

PESSIMISM IN THREE MAJOR ENGLISH POETS
OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The only limit placed on pessimism is the limit of death, and certainly no writer is a complete pessimist, for he would not be writing poetry if his response to life were total rejection. There may be various degrees of negation, and it may manifest itself in many areas of life and art. After the romantic melancholy of the early part of the nineteenth century in England, the middle and late century saw a particular kind of despair. The increasing industrialism, the development of scientific modes of investigation, and the upheaval in religious thinking combined to create an atmosphere of fear and doubt. Since writers reflect the changes in any society, the three poets who are the subject of this thesis--Matthew Arnold, Thomas Hardy and Alfred Edward Housman--must reflect strongly these very tendencies.

The nature of the subject sets its own limitations, and it is readily admitted that to determine a poet's basic outlook on life must always be tentative speculation for the critic. Nevertheless, twentieth-century literature, with its inherited spirit of decadence, must look to these men and others of their time as transitional figures from a

mutual past. The major writers of the eighteenth century had clung to more traditional values and more established notions of faith; the romantics had leaned heavily upon the senses to interpret life; these three writers tried to face more realistically the issues of their society and, at the same time, to make poetry out of their philosophical ponderings.

This thesis examines the evidences of pessimism in the poetry of each, substantiated when possible by parallel prose writings and other critical and biographical material; and finally, it reaches tentative conclusions about the direction of the change in pessimistic outlook of the three poets.

CHAPTER II

MATTHEW ARNOLD

An examination of the poetry of Matthew Arnold reveals the extent of his pessimistic thought and the two major aspects of his disillusionment. Arnold felt despair when he observed his contemporary society. His immediate reaction was one of wishing to escape from this society; yet, he came later to give himself almost completely to trying to perfect it. Arnold's deeper despair came with a consciousness of the more personal problems of the inward life of man, and his attempt to synthesize his thoughts into a faith is seen in his poetry.

Arnold and City Life

Matthew Arnold was sensitive to the times in which he lived; he looked at the busy cities of the new industrialism and saw much there to condemn. His judgments may be examined in his poetry; yet they are often just as clearly exemplified in his prose writings and his published letters. In the poem "The Scholar Gipsy" (1853) Arnold speaks of ". . . this strange disease of modern life,/ With its sick hurry, its divided aims,/ Its heads o'ertax'd, its palsied

hearts;/"¹ he advises the subject of the poem to fly from this world of sick fatigue before he contacts ". . . the infection of our mental strife."²

This same general judgment upon the society of his day is shown in a letter to his good friend, Arthur Hugh Clough, in 1849:

My dearest Clough these are damned times-- everything is against one--the height to which knowledge is come, the spread of luxury, our physical enervation, the absence of great natures, the unavoidable contact with millions of small ones, newspapers, cities, light profligate friends, moral desperadoes like Carlyle, our own selves, and the sickening consciousness of our difficulties.³

Again, in a letter to his mother, Arnold expresses himself concerning his fellow countrymen:

The want of independence of mind, the shutting their eyes and professing to believe what they do not, the running blindly together in herds, for fear of some obscure danger and horror if they go alone, is so eminently a vice of the English, I think, of the last hundred years-- has led them, and is leading them into such scrapes and bewilderment. . . .⁴

Politics

Part of Arnold's despair with the society of the day was directed toward the political ideals which he saw being

¹Matthew Arnold, The Poems of Matthew Arnold (London, 1913), p. 236.

²Ibid., p. 236.

³Howard Foster Lowry, editor, The Letters of Matthew Arnold to Arthur Hugh Clough (London, 1932), p. 111.

⁴George W. E. Russell, editor, Letters of Matthew Arnold (London, 1895), I, 44.

sacrificed for personal gain. The French Revolution, though based on noble intentions, had, he felt, fallen from its high purpose because the politicians were more interested in party considerations and selfish aims than in the cause of liberty. Again, the devotion to true liberty is thoroughly expressed in his prose, but the essence of his views is expressed in several poems. "To the Duke of Wellington" (1849) praises the Duke for having seen ". . . one clue to life, and follow'd it."⁵ In "To a Republican Friend" (1849) and "Continued" (1849) Arnold regrets that the French Revolution has not assured the prospects for democratic ideals. He fears that man can never overcome his lust, avarice, and envy, however much he may plot and plan.

In a letter to his sister dated May 22, 1859, Arnold gives an interesting account of his views on the current political situation in France. He feels that Louis Napoleon is invading Italy to obtain glory for France by following through the plan of his uncle. He fears that English politicians and diplomats will be so bound by the traditions and routines of the past that they will be unprepared for whatever happens. Arnold in this same letter to "K" repeats an assertion he later makes in Culture and Anarchy that aristocracies are inaccessible to ideas: ". . . the true type of the British political nobleman is Lord Derby--with

⁵Arnold, op. cit., p. 59.

eloquence, high feeling and good intentions--but the ideas of a school-boy."⁶ Perhaps it was this opinion of the aristocracy which determined his desire to elevate and educate the middle classes toward the responsibilities which he saw before them as England and Europe became more democratic.

Education for Democracy

A further evidence of Arnold's prudent concern with the political aspect of society in England may be seen in one phase of his job as an inspector of public schools for the Department of Education. He saw education as a means of preparing those to follow for the responsibilities mentioned above. In a letter to his wife written October 15, 1851, he explains this reward:

I think I shall get interested in the schools after a little time; their effects on the children are so immense, and their future effects in civilising the next generation of the lower classes, who, as things are going, will have most of the political power in their hands, may be so important.⁷

The thirty-five years which Arnold spent in examining, reporting on, and trying to improve the public school system of England are important years as indications of his genuine concern for the social conditions of his day, whether or not he believed with much vigor in the possibilities for improvement.

⁶Arnold Whitridge, editor, Unpublished Letters of Matthew Arnold (New Haven, 1923), pp. 47-49.

⁷Russell, op. cit., I, 17.

Quite logically, Arnold was not in sympathy with the American system of democracy, which had no aristocracy to guide it. In a letter to his sister dated January 28, 1861, he expresses an opinion about the coming clash between the states:

I have not much faith in the nobility of nature of the Northern Americans. I believe they would consent to any compromise sooner than let the Southern States go. However, I believe the latter mean to go, and think they will do better by going, so the baseness of the North will not be tempted too strongly.⁸

Arnold thought that Americans could learn their lessons without war, and he was surprised at the lack of sympathy which he found among the English middle classes, who, he supposed, would feel a kind of kinship with the Americans.⁹

While Arnold recognized that democratic ideas were pervading all of Europe, he was not convinced that England was ready for democracy or that she would be able to establish a state which would support democratic aims. An essay, "Democracy," which appeared as an introduction to his report, Popular Education in France, gives the fuller account of Arnold's views on this subject. Also, his personal feelings on the issue are well expressed as early as 1849 in "Sonnet to the Hungarian Nation" where he looks for some heroic action not to be found in ". . . rich England, bent but to make pour/ The flood of the world's commerce

⁸Ibid., p. 130.

⁹Ibid., p. 156.

on her shore."¹⁰ He here refers to "American vulgarity" and ". . . that madhouse, France, from whence the cry/ Afflicts grave Heaven with its long senseless roar."¹¹

Marriage

Not only did Arnold believe that political ideals and democratic aims may often fail, but he also exemplified in his poetry that the cherished institution of marriage--that is, of an unequally joined pair--can give occasion to despair and disillusion. Arnold reveals no ostensible pessimism in his treatment of the subject, nor is there anything in the biographical information available to indicate that he was dissatisfied in his own marriage relationship; still, he was aware that in the union of unequal elements there is certain tragedy. Much critical speculation has been spent on the "Marguerite" of his love poetry, with no satisfactory conclusions being drawn as to her identity or even to her reality. Imagined or real, however, she does represent Arnold's pessimistic thoughts on the outcome of passionate love. The short poem "Destiny" (1852) is representative of the thought of many of the poems on love.

Why each is striving, from of old,
To love more deeply than he can?
Still would be true, yet still grows cold?
Ask of the Powers that sport with man!

¹⁰Arnold, op. cit., p. 35.

¹¹Ibid.

They yok'd in him for endless strife,
 A heart of ice, a soul of fire;
 And hurl'd him on the Field of Life,
 An aimless unallay'd Desire.¹²

The real or mythical Marguerite could not become a suitable partner for the poet because of the disparity in their backgrounds. In "Parting" (1852) she represents all that is desirable, "But a sea rolls between us--/ Our different past,"¹³ so that while the two lovers have a passionate attraction for each other, the union is incomplete. The poem points out the folly of using pure physical desire as a guide in matchmaking; and it suggests that Arnold felt that marriage must be based on the more enduring quality of similar backgrounds, though it often is not. One of Arnold's most anthologized poems celebrates the same theme of unequally joined lovers. "The Forsaken Merman" (1849) shows the depth to which grief can be experienced in the loss of a marriage companion to the social order into which one, by birth, cannot enter.

Seclusion

It follows naturally that a man who finds the society of his time unendurable will attempt to flee from it in some direction, and it is here that Arnold shows his attempt to escape and his inevitable failure, for he was in essence a highly social being. Arnold longed for quiet repose; he

¹²Ibid., p. 134.

¹³Ibid., p. 133.

sought to find it in isolation, but he came to feel that calmness was not to be found, for him, in isolation, but rather in seeking to know himself and to serve his fellowman.

He expresses his own need to flee from the world through several heroes--generally lonely, solitary figures who wish to find contentment in isolation. "The Scholar Gipsy" (1853) retreats from his academic world to Nature and Nature's children where he finds another kind of reward from the generally admired worldly fame:

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.¹⁴

Arnold, in a eulogy to the poet E. P. de Senancour, further praises the spirit of seclusion. In "Stanzas in Memory of the Author of 'Obermann'" (1852) Arnold calls his age a "hopeless tangle." He feels two desires: one toward the world without and one toward solitude. This poem praises Senancour for renouncing his worldly life in order to see clearly and poetically all the affairs of men. Arnold here makes it plain that he himself cannot escape from his world, although he desires the freedom. "I go;

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 234-235.

Fate drives me: but I leave/ Half of my life with you./
 We, in some unknown Power's employ,/ Move on a rigorous
 line:/ Can neither, when we will, enjoy;/ Nor when we will,
 resign./ I in the world must live:. . . "15

In a letter to Clough, Arnold further shows his feeling that in isolation he might have found the quietness of spirit which was impossible, even among his friends:

I felt a strong disposition to intellectual seclusion, and to the barring out all influences that I felt troubled without advancing me: but I soon found that it was needless to secure myself against a danger from which my own weakness even more than my strength--my coldness and want of intellectual robustness--sufficiently exempted me. . . .16

The same feeling of being drawn both to and from the world of men is reflected in "A Summer Night" (1852); Arnold wishes for an untroubled spirit, "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."17

Arnold appears to have settled upon a position somewhere between poetic seclusion and satisfying action in the worldly affairs of his society. He hoped to free men from the "brazen prisons" where he saw them working throughout their lives without the vision of another kind of life. By 1863 he had begun to publish articles in magazines and had written

¹⁵Ibid., p. 178.

¹⁶Lowry, op. cit., p. 129.

¹⁷Arnold, op. cit., p. 167.

the essay "Democracy," by which he hoped to enlighten men and persuade them toward an appraisal of their society, a literary, political, and social evaluation. That Arnold was enthusiastic in his task of enlightenment is shown in a letter to his mother dated October 29, 1863. "It is very animating to think that one at last has a chance of getting at the English public. Such a public as it is, and such a work as one wants to do with it!"¹⁸ Arnold devoted himself untiringly to the effort which is perhaps best expressed in Culture and Anarchy. In this work he attempts to speak to all classes about their responsibilities; he gives full treatment to ideas which are suggested throughout his poetry, and prescribes the cures for the ills he has discovered.

Self-Knowledge

If Matthew Arnold was convinced that he must try to cure the ills which he saw in English society, he shows in his poetry that he was equally convinced that the beginning of any reform must have its source in the individual life. He developed a very clear and persuasive pattern for the expansion of culture in all classes, extolling the virtues of "sweetness and light"; yet he based this very extensive expansion on the realization that "Culture, after all, is

¹⁸Russell, op. cit., p. 201.

not enough, even though nothing is enough without culture."¹⁹
 In the poem "Self-Dependence" (1852) Arnold expresses the conviction that man must look within himself and "Resolve to be thyself: and know, that he/ Who finds himself loses his misery."²⁰

Arnold did not mean that self-reliance is the final answer to man's problems, but he felt that men look everywhere for the reason for their misery except the most logical place to find it, within themselves. Arnold felt that men seldom had the courage or the will to know themselves truly. In "The Buried Life" (1852) he explains man's melancholy as a result of a desire to express his hidden self which he thwarts except in rare moments of love. Men fears the indifference and blame of other men; yet each has a "something" within him which makes him seek to know the genuine self.

But often in the world's most crowded streets,
 But often in the din of strife,
 There rises an unspeakable desire
 After the knowledge of our buried life,
 A thirst to spend out our true, original course;
 A longing to enquire
 Into the mystery of this heart that beats
 So wild, so deep in us, to know
 Whence our thoughts come and whence they go
 And many a man in his own breast then delves,
 But deep enough, alas, none ever mines.²¹

¹⁹Thomas Stearns Eliot, Selected Essays (New York, 1950), p. 435.

²⁰Arnold, op. cit., p. 166.

²¹Ibid., p. 397.

Arnold saw this inability of man to know himself as one of the unavoidable pains of life. He realized that each one wears a face not his own. Lionel Trilling says that "No writer of his time--except perhaps Emerson--understood in terms as straightforward as Arnold's this psychological phenomenon of the distortion of purpose and self and the assumption of a manner to meet the world."²² In "Resignation" (1849) Arnold had stoically recommended a merging of the poet's life into a "general life" which ". . . sees Life unroll/ A placid and continuous whole;/ That general Life, which does not cease./ Whose secret is not joy, but peace; . . ."²³ The two optimistic goals of seeking one's true self and then becoming absorbed in social action are expressed in Arnold's poetry; yet he remains despairing, and wonders if life is ". . . hardly worth/ This pomp of worlds, this pain of birth."²⁴

Loss of Faith

Arnold was able in some measure to solve the problem of adjustment to society which confronted him, and he was able to establish a pattern for evaluating various ideals of his culture. It is in his attempt to resolve the various facets of the inward reality of a man's life that Arnold most despaired. "The central fact of Arnold's life is his loss

²²Lionel Trilling, Matthew Arnold (New York, 1949), p. 137.

²³Arnold, op. cit., p. 91. ²⁴Ibid., p. 92.

in youth of the Christian faith. His early years reveal an attempt to ignore this loss of faith by making poetry out of the doubts which it occasioned."²⁵ In England in the last half of the nineteenth century it was increasingly difficult for any man to retain his traditional faith in a literal interpretation of the Scriptures which were under the pressure of modern inquiry. The theory of evolution had undermined to some extent the literal interpretation, and the whole theory of the supernatural was being questioned by poets, essayists, historians, philosophers, and theologians. "Dover Beach" (1867) contains Matthew Arnold's most melancholy expression of his loss of faith:

The sea of faith
 Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
 Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd;
 But now I only hear
 Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
 Retreating to the breath
 Of the night-wind down the vast edges drear
 And naked shingles of the world.²⁶

To Arnold, religion could not be pursued merely by an active application of rules and the practice of a set of virtues, although he did not question the right of others to do so. He rather felt that religion was totally individual and in his words, ". . . a distinct seeing of my way

²⁵William Anthony Madden, "The Religious and Aesthetic Ideas of Matthew Arnold," Dissertation Abstracts, XV (October, 1955), 1620.

²⁶Arnold, op. cit., p. 402.

as far as my own nature is concerned."²⁷ He found that ". . . a clear almost palpable intuition is necessary before I get into prayer: unlike many people who set to work at their duty self-denial etc. [sic] like furies in the dark hoping to be gradually illuminated as they persist in this course."²⁸ Although Arnold may not have found a distinct seeing of his way on all questions involving his own inward condition, he was able to resolve a clear conception of the relationship of man to his natural surroundings.

Nature

Arnold's use of nature in his poetry shows that he felt an emotional certainty about the function of nature in the life of man. Nature is apart from man, and indifferent to his end. Nature may inspire man with its permanence, and nature may teach man, but nature will not save nor satisfy the soul of man. When Nature is used, either symbolically or historically, in Arnold's poetry it is represented as the enduring element as opposed to the brevity of man's life. Frequently he uses the flow of rivers to signify the progress of a man's life toward his death. In "The Future" man is shown to become what he is according to where and when he is born, since he "Rivets his gaze on the banks of the stream."²⁹ It is vain for man to wonder about the

²⁷Lowry, op. cit., p. 110.

²⁸Ibid., p. 110.

²⁹Arnold, op. cit., p. 195.

source of life, as he cannot hope to know the purity of the beginning, nor to share the early man's feeling of tranquility which he accomplished in repose. The modern life is represented in this poem by the "Plain," and "Gone is the calm of its earlier shore./ Border'd by cities and hoarse/ With a thousand cries is its stream./ And we on its breast, our minds/ Are confus'd as the cries which we hear,/ Changing and shot as the sights we see."³⁰ Arnold has here used the enduring element of nature to point out that man can neither know his beginning nor his end; and far from being a help to man, nature confounds the understanding of a finite mind. Arnold felt that he would never "Drink of the feeling of quiet again."³¹

In addition to being apart from man and indifferent to his end, Nature symbolizes in the form of clear running streams in Arnold's poetry the purity of feeling which he sought. He had what amounted to a near fetish for clear water, writing to his friend Clough of his preoccupation, "And the curse of the dirty water--the real pain it occasions to one who looks upon water as the Mediator between the inanimate and man is not to be described."³² The Nile is rushing and turbulent at the king's unjust sentence in "Mycerinus" (1849), and it only murmurs as he finds peace

³⁰Ibid., p. 196.

³¹Ibid., p. 197.

³²Lowry, op. cit., p. 92.

in death. In "A Dream" (1853) the stream of life rushes thundering and foaming to the sea. The River Oxus in "Sohrab and Rustum" (1853) suggests a contrast between the calm majesty of nature and the "unquiet heart" of man. The river also symbolically represents the course of a ". . . foild circuitous wanderer" from his joyful beginning through troubles, restraints, and disillusionment to his only hope for tranquility, death.³³ W. Stacy Johnson summarizes Arnold's use of the sea symbol as follows: "From an exalted view the sea is calm and noble, but from a passionate human view it is cold and estranging. The conflict remains insoluble in terms of an amoral and unmoving sea of life underlying human existence."³⁴

Not only did Arnold see in nature the symbols of permanence and purity from which man might find inspiration, but he found represented in nature the principle of "quiet work" which he celebrated in "Sonnet" (later known as "Quiet Work"). Arnold felt pessimistic about the wasted efforts of man; his own life was spent doing a number of rather prosaic tasks, and he must have had to resort to some mental whipping posts to accomplish his duties as a school inspector. But he saw in the work which nature accomplished a lesson

³³Arnold, op. cit., p. 219.

³⁴W. Stacy Johnson, "Matthew Arnold's Sea of Life," Philological Quarterly, XXXI (April, 1952), 203.

for himself--"Of Toil unsever'd from Tranquillity."³⁵ Arnold felt that Keats was overcome with the "multitudinousness"³⁶ of the world; Arnold himself shows a similar tendency and it is then that he turns to the quiet working of nature to calm the troubled spirit. In "Lines Written in Kensington Gardens" (1852) Arnold describes the peace that nature can emotionally induce in man.

Yet here is peace for ever new!
When I, who watch them, am away
Still all things in this glade go through
The changes of their quiet day. . . .
Calm soul of all things! make it mine
To feel, amid the city's jar,
That there abides a peace of thine,
Man did not make, and cannot mar!³⁷

Although nature may have given Arnold an emotional response of peace which is related to religion, his final appraisal shows his feeling of the limits of nature as a consoler. In "To an Independent Preacher Who Preached that We Should Be 'In Harmony with Nature'" (1849), Arnold berates the preacher with "Man must begin, know this, where Nature ends;/ Nature and man can never be fast friends./ Fool, if thou canst not pass her, rest her slave!"³⁸ It was clear to Arnold that nature had nothing to do with the soul of man, though it might speak to his mind or his emotions.

³⁵Arnold, op. cit., p. 36.

³⁶Lowry, op. cit., p. 97.

³⁷Arnold, op. cit., p. 183.

³⁸Ibid., p. 36.

Religion

Part of the questioning of Arnold's day concerned the nature of Divine Essence. Arnold's religious career, according to William Anthony Madden, was a ". . . gradual but consistent moving away from the remnants of a dogmatic, supernatural religion toward an increasingly explicit naturalistic morality."³⁹ The poem "The Divinity" (1867) is important because it gives the "cornerstone of the poet's own faith. To Bernard the Deity was a person; to Arnold, an abstraction."⁴⁰ To Arnold, judging from this poem, wisdom and goodness are God; but he knows and mentions that no Saint preaches this nor does any church rule it to be true. Arnold thus understood many of the spiritual truths of Christianity, yet he saw that man must reevaluate his faith. An examination of earlier interpretations of the Bible was being carried on by professional scholars and by interested laymen; the magazine Fortnightly Review was the "arena" for the discussions;⁴¹ "Anti-Desperation" (1867), later called "The Better Part," states that the fact that a man may not

³⁹ Madden, op. cit., p. 1,620.

⁴⁰ C. B. Tinker and H. F. Lowry, The Poetry of Matthew Arnold (London, 1940), p. 145.

⁴¹ A. W. Ward and A. R. Waller, editors, The Nineteenth Century, Vol. XII of The Cambridge History of English Literature (New York, 1932), 329.

believe in the dogmas of Christianity does not mean that he must discard the teachings of Christ.

The poem "Immortality," along with "The Better Part," reveals Arnold's increasing interest in religious matters during the sixties. "Immortality" is a "reiteration that any true immortality begins the moment a man dies to the law of his ordinary self, and rises to the law of his better self, with its own rewarding consciousness that righteousness partakes of life not death."⁴² In Literature and Dogma Arnold develops the idea more fully and states that if a man has such a little experience with righteousness, then he may well permit himself to "trust Jesus," whose practice and intuition of righteousness were deeper than his own.⁴³

That Arnold felt the pure emotional power of Christianity is also shown in the poem "Obermann Once More" (1867). Obermann speaks to Arnold from a vision and explains that the world's heart was stone "And so it could not thrive."⁴⁴ Everywhere Arnold extols the individual attempt to attain perfection, and he places emphasis on the lasting qualities of such an attempt. In a letter to his sister, commenting on the death of her father-in-law, he speaks of the "pure in heart," feeling that their lives touch us more than others.

⁴²Tinker and Lowry, op. cit., p. 145.

⁴³Matthew Arnold, Literature and Dogma, Vol. VII of The Works of Matthew Arnold (London, 1903), 380.

⁴⁴Arnold, Poems, p. 435.

"I feel--that for their purity's sake, if for that alone, whatever delusions they may have wandered in, and whatever impossibilities they may have dreamed of, they shall undoubtedly, in some sense or other, see God."⁴⁵ This same praise for a righteous life is shown in Arnold's eulogy to his father, "Rugby Chapel." Lillian Herlands Hornstein makes an interesting deduction concerning Arnold's beliefs as shown in this poem.

Although Arnold did not have a faith in the Scriptures in an orthodox or conventional way, the commingling of morality tinged with deep emotion--the attitude of the poem--met precisely Arnold's definition of a religious experience. The tone is sincere. Arnold displays a fine poetic tact in securing this tone by basing the structural images upon one of the great religious experiences of history, the travels of the Israelites from Egypt to the Promised Land.⁴⁶

A further example of Arnold's deeper despair and religious need is found in "Empedocles on Etna" (1852). Arnold excluded this poem from a later edition, explaining in his preface that it falls short of his theory of art, in that it represents suffering without any outlet in action--"everything to be endured, nothing to be done."⁴⁷ He considered the poem to be morbid rather than tragic. The poem seems to represent the deepest pessimism in all of Arnold's work. In

⁴⁵Russell, op. cit., p. 33.

⁴⁶Lillian Herlands Hornstein, "'Rugby Chapel' and Exodus," The Modern Language Review, XLVII (April, 1952), 208-209.

⁴⁷Arnold, Poems, p. 3.

this one poem he touches on every phase of the inward life. In The Poetry of Matthew Arnold Tinker and Lowry reproduce from Arnold's notebook his summary of the poem "Empedocles on Etna" which he really wished to create. They point out that Empedocles was simply Arnold himself, as the poem represents his thought.

He is a philosopher. He has not the religious consolation of other men. . . . He sees things as they are--the world as it is--God as he is: in their stern simplicity . . . he started toward it [life] in hope: he had friends who shared his hope and joy and communicated to him theirs: even now he does not deny that the sight is capable of affording rapture and the purest peace.

. . . He perceives still the truth of the truth [sic] but cannot be transported and rapturously agitated by his grandeur: his spring and elasticity of mind are gone: he is clouded, oppressed, dispirited, without hope and energy.

. . . He desires to die; to be reunited with the universe . . . he has become utterly estranged from it.⁴⁸

The Empedocles of the poem which came from these notes chose suicide because he could not endure to live in a world where "The Gods laugh in their sleeve/ To watch man doubt and fear,/ Who knows not what to believe/ Since he sees nothing clear,/ And dares stamp nothing false where he finds nothing sure."⁴⁹

It is impossible to determine the exact extent of Arnold's religious faith, as he nowhere records it, but a

⁴⁸Tinker and Lowry, op. cit., pp. 291-292.

⁴⁹Arnold, Poems, p. 102.

rather revealing letter to his mother explains perhaps his reticence:

Today I am forty-one, the middle of life, in any case, and for me, perhaps, much more than the middle. I have ripened, and am ripening so slowly that I should be glad of as much time as possible, yet I can feel, I rejoice to say, an inward spring which seems more and more to gain strength, and to promise to resist outward shocks, if they must come, however rough. But of this inward spring one must not talk, for it does not like being talked about, and threatens to depart if one will not leave it in mystery.⁵⁰

"Stanzas from the Grand Chartreuse" (1855) expresses Arnold's dilemma perfectly; he cannot be a man of traditional faith, for he has pursued Truth. The poet mourns that he is a man "Wandering between two worlds, one dead, / The other powerless to be born."⁵¹ Perhaps the one thing which seems certain about Matthew Arnold is his genuine lack of a well thought through philosophy. This lack may indicate the supreme liberality of his mind; it may only prove that he succeeded where others have failed in keeping an open mind. There is, in other words, no temptation to judge his reasons, but merely to take note of them. "There is no question that Arnold's conflicting attitudes toward the modern spirit remained until his death, no matter what one may think about his possible approach to a more purely conservative position in the last years."⁵²

⁵⁰Russell, *op. cit.*, II, 213. ⁵¹Arnold, *Poems*, p. 272.

⁵²Gaylord C. LeRoy, *Perplexed Prophets* (Philadelphia, 1953), p. 70.

Conclusion

Matthew Arnold (1822-1888) lived in a time of social changes. He observed these changes with a mixture of awe and rebellion. In attempting to resolve the problems of his society, he communicated with much authority on literature, politics, education, and culture; his opinions were more popular in prose than in poetry, yet they were essentially the same in thought. With great indignation he noted the crass industrialism of England and the rising materialism of the middle classes. In his prose writings, the aristocracy heard his condemnation of their inflexibility. But the core of his pessimistic thought began and remained within himself. He was unable to follow the belief of a traditional faith; he took part in the extensive questioning of a literal interpretation of the Bible, and he did not leave for examination any religious creed which he may have felt. There are, however, some indications that he found an "inner abiding reality," and his own active life testifies that his pessimism was limited to the apocalyptic aspects of religion.

CHAPTER III

THOMAS HARDY

Thomas Hardy has been more frequently labeled a "pessimist" than any other writer of his time, and he has disavowed the title with more vigor and less consistency than would seem logical for one innocent of the charge. On the one hand he wondered why people were always asking him about pessimism; he thought it was only an easy thing to say and remember, "It's only a passing fashion;"¹ on the other hand, he writes in his notebook that there never was any great poetry which was not pessimistic.² Like Matthew Arnold's, Hardy's pessimism can be examined in his attitudes toward man-created society and in his inward response to the personal perplexities of life.

Hardy's opinion of the life in crowded cities was similar to Arnold's; he tried to live in London and partake of the society there, but he finally felt driven back to the country life he loved. He saw as clearly as Arnold the disparity between the politician's campaign speeches and his

¹Vere H. Collins, Talks with Thomas Hardy at Max Gate 1920-1922 (New York, 1928), p. 63.

²Evelyn Hardy, Thomas Hardy's Notebooks (New York, 1955), p. 68.

performance in office; he was critical of both Tories and Radicals. The World War appears to have shocked his sensibilities and crystallized his despair. His biographer Florence Hardy says that the war destroyed "all Hardy's belief in the gradual ennoblement of man, a belief he had held for many years, as is shown by poems like 'The Sick Battle-God' and others."³ In his poetry Hardy shows more interest in and knowledge of the advances of science, particularly the theory of evolution, than did Matthew Arnold. But Hardy's deeper concern was for man and his relationship with other men; yet he did not write didactic poetry, for he saw people as ends in themselves, not as means for improving the world. Hardy showed his discouragement with the prevailing marriage customs and laws. He doubted

. . . whether civilization can escape the humiliating indictment that, while it has been able to cover itself with glory in the arts, in literature, in religions, and in the sciences, it has never succeeded in creating that homely thing, a satisfactory scheme for the conjunction of the sexes.⁴

Hardy's most profound pessimism is seen in his total view of the universe and man's relationship to the cosmos. He despaired of organized philosophies and denied having a scientific system of beliefs, preferring to call his opinions

³Florence Emily Hardy, The Later Years of Thomas Hardy 1892-1928 (New York, 1930), p. 165.

⁴Ernest Brennecke, Jr., editor, Life and Art by Thomas Hardy (New York, 1925), pp. 118-119.

"provisional impressions" which he used artistically because they represented plausible impressions of the age. He records a defence of his views, "I might say that the Good-God theory, having after some thousands of years of trial, produced the present infamous and disgraceful state of Europe--that most Christian Continent!--a theory of a Goodless and Badless God (as in The Dynasts) might perhaps be given a trial with advantage."⁵ With or without a title, Hardy's poetry shows evidences that he was not a Christian in the orthodox sense; nor, however, was he an atheist in any sense. He simply reports that he could not find God, "I have been looking for God for 50 years, and I think that if he had existed I should have discovered him. As an external personality, of course--the only true meaning of the word."⁶ Hardy felt that religion had not kept pace with modern times; yet he felt that churches and church going were essential to life, and he wanted the reforms to come from within the church.⁷ Hardy's projection of "blind chance" and "crass casualty" upon the lives of man and the tragedy which results show the insolvable dilemma of mankind. In "Hap" the poet would welcome even a vengeful God, so desolate is the

⁵F. Hardy, op. cit., p. 175.

⁶Florence Emily Hardy, The Early Life of Thomas Hardy 1840-1891 (New York, 1928), p. 293.

⁷F. Hardy, op. cit., p. 121.

view which sees Time as the ally of chance, together forming the "purblind doomsters" of the poem.

Hardy and City Life

Hardy felt that he should live in London to provide himself with the necessary material for his novels, but he never liked either the social functions or the accommodations to be found there. He called London, ". . . that hot-plate of humanity, on which we first sing, then simmer, then boil, then dry away to dust and ashes!"⁸ He found the people in cities to be excessively nervous, and he deplored the busy transient atmosphere of London.

London appears not to see itself. Each individual is conscious of himself, but nobody is conscious of themselves collectively. . . . The city has no consciousness of where anything comes from or goes to--only the present.⁹

In 1897 while everyone was visiting in London during the Diamond Jubilee, he and Mrs. Hardy went traveling on the continent. His dislike of city life finally drove him back to his beloved Dorset, which provided most of his settings for both novels and poetry. Hardy felt that the modern migrations of his day toward the towns were fatal to "local traditions and to cottage horticulture."¹⁰ The characters

⁸Ibid., p. 8.

⁹F. Hardy, Early Life, p. 271.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 270.

in his novels and poems have sturdy souls from their healthy country habits. He once had trouble getting a novel published in book form because of a lack of aristocratic representation, which supposedly was against mid-Victorian taste.¹¹

Politics

In his notebook Hardy had revealed much of the pessimism of his view of politics and politicians. He was neither a Tory nor a Radical, and he calls himself an "Intrinsicist." "I am against privilege derived from accident of any kind, and am therefore equally opposed to aristocratic privilege and democratic privilege."¹² After a social-political party at Lord Carnarvon's, Hardy commented on the fact that history and great events of history are made by perfectly ordinary men without any great talent for politics. His criticism: "A row of shopkeepers in Oxford Street taken just as they come would conduct the affairs of the nation as ably as these."¹³ Hardy appears, however, to have been content to observe the foibles of government without entering actively into criticism; but in 1886 he became interested in the parliamentary debates on Gladstone's Bill for Irish government. And he said of home rule that it was ". . . a

¹¹Ibid., p. 236

¹²Ibid., p. 268.

¹³Ibid., p. 225.

staring dilemma, of which good policy and good philanthropy were the huge horns. Policy for England required that it should not be granted; humanity to Ireland that it should."¹⁴ His tendency toward idealistic politics had been shown as early as 1881 in a statement that "Conservatism is not estimable in itself, nor is Change, or Radicalism. To conserve the existing good, to supplant the existing bad by good, is to act on true political principle, which is neither Conservative nor Radical."¹⁵

Hardy's resentment, even in political matters, was focused against the illogical and unpredictable "chance" which he associated with all phases of life. Florence Hardy feels that if he had had more hatred in him or had been more rebellious, he might have been a great reformer in political matters; but as an artist he wrote out his resentment in novels or biting verse. His notebook records Hardy's belief in the unpredictable aspect of political history.

History is rather a stream than a tree. There is nothing organic in its shape, nothing systematic in its development. . . . The offhand decision of some commonplace mind high in office or a critical moment influences the course of events for a hundred years.¹⁶

The apparent pessimism in this remark may reflect only a compensatory reaction to the widespread complacency of the

¹⁴Ibid., p. 234.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 191.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 225.

The War Poems in Poems of the Past and Present were written at various times during the Boer War, and they deal with the scenes of embarkation, the trials of rain and mud for troops, and women who shared the lives of the soldiers. The irony of events during wartime is well expressed in "A Wife in London." By cablegram a poor woman receives word of the death of her husband on one day, and on the next day she receives a letter from him full of rosy hopes and plans for the future. To the realization of the essentially tragic quality of events as they affect individuals Hardy added disillusioning conclusions about war. "The Sick Battle-God" records Hardy's hope that men would, after the horror of war, be led toward the loving fellowship of peace. The thought is expressed that methods of war have become so fiendish that thinking mankind must reject ". . . men deplore, / The lurid Deity. . . ." ¹⁹

Another note of hope is seen in The Dynasts; the voice of the Pities has the last word, but Florence Hardy records that Hardy said he would not have ended the poem as he did if he could have foreseen what was going to happen in a few years.

Moreover, the war gave the "coup de grace" to any conception he may have nourished of a fundamental ultimate wisdom at the back of things. With his views on necessitation, or at the most, a very

¹⁹Thomas Hardy, Collected Poems of Thomas Hardy (New York, 1940), p. 90.

limited free will, events seemed to show him that a fancy he had after held and expressed, that the never-ending push of the Universe was an unpositive and irresponsible groping in the direction of the least resistance, might possibly be the real truth.²⁰

The World War then brought Hardy's despair with man-made politics to its highest point; yet his personal grief did not keep him from serving, at seventy-four, as adjudicator on food-profiteering cases and as a frequent visitor in both English and German prisoner-of-war camps and hospitals.²¹ The two poems "The Dead and the Living One" and "I Looked up from my Writing" show both his profound despair and the pre-eminence of a cruel and irresponsible "chance." The poet exalts the human element and shows the extreme pain to his consciousness of the inflictions of lethal chance. Hardy's concern is always with the sufferer, whether saint or sinner, and always his anger is against the cause. The poet in "I Looked up from my Writing" expresses the futility of writing or even living in such a world where men's sons are killed without reason and the men themselves driven to suicide. "The Dead and the Living One" shows the irony of a woman visiting the grave of a rival and expressing her gratitude that the rival will not be around to tempt the returning lover; the lover is coincidentally killed on the

²⁰ F. Hardy, Later Years, pp. 165-166.

²¹ Evelyn Hardy, Thomas Hardy (New York, 1954), p. 297.

battlefield and thus will join the dead rival in the grave. Some of Hardy's most ironic poetry was produced during and after the war which so affected him. Harvey Curtis Webster evaluates the despair which the war caused in Hardy as producing ". . . moods in which he was more blankly pessimistic than he had ever been before."²²

Women, Love, and Marriage

Not only did the war serve to heighten Hardy's despair with man's established society but the current marriage laws and courtship customs also provoked his anger. He undertook to present a modern characterization of women, and incidentally released upon himself a storm of protest. Henry Charles Duffin analyzes with great clarity some of the reasons for the protests which Hardy's characters provoked from bishops and parents. The following is his summary of the decadent incidents in the novels.

The story of Tess is founded on a gross faux pas, renewed under the most outrageously vulgar circumstances later in the book. In Jude the Obscure, the hero's liaison with Arabella Donn is motivated by instincts almost entirely animal on both sides, and one of the tragedies of the book lies in the entering of Jude and Sue into sexual relations slowly led up to. The Return of the Native was shown to be full of animalism in a less obvious sense: it is the tragedy of the revolt of human nature against the close confinement within somewhat cold and rigid spiritual conditions. There is a betrayal and an illegitimate child in Far From

²² Harvey Curtis Webster, On a Darkling Plain (Chicago, 1947), p. 204.

the Madding Crowd; . . . Fitzpiers' relations with Suke Danson in The Woodlanders are improper, and considerable influence is exerted over the action of Two on a Tower by the fact that St. Cleeve and his secretly married Lady Constantine found it impossible to limit their mutual interest to a sympathy of the spirit.²³

This represents a lot for Victorian taste to take in its stride. But when the sum of Hardy's statements about love is seen, these vulgarisms lose their significance. In Tess, Hardy is making a profound plea for a woman's purity. He asserts that purity is both less and more than a rigid line of conduct. Most critics feel that Hardy was ahead of his time in seeing some independent worth in the life of women apart from men. Ethelberta, in The Hand of Ethelberta, shows the struggle of women to live on equal economic terms with men. She wishes to enjoy his freedoms, but the consequences of living in a man's world force her to the solution of marriage. Evelyn Hardy says that ". . . Hardy never envisaged a woman strong enough to stand alone without the support of marriage. . . . If the feminists were at pains to make women imitate and rival men, Hardy strove to develop women, according to their own natures."²⁴

Sue Bridehead in Jude the Obscure is in one sense a further development of Ethelberta. She attains a kind of

²³ Henry Charles Duffin, Thomas Hardy (Manchester, 1937), pp. 203-204.

²⁴ Evelyn Hardy, op. cit., pp. 149-150.

sexlessness while denying the depth of it. For this study, the interesting point is her assertion (and perhaps it is Hardy's assertion) that, "Fewer women like marriage than you suppose, only they enter into it for the dignity it is assumed to confer."²⁵ This seems further strengthened by Hardy's writing in The New Review, in a contribution to a symposium of opinions on the physiological aspects of marriage, that he doubted if marriage as we now understand it is a very desirable goal for all women.²⁶

Like Arnold, Hardy never gave up writing of mis-mating and desertion; he felt that wise marriages must include a common background. Evelyn Hardy assumes that this preoccupation with the theme shows ". . . inner conflicts, never fully resolved, which have something of an obsessional nature."²⁷ From the same critic:

It has become the fashion to imagine that great men are unhappy in their marriages, to pity them for having inadequate mates. Yet the personal tragedy implied in Hardy's life by the writing of Tess, Jude, "In Tenebris" and other lyric poems, is substantiated by those who knew and watched him with anxiety during these years. Edmund Gosse noticed that "the wells of human hope had been poisoned for him by some condition of which we know nothing;" and there were others equally observant, although Hardy himself revealed nothing by pen or word of mouth. His doctrine was to suffer in dignified silence.²⁸

²⁵Thomas Hardy, Jude the Obscure (New York, 1895), p. 307.

²⁶Brennecke, op. cit., p. 119.

²⁷Evelyn Hardy, op. cit., p. 132. ¹⁹²⁸Ibid., p. 261.

Whatever the temper of his own marriage, Hardy was certainly adept at exposing the aching, empty disenchantment of some marriages. "A Poor Man and a Lady" describes the ending of a mis-mated betrothal. "I was a striver with deeds to do,/ And little enough to do them with,/ And a comely woman of noble kith,/ With a courtly match to make, were you; . . ."29

At times, especially in poetry, Hardy seems to see marriage as the end of love itself. "The Conformers" is such a prediction; "Our game of passion will be played,/ Our dreaming done."30 And again in "The Curate's Kindness" Hardy shows a man wishing to escape the wife he has lived with for forty years. "The Recalcitrants" reflects Hardy's admiration for the refusal to conform to empty marriage laws. Many short poems represent hurried decisions of marriage and a lightly accepted vow; Hardy seems always to see the shams which marriage laws may hide. In "Over the Coffin" a divorced wife confesses that she wishes she had not given up her husband, but rather had shared him with his new love.

R. P. Blackmur says that

. . . Hardy had a genuine insight into the instability of irresponsible passion and the effect upon it of conventional and social authority. . . . Surely no serious writer ever heaped together so much sordid adultery, so much haphazard surrender of human value as Hardy did in these [love] poems, and with never a pang or incentive but the pang

²⁹T. Hardy, Poems, p. 759.

³⁰Ibid., p. 213.

of pattern and the incentive of inadequacy, and yet asked his readers to consider that haphazard sordor [sic] a full look at the worst. . . .³¹

Inward Despair

The full look at the worst of current social injustices, political dealing, the ravages of a global war, and outmoded marriage laws may have been a discouraging sight to any thinking man in the nineteenth century; but a further examination of Hardy's more personal despair of scientific developments, new concepts of nature, church reforms, and the cosmic order of the universe may show more clearly the extent of his philosophical pessimism. It should be noted that Hardy became resigned to the melancholy of life quite early, and that he never felt basically called upon to correct human nature to the extent that Arnold did. His despair was thus more complete, yet perhaps more comfortable, for though he valued man's artistic temperament, he did not expect nor work toward an organized scheme of perfecting the world. His resignation to life is indicated in the following entry of his notebook.

I have attempted many modes of finding it. For my part, if there is any way of getting a melancholy satisfaction out of life it lies in dying, so to speak, before one is out of the flesh; by which I mean putting on the manners of ghosts, wandering in their haunts, and taking their view of surrounding

³¹R. P. Blackmur, "The Shorter Poems of Thomas Hardy," The Southern Review, VI (1940-1941), 24.

things. To think of life as passing away is a sadness; to think of it as past is at least tolerable.³²

But another entry shows some limit of despair in recording a ". . . determination to enjoy. . . ." which he feels is universal. "Even the most oppressed of men and animals find it, so that out of a thousand there is hardly one who has not a sun of some sort for his soul."³³

Science

Nearly all critics of Hardy feel that he was greatly influenced by the new discoveries and advances made by science, especially the controversial The Origin of Species by Charles Darwin, published in 1859. An earlier book, Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation, was called blasphemous of Genesis, and even the scientists found it unscientific in its reasoning. George Eliot's translation of Strauss's Leben Jesu was also widely read and discussed. Churchmen opposed these new theories, though some tried to affect a compromise. Hardy could not have failed to read the many articles in periodicals which discussed this issue, and "his sympathies were with the scientists, Darwin, Huxley, Mill, and others who began in the eighteen fifties to upset so-called Victorian Complacency."³⁴

³²P. Hardy, Early Life, p. 275.

³³Ibid., p. 279.

³⁴James Granville Southworth, The Poetry of Thomas Hardy (New York, 1947), p. 3.

Hardy was one of the first to introduce into poetry the concepts of nineteenth-century science. While Browning, Tennyson, and Carlyle rejected some of science's claims, Hardy embraced many with interest; he even put a private telegraph in one of his novels. He studied the theory of evolution, and apparently his acceptance was complete.

Granting that Man is "evolving"--and Hardy seems not to have questioned that seriously--it remains to be shown that this development is a good thing. To this point Hardy directed his doubts, his mis-giving and found there the motive and the cause for the "pessimism" which became his trade-mark.³⁵

In almost every piece of his writing Hardy asserts that this development is indeed not a good thing. From the early "Hap" to The Dynasts he constantly points to the purposeless accidents which destroy the lives of men; he was led finally to assume that the whole universe was not scientifically planned or operated, but simply was an outcome of blind chance.

Nature

Science offered Hardy no system of beliefs, and an examination of his view of Nature fails to confirm any except a minor attempt to synthesize man's problems with those of nonhuman life. Robert Shafer feels that Hardy

³⁵Desmond Hawkins, Thomas Hardy (London, 1950), p. 22.

progressed to a deterministic monism through a return to nature as one with man; he tried to deny that human nature is dual; the result could hardly be more of a rejection of hope.

Accordingly, his formulation of his experience was subject to this prejudice. He concluded . . . that the phenomenal world, of which we are a part, is a non-moral, purposeless, meaningless complex of appearances exhibiting a single gross anomaly, probably the result of blundering accident, in human consciousness--the world of feeling, values, and purpose--he pronounced unreal.³⁶

There are evidences in Hardy's work that he did see a fundamental identity of outer nature with human nature, and that he saw all organic creatures as belonging to one family; his kind treatment of animals is a well-known example of this feeling.

Hardy expresses the view in The Woodlanders that nature suffers with and like man. Carl Weber says that this is made clear in the passage from the novel which he quotes as follows:

Here, as everywhere, the Unfulfilled Intention, which makes life what it is, was obvious as it could be among the depraved crowds of a city slum. The leaf was deformed, the curve was crippled, the taper was interrupted; the lichen ate the vigor of the stalk, and the ivy slowly strangled to death the promising sapling.³⁷

³⁶Robert Shafer, Christianity and Naturalism (New Haven, 1926), p. 265.

³⁷Carl J. Weber, Hardy of Wessex (New York, 1940), p. 113.

The fundamental identity of outer nature with human nature includes the idea that nature is not an external condition but shares the same inherent condition of man himself. "In a Wood" records Hardy's discovery that the vegetable world is, like the world of man, a scene of destruction and fighting. In "Nature's Questioning" he represents natural creatures such as fields and flocks as coming to him for enlightenment and he is totally bewildered. In "The Bullfinches" the poet tells the birds that nature ignores all its creatures. In the poem "The Sleep-Worker" nature is again identified both with man and God, while in "The Voice of Thorns" the sounds are at first in harmony and then in contrast to the human feeling. In spite of the Pities having a rather hopeful last say in The Dynasts, the underlying thought is one of consistent and hopeless fatalism. This dramatic poem does, however, represent another defence for a monistic point of view. Nature and man are both pawns in the hands of the all-powerful and unrelenting "Will." Georg Roppen states that, "The poetic intention of The Dynasts is to show how the Will objectifies itself in Nature, History, and in all human experience. . . ." ³⁸

To Hardy Nature is never just a backcloth against which human action can be seen, but it is a system which includes human life, modifies it, and frequently controls it.

³⁸Georg Roppen, Evolution and Poetic Belief (Oslo, 1956), p. 311.

John Holloway analyzes Hardy's view of Nature in four of its main aspects:

First, Nature is an organic living whole, and its constituent parts, even the inanimate parts, have a life and personality of their own.

Second, it is unified on a great scale through both time and space.

Third, it is exceedingly complex and varied, full of unexpected details of many different kinds-- details that are sometimes even quaint or bizarre.

Fourth, for all that, these heterogenous things are integrated, however obscurely, into a system of rigid and undeviating law.³⁹

Perhaps the best nature poem which strengthens the monistic view is "The Blind Bird."

Who hath charity? This bird.
Who suffereth long and is kind,
Is not provoked, though blind
And alive ensepulchred?⁴⁰

The Church

The monistic view has been shown as a rejection of specifically human values. A further disappointment to Hardy was the failure of the church to effect a reform of its dogma. Hardy appears to have felt an emotional attachment to a religious institution in which he did not actually believe. Webster has excellently traced the changes in Hardy's thought from youth to old age in On a Darkling Plain; he has demonstrated that Hardy grew up as a relatively happy devout High Church believer who about his

³⁹ John Holloway, The Victorian Sage (London, 1953), p. 252.

⁴⁰ T. Hardy, Poems, p. 419.

twentieth year became intellectually alive to various influences which gradually changed his attitude to one of agnosticism and renunciation of an earlier decision to become a minister. Webster further shows that Hardy's first thwarted attempts at a literary career caused him more disillusion, and that either by experience or observation he became disillusioned in love affairs, and finally he became increasingly conscious of social inadequacies. As has been noted, "Hap" most clearly expresses Hardy's early outlook; Webster interprets the poem as follows:

If misery occurs, it is not the work of a vengeful God who enjoys human suffering. There is no power which controls or cares for human happiness or unhappiness. Accident, "crass Casualty," and "dicing Time" are responsible for fortune and misfortune. Natural law is not directed by conscious intelligence that contemplates the emergence of man. It is mere Chance that man as he is and the world as it is exist rather than an altogether different world otherwise inhabited; it is Chance that accounts for man's consciousness, man's values, and man's suffering. It might equally well have happened that man would have been unconscious or possessed of other sets of values, or incapable of suffering--as far as natural law's unconscious and purely hypothetical wishes are concerned.⁴¹

Some poems speak of a "lost faith," a fact which lends credibility to Webster's account of Hardy's growing agnosticism. In "God's Funeral" the poet says of God, "I did not forget/ That what was mourned for, I too, long had prized."⁴² "The Impercipient" reveals true agnosticism.

⁴¹ Webster, op. cit., p. 65.

⁴² Hardy, Poems, p. 309.

At a Catholic service the poet bemoans the fact that his sincerity has made him an outcast from the believers; he cannot find comfort or joy, and he cannot accept the suffering he sees which seems without reason or purpose. In "God Forgotten" the poet confesses that often in other times he has believed in God. "Homing at dawn, I thought to see/
One of the Messengers standing by/ --Oh childish thought! . . .
Yet often it comes to me/ When trouble hovers nigh."⁴³ "A
Plaint to Man" shows man himself as the creator of an unnecessary external God. "Wherefore, O Man, did there come
to you/ The unhappy need of creating me--/ A form like your
own--for praying to?"⁴⁴

Hardy continued to visit churches throughout his life; he wrote novels in which one of the conflicts faced by a major character involved the question of faith and dogma; he used church scenes in his poetry, and wrote of the conflicts which modern minds meet with the "death" of their God. His second wife contributes to the conclusion that he was emotionally tied to the church by calling him "churchy"; if Hardy had been of one mind concerning the church, he would not have felt the need either to correct its tenets or to advocate church going for others. Delmore Schwartz feels that Hardy kept his inherited sensibility to the church.

⁴³Ibid., p. 113.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 306.

Hardy was convinced that the new scientific view was the correct one; he was convinced intellectually, that is to say, that Darwin, Huxley, Schopenhauer, Hartmann, and Nietzsche had obtained the truth about Life. But at the same time, he could not help seeing Nature and human life in the light which was as habitual as walking . . . and the undeniable necessity of seeing life from the inside of the human psyche rather than from the astronomical-biological perspective of nineteenth-century science.⁴⁵

Hardy, then, could not accept the tenets of the church to which he was attached; many of his characters feel the struggle which he may have felt both toward and away from the crumbling institution. Two examples in his verse may be selected from many; "In Church" is a clever exposé of a vain and shallow clergyman; "A Drizzling Easter Morning" points to the useless creed of a risen Lord. Florence Hardy points out that Hardy did not feel antagonistic about the church and that he sometimes took a more nebulous view which she calls "transmutative." He saw that the church of his day was a different one from that of his boyhood; he comments in his notebook,

If I understand, it now limits itself to the religion of emotional morality and altruism that was taught by Jesus Christ, or nearly so limits itself. . . . The dogmatic superstitions read every Sunday are merely a commemorative recitation of old articles of faith held by our grandfathers, may not matter much either, as long as this is well understood. Still it would be more honest to make these points clearer, by recasting the liturgy, for their real meaning is often misapprehended.⁴⁶

⁴⁵Delmore Schwartz, "Poetry and Belief in Thomas Hardy," The Southern Review, VI (1940-1941), 68.

⁴⁶F. Hardy, Later Years, p. 122.

His hope toward this end was a disappointment which Florence Hardy notes was the end of his expectation that an Established Church could be made broad enough to include modern thinkers who had lost all belief in the supernatural.⁴⁷

Even if Hardy could not accept the tenets of the church, there is ample evidence that he accepted the emotional morality and the altruism which it fostered. The sensitivity to both human pain and animal suffering which Hardy demonstrates would lead to this assertion. He never blames man for his present state of woe, nor was he ever able to forget two signs of the cruelty of fate which he witnessed as a child: the accidental death of a poor fragile bird and a child he saw dead of starvation. The novels also evidence Hardy's moral sense. Tess is a plea for a fairer judgment of conduct; Jude and Ethelberta demand understanding for the problems of a changing society and of a changing religious conviction. This same view is perhaps best upheld by Hardy's poetry. In "To Sincerity" he would have the charity to use truth toward a better understanding of human needs that "The real might mend the seeming."⁴⁸ "A Plaint to Man" places firmly upon man's own shoulders his commission toward kindness, "The fact of life with dependence placed/ On the human heart's resource alone,/ In brotherhood bonded close

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 225.

⁴⁸T. Hardy, Poems, p. 262.

and graced/ With loving kindness fully blown,/ And visioned
 help unsought, unknown."⁴⁹ Again in "Survival" the poet
 upbraids himself, "You taught not that which you set about,
 That the greatest of things is Charity. . . ." ⁵⁰ Shafer
 states that it is possible to support the thesis that Hardy
 set out to offer charity as the greatest aim of life, but
 that his intent was cancelled by the realization that man is
 not responsible for his actions.⁵¹ Hardy's own pessimistic
 conclusion concerning the doubtful marriage of a scientific
 view of existence and a religious one is recorded in his
 notebook in 1881 as follows:

After infinite trying to reconcile a scientific
 view of life with the emotional and spiritual, so
 that they may not be interdestructive I come to
 the following:

General Principles. Law has produced in man
 a child who cannot but constantly reproach its
 parent for doing much, and yet not all, and con-
 stantly say to such a parent that it would have
 been better never to have begun doing than to have
overdone so indecisively; that is, than to have
 created so far beyond all apparent first intention
 (on the emotional side), without mending matters
 by a second intent and execution, to eliminate the
 evils of overdoing. The emotions have no place
 in a world of defect, and it is cruel injustice
 that they should have developed in it.

If Law itself had consciousness, how the
 aspect of its creatures would terrify it, fill it
 with remorse.⁵²

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 306.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 661.

⁵¹Shafer, op. cit., p. 243.

⁵²F. Hardy, Early Life, p. 192.

Philosophy

It is clear that Hardy's most serious pessimism is found in his personal philosophy as an extension of ethical morality. It becomes necessary then to examine his indebtedness to various other philosophers and finally his various attitudes toward a universal or cosmic mind. Matthew Arnold was able to intellectualize the Scriptures to his satisfaction; Hardy pronounced Christian theology as dead as the Greeks'. Yet he repeatedly projects his art in philosophical concepts. These concepts are not consistent, a fact which he readily admits, calling his view ". . . a series of fugitive impressions which I have never tried to co-ordinate. . . ."53 And again he records in his notebook,

Since I discovered, several years ago, that I was living in a world where nothing bears out in practice what it promises incipiently, I have troubled myself very little about theories. . . . Where development according to perfect reason is limited to the narrow region of mathematics, I am content with tentativeness from day to day.54

His tentativeness, however, did not keep him from assigning to what Matthew Arnold would call the "not ourselves" his terms "Will" or "First Cause" or "Immanent Will."

Allen Tate refutes the idea that Hardy's metaphysic continues the Greek tradition and states that his two leading ideas of Necessity and Chance are only Victorian

53T. Hardy, Poems, p. 527.

54F. Hardy, Early Life, p. 201.

mechanisms for Spencer's "Unknowable,"⁵⁵ Ernest Brennecke, Jr., points out five unmistakable Schopenhauerian attributes of Hardy's "Will" and calls them the final development of Hardy's metaphysical thought. Briefly stated they are as follows:

1. The Will is One and Immanent; for it is represented as the one and only source from which all activity and life are flowing, and its patterns underline all mundane phenomena.
2. The Will is Autonomous; it is itself determined by nothing. Human events are but the manifestations of its mysterious designs. No earthly power can swerve the pulsion of the Byss which dominates all things by its clocklike laws.
3. The Will is Unconscious; viewless and voiceless, the Turner of the Wheels works unconsciously.
4. The Will is Aimless; thinking one, it does not weigh its thoughts.
5. The Will is indestructible; endless like the Wheel of Destiny it turns, it works eternal artistries in Circumstance.⁵⁶

J. O. Bailey finds a close relationship between Hardy's "Immanent Will" and Von Hartmann's "Unconscious," and he refutes Brennecke's attribution to Schopenhauer of Hardy's thought.⁵⁷ In his notebook, Hardy himself comments on several philosophical concepts, showing a familiarity with Hegel, Bergson, and Kant among others. But perhaps his attitude is best summed up in his recalling there that "it was Comte who said that metaphysics was a mere sorry attempt

⁵⁵Allen Tate, Reason in Madness (New York, 1935), pp. 123-124.

⁵⁶Ernest Brennecke, Jr., Thomas Hardy's Universe (Boston, 1924), pp. 33-34.

⁵⁷J. O. Bailey, Thomas Hardy and the Cosmic Mind (Chapel Hill, 1956), pp. 10-11.

to reconcile theology and physics."⁵⁸ Hardy himself may have felt no need to make the reconciliation, as he states several times that his view was transitory and changing. The statement made by Hardy in a letter to Alfred Noyes as late as 1920 must be considered his final say in the matter of his metaphysic.

. . . My imagination may have often run away with me; but all the same, my sober opinion--so far as I have any definite one--of the Cause of Things, has been defined in scores of places, and is that of a great many ordinary thinkers: that the said Cause is neither moral nor immoral, but unmoral: "loveless and hateless" I have called it, "which neither good nor evil knows"--⁵⁹

As has been mentioned there is a glimmer of hope expressed in The Dynasts, and the same glimmer is found in minor poems; he recognized that the universe is constantly changing, hence the "Will" may gradually become conscious of itself and thus mend its ways. This represents the closest approach to hope in his philosophical outlook, and it can easily be lost in the overwhelming abundance of more despairing notes. Hardy answered a birthday letter in 1919 with this condemnation of his world.

I should care more for my birthdays if at each succeeding one I could see any sign of real improvement in the world--as at one time I fondly hoped there was; but I fear that what appears much more evident is that it is getting worse and worse. All development is of a material and scientific kind--

⁵⁸F. Hardy, Early Life, p. 234.

⁵⁹F. Hardy, Later Years, p. 217.

and scarcely any addition to our knowledge is applied to objects philanthropic and ameliorative. I almost think that people were less pitiless toward their fellow creatures--human and animal--under the Roman Empire than they are now. . . .⁶⁰

It seems clear that Thomas Hardy was more concerned with presenting truths of a philosophical nature in artistic form than he was in promoting any systematized scheme of beliefs. He saw about him many facets of life which caused him to ponder whether the "prime Mover" had any consciousness at all; his mood was more frequently one of gloom than of hopefulness; and though he sincerely called himself a meliorist, it is difficult to gauge the degree of hope which he said he felt. Perhaps the most sympathetic summary of Hardy's philosophy of life is given by Webster as follows:

As Hardy recognized, and as too many dogmatic philosophers have not recognized, idealism, naturalism, pessimism, meliorism, fatalism, and determinism are no more than categories into which man tries to press the nature of ultimate reality. In each of these concepts at least a residuum of truth is to be found. Absolute or final truth is not discoverable in any of them. . . . Perhaps Hardy, who always remained enough of an agnostic to welcome an apparent truth even when it did not square beautifully with his entire outlook, approaches the nature of the universe more clearly than those who hold to a more rigid system.⁶¹

⁶⁰Ibid., pp. 191-192.

⁶¹Webster, op. cit., p. 199.

CHAPTER IV

ALFRED EDWARD HOUSMAN

Like Thomas Hardy, A. E. Housman denied that he was a pessimist, and labeled himself rather ". . . a peyorist, and that is owing to my observation of the world, not to personal circumstances."¹ He, then, felt that everything in nature is getting worse, while Hardy, with his asserted meliorism, felt that man at least had the power of bettering his world. Matthew Arnold was apparently the only one of the three who had any systematized ideas as to the way of betterment, though Hardy does at times express a wish and a faint hope. Housman is perhaps the most controversially viewed of the three. His output of poetry is smaller in volume than that of the other poets; his range within the poetry is more limited. His biographer and brother Laurence Housman says that "Matthew Arnold he placed high: both as a critic and as an interpreter of human life in its relation to the Powers Above."² Hugh Molson sees a relationship

¹Laurence Housman, My Brother, A. E. Housman: Personal Reflections Together with Thirty Hitherto Unpublished Poems (New York, 1938), p. 72.

²Ibid., p. 67.

between Hardy and Housman in their similar treatment of death as an end to the gross injustices of life.³

Housman's rejection of hope is seen in his first published volume of poetry; A Shropshire Lad shows his interest in country life and in soldiers and his almost obsessional interest in death. Nearly all his poetry reveals a consciousness of social injustices, and at the same time it shows a strong interest in the emotion of patriotism. Laurence Housman records that Housman regarded the subject of patriotism as dangerous; ". . . the reason being that it so easily degenerated into vice, for when poets began praising their own country they commonly ended by insulting others."⁴ This restraint is typical of Housman; for years he did not receive royalties for his poetry published in America. Apparently he did not care. He liked many American writers, and his poetry was well-liked in America. Housman's attitude toward marriage and mating is different from that of Arnold or Hardy; the lovers in his poetry are most frequently flippant. He as much as says that love is only a fleeting pastime. This may be either quite naive or it may represent a thoroughly jaded view of Hardy's "conjunction of the sexes." Housman shows a highly developed interest in friendship, and

³Hugh Molson, "The Philosophies of Hardy and Housman," The Quarterly Review, CCLXVIII (April, 1937), 205.

⁴Laurence Housman, op. cit., pp. 83-84.

his poetry is most despairing on the subject of the end of this friendship through death. Housman leaves little to dispute as to his final philosophical outlook: a combination of stoicism and epicureanism. The enigma persists only in his personality and the various estimates which may be made of it.

Housman and City Life

Housman uses a topography as the vehicle for his poetry, but he displays no urgent need to escape city life as did both Arnold and Hardy. His homesickness as seen in "A Shropshire Lad XLI" is not for home in the sense of a place.

Yonder, lightening other loads,
The seasons range the country roads,
But here in London streets I ken
No such helpmates, only men;
And these are not in plight to bear,
If they would, another's care.
They have enough as 'tis: I see
In many an eye that measures me
The mortal sickness of a mind
Too unhappy to be kind.
Undone with misery, all they can
Is to hate their fellow man;
And till they drop they needs must still
Look at you and wish you ill.⁵

He did take long walks away from humanity and often spent his holidays exploring the country in France and Italy. His main residence was London, and there is no indication that he disliked the city. "Housman was not a countryman, nor

⁵A. E. Housman, The Collected Poems of A. E. Housman (New York, 1940), pp. 59-60.

did he enjoy talking or mingling with rustics. . . . His friends have noted that he was indifferent to country landscape, though he was peculiarly sensitive to the shape and characteristics of trees."⁶

Soldiers and War

That he was immensely interested in war and the soldiers who fight in wars is seen throughout his poetry, but more especially in "A Shropshire Lad," which he published at his own expense in 1896. "The soldier's the trade:/ In any wind or weather/ He steals the heart of maid/ And man together."⁷ Ian Scott-Kilvert calls Housman's wars ". . . merely a heroic fantasy, a rumble which falls thrillingly on the ears of rustic lovers, but never approaches nearer than the distant frontiers of Empire."⁸ "A Shropshire Lad I" shows the bitterness of death in Asia and may also be cited as an ironical comment on the sovereign. "Oh, God will save her, fear you not:/ Be you the men you've been,/ Get you the sons your fathers got,/ And God will save the Queen."⁹ The nobility of fighting for one's country is extolled in "The Recruit" where the young soldier is advised

⁶Ian Scott-Kilvert, A. E. Housman (London, 1955), p. 27.

⁷A. E. Housman, op. cit., p. 105.

⁸Scott-Kilvert, op. cit., p. 31.

⁹A. E. Housman, op. cit., p. 10.

to "Come you home a hero,/ Or come not home at all."¹⁰
 "Reveille" urges "Up lad: when the journey's over/ There'll
 be time enough to sleep."¹¹ And "A Shropshire Lad XXII"
 shows the unqualified admiration of "But dead or living,
 drunk or dry,/ Soldier, I wish you well."¹² Perhaps
 Housman's tone is more personal in "Astronomy" in Later
 Poems which his sister, Katherine E. Symons, says refers to
 a brother Herbert who was killed in the Boer War.¹³ "Oh, I
 will sit me down and weep/ For bones in Africa."¹⁴ She
 confirms also the truth of a story told of Housman sending
 a check to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, in lieu of war
 service which he could not give in 1914, but felt a
 responsibility for.¹⁵

Housman treats his soldiers as fond friends, never
 seeming to ponder poetically the causes of war as Hardy did.
 It was as inevitable, apparently, as death itself. Polit-
 ically, according to his brother's sympathetic statement,
 Housman stayed aloof, though he was a sceptic about the
 benefits of democracy.

He even believed that slavery was essential to
 a well-governed State, but was so English in

¹⁰Ibid., p. 12

¹¹Ibid., p. 14.

¹²Ibid., p. 37.

¹³Katherine E. Symons and others, Alfred Edward Housman
 (New York, 1937), p. 35.

¹⁴A. E. Housman, op. cit., p. 118.

¹⁵Symons, op. cit., p. 34.

his preferences that he probably considered England a better governed country under democratic mismanagement than any other favoured with a form of despotism of which, theoretically, he more greatly approved.¹⁶

It should be mentioned, to somewhat clarify Laurence Housman's bias, that as a young man at Oxford Housman appeared very interested in politics, being by his own admission in a letter to his father in 1878, anti-Gladstone and the conservatives.¹⁷ However, it is just as clear that he did not actively engage in politics in any way, and his criticism, in poetry, is limited to a more general condemnation of social injustices.

Youth

Housman's fondness for the physical world of wars includes a special emphasis on youth: its education and glorious death. Derogatory criticism counts the use of the word "lad" sixty-seven times in sixty-three poems.¹⁸ Youth is held up as glorious in "To an Athlete Dying Young"; even in "Hell Gate" the sentry is young and handsome. "The Merry Guide" shows young manhood, as death, made as beautiful as Mercury. Housman's interest in youth might indicate several possibilities for interpretation; his own youth was a

¹⁶Laurence Housman, op. cit., p. 110.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 44.

¹⁸Cyril Connolly, The Condemned Playground (New York, 1946), p. 48.

relatively carefree and successful one until the death of his mother, which is said by all commentators to have been a devastating blow to him; he was reportedly very happy his first two years in Oxford as a young man. A. W. Pollard recalls that he recited humorous stories, played lawn tennis, and enjoyed walking.¹⁹ There is evidence in his life of a slight parallel between his Shropshire lads and himself as far as temperament is concerned. Their joy is cut off suddenly by some catastrophic event; Housman's study was cut off at Oxford by his failure to pass the Greats, and again there is agreement that this blow caused him to become introverted in his manner toward the world and somewhat of a recluse from his family. His subsequent job in H. M. Patent Office was a dreary one which perhaps he did not wish to share. During this time there were many financial hardships in his family, and he expresses his gratitude toward Moses Jackson, the "man who had more influence on my life than anybody else,"²⁰ who shared his living quarters with Housman. This influence is never explained, yet one may assume that he offered encouragement, for it was during this time at the Patent Office that Housman contributed notes to scholarly publications and prepared himself to

¹⁹Symons, op. cit., p. 40.

²⁰Laurence Housman, op. cit., p. 61.

re-enter the scholastic world. It is from this world, with first a Professorship of Latin at University College, London, and finally as Kennedy Professor of Latin at Cambridge that Housman's life work was accomplished. Certainly he taught and influenced young men. His standard of scholarship was as much a passion as can be seen in his life. There have been other scholars who wrote poetry; to some degree Housman and Arnold are related here, but Arnold was not the scholar in depth that Housman was. Both might, however, have given the address which Housman delivered as his Introductory Lecture at University College in 1892 on the value of knowledge. He quotes Dante's Ulysses speech, "Ye were not formed to live like Brutes, but to follow virtue and knowledge," and continues in his summary as follows:

It is the glory of God, says Solomon, to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter. Kings have long abdicated that province, and we students are come into their inheritance . . . and the pleasure of discovery differs from other pleasures in this, that it is shadowed by no fear of satiety on the one hand or of frustration on the other. . . . So long as the mind of man is what it is, it will continue to exult in advancing on the unknown throughout the infinite field of the universe.²¹

The apparent closeness of sentiment concerning knowledge and learning between Arnold and Housman can be seen further in Housman's defense of Arnold's poetry; one of Housman's

²¹Laurence Housman, op. cit., p. 61.

favorites, besides "Empedocles on Etna," was a poem addressed to an unsuccessful soldier in the war of the liberation of humanity which Housman's biographer quotes:²²

Creep into thy narrow bed,
 Creep, and let no more be said!
 Vain thy onset! all stands fast;
 Thou thyself must break at last.²³

Personality

Grant Richards, Housman's publisher and friend, has attested to the quality of Housman's devotion in a book which contains his memories of the man. The loyalty between them is unmistakable; others have combined their memories in an equally revealing volume. All agree to some extent, however, that Housman's personality was somewhat difficult in that he was not an aggressive, social-minded friend. Yet he was just as evidently agreeable and easily pleased. He was not easy to approach, and each relationship was apparently of his own choosing. Many instances have been given in these volumes of his rapier-like wit, and it is possible to suppose that one needed a "strong hide" to be on the receiving end of his sarcasm. Each writer agrees, again, that he was always kind to young people and tolerated more affronts from them than he would take from great and older men. His

²²Ibid., p. 65.

²³Matthew Arnold, The Poems of Matthew Arnold, Oxford Edition (London, 1913), p. 410.

poetry shows interest in both casual comradeship and a more serious and lasting kind of devotion between friends.

His brother relates the incident of Housman's writing "This is me" beside a passage in Seven Pillars of Wisdom which he feels reveals the nature of Housman's personality.

There was my craving to be liked--so strong and nervous that never could I open myself friendly to another. The terror of failure in an effort so important made me shrink from trying; besides, there was the standard; for intimacy seemed shameful unless the other could make the perfect reply, in the same language, after the same method, for the same reasons.

There was a craving to be famous; and a horror of being known to like to be known. Contempt for my passion for distinction made me refuse every offered honour. . . .²⁴

It seems certain that Housman was reticent, and he did refuse many honors offered to him; his biographer lists them as follows: Academic honors from Glasgow University in 1905, St. Andrews in 1922, Cambridge in 1928, Liverpool in 1931, North Wales in 1934, and the University of Oxford in 1928 and 1934. Housman never explained why he refused these honors; the final refusal was of the Order of Merit, which greatly puzzled those who knew of the effort. His brother says that Housman told him that he refused it because it was not always given to the right persons.²⁵

²⁴Laurence Housman, op. cit., p. 99.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 111-112.

Others have asserted that Housman always repressed himself. His sister, in the introduction of Grant Richards' book, says

His self-contained brooding led to repressions in several directions, manifested in increasing reticence as he grew older. Repression in the battle of adolescence must have played a part in the formation of his character, and certainly that was a direction in which he kept a restraining hold on himself.²⁶

His friend Grant Richards reviews all the adverse criticism published against Housman and then ventures his own opinion with vigor.

One of the best tributes that I can pay to his character is to say that in the many years that I knew him it never occurred to me to suspect any deviation from a perfectly normal, "respectable," and responsible way of life, or to suppose that anything else might be dug out of his poems.²⁷

It is not possible to say with certainty what effect this supposed repression may have had upon Housman's outlook. It does seem unnecessary to go as far as Robert Hamilton, who tries to show that Housman suffered a serious neurosis, calling him ". . . an over-sensitive and negative egoist, discouraged, godless, unsocial, whose morality was self-esteem and whose chief pleasures were poetry and food."²⁸ Nor does

²⁶Grant Richards, Housman 1897-1936 (New York, 1942), pp. xii-xiii.

²⁷Ibid., pp. 299-300.

²⁸Robert Hamilton, Housman the Poet (Exeter, 1953), p. 21.

it seem any more necessary to ascribe to Richards' view that he was in no way an exceptional personality.²⁹ In his own book Richards records enough instances to show that Housman was frequently unreasonable and bitterly sarcastic with both scholastic and business associates, and that his tendency toward perfection in all things made many people quite afraid of him.

Love as a Theme

Not only was Housman's reticent manner often a rebuff to his associates, but an attitude of coldness is observed in his poetry dealing with the subject of connubial love. His lovers are either carefree and gay or somewhat grim. Evidently he did not enjoy the company of women, and since he never married it is perhaps safe to say that he was never seriously in love with one. He advises in a poem that young men should give ". . . not your heart away;/ Give pearls away and rubies/ But keep your fancy free."³⁰ An equally light poem on love suggests the fleeting aspect of affection and may be given in full to illustrate a common representation.

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

²⁹Richards, op. cit., p. 19.

³⁰A. E. Housman, op. cit., p. 26.

And now the fancy passes by,
 And nothing will remain,
 And miles around they'll say that I
 Am quite myself again.³¹

The same emphasis upon the temporary aspect of love is seen throughout the small number of poems on the subject; only two show some variety, and it is of the morbid kind. "The True Lover" presents a dead lover in a caress.

"Oh do you breathe, lad, that your breast
 Seems not to rise and fall,
 And here upon my bosom prest
 There beats no heart at all"

"Oh lad, what is it, lad, that drips" . . .

"Oh like enough 'tis blood, my dear,
 For when the knife has slit
 The throat across from ear to ear
 T'will bleed because of it."³²

Or similarly, though in a lighter vein: "All knots that lovers tie/ Are tied to sever;/ Here shall your sweet-heart lie,/ Untrue for ever."³³ And again, speaking to his lover: "And I will tell you lies/. . . And I will work you ill."³⁴ One other poem of love seems more elevated in its sentiment; "Bredon Hill" gives the story of lovers separated by the woman's death and records the groom's promise to join her in death. There is genuine and moving pathos in this poem which is valid proof that Housman could write of the emotion of love with convincing art, whatever the facts of his own love life might indicate to his critics.

³¹Ibid., p. 31

³²Ibid., pp. 78-79.

³³Ibid., p. 183.

³⁴Ibid., p. 177.

Housman's poetry and his life show, then, a rejection of the marriage or mating convention. A further rejection of life itself is a prominent theme in his poetry.

Death as a Theme

On the whole, Housman is seen to be a quiet and restrained university scholar who is enamored of the youthful enthusiasm of soldiering, and one who strives after knowledge for its own sake. His personality puzzled even those closely associated with him, and this personality remains somewhat of an enigma to his audience today. His enthusiasm for war is underlined with the persistent theme of death and an attitude of forbearance for the ill: "In a world I never made."³⁵ "Death appears in every three out of four poems, whether as an inevitable tragedy or as a welcome release from a life that has been a tragedy."³⁶ Housman wrote a hymn for his funeral ten years before he died. A wish for death is in harmony with a pessimistic or pejorative viewpoint; lines from two poems well illustrate this wish: "The Welsh Marshes" "How long, how long, till spade and hearse/ Put to sleep my mother's curse?"³⁷ and "A Shropshire Lad XLVIII" "Oh why did I awake? when shall I sleep again?"³⁸

³⁵ Ibid., p. 111.

³⁶ Oliver Robinson, Angry Dust: The Poetry of A. E. Housman (Boston, 1950), p. 28.

³⁷ A. E. Housman, op. cit., p. 45.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 72.

Housman writes frequently of violent deaths; both suicide and hangings serve as tragic ends to life, an end greatly desired. Housman takes the view that suicide is a justifiable refusal to play at the game of life; Hardy or Arnold would show pity for the life that was lost, but Housman pities rather the intolerable life which a man must have had. Suicide is practically advised in the lines "But play the man, stand up and end you, / When your sickness is your soul."³⁹ and again in "Oh soon, and better so than later / . . . You shot dead the household traitor / . . . Oh lad, you died as fits a man."⁴⁰

Housman also appears very sympathetic of the executed; Hardy displayed a similar sympathy. "There sleeps in Shrewsbury jail to-night, / Or wakes, as may betide, / A better lad, if things went right, / Than most that sleep outside."⁴¹ "Eight O'Clock" poignantly describes the last hour of a convicted man. The predominance of death in Housman's poetry is discussed by R. P. Blackmur. He points out that death and death images have been used traditionally to show a meditation upon life, but "Whatever Housman may have known or felt, he disciplined out of his verse all but the easiest and least valid form of death: the invoked death, that can never be known," and he calls this a

³⁹Ibid., p. 68.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 66.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 21.

deliberate narrowing "which can only be called an escape from a full response to experience."⁴²

Various biographical comments have been made as explanation of Housman's predilection for the death theme. His mother's death affected his emotional stability at the age of twelve years, his brother's death during the Boer War was said to have hurt him deeply, and he was reported to have been profoundly affected by the death of Sophie Becker, the last of his three friends, "With the tenderness of passion utterly undisguised he went on to speak of this last of his friends--a woman--recently dead."⁴³ The rejection of life implied in such an abiding interest in death is perhaps best seen in Housman's own words in a letter to a friend written two years before his death. "My life is bearable, . . . but I do not want to continue it, and I wish it had ended a year and a half ago. The great and real troubles of my early manhood did not render those days so permanently unsatisfactory as these."⁴⁴

Religion

While Housman might have found in his work with the classics some basis for accepting life, he found none in the

⁴²R. P. Blackmur, The Expense of Greatness (New York, 1940), p. 204.

⁴³Percy Withers, Appendices to Grant Richards, op. cit., p. 395.

⁴⁴Laurence Housman, op. cit., p. 56.

Church of England. Both Arnold and Hardy wanted the dogma of the church broadened to reconcile faith and reason; Housman displayed no interest in the matter at all. His biographer records that he "conformed in the outward observances of religion, approving of the Church of England as an institution, while having no faith in its tenets."⁴⁵ The biographer also gives "New Year's Eve," a poem published while Housman was at Oxford, as an indication that his conviction was that Christianity was a dying religion in which he had ceased to believe, if indeed he ever did.⁴⁶ Again Housman is quoted as thinking the Church of England the best religion ever invented; it is less disturbing than other forms, and eliminates ". . . so much Christian nonsense . . . Christianity, he added, was most harmful in its social application. . . . Belief in immortality was quite unnecessary, he said, for good morals."⁴⁷

Nature

Housman apparently found little solace and a limited amount of inspiration in Nature; like Hardy he felt the indifference of Nature to man, particularly to the death of man. Nature is, to Housman, merely part of the same whole with man. His treatment is neither romantic nor classical; nature simply provides realistic setting or establishes the

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 111

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 35.

⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 114-115.

mood of a poem. Personification is kept to a minimum, and there are several almost pure lyric nature poems. The daffodil appears to have been a favorite of Housman's, and it like other life is doomed to die. "And bear from hill and valley/ The daffodil away/ That dies on Easter day."⁴⁸ That all things are temporary and pass away is seen in "The wind and I, we both were there,/ But neither long abode."⁴⁹ An example of a lyric nature poem is "A Shropshire Lad II" which ends "About the woodland I will go/ To see the cherry hung with snow."⁵⁰

Philosophy

An identification of nature with man's mortal destiny leads to the most inward expression of Housman's peborism. He sees the end of life in "the suffocating night." It is possible to pick almost at random among his poems for this universal theme of cosmic fatalism. Housman never formulated a written system of atheism or pessimistic philosophy; he said that he did not even read the German philosophers.⁵¹ But his art offers a rather systematic statement by itself. His own claim was that he admired the Epicureans more than the Stoics,⁵² but a combination of the two can be seen in

⁴⁸A. E. Housman, op. cit., p. 46.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 56.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 11.

⁵¹L. Housman, op. cit., p. 72.

⁵²Symons, op. cit., p. 50.

his life and his work. He called himself a Cyrenaic; all of these are in one way or another related. As a Cyrenaic Housman was professing that life is made up of pleasure and pain; these are his good and evil; every act is then regarded as morally indifferent, subject to the amount of pleasure or pain which it produces. Cyrenaicism paved the way for Epicureanism, and Housman devoted a very great deal of his leisure hours toward the milder pursuits of this ideal. He was a connoisseur of food and wine; Grant Richards gives a vivid account of the several holidays he spent with Housman in pursuit of these pleasures. A. S. F. Gow says essentially the same thing, that to see Housman at his best it was well to see him at a small social gathering such as the fortnightly dinners of a club to which he belonged. At these more intimate meetings Housman would ". . . show himself as vivacious as any member of the party."⁵³

Epicurean inducements are seen frequently in Housman's poetry. Lines such as "and man and maid had best be glad/
Before the world is old"⁵⁴ and the famous "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:"⁵⁵ or just as specifically, "Oh, 'tis jesting,

⁵³A. S. F. Gow, A. E. Housman (New York, 1936), p. 50.

⁵⁴A. E. Housman, op. cit., p. 15.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 88.

dancing, drinking/ Spins the heavy world around/. . . Think
no more; 'tis only thinking/ Lays lads underground."⁵⁶

Again in "Last Poems" the same attitude is seen, "Come, lads,
and learn the dances/ And praise the tune to-day/ To-morrow,
more's the pity,/ Away we both must hie."⁵⁷

Stoicism was a part of Housman's attitude toward the struggle of life. In his own life he bore the disgrace of failing at Oxford by plodding at a dull job for ten years; his own persistence and strength made possible his really outstanding success as a Latin scholar, and it is seen that he held whatever opinion he voiced with great vigor. Stoicism is revealed throughout the poetry as the only answer to the overwhelming odds against human life, but it is perhaps best seen in "Last Poems IX" where the whole universe appears to be against man. The consolation is stated in the last verse in the following lines: "The troubles of our proud and angry dust/ Are from eternity, and shall not fail./ Bear them we can, if we can we must."⁵⁸ Endurance is advocated in another poem in this group where the poet wishes that he could escape the twin laws of God and man, both of them being hateful to him. He wishes they would

. . . look the other way
But no, they will not

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 73.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 151.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 108.

They will be master, right or wrong;
 Though both are foolish, both are strong.
 And since, my soul, we cannot fly
 To Saturn nor to Mercury,
 Keep we must, if keep we can,
 These foreign laws of God and man.⁵⁹

Housman, in saying that he admired the Stoics less than the Epicureans, may have indicated that he wished no laurels for any enduring his life had required; nevertheless, he does display the attitude which Hugh Molson summarizes, "Dignity in enduring life and in facing death is the only protest that man can make against the injustices of which birth has made him the victim."⁶⁰ While Hardy was anxious to show, usually at length and in detail, the suffering of humanity and perhaps to obtain for humanity some relief, Housman is content to show man how to accept his lot stoically without expecting or seeking relief from his fellow-man.

Some changes have been noted in both Arnold's and Hardy's attitudes toward the world and their art, but with Housman, "The passing years seem to have brought him no new or changed experience, only an intensification of the old."⁶¹ Housman sees the serenity of history in "A Shropshire Lad XXXI"; all things pass away alike--"Then 'twas the Roman, now 'tis I."⁶² This line of poetry may be cited as

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 111.

⁶⁰Hugh Molson, op. cit., p. 213.

⁶¹Allison, op. cit., p. 277.

⁶²A. E. Housman, op. cit., p. 48.

representing a signal difference among the attitudes of the three men. Arnold outlined with vigor the changes he felt would correct the evils he saw; Hardy brilliantly identified his reader with social injustices which might inflame a desire to mend; but Housman accepted, as fact, all the woes of this world and introduced in his poetry that man must endure a life of injustice and pain with fortitude and courage.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The literary pessimism of these three poets was based upon elements of a personal philosophy. Pessimism may have social, ethical, or religious implications, or a combination of these. H. V. Routh suggests that

. . . the scientific spirit of the age had jaundiced the eyes of imaginative writers and that . . . [they] were almost doomed to describe the worst aspects of modern life, because they had lost affinity with the better. Whoever looked for too much of the naked truth found his undressed self.¹

The scientific method of inquiry had, at least, turned man's thoughts to himself and to a revaluation of his capacities and his accomplishments. Matthew Arnold found among the accomplishments of his fellow man much to criticize, and he rose to vigorously speak his mind on social matters, educational reforms, and literary and religious subjects. Thomas Hardy saw the same ills, but his method was to express his chagrin in novels and poetry from his seclusion at Wessex. Housman's alienation from society was so complete as to leave him without a reform to urge. This represents a full swing of

¹H. V. Routh, Towards the Twentieth Century (New York, 1937), p. 301.

the pendulum of social attitudes which were to swing again in the twentieth century.

Arnold lost his faith in the revealed Christian religion he had inherited, and he spent most of his spiritual life vacillating among his doubts about the nature of ultimate reality. Hardy also lost, if he ever had, a traditional faith, and he created an elaborate metaphysic to explain the cause and end of life. His view remained admittedly static, a series of impressions. With Housman questioning disappears; at twenty-one he proclaimed his denial of the existence of God and never afterward altered or sought to alleviate the negation.

Although it is doubtful whether any system can contain "as in a box" the tendencies of belief, the progression from Arnold's scepticism through the agnosticism of Hardy to the atheism professed by Housman perhaps parallels a development from Christianity to Naturalism. Major eighteenth-century writers such as Samuel Johnson, Jonathan Swift, and Alexander Pope experienced and wrote about despair, but they maintained at the same time a steady and secure faith. They subscribed to the Christian religion. The poets examined in this thesis experienced the loss of this stability, and their response to instability was pessimism.

Matthew Arnold was nearer to the romantics both in time and in temperament, but his consciousness of social responsibilities helped to prevent his being a romantic. His early

years reflected an interest in the sensual, and his early poetry is frequently empirical in tone and subject. The best of his verse pursues a knowledge of self, particularly the self which is hidden. His final achievement of "inner abiding reality" was not stable enough to bear discussion; perhaps his abstraction of God was as tentative as Hardy's "Immanent Will."

Hardy was intellectually a man of his time; he was familiar with the advancements being made both socially and philosophically. His sensitive nature refused to accept many of the Victorian conventions, and he spoke against them in novels and essays. Above all, he was acutely aware of man's inhumanity to man, but his personality led him away from organizing reforms. Because he did not believe in the dogma of the Church, he did not become a minister. His naturalism kept him from holding man responsible for the ills he must bear, but he nevertheless felt that changes were in order both for secular institutions and for the church. He could and did assume the role of meliorist writer, and with this avowed philosophy he wrote; yet his novels did not prove his meliorism, but his pessimism. Tess would have been happy, as a natural product of her environment, but she was not allowed her happiness because Hardy had to subject her to his equally fond "chance." And chance, to Hardy, was malign accident. The burden of Hardy's

pessimism, then, was with the universal scheme; he found no benign power ruling the universe, nor even an evil "Prime Mover" controlling it. All, to Hardy, was heedless and purposeless chance; yet chance always operated against man. Hence Hardy was yet tied to influences besides naturalism.

It remained for Housman to show again the final stages of philosophical despair. His poetry is one of acceptance; his soldiers do not wonder why they die, he does not question the death of love, and he does not mention a faith, either living or dead. Darwin's natural selection did not need any reconciliation with preconceived notions of morality in Housman's mind. He subscribed to "whatever is natural is right," even in education. His adjustment to the things he recognized as true required a dash of hedonism for which his critics have assailed him. But the twentieth century has surely found his hedonism as acceptable as his naturalism.

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