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La signification ambivalente de l'or dans la fiction victorienne : cheveux d'or et voix en or dans Silas Marner de George Eliot, "The Secret of the Growing Gold" de Bram Stoker et Trilby de George du Maurier

Françoise Dupeyron-Lafay

- 1 The meaning and symbolism of gold, in classical Antiquity, in various world mythologies, or in the Bible, have always been ambivalent since it is a precious, stainless metal with both a monetary and a spiritual value. It can stand for primeval innocence as in the nostalgic myth of the (lost) Golden Age, or for immortality and spiritual elevation because of its kinship with the sun, reborn every day with the dawn. It is associated with perfection and the ideal and many heroes embark on quests for it (the golden fleece, the golden apples in the garden of the Hesperides, the gold of the Rhine, etc.). But, even if the sun is life-giving, it can also burn and destroy. Likewise, gold, although a perfect metal, can be a poisoned gift with evil or even fatal effects, becoming a source of greed and discord, or the origin of man's misery and enslavement, as in the legend of King Midas.
- 2 All these aspects of gold are particularly well illustrated by nineteenth-century literature and art which not only feature numerous intertextual echoes of mythical and Biblical narratives, but re-appropriate and rework this age-old fund to address contemporary problems, within the new aesthetic, social, economic and ideological contexts. Industrialization and the capitalistic *ethos* with their attendant social and moral evils,

form the substratum accounting for the presence and distinctively Victorian treatment of gold in George Eliot's *Silas Marner* (1861), Bram Stoker's "The Secret of the Growing Gold" (1892) and George Du Maurier's *Trilby* (1894). By then, money and capital had become prime movers and the new social conditions were uncongenial to human values such as social justice, the sense of community and personal fulfilment. John Ruskin attacked "every principle held sacred by the economists and industrialists of the age" (Rosenberg 219) in his essay "The Veins of Wealth"—*The Cornhill Magazine* (1860), collected in *Unto This Last* (1862)—where he condemns the dehumanizing and deleterious consequences of the "mercantile economy" (246) and claims that accumulated wealth may indicate "merciless tyranny" and that "Some treasures are heavy with human tears, as an ill-stored harvest with untimely rain; and some gold is brighter in sunshine than it is in substance" (251). The essay collapses the metaphoric (the social body) and the literal (workers' bodies), positing that "the circulation of wealth in a nation resembles that of the blood in a natural body" (247).

- 3 Ruskin's influential essay and the rich polysemy and resonance of its title, which both denotes mineral, petrified ore (such as a "gold vein") and connotes life (blood flowing in human veins) and suffering (workers drained of their "blood"), prefigure the treatment of gold by Eliot, Stoker and Du Maurier and the metaphoric and metonymic ways they address its ambiguous power and value within the new capitalistic ideology. Ruskin's title conflates a series of opposed, if not contradictory, meanings—the metaphoric and the literal, the animate and inanimate, human life and capital. Likewise, gold has both a concrete and abstract symbolic meaning in *Silas Marner*, Stoker's story, and *Trilby*, in which it is literally and metaphorically *embodied* by female characters' hair (in Eliot's and Stoker's texts) and by Trilby's "golden" voice. The complex poetics the three texts mobilize—a series of similes and metaphors whereby gold appears as flowing, growing, turned into music, as an alchemical transformer or a fatal agency—gives full justice to its complex meaning since its apparent humanization (and feminization) coexists uneasily with the (actualized or potential) reification, if not commodification, of human beings produced by the new "mercantile" economy.
- 4 This is why Stoker's story takes place at a time largely anterior to its date of publication. So does *Silas Marner*, which is set within an early nineteenth-century rural community "when the spinning-wheels hummed busily in the farmhouses [...]" (1), before the full advent of the Industrial Revolution. The weaver is an emigrant "from the town into the country" (2). As P. Mudford shows, "Silas Marner arrives in Raveloe in the late 1780s, and Eliot's narration covers more than thirty years of his life: the period of prosperity for weavers during the Napoleonic wars, and subsequent decline of the trade, which would once more drive those less fortunate than Silas Marner back into the factories and towns" (xxiii).
- 5 Therefore, Marner's (and Stoker's character's) relations to gold and money have something comparatively archaic. In *Les Monnayeurs du langage* (1984),¹ Jean-Joseph Goux defines the three functions of gold as firstly an archetype and a measure of value with an ideal significance; secondly, an arbitrary or conventional means or instrument of exchange with a mere representative function, that can be replaced by any type of equivalent or token in capitalistic economies; and thirdly, a treasure function, as a metallic body with an "in person", material existence (and not an ideal or arbitrary and conventional one) enabling it to be hoarded, like coins or ingots (Goux 50-53). The first and third functions are particularly prominent in *Silas Marner*, in which Marner is paid in

gold (that he treasures and saves) for the most valuable and beautiful pieces of table-linen he weaves (13).

- 6 Eliot, Stoker and Du Maurier explore the conflicting functions of gold and stage the breaking point when its “exchange function” no longer coincided with its “payment function” or its “hoarding function” to borrow from Goux’s terminology (131). As R.P. Draper remarks in his “Afterword”: “The gold coins with which [Marner] becomes sterilely obsessed take the place of a living community in relation to which he might thrive, and his useless hoarding of them beneath his brick floor appropriately denotes a currency which has become an end in itself instead of a means of exchange” (240).
- 7 Like Ruskin whose “whole argument [in] *Unto This Last* culminates in a single sentence: “There is no Wealth but Life” (Rosenberg 221), Eliot, Stoker and Du Maurier yearned for the “humanization of the concept of value” (221) and strove to reassert the spiritual value of gold over its monetary or mercantile one. However, their strong ethical message is not conveyed dogmatically or explicitly but through elaborate aesthetic and stylistic strategies that highlight the radical ambiguity of gold.
- 8 In these three texts that all have a realistic substratum, gold functions as a loophole into another dimension, a magic and / or supernatural one. *Silas Marner* draws from several generic influences; it is a distinctly realistic text with Christian allegorical overtones that looks back to “medieval romance”, “the tradition of the moral fable” and Bunyan (Mudford xxiv-xxv). It elaborates a complex metaphoric network and coalesces different and contradictory images of gold through the figures of Silas Marner and Eppie. He is initially represented as a living paradox with his “large brown protuberant eyes”, a physical detail suggesting an outward-going and visionary tendency, but contradicted by the telling reservation that his eyes “really saw nothing very distinctly that was not close to them” (2). However, his trances whereby, according to the Raveloe population “there might be such a thing as a man’s soul being loose from his body, and going out and in, like a bird out of its nest and back” (4) foreshadow his great metamorphosis. But at this early stage, he is as yet short-sighted, unenlightened and “unnurtured” like “young winged things, fluttering forsaken in the twilight” (7). In the first ten chapters, the “weaver of Raveloe” is aptly compared to wingless insects blindly following their instinct, such as the spider or the ant. His “shrunk” (14), dehumanized life is reduced “to the unquestioning activity of a spinning insect” (12). This obviously accounts for Eliot’s publisher, John Blackwood, writing to her on February 19, 1861: “I wish the picture had been a more cheery one and embraced higher specimens of humanity, but you paint so naturally that in your hands the veriest earth-worms become most interesting perfect studies in fact. My only objection to the story is the want of brighter lights [...]” (Draper 37). In his essay “The Novels of George Eliot” (*The Atlantic Monthly*, October 1866), Henry James had also dealt with the pictorial quality of the novel, emphasizing its subdued, “Dutch” tonality: “In *Silas Marner*, in my opinion, [Eliot] has come nearest the mildly rich tints of brown and gray, the mellow lights and the undreadful corner-shadows of the Dutch masters whom she emulates” (Draper 67).² Surprisingly, neither he nor Blackwood ever evoked the pictorial radiance of gold in the novel where it is nevertheless central.
- 9 Silas, being, as he thinks, forsaken by men and God, begins to “worship” it (35) as his new God, his sole reason for living and his only joy. In chapter II, when the narrative adopts his perspective in internal focalization and occasionally free indirect speech, the meaning of “face” in the “bright faces of the guineas” (13) becomes both denotative (designating one side of the coins) and metaphoric since it connotes their humanization, as do the

anthropomorphic “dark leather *mouths*” of the bags whence “the guineas shone as they came pouring out” (17, emphasis added). They soon become Marner’s “familiar” (15) that he would not exchange for “other coins with unknown faces” (15) and he draws them out from their hiding-place “to enjoy their companionship” (15). This should be contrasted with his shunning of the Raveloe community where “there was nothing that called out his love and fellowship toward the strangers he had come amongst” (12-13). Because of this pathologically displaced sentimental attachment, the loss of this gold, the “supremely loved object” (98) makes him feel the “desolation” of “bereavement” (66), evoked again at the end of chapter XIV (118).

- 10 The images and metaphors that the omniscient narrator uses about the character’s “shrunk” moral and physical existence (stunted vegetal growth, drought and darkness) find their exact inverted correspondences in the life-giving role that his troubled perspective gives to gold. Therefore, while he is “withering” (16) even if the “sap of affection” is not quite dead in him (16), his melancholy turns the money into “a loam [...] deep enough for the seeds of desire” (13) to thrive. He sees his earnings as “begotten by his labour” (17) and he delights in seeing his gold “grow” (36), proleptically thinking of his as yet unearned guineas “as if they had been unborn children” (17).
- 11 He “pours” the coins from their hidden bags every night, and “bath[es] his hands” (17) in them, as if performing his ablutions. This ritual moment is his “revelry” (17), a term hinting at their intoxicating power. The metaphor of the “golden wine”, that could be regarded as a hypallage produced by Marner’s subjective perspective, and the lustral connotations of hand bathing, express a diversion or perversion of the religious: “For joy is the best of wine, and Silas’s guineas were a golden wine of that sort” (36). His “wine” flows freely every night while “his life had shrunk away, like a rivulet that [...] cuts a groove for itself in the barren sand” (17), a Christian allegorical image of drought and aridity inspired from the Book of Exodus and *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, and foreshadowing the state of his “soul like a forlorn traveller on an unknown desert” (37).
- 12 The weaver has led a twilight existence ever since he was rejected from the Lantern Yard community in the North, and, so he thinks, by God : “[...] and the future was all dark, for there was no Unseen Love that cared for him” (13). But one evening, at dusk, as he was walking “homeward across the fields”, and looking at the first gold coins earned through his hard work, he found them “brighter in the gathering gloom” (13), a first intimation of the perniciously dazzling light they will shed on his dark life. However, the text is ambivalent and “[...] while his gold provides a sterile substitute for human affection, it nonetheless creates forms of affective exchange. He takes pleasure in the ‘bright faces’ [...] of his coins, thinking that his money is ‘conscious of him’ and feels a sense of loyalty to it [...]. The forms and habits of responsiveness provide the foundation for the transference of affection, when the right moment comes” (Nestor 83).
- 13 These blended and conflicting voices and perspectives juxtapose the notions of sterility and growth, emptiness and fullness, darkness and light, the profane and the sacred. The description of the hole where the bags of coins are concealed is itself just as ambivalent: it contains Marner’s “bright treasure” (67), but it is the “resting-place” of the bags of coins (17) and it lies in “the hole under his feet” (67), as if it were a dangerous pit, or his (future) grave. He comes to realize that his hoard was not a treasure but a “curse” when, years afterwards, he tells Eppie: “Eh, my precious child [...] If you hadn’t been sent to save me, I should ha’ gone to the grave in my misery” (149). Conversely and very morally,

Dunstan Cass's greed causes his death, and his highly symbolic fall into the Stone-pits with the stolen money bags.

- 14 Silas Marner was indeed “dead” before Eppie’s miraculous arrival in chapter XII. This crucial turning-point scene occurs at a trebly liminal moment: on the symbolic night of New Year’s Eve, while his cottage door stands open, and while he is the victim of a new trance whose magical results are prefigured by the metaphor of the “invisible wand of catalepsy” that makes him “powerless to resist either the good or the evil that might enter there” (98). Good only will cross his threshold as, significantly, he “put his *right* hand on the latch of the door to close it—but he did not close it” (98; emphasis added). “The preliminary intrusion of the thief into his cottage prepares the ground for the more decisive entrance of the child” (Nestor 83). It is only once the “bright guineas” are gone that his house, as if exorcised, sheds a bright light on the snow outside, through its open door, “a bright glancing light”, a “bright living thing” that Eppie tries to catch, and that draws her inside the “very bright place” with its “bright fire of logs and sticks” (97). Just as this light is a “living thing”, Marner, after mistaking Eppie’s “little golden head” (97) for a “heap of gold that seemed to glow” (99), realizes on touching it that it is not “the hard coin with the familiar resisting outline” but “soft warm curls” (99). Actually, Eppie is so like his lost little sister that the past seems to be resurrected and “he ha[s] a dreamy feeling that this child [is] somehow a message come to him from that far-off life” (99). The little girl’s hair begins to be described as “soft yellow rings all over [her] head” (99). The shift from “golden” to “yellow” points to Silas’s returning humanity. Besides, the phrasing connotes a halo round her face, foreshadowing her redeeming role and his moral “transfiguration” (148) thanks to this “something unknown dawn[ing] on his life” (109). As J. Reilly remarks, “Two interdependent indices of growth mark Silas’s progress in deserving, and achieving, his disenchantment from alienation; the slow shift in his vocabulary whereby he comes to call Eppie ‘her’ rather than ‘it’ and the commensurate erosion of his conception of her as his private property” (200), even if he regards her as a “treasure” (201). In “La Phénoménologie du rond” (*La Poétique de l’espace*, chapter 10), Bachelard addresses the modalities of roundness and their role as symbols of perfection, a very apt reference for Eppie whose own perfection is already prefigured by her blonde “curls” or “rings” (99), the ring also foreshadowing sentimental and spiritual alliance. As a baby, “her round arms and legs” (117) are “remarkably firm”, a visual detail connoting fullness and plenitude. And at the age of sixteen, her “rounded chin and throat” are characterized by their *whiteness* (128).
- 15 Eppie will play the role of a crucible, ridding him of his flaws, and gold of all its previous ambivalence by embodying it herself through a mysterious process of transubstantiation: “[...] he could only have said that the child was come instead of the gold—that the gold had turned into the child” (109-110). He had initially mistaken her for “his own gold—brought back to him as mysteriously as it had been taken away!” (99) but he then began to see the child as the *living* (re)incarnation of his “dead” gold. “The ‘legendary’ narrative parallels and reverses the alchemical process in which base metal is transmuted into gold; here, gold is transmuted into life. For Marner himself, this substitution is an indispensable part of the process of what Jung was later to call ‘individuation’ [...]” (Mudford xxiv). The weaver is metamorphosed back into his former (and better) self when he starts “cherishing this young life that had been sent to him out of the darkness into which his gold had departed” (128). Apparent loss and emptiness lead to recovery and fullness, to a “sense of crowding remembrances” (113), instead of the

- “companionship” (15) of his coins, to the regained “consciousness of unity between his past and present” (129), and a sense of belonging. Marner understands how he worshipped a false god that kept him in darkness and bondage (as Molly was “enslaved” by the “demon Opium”, 96) and alienated him from himself, his fellow-men and his past.
- 16 In the brief concluding chapter taking place on Eppie’s wedding-day, the idyllic spring picture of Raveloe suggests a pastoral golden age with strongly Christian overtones. Eppie’s attributes evoke the Virgin’s in religious iconography: “Seen at a little distance [...], she seemed to be attired in pure white, and her hair looked like the dash of gold on a lily” (162), an echo of her halo-like curls in chapter XII. Because she has healed Marner (and the Raveloe community) and re-enchanted his world, wealth has become a shared, communal blessing with the “golden and purple wealth” of the lilacs and laburnums (161) and the presence of the young calves, that bring back to mind Marner’s idolatrous cult of gold (and the worship of the Golden Calf in Exodus XXXII). The ending suggests that life is more golden and precious than gold, echoing Ruskin’s “There is no Wealth but Life”.
- 17 Golden hair, “through which wealth and female sexuality” are coalesced (Gitter 936) is the central theme of Bram Stoker’s 1892 short story. Here, it does not belong to an “angel” in a narrative about redemption and love. This “shining hair” is not her “aureole”; it is instead “a glittering snare, web, or noose” (936) in a story of hate and revenge that the enigmatic title, “The Secret of the Growing Gold”,³ does not in the least foreshadow. Gold *literally*—and no longer metaphorically—“grows” and kills in this dark Gothic story. It has a realistic background and unmistakably looks back to *Silas Marner*, with its country setting, its protagonists from the squirearchy (like Eliot’s Cass family), and the very unfortunate love affair between Margaret Delandre and Geoffrey Brent whose name brings back to mind *Godfrey Cass* and his ill-fated union with Molly.
- 18 Unlike the golden-haired Eppie, Margaret Delandre is there to act as Geoffrey’s Nemesis after he killed her abroad—or so he thought—in the Zermatt Valley, in Switzerland, and married an Italian lady one year later, just as G. Cass will marry Nancy after Molly’s death. When Margaret finally and mysteriously returns, horribly scarred (63) and “like a battered, ghostly edition” (62) of her former self, to take revenge on Geoffrey, he finally murders her and buries her body under the broken hearth-stone in the old hall. But the power of hate somehow keeps Margaret alive and murder will out as “through the crack in the broken stone were protruding a multitude of threads of golden hair just tinged with grey!” (65). Margaret’s hair used to be “pure” gold but was slightly streaked with grey after her nearly fatal “accident” in Switzerland. However hard he tries, burning the tell-tale vengeful hair repeatedly, it always grows again and Geoffrey’s unknowing wife finally discovers its presence and innocently rejoices at it, unaware that it will kill her, too. She wants to “watch the gold growing” and “find the secret of the growing gold” (67).
- 19 The enigmatic, mythical-sounding title of the short story initially seemed to suggest a golden age of plenty with gold growing magically for men to pick effortlessly but its actual meaning is much darker. This threatening posthumous growth (in some ways comparable to that of the “dead” coins in *Silas Marner*) had been skilfully prefigured at the very beginning of the story by the genealogy of the degenerate and almost extinct Delandre “stock” through an extended vegetal metaphor: we learn that in spite of their “ancient record” and former financial prosperity, “their fortunes had withered under the scorching of the free trade sun” but they had “taken root” in the land “body and soul”, and “having chosen the life of vegetables, had flourished as vegetation does—blossomed and thrived in the good season and suffered in the bad” (56). The tenacity and stubborn

growth of the “stock” is confirmed by the end of the story when Geoffrey is found dead, with a “look of unutterable horror” on his face and his feet “twined with tresses of golden hair” (68). But how can his pregnant wife’s death be accounted for, since she was unaware of his previous attachment and there was no reason why *she* should be punished except to prevent her from perpetuating the Brent line? With hindsight, though, we may assume she also “pays” because she is rich whereas Margaret is now impoverished, her “golden hair” being ironically her only “wealth” left (62) after “the free trade sun” had “scorch [ed]” and “withered” her family’s fortune (56), a state of things jointly produced by their depravity and the new capitalistic economy. As in *Silas Marner*, Stoker’s story “portrays the life of the squirearchy as intrinsically negative and unproductive” (Shuttleworth 219). Geoffrey’s wife may also have to “pay” for her apparent greed, for wishing to own and hoard the mysterious gold after discovering the “secret” of its “growing”, thereby accumulating wealth.

- 20 This strongly intertextual Gothic ghost story can therefore be read in at least two possibly complementary ways: as a revenge story (but an enigmatic and morally ambiguous one), and as a fantastic tale with an ideological subtext, namely an indictment of cupidity and / or the new ruthless capitalist economy that “kills” and whose (partly guilty) victims “strike back”, even from beyond the grave as the “dangerous” and “murderous energy” of Margaret’s hair shows (Gitter 948). Moreover, the “tresses of golden hair” described as “twined” round Geoffrey’s feet provide a *fin-de-siècle* echo of previous representations of dangerous femininity: women’s luxuriant golden blonde hair as a fatally attractive attribute in Pre-Raphaelite painting or in D.G. Rossetti’s Lilith poems, such as the ballad “Eden Bower” (1869) or the sonnet “Lilith” in *Ballads and Sonnets* (1881).
- 21 In George Du Maurier’s *Trilby* (1894), gold, at its most material, is a central concern of most of the penniless bohemian characters, including the Jewish pianist and composer Svengali who, partly out of greed and ambition, and partly out of love, turns the eponymous heroine into a world-famous *prima donna*, “us[ing] her body as the vehicle of his genius” (Showalter xx). Trilby was initially a hard-up, tomboyish *grisette* and a painters’ model who “nevertheless preserved a certain carefree innocence” (Gracombe 81). She is tone-deaf and quite unable to sing in tune (Du Maurier 59, 175), but when he first meets her, Svengali uncannily senses her unsuspected potential, comparing her nose to the “belly of a Stradivarius” and immediately noticing she has a “quick, soft, susceptible heart, a heart of gold” (39), the ambiguous phrase referring both to the monetary value he sees in her and to her intrinsic moral and spiritual worth in spite of her morally dubious existence. After curing her from her headaches through mesmerism, he gains her confidence and affection, bewitches and controls her, altering her beyond recognition. Despite some anti-Semitic overtones in his characterization, he is depicted as a talented artist. Besides, his turning Trilby into a diva appears as a blessing to the world, the narrative strongly emphasizing the spiritual and religious dimension of her singing. Ideologically, the novel is therefore much more ambiguous, if not “bewildering”, and complex (Gracombe 77) than it is usually credited with. Trilby’s status is itself ambiguous, if not paradoxical, since she “possesses compelling power” (Titus 29) and is “physically very large” but appears as “an empty vessel to be filled with the genius of the male imagination” (30), being both “a passive medium and a potent goddess” (35).
- 22 “Little Billee”, a young painter in love with her, is the main focalizer of the concert scenes and it is through his perspective that a strikingly syncretic image of the diva gradually builds up, resting on the dual pagan and Christian symbolism of gold. On her first *début*

concert in Paris, her “classical dress of cloth of gold” and the “gold coronet of stars on her head” (164) make her look like a Greek goddess but the “garnets and beetles’ wings” suggest something more Oriental that should be related to the *fin-de-siècle* esoteric interest in the cult of Isis or Astarte, for instance. Therefore, Trilby’s singing is like “a broad heavenly smile of universal motherhood turned into sound” (166). In the previous paragraph, Little Billee had described her singing as something only a “woman archangel” (166) could produce, but her ineffable voice also gave the “revelation of some impossible golden age—priceless—never to be forgotten!” (166), a clear reference to antique pagan myths, before another shift back to Christian imagery when her “mellow, powerful, deep chest notes” are compared to “the pealing of great golden bells” (172).

- 23 Du Maurier’s pen and ink illustrations initially appeared with the novel in seven monthly instalments in *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* from January 1894 on, before publication in volume form. Oddly, plate 9 (*Trilby*, Part 6), entitled “Au Clair de la lune”⁴ highlights Trilby’s classically statuesque appearance and goddess-like stature, since she towers from her pedestal above Svengali in her ancient and rather Spartan-looking Greek dress, but it does not register the presence of gold in her attire unlike her description in the novel that brings to mind John Singer Sargent’s *Astarte* painting (1890-95).



John Singer Sargent, *Astarte* (c. 1890-95), oil on canvas, 98.1x30.5cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, OASC, source: www.metmuseum.org

- 24 Christian references finally dominate after her death, when Gecko describes her as a “bird of paradise” and likens the “many overtones” of her voice to “the bells in the Carillon de Notre Dame”, adding that she had “that good smile like the Madonna’s, so soft and bright and kind” (238), the comparison with the Virgin bringing back to mind Eppie’s Marian connotations at the end of *Silas Marner*.
- 25 But when Gecko goes on to add that “[...] there was no end to her notes, each more beautiful than the other—velvet and gold, beautiful flowers, pearls, diamonds, rubies—

drops of dew and honey; peaches, oranges, and lemons! [...]—all the perfumes and spices of the Garden of Eden!” (237-238), we get to understand that just as Trilby’s “golden” voice, as a vehicle of the sacred, cannot be confined to a single religious frame of reference, her “cosmic” (168) singing transcends the usual power of words and can only be addressed through a complex associative metaphoric network mixing gold, gems,⁵ water and elemental images. Synaesthesia is therefore used to depict the entrancing Paris concert when her voice, described in the present and on the parataxic mode, can be heard, seen and felt, and gives those who hear it a total sensory and emotional experience: “Waves of sweet and tender laughter [...]—the freshness of the morning, the ripple of the stream [...], the lisp of wind in the trees, the song of the lark in the cloudless sky—the sun and the dew, the scent of early flowers and summer woods and meadows—the sight of birds and bees and butterflies [...] as she warbles that long, smooth, lilting, dancing laugh, that wondrous song without words” (172).

- 26 The day after the concert, Little Billee is still obsessed by the “golden suavities” (180) of Trilby’s voice and like Marner with his “golden wine”, he wishes to “drink of that bubbling fountain once more” (181). As Marner’s gold had done, the voice causes a form of painful addiction. It is a “cruelly sweet” oxymoron and “so strangely heart-piercing and seductive, that the desire to hear it once more [becomes] nostalgic—almost an ache!” (180). What Jim Reilly writes in his paper on *Silas Marner*, about “the commodification of the artwork [...] as a defining characteristic of capitalism in its world-monopoly phase” (197), is particularly adapted to Trilby whose “golden” voice is itself an embodied artwork, but also a much advertised and profitable one (for Svengali whose fortune it makes) in a world “where artworks are reduced to the status of commodities and where commodities [...] are swathed in an aesthetic allure” (197). Trilby is therefore commodified *both* as a woman *and* as an embodied art-work.
- 27 The ambivalence of gold in *Trilby* actually originates from the paradox whereby she is bewitched and bewitching, haunted and haunting. But although her singing voice is unnatural, it only conjures up primeval *natural* images, and in spite of its impure supernatural origins (the fact Svengali uses her body as the vehicle of his own ambition), its effects are so beneficent and cathartic because of her “heart of gold”. Once she resumes her normal identity (shortly before dying), Billee and his friends consider that her voice “rang as true when she spoke as that of any thrush or nightingale [...], and though she might never sing another note, her mere speech would always be more golden than any silence, whatever she might say” (207).
- 28 It is because of Svengali’s immoral appropriation of Trilby that her golden voice appears as double-edged in the novel, a source of ineffable bliss for those listening to her but also a cause of bondage (as in *Silas Marner*) ultimately leading to her death shortly after Svengali himself dies. “Like Charcot and Freud, Svengali sees women’s bodies as ‘cases’. [...] he anatomizes Trilby, imagining her first as a hollow architectural construction [...]” (Showalter xx). Indeed, on their first meeting, his slightly macabre (albeit humorous) vision of her head dehumanizes her when he compares the “roof” of her mouth to the “dome of the Panthéon” in which “there is room [...] for ‘toutes les gloires de la France’” (39), and the “entrance” to her throat to the “middle porch” of St Sulpice “when the doors are open for the faithful on All-Saints’ day” (39). Like them, *he* will enter Trilby’s throat and fill it but his unlikely reference to the “Toussaint” festival is quite ominous. From the start, the mission of art—that should be sacred and selfless—appears as warped by egoism and ambition. Moreover, Svengali’s likening the “bridge” of her nose to the

“belly of a Stradivarius” (39) suggests a form of sinful profanation, the violin frequently appearing as the devil’s instrument in *fin-de-siècle* narratives. “Svengali’s fantasies” involve economic, “sexual and professional power, sully[ing] his musical talent by connecting it to avariciousness and making him more threatening” (Gracombe 104).

- 29 These works explore the potentially or actually tragic consequences of the misuse of gold, its objectification, and the misinterpretation of its value. Within the prevalent capitalistic logic that forms the substratum (and anti-model) of the texts, bodies—those of Silas, of Margaret (her hair reduced to “growing gold”) and of Trilby, herself reduced to her “golden voice”—are reified and alienated. Reilly presents an illuminating parallel between the *Selected Writings* of Marx and Silas Marner whose “life had reduced itself to the functions of weaving and hoarding, without any contemplation of an end towards which the functions tended” (Eliot 16):

Marx: the more values he creates the more valueless and worthless he becomes, the more formed the product the more deformed the worker... [...]

Eliot: Strangely Marner’s face and figure shrank and bent themselves into a constant mechanical relation to the objects of his life, so that he produced the same sort of impression as a handle or a crooked tube, which has no meaning standing apart. (Reilly 192)

- 30 Eliot clearly shows that Marner’s “work and his money [...] had fashioned him into correspondence with themselves” (36), a passage inspiring Shuttleworth’s analysis of “his increasing subjection to his loom and his gold” and his “endow[ing] these alienated self-images with his own active powers” (210). Stoker’s and Maurier’s stories similarly describe cases of possession and dispossession of the self in which the magic realism characterizing the representation of gold coexists with an acute social awareness of subjection and alienation. Indeed, Svengali “[b]y corrupting Trilby and using her like an exotic musical instrument” reduces her to a “morbid condition” and finally causes her death (Kelly 104). Yet, her singing has resurrected Billy’s “lost romantic vision of a world built upon love, fellowship, and freedom” (104).
- 31 The three works rest on final redress, atonement or redemption. In Stoker’s story, Geoffrey Brent has to *pay* with his life and is literally killed by “gold” but Eliot’s or Du Maurier’s narratives end more optimistically by highlighting the spiritual significance of gold and its power to “lift the veil”. Trilby’s “golden voice” gives Little Billee a “cosmic vision of the beauty and the sadness of things”, of “their pathetic evanescence” and a “heavenly glimpse beyond the veil” (168). As for Marner, he initially saw the world as “a hopeless riddle” (15) and took refuge in his weaving (and his gold), thereby “reiterat[ing] his rejection of complexity by creating a pattern which he [could] understand” (Carroll 200). But thanks to the loss of his gold coins and their “transmutation” into a living child, the weaver’s “large brown eyes seem to have gathered a longer vision [...]” (124).⁶
- 32 After its initial publication in 1861, *Silas Marner* was collected “at George Eliot’s request, in the Cabinet edition of 1878” (Mudford xix) alongside “Brother Jacob” (1860) in which a son steals his mother’s guineas, and *The Lifted Veil* (1859). Indeed, *Silas Marner* is also the story of a lifted veil. And on a very dark mode, Geoffrey Brent, after the “growing gold” killed him, is found with his *eyes open* “star[ing] glassily at his feet” (68), with the golden hair tied round them.
- 33 For Godfrey Cass, Marner’s recovered treasure “after all, is but little. It won’t go far” even if “it’s put out to interest” (150), a capitalistic conception that reduces gold to its mere materialistic exchange value, but although he is painfully aware that there are “debts we

can't pay like money debts" (157), he has not fully understood that Eppie has become the weaver's "new treasure" (123). Similarly, the weaver's "heart had been as a locked casket with its treasure inside". Once his gold was gone, the "casket was empty, and the lock was broken" (71), because gold had paradoxically impoverished and emptied him, before he was filled again by the child.

- 34 Like Trilby's voice which Little Billee describes as "the ripple of the stream" (172), as "a joy there is no telling; a clear, purling, crystal stream that gurgles and foams and bubbles along over sunlit stones" (173), the "rippling radiance" of Eppie's hair (128) fuses the metaphors of gold as water, gold as joy (ripples of laughter) and gold as sunshine, the synaesthesia expressing the sense of wholeness regained by the fictional characters, and more poignantly, suggesting the writers' nostalgia and hankering for an irretrievably lost world whose "golden" rules, vibrantly expressed by Ruskin in "The Veins of Wealth", were still within reach, however, and should still be believed in and adhered to. "[...] in this moral power, quite inscrutable and immeasurable though it be, there is a monetary value just as real as that represented by more ponderous currencies. A man's hand may be full of invisible gold, and the wave of it, or the grasp, shall do more than another's with a shower of bullion. This invisible gold, also, does not necessarily diminish in spending" (Ruskin 253).

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NOTES

1. It was translated as *The Coiners of Language*.
2. Hugh Witemeyer questions the generalized application of these pictorial comparisons and considers *Silas Marner* and *The Mill on the Floss* as Eliot's least pictorial (and most Wordsworthian) novels even if "both are full of visually memorable scenes" whose "construction" is nevertheless "seldom indebted to the visual arts" (Chapter 8).
3. It was first published in the illustrated weekly *Black and White* (January 23, 1892) and collected posthumously in *Dracula's Guest and Other Weird Stories* (1914).
4. <http://www.victorianweb.org/art/illustration/dumaurier/trilby/84.html>
5. Gold, associated with precious stones, works incrementally through echoing, and amplification: "Every separate note was a highly-finished gem of sound, linked to the next by a magic bond" (167) and "every single phrase is a string of perfect gems, of purest ray serene, strung together on a loose golden thread!" (172).
6. True enough, he feels "bewildered by the changes" (159) when he revisits his home town thirty years after leaving it, and the Methodist chapel of Lantern Yard has been pulled down and replaced by a huge *factory*. He will never get definite answers to the insoluble "riddle" but he has come to terms with it.

ABSTRACTS

The meaning and symbolism of gold, in classical Antiquity, in various world mythologies, or in the Bible, have always been ambivalent since it is a precious, stainless metal with both a monetary and a spiritual value. It can stand for primeval innocence, for immortality and spiritual elevation because of its kinship with the sun, and it is associated with perfection and the ideal as many heroes' quests show (the golden fleece, the golden apples in the garden of the Hesperides, the gold of the Rhine, etc.). But, just as the sun is life-giving, it can also burn and destroy. Likewise, gold, although a perfect metal, can be a poisoned gift with evil or even fatal effects, becoming a source of greed and discord, or the origin of man's misery and enslavement, as in the legend of King Midas.

All these aspects of gold are particularly well illustrated by 19th-century literature and art which not only feature numerous intertextual echoes of mythical and Biblical narratives, but reappropriate and rework this age-old fund to address contemporary problems, within the new aesthetic, social, economic and ideological contexts. The capitalistic *ethos* and rampant industrialization, with their attendant social and moral evils, form the substratum accounting for the presence and distinctively Victorian treatment of gold in George Eliot's, Bram Stoker's and George Du Maurier's texts. By then, money and capital had become prime movers and the new social conditions were uncongenial to human values such as social justice, the sense of community and personal fulfilment, a state of things denounced by Ruskin in his 1860 essay "The Veins of Wealth", where he condemned the dehumanizing and deleterious consequences of the "mercantile economy", claiming that "Some treasures are heavy with human tears, as an ill-stored harvest with untimely rain; and some gold is brighter in sunshine than it is in substance" (251). The essay collapses the metaphoric (the social body) and the literal (workers' bodies), positing that "the circulation of wealth in a nation resembles that of the blood in a natural body" (247). This prefigures the metaphoric and metonymic treatment of gold by Eliot, Stoker and Du Maurier who highlight its ambiguous power and value within the new capitalistic ideology. In *Silas Marner*, Stoker's story, and *Trilby*, gold has both a concrete and abstract symbolic meaning. It is literally and metaphorically *embodied* by female characters' hair (Eliot and Stoker) and by Trilby's "golden" voice. The complex poetics the three texts mobilize—whereby gold appears as flowing, growing, turned into music, as an alchemical transformer or a fatal agency—gives full justice to its complex meaning since its apparent humanization (and feminization) coexists uneasily with the (actualized or potential) reification, if not commodification, of human beings produced by the new "mercantile" economy.

La signification et le symbolisme de l'or, dans l'Antiquité, dans diverses mythologies du monde, ou dans la Bible, ont toujours été ambivalents car ce métal précieux et inaltérable possède une valeur monétaire et spirituelle. Il symbolise tantôt l'innocence originelle, tantôt l'immortalité et l'élévation spirituelle en raison de sa parenté avec le soleil, mais aussi la perfection et l'idéal, ce qui explique la quête de nombreux héros (la toison d'or, les pommes d'or du jardin des Hespérides, l'or du Rhin, etc.). Mais si le soleil est source de vie, il peut aussi brûler et détruire. De même, l'or est un métal parfait mais parfois un cadeau empoisonné qui engendre la cupidité et la discorde. Il peut faire le malheur de l'homme et l'asservir, comme dans la légende du roi Midas, et il peut aussi tuer.

Toutes ces valeurs de l'or sont présentes dans l'art et la littérature du XIX^e siècle qui comportent de nombreux échos intertextuels des récits mythologiques et bibliques mais se réapproprient cet héritage ancestral et l'adaptent au nouveau contexte esthétique, social, économique et idéologique de l'époque victorienne pour aborder les problèmes contemporains. Les maux engendrés par la nouvelle philosophie capitaliste à l'ère industrielle infléchissent donc le traitement de l'or dans les textes de George Eliot, Bram Stoker et George du Maurier. Dans son essai de 1860, « Les Veines de la richesse », Ruskin s'insurgeait contre l'iniquité du système, et dénonçait les effets déshumanisants et délétères de la nouvelle « économie mercantile » dont certains « trésors » étaient « gorgés de larmes humaines ». Il considérait que « certains types d'or » avaient au soleil « un éclat plus brillant que leur véritable essence ». Cet essai fait se rejoindre le métaphorique (le corps social) et le littéral (le corps des travailleurs) et postule que « la circulation de la richesse d'une nation ressemble à celle du sang dans un corps vivant », annonçant le traitement très métaphorique et métonymique que Eliot, Stoker et du Maurier donnent de l'or, et la façon dont ils soulignent sa valeur et son pouvoir ambigu au sein de la nouvelle culture capitaliste. Dans *Silas Marner*, dans la nouvelle de Stoker, et dans *Trilby*, l'or possède une signification concrète et abstraite (symbolique). Au sens propre, comme figuré, il est incarné par les cheveux des personnages féminins (Eliot et Stoker) et par la « voix en or » de *Trilby*. La poétique complexe mise en œuvre dans les trois textes – l'or qui coule, qui pousse, qui se change en musique, qui devient un creuset alchimique ou une puissance meurtrière – donne toute la mesure de sa complexité. En effet, son humanisation apparente (et sa féminisation) coexistent avec la réification (effective ou potentielle), voire l'instrumentalisation, d'êtres humains, état de fait engendré par la nouvelle économie « mercantile ».

INDEX

Keywords: mythology, capitalism, poetics of gold, ambivalence, monetary value, greed, enslavement, commodification, dehumanization, spirituality, symbolic, metaphor

oeuvre citée *Silas Marner*, *Secret of the Growing Gold (The)*, *Trilby*

Mots-clés: mythologie, capitalisme, poétique de l'or, ambivalence, valeur monétaire, cupidité, asservissement, réification, déshumanisation, spiritualité, symbolique, métaphore

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