THE STRAIN OF MELANCHOLY IN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY POETRY

APPROVED:

F. M. Darnall
Major Professor

L. W. Newton
Minor Professor

Floyd Stovall
Director of the Department of English

L. A. Sharp
Chairman of the Graduate Council

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By

Manora Crass Savage, B. A.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In this thesis it shall be my purpose to try to throw some light on the origin and kinds of melancholy which became an outstanding strain in the literature of the Eighteenth Century. Many problems confront a writer attempting to trace the development of this type of writing. Where does it originate? Is it derived from attitudes toward nature, from some mental characteristics of the age, merely from the poet's own sentimental nature, or was it from the influence of some writer, perhaps Milton? May be each had a definite influence in the development of melancholy.

The probable starting point of this melancholy expression is during the period 1740-1752, which saw the production of all the best mid-century melancholy verse except the elegies of Shenstone. Dyer's Ruins of Rome appeared in 1740. This same year also saw the production of Joseph Warton's Enthusiast, which was not published until 1744. The year 1742 brought forth Young's The Complaint or Night Thoughts on Life, Death and Immortality. In the following year came Blair's The Grave. The first collected edition of Night Thoughts, the Odes of Joseph Warton and Collins, and Thomas Warton's The Pleasures of Melancholy appeared in 1747. In 1748 we have Thomson's The Castle of Indolence. Gray's Elegies appeared in the 1850's. With the exception of Parnell's Night Piece on Death

this list includes the most important types of melancholy developed in the first half of the century.[1]

Gray apparently played the largest part in establishing the new Eighteenth Century elegy; yet he was not the only one, and he was not the first. All of the twenty-six Elegies of Shenstone, which were "moral" in tone, were circulating in manuscript long before Gray's Elegy was published. Shenstone, however, was influenced by Hammond. He regarded Hammond's choice of the quatrain for elegy as an original experiment, and he made it the meter of his own elegies in conscious imitation of Hammond. Bishop Percy and Thomas Grainger, who corresponded at one time with Shenstone about elegies, and who, soon after Gray's Elegy was in print, were writing love elegies, regarded Hammond as the poet who made the quatrain "our English elegiac Stanza." Thus it is evident that the quatrain was not regarded as "elegiac" until Hammond made it so.[2]

Since Gray is responsible for perfecting the elegy, he shall be used as a guide in discussing the elegiac mood. The death theme, the retirement theme, and the complaint against life are either implied or expressed in Gray's Elegy. Since it is, however, an elegy in a churchyard it is only natural that the outstanding theme should be death; and since it is

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[1] Eleanor M. Sickels, The Gloomy Egoist, pp. 4-5.

[2] J. Fisher, "James Hammond and the Quatrain of Gray's Elegy," Modern Philology, XXXII (1934-1935), 302-303.

a generalized elegy rather than a specific funeral elegy the theme of death is more general in nature, being free from its intimate terrors.[3] John Dyer's Ruins of Rome (1740), a descriptive-historical poem, may be associated with Gray's Elegy. The following lines are taken from it as an illustration:

> Fall'n, fall'n, a silent heap; her heroes all
> Sunk in their urns; behold in pride of pomp,
> The throne of nations fall'n; obscured in dust.
> Ev'n yet majestical; the solemn scene
> Elates the soul, while now the rising sun
> Flames on the ruins in the purer air
> Tow'ring aloft, upon the glitt'ring plain,
> Like broken rocks, a vast circumference;
> Rent palaces, crush'd columns, rifted moles,
> Fanes roll'd on fanes, and tombs on buried tombs.

Still nearer to Gray are the lines from Grongar Hill, also written by Dyer and published in 1726, which is not elegiac in general tone:[4]

> "A little rule, a little sway,
> A sunbeam on a winter's day,
> Is all the proud and mighty have
> Between the cradle and the grave."

It is evident that Milton also stamped his imprint upon the elegy. Professor R.D. Havens in his extensive study of The Influence of Milton on English Poetry, while he shows the tremendous influence of Milton's octosyllabics from its early beginning, does not believe that Il Penseroso had anything to do with the rise of "graveyard" poetry. He says,

Poems on solitude, contemplation, and similar subjects

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[3] Sickels, op. cit., p. 12.

[4] Ibid., p. 13.

> connected with a love of retirement and seclusion are, to be sure, frequently found and were without a doubt influenced by Milton's poem. But these are not gloomy any more than is Il Penseroso...which it should be observed, is not Il Melancholio. They praise quiet, contemplative life and they praise it, as Milton does, because it seems to them the happiest life and not because they are deprest or because they enjoy gloom. The love of gloom which characterized much of the literature of the eighteenth century belongs with the fondness of the middle ages, for wild nature. It was part of the romantic and rather sentimental tendencies of the time; it is alien to the mood of Il Penseroso and would have been quite the same if Milton's poem had never been written.[5]

However, Milton's poems did have a pronounced effect on some of the poetry of the time. This is shown very clearly in the works of Joseph Warton, an important character in the history of English Romanticism. In 1740 he wrote The Enthusiast, a poem in blank verse, which echoes Miltonic quality and the Romantic feeling, and ends with a passionate cry for solitude and wild nature.[6] The following excerpt from the poem reveals the Miltonic influence:

> "Rich in her weeping country's spoils, Versailles
> May boast a thousand fountains, that can cast
> The tortur'd waters to the distant Heavens;
> Yet let me choose some pine-topt precipice
> Abrupt and shaggy, whence a foamy stream,
> Like Anio, tumbling roars; or some bleak heath,
> Where straggling stands the mournful Juniper,
> Or yew-tree scath'd."

Just six years later he published a small volume of odes. His Ode to Fancy shows Milton's influence.[7]

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[5] R.D. Havens, "Literature of Melancholy," Modern Language Notes, XXIV (1909), 226-227.

[6] William Lyon Phelps, The Beginning of the English Romantic Movement, p. 89.

[7] Ibid., p. 91.

"Haste Fancy from scenes of folly,
To meet the matron Melancholy,
Goddess of the tearful eye,
That loves to fold her arms and sigh;
Let us with silent footsteps go
To charnels and the house of woe,
To Gothic churches, vaults and tombs
Where each sad night some virgin comes,
With throbbing breast and faded cheek,
Her promis'd bridegroom's urn to seek."

Thomas Warton was a still closer follower of Milton than was his brother Joseph. This is shown in the following excerpt from The Pleasures of Melancholy, which he wrote in 1745:[8]

"Beneath yon ruin'd abbey's moss-grown piles
Oft let me sit, at twilight hour of eve,
Where thro' some western window the pale Moon
Pours her long-levell'd rule of streaming light;
While sullen sacred silence reigns around,
Save the lone screech-owl's note, who builds
his bow'r
Amid the mould'ring caverns dark and damp,
Or flaunting ivy, that with mantle green
Invests some wasted tow'r."

The love of gloom in Eighteenth Century poetry was due perhaps primarily to the prevailing type of religious melancholy which will be discussed later.

Melancholy is also closely associated with nature. Thomson is the most distinguished poet in showing how gentle melancholy is associated with nature. Of course not all nature descriptions were melancholy, but a descriptive poem of considerable length usually contained passages of pensive wanderings in the moonlight or reflections on morality; while on the other hand a poem expressing pensive or mournful tone was likely to have a background of outdoor nature.[9]

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[8] Ibid., p. 93.

[9] Sickels, op. cit., p. 16.

Gray gives us the "lowing herd" and the beetle's "droning flight;" Collins the "brawling springs" and "dim discovered spires" of his pensive Eve; Joseph Warton meets Philosophy and Wisdom while wandering "in cloudless nights;" and Thomas Warton asks Contemplation, "queen sublime," to lead him

> to solemn glooms
> Congenial with my soul; to cheerless shades,
> To ruin'd seats, to twilight cells and bow'rs,
> Where thoughtful Melancholy loves to muse,
> Her fav'rite midnight haunts...[10]

The relation between melancholy and description is due partly to the praise of retirement and withdrawal into the country seclusion from the distractions and corruptions of the city and court. Thomson and Dyer, as well as others, combine this love of retirement with the loveliness of hills and streams, and the desire to give up ambition and to retire to one's library or garden.[11]

Another neo-classic melancholy theme is the complaint against life. This may connect itself with the elegiac mood; or it may, by showing the sorrows of life, combine itself with religious melancholy. Several of Gray's odes are fitting examples of this type: Ode to Spring, Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College and the Ode to Adversity.[12]

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[10] Quoting respectively from Gray's Elegy, Collins' Ode to Evening, Joseph Warton's The Enthusiast, and Thomas Warton's The Pleasures of Melancholy.

[11] Sickels, op. cit., p. 17.

[12] Ibid., p. 19.

Besides the moods of melancholy which are with death, retirement, and woes or futility o: is also the love melancholy poetry. The Cavali(of the poets up to the middle of the Eighteenth Century addressed their Chloes and their Chlorises in songs and lyrics; but the love poetry in the latter part of the century was expressed chiefly in the love elegies. Shenstone, Percy, and Grainger were among the first poets who wrote love elegies after the type of Hammond.[13] One type of the mournful love poem, which later became popular, is the early ballad revival, of which Tickell's Colin and Lucy is an excellent example.

There remains unmentioned another type of melancholy. Its mood is found in Young's The Complaint or Night Thoughts, and Robert Blair's The Grave. The melancholy mood in these poems is deep funeral gloom which is engendered by the contemplation of death in its terrible and intimate aspects. If it drinks of the joys of nature, it is the sadistic joy of the saints watching from Paradise the tortures of the damned. Fear is the distinguishing note and its roots are steeped in religious fanaticism and inextricably bound up with the history of the Christian church.[14] Burton in his Anatomy of Melancholy classifies religious melancholy as a subdivision of love melancholy. Young by virtue of his

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[13] Fisher, op. cit., p. 308.

[14] Sickels, op. cit., p. 27.

wide influence in literature is the central figure in religious melancholy associated with problems of death and destiny.[15] His philosophical idea of life is one cause of his melancholy spirit. He believed a choice must be made between this world and the world to come. To him there was no harmonizing the two. He says,

> "Religion all. Descending from the skies
> To wretched man, the goddess in her left
> Holds out this world, and in her right
> the next.[16]

His religion casts a dark shadow upon his present life and led him

> To frown at pleasure, and to smile at pain
> Fired at the prospects of unclouded bliss.[17]

He had a very gloomy conception of the world in which he lived. He described it very vividly in the following words: "miry vale,"[18] "this nest of pain,"[19] "this dark incarcerating colony,"[20] "this night of frailty, change, and death',"[21] "this dismal scene,"[22] "this prison,"[23] and "this pestilential earth."[24]

In his long sermon upon Narcissa in the Night Thoughts

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[15] Louis Cazamian, A History of English Literature, 1660-1914, Vol. II, p. 154.

[16] Young, "Night Thoughts," Canto IV, ll. 246-250, Edward Young, Poetical Works, p. 3.

[17] Ibid., VII, 1054-55ff.

[18] Ibid., IV, 537.

[19] Ibid., III, 409.

[20] Ibid., IV, 665.

[21] Ibid., IV, 555.

[22] Ibid., III, 363.

[23] Ibid., IX, 1019.

[24] Ibid., IX, 1332.

he says her youth should remind us that death may come any moment; her gayety, that the approach of death may be disguised; and her fortune that one should guard against wealth distracting our thoughts from the grave.[25] The things that chiefly concern us in Young's poem are its didacticism, the depth of its gloom and its unabashed egoism, which are elements natural to religious melancholy.[26]

Before leaving this thought of death in connection with religious melancholy, I should like to say a few words about the other "graveyard" poem which has been mentioned, Blair's The Grave. This poem is Medieval in thought and feeling and is distinctly Gothic in effect.[27] The central idea is similar to that of the Night Thoughts; that is, in the midst of life it behooves us to meditate on the tomb. The poem largely presents a series of pictures and characters of the schoolboy fleeing the churchyard at night on his imagining he heard a sound; of a weeping widow bemoaning her husband's death; of the "hoary-headed" sexton cracking an obscene jest over his pot of ale; or near the end of the poem moralizing concerning suicide, the incommunicativeness of the dead, and the doctrine of the resurrection. However, for our purpose

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[25] H.H. Clark, "A Study of Melancholy in Edward Young," Modern Language Notes, XXXIX (1924), 135.

[26] Nickels, op. cit., p. 30.

[27] Odell Shepard and Paul S. Wood, English Prose and Poetry 1660-1800, p. 512.

the wealth of macabre detail, and the almost sadistic dwelling on sickness and corruption are the important elements. This manner of treating the death theme during the early part of the century was closely associated with the broadside elegies and other personal laments for the dead and with Parnell's Night Review on Death. Blair on the other hand reveals in this macabre element an Elizabethan flavor. He seems to have at his command all the "horror" furnishings of his own country... the "sickly taper," the "yew," "skulls," "coffins," "worms," "night foul bird," and "shrieking ghosts."[28] Because of this Elizabethan phrasing we hear echoes of Shakespeare rather than Parnell in the following lines:

> Why this ado in earthing up a carcase
> That's fallen into disgrace, and in
> the nostril
> Smells horrible.....
>
> Now tame and humble, like a child
> that's whipped
> Shakes hands with dust, and calls
> the worm his kinsman...
>
> Methinks I see thee with thy head low laid,
> Whilst, suffeited upon thy damask cheek,
> The high-fed worm, in lazy volumes roll'd
> Riots unscared....
>
> Oh! how his eyes stand out, and stare
> full ghastly!
> While the distemper's rank and deadly venom
> Shoots like a burning arrow 'cross his bowels,
> And drinks his marrow up.....

As has already been stated Blair's The Grave had a

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[28] Sickels, op. cit., pp. 29-33.

Gothic effect. Likewise, other melancholy poetry, especially the works of the Wartons, was attaching itself to the Gothic revival. A more lengthy discussion will be given of this phase of melancholy poetry later; but Joseph Warton's Ode to Fancy, which has already been quoted in connection with Milton, will show that this is true.[29]

> "Haste, Fancy, from these scenes of folly,
> To meet the matron Melancholy,
> Goddess of the tearful eye,
> That loves to fold her arms and sigh!
> Let us with silent footsteps go
> To charnels and the house of woe,
> To Gothic churches, vaults, and tombs,
> Where each sad night some virgin comes."

Thus far in our glance at Eighteenth Century poetry, it has been observed that melancholy in solitude, in death and religion, in nature, in love, and in the complaint against life furnished most of the poetry of the middle decades of the century. Each of these themes will be discussed in the following chapters.

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[29] Ibid., p. 34.

CHAPTER II

MELANCHOLY IN SOLITUDE

Students of English poetry of the Eighteenth Century will doubtless recall how often in this poetry man is depicted as solitary, and to what a remarkable extent it manifests a love of solitude. To Eighteenth Century Society a chastened and pensive contentment was to withdraw from the world, by which was usually meant the court and the high society, and live in rural seclusion. Throughout the century this delight in solitude is an ever-recurring theme. One phase of it, the desire for a country life, is revealed as early as 1700 in Pomfret's Choice.[1]

The word solitude has many meanings; hence it is only fitting that some distinctions should be made. At first one might think of it in connection with monasteries, for the people who shut themselves in such places were withdrawn from all the activities of the world. However, there was nothing monastic about the solitude of this period. The monasteries in England had long since been abandoned, and the men of the Eighteenth Century found no charms embedded in the monastic life. Perhaps I am safe in saying that this desire for solitude had very few religious or mystic

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[1] A.C. Martin, "The Love of Solitude in Eighteenth Century Poetry," South Atlantic Quarterly, XXIX (1930), p.48.

characteristics. However, we do find in Father Francis's Prayer, by Ambrose Philips (1675-1749), a priest in a monastery praying to God to

"bless from fools this holy ground."

In reality this is not a priest praying, but a man of the great world, seeking asylum from fops and fools. History shows that the great hymn writers of the time rarely expressed a love for solitude because they were for the most part evangelical in temperament, and were "enthusiasts" rather than solitaries.[2]

But we find the hermits playing an important part. Parnell's the Hermit, a didactic poem published in 1722 undoubtedly influenced the retirement theme. Hermits made frequent appearance in pre-romantic verse; sometimes they appeared in connection with artificial hermitages, and sometimes in a romantic ballad; but in each instance demonstrating the fact that their seclusion in some way gave them prerogatives of virtue and wisdom, and hence was pervaded with a melancholy cast. They usually sought retirement because of the oppression of the woes of the world, and in solitude they found peace and contentment for their souls. Thomas Penrose's hermit alone climbs the top of a cliff and sees a vision of Joy, Hope, Grief, and other abstractions, until he calls on heaven to permit Reason to take the helm and guide his life. Also many pious sentiments about Virtue

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[2] Ibid., p. 49.

are found in an annoymous Hermit's Address in 1788.[3]

Goldsmith gives us another related theme, the "let-me-return-to-die" theme. The most influential example of this is found in the section of The Deserted Village which begins: "In all my wanderings round this world of care." However, this theme did not have its origin in Goldsmith. Sir William Blackstone ends his The Lawyer's Farewell to His Muse (1764) with the desire that he may retire in old age to "the still, the rural cell," and having the satisfaction that he has played his part, descend to his grave in peace.[4] Following Goldsmith the theme recurs in other poems which were probably influenced by The Deserted Village. Kirke White's Childhood and the passage in John Struther's To Calder Water which begins

> And after all my wanderings past,
> May I within thy vale at last...

are examples of Goldsmith's influence.[5]

Pomfret's Choice, already referred to, is the one work that has really kept the retirement theme alive. Dr. Johnson in his Life of Pomfret says, "perhaps no composition in our language has been oftener perused than Pomfret's Choice." It is not surprising, therefore, to find minor poets still expressing "choices" and "wishes" fifty or seventy-five years

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[3]Eleanor M. Sickels, The Gloomy Egoist, pp. 70-72.

[4]Ibid., p. 72.

[5]Ibid., p. 73.

after its publication. A series of variations on the subject of "wishes" appeared in the Gentleman's Magazine; John Miller in the April, 1746 issue wrote half a column of octosyllabics in which he expressed a desire to have the usual cot "near some venerable wood," where he might walk and talk with God, and have Contentment in his"humble cell."[6]

We find that the odes to contentment contain also the retirement idea. However, not all of them are melancholy. Yet, when content is allowed to choose her place of abode, it is usually in Arcadian retirement. Harriet Falconer's On Contentment shows the affinity of the contentment literature with melancholy.[7] The following excerpt is taken from the poem:

> Perhaps in some sequester'd cottage laid,
> Contented Virtue like a flow'r unblown.
> Which if emerging from the humble shade,
> Might well have added lustre to a throne.

Besides odes to contentment which contain the retirement theme, there are also odes to retirement, and several miscellaneous poems carrying the word in their titles. The moods naturally vary. Retirement in relation to melancholy is shown by James Beattie's poem, Retirement (1758).[8]

> Ye cliffs, in hoary grandeur piled
> High o'er the glimmering dale,
> Ye woods, along whose windings wild

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[6] Ibid., p. 73.

[7] Ibid., p. 74.

[8] Ibid., p. 75.

Murmurs the solemn gale;
Where Melancholy strays forlorn,
And Woe retires to weep,
What time the wan Moon's yellow horn
Gleams on the western deep!

Philosophical Retirement, by B. Fowler, which is found in the London Magazine for September, 1778 is the most interesting of the retirement poems. It is definitely elegiac in tone, giving evidence of the influence of Thomson, and is written in the stanza form of Gray.[9]

Night's solemn bird disconsolately plains
From the lone abbey's ivy-vested wall;
And sadly-pleasing Philomela's strains
On the sooth'd ear in trilling accents
fall.

We may now examine some of the characteristics which this love of solitude expresses. First, we find the delight in "pleasing melancholy" or the "pleasures of this and that." The love of solitude and the love of melancholy are inextricably mingled; hence the same poem may express a desire for both. William Mason in An Ode to a Friend, found among his poems published in 1746, seeks only to meditate upon his own ills.[10]

Leave me, my friend, indulgent go,
And let me muse upon my woe.

The series of "Pleasures for this or that" starts with Thomas Warton's Pleasures of Melancholy (1745), and runs through the pleasures of night, the mind, the poet, contemplation, and solitude, to Samuel Rogers' Pleasures of

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[9] Ibid., p. 76.

[10] A.C. Martin, op. cit., p. 50.

Memory (1792) and Thomas Campbell's Pleasures of Hope.[11] Warton's poem is the major one on this theme. It opens with an address to Contemplation, who is the sister of Melancholy.

> Mother of musings, Contemplation sage:
> Whose grotto stands upon the topmost rock
> Of Teneriff; 'mid the tempestuous night...

Warton links contemplative melancholy with the romantic love of mountains. Then he urges his "queen sublime" to conduct him to "solemn glooms," "ruin'd seats," and "twilight cells;" and to let him sit musing beneath the ruins of an abbey at twilight, when the still dead silence is disturbed only by the screech-owl. The poem is brought to a close after much wandering with a final invocation to Melancholy and Contemplation.[12]

The earliest poem on "The Pleasures of Solitude" is found in 1752. Sickels says, "it is a mere recipe poem in octosyllabics..."grot," "mossy cell," "hermit-like," "the vanity of life." The theme is treated more elaborately in P. Courtier's Pleasures of Solitude.

Another phase of the retirement poetry is the desire for serenity, for equilibrium in life, which is a classical tendency. It is worth our noting that it was not always absolute solitude that was sought, but often merely

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[11] Sickels, op. cit., p. 79.

[12] Ibid., p. 80.

retirement or withdrawal from the great world.[13] An excellent example of this type of poetry is Pope's Ode on Solitude, (Works, 1735), which is quoted below:

Happy the man, whose wish and care
A few paternal acres bound,
Content to breathe his native air,
In his own ground.

Whose herds with milk, whose fields with bread,
Whose flocks supply him with attire;
Whose trees in summer yield him shade,
In winter fire.

Blest, who can unconcern'dly find
Hours, days, and years, slide soft away,
In health of body, peace of mind,
Quiet by day.

Sound sleep by night; study and ease,
Together mix'd; sweet recreation,
And innocence which most does please,
With meditation.

Thus let me live, unseen, unknown;
Thus unlamented let me die,
Steal from the world, and not a stone
Tell where I lie.

Neo-classical poetry is filled with this desire of serenity and equilibrium. Thomas Parnell (1679-1718) in his Hymn to Contentment defines solitude as "the nurse of woe," and urges man to rule his will, to bid his passions all be still, and to know God; yet it is still in his "hours of sweet retreat" that he finds his greatest happiness.[14]

Matthew Green (1696-1737) in his poem The Spleen (1737), which shows the influence of Pomfret's Choice, expresses a

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[13] A.C. Martin, op. cit., p. 50.

[14] Ibid.

desire for rural contentment, and describes a quiet farm away from the busy streets of the city, as shown by the following excerpt:

> A farm some twenty miles from town,
> Small, tight, salubrious, and my own;
> .....
> A pond before, full to the brim,
> Where cows may cool, and geese may swim;
> Behind, a green like velvet neat,
> Soft to the eye, and to the feet,
> Where od'rous plants in evening fair
> Breathe all around ambrosial air.
> .....
> Thus sheltered, free from care and strife
> May I enjoy a calm through life,
> See faction, safe in low degree,
> As men at land see storms at sea,

Experience taught William Somerville how to enjoy retirement, and in his poem The Student, published in 1750, he gives evidence of this.

> Sage experience taught me how to prize
> Myself, and how this world.

Further desire for retirement is expressed by William Cowper. He flees from the world of strife and tumult, and seeks the calmness only to be found in rural retreat. The following excerpt from his hymn Retirement gives the poet's desire for the quiet places:

> Far from the world, O Lord, I flee,
> From strife and tumult far;
> From scenes where Satan wages still
> His most successful war.
>
> The calm retreat, the silent shade,
> With prayer and praise agree;
> And seem by thy sweet bounty made
> For those who follow thee.
>
> The tide of life, swift always in its course,

May run in cities with a brisker force,
But nowhere with a current so serene,
Or half so clear, as in the rural scene.

The dislike of cities and the love of serenity and the humanist's attitude toward life as expressed in the poetry previously quoted are all evidences of the classical inspiration. James Thomson also reveals the classical inspiration when he tells us in the Castle of Indolence that

Scipio to the soft Cumaean shore
Retiring, tasted joy he never knew before.

Elizabeth Carter (1717-1806) escapes the dullness of life and the noise and strife of the city by retreating to peaceful groves in her Ode to Wisdom.

From envy, hurry, noise, and strife,
The dull impertinence of life,
In thy retreat I rest:
Pursue thee to the peaceful groves,
Where Plato's sacred spirit roves,
In all thy beauties dressed.

Isaac Hawkins Browne (1705-1760) gives us one of the most delightful examples of the humanist mind in The Foundling Hospital for Wit published in 1747.[15]

Now I pass with old authors an indolent hour,
And reclining at ease turn Demosthenes o'er;
Now facetious and vacant, I urge the gay flask
With a set of old friends...who have nothing to ask;
Thus happy I reck not of France nor of Spain.

Of course this was not absolute solitude; but it satisfied the desires of the men of the Eighteenth Century. Their chief aim,as already stated,was to get away from the vexations and disturbing influences in life. They would have

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[15]Ibid., p. 52.

been opposed to excessive love of solitude. Yet they wanted to be true to their own nature, and they were mature enough to know:

> That man is never less alone
> Than when alone; 'tis so with me
> When in my own large company.[16]

It is clear to the readers of the poetry of this period that the solitude they sought was a philosophical one, and what they desired was detachment. Therefore, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu wrote "In answer to a lady who advised Retirement:"

> You little know the heart that you advise;
> I view this various scene with equal eyes;
> In crowded courts I find myself alone.[17]

The neo-classicists seemed to maintain a more sincere attitude toward life. In keeping with their attitude of flying the world, shunning ambition, strife, and care, avoiding fops and fools, William Shenstone wrote:

> I fly from pomp, I fly from plate!
> I fly from falsehood's specious grin!
> Freedom I love, and form I hate,
> And chuse my lodging at an inn.[18]

Shenstone, like many other poets, desired to be a recluse. This is shown in the following lines:

> Since it is decreed by Fate
> Friends must sever, soon or late;
> Darkling to their Lodgings roam;
> Stagger to their longest Home;
> Of all Deities the best,
> Bacchus! hear a Son's Request!

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[16] Quoted by Martin, Ibid., p. 52.

[17] Ibid., p. 53.

[18] Excerpt from "Written at an Inn at Henley," Odell Shepard and Paul S. Wood, English Prose and Poetry 1660-1800, p. 565.

> Let me metamorphos'd be
> Into some wide-spreading Tree:
> In some pleasant flow'ry Glade,
> With my Branches form a Shade.
> Lovers there may bless my Boughs;
> Topers, merrily carouze.[19]

William Cowper also desired to escape to some green island of innocence "in the deep, wide sea of Misery."

> Oh! to some distant scene, a willing exile
> From the wild uproar of this busy world,
> Were it my fate with Delia to retire;
> With her to wander through the sylvan shade,
> Each morn, or o'er the moss-imbrowned turf,
> Where, blest as the prime parents of mankind
> In their own Eden, we would envy none;
> But, greatly pitying whom the world calls happy,
> Gently spin out the silken thread of life...[20]

The changing moods, the interrelation of liberating impulse, and the crippling inhibition, which affected Cowper from day to day, are reflected in his poetry which ended with a cry for peace, for an end to the theological anxiety which drained away his vitality and divided him from the fields and woods where life fulfilled its purpose with no uneasy questioning and glided through the twilight by stealth away. The following lines are indicative of this as well as other lines of his that have already been quoted:

> So glide my life away! and so at last,
> My share of duties decently fulfilled,
> May some disease, not tardy to perform
> Its destined office, yet with gentle stroke,
> Dismiss me weary to a safe retreat,
> Beneath the turf that I have often trod.[21]

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[19] Quoted by A.R. Humphreys, William Shenstone An Eighteenth Portrait, p. 16.

[20] Quoted by Hugh I'Anson Fausset, William Cowper, p. 44.

[21] Ibid., p. 247.

Thus, we can see by the type of poetry produced in the Eighteenth Century that one of the favorite themes of the poet of a melancholy mood was retirement. Today we realize that the poets of the town who painted so vividly the delights and enjoyments to be found in the country did not know the source of their own powers[22], and we can say of them what Austin Dobson said of himself:

> On London stones I sometimes sigh
> For wider green and bluer sky;--
> Too oft the trembling note is drowned
> In this huge city's varied sound;--
> "Pure song is country born"--I cry.
>
> Then comes the spring,--the months go by,
> The last stray swallows seaward fly;
> And I--I too!--no more am found
> On London stones!
>
> In vain!--the woods, the fields deny
> That clearer strain I fain would try;
> Mine is an urban Muse, and bound
> By some strange law to paven ground;
> Abroad she pouts;--she is not shy
> On London stones![23]

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[22] A.C. Martin, op. cit., p. 53.

[23] Austin Dobson, Poetical Works, p. 326.

CHAPTER III

MELANCHOLY AS REVEALED IN THE POET'S ATTITUDE TOWARD DEATH AND RELIGION

In the preceeding chapter a discussion was given on "melancholy in solitude" or the retirement theme. The poets of the Eighteenth Century found great contentment in withdrawing themselves from worldly cares, and spending the last days of their lives in some sequestered vale. This pensive solitude naturally affected their outlook on life, and their conception of death. Therefore, one of the interesting aspects of the neo-classicist's love of solitude is his attitude toward death. As set forth in the poetry of the time, it was one of quietness and unconcern. The words of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu give testimony to this fact:

> And, unconcerned, my future state I trust
> To that sole Being, merciful and just.[1]

One of the chief ideas or conceptions enveloped in solitude, according to the neo-classicists, was that it prepared the soul for heaven. Hence, religion has a close affinity with death. In the introduction of this thesis, I briefly suggested the death theme; now, I shall continue to develop it in the light of the Eighteenth Century poet.

Melancholy in solitude and in contemplation was usually

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[1] Quoted by A.C. Martin, "The Love of Solitude in Eighteenth Century Poetry," South Atlantic Quarterly, XXIX (1930), p. 49.

a very pleasing mood; but when the death theme, which itself in religious horrors, appears with the feeling of pain, and the grisly details of decay and corruption, the pleasing mood is shaken.[2]

The death theme is often referred to as "black melancholy." Since it is fabled that Death leads us to judgment, it is only natural that the theme of Sin, who, as Milton tells us, is the daughter and paramour of Satan and the Mother of Death, should be connected with Death. Despair and madness are the human aspects of this black melancholy; its literary relationships are with the "horrendous" and the macabre; and it is a natural aspect of religious melancholy when it is sincere and subjective. The essential ingredients are the sense of sin and fear of punishment; however, it may express itself in a morbid preoccupation with the physical and psychological details of crime and death. Sometimes it is the outgrowth of realistic horrors and old superstitions.[3]

As already stated in the introduction, Young is the source of the current religious melancholy associated with problems of death and destiny. This theme also had early inception in Blair's The Grave, and in the other gloomy meditations on death and judgment which continued to express Christian pessimism throughout the period.[4] Young's Night

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[2] Eleanor M. Sickels, The Gloomy Egoist, p. 130.

[3] Ibid., p. 131.

[4] Ibid., p. 131.

Thoughts is a long meditation in nine cantos. Three successive bereavements had cast a dark gloom over the poet's soul, and the nocturnal hours are in keeping with his sorrow; pensive and alone he abandons himself to the reflections of the poem.[5] It is made up, like many elegies, of sombre moralizing and horrific description; and the circumambient atmosphere of gloom, as is characteristic of the Puritan elegists who dwelt at length on the anguish of the mourners, is largely personal to the author. The poet centers his sadness upon himself rather than on the deceased or the dissolute youth to whom he addressed his apothegms. Night and the sadness and horror of night, are the central themes of the poem. He borrows the verbiage of the elegy to call himself a "frail Child of Dust" and a "Worm."[6]

References to Young's poems, poems concerning Young, and indications of his influence are very often made until the close of the century. Before 1844, his Night Thoughts had been translated into twelve different languages, thus deeply impressing Continental literature, especially the German romanticism. During the decades 1750-1770, pieces written on night or death which were religious in spirit, and which were not written in Gray's stanza form, were more than likely influenced by Young. However, Blair, Hervey and

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[5]Louis Cazamian, A History of English Literature 1660-1914, p. 154.

[6]John W. Draper, The Funeral Elegy and the Rise of English Romanticism, p. 307.

Parnell had a part in contributing to the death theme. John Cunningham in 1762 wrote Night Piece, which contains his musings on the tomb. Elizabeth Carter's midnight meditations are characterized by a religious gloom, and as a result show the influence of Young. "A Midnight Piece," which appeared in Scots Magazine in 1756, reveals even greater imitation of Young.[7] The following lines are taken from it:

> Yet the muse
> One hint must drop: If awful midnight this,
> How sad, from this to plunge in midnight deeper!

It would be a useless task to try to separate the influence of Young, Hervey, and Blair, because they influenced each other. Young's Last Day influenced Blair's The Grave, which in turn had its influence on the Night Thoughts; and both of these poets influenced Hervey.[8]

Another famous poet of the Eighteenth Century who wrote about death is Bishop Porteus.[9] In the following lines the poet describes his search for Death in the silent watches of the night:

> Friend to the wretch, whom ev'ry friend forsakes,
> I woo thee, Death! In fancy's fairy paths
> Let the gay songsters rove, and gently trill
> The strain of empty joy.--Life and its joys
> I leave to those that prize them.--At this hour,
> This solemn hour, when Silence rules the world,
> And wearied Nature makes a gen'ral pause!
> Wrapt in Night's sable robe, through cloisters drear,
> And charnels pale, tenanted by a throng

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[7] Sickels, op. cit., pp. 132-133.

[8] Ibid., p. 134.

[9] Ibid., p. 135.

> Of meagre phantoms shooting cross my path
> With silent glance, I seek the shadowy vale
> Of Death!--Deep in a murky cove's recess,
> Lav'd by Oblivion's listless stream, and fenc'd
> By shelving rocks, and intermingled horrors
> Of yew' (sic) and cypress' shade, from all intrusion
> Of busy noon-tide beam, the monarch sits
> In unsubstantial majesty enthron'd.
> At his right hand, nearest himself in place,
> With fatal industry and cruel care
> Busies herself in pointing all his stings,
> And tipping every shaft with venom drawn
> From her infernal store; around him rang'd
> In terrific array, and strange diversity
> Of uncouth shapes, stand his dread Ministers...[10]

"The ministers in question are Old Age, Fever, Consumption, Palsy, Gout, and their brethren," all waiting to

> rush forth to execute his purpose,
> And scatter desolation o'er the earth.[11]

Milton's Paradise Lost contributed much to this passage, as well as to other religious poetry on death and judgment.

Porteus assures us that man and not God is responsible for the destruction of life; first, for death which is a consequence of the Fall, and then by continued wickedness for suffering of disease. He tries to tell us that although we are miserable here, we had better repent because hell is even more miserable. The poet concludes with a prayer asking for a peaceful and pious death.[12]

Various aspects of this melancholy picture are felt in the numerous meditations on death scattered through the

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[10] Quoted by Sickels, Ibid., p. 136.

[11] Ibid., p. 136.

[12] Ibid., p. 136.

fugitive verse; for instance, an anonymous writer in the Gentleman's Magazine (1765)[13] warns a lady who had wished for sudden death that no one is good enough to die without repenting and taking time for pious preparation.

A discussion of religious poems on death would certainly not be complete without some mention of the poems on the "day of judgment." For our present use, I shall deal only with those of the Eighteenth Century. The earlier group of these poems begins with R. Glynn's and George Bally's poems called The Day of Judgment written in 1757. Both of these poems are written in blank verse, and show evidence of the influence of Paradise Lost. Glynn's poem, which won the Seatonian prize, opens: "Thy justice, heav'nly King!...I sing advent'rous..." and ends with a prayer that God will remember man in this wretched world.[14]

John Oglivie's Day of Judgment, which is written in heroic couplets and which was also influenced by Milton and Young, appeared about the same date as those of Glynn and Bally. Although most of these poems on judgment were usually horrific, Oglivie's poem is characterized by mild melancholy, which led the poet to moralize and to represent his guardian angel as paraphrasing Gray:

> Say where, vain mortal! now the pomp of state?
> The pride of kings, the triumphs of the great?
> .....

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[13]"Thoughts on Sudden Death. To a Lady," Gentleman's Magazine, XXXV (July, 1765), p. 334.

[14]Sickels, op. cit., p. 143.

Hope's flatt'ring wish, Ambition's tow'ring aim?
The boast of Grandeur, and the wreaths of Fame?[15]

He breaks away from the orthodox procedure of speaking of the condemned, and gives more space to the blessed. Michael Bruce (1767), on the other hand, in his The Last Day gives a much more lurid and ruthless picture of the final judgment.[16]

A contributor to the Town and Country Magazine (1775) attempted to describe the Judgment scene in an ode called The Last Day; but when he came to the point where the Judge was about to pass sentence on the wicked, his "soul recoiled" and he dared not survey the rest.[17] Such a feeling did not keep Richard Lee, a minor poet on religious subjects, from writing of how

Guilty Souls emerge from Tophet,
Join their rising Dust again,
Curse the Union, and prove it
Highly aggravates their Pain.[18]

To this period also belongs Kirke White's poem called Time in which he describes in phrases with the Miltonic accent how

The wicked shall be driven to their abode,
Down the imitigable gulf, to wail
And gnash their teeth in endless agony.[19]

We find also in this death and religious melancholy

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[15] Quoted by Sickels, Ibid., p. 145.

[16] Ibid., p. 145.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Quoted by Sickels, Ibid., p. 145.

[19] Ibid., p. 146.

poetry sin and fear of God playing an active part. William Cowper is one of the great examples of religious melancholy grounded in conviction of sin and fear of hell. The Calvinistic spirt which was presented to his pensive mind by ill-chosen spiritual advisors, particularly John Newton, encouraged his melancholy nature. A conviction that he was damned, which made a deep impression on him in early manhood, never entirely left him. During his last miserable hours he sought to forget the inevitable flames of hell by keeping himself busy in his garden, playing with his pets, or writing. He felt that he was forever shut away from God.[20]

Most of Cowper's poetry was undertaken as an escape from brooding; therefore, the prevailing tone of his verse is didactic rather than lyric.[21] The thought that he was alienated from God led him to deep despair, and while beset with that mood he wrote Lines Written Under the Influence of Delirium.

> Hatred and vengeance, my eternal portion,
> Scarce can endure delay of execution,
> Wait with impatient readiness to seize my
> Soul in a moment.
>
> Damned below Judas; more abhorred than he was,
> Who for a few pence sold his holy Master!
> Twice-betrayed Jesus me, the last delinquent,
> Deems the profanest.
>
> Man disavows, and Deity disowns,
> Hell might afford my miseries a shelter;

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[20] Odell Shepard and Paul S. Wood, English Prose and Poetry 1660-1800, p. 866.

[21] Sickels, op. cit., p. 154.

Therefore, Hell keeps her ever-hungry mouths all
Bolted against me.

Hard lot! encompassed with a thousand dangers;
Weary, faint, trembling with a thousand terrors,
I'm called, if vanquished! to receive a sentence
Worse than Abiram's.

Him the vindictive rod of angry Justice
Sent quick and howling to the centre headlong;
I, fed with judgment, in a fleshly tomb, am
Buried above ground.[22]

Reading such lines makes one shudder, because in them are revealed Cowper's utter despair. With almost equal despair he wrote The Castaway in which he uses the figure of a shipwreck to symbolize his own perilous case and his own pitiful struggle in the deeps of despair.

Obscurest night involved the sky,
The Atlantic billows roared,
When such a destined wretch as I,
Washed headlong from on board,
Of friends, of hope, of all bereft,
His floating home for ever left.
.....
Not long beneath the whelming brine,
Expert to swim, he lay;
Nor soon he felt his strength decline,
Or courage die away;
But waged with death a lasting strife,
Supported by despair of life.
.....
He long survives, who lives an hour
In ocean, self-upheld;
And so long he, with unspent power,
His destiny repelled;
And ever, as the minutes flew,
Entreated help, or cried "Adieu!"
.....
No voice divine the storm allayed,
No light propitious shone,
When, snatched from all effectual aid,
We perished, each alone:

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[22]William Benham, ed., The Poetical Works of William Cowper., p. 23.

But I beneath a rougher sea,
And whelmed in deeper gulfs than he.[23]

In his Last Stanzas to Delia Cowper depicts himself as being submissive to fate that has come home to him as a bitter personal necessity, a hell into which he had sunk from the heaven of his hopes.

The seaman, thus his shattered vessel lost,
Still vainly strives to shun the threatening death;
And while he thinks to gain the friendly coast,
And drops his feet, and feels the sand beneath,

Borne by the wave steep-sloping from the shore,
Back to the inclement deep, again he beats
The surge aside, and seems to tread secure;
And how the refluent wave his baffled toil defeats.[24]

Not all of his moments were filled with religious despair. There were times when his spirit was lifted to a higher level. It was during one of his happy periods that he wrote Walking with God. The following stanzas reveal the spirit of the poem:

Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord?
Where is the soul-refreshing view
Of Jesus and his word?
.....
What peaceful hours I then enjoyed!
How sweet their memory still!
But they have left an aching void
The world can never fill.[25]

But his morbid soul soon falls back into despair, and he

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[23]Excerpts from "The Castaway," Ibid., p. 400.

[24]Excerpts from "The Last Stanzas to Delia," Ibid., p.15.

[25]Excerpts from "Walking with God," Ibid., p. 24.

cries out of a heart stricken with terror that he is "forsaken and alone."

> My former hopes are fled,
> My terror now begins;
> I feel, alas! that I am dead
> In trespasses and sins.
>
> Ah! whither shall I fly?
> I hear the thunder roar;
> The law proclaims destruction nigh,
> And vengeance at the door.
>
> When I review my ways,
> I dread impending doom;
> But sure a friendly whisper says,
> "Flee from the wrath to come."[26]

He is morbidly preoccupied with sin and luxuriates in self-abasement. He exclaims, "Sin has undone our wretched race;" and warns those who "contented lick their native dust" that

> We see, though you perceive it not,
> The approaching awful doom;
> Oh tremble at the solemn thought,
> And flee the wrath to come![27]

The gentle sensitive nature of Cowper would often pity others because of their sinful state. To him nothing was more melancholy than a crowd of godless gentry.

Strange enough in the Eighteenth Century, it was not the people who really believed in hell that were concerned or troubled over it. For instance, the Quaker poet, John Scott, may end a melancholy meditation on the woes of life by asking

> Say, will Religion clear this gloom,

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[26] Quoted by Hugh I'Anson Fausset, William Cowper, p. 121.

[27] Ibid., p. 122.

> And point to bliss beyond the tomb!
> Yes, haply for her chosen train;
> The rest, they say, severe decress ordain
> To realms of endless night and everlasting pain![28]

But the poet hastens to add a note: "The author does not give these as his own sentiments, but merely such as the gloomy moment described might suggest."[29] As time grew on, the preaching of "hell-fire and brimstone" seems to have ceased, and one is constrained to think the people ceased very seriously believing in it. This does not mean, however, that the preachers were tending toward atheism. The change in manners and humane sensibility taught most of the people to romanticize death and to think more pitifully of human frailty.[30]

However, this spirit was destined to arise again in a new aspect. Since the world in the Eighteenth Century grew up against a background of ruined castles and abbeys, twilight churchyards and midnight charnels, it is only natural that this should take a new light in the terrorism of "Gothic" romance. We have already noted in the introduction the early association of the "graveyard" mood and paraphernalia with the Gothic; especially in Thomas Warton's The Pleasures of Melancholy and Joseph Warton's The Enthusiast. The elements, which this Gothic-theme took from the medieval rivival, were

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[28] Quoted by Sickels, op. cit., p. 157.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Sickels, op. cit., p. 158.

the backgrounds of dim cathedrals, midnight churchyards, charnel houses, and the gloomy monastic ruins. It also took the death theme and saturated it with all the grossness and terrors of physical corruption. The theme of sin was also taken because sin is always closely related to death. All the elements enumerated above are those common in black religious melancholy,[31]

The extent to which the "graveyard" paraphernalia was inherited from seventeenth Century religious melancholy, and made popular in the middle of the Eighteenth Century may be comprehended in the study of odes and elegies. The fact that such a theme was prevalent in the minds of the poets may be seen in the following lines from Beattie:

> There would he dream of graves and corses pale,
> And ghosts that to the charnel-dungeon throng,
> And drag a length of clanking chain, and wail,
> Till silenced by the owl's terrific song,
> Or blast that shrieks by fits the shuddering isles along.[32]

A striking example of the fusion of the graveyard and the Gothic element is John Leyden's Ode to Fantasy. The ode was "written during an attack of ague" and is, therefore, dismal. In Miltonic octosyllabics,

> the sick man cries avaunt to the singing lark and cheerful village throngs, and imagines himself in succession watching a funeral, sitting at midnight on the haunted grave of a suicide, listening to lost and wailing ghosts by a winter torrent, working lonely spells on St. John's Eve, watching all night by the tortured bed of a dying

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[31] Ibid., pp. 159-160.

[32] "The Minstrel," Book I, Quoted by Thomas H. Ward, The English Poets, Vol. III, p. 397.

> murderer, braving horrid spectres in some Gothic hall, voyaging over far enchanted deeps, whirling through the air with the fairies, and then--suddenly--witnessing the resurrection of the dead and hearing their shrieks of despair.[33]

This theme also was an outgrowth of realistic horrors and superstitions. With Percy's Reliques (1765) and various other collections of like poetry, there flowed into English poetry a stream of new terror element, which was beset with primitive fears and superstitions, witches, ghosts, and haunted glens. These things,which were originally the outgrowth of religious fears, fit well with the "graveyard" element. It might be noted that this type of thing was closely associated with the ballad. Hence, in William Mickle's Cumnor Hall (1777) we find the death-bell, the raven, howls of dogs, and aerial voices.

> The death-bell thrice was heard to ring,
> An aerial voice was heard to call,
> And thrice the raven flapp'd its wing
> Around the towers of Cumnor Hall.
>
> The mastiff howls at village door...[34]

Thus far in my discussion of the death theme, I have been concerned mainly with death as associated with religion, Gothic ruins, and fears and superstitions. Now I should like to direct attention more closely to the truly "graveyard" poetry. Thomas Parnell's Night Piece on Death is considered the first "graveyard" poem of the early part of the

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[33] Sickels, op. cit., p. 161.

[34] Quoted by Sickels, Ibid., p. 165.

Eighteenth Century.[35] Such lines as the following played an important part in fostering that mood of romanticism which loved gloom and sadness; and the last four lines reveal Gray's debt to Parnell:

> "And think, as softly-sad you tread
> Above the venerable Dead,
> Time was, like thee they Life possest,
> And Time shall be, that thou shalt Rest.
> Those graves, with bending osier bound
> That nameless heave the crumbled ground,
> Quick to the glancing thought disclose,
> Where Toil and Poverty repose."[36]

Since Thomas Gray is the outstanding "graveyard" poet, it is fitting that we should study his works and his influence on other poets of the time. "The Elegy gave Thomas Gray such glory as has fallen to few in the whole history of literature; it is probably the poem most read and quoted and remembered in the English language."[37] Yet the poet himself has been an enigma to generations of readers.

Seclusion and solitude, thought, and reading, quiet days and nights steeped in tranquility and saturated with reflection, were characteristics of Gray's life in the middle of the Eighteenth Century. Not all of Gray's life was filled with solitude and introspection. He frequently made leisure trips through the beautiful English country.

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[35] Dr. Harko G. De Maar, A History of Modern English Romanticism, p. 183.

[36] Excerpt from "Night Piece on Death," Shepard and Wood, op. cit., p. 319.

[37] Gamaliel Bradford, "Bare Souls. II: Thomas Gray," Harper's Magazine, CLXIV(May, 1934), 732.

His journeys always filled his poetic soul with new thought because he was always eager to inspect old castles and churches, to examine monuments and decipher inscriptions, and to classify rare specimens of Gothic architecture. But after his brief wanderings he would return to his solitude.[38]

Gray in the following words describes his own melancholy life:

> I keep an owl in the garden, as like me as it can stare; only I do not eat raw meat, nor bite people by the fingers. But still, still as with Burton, that black-robed goddess Melancholy is waiting round the corner, spreads her quiet smothering pall over the gayest hopes and the wittiest associates. She comes in youth: "low spirits are my true and faithful companions...most commonly we sit alone together and are the prettiest insipid company in the world.[39]

No doubt physical sensitiveness or inertia had its share in encouraging Gray's melancholy turn. In his life he took good care of his body; yet he was never quite well. He seemed to have suffered from a sensation of weariness, frequent dizziness and lightness of head; he was easily fatigued and sometimes had little pains in his breast. He made light of these things, but still he suffered mental agony as a consequence.[40]

With such a background, it was only natural that Gray should write such a poem as The Elegy in a Country Churchyard.

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[38] Ibid., ppp 732-35.

[39] Quoted by Bradford, Ibid., p. 742.

[40] Ibid., pp. 742-43.

The poem opens with a darkening landscape and the "knell" of parting day, as so many elegies begin with a touch of rural scenery, and the death knell of the deceased. The poet develops his mortuary countryside with delicate, life-like details; for example, there is the "lowing herd," the "beetle's droning flight," and the distant tinkling of sheep-bells. Gradually the world is left in darkness to the author, whose own melancholy is by no means forgotten; however, it is more subtly expressed than Young's. The Gothic touch of an "ivy-mantled tower" directs the poet's attention to the scene before him--the mounded graves and the yew.[41]

The main influence of the Elegy on the melancholy element was on the general theme of death. The following characteristic lines reveal the tone of the poem:

> Each in his narrow cell for ever laid...
>
> The paths of glory lead but to the grave...
>
> Can storied urn or animated bust
> Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath?...
>
> Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid...
>
> Yet ev'n these bones from insult to protect
> Some frail memorial still erected nigh...
>
> Ev'n from the tomb the voice of Nature cries...
>
> Slow thro' the churchyard path we saw him born...[42]

Probably we would not be far wrong in saying that Gray

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[41] John W. Draper, op. cit., p. 311.

[42] Austin Lane Poole, ed., Poetical Works of Gray and Collins, pp. 92, 93, 95, 97.

greatly influenced "churchyard" meditations written seventy-five years after the publication of his Elegy. Of course, Young, Blair, and Hervey also contributed to the theme. However, Gray is the major poet of the "churchyard" type.

Suzanna Blamire in 1766 with her "pensive mind" wrote the following lines which are imitative of Gray:

> Then what is honour?---what is wealth or fame?
> Since the possessor waits the common doom![43]

There is also a "churchyard" meditation, which expresses the orthodox conception of the inevitability of death, among the writings of John Learmont.

> The village clock had struck the midnight hour;
> The moon was set;--and no translucent ray
> Did o'er the night its cheary influence pour,
> When thro' the churchyard's mound I took my way.[44]

There appeared in the Gentleman's Magazine, between 1772 and 1790, three churchyard meditations which give further indication of Gray's influence. J. Ferrar's Stanzas Written in a Country Churchyard, on the occasion of the death of a parent, appeared in 1772. A Walk in the Parish Church of Chelmsford appeared in 1783.[45] The following excerpts are taken from the poem:

> In these lone walks, these melancholy isles,
> Where ever-musing Silence holds her sway...
>
> Come to my aid, with all thy pensive train,
> In sombre pomp, O sainted Melancholy...

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[43] Quoted by Nickels, op. cit., p. 100.

[44] Ibid., p. 101.

[45] Gentleman's Magazine, LIII (Jan., 1783), 63.

During this period there were also various other meditations in churchyards which are not written in Gray's stanza and may not have been influenced by him. But by the fact that they have the churchyard setting, they show at least some similarity to Gray. Kirke White's Wilford Churchyard expresses the idea of Goldsmith; yet in the following lines he exhibits the sentiment of Gray:

> Yet nature speaks within the human bosom,
> And, spite of reason, bids it look beyond
> His narrow verge of being, and provide
> A decent residence for its clayey shell,
> Endear'd to it by time.[46]

Although Gray's poems contain no description of ruins, he inspired many of the poems about ruins. It is evident that mouldering ruins afford just as natural setting for the elegiac moods as do graves and churchyards. John Cunningham's Elegy on a Pile of Ruins, published in 1761, is an interesting example. The poet, looking from a hill top, views the ruins of an abbey and an old castle, and there close by a tumbling rivulet Contemplation

> Sits musing on a monumental stone
> And points to the memento at her feet.[47]

When twilight fades into dusk, the poet takes his place by her side, and while contemplating the ruins, meditates on the ravages of Time:

> Inexorably calm, with silent pace

---

[46]Quoted by Sickels, op. cit., p. 103.

[47]Ibid., p. 106.

Here Time has pass'd--What ruin marks his way![48]

And then the Poet utters the following lines, which are closely associated with Gray:

> Can the deep statesman skill'd in great design,
> Protract, but for a day, precarious breath?
> Or the tun'd follower of the sacred Nine
> Soothe, with his melody, insatiate Death![49]

Besides the works which have already been quoted to show the influence of Gray, there are others that might be considered "out-and-out" imitations. The earliest example is an elegy on Shenstone.

> Full many a flow'ret blushing to the sun
> That scents the sweetness of the eastern morn,
> Inglorious oft its little life does run
> Nor once the bosom of the fair adorn.[50]

In 1797, W. Hamilton Reid almost paraphrased a section of Gray's Elegy in his Evening. The following lines are taken from various poems at the close of the century to show the extent of Gray's influence:

> Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife
> Unbless'd with learning's scientific ray...
>
> Should proud Ambition sleep beneath the tomb
> Of pomp, and state, to catch the public eye...
>
> The plowman hies him o'er the wither'd plain...
>
> Say, can bright Beauty's magic power save
> Its lov'd possessor from the loathsome tomb?
> Or, while Ambition's colours round us wave,
> Can we escape the inevitable doom?[51]

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[48] Ibid., p. 106.

[49] Ibid., p. 106.

[50] Ibid., p. 107.

[51] Ibid., p. 108.

It has been my purpose in writing this chapter to show the rise of melancholy associated with death and religion. Young is apparently the chief source of religious melancholy associated with death. This theme was an outgrowth of the people's ideas concerning Sin, The Day of Judgment, Hell, fears and old superstitions, and old Gothic ruins. I have also traced the influence of the works of the "graveyard" poet, Thomas Gray, on the elegy. In the following chapters the development of the melancholy strain in Eighteenth Century poetry in connection with Nature, love, and the complaint against life will be traced.

CHAPTER IV

MELANCHOLY OF NATURE

Melancholy of nature is very closely associated with the retirement and death themes. The yearning for peace and contentment that could only be found in rural retreat caused the poets of the Eighteenth Century to seek refuge in some quiet sequestered vale. The ivy-mantled towers, the rugged elms, the black yews, dark nights, etc., are associated with the death theme. Thus it is evident that nature is closely bound up with solitude and black melancholy.

As was true in the treatment of death, religion has an important part in nature melancholy. The spirit of worshipping God because of his wonderful works in nature ranged all through the century. Usually the poets tended to glorify God because of his more grandiose works--seasons, the stars, the tempest, the earthquake, and the sea.[1]

But the argument for the existence of God is not essentially melancholy. However, Young and Thomson's poems, as well as others on the seasons, which were religious were also melancholy. An ode to spring may end with the melancholy reflection that when "spring life" is over, it will return if our prospect is "lengthen'd through the vale of death

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[1] George G. Williams, "The Beginnings of Nature Poetry in Eighteenth Century," Studies in Philology, XXVII (1930), 604.

to Paradise. Autumn is even more likely to inspire melancholy moralizing than Spring. It may lead a poet who has passed the flower of his youth to resolve to leave fruit behind him, or a younger poet to lay up virtue and honor for his approaching old age; or its melancholy nature may cause the poet to find relief in his belief in immortality. An evening meditation might even turn one's thought from the world to religion; the poet may be glad for night to come because he will be one day nearer heaven, or it may turn his thoughts to the passing of time and the judgment day.[2]

Religious and philosophical meditation are very closely associated with one another; therefore, James Hurdis pictures them walking together in the melancholy woodland shades:

> Such is the haunt
> Religion loves, a meek and humble maid,
> Whose tender eye bears not the blaze of day.
> And here with Meditation hand in hand
> She walks, and feels her often-wounded heart
> Renew'd and heal'd...[3]

Poems about night were a more attractive medium through which the poet might express religious meditation. In another chapter this has been noted in connection with the Night Thoughts of Young. Often a poet after giving the orthodox details of pensive description---"the sad nightingale," and the "midnight owl that takes its flight from the ruins of some old castle"---will close his poem with praise of or a prayer to God. Following Young, George Harley gave a very

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[2] Eleanor M. Sickels, The Gloomy Egoist, pp. 241-242.

[3] Quoted by Sickels, Ibid., p. 242.

interesting treatment of this theme in his long blank verse poem called Night published in 1796. He begins his poem with a general welcome to Night in her "shadowy car," and then proceeds to enumerate the wrong ways to use darkness.[4]

The meditation on the starry heavens frequently in night poems sometimes serves as a symbol of the religious attitude in its more somber aspect. The theme occurs in The Pleasures of the Night (1747); Kirke White's Time and Robert Montgomery's Death. William Wety (1760) with his mind turned to "solemn musing and celestial wonder" by the "dirge" of Philomel and the "pleasing melancholy air" of the owl, gazes up into the moonlit sky and draws this conclusion: that atheists in the face of the glory of the nocturnal heavens will wake in torment.[5] A poem written in blank verse called An Astronomical Thought (1782)[6] is headed with a quotation from Young: "An undevout astronomer is mad." Michael Bruce (1786), watches the twilight fade into darkness and breathes forth a song of praise to the "Maker of yon starry sky,"[7] who

> Pours life, and bliss, and beauty, pours Himself,
> His own essential goodness, o'er the minds
> Of happy being, thro' ten thousand worlds.

Anna Barbauld, while meditating deep into a summer evening

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[4] Ibid., p. 243.

[5] Ibid., p. 244.

[6] Gentleman's Magazine, LII (Sept., 1782), 448.

[7] Quoted by Nichols, op. cit., p. 244.

allows her thoughts to be swept through the universe, out beyond the stars and then wishes that in this quiet place she might wait the coming of death. Robert Bloomfield in his Farmer Boy (1798) is charmed by the wintry sky on his way to see after his snow-bound flock, and hence sees the stars as a great flock of sheep which "aloud proclaim Their Mighty Shepherd's Everlasting Name."[8]

Although a great number of the nature poems have a religious melancholy cast, the majority are more philosophical or personal. Ambrose Philips (1675-1749) in his Pastoral poems notes the fleeting, dusky shadows cast by moving clouds, the glossiness of plums, and the moaning of the night wind in the grove.[9]

Lady Winchilsea is perhaps the most significant minor poet in the study of nature before Thomson. Her poetry is not distinctly melancholy, but it does contain some element of melancholy; for instance, the use of the Nightingale, which makes one think of sadness, and then the distant call of the curlew.[10]

Following Lady Winchilsea is Parnell, whose literary use of Nature is very significant. In his Night Piece the external scenes give an appropriate background for the thought presented by the poet. The calm, perfect beauty of

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[8] Ibid., p. 245.

[9] Myra Reynolds, The Treatment of Nature in English Poetry, p. 61.

[10] Ibid., pp. 61-63.

the picture of the night with its suggestions of mystery and sadness, the fading of the pale moon, and the sounds that are heard over the lake, all are well fitted to the poet's melancholy meditation.[11] In his Hymn to Contentment he tells us "that solitude is the nurse of woe," and bids us "converse with the stars above, and know all nature.[12]

William Pattison is another poet who expresses the melancholy in nature. In his Morning Contemplation, he is sensitive to the "sadly pleasing melancholy" of moonlight nights and solitary walks. He is one of the first poets to express a longing for the solitude only to be found in nature. Gilded rooms of state, the purple slavery of towns, took from him the pleasure and happiness he found in the living forest. His poem is of real significance because its early date makes it probably the first of the Eighteenth Century poems that treated Nature in the romantic, sentimental fashion, which later was brought to its culmination in the Wartons.[13]

In 1725 three poems on Winter were written. They are of importance because they mark the first real turning from the softer to the sterner aspects of nature. In Dr. Armstrong's Winter we note the following lines:

when the murk clouds

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[11] Ibid., p. 70.

[12] George A. Aitken, ed., The Poetical Works of Thomas Parnell, p. 98.

[13] Reynolds, op. cit., pp. 71-72.

> Roll'd up in heavy wreaths, low-bellying, seem
> To kiss the ground, and all the waste of snow
> Looks blue beneath them;

or these

> huge sheets of lossen'd ice
> Float on their bosoms to the deep, and jar
> And clatter as they pass;
> . . . . . .
> The cuckoo wakes the solitary wood;[14]

James Thomson, the most important poet of nature in this period, because of his quick sensitiveness to the sights and sounds and odors of the world about him received, it seems, more inspiration through the eye than through the ear. He speaks of the Alps as "dreadful," as "horrid," "vast," and "sublime." In his Hymn on Solitude he shows that one of the secondary pleasures of solitude is a delight in nature.[15] The following lines are interesting in that they show how the love for nature and the pleasure of "musing" go hand in hand:

> Thine is the balmy breath of morn,
> Just as the dew bent rose is born;
> And while Meridian fervours beat,
> Thine is the woodland dumb retreat;
> But chief when evening scenes decay,
> And the faint landscape swims away,
> Thine is the doubtful soft decline,
> And that blest hour of musing thine.[16]

Isaac Hawkins Browne in the following lines illustrates

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[14] Quoted by Reynolds, Ibid., pp. 78-79.

[15] A.C. Martin, "The Love of Solitude in Eighteenth Century Poetry," South Atlantic Quarterly, XXIX (1930), 55.

[16] "Hymn on Solitude," J. Logie Robertson, ed., The Complete Poetical Works of James Thomson, p. 430.

the Eighteenth Century attitude toward cities and towns, and at the same time expresses, as did Thomson, the pleasures of solitude in nature:

> Hail ye woods and ye lawns, shady vales, sunny hills,
> And the warble of birds, and the murmur of rills,
> Ye flowers of all hues that embroider the ground,
> Flocks feeding, or frisking in gambols around;
> Scene of joy to behold! joy, that who would forego,
> For the wealth and the power that a court can bestow?
> I have said it at home, I have said it abroad
> That the town is Man's work, but that this is of God;
> Here my trees cannot flatter, but plants nursed by my care
> Pay with fruit or with fragrance, and incense the air;
> Here contemplative solitude raises the mind,
> (Least alone when alone) to ideas refined.[17]

John Dyer's use of nature is best seen in his two short poems, Grongar Hill and The Country Walk. In these he describes a landscape with loving minuteness for its own sake, and considers it as the occasion for a strain of half-melancholy reflection on human life. The phrasing of these poems leads one to believe that evidently their author loved to linger over the charms of Nature in solitude, and let them sink into his mind and heart.[18] Grongar Hill, like Milton's L'Allegro and Il Penserogo, is a poem of unchecked reverie rather than of directed thought. The chief thing, however, is that it is a poem of solitude, written by one who has at least for the time being forgotten all "the noise of busy man," who ignores politics, wit, the Town, and the duties of the poet.[19] The closing lines of the poem show a

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[17] Quoted by Martin, op. cit., p. 55.

[18] Reynolds, op. cit., pp. 105-106.

[19] Odell Shepard and Paul S. Wood, eds., English Prose and Poetry 1660-1800, p. 230.

wonderfully true and delicate conception of the spiritual influence that speaks through Nature's forms, and makes plainer the conception in Parnell's Hymn to Contentment:[20]

> Be full, ye courts; be great who will;
> Search for Peace with all your skill;
> Open wide the lofty door,
> Seek her on the marble floor;
> In vain you search, she is not there;
> Grass and flowers Quiet treads,
> On the meads and mountain-heads,
> Along with Pleasure, close allied,
> Ever by each other's side.
> And often, by the murm'ring rill,
> Hears the thrush, while all is still,
> Within the groves of Grongar Hill.[21]

David Mallet wrote three poems, A Fragment, The Excursion, and Amyntor, in which there is an external use of Nature. In A Fragment, the octosyllabic verse, the general plan of a walk at different times of the day, the ascent of a hill for the view, the pleasure in the solitude of Nature are elements that are suggestive of Dyer. Also the description of the noontide woodland retreat, and the forest sounds are similar to passages in The Country Walk.[22]

> On the brow of mountain high
> In silence feasting ear and eye,[23]

or

> And then at utmost stretch of eye
> A mountain fades into the sky;

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[20] Reynolds, op. cit., p. 106.

[21] Grongar Hill in Shepard and Wood, op. cit., p. 232.

[22] Reynolds, op. cit., p. 107.

[23] Cf. Grongar Hill, l. 137 in Shepard and Wood, op. cit., p. 232.

While winding round, diffused and deep,
A river rolls with sounding sweep.[24]

Shenstone is another important figure in the history of the development of Nature poetry. His sentiments were inspired by Nature. He is of special importance because of his thorough enjoyment of country solitudes.[25] This fact has already been discussed in the chapter on "Retirement."

We find William Hamilton's chief use of Nature is in gentle little allegories of life. His main poem is The Braes of Yarrow, which is a remarkable blending of external Nature with the tragedy of love and death. The phrase, "the Braes of Yarrow," itself adds a curiously subtle touch to the pathos of the poem. The fact that tradition had so closely associated the sloping hills and the winding stream of Yarrow with the events of unhappy love made the title itself suggestive of sorrow. The tone that actual human experience had once given to the scene furnished Hamilton with an appropriate background for a new tale of grief. The following descriptive lines:

Sweet smells the birk, green grows, green grows the grass,
Yellow on Yarrow's banks the gowan,
Fair hangs the apple frae the rock,
Sweet the wave of Yarrow flowan;

and this line of lament

I sang, my voice the woods returning,

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[24]Cf. The Country Walk, l. 120, in Shepard and Wood, op. cit., p. 233.

[25]Reynolds, op. cit., pp. 114 and 116.

furnished an appropriate setting for the happy love. But Nature is destined to share in the grief, and to be implicated in the crime. "On Yarrow's rueful flood floats the body of the slain knight; her doleful hills echo the cries of sorrow. And the desolate bride prays that rain and dew may forever forsake the fields where her lover was so basely slain.[26]

Collins is another interesting figure in nature poetry associated with melancholy. His indolence, his wavering, irresolute disposition, his morbid sensitiveness, the intensity of his emotions, his love of liberty, his passion for "high romance and Gothic diableries," combined with his new sense of the mystery of Nature, differentiate him from other nature poets. He manifested deep interest in the remote history of his own country, and in the legendary lore and superstitions of any land. Dr. Johnson says of him: "He loved fairies, genii, giants, and monsters; he delighted to rove through the meanders of enchantment, to gaze on the magnificence of golden palaces, to repose by the waterfalls of Elysian gardens."[27]

He takes delight in the wilder and freer, and in the remote and mysterious aspects of Nature. For instance, he makes Fear sit

> in some hollow'd seat
> 'Gainst which the big waves beat,

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[26] Ibid., pp. 117-118.

[27] Quoted by Reynolds, Ibid., p. 122.

and hears

Drowning seamen's cries in tempest brought.

His "gifted wizard" seers

> view the lured signs that cross the sky
> Where in the west the brooding tempests lie
> And hear their first, faint, rustling pennons sweep.[28]

Collins skilfully mingles landscape details and superstitious terrors in the Ode to Popular Superstitions: "the wintry cave,"[29] "wat'ry starth or quaggy moss,"[30] "Uist's dark forest,"[31] "gliding ghosts,"[32] "dark fen,"[33] "the hill that seems uprising near,"[34] "tears and hopeless sighs,"[35] "fear-shook limbs,"[36] "midnight's solemn hour,"[37] and "twilight tombs."[38] However, his most appreciative use of Nature is in the Ode to Evening. The final impression of the poem is powerful because the very mood and spirit of evening, its calm, and its tender melancholy, is breathed through the unprentending lines.[39]

One of the best expressions of the harmony which exists between Man and Nature is the Pleasures of Imagination of

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[28] Quoted by Reynolds, Ibid., p. 122.

[29] "Ode to Popular Superstitions," l. 55, quoted by Thomas H. Ward, The English Poets, Vol. III, p. 294.

[30] Ibid., l. 59.

[31] Ibid., l. 56.

[32] Ibid., l. 60.

[33] Ibid., l. 105.

[34] Ibid., p. 113.

[35] Ibid., l. 118.

[36] Ibid., l. 119.

[37] Ibid., l. 150.

[38] Ibid., l. 155.

[39] Reynolds, op. cit., p. 123.

Mark Akenside.[40] When the poet tries to explore the "secret paths of early genius," he imagines inspiration as coming to the lonely youth from some "wild river's brink at eve," or from "solemn groves at noon."[41] In speaking of the influence of nature in his early years he says:

> O ye Northumbrian shades, which overlook
> The rocky pavement and the mossy falls
> Of solitary Wenbeck's limpid stream;
> How gladly I recall your well known seats
> Beloved of old, and that delightful time
> When all alone, for many a summer's day
> I wandered through your calm recesses, led
> In silence by some powerful hand unseen.
> Nor will I e'er forget you, nor shall e'er
> The graver tasks of manhood, or the device
> Of vulgar wisdom move me to disclaim
> Those studies which possessed me in the dawn
> Of life, and fixed the color of my mind
> For every future year.[42]

"For the happy man who neither sordid wealth nor the gaudy spoils of honor can seduce to leave the sweets of Nature,"

> Each passing hour sheds tribute from her wings:
> And still new beauties meet his lonely walk,
> And loves unfelt attract him...
> .....
> Fresh pleasure only; for the attentive mind,
> By this harmonious action on her powers,
> Becomes herself harmonious; wont so oft
> In outward things to meditate the charm
> Of sacred order, soon she seeks at home
> To find a kindred order, to exert
> Within herself this elegance of love.[43]

The power of Nature over man is great; her dark woods may

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[40] A.C. Martin, op. cit., p. 56.

[41] Reynolds, op. cit., p. 123.

[42] Quoted by Reynolds, op. cit., p. 124.

[43] Ibid., p. 125.

rouse him to solemn awe, or the twilight or moonlit sky may bring forth a touch of melancholy.

Robert Blair's The Grave, which has already been mentioned in connection with "graveyard poetry," makes use of nature. The realistic description of a row of ragged elms is very striking.

> Long lash'd by the rude winds, some rift half down
> Their branchless trunks, others so thin at top
> That scarce two crows could lodge in the same tree.[44]

These elms, "the cheerless unsocial yew,"[45] "worms,"[46] "wan cold moon,"[47] "shrieks of the screech-owl,"[48] "the moss-grown stones skirted with nettles,"[49] are phrases well chosen to add to the "supernumerary horror" of the poem. This poem is one of the earliest in an appropriate Nature setting.

Thomas Gray is the greatest name that is connected with nature poetry between 1730-1756. Of course, not all of his poems express melancholy. His Ode On A Distant Prospect of Eton College, written while the poet was wandering in solitude about his beloved Stoke Poges Country and reflecting on the death of his two dear friends, expresses the futility of life, and hence, is melancholy in spirit. The beloved

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[44] Robert Blair, "The Grave," ll. 47-49, in Shepard and Wood, op. cit., p. 513.

[45] Ibid., l. 22, p. 512.

[46] Ibid., l. 23.

[47] Ibid., l. 25.

[48] Ibid., l. 43., p.513.

[49] Ibid., l. 61.

fields, the happy hills, and silver-winding streams all bring back a pleasant memory, yet sad, of the time when he and West and Walpole had been companions.[50] The following excerpts express the melancholy mood of the poet:

Ah happy hills, ah pleasing shade,
Ah fields beloved in vain,
Where once my careless childhood strayed
A stranger yet to pain!
I feel the gales, that from ye blow,
A momentary bliss bestow,
As waving fresh their gladsome wing
My weary soul they seem to soothe,
And, redolent of joy and youth,
To breathe a second spring.
.....
Alas, regardless of their doom,
The little victims play!
No sense have they of ills to come,
Nor care beyond to-day;
Yet see how all around 'em wait
The Ministers of human fate,
And black Misfortune's baleful train!
To seize their prey, the murd'rous band!
Ah, tell them, they are men!
.....
Lo! in the vale of years beneath
A grisly troop are seen,
The painful family of Death,
More hideous than their queen.
This racks the joints, this fires the veins,
That every labouring sinew strains,
Those in the deeper vitals rage;
Lo, Poverty, to fill the band,
That numbs the soul with icy hand,
And slow-consuming Age.
.....
To each his sufferings; all are men,
Condemned alike to groan--
The tender for another's pain,
The unfeeling for his own.
Yet ah! why should they know their fate?
Since sorrow never comes too late,
And happiness too swiftly flies.

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[50] William Henry Hudson, Gray and His Poetry, pp. 36-37.

Thought would destroy their paradise.
Nor more; where ignorance is bliss,
'Tis folly to be wise.[51]

His Elegy Written in A Country Churchyard is even more melancholy in spirit. Nature, of course, is subordinated to the theme, but it furnishes excellent scenes for the melancholy mood. Every detail of the opening twilight picture helps to prepare the mind for the succeeding reflections on death. The sounds, the tinkling of the distant folds, the droning of the beetle, and the complaining owl, are elements that emphasize silence which is an emblem of death. The ivy-mantled tower, the rugged elms, the black yews are also companions of death. The stirring sounds are pathetic in that they once waked an answering throb of life in the hearts of men who are now resting in the silent city of the dead. The enumeration of homely country tasks is important because it gives an interesting contrast between the delight of the workman in his occupation and the emphasises on the pathos of life.[52]

In this poem Gray exhibits sympathy for the toils and sufferings of the humble and the poor. "Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife" he lingers among the groves where the "rude forefathers of the hamlet" are laid to rest; and as he thus lingers and meditates he is aroused to pity by the

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[51]"Ode On A Distant Prospect of Eton College," Ibid., pp. 39-41.

[52]Reynolds, op. cit., pp. 133-134.

thought of the unrecorded joys and sorrows of those obscure live, and by all the pathos of unrealized possibilities.[53]

However, for this study on nature the last six stanzas are of more importance because they reveal the true romantic conception of the relation between Man and Nature. "The poet is represented as a shy, solitary being in communion with Nature, and drawing his inspiration from her."[54] In the morning the poet hurries out to the hillside in order that he might watch the sun as it rises in the east; at noon he either stretches himself at full length under some beech-tree by the side of a brook, or wanders through the woods.[55]

> For thee who, mindful of th' unhonour'd dead,
> Dost in these lines their artless tale relate,
> If chance, by lonely Contemplation led,
> Some kindred spirit shall inquire thy fate,
>
> Haply some hoary-headed swain may say:
> "Oft have we seen him at the peep of dawn
> Brushing with hasty steps the dews away,
> To meet the sun upon the upland lawn.
>
> "There, at the foot of yonder nodding beech
> That wreathes its old fantastic roots so high,
> His listless length at noon tide would he stretch,
> And pore upon the brook that babbles by.
>
> "Hard by yon wood, now smiling as in scorn,
> Mutt'ring his wayward fancies, he would rove,
> Now drooping, woeful-wan, like one forlorn,
> Or craz'd with care, or cross'd in hopeless love.
>
> "One morn I miss'd him on the custom'd hill,
> Along the heath, and near his fav'rite tree;
> Another came; nor yet beside the rill,

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[53] William Henry Hudson, op. cit., p. 58.

[54] Reynolds, op. cit., p. 134.

[55] Ibid.

Nor up the lawn, nor at the wood was he;

"The next with dirges due, in sad array,
Slow through the church-way path we saw him
borne.
Approach and read (for thou canst read) the lay
Grav'd on the stone beneath yon aged thorn."[56]

Gray also makes use of nature in his imprecatory elegy, The Bard. However, the range of sympathy is different from that in the preceeding poem. In this poem he writes of northern mythologies and superstitions. Rough and frowning steeps, foaming floods, warring winds, the Snowdon's shaggy side, darkness, and cold make up the environment for the elegy which the bard utters over his lost companions.[57]

A minor poet following Gray is R. Potter, who in his poem A Farewell Hymn to the Country shows much sympathetic knowledge of some parts of nature, especially birds and trees. He speaks of the quail that "runnes piping o'er the land," of the mavis-haunted grove," and of the nightingale that delights "the stillness of the night."[58] The nightingale is always associated with melancholy.

A very important work in this literary field was done by the Warton brothers. Joseph Warton found peculiar pleasure in all the wild, solitary, mournful aspects of Nature.[59] He is a lover of "hollow winds" and "ever beating waves," and

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[56]"Elegy Written In A Country Churchyard," in Hudson, op. cit., pp. 64-65.

[57]Reynolds, op. cit., p. 135.

[58]Ibid., p. 137.

[59]Ibid., p. 140.

hoary mountains where

> Nature seems to sit alone.[60]

We find him wishing for

> some pine-topt precipice
> Abrupt and shaggy, whence a foamy stream,
> Like Anio, tumbling, roars; or some bleak heath,
> Where straggling stands the mournful juniper
> Or yew tree scath'd.[61]

He escapes from the city's "tradeful hum" and looks for solitude at "deep dead of night" under the pale moonlight. In storms his ears are attuned to the shrieking goblins in the dark air. The poet often cries out for solitary communion with Nature as a necessity of his own. He is considered the first of the romantic poets to advocate a return to Nature in the sense in which Rousseau used the phrase.[62]

> Happy the first of men, ere yet confin'd
> To smoky cities; who in sheltering groves,
> Warm caves, and deep-sunk valleys liv'd and lov'd,
> .....
> Yet why should man, mistaken, deem it nobler
> To dwell in palaces, and high-roof'd halls,
> Than in God's forest, architect supreme![63]

Thomas Warton's The Pleasures of Melancholy is a defense of solitude against various pleasures, finding customary delight in darkness, tombs, pale "fav'rite midnight haunts," "pale December's foggy glooms," "pale moon," "mournful Yew,"

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[60]Joseph Warton, "Ode to Fancy," l. 31, in Shepard and Wood, op. cit., p. 556.

[61]Joseph Warton, "Enthusiast," Ibid., p. 553.

[62]Reynolds, op. cit., p. 141.

[63]Joseph Warton, "The Enthusiast," ll. 86-88; 136-138; in Shepard and Wood, op. cit., pp. 553-54.

"the curfew's solemn sound," and "solitary domes."

> What are the splendours of the gaudy court,
> Its tinsel trappings, and its pageant pomps?
> To me far happier seems the banish'd lord,
> Amid Siberia's unrejoicing wilds
> Who pines all lonesome, in chambers hoar
> Of some high castle shut, whose windows dim
> In distant ken discovered tackless plains,
> Where Winter ever whirls his icy car;
> While, still repeated objects of his view,
> The gloomy battlements and ivied spires,
> That crown the solitary dome, arise;
> While from the topmost turret the slow clock,
> Far heard along th' inhospitable wastes,
> With sad-returning chime awakes new grief.[64]

After reading his poem, one gets the impression that he saw nature through a Miltonic eye.

Macpherson's Poems of Ossian is another step in tracing the melancholy theme in nature through the Eighteenth Century. The adventures of Fingal, Ossian, Oscar, and Gaul are closely associated with scenes in nature. The most frequent scenic details are the mist-covered mountains, storm-swept skies, rough streams, desolate shores, dim moonlight nights. These are closely connected with the human tragedy in the poems.[65]

Another minor poet who contributed to this theme is Michael Bruce, who imitated Milton's Lycidas in an elegy called Daphnis. This elegy was written when the poet felt himself dying of consumption, and it reveals his delight in all forms of Nature's life and his deep melancholy at bidding farewell to the spring-time world.[66]

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[64]Thomas Warton, "The Pleasures of Melancholy," ll. 226-39, in Shepard and Wood, op. cit., 546.

[65]Reynolds, op. cit., p. 156.

[66]Ibid., pp. 162-163.

John Logan, who was a most intimate friend of Bruce, wrote Braes of Yarrow which is an effective presentation of the ancient, sorrow-laden Yarrow motif. The forest, the bonny braes, and the sounding stream are felt throughout the plaintive story.[67] Previous mention has been made of William Hamilton's The Braes of Yarrow in connection with melancholy in nature. In Logan's Ode Written in Spring the milkmaid shortens her solitary way by singing a song.

> At eve the primrose path along,
> The milkmaid shortens with a song
> Her solitary way.[68]

James Graeme, who like other votaries of the Muse, was passionately found of rural scenery, delighted in walking alone in the fields. His chief poems of Nature are descriptive elegies, which are a composite of phrases belonging to the typical poetry of sentimental melancholy. This attitude toward nature is shown by his frequent references to "chilly midnight when howlets scream and ravens croak," and when he with pensive care tunes the voice of woe and sheds "teary torrents" over grass-green graves.[69]

Goldsmith's intention was the study of man in social relations; consequently, his use of nature is limited. However, the fair landscapes of The Traveller are so delicately drawn, so pleasantly colored, and so suffused with

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[67] Ibid. pp. 163-64.

[68] Quoted by Reynolds, Ibid., p. 164.

[69] Ibid., p. 165.

the poet's own tender thoughts and feelings, that we value the poem; and it is because of the expression which Goldsmith gives to his wistful longings for old scenes and old places, and because of his abounding self-pity for the unkind fate that left him ever climbing waves of troubles and perplexities, that the poem draws all of its readers under its tender melancholy.[70]

The year 1770 brought grief to his heart by the death of his brother, Henry Goldsmith. In this sad, melancholy state Goldsmith wrote one of the loveliest poems in literature, The Deserted Village. The better tone of the peasant life in the poem is closely associated with nature.[71]

John Bampfylde, who belonged to a school of young poets, attracted primarily by the influence of the Warton brothers, has written several really exquisite vignettes of nature in a melancholy mood. He observed the sea in storm and calm, and celebrated country retirement.[72] In the following lines he tells us of sitting "in parlour dim" to watch

> the wistful train,
> Of dripping poultry, whom the vine's broad leaves
> Shelter no more.---Mute is the mournful plain;
> Silent the swallow sits beneath the thatch,
> And vacant hind hangs pensive o'er his hatch,
> Counting the frequent drop from reeded eaves.[73]

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[70] Horatio S. Krans, The Poems of Oliver Goldsmith, Introduction, p. 1.

[71] Ibid., p. lxvii.

[72] Sickels, op. cit., p. 247.

[73] Quoted by Sickels, Ibid., p. 248.

James Beattie's The Minstrel, an autobiographical poem, has a part in the main stream of melancholy nature poetry. The poet visited haunted streams by moonlight and let his imagination dwell on graves and ghosts; and his soul was possessed by the "mystic transports" born of "melancholy and solitude."[74] He watches from pine-covered precipices "the foaming torrents;" and he wanders on the uplands at dawn, finding a "dreadful pleasure" in viewing and meditating from a lofty cliff "the enormous waste of vapour" below him.[75]

> And oft the craggy cliff he loved to climb,
> When all in mist the world below was lost,
> What dreadful pleasure, there to stand sublime,
> Like shipwreck'd mariner on desert coast,
> And view the enormous waste of vapour toss'd
> .....
> In truth he was a strange and wayward wight,
> Fond of each gentle and each dreadful scene.
> In darkness and in storm he found delight,
> Nor less than when on ocean-wave serene
> The southern sun diffused his dazzling sheen.
> Each sad vicissitude amused his soul;
> And if a sigh would sometimes intervene,
> And down his cheek a tear of pity roll,
> A sigh, a tear so sweet, he wish'd not to control.[76]

George Crabbe also has a hand in the development of this theme; however, he was more interested in man than he was in nature. In The Village he gives a hard, truthful representation of sordid life, and Nature had no meaning for him except as it was brought into connection with that life.[77]

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[74]Reynolds, op. cit., p. 168.

[75]Sickels, op. cit., p. 282.

[76]"The Minstrel," Book 1, ll. 189-198, in Shepard and Wood, op. cit., p. 778.

[77]Reynolds, op. cit., p. 183.

Nature sometimes reflected his sadness; for instance, in Tales of the Hall we find a marvellous illustration of "the pathetic fallacy," in which the dejected lover looks out upon a dull October morning, and sees in the landscape the reflection of his own sadness.

> "Early he rose, and looked with many a sigh
> On the red light that fill'd the eastern sky;
> Oft had he stood before, alert and gay,
> To hail the glories of the new-born day;
> But now dejected, listless, languid, low,
> He saw the wind upon the water blow,
> And the cold stream curl'd onward as the gale
> From the pine hill blew harshly down the vale.
> On the right side the youth a wood survey'd,
> With all its dark intensity of shade;
> Where the rough wind alone was heard to move,
> In this, the pause of nature and of love,
> When now the young are rear'd and when the old,
> Lost to the tie, grow negligent and cold:
> Far to the left he saw the tents of men,
> Half hid in mist that hung upon the fen;
> Before him swallows, gathering for the sea,
> Took their short flights, and twitter'd on the lea;
> And near the bean sheaf stood, the harvest done,
> And slowly blackened in the sickly sun;
> All these were sad in nature, or they took
> Sadness from him, the likeness of his look."[78]

At the close of the Eighteenth Century, we find another influential poet, who was associated with melancholy in nature. The influence of the Wartons had been very great, and when sorrow came to him it was only natural that he would turn to poetry and Nature. What Bowles saw in Nature was largely governed by his state of mind. His own sadness led him to a quick perception of the pensive or melancholy or mournful aspects of Nature. "He loved sequestered streams,

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[78] "Tales of the Hall," T.E. Kebbel, Life and Writings of George Crabbe, p. 104.

romantic vales, the hush of the evening; and the sounds he heard were soft and plaintive.[79] In his poem The River Wainsbeck, he listens to the wind and hears a plaint of sorrow. Also in his poem The Bells, Ostend, the bells seem to fling their melancholy music, which awakes in him the wonderings of his childhood.

> And Hark! with lessening cadence now they fall;
> And now, along the white and level tide,
> They fling their melancholy music wide;
> Bidding me many a tender thought recall
> Of summer days, and those delightful years
> When from an ancient tower, in life's fair prime,
> The mournful magic of their mingling chime
> First waked my wondering childhood into tears.[80]

Bowles found melancholy solace in wilder landscapes--the mountains and the sea. As he departs from a remote Highland village, he desires to carry with him a picture of its towering rocks and wild mountain torrents as an ointment to sooth him as he pursues his "path in solitude."[81] Ten years later the melancholy spell of the mountains was still upon him when he wrote his long descriptive pieces on St. Michael's Mount and Coombe-Ellen (1798). "Hast thou in youth known sorrow!" he cries:

> Here, lapped into a sweet forgetfulness,
> Hang o'er the wreathed waterfall, and think
> Thou art alone in this dark world and wide!
> Here Melancholy, on the pale crags laid,
> Might muse herself to sleep...[82]

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[79] Reynolds, op. cit., p. 201.

[80] Quoted by Reynolds, Ibid., p. 201.

[81] Sickels, op. cit., p. 251.

[82] Quoted by Sickels, Ibid., p. 252.

He also felt a closeness to the "melancholy surge" of the sea, which he delighted to watch from some dark promontory. In his sonnet Dover Cliffs he muses mournfully of "many a lonely wanderer" who has there said farewell to friends and country.

> On these white cliffs, that calm above the flood
> Uprear their shadowing heads, and at their feet
> Hear not the surge that has for ages beat,
> How many a lonely wanderer has stood!
> And,whilst the lifted murmur met his ear,
> And o'er the distant billows the still eve
> Sailed slow, has thought of all his heart must leave
> Tomorrow.[83]

In concluding this discussion on Nature melancholy, the words of the poet, James Thomson, seem fitting:

> I know no subject more elevating, more amusing, more ready to awake the poetical enthusiasm, the philosophical reflection, and the moral sentiment than the works of Nature. Where can we meet with such variety, such beauty, such magnificence? What more inspiring than a calm, wide survey of them? In every dress Nature is greatly charming: whether she puts on the crimson robes of the morning, the strong effulgence of noon, the sober suit of the evening, or the sables of blackness and tempest. How gay looks the Spring, how glorious the Summer, how pleasing the Autumn, and how venerable the Winter. But there is no thinking of these things without breaking out into poetry; which is, by the by, a plain and undeniable argument of their superior excellence.
>
> For this reason the best, both ancient and modern, poets have been passionately fond of retirement and solitude. The wild, romantic country was their delight. And they seem never to have been more happy than when, lost in unfrequented fields, far from the little busy world, they were at leisure to meditate, and sing the works of Nature.[84]

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[83] Quoted by Reynolds, op. cit., p. 202.

[84] Quoted by Marguerite Wilkinson, The Way of the Makers, p. 201.

CHAPTER V

LOVE MELANCHOLY

Thus far we have followed the melancholy strain in Eighteenth Century poetry in its association with retirement, death, religion, and nature. The mood that we are now to study is the melancholy of love. Such a study, naturally, resolves itself into an analysis of the growth of sensibility, and along with it the inevitable growth of the literary power and importance of women. This sentimental mood could not escape the sighs, and tears, pitiful death, and general unhappiness that is found in the poetry of disappointed love.

Love has always been an inspiration to poets; however, this love does not always fill the poet's life with sunshine. Love often casts a melancholy gloom over the human heart. The greatest poetry may come out of the agony of denial, or out of the love that is so often characterized by pain.[1] Ridgely Torrence says:

> "Love had pierced into my human sheathing,
> Song came out of me simple as breathing..."

Sometimes it almost seems that the thwarting of the material fulfillment intensifies and deepens contemplation and hence increases the value of the poet's gift. In this connection we might ask: "If Dante had won his Beatrice, would he have

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[1] Marguerite Wilkinson, The Way of the Makers, p. 144.

set her forever in a luminous Heaven."[2]

> Shall I, wasting in despair
> Die because a woman's fair?

is the essence of Elizabethan philosophy in matters of love, while the Cavalier mood could not speak more typically than the advice of Suckling to the sighing lover:

> Quit, quit, for shame!
> This cannot move her,
> This cannot take her.
> If of herself she will not love,
> Nothing can make her
> The devil take her![3]

The fact that love elegies are a form that is almost extinct at the present time, accounts for the lack of knowledge of most literature students concerning this theme in the Eighteenth Century. Just a glance at almost any of the periodical files of the latter half of the century is enough to show that it did flourish at one time. Although Gray's influence on the form of this type of elegy was the most powerful, it was not the first. The quatrain was not regarded as "elegiac" until Hammond made it so. Before the publication of his Love Elegies in 1743, the epic as the "heroic stanza" was the only type of literature that made consistent use of this meter.[4] Hammond, however, was an imitator of Tibullus. He sat down with Tibullus before him,

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[2] Ibid., p. 145.

[3] Quoted by Jessie B. Rittenhouse, "Love as a Dominant Theme in Poetry," Forum, LVI (Sept., 1916), 345.

[4] J. Fisher, "James Hammond and the Quatrain of Gray's Elegy," Modern Philology, XXXII (1934-1935), 302.

and after choosing an elegy proceeded to model an elegy after it. He followed Tibullus line by line, and those thoughts that were pleasing to him he almost translated, while others he either omitted or paraphrased. As a result he reproduced the ideas of Tibullus, sometimes literally. All that is in Tibullus is not in Hammond, but what you find in Hammond will be found also in Tibullus.[5]

Shenstone, Percy, and Grainger were among the first poets who wrote love elegies after the style of Hammond. The sonnet was the chief literary form used by Elizabethans to express their love poetry; while the Cavaliers, and most of the poets up to the middle of the Eighteenth Century expressed their love in songs and lyrics. But the love sentiment of the latter half of the century found expression chiefly in elegies.[6]

The mood in these love elegies was characteristically melancholy, which varied from the pensive pleasure of contemplating retired simplicity and obscurity with Delia to the black despair that ends or threatens to end in suicide. Various motifs recur from time to time. There is the invitation motif; also the absence motif;[7] the accepted lover has been absent four tedious days; or malignant fate has torn the lover from his beloved. There is also present in this theme

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[5]Ibid., p. 304.

[6]Ibid., p. 308.

[7]I.S. Academicus, "Absence," Gentleman's Magazine, XXII (Feb., 1752), 84.

the fickleness motif: Daphne has changed and left Damon to warn other swains against the wiles of women.[8] As a result Damon pines away to an early death and writes his own epitaph.

> His heart then sunk beneath the storm,
> (Sad meed of unexampled truth)
> And sorrow, like an envious worm,
> Devour'd the blossom of his youth.[9]

Usually the lover is humble, and will not forsake his love; and even though she dooms his "trembling breast to sad despair", he will bow to her will. If he lacks the courage to commit suicide, he will try

> To walk beneath the burden of my woes
> Or sink in death, nor at my fate repine.[10]

As a rule the lover does or expects to do the latter. In this sad state, his only request is that the woman who has so cruelly wounded his heart may shed a tear on his tomb.

Another element, which is also closely associated with the death and religious theme, that made its appearance in the love elegies, is the "graveyard-Gothic" tone.[11] Hence, we find Chatterton in his Elegy wondering at dusk to the "gloomy cloister's lengthening way" and wishing that the ruins would fall on him:

> Now through the gloomy cloister's lengthening way,
> Through all the terror of superstition frames,
> I lose the minutes of the lingering day,

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[8] Eleanor M. Sickels, The Gloomy Egoist, p. 185.

[9] Quoted by Sickels, Ibid., p. 185.

[10] Quoted by Sickels, Ibid., p. 186.

[11] Ibid., p. 187.

And view the night light up her pointed flames.

I dare the danger of mouldering wall,
Nor heed the arch that totter's o'er my head;
O! quickly may the friendly ruin fall,
Release me of my love, and strike me dead.

M-----! cruel, sweet, inexorable fair,
O! must I unregarded seek the grave?
Must I from all my heaven holds repair,
When one indulgent smile from thee would save?

Also in an Eighteenth Century publication, the Poetical Calendar, we find two Love Elegies picturing an anonymous lover as he wanders with Despair at "dead night," to the "churchyard's horrors," and, amid "fearful echoes," leans his head on "some cold stone," or "throws his body on the ground."[13] James Graeme, who died at the age of twenty-three of tuberculosis, also wrote about midnight wanderers. His elegies usually represent him as wandering mournfully by some "time-struck Turret" or "where wild woods thicken and where waters flow" in order to complain to the moon of his misery.[14]

It is not surprising to find that many of the poems called "pastoral elegies" are concerned with unhappy love. These poems present similar situations to those found in Love Elegies. However, these "pastoral elegies" are not so uniformly melancholy as the other elegies. They tend more toward the semi-realistic or rural realistic tale rather

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[12] Walter W. Skeat, ed., The Poetical Works of Thomas Chatterton, Vol. I, p. 191.

[13] Nickels, op. cit., p. 187.

[14] Ibid., p. 188.

than toward romantic lyric.[15]

Sentimentalism has a very definite effect on the melancholy poetry associated with love. The word, according to literary authority, means the doctrine or practice of cultivating and expressing the emotions for their own sake; while sensibility is the name usually given to the personal ideal embodying this practice. Therefore, when sensibility becomes the fashion, it must necessarily become self-conscious, and partake of the nature of sentimentalism.[16] The qualities of the man of sensibility are known by all literary students. However, I shall point out a few of them. He is acutely attuned to the slightest touch of joy or pain; he is capable of swooning with joy or dying of a broken heart; of rejoicing with those who have been fortunate in this life or weeping with those in grief over the loss of a loved one.[17] Since he is usually poetically inclined, he may write love elegies about Negroes[18], a turtle-dove who dies of a broken heart,[19] or even about a nightingale who has lost her mate.[20] He will probably write an elegy or a sonnet to "Pity" or "Tears;" he will write about the "patient meekness" of the willow. He

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[15] Ibid., p. 189.

[16] Ibid., p. 195.

[17] Ibid., p. 195.

[18] E.g., "A Negro Love Elegy," Gentleman's Magazine, LXII (July, 1792), 652.

[19] "An Elegy," Ibid, XXXIX (March, 1769), 159.

[20] Mr. Pratt, "Elegy of a Nightingale," Ibid, LV (May, 1785), 386.

is truly a man of feeling, and he finds it easier to express his own woes and the sorrows of others than the happiness of others; hence, sentimental poetry is usually melancholy in tone.[21] The following anonymous poem, Sensibility, shows how the goddess of "Sensibility" is in the same category as "Melancholy," "Contemplation," and "Solitude;"

> Nymph of the glist'ning eye, I know thee well;
> The jarring world is not thy favor'd sphere,
> Thy sighs responsive to the gales I hear,
> Thou liv'st to weep, the giddy world will say,
> By moss-grown tow'rs, or by the lucid stream,
> To melt and sigh thy pensive soul away,
> While musing in the yellow moon-light beam.
> When slander's secret whispers buzz around;
> Or rude reproof, or Envy speeds her dart,
> Thy nerves strait quiver with the mortal wound,
> Bleeds ev'ry pore, and faints thy aching heart.
> The tearful eye, the mantled cheek are thine,
> The pointed anguish throbbing at the heart,
> The thrill of rapture, ecstasy divine,
> Which Angels to their favor'd Saints impart.
> Then fly to Solitude's deep-russet shade,
> Where zephyrs gently wave the roseate bow'r:
> The lute's soft swell, that dies along the glade,
> May sooth the sadness of the midnight hour.
> With fancy trip the mountain's shaggy brow,
> And view the silver ocean's briny wave:
> Which dashes restless on the rocks below,
> Or tends the sea-nymph to her coral cave.[22]

The triumph of sensibility in the Eighteenth Century was closely associated with the rise of women in social and literary importance. The women had repeatedly protested against masculine assumption of a monopoly of reason. One auther in his remarks about the masculinity of melancholy left this impression: that it is selfish in a woman, though

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[21] Sickels, op. cit., p. 196.

[22] Gentleman's Magazine, LXV (April, 1795), 324.

not in a man, to be melancholy because her social obligations call for cheerfulness; and that melancholy is a prerogative of reason--and hence of man alone. The philosophical melancholy, such as that of Milton in Il'Penseroso and of Gray in his Elegy is based on a reasoned contemplation of life, and definitely involves philosophical generalization. Certainly no woman has written a masterpiece of this sort associated with melancholy; and even in the fugitive verse her contributions have been very few. Therefore, "sweet sensibility" came to more and more a prime ingredient of the feminine ideal.[23]

This sensibility leads to melancholy associated with romantic love, family affection, benevolence, and religion. Since all these things supposedly belonged to the special realm of womanhood, it was inevitable that the great body of literate women should have a remarkable influence in the current of sentimental melancholy. The majority of the men seemed to have relished it;[24] and in 1775 we find evidence of a "little miss" being commended in verse for her "sweet softness" when she bursts into tears" upon reading the "Ballad of the Babes in the Woods."[25] The "fair" are admonished to "cherish Pity's soft tear."[26] A brief "Song"

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[23]Nichols, op. cit., p. 204.

[24]Ibid., p. 205.

[25]Ibid., p. 205.

[26]Sympatheticus, "The Beggar-Woman," Gentleman's Magazine, LVI (Mar., 1786), 251.

which is quoted in full makes clear this feeling of sympathy:

> O seek not to repress the sigh,
> Nor check the tear that downs the eye!
> These love-fraught eyes seem more divine
> When the slow drops o'er Pity's shrine
> From pearly sources graceful flow,
> To bathe the bruised heart of Woe;
> And lovely is the bosom's swell,
> Whose quick, tumultuous heavings tell,
> That softest sympathy is there,
> And Laura's good as she is fair![27]

The feminization of lyric love melancholy, however, was not complete. As time went on these lyrics became more and more penetrated with sensibility and showed an increasing interest in the woman's point of view; nevertheless, they continued for the most part to be written about, or by men.[28] Of course, there were exceptions. An occasional anonymous or pseudonymous lyric or sonnet of disturbed feminine love could be found in some of the magazines of the time, especially the Gentleman's Magazine.[29]

Romantic love lyrics, especially of the melancholy type, in any meter are susceptible to excessive sentimentality. Moore and even Byron and Shelley did not escape this sentimentality. Shelley's poems are the most intense, sincere, and the loveliest of the romantic love lyrics, but a discussion

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[27] T.C.: "Song", Ibid., LIX (Sept., 1789), 841.

[28] Nichols, op. cit., p. 208.

[29] E.g., Sapho, untitled stanzas, Gentleman's Magazine, XXII (Feb., 1752), 85; Maria, "Verses by a Lady," Ibid., XXIX (Mar., 1759), 131; A.W.S., "Sonnet by a young Lady, who, at the same time that her parent Died, Received an Account that her Lover was Married," Ibid., LXI (Aug., 1791), 757.

of his lyrics and these of Byron, Wordsworth, and Keats would take us out of the realm of the Eighteenth Century.

However, among the poets of the Eighteenth Century we find several of them writing poetry inspired by disappointed love. William Cowper, who wrote many poems associated with melancholy of death and religion, also wrote love poems in which there is a melancholy tone. He tried from time to time to cast off the heavy lead of disappointment and melancholy, but his dull spirit was disturbed all the more when his uncle Ashley refused to sanction an engagement between his daughter and Cowper.[30] The following excerpt from his poem Written After Leaving Her at New Burns reveals the influence of love on his melancholy nature:

> "Love, on whose influence I relied
> For all the transports I enjoyed,
> Has played the cruel tyrant's part
> And turned tormentor to my heart.
> But let me hold thee to my breast,
> Dear partner of my joy and rest,
> And not a pain and not a fear
> Or anxious doubt, shall enter there."[31]

Then, in his poem Written in a Fit of Illness, he pictures love as bringing pain instead of joy.

> Oh! wert thou near me; yet that wish forbear!
> 'Twere vain, my love,--'twere vain to wish thee near;
> Thy tender heart would heave with anguish too,
> And by partaking, but increase my woe.[32]

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[30] Hugh I'Anson Fausset, William Cowper, p. 43.

[31] William Benham, ed., The Poetical Works of William Cowper, p. 12.

[32] Ibid., p. 13.

George Crabbe also contributed to the love melancholy of this century. In the following lines he describes the misery of long engagements, and the disappointment occasioned by repeated failures in the pursuit of independence:

> "In vain my anxious lover tried his skill
> To rise in life; he was dependent still;
> We met in grief, nor can I paint the fears
> Of those unhappy, troubled, trying years.
> Our fleeting joys, like meteors in the night,
> Shone on our gloom with inauspicious light;
> And then domestic sorrows, till the mind,
> Worn with distress, to despair inclined.
> When, being wretched, we incline to hate,
> And censure others in a happier state;
> Yet loving still, and still compelled to move
> In the sad labyrith of lingering love.
> .....
> My lover still the same dull means pursued,
> Assistant called, but kept in servitude;
> His spirit wearied in the prime of life,
> By fears and wishes in eternal strife."[33]

A discussion of this type would not be complete without some mention of Robert Burns. His association with and love for the opposite sex often caused him much grief. The story of his love for Mrs. Jean Armour, a young Edinburgh widow, is very touching, and furnished inspiration for some his poems. When Burns learned that he was denied the hand of Mrs. Armour in marriage, he was deeply grieved. The fact that she was to be a mother made his grief even more great.[34] As a victim of such a circumstance he emptied his heart in a poem called Lament.

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[33] Quoted by T.E. Kebbel, Life and Writings of George Crabbe, p. 52.

[34] J.G. Lockhart, Life of Robert Burns, p. 60.

"O thou pale orb, that silent shines,
While care untroubled mortals sleep!
Thou seest a wretch that inly pines,
And wanders here to wail and weep!
With Woe I nightly vigils keep,
Beneath thy wan, unwarming beam;
And mourn, in lamentation deep,
How life and love are all a dream.
.....
No idly-feign'd, poetic pains
My sad, love-lorn lamentings claim:
No shepherd's pipe--Arcadian strains;
No fabled tortures, quaint and tame.
The plighted faith; the mutual flame;
The oft-attested Pow'rs above;
The promised father's tender name;
These were the pledges of my love!"[35]

There is a question in the minds of some concerning Mary Campbell whose sudden death grieved Burns very much; and many theories concerning her relationship to the poet have been expounded.[36] The poem that was written as the result of her death has been given two different titles by its publishers. One title is Thou Lingering Star, and the other To Mary in Heaven.[38] The poem was composed by Burns in September, 1789, one the anniversary of the day on which he heard of the death of Mary Campbell. The following excerpt depicts the melancholy note of the poem:

"Thou lingering star with lessening ray,
That lov'st to greet the early morn,
Again thou usher'st in the day
My Mary from my soul was torn.

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[35]Horace E. Scudder, ed., The Complete Poetical Works of Robert Burns, p. 34.

[36]Ibid., Introduction, p. xxxviii.

[37]Ibid., p. 226.

[38]Lockhart, op. cit., p. 137.

O Mary, dear departed shade!
Where is thy place of blissful rest?
See'st thou thy lover lowly laid?
Hear'st thou the groans that rend his breast?[39]

As has already been stated, women played a major part in this love melancholy. It was the women who most frequently lost their lives or reasons, because of the loss of a lover. This was true, because the sentimental ideal was that a woman should be too delicately balanced to bear a grievous emotional shock; and according to the social convention a woman should so center her whole being in devotion to her lover or husband that his loss would bring intense grief. The ballad and the Ossian poems influenced the poetry in which the woman bereaved of her lover dies at once upon his body.[40] Part I of Joanna Baillie's Night Scenes of Other Times (1790) is an illustration of the fusion of the Ossian poems and the true ballad in this type of poetry. The wandering maiden in the poem meets the ghost of her lover and dies on the heath.[41]

Suicide as a result of a lover's death was more frequent among the heroines of romance than among the heroes. Lover's suicide in the pastorals, the ballads, and the tales were almost invariably committed by leaping off a precipice into deep water.[42] Two examples of these love suicides will

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[39] Boudder, op. cit., p. 226.

[40] Nichols, op. cit., p. 229.

[41] Ibid., p. 229.

[42] Ibid., p. 232.

be sufficient for our purpose. Chatterton's Elinore and Jura illustrates not only the use of melancholy, but also the use of the "graveyard" element. Jura in speaking to Elinore says:

> Sisters in Sorrow, on this daisied bank,
> Where Melancholy broods, we will lament,[43]

and likens herself and her friend to "leven'd oaks" and "forletten halls of merriment" where "lethal ravens bark and owlets wake the night." Elinore in her reply to Jura says that she will go at night to the graveyard and relate her woes to the "passing sprites." In the end, upon receiving news that their lovers have fallen in battle, they leap together over the cliff. The other example of this suicide love is Darley's The Enchanted Lyre. The poem opens with the following lines:

> Listen to the Lyre!
> Listen to the knelling of its sweet-toned ditty!
> Shrilly now as Pain resounds the various wire,
> Now as soft as Pity!
> Soft as Pity![44]

The story the wind-touched lyre [illegible] to the Dreamer was that of a maiden, who was "once the flower, The all-beloved lily of this sweet, sweet valley," and who had leaped after her lover into the "roaring wave"...

> Where amid the billows I was shown my grave
> With a hideous laughter!
> Hideous laughter!

----and who now, finding no peace in Heaven, haunts the spot

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[43] Walter W. Skeat, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 209.

[44] Quoted by Nichols, op. cit., p. 232.

where her coffinless love is lying. See how, "with this deep wail" the "very bosom-strings" of the harp, "like mine, are broken!"[45]

A large number of melancholy poems not only concern women whose suffering arises from the absence of death of their lover, but also from the loneliness and shame of desertion.[46] The man involved in this type of melancholy was often vigorously blamed, and often died of remorse when he realized the tragedy he had caused.[47] The girl's life is also darkened with remorse, and she either returns home to seek forgiveness, or half rejoices that she has no home on which her shame would bring reproach.

Through our study of this love melancholy we have noted that the heroine approaches the feminine ideal of sensibility, and the young hero is a man of delicate feeling, chaste and loyal, brave and gentle, and often possessed with a melancholy temperament.

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[45] Nichols, op. cit., pp. 232-233.

[46] See "Will the Ferryman, A Water-Eclogue," an early example in which the culprit sees the dead girl's ghost and is drowned in his terror. Gentleman's Magazine, XXVIII (June, 1758), 280.

[47] See two "elegiac" ballads, presenting a woman's remorse for an illicit love; Gentleman's Magazine, XXXIV (Sept., 1764), 443.

CHAPTER VI

COMPLAINT OF LIFE

At the beginning of this discourse we were confronted with the question: Where did the strain of melancholy originate? Thus far we have seen its inception in the desire for solitude or rural retreat; in the religious ideas of the people concerning death, sin, and judgment; Gothic ruins, and old fears and superstitions; various aspects of nature; and in the romantic or love element of the period. All of these elements are closely bound up with the last one; namely, the complaint of or pathos of life.

Samuel Johnson's The Vanity of Human Wishes is unquestionably one of the finest examples of the "complaint of life" found among the poets of the Eighteenth Century. In this poem is revealed Johnson's characteristic melancholy as the result of his clear-eyed perception of the vanities of the world; and his Christian stoicism which enabled him to face the future undismayed.[1] To Johnson wealth and fame are here just for a little while, and then they are gone.

> Athirst for wealth, and burning to be great;
> Delusive fortune hears th' incessant call
> They mount, they shine, evaporate, and fall.[2]

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[1] Odell Shepard and Paul S. Wood, eds., English Prose and Poetry 1660-1800, p. 606.

[2] Vanity of Human Wishes, ll. 74-76.

Each day "Misfortune" seems to bring new sorrows to humanity.

> Yet ev'n on this her load Misfortune flings,
> To press the weary minutes' flagging wings;
> New sorrow rises as the day returns,
> A sister sickens, or a daughter mourns.
> Now kindred merit fills the sable bier,
> Now lacerated friendship claims a tear,
> Year chases year, decay pursues decay,[3]

Such a complaint is generalized and didactic, and is as unemotional and impersonal as the nature of the poet will allow it to be. It is not strictly classic, but also includes the Christian elements. Hence, the literary sources of this theme are found in the Latin classics and in the Bible.[4]

Among the most important perpetuators of the neo-classic complaint were various long blank verse poems on Christian apologetics. The characteristic method of proving personal immortality seemed to be to make the woes of life so dreadful that only the thought of a better world would make life bearable. Young's Night Thoughts, a long blank verse piece inspired by melancholy into which the poet plunged because of the death of his wife and two children,[5] is a good mid-eighteenth century example of this type of reasoning. He speaks at length about the woes of life and death, and then asks

> What, now, but immortality, can please?[6]

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[3] Ibid., ll. 299-305.

[4] Eleanor M. Nichols, The Gloomy Egoist, p. 291.

[5] Thomas A. Arnold, A Manual of English Literature, p. 405.

[6] Night Thoughts, Canto I, l. 454.

The two books of Peet's Penseroso also explain that the follies of life are the result of man's wrongs, and point to God as the escape. In Book I, which is called "The State of Man", Penseroso, "the western Job," moralizes

> And human life, to prove on man it vain intent
> And full of woe

---all due to man, and not Heaven. Book II, which is called "On the Disasters which happen in the world", and the Wisdom of the Divine Government, describes the disasters of life in such minute details that the conclusion reached is that

> The Lord of nature is supremely good.[7]

The theme of misery is nearly always combined with the theme of mutability: "Man that is born of woman is of few days, and full of trouble [8] The first of these lamentable facts does not give us comfort for the second, but only adds one more crowning trouble to our list of woes.[9] However, there are several poems in which this crowning trouble is not the main theme. For instance, in mid-eighteenth century one finds such titles as On the Vanity and Vicissitude of Human Life,[10] and Deception, or the Vanity of Human Prospects and Possessions.[11] There are also several poems entitled Life. The following

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[7] Nickels, op. cit., p. 292.

[8] Job 14:1.

[9] Nickels, op. cit., p. 293.

[10] Gentleman's Magazine, XXIII (Sept., 1753), 437.

[11] Ibid., LI (Jan., 1781), 38.

excerpts are taken from the poems:

> Life! the dear precarious boon!
> Soon we lose, alas! how soon!
> Fleeting vision, falsely gay...
>
> Life! thou dear, delusive guest,
> Lovely phantom! fleeting jest!
> .....
> In every state, do what we can,
> Life is, at best, a plague to man...[12]

Often the elegies are not concerned with death, love, or ruins, but rather with the misery of mankind in general, and often times of the poet himself. James Beattie's The Triumph of Melancholy is an interesting example of this type. The poet opens his poem by bidding his memory, which has tortured him by "scenes deep-stain'd with Sorrow's sable dye," to be still or present happier scenes. But memory does not obey his commands, and the memories of innocence and youth lead him to lament the swift poison of passion. After exclaiming, "How Memory pains!," he sets himself to musing by the winter fire, and then begins to meditate on the coming spring. Then, his thoughts are directed to the impotence of spring to bring relief to sickness, death, and disappointment--and all his hopes are lost in contemplating the want and oppression which is still king of the world. When he turns to the pages of history for relief, he is not comforted because he sees before him defeated and dying Brutus mourned over by

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[12]Quoted by Nichols, op. cit., p. 293.

"weeping Liberty." Virtue itself cannot "still the burst of sighs, When festers in the soul Misfortune's dart," or save man from his woeful fate. He calls on his friend to comfort him in his retirement; but even the thought of friendship and love directs its course to mutability. Finally, in despair the poet gives up and admits that "Melancholy has triumphed,"[13] and the following lines bring the poem to a close:

> The traveller thus o'er the midnight waste
> Through many a lonesome path is doom'd to roam,
> Wilder'd and weary sits him down at last;
> For long the night, and distant far his home.

Many things contributed to the complaint of life theme during the latter half of the Eighteenth Century. England had begun to stir with profound uneasiness in the ever increasing grasp of the Industrial Revolution. The peasantry who were crowded into the industrial centers, or left to eat a pauper's crust were sinking into hopeless degradation. Utter loss on the one hand, and on the other ruthless greed and oppression, thrust themselves before the sensitive eye of the poet. The feeling of sympathy was already fashionable; and it was only necessary for the man of sensibility to shift his center of interest from the sentiment or emotion itself to the object itself, in order to make sentimentalism become true and genuine sympathy. This new sentiment was directed not only to the victims of the Revolution; it abolished the slave trade and fostered a widespread reform in the treatment

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[13] Ibid., p. 294.

of dumb animals.[14]

Something of how this movement affected the poets of the age can be seen in some of the poetry of the time. Gray's Elegy, as has already been stated, contains nearly all the themes connected with the strain of melancholy in the Eighteenth Century. It also has a significant place in this complaint of life theme because it reveals that rising democratic sentiment which was already to some extent characteristic of the time. Reacting against the narrow metropolitanism of Pope and his school, and their interest in urban society, the poets of the new generation were beginning to exhibit a sympathy with the toils and the sufferings of the humble and the poor.[15] Thomson, who has been referred to in previous chapters, had already shown such sympathy in The Seasons; a little later, as we shall see, Goldsmith and Crabbe were to show it, although in a different manner. Gray also exhibits sympathy for the toils and sufferings of the less fortunate. "Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife" he lingers among the graves where the "rude forefathers of the hamlet" are laid to rest; and as he does he is touched to pity by thought of the unrecorded joys and sorrows of those obscure lives, and by all the pathos of unrealized possibilities.[16] The following verses exhibit Gray's feelings and sympathy:

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[14] Ibid., pp. 296-97.

[15] William Henry Hudson, Gray and His Poetry, p. 58.

[16] Ibid., p. 58.

Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,
  Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;
Nor Grandeur hear, with a disdainful smile,
  The short and simple annals of the poor.

.....

Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid
  Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire;
Hands, that the rod of empire might have swayed,
  Or waked to ecstasy the living lyre.

But knowledge to their eyes her ample page
  Rich with the spoils of time did ne'er unroll;
Chill Penury repressed their noble rage,
  And frose the genial current of the soul.

Full many a gem, of purest ray serene,
  The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear;
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
  And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

Some village Hampden, that with dauntless breast
  The little tyrant of his fields withstood;
Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest;
  Some Cromwell guiltless of his country's blood...

.....

Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,
  Their sober wishes never learned to stray;
Along the cool sequestered vale of life
  They kept the noiseless tenor of their way.[17]

Goldsmith was also not unmindful of the sad plight of the peasants. Although the melancholy spirit of his Deserted Village was no doubt enhanced by the death of his brother, it was also urged on by the conditions of the time. The bitter tone of the peasant feeling is felt in the passages of the poem which pictures the emigrants departing to take their chances among the swamps and jungles, whirlwings and sunstrokes.

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[17] Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard.

savages, wild beasts, and poisonous reptiles of Georgia.[18]

> Ah, no! To distant climes, a dreary scene,
> Where half the convex world intrudes between,
> Through torrid tracts with fainting steps they go,
> Where wild Altama murmurs to their woe.
> Far different there from all that charm'd before,
> The various terrors of that horrid shore;
> Those matted woods where birds forget to sing,
> But silent bats in drowsy clusters cling;
> Those poisonous fields with rank luxuriance crown'd
> Where the dark scorpion gathers death around;
> Where at each step the stranger fears to wake
> The rattling terrors of the vengeful snake;
> Where crouching tigers wait their hapless prey,
> And savage men more murderous still than they
> While oft in whirls the mad tornado flies,
> Mingling the ravag'd landscape with the skies.
> Far different these from former scene,
> The cooling brook, the grassy vested green,
> The breezy covert of the warbling grove,
> That only shelter'd thefts of harmless love.
>
> Good Heaven! what sorrows gloom'd that parting day,
> That call'd them from their native walks away;
> When the poor exiles, every pleasure past,
> Hung round the bowers, and fondly look'd their last,
> And took a long farewell, and wish'd in vain
> For seats like these beyond the western main;
> And shudd'ring still to face the distant deep,
> Return'd and wept, and still returned to weep.[19]

George Crabbe in The Village presents a similar picture to that of Goldsmith. Crabbe's own youth and manhood were spent in poverty among coarse and ignorant people. This association with the toils of life led him to resent what he considered the sentimental falsification of the lives of the rural poor, which were perpetuated in pastoral tradition; hence, he set about in his long poem to report the actual

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[18] Horatio Sheafe Krans, The Poems of Oliver Goldsmith, Introduction, p. lxvii.

[19] The Deserted Village, ll. 343-370.

facts as they appeared to him.[20] He asks us in his description of the toils of life to go and watch the people rising with the sun and to follow them through the work of the day. The following lines embody that conception of the agricultural poor with whom Crabbe started life, and reflect the mood of his own mind when he saw everything around in its worst colors:

> Or will you deem them amply paid in health,
> Labour's fair child, that languishes with wealth?
> Go then! and see them rising with the sun,
> Through a long course of daily toil to run;
> When the knees tremble and the temples beat;
> Behold them leaning on their scythes; look o'er
> The labour past, and toils to come explore;
> See them alternate suns and showers engage,
> And hoard up aches and anguish for their age;
> Through fens and marshy moors their steps pursue,
> When their warm pores imbibe the evening dew;
> Then own that labour may as fatal be
> To these thy slaves as thine excess to thee.
>
> Amid this tribe too oft a manly pride
> Strives in strong toil the fainting heart to hide.
> There may you see the youth of slender frame
> Contend with weakness, weariness, and shame;
> Yet urged along and proudly [illegible] to yield,
> He strives to join his fellows of the field;
> Till long contending nature droops at last,
> Declining health rejects his poor repast,
> His cheerless spouse the coming danger sees,
> And mutual murmurs urge the slow disease.
>
> Yet grant them, health, 'tis not for us to tell,
> Though the head droops not, that the heart is well;
> Or will you praise that homely, healthy fare,
> Plenteous and plain, that happy peasants share;
> Oh, trifle not with wants you cannot feel,
> Nor mock the misery of a stinted meal--
> Homely, not wholesome, plain, not plenteous, such
> As you who praise would never deign to touch.
>
> Ye gentle souls who dream of Rural ease,
> Whom the smooth streams and smoother sonnets please:
> Go! if the peaceful cot your praises snare,
> Go look within, and ask if Peace be there;
> If peace be his--that drooping weary sire;
> Or theirs, that offspring round their feeble fire;

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[20] Shepard and Wood, op. cit., p. 856.

> Or hers, that matron pale, whose trembling hand
> Turns on the wretched hearth the expiring brand![21]

Cowper also was not insensible to the sufferings of the poor. His long blank verse poem, The Task, which is composed of six books has one general thought: "To discountenance the modern enthusiasm after a London Life, and to recommend rural ease and leisure, as friendly to the cause of piety and virtue."[22] However, Book IV gives the poet's attitude toward life. The following lines are contributive to the complaint of life of the Eighteenth Century:

> In such a world, so thorny, and where none
> Finds happiness unblighted, or, if found,
> Without some thistly sorrow at its side,
> It seems the part of wisdom, and no sin
> Against the law of love, to measure lots
> With less distinguish'd than ourselves, that
> thus
> We may with patience bear our moderate ills
> And sympathize with others, suffering more.
> Ill fares the trav'ller now, and he that stalks
> In ponderous boots beside his reeking team.
> The wain goes heavily, impeded sore
> By congregated loads adhering close
> To the clogged wheels, and in its sluggish pace
> Noiseless appears a moving hill of snow
> The toiling steeds expand the nostril wide
> While every breath by respiration strong
> Forced downward, is consolidated soon
> Upon their jutting chests.[23]

The poets of this century not only expressed a general complaint of life, but also expressed their own personal complaint. Long years ago Aristotle made the statement that

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[21] Crabbe, "The Village," Book I, ll. 139-179, Shepard and Wood, op. cit., p. 859.

[22] Shepard and Wood, op. cit., p. 879.

[23] William Benham, ed., The Poetical Works of William Cowper, p. 238.

men of genius are melancholy. Cicero repeated the same thing; while Rosseau gave the conception its characteristic Eighteenth Century form. The prevailing thought in preromantic time and particularly of the romantic period was that the lot of a poet was more lamentable than that of ordinary men. This, of course, is due to the fact that the poet is more sensitive, more aware of the sufferings about him, and especially attuned to his own misfortunes and sufferings. The poet seems to have looked forward to an early and forgotten grave.[24]

This thought is not only revealed in the writings of the greater poets of the age, but also in the minor ones. For example, through James Montgomery's The Pillow there flowed a "tone of unconscious complaining woe," and Robert Montgomery's Death depicts a lonely poet who sank beneath the "wear of passion and the waste of thought."[25] George Darley's poem Tears,[26] which is quoted in full, reveals the poet's own individual loneliness and sorrow:

> O, I could weep myself into a stream
> Making eternal fountains of mine eyes;
> Would that the ancient mythologic dream,
> Were true, that peopled earth with deities,
> Then might some God, compassioning my cries,
> Turn me into an ever-weeping rill,
> Or bend me to a willow that with sighs
> The very region of the vale doth fill.
> For I have woes too mighty for such tears,
> As these I shed, but am compelled to hide;
> Their burning bitterness mine eyeballs sears,

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[24] Nichols, op. cit., p. 303.

[25] Ibid., p. 304.

[26] Quoted by Nichols, Ibid., p. 305.

And I am forced to drink the scalding tide;
Lest the orbs melt to brine, and leave me more
Desolate and darkly-fortuned than before.

Sometimes ill health, or the death of a loved one, and the poet's attitude toward religion caused the poet to complain about his lot in life. The best way to understand this complaint of life is to read the poetry of the time; thus I shall quote several passages from some of the writers.

One of the great determining influences in the life of Shenstone was ill health; the drawbacks of a weak constitution began to overshadow his life at an early age. The melancholy such a condition produced is shown in the following excerpts from his Ode to Health:

O Health, capricious maid!
Why dost thou shun my peaceful bow'r,
Where I had hoped to share thy pow'r,
And bless thy lasting aid?

Since thou, alas! art flown,
It 'vails not whether muse or grace,
With tempting smile, frequent the place;
I sigh for thee alone.
Age not forbids thy stay;
Thou yet might'st act the friendly part;
Thou yet might'st raise this languid part;
Why speed so swift away?

.....

There was, there was a time,
When tho' I scorn'd thy guardian care,
Nor made a vow, nor said a pray'r,
I did not fear the crime.
Who then more blest than I
When the glad school-boy's task was done,
And forth, with jocund sprite, I run
To freedom, and to joy?
How jovial then the day!
What since have all my labours found,
Thus climbing life, to gaze around
That can thy loss repay?[27]

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[27] Quoted by A.R. Humphreys, William Shenstone An Eighteenth Century Portrait, p. 8.

Thomas Gray, who is the outstanding poet in the development of melancholy of this century, on receiving news of the death of his dear friend, Richard West, enshrined his grief or complaint in the following touching sonnet:

> In vain to me the smiling Mornings shine,
> And reddening Phoebus lifts his golden fire;
> The birds in vain their amorous descant join;
> Or cheerful fields resume their green attire;
> These ears, alas! for other notes repine,
> A different object do these eyes require;
> My lonely anguish melts no heart but mine;
> And in my breast the imperfect joys expire.
> Yet Morning smiles the busy race to cheer,
> And new-born all pleasure brings to happier men;
> The fields to all their wonted tribute bear;
> I fruitless mourn to him that cannot hear,
> And weep the more because I weep in vain.[28]

William Cowper, who was one of the outstanding poets of melancholy associated with death and religion, also is represented in this complaint of life theme. His conception of religion and his melancholy spirit often led him to the depths of despair. In one of his desolate hours he wrote the following lines about himself:

> A dark impertance saddens every day;
> He hears the notice of the clock perplexed,
> And cries, "Perhaps eternity strikes next";
> Sweet music is no longer music here,
> And laughter sounds like madness in his ear;
> His grief the world of all her powers disarms,
> Wine has no taste, and beauty has no charms.[29]

An even darker picture of life is revealed by Cowper in the following lines into which he breathed a personal

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[28]Quoted by William Henry Hudson, op. cit., p. 15.

[29]Quoted by Hugh I'Anson Fausset, William Cowper, p. 188.

conviction:

> I suffer fruitless anguish day by day,
> Each moment, as it passes, marks my pain;
> Scarce knowing whither, doubtfully I stray,
> And see no end of all that I sustain.
> .....
> My peace of heart is fled, I know no where;
> My happy hours, like shadows, passed away;
> Their sweet remembrance doubles all my care,
> Night darker seems, succeeding such a day.
> .....
> Has hell a pain I would not gladly bear,
> So thy severe displeasure might subside?
> Hopeless of ease, I seem already there,
> My life extinguished, and yet death denied.[30]

This complaint of life theme is carried over into the poetry of the Nineteenth Century. Such poets as Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, and Byron are outstanding in expressing the melancholy spirit of the age.

Thus we draw to a close our survey of the strain of melancholy in Eighteenth Century Poetry. In this study it has been observed that melancholy of one sort or another is one of the prevailing moods in the lives of the poets as well as in the poetry of this century. Some very definite conclusions may be drawn from this analysis of English poetry: The pseudo-Miltonic tradition of melancholy was an early factor in developing the gloomy spirit of mid-eighteenth century poetry; Gray's Elegy combined with the Ossian poetry influenced the ruin and mutability literature, and with Young, Blair, and Hervey influenced meditation on death; religious meditations on death, sin, and judgment were

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[30] Cowper, "The Vicissitudes Experienced in the Christian Life," William Benham, op. cit., p. 421.

prevalent to the end of the romantic period; there is a psychological and historical connection between the wane of religious terrorism and the rise of terror-romanticism; the tendency in the melancholy treatment of nature was to seek in nature a relief from the busy hum of the towns and courts; the status of the women of Eighteenth Century society made it inevitable that they should be an outstanding factor in sentimental or love melancholy; and that the imaginative conviction of the inextricability of joy and pain in life is perhaps the deepest thing in romantic melancholy.

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