EDWIN FITZPATRICK, PALINDROMIST

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It is generally agreed among logologists (and more general critics of literature) that Edwin Fitzpatrick is the greatest palindromist of modern times—and that he is, in fact, the only one who consistently elevated this apparently restrictive genre into works whose unlabored eloquence have more to do with lyrical and mystical poetry than the mere mechanics of a verbal tricksterism. He was able to compose full-length novels and plays in strictly symmetrical palindromes and, as we shall see, felt himself no more hampered in his verbal and grammatical choices than would any more ordinary writer in the language. He was an eccentric in an age of multiform eccentrics, and his upbringing and young manhood very much suited him for the dazzling and wide-ranging explorations he set for himself as a life’s work. This is especially true in light of his best known (although not perhaps most brilliant) production, “The Rubiayat of Charades and Palindromes,” a work of epic length which sent him, rather obsessively, down a kind of mirror image of the pathways of scholarship, translation and poetic striving which for so long occupied the man whose name is so strangely similar to his, Edward Fitzgerald. (The one recorded meeting of the two men will be touched on later in this sketch.)

Sadly, very few of Fitzpatrick’s works—privately printed and in very limited editions—survive today in their complete form, and it is largely through the notes and private papers of his disciples, Norby Lime and a few others, that we know of the flavor and full scope of his work. And it was not until as late as 1973 that Howard Bergerson, working from these and other sources, developed the first coherent picture of Fitzpatrick’s life and literary output and more or less introduced him to the general reading public in his book, Palindromes and Anagrams.

Edwin Fitzpatrick’s father was Simon Fitzpatrick, a rather remarkable man in his own right who had worked as a hod carrier in the poorer districts of Dublin until, after years of the most painful self-denial, he had saved enough money, at age 28, for a single term of tuition at Trinity College. He enrolled himself there in the middle of the bitter winter of 1820 and continued to work as a laborer while he studied the two subjects which somehow had fascinated him since boyhood, philology and foreign languages. (He had already educated himself with a surprising thoroughness by borrowing from public libraries.) His scholarship at Trinity proved impeccable and, with some time off every six months or so, he was able to finance four years of tuition and a bachelor’s degree. On St. Patrick’s Day in his Junior year, he attended a
college dance (a rare relief from his usual stoical work habits) and met Mary Doneghan, the daughter of a philology professor with whom Fitzpatrick had once studied. In the spring that followed, to the amazement of those few people who knew of his laboriousness, Fitzpatrick often accompanied Mary on boat rides on local lakes, and just as often spent late nights of wine and conversation with both her and her father in their home.

Mary, largely on her own hook, had developed an interest in lexicography and even published a small pamphlet on some problems in Old English etymologies. Fitzpatrick soon shared her interest and together they vaguely planned to one day write a full-scale dictionary of their own. Almost without thinking of the seriousness of the move (so few doubts did they have about each other), they were married in a college chapel in the spring of 1827, only a few days after Simon's graduation exercises. Two years later Mary gave birth to a son (their only child), a boy they named Edwin after Mary's maternal grandfather, a man who was lost and presumed drowned during a voyage around the Horn in 1760, sailing to the small settlement of Los Angeles.

Like so many Irishmen of ambition and talent before him, Simon Fitzpatrick, with the reluctant blessing of his father-in-law, took his wife and child across the Irish Sea to the relative prosperity of London. By this time he and his wife were well along in writing their first collaborative dictionary, a rather clumsy precursor of the small, vest pocket lexicon. The book was finally published in 1833 and was an instant popular success, continuing to sell thousands of copies over the next twenty years. The couple received generous royalties from the book and Simon, who had known nothing but the most arduous manual labor since his boyhood, was now free to do nothing but pursue his passionate interests in language. In a year he and Mary launched the project which would occupy them for over three decades, the construction of a multi-volume dictionary which was very much a forerunner of James Murray's Oxford English Dictionary—that is, a work which not only defined words but which gave examples of their usage throughout English history, in the form of innumerable literary quotations.

The Argentine poet and story writer J. L. Borges has said that his childhood consisted almost wholly in being allowed to read in his father's library; something very similar might be said of Edwin Fitzpatrick. He was able to read English fluently at three and his father made a point of speaking Spanish and French around the house so that he had a good grasp of both of these languages by the age of five. He had few playmates and rarely seemed comfortable outside in even the warmest weather. By the time Edwin was eleven he was made a full participant in the work of the dictionary, mainly having the task of reading literally hundreds of books in search of illustrative quotations. It is not an exaggeration to say that three years later Edwin knew the meaning of every word in the language (including archaisms) and that he was as well read as scholars three times his age. Simon thought nothing of having his son work ten or twelve hour days, with short breaks for meals.
for light meals of scones, coffee, and sandwiches, and the boy, knowing no other life, rarely complained about his schedule. Young Edwin at that time had little or no interest in palindromes or other verbal curiosities, although his boyhood writings, meager and off-hand as they are, contain a few comic rebuses and 3-by-3 letter word squares. It was only after he enrolled at Oxford (the first time he was ever away from home) that he experienced what he called his Days of Revelation and dedicated his life to palindromes and a few other logological forms.

His father at first objected to his attending school at all, saying that Edwin was already more educated than most of the young wastrels who studied there and that, in any case, Edwin was need-ed at home to provide definitions and quotations for the dictionary. After nearly fourteen years things had gotten no further than "Car-olingian." But Mary finally convinced him, arguing that college experience could only broaden and make more useful Edwin’s knowledge, and that it might be helpful if he had a bachelor’s degree, however little it meant in terms of actual learning. So in 1847 Edwin journeyed by rail to Oxford and was matriculated into Baillol College in the study of English literature and linguistics. And at first his habits did not change much from those he had had at home: he was cloistered, bookish, and rather reserved with the few friends he managed to make. He even continued to work on his parents’ dictionary and would send them periodic reports on his progress with it every month or so. (He once said how greatly surprised he was to ever encounter a word he did not know.)

His one eccentricity was keeping a small caged lizard in his rooms, a tropical reptile called an amphibian whose head remarkably resembled its tail. Edwin would explain that the amphibian was also a mythical two-headed snake-like creature of which there was a rather dramatic mention in Paradise Lost. (When Satan and the other fallen angels are vanquished in Book X, they are turned into "amphisbaena dire" and other kinds of serpents—a bit of imagery that made him later conjecture that there might be something devilish about the whole concept of reversibility. This was reinforced by the obvious mirror relationship, known to every child, of "God" and "dog," which later troubled Fitzpatrick in some obscure theological sense.)

And it was about this time that he began to occasionally dabble in palindromes, composing a few, we are told, of no more than three or four words in length. He remarked to his classmates in the dining hall how peculiar it was that the two most famous and eloquent palindromes dealt with subjects no less weighty than the Garden of Eden ("Madam, I’m Adam") and the catastrophic career of Napoleon ("Able was I ere I saw Elba"). He guessed that there might be something worthwhile, even noble, in the form itself and later would make the boldly intuitive statement that the meaning of a palindrome gave a profounder access to Truth than what he once contemptuously called "mere one-way writing." He also began to develop a facility for charades during this period, pairs of sentences with an identical series of letters but in which these
letters were differently spaced and grouped so as to form two distinct sequences of words. (To quote one from his famous "Rubaiyat": "Coo, lisp, or to a mate urban joyously come, Dian / Cool, I sport, O amateur banjo, you sly comedian.")

But it was not until his sophomore year that, seemingly all at once, he began his serious involvement with the real artistic adventure of his life, palindromes. On a night in 1849 he inexplicably locked himself in his rooms and was not seen again for several days. He had always been known as a depressive young man but usually could be cajoled by his friends into an hour or two of dark ale and whist in a common room. But during these few days no one saw him take any food or drink and it is very likely he did not allow himself a moment’s sleep. Some of his friends began to be concerned about him. At last, almost four days later, he was seen to stumble down the main stairs at breakfast time, looking haggard and unshaven and virtually chalk-white. He stood leaning on one of the steps and had to clutch one of the thick oak bannisters with both hands. A friend of his noticed him and cried out, "Edwin! What have you been doing all this time? Involved in that confounded research of yours?" "You might say so," Fitzpatrick said. "I have solved the riddle of syntax," and thereupon collapsed like a cloth doll on the stairs.

A few days later he explained his findings. He said that the key to syntax (and it was something too obvious for most people to comprehend) was that all sentences were meant to be read from left to right, and that all semantic content depended very much on this "directional linearity," in which the meaning of a sentence is progressively revealed as it moves from start to end. And so profoundly did he understand the essence of this innate grammatical need for direction that he saw no reason why a sentence could not have a bi-directional syntax as well, and thereby communicate two messages at once. It was this "revelation," he always insisted, which lay behind his masterful skill with palindromes, not any particular ability for combining reversely spelled words.

And from that week on, Edwin began to drastically neglect both his studies and the lexicographical problems which his parents continued to mail to him. He would sit instead on the steps under the mossy archway of his dormitory building, loosen his cheap cotton tie, and write palindromic strophes about the glories of fall or the pleasure of excessive glasses of dark ale. Insofar as we can say that any man changes from childhood, we can say that Edwin Fitzpatrick underwent a permanent change that year, spending more time than ever in the company of his friends and with the respectable and less-than-respectable young ladies of that quiet college town. He even indulged in the old nocturnal Oxonian sport of secretly climbing the towers and buildings of the college with ropes, grappling hooks, and folding ladders. It may be because of these autumn days that he always referred to palindromes as the "joyful art" (just as anagrams, an anagram for ars magna, are called the "great art"), and why he once said that the form itself might be unsuitable for somber or tragic literature.
Things took a different turn for Fitzpatrick when he returned home for his Christmas holidays. His father greeted him stiffly at the door and wished to know immediately where Edwin’s reports were concerning the dictionary. (Without his help the work had gotten no further than “dromomaniac.”) Simon had also received word from the provost of Baillol that Edwin had missed almost all his classes and was seen to drink boisterously in the small pubs scattered through Oxford. Was this how he squandered his parents’ money and devotion, Simon wanted to know. Was this the lover of language who perhaps changed his allegiances to loafing and drinking and carousing like a common vagabond?

An angry scene followed in which Edwin openly admitted he did not care a whit about the Fitzpatrick Universal Dictionary or any other dictionary; he said he only intended to stay on at Baillol for the sake of getting a degree. "And what, if I may ask, is your plan of action after that?" stormed his father. "I intend to do nothing at all," replied Edwin, "except to write palindromes. When the spirit moves me." This statement, callow and self-satisfied, was, of course, the last straw. "Palindromes!" cried the elder Fitzpatrick. "You mean those tricks where words are read in reverse or some such nonsense? And you suppose that a child’s bagatelles will put bread and meat on your table? You have no conception how long I had to labor to achieve even my state of education! And you throw yours in the gutter, in the trash! You even refuse to ready yourself for useful employment." "I will have to see if there are any positions for a hod-carrier hereabouts," Edwin said with some cruelty.

At this point Simon turned to his wife and violently accused her of sending Edwin to Oxford in the first place, where had obviously molded himself to the school’s profligate laziness. But Mary knew the battle was lost. She could see a new dreaminess in her son when he spoke of palindromes and sensed his determination to pursue a genre which she, as pointedly as her husband, regarded as a sad and ludicrous waste of verbal ability. (Neither of them knew at this time that Edwin had developed a facility for writing coherent palindromes almost at will.) Mary made an attempt to calm the two men toward a compromise but their arguing continued into the night. By two o’clock in the morning Simon had decided to completely disinherit his son and told him angrily that if he would not work on the dictionary, he was no longer welcome in his house. Without another word, Edwin picked up his suitcase, which he had not yet unpacked, and walked into the street in the direction of the railway station. His mother wept uncontrollably, but Simon would not relent, thinking that his son, born into such learning and purposeful industry, was destined to be, at best, a foolhardy dilettante.

After what seemed like a long train ride, Edwin returned to his rooms on the now deserted campus; he stood and shivered in his still-buttoned overcoat as his building was kept only minimally heated during the Christmas holidays. A blustery snowstorm began to cover the quadrangle below his frosted-over window and he could
hearing his lizard scratching fitfully in his cage. He later confessed this was by far his darkest hour and that, even then, he had serious doubts about finding any artistic value in palindromes. Perhaps to distract his mind for an hour or two, he turned at random to a lyric by Catullus and began to translate it into Sofadic stanzas: "Give me a hundred kisses, a thousand kisses, and a thousand more." He kept turning the tissue-thin pages and somehow managed to get through till dawn. In two weeks the other students returned and Edwin found that by tutoring and waiting on tables at the student dining halls, he could pay his own tuition and expenses at Oxford. Two years later he had his degree and set himself up in a small flat in London, thinking, perhaps, he could support himself as a teacher.

And Edwin soon found a post in a rather ordinary but pleasant school called Adolphus College, on the outskirts of the city, where he was hired in 1852 to teach French composition and English literature. Without really trying to, he was soon regarded as undoubtedly the brightest and also one of the best-liked teachers in the school. (The Adolphus seal bore an unusual motto from Virgil, "Dis Aliter Visum"—"to the gods it seemed otherwise.".) In the evenings Fitzpatrick would compose palindromes and other logological genres, most of it poetry but sometimes an involved literary essay or short story. He was amazed at how easy it was to write smoothly readable palindromes stretching some twenty pages from end to end. His only requirement was to fully plan the development of his plot or outline, knowing in detail not only the ending, but also what he intended to say, for instance, precisely three-quarters of the way through. He would then simply seat himself at his lacquered desk and, beginning at the beginning, write a poem or tale with hardly any hesitation or revision at all. (To save time he would usually put down his pen midway through a work, regarding it as a tedious scribe's chore to merely "write out" the second half of a palindrome.)

One day on a holiday, while he lazily rummaged through a small room at the University of London library, he came upon a yellowed manuscript, handwritten in purple ink, of a little-known Persian poem written in rhymed quatrains. Becoming fascinated by it, he was soon able to teach himself Persian, and in this way became one of the first English readers of "The Rubaiyat" of Omar Khayyam. He experimentally began to see if he could translate it into English charades and palindromes and composed a few such oddly hybrid rhymed stanzas. In a few months' time he learned from a colleague that an older man named Edward Fitzgerald was also translating this work and Edwin soon found enough courage to present himself at Fitzgerald's house. The latter was entirely gracious and confessed that, yes, he had read the poem in its original Persian but so far hadn't rendered it into English—he had only tried to fit a stanza or two into Latin. Fitzpatrick replied that his translation would be even more eccentric than that and explained in some detail the workings of his uniquely restrictive verse forms.

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other's intention. He had himself been first drawn to the poem for its fantastic Oriental imagery—what, he wondered, did Fitzpatrick see in it which made him willing to invest so much ingenuity in transforming it into such torturous shapes? The young Fitzpatrick had a ready answer: its hedonism and fatalism, he replied. Its insistence that life is a fleeting and irreversible experience, a quick irrevocable march from youth to old age. And his use of the verse form, Edwin further explained, was two-fold: he would not alter the Tentmaker's materialist philosophy, yet the use of charades would covertly signify that, just as a string of letters might have several meanings, and even form several sets of words, so a single human experience might have a staggering multitude of moral inferences; in an equally covert fashion, the constant two-way rushing surge of the palindromes (even to a reader who was unaware that they existed) would suggest that the whole move-
ment of time itself might be somehow reversible and that one's ap-
parently accelerating progress from birth to old age might be, at bottom, the most scandalous materialist illusion of all.

Fitzgerald listened to all this in puzzlement but did not regard the languid and rather bony young man, seated opposite to him in an ill-fitting velvet jacket, to be his rival. He had enough wisdom to guess that the most eccentric and deeply inward of poetic talents might, in the long view, be seen as the most willingly and obviously cooperative. In any case, he began his English version of "The Rubaiyat" shortly after Fitzpatrick's visit and it may be that the latter inspired him to so energetically launch his work. Certainly the similarity of their names did not create any jealousy, as it did, a few decades later, between the painters Edouard Manet and Claude Monet. When they were separately asked about this point, both poets—perhaps out of vanity and perhaps, too, out of a lack of vanity—were surprised that anyone could think their names had any verbal likeness at all.

Meanwhile Fitzpatrick received bad news concerning his parents, who lived many miles away in London's East End. He heard from a writer friend that a fire had destroyed the bulk of their lexicographic notes and the loss of their work, on top of the loss of their son, very much dampened the enthusiasm they shared early in their marriage. They revised the plans for their dictionary, greatly reducing its size and scope, but then discovered, after repairing the extensive damage of the fire, that they were deeply and unexpectedly in debt. Other small lexicons competed with their original vest-pocket edition and they began to quarrel over their slowly dwindling royalty checks. Mary proposed that they visit Edwin at Adolphus (they knew where he was) or even ask for his help, but Simon would rage at the idea of seeing his son when both he and his wife were in such a disadvantageous position. And their son, for his part, thought it better not to stir up any of the troubles that still lay between them.

So Edwin continued to work quietly at his teaching post, conduct-
ing classes in French and introducing young people to the era of Dryden, Pope, and Swift. And, inevitably perhaps, he would some-
times mention his real passion during his lectures, until a group of his students—and outsiders from the literary life of London as well—soon began to meet in his apartment to hear him recite his latest palindromic work or furtively share their own attempts at this most difficult genre. After the success of his "Rubiyat" (success at least in his own circle), he set out for himself a much more ambitious project, a summary refashioning of all three books of the Divine Comedy. He then tried another text—much shorter, but more of a challenge, he thought, to the depth of his palindromic understanding—namely, the fragments of Heraclitus which philosophically compare human existence with a flowing river. (Both translations he later rejected as heavy-handed failures, saying again that only comedy was truly suitable to the Sotadic form.) One of his best works perhaps is "Dr. Allard", a mystery story in which a bed-ridden detective, Professor Burton Allard, is able to ultimately discover the killer by weighing the unconscious palindromic utterances made by each of the suspects. The murderer, it turns out, is a seemingly harmless deafmute and the detective concludes sagely—and puzzlingly, too—that silence is the most consuming of all palindromes. Fitzpatrick also wrote a short play about two vagabonds whose structure is curiously similar to Waiting for Godot, many rhymed lyric poems, and several volumes of notebooks, handwritten essays, and journals. Almost all of these works have now disappeared or have been read by a very select group of scholars.

Fitzpatrick's literary output has been preserved in a number of ways. On some nights his circle of disciples would enter his apartment and be treated to an informal lecture by the master, with one of the students worshipfully writing down Fitzpatrick's words (an excerpt from one of these talks can be found in Bergerson's Palindromes and Anagrams). The recording secretary on such nights would often be a young poet and sculptor named Norby Lime ("Emily Bronte met Norby Lime," Fitzpatrick quipped when first introduced to him) and it is probably thanks to his efforts that we have even the small fragment of the lecture printed below. (And it should be noted that Fitzpatrick's speaking style, in his maturity, became more and more soft-spoken, although at times, reaching certain points of insightful intensity, he would pace with nervous excitement in front of his customary green velvet chair.)

"People have sometimes asked me (he said on one occasion) if English is the most suitable language for palindromes and I confess I cannot evade this question since my knowledge of foreign languages is not altogether insubstantial. These people suppose that the regular endings and almost mathematical alterations of vowels and consonants in Italian, Spanish and Latin (in which some excellent palindromes were written in the Middle Ages) have a greater affinity for being read backwards than the dense consonant clusters, 'th' and 'qu' combinations and general syntactical refractoriness which characterize the English tongue. I can reply to these doubters that where English presents such superficial and even illusory obstacles, it will reward the palindromist a hundredfold..."
with its wealth of vocabulary as well as its well-known flexibility of usage and grammar. And in what other language, I ask in all frankness, could anyone find a word so literally and semantically replete as 'sensuousness'? As a boy, I learned English more perfectly than perhaps any young person in modern history, and now I have recently read the works of De Quincey and feel an abysmal ignorance in the face of the rhapsodic powers and secrets of 'mere' English. Never say, either as a reader or a palindromist, that our native language has disappointed you. Push onward—or better still, relax your waking mind entirely and let the English language show you through its essential backwardness (I am well aware of the pun) the coherence and eloquence with which it will illuminate all your forthcoming Sotadic utterances." (Although the actual lectures do not exist, it is known that Fitzpatrick would also speak at length on the idea of bi-directional syntax, although it seems none of his disciples ever understood this concept.)

Still another fragment from his recorded lectures has him say, "To read a palindrome properly for the first time, to absorb both its syntactical directions at one and the same moment, is to experience an ecstatic, electric thrilling of one's whole awareness which cannot be equalled by any other kind of writing, or for that matter, any other kind of artistic enjoyment. And after one becomes used to this necessary mode of reading Sotadics, especially the book-length examples, one begins to understand perhaps what the mystics meant when they claimed that time did not flow or that the end of each thing was exactly immanent in its beginning. But, again, these rather weighty philosophical meanings should never be expressed in so many words in any palindromic work, for it is very evident to me that the reader of palindromes, in time, will discover them for himself."

Fitzpatrick's published output always remained small, consisting mainly in a few poems in English and Irish magazines (he was always delighted when they were printed with no apparent knowledge that they were palindromes), a few essays and mystery stories, and one privately-printed novel which is now certainly one of the rarest volumes in Victorian literature. The appearance of this book in 1871, with its hand-tooled green Moroccan binding and gilt edging on its pages, was probably the happiest single moment in Fitzpatrick's life. He distributed copies free to his friends and colleagues and proudly held one up shoulder-high from the lectern in his classroom. His disciples instantly shared his enthusiasm (of course, they had already placed orders for copies themselves), and planned a slightly-delayed publication party for Fitzpatrick in his apartment. It was one of those few times when there was both drinking and dancing in these rooms, and Fitzpatrick quite eagerly joined in both. (To say the least, it was a livelier affair than the apocryphal gathering in Sydney Yendys's apartment upon his completion of the novel D'neeht.)

At the height of Fitzpatrick's party, Norby Lime and a young woman student sat side by side at a desk and, with their heads cocked to the side, one began to read the novel from the first page,
the other from the last; when they reached the center page, to much grinning applause from the other guests, they switched chairs and each read happily to the end. The two were duly rewarded with glasses of punch and there was a general toasting for Fitzpatrick and even a song sung in his honor, both of which left him nearly in tears. And in the high exuberance of that night, a night which seemed to justify his impossibly-circumscribed career, Fitzpatrick sent by special messenger a letter to his parents along with a carefully inscribed copy of the novel. He waited till almost dawn for the reply and was alone in his apartment when the messenger boy returned with a small gray envelope—Edwin tore it open and learned in a moment that his father had died of a stroke some two weeks before. His mother finished by saying how happy she was to hear from him and that she was coming to visit the next day. She stayed for a week, mainly staring out the window and politely pretending to read her son's long and complicated narrative. She returned to a largely reclusive life in London, and it is believed that after the emotional shock of this night Fitzpatrick never again regained his confidence as a teacher or as a palindromist. But, at least outwardly, he remained productive in both fields for a number of years.

Aside from this, not much is known of Edwin Fitzpatrick's life, which at least had the public appearance of being mild and bookish and unvarying. There still persists a rumor at Adolphus that he had a short affair with a young student named Natasha, whom he came to associate, fatally enough, with Satan. If the story is at all true, it's at least consistent with his life-long suspicion that palindromes were somehow infernal—"devil's writing", as he once jokingly called them. At one period, these and other religious anxieties led him to dabble in outright occultism, and he claimed to have contacted the departed spirits of several well-known British and American poets. And, by the end of his life, he undoubtedly believed that palindromes, at least when read simultaneously, constituted knowledge which was beyond most men's capacity, and that therefore whatever beauties or terrors, eloquence or occasional stumbling they might contain, all such writings should be forbidden and suppressed.

His last years are an unhappy story. After composing so many stories and poems and plays, he began to doubt if, in effect, he had really accomplished more than an ordinary one-way writer could have done with the same abilities. Why, even his followers, he would say, couldn't read his works with proper simultaneity! And did he really wish that any of them could? Was it wholly impossible to find an audience for his work? Added to this was his growing guilt over his parents. His mother lived uncomplainingly in the East End and he tried to support her with small weekly checks, but then she died of pneumonia and exposure, about a year after her husband. Yet it was his father's death, with so much bad and bitter blood still between them, which more deeply troubled Fitzpatrick. He wondered openly if he should return to his old calling of lexicography, and even thought of enlisting his disciples for the immense, forgotten project he had worked on in his youth.
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youth. Norby Lime's pathetic notes concerning such a book can
still be seen in the manuscript collection of the Morgan Library
in New York. In these last years the supposed Satanic qualities
of palindromes plagued him more and more strongly, and he began
to think of them as a subtle and complicated kind of seduction
which had somehow led to his father's death.

In 1874, in the middle of writing a semi-fictional account of
his great-grandfather Edwin, who had sailed the century before
to Los Angeles, Fitzpatrick noticed that he had used the word-pair
"throw" and "worth"—and he was perhaps more shocked and sadd
ened by this careless spelling mistake than by all the pained
remorse he felt toward his parents. His powers were in decline
and he knew there was no way to revive them. He still understood
bi-directional syntax, he said, but he lacked the rapid suppleness
to find palindromically potent word-choices to fit into his prede
signed sentences. It was also during this period that he became
increasingly careless about his own manuscripts, losing some by
accident, and destroying many others in midnight fits of depres
sion and self-disgust. It is known that some of his notebooks were
mailed, without covering letters, as unexpected "donations" to var
cious university libraries in Russia, South America, and the United
States. Without suffering any serious prior illness, Fitzpatrick died
at the age of forty-five in 1874, apparently from a stroke, the
same disease that took his father some three years before.

Fitzpatrick and both his parents were what we once called free
thinkers, and belonged to no organized church; nevertheless, Ed
win's body was taken as a matter of course to a chapel on the
Adolphus campus where the chaplain conducted a short Presbyterian
service. He was then buried in the chapel's small cemetery with
a small stone whose epitaph strangely foreshadows T.S. Eliot's:

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Ends . Beginnings
Nothing in the
Moment of God
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This was probably composed by Norby Lime or some other of the
disciples, as Fitzpatrick would hardly have endorsed such a dis
play of undiluted piety. His own assessment of himself might have
been more self-effacing, more comical ("appalling drone", he called
himself shortly after coming to teach at Adolphus). In any case,
the epitaph has become so weather-worn that it is now nearly il
legible.

It is, of course, difficult to draw conclusions about Edwin Fitz
patrick when so little is known about his life and when so few
of his published and unpublished texts are now available to us.
He exists as a kind of legend at Adolphus College, where he is
remembered mainly as a genial and imaginative teacher ("Mr. Back
ward", as he was nicknamed at one time), and at Baillol, too,
there have been some out-of-the-way references made to his period
of "conversion" and his peculiar attitudes toward writing. Even
in his own time, his works were rarely studied or understood,
and his principal follower, Norby Lime, was killed in a carriage acci
dent before he could sort out and assemble much of Fitzpatrick's
private papers.

But if we confine ourselves to Fitzpatrick's extant writings, we will see, putting aside the purely literal, manipulative aspects of his work, that he was a writer of considerable poetic sensitivity and power. To compare for a moment his writing style with his contemporaries, we might say his ceaseless, dizzying gift for ambiguities puts him close to Browning, while his muscular exhortations and comedy remind us of the best of Carlyle. Although the totality of his work may strike us as incomplete, we should remember that Heraclitus, Sappho, and Kafka do not seem any less whole to us simply because so much of their work is lost or unfinished. In addition, from time to time, authentic pieces of Fitzpatrickiana are still being unearthed by devoted scholars involved in the global search for traces of this enigmatic man.

To quote this highly specialized genius one final time, here is his translation of one of Omar Khayyam's more intricate passages, stanzas which, although written while he was still in his thirties, anticipate to some degree the moods of self-doubt and self-reproach which haunted him in his last years. They also, of course, exemplify the one recurrent strain of faith which appears in nearly all his extant literary and informal writings—his intuitive longing for peace and pastoral quietude.

Flamingo pale, scenting a latent shark,
Flaming opalescent in gala tents—hark!
Ha! Thou tragedy ingratitude, dwell on—superb old stag—in gloom.
Hath outrage, dying, rated well? On super-bold staging loom!
Moody spigot dew, sag assured. Roar, zero-tide!
Editor Ezra, order us sagas wed to gipsy doom.
Loop, dip, mild natal fay, by a water.
Fret away by a flat and limpid pool...