,
Ne'er stopping to look towards Calvary mount.

How vastly different do those feel who gaze
Upon the same object! As a portrait
Whose features change whene'er our point of view
Doth change -- so nature is unto the mind.

Now are you not ready to ask, 'What is the meaning of all this?' But as we well know John that any exercise of the mind is agreeable, I will let you find out the meaning . . . the deep-hidden signification of this flight of my cropped-winged Muse.[12]

In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Sigmund Freud advanced the then revolutionary theory that "a dream is the fulfillment of a wish."[13] To correctly interpret a dream, one must

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[12]William Walker, Letters to John Berrien Lindsley.

[13]Freud says that *every dream represents the fulfilment of a repressed wish.* Jung states that "nobody can say anything against Freud's theory of repression and wish fulfillment as apparent causes of dream symbolism," but he also believes that "dreams serve the purpose of compensation." Freud, *Op. Cit.*, p. 155; Carl G. Jung, *Dreams*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 5; Carl G. Jung, *Man and his Symbols*, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1964) pp. 27, 67.

Freud adds: "Every one has wishes that he would prefer not to disclose to other people, and wishes that he will not admit even to himself. . . . And we are justified in concluding that these dreams are distorted and the wish-fulfilment contained in them disguised to the point of being unrecognizable precisely owing to

Methought, with a companion of my youth,
I walked in Lydia's sacred scene. The day
Was fast declining: the slender palm-trees,
Like dial-hands, cast their lengthening shadows
O'er the sunny plain, although their waving boughs
Shaded but little the scorching heat,
The views inspired with melancholy musings.
'Twas not that there was aught of gloom around;
But the mind off sees the face of nature
Through a veil of its own weaving; then making
Light appear dark and dark, light. Soon we climb
The side of Calvary, and stand upon
The martyr-mount where died the Son of God.
How sad and yet how glorious are we! Here
A God was murdered, but a race was saved!
See on the watery blood run down His limbs
Already stiffening; we hear the mock praise
Of Pharisaic priest and fierce fanatics.
But hark! What sound was that which well might cause
The earth to quake and rend the rocks, as on
That dread day of death? Is't not the glad shout
Of those redeemed by His atoning blood?
Sometime entranced, we thought of things past;
Then turning, we viewed while the present.
On the mount summit, there knelt an old man
Bare-headed: Past long and watching frequent
Had withered his flesh, and sunk yet brightened
His dark eyes. He wore a long robe of brown

BILLY'S POEM ON THE CRUCIFIXION

discover the hidden wish of the dreamer that is fulfilled in the episode. An inner censor makes use of many symbols and mechanisms to disguise and express the forbidden and unconscious yearnings.

By applying Freudian concepts to Billy's poem on the Crucifixion, the deep-hidden signification of his flight of fancy is uncovered, and his Oedipus complex again emerges. "Methought" introduces the poem as a genuine creation of Billy's cropped-winged Muse -- a flight of his fancy or daydream.[14]

Landscapes such as "Syria's sacred scenes," "side of Calvary," "martyr-mount," "sunny plain" and "scorching herbage" represent the female genital organs.[15]

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the repugnance felt for the topic of the dream or for the wish derived from it and to an intention to repress them. The distortion in the dream is thus shown in fact to be an act of the censorship. . . . The stricter the censorship, the more far-reaching will be the disguise and the more ingenious too may be the means employed for putting the reader on the scent of the true meaning." Freud, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 176, 193.

[14]It may be objected that there is a great deal of difference between a poem and a dream. Jung discusses and dismisses this objection when he interprets the complex that sets Gretchen, in *Faust*, singing a song. He says: "The song unconsciously chosen by Gretchen, is what we have called the *dream-material*, which corresponds to the secret thought. One might apply this example to the dream, and suppose that Gretchen had not sung but dreamed this romance. It might be objected that such a supposition is not permissible, as there is a great deal of difference between a song and a dream. But thanks to the researches of Freud we now know that all the products of any dreaming state have something in common. First, they are all variations on the complex, and second, they are only a kind of symbolic expression of the complex. That is why I think I am justified in making this supposition." Jung, *Dreams*, p. 5.

For Freud, "Unsatisfied wishes are the driving power behind fantasies; every separate fantasy contains the fulfillment of a wish . . ." Sigmund Freud, *Delusion & Dream and Other Essays*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1956), p. 126. In 1906 he applied his psychoanalytic method for the first time in detail to a novel: *Gradiva: A Pompeiian Fancy*, by Wilhelm Jensen. Soon afterwards he applied it to Leonardo da Vinci's paintings and fantasies. Sigmund Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci*, (New York: Random House, 1947).

[15]"In the same way, many landscapes in dreams, especially any containing bridges or wooded hills, may clearly be recognized as descriptions of the genitals. . . . Behind the church there was a hill ('*Mons veneris*') and above it a thick wood ('Pubic hair')." Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, pp. 391, 402.

"Slender palm-trees," "dial-hands," "limbs," "hat," "pilgrim-staff," "cimitar" and "plough" are phallic symbols.[16] "Lengthening shadows" and "Limbs already stiffening" denote penile erection.[17] "Watery blood" means semen.[18]

"Riding round the hill's base," "climb the side of Calvary" and "stand upon the martyr mount" express sexual intercourse. "Bare-headed" (hatless), "ox" (castrated bull) and "pilgrim-staff cut from the Alpine trunk" refer to castration.

"Earth" is MOTHER earth. "Martyr-mount" camouflages the name of Billy's mother, Mary. Reversals of meaning and the substitution of words with similar spelling are common devices utilized by the censor to disguise the message. "His," underlined twice by Billy's own hand, points to its true meaning: "My." "His death" means "my birth."[19]

When numbers are broken up by the dreamer, each component has a separate meaning.[20] "Five and twenty summers" thus mean Billy's age in the "past" (five) and at "present" (twenty). He celebrated his twentieth birthday on May 8, 1844, one week before writing the letter.

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[16] "All elongated objects, such as sticks, tree-trunks and umbrellas (the opening of these last being comparable to an erection) may stand for the male organ. . . . Nor is there any doubt that all weapons and tools are used as symbols for the male organ: e.g. ploughs, hammers, rifles, revolvers, daggers, sabers, etc. . . . A Hat as a Symbol of a Man (or of Male Genitals) . . . No doubt that the hat was a male genital organ . . . At the time my patient told me this dream I had long been familiar with the hat symbol." Ibid., pp. 391, 395.

[17] "Whips, sticks, lances and similar objects are familiar to us as phallic symbols; but when a whip further possesses the most striking characteristic of a phallus, its extensibility, scarcely a doubt can remain." Ibid., p. 414.

[18] "Water = urine = semen." Ibid., p. 439.

[19] "Incidentally, reversal, or turning a thing into its opposite, is one of the means of representation most favoured by the dream-work and one which is capable of employment in the most diverse direction. . . . reversal is of quite special use as a help to the censorship, for it produces a mass of distortion in the material which is to be represented, and this has a positively paralyzing effect, to begin with, on any attempt at understanding the dream." Ibid., p. 362.

[20] "The mere fact that in reporting the dream the dreamer broke up the number 2262 showed that its components had separate meanings." Ibid., p. 453.

The hidden meaning is clear. In the poem, Billy fulfills his erotic fantasies with Mary and castrates his father in rivalrous hatred.

This Oedipal presence in Billy's unconscious in the spring of 1844, when the depression of the Paris crisis overwhelmed him, points to the role that the complex may have played in the emergency. The few fragments of information available may serve to sustain a logical and congruent hypothesis. For instance, the following reminiscence, published by Billy in the *Crescent* on January 14, 1850 during a polemic with the French editors of the *Bee* and the *Courier*, revealing his unpleasant memories of the crisis in Paris:

> As to the understanding of the word *chic*, we can only say that we comprehend its import fully and completely. We have the merit — if any it be — to know something of Parisian slang.
>
> We have put on a blouse and drank at Paul Nicquet's with the Parisian thieves and *chiffoniers;* and our knowledge of *chic* was picked up among the roystering students of the Latin quarter, and its significance fixed on us by visits to La Chaumière, and such like places. Nor was *chic*, by any means, the least significant word we picked up in that same Paris, which, take it all in all —from the Chaussée d'Antin to the Barrière du Trone — is the most farcical and yet most disgusting city in Christendom.
>
> Beneath the appearance of elegance and refinement, there lurks in this Parisian world, an amount of depraved taste and sensual vulgarity which chokes up the aspirations of the higher Art, and degrades men who might otherwise soar beyond the depressing influences of the world they live in.[21]

21"Biscaccianti -- Paris, Frenchmen Generally," *Daily Crescent*, 1/14/1850, p. 2, c. 2.

Let's picture Billy in the summer of 1843, 19 years old and "drinking at Paul Nicquet's" in Paris. Uninhibited by wine, he succumbs to temptation and goes to bed with his first woman. But at the crucial moment, he is unable to perform, paralyzed by seeing Mary's face while looking at the girl's. Petrified by the terror of incest, insult is added to injury when the girl bursts out laughing at his impotence and hurls at him the appropriate French insult, somewhat stronger than the *girl-boy!* of his childhood days.

The sudden loss of self-esteem sets in motion defense mechanisms to restore it. Grandiose fantasies of power rush in to compensate for his sexual inadequacy: "but there is no height to reach in medicine and surgery," and Billy abandons medicine to build castles in the air on the political arena.[22]

That would explain the thought that thereafter haunted him: that "the hearing of a single word may change the whole course of existence."[23] It would also explain his recollection that "there lurks in this Parisian world, an amount of depraved taste and sensual vulgarity which chokes up the aspirations of the higher Art, and degrades men who might otherwise soar beyond the depressing influences of the world they live in."

Hopelessly banned from ever satiating his carnal passion with Mary, Billy clamored for a proxy to be able to fulfill the biological urge. Ellen's entrance into his life, in 1846, seemed to furnish that proxy. Ellen's disability, a handicap similar to his mother's illness, contributed to make her an appropriate substitute for the Oedipal love object. Moreover, since she was a deaf-mute, he ran no risk of ever hearing *girl-boy!* from her lips.

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[22]Carter, "Home Life of General William Walker."

[23]William Walker, Letters to John Berrien Lindsley, 11/14/1843 to 11/19/1844.

11. The Journalist

The Daily Crescent, founded in New Orleans by A. H. Hayes and J. E. M'Clure on March 5, 1848, derived its name from the moon shape imparted to the city by the curving Mississippi river that embraces it against Lake Pontchartrain. The paper followed an independent political line. In September, J. O. Pierson and J. C. Larue joined as owners, supplying additional capital to acquire a larger printing press.

In the Spring of 1848, Billy published a poem and three articles in *The Crescent*, at a time when a young New Yorker named Walt Whitman, then living in New Orleans, also wrote a series of articles in the paper. Both writers had identical initials: "W.W." Whitman left for New York in the summer to take charge of the Free Soil paper *Brooklyn Freeman*, on his way to the pinnacle of fame in the world of letters, while Billy went to Nashville where he delivered *The Unity of Art*.

Neither in the speech or in his writings does Billy evince any enthusiasm for practicing law in New Orleans. He had become a lawyer so that he would have an entry into politics. He knew that a young attorney was not likely to acquire prominence and power in the forensic field, especially in Louisiana where old fogies held a monopoly, and police extortions and shady deals in court were common.

Billy's writing ability hence led him to journalism, and he soon had the opportunity to write for the *Crescent* when Pierson and M'Clure retired from that newspaper. The former transferred his share to S. F. Wilson, a veteran Mobile newspaper editor, and the latter, afflicted with a serious chronic illness, sold his to Billy. The new collective ownership, "J. H. Hayes & Co. -- J. H. Hayes, J. C. Larue, S. F. Wilson and Wm. Walker," appeared on the masthead on March 7, 1849, and on the editorial page, a notice from Billy:

> TO THE PUBLIC.-- In entering on a new and untried career, I am liable to fall into errors and make

> mistakes. For these, I shall not ask the indulgence of the public; censure will the fitting reward and surest remedy for them. As the discovery and dissemination of truth shall be the objects of my editorial existence, I will be as happy in receiving aid to investigation as in imparting the results of my labors. And though my contributions to the general welfare may be trifling and unimportant, they shall be, like the widow's mite, the gift of all I have.
>
> WM. WALKER.[1]

The results of Billy's labors begin to flow the same day, in an article titled "Warehousing System":

> In reviewing the history of the world, we often see the simultaneous development of facts apparently disconnected in their origin, yet subsequently bound to each other in the closest and most important manner. Thus the mines of America were first found at a time when all Europe, impelled by the spirit of the Baconian philosophy, was entering on that career of discovery and invention which has so materially changed the face of modern society. The circulating medium was thus furnished for the increased exchanges which were the result of increased production.
>
> So the introduction of the warehousing system into the United States just at the period when we are making such vast acquisitions on the Pacific side of the continent, is one of those striking phenomena which lead us to believe that there is an interfering mind as well as guiding laws in the moral development of the human race.[2]

From the first paragraph of the first article, Billy's Positivism is evident, even though no signature is attached.

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[1] William Walker, "To the Public," *Daily Crescent*, 3/7/1849, p.2, c.1.

[2] "Warehousing System," Ibid., p. 2, c. 2.

Thereafter, his typical philosophy and style exert a commanding influence on the editorial page of the *Crescent*. Forty-four articles bear his mark in the first six weeks. He covered a wide variety of subjects, domestic and international, repeatedly evincing his allegiance to the United States. For him:

> The individual is the centre of an infinite number of concentric circles, and his benevolence must have passed through the smaller and more internal circles before it can enlarge in the great curves which lie more remote from the centre. As the love of country is founded in the love of family, so general philanthropy is based on patriotism.[3]

The expansion of slavery into the new territories continued to capture the nation's attention in the Spring of 1849, igniting passionate debates in Congress and seriously threatening to disrupt the national compact. On March 14, Billy called attention to the danger, but emphasizes the "Unionist Tendencies" counteracting it:

> He who would learn the tendencies of his time must look more at the silent changes slowly and gradually going on than at noisy and turbulent revolutions which are only the external manifestations of a prior change in public opinion. If any one desires to know whether the United States are advancing towards a more complete union of interests and feelings than they had in the earlier days of the Republic, he must listen not to the loud declarations of alarmists who often prate merely to produce a sensation, but to the deep and solemn expressions of popular will as given in habits, in elections, and in the acts of Congress, when approved by the voice of the nation . . .
>
> If any one will take the trouble to review the

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[3]"Navigation Laws." Ibid., 4/17/1849, p. 2, c. 2.

> history of the country from the formation of the Constitution to the present time, he will see that we are becoming every day more and more united in habits, in feelings and in opinions . . .[4]

Billy also manifested his allegiance to the South and the slavery system. Yet, he opposed the extension of slavery into the newly acquired territories, considering it detrimental to authentic Southern interests:

> Connected as we are with the South in all our nearest and dearest interests, bound to it by all the ties that link men with the country peculiarly their own, we cannot but look with displeasure on the attempt made to get up an agitation on the most exciting of all subjects. Such an agitation must end in discomfiture or disunion.
>
> We must, when the great question of slavery becomes the masterkey of political parties, either yield in despair or determine on independence and separate existence from the North. Our only object, consistent with reason, can be to preserve the slave propriety we possess. Like the dog in the fable, by snatching at the shadow in the water, we drop the substance which we once firmly held.
>
> Our safety is in silence: our policy "in letting well enough alone." Let not Southern men be frightened from their property by the loud declarations of passionate politicians, that a course of inaction is a course of cowardice. It is the course of prudence: the course of wisdom; the course of a courage too confident in its virtue to be deterred from what is right by charges of cowardice.
>
> The just man lives down the sneers of a contempt itself contemptible.[5]

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[4] "Unionist Tendencies," Ibid., 3/14/1849, p. 2, c. 2.

[5] "Senator Houston to his Constituents," Ibid., 3/22/1849, p. 2, c.3.

Commenting on the news from the Balkans, he portrayed Russia as "the great prophet and leader of absolutism," and predicted a U.S.-Russian rivalry for the Far Eastern trade:

> Russia has got the start of us in furnishing the world with gold; and it is probable that the Ural mines will prove richer and more inexhaustible than those of the Sierra Nevada. But in securing the Eastern trade, which will enable us to command the commerce of the world more effectually than by digging and coining gold, we think that we are a little ahead of the Russian empire.
>
> We have secured California, and hold San Francisco in peaceable possession. We are even talking about a railroad from that port to the Mississippi . . .
>
> If we are wise we will make no unnecessary delay in getting connection with California. If we wait ten years for the road that is to connect the Pacific with the Mississippi, we may find out that we have been too late. And double will be the shame if we are forestalled by such a people as the Russian — double ought to be our disappointment if we find out that we have been beaten in the race by a government founded on despotism and utterly subversive of all human liberty.
>
> For the sake of the whole human race, as well as for our own sake, we ought to hasten our movements and speedily build up a port on the Pacific that will make us the neighbors of Canton and Calcutta . . .[6]

Billy's wishes for San Francisco were fulfilled by the Gold Rush and the 60,000 new residents that began pouring into the Pacific port. First-hand reports published by the *Crescent* established that the situation in California was constantly getting worse. They had no government, either civil or military, and the territory was full of lawless

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[6]"Russia and the United States," Ibid., 4/6/1849, p. 2, c. 3.

men, committing the most shocking crimes. Billy commented:

> The letter of Capt. Folsom, which we published yesterday, gives us a lively idea of the state of society at present existing in California. And never in the whole course of human history has so interesting an experiment in civilization been made as the one now to be observed on the coasts of the Pacific.
>
> Had Rousseau lived to-day, he would have been forced to add another chapter to his essay on the comparative merits of savage and civilized life; for the facts which have been and continue to be wrought out in California are what the Baconian philosophers call an *experimentum crucis* on the question discussed by the great genius of Geneva. These facts decide the matter at once . . . Never, hereafter, can men, with any show of reason, prefer savageism to civilization . . .
>
> Bold, ardent and imaginative minds, feeling themselves cramped by laws and the restraints of what they considered an unnatural and artificial society, have at various times, lifted up their voices against civilized life and portrayed in lively colors the delights and freedom of savage existence. These have been joined by many high-minded and benevolent men who were more impressed with the evils of society, than capable of remedying them.
>
> In the present day such enthusiasts take the name of socialists, and declaim with vehemence against most existing institutions. They are but a new species of the dreaming world-betterers that have existed since the days of Abel — for Abel was clearly the dreamer that his worldly brother hated and despised — and will probably continue to exist to the last syllable of recorded time.
>
> But California tells us that civilization, with all its evils, with all the wrongs it inflicts on the poor and the weak, with all the favors it so unworthly lavishes on ungenerous strength and ill-

> gotten wealth, is yet a mighty softener and refiner. California teaches us that the race has not lived in vain; that its trials and its sufferings have not been lost upon it; that hard experience has ground at least some truths into the human soul, and forced some good habits upon mankind.[7]

The article goes on, presenting as proof "the comparatively few crimes" that have been committed in California. Billy's posture was in keeping with his individualistic liberal creed and resolute faith in scientific progress. Yet, the very letter he offered as evidence could hardly be more eloquent in burying his thesis. It told that "outrages are occurring in all quarters of the country, and the public astonishment has scarcely subsided after one murder has transpired, before another is committed, more horrible than the first. House-breaking, thefts and robberies are of almost hourly occurrence."[8]

It could be that the topic fans the flames of Billy's inner conflict, calling forth defense mechanisms that distort his perception of reality. His singular dislike for Abel, and a "strong leaven of the old Adam" at the end of the article, point in the same direction.

Billy's inner conflict again appeared between the lines in his next editorial, on Cuba, which in 1849 remained a Spanish colony. Its million odd inhabitants were 60% of African origin, almost all slaves, and 40% of Iberian stock. Its annual yield of sugar, tobacco, coffee and other agricultural products was said to surpass the fifty million dollar mark, which naturally attracted the attention of American entrepreneurs and Southern slave owners. In the immediate aftermath of the Mexican war, the "Pearl of the Antilles" loomed as the next prey of Manifest Destiny. For Billy:

> It is only necessary to look at the map in order to perceive the vast importance of Cuba to the

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[7] "Condition of California," Ibid., 4/12/1849, p. 2, c. 2.

[8] "Interesting from California," Ibid., 4/11/1849, p. 1, c. 3.

United States. Lying between the peninsulas of Florida and Yucatan, blocking up completely the entrance from the Atlantic Ocean into the Gulf of Mexico, this island may be made to control all the foreign commerce that leaves or enters the mouths of the Mississippi as well as of the ports of Texas, Alabama, and Florida, scattered along the Gulf. But in addition to the commanding position of Cuba, which may be seen by a glance at the map, the island has one of the finest harbors in the world.

With stout hearts and scientific heads to guard it, the port of Havana would be hermetically sealed to an enemy's vessel. At one time the English had possession of this place, and it is singular that they should ever have loosened their grip on so valuable a prize. It was during the seven years' war that they took Havana from the Spaniards: and ever since the English gave up their hold on this magnificent harbor, their power in America has been on the decline.

Soon after they lost Havana the United States separated from the mother country; and thus one great reason for getting Cuba was taken away from the British. But although in their folly and judicial blindness, the English Government threw away the priceless possession that the fate of war had given into its hands, it has for the last twenty years been full of fear and jealousy lest the quondam colonies should conquer or purchase the island from the Spanish Government.

Although England may gnash her teeth for her former folly and present impotence to prevent what she fears will happen . . .[9]

"Cuba" unfurled Billy's Southern flag in the ranks of Manifest Destiny. Expressions like "folly," "Judicial blindness," "fear," "jealousy," "gnash the teeth," "impotence," and others are overly passionate, suggesting the

[9]"Cuba," Ibid., 4/13/1849, p. 2, c. 2.

possibility of an unconscious projection of his Oedipus complex, with Havana representing his mother, England his father, and the United States, himself.

The pages of the *Crescent* reveal Billy deeply immersed in the political affairs of the day. He wrote on municipal finances and the cleanliness of the city, and on the national issues set in motion by the Gold Rush, the slavery controversy, and Manifest Destiny. He covered the revolutionary explosions in Europe, the forthcoming unification of Italy and Germany, the British in India, the awakening of Russia, and the expansion of Western commerce to the Far East. He also discussed navigation laws, the pay of American diplomats, and many other topics.

In his search for general laws, his conclusions frequently entail a moral judgement, and his Oedipus complex seems to color his subjects. Words and phrases like "were we angels," "of the earth, earthy," "some great question of right and wrong," "the baser parts of our nature," "the arch-corrupter and demoralizer of the race," "a loathsome cancer that was consuming their entrails," "invade the sanctity of the domestic hearth and expose all the bickerings and squabbles of family life," "the soul that delights in the degradation of a high name," "the sores and weaknesses of a noble nature," are typical and he applies them in cases in which they appear to be uncalled-for. In other words, Billy's articles in the *Crescent* suggest his constant use of the psychological defense mechanism of Projection.

12. Doomsday

Vibrio cholerae is a tiny bacteria that from time immemorial has been the scourge of humanity in Asia. Its periodic visitations sowed terror in many cities of the New World in the nineteenth century. A cholera pandemic circled the globe in the 1830s, radiating, as always, from its endemic reservoir in the delta of the Ganges river in India. It made its entrance to Moscow in September 1830, and after spreading throughout Europe it reached England in October 1831, crossing the Atlantic the following summer to wreak havoc on Quebec, New York, Boston, and other cities in America.

With memories still fresh of its ravages, New Orleans residents waited and prayed in dread when in 1847 they read the news of a recent cholera outbreak in Eastern Europe. The pestilence spread to France during the summer of 1848, and on December 14 the New Orleans *Crescent* reported two fatal cases among immigrants just arrived from Le Havre.

Three additional deaths were reported on December 18. By Christmas, the cholera was killing one hundred humans daily, and by the end of the year it had claimed one thousand victims in the city. One of them was Ellen's father, "Mr. John Martin, Esq."[1]

The epidemic followed its familiar course, declining in virulence by mid January to stabilize at figures of roughly seventy dead a week. The *Crescent* ceased publishing mortality statistics during Mardi Gras, and by March 7, when Billy became its editor, its pages rarely registered the dreaded word *cholera* as a cause of death.

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[1] "Died -- on Saturday morning, December 30, at a quarter past 3 o'clock, John Martin, Esq., (of the late firm of Martin, Pleasants & Co.,) on his 60th year." *Daily Picayune*, 12/31/1848, p. 2, c. 6.

At that time, New Orleans had the good fortune of another visitor, William Charles Macready, renowned British actor considered today as the greatest figure of the 19th-century stage in the development of techniques of acting and production. Macready was capable of great emotional intensity, and in parts involving paternal or domestic feelings, he was unequalled. As soon as Billy took charge of editorial functions in the *Crescent*, he offered its readers a theatrical review on March 9:

> MACREADY'S WERNER. — Macready's Werner is a masterpiece of art; and the character is entirely his own, both in conception and execution . . . You see in the actor's conception the leading characteristics of the Byronic Werner; you behold the poor, proud, suspicious, affectionate man, strongly tempted, weakly yielding, harrowingly remorseful; and then the loving and just father, broken-hearted and dying from the knowledge of his son's guilty crimes and hardened nature. . . .
>
> . . . We cannot, however, refrain from noticing the powerful impression which *Werner* twice produced by the simple utterance of his son's *Ulric's* name. When he first recognizes his son, at the intendant's, he speaks as a sick man overcome by the strength of a deep and holy affection; when he last articulates the name, it reminds us — we dislike to make a comparison so trite, but in this instance it is so apt — of the expiring candle that blazes up in the socket before it is finally extinguished.[2]

The dramatic excellence of the British actor deeply affected Billy. The piercing words uttered by Werner to his son Ulric moved him in the semidarkness of the theater, the same way as Lear's curses did in the solitude of his chamber:

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[2]"Macready's Werner," *Daily Crescent*, 3/9/1849, p. 2, c. 1.

Werner: Ulric! *[Embraces him]*
. . . . . .
My boy!
My friend, my only child,
and sole preserver!
Oh, do not hate me!
. . . . . .
Now, Count Ulric!
For son I dare not call thee
-- What say'st thou?
Ulric: His tale is true.
Werner: True, monster!
Ulric: Most true, father!
. . . . . .
Werner: Parricide! no less[3]

Billy's favorable review was instrumental in promoting a repeat performance of *Werner*, after which Macready bid farewell to a full house at the St. Charles Theater with *Hamlet*. Billy's review again revealed, as in Werner, the defense mechanism of projection, unconsciously utilized to abate the anxiety aroused in his mind by Shakespeare's masterful drama.

The "adulterous conduct" of the mother awakened his horror of incest. "Get thee to the nunnery" kindled his terror of castration -- Hamlet's sire was "so good a father." In Ophelia he saw Ellen -- "The love for Ophelia is the nearest approach to passion that the distracted prince manifests: yet this living sentiment is swallowed up and overwhelmed by his horror of the crime revealed to him by the ghost."[4] Billy relived his own tragedy in Hamlet.[5]

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[3]Byron *Werner* II.ii.20; III:i:226; V:i:399; V:i:423.

[4]"Macready's Hamlet," *Daily Crescent*, 3/12/1849, p. 2, c. 5.

[5]Freud points out: "Another of the great creations of tragic poetry, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, has its roots in the same soil as *Oedipus Rex*. But the changed treatment of the same material reveals the whole difference of the mental life of these two widely separated epochs of civilization: the secular advance of repression in the emotional life of mankind. In the Oedipus the child's wishful phantasy that underlies it is brought into the open and realized as it would be in a dream.

Before returning to England, Macready delivered two Shakespearean Lectures at the Armory Hall, in which he read, analyzed, and explained selected passages from *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. Billy attended both, and reviewed them in the *Crescent*. His "Macready's Reading of Hamlet," on March 16, opened with these words:

> We are still beneath the spell of the enchanter; our imagination has not yet escaped from the magic circle, so that the reason is hardly prepared for the analysis of the manner in which Mr. Macready read his favorite play of "Hamlet."[6]

What could possibly be the nature of the enchanter's spell that charmed Billy's imagination in the magic ring? None other than Hamlet's "agonizing horror, when his father reappears"; and Gertrude's "softness and maternal solicitude" for him who, "though cruel in his words, is yet her only son, by one she once loved well."[7] Precisely, awakening in his mind the two faces of Oedipus.

A few days later, Billy was disappointed at Macready's reading of Macbeth. Throughout the play, Macready "seemed to be making an effort," but "his spirits did not appear to accord with the work he was engaged in." Billy attributed Macready's failures "more to a temporary weakness of his nerves than to any deficiency of dramatic power."[8]

In *Hamlet* it remains repressed: and -- just as in the case of a neurosis -- we only learn of its existence from its inhibiting consequences. Strangely enough, the overwhelming effect produced by the more modern tragedy has turned out to be compatible with the fact that people have remained completely in the dark as to the hero's character. The play is built up on Hamlet's hesitation over fulfilling the task of revenge that is assigned to him: but its text offers no reasons or motives for these hesitations . . . Hamlet is able to do anything -- except take vengeance on the man who did away with his father and took that father's place with his mother, the man who shows him the repressed wishes of his own childhood realized." Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, p. 298.

[6]"Macready's Reading of Hamlet," *Daily Crescent*, 3/16/1849, p. 2, c. 2.

[7]Ibid.

[8]"Macready's Reading of Macbeth," Ibid., 3/20/1849, p. 2, c. 3.

According to the *Picayune*, Macready's reading of Macbeth was even better than Hamlet's: "Accent, tone, emphasis, were all perfect; whilst the expression of his physiognomy gave additional force to the words he uttered . . . He was enthusiastically applauded at the end of each scene."[9] Obviously, the temporary weakness was not in the actor but in the eye of the beholder. The tragedy of Macbeth provided no episodes of incest, filial ingratitude, or maternal love to stimulate Billy in the manner done by Manfred, Lear, Werner, and Hamlet.

On March 10, Billy commented upon a famous Russian pianist's New Orleans debut:

> M. Strakosch gave his first concert last night and the entertainment was delightful. The prevailing characteristics of his style are softness and sweetness . . . And whenever M. Strakosch left the softer and gentler notes he seemed to part from them with reluctance and return to them with pleasure. He prolonged his stay with them like a lover even about to take leave of his mistress, yet never departing.[10]

On March 14, the *Greek Slave*, the most famous work of Hiram Powers, held his attention. Powers, the number one American sculptor of the period, made several replicas of the *Slave*, chiseling blocks of white marble into a young, nude female form in chains. For Billy:

> The cloudiness of the day softened the light that fell upon the marble. And whether it was the mellow light, or a quality inherent to the statue, we cannot say, but the face of the "Slave," at the Statehouse, seemed to have a sorrow more unmixed with pity and contempt than the one now exhibiting at Cooke's Gallery. The upper lip seemed to be straighter — not curled so much as that of the Robb

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[9] "Mr. Macready's Second Reading," *Daily Picayune*, 3/19/1849 eve, p. 1, c. 4.

[10] "M. Strokosch," *Daily Crescent*, 3/10/1849, p. 2, c. 3.

statue — while the beautiful curve of the mouth was maintained in all its integrity.[11]

Early in April, the coming of Spring moved him to quote romantic poetry:

> The weather remains charmingly delightful; although perhaps a little too warm. The long drought was interrupted night before last by a copious shower of rain, whose effects are agreeably felt in the absence of the dust with which we have been so long overwhelmed. The nights, too, are illumined by the bright rays of the moon; in truth, they are just the nights for
>
> *"Such dreams as youthful poets dream*
> *On summer's eve by haunted stream."*[12]

On Sunday, April 15, the day was very disagreeable, cold and cloudy, with a piercing north wind. On that date, Ellen was fatally ill with the cholera. Billy told it next day, in the meteorological report:

> THE WEATHER. — Some poet, somewhere, sings of "Winter lingering in the lap of Spring," which we believe to be a very improper liberty for the cold-tempered, hard-featured, grey-headed old fellow to take with a damsel so young, warm, fair and blooming; . . . Old Winter has been cutting up more than ordinary shines lately. He is not content to "linger in the lap of Spring" for a reasonable time, and then be off as heretofore: but after having bidden the young lady a formal farewell, seized his hat and icicle, and pretended to depart for good and all, the damsel has no sooner begun making love in good earnest to her cousin Summer, than the old fellow

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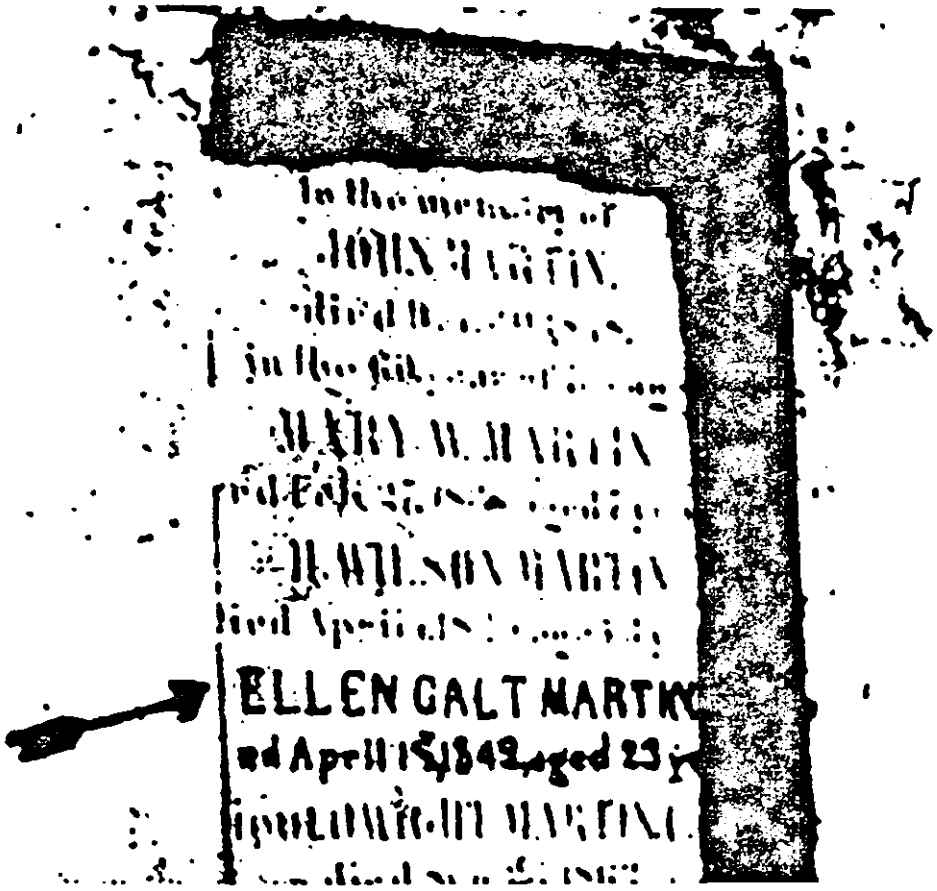
11 "The Greek Slave, at the State-House." Ibid., 3/14/1849, p. 2, c. 1.

12 "The weather . . . ," Ibid., 4/5/1849, p. 2, c. 1.



ELLEN'S GRAVE

THE SLAB READS: "SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF JOHN MARTIN. DIED DECEMBER 30, 1848. [AGED 60 YEARS; HER FATHER]. MARY W. MARTIN. DIED FEBRUARY 27, 1834. AGED 7 YEARS. [HER SISTER]. H. WILSON MARTIN. DIED APRIL 1, 1849. AGED 3 YEARS. [HER BROTHER]. ELLEN GALT MARTIN. DIED APRIL 18, 1849. AGED 23 YEARS. LIEUTENANT DWIGHT MARTIN, C.S.A. DIED SEPTEMBER 21, 1862, OF WOUNDS RECEIVED IN THE BATTLE OF SHARPSBURG. AGED 29 YEARS. [HER BROTHER]. HOWARD MARTIN, CRESCENT REGIMENT, LOUISIANA VOLUNTEERS. DIED MAY 29, 1861. AGED 23 YEARS. [HER BROTHER]. CLARINDA G. MARTIN. DIED JULY 22, 1865. AGED 27 YEARS. [HER SISTER, KILLED RIDING A RUNAWAY HORSE]. MARY W. ROGERS. CONSORT OF WILLIAM O. ROGERS. DIED MARCH 15, 1868. AGED 28 YEARS. [HER SISTER]. HOWARD MARTIN ROGERS. DIED APRIL 11, 1868. AGED 21 MONTHS. [HER NEPHEW]. CLARINDA G. MARTIN. AGED 67 YEARS. DIED APRIL 1, 1871. [HER MOTHER]. CLARA CAMILLE MARTIN, WIFE OF W. L. BRES. DIED JULY 30, 1881. [HER NIECE]. AGED 21 YEARS. MARY SLAY MARTIN, WIFE OF W. A. BRES. DIED JANUARY 1, 1891. AGED 27 YEARS. [HER NIECE]."

> returns, interrupts their most amorous kisses by obtruding his cold and death-like nose between their lips, and seizing Spring in his arms covers her with clouds of dust and chills her young blood with the bitter blasts of the North.[13]

Ellen died on Wednesday, April 18, doomsday for Billy. Like Old Winter, the epidemic had returned, and would soon be slaying 285 victims a week. Ellen's younger brother, Hugh Wilson Martin, 3 years old, had also been a victim.

The intrusion of the Billy's personal problems can again be seen in his articles and poems. Even small items selected from other sources served to reflect his domestic tragedy. A poem titled "The Blind Boy" fancied a child's flight to heaven on April 2, the day Hugh Wilson Martin's body was lowered to the ground. "The First Violets" and "There is Sorrow all around our Path," on April 19 and 20, dropped timely lyrical garlands over Ellen's fresh grave.

Ellen was buried on April 19 in the Protestant Cemetery on Girod Street. Next day, Billy sought consolation in "the feeling of the sublime" and hence went to the State-house, on Canal Street, where three Powers' sculptures, sent from Florence, were unveiled to the public for the first time in America: Proserpine, the daughter of Zeus, wife of Pluto and queen of Hades: the Fisher Boy, a smiling youngster captivated by Poseidon's secrets whispered in an ageless seashell at his ear; and General Jackson, hero of the Battle of New Orleans, vied for Billy's attention. The Greek Slave was still there, too, but he only had eyes for General Jackson.

"Powers' Jackson," April 21, recorded Billy's "secret thoughts and feelings" in the "critical circumstances that sometimes arise in the course of human events," when "the whole force of a great soul is elicited." "By the power of Imagination," he perceived in Jackson's face "the whole history of the Old Hero's eventful life in which so many strong resolutions had been taken and so many great deeds executed." And he concluded:

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[13] "The Weather," Ibid., 4/16/1849, p. 2, c. 1.

> That mouth is not dumb: it must surely be speaking words of great moment and fierce meaning. Those nostrils are hardly motionless; they must certainly be expanding under the influence of a passion that burns up every thing that opposes its progress. Though the bust is without arms and hands, you almost expect the see the arm raised and the hand clenched to give more force to the violent words that seem to be bursting from the lips.
>
> Go then, if you are an admirer of Gen. Jackson — and what American is not? —and see the bust of Powers. It will fill you full of the old General's character, and infuse into you some of that dauntless, undying spirit that animated the Hero of the Hermitage, and made him the uncompromising opponent of wrong and injustice in every shape and under every form.[14]

Here again, projection was at work. For Billy, Ellen's departure was equivalent to his mother's death, the disappearance of his love object, the end of the world. The stream of psychosexual energy directed to Mary's substitute, poured back to his own ego, to nurture his narcissism.[15] Billy saw himself as a dauntless, uncompromising opponent of wrong and injustice in every shape and under every form, and expressed it by projecting his secret thoughts and feelings on the figure of Gen. Jackson.

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[14] "Powers' Jackson," Ibid., 4/21/1849, p. 2, c. 1.

[15] On discussing Paranoia, Freud explains: "The patient has withdrawn from the persons in his environment and from the external world generally the libidinal cathexis which he has hitherto directed on to them. . . . Our first reflection will tell us that this detachment of the libido cannot occur in paranoia only . . . But in paranoia the clinical evidence goes to show that the libido, after it has been withdrawn from the object, is put to a special use. It will be remembered that the majority of cases of paranoia exhibit traces of megalomania, and that megalomania can by itself constitute a paranoia. From this it may be concluded that in paranoia the liberated libido becomes fixed on to the ego, and is used for the aggrandizement of the ego. A return is thus made to the stage of narcissism, in which a person's only sexual object is his own ego."
Sigmund Freud, *General Psychological Theory*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, Inc., 1963), pp. 40, 42.

A week after the funeral, Billy's deep sorrow is still evident in an editorial about two letters from Col. John C. Frémont published in the *Crescent*. Frémont was the son in law of Senator Thomas Hart Benton, of Missouri, and was exploring a railroad route between St. Louis and San Francisco under the auspices of his father in law. He got lost in a snowstorm in the Rocky Mountains. Eleven of his men perished from hunger and cold. Billy observed:

> There are two facts mentioned in Col. Fremont's letters, which illustrate some of the laws of mental action not often observed . . . In the midst of trial and danger he flies to the study of a hard and abstract science, in order to divert his mind from his position and prospect; with ease and comfort and safety around him, he employs his imagination with a French novel . . . These facts are full of interest to the physician who wishes "to minister to a mind diseased."
>
> It is often the case that friends and medical men attempt to divert the mind of one suffering from intense anxiety or profound grief, by engaging the attention in some object that pleases the fancy or attracts the imagination. This may do when the anxiety is only ordinary, and the grief moderate; for then the soul is not so much absorbed by passion as to forbid the exercise of the imaginative faculties.
>
> But when the anxiety has reached that painful intensity which makes the heart almost cease to beat and palsies, if it does not entirely destroy the intellect —when the grief is of such power and strength that the world appears withered and the universe darkened — some other remedy, more violent than those that are addressed to the imagination, must be used. Then recourse must be had to those studies or pursuits which severely task the intellect and force the mind into action almost against its will.
>
> Hence, when stricken by the sharp agony that pierces instead of bruising — when overwhelmed by

> the anguish that annihilates every feeling but one — we fly for relief not to the poets that charm or the novelists that enliven; but plunging into the difficulties of science, that drag the intellect into the regions of abstract thought, we may possibly escape, by such means, the pangs which rend the heart in twain and devour the mind that permits itself to dwell upon them . . .
>
> When the strong soul suffers, it never spends the time in idle whining or complaint; and we see men of powerful passions, when overtaken by great suffering, throw themselves with tenfold ardor into the busiest and most exiting scenes around them. In the intensity of mental action they seek to drown the cries of the anguished soul. By the efforts they make to keep the mind employed you may perceive and measure the strength of their emotions. The pangs of passion are seen only in the spasms of the intellect.[16]

Billy, in effect, followed his own advice, throwing himself into the editorial tasks of the paper. During the succeeding weeks, his prolific pen incessantly recorded his "spasms of the intellect." In May, the Mississippi river followed a traditional springtime practice and flooded parts of the city. On May 15 it overflowed the Protestant Cemetery on Girod Street, forcing the undertakers to float about the paths, rowing coffins on skiffs to bury the dead.

On May 18 -- one month, to the day, after Ellen's death -- Billy visited her grave, and next morning he poured his heart out on the editorial page of the *Crescent:*

> OVERFLOW OF THE CEMETERIES. — The water comes on, and covers the houses of the dead as well as those of the living . . . the ripple of the waves, as stirred by the breeze, seems like the nurse's lullaby to make the slumber of earth's children more profound and dreamless . . .

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[16] "Col. Fremont's Letters --Their Psychological Facts." Ibid., 4/26/1849, p2 c2.

> The invading water, while it brings into the burying grounds the animals that prey upon and devour one another, chokes also the life of the lowly plants that gather about the habitations of the dead. The flowerets can get no air when the river flows over them; and like the gentle maiden over whose grave mayhaps they dwell, they wither and softly sigh away the life that but a little while ago seemed so bright and beautiful . . .
>
> The living fly from the flood, but the dead stir not from their graves. The water soaks their cerements, but disturbs not their sleep. And so it is with that portion of the departed which is still left to the living. The characters and reputations of those who have filled the world's history with their deeds and their thoughts, are little affected by the chances and changes that may in future happen to the race. "As the tree falls, even so it lies."
>
> No revolution in government or society can now modify, to any extent, the reputation of him who, a little while ago, made all Europe tremble at his nod. He sleeps soundly in the tomb of the Invalides, though the turbulent Assembly convulses all France by its discussion, within a few yards of its resting place . . . The deeds and motives of Napoleon are now unchanged . . .[17]

Billy's allegory recorded on the pages of the *Crescent* the great change that had come over his soul. In the burying grounds of his Inner Crescent City, the invading water had choked the life of the flowerets, and had brought the animals that prey and devour one another. As the Mississippi covered Ellen's grave, the great Napoleon surfaced in the depths of Billy's unconscious.

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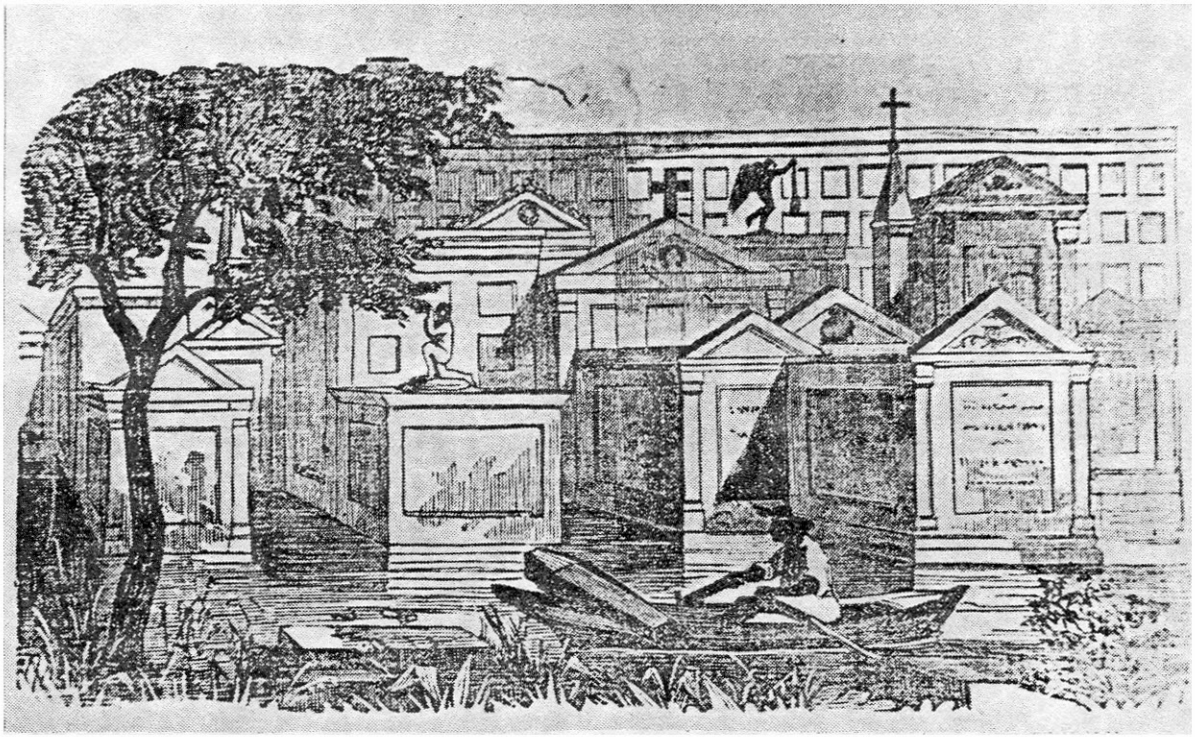
[17]"Overflow of the Cemeteries." Ibid., 5/19/1849, p. 2, c. 2.



OVERFLOW OF THE GIROD STREET CEMETERY

THIS OLD WOODCUT REPRESENTED A NEGRO ROWING A SKIFF WITH A COFFIN IN IT DOWN THE MAIN AISLE OF THE GIROD STREET CEMETERY WHEN THE PLACE FLOODED IN MAY, 1849. EFFORTS WERE MADE IN 1854 TO FILL THE PRINCIPAL WALKS AND PATHS WITH STABLE MANURE, STREET DIRT, OYSTER SHELLS AND OTHER MATERIAL SO AS TO PLACE THEM ABOVE THE RISE OF WATER. IN 1880, A WRITER WHO VISITED THE CEMETERY MENTIONED THAT THE GRAVEYARD PRESENTED A RUN-DOWN, NEGLECTED APPEARANCE. AT THE TIME OF HIS VISIT, BROWN, THE SEXTON, WAS RAISING CHICKENS IN THE REAR PORTION OF THE GROUNDS TO SUPPLEMENT THE MEAGRE AND SLOWLY DECREASING INCOME HE RECEIVED FROM THE FEES FOR BURIALS WHICH EACH YEAR BECAME LESS AND LESS. BY THE 1900'S, THE LUXURIANT VINES AND SHRUBS WITH WHICH IT WAS OVERGROWN GAVE IT A HAUNTED APPEARANCE. GNARLED FIG TREES PUSHED THEIR WAY THROUGH THE BULGING SIDES OF SOME OF THE OLD TOMBS, AND THE WALL "OVENS" WERE DAMP AND GREEN WITH MAIDENHAIR FERN. FEW TABLETS SURVIVED THE VANDALISM WHICH PRECEDED THE DEMOLITION OF THE CEMETERY IN 1957. THE FORMER GRAVEYARD IS NOW THE SITE OF THE LOUISIANA SUPERDOME.