Maud
Mono-drama by Alfred Tennyson

Semi-staged performance,
with images and projected text,
and with incidental music by Robert Schumann

Adapted and directed by Patrick Boyde

Old Divinity School Theatre
St John’s College
7.30 pm

21 February 2019
Acknowledgements

Special thanks are due to the following:

Dudley Collard (a prominent left-wing barrister in the 1930s), who came down to Essex on leave in 1944 as a wartime lieutenant in the RNVR, and read aloud to Pat Boyde, then aged 9, Tennyson’s *The Lady of Shalott*.

Nicolas Bell, who contributed the essay (pp. 6-7) on the early reception of *Maud*.

Sam Motherwell, who conceived and executed all the illustrations, in the spirit he describes on p. 11 of this Programme.

Mark Harrison, who gave indispensable help and advice on all the technical aspects of the visual display.

Alexander Kusztyk who gave invaluable help with the editing of the PPT and the production of this Programme.

Constantin Sahm who took charge of Eventbrite publicity.

Tom Pearson who oversaw the setting up of the stage and screen.

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Robert Schumann (born 8 June 1810)

The incidental music for this performance is taken from seven collections of Schumann compositions for piano:

*Carnaval*, 15, 19  
*Fantasiestücke*, 3, 4  
*Kinderszenen*, 1, 3, 5, 9  
*Kreisleriana*, 13  
*Novelletten*, 1  
*Papillons*, 5, 8  
*Studies in Canonic Form*, 4
THE PERFORMERS

READERS
First Speaker (DD) Reuben Thomas
Second Speaker (AT) Patrick Boyde

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MUSICIAN
Piano Matthew Gibson

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SYNCHRONISER
Text and images Elena Violaris
Two Presentations of *Maud* (by the Author and the Director)

A. Tennyson described his poem as:

‘a little *Hamlet*, the history of a morbid, poetic soul, under the blighting influence of a recklessly speculative age.

He is the heir of madness, an egoist with the makings of a cynic, raised to a pure and holy love which elevates his whole nature, passing from the height of triumph to the lowest depth of misery, driven into madness by the loss of her whom he has loved, and, when he has at length passed through the fiery furnace, and has recovered his reason, giving himself up to work for the good of mankind.

The peculiarity of this poem is that different phases of passion in one person take the place of different characters’.

B. Patrick Boyde advertised this production in the following terms:

Tennyson’s *Maud* remained immensely popular for a good eighty years after its publication in 1855, perhaps because the powerful story shares many elements with great novels from the first half of the nineteenth century: a morbidly sensitive hero, an unattainable beloved, financial ruin, thirst for revenge, a fatal duel, flight abroad, madness, and promise of cure and redemption.

But the content is autobiographical rather than fictional, and the form could hardly be less like a three-volume novel. A series of short lyrics (apparently composed by the protagonist with all the immediacy of entries in a diary) are arranged to create what Tennyson called a *Mono-drama*, a ‘play for one voice’, which demands to be read aloud (as we shall do, and as the author himself continued to do, inexhaustibly, right down to his death in 1892).

Its closest relatives are the great song cycles of Schubert and Schumann (*Die schöne Müllerin* and *Winterreise; Dichterliebe* and *Liederkreis op. 39*); and we are confident of bringing you an experience of comparable intensity and beauty in our single, semi-staged performance on 21 February, which will last for about seventy-five minutes.

Tennyson’s lyrics will be framed and punctuated by fragments for solo piano by Robert Schumann, his exact contemporary. (In many cases, the very titles of the pieces seemed to demand inclusion: *Novelette, Impatience, Declaration, From Foreign Lands*.)

Judicious pruning and ‘waymarking’ will ensure that the shape of the drama will emerge clearly; and each poem will be immediately intelligible, thanks to the projection of the text and the specially commissioned accompanying sketches.
**Maud in the public eye**

In Memoriam A.H.H. occupied large amounts of Tennyson’s time and concentration in the long period from Arthur Hallam’s death in 1833 until its publication in 1850, the year of his marriage and his appointment as Poet Laureate. It had taken his publisher Edward Moxon a great deal of work, and a great deal of money, to persuade Tennyson to allow publication, but the critical and financial success of In Memoriam did nothing to encourage the poet to publish more. It was only after moving to Farringford on the Isle of Wight in November 1853 that Tennyson’s creative muse was re-awakened, and he was able to settle into a new routine of writing. As his son Hallam would later record,

my father worked at Maud, morning and evening, sitting in his high-backed wooden chair in his little room at the top of the house. His ‘sacred pipes’, as he called them, were half an hour after breakfast, and half an hour after dinner, when no one was allowed to be with him, for then his best thoughts came to him.

Maud came into existence very gradually through the course of 1854, inspired at first by an earlier poem which he had reluctantly published in 1837, beginning ‘Oh! that ’twere possible, After long grief and pain, To find the arms of my true-love, Round me once again!’ The stages of Maud’s composition can be very clearly traced in the surviving drafts in the Wren Library at Trinity and the Houghton Library at Harvard. By the spring of 1855 a fair copy of the complete sequence was ready to send to the printer, and Maud, and Other Poems was published on 28 July, his first substantial publication for five years.

Unlike In Memoriam, Maud met with unprecedentedly severe criticism in the press. A long article in The Times, which we now know to be the work of the Scottish journalist Eneas Sweetland Dallas, concluded that ‘Mr. Tennyson has never yet presented to the public anything so crude, so shapeless, and so commonplace. . . . What have we now? Poets hiding themselves in holes and corners, and weaving interminable cobwebs out of their own bowels.’ The Press reported that Maud ‘is a strain of pulling, incoherent sentiment and disordered fantasy such as might flit through the brain of a love-sick youth in the measles’. Several critics disparaged the poem by aligning it with the spasmodic school, the term coined the previous year by William Edmonstoun Aytoun (himself one of Maud’s fiercest critics) for the new genres of introspective verse pre-occupied with ‘the old hysterical mock-disease’. Some preferred to mock Tennyson’s Maud as ‘Tennyson’s Maudlin’, or to see its title as a combination of Mad and Mud. Parodies were also issued, the most extensive being a soliloquy on the death of his dog by William Cox Bennett, Anti-Maud, the opening stanza of which is perhaps worthy of quotation:

I hate the murky pool at the back of the stable-yard,
For dear though it be to ducks and geese, it has an unpleasant smell;
If you gaze therein at your own sweet face, the reflection is broken and marred,
And Echo, there, if you ask how she is, replies, ‘I feel very unwell!’
Tennyson was well known for inviting criticism but accepting only praise, and it was no surprise that he received these complaints very badly. Dante Gabriel Rossetti wrote that ‘I was never more amused in my life than by Tennyson’s groanings and horrors over the reviews of Maud. . . . His conversation was really one perpetual groan.’ But the groans led Tennyson to make several revisions to the text, many of them directly in response to specific criticisms. He added two new sections for the 1856 edition, divided the poem into two parts in the 1859 edition, and into three in 1865, each time introducing many small amendments.

Not all of his critics were adverse, however. His staunchest support came in a long account contributed to Cambridge Essays in October 1855 by George Brimley, the Librarian of Trinity College. Brimley pointed out that most of the horrors which critics claimed to deplore may just as readily be found in Shakespeare, and systematically unpicked the other accusations of morbid depravity. He concluded that:

> English literature has nothing more dramatically expressive of a mind on the verge of overthrow, than the verses in which the shell on the Brittany coast serves as text; nothing that presents the incipient stage of madness, springing from the wrecked affections, with more of reality and pathos than the poem, ‘Oh! that ’twere possible’, now recovered from the pages of a long-forgotten miscellany, and set as a jewel amid jewels; nothing that surpasses in truth and terrible force the madhouse soliloquy, ‘Dead, long dead!’

Tennyson was naturally pleased by this encomium, writing to Brimley on 28 November:

> I wish to assure you that I quite close with your commentary on ‘Maud’. I may have agreed with portions of other critiques on the same poem, which have been sent to me; but when I saw your notice I laid my finger upon it and said, ‘There, that is my meaning.’ Poor little ‘Maud’, after having run the gauntlet of so much brainless abuse and anonymous spite, has found a critic.

Nicolas Bell
Librarian, Trinity College
An early witness (1871) to the popularity of *Maud*

*Through the Looking Glass, and What Alice Found There*

Chapter 2: The Garden of Live Flowers

However, there was the hill full in sight, so there was nothing to be done but start again. This time [Alice] came upon a large flower-bed, with a border of daisies, and a willow-tree growing in the middle.

‘O Tiger-lily,’ said Alice, addressing herself to one that was waving gracefully about in the wind, ‘I wish you could talk!’

‘We can talk,’ said the Tiger-lily: ‘when there’s anybody worth talking to.’

Alice was so astonished that she could not speak for a minute: it quite seemed to take her breath away. At length, as the Tiger-lily only went on waving about, she spoke again, in a timid voice—almost in a whisper. ‘And can all the flowers talk?’

‘As well as you can,’ said the Tiger-lily. ‘And a great deal louder.’

‘It isn’t manners for us to begin, you know,’ said the Rose, ‘and I really was wondering when you’d speak! Said I to myself, “Her face has got some sense in it, though it’s not a clever one!” Still, you’re the right colour, and that goes a long way.’

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*continues*
“Are there any more people in the garden besides me?” Alice said. (...

“There’s one other flower in the garden that can move about like you,” said the Rose. “Is she like me?” Alice asked eagerly, for the thought crossed her mind, “There’s another little girl in the garden, somewhere!”

“Well, she has the same awkward shape as you,” the Rose said, “but she’s redder—and her petals are shorter, I think.”

“Her petals are done up close, almost like a dahlia,” the Tiger-lily interrupted: “not tumbled about anyhow, like yours.”

“But that’s not your fault,” the Rose added kindly: “you’re beginning to fade, you know—and then one can’t help one’s petals getting a little untidy.”

Alice didn’t like this idea at all: so, to change the subject, she asked “Does she ever come out here?”

“I daresay you’ll see her soon,” said the Rose. (...

“She’s coming!” cried the Larkspur. ‘I hear her footstep, thump, thump, thump, along the gravel-walk!”

Alice looked round eagerly, and found that it was the Red Queen. ‘She’s grown a good deal!” was her first remark. She had indeed: when Alice first found her in the ashes, she had been only three inches high—and here she was, half a head taller than Alice herself!

“It’s the fresh air that does it,” said the Rose: “wonderfully fine air it is, out here.”

“I think I’ll go and meet her,” said Alice, for, though the flowers were interesting enough, she felt that it would be far grander to have a talk with a real Queen.

Lewis Carroll

A page from Tennyson’s note book (Trinity College Maud/XL, 0.15.36) with the opening stanzas of Come into the garden, Maud.
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Notes on the Illustrations for this Performance of Maud

My background is as a scientist specialising in computing in chemical crystallography. However, as a balance to the exacting precision required in computer programming my approach to illustration is primarily graphic and expressive rather than a detailed rendering of the subject. I was introduced to Pat Boyde by an artist friend to assist with illustrations to the Greek play Oedipus at Colonus, about which I knew nothing. The challenge of widening my view of what was required produced many illustrations which would never have been created without this sparking of ideas off each other. The images in one's mind when listening to poetry are very individual and private, and of course are created by the listener's imagination. My style has followed the dictum ‘Less is More’, so that each listener can add and interpret my drawings, even in ways I did not consciously intend.

The contemporary Victorian style of illustration to Maud was accurate and detailed but to my eye a little heavy and limited. As I worked with Pat, the characters of the poetic, dreaming young man, the remotely beautiful Maud and the controlling brother, all gradually took shape. In fact, they almost drew themselves in my approach, where a quick pencil and watercolour sketch is chosen for the final illustration. Just a little colour enhancement or cropping is the only computer intervention.

So, in my case, alongside ‘Less is More’ I add the motto ‘First is Best’.

Sam Motherwell

Who’s Who

PATRICK BOYDE is Emeritus Professor of Italian. He has been adapting and directing dramas in Greek, Latin, French and English since 2004.

MATTHEW GIBSON is now in his third year at St John’s, reading music, singing bass in the Choir. He has a special love of accompanying and conducting.

SAM MOTHERWELL has drawn the images for many previous productions in this theatre. He is past President of the Cambridge Drawing Society and works in pen and ink, collage and linocut, often on Mill Road subjects. (See his note above)

REUBEN THOMAS was a chorister, volunteer, choral scholar and lay clerk in the Chapel choir between 1982 and 2003. Until recently, he was a lay clerk at Westminster Cathedral. He devotes his spare time to miscellaneous technomusico-literary pursuits.

ELENA VIOLARIS is studying for a PhD in the Faculty of English on James Joyce, Milton and the frontiers of poetic language. She is the supreme exponent of the art of synchronising actors and subtitles.
‘Old men ought to be explorers’

This performance of *Maud* is the latest in a series of semi-staged productions which have kept me busy since my retirement. I have had to learn so much in the past sixteen years – how to speak dead languages as though they were living, how to use, creatively, the essential high-tech resources; how to coach and inspire teams of amateurs; how to persuade audiences to come along to a reading aloud of dense and complex texts in four different languages (none of them Italian). But I have of course been re-deploying my previous knowledge and skills (acquired through the teaching of Dante and Italian Narrative Art); and there are some ‘red strands’ running the whole length of the ‘cable’.

The plays are all abridgements of rarely performed verse-dramas or dramatisations of episodes in classical epics or books of the Bible. All have been enhanced by live music and illuminated by appropriate images. The meaning has always been made crystal-clear by specially composed surtitles, or by the projection of the original text.

In every case the focus has been on the language of a major text that is to be enjoyed on its own terms and for its own sake, just like a symphony. Every directorial choice is intended to heighten the impact of the Word, to rouse it from its hibernation on the page, to bring it from potency to act. There are two underlying obsessions; first, my conviction – shared with Dante – that the essence of poetry lies in its verbal music (*armonia, dolcezza*), which is why it does not survive translation: and, second, that a good reading depends on deep understanding and conveys a loving interpretation – which it does more effectively than any written commentary. (And, yes, there is also a thin, ‘black thread’ of muted protest against the cult of the Director in the modern theatre and against the dominance of Theory in the teaching of literature at our universities.)

**Patrick Boyde**

**Alphabetical table of the principal works semi-staged between 2002 and 2018**

- *Achilles: The End of his Wrath*  
  Homer
- *Aeneas I: Troiae Tutamen*  
  Homer
- *Aeneas II: Teurcorom Spes*  
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