

Francis Thompson:

I.

The recent publication of Francis Thompson's Work has not only brought into wider /obvious\ evidence ~~not only~~ the man himself and the genius of him, but has also rendered possible, for the careful wielder of analysis, a clear perception, at last, of the whither /trend\ of the contemporary /modern\ poetry. This latter study could, without internal disadvantage, be made through several other poets, and supremely through contemporary Portuguese poetry - so far has it out distanced all European competitors -, but for the English reader no name stands so advantageously in the forefront of opportunity as that of the Paisley poet.

We will ~~proceed~~ begin our analysis by ~~eri~~ a critical examination of Francis Thompson's work; or ~~will~~ will then, ~~by a comparison~~ {...}

II.

The most important thing, for the ~~exam~~ ultimate purpose of this study, is to get at the central meaning and soul-significance of Francis Thompson's inspiration. The first misleading circumstance we meet on the way to analysis is the |circumstance| /fact\ that he was a Catholic. So he was, but he was not a Catholic poet. Nay Catholic poets are not. I mean this: his vision of the universe, his Weltanschauung was such as no really Catholic soul could hold. The manner in which images were found in his mind, the manner in which he thought were unorthodox.

After all, the best manner of obtaining a true glimpse of his soul is to determine his influences. We

mean no injury to any appreciation of his genius by naming his influences. Influences are ~~peculiar~~ {...} that reveal the poet to himself. When they are anything else, they are only |copybooks| and there is no poet visible.

These influences are:

- (1) Shelley
- (2) The "Metaphysicals."
- (3) William Blake and Victor Hugo.

The first two influences are obvious. Sometimes they are flagrant: (Quote)

William Blake is often noticeable {...}

And where Blake is, only absence of reading will omit Hugo. Hugo and Blake are alike. This will seem astonishing to many. Yet the Weltanschauung of Blake and of Hugo are similar. Their ~~religious~~ conscious outlook upon the universe is ~~as~~ different. But their unconscious, their sense-born view of things has a similar basis. ~~Both for Blake and for Hugo.~~ [Further on we will see what that similarity is.]

(1) What is Shelley, essentially? What did Shelley fundamentally, bring to poetry? Only one thing: the spiritualization of Nature. Shelley was the central & culminating point of English Romanticism. [English] romanticism is no more, ~~than a~~ centrally, than an adoration of Nature rising for intensity in her (the ~~presence~~ forerunners, Thompson, Cowper) to adoration (Wordsworth, Coleridge) up to divinization (Shelley). The poet who went further in the ~~sentiment~~ adoration of Nature was naturally

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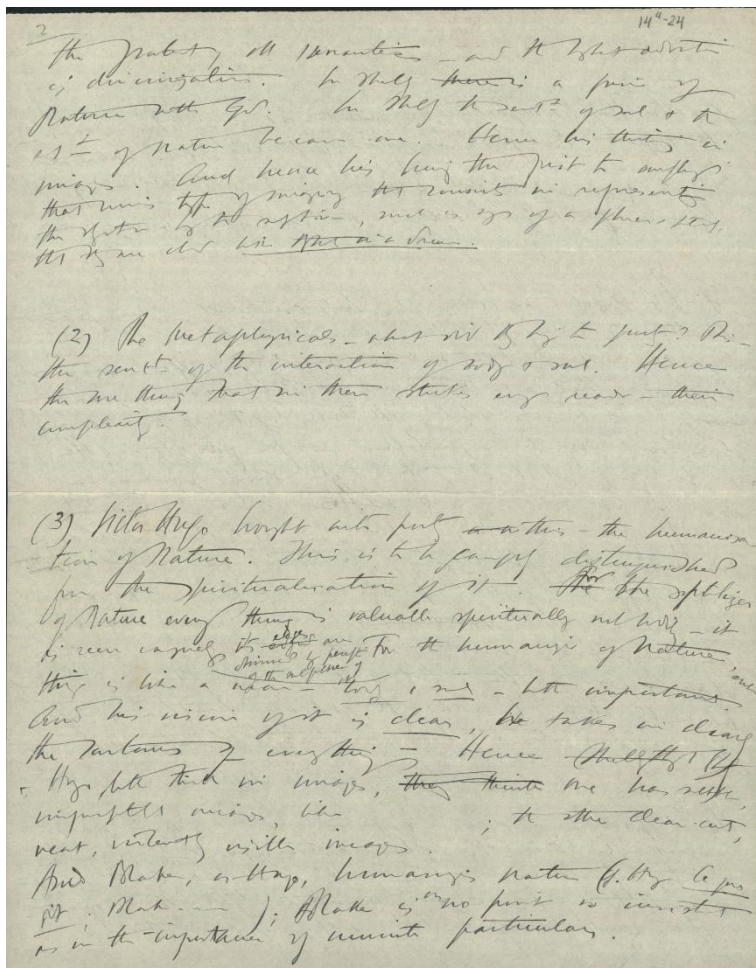
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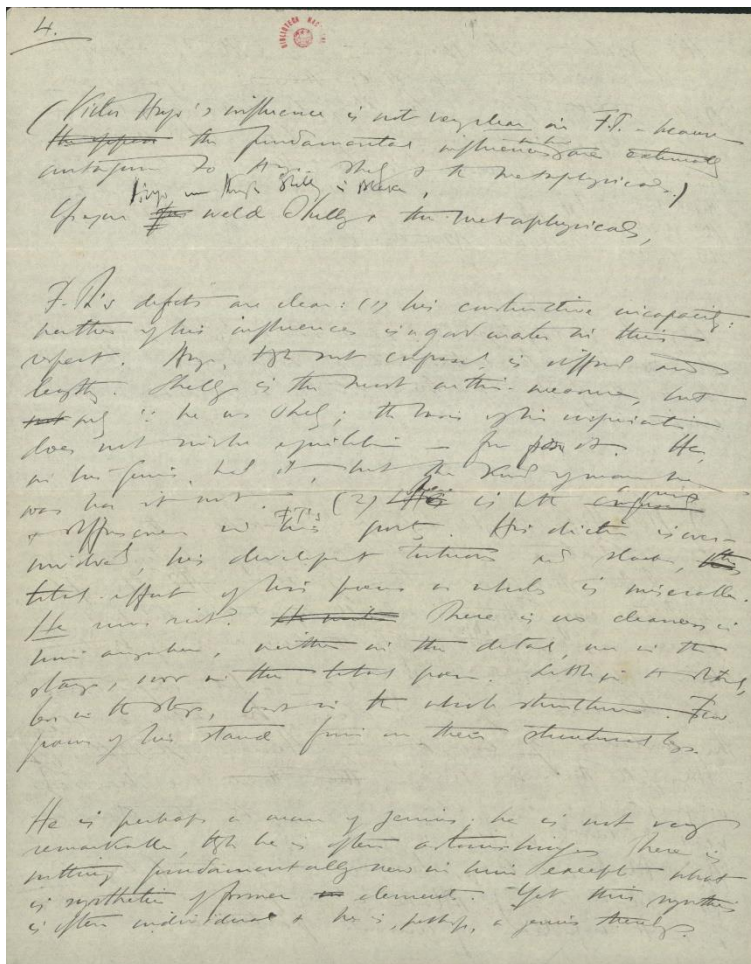


the greatest of all romantics - and highest adoration in divinization. In Shelley there is a fusion of Nature with God. In Shelley the sentiment of soul and the sentiment of Nature become one. Hence his thinking in images. And hence his being the first to employ that curious type of imagery that consists in representing the objective by the subjective, such as says of a flower's petals, that they are closed like thoughts in a dream.

(2) The Metaphysicals - what did they bring to poetry? This - the sentiment of the interaction of body and soul. Hence the one thing that in them strikes every reader - their complexity.

(3) Victor Hugo brought into poetry ~~aa~~ this - the humanization of Nature. This is to be carefully distinguished from the spiritualization of it. ~~The~~ For the spiritualizer of Nature every thing is valuable spiritually and bodily - it is seen vaguely, its edged edges are dimmed by perception of the sculpture of it. For the humanizer of Nature, every thing is like a man - body and soul - both important. And his vision of it is clear, he takes in clearly the contours of everything - Hence ~~Shelley thought~~ Shelley and Hugo, both think in images, ~~they think~~ one has subtle, imperceptible images, like {...}; the other clear-cut, neat, violently visible images.

And Blake, as Hugo, humanizes Nature (cf. Hugo Ce que dit; Blake {...}); Blake is on no point so insistent as in the importance of minute particulars.



(Victor Hugo's influence is not very clear in Francis Thompson - because ~~the proper~~ the fundamental influences in him are externally antagonistic to Hugo, Shelley and the Metaphysicals.)

Hugo seen through Shelley is Blake, {...} If you ~~was~~ weld Shelley and the Metaphysicals, {...}

Francis Thompson's defects are clear: (1) his constructive incapacity: neither of his influences is a good master in this respect. Hugo, though not confused, is diffused and lengthy. Shelley is the most within-measures, but ~~not~~ only because he was Shelley; the basis of his inspiration does not involve equilibrium - far from it. He, in his genius, had it, but the kind of man he was has it not. (2) ~~He is~~ There is both ~~confused~~ confusion and diffuseness in his /Francis Thompson's\ poetry. His diction is over-involved, his development tortuous and slavish, ~~his~~ the total-effect of his poems as wholes is miserable. He seems riot. ~~He writes~~ There is no clearness in him anywhere, neither in the detail, nor in the stages, nor in the total poem. Little in the detail, less in the stages, least in the whole structure. Few poems of his stand firm on their structural legs.

He is perhaps a man of genius; he is not very remarkable, though he is often astonishing. There is nothing fundamentally new in him except what is synthetic of former elements. Yet this synthesis is often individual and he is, perhaps, a genius thereby.

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