The Despair of Heroes in Victorian Poetry

DONALD J. GRAY

Change—the rapidity, even the violence with which the present exploded into its future—offered to the middle decades of nineteenth-century England a visible threat and an explicit promise. The threat was revolution, change too long suppressed erupting into the tumult of Chartism or the chaos of Europe in 1848 and France in 1789. The promise was progress, change controlled, its turbulence confined as in a steam engine and channelled to useful purposes. The lessons of revolution and progress were clear enough. A society could survive only by accommodating necessary change, and it could prosper only by directing change to desirable ends. But who was to decide what change was necessary and which ends were desirable? Who was to impose on the rapid changes of the nineteenth century the direction of his will and the order of his values?

To these questions Carlyle, speaking for many of his contemporaries, repeatedly gave a single answer. "Find me the true Könning, King, or Able-man," he demanded. "Yes, friends: Hero-kings, and a whole world not unheroic,—there lies the port and happy haven, towards which, through all these stormtost seas, French Revolutions, Chartisms, Manchester Insurrections, that make the heart sick in these bad days, the Supreme Powers are driving us."1 Hero-worship, which Carlyle championed as "the one fixed point in modern revolutionary history,"2 was of course not the only solution proposed in his time to the problem of change. But in Carlyle’s England the wish for an order fixed by the strong wills of heroes was nearly as pervasive as he claimed it to be. Victorians who might disagree about al-

most everything else were alike in their admiration of men like the
oak-hearted heroes of Froude's histories, or the successful business-
men of self-help tracts, or the model revolutionaries whose biog-
raphies blazed in the pages of radical weeklies: alike in their admiration
of strong men of action who wrestled change to their own triumphs.
More sophisticated imaginations found leaders—Disraeli's Conings-
by, or Carlyle's Captains of Industry and his Cromwell—in whom
a capacity for decisive action was put in the service of a clearly articu-
lated code to which the hero was determined to convert his time.
Even such complex responses to change as Newman's careful journey
toward the final authority of an ancient church and Mill's and Ar-
nold's trust in the provisional authority of a political elite were spun
from the stuff of which hero-worship was made. For hero-worship
was fundamentally an explicit, dramatic, and powerful expression of
a hope which ran a full and complicated career through nineteenth-
century England—the hope that men, unusual men perhaps, but
nonetheless finite, imperfect men, could find the will and intelligence
and heart to establish an order on the bewildering flux of change.

The expression of this hope as hero-worship reveals both its power
and its vulnerability. A great man can remake the world, for such is
the power of man's will. But he must remake it, and in that necessity
lies his vulnerability. For by clear implication an age in need of heroes
is an unheroic age. The hero will therefore enter alien to its character
and values. He will come to destroy the old order whose errors have
required his coming. Because all will not recognize him as the hero
for whom they have waited, some will resist the change he proposes
and dispute his claim to be their savior. Even those who accept him
must fit themselves to the new order of his will. And finally, even
heroic will itself is mortal, and the hero himself must work within
the limitations of being ultimately as susceptible to change as the sub-
jects for whom he builds his order. Destroyer and rebuilders; a man
different from other men who must remake them in his alien image;
a mortal man in battle with change: the very conditions of the hero's
task define not only the urgency of his success but also the possibilities
of his failure.

The particular interest of the four heroes upon whom this paper
will center is that their careers enact the possibilities of heroic failure.
Tennyson's Arthur, Browning's Childe Roland, Arnold's Empedoc-
les, and Morris' Sigurd all attempt to establish in the error and an-
archy and waste of their times a code which will regenerate men and
direct their actions toward good. Whatever their personal triumphs,
each fails to accomplish his purpose. Arthur is defeated in battle and
carried, wounded, to Avalon, leaving his people leaderless before the
chaos which follows the collapse of his Order. Roland ends waiting
for almost certain destruction in a desert his personal courage cannot
bring to bloom. Empedocles dismisses his disciples with the grim in-
junction neither to hope nor to despair, divests himself of the symbols
of his heroic power, and annihilates himself. Sigurd wins the treasure
which enriches the land, but he is tricked, sins, and is murdered, leav-
ing his treasure and his people to be wasted by the treacherous and
mean who flourish in the catastrophe of his defeat. These failures are
not, it is true, typical of the fates of heroes in Victorian poetry. Some
heroes do succeed in their heroic tasks. David in Browning's Saul,
for example, cures his king and redeems a desolate land, and in his
funeral ode for the Duke of Wellington, Tennyson preserved for his
countrymen a set of private and public virtues which had in the past
and can in the future master the dangerous possibilities of violent
change. Other heroes, though they are defeated—as Tennyson's
Sir John Grenville and Arnold's chastened Rustum are defeated—do
not involve their entire societies in their defeats and leave to their
survivors a memory of courage, self-knowledge, or some other usable
legacy of heroic character on which to build. But if the failures of
Arthur, Roland, Empedocles, and Sigurd are not typical, they do
fairly represent the development through the Victorian period of the
idea expressed in hero-worship. The dimensions of their failures dif-
fer, and after their failures their creators consider different alternatives
to the hope invested in them. Tennyson and Browning salvage
enough from defeat to sponsor an uncertain trust that men can still
meet change if they cannot master it—their heroes are not successful
but neither are they entirely destroyed. Arnold's Empedocles and
Morris' Sigurd are entirely destroyed, and while Arnold backs away
from this annihilation to manufacture in later poems a reconstituted
hope for heroes, Morris chooses to interpret Sigurd's destruction as
evidence of his participation in a kind of success very different from
that conventionally proposed by mid-Victorian hero-worship. If,
then, these progressively more complete failures mark the stages by
which a time which placed its hope in heroes learned to despair of
their promise, the different alternatives offered to meet the conse-
quences of heroic failure suggest the stages by which Victorians moved toward their last answer to the failure of heroes, an answer which accepted failure as an inevitable condition and worked from there to redefine the role of human will in the uncontrollable process of change.

Tennyson said that *The Idylls of the King* dramatizes "the dream of man coming into practical life and ruined by one sin." The dream is Arthur, man at his most perfect. By establishing his Order on the chaos left by the Roman withdrawal from Britain, Arthur hopes to lead men to the perfection of their own flesh. The sin which ruins his dream is adultery, a mark of the beast which Arthur is unable finally to exorcise from man. His effort, then, is to make the ideal actual, the dream flesh. His failure is forecast from the very beginning. His origins are uncertain: he may have been born not of flesh but of the sea. Even after he vanquishes the petty kings who dispute his kingship and unites himself in friendship to Lancelot and in marriage to Guinevere—even after, in other words, he has bound himself to mortality, men doubt his existence. When Gareth sees Arthur’s capital, it seems a fairy dream, "tho some there be that hold," a seer tells him, "The King a shadow, and the city real." ("Gareth and Lynette," 261–262). In the springtime of Arthur’s Order such doubts are easily resolved, and Gareth proves to dubious Lynette that Arthur can make a knight from a kitchen-boy. But then Guinevere and Lancelot sin. Arthur has been betrayed by the very flesh to which he has committed his dream. Hearing of the sin, men begin to doubt their own ability to hold to the dream. Geraint is told of the sin, and is shocked into an ungallant test of Enid’s faithfulness. Balin and Balan are told of the sin, and are surprised into the loss of their precarious hold over their self-destructive passion. Mark, learning of the sin, is encouraged to send Vivien to seduce Merlin; Lancelot, knowing of the sin, is helpless to prevent the destruction of innocent Elaine; Percivale’s sister, striving to counter the force of the sin, is inspired to pray for that vision of the Holy Grail which, despite Arthur’s warning, sends the Order on its desperate, disastrous quest to prove itself worthy of the dream of flesh consecrated to perfection. Defection follows when Pelleas hears of the sin and cynically renounces his vows. Then rebellion breaks open when the Red Knight

sets up a parody of Arthur’s Order, with a tower “full of harlots, like his court,” and knights who “are all adulterers like his own” (“The Last Tournament,” 81, 84). With savagery Arthur can no longer control, the Red Knight’s order is crushed. But in the King’s absence the adulterer Lancelot presides over the Tournament of Dead Innocence, won by the adulterer Tristam. The beast has triumphed, and the King returns in the dead winter of his failure to ponder its cause and to face its consequences.

In what Tennyson called “the (spiritually) central lines of the Idylls” Arthur had warned that the Grail vision was delusive because men were not ready for the Grail. First imperfect man must prepare himself by hard, practical work, and then moments would come when flesh seems spirit, when earth, light, air, "yea, his very hand and foot" seem visions,

> moments when he feels he cannot die,  
> And knows himself no vision to himself,  
> Nor the high God a vision...."  

(“The Holy Grail,” 911–914)

Such moments do not come to Arthur’s subjects. Hand and foot, Guinevere and physical love, are more real to Lancelot than the King to whom he has sworn allegiance. Even Guinevere, although she admits his power, cannot love her husband: “But who can gaze upon the sun in heaven?... The low sun makes the color” (“Lancelot and Elaine,” 123, 134). Arthur himself, before he fights his last battle in mist that obscure his vision of the ideal and on sands which undermine his footing in actuality, recognizes that his failure to establish his existence firmly in the world has made it difficult for all men, including himself, to believe in the possibility of perfecting practical life.

> ... why is all around us here  
> As if some lesser god had made the world,  
> But had not force to shape it as he would...?  
> Or else as if the world were wholly fair,  
> But that these eyes of men are dense and dim,  
> And have not power to see it as it is..."  

(“The Passing of Arthur,” 13–20)

His last act is to destroy the remnants of his Order, and then he de-

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4. Hallam Tennyson, ii, 90.
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The Design of Information Systems

The benefits of using a structured approach to information systems design are now widely recognized. However, the application of these methods to real-world problems can be challenging. This chapter will focus on the process of designing and implementing information systems, emphasizing the importance of understanding the business environment and the needs of users.

The first step in the design process is to gather requirements from users. This involves conducting interviews and surveys to understand the needs and goals of the organization. Once the requirements are defined, a detailed system design can be developed.

The second step is to select a system architecture. This involves choosing the appropriate technology and infrastructure to support the system. The selected architecture should be flexible and scalable to accommodate future growth.

The third step is to develop the system's components. This includes designing and implementing the database, user interface, and other necessary modules.

The fourth step is to test the system. This involves running simulations and testing the system under various conditions to ensure its reliability and performance.

Finally, the system is implemented and deployed. This step involves training users and providing support during the transition to the new system.

Throughout the design process, it is important to maintain a focus on the users and their needs. This ensures that the system meets the goals of the organization and provides value to its constituents.

In conclusion, the design of information systems is a complex process that requires careful planning and execution. By following the steps outlined in this chapter, organizations can develop systems that meet their needs and contribute to their success.

References:

The Design of Victorian Heroes

The design of Victorian heroes is characterized by their moral purity and their tendency to oppose evil. The heroes are often depicted as strong and noble, embodying the values of the time. They are often shown in the midst of conflict, facing challenges and obstacles, but never allowing their resolve to waver. Their stories are filled with lessons about virtue, courage, and the importance of doing what is right.

In Victorian literature, the hero's journey is a common theme. The hero starts as a普通人 (ordinary person), often with faults or weaknesses. Through a series of trials and tribulations, the hero learns and grows, eventually emerging as a hero in the truest sense. The hero's journey is not just a personal transformation, but also a moral one, as the hero learns to overcome evil and protect the innocent.

The Victorian hero is often contrasted with the villain, who represents all that is evil and corrupt. The hero's struggle against the villain serves to highlight the hero's virtues and to emphasize the importance of moral integrity. The hero's victory over the villain is often seen as a triumph of good over evil, and is celebrated as a testament to the hero's moral strength.

In conclusion, the design of Victorian heroes is characterized by their moral purity, their strength in the face of adversity, and their triumph over evil. Their stories are filled with lessons about virtue and the importance of doing what is right, and they serve as a reminder of the power of good to overcome evil.
In the experiment, Bryn seduced Clara on the dance floor, playing her to a victory. The possibility of a magical or otherworldly element in the story led to Speculator's sudden change of mood, which in turn triggered his reaction. This, in turn, caused a chain reaction, as Speculator's emotions and actions were influenced by the magic.

Bryn, however, this exhibition of nothingness, no "Trinity's" came.

(birds, begun; on 15:01:29)

In new-evidence, the "spire of the"

In the realm of a great mind.

Of age, and any more than to "hold"

I, the true arcane to the.
The Design of Victorian Heroes

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Donald G. Kray

The image contains a page from the book "The Design of Victorian Heroes" by Donald G. Kray. The page appears to be discussing the role of design in shaping the perception of heroes and villains in Victorian literature. The text is somewhat fragmented, but it seems to address the idea of how the design of characters impacts their portrayal and reception. The page is in English and contains a mix of paragraphs and possibly headings or subheadings, with some sections numbered or marked as important points. The text appears to be an academic or critical analysis of Victorian literature, focusing on the design of characters within this context.
THE DESPAIR OF VICTORIAN HEROES

DONALD J. GRAY
once rode the winged horse to a triumph. In the same decade Meredith also proposed the counsel which will resolve such failures. Only when men submit to the forces of a Nature which moves independently of human desires, Meredith wrote in *The Woods of Westernmain*, will men share in the triumph which change is preparing for them.

Change is on the wing to bud
Rose in brain from rose in blood.

(*The Woods of Westernmain, 202–203*)

In the first decade of the twentieth century John Davidson promised the hero of *The Testament of John Davidson* a similar success. Lost like Roland among the broken ruins of past failures, this hero identifies himself with the “automatic fate” of a mindless evolution and is swept through the destruction of gods and demi-gods and delusions of his own difference from nature to the supremacy of an entirely new consciousness:

in me
Matter fulfils itself, before me none
Beheld or heard, imagined, thought or felt. 8

The heroes of Thomas Hardy’s *The Dynasts* buy a kind of tragedy with the same coin with which Sigurd and Davidson’s hero buy their kind of triumph. But the conditions of their heroism are the same, and the differences from mid-Victorian heroes as sharp.

“So the Will heaves through Space, and moulds the times,
With mortals for its fingers” (*The Dynasts*, Part 2, ii, iii),

the Spirit of the Years says as Wellington and Napoleon alike are rushed by events towards a tragedy which begins with their conceit that they determine history and ends with their recognition, not merely that they have lost the control of change which Tennyson gave to Wellington and Tennyson’s generation asked of heroes, but that change has always been beyond their control.

Nor are Morris, Meredith, Davidson, and Hardy the only late-Victorians to abandon hope in the efficacy of individual will. As the nineteenth century spun into the twentieth, Carlyle’s idea that men make their history was challenged by other ideas which despaired of the possibility of significant action, or identified race, nationality,

destiny, or the dialectic of history as the decisive force in human events, or argued that the community, the corporation, and the state have a purpose and an identity distinct from that of the human wills which serve them. These ideas have of course been amplified in our century, just as the images some twentieth-century poets have chosen to depict our possibilities—Yeats’ falcon whirling from the falconer’s control and his beast slouching toward Bethlehem; the screaming bomber-dove descending to the flaming London of “Little Gidding”—suggest, as Sigurd’s triumph suggests, that salvation lies the other side of a catastrophe whose onset no man can prevent and whose consequences no man can control. The passage of the Victorian hope for heroes from Arthur through Sigurd and into our time is therefore a partial chronicle of the adventures of our hope in ourselves, and the beaten ground where mid-Victorian heroes tried and failed is a station on the road we have traveled from the nineteenth-century hope that men could make a world to their wills.

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