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A critical study of the seven major Victorian pessimistic poets

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A CRITICAL STUDY
OF THE
SEVEN MAJOR VICTORIAN
PESSIMISTIC POETS

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the
Graduate School

University of Richmond

In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by

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August 1969

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INTRODUCTION

The following thesis is a critical study of seven significant Victorian pessimistic poets. Having as its basis a seminar paper for Dr. Lewis F. Ball in which four of the Victorian pessimists were discussed, the original study was expanded in order to include the remaining three.

In this critical study, the emphasis has been placed mainly upon the themes characteristic of these pessimistic poets, and the poems that I consider to be the best examples of their various attitudes have been incorporated, either partially or in full, into the text of this thesis. Furthermore, though these chapters are not intended as critical biographies, some biographical facts have been included so that the poets' lives can be seen as influencing their thought and work.

The order of the poets follows that used in Buckley and Woods' anthology, Poetry of the Victorian Period (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1965), except that Matthew Arnold precedes Edward FitzGerald.

It will become obvious to the reader that the only real similarity between these seven poets is their collective grouping under the classification of pessimist. The seven poets are: Matthew Arnold, Edward FitzGerald, James Thomson, Algernon Swinburne, Ernest Dowson, A. E. Housman, and Thomas Hardy. Each poet, as I have discovered, is unique in regard to personality and poetic output. The three basic pessimistic themes deal with love, fatalism, and religious doubt, but each poet's treatment of them will be found highly individual. Furthermore, though the pessimistic themes have occurred previously in world literature, I feel that they reached their culmination in the Victorian era. The intensely personal aspect of this poetry creates a mood that serves to balance the verse of an era whose tastes, ideals, were literarily dominated by the major optimistic poets, Tennyson and Browning.

The most endearing aspect of the pessimistic poets (with the possible exception of Algernon Swinburne) was their outright refusal to use their poetry for didactic purpose; it was too personal. The poetry that they wrote came directly from the heart, and they, by and large, cared little for public acceptance.

My sincere thanks are here extended to Dr. Lewis F. Ball and Dr. Garland O. Gunter for their valuable assistance, encouragement, and understanding of the numerous difficulties that faced me while striving for the completion of this thesis. Their insistence on accuracy and truth helped me to differentiate between opinion and scholarship.

CHAPTER I

MATTHEW ARNOLD

Matthew Arnold was a pessimistic poet, and the poem most quoted to underline this classification is "Dover Beach." True enough, this particular poem is an excellent literary touchstone, for it contains several themes basic to Arnold's pessimism. However, when all of Arnold's verse is taken into consideration, other poems stand out equally well in regard to conciseness of diction, range of theme, and tone of pessimism.

Central to all of Arnold's verse, pessimistic or otherwise, is the theme that man must live life as well as he can; he must endure. In his more pessimistic poems, Arnold intimates that life is a long, dreary, defeating process but, if the soul remains intact, the individual can somehow survive. His fatalistic poems are fraught with this idea. For example, in "Sohrab and Rustum," Rustum, torn with sadness over his deed, and cursing the Fate that caused it, knows that he must continue to live as best he can even though, in effect, his will to do so has been destroyed when he slays his son. On the other hand, Arnold's attitude of perseverance is quite

positive in "Rugby Chapel." Here he says that the storm of life can be weathered if we can live as well as his father, Dr. Thomas Arnold. Furthermore, he also believed that if we remain stalwart to our goals and live life well, the soul will be assured an eternal life upon our death.

By and large, however, Arnold was a fatalist and an agnostic. To him, man's lot in life was determined by Fate; it regulated his achievements and determined his outcome. Consistent with this belief is Arnold's agnosticism. Since Fate was such a large factor in men's lives, then how could he wholeheartedly believe in the basic Christian concept of an omnipotent God? If God were indeed the driving force in the universe, how could injustice, strife, and turmoil be allowed to run rampant? Of course, Arnold's agnosticism mellowed as he aged; and, by 1867, some of his poems dealing with religion assume a hopeful, even orthodox, tone. In the main, though, Arnold's agnosticism spans the spectrum of his poetic output.

The poems to follow have been arranged into three thematic groups: fatalism, agnosticism, and commentaries on life. As will become evident to the reader, these classifications are somewhat arbitrarily drawn in that many of the poems to be discussed belong to more than one group. However, each poem has one predominant theme, tone, or mood; and, for

this reason, classification, though arbitrary, seems to me to be justified.

In the final section (commentaries on life) many of the poems are fatalistic or agnostic. Furthermore, some of the poems in this final group ("The Forsaken Merman," "Tristram and Iseult," the "Marguerite" collections, and "Thyrsis") are unique in that their predominant themes are either tragic or melancholy. "The Forsaken Merman" and "Tristram and Iseult" are based on Danish or Arthurian legends, respectively; hence, in Arnold's treatment of them, the implicit sadness is, in a sense, impersonal. However, in the "Marguerite" collections and "Thyrsis," Arnold is writing about the loss of two loved ones and, for this reason, the despair and melancholy are very personal and real.

For the discussion of Arnold's fatalism as it appears in his poetry, I have chosen "Sohrab and Rustum," "Mycerinus," "Empedocles on Etna," and "The Buried Life" as examples.

These poems all deal with Fate as the predominant force in men's lives. Fate is the controlling factor and regardless of what man wishes or attempts, he is essentially only a pawn in Fate's game. For example, in "The Buried Life" Arnold says that each man has in reality two distinct lives. One life is the one which the world sees. Man's strivings,

hopes, and fears are enacted in a scenario whose last act has already been written out by Fate. The second life, the secret one, is the life that man would wish to live if he were able to control his own destiny. However, since he cannot, the "buried" life remains forever concealed, and man journeys through life with the two conflicting personalities. To quote the poem:

Fate, which foresaw
 How frivolous a baby man would be,
 By what distractions he would be possess'd
 How he would pour himself in every strife,
 And well-nigh change his own identity;
 That it might keep from his capricious play
 His genuine self, and force him to obey,
 Even in his own despite, his being's law,
 Bade through the deep recesses of our breast
 The unregarded River of our Life
 Pursue with indiscernible flow its way;
 And that we should not see
 The buried stream, and seem to be
 Eddying about in blind uncertainty,¹
 Though driving on with it eternally.

The pessimism of the poem derives from the fact that man realizes that he has been forced by Fate to adopt a mode of life that he himself knows to be false. The understanding is implicit in the poem that this is the way life actually is and that it must be accepted.

This theme occurs also in "Empedocles on Etna." Empedocles, realizing that life is determined by Fate, is driven

¹Matthew Arnold, The Poems of Matthew Arnold, Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1913), p. 169. (Hereafter cited as Poems.)

to suicide. Vainly he rails against the limits that have been imposed upon him; even though he finally admits that life can be carried on, he has lived too long to have any hope whatsoever, and the drama ends with his suicide.

While he is standing atop Mount Etna he openly confronts the gods and Fate, saying:

The out-spread world to span
A cord the Gods first slung,
And then the soul of man
There, like a mirror, hung,
And bade the winds through space impel the
gusty toy.
Hither and thither spins
The wind-borne mirroring soul,
A thousand glimpses wins,
And never sees a whole;
Looks once, and drives elsewhere, and leaves
its last employ.²

Empedocles feels, strangely enough, that man's hope is his downfall. Man, in his naïveté, does not realize that Fate has such an absolute control over men's lives, and he (vainly) tries to find some happiness. Empedocles says that Fate does not even allow man the right to bliss. Therefore, men are fools who think so. If Fate can control men's lives, it can also control their feelings. To quote the poem once again:

Nor is that thirst to blame!
Man errs not that he deems

²Ibid., pp. 101-102.

His welfare his true aim,
 He errs because he dreams
 The world does but exist that welfare to bestow.

In vain our pent wills fret,
 And would the world subdue.
 Limits we did not set
 Condition all we do;
 Born into life we are, and life must be our mould.³

This particular poem has received justified criticism because Empedocles' utterances do not coincide with his actions. Why should he commit suicide if he, finally, admits that life can be endured? Perhaps, Empedocles can no longer live with the oppressive limitations that have been imposed upon him?

In the next poem ("Mycerinus") the story revolves around the young king Mycerinus and a sentence of doom within six years that has been handed him by the gods. The tragedy in the poem derives from the character of Mycerinus. He, unlike his father, has been a wise, benevolent king. Throughout his reign he has attempted to put the welfare of his people above his own; self-indulgence has not been one of his faults. However, when the gods' sentence is delivered unto him, he is shocked and confused, and the injustice of it causes a complete character reversal in him. Rather than acquiesce meekly, he vows to devote the remainder of his life

³Ibid., p. 104.

to all manner of sensual pleasures. The fallacy of Mycerinus' reasoning is this: by giving himself to profligacy, he is merely exchanging one unhappiness for another. He realizes that life continues on its own course regardless of how well, or badly, man lives; and, both the good and bad among us are all victims of the same Fate. To justify his radical change in character, Mycerinus says:

Oh, wherefore cheat our youth, if thus it be,
Of one short joy, one lust, one pleasant dream?
Stringing vain words of powers we cannot see,
Blind divinations of a will supreme;
Lost labour: when the circumambient gloom
But hides, if Gods, Gods careless of our doom?⁴

Had he been an evil ruler, perhaps he would have understood the gods' pronouncement of his impending doom.

At the end of the poem Arnold employed description to heighten the reader's sympathy for the unfortunate Mycerinus. Using a technique that he was to rely on often, particularly at the end of "Sohrab and Rustum," "The Forsaken Mermaid," and "Dover Beach," Arnold describes the desolation and solitude of the geographic area which parallels the loneliness of the individual. For example, at the end of "Mycerinus" he says:

So six long years he revell'd, night and day;
And when the mirth wax'd loudest, with dull sound

⁴Ibid., p. 38.

Sometimes from the grove's centre echoes came,
 To tell his wondering people of their king;
 In the still night, across the steaming flats,
 Mix'd with the murmur of the moving Nile.⁵

The second narrative poem dealing with the theme of Fate is "Sohrab and Rostum." The plot of the poem centers on the tragic case of ignorance and circumstance in which Rostum unknowingly engages Sohrab, his son, in mortal combat. At the time of battle, neither of the two men is aware of the other's true identity; but, following the encounter, as Rostum kneels by his dying son, Sohrab's true identity is revealed. Ironically, the younger man is not bitter over his defeat or imminent death. Before battle he speaks, saying that the outcome of the contest has been decided by Fate before it has been fought. To quote Sohrab:

But yet Success sways with the breath of Heaven.
 And though thou thinkest that thou knowest sure
 Thy victory, yet thou canst not surely know.
 For we are all, like swimmers in the sea,
 Pois'd on the top of a huge wave of Fate,
 Which hangs uncertain to which side to fall.
 And whether it will heave us up to land,
 Or whether it will roll us out to sea,
 Back out to sea, to the deep waves of death,
 We know not, and no search will make us know:
 Only the event will teach us in its hour.⁶

With his last dying words Sohrab admits to his father that he intuitively knew Rostum's true identity "but Fate

⁵ Ibid., p. 40.

⁶ Ibid., p. 207.

trod those promptings down . . . and hurl'd me on my father's spear."⁷ As the poem fades out, Arnold describes Sohrab lying, bleeding beside the kneeling Rustum; the two men are left on a lonely plain, the desolation of it broken only by the twinkling campfires of the two opposing armies.

As evidenced by his poetry Matthew Arnold was a religious agnostic. However, as opposed to the religious pessimism of Housman, Thomson, or Swinburne, the basis of Arnold's agnosticism is not as definitely attributable to specific causes as is that of the others. His father, Dr. Thomas Arnold, was a religious man, but he was also something of a pragmatist. As Arnold grew up, the Tractarian movement was sweeping England, preaching a gospel of reawakened faith. The Tractarians' ideals centered on a renewal of faith in church dogma, history, and martyrs. Dr. Arnold was opposed to the movement from its inception, for he felt that the Tractarians placed an undue emphasis on esoteric ideals rather than the practical application of Christian principles directed toward the working class. Dr. Arnold believed that the church, in order to be truly representative of its basic teachings, should concern itself with social reform.

⁷Ibid., p. 215.

Arnold was well aware of his father's liberalism; but, as evidenced by his poetry, he was not in sympathy with either his father's or the Tractarians' polemics. He felt that man's salvation rested solely upon the individual. Instead of relying on church movements or social reform, Arnold steadfastly maintained that each man must try to make the best of his predicament in life. However, he also believed that man might achieve a modicum of happiness but the chances of his doing so were slim at best. Basic to Arnold's agnosticism--indeed, basic to his poetry in general--is the idea of enduring. Although church or social reform offered possible solutions to man's questioning spirit, man had to realize that these were not, nor could they be, ultimate answers. Arnold felt that the only hope for the individual in an age of industrial boom, religious doubt, and seemingly insoluble social ills lay in a spiritual self-reliance. Furthermore, Arnold considered it the primary task of each individual to make peace with himself rather than with God. However, as will be pointed out in some of Arnold's poetry, he also believed that the man who had made peace with himself, persevered, and lived life as well as he could was destined for salvation.

In the agnostic poems to follow the themes and tones vary. "Self-Deception" is perhaps the most bitter of this

group; "In Utrumque Paratus" is the most patently agnostic, but yet the least bitter because of its detachment. In all of the agnostic poems, Arnold repeatedly expresses the thought that man, earth, and God are separate entities; each is governed by its own driving force, and the secret of enduring, to Arnold, resided in the realization of this fact. For example, in the poem "Religious Isolation," Arnold says:

What though the holy secret which moulds thee
Moulds not the solid Earth? though never Winds
Have whisper'd it to the complaining Sea,
Nature's great law, and law of all men's minds?
To its own impulse every creature stirs:
Live by thy light, and Earth will live by hers.⁸

Continuing the theme of the separateness of earth, man, and God is "In Utrumque Paratus." Here Arnold was debating with himself the nature of the creation of the earth. At the onset of the poem, he reasons that, conceivably, the earth was created by God. He states quite logically that the earth could have been thought of and created by God, a divine continuum of an idea set into motion. However, as the poem proceeds, Arnold presents the other side of his reasoning. To quote from the poem:

But, if the wild unfather'd mass no birth
In divine seats hath known:
In the blank, echoing solitude, if Earth,
Rocking her obscure body to and fro,

⁸Ibid., p. 62.

Ceases not from all time to heave and groan,
 Unfruitful oft, and, at her happiest throe,
 Forms, what she forms, alone.⁹

Therefore, Arnold was prepared for either concept; if the earth was indeed created by God, he could accept it; yet, if the earth simply sprang from the cosmos without divine intervention of any sort, he could just as readily accept that also.

Arnold's religious agnosticism, as it appears in his poems, is remarkable for its detachment. Unlike the poetry of Swinburne or Thomson, personal invective against God rarely is found in Arnold. However, there are two notable exceptions: "Self-Deception" and "Self-Dependence." As their titles indicate, both of these poems are Arnold's personal feelings laid bare. In the most bitter of these two poems, "Self-Deception," Arnold accuses God of granting man wishes and desires that he cannot fully use or understand. Therefore, Arnold blames God for making man's task of endurance on earth unnecessarily difficult. For example, he says:

For, alas! he left us each retaining
 Shreds of gifts which he refus'd in full.
 Still these waste us with their hopeless straining--
 Still the attempt to use them proves them null.

And on earth we wander, groping, reeling;
 Powers stir in us, stir and disappear.

⁹Ibid., p. 85.

Ah, and he, who placed our master-feeling,
Fail'd to place our master-feeling clear.¹⁰

In "Self-Dependence," Arnold accuses God again of implanting in the soul of man yet another pitfall. Continuing the idea as it first appeared in "Empedocles on Etna," Arnold says that men have always lived harboring the mistaken impression that a certain amount of bliss is due them in life. Arnold feels that this expectation of happiness causes men to lose sight of their basic goal of enduring. Furthermore, the life that has been lived well will, as a matter of course, be one containing a certain amount of bliss. Arnold is saying that when man simply survives and expects bliss, he will never attain it; in contrast, the man who lives life as best he can will be rewarded with a degree of contentment which, in the final analysis, is about all that anyone can justifiably expect from life. In "Self-Dependence" Arnold pictures the speaker as addressing the stars, asking them to reveal the secret of happiness. The answer comes back resoundingly. What began as a bitter poem ends on a note of hope:

From the intense, clear, star-sown vault of heaven,
Over the lit sea's unquiet way,
In the rustling night-air came the answer--
'Wouldst thou be as these are? Live as they.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 138.

'Unaffrighted by the silence round them,
 Undistracted by the sights they see,
 These demand not that the things without them
 Yield them love, amusement, sympathy.

'Bounded by themselves, and unobservant
 In what state God's other works may be,
 In their tasks all their powers pouring,
 These attain the mighty life you see.'

O air-born Voice! long since, severely clear,
 A cry like thine in my own heart I hear.
 'Resolve to be thyself: and know, that he
 Who finds himself, loses his misery.'¹¹

Therefore, in order for man to survive, he must accept life within its imposed limitations. If he can accommodate these limitations within his own soul and find his own way in life, he can lose his misery. At this point in Arnold's career, he was still an agnostic. His formula of perseverance centered on a faith in self rather than a faith in God, but his attitude later relaxed to the point where his agnosticism gradually gave way to a more benevolent, if not orthodox, view of life.

As stated in the introduction, the third, major body of Arnold's pessimistic verse deals with poems commenting on life from both the positive and negative sides. Some of these poems use sadness as their exclusive theme, and they will be discussed first in order for them to serve as a

¹¹Ibid., pp. 165-166.

transition into Arnold's other commentaries on life.

The poems in which anguish, heartbreak, or sadness are the primary distinguishing characteristics are "The Forsaken Merman," "Tristram and Iseult," the "Marguerite" collections and "Thyrsis." Since these poems are not central to Arnold's pessimism, they will not be discussed at length; but, since they are an important part of his poetry generally, a word or two must be said about them.

"The Forsaken Merman" tells the story of a sea-creature who has fallen in love with a mortal. The woman, fascinated by the merman when first she sees him, agrees to accompany him into the sea. While she is in the sea, she is a devoted wife to him and bears his children; however, the tolling of church bells on shore summons her away from the merman and their children, never to return. The merman follows her. Finding her seated in church, he pleads with her to return with him; she is deaf to his entreaties and will not return. Although the woman has given the merman children and a love he has never known, she cruelly rejects him. For this reason, the merman is disconsolate. As he and the children return to their home in the sea, he says:

But, children, at midnight,
When soft the winds blow;
When clear falls the moonlight;
When spring-tides are low:

We will gaze, from the sand-hills,
 At the white, sleeping town;
 At the church on the hill-side--
 And then come back down.
 Singing, 'There dwells a lov'd one,
 But cruel is she.
 She left lonely forever
 The kings of the sea.'¹²

The second poem, also based on legend, is "Tristram and Iseult." In this particular poem, the situation in which the lovers find themselves is also the basis for melancholy. Arnold pictures Tristram lying on his deathbed calling for his true love, Iseult of Ireland, wife of his uncle, King Marc of Cornwall. Prior to his marriage to Iseult of Brittany, Tristram had escorted Iseult of Ireland to Cornwall to her marriage to King Marc. In transit, Tristram and Iseult mistakenly drank a love potion intended for King Marc which makes them permanent lovers. When King Marc learns of this tragic occurrence, he banishes Tristram from the kingdom. Tristram returns home and marries Iseult of Brittany. Tristram's wife loves him, but she also knows where his true feelings lie. The pathos of the poem is based on the fact that each lover is in an untenable position from which there can be no resolve. King Marc loves Iseult, but he knows that she prefers Tristram; Tristram also loves her,

¹²Ibid., p. 83.

but her marriage thwarts him. Indeed, the dilemma of the two lovers is tragic, and the love potion is to blame. Pitiable as their situation is, however, the real sadness in the poem evolves around the two people who are most injured: Iseult of Brittany and King Marc. The poem ends in the death of Tristram and the two Iseults.

The next poems deal with Arnold's loss of two loved ones. In the so-called "Marguerite" poems, Arnold describes his heartbreak over a girl he had known in Switzerland. The poems to her are found in two groups titled Switzerland and Faded Leaves, and all of them are fraught with love melancholy. For whatever the reasons, Arnold's affair with Marguerite could not continue; and, saddened over the termination of it, he wrote the poems to relieve his heart of the burden it carried.

The second loss was that of his friend and fellow poet, Arthur Hugh Clough. Arnold and Clough had attended Oxford together and remained friends after their college days. His untimely death was a profound loss to Arnold.

In "Thyrsis," the monody commemorating Clough's death, Arnold returns to the environs of Oxford, describing himself as a lonely shepherd walking the familiar hills without his friend. The poem, similar to Milton's "Lycidas," uses the stock, pastoral convention; but, unlike this elegy, "Thyrsis"

does not end on a hopeful strain. Rather, Arnold says simply (and beautifully):

Yes, thou art gone! and round me too the night
 In ever-nearing circle weaves her shade.
 I see her veil draw soft across the day,
 I feel her slowly chilling breath invade
 The cheek grown thin, the brown hair sprent
 with grey;
 I feel her finger light
 Laid pausefully upon life's headlong train;
 The foot less prompt to meet the morning dew,
 The heart less bounding at emotion new,
 And hope, once crush'd, less quick to spring
 again.¹³

Arnold infuses this pastoral elegy with a theme from another of his poems. In "Thyrsis" he represents both himself and Clough as being inspired by the gentle, wandering spirit of the scholar gipsy. As Arnold intimates in both poems, the scholar gipsy is to them an ideal of temperance of character and a symbol of the man who has found inward peace. Furthermore, although Arnold is grieved over the loss of his friend, he nevertheless knows that he can somehow keep going as long as he can return from time to time to the Cumnor hills and recall their friendship. When he sees the Fyfield elm (their symbol for the scholar gipsy) he fondly remembers the past, and his spirit seems sufficiently restored to face the future.

¹³Ibid., p. 390.

Arnold's later contributions to his poetry mark a turning point in his pessimistic statements. Incongruously, even though his most noted pessimistic poem ("Dover Beach") appeared in one of his latest editions, a definite, though admittedly small, number of his poems are hopeful in tone. Throughout his poetry the pessimism and agnosticism can be seen gradually subsiding until, by 1867, the content of some of his poems is almost orthodox.

All of the poems to follow have been classified as "commentaries on life." In my discussion the most pessimistic ones will appear first in order to show the contrast between them and the more hopeful poems.

In "Resignation," "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse," "Lines Written by a Death-Bed," "A Summer Night," "To Fausta," "Human Life," and "Dover Beach," Arnold contemplates man's feelings and dreams against the panorama of the world in which he lives. In "Resignation," a poem addressed to his sister (whom he refers to as "Fausta"), Arnold says that man's struggles are insignificant. He merely inhabits the world for a short time, is gone, and then forgotten. Furthermore, Arnold also says that man, in his headlong rush to better himself, has even lost his soul, his compassion. The picture that Arnold paints is bleak indeed, for, to him, man has lost

sight of the higher goals in life through his mere living through it.

In contrast to "Resignation" is "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse." Here Arnold ruminates over the Carthusian monks, their home, and their outlook on life. The Carthusians are completely unique in their attitude. Rather than entering into the maelstrom of life, they have chosen to seclude themselves in a monastery. Arnold finds fault with this theory also. How can man, he asks, endure life honestly if he has shut himself off from it? Arnold freely admits that the Carthusians are dedicated, sincere men, but he also concludes that their high ideals are somewhat questionable, for they remain forever untested within the walls of the monastery.

Arnold, in all of his commentaries on life, in some way reiterates the theme that man consistently expects too much from life, and, for this reason, he is consistently disappointed. As disappointments build in the soul of man, he gradually comes to realize that life is ruthless and arbitrary. Therefore, rather than follow his dreams, inclinations, or hopes, man chooses a life of expedience. This aspect of the majority of men's lives, their willingness to be nothing more than time-servers, is basic to Arnold's pessimism. For example, as he says in "A Summer Night":

And the calm moonlight seems to say--
Hast thou then still the old unquiet breast
That neither deadens into rest
Nor ever feels the fiery glow
That whirls the spirit from itself away,
But fluctuates to and fro
Never by passion quite possess'd
And never quite benumb'd by the world's sway?--
 And I, I know not if to pray
 Still to be what I am, or yield, and be
 Like all the other men I see.

For most men in a brazen prison live,
 Where in the sun's hot eye,
 With heads bent o'er their toil, they languidly
 Their lives to some unmeaning taskwork give,¹⁴
 Dreaming of naught beyond their prison wall.

When Arnold writes about contemporary life, his pessimism becomes more and more apparent. "To Fausta" echoes the same theme as "A Summer Night," the only difference being that the latter poem is more depressing. In "Stanzas in Memory of the Author of 'Obermann,'" Arnold addresses himself to Senancour, begging his predecessor to help him find a way of endurance. However, Arnold says that Senancour offers no solution:

And then we turn, thou sadder Sage!
 To thee: we feel thy spell.
 The hopeless tangle of our age--
 Thou too hast scann'd it well.

Yes, as the Son of Thetis said,
 One hears thee saying now--
Greater by far than thou are dead:
Strive not: die also thou.--

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 167.

The glow, he cries, the thrill of life--
Where, where do these abound?--
 Not in the world, not in the strife
 Of men, shall they be found.¹⁵

In this poetic progression of gloom, where every alternative seems to be unsatisfactory, "Dover Beach" is Arnold's most concise statement of pessimism. Here, Arnold simply rejects the concepts of hope and faith. As he stands on the Dover cliffs, he visualizes the sea as the symbol of life: dreary, continuous, and this sea of life further symbolizes, with each break of wave, the eternal sadness of the world. Arnold says that the sadness is brought in on the flood of the tide and that faith recedes with the tide's ebb.

This particular poem achieves its utterly despairing tone through the fusion of themes. Agnosticism and fatalism vie with the ever-present sadness to depict an attitude of complete defeatism. To conclude the poem, Arnold pictures the speaker as turning to his loved one, imploring her to remain faithful to him in order that he might have something in which to place his faith. To quote from the poem:

Ah, love, let us be true
 To one another! for the world, which seems
 To lie before us like a land of dreams,
 So various, so beautiful, so new,

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 176-177.

Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
 Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
 And we are here as on a darkling plain
 Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
 Where ignorant armies clash by night.¹⁶

With the world in chaos, faith dead, and sadness universal, the only way that the speaker of the poem can survive is to place all of his spent feelings and dashed dreams with a loved one. Perhaps with her he can find some solace.

Another poem of complete despair is "Growing Old." Arnold catalogues all of the ills that plague men in old age: the loss of grace, form, eyesight, strength. However, the real horror of old age is not physical. To Arnold it is:

Yes, this, and more! but not,
 Ah, 'tis not what in youth we dream'd 'twould be
 'Tis not to have our life
 Mellow'd and soften'd as with the sunset glow,
 A golden day's decline!

It is to suffer this,
 And feel but half, and feebly, what we feel.
 Deep in our hidden heart
 Festers the dull remembrance of a change,
 But no emotion--none.¹⁷

Yet another poem commenting negatively on life is "Youth's Agitations." Arnold, in this earlier poem (1852), states that the fiery emotion of youth is absent in old age; nevertheless, there is one emotion common to all ages of men:

¹⁶Ibid., p. 402.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 408-409.

discontent. Unlike Robert Browning's conception of old age ("Grow old along with me! The best is yet to be" from "Rabbi Ben Ezra"), Arnold saw in the closing years a gradual decline of a person's faculties rather than a gradual increase of them.

Arnold, to a certain extent, represents an enigma among pessimistic poets, for his poetry reflects a lessening of his pessimism in a few poems written toward the latter part of his career.

This apparent (though admittedly partial) change of attitude can be, I feel, explained in the light of Arnold's familiar theory of endurance. In the vast majority of his poems having endurance as a theme, he represents life from its most depressing side. For example, the speaker in "Dover Beach" has absolutely no faith in the world; he feels that the earth is at best chaotic, and that no benevolence or truth exists.

However, in Arnold's more hopeful poems, he comes to the realization that, even though the general lot of men do indeed live in a "brazen prison" still, there are a rare few having lofty ideals (tempered with the practical application of them) who manage to live and live well.

Furthermore, though Arnold never says that the task of enduring is an easy one, he does say that the key to happiness

is a thorough understanding of oneself. Therefore he saw happiness in life as based on a duality of thought and action. If man could rise above the pettiness of the world, his happiness in life would necessarily have to follow.

"The Scholar Gypsy" is a case in point. Here, Arnold retells Glanvil's old tale of a young Oxford student, dismayed by the world as he saw it, who resigned to live the life he chose. Shunning all normal society, the scholar elects to live with the gypsies, who are not affected by the demands of society because they themselves live completely apart from them. With clear head and firm resolve, the scholar gypsy pursues his solitary way. Arnold admires the young lad's strength of character and describes him thus:

For early didst thou leave the world, with powers
 Fresh, undiverted to the world without,
 Firm to their mark, not spent on other things;
 Free from the sick fatigue, the languid doubt,
 Which much to have tried, in much been baffled,
 brings.

O Life unlike to ours!
 Who fluctuate idly without term or scope,
 Of whom each strives, nor knows for what he strives,
 And each half lives a hundred different lives;
 Who wait like thee, but not, like thee, in hope. ¹⁸

Interestingly, Arnold's optimism is apparent in those poems dealing with persons he admired. In the sonnet "To A Friend," Arnold praises Homer, saying that he is the "clearest-

¹⁸ Poems, pp. 234-235.

soul'd of men."¹⁹ Furthermore, Homer was a great man because he "saw life steadily, and saw it whole."²⁰ Homer's resolve, courage, and self-wisdom enabled him to weather the storm of life.

Even in "Obermann Once More," Arnold, in the very last line, reveals that life is not as bleak as he or Senancour had heretofore represented it. Such also is the case in "Empedocles on Etna" and "Self-Dependence." Both poems are pessimistic, but the gloom of the two poems is relieved in both their endings. This same idea is repeated in four sonnets and one longer poem contained in the 1867 edition of Arnold's poetry. In "Anti-Desperation" (also known and titled as "The Better Part"), "Immortality," "Worldly Place," "The Divinity," and "Palladium," respectively, Arnold repeatedly expresses the theme of finding oneself and preparing for an eternal life while we still live on earth.

Dr. Thomas Arnold was the man most admired by Arnold; therefore, his poem to his father ("Rugby Chapel") is the most optimistic of all of his poems. Although Dr. Arnold and his son were incompatible in regard to politics and religion, Arnold realized that these differences were insignificant in

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 40.

²⁰ Ibid.

light of Dr. Arnold's strength of character and absolute confidence in the ultimate victory of truth. Furthermore, Arnold's agnosticism had gradually relaxed to the point where he could categorically state in the poem that such a man as his father was assured of an eternal life. As Arnold says of his father:

And through thee I believe
 In the noble and great who are gone;
 Pure souls honour'd and blest
 By former ages, who else--
 Such, so soulless, so poor,
 Is the race of men whom I see--
 Seem'd but a dream of the heart,
 Seem'd but a cry of desire.
 Yes! I believe that there lived
 Others like thee in the past,
 Not like the men of the crowd
 Who all round me to-day
 Bluster or cringe, and make life
 Hideous, and arid, and vile;
 But souls temper'd with fire,
 Fervent, heroic, and good,
 Helpers and friends of mankind.²¹

Therefore, Arnold came to the realization that man had an opportunity in life to achieve happiness. Although he considered the general lot of mankind to be pathetic and defeating, men such as his father gave the lie to an attitude of complete pessimism. Arnold could see, as could other pessimistic poets, life at its absolute worst; however, he could also see hope in a life of unflagging courage. Of

²¹Ibid., pp. 425-426.

course, Arnold could see the pessimistic side of life; but, of equal importance, he could sometimes see the other side, too.

CHAPTER II

EDWARD FITZGERALD

Edward FitzGerald was born in 1809 in the family home of "The White House" near Ipswich, England. His father, John Purcell, married Miss Mary Frances FitzGerald and Edward adopted his mother's name.

He received his early education at the Bury St. Edmonds grammar school and, following his graduation, he entered Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1826. While at college, he fostered friendships with men who were later to become outstanding literary figures themselves, and "amongst them were Alfred Tennyson, James Spedding, John Mitchell Kemble, and William Makepeace Thackeray."¹ Furthermore, FitzGerald became a member of the "Apostles," the organization of intelligent, high-thinking students.

Following graduation from Cambridge, FitzGerald settled down into a life pattern that he was to maintain until his death. His family had a great deal of money (especially his

¹Michael Kerney, "Edward FitzGerald" in The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám (New York: Fine Editions Press, 1957), p. 21.

mother, who is generally reputed to have been the wealthiest commoner in England at this time), and he lived in various family residences or took lodgings wherever he happened to be. "At twenty-one he adopted his lifelong principle of 'plain living and high thinking' and in 1833 he adopted a diet in which bread and fruit were the staple foods; and his life took on the 'even gray paper character' that it would always retain. Reacting, perhaps, against the luxurious life of his parents, resenting 'the espalier of London dinner-table company' he determined to fling out his branches in his own way."²

Another aspect of FitzGerald's life should also be mentioned. While he was at Cambridge and a member of the "Apostles" he began to have doubts concerning religion. In a letter to Thackeray in 1831, FitzGerald wrote:

Religious people are very angry with one for doubting: and say, "You come to the question determined to doubt, not to be convinced." Certainly we do: having seen how many follow and have followed false religions, and having our reason utterly against many of the principal points of the Bible, we require the most perfect evidence of facts, before we can believe. If you can prove to me that one miracle took place, I will believe that he is a just God

² Joanna Richardson, Edward FitzGerald (London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1960), pp. 8-9.

who damned us all because a woman eat (sic) an apple; and you can't expect greater complaisance than that, to be sure.³

Even though FitzGerald was a member of the Church of England and attended services regularly, his doubts about the validity of the miracles and life after death were always to remain with him. There can be little doubt that the eleventh century poetry of Omar Khayyām, which contained many of the same theological questions, appealed to FitzGerald because his thoughts and Khayyām's coincided.

In addition to his religious doubts, FitzGerald also questioned the practicality and relative worth of the British college system. In one of his earliest works (Euphranor), he put these doubts into print. The work was a Platonic dialogue in which FitzGerald assumed the persona of a physician practising at Cambridge. The dialogue is carried on between Euphranor, a bookish graduate student; Lexilogus, a hard-reading honors candidate; Lycion, an intelligent though lazy undergraduate; and Phidippus, an intelligent man given to sports.⁴ "The author charged the schools, first, with neglecting to develop the youth of England physically, and,

³ Alfred M. Terhune, The Life of Edward FitzGerald (New Haven: The Yale University Press, 1947), p. 57.

⁴ Ibid., p. 155.

second, with failure to provide practical training."⁵

FitzGerald's reputation rested entirely on his translation of Omar Khayyám, but he also edited and translated other writers in English and Spanish and his technique of editing was of the utmost importance when viewed in light of his translation of Omar Khayyám. In July of 1853 FitzGerald's first important translation (Six Dramas of Calderon. Freely Translated by Edward FitzGerald) appeared. This was the only one of FitzGerald's early works to bear his name. He was doubtful of his literary capabilities and the only reason for affixing his name on the title page was that another translation of Calderon's dramas had been published the same year by Denis Florence M'Carthy.⁶

FitzGerald fully appreciated the qualities of his dramatist. He chose, therefore, six of the less famous plays, which seemed to him suited to the English taste, and, "while faithfully trying to retain what was fine and efficient; sunk, reduced, altered, and replaced, much that seemed not; simplified some perplexities, and curtailed or omitted scenes that seemed to mar the breadth of general effect, supplying such omissions by some lines of after narrative." In his preface he defended the freedom of his translation by stating that he did not believe that an exact translation of Calderon could be successful, "retaining so much that whether real or dramatic Spanish passion, is still bombast to English ears conceits that were a fashion of the day;

⁵ Ibid., p. 154.

⁶ Ibid., p. 164.

or idioms that, true and intelligible to one nation, check the current of sympathy in others to which they are unfamiliar; violations of the probable, nay possible, that shock even healthy romantic license; repetitions of thoughts and images . . . so much, in short, that is not Calderon's own better self, but concession to private haste and public taste.⁷

Therefore FitzGerald had a technique of translation. He first read a work, and then he translated it into an idiom that would appeal to the greatest number of people. Furthermore, he preferred to translate the thoughts of any given author rather than to labor over an exact, literal translation. He also edited the poetical works of his long-time friend Bernard Barton, and in a letter to his friend William Donne, he confessed that he had trimmed a vast amount of Barton's poetry. "I have . . . selected what will fill about 200 pages of print . . . really all the best part of nine volumes! Some of the poems I take entire--some half--some only a few stanzas and these dovetailed together--with a change of a word or even of a line here and there, to give them fluency I am sure I have distilled many pretty little poems out of long dull ones which the world has discarded. I do not pretend to be a poet: but I have faculty enough to mend some of B. B.'s dropped stitches, though I

⁷ Ibid., pp. 165-166.

really could not make any whole poem so good as many of his. As a matter of Art, I have no doubt whatsoever I am right:

. . . .⁸

FitzGerald continued with his literary career, reading and editing various authors in different languages. It was his association with Barton, however, that led to his acquaintance with his daughter, Lucy Barton. FitzGerald had lived the life of a wealthy bachelor; yet he felt a deep regard for Barton and he felt it was a matter of duty, more than anything else, to edit Barton's work and to help Lucy in any way that he could after Barton died.

Lucy had been raised as a pious and devout Quaker, but following her father's death in 1849, she underwent a rather abrupt change and became a socialite. FitzGerald was her complete opposite. He had been raised amidst wealth and splendour, but, at an early age, he had chosen to reject the social aspects of his environment and he preferred to live a quiet, almost bohemian existence. Nevertheless, he and Lucy were married in November of 1856 when they were both forty-seven, and the marriage was never a success. They separated for the first time five weeks after they were married (indeed, while they were still on their honeymoon), and

⁸Ibid., pp. 153-154.

in August of the following year they separated permanently. Lucy had wanted to entertain her friends and circulate among them. Furthermore, she thought that she had found someone with enough money to enable her to do so. FitzGerald, on the other hand, refused to be changed in any way by Lucy, and he wished only to dress and act as he pleased, and entertain only those few people who had been his lifelong friends.

Before his marriage, he had been working on the translation of Omar Khayyám. After his final separation from Lucy he wrote to his friend Edward Cowells, saying that "Omar breathes a sort of consolation to me!"⁹ It was not surprising that FitzGerald should empathize with Khayyám. Because of his marriage problem, FitzGerald had begun to drink a little more than he was normally accustomed to do. His doubts grew concerning the authenticity of the Bible and the validity of the belief in life after death. Lucy had been reared as a staunch Quaker and she considered the theological questionings of her husband absurd. Khayyám, in his poetry, continually questioned the doctrine of life after death. He felt that our only life was the one that we lived on earth and that we should live it to the fullest. His thoughts so

⁹Ibid., p. 205.

paralleled FitzGerald's that it was natural that he (FitzGerald) should have devoted so much effort in regard to the translation and editing of Khayyám's Rubáiyát.

Influenced largely by Edward B. Cowells, and first introduced to Persian literature by him, FitzGerald began to edit the works of the eleventh century astronomer, philosopher, and mathematician. Using three sources for his translation (the Ousley manuscript at the Bodelian Library, Nicolas' translation, and the Calcutta Manuscript of the Bengal Society) FitzGerald had as many as 516 stanzas upon which he could base his translation.¹⁰

The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám was first published in 1859, and, consistent with his normal practice, he did not have his name printed on the title page as the translator. The small volume was printed and then forgotten until one day a friend of Dante Gabriel Rossetti found the volume and showed it to him. Rossetti and his circle of literary friends, the Pre-Raphaelites, were greatly impressed by FitzGerald's translation, and it was due largely to their praise of the work that it became known at all. FitzGerald did nothing to advertise the fact that the work was his; yet

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 223-224.

FitzGerald "lived to see the Rubáiyát recognized as a masterpiece."¹¹ Indeed, the translation went through four printings during FitzGerald's lifetime (1859, 1868, 1872, and 1879).

FitzGerald found that his poem had become far more popular than he had ever hoped or expected that it would. The various editions were brought out in order to accommodate the public demand and to allow for the changes and modifications that FitzGerald made to the original edition. For example, the edition of 1859 contained only 75 quatrains, but the next edition (1868) contained 110; the third edition was composed of 101 stanzas; and the fourth and fifth editions had the same number of quatrains as the third.

In regard to verse form, FitzGerald altered the original composition. The quatrains of his translation were formed from the rubai, or two-lined stanzas of the original. "In every variety of Persian poetry, the unit is the bayt, a line which consists of six or eight feet. Each bayt in a rubai is divided into two symmetrical halves called misra. Usually the first, second, and fourth misra, rhyme, resulting in the aaba pattern used in English translations."¹² In FitzGerald's translation, the quatrains use the rhyme scheme of aaba (usually),

¹¹Ibid., p. 213.

¹²Ibid., p. 220.

but he shortened the original lines and compressed the thoughts so that the poem would be more appealing to a nineteenth century audience.

The greatest change that FitzGerald made in his translation was the interpolation of the stanzas from the original. His poem was markedly shorter than any of the translations or manuscripts from which he worked. Of far greater importance however was his arrangement of the stanzas, so that what was once a random collection of Omar's thoughts was now, due to FitzGerald's arrangement, a unified poem containing a logical thought-progression.

In the translation, the poem began with the tent maker in a sober and contemplative mood. As the day progressed he became loud, blasphemous and savage in his thoughts, and by nightfall he had sobered into a quiet melancholy.¹³ Omar could not find an answer to life's riddle and he therefore resorted to wine and women. He said:

Come, fill the Cup, and in the Fire of Spring
Your Winter-garment of Repentance fling:
The Bird of Time has but a little way
To flutter--and the Bird is on the Wing. (VII)¹⁴

¹³ Ibid., p. 227.

¹⁴ Edward FitzGerald, The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám (New York: Fine Editions Press, 1957), p. 88. Note: This and all other quotes are from this variorum edition, using the third edition of The Rubáiyát--unless otherwise noted.

Again, in a famous and tender passage expressing the carpe diem theme, he said:

A Book of Verses underneath the Bough,
 A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread--and Thou
 Beside me singing in the Wilderness--
 Oh, Wilderness were Paradise enow! (XII)

Most of Omar's ravings in the poem were concerned with the question of man and his relation to the universe. Two examples follow:

We are no other than a moving row
 Of Magic Shadow-shapes that come and go
 Round with the Sun-illumin'd Lantern held
 In Midnight by the Master of the Show; (LXVIII)

Impotent Pieces of the Game He plays
 Upon this Chequer-board of Nights and Days;
 Hither and thither moves, and checks, and
 slays,
 And one by one back in the Closet lays. (LXIX)

The poem ended on a note of resignation. The poet expressed the thought throughout the poem that man was the victim of the universe. Our fate was decided for us by an omnipotent being, and our only recourse was to live the best we could.

Yon rising Moon that looks for us again--
 How oft hereafter will she wax and wane;
 How oft hereafter rising look for us
 Through this same Garden--and look for one in vain! (C)

And when like her, oh Saki, you shall pass
 Among the Guests Star-scatter'd on the Grass,
 And in your blissful errand reach the spot
 Where I made One--turn down an empty Glass! (CI)

One final word should be said about the text itself. FitzGerald's translation of Omar Khayyám was edited in the same manner as his translation of Calderon and his edition of Barton's poems. Aside from the fact that FitzGerald re-arranged the stanzas in the original in order to create the unity in his poem, he also often created a stanza from several in the original. FitzGerald's gift of translating for sense and lyricism rather than for strict literalness was shown by Terhune by his comparison:

What, without asking, hither hurried Whence?
 And, without asking, Whither hurried hence!
 Oh, many a Cup of this Forbidden Wine
 Must drown the memory of that insolence.

Heron-Allen, who translated Omar literally, traced this stanza of FitzGerald's translation to two stanzas in the original. Heron-Allen's translation follows, and FitzGerald's fairly shines by comparison.

Seeing that my coming was not in my power at the Day
 of Creation,
 And that my undesired departure hence is a purpose
 fixed (for me),
 Get up and gird well thy loins, O nimble cup bearer,
 For I will wash down the misery of the world in wine.

Had I charge of the matter I would not have come
 And, likewise, could I control my going,
 how should I have gone?
 There could have been nothing better than that,
 in this world,
 I had neither come, nor gone, nor lived.¹⁵

¹⁵ Terhune, p. 225.

Thus, FitzGerald created a poem that was quite popular and widely read. Scholars of Persian literature have taken him to task for the liberties that he assumed with the original text, but this was a minor consideration when FitzGerald's Rubáiyát was viewed as a piece of English literature. Indeed, The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám would have remained a forgotten poem in manuscript had it not been for FitzGerald's interest and subsequent edition of it. The lyricism of FitzGerald's translation was apparent when compared with an exact reproduction of the original, and he introduced the poetry of Persia to the reading public.

CHAPTER III

JAMES THOMSON

James Thomson was born in Port Glasgow, Scotland, on November 23, 1834. His father was a sea captain who was frequently away from home, and his mother was a pensive, quiet, and deeply religious person. In 1840 Thomson's father became paralyzed, and since he was the family's only means of support, they found themselves almost destitute. The family moved to East London, and Thomson lived with them up until his mother's death in 1843. That same year Thomson entered the Royal Caledonian Asylum in London, a school for orphans and other equally unfortunate children, and here he was very happy, making friends and acquiring the first clarinetist's chair in the school orchestra.

In 1850 Thomson enrolled in the "Model School" of the Royal Military Asylum in Chelsea to train for a job as an army schoolmaster. Here, too, he was happy and well liked.

Between 1851 and 1853 Thomson was stationed at Ballincollig, Ireland, where he held the position of assistant schoolmaster to Mr. Joseph Barnes. At Ballincollig, Thomson

made his most permanent friendships. Mr. Barnes and his wife became his close friends, and it was to them that Thomson wrote six sonnets in 1862. Thomson also met and became friends with one Charles Bradlaugh, a radical in politics and thought, who later was to edit the magazines to which Thomson contributed the vast majority of his literary works. The most profound influence on Thomson was Matilda Weller, a girl of fourteen whom he met and with whom he fell passionately in love. Unfortunately, she died in 1853. Her death was such a blow to the young man that his whole life was colored by the event. Every major poem that he wrote later was to contain some allusion to her. In the final sonnet of the series that he wrote to the Barnes family, he said:

Indeed you set me in a happy place,
 Dear for itself and dearer for you,
 And dearest still for one life-crowning grace--
 Dearest, though infinitely saddest too:
 For there my Good Angel took my hand,
 And filled my soul with glory of her eyes,
 And led me through the love-lit Faerie Land
 Which joins our common world to Paradise.
 How soon, how soon, God called her from my side,
 Back to her own celestial sphere of day!
 And ever since she ceased to be my Guide,
 I reel and stumble on life's solemn way;
 Ah, ever since her eyes withdrew their light,
 I wander lost in blackest stormy night.¹

¹James Thomson, The Poetical Works of James Thomson (London: Reeves and Turner, 1895), I, p. xx.

Thomson remained with the army and began writing highly autobiographical poems that were concerned with his lost love and his utter despair over the death of Matilda. In 1854 "his only poem . . . was a lament for Matilda and was entitled 'Marriage.' In the following year he wrote the 'Dreamer,' which also deals with the poet's dreams of marriage with his dead lady, and the reflection (a trifle uncertain, it seems) that she was in a better world." Again, in 1856, Thomson wrote "Tasso to Leonora," "in which the poet shows his apprehension as to the immortality of the soul, and again reveals the scars of his unhappy love affair."²

The rest of Thomson's life can be briefly summarized. He was dismissed from the army in 1862, and from this time on, he relied solely on his poetical and critical writings as his primary means of livelihood. Using the pen name of "Bysshe Vanolis" ("Bysshe" taken from Shelley's middle name, and "Vanolis" taken anagrammatically from the German poet Novalis) or, more often "B. V.," Thomson submitted his poems to small magazines that tended to be radical in regard to their political affiliation--especially the "National Reformer," the magazine edited by his old army comrade Charles Bradlaugh.

²J. Edward Meeker, The Life and Poetry of James Thomson (New Haven: The Yale University Press, 1917), pp. 26-27.

In 1874, the "National Reformer" printed Thomson's major poem, "The City of Dreadful Night." This poem was Thomson's greatest achievement, and he produced nothing else that had its force or power. Furthermore, he had begun to drink heavily before the "City of Dreadful Night" was published, and his intemperance grew and grew until he finally died in 1882 of liquor, exhaustion, and malnutrition. Thomson's poetry was never well received during his lifetime, and it was ironical that shortly before his death a collection of his poems was published (1880) and it met with moderate success. However, a second volume of his poems (Vane's Story, and Other Poems) and a collection of prose essays (Essays and Phantasies) appeared in 1880 and 1881 respectively, and both received an unfortunate and quite undeserved critical fate.³

In 1857, two of Thomson's most powerful poems, "A Festival of Life" and "The Doom of The City," appeared. Both poems demonstrated Thomson's debt to Shelley and Dante in regard to allegorical elements and vivid descriptions-- techniques that were to see their ultimate development in "The City of Dreadful Night."

³Meeker, p. 118.

"A Festival of Life" was an allegorical narrative in free-ode stanzas, after Shelley /note: "free" in the sense that they did not conform to the regular Pindaric ode pattern/. There is in it much highly imaginative description. Like some of the allegories of Shelley, too, it is rather difficult to interpret. It seems to be an allegorical restatement of the poet's spiritual experiences, in which his artistic nature and his love of song and beauty struggle with the inevitable sense of Doom. The poet relates how, at a riotous feast, the banqueters are startled and sobered by the entrance of two mysterious masquers, who at each appearance carry off one of the revelers. These masquers seem to represent Death in its double aspect of a gracious deliverer and as a malignant demon . . .

Under a religious and moral veil, the allegory of which suggests Poe's Masque of the Red Death, Thomson showed in his poem a terrible despair on contemplating death. While the Good and the Beautiful conquer, there is a doubtful air about their victory, as though the poet were trying rather to persuade himself of the triumph than to celebrate it.⁴

Again, the vivid detail and allegorical elements were to be seen in "The Doom of a City." The poem had four parts-- "The Voyage," "The City," "The Judgment," and "The Return." Meeker said of the poem that "the influence of Shelley is again seen, and even more clearly, in Thomson's first poetic masterpiece, "The Doom of a City," a lyric allegory founded on Zobeide's tale of the Petrified City, in the Arabian Nights. In style this poem is very like the "Festival of

⁴Ibid., pp. 29-30.

Life," only on a considerably larger scale."⁵ In this poem, as in "The City of Dreadful Night," Thomson varied his meter and rhyme scheme to suit the section and subject matter.

Thomson's abject despair was exemplified by such lines as:

No eye which sorrow fills
 With constant bitter tears,
 Drowning all life and lustre, joy and pride,
 Can gaze more faint and wan and hopelessly
 Into the homeless world and waste of years
 Spread out between it and the grave's sweet
 sleeping;
 Can let the dark lid sink upon its weeping
 More often, fain to hide
 The chilling desolation blurred with strife
 Which, seen or unseen, maps its future life.⁶

Bertram Dobell, who edited the major collections of Thomson's poetical works, said in his introduction to The Poetical Works of James Thomson that

it is found--while curiously anticipating his greatest poem in some points--to be more diffuse in style, less full of lurid and Dante-like power, and less firm in its grasp of thought. Yet it is, nevertheless, a very remarkable production for a youth of twenty-three, and has some striking merits. In a few passages, indeed, it may almost challenge comparison with the later poem; and the one is so obviously the elder brother of the other that it is worth while to study the earlier poem if only for the purpose of tracing the germs of many ideas which are found fully developed in "The City of Dreadful Night." Both are profoundly pessimistic in tone--though in the earlier poem the pessimism

⁵ Ibid., p. 31.

⁶ Thomson, II, p. 118.

seems to display itself in its author's despite-- and both display a great and common daringness of thought and imagination. In both poems the most remarkable quality is perhaps the painter-like power which the author displays of bringing the scenes described with astonishing clearness and vividness before the mental vision of the reader.⁷

Thomson's writings were all influenced by the death of Matilda Weller. In "Vane's Story," a highly autobiographical poem, Thomson stated:

For thought retraced the long, sad, years
Of pallid smiles and frozen tears.
Back to a certain festal night,
A whirl and blaze of swift delight
When we together danced, we two;
I live it all again--Do you
Remember how I broke down quite
In the mere polka? . . . Dressed in white,
A loose pink sash around your waist,
Low shoes across the instep laced,
Your moon-white shoulders glancing through
Long yellow ringlets dancing too,
You were an angel then; as clean
From earthly dust-speck, as serene
And lovely and above my love⁸
As now in your far world above.

In this poem, as in most of Thomson's other works, again and again the poet stressed how life had ended for him with Matilda's death. In the poem "To Our Ladies in Death," Thomson treated death as a trinity, represented allegorically by the Lady of Beatitudes, the Lady of Annihilation,

⁷ Bertram Dobell in his introduction to Poetical Works, I, pp. xxxix-xl.

⁸ Thomson, I, pp. 29-30.

and the Lady of Oblivion. Throughout the poem the poet begged for death to come to him and relieve him of his abject depression. He said:

Weary of living isolated life,
 Weary of hoping hopes for ever vain,
 Weary of struggling in all-sterile strife,
 Weary of thought that maketh nothing plain,
 I close my eyes and hush my panting breath,
 And yearn for Thee, divinely tranquil Death,
 To come and soothe away my bitter pain.⁹

Even though this poem was written in 1861, the utter pessimism and despair of the poet was obvious. However, in such poems as "Sunday at Hampstead" (1863) and "Sunday Up the River" (1865), Thomson exhibited a light, carefree, even humorous vein in his poetry that was not typical. For example, in "Sunday Up the River," Thomson wrote such lines as these:

Let my voice ring out and over the earth,
 Through all grief and strife,
 With a golden joy in a silver mirth:
 Thank God for Life!

Let my voice swell out through the great abyss
 To the azure dome above,
 With a chord of faith in the harp of bliss:
 Thank God for Love!

Let my voice thrill out beneath and above,
 The whole world through:
 O my Love and Life, O my Life and Love,
 Thank God for You!¹⁰

⁹Thomson, I, p. 121.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 199-200.

These poems were actual misfits in the canon of Thomson's poetry. Yet it should be noted here that these poems were also autobiographical. They were written following an extended vacation in the English countryside. Meeker said of these two poems:

On the whole, these two gay and good-humored poems have a sweetness, richness and simplicity about them almost unique among Victorian poetry of the medley type, yet they are not at all alien to the temperament of the author of "The City of Dreadful Night." As that is the consummate expression of his dark side of life, so they are the fullest expression of his sunnier moments. No optimist could be so rapturous had he not also known the pangs of sorrow, nor could a pessimist who was not also partially an idealist be so vividly and poignantly despairing.¹¹

In 1874 The National Reformer, the radical magazine edited by Charles Bradlaugh, published "The City of Dreadful Night" in the March through May issues. The poem was Thomson's best work, and it reflected the years in which he had struggled to achieve literary prominence, only to meet with disappointment at every turn. Burdened with despair, the memory of his beloved Matilda Weller, an alcoholic intemperance, and the curse of insomnia, Thomson composed the poem to give vent to his feelings.

¹¹Meeker, pp. 69-70.

The "City" was actually two cities. The exterior one was London, described thus:

A river girds the city west and south,
 The main north channel of a broad lagoon,
 Regurging with the salt tides from the mouth;
 Waste marshes shine and glister to the moon
 For leagues, then moorland black, then stony ridges;
 Great piers and causeways, many noble bridges,
 Connect the town and islet suburbs strewn. (ll. 64-70)¹²

The other city was a mental one that had become one with the actual, physical city. It was a place of hopelessness, Godlessness, despair and death.

Thomson realized better than any of his critics that his city is built in a sleepless nightmare, and that in clear daylight it "dissolveth like a dream of night away." Yet he declares that if such a dream returns night after night, and year after year, it cannot be distinguished from life itself, which is composed essentially of habitual dreams, whose reality is measured only by the frequency and force of their recurrence. Hence, his city has none of the conventional and outworn imagery of the ruined city beloved of romantic poets, but consists of orderly streets and spacious mansions. It is London itself, seen in a moment of despair, and described with a lurid force unequalled since Coleridge and De Quincey.¹³

¹²James Thomson, "The City of Dreadful Night" in Poetry of the Victorian Period, III^d Ed., edited by J. H. Buckley and G. B. Woods (Chicago: Scott, Foresman & Co., 1965), p. 586. (This and all other quotations from "The City" are from this source.)

¹³Meeker, pp. 87-88.

Structurally, the poem was divided into twenty-one sections with the narrative stanzas using a seven-line stanza rhyming ababccb. This stanza form had been used previously by Thomson in "To Our Ladies of Death" but, in that particular poem, the fifth and sixth lines were a masculine rhyme. In "The City of Dreadful Night" "he restored the feminine couplet (double-rhymed) as he had found it in Browning."¹⁴ (The poem of Browning being referred to here is "The Guardian Angel.") Samuel C. Chew said of the structure that the double rhymes in the fifth and sixth lines, with their "weighty, mournful iteration" suited the mood.¹⁵ The episodic sections were in a variety of stanzaic forms of three, four, and six lines; and one section was in blank verse. The alternation of lyric and narrative description and the interchange of one basic stanzaic forms (in the lyrical sections) relieved "what would otherwise have been a tremendous monotony in its constant burden of despair."¹⁶

The wanderer in the poem roamed through the streets, occasionally meeting a fellow traveler. In section II he has followed another wanderer into the City, walking beneath

¹⁴Ibid., p. 56.

¹⁵S. C. Chew in A Literary History of England, p. 1420.

¹⁶Meeker, p. 86.

the portals on which are written, in an echo of Dante's phrase in The Inferno, "They leave all hope behind who enter there." (l. 120) The companions walked on with one saying:

Here Faith died, poisoned by this
charnel air.

Here Love died, stabbed by its own
worshipped pair.

Here Hope died, starved out in its
utmost lair.

When he had spoken thus, before he stirred,
I spoke, perplexed by something in
the signs
Of desolation I had seen and heard
In this drear pilgrimage to ruined
shrines:

"When Faith and Love and Hope are dead indeed
Can Life still live? By what doth it proceed?"
(ll. 137-156)

The man left his companion walking around the ruined shrines. He passed an orator who was describing the vast, horrible desert that he had passed through and the spectre of a beautiful girl who approached him with her bleeding heart held before her as a lamp. When he saw her, his spirit split in two.

The repetition of the first two lines of each stanza in this section (IV) gave a powerful and fearful aspect to the poem. The stanzas gathered momentum that led to the eventual

horror by repeating over and over "As I came through the desert thus it was, As I came through the desert." (ll. 209ff.)

The poem built one horrible incident upon another until the effect was overpowering. In section XIV, a silent congregation listened to a great hairy orator reveal the truth to them. He said:

"O melancholy Brothers, dark, dark, dark!
 O battling in black floods without an ark!
 O spectral wanderers of unholy Night!
 My soul hath bled for you these sunless years,
 With bitter blood-drops running down like tears;
 Oh dark, dark, dark, withdrawn from joy and light!

"My heart is sick with anguish for your bale;
 Your woe hath been my anguish; yea, I quail
 And perish in your perishing unblest.
 And I have searched the heights and depths,
 the scope
 Of all our universe, with desperate hope
 To find some solace for your wild unrest.

"And now at last authentic word I bring,
 Witnessed by every dead and living thing;
 Good tidings of great joy for you, for all;
 There is no God; no Fiend with names divine
 Made us and tortures us; if we must pine,
 It is to satiate no Being's gall." (ll. 710-727)

It would be difficult for anyone to pen more sacrilegious or pessimistic words than these. Thomson's despair was utter and complete.

In section X the poet found a festival and a great, well-lit mansion. The scene was of a boy mourning for a dead girl who lay before him as he kneeled in front of her.

Thomson used terza rima and quoted the boy as saying:

"The chambers of the mansion of my heart,
In every one whereof thine image dwells,
Are black with grief eternal for thy sake.

"I kneel here patient as thou liest there;
As patient as a statue carved in stone,
Of adoration and eternal grief.

"Whilst thou dost not awake I cannot move;
And something tells me that thou wilt never wake
And I alive feel turning into stone. (ll. 531-545)

Here again, Thomson brought into the City, as he had done in so many of his other poems, his grief and despair over his lost Matilda.

Furthermore, consistent with the technique that Thomson had employed in his earlier major poems, he introduced two allegories into "The City of Dreadful Night." In the first allegory

a triumphant angel in stone opposes the vacant-eyed Sphinx of Nature. In turn the Angel's wings and sword fall, and it becomes a doomed and helpless man. The man falls, while there remains only the "cold majestic face" of the eternal Sphinx, "whose vision seemed of infinite void space."¹⁷

In the second allegory Thomson described the patroness of the City--"Melencolia." His portrait of her was based on an actual engraving by Durer that was entitled "Melancholia." The patroness in the poem "is the emblem of the human race,

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 94.

which struggles with a vain but continual heroism against its bitter destiny."¹⁸

Thus, Thomson climaxed his long, unrewarded literary career with the ultimate statement of agnosticism, bitterness, loss of faith, and loss of love that has ever been recorded in English literature. The poem marked the end, for all practical purposes, of his literary career. The influences of Browning, Shelley, and Dante were apparent in the poem; yet Thomson's own poetic genius and his long years of suffering shaped these influences and aided him in his creation of "The City of Dreadful Night."

¹⁸Ibid.

CHAPTER IV

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

In any discussion of pessimistic poets, the primary task of the student is to classify and define the pessimistic statements of any given poet under consideration, and to explain them in terms of their author. Unlike the other pessimistic poetry thus far treated that contained usually one predominant pessimistic theme, Algernon Charles Swinburne's poetry contains three distinct yet related ones. Whereas A. E. Housman wrote of the bitter-sweet elements of life, Thomson of the abject despair that grew within him, FitzGerald of the unkind and aloof God, and Dowson of the decay of life and love, Swinburne wrote of the "fatal woman," an indifferent God, and the sorrow that was life.

Swinburne's earliest pessimistic statements center on the theme of the "fatal woman"--a perverse being that lured men to her for the sole purpose of ruining their lives. Invariably, the men sought the woman with a definite masochist's glee; however, her excesses soon changed their attitude from attraction to repulsion, and they found themselves left only with feelings of abject despair.

The next series of pessimistic poems that Swinburne wrote dealt with his religious pessimism, and his attitude developed as a natural result of his outgoing feelings toward Giuseppe Mazzini and his efforts to free the people of Italy from foreign domination. Swinburne viewed Mazzini's cause as a holy one, and he lost faith in God and organized religion when God did not directly make Himself manifest, and intervene on behalf of the Italians.

Swinburne's final poetic statements deal with the theme of fatalism. This attitude had been growing within him--his "poems of passion" and those denouncing God are evidence of this--but his ultimate pessimistic statements did not center on any specific theme as did his other poems. In contrast to his other poems, those dealing with general pessimism and fatalism reflected the attitude that life held nothing for him. Swinburne had seen his hopes dashed (in regard to Mazzini), and he believed that he had nothing to live for. To him, life had become a slow decay that ended in an endless sleep. Failure and defeat were the only rewards that life had to offer him. When he realized this, he resigned himself to it, taking a thoroughly fatalistic outlook.

Let us begin our discussion of Swinburne with his pessimistic statements concerning women. Swinburne, in his Poems and Ballads (1866), dwelt excessively upon the theme of the

"fatal woman." Love represented to him a debasing, horrid experience that left the male bruised and battered and the woman triumphant. In his so-called "poems of passion," the man was invariably, inexorably drawn toward the women who would do him the most harm. In these poems the protagonist was represented as being driven to fatal women by a colossal, amorphous force which he could neither control nor understand. Furthermore, in contrast to Dowson or Thomson, whose despair in regard to love relationships grew from their own personal tragedies and was reflected by their poetry, Swinburne's poems of passion were the products of a somewhat warped attitude toward women in general that grew from fantasy rather than actual experience. Additionally, the male character in Swinburne's poems could be considered a masochist. However, rather than reveling in all manner of perversities and delighting in physical torment, the protagonist, even though he entered into profligate affairs quite willingly at first, soon became satiated with the woman's excesses. This satiety led to disillusionment, and this disillusionment led eventually to abject, utter despair. Had Swinburne been trying studiously to depict the male as a masochist in order to enhance the sadistic qualities of the woman, he would not have portrayed him as becoming satiated and disillusioned. Indeed, were masochism and not pessimism his ultimate thematic

end, Swinburne would not have depicted his male characters as he did.

Returning to the major premise, a good example of Swinburne's typical, pessimistic attitude can be seen in his poem "Satia Te Sanguine." Here, the typical male victim is described:

He is patient of thorn and whip,
 He is dumb under axe or dart;
 You suck with a sleepy red lip
 The wet red wounds in his heart.

You thrill as his pulses dwindle,
 You brighten and warm as he bleeds,
 With insatiable eyes that kindle
 And insatiable mouth that feeds.

Your hands nailed love to the tree,
 You stript him, scourged him with rods,
 And drowned him deep in the sea
 That hides the dead and their gods.

And for all this, die he will not;
 There is no man sees him but I;
 You came and went and forgot;
 I hope he will some day die.¹

The over-all uniqueness of Swinburne's pessimistic poetry--that is, that poetry treating the "fatal woman" theme--lay in the fact that he took his theme from other writers and absorbed it as his own. Notably, the basis for the thematic content of Swinburne's pessimistic passion

¹Algernon Charles Swinburne, The Complete Works of Algernon Charles Swinburne. Sir Edmund Gosse and Thomas J. Wise, eds. (New York: Gabriel Wells, 1925), I, p. 221. (Hereafter cited as Works.)

poems was related directly to the writings of the Marquis de Sade and Charles Baudelaire. In Swinburne's Poems and Ballads collection, of the sixty-odd poems contained therein, no less than eighteen of them dealt exclusively with pessimistic themes. More importantly, the vast majority of the pessimistic poems were based on the theme of the despair that resulted from excessive, sado-masochistic behaviour. Significantly, Swinburne had written many of these pessimistic poems by as early as 1862, and he had been introduced to the writings of the Marquis de Sade through Richard Monckton Milnes (Lord Houghton) in 1861-62. Houghton, it should be noted, reputedly had one of the largest collections of erotic and sadistic literature in England, and he took a great delight in cultivating Swinburne's interest in his rather extensive library.²

As is well known, the writings of de Sade treat of the pleasure of inflicting pain through hideous torture upon others, indeed, finding sexual gratification through its infliction. Throughout Swinburne's poems of passion, the central figure was invariably a sadistic woman who delighted in the suffering of her somewhat masochistic male victims.

²John A. Cassidy, Algernon Charles Swinburne (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1964), pp. 70-71.

Typically, the male was initially drawn to the woman by her (fatal) beauty; he allowed her her every whim and caprice, suffering her tortures not so much willingly as resignedly. The poems of passion were usually structured to portray the man and woman moving to sadism through lust. The resultant sadism led to satiety, and the satiety eventually gave way to feelings of disillusionment and despair. The man's reasoning followed the line of thought that there could never be a normal man/woman relationship for him. Consistently the man's position was one of subservience to the woman, and he accepted his lot with resignation. For example, Swinburne's "Anactoria" reads:

Would I not hurt thee perfectly? not touch
 The pores of sense with torture, and make bright
 Thine eyes with bloodlike tears and grievous light
 Strike pang from pang as note is struck from note,
 Catch the sob's middle music in thy throat,
 Take thy limbs living, and new mold with these
 A lyre of many faultless agonies?
 Feed thee with fever and famine and fine drouth,
 With perfect pangs convulse thy perfect mouth,
 Make thy life shudder in thee and burn afresh,
 And wring thy spirit through the flesh?
 Cruel? but love makes all that love him well
 As wise as heaven and crueller than hell.³

Concomitant with the themes of sadism and despair in his poems of passion, Swinburne also infused them with a thematic element of Baudelaire's poetry--that is, the beauty

³Works, I, p. 194.

of evil. Even though the male characters in these poems are aware of their position, they nevertheless allow it to be so, and they find a perverse attraction in the beautiful but evil woman. The "beauty of evil" theme, be it in people or their actions, was the mainstay of Baudelaire's poetry, and it was from him that Swinburne took the theme to use in his own poetry. In a review of Baudelaire's Les Fleurs du Mal, printed in The Spectator (1862), Swinburne enunciated Baudelaire's poetic creed. He said: "Throughout the chief part of the book he has chosen to dwell mainly upon sad and strange things--the weariness of pain and the bitterness of pleasure--the perverse happiness and wayward sorrows of exceptional people. . . . Failure and sorrow . . . seem to have an infinite attraction for him."⁴

Therefore, Swinburne used the writings of de Sade, tempered with thematic elements of Baudelaire's poetry, to construct his own poems of passion. Even though the despair theme was always implicit, and often explicit, in Swinburne's poetry, he nevertheless found the themes of sadism and the beauty of evil morbidly fascinating. The male in Swinburne's poems entered into profligate affairs with fatal women with thorough precognizance that the affair would far surpass lust.

⁴Review reprinted in Works, XIII, p. 419.

The pain through sadism was, to Swinburne, the physical castigation for ever having entered the affair to begin with. However, the mental castigation (despair) was the ultimate result, and this despair gave to the passion poems their final note of pessimism.

The following section is designed to point out the theme of despair through passion as seen in Swinburne's poetry. As stated above, eighteen of the poems contained in Poems and Ballads in some way deal with the excessive passion or cruelty themes that led to abject despair. Although not all of them will be discussed here, a sufficient number will be presented in order to achieve a clear understanding of them.

To begin with a "typical" poem, "Fragoletta" expresses the ideas of the beauty of evil, the pleasure derived from pain, and the ephemeral quality of love.

O Love! what shall be said of thee?
 The son of grief begot by joy?
 Being sightless, wilt thou see?
 Being sexless, wilt thou be
 Maiden or boy?

. . .

Cleave to me, love me, kiss mine eyes,
 Sate thy lips with loving me;
 Nay, for thou shalt not rise;
 Lie still as Love that dies
 For love of thee.

. . .

O bitterness of things too sweet!
 O broken singing of the dove!
 Love's wings are over fleet,
 And like the panther's feet
 The feet of Love.⁵

In the passage from "Anactoria" already quoted in this paper (see p. 62), sadism was the key theme. As the poem progressed thematically, the sadism resulting from lust gave way to feelings of despair. In fact, the speaker's pessimism grew to such an extent that he renounced God for ever creating him. Another excerpt follows from "Anactoria," with a word of explanation by Swinburne.

Is not his incense bitterness, his meat
 Murder? his hidden face and iron feet
 Hath not man known, and felt them on their way
 Threaten and trample all things every day?
 Hath he not sent us hunger? who hath cursed
 Spirit and flesh with longing? filled with
 thirst
 Their lips who cried unto him? who bade
 exceed
 The fervid will, fall short the feeble deed,
 Bade sink the spirit and flesh aspire,
 Pain animate the dust of dead desire,
 And life yield up her flower to violent fate?
 Him would I reach, him smite, him desecrate
 Pierce the cold lips of God with human breath,
 And mix his immortality with death.
 Why hath he made us? what had all we done
 That we should live and loathe the sterile sun,
 And with the moon wax paler as she wanes,
 And pulse by pulse feel time grow through our
 veins.⁶

⁵Works, I, pp. 215-217.

⁶Ibid., p. 195.

Understandably this particular poem felt the full weight of critical disapproval when it appeared in Poems and Ballads. As a counterattack, or at least, a justification, Swinburne defended himself and "Anactoria" in his own critical article "Notes on Poems and Reviews" (1867). In regard to the poem he said:

In this poem I have simply expressed, or tried to express, that violence of affection between one and another which hardens into rage and deepens into despair As to the angry appeal against the supreme mastery of oppressive heaven, which I have ventured to put into her mouth at that point only where pleasure culminates in pain, affection in anger, and desire in despair--as to the "blasphemies" against God or Gods of which here and elsewhere I stand accused--they are to be taken as the first outcome or outbursts of failed and fruitless passion recoiling on itself.⁷

Yet another major aspect of the poems of passion was the depiction of the sadistic woman as an eternal type, as old and wise as the world itself. Swinburne very often characterizes the female characters as queens, princesses, or eternal spirits. Consistently, these sadistic women are all larger than life figures. For example, the woman "Locusta" is just such a person.

⁷ Reprinted in Works, XVI, pp. 357-359.

Come close and see here and hearken. This is she.
 Stop the ways fast against the stench that
 nips
 Your nostril as it nears her. Lo, the lips
 That between prayer and prayer find time to be
 Poisonous, the hands holding a cup and key,
 Key of deep hell, cup whence blood reeks
 and drips;
 The loose lewd limbs, the reeling hingeless
 hips,
 The scruf (sic) that is not skin but leprosy.
 This haggard harlot grey of face and green
 With the old hand's cunning mixes her new priest
 The cup she mixed her Nero, stirred and spiced.
 She lisps of Mary and Jesus Nazarene
 With a tongue tuned, and head bends to the east,
 Praying. There are who say she is the bride of
 Christ.⁸

Another larger than life female character is "Faustine,"
 the Roman empress. The poem, named after her, describes her
 perverse delight in watching gladiatorial battles in which
 men fight, suffer, and die solely for her amusement. Fur-
 thermore, her survival is seemingly dependent on others'
 suffering. That is to say, she is kept alive, sustained, if
 you will, by the blood of her victims.

She loved the games men played with death,
 Where death must win;
 As though the slain man's blood and breath
 Revived Faustine.

Nets caught the pike, pikes tore the net;
 Lithe limbs and lean
 From drained-out pores dripped thick red sweat
 To soothe Faustine.⁹

⁸Works, II., p. 352.

⁹Ibid., I., p. 240.

Significantly, with Swinburne's depiction of the fatal women as eternal types, he moved from the actual world to an imaginary one. Fantasy had overcome reality. Swinburne himself probably realized this aspect of his poetry also; because, in some poems, he described "Desire" in terms of symbolism. These fatal women were all "the phantom of the mind rather than of the real human being";¹⁰ consequently, Swinburne represents them as a type, and just such a type appears in "A Cameo."

There was a graven image of Desire
 Painted with red blood on a ground of gold
 Passing between the young men and the old,
 And by him Pain, whose body shone like fire,
 And Pleasure with gaunt hands that grasped their
 hire.
 Of his left wrist, with fingers clenched and
 cold,
 The insatiable Satiety kept hold,
 Walking with feet unshod that pashed the mire.
 The senses and the sorrows and the sins,
 And strange loves that suck the breasts of
 Hate
 Till lips and teeth bite in their sharp indenture,
 Followed like beasts with flap of wings and fins.
 Death stood aloof behind a gaping gate,
 Upon whose lock was written Peradventure.¹¹

Therefore, Swinburne viewed a love relationship as being a one-sided contest. The woman, an incarnation of lust,

¹⁰Mario Praz, The Romantic Agony (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 217.

¹¹Works, I, p. 244.

sadism, and satiety, consistently dominated the man. Initially, the male character was thrilled by the depth and extent of her passion, and he took a masochistic delight in her sadism. However, as the affair progressed, satiety gave way to disillusionment and this disillusionment led always to despair.

The eternal qualities with which Swinburne invested his female characters said two things about the poet. First of all, he viewed a love relationship as being always the same. Traditionally to him men had been the hapless thralls of beautiful, fatal women. This was the established norm that always had been and that would always be. Second, by making the women larger than life, Swinburne revealed an inability to write of an actual experience. The element of despair in his poetry was certainly real; but, just as certainly, his female characters were not.

In addition to the passion poems already mentioned, others of this genre that Swinburne included in Poems and Ballads were "Laus Veneris" (based on the Venus and Tannhäuser theme--here again, Tannhäuser was represented as being the thrall of Venus), "Hermaphroditus," "Felise," "Sapphics" (based on the theme of Lesbianism), "Phaedra," "Rococo," "Les Noyades," "Love and Sleep," "Dead Love," "The

Year of Love," "The Dreamer," and "Aholibah." Consistently these poems featured the theme of despair that was the final outcome of love relationships, and they usually depicted this mental attitude as the ultimate result of lust, sadism, and satiety. Furthermore, the imagery in the poems was that of decay and death. Dead or dying flowers, the ebb of the tide, gray days, sunsets, and the characters' sorrowful remembrances were images frequently used in even the most flagrant of Swinburne's poems to firmly establish the final tone as pessimistic.

Unlike the continuum of negatives that so characterized Swinburne's poems of passion, his poems reflecting his religious pessimism were spawned by his very positive political beliefs.

While attending Balliol College, Oxford, Swinburne, under the influence of John Nichol, took an ever-increasing interest in the efforts of Giuseppe Mazzini, the Italian rebel-patriot, to free his land from foreign domination. At once appalled at the sufferings of the Italian rebels and thrilled by Mazzini's noble cause, Swinburne began to assume the attitude that Mazzini was engaged in a holy struggle. To Swinburne, Mazzini epitomized the ideals of freedom and

personal liberty; and, to both men, no cause could be more sound or just. Swinburne became so enthusiastic over Mazzini that he began to reason that God should intervene on behalf of Mazzini and his followers. However, when divine intervention was not forthcoming, Swinburne began to have serious doubts about God and religion itself. In fact, God's lack of intervention (interpreted by Swinburne to mean lack of concern) opened Swinburne's thoughts to all manner of religious pessimism. When he saw that God would do nothing for the Italians, he concluded that God was no longer relevant to the current world situation; furthermore, Swinburne advocated the abandonment of the traditional concept of God and the inception of a new religion in which a relevant deity was supreme.

After careful consideration, Swinburne reached the conclusion that man must look solely to himself for salvation. In the final analysis, man was more prone to trust in himself instead of God anyway; hence, Swinburne reasoned that the hypocrisy be taken out of religion and supplanted by what was to him reality. Swinburne went further in his religious pessimism. He believed that God had been created by man in order to have something higher than himself to worship. Traditionally, man had not trusted in his own initiative in

his times of most dire need, but had turned to his creation for solace and guidance. Swinburne resolved that man should now rid himself of his self-imposed tyranny, personified by God.

Swinburne went so far as to establish a new set of gods for man to worship. The supreme being was Man, and his most noble aim was the acquisition, through force if necessary, of universal liberty. (Hence, God and Love were replaced by Man and Liberty.) In Swinburne's hierarchy Giuseppe Mazzini replaced Christ. Just as Christ had been God's son and had delivered His message of universal Love on earth, then Mazzini was the son of Man who, at this time, was delivering his message of universal Liberty. In his "Ode to Mazzini," Swinburne begged him to accept the challenge and rescue the world from tyranny and the antiquated belief in God:

IV

Too long the world has waited. Day by day
 The noiseless feet of murder pass and
 stain
 Palace and prison, street and loveliest
 plain,
 And the slow life of freedom bleeds away
 The voice of earth goes heavenward for revenge:
 And all the children of her dying year
 Fill up the unbroken strains
 From priestly tongues that scathe with lies
 and vailing

The Bourbons' murderous dotard, sick
of blood,
To the 'How-long' of stricken spirits, wailing
Before the throne of God.¹²

In the last half of this quote, Swinburne touched on yet another aspect of his religious pessimism. Parallel to his belief that God was no longer relevant to man, Swinburne maintained that if God was the omnipotent and benevolent force He had always been portrayed as being, then He would answer man's innumerable prayers. However, He did not.

Furthermore, still another cherished belief that Swinburne flatly rejected was the hope of an eternal salvation in the kingdom of God--heaven. Swinburne contended that man would not have to wait for an afterlife. If man trusted in himself, believed in Liberty, and followed Mazzini's example, he would then achieve his eternal salvation on earth: a kingdom in which universal Liberty reigned supreme.

In order to cite poetically Swinburne's attitude toward God, let us examine some of his poems on the subject. In the "Hymn of Man," Swinburne expatiates on the theme that God was only a creation of man. Logically, Swinburne says that if man could create God, then he could also destroy Him:

¹²Ibid., pp. 116-117.

Therefore the God that ye make you is
 grievous, and gives not aid,
 Because it is but for your sake that the
 God of your making is made.
 Thou and I are not gods made men for a span,
 But God, if a God there be, is the substance
 of men which is man.

Thou are judged, O judge, and the sentence is
 gone forth against thee, O God.
 Thy slave that slept is awake; thy slave but
 slept for a span;
 Yea, man thy slave shall unmake thee, who
 made thee lord over man.

Thou art smitten, thou God, thou art smitten;
 thy death is upon thee, O Lord.
 And the love-song of earth as thou diest
 resounds through the wind of her wings--
 Glory to man in the highest! for Man is the
 master of things.¹³

In the "Prelude" to Songs Before Sunrise, a series of poems dealing with Mazzini and his efforts to liberate his country, Swinburne continues the theme that man must look only to himself for aid.

Save his own soul's light overhead,
 None leads him, and none ever led,
 Across birth's hidden harbour-bar,
 Past youth where shoreward shallows are,
 Through age that drives on toward the red
 Vast void of sunset hailed from far,
 To the equal waters of the dead;
 Save his own soul he hath no star,
 And sinks, except his own soul guide,
 Helmless in middle turn of tide.¹⁴

¹³ Ibid., II, pp. 160, 164, 169.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 74.

Just as Swinburne strongly advocated man's turning to himself for guidance, he just as strongly advocated that man turn away from the worship of God entirely and worship the new god Liberty (here, in "To Walt Whitman in America," called "Freedom"):

God is buried and dead to us,
 Even the spirit of earth,
 Freedom; so they have said to us,
 Some with mocking and mirth,
 Some with heartbreak and tears;
 And a God without eyes, without ears,
 Who shall sing of him, dead in
 the birth?

The earth-god Freedom, the lonely
 Face lightening, the footprint
 unshod,
 Not as one man crucified only
 Nor scourged with but one life's
 rod;
 The soul that is substance of nations,
 Reincarnate with fresh generations;
 The great god Man, which is God.¹⁵

Furthermore, the prince of Liberty was Giuseppe Mazzini. Many of Swinburne's lyrics are lavish in praise of him and his cause; and, as in the following excerpt from "After Nine Years," Swinburne regards him as a messiah:

4

Thou was a very Christ--not he
 Degraded in Deity,
 And priest-polluted by such prayer
 As poisonous air,
 Tongue worship of the tongue that slays,

¹⁵Ibid., p. 187.

False faith and parricidal praise:
But the man crowned with suffering days.

5

God only, being of all mankind
Most manlike, of most equal mind
And heart of most perfect, more than can
Be heart of man
Once in ten ages born to be
As haply Christ was, and as we
Knew surely, seeing, and worshipped thee.¹⁶

The most vehement statements of Swinburne's religious pessimism are contained in his poems treating the matter of prayer. Indeed, the basis for a large part of Swinburne's religious pessimism was his belief that if God were omnipotent, He would answer man's pleas to Him. When God remained aloof, turning a deaf ear to prayer, Swinburne raged. In "Before a Crucifix" the speaker ponders over the nature of Christ and the role of prayer in our daily lives. Through his mental questioning, he arrives at a thoroughly pessimistic conclusion:

It was for this, that prayers like these
Should spend themselves about thy feet,
And with hard overlaboured knees
Kneeling, these slaves of men should beat
Bosoms too lean to suckle sons
And fruitless as their orisons?

It was for this, that men should make
Thy name a fetter on men's necks,

¹⁶Ibid., IV, p. 298.

Poor men's made poorer for thy sake,
 And women's withered out of sex?
 It was for this, that slaves should be,
 Thy word was passed to set men free?

This dead God here against my face
 Hath help for no man; who hath seen
 The good works of it, or such grace
 As thy grace in it, Nazarene,
 As that from thy live lips which ran
 For man's sake, O thou son of man?

The tree of faith ingrafted by priests
 Puts it foul foliage out above thee,
 And round it feed man-eating beasts
 Because of whom we dare not love thee;
 Though hearts reach back and memories ache,
 We cannot praise thee for their sake.¹⁷

"Christman Antiphones" contains the same thoughts as "Before a Crucifix"; hence, it will not be quoted here. However, both poems deal with the theme that God had set man adrift in the universe and that all of his cries for help to Him were in vain. After denouncing God so severely, if His replacement failed with Mazzini's lost cause, how could Swinburne return to the old beliefs? Needless to say, Mazzini's heroic cause did fail, and Swinburne found himself isolated from any religion.

In the poetry thus far discussed, the pessimism was directed to a specific subject. As was shown above, Swin-

¹⁷ Ibid., II, pp. 147, 151.

burne's poems of passion took a thoroughly pessimistic outlook on women and love relationships; his poems dealing with religion took an equally pessimistic view of God, organized religion, and prayer.

However, in the final pessimistic poems that Swinburne wrote, the direction changed. No longer was he striking out at a particular grievance. Instead, these final poems were nothing more or less than fatalistic lyrics. One of the reasons for Swinburne's change in, or lack of, direction in his final pessimistic poems can be partly explained by his religious pessimism. Although he had adamantly supported Mazzini, upheld his cause, and created a new religion in which he (Mazzini) was the Christ-figure, Swinburne saw the basic fallacy in his reasoning. That is, even though man may hope to change life or the attitudes of men, he is more often than not defeated. Swinburne was defeated by his own excessive enthusiasm. Therefore, it was understandable that he should begin to write poems in which the predominant themes were of fatalism, defeat, and decay. He saw man struggling throughout his life against forces that were larger than himself. He finally came to the conclusion that man's struggles were all for nought; that regardless of what man did, he was always controlled by them.

Swinburne's later poetry therefore reflected various fatalistic or pessimistic attitudes. Basically, he saw no hope for human achievement. Many of his poems echoed these thoughts. For example, in "Pastiche," he says:

Now the days are all gone over
Of our singing, love by lover,
Days of summer-coloured seas
Blown adrift through beam and breeze.

Now all good that comes or goes is,
As the smell of last year's roses,
As the radiance in our eyes
Shot from summer's ere he dies.

Now the morning faintlier risen
Seems no God come forth of prison,
But a bird of plume-plucked wing,
Pale with thoughts of evening.

Now hath hope outraced in running,
Given the torch up of his cunning
And the palm he thought to wear
Even to his own strong child--
despair.¹⁸

The two predominant pessimistic themes were that life is nothing more than a slow process of defeat and decay and that life ends in a long, dreamless sleep, not eternal life. In fact, in "The Garden of Proserpine" Swinburne portrays the protagonist as asking nothing more from life than a release from it. If life is destined to be a series of heartaches and futile strife, death is a welcome relief:

¹⁸Ibid., III, p. 81.

I am tired of tears and laughter,
 And men that laugh and weep;
 Of what may come hereafter
 For men that sow to reap:
 I am weary of days and hours,
 Blown buds of barren flowers,
 Desires and dreams and powers
 And everything but sleep.¹⁹

In the same vein as "Pastiche" is "Anima Anceps:"

If one day's sorrow
 Mar the day's morrow--
 If man's life borrow
 And man's death pay--
 If souls once taken
 If lives once shaken,
 Arise, awaken,
 By night, by day--
 Why with strong crying
 And years of sighing,
 Living and dying,
 Fast ye and pray?
 For all your weeping,
 Waking and sleeping,
 Death comes to reaping
 And takes away.²⁰

In these his last pessimistic poems Swinburne struck the same note of fatalism again and again. For example, in "Genesis" he depicts man as being born with "white seed of the fruitful, helpful morn, The black seed of the barren, hurtful hours."²¹ The course of man's life is determined by

¹⁹ Ibid., I, p. 299.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 232-233.

²¹ Ibid., II, pp. 182-183.

the equal mixture of these elements; however, to Swinburne, the hurtful elements by far have the greatest effect on his life. Finally, he asks to be cast into a dark void where sense and feeling are stripped away, where he can simply sleep. "Ilicet" and "Sestina" reiterate this same theme.

The ultimate statement of Swinburne's feelings of fatalism and pessimism is found in his sincere monody to Charles Baudelaire, "Ave Atque Vale." He advises Baudelaire to accept death as simply a release from life. It is to be viewed as a quiet time and place where all strife ends, all sorrow ceases, and no hopes are ruined:

XVII

Sleep; and if life was bitter to thee, pardon,
 If sweet, give thanks; thou hast no more to
 live;
 And to give thanks is good, and to forgive.
 Out of the mystic and mournful garden
 Where all day through thine hands in barren
 braid
 Wove the sick flowers of secrecy and shade,
 Green buds of sorrow and sin, and remnants grey,
 Sweet-smelling, pale with poison, sanguine-
 hearted,
 Passions that sprang from sleep and thoughts
 that started,
 Shall death not bring us all as thee one day
 Among the days departed?

XVIII

For thee, O now a silent soul, my brother,
 Take at my hands this garland, and farewell.
 Thin is the leaf; and chill the wintry smell,
 And chill the solemn earth, a fatal mother,

With sadder than the Niobeian womb,
And in the hollow of her breasts a tomb.
Content thee, howsoe'er, whose days are done;
There lies not any troublous thing before,
Nor sight nor sound to war against thee more,
For whom all winds are quiet as the sun,
All waters as the shore.²²

²²Ibid., III, pp. 50-51.

CHAPTER V

ERNEST DOWSON

Ernest Dowson was born at the family home of his parents, "The Grove," in Kent on August 2, 1867. His father owned and operated a dock (Bridge Dock) for the repair of ships in Limehouse; yet because of his poor health he was forced to take frequent trips to the Continent, and his health failed as rapidly as his business. Ernest accompanied his parents on their trips to the French Riviera, and the greatest part of Ernest's early education was acquired from French tutors. He preferred the French authors to the English, and he read the works of Dumas, Balzac, Hugo, Gautier, Musset, and especially Charles Baudelaire, the author of Fleurs du Mal. As a matter of fact, Ernest in later years was to recall that at the age of fifteen he spoke French as fluently as English.¹

Alfred Dowson, Ernest's father, travelled about the Continent seeking a more salubrious climate. In Senta, Italy,

¹Mark Longaker, Ernest Dowson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1944), p. 10.

he procured an Italian tutor for his son. The tutor was a priest who introduced Ernest to the writings of Catullus and Propertius.

His father encouraged and helped him with the study of Latin literature, for he believed with many of his generation that a solid foundation in Latin was not only a mark of culture but fundamental to intellectual development and attainment. It is remarkable, however, that the boy, undisciplined and little accustomed to assiduous application to anything, attained the proficiency in the language and literature that he did. In fact his knowledge of Latin literature was sufficiently evident when he went up to Queen's College to cause his tutor at Queen's to suggest that he read for honors.²

As early as August of 1886, Ernest had written poems which he was putting in a notebook, and in that same year he entered Queen's College, Oxford. While at college, he was a quiet and shy youth given to continuing his writing of poetry in notebooks. He rarely participated in activities with his fellows, and two of his poems, "Sonnet--To a Little Girl," and "Moritura," were published that year in London Society, and in the latter poem he revealed "some of the life-weariness which was to become a frequently recurrent sentiment in his later poems"³ Later in the year, however, he made friends with W. R. Thomas, Arthur Moore,

²Ibid., p. 13.

³Ibid., p. 29.

and Sam Smith. They formed a luncheon club and held meetings in the rooms of the various members. Ernest's outlook improved with his acquisition of friends, and he began to enjoy college more than he had before. Furthermore, Moore continued to be Dowson's friend throughout his life, and later collaborated with him on two novels.

The following year at Oxford, he began to espouse Bohemianism "which became a creed to him . . . and was a natural development of the philosophies of pessimism and estheticism which he absorbed at the University and from his own reading."⁴

Another aspect of his college career should also be mentioned. Arthur Symons, in his memoir of Dowson in The Poems of Ernest Dowson, said that "his favorite form of intoxication had been hachish (sic); afterwards he gave up this somewhat elaborate experiment in visionary sensations for readier means of oblivion. . . ." ⁵ Longaker refuted this charge, and the recollections of Dowson's college contemporaries alluded to the fact that, although he had tried hashish and liquor, his intake of them was not large--while he was at college, at any rate.

⁴Ibid., p. 38.

⁵Arthur Symons, "Ernest Dowson," in The Poems of Ernest Dowson (London: John Lane, the Bodley Head, 1905), pp. xi-xii.

In March of 1888 Dowson left the University and rejoined his family at Bridge Dock in Limehouse. Here he helped his father in his failing business venture by doing those odd jobs that his father assigned him, and "his principal work was to do the bookkeeping, for which he had neither aptitude nor liking."⁶ Even though Dowson's literary output had been slight up to this time, he felt that his real calling was a career in literature, and while he was working for his father he became the assistant editor of a short-lived magazine, The Critic.

The periodical which Plarr called "a weekly of some dimensions" lasted beyond the third number; but by March 8, 1890, with the fifth issue, the unhappy Critic gave up the ghost. Plarr reported that Dowson "severed his connection with it before very long." The fact of the matter is that Dowson was with The Critic until the end. His work as assistant editor had done little to give life to an enterprise which was doomed from the start, but a few of his contributions of a creative sort undoubtedly did much to raise the literary quality of its meager contents. The two pieces selected as representative by Guy Harrison in his bibliography of Dowson's works, "Between the Acts" and "The Cult of the Child," have never been reprinted.⁷

Dowson had assumed his style of life after he returned from Oxford. The Bridge Dock was near London. Every night

⁶Longaker, pp. 50-51.

⁷Ibid., p. 65.

after work he would go into town to make the rounds at the numerous bars, and his intake of liquor began to increase steadily. Furthermore, he had formed an association with a group of fellows of temperaments similar to his own who called themselves "The Bingers." During this time Dowson's favorite pub was "The Crown," and it was generally known that he could be found there nightly.

It was in the last decade of the nineteenth century that Dowson gained his greatest degree of prominence. Between 1890 and 1900 (the year of his death) he was a member of a group of writers, critics, and artists who formed "The Rhymer's Club." This group had as its regular members John Davidson, Edwin T. Ellis, George Arthur Greene, Lionel Johnson, Arthur Cecil Hillier, Richard Le Gallienne, Victor Plarr, Ernest Radford, Ernest Rhys, Thomas William Rolleston, Arthur Symons, John Todhunter, and William Butler Yeats.⁸

All of these men were part of a movement known variously as The Decadence, Aestheticism, and/or Fin de Siècle. They took as their literary idols Walter Pater, Swinburne, Rossetti, Verlaine, Baudelaire, and Oscar Wilde, and in all of their writings, the themes are perverse, pessimistic, morbid, and

⁸ Ibid., p. 89.

often cruel. Swann said of these writers and poets that

Into the making of such perversities went a fierce energy, but one which concealed despair and weariness. The century had begun with promise, and it flowered through its middle decades into rich scientific progress and far-reaching social reforms. But the very effort which had accomplished such advances left many Englishmen weary, and the fact that progress had brought instead of happiness, increasing spiritual doubt and deep-rooted pessimism left them disillusioned. Hence gloom and languor pervade the work of the Decadents, who exhale a great heart-wrenching sigh in the face of . . . futility-- . . . Symons writes a poem called "Satiety" and another in which he sighs with Swinburne, "I have grown tired of sorrow and human tears." The death wish becomes a major theme in Dowson, and his anguished "Cynara" has been called a "parable of the Decadent soul." In a very real sense the stylistic perfection--the high and glittering polish of Wilde, Dowson, and others--is an effort to combat despair. Life is meaningless they seem to say. Man is dust in a mindless universe. But at least we can write or paint well; protest our impermanence through permanent art. In the brilliance of their best work lies the justification for artificiality, perversion, and defeatism. Out of these doubtful materials they did indeed create the enduring poem and the lasting picture.⁹

The official mouthpieces for Dowson and his fellow Decadents were The Yellow Book and The Savoy, hard-cover magazines that boasted the often shocking illustrations of Aubrey Beardsley and poems that bore such titles as "Night," "Lost," and "Euthanasia."

⁹Thomas Burnett Swann, Ernest Dowson (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1964), pp. 22-23.

Dowson was greatly influenced by his contemporaries, notably Swinburne and Wilde, but his poetic inspiration received its greatest impetus from one Adelaide Foltinowicz. As a matter of fact, his love for the girl assumed the characteristics of a decadent relationship. Adelaide was the daughter of immigrant parents who ran a pub known as "Poland." When Dowson met her in 1891, he was twenty-four and she was but twelve. He courted her for six years without her ever giving him any real signs of encouragement. From all accounts the girl was a plain waitress, hardly the source for poetic inspiration, but to Dowson she represented an ideal and pure beauty. Dowson was known to have associated with harlots during his short life, and they often appear in his poems. However, the perfect love and the child love that he mentioned in many of his poems was generally believed to have been founded in his love for Adelaide.

In regard to literary output, the majority of Dowson's poems were brief lyrical statements that reflected his pessimistic heritage and the influence of his fellow Decadents. He published two novels in collaboration with Arthur Moore-- A Comedy of Masks (1893-94) and Adrian Rome (1899). In verse his works published during his lifetime, were Verses (1896-- with a dedication in French to Adelaide Foltinowicz) and

Decorations: In Verse and Prose (1899). Dowson also wrote short stories which were published in 1895 under the title Dilemmas: Stories and Studies in Sentiment. Furthermore, he wrote one one-act play, The Pierrot of the Minute, published in 1897 and illustrated by Aubrey Beardsley.

Most of Dowson's poems echoed various types of love--wanton love, child love, unrequited love, and lost love. His most famous (or notorious) poem about sensual love was "Non Sum Qualis Eram Bonae Sub Regno Cynarae." The poem has been popularly referred to as "Cynara" and was first published in The Century Guild Hobby Horse in 1891. The lady in the poem has been identified by some as Adelaide, but others have pointed out that Dowson could have hardly felt an "old passion" for a girl of twelve whom he had just recently met. Swann said of the poem:

Regardless of the model for Cynara, the poem is important as the heartcry of Decadence. The mood of despair, epitomized in the line "When I awoke and found the dawn was gray," is characteristic of the period. The past, once bright, is irretrievable, the poet seems to say. The present is barren and hopeless. What is life but memories and drugged forgetfulness, bought love and even stronger wine? Decadent too are the richly symbolic flowers, the rose as an emblem of vice, the lily as an emblem of virtue. In Dowson's poem roses are flung by the throng to deck the path of sin, while pale, lost lilies symbolize the innocence of Cynara. Finally, the Decadents liked to proclaim their love for harlots. It was a way of attacking the Victorian prudery which they despised,

the maidenliness of poets like Tennyson, and the stuffiness of critics and editors. Wilde wrote a poem about a harlot's house . . . ; and Dowson intimates a night in the arms of a woman he has bought to help him forget his Cynara.¹⁰

Last night, ah, yesternight, betwixt her lips and mine
 There fell thy shadow, Cynara! thy breath was shed
 Upon my soul between the kisses and the wine;
 And I was desolate and sick of an old passion,
 Yea, I was desolate and bowed my head:
 I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion.

All night upon mine heart I felt her warm heart beat,
 Night-long within mine arms in love and sleep she lay;
 Surely the kisses of her bought red mouth were sweet;
 But I was desolate and sick of an old passion,
 When I awoke and found the dawn was gray:
 I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion.

I have forgot much, Cynara! gone with the wind,
 Flung roses, roses riotously with the throng,
 Dancing, to put thy pale, lost lilies out of mind;
 But I was desolate and sick of an old passion,
 Yea, all the time, because the dance was long:
 I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion.

I cried for madder music and for stronger wine,
 But when the feast is finished and the lamps expire,
 Then falls thy shadow, Cynara! the night is thine;
 And I am desolate and sick of an old passion,
 Yea, hungry for the lips of my desire:
 I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion.¹¹

Other of Dowson's poems were not as lurid in their statement as this one, however. The last two stanzas of "Ad Domnulam Suam" reflected Dowson's ideal love of a child. He

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 46- 47.

¹¹ Dowson, pp. 27-28.

felt that mature love debased and cheapened the participants whereas child love was beautiful and pure.

Soon thou leavest fairy-land;
 Darker grow thy tresses:
 Soon no more of hand in hand;
 Soon no more caresses!

Little lady of my heart!
 Just a little longer,
 Be a child: then, we will part,
 Ere this love grow stronger.¹²

In the poem he hoped that the girl would never grow up. While she was young, he could love and adore her innocently. Yet, she was growing up, and soon their love would reach the point of physical consummation. He dreaded this for he felt that their love would be cheapened by it.

Other poems have the girl die in childhood. In such poems as "Yvonne of Brittany," "Villanelle of Sunset," and "The Dead Child," even though the girl died, her innocence and beauty remained forever at their zenith with no fear of losing them in maturity.

The theme of death preoccupied Dowson and his fellow Decadents. In such poems as "Dregs," and "Vitae Summa Brevis Spem Nos Vetat Incohare Longam" ("The sum total of life, brief as it is, forbids us to begin the long hope") the poet

¹²Ibid., pp. 11-12.

treated death with resignation. He felt that life was indeed short and that death offered only an end to life and no hope. Furthermore it was from "Vitae Summa . . ." that the famous phrase "the days of wine and roses" had its origin. The brief poem follows:

They are not long, the weeping and the laughter,
 Love and desire and hate:
 I think they have no portion in us after
 We pass the gate.

They are not long, the days of wine and roses:
 Out of a misty dream
 Our path emerges for a while, then closes
 Within a dream.¹³

With the marriage of Adelaide in 1897 to one of the waiters in her father's pub, Dowson's life assumed a character of complete defeat. Even though he was productive up until his death, his closing years were ones of dissipation and an excessive intake of absinthe. In February of 1900, he died, and his poem "Dregs" from his last collection epitomized his attitude and his life.

The fire is out, and spent the warmth thereof,
 (This is the end of every song man sings!)
 The golden wine is drunk, the dregs remain,
 Bitter as wormwood and as salt as pain;
 And health and hope have gone the way of love
 Into the drear oblivion of lost things.
 Ghosts go along with us until the end;
 This was a mistress, this, perhaps, a friend.

¹³Ibid., p. 2.

With pale, indifferent eyes, we sit and wait
For the dropt curtain and the closing gate:¹⁴
This is the end of all the songs man sings.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 148.

CHAPTER VI

A. E. HOUSMAN

During the latter half of the nineteenth century, a large body of English poetry assumed a particular tone of pessimism and cynicism that had not been so apparent earlier. Alfred Edward Housman, James Thomson, Edward FitzGerald, Thomas Hardy, and Mathew Arnold each expressed a sense of futility and pessimism that was common in tone yet distinct in character.

A. E. Housman was born in Bromsgrove, Worcestershire, in 1859, and he grew up in and around Bromsgrove and Shropshire--localities that he used later in his poetry as microcosms representing the world as he knew it.

Housman's parents were devout people. His father was a solicitor, descended from a long line of Anglican bishops; and Housman's mother, to whom he was deeply devoted, was herself the daughter of a local parson. Laurence Housman, Alfred's younger brother, recalls that "during his early school-days he was still small for his age and also, probably, unusually quiet. This got him the nickname of Mouse,

and bigger boys used to tread on him, pretending that they could not see him."¹

Alfred had two personalities, however. Even though he was a small, quiet, studious youth, he was also the family wit. He helped his younger brothers and sisters write what were called "nonsense lyrics." Laurence Housman further recalls that "under his leadership in a family of seven, we all wrote poems, even the unpoetic ones: Lyrics, ballads, sonnets, narrative poems, nonsense rhymes, and compositions to which each contributed a verse . . . occupied a large part of our playtime alongside of the more active games of childhood, in which also, as often as not, he led and we followed."²

However, Alfred was soon to face the first of several major crises in his life. At the age of twelve, while he was away visiting friends of the family, his mother died. Laurence Housman said of the event that:

Her death had a profound effect upon him for there had been between them a deep bond of affection and understanding. As she neared her end she became quite anxious lest his loss of her should affect his attitude to religion; and when his father wrote to tell him of her death,

¹Laurence Housman, My Brother, A. E. Housman (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938), p. 23.

²Ibid., p. 22.

there was something in the nature of a message to that effect--that what they feared did actually happen; and this early estrangement from the religion of his childhood was caused by her death.³

Indeed, Alfred Housman in later years was to recall that "'I became a deist at the age of thirteen and an atheist at twenty-one', and the coincidence of these dates is surely significant."⁴

Nevertheless, Alfred threw himself into his studies at Bromsgrove School, an institution that he attended with the aid of a scholarship, and he became one of the best scholars that the school produced. A. S. F. Gow, Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, in his A. E. Housman, A Sketch, says that Alfred was a "winner of a large number of prizes in classical subjects, English verse, French, and, less expectedly, freehand drawing, and scholar-elect of St. John's College, Oxford."⁵

Alfred excelled in all of his academic work, but the classics became--and were to continue to be throughout his life--his special interest, and he read in them extensively.

³ Ibid., p. 24.

⁴ A. E. Housman, Complete Poems of A. E. Housman (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1959), p. 4.

⁵ A. S. F. Gow, A. E. Housman, A Sketch (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1936), p. 3.

Following his graduation from the "sixth form" at the Bromsgrove School, Housman entered St. John's College, Oxford, in 1877. At college, he devoted himself to reading the classics. However, he read more of what he liked than of what was assigned him. His letters to his family during his years at Oxford reflected a genial spirit of youth, and from all accounts he seemed to enjoy his college experience. While he was attending Oxford, Alfred met Moses Jackson, his best friend and profound influence. Laurence Housman notes that in the letters Alfred wrote to the family, "nowhere did he make mention of what proved to be one of the most important events in his life--the beginning of his great friendship with a fellow scholar of St. John's, Moses Jackson."⁶ Laurence Housman goes on to quote Alfred W. Pollard, a mutual friend of both Alfred Housman and Moses Jackson, and says that Jackson was "an absolute first in science--who had therefore no need to read much in the evening. And it well may be that Alfred's close association with one who found study so little necessary may eventually have diverted him from his own book-work when studying for the Greats. In any case he began soon to take an independent line, studying

⁶L. Housman, p. 43.

those classics which most interested him ("Propertius as a recreation" says Dr. Pollard)."⁷

At the end of his sophomore year (1879), Alfred placed among the finalists in competition for an award in the classics called Moderations, and though he did not win an absolute first place, it is obvious that he studied enough in order to remain among the leading students.

However, at Oxford, a degree requirement had to be overcome, namely, the passing of an oral examination known simply as the "Greats."

The program of Greats, apart from translations from and into Greek and Latin Prose, consisted of papers in Ancient History, Logic, and Moral and Political Philosophy, reinforced by others on a formidable array of prose authorities. Plato and Aristotle, Herodotus, Thucydides, and Xenophon, Plutarch and Cicero, Sallust and Tacitus . . . ; but abstract thought of this kind was distasteful to him, and ancient history he valued less for its own sake than for the light it threw on ancient literature.⁸

In view of the fact that Housman preferred poetry to prose and that the prescribed course of study at Oxford was, by and large, distasteful to him, it is not surprising that he failed his examination. Laurence Housman remembers the

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Gow, p. 6.

event as "catastrophic."⁹ Gow goes on to say that

Housman's chief love was poetry. The tuition provided by St. John's College seems to have been uninspiring, or at any rate it failed to inspire him with interest in this curriculum Probably he hoped to get through on his knowledge of Greek and Latin, but, in any event, whether because he had miscalculated the knowledge required, or because he was too fastidious to do ill what he was in no position to do otherwise . . . , he showed up no answers to many of the questions set¹⁰

It should be noted here that Alfred's remarks concerning his change in faith from Anglicanism to deism and, finally, to atheism coincided with the two great disheartening events of his youth; the death of his mother and his failure at Oxford. Laurence Housman felt that this aforesaid failure changed his brother permanently. He says:

It was probably the blow of his failure which caused him to withdraw completely into himself, and become a silent and impenetrable recluse in the midst of his own family during the eighteen months which elapsed before he left home to take up his Civil Service appointment in London.

Up to the beginning of his University career he had been our social and intellectual leader When he came back, and for a good many years afterwards, we ceased to know him--mainly, if not entirely, because he was determined not to be known. If sympathy was what he feared to receive on his return from Oxford, he took the best means to deprive himself of it; and only occasionally at

⁹L. Housman, p. 39.

¹⁰Gow, p. 9.

first, then gradually as the years went on, did he allow a breaking-down of the barrier.¹¹

Therefore, a year and a half after his failure at Oxford, Housman accepted a mediocre position in the Patent Office in London. He occupied rooms with Moses and Adalbert Jackson, and he spent most of his free time in the pursuit of classical scholarship, almost, it would seem, to rectify his recent humiliation to himself and his examiners. As a matter of fact, his outpouring of contributions to the learned journals (for example, his work on Propertius, submitted to The Journal of Philology in 1888, occupied thirty-five pages) provided him with the qualifications that he needed to become the Latin professor at University College, London, in 1892. Housman's career at last had begun to develop along the lines that he apparently wished it would. Always a classical scholar, he now devoted himself to the scholarship in which he excelled. In 1911 he accepted the Kennedy Chair of Latin at Cambridge, and he remained on the faculty until his death in 1936.

A Shropshire Lad first appeared in 1896, and it was this volume that established A. E. Housman as one of the better poets of the later Victorian period. Although there

¹¹L. Housman, pp. 56-57.

were only sixty-three short poems in A Shropshire Lad, the volume gained ever-increasing recognition in the nineteenth century, and was very popular in the early years of the twentieth century.

The poet himself stated that most of A Shropshire Lad was composed during a period of "continuous excitement in the early months of 1895," and that the whole book had been finished at full stretch over eighteen months. Recently, however, the remains of Housman's verse note-books have been completely and ruthlessly scrutinized by American scholars, and their findings tell a different story. According to his friend Dr. Withers, Housman first set himself seriously to write poetry soon after he had settled in London, his preparation consisting less in practising versification than in an intensive study of his chosen models, mainly the Border Ballads, the songs of Shakespeare, and the lyrics of Heine. For four or five years, progress was painfully slow, but the note-books suggest that his inspiration had begun to move as far back as 1890. The first five months of 1895 thus represent the climax of his creative power during which twenty-three of the sixty-three Shropshire Lad lyrics were drafted or finished. Eighteen ninety-five, in fact was the annus mirabilis, for in its later months were written not only the remaining third of A Shropshire Lad but drafts of some half-dozen pieces which later appear in Last Poems, and a still larger number good enough to be preserved for the posthumous More Poems.¹²

The poems contained in the volume reflected the thoughts and feelings, the loves and heartaches of a Shropshire lad who in actuality was Housman. The youth is a cynic, and

¹² Ian Scott-Kilvert, A. E. Housman (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1955), p. 22.

oftentimes he is bitter and resentful at the lot that Fate has cast him. However, Housman himself denied that he was the lad in the poems. He said that "'The Shropshire Lad' . . . is an imaginary figure, with something of my temper and view of life. Very little in the book is biographical . . ."¹³ It is interesting to speculate as to why this erudite Latin scholar should have all at once created a volume of short, yet deeply moving verses. There can be little doubt that the Shropshire of the poems is an idealization of Housman's native countryside. Ian Scott-Kilvert said of the poems and their setting that "at first glance, A Shropshire Lad is written in the character of a country youth, uprooted from his surroundings and exiled to a hostile metropolis, where he clings to his memories of a simpler life. But it is soon clear that 'Shropshire' is not a native heath with a solid existence like Hardy's Wessex. It is rather a composite of the writer's memories, dreams, and affections. In order to make his emotions articulate, Housman apparently needed an imaginary setting and central character who could at once be himself and not himself."¹⁴

¹³L. Housman, p. 71.

¹⁴Scott-Kilvert, p. 27.

The poems contained in the Shropshire Lad were narrow in range of theme. That is, Housman wrote primarily of rejected lovers, death, homesickness, and loneliness. A typical poem that dealt with the rejected lover theme was poem VI:

When the lad for longing sighs,
 Mute and dull of cheer and pale,
 If at death's own door he lies,
 Maiden, you can heal his ail.

Lover's ills are all to buy:
 The wan look, the hollow tone,
 The hung head, the sunken eye,
 You can have them for your own 15

Of course, the most famous rejected lover in A Shropshire Lad appeared in lyric XIII. The sadder but wiser young man said in the poem:

When I was one-and-twenty
 I heard a wise man say,
 'Give crowns and pounds and guineas
 But not your heart away;
 Give pearls away and rubies
 But keep your fancy free.'
 But I was one-and-twenty,
 No use to talk to me.

When I was one-and-twenty
 I heard him say again,
 'The heart out of the bosom
 Was never given in vain;
 'Tis paid with sighs a plenty
 And sold for endless rue.'

¹⁵A. E. Housman, p. 27.

And I am two-and-twenty,
 And oh, 'tis true, 'tis true.¹⁶

The untimely, usually unwarranted, death of young men and women--in battle, by hanging, by natural causes--occupied thematically a great deal of space in A Shropshire Lad. In poem XIX, "To An Athlete Dying Young," Housman felt that the youth was fortunate because he had died while his fame was at its zenith. The youth had no need to fear that he would lose his earlier fame.

The time you won your town the race
 We chaired you through the market-place;
 Man and boy stood cheering by,
 And home we brought you shoulder high.

Today, the road all runners come,
 Shoulder-high we bring you home,
 And set you at your threshold down,
 Townsman of a stiller town.

Smart lad, to slip betimes away,
 From fields where glory does not stay
 And early though the laurel grows
 It withers quicker than the rose.

Eyes the shady night has shut
 Cannot see the record cut,
 And silence sounds no worse than cheers
 After the earth has stopped the ears:

Now you will not swell the rout
 Of lads that wore their honours out,
 Runners whom renown outran
 And the name died before the man.¹⁷

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 32.

Housman's fatalism was an integral part of most of the poems that he wrote. "Bredon Hill," for example, was a melancholy portrait of the death of a boy's loved one. The happiness and glee that the two lovers had formerly enjoyed while they sat on Bredon Hill listening to the bells summoning the people to church was contrasted with the loneliness of the boy. The bells that he had once hoped would toll for their marriage now toll for her funeral.

In summertime on Bredon
 The bells they sound so clear;
 Round both the shires they ring them
 In steeples far and near,
 A happy noise to hear.

Here of a Sunday morning
 My love and I would lie
 And see the coloured counties
 And hear the larks so high
 About us in the sky.

The bells would ring to call her
 In valleys miles away:
 'Come all to church good people;
 Good people come and pray.'
 But here my love would stay.

And I would turn and answer
 Among the springing thyme,
 'Oh, peal upon our wedding,
 And we will hear the chime,
 And come to church in time.'

But when the snows at Christmas
 On Bredon's top were strown,
 My love rose up so early
 And stole out unbeknown
 And went to church alone.

They tolled the one bell only,
 Groom there was none to see,
 The mourners followed after,
 And so to church went she,
 And would not wait for me.

The bells they sound on Bredon,
 And still the steeples hum.
 'Come all to church, good people,'--
 Oh, noisy bells, be dumb;
 I hear you, I will come.¹⁸

However, "Bredon Hill" was not typical of the poems that Housman wrote concerning youthful love. Unlike "Bredon Hill," most of them were ironical with a good deal of cynicism. As a matter of fact, Housman found the best vehicle for his ironical and cynical statements in the poems that he wrote concerning youthful love. For example, in poem XVIII, he wrote:

Oh, when I was in love with you,
 Then I was clean and brave,
 And miles around the wonder grew
 How well I did behave.

And now the fancy passes by,
 And nothing will remain,
 And miles around they'll say that I
 Am quite myself again.¹⁹

Again, in lyric XXV, the irony was implicit.

This time of year a twelvemonth past,
 When Fred and I would meet,
 We needs must jangle, till at last
 We fought and I was beat.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 35-36.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 31.

So then the summer fields about,
 Till rainy days began,
 Rose Harland on her Sundays out
 Walked with the better man.

The better man she walks with still,
 Though now 'tis not with Fred:
 A lad that lives and has his will
 Is worth a dozen dead.

Fred keeps the house all kinds of weather,
 And clay's the house he keeps;
 When Rose and I walk out together
 Stock-still lies Fred and sleeps.²⁰

Poem XXVII was written in the form of a dialogue between the living and the dead; yet the theme and tone were identical in their irony to poem XXV.

'Is my team ploughing,
 That I used to drive
 And hear the harness jingle
 When I was man alive?'

Ay, the horses trample,
 The harness jingles now;
 No change though you lie under
 The land you used to plough.

'Is my girl happy
 That I thought hard to leave
 And has she tired to weeping
 As she lies down at eve?'

Ay, she lies down lightly,
 She lies not down to weep:
 Your girl is well contented.
 Be still, my lad, and sleep.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 40.

'Is my friend hearty,
 Now I am thin and pine,
 And has he found to sleep in
 A better bed than mine?'

Yes, lad, I lie easy,
 I lie as lads would choose;
 I cheer a dead man's sweetheart,
 Never ask me whose.²¹

In these poems, Housman's irony was obvious. He had an apparently cynical outlook upon women, and he felt that love in youth was something of a joke--a horrid hoax perpetrated upon the sincere party. In these poems, the sweetheart's love was not as deep or lasting as the boy's love. Ironically enough, in these two poems (XXV and XXVII) the girl found another suitor very soon after her former lover had died. Furthermore, the new lover was the best friend of the recently departed one.

Humor was also to be found in A Shropshire Lad, but here again the humor was infused with the tongue-in-cheek irony so typical of Housman. The poem "Terence, This Is Stupid Stuff" (LXII) was light verse. For example:

'Terence, this is stupid stuff:
 You eat your victuals fast enough;
 There can't be much amiss, 'tis clear,
 To see the rate you drink your beer.
 But oh, good Lord, the verse you make,
 It gives a chap the belly-ache'

²¹Ibid., pp. 42-43.

Why, if 'tis dancing you would be,
 There's brisker pipes than poetry.
 Say, for what were hop-yards meant,
 Or why was Burton built on Trent?
 Oh many a peer of England brews
 Livelier liquor than the Muse,
 And malt does more than Milton can
 To justify God's ways to man.
 Ale, man, ale's the stuff to drink
 For fellows whom it hurts to think:
 Look into the pewter pot
 To see the world as the world's not.
 And faith, 'tis pleasant till 'tis past:
 The mischief is that 'twill not last.²²

This poem, as did so many others, reflected the sad, gentle, melancholy personality of Housman himself. A Shropshire Lad was written during a time when Housman was forced to write in order to relieve himself of the sad thoughts and melancholy remembrances that had built up in him. The death of his mother, his failure at Oxford, his years of almost complete seclusion in London, and his estrangement from his closest friend, Moses Jackson, were all contributing factors to Housman's poetic inspiration.

It is obvious that Housman's nature, like Hardy's, was one that became "vocal to tragedy," that saw the frustrations of life more clearly than its satisfactions, though his bitter pity has in it little of Hardy's all-embracing compassion. With laconic brevity, forceful directness, and exquisite simplicity, a dark fatalism was expressed

²²Ibid., pp. 88-89.

This poetry, so narrow in range of thought and emotion and so slender in quantity, bids fair to survive²³

²³Samuel C. Chew, "Other Late-Victorian Poets," A Literary History of England, Albert C. Baugh, ed. (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1948), p. 1546.

CHAPTER VII

THOMAS HARDY

Thomas Hardy, by virtue of his birth date and the publication dates of his poems, is the last of the Victorian pessimistic poets. His first volume of verse (Wessex Poems and Other Poems) appeared in 1898, followed by Poems of Past and Present (1901), Time's Laughingstocks and Other Verses (1909), Satires of Circumstance, Lyrics and Reveries (1914), Moments of Vision (1917), Late Lyrics and Earlier (1922), and the posthumous volume, Winter Words, In Various Moods and Metres, published the year of his death (1928).

These publication dates offer no real insight into the development of Hardy's pessimism, for it is generally believed that many of the poems were composed as early as the 1860's; and, aside from the various elegies and occasional poems that he wrote commemorating his first wife's death in 1912, his poems must needs be grouped thematically rather than chronologically.

When a thematic classification is employed, Hardy's pessimistic poems fall into three general groups. As will

become obvious to the reader, these themes are also the basis for his prose works; hence, I deem my selection or classification to be valid. The first major theme is that of religious doubt. In the poems to follow, some are agnostic in a manner similar to Arnold, while others echo the philosophy of Swinburne. Still others are unique with Hardy.

The second theme found in Hardy (indeed, found in varying degrees in all of the other pessimistic poets as well) is fatalism. Closely allied with his negative outlook on religion is Hardy's rather bitter attitude toward the "purbblind Doomsters" who control men's lives.

Hardy's major theme is pessimism in regard to love. Whether the participants be married or single, unfaithful or virtuous, Hardy devotes the majority of his love poems to the theme of love gone awry. Melancholy, sadness, cynicism, irony, and unfaithfulness form the basis for these love poems. Furthermore, as will be discussed below, certain aspects of Hardy's first marriage can be cited as probable causes for his cynical attitude, but the fact remains, however, that Hardy's kind poems to Emma Gifford Hardy far outnumber those bitter ones addressed to or written about her. Therefore, it appears that Hardy's love cynicism was simply a development of his poetic thought, and whether or not it was influenced

by aspects of his first marriage is, at best, a matter of conjecture.

Of course, a poet's statements concerning his own work are often valuable guides, and such is the case with Thomas Hardy. In his "Apology" to Late Lyrics and Earlier, he partially explains his pessimistic attitude by saying that:

If I may be forgiven for quoting my own words, let me repeat what I printed . . . more than twenty years ago, and wrote much earlier, in a poem entitled "In Tenebris":

If way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the Worst:

that is to say, by the exploration of reality, and its frank recognition stage by stage along the survey, with an eye to the best consummation possible: briefly, evolutionary meliorism. But it is called pessimism nevertheless; under which word, expressed with condemnatory emphasis, it is regarded by many as some pernicious new thing (though so old as to underline the Gospel scheme, and even to permeate the Greek drama); and the subject is charitably left to decent silence, as if further comment were needless.¹

Therefore, the word "pessimism," when used as an appellation for his poetry, was considered by Hardy to be onerous; for whatever his reasons, he believed that such a description was pejorative and, hence, inaccurate. Nevertheless, if Hardy

¹Thomas Hardy, Collected Poems of Thomas Hardy (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1926), pp. 526-527. (Hereafter cited as Poems).

truly considered his work to be fraught with "evolutionary meliorism," it is interesting to note that his poetry maintained its tone of cynicism throughout his life, and his supposed meliorism is just not present. In the poems to follow, Hardy most certainly exacts a full look at the worst in regard to God, Fate, and love relationships.

In one of Hardy's earliest religiously pessimistic poems, "The Impercipient," he offers us one of the best insights into his negative attitude toward religion. In this poem, he pictures himself seated in church, impartially observing both the service and his friends. Rather than join in the worship or accept the beliefs of his fellows, he simply says:

That with this bright believing band
 I have no claim to be,
 That faiths by which my comrades stand
 Seem fantasies to me,
 And mirage-mists their Shining Land,
 Is a strange destiny.

I am like a gazer who should mark
 An inland company
 Standing upfingered, with, "Hark! hark!
 The glorious distant sea!"
 And feel, "Alas, 'tis but yon dark
 And wind-swept pine to me!"²

²Ibid., pp. 59-60.

Briefly stated, Hardy could not accept faith or religion. He looked upon his fellow man's blind faith as a substitute for seeing life as it is in reality. Of course, a continuous view of life at its absolute worst would necessarily include a pessimistic attitude toward religion; for, like Swinburne, Hardy could not believe in a benevolent God when he saw injustice and strife rampant in the world.

In a poem addressed to life ("To Life") Hardy continues the theme of estrangement from his fellows in regard to religious beliefs. Depicting the "sad seared face" of life, he asks for some sign from Heaven that will force in him a change of heart. As he asks in the poem:

But canst thou not array
 Thyself in rare disguise,
 And feign like truth, for one mad day,
 That earth is Paradise?

I'll tune me to the mood,
 And mumm with thee till eve;
 And maybe what as interlude
 I feign, I shall believe!³

From this meagre beginning, Hardy's religious pessimism develops to the point where he portrays God as creating the world and then setting it adrift in the universe. The most frightening aspect of Hardy's religious pessimism is his

³Ibid., pp. 107-108.

portrayal of God as nothing more than an absent-minded buffoon who creates a world at his own whim and then ignores (or forgets) it. In the poems dealing with God's indifference, Hardy's religious pessimism is at its most obvious (though not at its most pessimistic) point. For example, in "Nature's Questioning," Hardy describes God and the world He created thus:

Has some Vast Imbecility,
 Mighty to build and blend,
 But impotent to tend,
 Framed us in jest, and left us now to hazardry?⁴

Continuing this theme is "An Inquiry." Here Hardy relates a conversation between a man and God in which the man asks God why He crowned Death as the "King of the Firmament." God considers the question proper and goes off in order to contemplate it. When He returns, His answer is this:

Well, my forethoughtless modes to you
 May seem a shameless thing
 But--I'd no meaning, that I knew
 In crowning Death as King!"⁵

Hence Hardy believes God to be irresponsible and, therefore, not worthy of man's worship or faith. Furthermore, though Hardy never carries his religious pessimism to the

⁴Ibid., p. 59.

⁵Ibid., pp. 724-725.

point of outright rejection that characterizes the verse of Swinburne or Thomson, he does treat the matter of God's existence. In three poems that echo Swinburne, Hardy deals with the idea that God was created by man in order that he might have something divinely ethereal to worship. In all three of these poems ("God's Funeral," "A Plaint to Man," and "The Blow"), Hardy either states or implies that the world is so oppressive that man, in self-defense, created God in order to have something in which to believe. This attitude of Hardy's was not sustained, however; these three "Swinburnian" poems stand alone in regard to Hardy's religious pessimism, but they are not completely divorced from it. That is to say, in a few religiously pessimistic poems that I consider unique with Hardy, God's existence is not questioned so much as His very holiness. Certainly, those poems depicting God as absent-minded or unconcerned are basically skeptical; yet there are other poems that far exceed them in religious pessimism.

To begin with one of the milder examples, "A Christmas Ghost-Story," Hardy describes a soldier's ghost musing over the validity of God and Christ. To the ghost, the doctrine of peace on earth is an absurdity, else why would he have been a soldier? Furthermore, the phantom also states that

the world has waited for over 2000 years for the reason behind Christ's crucifixion to be made manifest, and it has not.

A second poem following this same theme is "A Drizzling Easter Morning." Here, Hardy simply says that Christ's death and subsequent ascension, miraculous as they may have been, have proven nothing; man is still weary and defeated. Easter, to Hardy, is nothing more than another day marked on a calendar.

The next two poems, "The Wood Fire" and "Panthera," are by far the most religiously pessimistic poems that Hardy wrote. In both of them Hardy tells stories set in the time of Christ, and the crucifixion is used as the focal point of the action. The horror of both poems derives from the method used in the writing of them. Furthermore, the poems are highly ironic. In "The Wood Fire" two men are pictured as sitting before an open fire; as it turns out, the wood burning is from the Cross, and the practicality and nonchalance of the men's speech is religiously pessimistic by implication. To quote the poem:

Yes, they're from the crucifixions last week-ending
 At Kranion. We can sometimes use the poles again,
 But they get split by the nails, and 'tis quicker
 work than mending
 To knock together new; though the uprights now and
 then

Serve twice when they're let stand. But if a feast's
 impending,
 As lately, you've to tidy up for the comers' ken.

Though only three were impaled, you may know it didn't
 pass off

So quietly as was wont? That Galilee carpenter's son
 Who boasted he was king, incensed the rabble to scoff:
 I heard the noise from my garden. This piece is the
 one he was on. . . .

Yes, it blazes up well if lit with a few dry chips and
 shroff;

And it's worthless for much else, what with the cuts
 and stains thereon.⁶

The next poem, even more horrible, is "Panthera." Hardy describes the life and fortunes of a Roman soldier campaigning in the Near East during the time of Christ. Panthera's legion arrives in Nazareth; he meets and seduces a young Jewish girl, whom we later realize is Mary. Finding herself pregnant, the unfortunate girl is forced to marry an old man, Joseph, who takes pity on her. By this time, Panthera's unit has been sent elsewhere, and it is not until thirty years later that he is again sent to Nazareth. Panthera has been a loyal Roman soldier, and the legion under his command has been ordered to quell a rebellion started among the Jews by a self-proclaimed king. To quote Panthera's narration:

Well; there it ended; save that then I learnt
 That he--the man whose ardent blood was mine--

⁶Ibid., pp. 585-586.

Had waked sedition long among the Jews,
 And hurled insulting parlance at their god,
 Whose temple bulked upon the adjoining hill,
 Vowing that he would raze it, that himself
 Was god as great as he whom they adored,
 And by descent, moreover, was their king;
 With sundry other incitements to misrule.

The impalements done, and done the soldiers' game
 Of raffling for the clothes, a legionary,
 Longinus, pierced the young man with his lance
 At signs from me, moved by his agonies
 Through naysaying the drug they had offered him.
 It brought the end. And when he had breathed his last
 The woman went. I saw her never again.⁷

What is to me the frightening aspect of the poem is that the story of Panthera is told in such a way that the events of Christ's birth and death are treated with no more emphasis than the rest of Panthera's tale. To describe the events of Christ's life without a religious interpretation is unique in that these statements themselves are sacrilegious and the thought contained therein, by association, is religiously pessimistic. Furthermore, to actually deny the Biblical story of Christ's life in favor of a plausibly presented, though fraudulent, tale is certainly religious pessimism. Both "The Wood Fire" and "Panthera" are shocking, and they are the most severely negative religious poems thus far discussed.

⁷Ibid., pp. 266-267.

Therefore, Hardy's religious pessimism was diffuse in that he, unlike the other pessimistic poets, did not have one major religiously pessimistic theme. Rather than being incensed by God's injustice, Hardy implied that God should be pitied for having a supreme power over which He had no control; he felt that God should be considered in the same light as the village idiot. Furthermore, in "The Wood Fire" and "Panthera" Hardy used irony of situation to create a new kind of religiously pessimistic poem. Instead of relying on invective or outrage, he formed poems in which practicality and ordinary events were used in order at once to underline yet underplay his denial of the divinity of Christ.

Still another unique poem of religious pessimism is "At A Country Fair." Set in the microcosmic world of the carnival, Hardy creates a parable in which a dwarf is God, a blind giant is man, and the fair is life itself. Hardy is the impartial observer who records the scene of a dwarf leading the silent giant through the fair's avenues. Wherever the dwarf decides to go, the giant meekly follows, never caring or thinking that he can free himself from his bondage with little or no difficulty. This particular poem is religiously pessimistic and fatalistic. The religious pessimism derives from the allegorical nature of the characters; the

dwarf represents God, but he also represents man's total willingness to be led by a force that he trusts blindly. By implication, Hardy takes Swinburne's view that man has allowed himself to be the thrall of God without ever considering his own individual strength.

The fatalistic strain in the poem is brought out in a closing stanza:

Wherever the dwarf decided to go
At his heels the other trotted meekly,
(Perhaps--I know not--reproaching weakly)
Like one Fate bade that it must be so,
Whether he wished or no.⁸

Therefore, when the whole poem is considered, it becomes obvious that Fate, not the dwarf (God), has the ultimate authority in the course of men's lives.

Hardy's fatalism, as it is seen in his poetry, is the supreme power in life. Furthermore, in his semimythical land of "Wessex," Hardy continually demonstrates how events are determined by Fate and how the people are what they are and do what they do because Fate has willed it.

In an early poem ("Hap," 1866) Hardy set forth the fatalistic credo that he was to adhere to for the rest of his life, saying:

⁸Ibid., p. 474.

If but some vengeful god would call to me
 From up the sky, and laugh: "Thou suffering thing,
 Know that thy sorrow is my ecstasy,
 That thy love's loss is my hate's profiting!"

But not so. How arrives it joy lies slain,
 And why unblooms the best hope ever sown?
 --Crass Casualty obstructs the sun and rain,
 And dicing Time for gladness casts a moan. . . .
 These purblind Doomsters had as readily strown
 Bliss about my pilgrimage as pain.⁹

Man must realize that he has only a tenuous control over his life, actions, and associates. In the final analysis, he can venture only so far before Fate steps in to guide him toward fortune or disaster. Hardy is, of course, pessimistic over the all-pervasive control of Fate, but he also says that man can at least survive if he understands that control. For example, in "Let Me Enjoy," Hardy says:

Let me enjoy the earth no less
 Because the all-enacting Might
 That fashioned forth its loveliness
 Had other aims than my delight.¹⁰

It follows that, since Hardy considered God to be less powerful than Fate, man must realize that the universe is not benevolent, nor is happiness guaranteed.

In a poem ostensibly addressed to an unborn child, Hardy tells him what to expect from life. He says that it would be

⁹ Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 222.

far better for the child to continue his prenatal bliss rather than to enter the world with the hope that he can change the plight of man. Therefore, in "To An Unborn Pauper Child," Hardy is giving him the benefit of his advice; the advice is based on his attitude toward life, and it is bleak indeed.

In the interest of brevity, only one other fatalistic poem of Hardy's will be discussed--"Heiress and Architect," in the Wessex Poems collection.

In a manner similar to "At A Country Fair," Hardy uses the allegory of an architect designing a house for a noblewoman. The architect symbolizes Fate. In her plans to build the house (parallel to man's dreams of an illustrious future of wealth and splendor), the heiress' initial plans are quite grandiose; she first proposes a high-walled mansion covered with clinging vines and flowers. The architect rejects her plan, saying that, when winter comes and the flowers die, she will be left with only a cold shell for a home. Somewhat vexed, she then suggests a house walled with glass; again, the architect finds her idea unacceptable. He maintains that when her soul is sick and oppressed she will not wish a house in which her own reflection will be constantly before her, mirroring her emotions. Nearing desper-

ation, she then pleads with him to build her a small, albeit luxuriously furnished, chamber, where she can retire from the world. Says he:

"This, too, is ill,"
 He answered still,
 The man who swayed her like a shade.
 "An hour will come when sight of such sweet
 nook
 Would bring a bitterness too sharp to brook,
 When brighter eyes have won away his look;
 For you will fade."¹¹

By now, the haughty beauty has been reduced to begging the architect to grant her a narrow winding turret where she can be left entirely alone. In reply he says:

"Such winding ways
 Fit not your days,"
 Said he, the man of measuring eye;
 "I must even fashion as the rule declares,
 To wit: Give space (since life ends unawares)
 To hale a confined corpse adown the stairs;
 For you will die."¹²

Hence, the architect (Fate) knows that, regardless of what her plans are or to what extent they are carried out, all of her architectural dreams are but her way of avoiding the fact that she will die. In contrast, the architect harbors no dreams or illusions, and he "typifies the rigor and

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 67-68.

¹² Ibid., p. 68.

indifference of the universe."¹³ He represents the only reality that she cannot face.

The greatest bulk of Hardy's poetry centers on his cynical attitude toward love; and, in his poems dealing with love relationships, the vast majority of them are very ironic. That is to say, Hardy believed that people are basically motivated by their desires and not by altruism, sincerity, or kindness. Furthermore, Hardy viewed the sincere party in love affairs as something of a fool, for he is the one who is constantly being cuckolded.

To digress briefly, it has been said of Hardy that certain aspects of his first marriage caused him to adopt a cynical attitude toward marriage and love in general. Although Hardy married Emma Lavinia Gifford in September of 1874 and remained with her until her death in 1912, there was a classic case of conflicting personalities. She was of high station in life; he was not. He wanted children, but Emma proved to be barren. Furthermore, Emma believed that she had the talent to be a writer of equal rank with her husband. She not only composed rather bland lyrics about her pet cats, but she became increasingly interested

¹³ Samuel C. Chew, Thomas Hardy (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1928), pp. 16-17.

in "helping" Hardy write his novels. This facet of her personality led to the fourth and most serious cause for friction between the two. Having been raised amid a genealogical heritage of high churchmen, she was strictly conventional in religion. Hardy was strictly unconventional in religion, and his "knowledge of the Bible, his interest in church music, and his experience as a Sunday-school teacher and as a church architect served for a while to disguise for her his complete rejection of the doctrine and dogma of the Established Church."¹⁴ This basic difference did not become noticeable until Emma began reading the manuscript of Hardy's Jude the Obscure, a novel in which established morals and religious ethics were either questioned or rejected. To her, as well as the general public, his novel was too outspoken and iconoclastic, and it revealed its author in his true light.

Though Hardy's marriage was not the epitome of marital bliss, I hardly think that the minor irritations contained therein could have caused him to write such cynical love poems. Furthermore, though it has been popularly believed that Somerset Maugham's Cakes and Ale is a thinly disguised

¹⁴ Carl J. Weber, Hardy of Wessex (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940), p. 163.

portrait of Hardy and Emma (portrayed as Herbert and Rosie Driffield); by the author's own admission, Driffield was no more a portrait of Hardy than of Meredith or Anatole France. This statement, however, "left readers free to guess and invited false and uncharitable inferences."¹⁵

Why, then, should Hardy have adopted so cynical an attitude toward love? The question will here remain unanswered except to say that his cynicism concerning love pervades his poetry and is central to his pessimism. It seems that this was simply his attitude; he considered happiness in love a dubious proposition at best and, when love turned sour, he usually acknowledged Fate or unfaithfulness to be culpable.

Although Hardy may be best remembered for his sketches of marital infidelity in his poems, he also wrote poems analyzing the ephemeral quality of love before marriage. To cite but three examples ("Revulsion," "He Abjures Love," and "The End of an Episode"), Hardy maintains that the attainment of a girl's love is short-lived and that when her love is won, the nature of the individuals and the course of events necessarily force the affair to be terminated.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 156.

Therefore, in these three poems, Hardy argues that it is far better never to win love rather than attain and then lose it. For example, Hardy says in "Revulsion":

For winning love we win the risk of losing,
 And losing love is as one's life were riven;
 It cuts like contumely and keen ill-using
 To cede what was superfluously given.

Let me then never feel the fateful thrilling
 That devastates the love-worn wooer's frame,
 The hot ado of fevered hopes, the chilling
 That agonizes disappointed aim!¹⁶

Since the ending of an affair results in such agony to both parties, Hardy says that he would rather abjure the temporary bliss than live with the inevitable heartache. For example, in "He Abjures Love," he says:

--I speak as one who plumbs
 Life's dim profound,
 One who at length can sound
 Clear views and certain.
 But--after love what comes?
 A scene that lours,
 A few sad vacant hours,
 And then, the Curtain.¹⁷

The theme of the pain that love brings is continued by Hardy in his later poetry. In a poem generally reputed to be one of his best in regard to tone and mood, "The Clock-Winder" from Moments of Vision, Hardy poses as an observer

¹⁶ Poems, p. 11.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 220-221.

secretly watching a solitary clock-winder climb the narrow turret of a church steeple. The observer overhears a personal confession made by the clock-winder when he thought he was completely alone and, after he hears what he should not have, he inserts his own comment. To quote from the poem:

"So I wipe out one more,
My Dear, of the sore
Sad days that still be,
Like a drying Dead Sea,
Between you and me!"

Who she was no man knew:
He had long borne him blind
To all womankind;
And was ever one who
Kept his past out of view.¹⁸

Though the narrator has known practically nothing about the clock-winder, he, in a quintessential moment, observes his soul laid bare and can discern the reason for his self-imposed solitude.

In regard to the termination of love affairs, the implicit irony of situation did not escape Hardy. In a few poems that form a transition between his sad love lyrics and his cynical ones, Hardy relates the thoughts of the two people now that they have separated. In all of the transitional

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 488-489.

poems, Hardy describes a love-struck youth romantically brooding over his former love and wondering whether she is thinking of him at the very same moment. Hardy reveals the ironic truth of the situation: though the boy may be sustained by his memories, the girl has found new fields to conquer, and she could not be less concerned over her old love. Two poems of this genre are "The Moon Looks In" and "In Her Precincts." Quoting from the latter, Hardy says:

Her house looked cold from the foggy lea,
 And the square of each window a dull black blur
 Where showed no stir:
 Yes, her gloom within at the lack of me
 Seemed matching mine at the lack of her.

The black squares grew to be squares of light
 As the eyeshade swathed the house and lawn,
 And viols gave tone;
 There was glee within. And I found that night
 The gloom of severance mine alone.¹⁹

It should be noted here that Hardy's poetry (and, to a greater extent, his novels) utilizes the semimythical land of "Wessex" for its setting. The land is semimythical in that it, like Housman's "Shropshire" or Thomson's "City," has as its basis an actual geographic area; the people of this land, their actions, and their feelings are, however, creations of Hardy's imagination colored by recollections

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 444.

of his native area. Using this microcosm, Hardy is able to invest his characters with whatever personality quirks he so desires.

In his most cynical love poems, Hardy's land plays a most important part. Since the environment is a rural, hence "natural" one, the actions of his characters are governed only by natural impulse without trace of metropolitan sophistication. Therefore, whatever their deeds may be, Hardy implies that their emotions and actions are basic and natural.

In the love poems to be discussed below, Hardy's favorite theme is the portrayal of the ignorant, cuckolded male spouse. The husband is pictured as being injured, and his wife is typically portrayed as taking a lover after she marries in order to relieve herself of marital boredom; retaining or returning to a lover whom she has had before her marriage; or, being by nature an individual whose sexual appetite exceeds her husband's to the extent that she is incapable of remaining faithful. To name but a few of these poems followed by a brief explanation will suffice.

Often Hardy's poems deal with the honeymoon. In "Honey-moon Time at an Inn," Hardy portrays a man and wife lying together, observed by the spirits of Irony and Pity. Pity

says that the portent of their love fading with their youth is too awful a thought to contemplate, but Irony wryly marks that their lot is no different from that of any other newly married couple. "In the Nuptial Chamber" pictures a man asking his bride why she should become incensed over the tune being played below their window in honor of their wedding day. His question receives this bone-chilling reply:

O but you don't know! 'Tis the passionate air
 To which my old Love waltzed with me,
 And I swore as we spun that none should share
 My home, my kisses, till death, save he!
 And he dominates me and thrills me through,
 And it's he I embrace while embracing you!²⁰

In another cynical poem based on the implicit irony of the marriage rites, "The Wedding Morning," Hardy tells the story of Tabitha, forced to marry because she is pregnant. The day before her marriage, however, she has gone to see her friend Carry. Tabitha overhears her future husband saying that he would far rather marry Carry, but circumstances are such that he cannot void the sham marital contract that he has made.

Hardy's attitude is seen to grow more cynical in those poems dealing with couples who have been married for a while. For example, "In the Days of Crinoline" tells the story of

²⁰Ibid., pp. 395-396.

a parson's wife ostensibly going to town; however, before she arrives, she is met by her lover and together they retire to a secluded nook. She returns home in the evening, and her husband is none the wiser. In "The Duel," Hardy tells the story of a man defending his wife's honor against slander. Of course, what the husband does not suspect is that the tales are true, and that he is fighting his wife's lover. The wife, disguised as a page to the blackguard, watches her husband receive his death wound and then nonchalantly rides away with her lover. "The Dolls" is in the form of a dialogue between a mother and her daughter. When the girl asks her why she dresses all of her dolls as soldiers, the mother replies:

Because your mammy's heed
Is always gallant soldiers,
As well may be, indeed.
One of them was your daddy,
His name I must not tell;
He's not the dad who lives here,
But one I love too well.²¹

Of these last, most cynical, love poems, one stands out as the epitome of its genre. "A Conversation At Dawn" presents a recently (by months) married couple. The woman has lain awake all night, and her husband, sensing her unrest,

²¹Ibid., pp. 466-467.

questions her until she finally reveals the source of her anguish. To his utter disbelief, the woman tells how she had taken, prior to their marriage, a lover who was a married man. The day before, she had seen the body of her former lover's wife being transported home for burial, and on this fateful day had also received a note from her former paramour asking her to flout her marriage vows and resume their affair. Unlike the other cuckolded husbands thus far presented who have been unaware of their wives' duplicity, the husband in this case takes control of the situation. Continuing her sordid confession, the young wife asks her husband if he would consider "loaning" her to her lover for a week; after all, she reasons, she married only in order to protect the name of the child she thought that she was carrying by him. Rather than throwing her out, the husband assumes an unexpected attitude, saying:

So, my lady, you raise the veil by degrees. . . .
 I own this last is enough to freeze
 The warmest wight!
 Now hear the other side, if you please:

 No: I'll not free you. And if it appear
 There was too good ground for your first fear
 From your amorous tricks,
 I'll father the child. Yes, by God, my dear!

Even should you fly to his arms, I'll damn
 Opinion and fetch you; treat as sham
 Your mutinous kicks,
 And whip you home. That's the sort I am!

I'm a practical man, and want no tears;
 You've made a fool of me, it appears'
 That you don't again
 Is a lesson I'll teach you in future years.²²

In a way, this particular poem is refreshing. Instead of escaping from spouse and obligations, the woman is forced to be faithful. However, the poem also offers an opportunity for Hardy's use of irony because at the close of the poem he intimates that the husband has made his wife a recalcitrant captive who, when the opportunity presents itself, will probably damn the consequences and fly to her waiting lover. Though this last interpretation goes beyond the text of the poem, I certainly think that Hardy intended the reader to surmise that this initial revelation of the wife's is only the first manifestation of a marriage destined for unpleasantness and suspicion.

Other cynical vignettes of marriage could be cited, but they would not be significant enough to warrant their inclusion.

Thomas Hardy, last of the Victorian pessimistic poets, based his poetry on familiar pessimistic themes. A religious doubt is very apparent; and, in two of his religiously pessimistic poems, his method is unique. Fatalism is also a

²²Ibid., pp. 349-350.

basic theme used in his poetry. His Wessex characters are in the hands of the "purblind Doomsters" who arbitrarily determine the course of their lives. Hardy's love or marital cynicism is his most characteristic theme. As stated above, his first marriage was perhaps less felicitous than he would have wanted; yet there is no evidence to support the theory that his most bitter love poems had their origin in his personal travails with Emma. If anything, quite the opposite is true. Therefore, though Hardy dwelt upon cynical love themes, the only true explanation possible is that he simply took a negative attitude toward the accepted Victorian dream of matrimonial bliss and set out in his poetry to bring to light the other side of the marital situation.

CONCLUSION

The Victorian age is remembered for its industrial growth, landmark social legislation, and rampant optimism; and the poetry of the period generally reflected these trends. In the majority opinion, the age and its people were inexorably becoming more religious, moral, and optimistic.

However, seven men, whose works span the entire period, wrote poetry which served as a rejection of all the current ideals.

The quiet school-inspector Matthew Arnold ushered in the pessimistic trend, but his poetry was soft enough in its expression so as not to arouse the public distaste. Next, Edward FitzGerald's Omar spoke eloquently of the unkind Fate that determined the course of his life. Though his hope resided in wine and women rather than the perseverance of Arnold, the tentmaker's quatrains had a winning charm that enabled the public to read and enjoy, if not accept, them.

The next three poets, Thomson, Swinburne, and Dowson, were the most bitter of the lot. To them, life was a long,

gradual, personal defeat, and their poetry explicitly stated their pessimism with little or no regard for the feelings of their readers. To read "The City of Dreadful Night," "Anactoria," or "Cynara" is to see the poets' souls at their darkest moment.

Interestingly enough, the poetry of the pessimistic school ended on the same note with which it was begun. The last poets, Housman and Hardy, were of course despairing, too, over life and love, but their poetry was a good deal more quiet than that of their immediate predecessors. Their poetic statements were soft, mournful sighs or bittersweet comments rather than brazen, screaming invectives.

The poets discussed here will not be acknowledged as innovators of verse forms, but they will be remembered for their attitudes. Whether the character is a lonely man standing atop the cliffs of Dover, a defeated insomniac pacing the darkened streets of London, a satyr-like individual raving of lust and sadism, or a wistful Shropshire lad remembering the peace of a former time, all of the poets, each in his own way, expressed the thought that life was at times too much for them to bear.

The causes for each poet's pessimism were numerous and divergent from that of his fellows, but in one respect they

shared a common bond. In order to survive, they had to purge themselves of their defeatism, and poetry was the only medium that they found suitable for that purpose.

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