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THE ENGLISH MUSE

A SKETCH

BY

OLIVER ELTON

LL D, LITT D, F B A

Emeritus Professor in the University of Liverpool, Hon Fellow of Corpus Christi College, Oxford

panteram quam sequimur
redolentem ubique et ubique apparentem
DANTE

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TO THE MEMORY OF

JOHN SAMPSON

PREFACE

THE present sketch is not a 'survey' with apparatus, nor does it affect to be a history, rightly so called. The emphasis is on the poetry, on poetry for its own sake, and the historical setting has been kept as light as possible Vexed critical questions are hardly alluded to. The book is meant as an introduction, or as a companion to an imaginary, and most imperfect, anthology The vowed student will see at once in what fields the writer is least expert. I am no specialist in Old and Middle English literature, or in the questions of Shakespeare's text and script—the list of such inexpertnesses would be long enough. But it seemed worth while to take some risks, and some care, and to begin at the beginning. A rapid review of the story may be of interest to those who have little time or wish to go behind the poetry itself to the mass of lore which surrounds it, and even to scholars who are deep in some particular periods or inquiries and are willing for an excursion Indeed I would fain write for all who like myself regard poetry as a material part of their life and their religion Poetry is an art, and art, science, religion and philosophy are the four Great Powers to which the mental destiny of mankind is committed I have here spoken of it chiefly as an art, and of the finished work, saying little about origins, surroundings, sources, formative influences, and the like All that is most important and illuminating, and none of us who have laboured in corners of the vineyard will make light of it But the ultimate fact, the *unit*, and the real matter in hand, is the individual poem, and, behind the poem, the artist In a work of the kind and on such a scale it would be impossible, and merely the letting in of waters, to attempt a list of books or editions recommended, or of authorities drawn upon. A few verbal quotations are acknowledged in the footnotes, and a short list of translations from the older

verse is appended to the first chapter Living poets, and poets beyond these islands, are not included in the sketch

I have to offer many thanks to Professor H C Wyld, to Professor P G Thomas, and to Sir Edmund Chambers, for valued advice on certain pages submitted to them, and also, for kindly answering inquiries, to Professor Lascelles Abercrombie, Professor L C Martin, and Mr W B Yeats

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O. E.

OXFORD,
November, 1932

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CORRIGENDA *

Page viii, line 11, *for* Mc *read* Mr
,, 27, line 18, for *actantius* read *Lactantius*
,, 42, headline, *for* TEH *read* THE
,, 43, line 16, *for* jey *read* fey
,, 113, last line, *for* thau his meu *read* than his men
,, 199, line 27, *for* Massinge- *read* Massinger
,, 216, line 12, *for* rememberep *read* remembered
,, 250, last line, *for* host *read* ghost
,, 255, last line, for *Oroonook* read *Oroonoko*
,, 277, line 1, *for* ates *read* lates
,, 327, line 10, for *Edwin of Deira* read *Edwin the Fair*
also Index, p 435
,, 327, line 38, *for* rhyhm *read* rhythm
,, 405, line 21, for *Versesnda* read *Verses and*

* It is regretted that, owing to an unfortunate displacement of type, a few misprints which were not in the original edition have found their way into this impression of the book

CHAPTER I

OLD ENGLISH (I).

I

WE ought to feel a Chinese piety towards the Old English poets, the nameless ancestors of so long a line, they deserve promotion by a state decree a thousand years after their departure The pedigree is sound, if the links at times appear to be faint There is such a thing as the English spirit, and it is mirrored in our poetry The love of righteousness and order, the passion for adventure of the mind and body, and the perception of natural beauty, are in the race, they are but deepened by the mixtures in the stock and by the influence of foreign literatures The melancholy of the *Seafarer* might be detected in some of Conrad's inarticulate British sailors; chivalry is the same in *Maldon*, in the *Battle of Otterburn*, and in the *Lady of the Lake* Features of the Satan of *Genesis B*, the defiant explorer, are reproduced, perhaps consciously, by Milton There is a true continuity of spirit, as well as of expression, in our poetry Dream of it for a moment as all written by a single poet of unimaginable gifts, and older than Methuselah.

II

No doubt the earlier period stands in a certain isolation. Old English verse from the seventh century to the twelfth is more homogeneous than that of any later age Most of us travel to it backwards, with our minds full of Shakespeare and Milton, or else downwards, if we are brought up on the classics In either case we find ourselves in a new world with no Renaissance behind it and only touched indirectly by Greece and Rome. The sacred poetry, indeed, depends on

the Vulgate and the Saints' Lives, and the epic verse flourishing beside it is at many points in its debt Still these are not the 'classics', and the epic, like much of the lyric, is secular in its groundwork and comes to us as something indigenous It reflects the historical and legendary lore, the mode of life and the culture, of the old Germanic world, and for this we are not prepared either by the 'grand old curriculum' of the classics or by our own later literature Nearest in blood-brotherhood to the Old English verse, nearest also in beauty and richness, is the *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, the poetry written in Old Norse, or Icelandic The prosody is similar in principle, and there is a similar coinage of descriptive phrases, or *kennings* But the best Norse poems are lays, not long epics, and their general tone is lyrical, or else didactic and sententious Iceland was converted some four centuries later than Saxon England, and the poetic *Edda* contains much of the rich old pagan theology which in English has all but vanished We have nothing like the great lyrics, the *Sibyl's Prophecy* and *Sun-Song*, the one written by 'a heathen with glimpses of Christianity', the other by 'a Christian with heathen remembrances'[1] The passions, too, in the *Edda* seem fiercer even than in *Beowulf* or the *Fight at Finnsburg*, which can hardly match the curse hurled by Sigrun at the brother forsworn who has killed her lover

> 'May the steed run not, that runs beneath thee,
> Though fast foemen follow after!
> May the blade thou bearest bite not ever
> Save when singing it circles thy head!'

III

The old English metre may sound strange to those who know only classical or modern poetry Neglecting refinements and questions at issue, I will but state its main principles, as they are followed in the best period Some of them will appear, if the following unliteral translations are read with the natural accent; although the fixed quantity which Old English observes for every syllable, and which is essential to the verse-structure, cannot be reproduced. There are four beats, with a marked pause between the half-

[1] *Corp Poet Bor*, ed Vigfusson and Powell, 1883, i, 203

lines Two or three of these beats bear alliteration, the commonest types being *aa ax* and *ax ax*, *xa ax* is also very frequent, and *xa xa*, and there are other arrangements, or 'types', and modifications of them, which are harder for the modern ear. The last beat does *not* bear alliteration. The number of syllables between the beats varies with much apparent freedom, though the varieties have been counted and, to a great extent, classified. Any vowel is reckoned to alliterate with any vowel,—usually a different one The following lines will partially illustrate this mechanism

'The fruit is *l*óvely, my *l*órd Ádam,
And my *b*reást is *b*líthe, this *b*right annoúncer
Is *G*ód's own ángel, by his *g*eár I knów him;
A *h*érald, *h*é of the *h*eávenly kíng,
*H*igh abóve us, and to *h*áve his gráce
May sérve us *b*óth *b*étter than his hátred.'

Rhyme, be it added, is absent, except casually. It is commoner in the later period, when the half-lines are sometimes found rhyming, and this, in the very obscure *Rhyming Poem*, they do throughout. Lastly, the poets, seeking for an instrument of larger compass, sometimes lengthen out the line to six beats But the practice is not strict, and these 'extended lines' are apt to flap along heavily and irregularly, like a wounded bird. The ordinary measure, in good hands, is a noble and delightful one. soft and tuneful, or rough and crashing, 'dilated or condensed' at will, flowing on from line to line, or sharply marked off almost like Pope's couplets It can hold out through an epic, and it suits a short lyric, or a sententious poem, or a versified 'riddle'. It has been rightly credited with a 'history of more than a thousand years'[1] and is common in various forms to Old English, Old Norse, and Old Saxon As will be seen, after going long underground, it reappears, with a difference but in brilliant guise, in Chaucer's time, and lingers on afterwards for a century and a half

The Old English poems present a great range of style and certain sharply marked peculiarities of diction. In *Maldon* it is plain, as befits the heroic mood; and we think

[1] W P Ker, *English Literature, Mediæval*, p 40 this small book ('Home University Library') is an introduction, by a master of the whole field

of a fighter who is stript for business In *Exodus*, with its elaborate incrustation of epithet, we think rather of a prince in splendid but bizarre dress In *Beowulf* the ruling style is simple and stately, the ornament, though fresh and abundant, is kept in its place Every poet has his own habits of speech, and some of them use more, some less, of the particular verbal coinage that distinguishes Old English. There is, to begin with, a store of 'synonyms', single words, it may be for 'man' or for 'prince' or for 'God'. Failing fuller knowledge, they often seem to differ only in sound-value. There is a much larger body of expressions known as *kennings* (Icelandic *kenningar*, tokens for recognition). The kenning may be a single, but compounded, word, or a phrase consisting of two words A person or a thing is called by a name that is thought to be more magnificent or expressive than the literal term This practice is of course found, in some shape, in all poetry, but in Old English the kenning stands out like an embossed stamp, or an illuminated letter in a manuscript There are kennings for God and the devil, for death and the grave, for earth and heaven, for sword and noble and warrior, for the sea and ships, for the elements, and for wild beasts and birds Some are vivid and condensed, such as 'blink-swift' as an epithet of lightning, or 'snake-hall' for hell In *Exodus* the sea is the 'grey highway for the host', and the water swamping the Egyptians is the 'naked messenger of violence'.

> And high uprose a *heaven-beacon*
> That was strange to see, when the *setting-journey*
> Of the sun was finished, a fresh marvel,
> That on each éven-tide óver the *fólk hòst*
> Blazed, a shining and a burning pillar.

In *Beowulf* the stag is the 'heather-stepper', and to die is to 'lay aside laughter'. The whole topic is too large to pursue here Sometimes the kenning, or the synonym, is truly expressive, sometimes it is flat, and is used only to hide the absence of imagination, as in the stock diction of the eighteenth century with its 'finny tribe' and the like. Tennyson is full of curious and happy kennings, but Milton with his 'mighty Paramount', and his line 'So spake our Morning Star, then in his rise', is nearer to the Old English manner.

IV

The extant Old English poems are like the remnant who came home from the Trojan war, saved only by their luck The great body of them are preserved in four unique MSS They imply the existence of a mass of contemporary verse now lost; and, more than that, of a mass of lost verse preceding them They are not 'primitive', any more than the life and culture that begot them They represent a long, well-schooled, and elaborate tradition of the poet's craft, and this must be true even of the oldest amongst them that survive Their actual dates, and, what is more important, their relative dates and order of production, are at many points undetermined, so that the literary history is still insecurely founded The upper limit of time is fixed by external evidence only in a few instances Cædmon did not see the angel before the year 658, St Guthlac died in 714, Brunanburh was fought in 937, Maldon in 991 Nearly all the poetry comes to us in West Saxon, which is translated, or rather transliterated, from lost originals in Northern speech The intricate linguistic tests devised in order to decide the relative chronology have been variously estimated, and there is still much dispute among the experts It is usually, however, agreed that the golden age was the last quarter of the seventh century and the first half of the eighth, that is to say, that the *extant* versions date from that period Two great groups of poems are then to be found, flourishing side by side and influencing each other In one, the original groundwork is *secular*, however much it may have been edited, added to, or intertextured by the pious clerks to whom we owe its preservation The form may be epical as in *Beowulf*, or lyrical as in *Widsith*, the *Wanderer* or the *Riddles*, or it may be didactic, and more or less devout, thus forming a link with the second group in which the groundwork is visibly *religious* In the earlier, or 'Cædmonian', school the temper is Hebraic rather than Christian, and the lay heroic poetry has left its stamp In the later, or 'Cynewulfian' school, generally assigned to the later eighth century, that stamp, though not effaced, is fainter, and the spirit is definitely Christian Later still some poems of great mark are known, while others are conjectured, to belong to the tenth century. I follow this general order, which has been, broadly speaking, accepted, owing

to the labours of a noble army of scholars in England, Germany, and America But the numerous critical questions that are still at issue do not much affect the value of the poetry, as poetry.

V

Widsith, 'the far-travelled', an ideal or generalised figure, is the titular author of one of the oldest lyrics It bears his name, it may be called an epic catalogue in the form of a lay He is the 'scop', or minstrel, who chants and hands down the glories of his prince and claims treasure and honours for reward Widsith has flashes of inspiration, and he laments that he is now in the shade of disfavour. He is not much of a poet, yet the catalogue of countries and peoples by this imaginary traveller is a quarry precious to scholars The chieftains and dynasties that he names cover many centuries Some of them, such as Finn, recur in *Beowulf* as part of the tragic fringe to the epic story, and we think, once more, of a whole buried literature The same mood is induced by another early, and a much shorter, lyric, *Deor*, and this may be the name of its melancholy composer. Almost unique in Old English is the refrain coming after each irregular strophe *That passed, so may this!* It is the cry of the poet himself, which in the old poetry we seldom hear 'This' is the speaker's own mishap. a rival poet has supplanted him with his lord and got his land 'That' is some old calamity of legend, the tyranny of Eormanric, or the rape of Beadohild by Weland the smith And Deor, we feel, is right all those princes, queens, and poets and their woes *are* past and forgotten, like so many cattle, except by a few students Or they are ghosts of ghosts, twice removed from earth, and there is not enough poetry left to save them.

VI

A dozen ancient *Charms* are extant, in which prose mingles with verse and English with dog-Latin, and where Christianity, in the process of transmission, has superposed itself upon heathendom They are true folk-verse, and most vivacious, nothing brings us closer to the common life of our

forefathers There are charms for the man who has lost his cattle or who is swarming his bees or who wishes to take a journey, charms against a sudden sharp pain that is caused by witches To stop this infliction you must begin (in a style that recalls *Macbeth*) with the words, 'Loud they were, ah loud, when over the mound they came riding!'; and must then exclaim thrice, at stated intervals, 'Out with thee, little dart, if thou be here within!' Or a woman who cannot nurse her child must do certain things with the milk of a cow and with running water, and say certain lines To relieve bewitched land, after praying to God and to the 'true *sancta Marian*' [*sic*], go on thus

> 'Hail, thou of mortals the mother, Earth,
> Continue growing in God's embrace,
> Replenished with food, for the foison of men!'

In another spell the four apostles are severally the helmet, the corslet, the sword and the shield of the traveller In our old poetry there is only too little left of this religion of every day

Runes were the letters used by the Germanic races through many centuries for incision upon metal, wood, or stone, the lines being angular, and greatly varied, to suit the material. Their origin is contested, good authorities trace them back, directly or otherwise, to some form of the Greek characters. In our *Rune-Poem* some colour and fancy are employed in teaching the names of the alphabet. The letter *M* was called 'man', and *B* 'birch' (or 'poplar') we have a kind of riddle

> *B* is fruitless, and barren twigs
> Bears, unchilded, the boughs are lovely,
> And fair decking has the foliage aloft

Again:

> On *I* we slip, it is sore a-cold,
> A gem it glistens, and glassy-clear,
> A floor fashioned by frost in beauty

Others are named after the bison, and hail 'the whitest of corns', and a sea-fish that feeds on land but lives in water.

VII

Beowulf is saved in a solitary manuscript, dated about the end of the tenth century. It is suggested that the

poem, as we have it, may have been composed during the age of Bede (673-735) It comes to us as a single work, but suffers, at first sight, from a certain spinal weakness, as though it contained two epic stories, one of 2199 and the other of 984 lines, from the same hand, and united only by the identity of the hero and of the style and spirit Between the two fifty years elapse In the first, the young hero Beowulf, nephew of Hygelac the prince of Geatland in southern Scandinavia, comes to Denmark with a handful of warriors He is generously eager to rid Heorot, the great hall of Hrothgar the king, of a cannibal ogre Grendel who has harried the Danes for twelve years In the night he wrenches off the creature's arm, and Grendel cries his 'dreadful chant' and weeps, and goes off to his native mere, a 'fugitive with his death upon him' Grendel's dam comes to Heorot and takes vengeance Beowulf pursues her to the mere, which is haunted by 'nickers' or sea-monsters, and fights her under water, in a strange place that is full of 'firelight' He is just saved by finding a magic sword, which presently melts in the life-blood of the ogress like ice in a thaw

So they sojourn in a secret land,
Where the wolf is on the wold, the wind on the headland,
By marshways dire where mountain streams
Downward are dropping under dark nesses,
Under earth a flood Nor far from the place
By the mile measured the mere standeth
With rime-hung coppice clinging above it,
Stiff-rooted forest shadowing its waters
And an evil omen to the eye nightly
Is the blaze along the river, and the bed how deep
Not the wisest one knoweth, nor the oldest
And the heath-stepper, in his horns mighty,
By the hounds harried, to the holt may go,
—He has fled from afar—but is fain to perish
At the river's brim rather than be hiding
His head in the pool, no happiness there!
Whence the surging stream ascends always
To the sky wanly, and the wind arouses
Evil weather, till the air thickens
And the welkin weeps

Beowulf returns, to be honoured by Hrothgar; then home to Geatland, to report to Hygelac Here ends the *Grendelkad.* Beowulf's character is plain, he is built on

large simple lines. He has a passion for glory, and he shows it He boasts, but boasting was held to be gracious in a warrior who could make it good He is the purger, the disinterested crusader, careless of his life, and has some of the Christian qualities, readiness in self-sacrifice and lack of rancour There are no dark places in him, or conflicts of motive He has nothing to atone for and asks only to be remembered His cleanness and decency shine out on the dark background of certain 'episodes', or inserted stories, that are told by the way If he loves gold it is less for its costliness than for the pleasure of the eyes In the second epic, or chapter of the epic, which might be called *Fifty Years After*, he is now king of Geatland, and old His last labour is to make an end of a fire-breathing dragon, who is wasting the land because some of his hoarded treasure has been stolen The dragon has less character than the Grendels, he is much like other dragons, but he wounds Beowulf mortally In the combat the coward thanes hold aloof, all but the loyal Wiglaf Beowulf gives his last orders, which are fulfilled a noble ending to the epic Nothing can be more spaciously staged, or better told, or in some respects more Homeric.

> 'When I am burned, do ye build, my fighters,
> A bright barrow on a bluff by the sea,
> On the Whale's Headland, let it hang aloft
> In memory of me in the mind of my people,
> So that séa-fàrers may sáy hereáfter,
> *There Beowulf is buried,* when the big vessels
> From afar come driving on the dark ocean'

VIII

The world of the poem is solid and actual, in spite of the 'nickers' in the mere. There are kings and queens, servers in the hall, minstrels, warriors, sailors, and coastguards. The manners are courtly and ceremonious, the obsequies, with which the story begins and ends, are those of princes. The passions, even those of the monsters, are on the natural scale The tales told by way of interlude are presented as historical facts These 'episodes' are histories related for entertainment or for warning, some of them, like that of Beowulf's swimming-match, spring out of the occasion;

others are more remote, and retard the action. Many are more tragic and sinister than the main story, and take us back into a wicked old unforgetting world where blood will have blood and where men die in ways less satisfactory than Beowulf's end. The poem has been criticised on this score, with some reason The pattern on the fringes is stronger than the main design , as though the tale of Thebes were told to pass the time while Heracles is merely slaying the man-eating birds of Stymphalus. Still, the doings of Beowulf are not so trivial ; for he disposes of the terror that walketh by night, of the ravagers of a whole society The episodes themselves give depth and body to the poem and contain matter for many tragedies The most impressive is Beowulf's vision, which he reports to Hrothgar He has the second sight In Heorot he had watched the princess Freawaru bearing round the ale-stoup to the guests He foresees her, a bride, going home with her husband Ingeld to the Heathobards whom the Danes had defeated , the marriage is to seal the peace But one of her train wears a sword taken from a Heathobard slain in the battle And Beowulf, still in his mind's eye, sees the son of that Heathobard being egged on by an old soldier to take revenge Ingeld will grow cold to his wife, and the bloodshed will begin again *Widsith*, in fact, tells us that Ingeld did make an attack, unsuccessfully, upon Heorot.

Out of another episode, and of the fragmentary *Fight at Finnsburg*, can be doubtfully pieced together a story no less tragical We see, in glimpses, a strong place beset, and the moonlight on the armour of the assailants , the wife of their leader, who is also the sister of the slain chief within, regarding her sons and brothers on the pyre , the remnant of the besieged, after much slaughter, going home with the besiegers under a pact of equal treatment , the captain of the exiles, as the spring comes with its 'glorious bright weather', turning restless and breaking faith , and more bloodshed . . . In another and double fragment, *Waldere*, a woman heartens her husband in a fray among the mountains The combatants vaunt their swords, one of which was forged by Weland, the smith of legend , and the swords themselves, with their recited virtues and histories, are almost *dramatis personae* The characters here figure as in the time of Attila, in the fifth century ; and the story is told at length

in the Latin poem of Ekkehard, *Waltharius*, written in the tenth

Beowulf is full of problems unsolved and disharmonies unexplained. One great difficulty is on the surface. There are many theories to account for the fusion of pagan and biblical (that is, of Hebraic) elements It is only partial; and yet it appears to be vital to the poem Many traits, it seems evident, are suggested by the 'Cædmonian' *Genesis A*. In *Beowulf* as it stands, we find side by side the old faith and the new, God and Wyrd, Grendel (who is Cain's kin) and the folklore of the mere, the Mosaic song of creation and the heathen burning of the dead The artist or series of artists who are responsible for our text seem to have made a gallant effort to unify these materials, but in its basis and prevailing morale, we surely feel that *Beowulf* goes back to an unconverted world There are traces of its influence on the later poetry, the parallels in *Andreas* or *Brunanburh* can hardly be explained as coming from the common stockpot of tradition

IX

The lyrics known as the *Wanderer*, *Seafarer*, *Ruin*, *Wife's Plaint* and *Husband's Message* seem to come to us out of the void They are preserved only in the Exeter Book, a manuscript given to Exeter by Bishop Leofric about the time of the Conquest Their date is uncertain, opinions varying between the eighth century and the ninth No persons or places are named in them, and herein they are unlike the heroic poems, which carry the imagination at once into a familiar field of legend The wife may be any wife, the wanderer any exiled minstrel All except the *Husband's Message* are plaintive, with the high wailing note that is not rare in Old English They are not in any sense rude; the craftsmanship is of the order that betrays a long history behind it.

A better name for the *Wanderer* might be the *Dispossessed*. Like Shelley, he is solitary-minded, he is so deeply absorbed into all that he sees and dreams of, that the barrier between himself and nature, between his present and his past, is very thin The 'dun waves', the sea-birds bathing, the memory of a derelict feast-hall or of a good knight who has been 'given to death by a grey wolf', these things are

himself Delightful had been his life with the lord who gave him treasure and received his kisses His old comrades pass before his mind, almost like a hallucination, and vanish But friends and all are gone, like the great mansions, the 'ancient handiwork of giants'. The poet advises modesty, and observance of the mean, in the manner of the Book of the Proverbs, and muses on the passing of earthly things:

> Ah, that bright beaker! Ah, that byrnie-warrior!
> Ah, that prince in his pride!

All things, he concludes, fail except the grace of Heaven It is a question how far any of this purely moral and religious matter belonged to the original poem

The language of the *Wanderer* is direct and dignified, and there are few kennings The *Seafarer* seems more of a conscious performance, it is built upon a contrast of alternating moods It is often read as a dialogue between an old sailor who has lost heart and a young one full of spirit who feels the call and charm of the sea But it is hard to allot the speeches, there may be only one sailor, and the abrupt changes of tone are not inconsistent with a dramatic monologue Now he feels the miseries of what Shakespeare's Pericles calls 'the unfriendly element' hunger, storm, and solitude But in the spring, when fields are fair, he is moved to voyage once more, though even now the note of the cuckoo, 'the warden of summer', is ominous to him, and he thinks on brave men departed A commonplace ending follows, which is usually regarded as an addition

In the *Ruin*, with its brief and broken text, there is a touch of grandeur The place is frequently identified with Roman Bath, as seen through English eyes There was once a great city, tiled red, with gushing hot springs and full of fighters in golden mail Now it has crumbled, all but the lichened wreck The mortar is frosted, and the fighters are dead The feeling here is not less genuine, and is much less literary, than in the lamentations of Du Bellay or Spenser over the ruins of Rome

The *Wife's Plaint* and the *Husband's Message* are in the nature of lyrical ballads, but in neither case are the facts fully explained In the first, the wife who is the speaker has been parted from her man by the machinations of his kindred, and one youth, in particular, she seems

to denounce Her husband, or lover, has sent her to take refuge in a cave under an oak-tree, amidst the briars, while he himself sits far away under a cliff, 'storm-berimed' and 'water-washed'. She does not reproach him, although she exclaims,

'full oft we promised
That nought should sunder us, save our dying'

In the enigmatic *Wulf and Eadwacer*, which has like *Deor* a species of refrain, another couple, Wulf and the woman, are sundered on different islands, and she hurls a reproach at a certain Eadwacer Wulf is carrying her child off into the forest, but it is not clear which man is the father, and the whole sense is obscure

The *Husband's Message* is spoken by the wood or reed on which it is written, and may perhaps be a continuation of the reed-riddle There is a nobler use of a similar device in the *Dream of the Rood* The man, harried by his enemies, has been exiled, but is now prosperous and has treasure and horses He summons his lady to take ship and rejoin him when she first hears the note of the sorrowful cuckoo; let no man stop her! He will keep his troth; he swears it on his sword, and on the wood he writes the anagram S R EO W D The strength of the situation in these poems, whatever it be precisely, saves them from being sentimental. So too in *The Exile's Lament*, a definitely Christian composition The exile, a sinner in his youth, has lost, and now implores, the divine favour He is punished by the ill-will of those who have driven him from home, he has no friend or patron left, and must live on alms and carry his scanty rations; and, he exclaims in a strange simile, 'Look at the very trees, how they can grow and put forth their natural shoots, and await their *wyrd*', but not so he! Such pieces, in which a dramatic story is lyrically told have a long but broken history in our poetry, the ultimate master of the form is Robert Browning

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NOTE TO CHAPTERS I AND II · SOME TRANSLATIONS

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Selections R. K Gordon, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 1927 (Everyman's Library, Dent), in prose J D Spaeth, *Old English Poetry*, 1922 (Princeton and O U P), in alliterative verse A S. Cook and C. B. Tinker, *Select Translations*, 1902 (Ginn, Boston), some in prose,

most in verse (chiefly modern, not alliterative) These are full and representative selections N Kershaw, *Anglo-Saxon and Norse Poems*, 1902 (C U P), gives six short pieces from each language, in prose Many passages from the whole body of Old English verse are translated (in alliterative lines) in Stopford A Brooke's *History of Early English Literature*, two vols., 1892 (Macmillan); e g a number of the *Riddles* This work (together with the same author's *English Literature to the Norman Conquest*, 1896) is still the most attractive introduction to the subject

Beowulf by C G Child (with *Finnsburg*), 1904 (Harrap), in prose; by J R Clark Hall (with *Finnsburg*), 1911 (Sonnenschein), in prose, by Charles Scott Moncrieff, 1921 (Chapman & Hall), in alliterative verse (with *Widsith*, *Finnsburg*, *Waldere*, and *Deor*)

The Cædmon Poems, by C W Kennedy, 1916 (Routledge), in prose, and *The Poems of Cynewulf*, 1910 (Routledge), in prose

Judith, by A S Cook, 1889 (Heath, Boston), in alliteratives (with O E text)

Brunanburh, by Tennyson, alliterative.

CHAPTER II

OLD ENGLISH (II).

I

THERE are more than ninety of the Old English *Riddles*, most of them are assigned to the eighth century, and the authors are unknown Often the text is broken, and the solution uncertain The riddle in verse is a European form of old standing, and there are many collections of them in Latin, composed by Englishmen. From these a few of our English specimens have been derived The longest, on the *Creation*, is based on some hexameters by Bishop Aldhelm of Sherborne, and his conceits and antitheses have been lifted into poetry on the way. The riddle is a form easy to refrigerate, but in the right hands it is capable of rare beauty Often indeed it is not so much a riddle, as a poetic description of something of which the familiar name is withheld It may be very short, little more than an expanded kenning, the average length is from ten to twenty lines The riddler may describe a homely thing, a rake, a key, or an onion, or a weapon, such as a lance or sword He likes to begin a long way back from the answer Thus a skin has been 'killed', stript, cut, folded, inked, and bound, before it becomes a *book*. The imaginative process is much the same as in Henry Vaughan's poem the *Tree*, or as in Mary Coleridge's lines *On the Hearthrug*, where the 'little tongue of red-brown flame' relates how it was once a sunbeam shining on a tree, and then sank into a slough, one day to blaze up again before at last rejoining the night. So, in Wilfred Owen's *Miners*, the 'sigh' of the burning coals calls up a 'tale of leaves and smothered ferns, frond-forests'.

The riddlers are at their best when they describe natural phenomena or living beings. The old *mcon* in the new moon's

arm is an 'aery vessel' swept away by the sun, and the *sun* is a 'wondrous being' who 'comes over the wall' and at dewfall goes on an unknown journey. The *storm* was chained underground before it broke on land and sea:

> Over the cities sorest is the tumult
> When a cloud cometh crashing on another
> And edge to edge Eager creatures,
> Swift and swarthy, they go sweating flame,
> Livid lightning, and loose comes thunder
> Darkly rolling, to bedin mortals
> A threat to towns, a terror to the people,
> Are those pale phantoms as they pace aloft,
> And sharp are the shafts they shoot upon men.

Or the *badger* scrabbles along a new-made burrow to save his young, and is ready to show fight to the 'death-whelp' pursuing The *midges* are 'little beings tinging loud', who 'tread' in castle halls or on woody shores The poems on the *nightingale* and the *swan* have an almost Japanese delicacy and the swan does not sing only at his death.

> When I stay in dwellings, or disturb the shallows,
> Or go on the ground, my garment is noiseless
> My trappings often take me upward
> To those heights of air, over human abodes,
> And I then am carried by the clouds in their strength
> Far above the people, and my fair raiment
> Maketh music and melody high
> And lucid song, no longer I keep
> By soil or stream,—a spirit on my travels.

In the most exalted of all these riddles, the *soul* is a 'noble guest', the *body* is its servant and fares well if it be faithful, but both in the end must hasten away from the bosom of earth, who is at once their 'mother and sister'.

II

The Englishman has ever been a moraliser, and throughout his record the most persistent species of poetry has been the ethical On the lips of Shelley, or of Shakespeare's Stoics, it may kindle into a holy flame, in Pope's *Essay on Man* it may rise to an exalted rhetoric, at other times it may drop into mere proverbial philosophy, or honest lay counsels of good behaviour Its life is thus assured in periods when the higher inspiration has run low Such are

the eleventh and twelfth centuries, when the language and versification are being transformed, and such, too, the fifteenth century in the South. In Old English there is no lack of this ethical verse, wavering more or less above the danger-line of the prosaic In *Beowulf* there are many passages of a high reflective kind, dwelling on the fragility of human power and happiness The ancient collections of *Sayings* are somewhat flat, unlike the racy *Guest's Wisdom* in the Icelandic But there is one lovely woodcut in words, presenting the sailor home from the sea His wife bids him welcome, and washes his brine-stained clothes, and then 'his love is so pleasant, on the land waiting' Also there are traces in these sayings of the change of faith, of the lost Pantheon, once we are told that 'Woden made idols, God the roomy heavens'

In the *Gifts of Men*, which is little but a bare catalogue, it is explained how a man may be strong, fair, wise, kind, or pious, a fighter, hunter, armourer, or gold-worker, a counsellor, or bookman, or poet, or draughts-player, but, providentially, he can only have *one* gift, lest he fall into the sin of pride The variety of the divine dealings is more severely illustrated in the *Fates of Men*. Some, certainly, may thrive and be happy, like the well-paid craftsman, or the falconer with his bird upon his wrist But this Old English Hogarth also describes a raven pecking at the eyes of one who hangs on a gallows and is wrapt in a 'death-mist', or, again, a man falling from a tree, featherless and 'fruit of that tree no longer' Or a fellow 'mad with the mead' talks too much, and comes to a hapless end,—'and they call it suicide' In the *Temper of Men* there is a cankered wretch who betrays his lord and the stronghold An unknown Polonius, in the poem called the *Father's Counsel*, instructs a youth that he is to love his parents, *if* they, in turn, love the Lord, and that he is to shun lying and malice *and* the love of women,—of strange women, it is added

Amongst many pious poems may be mentioned, for its touch of mystery, the *Wonders of Creation* The daylong course of 'heaven's candle' is traced, but where, it is asked, does the sun go when she sets? What earth-dwellers *then* enjoy the light? How do day and night, dry land and wave, and other opposites, manage to 'hold together', in the plan of things? Because all is in God's hand This

sense of wonder is visible in other songs of praise, to be found in the lofty lines of *Beowulf* describing the Creation, in Cædmon's *Hymn*, in *Genesis A*, and in the *Song of the Three Holy Children*.

III

In many of the works hitherto mentioned, such as the epos and the *Charms*, we can say that the foundation is pagan, or at least secular, that sometimes, as in the *Seafarer*, the Christian additions may be cautiously separated, while in *Beowulf* no such surgery is possible Probably every Old English poem has been saved for us by some devout clerk, and he may be either the author, or a more or less active editor, or a mere copyist and scribe When we turn to the extant sacred verse, there is naturally no doubt as to the groundwork In the 'Cædmonian' group it is certain books of the Old Testament, and the traditional visions of the Doomsday or the Harrowing of Hell In the later, or 'Cynewulfian', group, it is chiefly the Gospels or the Lives of the Saints Deeply as these two groups differ in temper, of both it is true that the Church was well repaid for her service in saving the secular verse for posterity For she was able to apply the ancient heroic art and style to some of her noblest stories The language answered to the call, the heroic art flowered afresh, and the diction and music, long schooled in lay and epic, now found new and great material

IV

This epical stamp is most apparent in the so-called *Cædmonian* poems A heavenly being (*quidam*) visited the sleeping herdsman of Whitby at some date between 657 and 680, and bade him 'sing of the beginning of things created'. Cædmon *coepit cantare*, and, on being reported to the abbess Hild and tested, was persuaded to turn monk and be taught in Holy Writ and make it into verse Thereafter, says Bede in the famous passage of his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Cædmon sang

of the making of the world, the origin of man, the whole story of the Genesis, the going of Israel out of Egypt and the entry into the land of promise, and very many other stories of holy scripture;

of the Lord's Incarnation, Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension into Heaven, of the coming of the Holy Spirit and the teaching of the apostles Also he made many songs on the terrors of judgment to come, on the dreadfulness of the penance of hell, and on the sweetness of the heavenly kingdom; yea, and a multitude besides on the divine benefits and judgments. . . .

Bede adds that many followed Cædmon in his task but that none could match him Of Cædmon's unquestioned writing we have less than fifty words the *Hymn*, existing both in his native Northumbrian and in a later West Saxon version In simple terms it honours the Creator who established for mankind the marvels of heaven and earth

The 'Cædmonian' poems are saved in a splendid and unique MS the contents are *Genesis*, *Exodus*, *Daniel*, and the group known as *Christ and Satan* In *Genesis* there are two distinct poems, now called *A* and *B*, of different authorship and date *A* is assigned to the early eighth century, and some, though not all the authorities of weight, think it may be from Cædmon's hand *B*, which is inserted in the midst of *A*, is held to be of the early ninth century or even later *Christ and Satan* is also assigned to a time much later than Cædmon Still, all these works, if we disregard the dates, stand in a fairly distinct relationship to those which are secular in basis The incrusted kennings, the metre, and the heroic sentiment have been passed on to the sacred poetry. The spirit of vengeance is there, Israelite and Egyptian, in the *Exodus*, hate each other as fiercely as the Swede and the Geat do in *Beowulf* It has always been noticed how closely the position of Moses, or of Satan, among their 'thanes' reproduces the scheme of the heroic societies. In return, as already noticed, the makers of *Beowulf* appear to be in debt at many points to *Genesis A* Once more, the chronology is not certain, but both these Cædmonian poems, and the great epic in its present form, may date from the best age, 700 to 750.

None the less the change is profound The devout writers, however gifted, are still paraphrasts and embroiderers, their scenes are taken from books, not from personal experience or from Germanic tradition long in store There is no room for the delicate presentment of the manners of Heorot. Old Noah has none of the melancholy of Wiglaf or the Wanderer. Instead of Grendels

and dragons there are demons, or angels. The poet-minstrel is no longer upon the stage in person In compensation, the Cædmonian writers have the dignity and strength of the Hebrew tales to nerve them, and the Hebrew passion to kindle them, they also develop a new sense of natural beauty The poems, it is true, are of very different quality and style The plain chronicle of Abraham and Isaac is unlike the highly-wrought description of the Red Sea, or the fervent song of the Holy Children Rare, no doubt, is the touch of grandeur or the sublime But this we can find, if we will wait for the outcries of the fettered Satan, in *Genesis B*

V

Genesis A starts with the fall of the angels and the creation, and reaches the four rivers of Paradise *Genesis B* then interposes, relates the fall of man, and leaves Adam and Eve awaiting penance The author of *Genesis A*, resuming, goes doggedly through his book (like Ruskin reading Scripture to his mother with the genealogies, 'hard names and all'), and ends with the story of Isaac and the ram He can be very bare, moving from one empty synonym to another, be it for God or for a patriarch Yet when he is stirred he is no mean poet, his fancy brightens when the Lord speaks with Abimelech or Noah, and he can build upon his text with a simple and pleasing rhetoric The six words of Hagar to the angel, *A facie Sarai dominae meae ego fugio* are thus expanded

> 'I fled humbled and wholly joyless
> From the miseries at home, from my mistress' hate,
> From offences and wrongs With a face all tears
> I must wait my doom in this waste country,
> Till wolves or hunger from my heart shall pluck
> My soul away, and my sorrow with it'

In his overture the poet rejoices in the pains of the fallen angels, and has a vision of the tract of heaven which they had forfeited, it is now 'radiant, splendid, uninhabited', and appointed for mankind

Of all these short epics the *Exodus* is the most startling and variegated It is full of unique expressions and of violent unharmonised colours The Egyptians are left

lamenting their first-born 'the delights of their hall had fallen asleep', for the king gave out no more treasure. The Jews go by daily stages to the Red Sea, past 'brown peoples' and the cities of Ethan The writer can hardly choose amongst his thick-thronging fancies The pillar of cloud is a holy net, a day-shield, a sail with unseen yards, a tent-house, a wonder of the sky Moses is the epical chieftain and commander, and also a homilist and magician. He spurs on his terrified band, while the foe is in pursuit and 'doomed spirits' are flying in the fear The parting of the Red Sea he describes while it happens, in a harangue; not, as in Scripture, in a subsequent song of triumph He points at the waters with his green bough Look, he cries, how the wave is mounting and the highway of the sea is emptying As the Egyptians enter the channel, the 'sea-towers melt' and the 'blue air is mixed with blood' The elements share in this Hebraic glee and fury The lines drop into short jerky phrases, somewhat as in Macpherson's *Ossian* The tale ends quietly with the dividing of the spoil, and with the Hebrews in prayer The poet, full of strange images, is impatient with the plain Bible language, and embroiders it curiously whenever he can

In *Daniel*, on the contrary, the balanced phrases of the Latin, the *Benedicite* of the Holy Children, run of themselves into the English measure 'the hills and earth, and the high mountains', 'sea-waters salt, and streaming billows'. Compared with *Exodus*, most of *Daniel* is a pale production. Also it is in some confusion, for there are repetitions that point to a double authorship But Nebuchadnezzar's vision of the tree is excellently told, and there is one of the epic similes which are rare in Old English verse In the furnace, when the angel came, it was even

> As when winds are soft in the sweet weather
> Of the summer season, and sent from heaven
> Is a daylong spatter of drops showering
> A warmth from the clouds That weather is the best,
> And even so was it seen in the fire,
> By the strength of the Lord, to succour the righteous

It is disputed whether the group of poems called *Christ and Satan* are by one hand and form a single work They are haunted by the Old One (*se ealda*), who has some unusual and piquant features In the *Lament of the Angels* he has

a mysterious 'son' (not yet identified), who was to have been a lord of mankind In his 'windy halls' he laments the loss of his former beauty, but he is sadly lacking in Miltonic pride The time is later than the Fall, for on the floor of hell are seen naked men struggling with serpents, but Satan can capture only those souls who are already rejected of God The *Harrowing of Hell* includes a vigorous but conventional picture of the Resurrection and Ascension. In the third piece, the *Temptation*, there are some curious infantine touches Satan, now foiled, is bidden by Christ to return to hell and 'measure it with his hands', in order to see 'how broad is its black vapour' It seems to be, from door to door, 'a hundred thousand miles'.

VI

The Dream of the Rood is remote from the 'Cædmonian' stories, in Old English, nay in English poetry, it is unique First the author has a vision of the Cross, and the hues of the jewels and the blood fade into each other He begins.

See, I will tell you of the treasured dream
That was dreamed by me, as midnight came
When speaking mortals are sunk in rest
I seemed to behold a splendid Tree
In the air lifted, with light enwound,
The brightest of beams, a beacon covered
With flowing gold, and fair jewels
Were fixt on it fast by the ground, and anóther five were álso
Above, where the beams are crossed, and all the beauteous angels
Of God guarded it for ever No felon's gibbet was here,
But sacred spirits on the spot were the guards,
And men through the world, and this mighty All

Then the Cross tells its story, its own share in the Passion How it had been felled, and served as a gallows tree, how it had longed to bow down to Christ and to lay low his enemies, but how it had stood fast, and had watched the crucifixion and the darkness How the disciples took down their master, how it was itself taken down, and how, instead of remaining a thing of horror, it is honoured above all trees even as Mary is honoured above other women In the end will come the judgment The poet then speaks again He has but few friends, he hopes for heaven, and he ends with a picture of the rejoicing at the return of

Christ with the souls that he has rescued from Limbo. Many sounding verses in this poem are of the long 'extended' kind, and the deep, quivering colour of the whole reflects the inner glow of the personified Cross Some of the lines appear, probably copied from the *Dream*, in Northern English but otherwise little changed, on the Ruthwell Cross now preserved in Dumfriesshire. The Brussels Cross also has a brief inscription, in which the Rood is the speaker.

VII

Some have believed that the *Dream* is by Cynewulf; but in his admitted poems there is little to recall its peculiar power and intensity Talent and scholarship they have, and often grace, and always fervour. and sometimes Cynewulf can tell a story But he is apt to drown it in lyrical expatiations and repetitions, and he does not easily come to a finish

Cynewulf is the first English poet to whom we can put a name, for Widsith and Deor are doubtful cases, he is the first whose features we can in any way divine. The name Cynewulf or Cynwulf, is given, letter by letter and in Runic characters, four times over in *Crist*, *Elene*, *Juliana*, and the brief *Fates of the Apostles* The names of the runes (*L* for *lagu*, sea, and *F* for *feoh*, treasure) have to be understood, to interpret the meaning, but this in several cases is uncertain, and in *Juliana* the runes may be merely letters In *Elene* Cynewulf tells that in his youth he had received gifts and 'appled gold' in the meadhall, but had been a sinner, that God had graciously awakened in him the power of song, that now he is old, without hope on earth; but he awaits, not too confidently, the final judgment of souls, and he forecasts the diverse dooms of mankind Cynewulf has been sometimes identified with the bishop of Lindisfarne, who died 781-783 But there is no agreement as to his personality, his date is commonly given as the latter half of the eighth century

In the Cædmonian poems we are tempted to feel that the Christian faith is little more than a top-dressing. The spirit is Hebraic, and often heathen too; it is that of fighting and the blood-feud. There is a deeper gap between *Exodus* and *Crist* than between *Exodus* and *Finnsburg*.

With Cynewulf and his school the emphasis is changed. The heroic trappings may survive, but the spirit is that of the Gospels, of church tradition, and of the Lives of the Saints. The *Crist* consists of three separate works, on the *Advent*, the *Ascension*, and the *Doomsday* Only one of these is signed, but internal evidence points to Cynewulf being the author of all Throughout there is the same diffuseness, high-pitched ardour, and feeling for beauty. In the *Ascension* the angels sound a ringing summons to the watching disciples There is also a recital like that in the *Gifts of Men* · the accomplishments of speechmaking, harping, fighting, astronomy, and the rest, are evenly distributed among mankind In *Doomsday* the tone is, for Cynewulf, unusually sombre , and we feel that there must be a decent limitation to our historical sympathies when we read how the blessed feel a ' jocund gladness ' when they look down on

> The boiling flames, the biting of the serpents,
> With their bitter fangs, and the burning throng

There are also powerful apocalyptic passages on the blackened sun and the breaking heavens, when all creation is groaning Behind this poem are Latin sources, including the great hymn *Apparebit repentina* , and the four words *Angelorum tremebunda circumstabunt agmina* seem to beat down the nine hundred lines of English Cynewulf's more fluid and easy manner is seen in his comparison of life to a voyage, in another of those unusual Old English similes :

> It is even as though on the ocean-flood
> In keels we were going over cold water,
> Borne in our vessels on the broad expanse,
> In our sea-horses swift , the streaming billows
> Are terrible and endless, that we toss along
> On the windy waves, in this world that changeth,
> Harsh was our sojourn, on that highway deep,
> O'er that ruthless ridge, till we reached the land . . .
> And set there fast our sea-horses,
> Anchoring firmly the ancient wave-steeds [1]

The *Advent* is a series of rapturous chants on the theme of the *Magnificat*, freely wrought up from the antiphons in the breviary. The figure of Mary here overshadows all others , and suddenly, in quite another strain, comes a

[1] By some editors these lines are included in the *Ascension*.

dialogue of fifty lines between her and Joseph. It stands alone in the old poetry, and no origin has been found for it. We seem to hear the voices, as of children saying the parts Mary perceives that Joseph is troubled; has he forsaken her? When he speaks vaguely of threatened scorn and sorrow, she cannot understand, surely, she cries, *he* has done nothing amiss? Joseph explains his perplexity concerning the child which is coming, and which is not his If he rejects it, then she, the daughter of the house of David, will be stoned, if he is silent, he will be a perjurer Mary tells him the truth, and how she is now the temple of God, and let Joseph give thanks that the world will deem him the father of such a child! The apportionment, however, of the speeches is somewhat uncertain.

VIII

In *Elene* the story is more plainly told than in the *Crist;* there is less of Cynewulf's indistinct brilliance He uses the life of the saint in the *Acta Sanctorum* An angel in a vision exhibits the lost and jewelled Cross to Constantine; and the sign gives him victory in the field Converted, he sends Elene, or Helena, to Jerusalem to seek the treasure. A Jew, converted by a miracle, discovers it, and also the sacred nails, he becomes bishop of Jerusalem Cynewulf is lengthy, but he contrives to light up his literal original He sees the lustre of the Rood, and how the fiery sword of the Seraphim who had guarded Paradise

> Shakes and shivers, and shifts its hue
> Fast in their fearful hold

There is much stir and colour in the account of Elene's embarkation, and a crowd of picturesque kennings for the ships They are the 'lofty sea-rushers', the 'ocean-wood', the 'roped sea-horses', and the sea itself is the 'bath-way' or the 'ocean-street' The rapid movement is like that in the voyage of Beowulf In *Juliana* there is more primitive energy than in *Elene.* The holy maid here is a masculine heroine Sooner than wed a heathen lord, she readily enters a bath of boiling lead or a balefire, but there she stands, miraculously,

> Her beauty unspotted, unburnt was she
> In hem or raiment or hair or skin.

At last she is beheaded, and goes to bliss, her oppressors are duly drowned and damned Once Juliana grips a fiend and forces him to confess his sins He is a poor creature, who has to go home to report his failure One of his evil feats had been to raise up a drunken strife in a beer-hall; and we can measure the change of sentiment since heroic times Such a brawl would in *Beowulf* be only an episode, but now it is treated as a sin.

IX

One of the two poems on *Guthlac*, though unsigned, is credited by many scholars to Cynewulf upon linguistic grounds The subject is the death of the saint, which is attended by an earthquake and a supernatural radiance. Here, again, the verse quickens at the sound of the sea, which 'spurns the sandy beach',—much as, conversely, the rock-foot in *Henry V* 'spurns back the ocean's roaring tides' The other poem on Guthlac is full of strangeness In this craggy romance, the saint has levied a lonely hill-dwelling from the demons who had been used to make it their resting-place They torment him, take up to a high spot, whence he can look down on luxurious monasteries, and then, equally in vain, bear him to the doors of hell. The tale is told with peculiar conviction, for was not Guthlac the Mercian an English Saint, who had died in the year 714 *our* saint, remembered by men still living, and was not Crowland Abbey, in Lincolnshire, built over his bones?

The matter of *Andreas* is traced back to a Greek story, probably known through Latin, and hence the note of oddity and fable It is another holy romance, and is full of entertainment God sends St Andrew overseas with a small troop to rescue St Matthew, who is prisoner among the cannibal Mermedonians Andrew finds a boat manned and awaiting him, and the youthful pilot, who is God himself in disguise, is almost roguish in his questioning of Andrew. He demands the fare, draws him out, and listens to episodes, not all drawn from the Gospels, of the life of Christ They reach Mermedonia, which is mediævally built, as in a tale of William Morris, it is a

> Town tile-brilliant, with towers above
> And windy walls

Matthew is saved, Andrew, at the personal request of the devil, is for a time shut up and tormented. The cannibals, who are all but drowned in a miraculous flood, are converted, and presently they receive a bishop A lively sea-breeze blows through the legend, there is an admirable short storm, not too dangerous, with

> Winds arising, waters surging,
> Billows dashing and drenching sailcloth,
> And yards creaking.

X

In much Old English poetry the scenery, like the temper, is severe The *Phœnix* is all Southern warmth and light· The verse is full of sunshine and Syrian odours, and of the noise of tributary wings The birds gather about their king the phœnix, now reborn after a thousand years of life. This is one of the few Old English poems devoted to beautiful and hopeful images. It is based on some rather cold Latin elegiacs ascribed to actantius Sometimes, perhaps, the chill is infectious, a certain stuffed effect is produced by the green, crimson, and brown plumage of the bird The most splendid passage is the description of the Happy Land. Many lines drop into a regular beat, and the half-lines even into rhyme 'no falling hail, no frosty gale' Tamer is the long allegory, where the fable is applied to the resurrection of the body At the end are some of those pleasant bilingual chimes, so often to be heard in Middle English

> Live in the blessing *lucis et pacis*,
> Earning the dwellings *almae letitiae*

In the verses on the *Whale* and the *Panther* there is the same allegorical method, it is that of the 'bestiaries', in which the mythic attributes of beasts are carefully moralised

XI

Dates, as ever, are but approximate, and we can judge only by such works as chance has preserved But some time early in the ninth century the wells of poetry seem to have run dry The causes can partly be conjectured. There was a great destruction of books, and of the monastic homes of learning, by the Danes. Yet such disasters have sometimes

quickened poetry Later came the great educational work of Alfred, who sought to revive the knowledge of Latin, founded our literary prose, and strove to make the best knowledge of his time available in the vernacular. General and English history, and also geography, were part of his programme He also translated the treatise of Boethius, written in the prison of Theodoric, *On the Consolation of Philosophy* Some of the nobler thoughts of the ancient world could now be read in English. It is the sixth century speaking to the ninth The lyrics of that great book Alfred put into prose But there is also a verse rendering of the *Metra*, of which he is probably the author. The prosody is not of the best mint, judged by the older practice Still a new current of thought enters into our poetry. There is the vision of the lost golden age, of the divinely appointed harmony of the physical elements, and of the transience of earthly things Are not the north and west winds for ever troubling the waters and spoiling the roses? But there abides the heavenly apparition of Wisdom, speculative and practical, the feminine figure who consoled the martyr in his cell The next service of Boethius to English letters was to penetrate the mind of Chaucer and to touch his still embarrassed prose with melody Alfred's labours bore little fruit, apparently, at the time, but the tenth century, in its last quarter, saw another great renewal of learning and instruction, and a second flourishing of the native prose The leading spirit was Ælfric, and though his work was not creative the language was greatly suppled and brought nearer to the people by his grammars, homilies, and expansions of the sacred books Ælfric did not touch poetry, save in so far as his prose often runs into lax alliterative metre The fortunes of poetry itself at this period are hard to estimate There survive, besides a mass of lesser devotional verse, four poems of mark namely, *Genesis B*, *Judith*, and two battle-pieces, *Brunanburh* and *Maldon*, preserved in the *Chronicle* It is a question whether these are to be called stray revivals, or survivals, of the earlier muse, or rather, treasures saved by pure luck out of a mass of good work lost. Their energy and beauty hardly suggest that they were produced in a vacuum, but this is guesswork

XII

Genesis B, the best and most dramatic of the sacred narratives, is none the worse for being, almost certainly, a translation from an Old Saxon poem on the subject. The fact, first asserted on linguistic grounds, was afterwards confirmed by the discovery of a fragment in which twenty-six lines of Old Saxon tally with the English There is a flame, a poetic energy in *Genesis B* which make it reasonable to think of Milton Likenesses of phrase in *Paradise Lost* have always been noticed, and it is true that Francis Junius, or Dujon, the younger, published both *Genesis A* and *B* in the year 1655, and that he or another may have quoted from them to the blind poet But there is no proof; and most of the parallels seem of the inevitable kind In any case, no English writer before Milton presents Adam and Eve, or a lost angel, with such dramatic distinctness. The climax is not the Fall itself, but the vision of Eve after she has tasted the fruit, and this well bears comparison with the passage in *Paradise Lost* Milton confers on Eve his own mighty language, but he makes her subtilise like some personage in Euripides The old writer is simpler, *his* Eve finds that all the world is now fairer to the eye, she seems to see the angels in their 'feather-dress,' and to hear their mirth in heaven Then, with the fumes, the vision passes away In Adam's plaint there is the same directness, he feels cold and hunger and fears the divine wrath The tempter is here a 'thane', for Satan himself is fettered below In Satan's outcry, and elsewhere, the poet breaks away from his limited metre into the roomier, irregularly lengthened lines I do not pretend to convey, by a paraphrase, the effect of these light scurrying syllables and sudden stops:

'Now heat and horror of darkness we endure in hell, calamities
Bottomless and bitter[2], we are brushed away
By Gód into gloómy místs here, nor may He hóld us guílty of offences,
Of wrongs we wrought Him in Heaven, and yét He róbs us of our brightness,
Tosses us to torments of the sorest, nor éver can we táke our vengeance,
Or wreak Him wrong in requital that thus He robs us of our brightness.

He hath marked out now a mid-world, where man, who is wrought
in His image,
May renovate His realm in Heaven with purer and with righteous
spirits
Then sate we our malice, if we may, hereafter
On Adam, and on all his offspring likewise,
And contrive against Gód, some time, a wáy to tráverse His
commándment'

The story of *Judith* is an ideal one for a short epic, and such an epic probably existed To judge by its scale, our fragment of 350 lines may have been one-third of the whole. It begins with the feast of Holofernes and ends with the bestowal of treasure on Judith by the grateful Jews, a short doxology follows The slaying of the drunken king in his tent is the most savage and brilliant episode in the old religious poetry We have not, indeed, Judith's final chant, and great is our loss Her spirit of blood-vengeance is sanctified by divine mandate and by the right of self-defence The picture of the revel, based on the Vulgate words *erant omnes fatigati a vino*, is truly Germanic. Holofernes is like one of the debauchees in the *Danish History* of Saxo Grammaticus, the princes in Heorot are no such sodden barbarians The poet commands, and even abuses, the wealth of the heroic diction He heaps up his kennings and synonyms, with no gain in distinctness, but his energy bears him forward, and he makes magnificent use, at intervals, of his long lines or *rollers* It is clear, if we contrast the superabundance of *Judith* with the severity of *Maldon*, that not one but many styles had kept themselves alive.

XIII

A few poems, probably the salvage from a number that are lost, are found in the *Chronicle*, and here we have sure upper limits of date The *Battle of Brunanburh*, fought in 937, has been made familiar by Tennyson, but his gallant measure departs from that of the Old English Æthelstan has routed the Danes, the Welsh, the Scots, and the Irish, and leaves their carcases to the 'garbaging war-hawk' and the 'wolf of the weald'. The havoc went on all day, as the 'candle of God crept along the waters' To us these images come freshly, but they had long been con-

ventional; and in spite of the general effect of splendour, the poet does not leave a distinct impression of the scene. *Brunanburh* has some likeness to an ode by Gray, finished and well-sounding and full of reminiscence

Not so with the *Battle of Maldon*, fought in 991. There is no greater poetic narrative in the language reporting an historical event The author, if not a combatant, must have been, or have spoken with, an eye-witness The Danes threaten the Essex town and Byrhtnoth comes to the rescue with his troop It appears that a creek, or loop, of the Panta, now the Blackwater, separates the forces It is flooded at full tide, and this must ebb before the ford, or causey, can be crossed The Danes, according to custom, are ready to be bought off by tribute and depart. But then,—

> With his shield lifted, and limber spear
> Aloft brandished, and brain resolved,
> Byrhtnoth in anger his answer gave
> 'Wilt thou hear, pirate, what my people say?
> The tribute they mean to tender is spears,
> Point envenomed, and proven sword,
> Tackle that shall serve you in the strife poorly.
> Sea-raiders' herald, haste thou backward!
> Take to them tidings twice as hateful —
> An honourable earl with his army here
> Is minded to defend the folk, the soil,
> The native land of my lord and monarch,
> Æthelred's country, and the cursed heathen
> Shall fall in the fray Too foul I judge it
> That with treasure of ours ye should take to ship
> With never a stroke, when ye now have come
> So far hither to the heart of our land
> Not so lightly shall the loot be yours,
> It is point and edge shall make peace between us,
> Harsh battle-play, ere we hand you tribute'

At the ebb, the Danes try to cross the ford, but are held back by Wulfstan and two others They then ask leave to cross unmolested, for an open fight Byrhtnoth, whose tragic fault or heroic virtue is over-confidence, consents, and loses his advantage. His best men stand by, but others turn tail One Godric jumps on a horse that had belonged to Byrhtnoth, and is mistaken for him, whence confusion. Those who stay fall one by one. Byrhtnoth is speared, and dies thanking God for the joys of earth and praying that

the devils may not harm his soul The rest close round his body, and the words of the veteran Byrhtwold have a universal quality

> 'Spirit shall be sterner, soul the keener,
> And manfuller our mood, as our might lessens;
> For see, on the ground stricken lieth
> Our noble chief, whoso nów is moved
> To get him from the sword-play, shall grieve for ever.
> I am well in years, and I will not quit,
> But I mean to lie by this man, by him
> Whom I love so well, by my lord and master'

The fragment ends with the fall of a different, a loyal, Godric.

CHAPTER III

MIDDLE ENGLISH (I)

I

FROM 1000 to 1200 there is little verse in English that can be read for pleasure. It was a time of formation, political, intellectual, and social, a new literature was in the crucible As inflections wore down, as the vocabulary lost old words and enriched itself from the French, the language slowly took a shape which the modern reader begins to recognise But Middle English, both in its 'earlier' form, which is taken to last till about 1300, and in its 'later' one, demands much application. There is a profusion of terms which became obsolete before the introduction of printing, the dialects are many, and often difficult Not until the fourteenth century does that of the Eastern Midlands predominate, it is the ancestor of modern standard English, and was the speech of the capital and the universities, of Chaucer and Gower Meantime, there was a rivalry between three languages It was long a question for an English writer whether he should not use either the courtly French, or Latin, the tongue of international thought and devotion In both of these there is an ample body of work, produced in Britain, and both of them, in vital ways, unite the culture of Britain with that of the mainland Lettered Europe, indeed, formed something like an 'intellectual confederation' I do but mark the existence of this great chapter of history, and one or two of its bearings on our poetry

This, indeed, was not directly affected by the great line of thinkers and schoolmen, like Roger Bacon (? 1214-1294), or Duns Scotus and William of Ockham in the following century But there is a steady and ever-growing industry of translating, adapting, and borrowing from mediæval

Latin authors Works of piety, chronicle histories, legends sacred and profane, all are drawn upon Poets of many generations were to drink of that well-head of romance, the prose *Historia Regum Britanniæ*, written by Geoffrey of Monmouth about 1136 A glance at Chaucer's library shows him familiar with an array of Latin works, post-classical or mediæval, light as well as learned, besides his favourite Virgil and Ovid More especially, the hymns of the Church, and accentual Latin poetry generally, sometimes grave and sometimes festive, told upon English verse, and contributed, as will presently appear, to the radical change in English metre

But the strongest plastic influence was that of France In the twelfth century, the age of Crestien de Troyes, of Benoît de Sainte-More, and of Wace, there was, it has been truly said, a kind of pre-Renaissance , and in the thirteenth, to name no others, there are Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meung, the two authors of the *Roman de la Rose.* More and more we are tempted to think of France as the Iphigénia who formed the soul of the rude untutored Cymon, in Boccaccio's story , and to say with Dryden that ' Love new-born the first good manners taught ' love, which together with religion, and even more than religion, was to be the chief inspiration of the new poetry The ' matter of France ', yet more widely than of Latin, became acclimatised in romance, in lyric, and in didactic verse Some few examples will appear in this chapter and the next, though it is not my plan to try to note the mass of ' sources ' and literary origins which must occupy, and which often engross, the historian This process was accompanied by the increasing flood of French, or ' romance ', words into the language , without which, indeed, English would have been like a palette lacking one of the primary colours But the creation of modern English verse, such as we share with most of the nations of the West, must be briefly touched upon It has been fully described by the authorities on prosody.

II

What is the true nature of the change from the measure of *Maldon* to that of *The Owl and the Nightingale,* written before 1250 ?

The blostmė ginneth spring and spredė,
Both mė tro and eke in medė. [*in the tree*]
the lilie mid hire fairė whitė [*with her fair face*]
Wolcumeth me that thu hit witė [*mayst know*]

First, there is the charm of rhyme, which in Old English was only sporadic It was learned from French and from mediæval Latin But the use of rhyme was not the essential change The novelty, which was learned in the same school, was the emergence of a metrical *base*, or pattern, perpetually varied, embroidered, and modulated, but never for a moment forgotten, and always present in the brain In Old English there was no such thing There, no doubt, the 'falling' or 'trochaic' rhythm was the commonest Still, this movement by no means imposed itself upon the verse, and the half-line, or unit, might be any one of several rhythmic types, which succeed each other in inconstant rotation (see p 3 above) I have pleaded for the beauty of this alliterative metre, where the number of syllables is also inconstant But modern verse is in its nature of a subtler beauty For here there is ever the mental pattern behind, with its numbered syllables, which fall into the pairs or trios we call 'feet', with its fixed length of lines, and its numbered accents with their appointed spacing Hence there is ever a double perception, first of the fixed base, or 'metre', and then of the modulations Each of these, again, is present in its own full right, and not in the least as a truancy, or a stolen liberty. In the endless interplay of these two perceptions lies the fundamental nature of our verse.

Not that the new principle owed nothing to the old If the French and the accentual Latin line, with their fixed rigid pause and limited variation of the stress, provided the base, the tradition of Old English—for what else could do so ?—kept alive the instinct of change, and of escape from the mere tyranny of the pattern. To these far-off origins we owe, I believe, the characteristic magic of English metre, with its shifting or dropped or doubled stresses and its 'substituted' feet, with its law that flowers into freedom, and its freedom that is controlled by law [1] This magic,

[1] The above is given as a confession of metrical faith, without any notice taken of the competing theories, 'musical' and other, as to the ultimate nature of prosody I am well aware of them, and also of the debates on the historical question concerning the change from the older metre and its causes, but am here concerned rather with results

during the years 1200 to 1400, grows in power, in spite of many relapses and failures.

III

As of old, the three main species of poem are the instructive or devout, the narrative, and the lyrical. Often they intermix, and the first of them, always the most persistent and abundant, is usually the least inspired The homespun *Moral Ode*, earlier than 1200, preaches of reward and punishment, and offers much sound counsel on the advantages of virtue, it contains at least one beautiful line

Crist sall one bien mogh alle his derlinges [*alone be to all*]

There is more colour in the vision called *An Orison of Our Lady*, where heaven is described as full of flowers, and the happy souls are perfumed from golden censers In the prolonged homily of the *Ormulum*, a work of much philological interest, the verse, which is of fifteen syllables and blank, ticks with the monotony of a metronome It was written about 1200 by Orm, a member of the order of Augustinian Canons In *Genesis and Exodus*, some fifty years later, Cædmon's old industry of adapting the Scriptures is renewed, and the tales of the patriarchs are told easily for simple hearers The ear is now relieved by a free lilting measure of four accents, in principle much the same as that of Spenser's *February*

Móyses, Móyses, do óf thy shón,	[*shoes*]
Thou stóndest séli stéde upón,	[*holy ground*]
Hic am Gód that in min géming nám	[*I in my care took*]
Iákob, Ýsaac, and Ábrahàm	

Before 1250 comes that brilliant little fable *The Owl and the Nightingale* a *débat*, or wordy quarrel, as light and lively as something in Chaucer The author has little to learn in the management of his short lines He listens to a *flyting* between the two birds, a steady flow of reasoned abuse, only half serious. The owl is informed that she is an ugly, greedy creature of the night, a singer of gloom and death and trouble The nightingale, in turn, hears that *she* is a tedious and wanton singer, a mere local poet unknown out of England, and that, dead or alive, she is useless to the world I, says the owl, am at least of value afterwards, as

a scarecrow The nightingale, who celebrates youth and song and happiness, has naturally the best of the poetry :

Ac ich alle blissé mid me bringe,	[*But I*]
Ech wight is glad for miné thinge,	[*on my account*]
And blisseth hit wanne ich cume,	[*blesseth himself*]
And highteth agen mine kume	[*rejoices, expectant of*]

The owl speaks out for discipline and conduct The real question in the debate, however, is What is the true code of love ? The nightingale, in defence, declares that she is all for the honest love of wife or maid, and that she has given many a warning that flesh is frail The owl, suddenly tolerant, says that a jealous bully of a husband who is deceived has only himself to thank I read this poet as a free-minded layman, who holds with the creed of the nightingale, yet with a due sense of its dangers and of the warnings of religion He is also a man of the open air who knows the life of hawks, and horses, and foxes, and who has a keen sense of the comedy of animals At last an arbiter is called in, Nicholas of Guildford, an actual cleric of Portesham in Dorset , but he never makes his award Some have identified him with the poet , but if this be so, Nicholas extols himself with a fervour which may be part of the jest.

IV

The craft of epic narrative, after a long slumber, is revived in the *Brut* of Layamon the son of Leovenath, a simple priest who lived at Ernley, now Arley, by the Severn, and wrote about the year 1200 It holds out well for more than 30,000 lines, in spite of its disconcerting and broken rhythms Partly rhymed and partly alliterative, the *Brut* suffers from the pains of a transitional prosody Yet it contains much poetry, and not merely poetic ore Brut is Brutus, great-grandson of Æneas and founder of Albion , and Layamon, beginning in mythical and ending in historic times (A D 689), tells the whole chronicle of the Troy-descended British kings With many broideries and additions he works upon the *Brut* of the French poet Wace, who in his turn had freely adapted Geoffrey's history The drama culminates in the tale of Arthur, who is a more mysterious and poetic figure than in Wace's work From Layamon we first hear of the elfin gifts attending Arthur's

birth, of his vanishing into Avalon with the wondrous women, and how Merlin prophesied of his greatness One day, gleemen would chant his praise, and poets 'eat out of his bosom', and warriors would drink of his blood. Layamon is a transmitter of many other tales on which the poets and playwrights were to seize of Leir, of Cymbeline, of Ferrex and Porrex, of Estrildis and Guendolen. There are scenes in the *Brut* full of pathos and melodrama, such as we might find in the theatre of John Fletcher as when the old queen-mother Tonuenne, Wace's 'Thomilaine', enters barefoot and reconciles her warring sons Brennus and Belinus Or there is the wild dream of Arthur, who sees himself astride of his own roof, slaying his queen with one hand and the traitor Modred with the other

Layamon, like his authorities, is anti-English in his sympathies He is all for the British Arthur, and against those heathen hounds the Saxon invaders Yet he is himself English to the root He knows and echoes the old heroic style and its conventions, and often closely echoes the ancient rhythm

> Feolen the fæie, faleweden nebbes,
> (*Fell the fey ones, fallow went their faces,*)
> Weoren al the feldes i-fawed mid blode
> (*Then were all the fields freckled with bloodstain*)

He has many an image taken straight from nature He describes a fox-hunt with the relish of Anthony Trollope He tells how the Saxon runs like a wild crane chased by hawk and hound, 'then is that royal bird doomed to die'. Or the Avon seems to be 'bridged with steel' by the bodies of soldiers in their armour Or they float on it like fish, but the poet's vision is so fierce that he inverts the image, and seems to see the fish, and he compares *them* to the armour

> Heore scalen wleoteth swulc gold-fage sceldes,
> (*Their scales float like gold-hued shields,*)
> Ther fleoteth here spiten swulc hie spæren weoren
> (*There float their fins as if they spears were*)

Many a romance of two centuries later, when versification and language were more mature, is far less vivid and effective than the *Brut* It is the most gallant venture in epic verse between the passing of Old English and the coming of Chaucer.

After Layamon there is awhile a blank in the chronicle of romance About 1250 appears *King Horn*, of much historical interest, yet little more than a pleasant, slightly infantine tale Unlike most of the romances, it is English in scenery and origin The child Horn drifts in a boat to a strange country, is fostered by the king, father of the princess Rymenhild, grows up, loves her, is knighted, wanders for seven years in order to earn her, vanishes, and reappears in humble guise just when she is being wedded perforce to a foreign bridegroom He throws into the cup the magic ring she had given him, this is the dramatic moment, though there are many more adventures

Havelok the Dane, dated before 1300, is a much better work, one of the good, virile romances, it has some of the qualities of a saga Though drawn, in a fashion not well understood, from the French, where it exists in various forms, it is rooted toughly in the native soil Grim the fisher, the legendary founder of Grimsby (on whose ancient seal he figures), has the 'stalk of carl-hemp' in him Havelok, whom he saves and protects, is the dispossessed prince of folklore, wandering in a mean guise before he comes into his own He does honest work as a scullion he is a bonny fighter, and he is known to be royal, for when he sleeps there is a cross brighter than gold upon his shoulder and a magic ray issues from his mouth Both he and his lady wife Goldborough have suffered much from treacherous persons The scene of the friendly king Ubbe marvelling at the beauty of the couple as they slumber is one of the prettiest in English romance The poem is not sentimental, there is a careful and playful account of the flaying of the traitor Goddard, from the toes upward

V

Soon after 1300 the romances and legends of the saints begin to multiply, and didactic poetry comes again in a flood Much of it is free translation, it is written for the plain man, and in order to reach him it has to be in English He must have the opportunity of learning the great points of conduct, the meaning of the Church ritual, and the accepted history of England and the world This purpose is a clear mark of much of the poetry between 1300 and 1350. The

other purpose is to amuse In the prose *Ancren Riwle*, or Rule of Nuns, about 1250, the two had been happily blended, and in one work, Robert Mannyng of Brunne's *Handlyng Synne*, there is plenty of gusto Mannyng, though little of a poet, is the best entertainer before Chaucer His humour indeed is sometimes like that of a cheerful, ferocious gargoyle He can be a bigot, he frowns on 'dances, carols, and summer games', the old pastimes of the English In one of his tales the young folk who dance in a graveyard are condemned to dance on for ever In another, a priest has a vision of the *real* faces of his communicants, and while some are radiant, others are black or leprous Or a devil confesses his sins to a priest in the hope that he may come away white But he will not repent, and is sent off

> 'A devil thou come, to Satan thou go!
> To that sorwe that thou come fro!'
> He went away alle forlore,
> A devil as he was before

These are random dips into a work of some 12,000 lines, it is a version, much edited and augmented, of a *Manuel des Pechiez*, by William of Waddington. Robert began his task in 1303, Brunne is Bourne in Lincolnshire His tales illustrate the seven sins and seven sacraments and the eight graces that are conferred upon shriven sinners He is a fierce reformer and has no fear of men, attacks land-grabbing knights, lecherous clergy, and bishops who had bought their sees and are now in hell Mannyng is an excellent narrator, and a very distinct and sardonic personage. In another work, a *Story of England* (1338), also full of lively passages, he tells us that he writes for the laity who have no French or Latin, that he therefore uses 'light' verse, and no intricate stanzas, and that he asks for no reward but our prayers

The long rhymed *Chronicle* of Robert of Gloucester, written about 1300, recites the history of Britain from the time of Brutus the Trojan to that of Henry III The earlier part is compiled chiefly from the Latin chronicles of Henry of Huntington and William of Malmesbury, and there is a question of Robert's authorship, but he seems to have written the record from 1156 onwards, and from 1256 to be a contemporary witness. His long jogging couplets

become vivid and rapid when he sees the great darkness overspread thirty miles during the fight of Evesham (1265). It is like the darkness of the Crucifixion, and it betokens the disapproval of heaven when Simon de Montfort was slain Robert describes no less sharply the town and gown riots at Oxford His method is epical and minute, every blow that struck Becket is recounted, and how the sword-point of his fourth assailant was broken on the marble pavement

Sir Thomas Browne would have enjoyed the prodigious *Cursor Mundi*, which relates the sacred history of the world from the origins to the doomsday The traditional 'seven ages' are marked off by the names of Noah, David, and Abraham, and by the Nativity and Resurrection, then follows the descent of Antichrist The unknown author draws from a great miscellany of lore We hear how Adam, when told at last that he was to die, laughed for pleasure, how the three wands of Moses cured four deformed Saracens and turned them white, how Pilate was told by certain *pardoners* that Christ claimed to be God, and how in heaven, besides bodily beauty and swiftness, there will be friendship and good conversation The poet's aim is to supplant the attractions of the profane romances, which are only too well known He will write of the Trinity, and of Mary 'lady of ladies all', and will write in English, more especially for Northern readers, in their own dialect He writes, in truth, rather flatly, in his short couplets, but his poem is a mine of curious things

VI

The hunt for poetry through many scores of romances is like a rush to the gold diggings, three-quarters disappointment The writers and the hearers, in truth, were seeking not for poetry but for a story, and for amusement These works, like the drama afterwards, furnished the chief mental recreation of the time for the great body of the people Most of them are an imported product, the worse for wear in their transit across the Channel, yet they manage to acquire a genuine English stamp There is usually a French or Anglo-French, more rarely a Latin, original, either known or presumed, and there are all degrees of borrowing and

free remodelling The French gift of fluent ease and graceful narrative is learned, more or less In the 'Breton lays', so called, drawn from Marie de France and other writers, the originals are sometimes improved upon. Crestien de Troyes, the great *trouvère* of the twelfth century, is represented in English by only one complete story, the *Chevalier au Lion*, and the procedure is typical The nice analysis of motive is cut down, but the chief incidents remain The real hero is still the faithful grateful lion, who has to be shut up while his master's duelling, lest the odds should be unfair The English adaptation, *Ywain and Gawain*, is admirable

The romances can be roughly classified either by their subjects or by their metres,—alliterative, rhymed, or mixed Up to a point the two principles agree, for the stories of Arthur and of Troy are the matter of two of the best alliterative poems In the same measure, tagged with rhymes interspersed, is *Gawain and the Green Knight*, which of all our romances, except *Troilus and Criseyde*, comes nearest to a work of art The two other great cycles relate the mythical doings of Charlemagne and Alexander the Great, but the English versions of these are of less account Charlemagne is little more than a figurehead in *Sir Ferumbras* and other works, but they are rhymed with much prosaic vigour The prolix *Wars of Alexander* are far better, but how the Middle Ages could listen, though life was shorter then! There seems to be no English word of that period for *ennui* Yet for equity's sake let me quote five lines describing Alexander's love at first sight, they are in no mean style, and show some of the resources of the new-old metre

Sone as himself was in the *s*ale and *s*ag hire with eye, [*hall*]
He beheld *O*lympadas that honourable lady,
Hire *b*ewte *b*itis in his *b*rest, and his *b*odi thrillis,
And *d*rifes thurghe his *d*epe hert as he were *d*art-wondid.
The *l*ede *l*awid in her *l*ofe as *l*eme dose of gledis
[*man glowed* *fire* *coals*]

By 1350, in Chaucer's day, this 'revival', or rather renewal, is in full swing There is a long preceding interval, no doubt, during which purely alliterative verse is not to be found, the rules of quantity, essential to it in Old English, had gradually ceased to apply, as the language changed, and

the Old English poetry itself must have been forgotten. But there can have been no break in the historical continuity of the measure The classic 'types' of alliteration in the old half-line, though loosened, are most distinctly to be traced, and many an example has the ancient cadence:

'With slik a *brónt* and a *brúsche* the *bátaill* asémbild'
'The *swóghing* of the *swift* wynde and of the *swéte* wéllis'

There are now many more light syllables, and other relaxations The alliteration is often overdone; to the confusion of the rhythmical structure, and loses its virtue Indeed, it is often the bane of these poems, as well as their principle. The danger of the metre, like that of the eighteenth century couplet, is to be too easy, and it is liable to drag and lumber, or to break into the gallop of a cart-horse Long as it survived (a poem on Flodden, *Scottish Field*, is preserved), it was really *jey* from the first, for the new versification was now established Yet it had its brilliant phase, and it points to a craving for some medium more spacious and heroic than the rhyming stanza or short couplet The mediæval tale of Troy must go to a tune which does not merely tinkle pleasantly like the bells on the horse's mane, and which admits of some dignity and magnificence

Maistur in magestè, Maker of alle,
Endless and on, ever to last! [*one*]
Now, God, of thi grace graunt me thi helpe,
And wysshe me with wyt this werke for to ende, [*guide*]
Of aunters ben olde of aunsetris nobill, [*adventures that are*]
And slydyn uppon slepe by slomeryng of age

VII

Thus opens the *Gest Hystoriale of the Destruction of Troy*, dated about 1375, and built on the prose *Historia Trojana* (1287) of Guido delle Colonne the Sicilian a work that broadcast the 'pro-Trojan' version of the story over Europe I will not carry back its pedigree, our poet knows nothing of Benoît de Sainte-More, whose *Roman de Troie* had been freely looted by Guido Homer 'feynit myche fals', the rape of Helen is a reprisal for that of Hesione, called by Shakespeare's Troilus an 'old aunt whom the Greeks held captive'; and the values of the heroes are changed, for

Achilles stabs Hector in the back This account was widely and piously believed by the Western nations who traced their lineage from Troy The English poet has a keen sense of beauty and great descriptive energy When Medea set eyes on Jason, her 'sheer [bright] face for shame shot into red', and Achilles, meeting Hector during a truce, rejoiced to see 'his body all bare out of bright wedes'. This cycle had a long lease of life From Guido Lydgate took matter for his *Troy-Book*, and Caxton for his *Recuyell*

The Arthuriad is represented in several poems The alliterative *Morte Arthure* is better wrought than the *Troy-Book* and more even in quality It relates the victories of the king over the Romans and over the traitor Modred, and his pious death at Glastonbury Arthur is no white-souled hero, Modred's children must be slain Still, he mourns nobly over Gawain, the paladin of the story, and in the end he seems to forgive his queen 'If Waynor have well wrought, well her betide!' He is one whose 'conquests shall be kept in chronicles for ever', and 'he shall in romance be read with royal knights' The poet has an ear for the song of birds, for the 'sweet noise of the nightingale' striving with the thrushes, 'three hundred at once', and to hear it, he adds, might salve a sick man of his sorrow A *Morte Arthure* in stanzas shows more sense of tragedy, and tells how the queen, now turned a nun, refuses a last kiss to Lancelot

> 'And keep thy realm from war and wrake, [*misery*]
> And take a wife, with her to play,
> And love well then thy worldes make, [*mate*]
> God give you joy together, I pray'

Malory, who is thought to have drawn on the same French source, presents this scene in his classic prose The poet also recites, for the first time in English, the casting of Excalibur into the lake, and the tale of the maid of Ascolot (Astolat) whose body floats downstream past the eyes of the queen He is not a highly accomplished versifier, his manner approaches that of the average ballad, but the stories shine through everything

There are many more alliterative poems without rhyme, which I cannot recount There is *William of Palerne*, a pretty, loitering fairy-tale of a prince who was turned into a werewolf and back again, and the legend of *Joseph of*

Arimathie, who brought the Grail to Britain *St Erkenwald* is a shapely and very charming little work, possibly by the 'Gawain-poet' presently to be mentioned Erkenwald is a bishop of London, formerly New Troy, and, by dropping one compassionate tear, he baptises the dead body, and saves the soul, of a certain upright Trojan judge That soul had been left behind in the 'harrowing of hell', and the corpse, swathed in gold and still fresh in colour, is found by masons in St Paul's, and speaks, and describes its plight The soul is taken to heaven, to the table of the Lord, and then the body crumbles

But sodenly his swete chere swyndide and faylide [*perished away*]

The company leave,

And all the belles in the burghe beryd at once [*rang out*]

VIII

As to the rhymed romances, which are harder to sift out, Chaucer and *Sir Thopas* must not be allowed to block our way Chaucer takes the cheaper specimens and tells us everything that makes one of them just like another the fauna and flora, the dresses, the chivalrous conventions and the poetic formulae Like a good parodist, he has an amused affection for his victims, and *he* well knows one romance from another It is his humour to pack into a single verse *Sir Ipotis*, which is a sermon in romance clothing, 'Beves and Sir Guy', the kind of stuff that makes the Host impatient, *Horn Childe*, a simple tale quite well told, 'Sir Libeux' (*Libeaus Desconnus*, the 'Fair Unknown'), one of the pleasantest 'Breton lays', and *Pleyndamour*, which may be an invented title

The great cycles do not fare too well in English rhyme There is a fragment of rough translation from the *Chanson de Roland* In *Kyng Alisaunder*, there is a breath of chivalry when the king mourns over the dead Darius, like the Percy over the Douglas. The noblest of the stories is sadly dimmed in *Sir Tristrem*, which was edited by Scott, but nothing can quite mar the passage where Mark finds the lovers asleep with a sword between them and shades the face of Iseult from a sunbeam The dog Hodain too is there, licking the fatal cup, and how much better this is than the

false note of Swinburne—'Hodain, with keen kind eyes that *read her whole heart's pain*'! The other romances, which are attached to no cycle, are a miscellany indeed. It is convenient to divide them into those that are purely secular and those which contain some religious element. I give but a few examples of each

Of the former class may be mentioned the early *Floris and Blancheflour*, an idyl that overran Europe It 'dallies with the innocence of love', and the sentiment runs to softness; but the change is a relief from the usual slaying of Saracens and giants The two children are reared together, grow up in love, and are parted by guile Floris, in a basket, enters the palace which is Blancheflour's prison They are found asleep, brought to judgment, and almost doomed, but they contend which of them shall first stretch out the neck to the sword, and the judges are melted The true note is heard when Floris, early in the tale, believing his lady dead, exclaims,

> If deth were dalt aright
> We should be deed both on oo night [*one*]

This legend is prettily turned into a parable by Sir Edmund Gosse in his lines *Secreta Vitæ*: Blancheflour is the soul prisoned in the tower and awaiting Life and Good, but the old writer is content with the story

The 'Breton lays' stand apart for their neatness of form and their sure poetic instinct Two, *Sir Launfal* and the *Lay le Freine*, are adapted from Marie de France, who dedicated her work to Henry II The former, written by Thomas Chestre about 1350, turns upon a pledge of silence exacted by a fairy bride from her lover He breaks it, and boasts of her beauty to a queen who tries to tempt him He is given a period in which to make good his boast or die. At the very last, preceded by a noble pageant, the fairy rides up in state and confounds all men with her beauty. In the *Lay le Freine* the story is more commonplace: there is a child condemned to exposure (like Perdita) and a relenting nurse, and a happy ending But one episode I am moved to compare to the *Eve of St Mark*, there is the same atmosphere of clear bright weather and cheerful piety. There is not Keats's 'chilly sunset', the maid is carrying the infant in the night through woodland and field Early

morning shows the walls and houses, and a 'steeple fair and high', and brings the sounds of barking and cockcrow. The 'acremen' go to plough, the porter of the convent rings the bells and lights the tapers, and the abbess takes the child from the hollow ashtree and tends her *Sir Orfeo*, another of these lays, is Orpheus in an English fairyland, and his Eurydice, or 'Heurodis', is not 'half-regained', but wholly, after a stay in the world of magic. The pair, in that presence, dare not speak to each other; but Orfeo, for his harping, is granted her release.

IX

Sir Orfeo is one of the few romances in which the true thrill of unearthliness is achieved. Usually magic and marvel are very much a matter of routine A giant is a rather too common species of monstrous man A dragon, though dreadful like a tiger, is not so very strange A ring of invisibility, though a rare thing, is almost in the order of nature. This want of surprise infects the modern reader. Sometimes, indeed, he has to hold his breath. The poets now and then understand the virtue of a silence In *Sir Degare* the knight enters a hall where all is quiet except the blaze of a fire A troop of huntress-girls appears,

> But they spake not to the knight,
> But into a chamber they be gone,
> And they shut the dore ful soone.

A dwarf passes, and then a lady, also mute In *Libeaus Desconnus* there is an opposite effect The wanderer sits down on the dais in a hall, and in a moment the torches go out, the walls shiver, horses neigh, and a 'worm' with a woman's face comes in—one of the many 'loathly ladies' of folklore who are retransformed by a kiss Or *Owain Miles* plunges into the hole that leads to 'St. Patrick's purgatory', and we feel the breath of

> The colde winde that blewe there,
> That unnethe any man might y-here, [*hardly bear to hear*]
> And percéd through his side

These last are religious terrors; and they are matched by some of the marvels in the pious romances and in the multitude of Saints' Lives In the early legend of *Sir Eustas*

a hart appears suddenly, and between its horns is a cross lighted by a sunbeam, the hart is Christ, in this disguise. In *Roberd of Cisyle*, a story of a 'proud king', Roberd wakes from his arrogance to find himself changed into a court fool, with an angel, a double of himself, upon his throne He repents after many trials, learns humility, and is restored. But the best supernatural romance of the pious class is *The Gast of Gy*, the ghost of Guy, a *Poltergeist* of the year 1323. Guy has committed an unnamed sin, which is shriven but still not expiated. His wife lies groaning abed, troubled by his noises, and he, the spirit, leads up to her the prior, who bears the Host The prior sees nothing, but hears a sound 'Lyke a besom made of brome that war swepand a pament' (pavement)—an effect that might have pleased Edgar Allan Poe

X

In *Gawain and the Green Knight*,[1] in spite of some prolixity, there is more structure and more poetry than in any of our romances outside the pages of Chaucer The secret is well kept from both Gawain and the reader, and it forms the point alike of the story and of the moral The Knight's bravery, chastity, and 'gentilesse' are all tried, and we only know at the end that they have been tried with the same intent and by the same person, the Green Knight *He* rides into Arthur's court at Yule, to exchange a game of strokes with the axe, *he*, or rather his severed head, bids Gawain to a tryst in a year's time, for the return blow, *he* is the unknown knight who entertains Gawain on the road, and tests his purity by a strange device in which his own wife is an accomplice, and *he*, once more, is the Green Knight who, in a lonely chapel, by rocks and ice and floods, returns, in seeming, the blow, and then, when Gawain hardly winces, laughs and explains I omit, so that the reader may seek it out, the delicate point of the story, which turns on the kisses given by the lady, the reasons, which are sufficient in a romance, for the Green Knight's whole enterprise, and the sequel, of Gawain's return to court, and the adoption, as a badge, by the Round Table of a certain

[1] There is a prose 're telling in modern English,' by Jessie L Weston, 1898 (Nutt)

green lace. No single foreign original is found for the poem, though for the two tests, interwoven here so skilfully, there are many parallels The scenes with the temptress are told with great nicety, and Gawain, not to be rude, has to plead that he is not worthy of her love There is a rich abundance of feasting and hunting scenes The alliterative verse is broken up in staves of varying length, each of them ending in the tags of rhyme known as 'bob and wheel', which have the effect of a twirl, or frisk, sometimes slightly grotesque

The alliterative homilies *Cleanness and Patience* and the lyrical elegy *Pearl* are usually held, on the evidence of style and temper, to be the work of the Gawain-poet *Cleanness* describes, besides other matters, the fate of Sodom, the Deluge, and the punishment of Belshazzar There is little construction or economy, indeed the bare tale of Lot and Abraham is better told in the Old English *Genesis A* The Middle English poet excels in pace and intensity, and has a Swinburnian wealth of words There is a surprising cascade of storm-imagery in his recital of the Flood His alliterative verses fall into something like four-lined stanzas—a practice that relieves the ear after the weariness of so many millipede romances It is also to be traced in *Patience*, a better-framed and compacter poem This is the story of Jonah, told with simple piety and in a spirit of broad fun Much is made of the filth in the mouth of the whale, and of Jonah washing it off his mantle And when the prophet took ship at Joppa, 'was never so joyful a Jew as Jonah was then' And why? because he was now out of the 'danger', or jurisdiction, of God, who surely could give him no trouble in *those* waters In *Patience*, too, there is no little verbal melody One of the stanzas is on the 'woodbine' (which is the 'gourd' of the Authorised Version and the 'ivy' of the Vulgate):

When the *dáwande dáy* *dryhtyn* con *sénde*, [*the Lord began to send*]
Then *wákened* the *wýghe* under *wód-býnde*, [*man*]
Lóked alóft on the *léfe* that *lýlled gréne*; [*shone*]
Such a *léfsel* of *lóf* never *léde máde* [*bower love man*]

Pearl is an elegy, a parable, and a vision, also a lyric, as Tennyson called it,—if a lyric can hold out through 1200

lines It seems to record the real grief, or *desiderium*, of a bereaved father. The pure pearl is his lost infant daughter, beheld in a dream, and now grown up in heaven He sees her all in white, pearl-bedecked, on the further side of a stream. She bids him not to mourn too much, like a 'joyless jeweller', tells him how she is one of thousands who serve Mary the queen of courtesy, and instructs her father on many holy things Then he sees her under the walls of the heavenly city, amid a troop of other bepearled maidens. Enraptured, he is fain to swim over, but wakes in his garden, in a chastened mood of resignation, with his love now 'equable and pure' The poet allows memories of the Garden of the Rose to intrude into his vision, and we hear that the beauty of the Pearl is such as never Pygmalion—no, nor *Aristotle*'—imagined But these are pleasing sallies and excursions He is also a master of intricate and beautiful harmonies, the stanza is elaborate, with a system of refrains Indeed the verse at times sticks, as it were, in its own honey, the alliteration is almost cloying But the *Pearl*, with its tenderness and paradisal rapture and glow of colour, is unique of its kind The 'Gawain-poet' writes in a difficult dialect, which is pronounced to be the West Midland of Lancashire Hence he seems much further off from us than his contemporary Chaucer Had he written in Chaucer's language and metre he would have won far more fame and influence, and yet, even as it is, though he is known chiefly to students, he remains an enigmatic, interesting figure; his view of life, his scenery, his language, and his workmanship take us entirely out of Chaucer's world

XI

Lyric awakens later than romance. The spring comes slowly up in England there is little to compare with the great flowering of song, Provençal, German, or Latin, that continues on the mainland from the eleventh century into the thirteenth The Latin tradition is the most persistent of all the line goes through the 'Cambridge Songs' of the 'goliards', or tramping clerks; the mysterious, but still distinct, 'Archipoeta', whose famous apology, containing *Meum est propositum*, is a piece of glorious impudence, and, above all, the *Carmina Burana*, collected in a thirteenth

century MS., vernal, amatory, bacchanalian, reckless, and in equal proportion devout. Our record, naturally, is thin in comparison. The historian starts with the Canute ditty and with the songs of St. Godric, dated about 1170, but their prosody, though interesting, is rudimentary. A setting of 1226 is preserved for the famed *Cuckoo-Song*, 'Sumer is icumen in', with its merry skilful measure; and the cuckoo is no longer, as in old English, inauspicious A little later, in the *Love Rune* of Thomas de Hales, the new metre is secure and its melody betrays no effort. Thomas, with his lament over dead ladies and princes, is like a Villon who has turned religious Where now are Paris and Helen and Isolt and Hector? Cold! But the maiden whom the poet addresses is sure, if maiden she remains, to have Christ in heaven for her lover About the end of the century the whole choir begins to strike up, and thereafter the songs of profane and sacred love are abundant They have never been silent since, and this is the true beginning of lyrical poetry in the modern language

The best examples, which are in every anthology, are found in one or two noted MSS The store, by the fourteenth century, becomes so large, that I can only mark some general features 1 The native muse is still trilingual. Why do our poets now never write in two languages at once? It is no mere trick, the music can be curious and delightful. There are the sovereign Latin, the vowelled French, and the new English which is nourished on them both. Sometimes all three unite.

Ma tresduce et tresamé,
Night and day for love of thee
Suspiro,
Soyez permenant et leal,
Love me so that I it fele,
Requiro.

The French ingredient was to disappear, but the Latin refrain had a very long life, and the favourite *Timor mortis conturbat me* was to boom in William Dunbar's *Lament for the Makaris* 2. The earthly lover rings the changes on a few simple feelings The motto might be taken from the *Carmina Burana* '*Revirescit et florescit Cor meum a gaudio*'. The burden may be 'Blow, northern wynd, Sent thou me

my suetyng', the time is 'bytuenè Mersh and Aueril', as in *Alysoun*. the time of pairing for all wild things, even for worms under the clod, when fennel and wild thyme are out Or love is cruel, 'nyht ant day my blod hit drynkes'. Or the figure of the lady is almost smothered under the garden of flowers, or under the gems of the Apocalypse, which are enlisted to describe her All this is in free lyrical form, the 'closed' species, roundel and balade, with their formal rules, as employed by Chaucer, are still to come. 3 The same clean and simple love-language flows over into the devotional lyric, which is much more profuse than the secular and can be equally beautiful It does not argue or refine and is not often, rightly speaking, mystical The poet calls Jesus his darling as a child might do who has but one language for all his affections

When y se blosmes springe,
Ant here foules song,
A suete love-longynge
Myn herte thourh out-stong

—not for an Alysoun, but for 'Jesu mild and softe', and we feel no jar An intenser strain, naturally, is heard in the numerous pieces that dwell and brood on the bodily aspects of the Passion But again, the Virgin is no stranger, she is addressed, and she speaks to Jesus, in the same natural tones In one poem she shivers and complains of cold, and tells him how he is born to suffer for mankind In another the infant Christ prophesies his sufferings to Mary, this is a dialogue with the refrain 'Lullay, la lullay, Mi dere moder, lullay', and is akin to a carol In *Quia amore langueo*, with its leaping rhythm, Mary speaks in turn to Christ and to mankind, the art here is more conscious and accomplished.

Why was I crouned and made a quene?
Why was I called of mercy the welle?
Why shuld an erthly woman bene
So hygh in heuen aboue aungelle?
For the, mankynde, the truthe I telle,
Thou aske me helpe, and I shall do
That I was ordeyned, kepe the fro helle,
Quia amore langueo.

One example may be given of a movement in monorimes which has caught some of the majesty of the Latin [1], but such effects are rare:

What ys he, thys lordlıng that cometh vrom the vyht [*fight*]
Wyth blod-rede wede so grysliche ydyht, [*dreadfully decked*]
So vayre y-coyntised, so semlich in syht, [*accoutred*]
So styflyche gongeth, so douhti a knyht? [*goeth*]
—Ich hyt am, Ich hit am, that ne speke bote ryht,
Chaumpyoun to hele monkunde in vyht.

4 These singers have learned their trade, instructed partly by French and Latin and partly, too, by the requirements of song itself. They shun discords and jamming consonants and like full ringing vowels. 'Heye louerd, thou here my bone'—'Heyle be thou, ladye so bryght!' They use many measures, preferring lines of eight syllables or six, and they favour a refrain. Most of them speak to the people, or to pious clerks for whom the more courtly verse is out of earshot. Sometimes these songs invade the romances. In the vivacious *Arthur and Merlin* we come suddenly on this:

In time of winter alange it is; [*irksome*]
The foules losen her blis,
The leves fallen of the tre,
Rein alangeth the cuntré.

5 In most of these poems there is a note of innocence and monkish inexperience, the world is denounced in vague general terms. It is fickle, and 'fareth as a fantasy'; or it is 'but a cherry fair, now in season and now dwindling'. Yet the light ripple of the verse often contradicts this melancholy strain. One devout author is sorry to die, the refrain is, 'against my will I take my leave'. But he does not take his leave too heavily, and bids young and old 'good day'. Another exclaims that death is not a 'thief' at all, but 'steadfast, true, and loyal', a friend who gives due warning.

[1] *Quis est iste qui venit de Edom, tinctis vestibus de Bosra? iste formosus in stola sua, gradiens in multitudine fortitudinis suae. Ego, qui loquor justitiam, et propugnator sum ad salvandum.* Is lxiii 1.

XII

The true mystical temper, I said, is little seen in this poetry, but in Richard Rolle of Hampole it finds ardent expression That master of the life contemplative, who died in 1349, wrote in Latin and English prose, and describes the progress of the votary, dwelling on the *calor* or heat, the *canor* or chant, and the *dulcor* or sweetness, that reward the climb His unquestioned verse is scanty and not highly finished, but one of Rolle's distinctive notes is heard, he dwells on the approach, ever more intimate, to Jesus through the medium of love:

My song is in sighing,
My life is in longing,
Til I see my king
So fair in thy shining . .
Ihesu, my dear and my drury, [*beloved*]
Delight art thou to sing,
Ihesu, my mirth and melody,
When wilt thou come, my king?

The experts differ, but some, happily, incline to credit Rolle with the beautiful piece 'My truest treasure'—

My fender of my foes, sa fond in the field, [*fender off of, tried*]
So lovely lighting at the evensang tide, [*alighting (from the Cross)*]
Thy mother and her mengey unlaced thy shield, [*company*]
Al wept that there were, thy wounds were sa wide

The lengthy *Prick of Conscience*, which long passed for Rolle's, is now denied to him, and the loss is small, there is little of his peculiar glow and ecstasy in this gloomy recital of sins and their penalties But round Rolle gathers a kind of *corona* of sacred and fervent verse, charged with the same sentiment The mystic vision which is shadowed forth in his prose seems to find no full expression in our poetry until we reach Traherne and Norris of Bemerton. Even then it is by no means purely Christian in character, for Plato and the neo-Platonists have 'passed that way'.

CHAPTER IV

MIDDLE ENGLISH (II) CHAUCER, GOWER, LANGLAND

I

ALL honour, then, to these poets, Chaucer must not be suffered to obscure them And yet, after a course of their legends and romances, we begin to be too thankful for small mercies, and insensibly to lower our standards To open Chaucer is to echo, if profanely, what are perhaps his earliest lines

> Help, and releeve, thou mihti debonayre,
> Have mercy on my perilous langour!

and to see that he must be judged in the light of his few compeers In sweetness, sureness, and ease of style he recalls his greatest disciple, Spenser He has less waste of words than Spenser, fewer passages where the substance has worn slight, although, no doubt, he is inferior in strength. He does not compare with Spenser in depth of melancholy, or in ethical fervour, or in mordancy of satire. His own satire can be fatal, but it is in the fashion of 'the pretty worm of Nilus, which kills and hurts not' Nor is he given to Spenserian dreams or reveries The dream, for Chaucer, is the fashionable framework for a tale or allegory, and is a thing to be treated playfully Even in the *House of Fame*, his only aery fantasy, he remains gently ironical His humorous outlook separates him, even more obviously, from Milton, and further comparison would be idle, since Chaucer, though he commands the lofty style, hardly comes within sight of grandeur He knows nothing of hell, and the paradise, of which his Troilus has a glimpse for a moment, is a paradise on this earth.

He is a master-romancer, his *Troilus and Criseyde* is the greatest long poem between *Beowulf* and the *Faerie Queene* Still, the world of romance is not Chaucer's true or final scene of operations, which is the world of men He is the first free and brilliant intelligence among our poets, the first artist to show the open life of mankind upon a generous scale and in a clear mirror, the first portrait-painter, and the first true comedian And he is so far in the company of Shakespeare, that he too presents character and the human scéne impartially, and in a way that we can trust. These two are the friendliest of our great poets After Shakespeare, there is no such showman of the English roads and their population until we reach Fielding, with whom Chaucer has much in common Both of them sit familiarly in the midst of their own *dramatis personae*, and yet apart from them, observers unsuspected At first sight, Chaucer may seem to treat his pilgrims with detachment, as delightful material for his picture, but very soon, like Shakespeare and Fielding, he lets us know where his own sympathies lie—with Troilus, with the Knight and Parson, or with the constant Dorigen Fielding, however, is not a poet, and the union of the narrative and portraying gift with the poetic gift is Chaucer's characteristic

II

Historically viewed, he appears upon the scene as the great deliverer Not only the spirit but the form of our poetry is forever in his debt He gave a new and prolonged life to allegory, romance, and *fabliau*, but his service to style, and above all to the instrument of verse, was far more lasting He established in English, and perfected for his own purposes, the heroic *line*, the line of ten syllables in 'rising', or 'iambic', rhythm Its pride of place is evident, it is the unit of most of our serious verse, epical, dramatic, descriptive, and didactic, and sometimes even of the lyric No discovery of the kind could well be more eventful Every language has to prove by trial and error what length and make of line is best suited to its genius. Dante, for Italian, pitched on that of eleven syllables, which answers to our line of ten (and this, in fact, in Chaucer's hands, is a line of eleven in a thousand instances).

Dante says that it is the stateliest of all (*superbius*), 'alike in the time it takes to utter, and in the quantity of thought (or matter), and of single words, that it will hold'. This is equally true of our heroic line. There had been stray examples, of course, in English, but Chaucer, adapting it from the French, and becoming also thoroughly conversant with its rhythm in Italian, made it flexible by varying the pause, and found for it a music of his own On this foundation, though only after much experiment, he built his two great metres One is the seven-lined stanza, rhymed *ababbcc*, of *Troilus and Criseyde* The other, destined as we know to a future which he could not surmise, was the heroic couplet Chaucer's prosody has been fully analysed, and its details are of much interest, its elements, like those of his pronunciation, can easily be learned from the manuals. His verse, to be appreciated, must be read aloud with close attention to its mechanism

III

The early association of Geoffrey Chaucer (? 1335-1400) with royal and courtly persons, his marriage with a lady of birth, his journeys, as soldier or diplomat, in France and Italy, and his familiarity with the French of the court,—all this soon determined his tastes as a poet the conventions he obeyed, the measures he used, the writers whom he followed, and, not least, the manner in which he wrote of love. He also knew from the first the *bourgeois*, from whom he sprang, and the professional classes His acquaintance with them all was increased by the posts that he held in the customs and elsewhere But it was some time before he brought this population upon his stage, for some fifteen years he composed 'complaints', and dreams, and allegories, and lyrics, and romances We no longer speak, indeed, of Chaucer's 'French period', all his life was a French period, he never forgot his French models or their lessons Still, for some years, from about 1366 to 1373, the dominant influence is French, and onward from 1373, when Chaucer may have met Petrarch at Arquà, that of Italy begins to be traced This was an influence that came to stay; it enlarged his whole outlook, and strengthened his constructive art, it made his verse more flexible, and prompted some

of his greatest poetry Later, it is supposed about 1385, he set himself to portray English life and character more regularly, and here too his foreign culture reinforced him at every point A fourth element, that of classical and mediæval Latin, pervades his writing from first to last, Chaucer can by no means be understood without it On all this lore and reading, which I am not trying to describe, he drew lavishly, not as a scholar, but as a poet should do, irresponsibly, inçlining to take it all humorously, however solemn its pretensions, using it sometimes as a definite original, sometimes for an elegant allusion, or a jest, or a quotation Vivacity, perhaps, is the most constant note of his poetry, it is never far off, even when he is sorriest for himself or for others.

IV

Very soon, though he has little enough to say, he is a practised executant His peculiar melody is heard in the *ABC*, an early translation from the French, the lines are in honour of the Virgin Mary

> O verrey light of eyen that ben blynde!
> O verrey lust of labour and distresse! [*delight*]

In the *Complaint unto Pity*, *Complaint of Mars*, and similar pieces the style and melody seem rather too good for the subjects The 'complaint' is that of the waiting, unhopeful, I had nearly said whining, lover, and the form, which is borrowed from French, is artificial enough The lady is dismembered into her various attributes of Beauty, Pity, Cruelty, and 'Danger' or Disdain, and these shadowy figures fill the scene For this fashion, *Le Roman de la Rose* was chiefly responsible No allegory had a wider vogue and influence in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Long fragments of an English version exist, and with at least one of them Chaucer, who tells us that he translated the work, is credited The rose of love, in its fair garden, is to be plucked by the lover after many a hindrance According to his mood Chaucer, in his own poetry, echoes either the earlier, lighter and gayer of the two authors, Guillaume de Lorris, or else the philosopher-cynic Jean de Meung, who spoke ill of women and mocked where Guillaume had adored After a while, reassembling as it were those ab-

stractions of Pity and Beauty into human shapes, Chaucer presents his various dreams of good women, Alceste, Emelye, or Dorigen This quest for the ideal feminine pattern is one of the clues to the course of his serious poetry. In the unfinished *Anelida and Arcite*, of uncertain date, there is a touch of portraiture, and also, in the short breathless lines, a throb of passion. Anelida is forsaken by Arcite for a dame who holds him firmly by the bridle :

The longė nyght, this wonder sight I dryė, [*endure*]
And on the day for this afray I dyė, [*affright*]
And of al this right noght, ywys, ye recchė, [*reck*]
Ne nevermo myn yen two be drye,
And to your routhe and to your trouthe I criė,
But, welaway ! to fer be they to fecche . .

The story of Anelida is here involved with one afterwards wrought into the *Knight's Tale*, that of Theseus returning in triumph to Athens , and here, perhaps, is first audible Chaucer's magnificent romantic style, when he pictures ' mony a bright helm, an d mony a spere and targe , and the ' olde wrath of Juno ' , even as when Keats exclaims, ' For large white plumes are dancing in mine eye '

His amused, not to say barefaced, use of his reading is seen in the *Book of the Duchess* (1369) and the *Parliament of Fowls* (? 1381) Blanche, the duchess whom John of Gaunt has lost, is compared to a queen taken at chess , and he is consoled by hearing of the greater troubles of Samson and Dido The tale of Alcyone mourning for Ceyx is dragged in, and the cave of Morpheus, with its ' deedly, slepyng soun ', is tunefully described The *Parliament* recites that noble vision, Cicero's *Dream of Scipio ;* draws, not too seriously, on the *Inferno*, and more fully on Boccaccio's *Teseide* all to usher in a comedy of chattering birds, who wrangle over the claims of three male eagles for the favours of a she-eagle An allusion has been read here to the expected betrothal of Richard II to Anne of Bohemia. The poet is in high spirits, is himself like a bird, and seems to echo his own line,

' Wel bourdėd ! ' quod the dokė, ' by my hat ! ' [*jested quoth : duck*]

There are some reasons for holding that the *House of Fame* was written before *Troilus and Criseyde* Here again the

booklore is tumbled out, though in less disorder. Virgil's Fame the goddess, and Ovid's House of Rumour are there, with further verbal reminiscences of Dante The classical poets stand each on his enduring pillar, from Homer down to 'Dares', the supposed Phrygian witness of the siege of Troy and its reporter in Latin prose Such a medley is well enough in a dream, and the dream is full of comedy and irony The poet is caught into upper air by a talking eagle and answers him in shaky monosyllables, visits the two 'houses', with the earth below him seen like a 'prick', or point, and finds that Fame is so indifferent to justice or merit, that by chance or caprice she is sometimes actually just The *House of Fame* breaks off suddenly amid the lying voices of the House of Rumour It is Chaucer's widest divagation, on his long journey as a poet, and is in the short octosyllabics, which he calls 'light and lewd', or common, and which he does not use again

V

Troilus and Criseyde, written about 1385, is a romance, not a tragedy, nor does Shakespeare himself try to give it tragic grandeur Troilus woos and wins Criseyde the Trojan beauty, she is exchanged, parts from him with many vows, returns to her father Calchas, and is soon false to Troilus, false with Diomede, that is all Boccaccio tells the story with a greater concision in his *Filostrato* Chaucer reshapes it and prolongs it, unfolding each mood and situation through the leisure of eight thousand lines Sometimes he lingers, the gold leaf, if not beaten through, is beaten thin, but we are in an enchanted country, the lovers, as beseems a romance, are severed—except for Pandarus—from the outer world Helen crosses the stage, Hector is just seen fighting, and Troilus himself, as he enters from battle or hunting, is beheld through the eyes of Criseyde Chaucer is entirely benignant to them both, he puts his strength into describing their happiness

Not nedeth it to you, sin they ben met,
To axe at me if that they blythe were,
For if it erst was wel, tho was it bet [*then*, *better*]
A thousandfold, this nedeth not enquere
A-gon was every sorwe and every feré,
And bothe, y-wis, they hadde, and so they wende, [*thought*]
As muche joye as herte may comprendé

Shakespeare puts his strength into the passionate self-scrutiny of Troilus, before 'the watery palate tastes indeed Love's thrice-repurèd nectar', and his Cressid from the first is visibly a wanton Chaucer hardly knows what to do with Criseyde, hitherto so fair and charming, when she turns fickle and makes herself into a proverb From the beginning, it is true, she is easily swayed all ways, like a leaf in the air lightly hung, nothing could be more delicately drawn than her first hesitations Still the change is something abrupt. After the parting, she writes her subtle letter to Troilus, but it does not convince us Chaucer falls back upon his 'auctor', the thing so happened, in a book After all, the ruling powers are Jove and Fate, and they leave man or woman little freewill The poem ends with a Christian invocation, but the whole spirit is secular, and at the last ironical Troilus goes out, fights, and dies, and his 'light ghost' rises up to the seventh sphere, laughing 'at the wo Of hem that wepen for his deth so faste' In one scene, indeed, the greatest, he roams the city

> Refiguring her shap, her womanhede,
> Within his herte, and every word or dedė
> That passed was,

and here Chaucer for once presents the whole bitterness of love

But a breath of the grosser earth is wanted for relief; and the *other* Chaucer, the realist, produces his Pandarus, the bringer-together, the uncle of Criseyde He is equally remote from Shakespeare's old, slimy broker, and from Boccaccio's young willing comrade, Griseida's cousin He is a liar genial and unashamed, full of light proverbs and cheap consolations, he is also a lover himself, and in his fashion sympathetic The first fully drawn comic figure in the language, Pandarus has the life and distinctness of the Wife of Bath and the Pardoner He enters whenever there is a fear of insipidity But this danger is rare enough, and always we are borne along on the gentle surge and fall of the stanza

> Love, that of erthe and see hath governaunce,
> Love, that his hestes hath in hevenes hye,
> Love, which that with an holsom alliaunce
> Halt peples ioyned, as him list hem gye, [*holds, as it pleases him*
> Lovė, that enditeth lawe of companyė, *to guide them*]
> And couples doth in vertu for to dwelle,
> Bind this acorde that I have told and tellė

Troilus, whimsically enough, is made to discourse upon providence and destiny, he is plainly, like Chaucer, a student of Boethius Chaucer, like King Alfred, translated the *De Consolatione*, and his prose has often a delightful, if a still uncertain, music We can compare his balade of *The Former Age*, on the same text, with the more literal version

> They slepen holsom slepes uppon the gras and dronken of the rennynge watres, and layen under the schadwes of the heye pyntrees

From Boethius Chaucer imbibed a kind of lay religion, which enlarged his horizons and which fits loosely enough into his sincere, slightly conventional piety. The traces of it are scattered up and down, as in the lofty speech of Theseus over the body of Arcite and in the late balades *Truth* and *Lack of Stedfastness* In one of the 'glosses' to the translation comes the stock definition, which is echoed in rhyme in the *Monk's Tale*

> Tragedye is to seyn a dite [poem or tale] of a prosperitee for a tyme, that endeth in wrecchidnesse

VI

The *Legend of Good Women* is a series of nine such tragedies Dido, Philomela, all the good women but Cleopatra, are mythical personages At last Chaucer tires, as in the *Monk's Tale*, of the monotonous plan, thus damning in advance by his impatience the whole tribe, which died so hard, of the *Falls of Princes* and *Mirror for Magistrates* In vain does he describe, with swift energy, the fight of Actium, and reproach Jason, and pay 'glory and honour' to Virgil, he cannot go on The *Prologue* to the *Legend*, on the contrary, is unflagging, it is the happiest and most buoyant of all his poems Once more the ideal woman is drawn or dreamed of, in the season when 'Forgeten had the erthe his pore estat Of wynter' The daisy, after the fashion of contemporary French poets, is solemnly celebrated; and the god of love leads in one like a daisy, who proves to be 'Alceste the debonayre'. To her is chanted the balade, 'Hyde, Absalon, thy gilté tresses clere', in praise of great friends and good women Chaucer thus

expiates, according to instructions, his picture of Criseyde. In one form, most probably the earlier, of the *Prologue* he speaks the balade himself, in the other, which varies widely from the first, it is spoken by dancing maidens. This bright overture, all in honour of 'gentilesse' and grace and beauty, is the last of Chaucer's allegorical dreams Here and in the *Legend* he plays, perhaps for the first time, on his chief instrument, the heroic couplet It is the measure of sixteen out of the twenty-two rhymed *Canterbury Tales*. To this measure Chaucer settled down, he found that he could tell a story, and muse, and portray, and dream, and preach, and above all jest, in couplets They are at once natural to him, they seem to write themselves They can go at any pace, usually it is easy and comfortable, with a tendency to quicken, and the lines, as in the opening of the *Prologue*, readily fall into a harmonious period of moderate length Or they go slower, as in the set descriptions of a temple, or of a man's head, and then they are marked off more sharply, each of them making a single point or trait·

The cruel ire, reed as any glede, [*red, hot coal*]
The pykepurs, and eek the pale dredė, [*Fear*]
The smylere, with the knyf under the clokė,
The shepne, brennynge with the blake smoke . . [*sheepfolds*]

or in a portrait·

His heer was by his erys round y-shorn
His tope was doked lyk a preest bifore
Ful longe were his legges and ful lenė,
Y-lyk a staf ther was no calf y-sene

The rhythm is swiftest, and most varied and broken, in the dialogue, and perhaps Chaucer's greatest triumphs are in dialogue

'Madame', quod he, 'how thynke ye hereby?'
'How that me thynketh?' quod she, 'so god me speede.
I seye, a cherl hath doon a cherles dedė
What shold I seye? god lat hym never thee . [*thrive*]

Whatever changes may be rung on it, the base, or fundamental pattern of the heroic line is never lost to the ear, —of that line which is, we saw, in our language *superbius*.

VII

In Boccaccio's *Decameron* the narrators are in their lovely garden, away from the plague and the noises, and they sit still So do the Greeks and Norsemen in the *Earthly Paradise* In the *Canterbury Tales* all is movement There is a double progression first, within the tales themselves, and then in the pilgrimage, with its banter on the road and its notes of places passed This second movement opens with the words of the Host in the *Prologue*, 'Now, lordinges, trewely . ', and it never stops The route need not be described here, nor the groups into which the tales are separated when there is no connecting 'link'\ No one has questioned Chaucer's pre-eminence as a framer of many stories in a single plan He begins with his row of portraits, they are like nothing in English before his time or since The method is minute, in a sense primitive, not unlike the pictures of Ford Madox Brown, we see the 'scaled [*scabby*] browes blake' of the Summoner and the sore upon the Cook's shin Yet some of the pilgrims, such as the Cook, have no faces, nor, for another reason, have the Knight and Parson. The one is all virtue and honour, travel and experience, and we see only his horse and doublet Of the Parson it is enough to know the behaviour and the inner man The Plowman, and some others, never speak, the *Canterbury Tales* were never finished In many cases nothing is kept back, the Prioress and Monk are seen, heard, and known The same kind of delineation recurs in the tales, by way of caricature, the Miller and Reeve describe each other at length There is some reason to surmise that Chaucer took certain features of his pilgrims from real persons who have been identified At any rate we know how he felt about those whom he admires and honours, or who, like the Pardoner, strike him chiefly as wonderful subjects, rascals too vivid to be left unpainted Few except the Summoner seem beyond the pale of his tolerance

I must pick and choose in what Dryden calls 'God's plenty' and mention only some of the typical stories The moral and religious ones in rhyme, whatever their actual dates, connect themselves with Chaucer's younger work, and also with the masses of popular legendary in verse The *Second Nun's Tale* is known to be early, the *Clerk's Tale*

of the patient Griselda, drawn from Petrarch, is almost as naif in manner and spirit, but Chaucer, while he inserts satire against shrewish wives, does not identify himself with its servile ethics, or approve of the unbearable marquis. The meandering *Man of Law's Tale* of Constance is more like a rhymed romance of the usual brand. All these are in 'Troilus-metre', and so is the tale, told by the Prioress, of Hugh of Lincoln But this, the shortest of the completed tales, is far more beautiful work Through it rings the pure treble of the children's voices and the sound of *Alma Redemptoris Mater*, so that the pilgrims were all sobered, 'that wonder was to see'. The folk-ballad on the same subject is only one more instance of this enormous and far-spread anti-Semitic calumny

The *Knight's Tale*, the foremost of the romances, is a glorious piece of patchwork, a second-rate story with a makeshift ending, and perhaps we owe some of its best poetry, the last words of Arcite, the great speech of Theseus ('And certeinly a man hath most honour') to the poet's wish to cover up its weakness It is carved out of Boccaccio's *Teseide*, with much skill, and its pageantry and generosity of feeling attracted Shakespeare, if he be indeed part-author of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* Dryden, too, hammered his own music out of Chaucer's poem Palamon and Arcite cannot both win Emelye, and our sympathies are balanced between them with a carefulness that defeats itself Even the gods are at a loss, until Saturn sends down a messenger to throw Arcite from his horse Yet what riches there are in the *Knight's Tale!* It is full of the clash of arms and the joy of the chase, of pictures that seem alive on the walls of temples, of funeral splendours, of queens beseeching, ladies interceding, gods deciding Theseus recalls the warrior of Plutarch and of Shakespeare's *Dream* The forest scene where Arcite brings food and armour for his friend-enemy is laid in the ballad-world

The Knight is indeed a great describer, the Squire his son, whose head is full of love and magic, has, we hear, no 'colours' of rhetoric, and tells a plain tale He does not dwell on the beauties of Canacee or on the dishes of Cambynskan Canacee is all 'pity', which is for Chaucer the cardinal virtue In this story he touches, as he does too rarely, the nerve of wonder, not so much in the account

of the wondrous horse and ring, both of Eastern origin, as in the apparition—

> In at the halle dore, al sodeynly
> Ther cam a knyght upon a steede of bras,
> And in his hand a brood mirour of glas

Also for once Chaucer varies the pleasant sameness of his spring weather

> The vapour, which that fro the erthe glood,
> Made the sonne to seme rody and brood

So, in the *Franklin's Tale*, May has

> *peynted* with his softe shoures
> This gardyn, ful of leves and of floures

This is the most finished and harmonious of the romantic tales, with its 'tregetry', or illusion-mongering, its point of honour and its contest of generosity We have not the answer of the pilgrims to the question, Which of the four behaved best? Dorigen, who promised her love to the squire *if* the rocks should be removed? her husband, who bade her keep the vow, when the tregetour seemed to remove them? the squire, who released her from her word? or the tregetour, who refused his fee? Probably the tregetour, the philosopher-clerk, who says he 'can do a gentle deed as well as the rest' Dorigen seems to embody an ideal of 'parfyt wyfhood', though the mischievous poet makes her quote twenty classical instances of female constancy

VIII

Now and then this world of ideals intrudes in a disconcerting way into the homelier stories Chaucer's *fabliaux* bring us close at once to the living idiom of his time, and any grossness is much transmuted, like the language of Mrs Gamp, by the mystery of style Still, a *fabliau* is best left in its cheerful nakedness In the *Merchant's Tale* of old January and young May there is a discordant element of inhumanity January is bemocked in the drollest and crudest fashion, but then, the wife of whom he dreams is no less than the poet's pattern woman, with

> Hir wisė governaunce, hir gentillesse,
> Hir wommanly berynge, and hire sadnesse [*staidness*]

—a picture that is sadly defaced in the sequel In the *Nun's Priest's Tale* the motley is different, and the comedy is of the soundest kind Chaucer, etching Chauntecleer and Pertelote line by line, mocks at his own style of portraiture, and, in their discourse on dreams, at his own learning and at learning generally The hue and cry after the fox, in which the very bees join, is told in incomparably rapid verse But of all these mixed stories that of the Pardoner is the most cunning A sermon, but a sham sermon, against avarice, preached before the pilgrims to show how well he can pose, it well fits the speaker, whom Blake calls 'the age's knave' He is carried away for a moment by it himself, and then drops into his hawker's whine But he is made to tell Chaucer's only sombre story Death hovers over the whole scene, over the Flemish rioters who hunt him for slaying, by the plague, one of their comrades, over the old man who knocks on the earth crying 'leeve [*dear*] mooder, leet me in!', and over the greedy three, who make an end of one another Chaucer turns this old Eastern fable into a masterpiece

Popular and merry tales in rhyme, the poor relations of the romances, and lying on the lower edge of poetry or beneath it, had long abounded One of the best is the *Process of the Seven Sages*, another Oriental cycle that was worn smooth in many languages Of this there are good English versions A prince's life hangs in the balance, while stories are told in turn by the wicked step-dame who has slandered him and by the counsellors who have trained him in the seven liberal arts They are told well there is the loyal, falsely accused greyhound, who had really killed the adder who killed the boy, and there is the wise man who let blood from his wanton wife Chaucer did not draw upon this store, much nearer to him is the variant, the *Miller of Abington*, of his *Reeve's Tale* Would he had also handled the pleasing yarn of the *Child of Bristowe*, who strips himself to the shirt of his inheritance, so ill-gotten by his father, in order to save the father's soul Every fortnight appears to him the father's spirit, with the chains of hell gradually dropping off and the face losing its burnt blackness, till all the money has returned to the creditors and the Church Much older than Chaucer is the admirable little *Vox and Wolf*, which is a scrap, like his own *Nun's Priest's Tale*, of the

Reynard cycle Down in the well, the fox declares he is in paradise, and tempts the wolf to descend, and, as they pass in the buckets, he exclaims

> Ac ich am thereof glad and blithe, [*But*]
> That thou art nomen in clenè live, [*received into*]
> This soul-cnule ich wille do ringè, [*knell have rung*]
> And masse for thy soule singe

There are other ancient fancies, such as that of the *Land of Cokaygne*, where all is game and glee and there are no wild beasts or vermin or foul weather, and where the geese fly about roasted on the spit There is also a host of light unseemly tales, early and late, the joy of the pothouse or of the loose cleric, such things die hard Chaucer is never more novel, more original, than when he tells them Once at least, and probably twice, he declares his repentance, but luckily he could not, or did not, suppress the *corpora delicti* For he makes *poetry* out of them, out of the 'flytings' of Miller and Reeve, or of Summoner and Friar The *Prologue* of the Wife of Bath is done with the 'full dark brush', and how is it done? Well, Chaucer is already master of his verse and language, and for homely matter he has but to lower the pitch—only not too far, never so as to make us say that he should have used prose The Wife preserves a mocking echo of the high style, indeed, in her *Tale*, she commands the style itself

> In tholde dayès of the Kyng Arthour,
> Of which that Britons speken gret honour . .

and her Prologue has an almost heroic note

> 'Y-blessed be God, that I have wedded fyve!
> Welcome the sixte, whan that ever he shal!'

IX

There remains a handful of balades and lyrics, mostly written in Chaucer's later life Some are Boethian, like *The Former Age*, *Lack of Steadfastness*, and *Lenvoy de Chaucer à Scogan* 'To-broken been the statutes hye in hevenè', 'Som tyme this world was so stedfast and stable' · it is hard to say how far all this is taken seriously, or is a kind of poetic exercise But the balade of *Truth* is solemn and in earnest, an old man's resigned but not spiritless

philosophy, such as we all may covet. 'Forth, pilgrim, forth! forth, beste, out of thy stal!' The poet can still take life gaily, although the 'empty purse', so he tells Henry of Lancaster, must now be his 'lady dear' He is parodying the 'complaints' of his youth The balade is one of the French 'closed metres', and Chaucer is French to the last The beautiful triple roundel, of uncertain date and authorship, *Merciless Beauty*, is certainly in his manner and well worthy of him

Chaucer is the first English poet of mark who is full of gaiety and cheer As a French critic says, to read him is *se réjouir d'être au monde* He is the natural man, thoroughly humanised His temper, though not undevout, is fundamentally lay The world is always interesting He does not see it, like his friend Gower or the author of *Piers the Ploughman*, as out of joint, or try to lay bare the roots of the social order He is content with the flower, if he notes by the way the predatory insects. He is, says Blake, 'the great poetical observer of men', he watches all ranks from the knight down to the ploughman, with only a glance at the wasters below He speaks to us still in cordial and unchanging tones, and of his art we think not simply as a great achievement but as something that removes all hindrance to companionship.

X

John Gower also marks the set of the tide and points to the poetry of the future He has had a bad name for being able to drone in three languages, but he need not be hidden behind Chaucer He uses the same form of English, much pleasant and delicate poetry can be found in him, and the best of his stories are told with a French fluency and transparency The quiet reputation of the *Confessio Amantis*, and of the dignified lines on the *Praise of Peace*, remains. It is unlucky that Gower wrote so much in French and Latin. There are many flashes of his talent in the *Speculum Meditantis* (more properly *Speculum Hominis*) adapted from the *Miroir de l'Omme*, and also in the *Vox Clamantis*, which is in Latin elegiacs (not the 'leonine', or internally rhymed kind) This last is an angry and vivid picture of the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, and Gower, whose mind is conservative and

pacific, suffers from a nightmare of peace and order overthrown His verse rises to a passion which, if it had been uttered in English, would have increased his fame

Though seldom humorous, he is akin to Chaucer in many ways, in his praise of 'gentilesse' and his conception of chivalrous love, in his harping on Fortune, in his debts to Ovid and Boethius He does not profess the heroic style, and his short octosyllabics would almost forbid it Nor is he a portrayer there are no pilgrims, no Ligurge or Pandarus The framework of the hundred and more tales in the *Confessio* is curious, and many of the stories are fitted into it by violence They are said to illustrate the seven sins and the opposing virtues, and are told to the Lover by 'Genius' The Lover, who has to plead that he is *not* a sinner, is less of a stick than might be feared When he meets his lady he is mute, as if he had seen a ghost, and curses his shy foolish heart ('Ha, nice herte, fy for shame!'), and when alone, he can 'nought but muse and prie Upon her fingres long and smale' This is not dreary writing Genius, who speaks for Gower, is often a ruthless proser, but he is no frigid moralist He has a warm heart for romance, and feels for Cephalus, who prays that the dawn may come slowly as he lies by Procris The poet is gently, not seriously, reproached by Chaucer for giving the story of Canace's illicit love, and he also tells at painful length the far-wandering legend of the incestuous Apollonius Some of the anecdotes have a touch of the *unheimlich* There is the case of a bird who kills a man, and who then, upon seeing its own *human* face in a drinking-well, dies of remorse

Gower likes to take his time over the sorrows of an Ovidian heroine, Alcyone or Philomela When he comes to the tragedy of Medea his usually steady verse, or *pad* takes a sudden leap Medea, while dealing with Æson, takes up her sword

> With which a wounde upon his side
> She made, that thereout may slidé
> The blood withinne which was old
> And sik and trouble and feble and cold

In another tale, Rosiphele on a spring morning comes upon a band of lovely ladies adorned with crowns, and behind them is a lady on a black horse, which though nobly decked

is feeble and galled This lady wears twenty score of horses' halters round her middle, for she has been slow in love's lore, and the other ladies, to whom the halters belong, have been quicker pupils

> The beauty faye upon her face [*fairy their*]
> Non erthly thing it may desface,
> Coronnes on here hed thei beere,
> As ech of them a qweene were,
> That al the gold of Cresus halle
> The leste coronal of alle
> Ne mihte have boght after the worth,
> Thus come thei ridende forth

Gower's aim is to make everything easy and pleasant, to be read and to improve his readers, and to give them a work which stands 'betwixt ernest and game' Let it be 'wisdom to the wise And play to them that list to play'. The lore, wedged in among the stories, can certainly be ponderous there are twelve hundred lines on the creeds, from the Chaldean down to the Christian, and a vast discourse, based on Aristotle, on 'Theoric, Rhetoric, Practic', showing 'how a king was taught' The advice was lost on Richard, and the successive versions of the *Confessio*, from 1390 onwards, show the poet's disenchantment He was forced to transfer his hopes to Henry of Lancaster Still, Richard, who called the poet into his barge on the Thames, seems to have the credit of prompting the *Confessio* Gower died, a blind man, in 1408 He appears, risen now 'from ashes', as a Presenter in *Pericles*, and there he rhymes in his own measure, in lines that resemble his own rather than Shakespeare's

One work by an unknown hand, the *Tale of Gamelyn*, dated about 1350, may be named in the same breath with Gower and Chaucer, and it is possible that Chaucer saw it It is sound material, indeed, for a *Yeoman's Tale* It is unlike the rhymed romances, and free from their style and conventions, without love-making, or religion, or magic Neither is it, in metre or language, exactly a ballad, though it has the pace and life of a good outlaw ballad, it has the English scenery and country atmosphere Gamelyn is a big fellow who lays about him with a pestle, throws a wrestler, and gets a bullying elder brother duly hanged Thomas Lodge adapted the story, sentimentally, in *Euphues'*

Golden Legacy, and through him some of the original traits descended to *As You Like It* the name of Adam, the wrestling-match, the irruption into a woodland feast *Gamelyn* goes merrily enough, with a movement of its own.

Than seide the maister king of outlawes,
'What seeke ye, yongé men, under woode-schawes?' . . .

or

The Iustice and the scherreue bothé honged hye,
To weyuen with the ropés and with the wynde drye [*wave*]

The victories of Edward III in France and Scotland found an eager, though prosaic, minstrel in Laurence Minot, who celebrates the battles of Halidon Hill and Crecy, the siege of Calais and the sea-fight with the Spaniards Minot is the first John Bull to rhyme and rattle with any spirit He is blunt and literal, and not very chivalrous, he likes to think of Paris burning, and of the enemy being food for fishes The triumphal march of the king with fire and sword goes to his head, and sometimes gets into his rhythms, which are full of elaborate alliteration The Normans, he says, were sorry at the sight of Edward approaching

Yit trumped thai and daunced with torches ful bright,
In the wild waniand was thaire hertes light [*waning of the moon*]

XI

All through the reigns of the Edwards there is a stream of ethical and social satire, of laments over injustice, luxury, and over-taxation, of attacks on the lewdness and avarice of the clergy, and of bitter advice to the sovereign The rule of wrong is sharply depicted in some lines *On the Evil Times of Edward II* Most of this writing belongs to the underworld of verse, but two alliterative poems rise higher. *Winner and Waster*, the earner and the squanderer, dispute while Edward III sits in judgment But there is no decision Waster pleads that his outlay supports the poor, and that the Winner does no good with his hoard ' In the *Parliament of the Three Ages*, which may be from the same hand, the vanities of Youth, Middle Age, and Eld are brilliantly described, but the strain here is ethical rather than political. The movement of protest, the mental revolt of the time, finds its full expression in that mighty problematical docu-

ment, the *Vision of William concerning Piers the Ploughman.* Despite high and splendid passages and an abundance of powerful and *dinting* verse, the attraction of the *Vision* is hardly that of poetry Much of it is a welter, which no artist could have left as it stands, we can just trace the course of an exalted argument

Chaucer has no evangel, he is a painter, and the world he paints is normal, and on the whole in fair order In *Piers the Ploughman* it is degenerate Mercy and justice are rare, and men, in general, abuse their rights, forgetful of mercy and goodwill The king, perhaps, may do his part fairly, and here and there a knight, and the ploughman, who feeds the rest, though far from perfect, is still an honest man, on him let us build our ideal, which is given us by the Gospel and the law of charity Nobles, judges, traders, and not least the professed men of God, have all forgotten it Lowest of all is the mob of wasters, who have no warrant for existing

Heremites on an heep with hoked staues, [*hermits*]
Wenten to Walsyngham and here wenches after, [*their*]
Grete lobyes and longe, that loth were to swynke, [*toil*]
Clotheden them in copis to be knowen from othere, [*copes*]
And shopen hem heremites here ese to haue [*shaped them as*]

The poem is an endless string of visions, some powerful and distinct, others merely chaotic Scores of figures cross the stage, and they are on different planes of reality Lady Meed, who signifies reward rightly earned, rides on the back of a sheriff to Westminster for trial Falseness, Soothness, Simony, are abstractions, moving amongst human beings Then there are the Seven Sins, English boors drinking, not wild and Corybantic as in Dunbar's *Dance*, but drawn with Hogarthian vividness and relish In the sequel are Lady Anima, Freewill, the Good Samaritan, Old Age, Antichrist we have to cut a way through the jungle Piers the Ploughman is at first himself, but is gradually idealised into a type of self-sacrifice and suffering, he blends with the figure of Christ, and, later still, assumes the aspect of the one Church, the 'rock' *Petrus*, we hear, *id est Christus*

XII

I do not try, in these few lines, to sketch the intricate structure of the poem, or even to state the many problems

that are still under discussion There are three texts, known as *A*, *B*, and *C*, of different dates ranging from about 1362 to about 1390 Up to certain points they run parallel, but they must each of them be read Then, after several opening 'passuses', or cantos, the work falls into three parts, entitled *Do-Wel*, *Do-Bet*, and *Do-Best*, each marking an advance, by no means too clearly defined, in the moral argument *Do-Bet* seems to add the graces of compassion and loving-kindness to the plain rectitude of *Do-Wel* And it is all a dream, or series of dreams The dreamer, moreover, is the poet, who seems—I say seems—to build up a portrait of himself and his calling Many of the personifications are impulses, or doubts, or reasonings of his own, projected on the moving show One question that vexes him is the fate hereafter of the virtuous unbaptised pagans It seems counter to divine justice that they should be damned, and, in a strange episode, he is given to understand that they are not cut off from hope

Now all this is to take the poem as it stands, as the work of William Langland But some eminent scholars argue, on grounds of text and dialect and style for a multiple authorship There is, so far, no agreement On these matters I cannot speak, though the artistic evidence, so far as it goes, I believe to point to a single hand There is the same kind of inequality everywhere, the same mixture of flats and elevations, the same sort of observing temper, and the same moral passion But, meanwhile, any portrait of 'William Langland', 'Long Will', the tramping clerk who sings *placebos* for the dead and refuses to salute the notables in Cheapside, must be taken with a certain reserve

As for the poetry, it sinks under the sand for long spaces, lost in haranguing and arguing, and fitfully shoots up again One of the summits of *Piers the Ploughman* is to be found at the close of *Do-Bet*, in the pictures of the Crucifixion and the Harrowing of Hell Grandeur is rare in Middle English literature, it is present in Lucifer's vision of Christ nearing the gates, 'sailing hitherward with glory and great light', and bidding the 'duke of this dim place' unbar But the climax of the poem is in *Do-Best*, where the dream returns to the real world of the fourteenth century Its condition is such that Christ might seem to have risen in vain Antichrist now appears, and in his train are Eld and Death, and

the great unrespecting Plague which spares the Palamons and Emelyes no more than kaisers and popes

> Many a louely lady and lemmannes of knyghtes
> Swouned and swelted for sorwe of Dethes dyntes

Conscience at last rises, half-dazed, and goes forth again to look for goodness upon the earth Such is the only way the true *no-solution*, in this life at least, for the pilgrim

The chief literary source of the poet, or poets, is the Vulgate, and the chanting Latin often breaks into the verse

> Patriarkes and prophets, *populus in tenebris,*
> Songen seynt Iohanes songe *ecce agnus dei*

The alliterative measure exhibits all its powers and all its vices It can run on with insupportable prolixity, sometimes on one letter for several lines But it lends itself to satire, to brilliant picturing, to lofty appeal, and not least to processional and massed effects I quote some lines that show at once the broad humanity of the writer, and his occasional power of harmonising a long paragraph. These crowded *plurals* are one of his favourite devices

Ac olde men and hore that helples beeth and nedy, [*But*]
And wommen with childe that worche ne mowen,
Blynde men and bedreden and broken in here membres,
And alle poure pacientes a-payed of godes sonde,
[*content, visitation*]
As mesels and mendinauntes men y-falle in myschef,
[*lepers, beggars*]
As prisons and pilgrimes paraunter men y-robbed,
[*prisoners perhaps,*]
Other by-lowe thorwe luthere men and lost here catel after,
[*Or slandered, evil, goods*]

Other thorgh fure other thorwe flood falle to pouerte,
That taken these meschiefes meekliche and myldliche at herte,
For loue of here lowe hertes oure lord hath hem graunted
Here penaunce and here purgatorie vpon thys puie erthe,
And pardon with Peers plouhman *a pena et culpa*

XIII

Swift might have enjoyed the irony—for there is no poetry—in *Richard the Redeless*, written in 1399 either by Langland or by an imitator The waster-favourites, the misleaders of King 'Richard void of counsel', are spoken of

in terms of their own clothes, they *are* the Dutch coats, with zigzag edges and trailing sleeves But the satire is mostly cumbrous, and *Pierce the Ploughman's Creed*, dated about 1394, and by a writer unknown, shows far more talent. The 'creed' is that of the Apostles, and it is simply held by the ragged ploughman, whose infant is seen lying in a 'bowl'. The orders black, white, and gray, and the Austin Friars, say the very worst—that is, the truth—about one another, they confide in Piers, and are ready, for a consideration, to sell him something better than the creed or the Beatitudes. *They* are not pure in heart, or peacemakers

> Asay of her soberness and thou might y-knowen,
> There is no waspe in this worlde that will wilfulloker stingen,
> For stappinge on a too of a stincande frere!

There is a bitter and circumstantial account of a Dominican house and its luxurious refectory But the best after-fruit of *Piers the Ploughman* is *Death and Life*, a dream in which the Harrowing of Hell is once more re-told That event is the climax of a fierce debate Death and his retinue of sins are depicted roughly and horribly, Life, with an almost pagan glow and frankness, like Spenser's 'fair young lusty boy' Let us not talk too much of the 'gloom of the Middle Ages' Life shows her bosom and neck, 'that gave light on the land as beams of the sun', and about her are birds, and hawthorn, and 'red rayling [*decking*] roses, the riches of flowers' The dreamer wakes in a happy and pious mood

The popular sacred drama was already flourishing in Chaucer's time, but a note upon it is reserved (Ch VIII)

CHAPTER V

THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

I

THE English Renaissance, greatly to its enrichment, was to flower very late, and in the fifteenth century poetry can still be called mediæval. Much of it is in the nature of a continuation, but there is also a new beginning The weight of poetry shifts from the South to the North, the dominant fact is the memory and influence of Chaucer, arousing and blending with the Scottish genius But first to speak of his English disciples, John Lydgate, Thomas Occleve, Sir Thomas Clanvowe, and the authors of the *Flower and the Leaf* and the *Assembly of Ladies*

Who will profess to have read all of John Lydgate, the monk of Bury St Edmunds? He is held responsible for 100,000 lines, and of many more the canon is debated His name survived through the centuries that could not hear the music of his master, and he is the subject of an interesting essay by Gray His prosody suffers through the breakdown of the *e*-inflexions, but he was probably born about 1370 and cannot have been quite ignorant of Chaucer's scansion. Wittingly or not, he maltreats the heroic line, dropping the light syllable just where it is most wanted

> 'He took his hórs / stóndyng on the gréne'
> 'So mércylès / in his crúeltè'

Lydgate's other metrical vagaries can be classified, but the discords are not thereby removed His short lines are less embarrassed, and can be fluent and agreeable The titles of his poems would fill several of these pages There are tales, allegories like the *Temple of Glass*, saints' lives, countless effusions moral and devout His most massive works are translations, or rather adaptations, the *Story of Thebes*,

told by a Canterbury pilgrim, and told with some colour and energy, the *Troy-Book*, a poor thing beside the *Gest Hystoriale*, the vast and desolate *Falls of Princes*, based on Boccaccio's Latin prose A verse from *The Mutability of Human Affairs* will show Lydgate's happier style and feeling for beauty, the last line is the refrain

> The golden chayre of Phebus in the eyre
> Chasith mistis blake, that thay dar not appere,
> At whos uprist mounteyns be maade so feyre,
> As thei were newly gilt with his bemys clere
> The night doth folowe, appallith all his chere,
> Whan Western wawis his stremys overclose,
> Reken all beaute, all fresshnes that is here,—
> All stant in chaunge like a mydsomer rose

Melody struggles through, and it is Lydgate's own, though his debt to Chaucer in respect of matter, language, and sentiment is hard to over-estimate He tells us most about himself in his *Testament*, where he is seen vivaciously repenting of many boyish japes and profanities The *Entry of Henry VI into London* is a bright motley picture of the ceremonies, performed 'towards the end of windy February'. Nature and Fortune are there, dressed up, also the seven Liberal Arts, not to speak of Enoch and Elias offering their gifts Experts differ about the authorship of *London Lickpenny*, a lively little piece relating the woes of a rustic who is driven from one court of justice to another, having but a penny piece in his pocket Doubts are also raised concerning the beautiful *Lover's Complaint*, spoken by a woman, and the rampant and excellent *fabliau* of the *Lady Prioress and the Three Suitors* A choice anthology of Lydgate's verse, to include these pieces with a due warning, is to be desired

Chaucer looks old and somewhat frail and wraith-like in the marginal portrait of a MS of Thomas Occleve, or Hoccleve (*c* 1368–*c* 1446), the best story-teller amongst his English disciples There is a streak of the *macabre* in the adventures of *Jonathas*, the hero has been beguiled of his magic carpet by a leman, and stranded far away He discovers a fruit that causes leprosy, and he returns to take a savage vengeance on the wanton In *Jereslaus* there is a good empress who resists many assailants and is left hanging, like Absalom, by her hair Occleve, like his master, can be

confidential In his light youth he spent too much, treating thirsty damsels to wine and 'wafers', for a time he lost his wits and his memory, and further, with much misgiving, he married Most of his avowals are found in *Le Male Regle de Thomas Occleve*, a dialogue between the poet and a beggar. It is the overture to *De Regimine Principum*, a body of heavy good advice offered to the heir-apparent Prince Henry. Occleve fails sadly in 'keeping of the accent', although his lines, more frequently than Lydgate's, have their full tale of syllables But we cannot deny poetic fancy to the man who, in speaking of his old age, could write

> In ernest now, the hony fro the hyve
> Of my spirit withdraweth, wonder blyve [*swiftly*]

The *Cuckoo and the Nightingale*, supposed to have been written about 1403, by Sir Thomas Clanvowe, is a debate upon the joys and disappointments of the lover The nightingale, silenced by the cynical cuckoo, summons the poet to stone him away, and then the birds hold parliament All, in a sense, is conventional, but there is a happy unity of tone, which would have been broken by any note of deeper feeling, there is no learning and no mythology Chaucer's prosody, though with some liberties, is observed in the short five-line stanzas, which have a nimbleness and delicacy of their own The rhyme-endings in one of them recall Sidney's greatest lyric

> For Love his servaunts evermore amendeth,
> And from al evel taches hem defendeth, [*blemishes*]
> And maketh hem to brenné right as fyr
> In trouthe and in worshipful desyr,
> And, whom him liketh, joye ynough hem sendeth

The same tune is still remembered, perhaps seventy years later, in the *Flower and the Leaf* and the *Assembly of Ladies* The former poem, honoured by Keats and also an inspiration to Dryden, is the better and perhaps the earlier of the two The *Assembly*, a heavier thing, looks like the work of an imitator, though some have assigned it to the same hand It celebrates, in more abstract style, loyalty in love and the attendant virtues In both poems a woman is the speaker, though not of necessity the author The *Flower and the Leaf* is full of flowers and greenery, of dresses and shining armour, and of the voices, 'to angels most lyk', of gemmed

ladies The constancy of the leaf and the frailness of the flower are symbolised by the rival companies, and we may leave Keats to praise the 'pleasantness' of the scene

II

There is an aftercrop in the North of un-Chaucerian romances Some are in very difficult language, and also in a complicated metre which is alliterative and rhymed, 'wheeled' and 'bobbed' In the crabbed *Anters*, or adventures, of *Arthur at the Tarnewathelan*, Guenevere, in Inglewood forest, receives counsel from the ghost of her mother, to the accompaniment of thunder and eclipse There is much phantom 'yowling and yammering' and the dogs fly in panic In *Rauf Coilyear*, or Ralph the Collier, the feudal values and assumptions of romance are pleasantly upset The collier and his wife have the advantage in courtesy and humour over the king who is wandering in disguise Ralph, deservedly, is knighted and performs the usual exploits The whole spirit of the poem is gay and independent But of all these works the most attractive is the 'epistle' or *Pistill of Susane*, the tale of Susanna and the Elders It can be safely assigned to the mysterious Huchown, who has been credited with many more poems, but as to these there is little agreement He softens the rigour of the Vulgate story The scene is a pleasance, described indeed too much as in a gardener's catalogue But Huchown has the gift of pathos Susanna, condemned and innocent, takes what seems to be a farewell of her husband Joakim

Heo keuered upon hire knes, and cussed his hand,
[*She rose up, kissed*]
'For I am dampned, I ne dar disparage thi mouthe'
[*condemned, disgrace*]
Was neuer a more sorweful segge bi se nor bi sand, [*man*]
Ne neuer a soriore siht bi north ne bi southe,
Tho thare [*than*]
Thei toke the feteres of hire fete, [*off*]
And euer he cussed that sweet, [*kissed*]
'In other world schal we mete'
Seide he no mare

III

The Humber rather than the Tweed was the southward boundary of Northern English, the only 'dialect' that long

held its own as an instrument of poetry beside the language of Chaucer and Gower. The *Cursor Mundi* had been written in it, and many a pious legend. The Scottish poets gave it pride of place and length of days Deep in debt to Chaucer, they set their own print upon everything, and once at least, in the *Testament of Cresseid*, his art is matched, or even bettered, by 'the patience of the North' The first utterance, and one of the truest, of the Scottish spirit, John Barbour's *Brus*, is independent of Chaucer This plain animated narrative, written in short couplets, has none of the Southern melodies or rhetoric The author, who was Archdeacon of Aberdeen, composed it about 1375 The story is in outline true, though rounded off into legend Bruce is distinct, in his bravery, ferocity, magnanimity, and kindness to the humble He was not destined to atone, as he wished, by a pilgrimage for his slaying of many an innocent man, even his heart, which was to go to Palestine in his default, must rest in Melrose Edward Bruce, Randolph, and James of Douglas who is the second hero, are no less clearly presented The common folk are vivid too one is Francass, who showed the besiegers the steep private way up the Rock in Edinburgh, which he had climbed in his youth as a lover Another actor is Bruce's dog who leaps at the ambuscaders, and, exclaims his master, 'God and my hound has slain the tua' Barbour has an eye for colour, he notes the sun 'blinking on the broad shields' before a fray, and also for the lie of the land, for the edge between cliff and water, where the foe are fatally cut off Bannockburn, the climax of the saga, is described at length In the *Lord of the Isles* Scott pays his dues to the old poet Barbour also wrote a *Brut*, of which nothing remains He is no longer credited with the authorship of a mass of legendary, or of a *Troy-Book*

The *Wallace* of Blind Harry, or Henry the Minstrel, a poem which was cherished for centuries in Scottish homes, is dated some seventy years later than the *Brus*. The annals of the earlier hero had long since been coloured into a romance. They are recited doggedly, with a kind of lumbering patience, yet with an energy that holds the mind Wallace is tedious enough when he 'swaps' through 'blood and bone and sinew' like a giant in a fable The story quickens when he fights in France with a caged lion, or at sea with the 'red reiver'

who presently becomes his follower, and, above all, when women enter on the scene The mistress, who has betrayed Wallace under threat of death and promise of riches, repents and sees to his safety, just in time, and his true love, who has waited for honourable marriage, makes him happy, only to be foully slaughtered afterwards There is an admirable passage of chivalry and bargaining when the Queen of England comes, but in vain, to ask the Wallace for terms of peace The Minstrel, unlike Barbour, owes much to Chaucer, and the smoother, more 'enamelled' style stands out stiffly against the Northern idiom and the too often hampered rhythm of the couplets Harry, according to the earliest notice, was born blind Some have questioned this fact, seeing that he has many descriptions of nature and the seasons But the pictures he could have learned from books or hearsay, and the sensations recorded are often those which in the blind are most acute He notes the 'clear voices' of birds, the 'sweet vapour' rising from the earth, and the 'humble' or gentle 'breath' in meadow or forest Harry was a wandering reciter, not so unlettered as he professes to be, he is said to have earned his keep by saying his poem to persons of rank He states that he took his material from the book of John Blair, who had served with Wallace, but the book has not been discovered, nor Blair either

IV

The Northern followers of Chaucer knew enough of his prosody to capture something of his music James I of Scotland, the earliest of them, in his *Kingis Quair*, or Book, offers his 'envoy' to the 'impnis', or hymns, of Gower and Chaucer, 'poetis laureate In moralitee and eloquence ornate', and he uses without effort the Troilus-measure, afterwards often called the 'rhyme royal' He is also steeped in the *Romance of the Rose* Indeed allegory, like some fatal plant originally imported for ornament or medicine, was long to strangle our poetry James also descants on the goddess Fortune, that mediæval nuisance of Latin extraction Yet the *Kingis Quair* is honest poetry and full of beauties It is saved by the spirit of delight that bubbles up through it, by the vision of the lady in all her 'bountee, richesse, and wommanly facture', by the flowers who 'thank' the

warm sun coming with his 'angel wingis', and by the poet's invocation to his 'unquiet spirit', 'O besy goste, ay flikering to and fro!' 'Blawė, wynd, blawe, and do the leves shake!', he cries, in order to make the nightingale strike up The *Kingis Quair* is the happiest poem of its time During his long years of internment in England James enjoyed much freedom and was generously educated. He tells a true story, freely embellished If Chaucer's Palamon had never seen Emelye from the tower in Athens, perhaps James would not have seen Lady Jane Beaufort from his prison window In 1424 she became his queen, and the poem seems to have been made not long before In his ballad the *King's Tragedy* Rossetti relates the murder of James in 1437, the heroine there is Catherine Douglas, or Bar-lass, who puts her arm in the staple of the door trying to save him

With its heavy atmosphere and its perception of beauty in the midst of ghastliness, Robert Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid* suggests some modern 'Pre-Raphaelite' distilment of romance rather than anything in the English Middle Ages. The poet wonders whether 'all that Chaucer wrote was true', and he imagines Cresseid deserted by Diomede and stricken leprous by the gods for blaspheming Venus and Cupid She sees her doom in her mirror, and sallies out with other wretches, bearing the cup and clapper and asking alms There is nothing in the Troilus story as told by Boccaccio, Chaucer, or Shakespeare, to excel the episode that follows Troilus passes, and sees something that awakens a memory

> Within ane quhile he changit mony hew,
> And nevertheless, not ane ane other knew

Cresseid, on learning who the knight had been, makes first her lament and then her testament, bequeathing to Troilus the ring he had once given her, and also, as if in contrition, her spirit to Diana Henryson makes the whole subject his own, though he freely appropriates Chaucer's language and movement By tradition, he taught school at Dunfermline, and is it in earnest, or is it a dominie's jest, that he tagged a 'morality' to each of his thirteen *Fables*? For they are seldom moral, several are taken from the Reynard-saga and celebrate humorous cunning, the power

of the weaker in body to outwit the stronger All are told with rapid and musical ease, the fables of Gay are cheap beside them, they even remind us of Krylov, one of the great masters of the form Henryson uses popular versions of Esop, who appears in full dress with white hair and inkhorn. Best of all is the history of the fox who shammed dead, managed to drop the fish out of the cadger's cart, led the wolf to sham dead also, and got him thrashed by the cadger Henryson is equally at home in the short lines of lyrical narrative, his gay little pastoral *débat, Robene and Makyne,* is known to all, and ends with a truly Scottish kick-up of the heels, and there is the same pace in the *Bludy Serk,* which is something between a romance and a ballad He is thought to have flourished during the last quarter of the century

The 'aureate' diction visible in James the First and carried on by Henryson comes to its extreme in Dunbar and Douglas It is gilded rather than golden, but the gilding can be excellent The aim, says one authority, was to 'bring dignity, ornament, and rhythm into the vernacular' The plain manner of Barbour and the riotous idiom of the people would not do for a love-allegory or for the prothalamy of a queen The language handed down from Chaucer was enriched by a stream of fresh words drawn straight from the French and by at least as many from the Latin Hence a new 'rethorik', a thing of artifice, which is often a thing of beauty It has its own pomp and colour, like a new pipe in an organ, it swells the tide of sound But it owes part of its effect to the vernacular creeping in perforce, as in Dunbar's *Goldin Terge.* The targe is Reason shielding the poet from the arrows of love, and Chaucer's spring morning is transformed

> Up sprang the goldin candill matutyne
> With cleir depurit bemis christilline

That is 'aureate', and we hear how the sunbeams are cast *back* on the leafage from the stream Soon comes the saving Scots

> The bonk was grene, the bruke wes full of bremis, [*bream*]
> The staneris clere as sternis in frosty nicht [*gravel on the floor*] [*stars*]

V

The many-mooded William Dunbar (? 1460–? 1520) is the best executant of all the Scottish poets before Burns He is a 'virtuoso,' one who loves to sport with his instrument and show off its powers Not like Burns a singer, he has the same gifts of raking satire, of speed and concision, and a similar freedom of mind Dunbar does not care what he says, at times he hath a devil, and there is a light in his eye that mocks at decorum Then comes revulsion, and no bard is more sober and religious Also he is a fertile inventor and bequeather of poetic forms, both a courtly and a popular writer After roaming as a Franciscan friar, he appears about 1500, now a priest, installed under the auspices of James IV He is not servile, but on easy terms with the king, jibing at the court officers and capering in the palace revels In 1503 he celebrates the royal marriage with Margaret Tudor, in the *Thrissill and the Rois* Later, in her widowhood, he bids her 'banish all bale', for she is still young, and tells her not to 'fade' her face with weeping. After Flodden Dunbar vanishes

In the *Thrissill and the Rois* the English Rose, the bride, is besung by all the birds, and much advice is proffered to the Thistle, with his 'radius crown of rubeis' and his 'busche of speiris' In this ornate and opulent work the *Parliament of Birds* is well remembered The *Merle and the Nightingale* is a 'debate' of much beauty, the theme is denoted by the two refrains, 'A lusty life in luvis schervice bene' and 'All luve is lost but upone God allone' a text to which the blackbird is soon converted Some other pious chants have been assigned to Dunbar's old age, but he is essentially a mutable poet, and they may only express a recurrent mood He writes *Of the Warldis Vanity*, and muses fervently on the Passion and Resurrection Aureation runs mad in his address to Our Lady as 'hodiern, sempiterne, angelicall regyne!' One of his pleasantest extravagances is *In Honour of the City of London*, the 'flour of cities all', and 'gemme of all joy, jasper of jocunditie' But in the *Merchantis of Edinburg* he censures the odours and quarrels of the streets, and hammers upon the refrain, 'Think ye no shame?', in good angry vernacular. Dunbar's many satires and 'flytings' are full of rampant fancy, of joyous

profanity and 'sculduddery' He parodies the *Dirige*, and his *Kittok*, the ale-wife who has slipt away from heaven for a drink, is kept out by St Peter for good and all Dunbar, however, is seldom bad-tempered, and there is no malice in his enormous exchange of mud-slinging with Walter Kennedy, a worthy opponent The pace is at its wildest in the *Dance of the Seven Deadly Sins* They are summoned by Mahoun, and Belial lashes Sloth upon the loins, and the covetous are filled up with molten gold The poem is not a sermon but a gross and splendid pageant In the *Tua Marit Wemen and the Wedo* the alliterative metre is revived, and its cart-horse gallop well suits the yarns which are exchanged by the three slippery dames at the expense of old or insufficient husbands They are even franker than the Wife of Bath, but the poet, meaning mischief, clothes them with golden tresses, and the scene opens and closes to the song of birds

The soft souch of the swyre, and sound of the stremes [*sough, ravine*]
The sweit savour of the swarde and singing of fowlis,
Micht confort any creature of the kyn of Adam,
And kindill agane his curage thocht it war cauld sloknit [*damped down*]

The Compleynt to the King is in rich vernacular, and there is a pleasing and pathetic humour in the *Petition of the Gray Horse, Auld Dunbar* Other short pieces show that Dunbar (as a critic has remarked of Leigh Hunt) loved a cheerful giver, but he did not receive the clerical preferment that he desired His most deeply felt composition is perhaps the *Lament for the Makaris*, the dead Scottish poets, with its tolling refrain *Timor Mortis conturbat me* There is more variety in Dunbar than in any writer between Chaucer and Spenser He may be the author of that excellent *fabliau* the *Freiris of Berwick*, written in Chaucer's couplet, and full of those confusions of the night in which Chaucer and Fielding delighted There is a mass of lively, reckless, nameless verse to show that the aureate school had no monopoly, but it is not poetry even in the most liberal sense Dunbar stands in much the same relation to the *Wowing of Jok and Jinny* or *Ane Ballet of Matrymonie* as Chaucer does to the *Basyn* or the *Frere and the Boye*.

Only, Dunbar himself practises in lower forms than Chaucer, and is nearer to the gross fat soil and to its vernacular.

VI

Poetry was only an episode in the troubled life of Gavin Douglas (*c* 1474–*c* 1522), latterly the Bishop of Dunkeld His *Palice of Honour* was finished in 1501, it is overstocked with goddesses and poets, with lovers and miscreants *King Hart* has more life in it, and more lightness There is something piquant about its masquers, with their dresses and their pantomime The heart of man, long wedded to Pleasance, finds Age knocking at the door Youth and Disport make off, and Decrepitus and Hoist, or Coughing, come in King Hart bequeaths his empty sleeve to Want and Vanity, and to Rere-Supper, the second and superfluous meal, he leaves 'this rottin stomak that I beir about' But the true achievement of Douglas was his translation of the *Æneid*, with his prologues, it was finished by 1513 It can be read as a poem in its own right, although its virtues are not those of Virgil, with his 'bewtie, sentence, and gravite', with his 'perfyte langage fyne' and 'sugurat sang' Douglas, with his 'corruptit cadens imperfyte', abases himself before the master The cadence, in reality, is not corrupt, but it is 'imperfect', the rhythm is sometimes uncertain, and, as Dryden found, the decasyllabic line holds too little matter, and the heroic couplet too much, to be an equivalent for the hexameter Still Douglas feels the pathos of his author, nor do the last words of Dido or of Turnus lose all their force, nor the lines in the Sixth Book upon the souls who abide

> quhile that the lang day
> Be perfyte cours of tyme, hes done away
> The spot of filth hardynit in the spreit

concretam exemit labem This was the first translation of an entire and great ancient classic into English verse In three of his prologues Douglas pours out a flood of descriptive language which no Southerner had yet equalled Winter and spring inspire him alike, he may be too lavish of words, and seldom attain finality of phrase, but the weather and the landscape are part of his being, and he drinks in the sunshine:

Before his regale hie magnificens
Mysty vapour upspringand, sweit as sens, [*incense*]
In smoky soppis of donk dewis wak [*clouds, wet*]
Moich hailsom stovis ourheildand the slak,
[*damp, exhalations shrouding the vale*]
The aureat fanys of his trone souerane [*vanes*]
With glytrand glans ourspred the occiane

VII

Like Statius, Douglas follows his Virgil 'afar off, and ever adores his footsteps' But Virgil had always been adored, and his translator, in spite of his date, is a mediæval writer, hardly standing on the threshold of the new humanism The same is true of the last remarkable Scottish 'maker,' Sir David Lindsay (*c* 1490–*c* 1555), with his *Dreme*, his *Testament of the Papyngo*, and his *Ane Pleasant Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis* Lindsay's forms and measures are late-mediæval, he dreams, he personifies, he relates a dismal 'tragedy', that of Cardinal Beaton, the *Monarche* tells the history of the world from the fall of man right down to the doomsday He is linked with Dunbar and the popular muse by his cheerful flow of grossness, which seems to be designed as a relief to his moral satire The public must be amused as well as reformed The Lyon King-at-Arms is not an artist like Dunbar and has none of the grace of Douglas But a new keen air blows through his pages, we are in another moral world Lindsay never broke formally with the old faith, but won his fame by giving voice to the ideals of the Scottish Reformation His enthusiasm is not, in the main, doctrinal His true concern is for 'John the Commonweal', whose faults he plainly sees What John needs is justice and order and the right to read the Bible in his own tongue Why, did not Moses, did not Aristotle, teach their flocks in *their* vernaculars? John is oppressed by the 'three estates', namely, the temporal, the spiritual, and the merchants In form, the poem is almost unique in the North, it is a well-built 'morality play' The players are abstractions, the estates are admonished interminably by Good Counsel and Correction Temporality and Merchant repent, while the churchmen, the villains of the piece, are left to be chastised But there are interludes the *Satyre* lives by its full-blooded comedy of

manners There are tailors, cobblers, sergeants, pardoners, brawling, or cheating, or discomfited. The sharp vivid dialogue, written in many metres, is telling, it is not poetry, but it is good verse literature. Some of Lindsay's smaller satires, made purely for entertainment, have the same savour the 'confessions' of Kitte, and of the King's dog

The vernacular verses of Alexander Scott, about whom little is known, are dated conjecturally about the middle of the century They include *A New Year's Gift to Queen Mary*, in 1562, full of satire and good counsel, but most of them are love-lyrics, simple, easy, and sincere They are often written in tuneful short lines A pretty stanza from this little-read poet may be given to show the contrast with the courtly Tudor verse that was being written at the same time

Throw langour of my sueit
So thirlit is my spreit, [*pierced*]
My days are most compleit [*done with, wound up*]
Throw hir absence
Chryst ! sen scho knew my smert, [*since she*]
Ingrawit in my hairt,
Because I must depairt
Ffrome hir presens

The old poetic fashions linger in Scotland down to the union of the kingdoms Alexander Montgomerie, who held a small office under James VI, deals without mercy in abstractions, maxims, aureate speech, floral openings, and the usual menagerie of birds and beasts There is not much in him but his curious and catching melody, which is heard in a few lyrics, and above all in the *Cherrie and the Slae*, a poem which was printed first in 1597 and then, considerably amplified, in 1615 The opening, with its garden of singers, promises well, and in the 'wheel' of every verse, with its facile rhymes, there is the noise as of a burn

With tumbling, and rumbling,
Amongst the roches round,
Devalling, and falling
Into a pit profound

The cherry-bough, atop of a crag, looks at first like a ladylove —a variant of the familiar Rose, the Sloe is the poisoned fruit of wantonness, which allures the young The poem drifts off into an endless discourse between Danger, Reason,

Experience, and the rest of the repertory In another mood, Montgomerie takes his part in a loud and loose-mouthed flyting with a fellow-poet, one Polwart

VIII

In the South the variety, though not the mastery, of Dunbar is rivalled by John Skelton (*c* 1460–1529) a 'laureate' in both universities, the favourite of Henry VII and many noble persons, and rector of Diss in Norfolk, the rabid assailant of Wolsey, and of all the abuses of courts, a maker of aureate allegory and eulogy, and of a shapely and interesting dramatic 'interlude', *Magnificence*, the celebrator of Flodden Field, the producer of many 'flytings' and vituperations, which are foul, enormous, and yet somehow not malignant, a learned poet, finally, and a sworn devotee of Chaucer Skelton's parable, the *Bowge of Court*,[1] is an odd and tiresome dream, the characters being Disdain, Fortune, and the familiar cast, but some of them, such as Riot, are portrayed, and are made to speak, with a Chaucerian vivacity Skelton's massed attack is to be found in his two satires, *Colin Clout* and *Why come ye not to Court?* there had been no such versified invective, except in Scotland, since Langland and his school Poetry does not come into the question Also a new weapon of offence, the 'Skeltonical' rhyme, was now sharpened to the utmost It is in the nature of angry and infinitely voluble speech, strung into short lines that rhyme in pairs, or in threes, or even oftener They are commonly built on three accents, but sometimes on two or four, and the poet says that though his rhyme is 'rusty and moth-eaten', yet 'If ye take well therewith, It hath in it some pith' Skelton has an ample and ferocious vocabulary The Hogarthian *Tunning of Elinor Rumming* is a ruthless picture of an ale-house It might seem that he has no wares except invective, but suddenly comes a transformation The staff that has been breaking many heads is set to his lips, and, behold, it is a flute, with a gentle, slow, irregular music, and poetry, after so much artifice and mismetring for a century, has suddenly recaptured charm There is nothing anywhere like the thirteen hundred lines of *Philip Sparrow* This is a lament imputed

[1] *bouche* the free rations of the courtier

to Jane, or Joanna, Scrope over her pet bird, who has been slain by Gib the cat Jane ripples and rambles on with a sweet pedantry, invoking the classics, summoning all the birds to mourn along with her, and also humming and sol-fa-ing fragments of church Latin

> And now the dark cloudy night
> Chaseth away Phœbus bright,
> Taking his course toward the west,
> God send my sparrow's soul good rest!
> *Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine!*
> Fa, fa, fa, my, re, re
> *Credo videre dona domini,*
> I pray God, Philip to heaven may fly!
> *Domine, exaudi orationem meam!*
> To heaven he shall, from heaven he came!
> *Do mi nus vo bis cum!*
> Of all good prayers God send him some!
> *Oremus!*

Then the poet continues in praise of Jane, and turns to rend those who had censured so profane a dirge There are many more snatches of this happy tune, such as the well-known 'Merry Margaret, the midsummer flower' It is plain that this metre, for all its occasional music, could not inaugurate the reform of prosody, a task left for Wyatt and Surrey But if we forget the *Nut-Brown Maid* and the best of the popular ballads, *Philip Sparrow*, written at latest in 1508, is the most delightful production of the whole dead season

Perhaps the last expression, in the South, of the mediæval temper untouched by the new culture, is Stephen Hawes's *Pastime of Pleasure*, printed in 1509, the author was a groom of the chamber to Henry VII A lover sees a fair lady who is far above him, in order to be worthy of her he is schooled in rhetoric and the other liberal arts After much giant-killing he is made happy and lives long, but Age comes, and Death, and Time blots out all remembrance of him Only Eternity, figured as a woman triple-crowned, abides, and so, let us pray for that knight's salvation The poem is a link between two ages, it may well have been read by Spenser, and Hawes is a vowed follower of Lydgate, that 'most dulcet spring of famous rhetoric' His verse is much broken, and often very dry, but we are aware of a poetic sense beneath, and of a real spring of feeling.

I quote a stanza from the vision of Grande Amoure, on the eve of his wedding to La Bell Pucell, marking the scansion at a venture

And she tóke / her léve, / I kýst / her loú / ely
I wénte / to bédde, but / I coúld / not slépe,
For I thoúght / so múch / upon / her ín / wardly,
Her móst / swète lókes / ínto my hérte / dyde crépe,
Pércynge / it throúgh / with / a woúnde / so dépe,
For ná / ture thoúght / év / ery hoúr / a dáye
Týll to / my lá / dy I shólde / my détte / wèll páye

It is plain how the Troilus-stanza has come down in the world, and what must be done to renew it

IX

The English and Scottish popular ballads contain some of the noblest and most stirring poetry that we possess During the later Middle Ages they were alive on the lips of the people, and they were still being composed at the beginning of the eighteenth century About the end of the fifteenth occur some of the earliest texts that are preserved, of the best examples Through its whole span of life the ballad is the same in essence It is an unique and independent form of art, it is different from the kindred forms, the song and carol, the legend and romance, by which it is surrounded It has its own metres, fount of language, and poetic formulae, its own conventions and *dramatis personae*, its own code of behaviour Such is the artistic result, whatever be the decision as to the 'dark backward' of the species and its origins It is, to begin with, a lyric, 'all ballads', it has been truly said, 'are lyrical' Further, it tells a story, and the story should be short, for the emotion of a lyric cannot be sustained beyond a certain point An exception like the *Gest of Robin Hood*, which runs to 1824 lines, is really three ballad-stories woven skilfully together Again, the story must be told in good order, it seldom begins at the end, and takes the facts as known This, however, is done in the *Bonny Earl of Murray*.

Ye Highlands and ye Lawlands,
O where have you been?
They have slain the Earl of Murray,
And they laid him on the green

The tales are told more barely and briefly than in the rhymed romances, they are addressed to a humbler audience, which cares above all for the event In the good ballads there is less *havering* and more epical and masculine force than in the romances The historical connections of the two kinds are much debated But they remain distinct in spite of cases hard to classify and of stories like those of Arthur and Gawain and Orfeo that come from a common stock The ballads are no less apart from the carols and sacred legends, although some of the earliest extant, such as *Judas* and *St Stephen and Herod*, show the points of contact In the latter poem we hear how 'the capon crew *Christus natus est*', this is not too far in spirit from the romance of *Sir Cleges*, who found the cherry in fruit on Christmas Eve

The true folk-ballad has no known author, no single author, and no canonical text. It comes down through the generations orally, altered by many a speaker to suit his public, until at last, if at all, it is written down and perhaps printed Once in type, the ballad is apt to go downhill How did it begin? Here again there is much dispute. Someone must have composed the original opening, with a story in his mind In many cases there are clear signs that others in the audience took up the clue, rang in turn the changes on a line or couplet, and so led up to the point Often a refrain, or phrase, survives in which all present may have joined at the end of each verse This snowball process, exemplified in many languages, has been called 'communal' authorship It is easy to picture the villagers under the 'old oak' taking their parts, each of them feeling himself a poet for the moment It is also plain that many of the ballads were not, or need not have been, thus composed, and that here the 'people' is only the author in the sense that there have been many transmitters each of whom was free to modify what he had received The controlling force, all the time, is the *story*, which persists under whatever disguises and variations

The 'people' like to have it told as nakedly as possible They like the decorations too, the colours and landscapes and costumes, but these are always subordinate, and run into fixed moulds It is spring, or it is summer when leaves are long The hues must be simple and telling, and 'skinkle in our een' gold and silver, red blood, dapple-grey steeds,

green velvet So with the sounds of the ringing bridle, the bells upon the horse's mane, and the 'roaring of the sea'. When these conventions become inspired the effect is magical.

> And yae tift of the norland wind,
> They tinkled ane by ane

The story should be a passionate one and go rapidly The primary emotions are let loose, which everyone can understand Foremost among them is the desire for revenge This may be personal, or it may be common to the family or the clan, it may be prompted by love or jealousy or local hatred, or simply a move in the game of reprisals There are border blood-feuds like those of the Pathan who religiously watches for months till he can shoot his foe across the valley The code is ruthless, but it is a code, with its own notions of honour There is treachery and treachery, inside and outside the rules The infamy and ferocity of Captain Car, who is ready to let women and children burn, are damned by the ballad-monger out of the woman's mouth

> 'It shall be talked throughout the land,
> The slaughter of a wife'

But on the whole the praise of valour is louder than the praise of mercy and generosity, and the dealings of the Percy with the Douglas have not many parallels We are equally far from the humour and the clemency of Robin Hood

Three hundred and five poems are admitted into the classical collection of Francis James Child, whose name stands with those of Percy and Scott in the history of our ballad-lore They may be roughly classed as follows —

X

1 The *English outlaw* ballads form a group apart, in respect of their scenery, characters, and temper Their stage is in the open air or the greenwood, and they are not, in the finest examples, tragic They are comedies, in which all our sympathies lie with the poor against the rich, with the rover, who hunts those *ferae naturae*, the king's deer, against the keeper, with Robin Hood and his men against the official class, the sheriff or the abbot The *Gest*

of Robin Hood was put together by some born draughtsman, name unknown Robin, with his wit and his delicacy of sentiment, is as distinct as a personage in Shakespeare, in *Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne*, and in some other pieces, he has the same gentle lineaments Hardly less vivid is the knight in whom Robin puts his trust, for repayment of a loan, upon the sole surety of Our Lady Many of these ballads are of commoner metal, but the best of them form no little make-weight against the general superiority of their Scottish neighbours The series as a whole is an object-lesson in the degradation of the ballad muse under the influence of the cheap press There is much of the same high quality in the other lengthy outlaw poem, *Adam Bell, Clim of the Clough and William of Cloudesly*, with its pictures of the heroic wife, Alice Cloudesly, and the little lad who brought her the bad news We only regret that these pardoned outlaws, unlike Robin Hood, remained in the king's service without repining

2 The ballads on *real events* often furnish us with an upper limit for the date of composition, although the oldest existing texts may be much later (*a*) They may celebrate, with whatever colouring of myth, some public conflict, as in the *Battle of Otterburn* and the *Hunting of the Cheviot* It is one of the glories of the ballad that the taste for it is shared by great men of letters with the simplest of the folk Sidney pays his tribute to the 'old song', and the temperate Addison is stirred by the tamer version known as *Chevy Chase* There are Homeric features in these poems the formal challenges, the displays of magnanimity, the delight in the music of names

> Tivydale may carp of care,
> Northumberland may make great moan

Considering her record, England is not too rich in heroic chants of the first order, and without the popular muse she would be much poorer (*b*) There are numberless *private* affrays, where the actors can be more or less identified The event described is often dated in the sixteenth century The stage is here smaller and the quarrel narrower than on the field of Otterburn Sometimes, as in *Captain Car* or the *Fire of Frendraught*, there is an incandescence that time has not been able to cool Lord John Gordon, penned in

the burning house, an innocent man who has strayed into hell, cries down to his man

> 'But I cannot loup, I cannot come,
> I cannot win to thee,
> My head's fast in the wire-window,
> My feet burning from me'

A more frequent tone is that of gaiety in victory, or of buoyancy in defeat Often a rescue is effected in the face of cruel odds In *Jock o the Side*, called by Child 'one of the best ballads in the world', the prisoner and the coward and the hero Hobbie Noble are alive and distinct, and depict themselves, the ballad-monger does not describe character, he shows it in action In another poem Hobbie dies game and defiant There is another rescue in *Kinmont Willie*, an old piece that comes to us with Scott's seamless tailoring

3 *Tragical* ballads, unlocalised Here the stories and themes are often far-spread and may be called international Over Europe and beyond, roses twine over lovers' graves, brides are slain at the altar by their rivals The king is any king, of no man's land The names, Annet or Margaret, may be English, but the situation is universal Sir Hugh of Lincoln is slaughtered by the Jews in many languages. The disapproving brother with a wee penknife is one of a stock company Some of these ballads are among the best of all *Lord Thomas and Fair Annet*, with its horse's bells, its flashing bridal dress, and its triple calamity, may perhaps contest the primacy, for tragical effect, with *Johnnie Cock*. This poem, indeed, is apparently localised, and the fight is at Cockley's Well, the 'sevén foresters' live at Pickeram Side But history knows nothing of such persons The purpose of the forsters is foreseen in 'carebed' by Johnnie's mother:

> And for a drop of thy heart's blood
> They wad ride the fords of hell

We do not hear why, and whether by chance or art or instinct, one of the great effects of the ballad-monger is won by such omissions This is often apparent in the best versions, while in later ones the story is explained and spoilt Why the sons in the *Wife of Usher's Well* returned, why Sir Patrick Spens sailed away, is better hid from us. But these belong to the last class, namely, of

4 *Supernatural* ballads, of which there are two principal species (*a*) Tales of the *revenant* *Fair Margaret and Sweet William*, *Sweet William's Ghost*, *Clerk Saunders*, are the best known The strain is sometimes one of sweet, rather drawling sentiment, but there is also the sense of fatality, and the shiver at the recognition of the unhappy dead 'Is there any room at your head, Willy, Or any room at your feet?' Or, as in *Binnorie*, the bones of the murdered find voice and reveal the slayer (*b*) Tales of capture by unearthly beings, like *Clerk Colven*, where the prisoner escapes from the toils of the mermaiden, and comes home, but only to die The classical instance is *Thomas the Rhymer*, the prophet Thomas of Erceldoune In the best version there are flat stretches, but also the superb stanzas that tell of Thomas riding with the fairy queen 'through red blood to the knee', lines that stand out like a gout of scarlet on a ragged coat It will appear later (Ch XVI) how Scott dealt with this story Such effects of colour and marvel haunted (with a hundred other memories) the author of the *Ancient Mariner*, but Coleridge was not trying to reproduce the plain heroic strength and pathos of the popular ballad No modern imitator has succeeded in that venture Morris and Swinburne surprise us for a moment with their skill, and Rossetti, in the *King's Tragedy*, shows his peculiar power and intensity. But none of them can say

> 'The only boon, my father dear,
> That I do crave of thee,
> Is, gin I die in southin land,
> In Scotland thou bury me'

The ballad metres are few and mostly simple The staple one is the 'common measure', the 'eights and sixes' that rhyme *abcb*, with the beats not too regular Coleridge took this, with its repeated phrases and cunning echoes, and built upon it, almost out of knowledge, his 'structure brave' with its 'manifold music'. The ballad-maker also uses the isolated couplet, which has a more primitive and even infantine ring than his quatrain, but here too he can strike hard enough

> It was nae wonder his heart was sair
> When he shooled the mools on her yellow hair.
> [*shovelled the mould*]

The arrangement is more intricate in the incomparable *Edward*, with its double refrain and crushing final curse. This, like other treasures, we owe to Percy (Ch. XV).

XI

The Nut-Brown Maid, first printed in 1502, is no folk-ballad, but a 'conflict' or *débat* of a special kind, there is nothing quite like it in English The greenwood is here the stage of a passion unknown to the company of Robin Hood The maid is tested like Fair Annet or Griselda, she will suffer any hardship or humiliation for her man He, the supposed outlaw and squire of low degree, is to our mind a poor complacent creature he is at his worst when he reveals that he had only invented the hardships, and that he is an earl's son and means marriage But the workmanship is not infantine at all, the unknown author is a cunning lyrical artist, and there is always the rush and ripple of the inner rhymes and of the alternating and ever-intensified refrain He has also the gift of structure, for the poem is a dramatic dialogue between maid and man, musically balanced, and with no word of narrative, and it is recited by a squire and a lady who are outside the story The pair say the last word, now is disproved the vulgar talk about the fickleness of woman Beside this masterpiece may be set the short and delicate Scottish lyric called *The Murning Maidin* Here, too, the maid is in the forest with her bow, deserted by her man, to whom she was willing to be 'doand service early and late', but a new man, a true man, finds her and at last consoles her The melody does not indeed match that of 'My somers day, in lusty May, is derked before the none', but it rings true, and the last two lines go home:

'Into this wode ay walk I shall,
Ledand my lyf as woful wycht,—
Heir I forsaik bayth bour and hall,'
And all thir bygings that are brycht! [*dwellings*]
My bed is maid full cauld,
With beistis bryme and bauld,— [*savage*]
That gars me say, bayth day and nycht,
Alace that ever the toung sould hecht [*vow*]
That hart thocht not to hauld!'

XII

All through the century there is a line of songs which speak to the people rather than to the literary class The best and freshest are of the carol type, and these are abundant One of the most delicate is 'I sing of a maiden That is makeles [*mateless*] ', where the coming of Christ to his Mother is 'stille As dew in Aprille ' In another ('This lovely lady sat and song ') the child sings back to her. In a third, 'jolly Wat,' the shepherd, is piping, and when he sees the star he tells his dog to keep the flock, and in Bethlehem he offers his pipe, skirt, tar-box, and scrip There are simple Yule-songs like the well-known ditty on the boar's head The most roguish is the girl's admiring chant on Jankin who sings the Yule office, with her refrain of *Kyrieleyson* There are many praises of ale The noble 'Back and side, go bare, go bare ' exists in a better and earlier form than that which is often quoted from the university play *Gammer Gurton's Needle* Most fertile of all is the moral and sententious verse, with or without a direct religious reference , and this, we have seen, has been the toughest though not the brightest strand in English poetry from the beginning In the fifteenth century the note of gloom is frequent We enter and quit the world naked, we are 'worms' fare ' The 'wicked tongue ' wags ever among men , truth is 'put in low degree ' Nothing could less resemble the joyous carols, or the song, wholly in the outlaw spirit, of the 'jolly forester ' ('Wherefore should I hang up my bow Upon the greenwood bough ? ') One poem of twelve lines, known in several forms, with the burden 'Lully, lulley . The faucon hath borne my make away ', is without flaw, and harmonises the spirit of a ballad with that of Good Friday In an orchard there is a hall, in the hall a bed, on the bed a bleeding knight, and beside him a weeping may [*maid*]

> And by that bede side there stondeth a stone,
> *Corpus Christi* wreten there on

So, in what might seem the humbler walks of the craft, the secret of accurate and tuneful verse is saved, while prosody, in the Southern followers of Chaucer, has mostly gone to pieces One reason, doubtless, is that the musical settings

kept the syllables truer to pattern, and since the lines are generally short, the vagaries of the final *-e*, now mute and now sounded, were less evident than in decasyllabics. The same preservative will be seen presently in the songs of Wyatt, and in other early Tudor lyric. I will mention but two beautiful examples. One is in Northern speech, Christ exclaims, 'Quho is at my windou, quho?' It is a sinful soul asking mercy, but it is unworthy, and the answer is 'Go from my window, go!' The other is only four lines: it might be the pride of any poet

> Western wind, when will thou blow,
> The small rain down can rain?
> Christ, if my love were in my arms,
> And I in my bed again!

CHAPTER VI

FROM WYATT TO SPENSER

I

THE new learning and culture, in the time of the first Tudors, were quickened by More and Colet, and by Erasmus, the great visitor and mental traveller The translators of the Bible from the Greek and Hebrew ennobled the vernacular Studious prose, on the Latin model, was raised into eloquence by the martyred Fisher Yet Southern poetry seemed to be arrested Allegory, for the time, had said its utmost in the halting metre of the *Pastime of Pleasure* The harping of Skelton, so delightful and elusive, could not, with its slippery rhymes, aid the recovery of a normal prosody The pattern of the heroic line of ten syllables was still obscured There are short pretty things like the holly-song attributed to Henry VIII and the ballad of William Cornish, 'The knight knocked at the castle gate' The knight is Desire, the portress is Strangeness, he 'briefs' a 'bill' to be 'borne' by Kindness and Pity

> Thus how they did we cannot say,
> We left them there and went our way

There is also the anonymous nightingale-song, 'By a bank as I lay', with its thick-coming notes and refrain, 'Come dyry, come dyry', and the pretty milkmaid-pastoral, 'Hey, troly, loly, lo'.

But these are strays, and lyrical poetry was first put into repair by Sir Thomas Wyatt (? 1503–1542) and his contemporaries

When Wyatt writes his little songs, with their refrains, 'Is't possible?', 'Say nay! say nay!', 'Forget not yet',

he has no trouble with his prosody, and probably it is his *lute* that keeps him right

> For when this song is sung and past,
> My lute, be still! for I have done

Some of these chants, in very short lines, are anything but mere exercises, they have the note of experience

> What should I say,
> Since Faith is dead
> And Truth away
> From you is fled? . .

Wyatt's poetic language is simple and pure, like that of his letters to his son and of his published speech in defence of his loyalty True, he has left plenty of studio-work, often in the form of translation or paraphrase from the Italian He has many a tracing from Petrarch or the later Petrarchans In respect of the decasyllabic line, he earns the title of the 'reformer of our scansion', and he starts with reforming his own He seems to begin bewildered, with no sense at all of the placing of the accent, and to end with true and happy melody The dating of this process is uncertain, but Wyatt at last attains something more than correctness Sometimes there is the great, unmistakable ring and finale that we know as 'Elizabethan'

> Such mocks of dreams do turn to deadly pain

In his sonnets Wyatt makes free with the Italian rules, he ends with a couplet, and his octet is not always orthodox Indeed they are seldom altogether 'true filèd', and he is more at ease in shorter stanzas like the *ottava rima* Wyatt must not be read in the smoothed-out shape in which he appears in *Tottel's Miscellany* (1557), the changes there may be for the better, but they are not his His most beautiful poem, in its original form, is not decently accented 'They flee from me, that sometime did me seek' *They* are his old remembered loves, imaged as creatures who had once been tame and fed from his hand, but now they are turned wild—his lady is cruel He remembers the fairest hour of all, when she had caught and kissed him and called him her 'dear heart', but now, he asks, what does *she* deserve? Wyatt's three familiar satires are of much interest, but they are very rough and obscure and the verse

is often rickety It is the *terza rima*, used by his contemporary Luigi Alamanni, from whom one satire is adapted Wyatt, now retired to Allington, down 'in Kent and Christendom', far from the turmoil of court, praises the country life, tells the fable of the two mice, and in irony explains to his friend Brian how the climber can profitably misbehave We hear the proverbial wisdom of a man disenchanted by experience of the world, who yet has kept his integrity and his good temper

II

Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey (? 1517–1547) does not compete with his master Wyatt in strength, but he started where Wyatt had ended, with ease and rightness of form He too studied the Italians, and made some bright and fluent sonnets, but he also went straight back to Chaucer and caught the temper of his vernal poetry, of 'the soote season, that bud and bloom forth brings' Possibly Surrey is the author also of the light buoyant octosyllabics

> The sun, when he hath spread his rays
> And showed his face ten thousand ways,
> Ten thousand things do then begin
> To show the life that they are in

The sun warms the earth and 'dries her children tenderly' and for the moment the poet is L'Allegro

> The hunter then sounds out his horn
> And rangeth straight through wood and corn

Then he muses more gravely, for his lady is away, but soon Hope cheers him up and 'a new blood overspreads his bones' Surrey is the voice of our still young Renaissance He preserves for us the colour and intoxicated life of the brilliant dangerous court In the lines called *Prisoned at Windsor* he 'recounteth the pleasure there passed' formerly—the 'palm-play' where, dazzled by ladies' eyes, they had missed the balls, and the friendships with 'the secret thoughts, imparted with such trust' In Surrey's most serious poem, his elegy on Wyatt, there are strokes that recall the *Happy Warrior*

> A heart, where dread was never so imprest
> To hide the thought that might the truth advance,

Elsewhere Surrey anticipates the full-vowelled strain of the song-books In one lyrical monologue a woman complains of her man's absence at sea 'He sails, that hath in governance My life, while it will last', and she apostrophises 'O happy dames, that may embrace the fruit of your delight' Surrey is also, by tradition, the very first importer of blank verse He is thought to have found it in Molza's translation of Virgil, and uses it in his versions of the Second and Fourth Æneids There is little in his handiwork from which the future of the measure might have been predicted, yet the lines are not so woodenly linear as we should expect Often they run on easily, the test passages, such as the watch of Dido and the departure of Apollo from Lycia, are not unworthily done, and the liquid movement of *suadentque cadentia sidera somno* is not wholly lost

> and when they all were gone,
> And the dim moon doth eft withhold the light,
> And sliding stars provokèd yet to sleep

Surrey, unlike Gavin Douglas, was enabled by his metre to study the conciseness of the Latin

III

Wyatt and Surrey are not alone, there are other early 'makers' like the excellent unknown writer whose lines 'O Death, rock me asleep' anticipate the bell-music of Sidney's famous poem, and Thomas Lord Vaux, whose verse on 'age with stealing steps' the Gravedigger in *Hamlet* did not perfectly remember One small jewel (this time cut by a commoner) is found in William Baldwin's *Canticles of Solomon* (1549)

> Christ, my Beloved, which still doth feed
> Among the flowers, having delight
> Among his faithful lilies,
> Doth take great care for me indeed,
> And I again with all my might
> Will do whatso his will is.

Much of the best work of Wyatt and Surrey was printed, and often planed out and edited, in the volume of *Songs and Sonnets* (1557) known as *Tottel's Miscellany* The other contributors, in general, are disappointing, and the facile spirited verse of Nicholas Grimald hardly makes amends,

or the lively 'Phillida was a fair maid' The tunes are very much of the grind-organ sort, it matters little who is at the handle Yet the book was most eventful, it was often reprinted and long remembered, and set the fashion for a string of miscellanies, good and bad a form of publication to which we owe the preservation of many treasures Also Tottel's work shows how, long before the accession of Elizabeth, accuracy of metre had become almost a matter of course It might be wooden, formal, and afraid of freedom, but that was a necessary stage There is a steady cart-horse gallop in the anapaests and lyrics of Thomas Tusser's *Five Hundred Good Points of Husbandry* (originally, in 1557, a 'hundred') Tusser is full of precise country lore and prosaic sagacity He is even, early in the day, a sonneteer, and he is not prosaic when he writes, 'Seven times hath blustering March blown forth his powers To drive out April's buds, by sea and land, For minion May' In equally formal metre is Thomas Churchyard's charming picture, in his *Chips* (1575), of a trim and well-looking housemaid, her dress, person, doings, and disposition 'She was not nice [*squeamish*] nor yet too kind, Too proud, nor of too humble mind' Nor should that treasure-house of the poets, Arthur Golding's version of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (1567), be forgotten, with its monotonous yet very far from lifeless 'fourteeners' a work *de longue haleine*, faithfully carried through Slowly, before the coming of Spenser, poetry thus begins to regain some colour The tone is often sententious and commonplace, the mood dull and overcast But in the *Paradise of Dainty Devices* (1576) is to be found the pleasant *Amantium Irae* of Richard Edwardes, with its burden, 'The falling out of faithful friends is the renewing of love' One epigram of that usually unrewarding writer, George Turbervile, might come out of the Greek Anthology.

> My girl, thou gazest much
> Upon the golden skies,
> Would I were heaven! I would behold
> Thee then with all mine eyes

In all this there is little to promise the sudden flowering of the eighth decade But it never does to say that poetry is dead, when the next morning may give despair the lie Two poets of unequal note, George Gascoigne (? 1542–1577)

and Thomas Sackville, Lord Buckhurst, Earl of Dorset (1536–1608), precede Spenser Gascoigne, a man-of-all-work with the pen, a translator or adapter of plays from the Italian, and a pioneer student of English prosody, has left one lyric, *A Lullaby of a Lover*, which announces the rarer music of the next age an old man lullabies his past youth, with its ' wanton will ' Another pretty thing of Gascoigne's is on the old topic of Catullus and Skelton, in *Praise of Philip Sparrow* His ambitious work is the *Steel Glass* (1576), a moral and social satire in which the ideals are those of *Piers the Ploughman* King and knight, priest and peasant, fail of their allotted duties and see themselves in a deceiving ' crystal glass ', the poet holds up to them the steel mirror of the truth Among all these callings, he knows the traders best, and their tricks, how they steal, adulterate, and turn out shoddy He recites some thirty small larcenies, with a line to each

> When upholsters sell feathers without dust,
> When pewterers infect no tin with lead

Gascoigne, too truly, speaks of his own ' mirthless metres ', and his blank verse thuds along, but his satiric energy and sincerity carry it through

A Mirror for Magistrates (1554) is a vast and doleful and forgettable production, the work of many hands, it ran through many editions, even down to the year 1610 It is a series of descants on the falls of great personages and on the punishment of their pride a scheme which goes back through Lydgate to Boccaccio, and which Chaucer, in his *Monk's Tale*, had dropt in weariness Sackville's *Induction* appeared in the third edition (1563) of the *Mirror*, it is like a shapely tomb of black marble in the middle of a spidery mausoleum it is the only poem, of any size, that really proclaims the great time coming Spenser does not excel Sackville in force and concentration, and an anvil-music is beaten here out of the ' Troilus-measure ' The procession of lowering figures is seen in clear symbolic detail Dread, ' his cap borne up with staring of his hair ', and Age, with ' his withered fist still knocking at death's door ', like the old man in the *Pardoner's Tale* The *Induction* reanimates some of the stock company of the allegories, such as Sorrow and Sleep, and it is just not too

long, its sombre monotony does not become tiresome. The temperamental gloom of the poem almost reminds us of James Thomson's *City of Dreadful Night* In the *Complaint of Henry Duke of Buckingham*, the lines on midnight are worthy of the *Induction*, but there is more stiffness and convention in the language Sackville was an eminent statesman, he carried the news of the death-sentence to Mary Queen of Scots, and died at the Council Board of James, thus outliving Edmund Spenser (1552–1599)

IV

The *Shepheardes Calender*, coming suddenly in 1579 like the challenge of youth, is indeed a good omen It is a bright flower in the many seedings of the pastoral lyric, which had descended from Greece through ancient and modern Italy In England there had already been lesser practitioners, such as Barnabe Googe In the hands of Spenser's followers it was to seed again, into many varieties The *Calender* is his first venture in the 'no-language' which is drawn from Chaucer, from old words mistaken, from foreign tongues, and from dialect As yet, though piquant enough, it is ill harmonised, and the effect is even a little amateurish Spenser is also playing with metre, his other great instrument, and is seeking, so far in vain, for a stanza that will carry him through some greater enterprise In *November* he has almost found it, only the alexandrine, a ninth line of twelve syllables, is needed, and already there is the unfailing music of the repeated rhyme in the fifth

> The Nightingale is sovereigne of song,
> Before him sits the Titmose silent bee,
> And I unfitte to thrust in skilfull thronge,
> Should Colin make iudge of my fooleree
> Nay, better learne of them that learned bee,
> And han be watered at the Muses well
> The kindlye dewe drops from the higher tree
> And wets the little plants that lowly dwell [1]

Fables, love-eclogues, defences of poetry, singing contests, Puritan polemics, echoes of older pastoralists ancient and modern, many metres, some (as in *February*) imperfectly

[1] I retain most of Spenser's spelling, which may be regarded as part of his peculiar invented language In general, quotations later than 1500 are here modernised

managed, some splendidly, as in the *April* lyric to the queen the *Calender* is packed with experiments and stray beauties Yet, as a whole, it is a tentative production, happiest, perhaps, in its flat, agreeable sheep-bell tinkle

> The simple ayre, the gentle warbling wynde,
> So calme, so coole, as nowhere else I fynde

Once, in *October*, there is the larger style, when Spenser dreams of an heroic subject, perhaps of an historical tragedy 'How I could reare the Muse on stately stage'.

V

There are many moods and trains of thought in Spenser, which he does not try to harmonise They are soon apparent, and recur throughout his poetry, I will try to describe three of them, without regard to dates 1 From the first his musings often take the form of melancholy emblems He draws on Petrarch and Du Bellay, who had been stirred by the sight of the wreckage of Rome, as Gibbon was to be long afterwards While at school Spenser, in an anonymous volume, had put into verse certain of their *Visions*, and these he afterwards revised and reprinted Already he dreams in pictorial images, which in *The Faerie Queene* are to become figures in full allegorical dress We seem to see him brooding on Detraction or Amorous Desire till their shapes and colours grow distinct upon the darkness In *The Ruines of Time*, the most powerful of these visions, the fallen images and towers are a symbol of the house of Dudley Sidney and Leicester are gone, they can survive, and shall survive, in Spenser's verse The volume of *Complaints* (1591) is full of this dejected language, some of it, as in *The Tears of the Muses*, is curiously unreal But in one woeful narrative, *Muiopotmos, or the Fate of the Butterfly*, Spenser seems to be jesting at himself, reducing to mock-heroic scale the well-worn topic of the 'complaint' and also the scenery of the knightly quest Clarion, whose spear-like antennae and bright head-piece are for all the world like a knight's trappings, perishes in the web of the revengeful spider Aragnoll, for her mother Arachne had been beaten in a contest of tapet-weaving by Minerva The goddess had wrought a butterfly so glorious that it seemed alive.

The poem itself is a shining cobweb, in perfect symmetry; of all Spenser's poems it is the lightest, the most gaily woven.

2 He has no compact body of dogma like Milton Many streams of thought float along in his mind together, mixing when they may He may be said to have several religions His Protestant Christianity adjusts itself easily to the doctrines of Plato, and in these he appears, quite early in his course, to have found a refuge from his melancholy mood He knew his Plato at first hand as well as through the Italian interpreters, and states that his two hymns (1596) *In Honour of Love* and *In Honour of Beautie*, were made 'in the greener times of my youth' We hear how the fair soul creates its own vesture, or bodily 'form', and how lovers perceive this double fairness in their lady.

> Sometimes upon her forhead they behold
> A thousand Graces masking in delight

and how Love ordered the elements, and how man, with the heavenly spark in him, embraces 'Beautie, borne of heavenly race' There was nothing fresh in these ideas, the new thing is the noble skill and clearness with which they are presented English philosophical poetry is now well and truly founded The later hymns, *Of Heavenly Love* and *Of Heavenly Beautie*, also published in 1596, are offered as a retractation, or corrective, of these pagan fancies They are no less fervent, exalted, and finished, with yet more Platonism, and they also introduce the 'hierarchies of the blessed angels' The sufferings of Christ and the enthronement of Sapience in heaven form each a climax Yet the truer Spenser, the son of the Renaissance, with the passion for earthly beauty deep in his blood, is perhaps to be found in the first two *Hymns* All four are in the Troilus-stanza, which thus gains yet another triumph

3. Spenser is no less in earnest when he is angry Among the *Complaints* is included *Prosopopoia, or Mother Hubberds Tale*, part of which was written in his youth It is a beast-fable with a satiric edge to it, and up to a point is a following of Chaucer and of his heroic couplet Spenser, no more than the rest of the world, was in a position to scan Chaucer correctly, yet he often catches Chaucer's light unperturbed movement

> Of such deep learning little had he neede
> But this good Sir did follow the plaine word,
> Ne medled with their controversies vaine,
> All his care was, his seruice well to saine,
> And to read Homelies upon holidayes

In the familiar lines on the 'hell of suing' at court the sharply severed couplets and antithetical style anticipate, like some of Drayton's, the verse of Waller, indeed they have the thrashing power of Dryden's But Spenser's indignation, unlike that of Dryden and Pope, is genuine He is also stung by his own disappointments, which lend great energy to the poem, even if they make us sceptical of the picture But in painting the Good Courtier he soars away again. The tale of the Ape and the Fox who peregrinate under many disguises is told with admirable skill, and the whole poem may be thought of as a Book of Discourtesy, inverting the quest of Sir Calidore Deep in Spenser is the strain of irony and ethical disgust, which often in the *Faerie Queene* goes near to shattering the dream In that poem, as in *Colin Clouts Come Home Again* (1595), there is a streak of dark and violent colour, and behind it is Spenser's experience in Ireland, with its scenes of 'wailing wretchedness' and 'grisly famine', engraved upon his mind The prose *View of the State of Ireland*, a document of historical importance, is the commentary In the *Faerie Queene* are found, at one time or another, all these moods and thoughts of Spenser his melancholy, his Platonic doctrine, his indignation, and his polemical Anglicanism

VI

But we do not go to the poem for its *-isms* 'Enter these enchanted woods, you who dare!' We can, if we like, first enjoy the pageant and music, and not heed the parable Spenser, perhaps, would have it so, he holds that the first duty of the moral teacher is to make himself agreeable You can dream your way into the great masque, and watch the bright figures of Amoret, and Belphœbe, and Pastorella, the Idle Lake, and the Bower of Acrasia, and the garden of the golden apples, and the amiable dancing satyrs, and the old men who say wise things or say nothing, and the snowy false Florimell who vanishes, all but her girdle, like a rainbow. There is Mirabella, for whom twenty-two

lovers pined, and the Graces who threw flowers on the lady, amidst

> An hundred naked maidens lilly-white,
> All raunged in a ring and dauncing in delight

The melody, if nothing else, will carry you through some thirty-five thousand lines The unfinished dream, six books of it, breaks off, as dreams do, uncomfortably, with a monster still pacing the earth, a dragon whom no Beowulf has made an end of There are still two more cantos, loosely tied on, the show ends with the masque of the Seasons, Months, and Hours, and with Life like 'a fair young lusty boy', and lastly Death Yet *he*, after all, is 'nought but parting of the breath', and the scene is gay in spite of him, like a festal performance in a London garden enacted by persons of quality before the queen

In this fairy tale there are long waits, weary interludes, some odious images, much mechanical fighting and killing, and loose stitches in the story The sense is often beaten out thin, like an elastic stretched too tight, in order to make up the stanza with its exacting rhymes We are left at the end with a sense of bright confusion Few are at the pains, though the task is amusing, to trace the exits and re-entrances of the figures, often thousands of lines apart When will Florimell come back, and which Florimell? and when the Blatant Beast, or the perfunctory Prince Arthur, who is due to rescue both the knight and the poet from a deadlock?

Still we cannot but ask what is the sense of it all, and judge the artist by his avowed purpose What is this, and does he harmonise it with his fable? The programme is given in the letter to Ralegh, and also in Spenser's earlier explanation, recorded by Lodowick Bryskett, to his friends in Dublin. There are to be, in the complete work, twelve knights, representing as many 'private moral virtues' Each knight is to go upon his quest, against the corresponding vice, and Arthur, or Magnificence, who comprehends all the virtues, is to be ready to strike in at need These virtues, in the poem, are of very mixed parentage The first, Holiness, is militant Anglican Protestant holiness, and the enemy is Rome, in scarlet unrelieved A political and ecclesiastical allegory is grafted upon the moral one, while the pure figure of Una rides through it all. The second virtue, Temperance, is Greek, and chiefly Aristotelian. This book has a

firm steelwork of construction, and the different shapes of Anger and Incontinence are symbolised with much nicety. It is the most shapely of all Spenser's moral fables The third virtue, Chastity, is Christian, mediæval, and chivalrous, with the conventional reference to the queen The fourth, Friendship, is not a virtue but a relationship in which the virtues flourish, the book is full of beauties, but is not clearly planned In the fifth, Justice, Aristotle's virtue is exhibited by Lord Grey's merciless executive in Ireland In the sixth, Courtesy is a Renaissance ideal, exemplified in Sidney, and its opposite, Detraction, or the Blatant Beast, is the vice of courts Spenser himself had suffered by it, and Shakespeare, too, in his later plays, seems to have been thus preoccupied, for Hermione and Imogen are the victims of calumny Constancy, in the fragment on Mutability, signifies the divine or fated rule of law, or recurrence, in the universe, typified in the coming round of the seasons. Once more, we are not to look for any harmonising of all these conceptions The poet is engrossed with each as it comes and with his desire to clothe it beautifully

The pattern for a long motley story, with many threads crossing and recrossing without confusion, he found in that masterpiece of plastic skill, Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, and from Ariosto he also takes many a hint and detail But the *Furioso* was a romantic epic of adventure, the ideal aim was wanting, and this it was Spenser's purpose to convey He had before him a far more symmetrical work than Ariosto's, and one severer in spirit, namely, the *Gierusalemme Liberata* of Tasso, afterwards translated, as *Godfrey of Bulloigne* (1600), by his own disciple, Edward Fairfax Here was the conception of the spiritual quest, and of knightly virtue, which Spenser adapted to his own aim of 'fashioning a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline'. Taking all risks, he uses the machinery of romance to enforce his teaching

VII

If we are to press the moral, we are faced by three kinds of difficulty 1 Much of the *Faerie Queene*,—luckily, as we may think—produces no moral impression at all, any more than Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* The pomps and emblematic houses and personages stand at various distances

from the lessons which they are meant to convey. The Masque of Cupid is the pictorial climax of the Book of Chastity, but chastity is not its subject The sermon, if any, is aimed against Love himself, for of the fourteen beings who ride behind him only three are figures of delight. Doubt and Cruelty, Care and Riotise, predominate 2 The picture does not always evoke the emotion demanded by the meaning In the second Book Guyon is attacked by the Five Senses (regarded here as evil creatures) Maleger, their captain, seems to represent the base fury of the exhausted senses, driven to their last stand Yet we are not frightened by Maleger

> As pale and wan as ashes was his looke,
> His body leane and meagre as a rake,
> And skin all withered like a dried rooke,
> Therto as cold and drery as a snake .

What a huddle of incongruous images, introduced *within* the main emblem, and what a waste of power! Maleger is one of the creatures that 'be but as bugs to fearen babes withall' Any sentence of Iago's is more alarming 3. A professedly moral poem, if it is to hold the mind, must *remain* moral for posterity Otherwise we are driven to fall back simply on our historical understanding of the writer's point of view There is nothing edifying to-day in the figure of the iron man, Talus, who suppresses the Irish, or in the campaign of the Red Cross Knight against popery, and, moreover, in these passages the poetry is apt to become clouded

The wealth of the poem could hardly be impaired even by greater faults Much of its power is due to the dark background, in which Spenser, with his memories of Ireland and of his own disappointments and of many broken careers, arrays his images of evil He excels in the art of presenting them in masses

> carkasses exanimate
> Of such, as having all their substance spent
> In wanton ioyes and lustes intemperate,
> Did afterwards make shipwreck violent
> Both of their life, and fame for ever fowly blent [*blemished*]

But he reverts to pictures of beauty, grace, and goodness. His women are more distinctly drawn than his men, and the

good women than the bad ones, and, amongst the bad ones, those who, like Phædria and Acrasia, have a fair outside Belphœbe has human features, although her father was a sunbeam, and in the portrait of Britomart there is character as well as beautiful colour

> And ever and anon the rosy red
> Flasht through her face, as it had been a flake
> Of lightning, through bright heaven fulmined,
> At last the passion past she thus him answered

Spenser's colours, and similes, and landscapes, are all delightful things to search for, but he can also write, at will, the more abstract, and unsymbolical kinds of poetry In order to rescue Guyon, he produces an angel,—who is, indeed, compared, in true Renaissance style, to 'fair Cupido on Idæan hill' But then follows the piercing *vox angelica*, 'How oft do they their silver bowers leave !' The pure metaphysical style, again, is heard in the description of the Garden of Adonis, and at the end of the cantos on Constancy There is also a touch of it in one of the loveliest stanzas in the poem, the invocation to Chaucer, where Spenser is enabled to follow his master 'through infusion sweete Of thine owne spirit, which doth in me survive'.

VIII

Scholars have thoroughly analysed the 'no language' of which Ben Jonson could not approve the vocabulary with its sources and corruptions, the syntax, and the inflexions The glossary is certainly large, and yet, apart from the spelling, the strange words and forms are but sparsely distributed over the mass of the poem Often, for some special effect, they come in clusters Two stanzas on Belphœbe's dress contain eleven uncommon terms, such as *camus*, *aygulets*, *embayld*, *entrayld* But in the first thirty lines of the recital not a word needs translating We think of some illuminated parchment, in a rare but legible script, with flourishes of purple and gold To Spenser this way of writing is second nature, and the result is a thing of beauty, which is acclaimed, like his versification, by all men

His great invention, the stanza rhymed *abȧb bcbc C*, the last line being one of twelve, has a marked effect upon his language. It encourages, or rather enforces, much grammatical

inversion For the rhymes have to be emphatic, the last syllable bearing the weight, and it is often a verb, which therefore has to be thrown forward in the sentence Sometimes inversion pervades a whole stanza

> Their groves he feld, their gardins did deface,
> Their arbers spoyle, their cabinets suppresse,
> Their banket houses burne

Milton carries this usage yet further, under the influence of classical syntax But Spenser's versecraft is an endless subject There are a hundred refinements which the prosodist will tabulate, and the lover of poetry perceive The general tenor of the stanza is sweet and even, with few *metrical* inversions and few rippling trisyllabic feet The pauses become more abrupt in the indignant passages

> Some mouth'd like greedy Oystriges, some faste [*faced*]
> Like loathly Toades, some fashion'd in the waste
> Like swine

but, in general, the linear character is marked, and each stanza, in point of structure, is in the nature of a separate poem It must therefore have a satisfying close, and Spenser's closing Alexandrine is a very flexible instrument It may come as a loud climax, or it may fall away gently with the air of an afterthought The internal pause usually occurs after a weighted syllable, and that the eighth, but often it is at the sixth, or the fourth

> Vile Povertie, and lastly Death with infamie

But the line goes quicker and the pause is briefer when it comes after a light syllable

> Great liking unto many, but true love to feowe

No one has the peculiar and continuous music of Spenser, though once or twice, in the *Castle of Indolence* and in Philip James Worsley's translation of the *Odyssey* (1861) it has been echoed with curious precision Worsley justly remarks that

> It is one great merit of the Spenserian stanza, that the number of styles possible under the laws which it introduces is practically unlimited

The authors of *Childe Harold* and *Adonais* (to go no further), while keeping to Spenser's scheme of rhymes,

have imparted to it, each of them, an utterly different movement

IX

The first three books of the *Faerie Queene* had appeared in 1590, the second three in 1596 But Spenser was not exhausted, he had both old and new poetry in store Most of *Colin Clouts Come Home Again* (1595) had been written some time previously It relates his voyage in 1589 with Ralegh to England and the court, his two years' stay, his disenchantment and return to Ireland At first the strain is gloomy the sea is dreadful, Ireland a savage country, the court a quicksand Yet, he proceeds, the same court is made glorious by the noble ladies and poets who frequent it At last he consoles himself—repeating the argument of his *Hymns*—with a descant on the mythic origin of love and on its lordship over the world In 1595 he had published *Amoretti* and *Epithalamion*, which celebrate his fortunate love and marriage

In the eighty-nine sonnets of the *Amoretti* there is a good deal of literary commonplace, and also, we are tempted to say, of melodious verbiage But the writer's passion, if somewhat diffused, or diluted, is exalted and true There is little of the *amari aliquid*, and we are far enough from Donne, who likes to turn the knife in his own wound The *Amoretti* can almost be read as a continuous poem, which moves towards the happy ending chanted in *Epithalamion ;* and the best are in Spenser's most uplifted style Among the most perfect sonnets may be named No 27, 'Faire proud', No 34, 'Lyke as a ship', which is none the worse for its Petrarchan origins , and, in especial, No 72, 'Oft when my spirit doth spred her bolder winges'

> There my fraile fancy fed with full delight,
> Doth bath in blisse and mantleth most at ease ·
> Ne thinks of other heaven, but how it might
> Her hart's desire with most contentment please
> Hart need not with none other happinesse,
> But here on earth to have such hevens blisse

The whole series runs on words like *light, beauty, divine, glory, altar* in this circle the poet's mind is moving

In his nuptial ode he extends his flight. It is Spenser's greatest poem in plan, spirit, and execution. The stanzas

are complicated and long, and the line of three beats is used to the full, and always with a purpose:

> For to receyve this Saynt with honour dew,
> That commeth in to you

Each verse, leading up to the burden 'Ne let the woods them answer, nor theyr eccho ring' with its variations, is uttered as in a single breath, the voice rising and falling The allusions to Maia and the Hours and Graces need not be felt as artificial, they are right in a bridegroom whose mind is full of 'the fair humanities of old religion'. Spenser's passion for colour, and light, and ceremony, and music, here finds full scope, and Hallam well calls this ode 'ardent, noble, and pure' *Prothalamion*, made for the 'double marriage' of two high-born ladies, has its even better refrain, this time of two lines

> Against the bridale daye, which is not long
> Sweete Themmes runne softly, till I end my song

The wedding train passes up river towards Leicester House, which the poet suddenly remembers had once been his own haunt, though now its masters are gone 'But Ah here fits not well Olde woes but joyes to tell' Once more is forced on us the contrast with Donne, who in his epithalamies —and no others of the time can be compared with Spenser's— plays round the matter with piercing 'wit', and opens the chamber-door after Spenser has shut it

In later times the ghost of Spenser is to be seen continually, keeping the conception of pure poetry alive Future chapters will note its presence in each of the three centuries that follow The train of imitations, allusions, parodies, and tributes is long indeed, and to-day he is being edited, and studied, and honoured more than ever

CHAPTER VII

OTHER ELIZABETHAN VERSE

I

THE late and sudden and profuse blossoming of lyric after the coming of Spenser is well seen in the various miscellanies, I will name only the most remunerative These anthologies preserve, besides the work of poets who are known, much good verse by writers who are nameless or little more *A Handful of Pleasant Delights* (1566), gathered by Clement Robinson, is in fact a handful of somewhat jogtrot ballads, often perhaps twenty years old, but the pearls and crimson and the 'silver aglets' of the *Lady Greensleeves* stand out on this grey background The *Phœnix Nest* (1593), tastefully arranged by the unidentified editor 'R S', rings the changes, with pleasant artifice, on the notes of entreaty, devotion, despondency, and the lover's happiness The tone is set to the book by the light bright contributions of Thomas Lodge and Nicholas Breton, but there are also the grave elegies on Sidney by Matthew Roydon and Ralegh In a long *Dream*, of uncertain authorship, the visible and other charms of the lady are luxuriously recited But one anonymous piece, the jewel of the collection, 'O night, O jealous night', is ardent, not luxurious, and has a magnificent movement

> Let sailors gaze on stars and moon so freshly shining,
> Let them that miss the way be guided by the light,
> I know my lady's bower, there needs no more divining,
> Affection sees in dark, and Love hath eyes by night.

Another, 'Sweet violets, Love's paradise', is remarkable for the skill of its intricate stanza, which almost makes us think of Spenser's *Epithalamion* In *England's Helicon* (1600, 1614) a score of the choicer lyrical poets are repre-

sented, from Shakespeare and Sidney to Ralegh, Peele and Barnfield, usually, however, by verse that had been already in print But some obscurer work of value is also rescued There is the pretty, anonymous 'Corydon arise'; and, from the hand of the 'Shepherd Tony', usually identified with Anthony Munday, the *Woodman's Walk* and other gay delicate pieces Edmund Bolton, who in 1617 sketched for King James an academy of arts and sciences, is probably the 'E B' who signs *Theorello* and the *Shepherd to the Flowers* We realise how far-spread was the gift of lyric when we light on verse like this.

> While glowworms shall attend
> And their sparkling lights shall spend
> All to adorn and beautify
> Your lodging with most majesty,

or on the lines *Of Disdainful Daphne*, by one M H Nowell:

> The deep falls of wide rivers
> And the winds turning
> Are the true music-givers
> Into my mourning

England's Helicon is a collection in the pastoral strain; a concert of sweet pipings, if a little monotonous The *Passionate Pilgrim* (1599), published as Shakespeare's, includes in its twenty-one items several of his songs and sonnets, some that may perhaps be his, including the faultless 'Crabbed age and youth', and verse by Marlowe, Barnfield, and others The last miscellany of note is the *Poetical Rhapsody* (1602), edited by Francis Davison, to whom we owe our knowledge of many treasures Both he and his brother Walter are gifted lyrists, and one epitaph by Francis is thoroughly Jonsonian in style

> Lovely boy, thou art not dead,
> But from earth to heaven fled,
> For base earth was far unfit
> For thy beauty, grace, and wit.

We are in the age of Jonson, with its greater care for point and finish, accompanied by a certain decline in the earlier freshness and birdlike quality of song; one consequeuce being a more formal balance in the rhythm But the *Rhapsody* includes verse of earlier as well as of later cast;

Spenser, Constable, and other familiar names are represented. Otherwise the chief contributor is the still mysterious 'A W', to whom the editors assign poems of such different styles that some have construed the letters to signify 'Anonymous Writer' However this be, several of his poems have the same species of excellence and, above all, the incomparable cadence that was to persist in our lyric down to Restoration times It is heard in 'When will the fountain of my tears be dry?', in 'Sweet Love, mine only treasure', and in 'The golden sun that brings the day':

I heard the praise of beauty's grace,
Yet deemed it nought but poet's skill
I gazed on many a lovely face,
Yet found I none to bind my will
Which made me think that beauty bright
Was nothing else but red and white

There is the same virtue, or more, in the anonymous madrigal 'My Love in her attire doth show her wit', with its conclusion,

No beauty doth she miss
When all her clothes are on,
But Beauty's self she is
When all her clothes are gone

II

Still greater is the store of first-rate lyric in the song-books Their dates range from 1588 to 1632, but they are most frequent, and richest in their yield, during the first five-and-twenty years The majority of the words are by unknown authors The poet is seldom the composer, although Thomas Campion, or Campian (1567–1620), is an illustrious exception John Byrd, John Dowland, Thomas Morley, Thomas Weelkes, and many other setters of the madrigals and airs, call for an honourable salute as the partners and benefactors of the poets The important distinction between air and madrigal[1] need only be mentioned in so far as it affects the literary result The 'air' needs no explaining:

the airs of the lutenists usually took the form of solo-songs with several stanzas of words, for each of which, as a general rule, the same music was repeated [1]

[1] E H Fellowes, *English Madrigal Verse, 1588-1632*, 1920, pp ix-xi, where both species are fully described All the texts are given in this standard work.

The madrigal, considered as a poem, comes out as a single, unrepeated stanza, ranging from perhaps six to fifteen lines, which may vary greatly in length and rhyme-arrangement. Musically speaking, it was a kind of part-song, the voices numbering from two to five ,—often the words come to the modern editor with all their overlappings and repetitions, so that it falls to him to construct a connected text

There are more than a thousand lyrics—either 'madrigals' or 'airs'—in these collections. The poet well knew what the musician expected of him, a song that could be sung The idea must be not too subtle, but readily translatable into musical terms , the words must be 'musical as Apollo's lute' The composer is the sworn foe of verbal harshness. Hence most of these poems, however frail in texture, are easy and gliding, and free from the clashing consonants that infest our language Many tunes, and the metres along with them, are taken from the Italian, 'with', we are told, 'a faithful imitation of every syllable' All this made for fullness and sweetness of vowelling , and, further, for the cultivation of those double rhymes which are native to Italian but often heavy and embarrassing in English Our poets learned to make the most of them without overloading the sound The three chief types of double rhyme are seen in the following snatch, which no one would or could write to-day

Sing we and chant it,
While love doth grant it
Not long youth lasteth,
And old age hasteth
Now is best leisure
To take our pleasure

Sometimes the very weight of the double ending is turned to noble profit, as in Sidney's refrain 'Only in you my song begins and endeth' Thus does the musician serve the poet But though a song is not fully itself till it is sung, still if it is to live as poetry it must be able to live as *un*sung, by its verbal melody and quality It is the glory of Elizabethan lyric that so much of it can face this test.

The commonest topic is love, carefree, youthful, cheerful, and straightforward The motto might be

Though I am young and cannot tell
Either what love or death is well . .

This mood seems to prevail during the last ten years of Elizabeth's reign, although, of course, as in the songs of Sidney, there are deeper notes and discords which anticipate the next age The usual text is 'Spring, the sweet spring, is the year's pleasant thing', or that of the madrigal,

> Adieu, ye city-prisoning towers,
> Better are the country bowers,
> Winter is gone, the trees are springing,
> Birds thus on every hedge sit singing
> Hark, how they chirp, Come, love, delay not,
> Come, sweet love, O come and stay not

There is much pastoral ditty, some of it of a more literary stamp, with its china Phillises and Corydons, while some is more English and homely, and in the strain that William Blake was to recapture

> And when the bagpipes play
> For this the merry day,
> Then comes in little Joan,
> And bids strike up the drone

In other songs the shepherds have grown up, the maypole dance is over, and the mere change of partners no longer gives satisfaction There is more thought, more suspense, and more rapture, the lover reasons with his lady or with himself 'Ah, dear heart, why do you rise' is an example Another exquisite love-song, hidden away in the collection of Robert Jones, called *A Musical Dream* (1609), may be set beside a certain lyrical dialogue in *Romeo and Juliet*

> And is it night? are they thine eyes that shine?
> Are we alone and here? and here alone
> May I come near? may I but touch thy shrine?
> O come, my dear, our griefs are turned to night,
> And night to joys, Night blinds pale Envy's eyes,
> Silence and sleep prepare for our delight

This cleanness of the imagination is a general characteristic of the song-books They contain some excellent devout verse, but the tone is in general pagan, or at least secular Even so, it is highly serious and ethical, or it may be the voice of disappointment or regret. There are some dirges of great beauty, like 'Come, ye heavy states of night', and one of these has the Roman concision that we associate with the handiwork of Jonson and of Landor.

O grief! even on the bud that fairly flowered
The sun hath lowered
And at the breast which Love durst never venture,
Bold Death did enter
Pity, O heavens, that have my love in keeping,
My sighs and weeping

III

In Campion's four *Books of Airs* (? 1613–? 1617) the words and the tunes are of his own making Campion, who held a medical degree and saw some foreign service, wrote many Latin *Poemata*, also *Observations in the Art of English Poesy* (1602) Here he revives the passing whimsy of Spenser, Sidney, and the shadowy group known as the 'Areopagus', he pleads for the adoption of classical metres into English and for the abandonment of rhyme Some of his own examples, 'Rose-cheeked Laura' and 'Just beguiler' are melodious, where the natural accents happen to fall on the 'long' syllables But Daniel in his *Defence of Rhyme* had an easy reply, nor did Campion long abjure his own rare gift of rhyming Some of his verses are only pleasant displays of skill, but he invents many measures of great charm, and some of his harmonies are hard to match 'Hark, all you ladies that do sleep', printed in 1591, 'My sweetest Lesbia', 'Thrice toss these oaken ashes in the air', 'When thou must home to shades of underground',—these are only a few poems that show the compass of Campion's tuneful invention In feeling, he avoids extremes, he cannot, like Donne, surrender his whole mind to bitterness One lyric indeed, spoken as by a woman, 'So quick, so hot, so mad is thy fond suit', is of unusual intensity Campion also wrote many pious or moral songs, which have all his purity of form, one of the most fervent is 'Never weather-beaten sail more willing bent to shore', an appeal to God to give rest to his soul 'The man of life upright' is Horace's *Integer vitae*, with variations But the best of the love-lyrics, 'Follow your saint', is marked by its absence of sting, and shows the self-absorption of the true musician, to whom it shall '*suffice*' that his notes to his lady were 'breathed for hér delight' He has also rustic and holiday moods, his 'Jack and Joan' is like a scrap of Herrick One song leaves a perfect impression of a festal patrician evening:

Now yellow waxen lights
Shall wait on honey love,
While youthful revels, masques, and courtly sights
Sleep's leaden spells remove,

and Campion's masques and entertainments also reveal his contact with the brilliant courtly life

Translator, playwright, pamphleteer, and romancer, Thomas Lodge lives by his songs, which might seem the frailest of his productions They are found, along with many sonnets, in his *Phillis* (1593), and are sprinkled through his stories Some of the best are in *Rosalynde*, on which Shakespeare drew for the comedy which is nearest of all to the spirit of the pastoral singers Lodge, in his sonnets, is a cheerful and silent borrower from poets French and Italian, not rarely refining what he takes He is no less communistic in some of his songs, but his nicety of language and airy music are all his own 'Strive no more', 'First shall the heavens want starry light', 'My Phillis hath the morning sun', and 'The earth, late choked with flowers' are auspicious openings for a lyric, and Lodge, unlike so many poets of the next century, has the power of sustaining an overture, and of not letting the style flag 'Love in my bosom like a bee' is universally known Another man of letters of all work, Nicholas Breton, if less highly trained than Lodge, has no less native gift for lyric, and more gaiety of heart He likes to ring the changes on the 'fair' and 'wise' and 'kind' attributes of Phyllis or Phyllida, and his *Passionate Shepherd* (1604) is a flowing pastoral descant, the best of its time Breton has a keener eye than most of his companions for small country things, and watches, as Bullen says, 'with friendly interest', the 'little black-haired coney On a bank for sunny place With her forefeet wash her face'. His best conceived song, 'Come, little babe', is the lullaby of a deserted mother, who consoles herself with the *quality* of the father, 'a noble youth of blood and bone' Much of Breton's verse has the savour of 'the merry month of May', even the lines 'Good Muse, rock me asleep', come short of real melancholy These singers share with Spenser and Marlowe the honours of founding a sure poetical style.

IV

Of the *un*sure style, with its conceits and splendours, its sudden soar and Icarus-like collapse, the first great example is found in Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586) 'Look in thy heart, and write' so his Muse adjures him, but often he looks only in the litter-basket of his fancy Not that we are to check at a bold phrase or two that would have startled Petrarch—'your rhubarb words', 'great with child to speak' But failures are not few, and conceits, as in Shakespeare's sonnets, are rampant Yet these, to my mind, make for rather than against the substantial truth of the story that is told It is natural, in the ebb of passionate feeling or in a mood of disgust, to dally with words The drama has every mark of being based on a real experience, however much of the detail may be day-dreaming, or built up by imagination, and whatever may be the literary borrowings Stella is Lady Rich, born Penelope Devereux Sidney would hardly, even in manuscript, 'publish his own slander', or record an illicit passion for a married woman whose identity was obvious The conventional strife, staled by so many pens, between desire and duty, here becomes alive The dates and stages of the episode admit of discussion, but the outline is clear *Astrophel and Stella* ends on a dubious note, 'in my woes for thee thou art my joy' Sidney's most exalted and finished sonnet, 'Leave me, O Love, that reachest but to dust', with which some editors have concluded the series for a pious purpose, does not belong to it at all

The sonnets were published in 1591, with the ten songs, but the songs were first inserted in their places in the edition of 1598 They are of varying metal, but three at least are of Sidney's best mint namely, the first, 'Doubt you to whom my Muse', with its weight of feeling and wealth of sound, the eighth (though this is hurt by conceits), 'In a grove most rich of shade', and the fourth, which is pure gold, 'Only joy, now here you are' I echo the words of M Emile Legouis, that 'there is nothing in the verse of the English Renaissance so true, so direct, and so noble' It is spoken to Stella in the silent house, and with her refrain 'No no no no, my dear, let be', she prevails Had we to choose four of the sonnets that are nearest to perfection, not in the Petrarchan style, nor in the Miltonic, but

in the Shakespearian, it would be easy to hesitate I would submit No 31, 'With how sad steps', No 39, 'Come, sleep!', No 64, 'No more, my dear', and No 99, 'When far-spent night', on the ground, not only of their verbal beauty, but of the nice correspondence of the thought with the metrical pattern The *Arcadia* and Sidney's miscellaneous poems yield little in comparison, except 'Leave me, O Love', and *The Nightingale*, and *Desire* Some of the best openings, like 'Ring out your bells' and 'Phœbus, farewell,' lead to disappointment But such a poem as 'My true love hath my heart' cannot be ruined, however hard the fancy of the 'bargain' may be worked, and the madrigal, 'Why dost thou haste away,' can hardly be criticised The song 'The lad Philisides' contains one inspired word, presumably a 'sound-word' 'To hear and not despise Thy *lyriblirring* cries' Nothing need be said of the perverse 'classical' metres, yet sometimes, when the accents fall aright, even they can please, and we think of Penshurst when we read

> O sweet woods, the delight of solitariness!
> O how much I do like your solitariness!

V

Many collections of sonnets follow after Sidney's, and come thickest in the years 1592 to 1595, some, like dim meteors, vanishing rapidly, while others remain, constellations of more or less brilliance Such are Henry Constable's *Diana* and Samuel Daniel's *Delia*, in 1592, Thomas Lodge's *Phillis*, and Barnabe Barnes's *Parthenophil and Parthenope*, in 1593, and, in 1595, Richard Barnfield's sonnets The word sonnet was loosely used, and covered many kinds of lyric, but each of these series either consists of or contains true sonnets Michael Drayton's *Idea*, appearing first in 1594, underwent many additions, subtractions, and changes before the final edition of 1619 The date of publication of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, 1609, is little clue to that of composition William Drummond's *Poems* of 1616 contain many sonnets, which open a new phase in the history of the species I omit many lesser names, and there are single sonnets of great excellence by Ralegh, Chapman, and other poets.

The form was an offshoot from Italy and France, and our writers helped themselves without scruple, and as the custom was without acknowledgment, from the common stock These debts have been minutely sifted by scholars, much to our profit, but it is too easy, in the process of digging at the roots, to trample out the flowers A poem is what it is, no matter how it came into being The 'translations' of Lodge or Constable from the French or Italian are often improvements on the original, or are at least delightful handiwork These inquiries, in truth, concern the biographer rather than the lover of poetry We cannot but wish to know whether Shakespeare, or Sidney, is addressing a woman or a dream, whether or no he is merely describing a translated passion Luckily, with Sidney, Drayton, and Spenser we are reassured (if need be) by the external evidence As to Shakespeare, the sceptic is met by a curious problem He has to suppose that a fictitious confession is uttered with an accent of sincerity and with a poetic power which could not be surpassed if the story had been a true one

For the varieties and changes in the metrical structure the reader is referred to the histories of prosody The technique is delicate and its niceties are not to be briefly explained The mechanics of the rhyming, however, can be quickly made out in their main principles The one extreme, the orthodox Italian form, can be seen in such a poem as Constable's 'Miracle of the world', in his *Diana*, and the other, known as the Shakespearian, in Drayton's beautiful example, 'The glorious sun went blushing to his bed' Every intermediate phase can be found in the numerous experiments of Sidney, and in the lacework scheme of rhymes that is associated with, though not invented by, Spenser But a sonnet, like Blake's 'tear', is 'an intellectual thing', and all these changes of rhyming are nothing, apart from the answering changes in the articulation and progress of the idea which the sonnet conveys The broad difference between the extremes is that with Shakespeare the whole weight is thrown forward to the clanging final couplet, whereas in the Italian scheme (perfectly carried out in Milton's 'Captain, or Colonel') it is poised at or about the ninth line, where the new set of rhymes begins, and where the new thought, in the sestet, in some way develops, or completes, or qualifies, or contradicts, that expounded in

the octet Shakespeare's form is of course not a heresy, or truancy, simply carried off by the writer's genius It is a new and splendid kind of poem with laws and rights of its own The sonnet, whatever its make-up, is the most important of the 'closed', or self-contained measures, with a limited number of lines,—the scheme of which, that is, cannot be repeated indefinitely The balade, triolet, roundel, and the rest cannot compare with it in resource In its Elizabethan forms it utters with peculiar power the pride and hopefulness, the aspiration and passion and bitterness, of the great age

VI

Barnabe Barnes is like Browning's bee, 'drunken and overbold' His 'sonnets, madrigals, elegies, and odes', in *Parthenophil and Parthenope* (1593), are packed with crudities, the writer is young, wanton, and confidential He is by no means content to rhyme to his mistress' eyebrow, he is filled, as he says, with an 'outrageous fire' There is usually a red spark somewhere in a poem by Barnes Once indeed he is quiet and elegant, and sings, 'Ah, sweet Content, where is thy mild abode?', and his madrigals and anacreontics show much deftness Richard Barnfield, in his *Affectionate Shepherd* (1594) and his singular poem *Cynthia*, is wanton in another fashion, the shepherd Daphnis is all too affectionate to his Ganymede, in imitation of Virgil's Corydon *Cynthia* also contains, as the author claims, the 'first imitation', and no bad one, of the stanza of the *Faerie Queene* In these works there is at any rate the sap of poetry, but Barnfield is remembered more justly for the pastoral 'My flocks feed not', for the sonnet 'If music and sweet poetry agree', and for the lines 'As it fell upon a day', which were long credited, and on their merits not unfitly, to Shakespeare. The last two were printed in the *Passionate Pilgrim*, a year after their appearance in Barnfield's *Poems* of 1598 In contrast to these writers is Henry Constable, with his command of a pure and elegant 'middle style' His *Spiritual Sonnets* are clear, even, and little inspired, and his sonnets to *Diana*, which contain a good deal of translation, are hardly above the pitch of fancy. That on Sidney, 'Give pardon, blessed soul', rises much higher Henry Chettle's *Diaphenia*, a lyric that matches

the best in the song-books, was formerly attributed to Constable

VII

Drayton's works are a 'poetical mirror' of the fashions from the time of Sidney and Spenser, his early masters, down to that of Donne and William Browne For nearly forty years he wrote untiringly eclogues, sonnets, *Endimion and Phœbe*, historical 'legends', *England's Heroical Epistles*, plays, satires, eulogies, odes, more eclogues, more sonnets, familiar epistles and elegies, *Nimphidia*, more and better eclogues (*The Muses' Elizium*), and, still unsated, *Poly-Olbion* (1613, 1622), 'my strange Herculean task'. Drayton can prose on without mercy, his grammar is often lax and his verse heavy, although both of them become smoother with time But he can always, in the midst of his *pedestris sermo*, startle us with a sudden phrase, or burst of music, as though the genius of the time had impatiently snatched up the lyre on which Drayton was conscientiously practising

A few of his sonnets, though probably coloured by those of Shakespeare, do not lose in the comparison One, as everybody knows, is in the first flight There is nothing anywhere like the lover's return upon himself in 'Since there's no help, come let us kiss and part' (1619), where, after dismissing his passion upon love's deathbed, he cries at last, 'Thou might'st him yet recover' More than once Drayton worthily renews the ancient theme, 'Whilst thus my pen strives to eternise thee', and the early sonnet, 'If chaste and pure devotion of my youth', is of a beauty only marred by a confusion of syntax at the close His first pastorals, *Idea, the Shepherd's Garland* (1593), abound in the characteristic Elizabethan glow and sonority, while the later ones, much more carefully finished, *The Shepherd's Sirena*, *The Quest of Cynthia*, and especially *The Muses' Elizium* (1630), have a true pastoral sweetness The fairy fantasy *Nymphidia* (1627), where everything is on the midget scale, has the precision and matter-of-factness that children ask for in such stories Everything is in the day-light, and everything is dainty *Endimion and Phœbe* is an Ovidian narrative, full of extravagance and luxury, of bad work and good, there is a touch of poetic intoxication in it that we scarcely associate with the author His first

popular success was won by the flowing rhetoric of the *Heroical Epistles* (1597), exchanged between Surrey and his 'Geraldine' and many other illustrious pairs of lovers As in *Mother Hubberds Tale*, the heroic couplets often anticipate the ring of Denham's or Dryden's But Drayton's most gallant poetry is in his *Odes*, amorous, aggressive, or patriotic. They are mostly in stanzas of short lines, with an abrupt, rapid movement Their variety can be seen in *Love's Conquest*, *To Cupid*, and an *Ode Written in the Peak*, while *The Virginian Voyage*, with its 'cypress, pine, and useful sassafras', recalls Marvell's *Bermudas* There is more than half a gale in lines like

> Britons, you stay too long,
> Quickly aboard bestow you

Akin to these is the *Ballad of Agincourt*, a martial chant which the poet Henley did well, in his *Lyra Heroica*, to interleave with the choruses of *Henry V*, nor is it dulled by such neighbourhood Drayton is an easy and felicitous epistoler, his lines *To Henry Reynolds* on Chaucer and Sidney and other poets contain sound criticism, as well as being a reflex of contemporary opinion The *Legends*, *Barons' Wars*, and other such enterprises, are all too solid, but contain spoil for the anthologist

Only students delve deeply in *Poly-Olbion*, that huge 'chorographical' description in Alexandrines of the hills and streams, the memorials and antiquities, the trades and scenery, of England It is, we must grant, something of a prodigious birth, but greatness of spirit went to its making, and it has many a resonant passage, pictorial or patriotic Drayton's poetry is like a broad low plateau, singular and pleasant to explore, though it sinks away into featureless plain, with a rich flora, often beautiful, and always strongly rooted, with many streams and meadows, and fairy rings where little beings can be watched at their tournaments, and with a high crest or two, jutting up abruptly It is all good travelling, for the devout

VIII

Daniel (1562–1619) follows the changing taste in poetry almost as faithfully as Drayton. In *Delia* there is none of Sidney's passion, no drama, the very conceits are not

violent; all is silvery and easy. The chain-sequence beginning with 'Look, Delia, how we esteem the half-blown rose', where the last line of each sonnet is the first of the next, and 'Care-charmer Sleep', and 'My cares draw on my everlasting night' all illustrate Daniel's grace, just as the *Complaint of Rosamond* does his gift of fluent and level, not very animated narrative *Musophilus* (1599) is in the higher mood The poet, the 'muse-lover', disputes with Philocosmus, the worldling, and proclaims his faith not only in the muse and her passports to fame but in all learning and knowledge Daniel's strain of stoicism begins to appear The lonely mind is its own fortress, and sufficient to itself No one, perhaps, may hear of the sequestered thinker, no one may praise him, but he can still say,

> This is the thing that I was born to do,
> This is my scene, this part must I fulfil

Also the poet has faith in his native tongue, and he ends with the prophetic vision,

> What worlds in th' yet unformèd Occident
> May come refined with th' accents that are ours?

This temper rises yet higher in the *Epistles* (1603) Like Chapman's plays, they are full of the conception that the high-minded man reflects the intelligent order of the 'universal frame' The young Lady Anne Clifford is full of 'clean-created thoughts' The greatest of these epistles is that addressed *To the Lady Margaret, Countess of Cumberland*, with its picture of the man who looks 'as from the shore of peace' with a constant mind upon 'distraught ambition,' and craft, and bloodshed The letter *To Sir Thomas Egerton*, and the chorus in *Philotas*, one of Daniel's Senecan plays, on 'restless Ambition', are in the same key

In Coleridge's favourite *Hymen's Triumph* (1615) Daniel shows an unexpected gift of analysis How differently would Donne have noted the innocent beginnings of love, and how would *he* have barbed such a line as 'And what was our disease we could not tell'? Coleridge has also pointed out Daniel's mastery of the 'neutral style', lying somewhere between that of verse and that of prose, and yet truly poetical. In his temperate way, resisting (though it may cost him little) all the lures around him of rich excess, he makes an

honourable third, somewhat in the rear, to Spenser and Marlowe. He commands the high plain manner to which good poets come back after whatever excursions In his *Ulysses and the Siren* (1605), he also commands—the theme being still the pursuit of virtue and honour—a grave lyrical music It is heard again in the songs of *Tethys' Festival* In his prose *Defence of Rhyme* (1602) Daniel is not content with disposing of Campion, but vindicates with spirit the despised Middle Ages and the Latin Renaissance

IX

We are not to look for Daniel's lofty, somewhat detached philosophy, or for his clear stream of language, in another ethical poet, Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke (1554–1628), whose *Caelica*, published in 1633, may have been written a generation earlier The contents, nominally 'sonnets', are in many metres, of true sonnets there are about forty Greville is weighed down by reflection and sombre experience The lines

> Through enamelled meads they went,
> Quiet she, he passion-rent,

might serve for a motto to many of his love-poems He reasons closely and severely on his own passions In the long-drawn-out lyric *Despair* he decides, after much balancing, that he is not after all to cherish hope

> Time past lays up my joys,
> And time to come my grief,
> She ever must be my desire
> And never my relief

Greville abounds in pregnant and beautiful phrase, 'the little hearts where light-winged passion reigns'—'Caelica with clouded face Giving unto passion grace' And there is Myra, 'Washing the water with her beauties white' But his thought and language are as a rule scornfully compressed One sonnet, 'Fie, foolish earth', is exceptionally lucid and well-rounded

> The hopes and fears of lust may make men sorry,
> But love still in herself finds her delight

Greville's epitaph upon himself runs 'Servant to Queen Elizabeth—Counsellor to King James—and friend to Sir

Philip Sidney—*trophaeum peccati*'. The strength of feeling in his elegy on Sidney, 'Silence augmenteth grief', forces its way through the somewhat pedestrian verse, the *Life of Sidney* is a descant on his friend's nature and genius, rather than a biography

The canon, like the chronology, of Sir Walter Ralegh's poems is beset with uncertainties, often the evidence amounts to little more than *aut Rawleius aut diabolus* Still we know enough to be able to judge of his style and mental habit Much of the lengthy, fragmentary *Cynthia* is not less crabbed than turbid Yet the writer's spirit smoulders hotly everywhere, his devotion to the queen and his ambition have been equally baffled The quibbles which are a trick of the time are Ralegh's 'fatal Cleopatra' He likes to pile them up, by simple enumeration and antithetically *The Lie*, with its concentrated gloom, the lighter *Description of Love*, the lines 'Farewell, false love', and the answer to Marlowe ('If all the world and love were young'), are all in this manner The conceits that follow on the flawless opening of 'Give me my scallop-shell of quiet' are of an uncommon wildness and quaintness 'our bottles and all we Are filled with immortality', and 'Christ is the king's attorney' Doubts are thrown on the authorship of that perfectly finished dialogue, 'As you came from the Holy Land', and it is not in Ralegh's usual vein There is a delightful unreason in the lover's query, for why *should* the pilgrim have met the lady? The epigram 'Even such is time', and the lines from Catullus (which occur in the *History of the World*), 'The suns may set and rise', are free from quibble, and are dateless in their language Ralegh's sonnet on the *Faerie Queene*, with its 'proud full sail', remains the greatest of his undoubted poems But two other sonnets, assigned to him on fair evidence, are well worthy of him, and have his die-stamp of phrase One is 'Like truthless dreams, so are my joys expired' The other a very popular 'Like to a hermit poor in place obscure', which is now known to be partly translated from Philippe Desportes, and is bettered in the process

We are apt to think of our Renaissance as dispersing 'the ghosts of the Middle Ages' and defiantly vindicating the freedom of the individual to think and enjoy This is true, but then the Renaissance has many facets, and,

faithful to her past, the English Muse never ceased to be ethical and religious The ethics, we have seen, are sometimes stoical and pagan, or at least of the higher worldly kind Content is often preached and a quiet detachment, as in Sir Edward Dyer's lines ' My mind to me a kingdom is ', where the maxims follow like beads upon a string This topic, indeed, was a favourite exercise ' I joy not in no earthly bliss, I force not Crœsus' wealth a straw ', declares one anonymous writer There is some neat and admirable verse of the kind by Robert Southwell, the martyred Jesuit, who is chiefly known for his magnificent lyric of sixteen lines, *The Burning Babe*, which is found in *St Peter's Complaint* (1602) In another poem Southwell admirably keeps up the old and pretty carol-fashion

> His chilling cold doth heat require,
> Come, seraphins, in lieu of fire,
> This little ark no cover hath,
> Let cherubs' wings his body swathe;
> Come, Raphael, this Babe must eat,
> Provide our little Toby meat

Pious familiarity could hardly go further it is heard again in the lines ' Behold a silly tender babe ' In the anonymous *Song of Mary* (1601) we find ' Hierusalem my happy home ', which lives and will live in the Hymnals

CHAPTER VIII

DRAMATIC POETRY BEFORE SHAKESPEARE

I

IT is now time to outline, not the history of the drama, but the fortunes of poetry within the drama Poetry comes to life, first of all, in some of the miracle plays, and again, later, in some of Shakespeare's predecessors In the long interval between it is much more scanty It is necessary to return awhile to the age of Chaucer The intricate history of the sacred drama is told at length by many authorities —its origins in the ritual enacted at the great feasts of the Church, its emergence from the precinct into the open, and its blending with the shows and processions of the people, the extension, hastened by the observance of Corpus Christi day, as ordered in 1311, from the single play to the cycle, and the formation of the cycles performed by guilds of craftsmen patrolling their several cities. The York plays, the most elaborate, began to be acted as early as 1378, those of Wakefield, the 'Towneley' series, somewhat later The so-called *Ludus Coventriae*, of which the scene is not ascertained and which is distinct from the fragments of the Coventry plays, is partly of the early fifteenth century The Chester plays are dated about (?) 1329 After the Reformation the miracle plays gradually died down, though some are heard of in Stuart times Besides the four main groups there are the Digby plays, the Brome play, and many others There was a great parallel growth of sacred drama on the mainland and especially in France, but our plays have a distinct physiognomy If we ask where poetry is to be detected in them, the answer is, in the general conception of the cycle, and in the pathos or power of single episodes

The imagination at work is not merely that of a crowd of forgotten artificers, it is the imagination of the race Centuries had shaped the scheme of the world-drama out of the sacred books and out of Church tradition Stretching from the creation to the doomsday, it was accepted and credited like the courses of the sun This is the only drama in Europe that has printed itself, along with its implicit poetry, on the *whole* mind of the people A composite picture of the cycles shows them revolving upon five great events the Creation, the Fall, the Nativity, the Resurrection, and the Second Coming Among the favoured scenes are the deluge and the sacrifice of Isaac Moses, Balaam, Solomon make their entry, the prophets foretell the Messiah. Then, after a long break, the typical scenes are laid in Bethlehem, in Pilate's court, at the foot of the Cross, or by the tomb, the Ascension and coming of Antichrist prepare for the finale The scheme, in itself, is majestic, it is that of a supreme romance, which is also a true one As to the performers, Shakespeare's Theseus has pronounced

> What are they that do play it ?
> *Philostrate* Hard-handed men that work in Athens here,
> Which never laboured in their minds till now . . .
> *Theseus* I will hear that play,
> For never anything can be amiss,
> When simpleness and duty tender it

In all the cycles there is heavy reading, the hand is seldom that of an artist The style, at one extreme, is pedantic

> And namely of your comfortable message !
> For I understand, by inspiration,
> That ye know by singular privilage
> Most of my sonys Incarnacioun

At the other extreme, it is like this (the Jews are using their daggers upon the Host)

> *Masphat.* And I you plight I shall him not please,
> For with this punch I shall him prick
> *Malchus* And with this angus I shall hym not ease, [*angush*]
> Another buffet shall he lick

But there are many oases, if we will only travel for them In the forty-eight York plays the versification is facile and varied, and in certain scenes the beauty of the Bible

story refuses to be impaired Joseph waits in the desert, and, as in Cynewulf's *Crist*, is vexed as to the paternity of the child. He is assured by *Puellae*, and by an angel, of the purity of Mary , she tells him that the child is ' Sir, Goddis and yours ', and sends up her thanks

Hail my Lord God ! hail, prince of peace
Hail my father, and hail my son !
Hail, sovereign sege, all sins to cease ! [*man*]
Hail God and man in earth to wonne ! [*dwell*]
Hail ! through whose might
All this world was first begun,
Mirkness and light

Mary's cry at the Cross in the Towneley series shows the imagination of these playwrights at its highest the strain is that of the rhymed *Legends*

Swete son, say me thi thoght,
What wonders has thou wroght,
To be in payn thus broght,
Thi blissed blode to blende ?
A son, thynk on my wo !
Whi will thou fare me fro ?
On mold is no man mo
That may my myrthes amende . . .

Alas, dede, thou dwellys to lang ! whi art thou hid fro me ? [*death*]
Who kende thee to my childe to gang ? all blak thou makys his ble , [*face*]
Now witterly thou wyrkys wrang the more I will wyte thee, [*blame*]
But if thou will my harte stang that I myght with hym dee [*sting*]
And byde ,
Sore syghing is my sang, for thyrlyd is hys hyde ! [*pierced*]

In the Digby play on *Christ's Burial* Mary refuses to leave the Cross, crying ' His moder am not I ? ' In another, the Magdalene asks Death what ' offence ' *she* has done to him, that the Lord should suffer ? and begs to be taken herself, *quia amore langueo* In another Digby play this Mary is the heroine of a dramatic romance She is seduced by a gallant at the prompting of evil powers, is changed in heart by Christ, effects miracles and converts Paynims, and makes a holy end in the wilderness

The sacrifice of Isaac is shown many times in the extant dramas , most fully and movingly, in the Chester series and the Brome play. In the latter Deus sends Angel to

try Abraham, whose heart (for Isaac is his best-beloved) is 'heavily set'. The boy carries the faggot, learns of his fate, and prays his father to tell Sarah that he is not dead but gone to a far country He is not the only son, and once he is dead he will be out of mind Isaac—it is a daring echo—exclaims, 'Lord receive me in thy hand' He does not see the angel, and asks why Abraham is so slow Afterwards he gaily catches the ram and blows up the fire, but still fears the shining sword A Doctor points the moral for the benefit of the audience The Harrowing of Hell is well presented in the Chester plays The emotions of the Saviour are simplified, but without loss of dignity, and there are none of the terrors portrayed in *Piers the Ploughman*

> Earthly man, that I have wrought,
> Awake out of thy sleep!
> Earthly man, whom I have bought,
> Of me thou take no keep
> From heaven man's soul I sought
> Into a dungeon deep,
> My dear leman from thence I brought, [*beloved*]
> For ruth of her I weep.

But in some versions of this scene the comic devils talk just as the saddlers who enact them might address a housebreaker Satan puts up a fight of words and pretends to remember Joseph the carpenter

> Thy fadir knewe I wele be syght,
> He was a write, his mette to wynne [*wright, meat*]

Then he retreats in good form, calling on Mahound

The farce and riot that besprinkle these plays (which Byron, of all men, terms 'very profane productions') are composed in lively and resourceful rhymes, and light up many a dull page with their impudence Some of us who have seen the elder Coquelin in *Les Fourberies de Scapin* can almost fancy him as the Mak, the roguish shepherd, of *Secunda Pastorum* in the Towneley series Mak's unknown inventor has a genius for rustic comedy, it was long before the Elizabethans produced his equal By means of a charm, Mak has looted a sheep from his slumbering mates, who presently awake and chase him to his cottage He and his wife Gib wrap the sheep in a crib, it is their baby. When detected, they vow it is a changeling, nay, that they had *seen* it changed Mak is tossed in a sheet, and all ends

cheerfully Then the party go to the manger with their gifts, and the tone changes to that of a carol All is natural, the shepherds may quite well have had their jest on the eve of that occasion There is nothing, any more than in a gargoyle, to jar upon the true believer And are not funning and horse-play themselves part of the world-drama? Rougher verse-smiths abound, who are humorists as well, and who drag their neighbours upon the stage Joseph is an elderly husband whom they know, Pilate ranting and Herod 'on a scaffold hie' are the town braggarts, Noah's railing wife lives next door It is a day of licence, no such chance again, till next year, of pinning out your acquaintance without malice or reprisals! A kind of poetry cannot be denied to these saturnalia

II

The Morality arose later than the miracle play, in part independently, partly as its offspring The governing purpose has been aptly described to 'the moral and sacramental teaching of the Church is assigned the prominence which in the miracle play is occupied by its history'[1] Most of the characters are now abstractions In the centre is Mankind, styled Infans, Freewill, or Everyman He is long misled by the world, the flesh, and the devil, who are embodied in the seven sins or in a Bad Angel He is guarded by Mercy, Conscience, Reason, Good Deeds, and Good Angel, and to these monitors, after much backsliding, he at last listens, as death approaches and youth and friends and pleasure desert him Everyman repents and confesses, is shriven and accepted It is all, in the mediæval sense, a comedy, for it ends well, but, until the end, the note is tragic, notwithstanding the farcical interludes Death the skeleton, another humorist, is ever at hand This picture of the human voyage has its grandeur, and it brings out the loneliness of the pilgrim, but the grandeur is of a narrow kind, and the Moralities are in truth a survival The blight of mediæval allegory and personification is on them Mercy and Caro and Abstinentia are a poor exchange for Isaac and Mary and the shepherds A few Moralities, however, are striking The oldest extant and the most elaborate,

[1] A W. Pollard, *English Miracle Plays*, ed 1923, p xlui

the *Castle of Perseverance*, is assigned to the mid-reign of Henry VI Here a dreamlike muddle is produced, since the characters are of many different orders of reality sins, angels, the Father in heaven, Anima, the five senses, and a nondescript being called Garcio In *Everyman*, a play which has been re-staged in our time, and is a version from the Dutch, these discords are absent, there is clearness, economy, and unity of action The verse, too, is more than competent.

> O all thing faileth save God alone,
> Beauty, Strength, and Discretion,
> For when Death bloweth his blast,
> They all renne fro me full fast

Only Good Deeds stands by Everyman, who is at last received by Angel with the words 'Come, excellent spouse to Jesu!' In other Moralities (we must except Skelton's interesting *Magnificence*) the principal relief to dullness is in the clowning, on which the playwright falls back in order to whip up the attention The Vice, or Iniquity, a ranting fellow and highly popular, is the protagonist Allusions to him were easily taken by Shakespeare's audience He rants sometimes in the broadest vernacular, evidently felt as a relief after the official diction

Mercy Mercy is my name and my denomination,
I conceive ye have but a little form in my communication

New Guise Ey, ey, your body is full of Latin English

III

In their middle stage the moralities show rather more talent and humour, and are associated (though authorship is often doubtful) with the names of John Rastell, John Heywood, and Henry Medwall Medwall's *Fulgens and Lucres*, of which the full text is now available, was printed between 1513 and 1519 It is a very early specimen of a genuine and spirited lay drama, with a double action A well-born boaster and a poor but virtuous suitor vie for the hand of an undecided lady, and the two servants, in turn, court a damsel who throws both of them over They fool admirably, parody a knightly contest by wrestling and in more unseemly ways, and talk to the audience The author pleads, unawares, for the mixture of jest and earnest

in the drama of the future every spectator, he says, must be satisfied

> For some there be that looks and gapes
> Only for such trifles and japes,
> And some there be among
> That forceth little of such madness, [*care for*]
> But delighteth them in matter of sadness, [*serious stuff*]
> Be it never so long

The Moralities trailed on during the sixteenth century, the old ingredients being recombined in many ways It would be idle here to enumerate titles Grace, or beauty, or serious grasp of character, is rare enough There is the song in *Lusty Juventus*, with the refrain 'In youth is pleasure, in youth is pleasure', and there is point and humour in the *Play of the Weather*, where eight 'suitors' put up simultaneous prayers for wind, or rain, or sun, or snow But the interest of work like Ulpian Fulwell's *Like Will to Like* or of the *Three Ladies of London* is almost wholly historical The Interlude, a term of various meaning, melts into the Morality rightly so called It may signify a comic play within a play, or, more fitly, a scene where the actors, somewhat like Chaucer's pilgrims, are not abstractions, but types and also individuals John Heywood, the author of the best-known interlude, the *Four Ps*, is in debt to Chaucer for his Pardoner and Pedlar They have a bout of lying and 'flyting' with Potecary and Palmer, the jokes are loud, and cheerful, and as rough as the versification Heywood wrote profusely and with vigour, but we are glad to hasten on from these transitional forms, in order to have a glimpse of true dramatic poetry

For a long while the omens are poor There is a great confusion and intermixture of forms for the historian to unravel The popular or half-learned comedy from *Ralph Roister Doister* (1554) and *Gammer Gurton's Needle* (? 1550) onwards is boisterous and ingenious, but uninspired There is in truth more style and feeling in those old chronicle plays, the *Troublesome Reign of King John* and *Lear and his Three Daughters*, which offered a rough scenario to Shakespeare, there are gleams of imagery and pathos. But most of the early classical, or Senecan, tragedy, while of great moment in the development of the drama, is dismal stuff

IV

The tragedies of Seneca, the tutor of the emperor Nero, left a large progeny in Italy, France, and England They were translated into English and studied, and furnished a pattern, or a kind of backboard, for the serious drama in its early youth The formal structure, the mixture of carnage and sermonising, the presiding Ghost, the central topic of revenge and retribution, all left a mark which is visible before, and during, and also after the golden age. There is a long series of black, or crimson, tragedies of which *Hamlet* is only the greatest But after 1580 this influence ceased to be a slavery As will appear, the great event in the history of our old drama is its escape from the Senecan model, which in France and Italy remained a shaping power In the earliest specimen, played in 1561–1562, *Gorboduc, or Ferrex and Porrex*, the Latin formula is applied to a British legend Already the blank verse has a certain petrified dignity, but it is strange that Sackville should have been one of the authors of this wooden composition Another sombre Senecan play, the *Misfortunes of Arthur*, was staged in 1588, the year after *Tamburlaine* I will not enlarge the list, but the *Spanish Tragedy* of Thomas Kyd, played about 1590, is of more than historical note

It is the first popular, well-built, full-blown melodrama of love, rivalry, murder, and gory vengeance It shows a true sense of the theatre, the verse is telling and rhetorical, and sometimes there is even poetry

> Had Proserpine no pity on thy youth,
> But suffered thy fair crimson-coloured spring
> With withered winter to be blasted thus ?

A father, Hieronimo (the only personage much like a human being), takes vengeance on the slayer of his innocent son. This villain is one Balthazar, and Hieronimo, in a play performed within the play, stabs him in earnest, and then stabs himself The heroine, beloved by the dead son, also commits suicide Hieronimo, during the action, goes mad, and an unknown Jacobean playwright, ill-content perhaps with Kyd's crude presentment, inserted, at intervals, certain 'additions', which are full of imaginative force though stamped with the extravagance of the declining drama Hieronimo, mistaking a living man for his lost son, descants on the ills of parentage. A child is but

A lump bred up in darkness, and doth serve
To balance those light creatures we call women,
And at the nine months' end creeps forth to light

These 'additions', sometimes assigned to Jonson, rather suggest Webster and his school Kyd is credited with a *Hamlet*, of which two words, 'Hamlet, revenge', survive Shakespeare, who introduces a Ghost, a play with a play, and a blood-feud, clearly knew and used this 'original *Hamlet*' as well as the *Spanish Tragedy*

The crimes of Balthazar leave us cold, not so those of Alice in *Arden of Feversham* A she-beast of prey and brazen resourceful dissembler, she dominates Mosbie her paramour and their pack of ruffians The victim is her husband, a decent and not too bright Kentish gentleman While he is being murdered by the gang, Alice exclaims 'What, groans thou? nay then, give me the weapon' Nearly all is on the plane of brutal realism, and the blank verse is little but prose carpentered into metre A few passages in a higher and richer manner have led some serious critics to hold that the play was written or at least handled by Shakespeare Chameleon as he was in his early days, he may possibly have attempted a Newgate tragedy, but there is no real evidence In any case the play is alive, as a report of a State Trial is alive, and it holds the unwilling mind The lines in which Mosbie reproaches his mistress are in a style equally foreign to that of Kyd and to the school of Marlowe

I left the marriage of an honest maid,
Whose dowry would have weighed down all thy wealth,
Whose beauty and demeanor far exceeded thee
This certain good I lost for changing bad,
And wrapt my credit in thy company
I was bewitcht,—that is no theme of thine—,
And thou unhallowed hast enchanted me
But I will break thy spells and exorcisms
And put another sight upon these eyes,
That shewed my heart a raven for a dove
Thou art not fair, I viewed thee not till now,
Thou art not kind, till now I knew thee not.
And now the rain hath beaten off thy gilt,
Thy worthless copper shows thee counterfeit
It grieves me, not to see how foul thou art,
But maddès me that ever I thought thee fair.
Go get thee gone, a copesmate for thy hinds,
I am too good to be thy favourite.

V

But the 'school of Marlowe' is a phrase that must be qualified The honours due to his 'mighty line' cannot suffer from the modest claim of a predecessor to have forestalled some of its music George Peele in his *Arraignment of Paris* (1584) is already writing the true kind of blank verse, and the word *beauty*, we see, is coming, as in Spenser's early *Hymns*, into the pride of place which it occupies in Tamburlaine's great allocution Paris justifies his award.

> I might offend, sith I was guerdoned,
> And tempted more than ever creature was
> With wealth, with beauty, and with chivalry,
> And so preferred beauty before them all,
> The thing that hath enchanted heaven itself

The lines on contentment that follow have a thin yet sweet melody that recalls some of the early verse of Shakespeare

> A shell of salt will serve a shepherd swain,
> A slender banquet in a homely scrip,
> And water running from the silver spring

In *David and Bethsabe*, the plain old story is tricked out with much luxury and colour, in the *Old Wives' Tale* is an enchanted lady who was well known to the author of *Comus* Here too are some of Peele's sweetest lyrics, which contrast, here and elsewhere, in their grace and light perfection with the scrambling plays in which they are set 'Fair and fair', 'When as the rye reach to the chin', and 'Gently dip, but not too deep' are only a few among them The most full-sounding, 'His golden locks Time hath to silver turned', is added to the 'triumph' *Polyhymnia* Here too are the apt praises of Sidney, the 'well-lettered warrior', and of Greville, 'lover of learning and of chivalry' Peele's hearty *Farewell* to Sir John Norris and to Drake is in the strain of Hakluyt's voyagers

> Hoise sails, weigh anchors up, plough up the seas
> With flying keels, plough up the land with swords,
> In God's name, venture on

The talent of Robert Greene (*c* 1560–1592) is not for tragedy, his *Alphonsus* and *Orlando Furioso*, full of sounding lines, are followings of Marlowe Nor is the poetic spirit often to be traced in his pamphlets, or in his portrayals

of the seamy side of London These are the work of the *other* Greene, the repentant wastrel and quarreller with his broken life, not of the singer and fluting pastoralist One of his pretty, artificially rustic stories, *Pandosto*, is the basis of the *Winter's Tale* His oddest and most anomalous drama, *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* is by far the happiest. Besides much magic and Marlowesque rhetoric, it contains Margaret of Fressingfield, the first natural and charming heroine on the English boards Margaret may talk at times of Danae and Semele, but her presence, and her wooing by Edward Prince of Wales and by Lacy, Earl of Lincoln, impart a freshness and country pleasantness of which there is not too much in our old drama

Margaret You, Beccles man, will not forsake us now?
Lacy Not whilst I may have such quaint girls as you
Margaret Well, if you chance to come by Fressingfield,
Make but a step into the keeper's lodge,
And such poor fare as woodmen can afford,
Butter and cheese, cream and fat venison,
You shall have store, and welcome therewithal
Lacy Gramercies, Peggy, look for me ere long

Greene is profuse of light sweet lyric, and also of 'odes' in flowing octosyllabics, spoken by shepherds, and palmers, and Philomelas 'Weep not, my wanton', and *Samela*, and 'Fair Adon'' with its burden '*N'oserez-vous, mon bel ami?*' are voices from his Arcadia Swinburne compares these poets to wrens and titmice, by the side of the eagle Marlowe, saying that they differ from him not in degree but in kind But 'blackbirds and thrushes' would be nearer the mark, and the eagle, moreover, does not often sing

VI

Marlowe's single recorded lyric, 'Come live with me', a specimen of perfect china, caught the fancy of more than one poet, and, as we know, bred in Sir Hugh Evans 'a great dispositions to cry'. Ralegh and Donne it led rather to mock, the first more amiably, and the second more strangely, as their imitations show In another, which is anonymous, the shepherd's homage reaches its height in the line, 'Ten thousand glow-worms shall attend', and Herrick, in his 'Live, live with me', beautifully elaborates

Marlowe's fancy Another verse, a fragment, by the 'dead shepherd', may be taken as a symbol of his style at his best:

> I walked along a stream for pureness rare,
> Brighter than sunshine, for it did acquaint
> The dullest sight with all the glorious prey
> That in the pebble-pavèd channel lay

For 'pureness' is the great and central characteristic in the language of Christopher Marlowe (1564–1593) So much has been written of his aspiring soul, of his service in liberating the drama, and of the music of his 'mighty line', that we are tempted to overlook his main gift to poetry For the mighty line is *natural* natural in its language, its order, and its cadence Chaucer is natural, without failure and without effort, but he is not mighty Milton is mighty, and he can be natural as well, but he tends to draw away from the order and idiom of English Marlowe, on great occasions, gives the accent of greatness and the glory of verse to the movement and arrangement of prose.

> 'Why, this is Hell, nor am I out of it'
> 'Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss'
> 'Love is not full of pity, as men say,
> But deaf and cruel where he means to prey'
> 'Infinite riches in a little room'

Marlowe thus established, once for all, a natural and simple style for the heroic line In this respect he is with Spenser, but he does not, like Spenser, modify ordinary English Other poets, and even Shakespeare, often fall away from this central pattern, and so does Marlowe himself, who can write turgidly and badly enough But think of Chapman, and of Donne when Donne is difficult, and of the whole metaphysical trainband, how often do they seem to be steering blindly, having lost the compass that Spenser, and the song-books, and above all Marlowe, had set for them Between Marlowe and Shelley it is hard to think of any major poet whose language is in the same degree pure, great, and natural

Marlowe's diction is bound up with his versification, and this has often been analysed both on its mechanical side and as an instrument of his art His line, in general, is self-contained, with a natural pause at the end, there

are few striking displacements of accent[1] and few rippling trisyllabic feet Still the effect is not that of a string of brilliant beads In the highly-wrought passages, such as the famous 'If all the pens that ever poets held', the impression left is one of continuity, of a long-breathed, thought-out, harmonious period Milton built up his periods far more intricately, but he studied Marlowe, and often comes back to his manner If we did not know that the lines

> I ban their souls to everlasting pains
> And extreme tortures of the fiery deep

were spoken by the Jew of Malta, we might credit them to God the Father. Marlowe had many other resources of sound and language, he is not always simple He likes learned polysyllables that slip easily into the metrical framework

> Jehovah's name,
> Forward and backward anagrammatised,
> The breviated names of holy saints .

VII

Tamburlaine the Great, probably acted in 1587, is a series of tableaux accompanied by 'loud speakers', it is hardly a play at all The Scythian shepherd is cruel and greedy upon a saurian scale, he destroys princes, slays virgins, wins his Zenocrate, loses her by death, and after ten acts dies, after protesting, 'What is it dares distemper Tamburlaine?' It is all ridiculous and grandiose, and often magnificent

> Some powers divine, or else infernal, mixed
> Their angry seeds at his conception

The story of Tamerlane, or Timur, who overran the East in the fourteenth century, was known to Marlowe in Latin compilations, and the map that he scanned in writing the play has been identified He is drunken with the exotic names of persons and places, Usumcasanè, Amazonia, Mediterranean, Capricorn Tamburlaine, it is often said, embodies the lust for empire, but in fact he is a huge puppet,

[1] The first syllable is sometimes dropt, for great emphasis 'Bárbarous and bloódy Támburlaíne!'

and in the glorious passage on beauty ('What is beauty, saith my sufferings, then?'), the poet is the speaker The subtler virtue of the verse is felt less in the loud trumpeting speeches than in the dying words of the queen

> I fare, my lord, as other empresses,
> That, when this frail and transitory flesh
> Hath sucked the measure of that vital air
> That feeds the body with his dated health,
> Wanes with enforced and necessary change.

In the *Tragical History of Dr Faustus* the poetry soars up at each of the crises,—the temptation, the bargain, the reward, and the penance The scenes with Mephistopheles are the first in the old drama that truly appeal to the intellect. The subsequent vision of Helen embodies the beauty which Tamburlaine had declared to be past all utterance; 'which into words no virtue can digest' Otherwise, this part of the play is inferior, for the desires of Faustus to 'wall all Germany with brass' and to hear blind Homer sing to him, though picturesque, are scarcely worth perdition. His actual sin is not the lust for power and earthly delights, it is, first of all, the quest for human rather than for divine learning, and, therewith, the cult of black magic and prohibited knowledge Marlowe makes dramatic use of the Protestant conviction that such things are merely damnable The Good and Evil Angel of the Moralities here become projections of the warring elements in the soul of Faustus For it is his soul that suffers In his last speech, one of the summits of our poetry, the *motif* is the dreadful rapidity of Time The clock mends its pace as his pulses quicken He prays that his stay in Hell may not be endless, and laments that he is not happy like the beasts that perish He sees Christ's blood in the firmament, and God frowning and gesturing,—as it might be in a picture of William Blake's The Chorus restores a quieter tone with the words 'Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight' Marlowe may perhaps have had a hand or finger in the wretched interspersed scenes of clowning, brought in to relieve the tension For the main story he works, probably in a translation, upon the *Faustbuch* of 1587 He uses the legends gathered about the figure of the quack magician who had flourished early in the century The play, probably written soon after *Tamburlaine*, was

printed in 1604, and again with many changes in 1616. *Dr Faustus* contains the purest essence of Marlowe's genius.

The *Jew of Malta* drops into melodrama, but in the first two acts the poetry, like the planning, is of Marlowe's best Barabas is enamoured of his treasure, but not like a Harpagon, his fancy dwells on the potency of a jewel or a bar of gold, which 'could ransom great kings from captivity' He is made comic and ferocious to please the groundlings, but he invites our sympathy when he is cheated by the unconscionable Christians It is this touch of equity in Marlowe, more than any detail, that links the play with the *Merchant of Venice* (In *Edward II* there are no superhuman passions, the king, indeed, is all too human, and his wanton love for Gaveston is painted with great freedom The play is our first historical tragedy of genius, and one of our best The structure, certainly, is somewhat broken-backed, after the disappearance of Gaveston the interest is shifted But there is a new skill in portraiture Young Spenser, Young Mortimer who is condemned and goes 'to discover countries yet unknown', and the servile scholar are firmly drawn in a few strokes. The pathos of the king's end, on which the last word has been said by Charles Lamb, reveals yet another gift, and nothing in Marlowe's poetry leaves a keener sense of what perished with him when he provoked the blow from Ingram Frizer in the inn at Deptford A dramatist can be tested by his power of regaining our sympathy, which he has done his utmost to estrange, for a villain or a weakling, and of Edward we remember only his sufferings. 'They give me bread and water, being a king'.

VIII

The rhymed fragment of *Hero and Leander* takes some hints from Ovid and from the beautiful Greek poem made about the fifth century A D by the 'pseudo-Musaeus' Marlowe introduces not only much luxury and ornament, but a streak of mischief He dissects the hesitations of Hero in a spirit of light irony, and Leander argues, in scholastic style, against virginity in the abstract, heaping conceits on Hero's head. She is the richest corn, but unreaped,

she is a golden string that has still to be tuned. There are many such minor discords, and the gold is mixed with alloy. But we forget all this when Marlowe forgets it himself in the scene of the feast of Adonis, in the lovers' tryst, and when Leander speaks naturally and nobly

> O shun me not, but hear me ere you go
> God knows, I cannot force love, as you do,
> My words shall be as spotless as my youth,
> Full of simplicity and naked truth

The poem, which is of the same Ovidian or Italianate species as *Venus and Adonis* or *Endimion and Phœbe*, is nearer to humanity than them all It was completed by Chapman in his own style, which, though frequently tangled and contorted, is now and then superb

Marlowe's share in *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, is not clear, but it cannot add much to his honours, his partner was Thomas Nashe At some uncertain date he translated Ovid's *Amores* into couplets, and the first book of Lucan's *Pharsalia* into blank verse The Lucan, if a youthful exercise, shows distinct auguries of Marlowe's more potent style, but the sounding vehement rhetoric of the Latin could not be the happiest of models

The songs that are 'star-scattered on the grass' through the prose comedies of John Lyly (? 1554–1606) are very possibly by later hands. 'Cupid and Campaspe', 'Sing to Apollo, god of day', and the rest, are merry, elegant, and tunable ditties These mythological and topical court plays were written between 1579 and 1593, so that Lyly was Shakespeare's elder contemporary The prose of *Midas*, *Endimion* and *Campaspe*, and their five companions is that of Lyly's *Euphues*, not less precise and balanced, but less mannered and tiresome; it was well known to Portia, to Falstaff, and to Rosalind Lyly's only play in metre is *The Woman in the Moon*, performed 1593–1595. The verse, though markedly linear, is not merely imitative, but has a ring of its own An old tale that goes back to Hesiod is wrought up in a high-fantastical manner The gods presiding over the planets have endowed Pandora with their several virtues and vices Sol with his genial kindness, Venus with her wantonness, and Nature, the creatrix of Pandora, rebukes them.

What foul contempt is this you planets use
Against the glory of my words and work ?
It was my will, and that shall stand for law,
And she is framed to darken all your prides
Ordained I not your motions, and yourselves ?
And dare you check the author of your lives ?
Were not your lives contrived in Nature's shop ?
But I have means to end what I begun,
And make Death triumph in your lives' decay

After many humours, the mutable Pandora is at last planted in the moon, with her shepherd lover for the Man, and she is henceforth the cause of inconstancy in women On earth she had been content with 'a gown of oaken leaves, A chaplet of red berries, and a fan Made of the morning dew to cool my face' There is nothing in the drama much prettier than this until we arrive in 'a wood near Athens'

CHAPTER IX

SHAKESPEARE

I

IT is hard to follow for however short a distance one or two pathways in that endless forest, the poetry of William Shakespeare (1564–1616) In *Venus and Adonis* (1593) he is like a young painter posing his models and studying every look and attitude Adonis is before us.

> Pure shame and awed resistance made him fret,
> Which bred more beauty in his angry eyes,

and Venus has been 'Leading him prisoner in a red-rose chain' Shakespeare's colouring is never richer, or his music purer Yet the amorous doings of the goddess and her rhetoric leave us all the colder for their attack upon the senses The effect is that of a theme, or exercise in words There is more pathos in the picture of the desperate hare than in all the lament of Venus over the slain Adonis The country-bred poet gives the hare's point of view, he is *with* the hare, and not with the beagles He also recites, more in the manner of a dealer, the fourteen points of a horse In the *Rape of Lucrece* (1594) he is still practising on a given theme, but with far more force and sonority, and there are glimpses of a mood that recurs in the *Sonnets* and in *Lear*

> The orphan pines while the oppressor feeds,
> Justice is feasting while the widow weeps

In spite of some glorious eloquence, the tragedy of the story is never made tragical, and the description of the Trojan pictures on the wall is an anti-climax after the outrage. Both poems, like *Hero and Leander* and Drayton's *Endimion*

and Phœbe, are in the fashion of the time, romantic re-tellings of an antique story. In *Lucrece* the 'Troilus-measure' reveals new beauties and resources.

The *Sonnets* were printed in 1609, and the language of many is that of the early plays and poems There are also close verbal resemblances to the later Histories and tragedies In 1599 the key-sonnet, No 144, 'Two loves I have of comfort and despair', and one other, appeared in *The Passionate Pilgrim* No 104 shows that the story told covers three years at least, and everything points to its longer duration Shakespeare in these confessions dislocates the whole conception of romantic love, this is the most original feature of the *Sonnets* The 'dark lady' has neither beauty nor virtue, but simply the power of attraction The poet *odit et amat*, sometimes he curses her lies and his own weakness, sometimes he asks her to delude him to his face She has stolen from him the splendid youth, whom he adores from afar, from below, in whom he sees truth and beauty incorporate, to whom he promises eternity in rhyme, who consoles for everything and to whom he forgives everything Neither lady nor youth are identified It is still undecided whether he is Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, or William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, or another Much of the language of ideal passion in which he is addressed is that usually reserved for a woman 'Take all my loves, my love, yea, take them all' Friendship is often glorified in Renaissance literature, in a manner foreign to modern feeling, but the situation presented in the *Sonnets* seems to stand alone Woven into the series are meditations containing some of Shakespeare's greatest poetry on the evils of the world, on the self-punishment of lust, on his own humiliations, and on the work of Time the wrecker Time can be outwitted only by leaving progeny or by the honours of verse One source of chagrin is the presence of a 'rival poet', superior to Shakespeare, who can praise the youth better than he. This poet, too, is unidentified, the case for Chapman, but for certain difficulties, would be a strong one

Sonnets 1-126 form a sequence, which though not quite orderly is still fairly distinct, and it is natural to attribute it to the poet, although he did not sponsor the book. The leading themes of time and absence, of the power of verse

and the beauty of the beloved, come and go and recur, and the position of the three actors is made plain In the twenty-six sonnets that follow it is more sharply defined, but these are much disarranged Throughout, there are many problems and obscurities, and the handiwork is unequal The poet, in the ebbtide of feeling, can quibble without mercy upon words But, as Mark Pattison says, the *Sonnets* 'mock at criticism' Shakespeare chose the metrical scheme which alone, of all those in vogue, could carry the full tide of his thought and emotion In 'Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore' the quatrains (rhyming *abab cdcd efef*) surge on to the couplet-ending (*gg*), and this is often the conclusion, consoling or triumphant, to a melancholy prelude, as in 'Tired with all these', and 'When to the sessions of sweet silent thought' Or, as in the Italian form of sonnet, the change of thought starts with the sestet 'But thy eternal summer shall not fade' There are other variations, but everywhere is heard the full-vowelled and emphatic rhyme, everywhere the imperial style *A Lover's Complaint*, a woman's tale of her betrayal by a beautiful youth, was published with the *Sonnets* under Shakespeare's name There are a few characteristic lines and phrases that are well worthy of his later prime, and some that resemble his younger verse But the style in general is not his, and we cannot be sure that he contributed anything The brief and riddling *Phœnix and Turtle*, if it be his, is of little account, and is unexplained

Most of the songs in the plays are like the standards in the Mint, we measure everything of the same kind against them On the whole their tone is happy, ~~or~~ happily pensive, they are more abundant in the comedies and tragi-comedies In the Histories there are none, in the Roman plays there is but one, 'Come, thou monarch of the vine', sung to Antony and Octavius In the tragedies they are rare, but all the more piercing in effect. there are the snatches of Ophelia and Desdemona, and of the Fool The songs must always be read in their surroundings, they belong to the occasion, and they arrest the action for a moment with their aerial or pastoral music Ariel and Autolycus show that Shakespeare's lyric gift became, if anything, more delicate towards the last.

II

The first comedies (1592–1595) are full of rhyme, in *Love's Labour's Lost* the measures change like the figures in an old-fashioned dance, and this befits the headiness and extravagance and youthfulness of a scene where the persons are little more than types From the first Shakespeare preferred blank verse for the more serious kind of eloquence and for the delineation of character It is already sweet, regular, and rapid; at need, like 'the current that with gentle murmur glides' The style is pure and less imitative than in the early Histories Biron's descant on ladies' eyes in *Love's Labour's Lost* and the moving appeals of Egeon and Adriana in the *Comedy of Errors* are the highest flights in these two plays, and the persons, however lightly sketched, are already distinct There is little of the same quality in the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, where the flimsy plot is just kept moving by the sprightly servants and by the melody of the verse Shakespeare's contribution to the *Taming of the Shrew*, a composite work, leads up to the speech of Katharina, something of a set piece, on the duties of a wife In all these the blank verse, alternating with the heroic couplet, is the instrument of a buoyant, light, and flexible speech It is an admirable working style, alike for the dukes and nobles, the Antipholuses, and the First Merchants, abounding in quip and wordplay, and also in poetry

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, written towards the end of this period, there is a new world of character The young lovers are all much alike, all poets, each of the princes, the fairies, and the artificers, has his own idiom and that of his rank or calling There was nothing strange or make-believe about fairies to the author or his audience They had their definite station in society They were shy of appearing, but a weaver was just the person to come upon them in a wood and begin, 'Methinks, mistress'. When they are alone, Oberon and Titania talk like angry, imaginative children Shakespeare's own kindliness and delicacy are to be felt in the words of Theseus about the players, and in the bridal blessings chanted by Puck Yet more visibly it is he who declares for the rights of the imagination, or 'apprehension', as against cool reason Nowhere else but

The influence of Marlowe is evident enough in the broad violent effects of *Richard III*, with its dominant personage and its 'mighty line' Whether he, or any of his train, took a hand in the play we cannot be sure There is nothing in his known writings like the harsh and splendid irony that emanates from Richard, and the poetry, in the dream of Clarence and the tirades of Margaret, is that of the Shakespeare whom we know He is already perfecting his great *public* style, leisurely, richly figured, and natural to kings and nobles and churchmen,—persons who must not be interrupted The speech of Gaunt in *Richard II* on the 'isle set in the silver sea' is a noble example But in this play the king has a language of his own, which sets the tone of the whole Critics have noted how the Richard of Holinshed's *Chronicle* has become a poet and fantast, refining, in his self-pity and self-absorption, on image after image to the uttermost, with a peculiar plaintive music Minion-led, a ruinous and impossible ruler, he is dignified at last by his very indignities and by death

IV

In face of the external evidence it is hard to deny that Shakespeare, about the year 1592, may have said, like Pistol, 'Shall we imbrue?', and have taken some part in *Titus Andronicus* It is a gory and repulsive production, but by no means feebly built or written, and there are passages that seem to bear, or at least to deserve, his signature. Opinions are divided, and there is no certainty in the matter, but no one hopes that Shakespeare had much to do with the horrors of *Titus* His first true romantic tragedy is *Romeo and Juliet* In Chaucer's *Troilus* the outer world that surrounds the lovers is shadowy, here it is all life and movement, full of comedy and the clash of rapiers The matter of the traditional, long-tested story is the love of the young, sacrificed to the hatred of the old, to the family feuds of Verona These are mended up at the end of the play but it is a hollow business, now that Romeo and Juliet have gone. The poetry is on many different levels. There are the strangest patches of bad writing, like Juliet's 'Beautiful tyrant! fiend angelical', when she learns of

Tybalt's death. But she is the true poet of the play In the great scenes at the window and in the tomb her words are direct and plain and noble Romeo dies in a magnificent, turbid flood of metaphors, death is the paramour, the engrosser of a bargain, the poison is a desperate pilot. In the Apothecary scene his lines are lucid and restrained, and most musical, and he bears his equal part in the duet, or 'dawn-song', that perfect example of lyrical blank verse. But Ellen Terry's tones in that passage ('Wilt thou be gone?') ring in the ear after half a century, *she* could say Shakespeare's verse, and bring out by an inflection the secret writing between the lines There are many other treasures in the play the rhymes of the Friar, and Mercutio's speech on Queen Mab This last, indeed, is somewhat dragged in, but it is infused with the gaiety of the speaker's character

In the *Merchant of Venice*, which Furnivall well calls 'a symphony of grace and fierceness', tragedy is merely threatened, and there is no real suspense The old pound-of-flesh story would not bear a sterner treatment Shylock is in earnest, but he is bound to fail, the only question is *how* he will be defeated There is much dispute as to Shakespeare's 'conception' of the character, but may he not have meant to leave the actor, within certain limits, free? Free to make Shylock more or less of a butt, more or less sympathetic, more or less formidable? In any case, though he utters some potent verse, he is most at home with 'the other harmony, of prose' ('Hath not a Jew eyes? ') Portia is a mistress in both kinds, and, like most of Shakespeare's heroines, she is sparing of figures, and speaks from her heart and to the point Contrast her words, 'You see me, Lord Bassanio', with Bassanio's lover-like fancies in presence of her picture The rhetoric of the other suitors, appropriately, is still more strained. The lines on the music of the orbs, allotted by the poet to a mere Lorenzo, are of a scope and grandeur that are rarely found in his writing prior to the great tragedies Nearest, perhaps, in the quality that we like to call inspired—for their outlook reaches far beyond the human drama and its earthly stage—are the words of the dying Hotspur

> But thought's the slave of life, and life time's fool;
> And time, that takes survey of all the world,
> Must have a stop

There is the same largeness of vision in Henry the Fifth's phrase—again, one not to be exactly construed,—'the tide of pomp That beats upon the high shore of this world.'

V

But in the two parts of *Henry IV* and in *Henry V* (1597–1599) much of the poetry is in the nature of a grave and balanced eloquence, which in the speech, 'Thy wish was father, Harry, to that thought', may be said to reach its height Long arguments, discourses, proclamations, and soliloquies characterise these plays Some of the rebel nobles, in the Second Part, are even long-winded, and we are left to marvel at the beauty of a style that contends with the heaviness of the matter But Henry the Fourth is the most interesting, and the most subtly studied of all the English kings He excels in a sustained royalty of language Baffled in his affections, and in his hope of atoning for his offences by a pilgrimage, he remains a somewhat solitary figure, whose dignity does not ask for our pity. Hotspur brings a gust of comedy and youthfulness into the world of war and intrigue Falstaff is king in the underworld of prose, in the richest comic scene that Shakespeare had yet created; and his own prose,—not to speak of its other virtues—has a superb rhythm Prince Henry commands more sympathy when he is roystering than when he is serious His announcement that he *will* reform is very naif dramatic art, and whatever critics may say, the poet, in the dismissal of Falstaff, has to make the best of a sorry business The intention in *Henry IV* seems plain enough The prince's faults are to minister to his virtues, his heart is to be with the common people, whom he knows all the better for his follies He is to unite all conditions of men, and he is also to be the first efficient, triumphant king of England Henry, thus burdened, and fighting for conquest, becomes a thinker His trumpeting speeches, with their mighty *bravura*, do not give his measure like his lonely musings on 'ceremony' and responsibility These are in the greatest manner, and conceits and excess are left behind The Choruses have the same large utterance, they make us rejoice in the bareness, which they deplore, of the old stage They are the classic appeal to the spectator to use his imagination,—that is, to use Shakespeare's, when

he *tells* us that 'Each battle sees the other's umbered face', and that the fleet is 'A city|on the inconstant billows dancing'

Such a volume of deep sound is not to be expected from the four comedies which follow presently (1598–1600) Here, most of the verse is of the nimble, natural, and beautiful kind that came to Shakespeare as easily as breathing It suits the voices of the women, who now rule the scene, and of their cavaliers There are traces of it even in the *Merry Wives of Windsor*, which is chiefly prose The passages of reflection or reverie in these comedies are of a rarer stamp Music, and reference to music, are never far off in the poetical parts of *Twelfth Night*, and Shakespeare gives the most exquisite lines of all to his sentimentalist, Orsino, as well as to Viola, when she 'never telling'—and is thereby actually telling—'her love' In Arden there is leisure to moralise, for Adam and the Duke, and there is the sententious Jaques, with his literary 'melancholy', who seems to come in with his impromptus all prepared The rhymes of Orlando are matter for the merriment of ladies, and the natural speech of Rosalind, as of Beatrice in *Much Ado*, is free melodious prose Beatrice confesses her love in a single rhymed stanza ('What fire is in mine ears?'), but most of the poetry in this play is at the pitch of high but not over-impassioned comedy The tragic note, since the death of Hero is known to be a fiction, would jar at once The most penetrative lines are those of the Friar, as he considers the effect which the device will have on Claudio

> The idea of her life shall sweetly creep
> Into his study of imagination

VI

About 1600 the tragedies begin with *Julius Cæsar*. It is Shakespeare's most truly classic play, both in style and structure. The poetry is now less and less the decoration of a speech, and springs more and more out of the action and the characters, rising in strain as the inner crisis of the hero approaches In *Julius Cæsar* lucidity and harmony rule The texture of the drama is argument, every one argues · the conspirators in conclave, Antony with the populace, Brutus with them all and with himself His description of his inner struggle, 'Between the acting of a dreadful

thing', exactly mirrors, in advance, the initial state of mind in Macbeth. His Stoical speeches and those of Cassius are no mere lofty words, they issue in act, they precede the Roman ending, and they are, above all, simple

> If we do meet again, why, we shall smile,
> If not, why then, this parting was well made

These are sayings that a boy can feel, and yet that no reflection can exhaust *Julius Cæsar* has also its touches of colour, in the recital of the omens before Cæsar's death, and of tenderness, when the music plays over the sleeping page But it is essentially an heroic drama, in which Plutarch, several of whose *Lives* are here drawn upon, strikes fire from Shakespeare

The same lucidity and harmony are found in *Hamlet*, but not everywhere Nothing can excel the opening, with its folklore, or Hamlet's converse with the Ghost, or the manner of Horatio, whenever he opens his mouth, or the Queen's elegy on Ophelia, which however little it may be in keeping irradiates for a moment the troubled scene But much of the verse in *Hamlet* is *un*beautiful, and this for good dramatic reasons Claudius, except while praying, uses a strained affected diction, and Polonius and Laertes are little better The player of Hecuba is there to rant, and the style of the inserted play, though more educated, is naturally kept distinct from that of the main drama. Repellent for other reasons is Hamlet's talk when his 'antic disposition' is 'on', also his horrible and semi-sane lecture to his mother This is one of the many passages in which the poet seems hampered by the barbarous picturesque old story of Saxo, which had come to him through a French provider the story which Goethe, who at one time thought of using it, said must be 'put vigorously through a purifying fire' Perhaps the problem of expression came before Shakespeare most acutely in composing Hamlet's five soliloquies They demanded a novel style a language charged with speculation, and passion, and conscious weakness, and self-analysis, broken, therefore, in the utterance, and not always clear The precise meaning of 'To be or not to be' can be long argued. No soliloquies in the later plays are so pregnant and thought-suggesting as Hamlet's. But nothing that he says in verse approaches in beauty his

discourse on the brave o'erhanging firmament and the paragon of animals We may hold either that the words throw new light on Hamlet's mind; or, if we will, that they are incongruous, and really utter the faith and vision of the dramatist himself, who keeps his faith in mankind, or on its possibilities, through all the tragedies that he relates.

VII

Othello is always duly praised, as *Hamlet* could never be, for its singleness of action and effect Any holes in the plotwork that are detected by the reader are unnoticed on the stage The slow match is lit very soon, and at first smoulders, but the flame runs along ever quickening up to the moment of the explosion An impression of fatality is given not only by Iago's plan, as he seizes on each accident which unfolds to him his own purpose, but also by his inner workings, as though he were driven by the law of his nature to find his pleasure in destroying His mind is antipoetical and cynical, in his utterance, as in his character, he is a foil to Othello Othello's grand style is sometimes more Miltonic than anything else in Shakespeare.

> like to the Pontic sea
> Whose icy current and compulsive course
> Ne'er keeps retiring ebb.

Unlike Hamlet and Macbeth and Lear, he is a natural orator. He has an instinct for magnificent effects which comes out in his plea before the signiors and in his last great speech with its pearl-simile and *coup de théâtre* A man of action and passion, he speculates little, and in this play, where the only philosopher is Iago, there are none of those passages, at once impersonal and dramatic, which are found in the other great tragedies · windows opening into the world of universal thought Hence, in part, the somewhat stifling atmosphere, which is all but insupportable when Othello suffers. The language of terrifying agony can go no further, and perhaps there is an element of the disgusting, inherent in the story, which the greatest poet—with his Iago on his hands—cannot purge away. The relief is given by the figure of Desdemona, whose speech is lucid, noble, and without ornament, the voice of simple honesty There is no hardness in her, but it is an error to read her as weak

or unintelligent She is firm in her protests; but she has had no experience, and cannot understand the madness of credulity, nor is there any reason why she should have fathomed Iago's plot

The law of the tragic hero seems to be that he discovers through suffering, and only so, the secret wealth of his imagination The greater the man and the greater his suffering, the greater, when Shakespeare is writing, is the poetry *He*, accordingly, as the conception grows and he hears the man speaking, finds new resources of expression. Hence the supremacy of *King Lear* among his writings, he has nowhere else so great a nature to portray, in a situation that brings out all its treasures The note of grandeur begins to be heard in Lear's speech to Goneril, 'I am ashamed That thou hast power to shake my manhood thus', and it is heightened as by degrees his wits unsettle His intelligence, which in the opening scenes has been blinded, now awakens, and is actually at its strongest—however jaundiced—when he is on the verge of madness and beyond He now sees all the injustice of the world and the indecency of man and womankind. His passion, and presently his hallucination, break into apostrophe He conjures the elements, the gods, the 'poor naked wretches', the 'rascal beadle', and the joint-stool that he mistakes for Goneril Language, in this brainstorm, is churned up from the depths, the rhythm follows every change of mood, marking the greater or less coherence of Lear's musings, as it slips from wonderfully modulated but normal verse into broken lines, and thence downward into prose When he recovers calm, and awakens now a different kind of pity, no longer mixed with terror, his speech is of the simplest and the verse runs evenly. *King Lear* is somewhat loosely hung together, but the ruling theme, in plot and underplot, is impiety, the breach of natural ties, filial, paternal, and conjugal In the cases of Cordelia and Edgar the breach is imaginary, it is they, and Kent and the Fool, who amidst so many moral discords furnish the consoling harmonies 'So young, my lord, and true' the words 'true' and 'truth' are heard also on the lips of Juliet, of Hamlet, and of Troilus, and Othello's cry, 'My life upon her faith!', is in the same spirit. If there is one virtue Shakespeare seems to prize above the rest in his favourites, it is fidelity.

VIII

Of all these tragic heroes Macbeth has the richest poetic endowment He is swiftest in response to the things of sense and of the guilt-fevered fancy to the wild attire of the Witches, the 'light thickening' in the wood, the phantom voice and dagger, the 'night-shriek', and the blood-boltered Banquo Hence the unique pictorial effect of this drama, enhanced by the visions of Lady Macbeth and by the Witches' chants and shows It is almost wholly in verse, and of this, much is in the true sense 'metaphysical' The play of intellect, reaching out to things beyond, is everywhere in Macbeth's converse with himself His conscience reasons on the life to come, on the peace of Duncan in the grave, on the blank old age that will be his, and upon 'dusty death' Nor is his reason, like that of Lear, ever unseated, he resists the delusions of eye and ear, and recovers He has no more brain-sickness, once he is rid of Banquo's ghost, the style of his soliloquies and of his speech with his wife undergoes a change Until Duncan is dead, their tangled sentences and troubled rhythm reflect the confusions of Macbeth's soul At the last, in 'To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow', there is the clear calm of despair Soon nothing is left but his courage, and he dies fighting Lady Macbeth, at first the stronger in will, and far more terrible, in her invocations to the 'spirits that tend on mortal thoughts' and to 'thick night', does not stay the course, and dies of her dreams The other riches of the play need no description the lyrics of the Witches, half-foretelling, half-beguiling, the picture of the martlet on the castle, and, in contrast with Macbeth, the clear-minded utterance of Banquo The action, as in *Othello*, goes straight forward, delayed only by the dialogue of Malcolm with Macduff *Macbeth* is Shakespeare's most harmonious tragedy, in style as in structure, and also, if the phrase may pass, one of his cleanest. In *Hamlet*, *Lear*, and *Othello* the design demands that the hero should be troubled by morbid sexual imaginations, but not so here, or in *Julius Cæsar* or *Coriolanus*, nor in *Antony and Cleopatra* (1606–7).

IX

The passion of Antony and Cleopatra, however fatal, is triumphant In Antony it overrides honour and duty and soldiership ; in Cleopatra it is heedless of consequences, and of Antony's spells of remorse, save in so far as these may touch Cleopatra None the less, or rather all the more, this passion absorbs the spectator as well as the lovers , and the tide of it gets into the surging harmonies of their dialogue

> My nightingale,
> We have beat them to their beds What, girl ! though grey
> Do something mingle with our younger brown, yet ha' we
> A brain that nourishes our nerves, and can
> Get goal for goal of youth

The rough Enobarbus is roused to the same bravery of language in relating the fascinations of the queen and the splendours of her barge It has been questioned whether Cleopatra, while upon the stage, fully accounts for his description Certainly Antony has far the larger share of great poetry to speak , and her vixen-moods seem to fit the 'squeaking Cleopatra', the boy-actor of the part, better than her whom Leigh Hunt (in a much-praised but abominable line) calls 'the laughing queen that caught the world's great hands' But it is something of a new Cleopatra who prepares to die when Antony is gone Here she is indeed inspired , and if her resolve is strengthened (it certainly is not determined) by the refusal to figure in a Roman triumph, its dignity is not thereby diminished The speech 'Give me my robe' is one of the most magical in Shakespeare .

> I am fire and air , my other elements
> I give to baser life

But this is no romantic play , and Dryden's second title, 'the world well lost', in his admirable recast, is false to the impression that Shakespeare leaves The world is neither well nor ill lost , it simply *is* lost The world is there, a hard fact , but it is not the subject, is not a possible subject for a drama Goethe, seeking for the *Begriff*, or ruling concept, of *Antony and Cleopatra*, observes that 'it tells with a thousand tongues that enjoyment and action are not to be reconciled' We may read it so , but we prefer to think of the poet as starting not with a *Begriff*, but with a vision, as he reads his Plutarch, of two great creatures,

and of their bond and their wreck, and as hearing the immortal words with which they encounter fate

In *Coriolanus*, the third of the tragedies wholly founded upon Sir Thomas North's version of Amyot's version of Plutarch, the general mark of the language is bleakness, rising by degrees into grandeur It is much condensed, and often elliptical and full of difficulties The prose of North is well worthy of Shakespeare's respect for it, it is frequently moulded into verse with but little change Still, the supreme effects are attained when the poet quits his book when Coriolanus goes into exile

> Like to a lonely dragon, that his fen
> Makes feared and talked of more than seen,

and in his greeting, upon his return, to his wife and mother Volumnia's second speech, 'Nay, go not from us thus', is almost wholly Shakespeare's and is the loftiest, as it is the longest, that he gives to any woman on his stage But these strains are long deferred, and through the first three acts the railings of Coriolanus, eaten up with pride and scorn, against the populace, become wearisome The play also suffers from the difficulty that besets the dramatist who has to depict two opposing camps One of them, that of the enemy, has to be made interesting, and yet, on pain of distracting the sympathies, not too interesting The temperature drops in the other Roman plays when Octavius enters, and here the whole presentment of Aufidius and the Volscians, though required by the action, and full of striking touches, is somewhat perfunctory *Coriolanus* is Shakespeare's severest play, with the fewest concessions to charm and grace The relief is given by the political comedy, or rather satire, of the open-air scenes, where the fickle humours of the crowd and the swirl and clash of parties are portrayed with wonderful nicety.

X

These seven tragedies were all written, according to the best reading of the evidence, during the years 1600–1607, and we may reflect with a kind of awe upon the sum of mental energy that lies behind them Yet there are three more plays which apparently must be inserted somewhere in the list. Two of them, *All's Well* and *Measure for Measure*,

are nominally comedies ; *Troilus and Cressida* is nondescript ; and all contain matter which can belong only to the tragic period Many very difficult critical problems are involved ; and I can but glance at a few characteristics of the poetry *All's Well That Ends Well* is evidently revised , it is like a piece of enduring fabric stitched on to some light old material that has been lying by Helena is Shakespeare's deepest-minded heroine , and her speech, ' O, were that all ! I think not on my father ', is in the grave intellectual manner of the tragedies The play is a philosophic comedy, and she is the philosopher Her love for the ill-conditioned Bertram is her destiny, a thing independent of the will Yet ' the fated sky gives us free scope ' , nor can even the ' stars ' forbid means being taken to an end ' Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie ' The trick by which she gains Bertram is applauded by the worthy persons in the drama, —and therefore, we may divine, by the poet, although the modern reader blenches Even here Helena remains a thinker ' But, O strange men ! That can such sweet use make of what they hate ' The talk of the Countess and of the sick king is in the highest style of serious comedy , and the atmosphere is sweetened, not without need, by these humane, generous old people, who remember their own youth so vividly

The truly inspired poetry of *Measure for Measure* is found in the two speeches on death, of which the Friar-Duke declares the nothingness and Claudio the terrors. They are not specially dramatic , it is as if the poet himself, and not the ' duke of dark corners ' or the light youth, were stating, in his most majestic style, both sides of the insoluble question Of another order, but still great poetry, is Isabella's plea to Angelo for mercy to her brother The verse, with its rise and fall and wealth of figure and passionate accent, shows how far the artist has travelled since he composed the beautiful but slightly formal speech of Portia in the same cause On a lower level is Isabella's scourging, or rather scolding, of Claudio when he wavers The virginal cruelty of the line ' More than our brother is our chastity ' does not command all the sympathy that is expected. As to the strange, case of Angelo, in no other play does Shakespeare set such a figure of perversity in the forefront. His amazed self-analysis, when his passion suddenly takes

him by the throat, has a tragic quality, but the interest fades with his subsequent lies and crimes, and he becomes scarcely more credible than the cheerful wind-up of the play, for which few have a good word Mariana's lyric 'Take, O take those lips away', allows us to forget for a moment the corruptions of Vienna, she is like a nightingale singing near a brothel

There are violent contrasts of style in *Troilus and Cressida*, also intricate questions as to the text and dating, and the drift and purpose are obscure The love-story is not told in Chaucer's gentle fashion Cressida is uninteresting, we suspect her from the first, she is composed of the 'wanton spirits' imputed to her by Ulysses, and if she is ever sincere, it is but for a moment, when she is taking leave of Troilus He has wasted himself upon her, and, as Ulysses, again, perceives, he is a perfect *preux chevalier* Troilus speaks some of Shakespeare's rarest lines, in his foretaste of rapture, and in his disenchantment, in his adieux, and in his vain dream of a constancy

> Outliving beauty's outward, with a mind
> That doth renew swifter than blood decays

But this baffled romance is only an episode The editors of the Folio were puzzled to classify the play, it is, in fact, a history play with Greek and Trojan characters, and one of a new kind I read it for a picture of war and diplomacy as they really are, both behind the scenes and in debate, with the seamy side of the 'heroes' exposed, and with Thersites for chorus This is certainly realism, but it is not 'cynicism' For reality, after all, is not entirely bad, and the *whole* truth has its alleviations Nestor is there, and Troilus advising gallant action There is abundance of lofty reflective poetry such as the great orations of Ulysses on social order, and on Time with his wallet at his back Much of the language, it must be admitted, is forced and difficult, in Shakespeare's harshest and most contorted manner

These discords are, if anything, intensified in the scattered scenes that he wrote for *Timon of Athens* The play is often regarded as an abandoned sketch, completed by an unknown hand Timon's curses after a time jade the attention and become horrific rather than terrible, a similar passion

of virulent invective is found in many of the tragedies There are interludes, all too brief, of the utmost beauty and grandeur, and the poetry soars up whenever the elements are invoked,—when Timon charges them all with thievery, when he conjures the sun and his mother earth, and when he sets his grave beside 'the light foam of the sea'. Shakespeare's latest, leaping verse, in its full freedom, and his latest cast of language, are heard in the lines of Apemantus

> What, think'st
> That the bleak air, thy boisterous chamberlain,
> Will put thy shirt on warm? will these mossed trees,
> That have outlived the eagle, page thy heels,
> And skip where thou point'st out?

XI

About the year 1608 Shakespeare turned from tragedy to tragi-comedy We do not know why, but it is as though he were saying, 'I have now told the worst, but life can be good after all, disaster is *sometimes* averted, passion and error are not always fatal, nor do the innocent always perish with the offender, leaving only their memory for our consolation' So at least we fancy, passing from *Coriolanus* or *Timon* to *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, and the *Winter's Tale* In these three plays there is a serious threat of tragedy, which in the *Tempest*, however, disappears In all there is the poetry, never equalled in its kind, of restored happiness All end with the reunion of kindred or of married lovers, who have been parted through accident or some grievous mistake Florizel and Perdita, Ferdinand and Miranda, complete the harmony The poetry in these scenes is of the most generous and heart-warming kind No reason now to be sparing in images of pure beauty, in pictures of the swallow and the azured harebell and the sunburnt sickleman, in pastoral song and masque The verse is nowhere lovelier than in the passages of mourning over the supposed dead, over Imogen-Fidele, or Thaisa in the shipwreck The speech of Pericles, 'Thou god of this great vast', may be read as a splendid inauguration of Shakespeare's last poetic phase Also the first of his scenes of reunion is that in which Marina, born in the storm and so long lost, is recognised by Pericles, and the 'heavenly music', which exists only in

his brain, charms him to slumber This play is most probably the work of another author, partially rewritten by Shakespeare about the year 1608 It is, like its successors, a romance, an old one and very far-spread, the tale of Apollonius of Tyre In these romantic comedies the emphasis is on the story and the poetry and on theatric effect. The logic of tragedy is not required, and drama, rightly so called, is at the best intermittent The plotting is usually loose, though in the long finale of *Cymbeline* many threads are woven up with extreme skill The scene is one of Shakespeare's most admired pieces of stage-craft But the heart of it is in the three lines in which Posthumus and Imogen come again together 'Hang there like fruit, my soul, Till the tree die!', he exclaims, it is the sublimest expression of what I have suggested is Shakespeare's cardinal virtue, constancy or fidelity The poetry, in this play, comes and goes, there are flat stretches like the scene between Imogen and Iachimo, a feeble villain He is the mere mouthpiece of one great set soliloquy, when he 'comes from the trunk' Imogen's language, on her wanderings and everywhere, has a peculiar richness and swiftness of rhythm ('O for a horse with wings! Hear'st thou, Pisanio?'), which belongs to her essentially spirited, mettlesome, and practical character We may regret, however, that the poet should have made her talk of Hercules and Hecuba over the headless corpse which she supposes to be that of Posthumus It is the only small fleck upon the idyll enacted by the mountaineer princes before the cave That picture is Spenserian, a leaf out of the Book of Courtesy, of which the boys and the old Belarius are patterns They are poets too, and their rare elegies over Fidele are the jewel of the play, just as the country scenes and the doings of Perdita ('a blossom in season among the blossoms'[1]) are of the *Winter's Tale* Here, however, there is a greater gravity in the serious part of the story Again we think of Spenser, and of his presentment of Detraction as the Blatant Beast Calumny, as in *Cymbeline*, menaces the pure heroine, but it is bred, in this instance, of mere senile suspicion Hermione speaks with the dignity of Shakespeare's Roman wives, with the same plainness and point, and without any ornament The ragings of Leontes

[1] ἐν ἄνθεσιν ἄριμον ἄνθος (Meleager)

inspire only disgust without pity, he is his own Iago, and a miserable one, and the poet wastes upon him the eloquence of diatribe His penitence is a poor thing, but Shakespeare now is above all things benevolent, and perhaps could not resist the chance of the statue-scene For him, as for Prospero, the fact of penitence suffices

The *Tempest* is the last of his completed works Here all is music and enchantment, pure comedy and spectacle, reality transfigured but never lost from view Everything is in harmony, but for Caliban, the monster, poet, and humorist, the savage, only half teachable, who wishes that he had been left alone The natural imagery in this sea-surrounded poem—for it is a poem rather than a play—is more intensely realised, nearer to the unwrought earth and to the waters, than anywhere else in Shakespeare. By contrast, the landscape in the rhyming masque is, except for the vineyard, English, it is the realm of Ceres The poetry of the elements, of the most transcendent kind, is heard in Prospero's speech, 'Ye elves of hills', for anything like it we must wait for Milton, and perhaps for Shelley. Shelleyan again, and Oriental too, are the lines on the dream-like quality of human life They make us forget that Prospero has been hitherto something of a dominie, relying more on his wand than on his wisdom, and too free with his offensive warnings to Ferdinand But he is saved by style The verse that he speaks is always regular and grave, rising to magnificence, that of Ariel is nimble and darting, with great variety of pause, that of Caliban is still freer, often on the edge of prose, but with some of Shakespeare's most delicate modulations

XII

During the years 1610–1614, probably after finishing the *Tempest*, he began one more history play, on a topic that was still dangerously modern He has left four separate scenes of *Henry VIII* and the greater part of a fifth All of them bear the die-mark of his latest versification and language The lines run on freely, with many weakened endings, and with a rhythm that sometimes dips down towards prose, yet is rich in sudden and characteristic harmonies The sentences are condensed, charged with thought, often elliptical, and, except in the picture of the

Field of the Cloth of Gold, are somewhat stript and plain, recalling the political passages in the Roman plays As in *Coriolanus*, the prose of Shakespeare's 'authority', who here is chiefly Holinshed, is often lifted into metre with little alteration In the scenes of Buckingham's condemnation and of Wolsey's dismissal Henry speaks with restraint and irony, and is drawn with much sympathy The play was filled out and finished by John Fletcher (Ch X), who here rises to the height of his copious and monotonous but often superb and coloured eloquence We miss Shakespeare's thinking, and much else, in Wolsey's farewell and in Katharine's pleading with the cardinals, they are none the less, poetically as well as dramatically, the summits of the play The genius of both poets is harmonised in the beautiful depiction of Katharine Whether Shakespeare was the partner of Fletcher in the *Two Noble Kinsmen*, a tragi-comedy founded upon Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* and full of its pageantry and chivalry, is an unsolved question The plotting and draughtsmanship are in general below Shakespeare's level, but in regard to much of the poetry we are forced to ask, What other known author could *imitate* him, and to a tune like this ?

> O, pity, duke!
> Thou purger of the earth, draw thy feared sword
> That does good turns to the world, give us the bones
> Of our dead kings, that we may chapel them

It is often, indeed, hard to unravel such passages, when they are tangled up with the loose declamatory style of Fletcher The *Two Noble Kinsmen* is no masterpiece, but much of it is either Shakespeare's, or is worthy of his hand [1]

XIII

Even were I qualified, I could not here touch on the abstruse questions, still under debate, of Shakespeare's text, or on all problems of the canon or of chronology It will be seen that the views here assumed are of a conservative kind There are learned speculators, who try to break up many of Shakespeare's commonly admitted works and to portion them out among various authors, but I cannot

[1] The vexed question of his authorship (and handwriting) in some passages of the play *Sir Thomas More* is still *sub judice*

follow their conception of what constitutes literary evidence Again, the books that the poet read, his 'sources', have been barely mentioned The study of them throws a bright light on his constructive art, but it may also interfere with our reception of his poetry *He* did not want spectator or reader to know his processes, but to get a direct, unhindered impression It may be wondered, again, that I have said so little about the mechanics of his verse These have been most carefully studied, and tables of percentages have been drawn up which can be found in many books They are of very high value in helping out the external evidence, and so in approximately settling the order of the plays and poems, although here many problems still remain open. Further, the changes in a poet's prosody are a delicate index of his artistic development and powers Rhyme is plentiful in Shakespeare's plays from 1591 to 1596, it gradually yields to blank verse, reappears in some of the 'middle comedies', and thereafter falls into disuse except for special purposes The double or 'feminine' ending, or added light eleventh syllable, multiplies after 1600, in the tragedies, and in the *Winter's Tale* one line in every three, on the average, is of this kind The 'light' and 'weak' endings, on the tenth syllable (pronoun, conjunction, or auxiliary) increase similarly, also, and concurrently, the proportion of lines that 'flow over' or 'run on', with little or no break in the utterance, to the next line The number and variety of pauses within the line become greater, also the proportion of lines that are divided between two speakers All these changes are in the direction of freedom, the movement is towards the natural unchartered rhythm of prose But it is freedom within the law, the metrical pattern, or base, must be always felt Sometimes, in the later plays, it is in danger of being obscured But Shakespeare is for ever moving towards the incomparable modulations and harmonies of *Antony and Cleopatra* and the *Tempest*

> When thou camest first,
> Thou strokedst me and madest much of me, would'st give me
> Water with berries in't, and teach me how
> To name the bigger light, and how the less,
> That burn by day and night, and then I loved thee,
> And showed thee all the qualities o' the isle,
> The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place and fertile:
> Cursed be I that did so!

The general course of Shakespeare's style, the 'progress of poesy' from the *Comedy of Errors* onwards to *Henry VIII*, —another limitless subject—is fairly clear, despite the uncertainty of many dates We see that the quipping and word-fencing are most profuse in the early plays, and are found to the last, that rant and extravagance have almost died out in the later English Histories, giving way to a stately, leisurely manner, and often to lengthy speeches of noble eloquence, that in the middle comedies and early tragedies there is a rare balance between the expression and the content, that with the representation of more troublous passions and more difficult and deep ideas, this balance begins to be shaken, and the language to strain, often painfully, after the thought, that in a play like *Coriolanus* the struggle is extreme, and that then, in the latter plays, there is a wonderful clearance, not indeed always of the meaning, but of the atmosphere, and a resurgence, the greater for the long repression, of gracious imagery and phrase, and of the language of happiness But one point may be overlooked I mean, that behind all these changes of tune and diction the driving force is simply the dramatic instinct We must think, surely, of the poet not as saying, 'I will write thus, and thus', but as imagining for ever new *persons*, all different, and hearing them speak, and therewith devising, not his own 'style', but *their* styles for lover, prince, shepherd, criminal, and victim Out of this need arise, too, the harangue, the soliloquy, the Chorus, the aside, the inserted lyric and play, all the forms that belong to the theatre It may be added, though it is needless, that Shakespeare, though he can again and again write badly to the last, can also write to perfection from the very first.

XIV

The general effect that he leaves on our imagination is threefold 1 He makes us think of the world of human character, not only within his range, but beyond it, as the sun makes us think of endless surrounding space, and of more possible suns and earths Other poets do not suggest, in the same degree, the unrecorded tragedies and comedies that must be enacted every day while the race survives Dante and Milton, no less great in other ways, move, in

comparison, within a 'closed system' of ideas, and they rule out, on principle, much of the spectacle in which Shakespeare rejoices 2 Thus, together with these great companions, he leaves us with the sense that he, and they, and the whole army of poets and artists taken together, present us with but an infinitesimal fraction of the goodness and beauty that really exist and will exist The beauty may be that of sights and sounds, or that of goodness. More than this, no doubt, our sense of the range of evil and ugliness and waste is enlarged at the same time Tragedy there will be But the poet, and the dramatist in particular, and certainly Shakespeare, leaves us with something more than a cautious hope that the last word is not tragic 3 He produces, more than any man of our race, a faith in the inexhaustible powers and future of language of verse and prose, the instruments of language [1] The drama, in his hands, has done its utmost, so far, in this triple ministry to mankind.

[1] The best companion, in a study that abounds in snares, is *A Shakespeare Glossary*, by C T Onions (second edition revised, Clarendon Press, 1925)

CHAPTER X

POETRY IN THE DRAMA

I

GREAT masses of the verse in our old drama, and especially in the comedy of manners, are written in a middle style, which may either soar into poetry or drop into the prosaic, but which speaks chiefly to the prose imagination The working instrument is the blank line, at once the easiest and the hardest of all metres It can be very telling verse, very efficient, very well deserving to be verse , and yet it is not the poetry realised, palpable, and indubitable, which is here our quest Such poetry may be discovered in four distinct regions (1) in the songs inserted among the plays , (2) in plays, or masques, of a definitely lyrical, and often pastoral, character , (3) in high romantic comedy, and (4) in tragedy Many writers practise more than one of these kinds , and Ben Jonson (? 1572–1637) practises them all He has also left (5) much verse that is independent of the drama In his case, and indeed throughout this chapter, only a few general bearings can be taken We are in a jungle full of blind tracks that cross and re-cross continually

Jonson is a central figure in the chronicle of the drama, of the stage, and of literary society In poetry he is not, like Donne, a central figure His position, none the less, is high and peculiar He founded (see Ch XI) a lyrical style which was more beneficial to poetry than that of Donne No one has a higher conception of his art, or can word it with more state and dignity In the early version (1598) of *Every Man in His Humour* is a pronouncement (afterwards erased as undramatic) in his very best manner

But view her in her glorious ornaments,
Attirèd in the majesty of art,
Set high in spirit with the precious taste
Of sweet philosophy, and which is most,
Crowned with the rich traditions of a soul
That hates to have her dignity profaned
With any relish of an earthly thought,
Oh then, how proud a presence doth she bear.
Then is she like herself, fit to be seen
Of none but grave and consecrated eyes . .

And in the *Poetaster* Ovid exclaims

O sacred poesy, thou spirit of arts,
The soul of science, and the queen of souls,
What profane violence, almost sacrilege,
Hath here been offered thy divinities !

The words *profane*, *sacrilege*, betray the spirit of scorn and moral indignation which in Jonson is often paramount It is an honest and fearless spirit , but it does not make for grace or charm , it easily becomes harsh, censorious, and tedious Its natural field is either didactic verse, or the ethical and realistic comedy of humours, of which the more natural medium is prose, and of which *Every Man in His Humour* is the most enduring example Jonson's mind was predominantly rational and positive , and thousands of lines of his blank verse are in that middle, or amphibious style, to which I have referred It is the staple of his two Roman tragedies, *Sejanus His Fall*, acted in 1603, and *Catiline His Conspiracy*, acted in 1611 Yet in *Sejanus* there is not a little of the 'gravity and height of elocution' that is promised in the preface It is well, in reading this play, to forget *Julius Cæsar* , but there are lines that would not disappoint us if we came on them in Shakespeare

O, they are fled the light Those mighty spirits
Lie raked up, with their ashes, in their urns,
And not a spark of their eternal fire
Glows in a present bosom

So too when the fatal letter of Tiberius has at last exploded, and the time-serving senators shift away from the fallen Sejanus, and Arruntius exclaims, 'Gods, how the leaves drop off, this little wind ! ' The tragic conception of the drama, the self-punishment and ruin of insolence, is powerful ; but in the verse, as in the characters, there is seldom the

play and movement of life. In the masterly cynical comedy of *Volpone, or the Fox*, some false hopes are raised by the almost Miltonic magnificence of the villain's opening address to his gold, 'Hail, the world's soul, and mine!' The poetry of gold attracted Jonson, as it had done Marlowe Jaques, in the *Case is Altered*, counting over his coins, calls them, in his delirious extravagance, 'my fair-feathered, my red-breasted birds' But in *Volpone* the general atmosphere is heavy and lowering, we laugh, but on the wrong side of the mouth, and poetic pleasure is little to be expected. In the topical and polemical *Poetaster* the higher mood is more than once audible, not only in the praises of poetry spoken by Ovid and Augustus Cæsar, but in the famous lines of Tibullus on Virgil, which many critics, without any good reason, have supposed to allude to Shakespeare. It would be hard to omit them here

> That which he hath writ
> Is with such judgement laboured, and distilled
> Through all the needful uses of our lives,
> That could a man remember but his lines,
> He should not touch at any serious point,
> But he might breathe his spirit out of him

Jonson's native sense of beauty finds little scope in his regular dramas In the *Sad Shepherd, or a Tale of Robin Hood*, a fragment which probably, though by no means certainly, belongs to his later life, the censor is on his holiday He is moving in the ballad-world, and also in that of the literary pastoral, the Arcadia of Italian origin, which was already well acclimatised in English romance and song and drama The skilled artifice of Tasso's *Aminta*, with its beautifully moulded lyrics, can still be traced, but it has yielded to something more natural and refreshing, to English humours and melodies

> I grant the linnet, lark, and bullfinch sing,
> But best the dear good angel of the spring,
> The nightingale

So pleads Jonson's Amie, remembering a phrase of Sappho Here indeed is nothing like the liquid, easy bird song of Fletcher's *Faithful Shepherdess*, but for more of the gracious blank verse and couplets of the *Sad Shepherd*, for more of Earinè and the spirit of spring, we would gladly sacrifice

many a hoarse tirade and angry epigram There is much of this pastoral strain in the masques and entertainments (1603–1634), of which nearly forty remain They are somewhat nondescript works to read, with their elaborate pageant, pantomime, and farcical interludes The verse is very often in short couplets, laden with learned allusion and full of a prettiness which does not dwell long on the mind But there is also a profusion of lyric, ranging from the tiny 'Buz, quoth the blue fly' in the *Masque of Oberon* to the rich epithalamy in the *Hue and Cry After Cupid* and the stately 'Who, Virtue, can thy power forget?' in the *Masque of Queens* The rush and tumble of Skeltonical rhyme is heard again, after many days, in the *Gipsies Metamorphosed.*

II

There is nothing transcendent, nothing remains unsaid, in Jonson's lyrics, the best of them, which are universally known, have an antique finish and purity Some can be found in the least promising of the plays 'Have you seen but a bright lily grow' in the *Devil is an Ass*, 'Slow, slow, fresh fount' and 'Queen and huntress' in *Cynthia's Revels*, that rather shapeless satiric comedy with its more pleasing mythological underplot, the *Fountain of Self-Love.* Others, such as 'Drink to me only' and 'O do not wanton with those eyes', are in the two miscellanies of Jonson's verse, the *Forest* and *Underwoods* Here, too, in contrast, are the severe and stript odes, *To Himself* and 'High-spirited friend', also an all but solitary and beautiful excursion into metaphysical verse, 'If beauty be the mark of praise', written in what we call the *In Memoriam* metre There are the epitaphs *On Salathiel Pavy* and *On My First Son,* with the brevity and perfection of the best Roman lettering There are many addresses to Donne, to Camden, to Chapman, to Drayton, to the shade of Shakespeare Jonson can praise as nobly as Landor, or as any man His always nervous but too often tuneless decasyllabics become rounder and sweeter to the ear when he speaks of his friend's 'well tornèd and true filèd lines' or of Drayton's 'soft airs'. There is the same cordiality in his lines *To Penshurst*, with its Sidneian memories and noble inhabitants, nor are its apricots and cheeses and fish ponds forgotten Everywhere there are tokens of the poet that Ben Jonson, distracted by

his own boisterous and fertile invention, did not always choose to be, but could be

III

One of his happiest salutes is to Chapman, on completing the translation of Hesiod's *Works and Days*

> What treasure has thou brought us! and what store
> Still, still dost thou arrive with at our shore,
> To make thy honour and our wealth the more!

This was in 1618, and the Homeric *Hymns* and *Battle of the Frogs and Mice* were yet to follow The entire *Iliad* had come out in 1611, a first instalment as far back as 1598 When Chapman produced the *Odyssey* in 1614, he appended one of those harmonious periods which so often reward us as we make our way through the sandhills and boulders of his original verse

> So wrought divine Ulysses through his woes,
> So crowned the light with him his mother's throes,
> As through his great Renowner I have wrought,
> And my safe sail to sacred anchor brought
> Nor did the Argive ship more burthen feel,
> That bore the care of all men in her keel,
> Than my adventurous bark, the Colchian fleece
> Not half so precious as this soul of Greece,
> In whose songs I have made our shores rejoice,
> And Greek itself vail to our English voice

The boast would have been the safer had all Chapman's *Homer* been written like that Matthew Arnold has told us how his diction, though plain and vigorous, is fantastical, Elizabethan, and not Homeric And it is clear that his lines are generally strong rather than harmonious, and that they cannot give 'the rush and the roll and the roaring' of the dactyl But this *Iliad* is one of our great translations, and it is true, as Chapman says, that 'there did shine A beam of Homer's freer soul in mine' His line of fourteen syllables (in the *Odyssey* he uses the heroic couplet) holds about the same amount of matter as the hexameter, and is sometimes rapid as a charge of lances

> 'His bright and glorious palace, built of never-rusting gold'

> 'All soundly on their cables slept, even till the night was worn,
> And when the Lady of the light, the rosy-fingered Morn
> Rose from the hills, all fresh arose, and to the camp retired,
> Apollo with a fore-right wind their swelling bark inspired'.

George Chapman (? 1559–1634) knew only too well the pains of expression, he is full of *parturient* poetry, he can write as purely as Marlowe, and more darkly than Donne In his completion of *Hero and Leander* can be found both these extremes It is the same in the *Shadow of Night* (1594), in the *Tears of Peace*, in the *Epicedium* on Prince Henry, in *Eugenia*, and in many a sonnet and meditation. Few poets of the time have Chapman's depth and intensity of spirit, and when the sediment has once settled, his spirit is mirrored in his language This is well seen in the very lines in which he describes his struggles to a friend.

> O, had your perfect eye organs to pierce
> Into that chaos whence this stifled verse
> By violence breaks, where, glow-worm-like, doth shine,
> In nights of sorrow, this hid soul of mine

The same vehement, condensed, and figured speech is found in Chapman's tragedies, in which there is much more poetry than genuine drama The subjects are frequently drawn from contemporary French affairs, or, as in *Caesar and Pompey*, from republican Rome, but the treatment shows little historical sense With their ghosts and bloodshed and revenges and numerous maxims, they preserve the Senecan tradition Chapman's pattern is the Plutarchian man, the Stoic who masters his desires and the little world within and is thus a reflection of the world without, where divine wisdom rules Byron, the Marshal of France, in *Byron's Conspiracy*, anticipates Pascal when he cries

> I am a nobler substance than the stars,
> And shall the baser overrule the better?

Bussy D'Ambois, *Bussy's Revenge*, *Cæsar and Pompey*, are full of exalted allusions to eternal law

> he that strives t'invert
> The Universal's course with his poor way,
> Not only dust-like shivers with the sway,
> But, crossing God in his great work . .

In this sense, Chapman is the most philosophical of our dramatists In his comedies, such as the *Gentleman Usher* and *Monsieur D'Olive*, there is more simplicity, much romantic beauty, and also an unexpected gift of light humorous caricature These qualities are seen in the 'gulling' play

of *All Fools* Valerio's speech, 'I tell thee, Love is Nature's second sun', a sentence of twenty-five lines spoken in one breath, is one of the most generous things in the old drama. Nor do these comedies want for more serious and abstract passages on death, on the goodness of women, on friendship, and on conduct reflections, no doubt, for which the *dramatis persona* may be little more than a mouthpiece.

IV

Chapman, like Ben Jonson, sits somewhat apart and aloft, contemning the profane Dekker and Heywood are nearer to their fellow-men, they are perhaps the most friendly of all the playwrights Thomas Dekker (? 1570–? 1632), like Goldsmith, is a Bohemian writer-of-all-work, and records the lighter or darker humours of London in easy natural prose In his lovely and elusive lyrics recur the words *merry* and *golden* 'Art thou poor, yet hast thou golden slumbers?', 'Golden slumbers kiss your eyes', 'O, the month of May, the merry month of May' These songs are scattered over the somewhat ramshackle plays, of which Dekker is often only part-author Here too may be remarked the same love of a rich and even exalted vocabulary In the *Virgin Martyr* it appears safe to credit Dekker, rather than his temperate and dignified partner Massinger, with some of the passages that take us back in spirit to the Middle English legendaries St Dorothea effects many conversions (and also re-conversions of backsliders) before her martyrdom. Meantime she is watched over by an angel, in human guise, whom in that guise she had befriended

> When in a beggar's shape you took me up,
> And clothed my naked limbs, and after fed,
> As you believed, my famished mouth

These scenes are full of characteristic words like *glory*, *divinity*, and *innocence* *Old Fortunatus* is a play rich in fancy and images of luxury The holder of the bottomless purse dreams of an ideal court, with troops of 'chaste goddesses', and 'jovial spirits Standing like fiery cherubims to guard The monarch'. In the *Honest Whore*, a joint drama, the sad reminiscences of the reclaimed Bellafront are always assigned

to Dekker rather than to Middleton, and also the lament of Hippolito over the portrait of his lost Infelice:

> look a painted board
> Circumscribes all! Earth can no bliss afford,
> Nothing of her but this! This cannot speak,
> It has no lap for me to rest upon,
> No lip worth tasting

Such musing on death and on its circumstance is common in the Jacobean poets, who hover round the topic like moths; Ralegh and Donne, Webster and Beaumont and Fletcher In Shakespeare death, like everything else, has no more than its place

The verse dialogue of Thomas Heywood (? 1572–? 1650) in his two best dramas is a good example of 'the real language of men', raised into poetry by the strength of the situation, and just enough above prose to be wholly unprosaic In *A Woman Killed with Kindness* (acted *c* 1603), and in the *English Traveller* (1633), the ruling tone is one of a most uncommon, and yet not unnatural, generosity There are trusting frank-hearted elderly husbands like Old Wincott in the *English Traveller*, whose confidence in Young Geraldine is well warranted The youth loves Mrs Wincott, but they have agreed to be loyal while Old Wincott lives So, to Old Geraldine he explains that he is determined, in order to avert baseless scandal, to 'forbear the house' and to 'travel'. The suspense in this play is most skilfully managed. In *A Woman Killed with Kindness* the honours rest with the husband, Master Frankford, that true gentleman, who can forgive without incurring the risk of contempt The wife and the paramour, though they speak with much passion, are hardly so well realised, and the somewhat sudden dying of the repentant Mrs Frankford is perhaps a needless turn of the screw But all is simply and purely written; and we turn to Heywood with relief after the Latin ruthlessness of the revenge-tragedies His production was vast and multifarious more citizen plays, chronicle plays, romantic plays, translations, long poems, prose tracts—the list fills pages I must be content to have referred to his two constructed masterpieces, and to add that Heywood, in 'Pack, clouds away' and in 'Ye little birds that sit and sing', has his full share of the particular bird-music which becomes ever rarer as the seventeenth century proceeds.

V

Song is not one of the gifts of John Marston (? 1575–1634), and his tragedies of violence and vengeance repel the imagination In his early satires the rhetoric is cracked to the point of bursting 'Nay, leave hyperboles', says one of his characters, but Marston never leaves them for long Yet he is capable of lightning strokes of imagery and of extraordinary poetic phrase In his chief play, *Antonio and Mellida* (1602), in two parts, there are many such compensations Marston had watched the sunrise, and one livid scene is laid upon the seashore

> Is not yon gleam the shuddering morn that flakes
> With silver tincture the east verge of heaven ?

In the bitter comedy of the *Dutch Courtesan*, which is chiefly written in prose, there is a pleasanter daybreak, in which 'The studious morn, with paler cheek, draws on The day's bold light' The *Malcontent*, a drama less abnormal and better contrived than *Antonio and Mellida*, contains an eloquent adjuration to 'pale sober Night', who brings the gift of sleep to the 'scythe-man' and the galley-slave Even the preposterous bloody tragedy of *Sophonisba* stirs us when the heroine, assailed by Syphax, beseeches him, in desperation, to be quick 'be but a beast', she exclaims, 'be but a beast!' In two of his comedies Marston has left some of his extravagance behind him Dulcimel, in *Parasitaster, or the Fawn*, is a human and engaging character, and in *What You Will* we come on a lofty panegyric, akin to Spenser's, of love, that 'mystery of co-united hearts', springing from 'a cause above our wisdom's reach' In truth, with Marston poetry is always breaking in His main work as a playwright lies within a few years, 1602–1607; he was involved in acrid literary quarrels with Joseph Hall and with Ben Jonson, and finally, and somewhat surprisingly, he took orders We do not know whether he thus found an answer to the characteristic question of his Antonio.

> Can man by no means creep out of himself,
> And leave the slough of viperous grief behind ?

Marston, as a tragedian, is not yet free from the Senecan strait-waistcoat The far more fertile and versatile talent of Thomas Middleton (? 1570–1627) finds scope in tragedy,

comedy, tragi-comedy, and masque, not to speak of 'snarling satires' Two of his tragedies—or three, if *More Dissemblers Besides Women* be included—stand out from the rest, and the main plot of the *Changeling*, acted in 1624, leads up to one of the most famous scenes in the old drama The adventurer De Flores, suborned by Beatrice to murder a betrothed whom she abominates, claims from her an unexpected price, and he closes in upon her relentlessly, saying 'Can you weep Fate from its determined purpose?' The passage, on account of its power, has been called Shakespearian, but the power is of just the kind that Shakespeare never cared to exert It is indeed so great, that we can scarcely speak of decadence, but we are on the brink of a decadence, which in *Women Beware Women* has arrived In both dramas the passions of 'pity and terror' are aroused, but they are certainly not 'purged away' These monotonous attacks on innocence and chastity soon deaden our very perception of virtue Livia, in *Women Beware Women*, is a liar, a wanton, and doubly a procuress But she is alive, in every one of her appearances, and were the rest of the play equally persuasive, we should call it a true, however sinister, work of art But it is packed, not only with poisonings and lusts (which might be made credible) but with sudden moral revolutions and impossible repentances, and on these is the brand of the decadence Not that the word implies, or ever need imply, any weakening of style, the writing of John Ford is sufficient witness to the contrary Middleton's tragic verse, though not specially musical, is clear, strong, and rapid, and his grip of language amazing. The poetry is never merely decorative, it springs out of the action His comic and romantic work is much more agreeable and humane The sound, high-blooded morality of *A Fair Quarrel* has been vindicated once for all by Charles Lamb, and the *Spanish Gipsy* is one of the pleasantest of tragi-comedies In the duel-scene between the old Alvarez and the young Louis courage and high generosity rule, yet there is no rant, and nothing beyond nature. The supposed gipsy, the high-born Constanza, pleads for her husband with a sweet eloquence that is not infrequent in Middleton:

> Gentle sir, our plighted troths are chronicled
> In that white book above which notes the secrets
> Of every thought and heart, he is my husband,
> I am his wife.

There is the same breath of poetry in Middleton's earlier lighter work, *Blurt, Master Constable* or the *Phœnix*, and some even in the broad and excellent funning of *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* But in his rattling realistic comedies prose predominates I do but mention the presence of various critical problems, such as the connection between the songs in the *Witch* and those in *Macbeth*, the precise share of William Rowley in the *Changeling*, *A Fair Quarrel*, and other plays, and the riddles, some of them still unsolved, in the ingenious fantasy of *A Game at Chess*, acted in 1624. Here the pieces and pawns denote the high political personages concerned in the project of the 'Spanish marriage', namely, that of Prince Charles with the Infanta Maria

VI

To judge by his dedications, the natural speech of John Webster was richly figurative and also highly sardonic. 'Men who never saw the sea yet desire to behold that regiment of waters'—'the ignorant scorners of the Muses, that like worms in libraries seem to live only to destroy learning' He likes the homely, almost violent images, so natural in a state of excitement which has no time for elegance and cares only to clinch the matter

> My life was a black charnel I *have caught*
> *An everlasting cold* I have lost my voice
> Most irrecoverably

So speaks the pander Flamineo in the *White Devil*, who has not spared his own sister, and is about to die Webster abounds in 'sentences' with the same characteristic

> Piteous fires
> That chance in towers of stone, are not so feared
> As those that light in *flax-shops*

His poetic language is spare, intensely concentrated, and full of strangeness, of all the dramatists, Shakespeare and he are the greatest masters of phrase It is all the more electric when suddenly, at the critical moment, it becomes simple when the boy Giovanni inquires concerning the dead, 'When do they wake?', or when the villain Bosola, repenting, is told, 'Thy pity is nothing of kin to thee', or when the Duchess cries, 'any way, for heaven-sake, So I were out of your whispering'.

Whether simply from a sense of the theatre, or from some deep philosophic instinct, Shakespeare likes to observe the convention by which at the close of a tragedy the threads are picked up by the living and the normal world is supposed to proceed Not so Webster, when *his* curtain descends, 'all's dark and comfortless', and we feel that 'we are merely the stars' tennis-balls' His world is without justice, order, or hope, nor does the noble figure of the sacrificed Duchess of Malfi throw upon it, like Cordelia in *Lear*, a backward ray of consolation So at least it is in Webster's two gréater tragedies The third, *Appius and Virginia*, of which the date is uncertain, is less discouraging, though not less sanguinary There is a strong gust in it of the heroic spirit, and a Roman height of temper, even the miscreant Appius is allowed to make a Roman end There is also a greater symmetry and skill in the structure, a quieter and more even beauty of language

Charles Lamb and Swinburne have all but exhausted the possible praises of the *White Devil, or Vittoria Corombona* (1612) and of the *Duchess of Malfi* (1623) It is ill differing with either, *ça porte malheur!* yet I own to finding something puerile, even contemptible, in the horrors that beset the Duchess inferior Grand Guignol Less would have served for proving her purity of metal The keyword of the play, ever recurring, is 'death' The poetry continues throughout, blazing from moment to moment as in a long storm of lightning, but after the Duchess has gone the dramatic interest slackens We lose interest in the villains and their internecine war The impression is left of a universe of unreason But this tragedy is one of the greatest we possess, with its lyrics 'Hark, now everything is still' and 'Arms and honours deck thy story', and with its inset maxims and reflections, such as Ferdinand's fable of Reputation, Love, and Death It is on the whole better schemed out and sustained than its predecessor The *White Devil* depends far more on a single scene of the first order, the trial of Vittoria, which is over very early, and on one other passage, that of the tigerish dialogue with Brachiano, which ends in her silent and sensual reconciliation For the rest, the interest comes in and goes out with Vittoria To the last her spirit holds out, and she will 'welcome death As princes do some great ambassadors' It is, however,

strange that Webster should let her die with a rhyming commonplace on her lips, 'O happy they that never saw the court' His ideal of a play (stated in the preface to that cobbled-up comedy with a few generous passages the *Devil's Law Case*) is a classical one, though it is hardly, except in *Appius and Virginia*, fulfilled As Webster says,

> yet can no action ever be gracious, where the decency of the language, and ingenious structure of the scene, arrive not to make up a perfect harmony

Another of these terrible specialists, Cyril Tourneur (? 1575–1626) has a far weaker sense of beauty than Webster, and nothing of his mental range, but his style at its best is not less fiery and clean of edge Nor can his power be obscured under any heap of horrors,—poisoned kisses, dressed-up corpses, and the like absurdities In the *Atheist's Tragedy* (1611), which is probably Tourneur's earliest play, D'Amville, the 'atheist', is brought to his end after many crimes, but not till he has seen the light

> There is the strength of natural understanding;
> But nature was a fool There is a power
> Above her that have overthrown the pride
> Of all my projects and posterity

There is this reflective strain in Tourneur, and Swinburne has judged him, I believe with some truth, to be at root a kind of moralist, whose passion for goodness—a thing rare on earth and ever defeated—vents itself in a scathing presentment of evil The plea, however, would be sounder if the morality offered were saner Vindice, the supposed spokesman, in the *Revenger's Tragedy*, of the ideal, shows a gratuitous vileness in the most potent scene, which contains the 'trial' of his mother, and of his sister Castiza whom the mother has betrayed The words of Castiza when she turns on her mother are molten metal, but the play, which was printed in 1607, is, for the most part, a nightmare of incoherences, lit up now and then by pure intensity of tragic language.

VII

In the fifty and more dramas assigned by tradition to Francis Beaumont (? 1584–1616) and John Fletcher (1579–1625) many other authors are concerned, and notably

Philip Massinger (1583–1640) Very often the allotment of shares is uncertain, resting purely on the evidence of language, manner, and temper It also turns on metrical 'tests', which are up to a point more tangible, though the possible exchange or interfusion of styles between two intimate partners must always be remembered But the single-handed work, when certified, of each of the three great contributors allows us to judge with some precision of their peculiar gifts, and such work is best ascertained in the cases of Fletcher, who outlived Beaumont, and of Massinger, who outlived Fletcher In touching on a few typical plays, I will assume only the findings that are commonly accepted The whole collection is the richest treasury, outside Shakespeare, of the poetic drama, and also of the lyrics that besprinkle it, the most brilliant and variegated fruit of the silver age This, indeed, overlaps the golden For Beaumont, with his pure concise language, his even and yet changeful verse, his graver and more intellectual temper, is a student not only of Jonson but of Shakespeare the Shakespeare, however, of *Julius Cæsar* and *Twelfth Night*, not of *Lear*

> Thou art Melantius
> All love is spoke in that A sacrifice,
> To thank the gods Melantius is returned
> In safety Victory sits on his sword,
> As she was wont May she sit there and dwell,
> And may thy armour be, as it has been,
> Only thy valour and thy innocence
>
> (*Maid's Tragedy*)

Contrast, when Ordella, in *Thierry and Theodoret*, speaks of death, the spendthrift profusion and magnificent rocket-flames of Fletcher's eloquence

> 'Tis of all sleeps the sweetest,
> Children begin it to us, strong men seek it,
> And kings from height of all their painted glories
> Fall, like spent exhalations, to this centre,
> And those are fools that fear it, or imagine
> A few unhandsome pleasures, or life's profits,
> Can recompense this place, and mad that stay it,
> Till age blow out their lights, or rotten humours
> Bring them dispersed to the earth

The constantly closed lines, and the double endings of which the spare syllable is often weighted ('But not so fast, your

jewel had been lóst thèn '), are Fletcher's hallmark, his regular habit in ordinary drama, although in the *Faithful Shepherdess* he can abandon it The danger is that the rhythmic period may go on indefinitely, it comes to an end not because it is planned but because it is exhausted But it is easy for the audience, and telling, and it suits the ceaseless play of passionate haranguing, and sentiment, and bustle, and living humours, that distinguish Fletcher's scene, in which, moreover, poetry, though it be poetry nearly always short of the greatest, is superabundant

Beaumont's gift of brilliant farce and mock-heroic extravagance is seen in the *Knight of the Burning Pestle*, acted in 1609 one of the few old comedies, outside Shakespeare, which are sure still to hold an educated audience The threefold humours of the aldermanic household, the prentice-Quixote, and the choric citizen with his wife, outlive the change of taste in jokes In the romantic portions of the *Coxcomb* there is the noble Viola, much humiliated but at last rewarded, the eloping lady whom her drunken lover fails at their tryst In Beaumont's two *Triumphs, Of Honour* and *Of Love*, there is the same delicacy and restraint In *Philaster* and *The Maid's Tragedy* the handiwork of the partners, though closely interwoven, is often distinguishable, and some at least of the rarer elements—the philosophic strain of the prince Philaster, and the heroic utterance of the injured soldier Amintor—can hardly be Fletcher's These two plays, the best fruit of the alliance and the best witness to its glory, were probably first staged during the years 1609–1611, and they open a new chapter, the one in tragi-comedy and the other in romantic and melodramatic tragedy There are plain echoes of Shakespeare, and some scholars have argued that he, in turn, in his latter plays, adopted from Beaumont and Fletcher certain features of versification and plotting However this be, nothing can be, in kind, less Shakespearian than *Philaster* The disguised girl Bellario is the speaker and also the subject of some of the loveliest lines in the drama, yet her figure, like that of the forlorn songstress Aspatia in the *Maid's Tragedy*, is ever so little sentimentalised The play, moreover, is stronger in humours than in real portraiture, and it is strongest of all in pure poetry This abounds also in the fierce and splendid *Maid's Tragedy*,

but there the real power lies in the action and in its dreadful logic The tigress Evadne holds the stage repelling her innocent bridegroom Amintor, to whom the king has married her to cover his own intrigue, tamed by her brother Melantius, who incites her to kill the king, and finally killing herself in despair, to be followed in death by Amintor

Two signal tragedies, *Valentinian* and *Bonduca*, of which Fletcher appears to be sole author, and which were both played in 1614 at latest, are full of his fervent and mounting rhetoric, of his rapid and brilliant stage effects, and also of his genuine though not often profound pathos He likes, it is true, to lash the nerves with a violence that is dearly bought The assaults on the chastity of Lucina leave us more indignant with the author than with the bad emperor Valentinian But there is a masterly irony in the scenes where Lucina is pushed to her doom amid songs and flatteries by his court creatures, who answer all her protests ('Are ye women?') with a kind of hideous good temper Palace plots follow, and vengeance is taken by her hitherto loyal husband Maximus, who himself becomes emperor A purer gift is seen in *Bonduca* The rival generosities of the British queen and the Roman general, and the heroism of the boy-prince Hengo, though strained somewhat far, satisfy the imagination, the verse flows at high tide, and is of Fletcher's best Here and always he excels in presenting a riot of soldiery, or the tumult of battle He uses verse and prose with equal facility Like Beaumont a man of culture and breeding, he knew the speech of his class Their gentlemen, it has often been said, talk naturally, and without conceits Fletcher is no less familiar with the talk of citizen and prentice, of page and lackey, or of procurer, bully, and courtesan He is at home in the underworld of London, which he calls 'Milan' or 'Austracia'. His inexhaustible blank verse, with its peculiar build, suits conversation at any pitch In his liveliest plays, like the *Chances* and *Rule a Wife and Have a Wife*, the talk and the action rattle along in unison It is not often poetic comedy, in the higher sense, but it is admirable comedy in telling verse

Pure idyll might seem foreign to such a talent, but the *Faithful Shepherdess*, printed before 1610, is the closest and happiest transplantation into English of the pastoral

play It is not, like the *Sad Shepherd*, specially English in scene or feeling, it is full of memories of Guarini and Tasso, and many a phrase, like the fall of its sweet octosyllabics, was to be remembered by Milton in *Comus* The persons are shadows, or masquers a witch, a kind satyr, a 'sullen shepherd', Perigots and Cloes Everywhere there is poetry, of no disturbing depth indeed or height, but with an even and limpid flow Much is written in heroic couplet, and there is also blank verse, of a normal kind and without the peculiar structure employed in Fletcher's plays Also there are lyrics, and the songs, more than seventy of them, which are scattered through his dramas are rich in beauty, spirit, and variety There are songs of war, of love, of drink, of tramping, of sleep, and of melancholy If we forget Shakespeare, there is no such store of excellent lyric in any other of the playwrights, or in any two of them taken together

VIII

The poetic flame often burns pale and clear, though seldom very hot or very high, in Philip Massinger (1583–1640), whose unaided work, amounting to some fifteen plays, appears to begin about 1620 With Dekker he had written the *Virgin Martyr*, with Fletcher he had been in constant partnership To judge by internal evidence, they are the authors of the *Tragedy of Sir John van Olden Barneveldt*, an admirable specimen of what may be called the middle kind of historical play, with its demand for a grave and yet animated style The conflict here is not in the soul of a Coriolanus, but simply between two parties in the state, and the issue is in suspense up to the final tragic sacrifice of the chief actor The judicial murder of Olden Barneveldt, the second maker of the Dutch republic, had been committed in 1619 He is drawn on heroic, not on superhuman scale, and the leaders and adherents on either side, not forgetting the women and children, are all distinct and natural The eloquence of Fletcher, though lofty, is unusually restrained, the constructive gift and the political sense of Massinger never found better scope His verse, indeed, if we take it at its worst, is apt to be sadly down at heel, with its profusion of such feeble endings as *or*, *is*, *to*, whereby metre shuffles into prose But the

measured dignity of which he is capable can be seen in his praise of England

> If examples
> May move you more than arguments, look on England,
> The empress of the European isles,
> And unto whom alone ours yields precédence,
> When did she flourish so, as when she was
> The mistress of the ocean, her navies
> Putting a girdle round about the world?
> When the Iberian quaked, her worthies named,
> And the fair flower-de-luce grew pale, set by
> The red rose and the white?

His subjects are often political, he is full of maxims on the freedom of the subject and on the punishment reserved by heaven for the despot His own temper is independent, and, though not demagogic, he is markedly on the popular side His wicked grandees, like Domitian in the *Roman Actor*, are duly made an end of, his good ones, Timoleon in the *Bondman* or Cozimo in the *Great Duke of Florence*, are gods who descend from the machine to do justice Impossible in Massinger would be the Amintor of the *Maid's Tragedy*, who is awestruck at the bare mention of royalty when he learns that his new wife is the foisted-on mistress of the king Massinger shows sympathy with the old faith, though there is no proof that he belonged to it In the *Renegado* there is a highly virtuous Jesuit, and in the *Maid of Honour* Camiola, one of his few natural and high-minded heroines, becomes a nun

Massinger has always been praised, not only for his knowledge of the theatre, but for the good architecture of his plots, and this is one of the rarest of qualities in the old drama It is conspicuous in the *Roman Actor*, with its three inserted plays which all minister to the plot, and again in the *Bondman*, where Marullo, the seeming slave and disguised gentleman who stirs up the oppressed populace of Syracuse, is also the righter of a private wrong He wins his Cleora by exposing the man who is at once his rival in love and the betrayer of his sister He is the orator of the play, and his speeches, as usual in Massinger, move as it were on a lofty though peakless table-land of stately rhetoric Tragic magnificence, transporting power of language, are not the gift of this poet Indeed, he all too readily drops into melodrama. The *Duke of Milan* is full

of rant and stabbing, and ends, by way of effective stage business, with the painting of a dead face Many of his women characters are repellent, and some are revolting With Massinger we are certainly in mid-decadence , but when we think of his greater qualities, we feel that it is an *arrested* decadence There is much charm and pleasantness in the *Great Duke of Florence*, with its frank brave lady, Lidia, and her wise old father Charomonte Massinger's masterpiece in comedy, *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*, dated about 1625, has succeeded on the stage during nearly three centuries To read it, brings out the smooth cogwork of the plotting, with every small rivet fitted tight , the saving streak of poetry in the speeches of the young lover , the commonness, too, of some of the humours, which pleased the old audience , and, above all, the dominance of Overreach, the usurer, in whose talk is also a sinister sort of poetry Nothing is more adroit than the devices by which Sir Giles's cruelty and greed, his almost tragical *virtù* and his servility to rank and title, are brought to defeat themselves The elder Irving, who played the part in 1860, no doubt carried off even that final burst of raving which in the book leaves us cold There is a perhaps subtler villain, the hypocrite Luke, in Massinger's other, much favoured comedy, the *City Madam*

IX

Poetry, in the sense of a pure, classical, and subtle style, makes a great recovery in the dramas of John Ford (1586–? 1640) , there had been nothing like it, in tragedy, since the death of Beaumont in 1616 The blank verse is not only free from the monotony besetting that of Fletcher and Massinger, but has a dignity of its own

> Glories
> Of human greatness are but pleasing dreams
> And shadows soon decaying , on the stage
> Of my mortality, my youth hath acted
> Some scenes of vanity, drawn out at length
> By varied pleasures, sweetened in the mixture,
> But tragical in issue beauty, pomp,
> With every sensuality our giddiness
> Doth frame an idol, are unconstant friends,
> When any troubled passion makes assault
> On the unguarded castle of the mind

This is what Addison calls a 'sentiment'; but in Ford's great scenes, like the last interview of Giovanni and Annabella in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, or the reunion of the distraught Meleander with his daughter in the *Lover's Melancholy*, there is a high tragic or romantic beauty The latter passage indeed is modelled on a far more moving one in *Pericles;* and Ford was a student of Shakespeare's tragi-comedies. Still, he bears many a mark of the decline His humours are vulgar, he deals in stage effects grosser than the blinding of Gloster in *King Lear*, a man tied in a chair and stabbed in full view, a brother waving his sister's heart upon a dagger. This spectacle defaces his master-work, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (1633), the subject of which is the illicit passion of the brother, Giovanni, for his sister, Annabella He has killed her because exposure is imminent Fate is the god of this play Giovanni, though duly admonished and threatened with hell by a friar, soon feels that he cannot resist his impulse, he goes straight to his aim, never repents, and at last is murdered Annabella does repent, all her pity is for the predestined Giovanni

> Would thou hadst been less subject to those stars
> That luckless reigned at my nativity!

It is an error, I think, to say that Ford here represents passion as its own warrant His sympathy is imaginative, not moral, he shows us the two star-driven victims hurrying to their ruin Their language is that of a delight and a despair which are both transcendent, nor is unlawfulness for its own sake the relish of their sin But we must distinguish the poet's purpose from the effect produced upon an audience who would not take these refinements The normal playgoer will either sympathise in the wrong spirit, or else will feel that passion and poetry are simply being misused in order to condone incest In Ford's other dramas there are strange byways, but no more of these dark excursions In the *Broken Heart*, acted in 1629, some sensation-mongering has to be forgiven for its complex and masterly plot, its three noble women, and its abundance of high poetry In this play we see the great drama blazing up once more, before it begins to die down for good and all. The famous dance of the heart-broken Calantha may leave us either in the fervid mood of Lamb or in the harder mood of

Hazlitt, we may well take it as the climax of an action throughout superbly extravagant. The testament of Penthea, who bequeaths her 'fame' to 'Memory, and Time's old daughter, Truth', is one of the summits of Ford's poetry. There are passages of a quieter grace in the *Lover's Melancholy*, and also in the *Lady's Trial* Spinella, the 'tried' lady, who banishes her husband's baseless but not unnatural suspicions, is a dignified and beautiful figure Ford also produced the belated history play of *Perkin Warbeck*, it is carefully constructed out of Bacon's *History of Henry VII*, but somewhat flat and perfunctory

There is no furnace of tragedy, and little deep hold on character, in the plays of James Shirley (1596–1666), they are the last and faintest, but still the genuine, utterance of the great age The verse is graceful, often gallant, even exalted, the handiwork facile and brilliant There is much literary re-working of old topics and situations The *Traitor* and the *Cardinal*, played respectively in 1631 and 1641 are dramas of Italian dissembling, vengeance, and carnage, they are full of spirited rhetoric Shirley's poetical comedies, such as *Hyde Park* and the *Lady of Pleasure*, have more true life in them, and are most sprightly pictures of citizen manners, full of coquetry, good-natured trickery, and turnings of the tables There are some delightful inventions, or appropriations of old legend, in *St Patrick for Ireland* the miracle of the saint banishing the vipers, and the triumph of that 'tame naked churchman' over the 'Archimagus' of Jupiter and Saturn

X

It will be understood that a score of authors and hundreds of plays that interest the historian are here ignored, and much, also, that concerns the seeker after poetry But in truth the poetry is seen best in 'specimens', of which Lamb's are so noble an instalment, it can be culled from many a tragedy which as a whole sickens the reason without refreshing the imagination, and in which the stage business is of the wildest I name but three examples Swinburne sees a likeness to the style of Middleton in the anonymous *Second Maiden's Tragedy*, licensed in 1611 Here the heroic 'Lady' dies, sooner than yield to 'Tyrant' In the end

he unburies her, sets her body on a chair, does obeisance, kisses its hand, and cries,

> I can see nothing to be mended in thee
> But the too constant paleness of thy cheek,
> I'd give the kingdom but to purchase there
> The breadth of a red rose in natural colours

Then her Ghost enters and greets her husband, and, when the body has been crowned and is taken back to the grave, exit, 'as it were attending it' Again, in *All's Lost by Lust*, the single-handed work of William Rowley (so often the partner of Middleton), a phantom 'show' appears to the ravisher Roderigo, presenting his various victims, and, most ominously, also *himself* Lamb's phrase of 'rape, murder, and superlatives' would befit this play, but amidst Rowley's rugged verse and rough language there are piercing strokes A Moor, dooming a father and a daughter, gives the order,

> Pluck out his eyes and her exclaiming tongue,
> She shall in silent sorrow then lead him,
> *Her eyes shall be his stars*

There are horrors also in the brilliant and animated *Tragedy of Nero* (1624), but it is the work of an unknown scholar who is versed in his classical authorities, and perhaps also in the more old-fashioned drama His verse and his rhetoric bear some tokens of the school of Marlowe But he addresses the mind, and the figures of Lucan, Seneca, and Petronius, and of the various flatterers and eavesdroppers, are distinct and even living The critics have noted, however, that the author missed his chance in describing Nero's end, when he neglected the vivid and appalling story in Suetonius Here I pause, without trying to speak of May and Davenport, of Nabbes and Marmion, of the academic plays in Latin, or of the masques in general The masques, though rich in spoil for the anthologist, belong rather to the record of the theatre

XI

But a note would be due, were it only to clear the air, to five of the writers who are known chiefly or wholly for the gift of poetical comedy I must therefore revert, first of all, to the year which probably saw the composition of the

Merry Wives. In 1599 was published the *Two Angry Women of Abington*, by Henry Porter, who is Shakespeare's nearest companion, and at some points his equal, in what is called citizen comedy When the confusions of the night are over Sir Ralph Smith invites the now reconciled Mistress Goursey and Mistress Barnes to 'country fare, mutton and veal, Perchance a duck or goose', and just such fare is this excellent play. The citizens wrangle, and blunder, and miss one another in the night-fog of the rabbit-warren The blank verse, like the passages of ringing rhyme, is rapid and nervous, and the right sort of poetry for the occasion.

The wit and gaiety of the former age are not quenched during the reign of tragedy John Day's *Parliament of Bees*, written possibly about 1607, is not, properly speaking, a play, but a string of twelve 'characters', presenting as many human types in hymenopterous guise, and written in the pleasantest of chiming couplets Day's poetry comes up from the purest spring, and betrays no effort There are the lover and the soldier, the Poetaster, with whom is contrasted the true poet *his* 'lines, like his invention, are born free, And both live blameless to eternity', and the Humble,

> who hath too long
> Lived like an outlaw, and will neither pay
> Honey nor wax, do service nor obey,
> But like a felon, couched under a weed,
> Watches advantage to make boot and feed
> Upon the top-branch blossoms, and by stealth
> Makes dangerous inroads on your commonwealth,
> Robs the day-labourer of his golden prize
> And sends him weeping home with empty thighs

At last Oberon deals out his awards, and to Flora he pronounces,

> Honey-dews refresh thy meads,
> Cowslips spring with golden heads;
> July-flowers and carnations wear
> Leaves double-streaked with maidenhair

Day must have studied Shakespeare's early comedies; he is full, says Swinburne, of 'golden murmurs from a golden hive' His dialogue is of the nimblest, and the quick returns in the tennis-match of his *Isle of Gulls* are an emblem of his talent. *Humour out of Breath* (1608) is a happy,

plotless fantasy Wandering disguised nobles go in chase of two truant girls, and a third, Florimel, frank and witty, is a mistress both of musical verse and of bantering prose. The play contains some remarkably sweet and buoyant blank verse:

> Early Sorrow, art got up so soon?
> What, ere the sun ascendeth in the East?
> O, what an early waker art thou grown! . .

Day's life of drudging, of part-sharing with other playwrights, failed to dry up this happy vein of poetry

The two independent plays of the actor Nathaniel Field, *A Woman is a Weathercock* (1612) and its palinode *Amends for Ladies* (1618), were both written in his youth, and the prose of both betrays, in its sharp and witty if sometimes tasteless humours, the study of Ben Jonson In the blank and rhyming verse that is interlaced Field is much more himself, it is straightforward, unaffected, and lucid, with touches of romantic grace, and it 'carries', as the phrase is, at once 'across' to the audience In the later of these two plays it is noticeably more pointed and varied The opening pleas of the maid, the wife, and the widow, each of them exalting her own estate as the more blessed, have this telling quality to the full, likewise the harangue of the Lady Honour, disguised as a boy, to the suitor whom she has dismissed She puts him in the wrong, and covertly woos him back, in a true strain of honest love-poetry Field also co-operated, it is uncertain exactly where, with Massinger in the tragedy of the *Fatal Dowry*

XII

The latter years of the drama are brightened by two other 'sons of Jonson', Thomas Randolph (1605–1635), and Richard Brome, who died about 1652 Randolph was a bright young collegiate wit and poet, whose early death was justly lamented His two chief plays, *Amyntas, or the Impossible Dowry*, and the *Muses' Looking-Glass*, together with his poems, were printed three years after it *Amyntas* is a pastoral, but there is little in it of Tasso except the title. It is full of what one of the characters calls the 'mellisonant tingled tangle' of sheep-bells, and of the fun and innocence of the greenwood The persons are shadows, not the firmly sketched

English figures of the *Sad Shepherd* The *Muses' Looking-Glass* is a most agreeable and fanciful variant on the comedy of humours The persons represent the Extremes of Aristotle's *Ethics* Alazon the Boaster is faced by his opposite Eiron the Under-Stater, who 'out of an itch to be thought modest, dissembles his qualities' Alazon declares himself to be an orator greater than the *three* greatest ones of Rome, Marcus, Tullius, and Cicero Finally these and their fellows see their true visages in the Muses' glass, an oration is delivered by the Mean, and Roscius the presenter utters a defence of the comic art More men, he had said at the outset, are

> Laughed into wit and virtue than hath been
> By twenty tedious lectures drawn from sin

The audience are converted, including Bird the puritan:

> Hereafter I will visit comedies
> And see them oft, they are good exercises!
> I'll teach devotion now a milder temper
> Not that it shall lose any of her heat
> Or purity, but henceforth shall be such
> As shall burn bright, not blaze so much

Randolph's lyrics remind us that we are now in the age of the *Hesperides* But he does not, like Herrick, reproach a 'dull Devonshire'

> I will the country see,
> Where old simplicity,
> Though hid in grey,
> Doth look more gay
> Than foppery in plush and scarlet clad

The whole of this *Ode to Master Anthony Stafford*, like *A Pastoral Courtship*, takes us back to the 'Elizabethan' mood

Randolph wishes to look at 'wholesome country girls' and to pipe 'Doric music' There is a wilder spirit, a Romany spirit, in Brome's play the *Jovial Crew, or The Merry Beggars*, acted in 1641 But for the songs of Autolycus and Amiens, it might be hard to find any earlier or fresher utterance of the kind in English verse than the cuckoo-song in this comedy, it gives the essence of the quest

Come away! why do we stay?
We have no debt or rent to pay;
No bargains or accounts to make,
No land or lease to let or take
Or if we had, should that remore us [*delay*]
When all the world's our own before us,
And where we pass and make resort,
Is our kingdom and our court?
'Cuckoo,' cries he, 'jug, jug,' sings she,
From bush to bush, from tree to tree,
Why in one place then tarry we?

The 'wind on the heath' calls the band of youths and damsels to wander away, not only from the town but from gardens and planted groves, into the highways and commons, and to forgather with the gipsies Oldrents, the squire, lets his steward Springlove go, a swallow escaped from a cage, and soon comes to envy the jovial crew, and to join them Brome wrote a host of other comedies, in prose or verse or in the two intermixed, some are realistic and Jonsonian, some romantic and more ambitious He is not a great workman in his verse, but it has a freshness and direct feeling which bids us be careful in our use of the word 'decadence' At the same time it is certain that the drama, both tragic and comic, had reached its natural term, and was perhaps saved from a worse decline, when the theatres were shut in 1642 by ordinance

CHAPTER XI

POETRY, 1600 TO 1660

I

THE poetical drama has a life-history of its own, like that of the Ages of Man In spite of its variety we can watch it from its childhood, through its youth and prime, down to the natural collapse which was hastened by external violence In other kinds of verse there is no such unity of development, and the mere presence of Milton (Ch XII) is enough to wreck any historical formula. Nor, so great is the confusion, is it safe to speak of schools or camps The drift of the current is hardly clear until the coming of Dryden , but then begins a new phase of the English Renaissance, with a definite character of its own

Meantime there are some clues, which can be followed with caution From time to time are heard professions of allegiance to three very different masters, Spenser, Donne, and Ben Jonson The cult of Spenser encouraged sureness and sweetness of style, a keener sense of ideal beauty, and also a certain garrulity The tradition of Donne could only make for *trouble* , for the intenser utterance of troubled feeling , for the expression of discords, and for discords in the expression , for an inequality that threatens to spoil even the shortest poem , and yet, again and again, especially in the lyric, for sudden and irresistible successes The influence of Jonson, except in the drama, was slighter , but he was a sounder model He made, for roughness indeed, yet also for plainness and strength , and sometimes, as in the case of Herrick, for grace and beauty and finish But the word ' influence ' is ever a snare, since the nature of a new talent can no more be deduced, or predicted, from its teachers, than that of a child from his parents Moreover, the legacy of a master is soon transformed out of all knowledge Cowley

and Marvell are not *like* Donne, although they would have been different without him With these reserves, we can group the poets up to a certain point

II

Spenser's estate fell to many heirs, a few of whom were able to administer their portion Some of them studied his speculative verse, others his eclogues, and others again his allegory In the *Four Hymns*, though hardly a reasoner, he had expounded to perfection, he had made philosophy melodious His most original disciple is a harder thinker, Sir John Davies, the statesman and lawyer, whose *Nosce Teipsum* (1599) is the first and one of the best English poems of its kind It is a long close argument for the immortality of the soul and is full of bright and changeful imagery. The soul is tied to the body not like a pilot to his ship or a spider to his web,

> But as the fair and cheerful morning light
> Doth here and there her silver beams impart,
> And in an instant doth herself unite
> To the transparent air, in all, and part

The soul is in essence other than the body, and prior, and superior, and more enduring Davies makes his points with precision, each quatrain marking a step in the proof, and some of his turns might have pleased Edward FitzGerald:

> And yet we see in her such powers divine,
> As we could gladly think, from God she came,
> Fain would we make him author of the wine,
> If for the dregs we could some other blame

In his *Orchestra* (1596) Davies figures law and rhythm, the principles of all things, under the image of the dance. The stars dance, and so do we, and song and verse, and the concord and alternate predominance of the sexes, are all ruled by rhythm *Orchestra* is a brilliant poem, and is written in the roomy *Troilus*-measure Davies's *Gulling Sonnets* neatly parody the tricks of the sonnet-trade, and in his *Astraea*, a string of acrostics addressed to the queen, the dispenser of *justice*, he reveals an easy gift of lyric

'Contemplations', says Henry More, 'concerning the dry essence of the Deity, are very consuming and unsatisfactory'; and it is hard not to apply the epithets to his

Philosophical Poems (1647) on the unity, the 'sleep', the immortality, and the pre-existence of the soul Most of them had appeared in 1642, with forbidding Greek titles such as *Psychozoia* and *Antipsychopannychia* They are a strange, eclectic blending of Plato, Neoplatonism, and Christianity, some of the names and symbols recall the worst jargon of William Blake Yet More (1614–1687), the most gifted of the Cambridge Platonists, and best known for his prose *Divine Dialogues* (1668), was a born votary of the holy inner life, and his long *Psychozoia*, he tells us, is 'a private record of the sensations and experiences of my own soul' His thought is akin to that of Spenser's *Four Hymns*, in his stanza, his language, and his similes and portraits he often echoes the *Faerie Queene* with startling closeness It is a pity that instead of the even stream of that poem we have here, too frequently, only a barren marsh But two verses will show how late the lofty style could survive

Like to a meteor, whose material
Is low unwieldy earth, base unctuous slime,
Whose inward hidden parts etherial
Lie close upwrapt in that dull sluggish fime, [*ordure*]
Lie fast asleep, till at some fatal time
Great Phœbus' lamp has fired its inward spright,
And then even of itself on high doth climb,
That erst was dark becomes all eye, all sight,
Bright star, that to the wise of future things gives light:

Even so the weaker mind, that languid lies
Knit up in rags of dirt, dark, cold, and blind,
So soon that purer flame of Love unties
Her clogging chains, and doth her spright unbind,
She soars aloft, for she herself doth find
Well plumed, so, raised upon her spreaden wing,
She softly plays, and warbles in the wind,
And carols out her inward life and spring
Of overflowing joy, and of pure love doth sing

There is much dispersed poetry in Henry More, one of his landscapes brings the Eastern counties before us

Vast plains, with lowly cottages forlorn,
Rounded about with the low wavering sky

III

The Devon climate is warm and slack, and the Devon lanes twist under their flowery banks the image may serve, perhaps, for the verses of William Browne of Tavistock.

His *Shepherd's Pipe* (1614), a series of Spenserian eclogues, has notes of sweetness, and shows an intimacy with rural things. His *Inner Temple Mask* proves that he is a lyrist, and he is now credited with the lines on Lady Pembroke, 'Underneath this sable hearse', so long assigned to Jonson. His long *Britannia's Pastorals* (1613) is written in free, dissolutely overlapping couplets, which were only too well remembered by Keats in his *Endymion* But they suit this rambling poem, where the shadowy speakers have pastoral names, where time passes unnoticed, and where the real West country, seen through a haze of allusions to Pan and Cynthia, comes out sharply in a picture of sheep-shearing or the game of 'barleybreak' There are interludes of lyrical beauty, there are many praises of the poets, Jonson and Daniel, and also of Wither, who was re-discovered by Charles Lamb

> But though that all the world's delight forsake me,
> I have a Muse, and she shall music make me,
> Whose airy notes, in spite of closest cages,
> Shall give content to me, and after ages

So sings George Wither (1588–1667) in his *Shepherd's Hunting*, written in 1614 in the Marshalsea, and his 'airy notes' ripple along with more melody than passion, but he is one of the most engaging of our pastoralists The monotonous *Fidelia* (1615), a lament by a deserted lady, contains the famous 'Shall I, wasting in despair', a song which was carefully revised, not always for the better In *Fair Virtue, or the Mistress of Philarete* (1622), a work of nearly 5000 lines, there are some admirable lyrics and country scenes, the best known is that perfect miniature of Hampshire water and woodland, describing Alresford Pool Wither is sadly betrayed by his own facility For nearly half a century he poured out verse and prose, satires and devout rhymes, in which poetry gleams out now and then, but he was soon forgotten We would abandon most of his later writing for one more verse of his so-called 'love-sonnet':

> 'Twas I that paid for all things,
> 'Twas others drank the wine,
> I cannot now recall things,
> Live but a fool to pine
> 'Twas I that beat the bush,
> The bird to others flew,
> For she, alas! hath left me,
> Falero, lero, loo.

Another genuine countryman, William Basse (1602–1653), who practised on the pipe of Colin, or Spenser, was for long remembered only by the fishing song quoted in the *Complete Angler*, and indeed his work, as he owns, is of 'slender composition' His eclogues are full of rustic realism; there is an exact picture of a goat who is chased by a dog and hurt, his horns being held fast in a rafter, and there are more dogs, with agreeable names, White Lily, Black Lady, in the spirited hunting-ditty 'Long ere the morn'. Basse assures us that he

> Ne'er gazed on Cheapside's glistering row,
> Nor went to bed by the deep sound of Bow,
> But lent my days to silver-coloured sheep,
> And from strawn cotes borrowed my golden sleep

We know how Jonson, contradicting Basse's epitaph on Shakespeare, would *not* 'bid Beaumont lie a little nearer Chaucer', but bade him lie further, since Shakespeare himself was 'a monument without a tomb'

IV

In the brothers Fletcher, Phineas and Giles, cousins of the dramatist, we often hear the voice of Spenser speaking, yet each of them mars, in various ways, the stanza of the *Faerie Queene* Giles, in his *Christ's Death and Triumph* (1610), can carry the movement through to perfection for six lines, and then it falls short

> As when the cheerful sun, elamping wide,
> Glads all the world with his uprising ray,
> And woos the widowed earth afresh to pride,
> And paints her bosom with the flowery May,
> His silent sister steals him quite away,
> Wrapt in a sable cloud from mortal eyes,
> The hasty stars at noon begin to rise,
> And headlong to his early roost the sparrow flies

He has the poetic senses, and a true religious fervour, but is too much given to luxuries In his picture of the Temptation, which was studied by Milton, the Graces with their silver flaskets appear to visit the Saviour, and in the debate in heaven between Mercy and Justice, the robe of Mercy is so curiously broidered that we forget what is at stake. The strain rises higher in the finale, *Christ's Triumph in*

Heaven, when the songs are heard of 'ten thousand saints at once', greeting the patriarchs who are freed from hell:

> Down from their thrones the Dominations flow,
> And at His feet their crowns and sceptres throw,
> And all the princely souls fell on their faces low

Phineas Fletcher, the elder brother, if a less exalted spirit, is a poet richer in variety He is best known by the *Purple Island* (1633), a long-drawn-out allegory of the body and mind of man This is a luckless design, though it descends, much altered, from the *Timæus* of Plato through some verses in the *Faerie Queene* But there are happy pictures and landscapes, and some ingenious 'characters' of the brave, the mild, or the covetous man Phineas here keeps up his master's measure only through four lines.

> But see, the smoke, mounting in village nigh,
> With folded wreaths steals through the quiet air,
> And, mixt with dusky shades in Eastern sky,
> Begins the night, and bids us home repair
> Bright Vesper now hath changed his name and place,
> And twinkles in the heaven with doubtful face
> Home, then, my full-fed lambs! the night comes, home, apace!

Too much of the *Purple Island* is pedantry, mere versified anatomy We hear of the cook, Concoction, and are told, concerning the liver, that 'so 'twixt Splenion's frost and th' angry Gall the jovial Hepar sits' Fletcher's *Piscatory Eclogues* are full, not unpleasantly, of Spenserian echoes He is now thought, on good evidence, to be the author of *Britain's Ida*, a poem which was published as Spenser's, it is a pretty thing, but cloyingly luxurious, like a piece of 'Turkish delight' His purest work is to be found in his *Elisa*, a long elegy on Sir Antony Irby, at the close, he bids the widow dream of her past happiness:

> Sleep, widowed eyes, and cease so fierce lamenting,
> Sleep grieved heart, and now a little rest thee
> Sleep sighing words, stop all your discontenting,
> Sleep beaten breast, no blows shall now molest thee:
> Sleep happy lips, in mutual kisses nest ye.
> Sleep weary Muse, and do not now disease her
> Fancy, do thou with dreams and his sweet presence please her.

This, in tone and versification, is purely Elizabethan, and reminds us of the song-books or of the best things in the *Phœnix Nest*.

V

William Drummond of Hawthornden (1585–1649) belongs to none of these groups, but rather to the former age The polar opposite of Donne, he is closest, in his instinct for verbal sweetness and rightness, to Daniel He outdoes all the Elizabethans in his careful looting of other poets, French, Italian, Spanish, English, and also Latin He will borrow an overture, or translate, or piece together several reminiscences, holding, in the fashion of the time, that a theft becomes lawful property But Drummond often transmutes rather than translates The man who could call the moon ' sad queen of silence ', and write

> My lute, be as thou wast when thou didst grow
> With thy green mother in some shady grove,

is no mere studio poet He is all for melody and purity of form, and tries to give English the beauty of a Southern tongue Often, no doubt, he has little to say, and leaves a certain impression of sterility The prose descant, the *Cypress Grove*, though it does not compare with the meditations upon death of Browne or Ralegh, has a solemn rolling rhythm, and perhaps is Drummond's best composition His couplets in *Tears on the Death of Moeliades* (1613), a lament for Prince Henry, are very smooth, but he prefers the sonnet and the madrigal He prolonged the life of the sonnet, making many experiments in the rhyme-order There is an almost Miltonic energy in *For the Baptist*, and the sincerity of grief in the sonnet, ' Sweet soul, that in the April of thy years ' His madrigals have seldom much substance, many are in the nature of delicate exercises, but the longest and most original, ' Phœbus, arise ', is rich in sound and colour Drummond, a born craftsman, was the friend of Jonson, of Drayton, and above all of books, and he kept alive, in an age of conceits and confusion, the sense of purity in form Much of his good work is in the *Poems* of 1616, the *Flowers of Sion* appeared in 1623

VI

But already, about 1595, one young poet had broken with the current styles, he refused to deal in smooth melodies, in moral parables, in *translated* passions, or in ' poor Petrarch's

long-deceasèd woes' He composed some highly acrid satires on contemporary manners, they are not poetry, and often, what with their wrenchings of the metrical accent, they are not verse They were perhaps the earliest writings of John Donne (1573–1631), who was to rule, in the opinion of an admirer, 'the universal monarchy of wit' The chief events in his outer life are his stolen marriage in 1601 with Anne More, followed by a spell of poverty and dependence, his conversion from the old faith, in which he was born, his ordination in 1615 as a convinced Anglican and remorseful believer, the death of his wife in 1617, and his appointment in 1621 as Dean of St Paul's He died in 1631, the chief preacher of his time, his sermons outflame all others of the century Most of his verse was posthumously published, the volumes of 1633 and 1635 are the most important He also wrote much in prose, including *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions* (1624), *Biathanatos* (1648), a treatise to show that suicide is not always sinful, and certain *Paradoxes and Problems* all of them showing, once more, that Donne was a 'mental traveller' of the strangest complexion The text and canon and dates and sequence of his poems, and often their interpretation, offer as many problems as the work of William Blake, —yet another genius who (like Shelley) makes all racial theories of the 'Anglo-Saxon' character look foolish

The *Satires*, the *Elegies*, and some of those *Songs and Sonnets* which are Donne's best legacy, are thought to date from his bachelor days It is clear that the harshness of his verse was wanton and deliberate, when he chooses, no one can be more melodious, though the melodies are of a new order For some of his songs, such as 'Go and catch a falling star', musical settings are known, but in general the mood shifts too suddenly, and the argument exacts too much thinking, for the rightful effect of a song For beauty of idea and execution, an anthologist might pick out 'Sweetest Love', the *Dream*, the *Anniversary*, with its wonderful concerted rhythm, and its fancy that the lovers are *kings*, keeping their state together, the *Sun Rising*, which opens with Donne's favourite shock tactics ('Busy old fool, unruly Sun'), and the *Canonization* ('For Godsake hold your tongue, and let me love') But every one of the fifty-five *Songs and Sonnets* has its peculiar virtue. Many,

and many of the best, are frankly pagan, libertine, and unregenerate, there is abundance of *odi et amo*, of *sentio et excrucior* Yet this strain is crossed, sometimes more and sometimes less, by an idealistic one, with much harping on the Platonic 'union of souls', and again, in the ebb of passion, by endless subtle teasing of words and thoughts—the 'false wit' and 'conceits' on which Johnson falls so heavily But even here we have the impression of a fierce honesty Not that these poems help the biographer It is not certainly known to whom any of them are addressed, and we cannot say, nor need we care, whether a particular piece records an actual experience, or a dream wrought up from some fragment of reality, or a pure imagination Sometimes, as in *Break of Day*, the speaker is a woman, it is the *aubade* of a Juliet whose lover is perforce 'removed' from her by his business. That splendid and brutal 'elegy,' *On his Mistress* ('By our first strange and fatal interview'), may or may not be as purely dramatic as anything in Browning's *Men and Women* It is all highly *irritant* poetry, disquieted and disquieting, its chief deficiency is that of any simple and direct feeling for the beauty of the world Even the beauty of women is not seen simply, the restless refining intellect as it were pounces on the vision and dissipates it in a thousand reasonings

Donne's vocabulary can be very pure and plain, it is close to the natural prose, which is *staccato* and monosyllabic, of love or anger In the *Songs and Sonnets*, there are many learned or scientific allusions, but not many unfamiliar terms *Transubstantiate*, *interinanimate*, are exceptional. The grammar easily becomes elliptical and condensed, and, as a later poet, Patrick Carey, observes 'Words may be common, clear, and pure, And yet the sense remain obscure'. Donne's rhythmic movement, in consequence, is often hindered He must be read aloud slowly, much of his music comes from those subtle doublings and shiftings of the stress, which, in his favourite short lines, are all the more emphatic He asks, for instance, where a true and fair woman can be found

> If thou find'st one, let me know,
> Such a pilgrimage were sweet,
> Yet do not, I would not go,
> Though at next door we might meet,

Though she were true, when you met her,
And last, till you write your letter,
Yet she
Will be
False, ere I come, to two, or three

Much of the verse that is assigned to Donne's middle years is merely repulsive to the artistic sense, in spite of some (all too rare) blessed oases and glorious interludes Such are the soaring lines in the *Second Anniversary*

> Think thou, my soul, that death is but a groom,
> Which brings a taper to the outward room

with its conclusion, forestalling Donne's later mood :

> Only in Heaven joy's strength is never spent,
> And accidental things are permanent

This is Donne's most transcendental long poem, and seems to show some reading of Dante , it makes us long for Dante's distinctness and superb sense of order The *Letters, Epicedes* and *Epitaphs* have the same kind of flaws and beauties everywhere But the *Progress of the Soul* is a Caliban of a poem the soul of man is traced from the apple of Eden through many horrid and fantastic incarnations , but, as in Caliban, there is music

In Donne's prose letters and *Devotions* and sermons can be traced the slow painful shifting of his outlook from the things of earth to those of heaven Some of the sacred pieces, the *Litany* and the *Annunciation and Passion* are dated about 1609, *La Corona* being also of this period , while two of the marriage songs, those on the Princess Elizabeth and on the Earl of Somerset, were written in 1613 The first of these is the boldest and richest and strangest of its kind in English , it has more blood in it than Spenser's nobler ode It is clear that the ' progress of the soul ' in Donne was subject to secular backslidings, which it is impossible to regret The *Divine Poems*, however, as a whole show his later frame of mind They are not free from monotony, but they are alive with remorse and fear and expectancy and rapture , and, like his sermons, are sorely preoccupied with the physical aspects of death Donne—to use a phrase which Robert Browning probably adapted from him—is ' soul-hydroptic with a sacred thirst '. He does not attain the mystical vision properly so called , there

are many glances backward, of repentance not unmixed with too keen a memory, at his wanton youth He is seldom really at peace Some of these poems come near to perfection Such are the sonnets 'Death, be not proud, though some have called thee', 'Thou hast made me, and shall thy work decay?', and, above all, 'At the round earth's imagined corners blow', with its vision of the souls which at the Last Day 'shall to your scattered bodies go' The manner is the same as of old, the words are cut to the quick, the thought goes like a weaver's shuttle But the imagination is now steadier and more consistently lofty, the execution less fitful The erect and shrouded stone figure of the poet, to be seen in St Paul's, may be thought of as his last poem, or his last sermon

Many of Donne's longer works are shapeless, but his lyrics and sonnets, whether sacred or profane, have one master-quality / strength and economy of design The mixture of 'false' wit with the true, the rapid zigzags of the thought, and the general strangeness of the style, easily make us overlook this virtue, which was Donne's most valuable lesson to the poets Study, from this point of view, his much-derided *Valediction of my Name, in the Window*, or the elaborate *Will*, or the brief *Hymn to God the Father*, tracking the argument, and heeding overture and close, and the rule, everywhere, of the artistic intellect, the mastery of *line*, is evident

VII

The dye, or stain, of Donne's handiwork can be traced down into Restoration times, although, as I have said, the colours may come to fade or change, almost out of recognition He profoundly affected both secular and religious verse, and only the chief practitioners, in each kind, can be mentioned out of a multitude The two strains are often heard, strangely enough interacting, in the same writer

Thomas Carew sat at the feet of Donne, and celebrates him in a finished eulogy He has neither the brains nor the passionate energy of his master, but his language is habitually smoother, and he has the gift of elaborate harmony He can maintain to the last the movement of a splendid opening The half-dozen pieces that every one knows, such as 'Give me more love, or more disdain', and 'When thou,

poor excommunicate', show this gift A single verse could be studied long for its wonderful cadence, for its echoing *i*'s and for the modulations of the last line but two.

> If, when the sun at noon displays
> His brighter rays,
> Thou but appear,
> He then, all pale with shame and fear,
> Quencheth his light,
> Hides his dark brow, flies from thy sight
> And grows more dim,
> Compared to thee, than stars to him

Much of Carew's writing is mere compliment, dashed with a streak of insolence, and he is most himself when his senses are thoroughly aroused The *Rapture*, written in skilful heroic couplets, is full of wit and mischief, and clears all the conventions at a leap The idea is just the opposite of Lovelace's 'Loved I not honour more', for Carew's honour is expressly thrown to the winds, provided only that he may win his mistress He seems to have lived till about 1645, and to have been an unusually raffish fine gentleman We have his picture with its long locks and full loose mouth and jaded lines There are stories that he was repentant in his later years The 'Jacobean,' or early 'Caroline', cadence and elegance that we admire in Carew are found also in Sir Henry Wotton's lines *On his Mistress, The Queen of Bohemia* His equally well-rounded *Character of a Happy Life* is a much greater lyric and wholly without decoration,—a perfect pattern of a moral poem, without austerity and warmed by humane feeling

Andrew Marvell (1621–1678) has, at moments, the intensity of Donne, and his longing to escape from the finiteness of actual life and love Love is 'begotten by Despair Upon Impossibility' In the lines *To his Coy Mistress* he hears 'Time's winged chariot', and tells her that we should 'tear our pleasures with rough strife Thorough the iron gates of life' Then he slips down to his usual vein of delighted fancy-mongering

> Thus, though we cannot make our Sun
> Stand still, yet we will make him run

This alternation of high imaginings and lighter daydreams runs through the lines *Upon Appleton House* Marvell here recalls the story of a former Fairfax, the ancestress of the

child whom he is addressing. She had resisted all persuasions to take the veil and had founded a noble line. Watching the garden below him, he reads himself into the life of flowers and trees and birds, and of the 'tawny mowers'; and the quivering leaves are a 'light mosaic' storied with the wisdom of Greece and Palestine It is the poetry of sheer pleasure, too rare in that age, despite Herrick and *L'Allegro*, and it is heard also in the *Garden* and the *Bermudas* Marvell's octosyllabics have a cadence of their own, and his inversions are infallible ('Wáves in its plumes the various light') Like Christina Rossetti he is the poet of fruit, of the 'curious peach' and the 'golden lamps' of the orange The *Horatian Ode*, his chief heroic poem, contains some cold figures and harsh constructions, partly due to the exacting and beautiful metre But it has the note of greatness, and the famed lines on Charles kneeling, in the 'memorable scene' are more than felicitous, they prove Marvell's humanity, and the independence of spirit which marks his whole career His salute to Cromwell is austere.

> But thou, the war's and fortune's son,
> March indefatigably on,
> And for the last effect,
> Still keep the sword erect

The elegy on the Protector and his daughter Elizabeth goes to another tune

> He without noise still travelled to his end,
> As silent suns to meet the night descend

This was to be the measure of Dryden and his age, Marvell, who is seldom at home in it, used it, both before and after 1660, for many praises, satires, and invectives Like his prose pamphlets, they are valuable documents, but they contain little poetry His devotion to Milton is seen in many ways besides his secretarial service We must not call him a Puritan, but he was almost the only poet of mark, apart from Milton, upon the popular side Of all the 'metaphysical' writers after Donne, he wears the best.

VIII

Of John Cleveland (1613–1658), the wit and satirist, we may almost say that *carmina desunt*, he was never a

singer, he is never suffering or enraptured, and he is seldom, rightly speaking, a poet He comes nearest to being one when he seems to emulate the delicate ingenuities of Marvell, as in his lines *Upon Phillis Walking*

> The winged choristers began
> To chirp their mattins, and the fan
> Of whistling winds like organs played
> Until their voluntaries made
> The wakened Earth in odours rise
> To be her morning sacrifice
> The flowers, called out of their beds,
> Start up and raise their drowsy heads,
> And he that for their colour seeks
> May find it vaulting in her cheeks,
> Where roses mix—no civil war
> Between her York and Lancaster

But Cleveland is amusing, he carries his conceits to the extreme, and sees the fun of them In his *Anti-Platonic* he turns his back on the idealists

> For shame, thou everlasting wooer,
> Still saying grace and never falling to her!

And when he 'falls to' himself, it is to quip magnificently:

> Is not the universe strait-laced,
> When I can clasp it in the waist?
> My amorous folds about thee hurled,
> With Drake I girdle in the world

Cleveland's vogue was great, but it soon came down like a rocket-stick It depended overmuch upon satire of the transient kind In spite of telling lines, his assaults on the 'flea-bitten synod', or Westminster Assembly, on the 'rebel Scot', and on the band of divines known as 'Smectymnuus', are no easier to read than the tirades of Oldham or of Marvell Nor has his workmanship, like Dryden's, the stamp of permanence Cleveland died too soon to clear up his style or to learn the new modes of warfare. His short and clattering rhymes were evidently studied by Samuel Butler ('Virtue's no more in womankind But the green-sickness of the mind'), but the debt is easy to overestimate

There are many more secular poets of the same line: the friend of Carew and Lord Herbert, Aurelian Townshend (? 1583–? 1643), a fantast with a gift of rhythm, and a few

sweet notes, the perversely ingenious, the sometimes felicitous William Cartwright (? 1615–1643), preacher and panegyrist, and the hardly known William Beedome, one of whose stanzas may be rescued from his *Poems* of 1641

> When the sad ruin of that face
> In its own wrinkles buried lies,
> And the stiff pride of all its grace
> By time undone, falls slack and dies,
> Wilt thou not sigh, and wish in some vext fit
> That it were now as when I courted it ?

But the list would be almost endless, and I hasten to the last great scapegoat of the tribe, who is rememberep best through Johnson's onslaught

The most popular poet of his generation, Abraham Cowley (1618–1667) stands as though on the watershed between the older and the newer kinds of verse Most of his conceits deserve what Johnson has said of them, and his attempts to be direct and passionate, in the fashion set by Donne, are apt to fall flat

> For heaven's sake, what do you mean to do ?
> Keep me, or let me go, one of the two

Smooth and grave passages can be found in his *Davideis*, that still-born epic, and in his 'Pindaric' odes But these, too, as Pope remarked, are 'forgot', they are in the planless, and therefore wholly un-Pindaric, measures which Cowley, though he did not invent them, made the vogue and left to the poets as a dubious legacy The virtues of his better verse are those of his admirable prose, they are plainness, simplicity, and sincerity,—what Pope calls 'the language of his heart' They are found in *The Wish*, and also in the gay *Chronicle* of his twenty successive and imaginary loves His 'anacreontics', such as the *Grasshopper*, are more literary and reminiscent, but full of spirit and lightness Cowley is at his best in his elegy on William Hervey, his college friend, and the touch of artifice is hardly more noticeable than in Arnold's *Thyrsis*

> Ye fields of Cambridge, our dear Cambridge, say,
> Have ye not seen us walking every day ?
> Was there a tree about which did not know
> The love betwixt us two ?
> Henceforth ye gentle trees, for ever fade ;
> Or your sad branches thicker join,
> And into darksome shades combine ;
> Dark as the grave wherein my friend is laid.

Cowley's first, precocious volume, *Poetical Blossoms*, appeared in 1633, his collected poems in 1668 He was early famous in both universities, was ejected, and served the exiled queen as cipherer and correspondent, and after the Restoration lived retired His *Essays* are his surest monument

IX

The religious poets who follow in the wake of Donne are no less notable, and some of them pay him due honours.

> thou didst so refine
> Matter with words, that both did seem divine
> When thy tongue uttered them

Such is the tribute of Edward, Lord Herbert of Cherbury (1583–1648), and he, too, in his verse, is for ever thus 'refining' His tone is remote and exalted, in strong contrast with that of his fantastic and stormy *Autobiography* He is steeped in the doctrine of supersensuous love, which unites, in this world and the next, the immortal part of lovers It is called 'Platonic', but Plato does not speak of the love of men and women, or of its survival after death In the *Ode upon a Question Moved, whether Love should Continue for ever* Melander reassures the doubting Celinda, he speaks in the measure which, whether used by Tennyson or Ben Jonson, has the same slow gravity and peculiar effect of finality

> Let then no doubt, Celinda, touch,
> Much less your fairest mind invade,
> Were not our Souls immortal made,
> Our equal loves can make them such

Herbert's *De Veritate*, in Latin prose, is the first reasoned plea in English for the axioms of 'natural', or universal, religion He is unorthodox, yet he believes in 'that Justice which keeps all in awe' The lines *To His Mistress* have great dignity

> Shew me that goodness which compounds the strife
> 'Twixt a long sickness and a weary life .
> Figure that happy and eternal rest
> Which till man do enjoy, he is not blest

Such a creed is for the few, but the *Temple* (1633) of George Herbert (1593–1633), Lord Herbert's younger brother, the parson of Bemerton, whom we cannot but see through

the spectacles of Izaak Walton, has refreshed generations of devout Anglicans He is an inveterate quibbler, a too hard driver of his metaphors, but his charm and tender grace have kept his poetry alive He sees a rainbow, it is 'the lace on Peace's coat', and his best lyric, 'Sweet Day', is chilled by the final quip about the 'whole world' turning to coal George Herbert has judged himself, it is to be feared, in the lines

> Wit's an unruly engine, wildly striking
> Sometimes a friend, sometimes the engineer

We had best resign ourselves to his habit of quaintness, and look for the verses where it is sublimed by truth of feeling and delightful cadence Such is *Aaron* ('Holiness on the head'), and such the Christmas lyric 'The shepherds sing, and shall I silent be?' Such, too, the opening of the *Flower*

> How fresh, O Lord, how sweet and clean
> Are thy returns! even as the flowers in spring,
> To which, besides their own demean,
> The late-past frosts tributes of pleasure bring,
> Grief melts away,
> Like snow in May,
> As if there were no such cold thing

There are clear and pathetic signs in George Herbert of an inward struggle, but it seems, unlike that of Donne, to be a thing of the past when he writes of it The conceit that closes the following lines is a kind of hall-mark, but they are none the less sincere

> I know the ways of pleasure, the sweet strains,
> The lullings and the relishes of it
> My stuff is flesh, not brass, my senses live
> And grumble oft, that they have more in me
> Than he that curbs them, being but one in five
> Yet I love thee!

Herbert had been public orator at Cambridge, and had cherished high hopes, which were baffled, of advancement and notice at the court of James I At last he settled down to the holy and pastoral life which is mirrored both in his verses and in his prose work, the *Priest to the Temple*. He was aware of his own proneness to the fantastic, to judge by the close revision to which he is known to have submitted his manuscript, and in poems like *Affliction* or 'Immortal Love' there is not a little of Donne's gift of firm lyrical construction. George Herbert definitely aims at counter-

poising by his sacred verse the lightness and profanity of the contemporary muse.

X

Richard Crashaw, who was born in 1612 or 1613, the son of a preacher who regarded the Pope as Antichrist, became a fervent High Churchman, joined the old faith about 1645, and died, an ecclesiastic of Loreto, in 1649. His chief English poems, in their first form, appeared in 1646 (*Steps to the Temple, Delights of the Muses, Sacred Poems*) Many, doubtless written much earlier, reveal a 'spirit naturally Catholic', and several, in later editions, are revised almost out of knowledge and for the better There are new and wonderful felicities, but nothing could eradicate the no less surprising inequality of handiwork Continually Crashaw drops from a strain of exalted beauty into images too grotesque to quote, he might have supplied Dr. Johnson with examples for the *Life of Cowley* But he can write as simply and purely as Herrick

> Therefore, if he needs must go,
> And the fates will have it so,
> Softly may he be possest
> Of his monumental rest
> Safe, thou dark home of the dead,
> Safe, O hide his lovèd head

In *Wishes*, the lines on the 'not impossible she', the fancies are happily in keeping But of Crashaw's best verse, as of some of his worst, the motto might be his own lines 'Love, thou art absolute sole lord Of life and death' It is heavenly love, of the kind that must needs speak in ardent and earthly imagery The *Assumption* ('Rise up, my fair, my spotless one') echoes, in a rhythm hard to surpass, the language of the *Song of Songs* In the lines, addressed to the Countess of Denbigh, *Against Irresolution*, the fancy of a commercial bargain suddenly soars into poetry·

> Our God would thrive too fast, and be
> Too much a gainer by't, should we
> Our purchased selves too soon bestow
> On Him, who has not loved us so
> When love of us called Him to see
> If we'd vouchsafe His company,
> He left His Father's court, and came
> Lightly as a lambent flame,
> Leaping upon the hills, to be
> The humble King of you and me.

No less suddenly, in the *Flaming Heart*, which follows the *Hymn to St Teresa*, a single fierce jet of religious passion, 'O thou undaunted daughter of desires', sustains itself unspent through sixteen lines Such a cry can only be, in its nature, 'brief as the lightning in the collied night' It is obvious to compare Crashaw with Francis Thompson, with both of them it is hit or miss, the lapses are of the sort that is impossible to the born artist, but we wait, not in vain, for the lightning

Thomas Traherne (? 1634–1674) is one of the mystics who, like Vaughan, Blake, and Wordsworth, try to find words for the remembered sensations of the age of innocence, when there was no reflection and when all 'oppressions, tears, and cries', and all 'harsh ragged objects' were hidden, and the world was their plaything The boys and girls, he exclaims, 'were *mine*', and so far from lamenting, like Wordsworth, the loss of this original glory, Traherne, in a fortunate hour, recovers it In those days the soul had no 'brims nor borders', it was all 'act', and 'more voluble than light', and 'simple like the Deity' We do not ask how far these memories may have been sophisticated by the adult mind, it is all true for Traherne, while he writes He does not attain the flashes, or the memorable phrase, of Vaughan, nor is his rhyming always true, but his language is clear and little troubled by conceits, and he moves as though on a high plateau

> A native health and innocence
> Within my bones did grow,
> And, while my God did all His glories show,
> I felt a vigour in my sense
> That was all Spirit I within did flow
> With seas of life, like wind,
> I nothing in the world did know
> But 'twas divine

Traherne is perhaps safer in his rolling and eloquent prose. His verse was first printed in 1903 by its discoverer, Bertram Dobell

In Henry Vaughan (1621–1695) there is more of what may be described as the logic of the imagination than in all his companions He reasons out his dreams, retrospective analysis is the habit of his mind In *Timber*, like Cowper in *Yardley Oak*, he regards a withered tree, he thinks

how 'many light hearts and wings, That now are dead, lodged in thy living bowers', and how the trunk still feels *resentment* when it forebodes a coming storm This is purely a reverie, no devout lesson is attached, as it is in the *Book;* where—and we are reminded of one of the Old English *Riddles*—the poet muses on the paper, which God saw 'when it was mere seed', and on the 'harmless beast' who once wore the skin of the binding, and, the poet adds, one day all shall be renewed, 'trees, beasts, and men' So, too, he muses on the origins of the *Rainbow*, and on the inward meaning of the *Waterfall* Sometimes his moral is commonplace, the magnificent opening and ending of 'I saw Eternity the other night' enclose a mere vigorous denunciation of the politician and the miser But in Vaughan the heavenly vision is never far off, and his most perfect poem is still the *Retreat*, to which Wordsworth acknowledges a debt, and which records the longing that the glorious moment of 'angel-infancy' may come back Vaughan began to publish verse in 1646, and we must expect him to have his full share of 'false wit' as well as of tender piety. But in 1678, three years before *Absalom and Achitophel*, in the midst of the new age and its urban verse, his shaded lamp is still burning, almost solitary, in *Thalia Rediviva*. Like Campion and Robert Bridges, Henry Vaughan was a physician His name for himself was the 'Silurist', he was a native of Brecon, once the abode of the Silures He was the Swan of Usk One of his volumes is entitled *Olor Iscanus* (1651), but most of his rarer verse is to be found in *Silex Scintillans* (1650, 1655) In the preface he declares himself a follower of George Herbert, in the campaign against worldly verse 'The most lascivious compositions of France and Italy are here naturalised and made English'.

This virtuous campaign is of less interest than Vaughan's recapturings of 'a white, celestial thought', and they are shared by his modest disciple, the Rev Nathaniel Wanley of Coventry, whose verse, though less rapturous than Vaughan's, has a more even finish It has lately been disinterred, and Wanley is best known for his prose *Wonders of the Little World* (1678), which is one of the sources of Browning's *Pied Piper* He wrote skilfully in the new form of the heroic couplet, but his talent is best seen in lyrics like the *Call* and the *Invitation:*

Lord, what unvalued pleasures crowned [*priceless*]
The times of old ?
When thou wert so familiar found,
Those days were gold

The last of these poets of the interior life is the Rev. John Norris of Bemerton (1657–1711), the disciple of Malebranche and More, the foe of Locke and rationalism, and the author of *An Essay towards the Theory of the Ideal, or Intelligible, World* (1701–1704) Norris is a link between the Platonists of Cambridge and the idealists, Berkeley and Collier, of the next age. His verse, however, is contemplative rather than argumentative, and can be read in his *Miscellanies* (1687). It more than once expresses with beautiful precision the aspiration of the soul imprisoned in the flesh , and one stanza may be quoted from the *Prospect*

What a strange moment will that be,
My soul, how full of curiosity,
When winged, and ready for thy eternal flight,
On th' utmost edges of thy tottering day,
Hovering and wishing longer stay,
Thou shalt advance, and have eternity in sight !
When just about to try that unknown sea,
What a strange moment will that be !

It is this feeling of *strangeness*,—not only 'strangeness in beauty', but in everything, and at all 'moments', that now begins to vanish from poetry, and from the mind of the 'classical age' generally Here, indeed, is the real deficiency of that age , the weakened sense of natural scenery is only a special case of this deficiency, and the fading of magic in language is only one result It is long before we come to William Blake, or even to Christopher Smart

XI

Nay, till the bellman of the night had tolled
Past noon of night, yet were the hours not old
Nor dulled with iron sleep, but have outworn
The fresh and fairest flourish of the morn
With flame and rapture
O thou almighty nature, who didst give
True heat wherewith humanity doth live
Beyond its stinted circle, giving food,
White fame and resurrection to the good ;
Soaring them up 'bove ruin till the dōom,
The general April of the world, doth come
That makes all equal .

Robert Herrick (1591–1674) is here recalling, in an unusually transcendental style, the raptures of days past, and his thoroughly pagan love-encounters, and is proposing, somewhat ruefully, to 'direct' his 'conscience unto priesthood' This *Farewell unto Poetry* does not occur among the fourteen hundred lyrics, published in 1648, of his *Hesperides* and *Noble Numbers* Many of them are very short and none exceed two hundred lines There is some trash amongst them, and Herrick's *Musa proterva* is dull indeed. But Swinburne has truly called him the 'first in rank and station of English song-writers', in the sense that his verse, unlike that of Shelley, is 'at once good to read and good to sing' A number of the pieces were set by the brothers Lawes, but the great body of them, even were it unsingable, would live as poetry Herrick is pre-eminent in his own time for his sense of artistic rightness He knows that a short thing should be without a fault He can play with little metres in lines of three or four syllables, and he can build up the intricate and lovely stanzas of *Corinna's Going a-Maying* More than a hundred measures have been counted in the *Hesperides* Some of his best music is to be heard in his couplets, as in the grave address *To His Dying Brother, Master William Herrick*

> Life of my life, take not so soon thy flight,
> But stay the time till we have bade good night . .

Herrick, certainly, is one of the *calculating* poets—and hence his air of spontaneity He revised his text freely, in order to make it easier and simpler He can plant a rare or learned word, *doxology*, *excathedrate*, to good effect, or use a common one curiously, as in his *Tears to Thamesis* ('No more shall I *reiterate* thy Strand'), or he will sprinkle in country terms (*codlin*, *maund*, *huckson* (haunchbone)) He is particular to shun consonantal discords and not to overdo alliteration

A stormy age is incomplete without at least one artist who sits by himself and cares only for his craft Herrick, no doubt, is a 'cavalier' minstrel, and pays his tribute to the king, and to certain gallant royalist soldiers But he is essentially a singer of the private life He moved for a time in the orbit of Ben Jonson, and had many friends and patrons. In 1629 he became vicar of Dean Prior in Devon;

in 1647 he was ejected, and in 1662 reinstated He died, almost ignored, in the same year as Milton, he was long forgotten, and does not figure in Johnson's *Lives*, but the reparation to his name has been ample 'Dull Devonshire' and the 'drooping West', at which he often murmurs, are the background for his best verse The stage is set by the *Argument of his Book*, with its flowers and fairies and 'hock-carts' and brides His rustic scene, in May or at Christmas-tide, is full of 'the paganism of the South of England', and his miniatures of his home, his maid, and his spaniel are familiar to us But all is seen, as in a dream, through the eyes of the Roman poets, of Horace or Martial The parson has his *lares*, the 'genius of his house' The place is peopled by dream-women with Latin names, Julia, Perenna, Anthea, all much alike Their charms are recited in a frank and somewhat cloying fashion, but they are hardly to be distinguished from the flowers, and the fading of both is lamented in the same spirit All such elegies pale beside a single line of Victor Hugo's 'Hélas! que j'en ai vu mourir de jeunes filles!' Herrick's dirges on children, on the other hand, are deeply felt There are many other strains in the *Hesperides* epithalamies, Horatian odes, praises of Ben Jonson, praises of drink One of the titles is 'To live merrily and to trust to good verses'

> Now is the time for mirth,
> Nor cheek nor tongue be dumb,
> For, with the flowery earth,
> The golden pomp is come

There are several fairy poems, invocations to Mab, and pictures of Oberon's feast, and palace, and 'temple' All is on the pigmy scale, as in Drayton's *Nymphidia*, and all is gay and pretty, minute and precise It is not clear whether Drayton or Herrick wrote first The *Fairies' Farewell* of Bishop Corbet, a later piece (1647), a 'proper new ballad' and rightly so entitled, has an open-air liveliness hardly to be found in Herrick, and sings itself

The *Noble Numbers*, as a whole, are inferior to *Hesperides;* but their sincerity, or rather their fidelity to a recurring mood, cannot be doubted In *His Litany*, in the *White Island*, and elsewhere, there is true piety and some poetic passion, but the real Herrick, the very late, the last

Elizabethan, is still heard in the *Dirge of Jephthah's Daughter*

> May no wolf howl, or screech-owl stir
> A wing about thy sepulchre!

XII

The 'Augustan' age had some reason for hailing Edmund Waller as the reformer of its 'numbers' When the old trimmer and 'plotter', so resilient and so often forgiven, died in 1687, aged eighty-one, he was an institution and a piece of history Exactly fifty years later, Pope printed the curt epitaph, 'Waller was smooth' He was not only smooth, he balanced his favourite line, the decasyllable, internally, also, in the couplet, he balanced line against line, and he severed, though not too rigidly, couplet from couplet Spenser and Drayton, upon occasion, had done the like, but the lax heroics of William Browne, and the wanton rudeness of Donne, had left their traces on many writers Waller found his own cadence as early as 1623; it is heard in the well-known passage

> He rent the crown from vanquished Henry's head,
> Raised the White Rose, and trampled on the Red,

as clearly as in his 'last verses' on 'the soul's dark cottage, battered and decayed' But apart from a few lyrics, such as the *Girdle* and 'Go, lovely rose', we almost think of him as a poet *manqué* He laments that 'we write in sand, our language grows', and most of his compliments to kings and patricians, even those to Lady Dorothy Sidney, or 'Sacharissa', are written in sand His longer pieces, the *Battle of the Summer Islands* and *Instructions to a Painter*, have little but an historical interest There are glimpses of the poet that Waller might have been, already, in 1638, he forestalls the graver harmonies of Dryden

> Let dark oblivion, and the hollow grave,
> Content themselves our frailer thoughts to have,
> Well-chosen love is never taught to die,
> But with our nobler part invades the sky

It might be Almanzor speaking, in the *Conquest of Granada*.

There is also a foretaste of Dryden in Sir John Denham (1615–1669), it is now the political and satirical Dryden. The royalist knight inveighs against Henry the Eighth, the despoiler of the monks

Was't luxury or lust ?
Was he so chaste, so temperate, so just ?
Were these their crimes ? they were his own much more ;
But wealth is crime enough to him that's poor

The forcible rhetoric and the structure of the verse surprise us in the year 1642 The lines occur in *Cooper's Hill*, the familiar passage on the Thames, 'O, could I flow like thee', was added later But *Cooper's Hill* as a whole is heavy, the landscape is but vaguely seen, and the hill is but a peg for many general reflections Denham's elegy on Cowley, to whom the virtues of many poets are imputed, is his liveliest piece There is more ease and more colour in the translation of the *Metamorphoses* by George Sandys, also the paraphrast of the Psalms and the Book of Job, and what he himself calls his 'never discontinued rhymes' are smooth and balanced enough But these writers, in general, are soporific, and not least Sir William D'Avenant, in his lengthy virtuous romance of *Gondibert* (1651) I name it, but its interest is mainly geological I mean that its bony structure, that of an epic divided like a drama, is a curious link in the anatomy of the heroic plays and poems D'Avenant's solemn quatrain was for a while utilised by Dryden He concerns the historian, had been a fertile playwright, and he was the reviver of the drama, in operatic shape, a few years before the Restoration As a poet he lives by his excellent lyric, 'The lark now leaves his watery nest', which is alive both in the anthologies and as a song

XIII

The residue of treasure before 1660 is large, and also difficult to sift or classify Before making some selection from the lesser lyrists, a word must be given to one species of romance that is peculiar to this age The long, invertebrate poem flourished exceedingly, and three examples may be noticed The first, though not printed till 1683, seems to have been written about 1600 John Chalkhill's *Thealma and Clearchus* is an incoherent, agreeable romance in heroic rhymes, with a pastoral atmosphere and setting, and not too long Far better knit and told, and with a welcome tinge of mockery, is the *Leoline and Sydanis* (1642) of Sir Francis Kynaston It is in the 'Troilus-stanza', and Kynaston also performed the feat of Latinising Chaucer's

Troilus, ingeniously, in the original metre His English tale is one of magic potions, of wandering ladies in male dress, and of lovers parted and reunited the matter, in fact, of a tragi-comedy of the silver age A more formidable work, drawn out to 13,000 lines, is William Chamberlayne's mazy *Pharonnida* (1659) The story cannot be followed without a waste of patience, the couplets run over and stumble and baulk the ear incessantly All is indistinct; yet in *Pharonnida*, open it where we will, there is beauty both of colour and of language, and a veering spray of fancy. A few lines will indicate the manner.

Their hair,
Wreathed in contracting curls beneath a fair
But often parting veil, attempts to hide
The naked ivory of their necks—that pride
Of beauty's frontispiece On their heads sate
Lovely, as if unto a throne of state
From their first earth advanced, two flowery wreaths,
(From whose choice mixture in close concord breathes
The fragrant odour of the fields), placed by
Them in such order, as antiquity
Mysterious held

XIV

There are many more writers, not here to be recounted. We may ask, how might an anthology of the best and most perfect things be arranged? In one group we should be struck, first and last, by a thorough and delighted command of the instrument rather than by freshness of idea or force of feeling The performer is not carried away, and neither are we Thomas Stanley (1625–1678), the historian of philosophy, has a score of pieces beautifully turned, but most of them seem impersonal—uttered in the best educated accent of the time Or they resemble those translations which Stanley made so well, from Ronsard or Marino. He excels in the deft interstringing of longer and shorter lines. Once at least, in *Expectation*, he is more than a *virtuoso*:

Chide, chide no more away
The fleeting daughters of the day,
Nor with impatient thoughts outrun
The lazy sun,
Or think the hours do move too slow:
'Delay is kind,
And we too soon shall find
That which we seek, yet fear to know.

Another easy translator, Philip Ayres, in his *Poems* (1687) draws on Greek and Latin, on Italian and Spanish Often, unlike the Elizabethans, he owns his debts, and the liquid Latin tongues lend him their music. It does not appear whether the two sonnets, variations on the same theme, entitled *On a Fair Beggar* and *On Lydia Distracted*, are translations, nor does it matter The second may be quoted for its delicacy of feeling and its unlikeness to any of the fashionable strains

With hairs, which for the wind to play with, hung,
With her torn garments, and with naked feet,
Fair Lydia dancing went from street to street,
Singing with pleasant voice her foolish song
On her she drew all eyes in every place,
And them to pity by her pranks did move,
Which turned, with gazing longer, into Love
By the rare beauty of her charming face
In all her frenzies, and her mimicries,
While she did Nature's richest gifts despise,
There active Love did subtly play his part
Her antic postures made her look more gay,
Her ragged clothes her treasures did display,
And with each motion she ensnared a heart

But enough of verse, however excellent, of which we exclaim, 'How accomplished!' The second, the central group, is one of poems in which the passion, be it of love, or loss, or honour, is heard speaking *toute pure* Often, indeed, the feeling may be honest while the speech is bookish The cult of 'Platonic' love lingers late in the period, and is not always conventional The numerous tributes of Katherine Philips ('Orinda') (1631–1664) to her women friends, the Rosanias and Lucasias,

From smoke or hurt those flames are free,
From grossness or mortality,

are genuine, although we can hardly believe it when she proceeds,

The heart (like Moses' bush presumed),
Warmed and enlightened, not consumed

Her best-known lines, 'I did not live until this time Crowned my felicity', have a pulse in them that forbids scepticism, while in the *Lure* of John Hall, when we hear that

Then shall aggrandized love confess
That souls can mingle substances,

the sentiment is living on its tradition So, too, with the super-refined though musical protestations of William Habington in his *Castara* (1634) There are wonderful phrases and overtures—'Thrice hath the palefaced empress of the night . ', yet the poet declares so insistently the purity of his mistress, and his own, that (though we need not doubt his word) we wish that he would take it for granted and have done with it There is a surer touch of the transcendental in Lovelace's phrase, 'Above the highest sphere we meet ', in his lines *To Lucasta, Going beyond the Seas*

XV

But Richard Lovelace (1618–? 1657), the soldier and cavalier, belongs to another group, which is distinguished by freshness of mind and a gallant gaiety , and his 'Tell me not, Sweet, I am unkind ', celebrates the call of honour It is strange how rarely this call is heard, frank and clear, during the period , the lines attributed to the Marquis of Montrose, 'My dear and only love, I pray ', have something of the same ring Lovelace's other noted song, *To Althea, from Prison*, is known in several versions That given in *Lucasta* (1649) has his authority and is on the whole the best , but we must regret, what seems now to be certain, that he should finally have approved the reading 'The *gods* that wanton in the air ', instead of the 'birds ' His more fanciful lyrics, such as *Gratiana*, are still too little known It is not surprising that the friend of Andrew Marvell should have written, in *Aramantha*,

> The noble Heliotropian
> Now turns to her, and knows no sun ;
> And, as her glorious face doth vary,
> So opens loyal golden Mary

To Lovelace is inscribed Sir John Suckling's *Ballad of a Wedding*, the most debonair of all such offerings The wedding is a real one, natural and gay and English, and the 'ballad ' comes as a relief after the close air and heavy classic drapery of many literary epithalamies Well is earned the praise of Congreve's Millamant 'Natural, easy Suckling ' (though he often writes ill enough, or merely in the fashion), is a master of that featherweight lyrical poetry which, when it is successful, can weigh down a hundred

Gondiberts. Such a success is 'Out upon it, I have loved', and 'I prithee send me back my heart', and the familiar 'Why so pale and wan, fond lover?' The *Session of the Poets*, which is a string of rhymed 'characters', and also good criticism, has the same kind of interest as Drayton's *Epistle to Reynolds*, or Goldsmith's *Retaliation* Sir John Suckling (1609–1642), a soldier, a gambler, a dramatist, a wit, and a man of fortune, lived, though not very long, yet lavishly and conspicuously, he is a brilliant link between the court, the theatre, and the world of letters

Another group might be formed out of the elegies of the period, and one of these is in a rank apart Between Ben Jonson's memorial lines to his boy and those of Dryden to John Oldham no lovelier funeral garland can be found than the hundred and twenty lines of Bishop King's *Exequy* upon his wife The loss may not have been recent, the mourner can already dally with his fancies he bids the earth

> Be kind to her, and prithee look
> Thou write into thy Doomsday book
> Each parcel of this rarity,
> Which in thy casket shrined doth lie

But he proceeds

> Sleep on, my Love, in thy cold bed,
> Never to be disquieted!
> My last good night! Thou wilt not wake,
> Till I thy fate shall overtake,
> Till age, or grief, or sickness, must
> Marry my body to that dust
> It so much loves, and fill the room
> My heart keeps empty in thy tomb

Henry King (1592–1669), bishop of Chichester, wrote other grave and excellent elegies, the *Surrender* and the *Legacy*, and also the lyric, 'Tell me no more how fair she is', in which the now long lost cadence of the seventeenth century is heard at its best

Another survivor into the next age was the younger Charles Cotton (1630–1687) It is a pity that he produced *Scarronides*, his gross burlesque of two books of the *Æneid*, but he was the intimate of Walton, a translator of Montaigne, a favourite of Lamb, Coleridge, and Wordsworth, and a pretty and versatile rhymer. Reading his *Winter*,

Wordsworth remarks on his 'extreme activity of intellect, and a correspondent hurry of delighted feeling'. There is also a Marvell-like richness and oddness of fancy, though nothing of Marvell's deeper note, and it is found again in his lines on the summer evening and on the interior of the English farm and cottage

> The shadows now so long do grow,
> That brambles like tall cedars show,
> Molehills seem mountains, and the ant
> Appears a monstrous elephant
> The fire's new-raked, and hearth swept clean
> By Madge, the dirty kitchen-quean,
> The safe is locked, the mousetrap set,
> The leaven laid, and bucking wet [*clothes for washing*]

Cotton poured out extempore stuff of all kinds, his *Voyage to Ireland* is a screed full of entertainment He wrote, in a spirited homely way, in praise of drink and angling, and also, with no little sweetness and innocent gravity, on *Retirement* and the contented life

CHAPTER XII

MILTON

I

TO stay long with these writers, so interesting, often so excellent, and yet so uncertain, and then to read Milton through, is to experience, what we had almost forgotten, the feeling of *security* True, we are safe enough with the Chaucer of *Troilus* and the *Prologue*, also with the Spenser of the *Four Hymns* and the *Fate of the Butterfly*, and with Herrick, though his flights are short But Milton reaches a high perfection more constantly than any of these and has a deeper strength of poetic will We hear in him what the Greek critic calls 'the reverberation of a great soul' In purity and sureness of language, perhaps his nearest heir is Shelley Indeed Shelley's poetry is less packed and embarrassed than Milton's, it is free from the rigour, the occasional pedantry, which mark Milton's grand style But he has nothing of Milton's shaping intelligence, or of his strength tried in the furnace Milton was born with the gift, and early formed the resolve to make a long poem on some lofty matter, with its parts all in harmony and order And though he is always full of memories of the poets, his own large utterance is heard almost at once.

II

His earliest work of great note, *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity*, was written in 1629 John Milton (1608–1674) was then just of age He has not yet forgotten the 'late fantastics', the sun is Nature's lusty paramour, and 'pillows his chin upon an orient wave' But in the fourth verse, 'No war, or battle's sound', the new voice is heard; and the lines on Peor and Baalim, on Isis and Orus, forecast

the strong indignant manner of the epic, and the ode, once the conceits are allowed for, is seen to betoken a master. The theme of the Nativity itself may seem to be swamped in many allusions But they all centre on the real subject, which is the revolution effected in the world by the coming of an obscure infant A whole Pantheon is dispossessed, and we sigh, with the 'parting Genius', over the going of the nymphs and oracles The closing scene in the courtly stable is a quiet Italian picture The measure is apparently Milton's own discovery, and in his lyric verse he was never to surpass the *Hymn* In these earlier pieces he is seeking all the time not only for a great and adequate subject but for its proper vehicle He seldom uses the same form or metre more than once or twice, he perfects each as it comes and then has done with it The two madrigals *Time* and *At a Solemn Music* already show his command of a long, concerted period The ten lines *On May Morning* are in the best Elizabethan fashion, and those on Shakespeare are also in the old, heightened language, here not too well maintained Then come the masterpieces in short lines the *Epitaph on the Marchioness of Winchester*, the twin poems, and the lyrical parts of *Arcades* and *Comus*, and here, too, Milton builds on former tunes, and well remembers the songs of the dramatists

> Gentle Lady, may thy grave
> Peace and quiet ever have!
> After this thy travail sore
> Sweet rest seize thee evermore

The figure of Melancholy, or grave pensiveness, is also an inheritance, partly from a song of John Fletcher's But *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* have an elusive quality which Milton was hardly to recover Seldom was he to write the poetry of reverie, in which the words seem to say themselves, and we cannot guess how they came In his epics we can imagine him at the forge, beating the language into shape But here we fail, as in sleep, to fix the image, it evades the focus of vision

> And let some strange mysterious dream
> Wave at his wings in aery stream
> Of lively portraiture displayed,
> Softly on my eyelids laid

There is the true marvel of these poems, even more than in the passages, which are in every memory, on the hermitage and Shakespeare and the Greeks So, too, the 'soft Lydian airs' and the 'full-voiced choir' have the power to beggar the fancy and to send it wandering Yet all the time the artist is awake, and there is a definite structure. The cheerful man proceeds from daybreak to evening, and the pensive man, after living with his books and with the nightingale, muses through the seasons of the day and at last paces in the cloister New changes, which are not those of Herrick or Marvell, are rung on the octosyllabic couplet

III

The verse of *Comus* (1634) goes like a yacht before the wind, and, like the style, it recalls the best age of the drama, so familiar to Milton Both had been recently renewed in the tragedies of Ford, who in sheer poetic power and in command of the blank line was his only living rival *Comus*, however, does not profess to be a drama, it is a masque, and an acted sermon Milton may have chosen his story by way of protest The Stuart playwrights had for ever been exploiting—it is a mark of the decline—the subject of chastity threatened or despoiled *He* would handle it in a cleaner way, and into the mouth of his child-actors he puts his own exalted, somewhat unreal doctrine, inspired by Plato and Spenser He words it superbly; yet he is not angry with his Comus, that admirable poet, one of the later-born of the Greek demi-semi-gods, who keeps much of his ancient jollity The fable is woven up from classic legend, and Peele's *Old Wives' Tale*, and Geoffrey of Monmouth, it is Milton's first exercise in myth-making He refines, too, the courtly masque, a form that had almost run its course, he gets rid of the cost and the pomp and concentrates on the poetry The songs, with their memories of Ariel and the *Faerie Queene*, were the last he was to write His *vox angelica* is heard once or twice, as in the great speech 'But Evil on itself shall back recoil' He is here speaking in person, through the mouth of the Elder Brother, not, as later, through that of an angel or a deity.

The 'eloquent distress' of *Lycidas*, as Keats so accurately calls it, is not passionately personal, but neither is it unreal Edward King, the lost companion, is also a symbol · a fellow-shepherd, both in the poetic and the evangelical sense His purpose of entering the ministry is made the excuse for the poet's blast against the paid, or 'hireling', state clergy.) This is a wanton discord, but it is an earnest of the power and ferocity that were to rule in Milton's prose tracts and in the utterance of his less dignified devils There is the same power, without the discords, in the lines on fame, and the thunders of verse which had already sounded in the Christmas hymn are presently heard overhead. 'Whether beyond the stormy Hebrides . . ' *Lycidas* is a proof that a poem of irregular build and metre may yet leave the strongest impression of unity and harmony) As Blake says of his own more lawless 'cadence' in *Jerusalem*, 'the terrific numbers are reserved for the terrific parts, the mild and gentle for the mild and gentle parts' The closing stanza, with its 'To-morrow to fresh woods', is a farewell, no doubt unconscious, not only to the pastoral-elegiac mood, but to the form The *alto estilo*, to hold out through a long poem, must be in a uniform measure Nothing now remained between Milton and his chief enterprise but his handful of sonnets and his long excursion into prose

In Italian he wrote five sonnets and one canzone, in English, first and last, eighteen sonnets and one canzone The Italian poems are addressed to a lady, a singer, who is graciously sketched but who is unknown, and are now thought to have been written in England, earlier than Milton's Italian journey (1638–1639) Her *portamenti alti onesti*, high and honourable bearing, and her sweet motions or gestures, *atti soavi*, remind us of the yet unfallen Eve The English sonnets are scattered over many years They are not love poems, unless we count as such the offering to Milton's 'late espousèd saint', his second wife, Catherine Woodcock, who is now a celestial dream The language in general is plain, bare, and high, with none of the old conventions and ornaments, Petrarchan or Elizabethan These are dropt, and yet the fabric and scheme of the Italian sonnet, in which they had abounded, are revived, though not always in their strictness This is Milton's twofold innovation, and it was to influence our poetry deeply, after

many days Wordsworth adheres, though often with modifications, to the Italian ways of rhyming, and Milton's ardour of public spirit is also reborn in Wordsworth It is heard again in Rossetti's sonnet *On Refusal of Aid between Nations*

One or two of these poems show Milton's vein of angry and clumsy facetiousness, but anger soars into grandeur in 'Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints', and grandeur becomes calm again when he discourses, twice, upon his blindness. The political sonnets to Cromwell, Vane, and others, smoulder hotly, but are severe and restrained in utterance Those addressed to Lawes and Edward Lawrence are the voice of the warrior casting off his cares and delighting in music and hospitality and a little wine The reader can trace how these changes of mood are reflected in the technique, how, when the mood is more serene, the metrical divisions and those of the thought correspond, in the Italian fashion, as in the sonnet *To Mrs Catherine Thomson*, and how at times the tide of feeling more or less overflows the metrical breakwaters, with what power of sound can be heard in the poem on the Piedmont massacre, and with what hard-won self-control, in 'When I consider how my light is spent' It has been shown that these variations, though exceptional, were familiar to the Italian sonneteers

Most of Milton's Latin poems can be read in the translations by William Cowper, whose free and elegant heroic couplets, however, miss the weighty effect of the original hexameters and elegiacs In the learned language Milton is very frank and confidential Now he is a youth, rejoicing in the spring and set on fire for a moment by a passing face Now he thanks his father, John Milton the musician, for granting him leisure and liberty to become a poet He speaks of the purity of life and the discipline demanded for such a calling, and of the subject, the tale of Arthur and Merlin, that is in his mind He is least reserved with his most intimate friend, Charles Diodati, and his elegy on Diodati, *Epitaphium Damonis*, written in 1639 or 1640, is the most personal and passionate of his early writings. It is on the classical pattern, and dense with pastoral allusions, but the strength of the feeling behind is all the more, and not the less, apparent.

The sonnets carry us into the years (1641–1658) of Milton's

warfare and of his all but complete abstention from verse I shall not re-tell the story how this experience only banked up the inner furnace, how it deepened his sympathy with the rebel angels, the champions of political freedom, how his blindness came, to sharpen his mental sight, and how at last he was nerved, alone in 'a fallen world', to renew the dreams of youth with the powers and passions of a veteran The poetic spirit breaks out a hundred times in his prose, often so turbid and overstrained, nay, so bad, and yet again and again so unsurpassable Now and then, perhaps unawares, Milton falls into verse

> to do our obsequies to the torn body of our martyred saint
> We boast our light, but if we look not wisely on the sun itself,
> it smites us into darkness Who can discern Those planets
> that are oft combust, and those stars (*Areopagitica*)

Many themes of the pamphlets are echoed in the later poems, and, as in *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes*, there are outbreaks and confessions, astonishing solos, in Milton's loftiest language I must not embark on these prose writings, but they cannot be too deeply studied for the comprehension of his mind They often allude to the poetic purpose which he had harboured from boyhood and had never dropt.

IV

The evidence for its many stages is abundant, and is found in Milton's prose and verse, in Latin and English, in print and manuscript He had long inclined to a profane subject, drawn for choice from British legend, which in his eyes was actual history At first it was the legend of Arthur, then, in his written list of about a hundred titles, he balances between a British—not now an Arthurian—story, and a sacred one He sketches out, in four drafts, a tragedy on the Fall, it is on the Greek pattern, with a chorus, there are also bodiless speakers, Mercy and Justice, who are an heirloom from the moral drama Milton's shaping of this plan into an epic is itself a lesson in construction Some lines that probably belong to the same period, about 1642, seem to show that he had already fixed on blank verse 'O thou, that with surpassing glory crowned .' He is thought to have started fairly upon *Paradise Lost* about the year 1658, it was published in 1667 All these changes

are inspired by Milton's passion for greatness, greatness in theme, design, style, and metre He would not take any risk short of the heaviest He would cover, at least in allusion, the span of eternity which reaches from the begetting of the Son down to the doomsday The scene must include hell, chaos, heaven, the 'world', and the earth within it The language and verse must be of the most resourceful, the most dangerous kind It was agreed on all hands that the topmost species of poetry was the epic, and it was also the roomiest There was not only the story to be told, into the pattern must be woven a hundred motley strands of Milton's doctrine, of his political opinions, of his reading, and of his experience To harmonise it all was his ambition, his performance is another matter

V

A great poem, like a great man, may have a grotesque side The 'limbo' on the 'backside of the world' and the changing of the devils into serpents are grotesque episodes, so familiar to us that we can hardly wish them away That of Sin and Death is horrider even than anything in the *Inferno*, it is a bad excrescence Sin, it is true, has her value in the story, as the builder of the mighty bridge from hell to the world But we fail to connect this monstrous figure with the actual sin, which was pride, of the rebel angels

These incidents are only on the fringe What is made of the central myth? Does it, in Milton's hands, embody some enduring truth that speaks to the imagination? I doubt it It is of no consequence that we do not accept it as a fact, but what of it as a symbol? The topic is the irruption of evil through the misuse of man's freewill But Milton fails, through the whole transaction, really to make us feel either the presence or the power of evil He puts his whole force into the crisis, in the ninth book But many a reader must have obscurely felt that there is something amiss with the argument It is all we can do to refrain from applauding the success of Satan *He*, the defender of personal freedom and of the right to explore experience, has the best of the pleading Against this is set a mere *malum prohibitum*, and the apple-branch will not bear the weight of the dogma.

Neither the lofty eulogy on pure love nor the wonderful picture of Eve's 'distemper' after she has eaten can make us see *why* the caresses of the pair should be less innocent after their disobedience, than before They have a sharp revulsion, they bicker tediously, now and then their words are deeply moving, but their faults are ordinary, and their punishment is not made otherwise than absurd

The real tragedy is played out in the breast of Satan, and it is true, in this sense, that he is the 'hero' of the poem He is an Æschylean sufferer, and in his 'remorse'—a word that implies both regret for error and the sense of pity—there are many stages One, when he cries, 'Evil, be thou my good', and another, when watching the happiness of Eden he goes back, if only in fancy, upon his purpose. He *could* love his victims, he *could* pity them

> And, should I at your harmless innocence,
> Melt, *as I do*, yet public reason just, *etc*

This is drama, and the fallen angels, as a body, are also a kind of 'tragic hero' The war in heaven, indeed, awakens little concern or suspense The cards are known to be packed, nor, in spite of the rally and the gunpowder, can the ups and downs of the fray deceive us Omnipotence is barely made uncomfortable We have to fall back upon the sheer splendour of the spectacle, and on our sympathy with the rebels, which, upon the other side, is active only when we listen to Abdiel of the 'undaunted heart' It is otherwise in hell, where the war is waged rather among the passions of the actors on the one side pain, anger, despair, and conscious impotence, on the other, hope, ambition, and courage never to submit or yield The speakers are at once human and more than human At last, after the debate on policy, all are swayed to one purpose by the genius of the leader, as a confusion of waters may be converted into one electric current 'at once with him they rose'.

VI

The speakers are all princes of oratory, even Belial and Mammon, politicians of the lower kind, have their grandeur Like Abdiel and Gabriel, their worthiest opponents, they all have the high parliamentary style. Satan is the chief

thinker, and a natural sceptic But unlike some of the others, he is sure that he is immortal,

> since, by fate, the strength of gods,
> And this empyreal substance, cannot fail

He is also a republican born , only, he must be the ruler of his republic , and he has a right to equal status with the Highest. The poet endows Satan with his own sensibility to beauty , it is awakened by the sight of Adam and Eve When he vanishes from the narrative there is an abrupt change in the interest Most readers may agree that the characters in *Paradise Lost* do not stir us as their rank and precedence demand God the Father is incongruity itself He is capable of saying, like an angry colonel, 'See with what heat these dogs of hell advance ', or like a 'school-divine ', precise and lucid,—'Some have I chosen of peculiar grace, Elect above the rest ', or, again, with full Miltonic majesty

> Meanwhile
> The World shall burn, and from her ashes spring
> New Heaven and Earth, wherein the just shall dwell
> And after all their tribulations long
> See golden days, fruitful of golden deeds,
> With joy and love triúmphing, and fair truth

The speech of the Son after his victory in heaven, 'Stand still in bright array, ye saints ', is at the same pitch , and his earlier reply to the Father, offering to be the sacrifice for man ('on me let thine anger fall '), is one of the most simple, direct, and beautiful in the poem But the Son scarcely comes to life before *Paradise Regained* Begotten on a certain day in time, he is the 'Word ', the creative agent and deputy and lieutenant , he remains, in spite of his powers and doings, an abstraction Adam and Eve, in their state of innocence, are carefully and tenderly drawn. The pure lines of the feminine form, mirrored in the pool, haunted Milton's blindness , and Blake has made us see the vision. She has the unspoilt senses of L'Allegro, a love of song and of 'grateful evening mild ' It must be felt that after the Fall the primal charm is impaired, when Eve has to sin and suffer, and also, unluckily, to argue Yet something of it remains, and in the sad tranquil finale, 'They, hand in hand, with wandering steps and slow ', it is recovered The last three books, often said to be a falling-off, mark a

change in method rather than a loss of power Milton had told the antecedents of the Fall in the middle books, by way of retrospect, after the manner of Virgil, they contain some of his chief material, the fall of the angels and the creation The sequel is shown in vision and prophecy, Michael being the spokesman Adam watches the killing of Abel, the flood, the fate of the Egyptians, as though on a 'slow-moving film', the action is now leisurely There is a reversion to the old scheme given in the Trinity College MS

> The Angel is sent to banish them out of Paradise, but before, causes to pass before his eyes, in shapes, a masque of all the evils of this life and world

'Show his eyes, and grieve his heart' The quiet of these set pieces is broken by startling bursts of energy, like the pictures of the lazar-house or of the clashing winds On the other hand, a recital like the tale of Cain resembles that of a messenger in a Greek play, delivered while the action waits

VII

It is easy to go up too close to this extraordinary *façade* and to talk of cracks and flaws, and to study, with deep interest and amazement, the steel structure behind,—namely Milton's theology and philosophy Much of this, but not all, is set out, article by article, in his prose *Treatise on Christian Doctrine*, with an array of Scripture texts literally read Glimpses have been traced of abstruser theory, of the divine immanence, and of the mysterious 'retreat' of God into Himself in the act of passing from the 'absolute' to the 'relative' and contingent state. This ontology, partly drawn from the Jewish theosophy of the *Kabbalah*, seems to have been known to Milton, and is part of the steelwork It points to a mystical element in him, quite distinct from the Protestant conception of conversion and 'experience', of which there is no trace Milton's 'experience' is worlds apart from Bunyan's But all this is at first sight hidden, nor does it inspire the best of the poetry Stand back a little from the fabric, and look at the vast plan, the proportioning, and the ornament, they

will bear any scrutiny After all, there is no such handiwork, sustained so *long*, by any poet of our race Greek[1] is richer than English in terms to express the quality of Milton's spirit, as it passes into his conceptions and his language.

VIII

Plain familiar words, in their natural order, form the bedrock of his style

> 'The mind is its own place, and in itself
> Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven'
> 'Those thoughts that wander through eternity'
> 'Infinite wrath and infinite despair'

Here, surely, Marlowe is the teacher The unit is the 'mighty line', self-contained and 'single-moulded', and firmly built on this foundation is the 'structure brave, the manifold music' of *Paradise Lost* It is elaborated in three ways, which it is useful to distinguish in analysis, although the great result, the poetic 'period', is *one*, to be apprehended by the intelligence and ear together in its entirety and variety and its inner evolution

1. *Vocabulary* —Aristotle compares the 'strange' words that may be used in prose to the garb of a foreigner, which at once catches the eye of the citizens How Milton's strange words, learned or technical, may have struck a contemporary, can only be judged by studying the historical dictionary At least they demanded, and still demand, some conversance with Greek, and still more with Latin They show the pedantry of the time, or rather, the process of trial and error which the language was going through, and which can be watched in the prose of Browne and Taylor and of Milton himself In his verse they are used to give weight and dignity and to ennoble the rhythm

> So hills amid the air encountered hills,
> Hurled to and fro with *jaculation* dire

[1] In the writer known as 'Longinus' (*On the Sublime*) See (1) the formations from *μέγας*, expressive of *character* *μεγαλοφυής*, great-natured, *μεγαλοφροσύνη* greatness of temper, *ἐν μεγαλοπρεπεῖ ϕεμνότητι*, in splendid majesty And (2) those from *ὕψος*, elevation (the so called 'sublime'), *ὑψηγορία*, lofty discourse, *ὑψηλοφανέστατα*, things of loftiest aspect Apply all these to Milton

And they are, after all, not too thickly sprinkled, their strangeness makes them seem more numerous, in proportion, than they are *Plenipotent, nocent, altern, dividual, intelligential, omnific*, have not remained in use, yet they are clear enough in meaning One frequent combination, amusing in the 'bush with frizzled hair *implicit*', and beautiful in '*circumfluous* waters calm', was to be a sad snare to Milton's imitators Many terms belong to the old astronomy, which gives the natural and only possible setting of the drama. The sun and planets revolve round the fixed earth, and upon it is man, making his fateful choice, he is the pivot of the whole system Milton takes the risk of words like *colure, sextile, trine and square, centre or eccentric*, and makes them poetical Often his abstract terms of learned origin have a double value, keeping traces of the primary physical meaning Such are *afflicted*, smitten down, *ruin*, bodily downfall, and *cadence*, in 'winds with hoarse cadence lull Seafaring men o'erwatched' The study of these effects is a delightful one, and can be pursued very far

IX

2 *Sentence*.—Milton set himself to alter the genius of English by imposing upon it an alien syntax and arrangement of words, and they became second nature to him It would be easy to quote, especially from the speeches, passages very tangled in construction The old charge of pedantry is often a true one Most great poets are difficult, but they seldom import the difficulty from a 'dead' language But Latin was a living language to Milton, Dr Johnson did not think and write in it more easily And in the long run he triumphs, whether in oratory, in description, or in narrative The grammarian will note inversions, the absolute clauses, the emphatic adverbs (or adjectives) which are the real predicates, and so forth, but all is in harmony, as any average passage will show

> So thick the aery crowd
> Swarmed and were straitened, till, the signal given,
> Behold a wonder! they but now who seemed
> In bigness to surpass earth's giant sons,
> Now less than smallest dwarfs, in narrow room
> Throng numberless—like that Pygmean race
> Beyond the Indian mount

It is a style that holds out through the ten thousand lines and more of *Paradise Lost* To say, what is true, that its movement is essentially a slow one, is not to allege a fault, the same thing, indeed, may be said of the *Æneid* For such a movement is the mark of a deeply-ruminating, fastidious mind, intent on concentration and on perfect form It can, of course, in spite of all obstructions, be liquid and undulating In Raphael's advice to Adam, the more rigid lines that open and close the period enhance the melody of the rest

> But whether thus these things, or whether not,—
> Whether the Sun, predominant in Heaven,
> Rise on the Earth, or Earth rise on the Sun,
> He from the east his flaming road begin,
> Or she from west her silent course advance
> With inoffensive pace that spinning sleeps
> On her soft axle, while she paces even,
> And bears thee soft with the smooth air along,
> Solicit not thy thoughts with matters hid,
> Leave them to God above, him serve and fear

X

3 *Versification* —Milton's blank verse has been described by another scholar-poet, Robert Bridges, and to his account [1] I refer the reader for the modulations that the poet allows himself to make on the pattern of the decasyllabic line These are of two main kinds By the dropping of stresses, and by the admission of certain forms of trisyllabic foot, the pace is quickened, and then the effect is one of ease and lightness

> 'Of Bácchus and his révellers, the ráce'
> 'Winged with red lightning and impet*uous rage*'
> 'Some nat*ural tears* they dropt, but wiped them soon'.

By the doubling of stresses in the foot, or by their displacement ('inversion'), the pace is retarded, and the effect is then one of strength and emphasis

> 'For Hót, Cóld, Moíst, and Drý, foúr chámpions fiérce'.
> 'Deliberate valour breathed, firm and unmoved'.
> 'Univérsal reproach, far worse to bear'

[1] *Milton's Prosody*, final ed, 1921

There is many another refinement; but if we pass from the single line to the period, or 'paragraph' as Masson terms it, it is plain at once how Milton's peculiar grammar lends itself to an ever-changing variety of pause, and hence to the no less varied overflow of sense from verse to verse, as is evident in the passage just quoted, 'So thick the aery crowd', and indeed on every page But all this variety ends in unity, and to realise Milton's almost infallible art in concerting a period of verse, the best way is to read one aloud, avoiding any temptation to chant it, and paying special heed to the last line For if that go wrong, all is lost, and it is just there that Milton is most secure, and his imitators are most apt to break down Consider, for instance, the virtue, not as a single unit, but as a finale, of each of the following

'Gorgons, and Hydras, and Chimeras dire' (II 628)
'Murmuring, and with him fled the shades of night' (IV 1015)
'And Eden raised in the waste wilderness' (*P R* I 7)

But these are only the bare elements, and little more can be said here of Milton's poetical resources There are his famed epic similes, which are yet another legacy from the ancients They are like panel-pictures built into the great edifice, and they serve not so much to point a comparison (for often the point is presently forgotten) as to relieve the attention They bear the mind away from the story into the world of nature, or history, or mythology, and this, in *Paradise Lost*, can only be the *future* world, future to the time of the action Eve and Adam gather leaves, and

> Such of late
> Columbus found the American, so girt
> With feathered cincture

This is one way of supplying the 'human interest', the want of which is 'always felt'—by Johnson. Milton's use of resounding names serves the same purpose. Also they are the 'reflected purple and gold' of the poem. They are of places or persons, real or legendary, classical or Oriental Like Marlowe, he loves a map, and the names pour down in a cascade when Adam on the hill has a vision of the realms of Africa and Asia, and, we hear, 'perhaps also' of Mid and South America. But these effects, like the similes, are

not too thickly interspersed, and the name is always cunningly placed in the rhythm of the line.

> 'Of Serican, where Chineses drive
> With sail and wind their cany waggons light.'
>
> 'Or Neptune's ire or Juno's, that so long
> Perplexed the Greek and Cytherea's son'

XI

In *Paradise Regained* these blazonries are found, unimpaired, but they are fewer, and the ground-tone is grey. The shades of colouring, if we look closely, come out like those on a lichened rock. Satan's address to his 'gloomy consistory', and his speech to the Saviour, 'Tis true, I am that spirit unfortunate', and the picture of the 'table richly spread' are in the old manner, like that of the storm in the fourth book. Nothing, again, can be nobler than the passages on Rome and Athens, yet Milton the fanatic seems to be speaking when the Saviour disparages the song and wisdom of Greece. It is Satan who tells the truth about them. The structure and thought of *Samson Agonistes* show that the poet had not yet done with Greece. He seems unwillingly to diminish the mental stature of Satan, he is forced to do so by the story, and we are tempted to deplore the heavy change, when the 'mighty Paramount' falls to speaking in the spirit of Mammon. But he is himself again when he despairs

> worst is my port,
> My harbour, and my ultimate repose

As to the argument, it cannot be said that the Saviour is 'fully tried', he shows no sign, as the Buddha does, of an inner conflict. But this drawback, again, was inherent in the subject. He must not waver, yet he must be represented as a man. Milton endows the Saviour with some of his own virtues, the contempt for false glory and mean statecraft and riches and retinue, and also, somewhat boldly, with some of his own reading. Further, Satan can allude easily to Socrates and the younger Africanus. Milton's tact however is seen in his refusal to load the poem with hard theology. Little, just enough, is said of propitiation or satisfaction. The Crucifixion and its sequel are barely

hinted at, and the Saviour seems to have no forecast of them. The pensive portrait would have been marred by any insistence on these events The setting for the great, and infinitely strange, debate with the Adversary is all in keeping: the musical overture, the glimpse of the fishermen 'Close in a cottage low together got', the humble thoughts of Mary, the fasting in the desert, and at last

> he, unobserved,
> Home to his mother's house private returned

Paradise Regained is a perfect pattern of the short epic, where the action is simple and moves straight forward, without any long story in retrospect Published in 1671 together with *Samson Agonistes*, it appears to have been in the nature of an afterthought It does not, strictly speaking, balance *Paradise Lost* as the opening and closing lines profess The Tempter is 'foiled', and, so far, Adam is 'avenged', but the episode does not, in itself, bring 'Recovered Paradise to all mankind' This will only come about hereafter, 'when time shall be', and the poet seems to treat the victory of the Saviour in the desert as an augury, or symbol, of his final triumph

XII

Some lines of the Chorus in *Samson Agonistes*, though harsh as poetry, give the key to the doctrine of the play.

> O dearly bought revenge, yet glorious!
> Living or dying thou hast fulfilled
> The work for which thou wast foretold
> To Israel, and now liest victorious
> Among thy slain self-killed,
> Not willingly but tangled in the fold
> Of dire Necessity, whose law in death conjoined
> Thee with thy slaughtered foes, in number more
> Than all thy life had slain before

It is often said, and with truth, that this play is nearer in spirit, in dignity, and in structure to Greek tragedy than any other in the language The outer structure, with its parode, episodes, choruses, and final dirge, is classical Yet the spirit and ethical structure are not like anything in Greek tragedy. Like Æschylus and Sophocles, Milton certainly moves among large moral ideas of sin, remorse,

punishment, and expiation The idea of Necessity, of a preappointed end, adds to the likeness But no Greek conceptions fit the Bible story, of which all the incidents are embodied, but which is transformed almost out of knowledge. Samson in his weakness has betrayed his mission to smite God's enemies To fulfil it, and to cancel his offence, he must really smite them at last , but he must also die, by his own choice, in the act It is a mystery only so can he atone Whatever its debts to antiquity or Scripture, *Samson Agonistes* is Milton's deepest and most original work He translates these ethical ideas into human passion and motive The drama, like that of Prometheus, is wholly inward up to the catastrophe The changes in Samson's mind are drawn with unfaltering precision , first weary pain and resignation, then despair , then the sense of 'something extraordinary' within him and nascent hope , then the fixed resolve kept secret, and the glorious suicide His interior loneliness is part of the penance The scenes with Dalila and Harapha have their dramatic use , they rouse the old lion , and the scene with Dalila shows a theatric skill that was hardly to be expected Dalila has the last word, and puts Samson so well in the wrong that the Chorus have to dispel the impression Milton gives her some of his most beautiful lines

> I shall be named among the famousest
> Of women, sung at solemn festivals,
> Living and dead recorded, who, to save
> Her country from a fierce destroyer, chose
> Above the faith of wedlock bands, my tomb
> With odours visited and annual flowers

There are not many of these concessions to grace and melody The language is on the stark side, now dropping into bleakness and now rising to Milton's utmost grandeur We are on the mountain, well above the line of tree or herbage, and the air is difficult Some passages are poetry in its absolute sense , they are on the crest Such are the opening, the last speech of Manoah, and Samson's exhalation of despondency midway, 'So much I feel my genial spirits droop' In the lament of the blind man Milton speaks for himself, and with a passion less controlled than formerly The more resigned temper seen in the sonnets and *Paradise Lost* has given way, as though the affliction were now past

bearing This may be ascribed to the circumstances under which the poem is written, to which there are many allusions. Samson, so far as he is a sinner, has no likeness to Milton, but both are stranded among enemies, amid 'nations grown corrupt' The picture of the disinterred regicides, 'to dogs and fowls a prey', is less in keeping with the story But the poem is not injured by these political allusions, which Milton cannot repress.

The verse in *Samson Agonistes*, as in *Paradise Regained*, is that of *Paradise Lost*, with certain innovations Bridges has pointed out how the trisyllabic foot in a line like 'But prov*idence or* instinct of nature seems' violates Milton's earlier practice of allowing only an *l*, *n*, or *r* to come, in such a foot, before an unstressed syllable It is a minute point, but it shows that Milton, in this austere poem, almost courted greater roughness of sound I follow Bridges in reading the apparently irregular lines of the Choruses and of Samson's lament as simply extensions of his usual metrical practice, the 'iambic' base being clearly audible everywhere. It is essential to bear this in mind in reciting, or Milton's verse will sound too like Walt Whitman's Here, too, we end with that feeling of security, of relying on the artist, of which I spoke at the outset

CHAPTER XIII

DRYDEN AND OTHERS 1660-1700

I

DRYDEN now almost fills the scene, beside him are the other makers of lyric, of tragedy, and of satire, and all these forms undergo a change After 1660 the progress, or regress, of poesy presents a more rapidly dissolving view Survivors like Vaughan, Stanley, Henry King, and Cotton still carry on the older styles On the other hand, Waller, Denham, and Sandys had long practised the new rhetorical couplet Marvell's poetry is a mirror of the general movement away from lyrical fancy and meditation towards invective, satire, and rhymed arguing This movement we associate with the coming of the restored court, with the immigration of French books and French manners, with the flocking of the younger writers to London, with the rise of a more urban and sociable literature, and with the approximation, in spirit and language, of verse to prose The higher inspiration begins to fade, the central themes of poetry, love and death, nature and warfare, are more rarely and feebly chanted, and Milton works alone in that mental solitude which seems to be required for the production of great art Even of great dramatic art, for though Shakespeare and Racine have to mix with the big world and for ever to be considering their audience, they have, all the time, some inner fastness where the dæmon lodges and the rarer work is done. Indeed this general lack of solitude, without and within, can only have injured poetry in Restoration times Poetry easily loses caste when it has to depend on the immediate response and applause of an eager, excited, and factious society. Hence in the new verse, so interesting, so exhilarating, so telling, so perfect in its own way, there is only the host

of greatness I would not be charged with slighting the 'classical age', so-called Ever let us salute, and with the proper number of guns, the prodigious talent of Pope and Dryden It is, whatever anyone may say, *poetic* talent Yet we are listening, all the time, for the note that Pope and Dryden, except in certain happy hours, do *not* strike.

> 'Most souls, 'tis true, but peep out once an age,
> Dull sullen prisoners in the body's cage'

> 'Farewell, too little and too lately known,
> Whom I began to think and call my own'

Their ordinary and characteristic note, in work like the *Epistle to Augustus* or *Absalom and Achitophel*, is of course different The new poetry originated in a spirit of revolt against shapelessness, prolixity, and cold ingenious fancy. What was needed, at whatever cost to the higher imagination, was law and order The virtues now to be sought were clearness of style and structure, and a rightness of language that was near to the rightness of good prose These virtues brought fresh vices with them, but they gave a discipline to poetry which was to profit the romantic writers long afterwards

II

Even in lyric there is a new precision and economy of words The courtly poets, headed by Rochester, are a well-marked group They were wild, and in their youth apt to be rakish, patricians, for whom rhyming was but one accomplishment the more Some, if they survived, became men of affairs, many of them were soldiers and duellists There is not much left of their verse except the small anthology which is in every hand Its peculiar neatness and lightness, its accent and favourite measures, and its tone of verbal gallantry are shared by Dryden, and it was turned out, with surprising facility, by Mrs Aphra Behn. Once or twice she triumphs, indeed her lines 'Love in fantastic triumph sat' might serve as a legend for the whole school This interchangeableness of style is no less marked than in the Elizabethan song-books Rhythm, as I have suggested, is the attribute of poetry that dies hardest; it wanders disembodied in the air, eluding the mesh of the prosodist. It is a series of pure sounds abstracted from

meaning, the tune is waiting for the right words, which may come at last after a hundred misses

'But 'twas from mine he took desires
Enough to undo the amorous world'

'But with what face can I incline
To damn you to be only mine?'

'No, no, poor suffering heart, no change endeavour,
Choose to sustain the smart, rather than leave her'.

'I must confess I am untrue
To Gloriana's eyes,
But he that's smiled upon by you
Must all the world despise'

Aphra Behn, Rochester, Dryden, Mulgrave, each of them has captured that tune, and it continues to be heard, with certain changes indeed, but the same in essence, more rarely and yet still to be recognised, well into the supposed 'age of prose' Dryden, in his own time, shows the greatest variety of lyrical skill, but Rochester, John Wilmot, the second Earl (1647–1680), is the best singer between Herrick and Collins

He has not much to show, he died young, and much dirt was imputed to him that was not his own and this was only natural, for his wicked wit knew nothing of decency. His good and authentic verse includes four or five songs, one notable satire, and one adaptation from Horace Few of the songs have the sharp and thrilling note of 'Absent from thee, I languish still', but 'All my past life is mine no more' and 'I cannot change, as others do', if not on the same level, are perfectly turned, and the gay mischievous lines ''Tis not that I am weary grown' are of their sort without a flaw The *Satire against Mankind* is best known for the bitter couplets on 'old age and experience'—to which, however, Rochester never attained, and for its plea for the *right* kind of 'reason', which tells us to enjoy, as against the wrong, the moral kind, that is preached by 'some formal band and beard' Browning might have written just such a poem in his *Men and Women*, dramatically, but Rochester is speaking for himself His *Allusion* to Horace's satire (I, x) is the first brilliant specimen in English of the 'imitation' that translates Roman into modern instances. Fully to portray Rochester would require an historical novelist of courage as well as genius.

There is a gleam of something more than gallantry in the easy songs of Sir Charles Sedley to his Chlorises and Celias Phillis is 'his only joy', and he can 'forgive her with her tricks' He too has an excellent cadence, but it is better kept up than his language, and the poem 'Love still has something of the sea' falls away from its noble opening Charles Sackville, Earl of Dorset, on the other hand, carries through his fresh and humorous ditty, 'To all you ladies now at land', to the end, and the verse goes with a rush For *his* Phillis he has a love that 'is full of noble pride', and for her sake he will throw over 'that fop, Discretion', and the quest of ambition and fame Another rhymer of cool and finished compliment in song is John Sheffield, Duke of Buckingham (or Buckinghamshire), best known as the Earl of Mulgrave the close associate, in versifying, of Dryden, who styles him 'sharp-judging Adriel, the Muses' friend' Mulgrave, in his *Essay on Poetry*, written in heroic couplets, observes that a 'song should be to just perfection wrought', and this was the aspiration certainly of the 'mob of gentlemen' In the same rather flat and correct poem he desires to see the true balance preserved between 'judgment' and 'fancy', finds that Shakespeare and Fletcher, for all their 'gross' failings, still prevail over our passions, and makes a temperate demand for fire and 'fury' in an ode.

III

There is little in the tragedies of the time to match the prose comedy of Etherege, Wycherley, and Congreve. They contain telling scenes, good theatrical situations, and there is poetry in them, hidden away in corners But they have not survived in the theatre, they are hard to read, there is little true creative power, and hardly a character that stays in the memory Above all, the imagination cannot *accept* them, most of them are, in the phrase of that age, beyond or above nature In the rhymed tragedies of Dryden, as will appear, and in Otway's *Don Carlos* or Lee's *Sophonisba*, there are lofty ringing passages, but the earlier kind of 'heroic play', in its nature, was a hybrid, and could not thrive long The movement towards blank verse, of which Dryden set the example in 1678, signified

an effort to get away from mere rhetoric and sonority and pointed sentences, and to use the 'real language of men'. Still, although *All for Love* and the *Spanish Friar* deserve their honours, no great master of blank verse arose Much of what we find is Fletcher's style, or Massinger's, with water added. Some interest and refreshment can be found in the tragedies of Lee, Otway, Southerne, and I will add Congreve

Nathaniel Lee (? 1653–1692) ended his days in 'despondency and madness', but no one has denied him a share of the right kind of madness, the kind on which the Platonic Socrates discoursed to Ion Lee, in the decline of the drama, reproduces some of the traits of its hot youth His passionate extravagance recalls that of *Tamburlaine*, now and then he flares into real splendour He is credited with the often-quoted lines which are worthy of Webster, on 'the great palace of magnificent Death' They occur in the *Oedipus* which he wrote in partnership with Dryden But alas, between them the two poets contrive to leave the subject hideous Lee's power is felt less in single phrases than in the rapid pulsing energy of particular scenes the meeting of Roxana and Statira in the *Rival Queens*, or *The Death of Alexander the Great* (1677), or the desperate outcries, in *Theodosius* (1680), of the empress Eudocia In his other tragedies, such as *Mithridates* or *Lucius Junius Brutus*, there is the same fitful flame

The prose of Thomas Otway (1652–1685) is pure, simple, and passionate, it can be read in his letters to Mrs Barry the actress, who rejected him His blank verse, although as verse it is seldom remarkable, has the same disarming pathos

Jaffeir Wilt thou then,
When in a bed of straw we shrunk together,
And the bleak winds shall whistle round our heads,
Wilt thou then talk thus to me? Wilt thou then
Hush my cares thus, and shelter me with love?
Belvidera Oh, I will love thee, even in madness love thee .

They are man and wife, Jaffeir sensitive and pliable, Belvidera loyal and exalted With Pierre, the rebel and archplotter, they fill the stage in *Venice Preserved* (1682), one of the few tragedies since Shakespeare that has remained in the general memory There are many crudities, the poetry,

in itself, is not very good, but the action is absorbing, with its swiftly changing situations and ever-growing intensity The scenes are linked together with admirable stagecraft Pierre drawing Jaffeir, his bosom friend, into the plot against the oppressive Senate, Jaffeir leaving Belvidera with the plotters as a hostage for his good faith, Belvidera persuading Jaffeir to betray them, so that her father, the senator Priuli, may be saved, the treachery of the senators, who violate their promise of immunity, and the final triple death The scenes of the conspiracy (which are adapted from a recent romance by Saint-Réal) disclose Otway's more masculine side, and the political writing almost reminds us of Massinger's The interludes between the courtesan Aquilina and the old Antonio (who is Shaftesbury, brutally caricatured) are disgusting, but they are astringent too, a corrective to the over-sweet flow of sentiment Another suffering and lamenting lady, Monimia, had figured in the *Orphan* (1680) The pathos here is less sound than in *Venice Preserved*, it turns on the treachery of Polydore, who personates his bosom friend Castalio in the night, ignorant that Castalio and Monimia are married Castalio duly runs him through, and all three die, but not till after much effusion of high sentiment Otway's irregular stanzas, the *Poet's Complaint*, contain some biting satire, they show a power, never developed, of concerting a long stanza, and they are a moving personal confession He speaks thus of his Muse.

> each part of her did shine
> With jewels and with gold,
> Numberless to be told
> Which in imagination as I did behold,
> And loved, and wondered more and more,
> Said she, *These riches all, my darling, shall be thine,*
> *Riches which never poet had before*
> She promised me to raise my fortune and my name,
> By royal favour, and by endless fame,
> But never told
> How hard they were to get, how difficult to hold . .

'But, for the Passions, Southerne sure and Rowe' This line of Pope's gives, not his own opinion, but that of the *vox populi* in his time. We do not find Thomas Southerne (1660–1746) so 'sure' to-day, but he inherits the instinct of Otway to be simple, moving, and direct. In his *Oroonoko*

(acted 1696), adapted from Mrs Behn's novel, Southerne, though he has no particular style, succeeds in holding our sympathy His noble Indian prince, Oroonoko, is something of a *poseur*, but is not without dignity, he is in the hands of a wicked English Governor, and so too, by chance, is his wife, Imoinda, on whom the Governor casts his eyes There is a revolt of slaves led by Oroonoko, a parley, a conditional surrender, and (as in *Venice Preserved*) a breach of faith by the authorities In the finale, there is the usual bloodshed, Imoinda stabs herself, Oroonoko stabs himself —and the Governor too An early play of Southerne's, the *Fatal Marriage, or, the Innocent Adultery* (acted 1694), was also popular, and was adapted under the title of *Isabella* It is a typical example of an *un*tragical tale, of a disaster which is due partly to accident, and of much pathetic writing wasted All the misery turns on the innocent re-marriage of a supposed widow on the day before her true husband reappears

Congreve's *Mourning Bride* (1697) is no doubt high-flown and artificial, and has suffered from Johnson's absurd praise of a few lines ('How reverend is the face of this tall pile . . ') But Congreve's brains are seen in the strength of his construction, and in certain flights and turns of language He was so able that he could almost make, or did at moments make, poetry, and there are signs, known to the careful reader of his comedies, of a certain background of melancholy thinking At least I seem to find it in lines like these.

> But 'tis the wretch's comfort still to have
> Some small reserve of near and inward woe,
> Some unsuspected hoard of darling grief,
> Which they, unseen, may wail, and weep and mourn,
> And, glutton-like, alone devour

IV

While poetry has no upper limit (for it may soar as high as it can), its lower limit is harder to define. There is a no man's land, without fixed frontiers, over which hangs ambiguity, and a new name is wanted for the verse of Samuel Butler (1612–1680), or of Swift If we call it poetry, we seem to be setting it in the same rank as the work, let us say, of Dryden Yet so sure is the reaction of metre upon syntax and idiom, and so powerful the consequent 'medication of

the atmosphere', that the result is more than a prose which merely rhymes and rattles At the best we might speak of it in a figure, as the 'plebeian underwood' of poetry, which will never grow up into the 'old patrician trees', and at the worst, if we pass downwards, beyond the sturdy growths that are found in Defoe or Bunyan, we come on barren soil

Butler's claim to be a poet rests less upon his *Hudibras* (1663, 1664, 1678), than on some savage lines that were first printed, along with his prose *Characters* and *Thoughts upon Various Subjects*, in his *Genuine Remains* (1759) there is a clear premonition of Swift

> Who would believe, that wicked Earth,
> Where Nature only brings us forth
> To be found guilty, and forgiven,
> Should be a nursery for Heaven?
> Our pains are real things, and all
> Our pleasures but fantastical
> All this is nothing to the evils
> Which men, and their confederate devils,
> Inflict, to aggravate the curse
> On their own hated kind, much worse

One of the *Thoughts* is in the same characteristic vein and they show throughout the strength and freedom of Butler's disenchanted mind

> All the business of the world is but diversion, and all the happiness in it, that mankind is capable of, anything that will keep it from reflecting upon the misery, vanity, and nonsense of it

It is a mind that thinks in a myriad images, most of them prosaic, and they fit easily into his curt couplets

> If he that in the field is slain
> Be in the bed of honour lain,
> He that is beaten may be said
> To lie in honour's truckle-bed

The aim is to make rhymes, by no matter what acrobatic feat, that will stick in the memory and be quoted ('Till with her worldly goods and body, Spite of her heart, she has endowed ye') Now and then Butler is graver, and we can detect his dream of what would be the chief good were it only attainable

Love is too great a happiness
For wretched mortals to possess,
For, could it hold inviolate
Against those cruelties of fate
Which all felicities below
By rigid laws are subject to,
It would become a bliss too high
For perishing mortality,
Translate to earth the joys above,
For nothing goes to heaven but love

But his habit of mind is detached and destructive. *Hudibras* is a new kind of mock epic, or mock romance It shows none of that sympathy with true romance which lights up the *Rape of the Lock* Instead, there is a machine-fire of wit and mockery The imaginative humour of *Don Quixote*, which externally is the model, is absent Butler's guiding star is reason, and everything that he deems to be irrational is his target nonconformity of all kinds, republican sky-palaces like *Oceana*, metaphysics, occult learning, quackery, astrology, amateur science, false style, and false sentiment This explains his audacity in covering so many incompatible bad qualities under one name His Presbyterian knight is a polyglot and a scholastic, the Independent Squire, the Sancho of the poem, is a Rosicrucian This Ralpho, by the way, is the occasion of one of the best learned epigrams in the language

He had First Matter seen undressed,
He took her naked, all alone,
Before one rag of Form was on

The medley is further confounded by the English, knock-about scenes of the bear-baiting, by half-veiled attacks on real persons, and by the love-debates between the knight and his lady In another poem, *Repartees between Cat and Puss*, there is an exact and fatal parody, tolerably gross, of the sentiment in the heroic plays, and of their rhetoric *Hudibras* crackles on interminably, and Johnson, in his *Life*, puts his finger on the source of the tedium '*If* inexhaustible wit could give perpetual pleasure' I have been tempted to say more of Butler than may befit a sketch of poetry. But though this problematical sort of writing has always existed, it was he who firmly established a powerful and distinct species of versecraft Also he is, with the exception of Hobbes, the most honest and interesting

intellect of his time in England Still, the rule of the critical reason is not favourable to poetry Some part of *Hudibras* must have been long stored up before publication Butler was in the service of Sir Samuel Luke, a parliamentarian and Presbyterian, and took his notes from that point of vantage After the Restoration he received various preferments, but despite the swift popularity of his *opus magnum* there is some evidence for the legend that he died in penury, 'neglected'.

V

If we close our Milton and at once open our Dryden we shall do Dryden wrong, the text of a contrast is too easy to embroider But turn back to him from Pope, and his magnitude is seen at once Never need we depreciate Pope, with his 'musical finesse' and his care for what he thought to be perfection, he is to-day in the ascendant, and needs no advocate Yet he is easier to imitate than Dryden, in whom there is something cordial and splendid which engages us at once a careless profusion, an impetus and a masculinity, that in Pope are wanting, and a gift, which remains with him to the last, of recovering from a hundred mistakes. The romantic poets demanded a charm, a mystery, and a transporting power, which they could not find in Dryden. But we must not rule out his more worldly writing—his satires and rhymed reasonings and political manifestoes—from the kingdom of poetry, though they are poetry of a secondary kind More than this, we must watch for the hours in which Dryden escapes from this region into a different air for his pathetic confessions and repentances, for his praises of his friends dead or living, for his translations from Lucretius, for the flashes in his dramas, and for the handful of songs that show his deeper feelings He is full of puzzles and contradictions, and it is hard to come to the end of him As a great, though very fitful, artist, he survives, his 'lofty line' has a challenge of its own, and its secret has long been lost The poets who have caught something of its ring include not only Pope and Gray and Johnson, Churchill and Canning, but also Keats—the Keats of *Lamia*.

VI

The talent of John Dryden (1631–1700) was not precocious, he printed nothing remarkable till he was twenty-eight, but his life as a man of letters covers about forty years, and long before the Revolution he was the chief poet and critic of the age Like Milton, he grew up among the 'late fantastics', and in their manner he could do his worst, he never wholly shook it off But Dryden always has a certain happy rashness It is seen, amid many conceits, in the *Heroic Stanzas* (1659) to the memory of Cromwell, and in the imposing *Annus Mirabilis* (1667) Here the fire of London becomes a living monster, full of 'enraged desire'; the rebels whose heads are spiked upon London Bridge descend as witnessing ghosts, and dance, 'and sing their sabbath notes with feeble voice' The battle with the Dutch is fought 'in doubtful moonlight'

> The mighty ghosts of our great Harries rose,
> And armèd Edwards looked with anxious eyes,
> To see this fleet among unequal foes,
> By which Fate promised them their Charles should rise

But the quatrain, suggested by the heavy *Gondibert*, could only hinder Dryden's native rapidity and ease He had already shown his skill in the measure for which he is 'glorious' the burnished, balanced, integrated couplet prepared for him by Waller and the rest His peculiar ring is heard already in the beautiful and ridiculous verses (1660) to the swarthy Charles

> How shall I speak of that triumphant day
> When you renewed the expiring pomp of May!
> (A month that owns an interest in your name
> You and the flowers are its peculiar claim)

One of Dryden's great virtues is here apparent the sentence is natural, the words are in the natural order of speech It is, if we like, prose glorified by metre He can be careless enough, but there are no knots or kinks in the grammar there is no Miltonic wresting of English into Greek or Latin syntax There are few inversions, except that the verb or epithet is often thrown forward for the sake of a strong rhyme 'That star that at your birth shone out so bright' Our poetry has always been deserting this canon, and always finding it again. Chaucer, Marlowe,

Donne, and now Dryden, all achieve such a 'return to nature'.

VII

Very soon Dryden shows that he can make an admirable lyric as early as 1667 he writes

> Ah fading joy, how quickly art thou past!
> Yet we thy ruin haste
> As if the cares of human life were few,
> We seek out new,
> And follow Fate that does too fast pursue

He never lost the gift, and made songs all his life, more sparsely while he was engrossed in satire and debate He wrote more good ones than all the courtly poets put together, although never once does he strike the piercing note of Rochester He is of their school there is the same precision, turn of epigram, and liking for the caressing double rhyme.

> 'Tis easy to deceive us,
> In pity of your pain,
> But when we love, you leave us
> To rail at you in vain
> Before we have descried it,
> There is no bliss beside it,
> But she that once has tried it
> Will never love again (1681)

Dryden can be cynical enough, and some of his songs have been dropt by some editors as altogether too voluptuous Their real fault is moral coldness and want of heart, but they are no less musical than the rest Dryden is essentially mutable in mood, and happily he can also write the gallant chorus in his *Amphitryon*

> Thus at the height we love and live,
> And fear not to be poor,
> We give, and give, and give, and give,
> Till we can give no more,
> But what to-day will take away,
> To-morrow will restore
> Thus at the height we love and live,
> And fear not to be poor

He has many other melodious things, including 'How happy the lover', in *King Arthur*, and the lines on the exiled James and his queen, 'A quire of bright beauties in spring did

appear' In one song the Elizabethan sense of beauty is alive again

> From the bright vision's head
> A careless veil of lawn was loosely spread,
> From her white temples fell her shaded hair,
> Like cloudy sunshine, not too brown nor fair

The *Song of the Sea-Fight* in the wretched play *Amboyna* is worthy of Fletcher, and is very like him Some of Dryden's free versions from Horace are excellent verse of the middle kind, one of the best is 'Behold yon mountain's hoary height', from *Vides ut alta stet nive candidum* So with his paraphrase of *Veni Creator Spiritus*, and many other hymns from the Latin have been doubtfully assigned to him, chiefly on the evidence of style His odes, written late in life, are the performance, above all, of a 'virtuoso'—'a person', according to the dictionary, 'skilled in the mechanical part of a fine art' Mechanical indeed is a niggardly word, for the long stanzas *To the Memory of Mrs Anne Killigrew* are rich in complicated harmonies The style is in turn tasteless and magnificent, artificial and sincere, one verse contains Dryden's moving confession of his *second fall* into grossness of writing In *A Song for St Cecilia's Day* (1687) and *Alexander's Feast* (1700) there is the same mastery of technique, but we sit somewhat too close to the 'trumpet's loud clangour', and are deafened Nor do the measures, which are varied with all Dryden's skill to represent the changing emotions, really *represent*, as he intends, their phases The theory of poetic imitation is too simple, the links between feeling and metre are finer and more circuitous than can be shown by such 'echoes of the sense' None the less, *Alexander's Feast* is a mighty display, and full of Dryden's strength and impetus

VIII

To revert to his record for many years (1658–1680) he wrote without ceasing, and yet he found no subject that could bring out the full powers of his instrument. He had already begun to rhyme tragedies, and for some twenty years the drama was his chief industry. The prologues and epilogues are full of Dryden's wit, which is often very

familiar and vernacular, and in the easy, cheerful, and dangerous vein of mockery that is peculiar to him :

> But, gentlemen, you overdo the mode,
> You must have fools out of the common road
> Th' unnatural strained buffoon is only taking,
> No fop can please you now of God's own making

The higher strain, in praise of Shakespeare, is heard in the prologue to that mutilation of the *Tempest* for which D'Avenant shares with Dryden the reproach, and, better still, in one of the addresses to the University of Oxford.

> Oft has our poet wished, this happy seat
> Might prove his fading Muse's last retreat,
> I wonder'd at his wish, but now I find
> He sought for quiet, and content of mind,
> Which noiseful towns and courts can never know,
> And only in the shades, like laurels, grow

This is the gentle, the dignified Dryden, for whom we are on the watch, and who speaks so often in his prose I will return to his criticisms, but already, in 1668, he had shown his power in *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy* His discourses, which continue through his life with little interruption, are often defences of his own principles and practice The craftsman explains how he thinks a heroic play or satire or translation ought to be done, and he takes up his own challenge and does it

It is easy to deride his heroic tragedies in rhyme, of which the most conspicuous are *Tyrannic Love* (1670), the *Conquest of Granada* (1672), and *Aureng-Zebe* (1676) They abound in rant, but more fatal to dramatic effect is the habit of epigram, which in Dryden's couplet is incurable The emperor Maximin, who is enamoured of St Catherine, observes

> Absent, I may her martyrdom decree,
> But one look more will make that martyr me

So, in the *State of Innocence*, the opera which Dryden, it is said with Milton's contemptuous leave, made out of *Paradise Lost*, 'tagging' the verses with the shining points of rhyme,—here, too, despite the cunning disposal of the vowels, and of every pause and syllable, comes the true Restoration note. Satan talking like Dryden

> Seraph and cherub, careless of their charge,
> And wanton, in full ease now live at large,
> Unguarded leave the passes of the sky,
> *And all dissolved in hallelujahs lie*

Not that these rhymed romances are to be despised The exotic subjects and the perpetual harping on the conflict between love and honour, favour a certain magnificence The love-exchanges of Almanzor and Almahide in *The Conquest of Granada*, and the cry of the senses uttered by the queen Nourmahal in *Aureng-Zebe* ('And why this niceness to that pleasure shown ?') rise far above declamation Sir Walter Scott notices the dignity of St Catherine's speech in *Tyrannic Love*

> Could we live always, life were worth our cost,
> But now we keep with care what must be lost,
> Here we stand shivering on the bank, and cry,
> When we should plunge into Eternity
> One moment ends our pain
> And yet the shock of death we dare not stand,
> By thought scarce measured, and too swift for sand

Dryden's abandonment, after *Aureng-Zebe*, of 'his long-loved mistress, rhyme', was all for good His blank verse, though never of the highest order, is neither loose nor rigid, but strong and rapid, and the language is far more natural to the drama, the style more continuous, than in his couplets It does not often wholly lapse, although, indeed, in *Amboyna* can be found one of the worst lines in the language

> give to my brave
> *Employers of the East India Company*
> The last remembrance of my faithful service

His greatest play is *All for Love, or The World Well Lost* (1678), which he wrote with *Antony and Cleopatra* before him Here, at whatever untold cost to the poetry, Dryden carves his original, with a free hand, into a kind of French symmetry 'every scene in the tragedy conducing to the main design, and every act concluding with a turn of it' He converts a mighty and complex work into one of a lower order, noble nevertheless The trail of the heroic play is over *All for Love*, the inevitable rival is produced, not out of Plutarch, and Cleopatra is tempted to use him, so to lure back the jealous Antony The yielding of Antony

is no longer the weakness of a hero. Yet Dryden can catch the accent, if not of Shakespeare, still of the great age. and Beaumont might have written

> I think the gods are Antonies, and give,
> Like prodigals, this nether world away
> To none but wasteful hands

The most ambitious, the most famous and skilful, of Dryden's later tragedies is *Don Sebastian* (1690) Here, once more, he shows his unequalled power of making us forget his faults I will not say forgive, for it would sound like patronage of so great a man The audience does not seem to have ridiculed the sorry stage business of counteracting a poison, not by an antidote, but by another poison, itself administered with evil intent The innocent marriage of a brother and sister, who resolve to turn anchorites when they know the truth, is a theme that, if it be possible at all, demands a different kind of artist Yet the plotting is intricate and skilful, the verse and language are full of power, and in one noted scene, the quarrel and reunion of Sebastian and Dorax, there is an admirable theatric effect

IX

The years 1681 to 1688 were Dryden's *anni mirabiles* He might have gone on prologuing and play-making for ever, using a now perfectly mastered medium for an inferior purpose But as usual he responded to his public, seized occasion after occasion, and invented more than one literary mould that was to have a prolonged existence He perfected, for his own purposes, not only the rhymed satire, but the rhymed argument, doctrinal or political These ancient species he transformed by his oratory, wit, and versification He began in 1681 with his chief feat of arms, the first part of *Absalom and Achitophel* The Jewish tale is adjusted by sleight of hand and without any reverence for persons to the situation of the hour The amours of David are treated gaily, they are those of Charles, and the poet keeps a wary eye upon the moods of the kindly king The pretender Absalom, the charming Monmouth, is spared for the time The heavy guns are kept for the tempter, Achitophel-Shaftesbury, for the London aldermen, or Jebusites, and for Zimri-Buckingham. These portraits

are known to thousands who would never be amused by the truth of history Dryden shows and feels no personal anger ; and he praises the loyalists in his handsomest fashion In the eulogy of Barzillai, the loyal Duke of Ormond, occur the Virgilian lines on his dead heir the Earl of Ossory, —' by me (so Heaven will have it) always mourned And always honoured ' Virgil always brings out the best of Dryden , in whose most beautiful elegy, *To the Memory of Mr Oldham*, the ' Marcellus of our tongue ', he is again echoed In *Absalom and Achitophel* we are left admiring the celebrated, unfair ' characters , the pervading intellectual force, and the dramatic aptness of the speeches Shaftesbury, inciting Monmouth against the king, is ' Hell's dire agent ',—as it were a satiric understudy of Milton's hero

> He to his brother gives supreme command,
> To you a legacy of barren land ,
> Perhaps th' old harp, on which he thrums his lays,
> Or some dull Hebrew ballad in your praise

In the *Medal* the argument has become serious , Dryden seems truly indignant, and reveals his own political ideas He has a surprising power of coining a formula, or principle, into a couplet He gives the common measure of a number of intelligent but not profound minds ' Kings are only officers in trust '

> Our temperate isle will no extremes sustain
> Of popular sway or arbitrary reign,
> But slides between them both into the best,
> Secure in freedom, in a monarch blest

The second part of *Absalom*, in which Dryden took a share, and his *MacFlecknoe*, might be called poems of the horse-pond Doeg is Elkanah Settle , Shadwell is both Og and the heir of Flecknoe , and Flecknoe (who in fact wrote one pleasing lyric) is Dulness They are all ducked, in a spirit of boisterous good humour , and poetry, naturally, is at a distance

It reappears in *Religio Laici* (1682) and in the *Hind and the Panther* (1687) Both poems, in a sense, are obsolete , both are, at the worst, consummate journalism The first is a plea for the Anglican, the second for the Roman faith,

which Dryden had adopted in the interval Both pleadings are sincere, and whatever be thought of Dryden's much discussed conversion, or of his mixed motives, there is the accent of conviction when he demands 'for erring judgments an unerring guide'. The impression is strengthened by his cry of regret for his 'thoughtless youth', and for his manhood which had been 'misled by wandering fires' But in the *Hind and the Panther* there is no little waste of mental power The ugly beast-fable, the Presbyterian Wolf and the rest of the menagerie, become tedious The Anglican Panther, the 'lady of the spotted kind', keeps a trace of her original purity, the milk-white Hind is Rome The two debate, there is gay conventional scenery in which 'the burnished brooks appeared with liquid gold to flow', and the Hind, amiably, has the best of the argument. Dryden's most vicious and lengthiest 'character' is that of the Buzzard, the Whig bishop, Gilbert Burnet With what relish of cross-alliteration does he describe him as 'A prophet formed to make a female proselyte'! Of the two poems *Religio Laici* is the more cleanly finished and less heavily weighted

But between them had come (1684–1685) the first two batches of 'miscellany poems', including translations, from Dryden's hand, from Theocritus, Lucretius, Virgil, and Horace, also from Ovid, some of whose epistles he had already rhymed in English His last phase had begun translation, or adaptation, was now to be his chief activity

X

The Revolution threw him once more on his resources; he was out of favour, he was staunch to his new creed; and Og was laureate, a post that Dryden had held for eighteen years But the veteran now did work that would have been sufficient of itself to make his name Dryden, indeed, was more purely a poet in his age than in his youth Besides more songs, and *Alexander's Feast*, and *Don Sebastian* and other plays, he produced his *Virgil* (1697), his *Fables* (1700), and some of his best criticism

Dryden is a mighty translator, and in his versions from Juvenal and Lucretius he is at his strongest Many have wished that he had put the whole of the *De Rerum Natura*

into English, for in what he did, he attains a greatness of style which in his own writing he hardly approaches

> For thou shalt sleep, and never wake again,
> And, quitting life, shalt quit thy living pain
> But we, thy friends, shall all those sorrows find,
> Which in forgetful death thou leav'st behind,
> No time shall dry our tears, nor drive thee from our mind
> The worst that can befall thee, measured right,
> Is a sound slumber, and a long good-night

The true Virgilian is ready to turn away from Dryden's reproduction The Latin, he says, is beaten out too thin, the sacred, the volatile essence is lost, and the couplet is a metallic affair by the side of the hexameter It is all too true, there is hardly a line in the English that would serve us in taking the *sortes Virgilianae*, nothing of that universal aptness which tempts us to open the *Æneid* and tell our fortunes But Dryden has forestalled such cavil

> What modern language, or what poet, can express the majestic beauty of this one verse, amongst a thousand others!
>
> > Aude, hospes, contemnere opes et te quoque dignum
> > Finge deo
>
> For my part, I am lost in the admiration of it I contemn the world when I think of it, and myself when I translate it

Yet his *Virgil* is a very good and gallant poem in its own order It has a sweep and inspiration that are wanting, to my ear, in Pope's *Homer*, and the style, on the whole, is less artificial In his preface he tells us much about his technical problems He aims at 'harmonious numbers', shuns 'the dead weight of our mother-tongue', the harsh collocations of consonants, and runs of heavy 'Teuton' monosyllables He defends his triplet rhymes, also his Alexandrines, which ennoble the verse and 'stop the sense from overflowing into another line' In fact, the twelve syllables often hold just the contents of one hexameter, which else must be crushed into one line of ten, or puffed out into two Pope did not gain by abandoning these resources Dryden further says that he will 'steer between the two extremes of paraphrase and literal translation' but he leans to the looser side, and his habit is to expand Virgil tells the thoughts of his heart in a *sunt lacrimae rerum* or, when Orpheus loses Eurydice, in *ibi omnis effusus labor* Dryden has, 'Straight all his hopes exhaled in empty air' In the same fashion, and always in the couplet, he trans

lated much more Ovid, much Juvenal, all Persius, a little Horace, and the first *Iliad* Open where you will, there is the same freedom, the same 'energy divine' and power of sound Dryden writes in a heat, and often with negligence, but he is always virile

XI

The *Fables* entitle him to be called one of the renewers of Romance He deals in one way with Boccaccio, in another with Chaucer The tales from the prose of the *Decameron* are more like original poems than *Palamon and Arcite* or the *Cock and the Fox*, paraphrastic as these are. In each case the older writer supplies little more than the canvas The story is followed, but is coloured by Dryden's rhetoric and poetry, and the poetry rises high in the pictures of tournament and temple, of Sigismunda searching in the cave, and of the lady followed by the hellhounds Chaucer, naturally, suffers from Dryden's blunter temper, and from his treatment of the language So great is his 'veneration' for the master that he must needs turn him into Revolution English Strange that Dryden did not see that the remedy for the 'obscurity' of Chaucer's language is to learn it It is also well known that he was, like the rest of the world during several centuries, unable to scan his author, and therefore to hear his melodies Thomas Tyrwhitt was to throw light on the matter in the year 1775 But in the *Preface* Chaucer is honoured more memorably than by any other poet between Spenser and William Blake Dryden is at his best in his paraphrase of the *Flower and the Leaf*, —the poem loved by Keats, and now denied to Chaucer. Whatever may be lost in delicacy, there is more beauty here, and more love for beauty, than in anything else that Dryden wrote, he rightly calls the poem a *Vision*

'Twas bordered with a field, and some was plain
With grass, and some was sowed with rising grain,
That (now the dew with spangles decked the ground)
A sweeter spot of earth was never found
I looked and looked, and still with new delight,
Such joy my soul, such pleasures filled my sight.
And the fresh eglantine exhaled a breath,
Whose odours were of power to raise from death.
Nor sullen, discontent, nor anxious care,
Ev'n though brought thither, could inhabit there:
But thence they fled as from their mortal foe,
For this sweet place could only pleasure know

In the picture of the Good Parson, avowedly 'imitated and enlarged' from Chaucer's, we are back again with Dryden's characteristic epigrams, and with his cunningly placed polysyllables

> Rich was his soul, though his attire was poor,
> (As God had clothed his own Embassador)
> For such, on earth, his blest Redeemer bore

And we imagine that Chaucer would have smiled at the compliments to the Pope, and at the conceit in the portrait of the Parson

> Such was the Saint, who shone with every grace,
> Reflecting, Moses-like, his Maker's face

XII

I am not to dwell on Dryden as a critic on his discussion of the poetical kinds and their canons, or on his 'sharp-judging' tributes to Shakespeare, Ovid, Juvenal, or Chaucer. But it was also his practice to judge himself, and to explain his artistic purposes He is often careful to let us know the exact pitch of the language that he means to use Someone had said, of his *Verses to Her Highness the Duchess* (1666), that

> I did *humi serpere* I might well answer with that of Horace, *nunc non erat his locus*, I knew I addressed them to a lady, and accordingly I affected the softness of expression, and the smoothness of measure, rather than the height of thought

He is at pains to define the right key of language for his *Religio Laici*, the style, he says, should be 'epistolary', not that of a heroic poem And he keeps his word, though he luckily forgets it in the full-sounding overture, 'Dim as the borrowed beams of moon and stars' The preface to the *Hind and the Panther* shows, as well as anything, Dryden's way of stating his programme, and many of his poems fall under one or other of his three headings

> The *first part*, consisting most in general characters and narration, I have endeavoured to raise, and give it the majestic turn of heroic poesy The *second*, being matter of dispute, and chiefly concerning Church authority, I was obliged to make as plain and perspicuous as possibly I could, yet not wholly neglecting the numbers, though I had not frequent occasions for the magnificence of verse The *third*, which has more of the nature of domestic conversation, is, or ought to be, more free and familiar than the two former

Thus the prologues and epilogues are usually 'free and familiar', the epistles, like the admirable one to his kinsman John Driden, are of the middle kind, with 'magnificence' breaking in, while the 'majestic turn of heroic poesy', heard now and then in the plays, appears constantly in the translations These divisions, it is true, take no account of Dryden's great performances in the line of the mock-heroic, or of his 'characters', whether of the subtler or of the rougher kind His habit of giving reasons for his practice is Gallic rather than British The prefaces, which owe their pattern to those of Corneille, carry us back also to the Pleiade and the gallant banner-wavings of Ronsard and Du Bellay Only, Dryden does not pose as a herald or reformer, he is content with trying to thresh out a problem of the workshop Here, and when he compares Horace with Juvenal, or Boccaccio with Chaucer, he writes always with the relish, the mingled modesty and assurance, of a great practitioner

When he wrote, creative poetry, in spite of the survival of Milton, was dying down, and the time seemed ripe for taking stock of its achievements Yet there was little to inspire Dryden in the atmosphere around him He was not, like Coleridge, to live and breathe in the rich air of romance. All the more to his honour is his power to resist his surroundings This he could do by falling back on the great writings of the past, and making his account with them Homer and Lucretius, Horace and Virgil, Shakespeare and Milton, were always there, translate them, judge them, praise them, live in them! The English Renaissance was now to enter on a new, on what seemed an unpromising phase, but it was to be alive all the time, and it is never ended

CHAPTER XIV

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY (I)

I

THE talent of Alexander Pope (1688–1744) followed a peculiar curve He ended where he had begun, with a natural, original style which is a perfect medium for the poetry of urban manners It is found in the *Rape of the Lock* (1712, 1714), and in the *Epistle to Arbuthnot* (1735) These are classics In the *Homer* (1715–1726), the *Dunciad* (1728, 1742), and *An Essay on Man* (1733–4), there are a hundred tokens of the true Pope, the lover and master of letters But they are all, for various reasons, classics *manqués*, though Pope, all the while, is aiming at perfection of form Everywhere in his work there is less waste than in Dryden's Nothing is tossed off in the plenitude of careless power, nothing neglected, all, be it good or bad, is tested and approved, and this is what he means by saying that he desires to be 'correct' Already, in *Windsor Forest* (1713), and even in the juvenile *Pastorals* (1709), there is something more than 'poetic diction' ('the leaden death' for a bullet), and imagery lifted from books. There is a distinct and delighted vision of natural things. of the dying pheasant, of the 'bright-eyed perch', of the 'fleet shades' that 'glide o'er the dusky green', of the 'russet plains', of the shot larks that 'fall, and leave their little lives in air' Pope is busy, too, with his metrical craft, already there is 'the spider's touch, how exquisitely fine', Pope's other spider-qualities are not yet apparent. As he says, 'the numbers came', and, in his own words, 'they are the smoothest, the most easy and flowing imaginable'. The lines are stuffed out with epithet 'The smiling infant in his hand shall take The crested basilisk and speckled

snake '. But even in the *Messiah* (1712), that patchwork of texts, what a mastery of vowel-values and of pause and cadence !

> See thy bright altars thronged with prostrate kings,
> And heaped with products of Sabæan springs !
> For thee Idume's spicy forests blow,
> And seeds of gold in Ophir's mountains glow

Very early Pope lets us know what he will do with Dryden's heroic measure He will avoid (like Dryden) the hiatus of vowels , a line made up of ten *low* monosyllables , and any ' needless Alexandrines ' These last, like Dryden's triplet-rhymes, he came to consider needless To the end, he likes to limit the position of the pause, keeping it usually after the fourth, fifth, or sixth syllable , to isolate, in grammar, sense, and pointing, couplet from couplet, and line from line , and, above all, to balance, as Waller and others had begun to do long before, the parts of the line against each other

> Poets themselves must fall, like those they sung ,
> Deaf the praised ear, and mute the tuneful tongue

In this process there is always the risk of monotony , but in Pope's hands the scales are those of a chemist Within a narrow range, the measurements are of the most delicate kind Here is the ' musical finesse ' praised by Cowper , and it bribes us, again and again, to forget anything that may be wrong with Pope's language, or with his own character, or with what he has to say

In *An Essay on Criticism* (1711) there is no clear code, and no original thinking The phrases about ' nature methodised ' and the ' rules ' and the ' ancients ' all mean much the same thing , but where is the idea behind them, the pea under the thimble ? And what a conception of ' art ' in the words ' and snatch a grace *beyond the reach* of art ' ! In truth, Pope is not really seeking ' rules ' at all , he is appealing for ' freer beauties ', and for a ' lucky licence ' , he is asking Homer and Virgil for ' some spark of your celestial fire ' No word is oftener on his lips than *fire* And he always has it himself, though it is hardly celestial , it may be the fire of anger or contempt , it is, at the least, an unfailing vivacity In the *Essay* itself, the flame sparkles

up when Pope comes to the great critics, to Aristotle and Longinus

Fireworks, too, can be a fine art, and the term is no disparagement of the *Rape of the Lock* Perhaps the poem is not everywhere so charming as it looks A certain contempt for Belinda and her sex peers out from behind the compliments, Pope writes as though the lady will never have the wit to feel his scratches Nor is the Cave of Spleen the happiest of fancies But otherwise all is 'airy substance' and gay mischief There is more pure poetry than in any other of Pope's works, and it is brought in, of course, by the sylphs, who were introduced in the revision against the wish of Addison the sylphs, with 'their fluid bodies half dissolved in light' The pomatum-box and 'alum styptics' lose their grossness (imagine what Swift would have made of them) and the scissors that cut the lock are of fairy metal When the court cards come to life, and the lock is turned into a *coma Berenices*, there is the same lightness and brightness

There is another kind of beauty, mingled indeed with rhetoric, in the *Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady* The occasion of the poem is unknown, but the opening, 'What beck'ning ghost', the dirge, 'By foreign hands', and the finale carry Pope for once into another realm of feeling, and make us think of the poet that he ceased to be The *Elegy* stands out beside his many paraphrases of Ovid and Statius and Chaucer, which exercised him for his task on Homer Ovid seems to have inspired something of the high-wrought, pseudo-passionate style of *Eloisa and Abelard*, a work which does not ring as true as the *Elegy*

II

The reader who does not consult the Greek may learn something of Pope's procedure in his *Homer* by confronting any passage with a bare prose translation He will perceive not only Pope's frequent ignorance or evasion of the meaning, his way of embroidering, and his bondage to antithesis, but also Pope's peculiar magnificence (which is better seen in the speeches than in the narrative parts or the similes drawn from nature), his rapidity, his mastery of sound, and his share of the 'fire and rapture' which he finds 'so forcible

in Homer' Poseidon, in the thirteenth Iliad, is spurring on the disheartened Greeks Homer says

But you, all of you who are the best in the army,—it is bad that you still abate the fury of your might Why, I myself would never quarrel with a man who kept away from war through cowardice, but I am angry in my heart with *you* My friends, very soon you will make the trouble worse by this slackness But now each one of you, put shame in his soul, and indignation ! for a mighty struggle, I tell you, is afoot Look how Hector, the mighty one, great at the war cry, is battling by the ships, and he has broken through the gates and the long barrier

Pope says

Think, and subdue ! on dastards dead to fame
I waste no anger, for they feel no shame
But you, the pride, the flower of all our host,
My heart weeps blood to see your glory lost !
Nor deem this day, this battle, all you lose,
A day more black, a fate more vile, ensues
Let each reflect, who prizes fame or breath,
On endless infamy, on instant death
For lo ! the fated time, the appointed shore
Hark ! the gates burst, the brazen barriers roar !
Impetuous Hector thunders at the wall,
The hour, the spot, to conquer or to fall

This is the *Homer* at its best, and I prefer to quote it, rather than to dwell on the diction of

When Jove, dispos'd to tempt Saturnia's spleen,
Thus waked the fury of his partial queen,

or to repeat the strictures of Coleridge on the night-scene in the eighth Iliad, where 'stars unnumbered gild the glowing pole' The book, for all its faults, is a *poem*, unlike so many *Homers* in English which are free from those faults, but which no one can read

Pope now relapsed upon the mock-heroic, and wrote the *Dunciad* a work brimful of energy, vivacity, malice, and mystification, and yet it was a waste of genius, and it is wearisome. There is hardly a genial passage except the dedication to Swift, without whom, says Pope, 'the poem had never been'. The prose *jeux d'esprit* of the original brotherhood, the 'Scriblerus Club', Swift, Pope, and Arbuthnot, with Pope's recipes for the *Art of Sinking in Poetry*, are much less fatiguing, and also briefer, than the *Dunciad*. This poem, in its original three books (1728), exalted Lewis

Theobald, the greatest emender of Shakespeare's text, upon the throne of Dulness Years afterwards, in 1742, Colley Cibber, who was even less of a dullard, was substituted, and a fourth book, under the influence of Warburton, was added, with the superlative, mock-majestical finale, which is really all about nothing 'In vain, in vain—the all-composing Hour . ' Pope's assaults on a hundred little authors, who would else have been forgotten, are none the more amusing for his pose of conducting a holy war against stupidity and bad verses Indeed, the motto of these wits, which may be expressed in Pope's line, 'That secret each fool, that he's an ass', will hardly bear expansion through several thousand lines, however scintillating As Sir Walter Scott remarks, Pope's 'war with the dunces' must have caused 'the most acute torture' to himself, and suffering of that kind does not favour poetry, or even satire.

III

But Pope settled down to a form that well suited his genius the epistle, namely, written in the free, Horatian, familiar style He had long since perceived its resources how it admits of a compliment, or a scoff, or a vignette, or a 'character', or a burst of eloquence He had pictured Teresa Blount exiled among 'dull aunts and croaking rooks', and the empty Paméla, wretched with her 'gilt coach and dappled Flanders mares', also his friend Harley in prison,

> A soul supreme in each hard instance tried,
> Above all pain, all passion, and all pride

An epistle is an elastic thing, it may swell out into a 'moral essay', and even into an *Essay on Man* in four parts From 1731 to 1738 Pope sat in the chair of the preacher and philosopher The *Essay on Man* gives the ambitious abstract scaffolding, the *Moral Essays*, on human character and on the use of riches, give Pope's direct observation of life One connecting link is the notion of the 'ruling passion' It is a clue to the contradictions in man, who at first sight is merely a chaos of thoughts and desires The passion may be vanity, or servility, or avarice, or, again, it may be love of country The theory lends itself to Pope's peculiar mode of portraiture by antithesis He balances, and accumu-

ates, and sprinkles in his tempered praises in order not to *seem* unfair

> Safe is your secret still in Chloe's ear,
> But none of Chloe's shall you ever hear

But all are governed by the 'ruling passion' Chloe, Lady Suffolk, or Atossa, Duchess of Marlborough, or Villiers dying in an 'inn's worst room' These are famous passages, and time has not worn down their lines Real equity does not enter into the question But Pope's manner is freer, more generous, and less artificial when he praises Swift or Arbuthnot He excels, above all, when he shows himself as he is, and forgets that he is an official patron of virtue If there is one picture I would choose to save, were all the rest of Pope to vanish, it would be that of 'Timon's Villa' in the fourth of the *Moral Essays* These seventy lines form a perfect whole, and are in his very best style He is there to the life, impatient, mischievous, and watching, nay spying, in the formal ducal garden, in the unused ducal library, in the chapel with its 'light quirks of music', and at the banquet, whence

> Treated, caressed, and tired, I take my leave,
> Sick of his civil pride from morn to eve

In 1754 the Prussian Academy of Sciences proposed an inquiry into the thesis of the *Essay on Man*, namely that *Alles ist gut* What, it was asked, did Pope mean by this, and what was the truth of the matter? Next year Lessing and Moses Mendelssohn issued a mocking pamphlet, entitled *Pope ein Metaphysiker!* The mockery was aimed at the pundits rather than at the poet Pope, says Lessing, has no system, for no poet *can* have a system (Lessing is driven, in passing, to describe Lucretius as a mere 'verse-maker') Careless of coherence, Pope had levied toll right and left, on Malebranche or on William King, seizing on any notion that he could fit into harmonious rhymes Had he not written to Swift 'permit me to wear the beard of a philosopher, till I pull if off and make a jest of it myself'? and had not the Academy taken the false beard for genuine? Later critics have explored more fully Pope's debts and inconsistencies, and the *Essay*, regarded as a 'system', has long been a ruin Pope borrowed much from his mentor Bolingbroke, himself a prince of borrowers At one moment

he might seem to be misreading Bishop Butler, when he justifies the presence of Catilines and Borgias in the moral order by that of plagues and earthquakes in the natural order At another he discovers the divine mind, and perfection, in every 'hair' Still, Pope is sincere, he is only jesting about the false beard Often he appropriates a large idea with all the passion of which he is capable, as in the lines on the spirit that 'spreads undivided, operates unspent' through all things, and in those on the transmutation of forms,

> Like bubbles on the sea of matter born,
> They rise, they break, and to that sea return

The language of the *Essay* can be very obscure and elliptical, often the wonderful sheen is only that of mica The best passages are those of general invective, and here the oratory is superb

> Go! if your ancient, but ignoble blood
> Has crept through scoundrels ever since the flood . . .

IV

Pope had already begun his six *Imitations of Horace* (1733–1737), in which he follows the fashion that in England had been set by Rochester He keeps close to the Latin, or embroiders freely just as he chooses, and he translates Roman into modern examples Hence the 'imitations' are in a true sense original Pope's skill is best seen in his treatment of the addresses to Augustus and to Florus Augustus, the conqueror, the cherisher of art and letters, becomes George the Second, who is saluted with elaborate ironical bows and 'congees' Loosely following Horace, Pope mints into enduring couplets the popular judgments, and also his own, on the poets and playwrights of the past, from Shakespeare and Milton to Cowley and Otway 'How Beaumont's judgment checked what Fletcher writ' and 'Who now reads Cowley?' have stuck in the mind of posterity more than many volumes of criticism In the epistle to Florus Horace sketches the changes in the Latin language and the poet's mission to refine it, and Pope's legerdemain is again perfect The old man is advised to make a graceful and resigned end.

Lusisti satis, edisti satis atque bibisti

You've played, and loved, and ate, and drank your fill

But one thing we miss, the sincerity of Horace Pope fails to move us with the voice of true experience.

ignoscis amicis ?
Lenior et melior fis accedente senecta ?

Canst thou endure a foe, forgive a friend ?
Has age but melted the rough parts away,
As winter fruits grow mild ere they decay ?

Pope's paraphrase is beautiful, if his own record is difficult to forget

In the *Prologue*, or *Epistle to Arbuthnot*, he is not leaning upon Horace, he speaks for himself, and this poem shows him at his best and worst and wittiest At his worst, in his scorn of indigent authors, in his self-praise, and in his vulgar furious 'character' of Lord Hervey At his best, in the honours paid to his father and to Arbuthnot, the physician and friend At his wittiest, in the celebrated lines on Atticus, who is Addison They are like some unfair portrait by an Old Master, which may be trusted to outlive the truth The inserted praises, the tone of hypocritical regret, are designed to deepen the final bad impression. Pope's power of manipulating his couplet grew to the last. In the two *Epilogues* of 1738 he adapts it (like Crabbe after him) to the ball-play of rapid dialogue

P The pois'ning dame—— *F* You mean—— *P* I don't——
F You do !
P See, now I keep the secret, and not you !
The bribing statesman—— *F* Hold, too high you go
P The bribed elector—— *F* There you stoop too low

The lady who wondered why Shakespeare allowed himself to make so many familiar quotations might also wonder about Pope He makes a dead set at the memory, few poets are harder to forget His lines—not always the best—have the stamp of the *mot*, or proverb Joseph Warton said that just because Pope is *not* a poet of the first order, he is 'a writer adapted to all ages and stations, for the old and for the young, for the man of business and the scholar'. There is truth in this, and it may be said, once more, that there is the rarer Pope, who sometimes attains to pure beauty :

See the wild waste of all-devouring years!
How Rome her own sad sepulchre appears,
With nodding arches, broken temples spread!
The very tombs now vanished like their dead!

V

We cannot ignore the verse of Jonathan Swift (1667–1745), some of it is literature, though we are tempted to call it sterilised poetry It is very accurate in its 'numbers'; and his favourite measure is the short colloquial couplet, which he uses with more dignity than Butler, and in a manner all his own His most humane production is the deft fable of *Baucis and Philemon* (1709), transmogrified from Ovid the tale of the country couple who were changed by two grateful 'hermits, saints by trade', into a parson and his wife, while their cottage grew into a church Then they were turned into yew trees, and one of these, long afterwards, was felled,

At which, 'tis hard to be believed,
How much the other tree was grieved

The numerous birthday verses to Stella have a beauty of their own, with their expression of a passionate and yet reasoned regard *Cadenus and Vanessa* relates, up to a point, the friendship of the Dean (*decanus*) with Esther Vanhomrigh Swift's aim is to cure Vanessa of her hopeless love for him, with what kindness and grace of fancy he may The high finish of this poem may owe something to his intercourse with his friend Prior Much of his fiercer verse belongs to the years 1731–1737, before his wits had begun to break Such are the lines *On Poetry*, and those on the *Day of Judgment*, the hardly sane tirades against 'Traulus', Lord Allen, and against the *Legion Club*, and the grim *Death and Daphne* There is the same economy and concentration, the same ease and flow, as we find in Swift's prose He seems to be improvising in a fit of cold anger, as with the spirits in Milton's hell, 'the parching air burns frore' The *Verses on the Death of Dr Swift* are his greatest performance in rhyme He prophesies exactly how friend and acquaintance, how the court and the pressmen and the clubmen, will receive the news, and then someone (who is Swift himself), 'my character impartial draws',—at full

length. This epitaph is, in effect, an answer to the critics who for two centuries have made overmuch of Swift's darker side It tells us, at least, what he had wished to do, and to be, throughout his career, how 'fair Liberty was all his cry', and how 'he kept the tenor of his mind To merit well of humankind'

The company of John Gay (1685–1732) is a relief after that of the colder and sharper wits around him, but his poetry is much diluted In his *Shepherd's Week* (1714) there are gleams of it, notes of real country things, flowers and owls and dormice, but the effect is at last prosaic In *Trivia*, that vivid picture of London streets with their smells and splashes and bullies who take the wall, the verse is a mere accident Gay's flat and neat and facile *Fables* were very popular, perhaps they are the best of their sort in English, but that is not much to say A pleasant breeze blows through *Mr Pope's Welcome from Greece*, which celebrates the completion of the *Iliad*, and the octave stanza is excellently managed But Gay did nothing better than one or two of the songs in the *Beggar's Opera* (1728) and *Polly*, the musical plays which bequeathed a most prolific species to the theatre Most of these songs depend upon the music, but few poets of Gay's age, or of the next, were capable of writing

> Sleep, O Sleep,
> With thy rod of incantation
> Charm my imagination,
> Then, only then, I cease to weep.

Pope and Swift could be benevolent and friendly, but they were too angry with 'dulness' and 'folly' to be tender towards commonplace human nature One poem of Matthew Prior, never printed till 1907 and baptised *Jinny the Just*, ought to live as long as the *Coverley Papers* Jinny is a country dame, with 'good household features', simple and merciful and pious her whole life from day to day is before us,

> While she read and accounted and paid and abated,
> Ate and drank, played and worked, laughed and cried, loved and hated,
> As answered the end of her being created

And she has for epitaph,

> Tread soft on her grave, and do right to her honour,
> Let neither rude hand nor ill tongue light upon her,
> Do all the small favours that now can be done her

Prior's gentle touch is found again in the lines on 'sauntering Jack and idle Joan' 'Without love, hatred, joy, or fear They led—a kind of—as it were' His fame has rested, safely enough if with less justice, on his ballads and epigrams, his easily turned compliments to his Cloe, his happy (and more heartfelt) addresses to children, and on his light social rhymes in general He is a master of the appropriate measures, and especially of the undulating rapid anapæstic Like his successors Praed and Thackeray, he is a man of the world, he knows the great world, too well to take it too seriously There is a streak of philosophy in him, not bitter or exactly melancholy, and perhaps to be expressed by the ejaculation, 'Heigho!' In other ways, he is little more than a versifier, a very skilful one, of his own day He pens stiff odes, and compliments to great personages, turns the *Nut-Brown Maid*, deplorably, into a *Henry and Emma*, and writes a lengthy dull poem, *Solomon on the Vanity of the World* His *Alma, or the Progress of the Soul*, published in the *Poems* of 1718, is far better, it turns on the long-drawn-out fancy that the soul flits from one quarter of the body to another It is full of entertainment, there is the picture of the 'youngster' whose day is domestic, or debauched, according to the drink that he has taken,—milk and tea or 'port and potent sack'. Prior's *contes drolatiques* are as easily turned as ever, but tend towards the outrageous He moved in many circles, was an ally of the Tory wits, he was a skilled negotiator, and was imprisoned by the Whigs for his share in the Peace of Utrecht, but ended, not undeservedly, in the Abbey. It should be added that Prior can write admirable prose, of what is called the 'Queen Anne' kind —a misnomer, for the style is seen at its best in Goldsmith as well as in Addison In one of his *Dialogues of the Dead* he mimics with great adroitness the contrasted styles of Montaigne and of John Locke.

VI

Most of this verse[1] is, predominantly, *rational;* the matter, be it life and manners, or argument and exhortation, is the matter also of normal prose, and verse is thought of not as an essentially and alchemically different, but as a more pointed, and no doubt a nobler, way of conveying it. With this temper is associated the measure of Pope and Dryden, which comes so close to spoken oratory at one extreme, and to witty, angry conversation on the other, and also, within a lesser range, the favourite short couplet of Butler, Swift, and Prior. The language follows suit, it is the language of the rostrum, or the pulpit, or the *salon*, but hardly ever of the world of dreams and solitude. Within these limitations much is produced that we dare not refuse to call poetry, or at any rate rhymed prose that is breaking from its fetters. For seventy years, from the *Choice* of John Pomfret (1700)—a very popular and still most agreeable discourse—down to the *Deserted Village* (1770) this kind of writing is superabundant, and I will glance quickly at the best of it, before returning to the other kind of poetry, which points to the poetry of the future, and which all the while is growing in power and volume.

The elegy of Thomas Tickell on Addison, despite a certain stiffness, is a grave and lofty work, and expressive, like Dryden's lines on Oldham, of a private as well as a public grief. In satire, Edward Young's *Love of Fame, or the Universal Passion* (1725–8) which precedes Pope's *Imitations of Horace*, hits off with easy skill many a type of modish town lady. Young does not pillory individuals. But the next great practitioner, after Pope, is Johnson. Into his two adaptations from Juvenal, *London* (1738) and the *Vanity of Human Wishes* (1749), he puts all his stern experience and his native, his well-warranted melancholy. The verses on the scholar, on the conqueror, and on old age, ring like an iron bell:

> Year chases year, decay pursues decay,
> Still drops some joy from withering life away.

[1] From now onwards the names multiply so thickly that many of interest must be omitted lest the map become illegible. I may be allowed to refer to my *Surveys of English Literature*, from 1730 to 1880, in which an attempt is made to do justice at greater length.

Here there is a new kind of strength, a healthy and honest and curative bitterness, which finds its way into the rhythm and is most unlike, in its sanity, to the bitterness of Swift. There is the same weight of sound and thinking in the prologue written for Garrick, and in the lines on Levett The Latin stamp that is on all Johnson's verse brings it closer to his prose These 'classical' writers speak to us most nearly when their own emotions suddenly light up a generality, or relieve a diatribe Most of the satires of Charles Churchill (1731–1764) are dead, the *Rosciad* and the rest, for all their smashing vigour, his sad confessions, in the *Conference* and elsewhere, come from the heart There is a vein of true imagination in his *Gotham* His master, in language and versification, is Dryden, and Churchill, though he scattered his powers, has often a share of Dryden's energy and sonority But the grace, charm, and humour of which the style is capable are first seen in Oliver Goldsmith (1728–1774) clearly in the *Traveller* (1764), and most abundantly in the *Deserted Village* (1770).

VII

Goldsmith can be sententious, in a soft Irish accent, and with a melody that is different from Pope's

> All evils here contaminate the mind
> That opulence departed leaves behind.
>
> So blest a life these thoughtless realms display;
> Thus idly busy rolls their world away

But such passages belong to the argument, and the argument is not the strength of the two poems, it is only a setting for the memories and pictures In these the *Deserted Village* is the richer The schoolmaster, the parson, the cottage interior, are as well known to us as Dr Primrose, or as Chaucer's Clerk, and something of Chaucer, it is manifest, was reborn in Goldsmith It would be absurd to quote The *Description of an Author's Bedchamber*, with its 'rusty grate unconscious of a fire', may be contrasted, for its humanity, with Pope's inn, 'the floors of plaster, and the walls of dung', in which Villiers came to his end, it is another kind of 'realism' The contrast is further pointed by the characters of Reynolds and Burke in *Retaliation*, and the lines, with their anapæstic tune, are so carefully

written as to seem impromptu, yet every stroke is final The casual ditties on the mad dog and on Mrs Blaize and Tony Lumpkin's song have the same sort of completeness

There are only thirteen years between the *Deserted Village* and Crabbe's *Village*, which is written by way of a counter-blast, and with Crabbe (Ch XV) the tradition of Pope and Dryden takes a renewed life It had shown signs of exhaustion since 1750, the latent powers of the heroic couplet are swamped in the masses of 'mechanic art' Yet all the while, in the *Collection* of Robert Dodsley, first issued in 1748, and in its sequels, in miscellanies like the *Poetical Calendar* (1763) of Fawkes and Woty, in the *Country Justice* (1774, 1777) of John Langhorne, a forerunner of Crabbe, and in countless lesser authors, there are passages for the anthologist, in which Pope's couplet shows true vitality But it is time to hasten back to Pope's age and to the new poetry that was pushing through the hard soil

VIII

At first the 'return to nature' means a timid pleasure in scenery and country things, apt to express itself in general or artificial terms, like Addison's 'verdant landskip' and Lady Winchelsea's gentle Zephyr and lonely Philomel In her *Tree* there is more vision, and a more imaginative treatment, like Vaughan, and Cowper in his *Yardley Oak*, she dreams of the tree's life-history and fate Thomas Parnell's *Hymn to Contentment* has touches that recall Marvell

> Then, while the gardens take my sight
> With all the colours of delight

But of considered 'landskip' there is little before John Dyer's *Grongar Hill* (1726) and *Country Walk* Here are 'woody valleys, warm and low' and the

> long and level lawn,
> On which a dark hill, steep and high,
> Holds and charms the wandering eye

Nature is already pictorial Dyer sees for himself, although, like many a later poet, he well remembers his *L'Allegro* In the same year, 1726, came out the *Winter* of James Thomson (1700–1748), and by 1730 all four of the *Seasons* had appeared Thomson revised them again and again, not always for the better. 'There is no thinking of these

things', he says in his preface to *Winter*, 'without breaking out into poetry' That is just what his poetry does, it breaks out, through a medium that both inspires and hinders it, namely the language and verse that he has studied in Milton He writes as though he would vindicate the ways of nature to the age of George the Second, which has forgotten her, and it must be done in the grand style The obvious risk is that the style may be too grand for the gentler and smaller objects described Latinised epithet and syntax, the periods of *Paradise Lost*, hardly suit

> The redbreast, sacred to the household gods,
> Wisely regardful of the embroiling sky

This, perhaps, is a kind of playful pedantry, and what follows is right and simple, as if Cowper had written it

> then, hopping o'er the floor,
> Eyes all the smiling family askance,
> And pecks, and starts, and wonders where he is

Thomson's more elaborate diction has been minutely dissected by the learned It is faulty enough, but no one will again be guilty of it, and it needs no further illustration When all is said, the *Seasons* is an enduring performance The vision is there, and the words are there, in abundance —for the changing weather, for light and cloud and shadow, for large horizons, for the 'mountain-cisterns' and the 'pure virgin-snows' and the 'dim-seen river', 'ten thousand wandering images of things'. There is also much alien matter,—discourses on political liberty, moral commonplace, and sentimental stories not ill told But Thomson is penetrated with the feeling that there is an omnipresent life and mind behind phenomena It is often nobly expressed, though it is not exactly mystical, he is, more than once, visibly prophetic of Wordsworth In his poem to the memory of Newton he speaks almost like a devout pantheist Yet we return rather to his pictures of storm and flood and whirlwind, and to his simpler scenes The awkward pseudo-Miltonic turns, though never far away, in the end vex us little

> Blue through the dusk the smoking currents shine,
> And from the bladed field the fearful hare
> Limps awkward, while along the forest glade
> The wild deer trip, and often turning gaze
> At early passenger

He found Spenser's manner easier to attain than Milton's, and in a few verses of the *Castle of Indolence* (1748) he has caught it more nearly than any poet before or since For the moment, he *becomes* Spenser he echoes the drowsy music, the rise and fall of the stanza, and he imitates, very skilfully and even to the point of parody, Spenser's habit of humorous portraiture—a habit that may escape the casual reader of the *Faerie Queene* Thomson is said to have been himself of an indolent temper If so, it qualified him to dream of the 'pleasing land of drowsihead', and of the 'shepherd of the Hebrid isles Placed far amid the melancholy main' However this be, he was active enough to produce a heavy, exalted eulogy on *Liberty*, and several no less heavy tragedies But even here poetry can be recognised The *Castle of Indolence* is only the best out of a score of Spenserian imitations Samuel Croxall in the age of Anne and William Thompson in his *Nativity*, written in 1736, had now and then recaptured, with curious accuracy, Spenser's colouring His more familiar style is pleasantly copied in the *Schoolmistress* (1737, 1742, 1748) of Shenstone, half in sympathy, half in travesty The fashion persisted, but I will not enumerate the other experiments, from which a little poetry can still be gleaned

IX

Many are the tomes of blank verse that betoken the influence of Milton It is difficult to say whether it did more good or harm Milton was very widely read, edited, admired, and copied, and, while this was so, the idea of great poetry, the existence of the unattainable great style, could not be forgotten But he was also misread, the idiom that he, and he only, had acquired by toil and discipline, was taken as a pattern, and a number of lesser poets puffed themselves out, frog-like, in the effort to reproduce it Edward Young's *Night Thoughts* (1742–1745) won both at home and abroad a glory that is now hard to comprehend. It is a turgid, impossible work, hardly redeemed by a few splendid sallies Young had been bereaved, and he had suffered, but such declamatory grief is always painful to the reader The best pages of *Night Thoughts* are those in which the satirist and epigrammatist of the *Universal Passion* puts forth his head again There is more poetry in the brief

Grave (1743) of Robert Blair, who is haunted by the ghosts of the Elizabethans There are many imitation Georgics, also in blank verse, on the sugar-cane, the hop, or the cider-apple Others, less ambitious, are on hunting, like the agreeable *Chase* of William Somervile, or on hygiene, such as Dr John Armstrong's *Art of Preserving Health* (1744), the pleasantry of a man of taste with a good ear for verse Another physician, Mark Akenside (1721–1770) is more noteworthy It is once more evident that the poets cannot be divided into sharply contrasted parties, in different lobbies The *Epistle to Curio* is a well-written satire, in Popian couplets, or rather a rebuke, addressed to a fickle politician The *Pleasures of Imagination* (1744), in blank verse, is an exposition of æsthetic theories chiefly drawn from Addison It is elaborate and pompous, but there are sudden curious anticipations of Wordsworth, in a diction singularly pure Akenside had a genuine passion for nature, and a sense of the mystery behind her He also wrote a *Hymn to the Naiads*, and some odes and inscriptions for grottoes, which are far in advance of his time both in their style and in their sensibility to the Greek spirit The brief inscription to Actaea I have elsewhere compared, as others may have done, to a 'Hellenic' by Landor With a little extra warmth in his composition Akenside would have figured among the poets as more than a pioneer

X

Song and lyric, in the years between Rochester and Collins, are seldom or never rapturous, or transporting, or transcendent,—or in a word, great, but they are at no moment extinct, there is good writing in plenty A silver age, if you will, but the metal is often pure, and delicately patterned Through Congreve, Granville, Walsh, and others the finished verse of compliment, with more or less heart in it, and generally less, is handed down, it continues during the first half of the century, and then becomes rarer There is a profusion of little lyrics of the gentler kind, on the home affections The *Song to Winifreda* (1726), gravely published by David Lewis as a 'translation from the Ancient British', is the most beautiful example A new kind of elegant artifice appears in William Shenstone (1714–1763), who is remembered for his *Schoolmistress* and for the 'pastoral ballad', 'My

banks they are furnished with bees' Shenstone's pretty, delicate tinkle is heard in other lyrics and ballads. The lines 'From Lincoln to London', on the couple who elope to Gretna, are full of spirit and gaiety Shenstone was something of a recluse and a *précieux*, in his retreat at the Leasowes with its laid-out landscape, but he has his cheerful side, and his essays and maxims reveal critical sensibility A little later, in John Cunningham's *Day, a Pastoral* (1763), 'the village windows blaze, Burnished by the setting sun', linnet and cuckoo are 'tuning sweet their mellow throats', and we hear 'the clack of yonder mill' Cunningham has the eyes and ears of a poet, and his verses (1766, 1771) well merit re-editing

By this time Gray and Collins have been on the scene, and Collins has left it Ever since the *Seasons* the inner as well as the outer eye has been turned, more and more, on the English landscape and its inhabitants But all this is Southern poetry, and it is time to glance again, after so long an interval, at the Scottish Muse.

XI

If we try to look back at her in the spirit of Burns or Fergusson, we perceive two large, and fairly distinct, masses of verse The first is the body of floating song and ditty, chiefly anonymous, often living by the tunes to which it is attached, and awaiting the hand of Burns to give it lasting form The second is chiefly the work of known authors, and much of it is satiric, and boisterous, and descriptive of manners and of persons The ancient six-line measure, used first in Provençal, is the favourite Burns was steeped in this literature, made its themes and metres his own, and applied them to the life around him The vernacular tradition stretches back past the seventeenth century to Alexander Montgomerie and Alexander Scott, William Drummond and Sir William Alexander used English The lives of the two Sempills, Robert and his son Francis, cover most of that century, and, to see the tenacity of the tradition, the *Habbie Simson* of the former can be read by the side of Burns's *Tam Samson's Elegy*, which is modelled upon it. The interest of the earlier revival by Allan Ramsay (1686–1758), though great, is mainly historical, his own

poetic gift is fitful, and the pastorals in his *Gentle Shepherd* (1725), though better than Gay's, are full of the conventions He made some happy songs of his own, but he dealt somewhat flatly, and also ambiguously, with those that he sought to edit into shape The result appears in his *Tea-Table Miscellany* (1724–1732), a storehouse that with all its deficiencies laid open many treasures, and further, in the *Evergreen* (1724–1727), in which Ramsay rescued and reissued much good old poetry The renewal of song, and the coming flood of inspiration from the past, is clearly prophesied. By his side the two William Hamiltons, of Bangour and of Gilbertfield, aided the revival, the former lives by his *Braes of Yarrow* The finest Scottish lyrics between these writers and Fergusson are to be read in Palgrave's *Golden Treasury* Lady Anne Barnard's *Auld Robin Gray*, and Jean Elliot's *Flowers of the Forest* We may add a verse or two of the *Cuckoo*, by Michael Bruce, and another *Braes of Yarrow*, by John Logan, to whom the *Cuckoo* is sometimes credited Much of this Scottish verse has a long-drawn wail in it that is foreign to anything in English, and, at the other extreme, there is the equally un-English

> Blythe and cheerie, blythe and cheerie,
> Blythe and cheerie we'll be a',
> And make a happy quorum

of John Skinner's *Tullochgorum* (1776), and of many another catch

This merrier wilder strain predominates in the young Robert Fergusson (1750–1774), to whom Burns paid so many honours and acknowledgments His *Hallow Fair* is not effaced by *Halloween*, nor the *Farmer's Ingle* by the *Cotter's Saturday Night* *Leith Races*, *Daft Days*, and *Braid Claith* set him by the side of Burns—the more amiable Burns—as an humorous delineator of scenes and manners Fergusson's method is minute and realistic, and his pages are thick with the vernacular He has abundance of lyrical movement, and he is much more than a poet in the making, although he was cut off early and unhappy in his end.

CHAPTER XV

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY (II)

I

THE new poetry came to depend more and more upon the old There was a Renaissance not only of the classics and of Chaucer and the romances and ballads, but *of* the Renaissance of Spenser, and Shakespeare, and the lyrics, and Milton Much that is instructive has been written on these contributory streams to the 'romantic movement', but here we are concerned only with the result Otherwise there would be more to tell of the brothers Warton, in whom many of these streams found their channel Joseph, the elder (1722–1800), that sound critic of Pope, is more of a poetic enthusiast than a poet, his odes and other verses are fervent, accomplished, and derivative Thomas Warton (1728–1790), the Professor of Poetry, besides satires of the ordinary kind, produced some pleasing skits and squibs Like his brother, he studied the younger Milton, he celebrated the *Pleasures of Melancholy* His sonnets have a true meditative beauty, and there is much spirit in martial lays like the *Crusade* In his lines (1782) on the painted window in New College, his most deeply felt poem, he discovers that Reynolds, by his Attic truth of design, has *reconciled* 'the willing graces to the Gothic pile' Warton thus frees himself from the undue, the almost resistless, fascination of unmixed Gothic But he loves Romance with his heart, and the classics and 'Reason' only on principle His *History of English Poetry* (1774–1781) will always be saluted with honour He explored, he revealed, he quoted and more or less arranged, great new masses of mediæval literature, and above all of Romance, the effect of which, he says, is to 'captivate the imagination, and to produce surprise'. The words are a clue to a work

which is content in general to display the facts without too much critical comment The span of the *History* is professedly 'from the eleventh to the seventeenth century'; but Warton, who had earlier published his *Observations on the Faerie Queene*, does not reach Spenser, and his later chapters are incomplete

By the twenty-three poems of William Collins (1721–1759) the renewal of lyric, in its higher forms, is seen to be assured. There are bursts of a rarer melody and of a purer poetic phrase than had been heard for more than a generation Collins wrote *Persian Eclogues* (1742), *Verses to Sir Thomas Hanmer* (1743), twelve *Odes* (1747), another on the *Death of Mr Thomson*, the *Dirge in Cymbeline*, and the unfinished *Highland Ode* on 'popular superstitions' Even in the *Eclogues* and the lines to Hanmer there are touches of beauty, and the happy epithet

> Where swains contented own the quiet scene,
> And twilight fairies tread the circled green

Here, as always in Collins, the more formal and the imaginative styles are intermingled Even in the odes *To Evening* and *On the Poetical Character*, and in 'How sleep the brave', his most flawless pieces, there are remnants of the frost the sylvan shed, the hopeless fair, the weeping hermit But nothing can really spoil these poems In the odes *To Fear*, *To Pity*, *To Liberty*, the *Manners*, and the *Passions*, there is more convention, and Collins often gives trouble by his elliptical or doubtful grammar His melody is safer than his language But there is a lyric energy that comes straight from the source in the lines on Joy in the *Passions*, on 'sad Electra's poet' and 'old Cephisus' in the ode *To Simplicity*, and on the death-haunted youth in the *Highland Ode* It is a habit of Collins to start with an abstraction, to apostrophise it, to muse on it till it assumes colour and dress and movement, and then to deck it with literary or historical associations He is nourished on Alcæus and Sophocles, on Tasso and Shakespeare and Milton and Otway, and on his own ardour for liberty and for England. In the *Highland Ode*, printed long after his death, he takes up a prosaic book of travels, and many wraiths and visions arise before him This poem, like the *Passions*, shows his mastery of intricate stanza-music; it is perhaps his most

imaginative work, both in its power, and in the sense that the scenes were visited only by the mind, while in *Evening*, the harmonies are discovered, for the eye and ear, of a scene familiar and English.

II

The verse of Thomas Gray (1716–1771) is also scanty, and includes translations from Propertius, Statius, Dante, and Tasso It is a sort of by-product of his tireless reading in the ancient and modern poets, and among these Pindar, Horace, Milton, and Dryden chiefly affected him the first two as to his structure, the other two as to his versification and language Like Collins, Gray put most of his strength into the long and the short ode, and there is the same mixture of a current poetical dialect with true and original utterance His work has three clear characteristics it is full of literary reminiscence, avowed and admirably harmonised, it is strictly planned and proportioned, and his ideal of lyric poetry, which in spite of his disclaimer he often achieves, is 'extreme conciseness of expression, yet pure, perspicuous, and musical' In the result, there is not one of his serious poems, however laden with 'cumbrous splendour', or hampered by enforced compression (for the 'perspicuity', certainly, sometimes fails) that does not stand wear His letters and many of his prose notes are literature too, but their virtues are of another kind Gray as a correspondent is easy, gay, friendly, talkative, learned, there is plenty of salt, and whim, and humour, and no formal diction at all The whim and humour come out also in his verse, in the *Satire on the Heads of Houses*, and in *A Long Story*, which is a pleasant thing and in the good tradition of Prior

There is melancholy—not at all the 'white melancholy' that Gray imputes to himself—but melancholy either remembered, or foreseen, or present and lowering, in most of his shorter odes *On a Distant Prospect of Eton College*, *On the Pleasure Arising from Vicissitude*, and the *Hymn to Adversity* The last of these, which is moulded on Horace and was studied by Wordsworth for his *Ode to Duty*, is the most abstract, yet the most impressive of the three, it is also the best designed. The feeling behind is vehement and personal; but it is expressed in abstract terms, and

Gray does not, like Collins, elaborate these into pictures, but keeps to a single pregnant epithet or phrase, 'grim-visaged comfortless Despair' or 'hard Unkindness' altered eye'. In the poem on the cat he is mocking at his own manner, or rather at that of the age, he sees how easily it can become pompous There are traces of poetic dialect, like 'Confusion, Terror's child', in the odes which are adapted (chiefly at second hand) from the Norse and the Welsh the *Fatal Sisters*, *Descent of Odin*, *Triumphs of Owen* But all have a wonderful swiftness of movement and fullness of sound Some lines are like an anticipation of Scott

> Thrice he traced the runic rhyme,
> Thrice pronounced, in accents dread,
> The thrilling verse that wakes the dead,
> Till from out the hollow ground
> Slowly breathed a sullen sound

Of the three longer odes the *Progress of Poesy* (1757) is by far the greatest, and, with the *Elegy*, is Gray's greatest work It is not popular like the *Elegy*, it requires, as he says, 'explanation for the many', and this he offers in his notes It is condensed beyond measure, and the poetical history is much foreshortened ⸗ But it is a masterpiece of changing harmonies, against which it can only be said that the schemes of strophe and antistrophe are, as Johnson noticed, difficult for the ear to follow⸗ The vision of the origins of poetry, the verses on Cytherea and Hyperion, and those on Milton and Dryden, with the poet's final and too humble glance at himself, are all in the stateliest manner The *Bard*, though it shows the same mastery of correspondent and sonorous rhyme, is more theatrical, and heavily crowded with allusion The *Installation Ode* (1769), which is not in regular or 'Pindaric' measure, but is made, like *Alexander's Feast*, for 'air' and 'recitative', is a more perfunctory work, yet even here, in the picture of 'willowy Camus', Gray recovers a Miltonic music an echo of the *Nativity Ode*

⸗ The *Elegy in a Country Churchyard* (1751), so long meditated and so strictly and delicately revised, is a poem rounded and complete all but the 'epitaph', which reads like a less happy afterthought. No other work that has sunk into the general memory is so full of abstract phrases, but

these suit the inscriptional character of the whole, and also the timeless, universal nature of the sentiment This is lasting, like the churchyards themselves, elm-hung and history-haunted, of the South and Midlands It gives voice to our feeling, so hard to define, for the stranger dead who are there and yet not there, and for whom we are neither happy nor unhappy The reflection on what the departed villagers might have been under brighter stars is not tragical, and hardly pathetic, it is pure reverie, it is only the poet, not they themselves, who are disappointed We are made, for some reason, to learn the *Elegy* by heart at an age when this sentiment is all Greek to us, but there is no harm in that, for experience only brings out its power Gray's Latin verses are accomplished, and some of them disclose his shyer and more intimate feelings The alcaics written in the Grande Chartreuse are the best known, but the elegy in hexameters on Richard West in *De Principiis Cogitandi* is at least as deeply conceived as the sonnet 'In vain to me the smiling mornings shine', on which Wordsworth spent some needless censures

III

In the 'mediæval revival' that became more conspicuous between 1760 and 1780 there is a large element of sham, which delays the historian of letters longer than the seeker after poetry The works of 'Ossian' (1760–1763) were proffered by James Macpherson as translations from the primitive and traditional Gaelic Whatever scraps of true material he may have used, these 'poems' present an imaginary age, time and place, atmosphere and culture, all are falsified, and Macpherson's bastard prose is for ever slipping into dreary metre But he had a gleam of genius, and though the fame of the blind 'Ossian' has long melted into his own mists, the melancholy wail and ghostly scenery of *Carthon* and *Temora* carried them for a time over Europe, and the debate over their 'authenticity' echoed long We use no such language of Bishop Thomas Percy, the editor of the *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765), although he trimmed into 'elegance' many of the precious popular ballads (Ch V) that he rescued He had before him some of the best in the language, and often in the best versions; and he made known, or much better known, treasures like

Sir Patrick Spens and the splendid *Glasgerion* Some of them he drew from forgotten printed sources, others from the famous MS. which was only to be fully disclosed and edited a century later The *Reliques* also brought to light many Elizabethan lyrics of the first rate, too long obscured, and some from the fifteenth century They further contain avowedly modern ballads, chiefly poor things, of which Percy's own *Hermit of Warkworth* is a specimen Many other collectors followed, some of them honest students like David Herd and Joseph Ritson, and others the reverse.

IV

The picture of the fifteenth century presented in the *Rowley Poems* of Thomas Chatterton (1752-1770) is imaginary, but it is the dream of a poet It is well to forget for the moment the story of their inception as a jest and their development into a forgery, the sources of their made-up language, and the whole dispute, long since at an end, over their 'authenticity' These matters, like the boy's life and death, are for some poem or romance that still awaits an artist Set the songs in *Ælla* beside Blake's 'My silks and fine array', and the *Excelente Balade of Charitie* beside the *Eve of St Mark*, and the kinship, not merely the common source of inspiration, of Chatterton with his successors is evident In the *Balade* (like Keats) he draws on Chaucer, though more largely upon Spenser, and in both there is the spirit of devotion, of quiet, and of pilgrimage Like Blake, he draws also on the Elizabethan songs, but he has a soul of his own as well, a particular turn of colour and language His longest piece, the *Bristowe Tragedie*, of nearly four hundred lines, is a fabricated ballad of the best order The prevailingly jogtrot tune, and also the heroic and pictorial style, are perfectly echoed

> Bolde as a lyon came Sir Charles,
> Drawne on a clothe-layde sledde,
> Bye two blacke stedes ynne trappynges whyte,
> Wyth plumes uponne theyre hedde

The roguery in all this, and in the *Freere of Orderys Whyte*, counts for much in our pleasure But Chatterton is often carried away into pure poetry, as in 'O! synge untoe mie roundelaie' or 'Tourne thee to this shepsterr swayne', the

songs that bedeck the 'tragedy' of *Ælla*, with its pretence of a story At other times, as in the *Battle of Hastings*, he adopts a level narrative manner not unlike Drayton's. The whole style of the *Rowley Poems* is more Elizabethan than Chaucerian, it is the setting that affects to be mediæval. Chatterton dreamed out a world of his own, distinct like that of an historical novel, with processions and costumes and ceremonies, with an invented poet Rowley, and with the actual Canynge, sometime mayor of Bristol, for his protector. The church of St Mary Redcliffe, named in the *Storie of William Canynge*, with its muniment-room, is ever in the background of the vision Chatterton also wrote a mass of satires and pastorals in ordinary English and the ordinary mode, and even here the poetry is sometimes audible.

V

There is no mock antiquity about Christopher Smart's *Song to David* (1763) He seems, while composing it, to have had before him his own rhymed versions of the Psalms, to be published two years later The *Song*, though in a sense a mosaic of texts, is not in the least like a psalm. Its text is *Benedicite opera omnia*, but nothing, for all its beauty, can be less 'sublime' With its 'scholar bulfinch' and 'mining coney', with David's 'muse' ('The more than Michal of his bloom, Th'Abishag of his age'), and with 'The seraph and his spouse, The cherub and her mate',— with all this, the *Song* is everywhere amusing It is also glowing and gorgeous and infinitely odd The structure is careful, and the poem has a wavelike progression At the crest of many a verse is a keyword expressing either an attribute of David ('Strong, constant, pleasant, wise'), or of the works of the Lord, 'sweet', or 'beauteous', or 'glorious', and out of these each stanza is developed Or the word 'Adoration' is sounded, line after line The effect is enhanced by the touch of inconsequence and wildness.

> For ADORATION, incense comes
> From bezoar, and Arabian gums,
> And on the civet's fur
> But as for prayer, or ere it faints,
> Far better is the breath of saints
> Than galbanum and myrrh.

Smart like Collins had long eclipses of the mind, but there is nothing insane in his perception that there is some splendid secret behind all the objects and messages of sense He was known in his lifetime for various fables, Georgics, satires, and the like, and for heavy prize poems on the attributes of the Deity Some of his short lyrics show his gift, but the *Song* was ignored, not to be reprinted in full for fifty-six years

The twelve years after the death of Chatterton were a great age of prose, with Gibbon, Burke, and Johnson in the fullness of their powers Poetry, on the very eve of her recuperation, might seem to be going into a rapid decline This interval is mildly brightened by the *Minstrel* (1771, 1774) of James Beattie, who was inspired by Percy's essay on the wandering mediæval bards Edwin the pensive hero and his counsellor the moral hermit are shadowy beings, of no period at all Beattie, like Waller, is 'smooth', and he manages Spenser's stanza smoothly, though not at all in Spenser's manner Much of his language is that of his time, and might be called official, there is the 'sylvan reign', and the 'majestic scene' Here and there are true, simple, and concrete notes of landscape and country things, the 'lake dim-gleaming' and the 'bewildered stream', and 'slow tolls the village-clock the drowsy hour' Beattie does not give us much, but poetry, as we know, 'reneweth like the moon', and in 1783 came the *Village* and *Poetical Sketches*, in 1785 the *Task*, and in 1786 *Poems* by Robert Burns

VI

Crabbe and Cowper, Burns and Blake can be measured, if we so desire, by the extent to which they severally break away from the reigning traditions George Crabbe (1754–1832) is the most orthodox, he is faithful to the pointed couplet and to its attendant rhetoric What is new is its application, on a large scale, to stories of grey ordinary life William Cowper (1731–1800) at first wears the gown, and preaches in the couplet, but then he deserts Pope, and joins the train of Milton, adapting blank verse to quiet familiar scenes and aiming in the end at plainness and simplicity. Robert Burns (1759–1796), it must be remembered, was brought up on Pope and Thomson, as well as on Scottish

verse, and could write both well and ill in unmixed Southern English Of the four, only William Blake (1757–1827) flung away the whole 'classical' baggage with shouts of derision, the effect of which is sometimes ludicrous But his lyrics, like many of Cowper's, and most of the vernacular poems of Burns, bear no mark of age or date

But Crabbe wears admirably too, and his coat of frieze is curiously shot with silver He shows progressive skill and power, and his final and predestined form is the tale told in heroic couplets In his early works, the *Library* and the *Village*, there are sharp strokes and precise descriptions, but they are sketch-book jottings that have yet to be fitted into a design For some twenty-two years after the *Newspaper* (1785) he published nothing, but amassed material Then, in 1807, he produced *Poems*, and in 1810 the *Borough*, in which some of his best stories are embedded *Abel Keene, Peter Grimes* In 1812 appeared *Tales*, in 1819 *Tales of the Hall* Writing now in the age of Scott, and even in the age of Shelley, Crabbe was hardly touched by his poetic surroundings Once or twice he seems to hold a corner of the magic carpet of Coleridge *Sir Eustace Grey*, otherwise a commonplace lyrical ballad, is suddenly transformed by the dreams of the madman who is carried by fiends—'no peace, no respite, no repose'—through all the elements and the polar night of the Arctic region But Crabbe's tales are chiefly laid in the low-lying scenery of the Eastern counties or the midlands He watches the slow tragedies brought about by absence, or treachery, or by the simple lapse of years He is not afraid of violence *Smugglers and Poachers* is no mere melodrama, but charged with primitive love and jealousy, there is a fratricide, enacted in a moonlit wood Peter Grimes is another murderer, and a miser, his deathbed is haunted by the wraith of his victim, who, he exclaims, 'has no compassion in his grave'. In lighter mood, Crabbe describes the pleasures of a boy turned loose into a library, or the discomfiture of a husband who bets that his obedient wife, 'a weeping willow' of a woman, will allow him to go to Newmarket, and who loses his bet Crabbe, always a parson-moralist, had also been a doctor, and he dissects mood and motive with his slow and sound if old-fashioned surgery But a tale in rhyme, no doubt, can be a good tale without being

much of a poem, and Crabbe's style frequently tumbles back into something which, just because it is in rhyme, is worse than decent prose Yet a poet he really is, with a feeling for beauty in nature and in character I may quote a single picture, it is not one of storm and cloud, nor of the dismal flowerage on his native shore at Aldborough, but of a homelike scene, the essence of it is in the last line.

> How stately stand yon pines upon the hill,
> How soft the murmurs of that living rill,
> And o'er the park's tall paling, scarcely higher,
> Peeps the low church, and shows the modest spire.
> Unnumbered violets on those banks appear,
> And all the first-born beauties of the year
> The grey-green blossoms of the willow bring
> The large wild bees upon the labouring wing . . .
> And then the wintry winds begin to blow,
> Then fall the flaky stars of gathering snow,
> When on the thorn the ripening sloe, yet blue,
> Takes the bright varnish of the morning dew,
> The aged moss grows brittle on the pale,
> The dry boughs splinter in the windy gale,
> And every changing season of the year
> Stamps on the scene its English character.

VII

The tragic side of Cowper's life has attracted the poets and psychologists, but the great body of his verse and prose is sane, cheerful, and companionable The losing fight that he fought against religious mania is reflected in many a letter, and in the dreadful *Castaway*, and his poetic powers were delayed by his illnesses He was over fifty before he found his true line, though he had already made some of his happy lyrics The *Olney Hymns* (1779), written in conjunction with John Newton, his fatal mentor, hardly gave him his chance A few of them, tender and profound in feeling, continue the tradition of Charles Wesley, but the most telling and rhetorical of all, 'God moves in a mysterious way', has found the widest audience The *Poems* of 1782–1785, *Table Talk*, *Expostulation* and the rest, are satirical, ethical, and declamatory, they are in the nature of a farewell to Pope and his following There are excellent sketches, in the style of Young rather than of Pope, of the prude on her way to church, and of the 'fine puss-gentleman that's all perfume' During the years 1782–1786

Cowper was at his best, and the variety of his talent is conspicuous He was a gentle person, but the *Loss of the Royal George* shows that he was not too gentle Between Drayton's *Ballad of Agincourt* and Campbell's *Battle of the Baltic* there is no such heroic lyric. *John Gilpin*, the jolliest and most rapid ballad of its kind, has the distinctness of a drawing by Rowlandson The plan of the *Task* is to have no plan, and it winds about like the Ouse It is a poetic diary without dates There are pages of the writer's opinions, attacks upon a wicked world of which he knew little, full of libertines and freethinkers, patches of pedantry and Latinism—although some of these, like the overture on the 'sofa', are serio-comic—playful imitations of Milton, who was Cowper's avowed poetic master There is some keen satire, which seems to cry out for rhyme, like the lines on the 'things that mount the rostrum with a skip', the modish preachers, also sudden bursts of Thomson-like imagery, as on 'Winter, ruler of th' inverted year' But Cowper is most at home with the simple record of things seen, with his own pains and pleasures, and with the 'pleasure in poetic pains, Which only poets know'. The hues of the leafage, the snowfall, the 'groves, heaths, and smoking villages remote', the postman and the waggoner, everything is noted In the lines on the stricken deer, Cowper describes his own hurts with piercing simplicity, but he soon escapes from them, and takes refuge in the world without, so charming and so amusing The dwellers in it partake of its quietude, only now and then, describing Kate the crazy girl, does Cowper see in it a reflection of his own troubles One of his friends and followers, the Rev James Hurdis, in his *Village Curate* (1788) has the same gentle kind of delineation, describing, in the same sort of verse, the parson's day, the birds and country plants, and the village fair with its quacks and cheapjacks

In Cowper's lyrics, as in his letters, the melancholy mood is exceptional, although it is heard in some of the best of all Such are the lines on his mother's picture, such the sonnet and other verses to Mary Unwin But there are scores of light things, on Beau the spaniel, on the garden shed, on the *Cockfighter's Garland*, on anything at hand, all admirably turned *Catharina* and the *Winter Nosegay*, 'The poplars are felled' and 'I am monarch of all I survey'

are in various forms of the sweet anapæstic measure which Cowper favours In his later years, during his clear intervals, he was much occupied with his translation of Homer into somewhat stiff and literal blank verse His renderings of Milton's Latin poems show a study of Dryden's, rather than of Pope's, heroic metre.

VIII

There is humour and satire in Cowper, satire and irony in Crabbe, and since the time of Prior there had been a whole army of lesser wits and humorists It takes some goodwill to relish much of their work to-day, and I will barely touch on it Some of the light raking rhymes of Sir Charles Hanbury Williams on the place-hunters of the first two Georges deserve recovery, and Williams could turn a pretty compliment The short neat octosyllabics of Robert Lloyd in honour of Shakespeare (1760) (whom he likens to a forest) and in mockery of the 'rules' are to be remembered, like the echo-parodies of Pope and Dryden in *A Pipe of Tobacco* (1735) of Isaac Hawkins Browne The cleverish sketches of Christopher Anstey's *New Bath Guide* (1766) hang in their corner beside the pictures of the city by the novelists Better than all these, and long unnoticed, is Sir John Henry Moore's *Duke of Benevento* (1778) a little tale, in irregular rhymes, of how a spirited humorous lady shames her lover into manliness and outwits the Turk her captor It recalls, as a critic has said, 'the spirit and note of Byron'[1] It is also worthy of Canning, whose verses, and those of his friends, Frere and Ellis, in their *Anti-Jacobin* (1798) belong to the age of Erasmus Darwin and Southey Darwin's *Botanic Garden*, otherwise the *Loves of the Plants* (1789, 1791), which describes the Linnæan system in brassy and highly-coloured couplets, is hardly remembered save by the *Loves of the Triangles*, even as Southey's false sapphics are remembered by the *Needy Knife-Grinder* The heroic measure flames up brilliantly again in Canning's *New Morality*, which is aimed against Rousseau, sham sensibility, the English Jacobins, and all the works of Whiggery. William Gifford, in the same

[1] D Nichol Smith, *Oxford Book of XVIIIth Century Verse*, 1926, p xi

measure, and in his *Bavıad* and *Mœvıad*, hammers fiercely at small poets and smaller playwrights, all now forgotten.

IX

The song 'My silks and fine array' in Blake's *Poetical Sketches* is written as with the pen of Shakespeare, and everywhere there are echoes of the old drama and of Spenser But the *Mad Song* is something new, and is more like Shelley, Blake is always at home in the elements, whether at peace or in stormy motion

> Lo! to the vault
> Of pavèd heaven,
> With sorrow fraught
> My notes are driven

In the *Songs of Innocence* (1789), Blake's purest and simplest, though not his greatest, body of verse, nature is all kindness, and life all happiness. The gospel is that of love, and as yet there is nothing to forgive The poet speaks for the child, who moves in a state of trust and wonder through an amicable world of lions, and lambs, and emmets, and to whom God 'appeared like his father, in white' The tunes in these songs are easy and short-flighted, seldom, as in *Holy Thursday*, 'like harmonious thunderings the seats of heaven among' There may be stray echoes of rhymed versions of the Psalms, or of Dr Watts's ditties for the young, but the whole strain is a fresh one, and quite unlike that of Vaughan or Traherne In the *Book of Thel* (1789) there is the same spirit, and something too much of what Blake calls a 'milky fondness', but the imminent note of discord is heard in the conclusion The measure is the rhymeless line of seven accents, which was afterwards Blake's favourite in his prophetic books a noble instrument, easy to misuse

The first series of those books includes *Ahania, Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793), and *America*, the forerunners of a row of 'prophecies' as terrible to the student as an army with banners. Blake's prodigious world of symbol admits of no brief or facile charting His changing moods and opinions cannot be called a system of ideas, and they are wrapt in a tangle of mythologies and cosmogonies, also continually changing, and highly repellent Masses of his writing, especially in the later 'prophetic books', not only

say little to the intelligence but defeat and dishearten the imagination None the less, a certain definite history has been traced in his ruling moods and tenets It has been examined by very careful scholars, and there is more coherence than at first seems possible in his use of parabolical terms and proper names The earlier books proclaim, in general, the release of the human soul from the bonds of the creeds, of the coercive moral law, of institutions, of the merely empirical messages of the eye and ear, and of the logical reason Man shall now be free to taste the just delights of the senses The poetic imagination, the one organ of truth, is no longer tied by the 'classics' and the spirit of contemporary rationalism This antinomian temper, after a long interval, becomes deeply modified, though never formally dropt, and at last Blake appears as the champion of a 'reinterpreted Christianity',[1] dwelling now on the themes of love, mercy, and forgiveness The war-cries of this earlier campaign are loud in the *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (? 1790), with its maxims in monumental prose, and in the *Visions* there is one great morning chant Oothoon, the spirit seeking for joy, conjures Theotormon, the symbol of conventional ethics, to arise and be free

> The lark does rustle in the ripe corn, and the eagle returns
> From nightly prey, and lifts his golden beak to the pure East,
> Shaking the dust from his immortal pinions to awake
> The sun that sleeps too long Arise, my Theotormon! I am pure,
> Because the night is gone that closed me in its deadly black

In *Songs of Experience* (1794) the child is now facing the world, where cruelty and destruction reign, and the poet, sharing his dismay, beholds these powers of evil In the *Tyger* they are mysteriously united with supreme strength and beauty There are tirades, not always powerful or poetical, against priestcraft and all social ills, one of them, *London*, is Blake's mightiest brief poem, and resounds with 'the youthful harlot's curse' In the *Sick Rose*, *Infant Sorrow*, and 'Hear the voice of the Bard', the effect is subtler, for the image is left as an image and has not hardened into a doctrine Many other lyrics of various dates accord with one or the other set of *Songs*, such are *Morning*, the

[1] I take this phrase from the edition of the *Prophetic Writings* by D. J Sloss and J P R Wallis, two vols, Oxford, 1926 a critical edition of the text, and the most searching exposition of the whole subject

Wild Flower's Song, and 'Silent, silent night'. The *Land of Dreams* reminds us of the *Pearl* (Ch III) the father and the boy see the dead mother in that happy land, but they cannot cross the sundering river Parables like the *Mental Traveller* and the *Crystal Cabinet* call for Blake's skilled interpreters He has much gnomic verse, such as *Auguries of Innocence*, it is a string of disjointed couplets, some absurd and some most beautiful, on the rights of animals to be spared, and on the changes of joy and pain in our experience In the *Everlasting Gospel* maxim and indignant question soar out of rhetoric into great poetry *Was* Jesus gentle and humble, and *did* he enjoin chastity? No, thunders Blake in his rushing rhymes, Jesus taught *my* proud antinomial gospel The poem is dated about 1810, it is not, however, Blake's last word on the Christian code

The earlier series of prophetic works continues (1794–1795) through *Europe*, the *Book of Urizen*, the *Book* and the *Song of Los* Here the parables thicken, the oases are fewer, and the measure is often the choppy abrupt line of four beats, suggested by the false prose of 'Ossian' Blake's stay of three years (1800–1803) by the Felpham sea inspired some of his loveliest celestial visions, they are recorded in his verse letters to his friend Butts 'Over sea, over land, My eyes did expand Into regions of air, Away from all care'. I do not begin to describe the huge *Four Zoas*, which Blake did not print, or *Jerusalem* or *Milton* (1804) Through the infinite fog of these works comes many a burst of radiance, presently eclipsed The song in *Milton* on the flowers and the nightingale is a psalm of natural beauty excelled by none of the 'romantic poets' The dialogue of Joseph and Mary in *Jerusalem* is a chant of forgiveness and sacrifice Latterly Blake returns towards the mood, now much deepened, of *Songs of Experience*, it is the gospel of love, 'which seeketh not itself to please' This is heard in the brief but comparatively finished *Ghost of Abel* (1822) But in point of form he is still the 'Anarch old' He declares that he will give up all regular, or 'monotonous cadence', and he falls into a lawless, yet more or less balanced, kind of biblical prose, divided into long lines Not that he wholly abandons lyric The verses in *Milton* on 'England's green and pleasant land' are now famous, and quoted in the newspapers.

Blake's actual prose is more compact, powerful, and defiant than ever It is sprinkled through these prophetic books, and is seen at its best in the *Descriptive Catalogue* (1809) accompanying his picture of Chaucer's pilgrims Their characteristics are incised by Blake in enduring words He sees them all as permanent types of humanity, *sub specie aeternitatis*.

None of his poems were set up in type except *Poetical Sketches* and the *French Revolution* (1791), and these he never published The rest were produced in his peculiar 'illuminated printing'. Each engraved copy was tinted by hand, and was thus a separate work of art The script and the encircling design form one whole This unique alliance of language with line and colour is connected with Blake's habit, which was both bodily and mental, of 'vision'. The image came to him, often appearing as external to the eye, in a form that he considered final, and it must be reproduced unprofaned Hence much is left poetically formless, although Blake revised some of his verse considerably The *Tiger* is the classic example of the process, the earlier drafts are happily preserved In general, Blake is far more of an artist when he sings than when he prophesies It is easy to see why his poetry was long unknown except to a few chosen spirits like Lamb and Wordsworth The immense mass of his other paintings and illustrations belongs to the history of fine art, and it all throws light on his poetic visions.

X

Burns is not only a born singer, a great force of nature, he is a sure and careful artist It is quite right to speak of his flame, and spontaneity, and inspiration, but that is only half the story Whatever his doings as a man, as a poet he had himself well in hand, he was for ever revising and improving Proportion, economy of stroke, rapidity, immediacy of effect, all are there Even his work in Southern English can be underestimated Often, no doubt, it is poor and rhetorical, the verse of a middling follower of Gray or Thomson, he was well read from his youth up in the English poets of the century Their more official diction gets into the *Vision*, the *Cotter's Saturday Night*, and many

other good pieces But there is very little Scots in *M'Pherson's Farewell* or in *Ae Fond Kiss*, and often the Scots is scarcely more than a matter of *accent* Naturally, he is at his best when he abounds in the native words and idioms, with all their richness and colour and range of expressive sound But his problem, like his performance, is different in the two broad divisions of his work namely in his songs, and in what may be called for contrast his 'talking' poetry

In the volumes of 1786, 1787, and 1793 the lyrical spirit is everywhere, but there is relatively little pure song There are epistles, fables, laments, satires, musings, descriptions, confessions, and *Tam O'Shanter* Here Burns had before him a mass of traditional patterns, precedents, and metres He was well versed in the literary poetry of Scotland, through Fergusson and Ramsay backwards His three or four favourite measures came down to him technically perfected The chief of them, the very ancient six-line stave of *Poor Mailie's Elegy*, *Scotch Drink*, *Address to the Deil*, *To a Louse*, and many another masterpiece, had long been classical, and Burns uses it for every mood and purpose, more easily, indeed, than he uses prose Perhaps the nearest path to an understanding of his passions and emotions is through a study of his rhythms The frisking movement of the *Halloween* stanza, with its final 'bob' ('Fu' blythe that night'), the gaiety of the inner rhymes in the *Epistle to Davie*, which is in another ancient stanza, the shattering rat-tat of 'Calvin's sons! Calvin's sons!' in the *Kirk's Alarm*, all these lively or angry metres mark the very pulses of the poet Nowhere is the strength and speed of his style more apparent than in the short lines of the *Twa Dogs* and *Tam O'Shanter* The rake's progress in the one, and the journey of Tam in the other, are signalled, stage by stage, by the pavior-beat of the rhymes:

> There, at Vienna or Versailles,
> He rives his father's auld entails,
> Or by Madrid he takes the rout [*road*]
> To thrum guitars an' fecht wi' nowt; [*cattle (bulls)*]
> Or down Italian vista startles . . [*rushes*]

Burns inherited from the Scottish past not only these forms but the passions and sensibilities that they express Other poets had shown a humorous sympathy with animals

or a love of Lowland landscape or a simple-minded piety. There had been plenty of flings against the clergy, of 'flyting' and 'sculduddery', of devil-may-care sallies, and of sharp realistic pictures of life and manners Burns differs chiefly from his forbears in having all these powers and instincts at once,—all, as we say, 'under one hat', and also by his wider and firmer artistry Some sides of the Scottish genius, naturally, are foreign to him There are wilder and fiercer streaks in Dunbar, his only rival, and we need only think of the different imaginative world of Scott Burns does not appropriate the border ballad, though a ballad-strain is heard in verse like *John Barleycorn* and *A Waukrife Minnie*

In the songs, which need no praise or quotation, his procedure is different from that observed in his poems The editors show at length how he coupled wandering words with wandering airs, blended bits of different old ditties, and added whatever of his own might make for perfection No such stroke of rescue-work has ever been done for the Northern or the English Muse Most of the material was going under, soon to be forgotten, when Burns took it in hand, much, until he refined it, was not worth saving The best of his songs appeared in the *Scots Musical Museum* (1787–1796) of James Johnson, others in George Thomson's *Scottish Airs*, from 1793 onwards The treasure is so large and the range of tune and topic so wide that sifting is not easy The warlike or patriotic poems, *Killiecrankie*, 'It was a' for our rightfu' King', and 'Scots wha hae', are few and famous The majority are love-songs, and these might be roughly arranged in a scale of feeling At one extreme are such simple, perfect, and homefelt things as 'Ay waukin, O' and 'Laddie, lie near me', at the other, the law-defying strains of the *Rantin' Dog* and *Scroggam Duncan Gray* exists in two versions, one of them for the drawing-room Somewhere on the road between jest and earnest is 'What can a young lassie?' A large group, of the gentler kind but not melancholy or cheerless, is represented by *Mary Morison*, 'Wilt thou be my dearie', and 'Of a' the airts the wind can blaw' The songs that he saved or created, like his other more strictly original poems, show once more that Burns was many men in one He paid for it, and made others pay for it, in his life; but his art owes everything to his many-

faceted nature and not a little to his faults Matthew Arnold somewhere finds the real Burns in a phrase like 'Whistle o'er the lave o't', but this is too like the theory of the ruling passion No doubt there is the repentant, orthodox Burns, slightly posing, who, we feel, is by no means the ultimate man In 'Clarinda, mistress of my soul' he is still less himself But the Burns of 'I'll meet thee on the lea-rig, My ain kind dearie, O', and of 'Thou hast left me ever, Jamie' is real enough It must be admitted that in the *Jolly Beggars, a Cantata*, his most perfectly planned and concerted and glorious composition, he 'whistles' indeed Like much of his verse, it was not printed in his lifetime

Many Scottish writers follow in the wake of Burns As we know, education and the love of letters have always struck deeper in the North among the common folk, than in the South with its stiffer barriers of caste, and the demand for song and poetry has seldom failed of a supply. Burns, naturally, gave a most potent impulse to both, and its force was still felt in the age of Scott and of Hogg, the 'Ettrick Shepherd' Meantime, the most gifted successor of Burns was Robert Tannahill (1774–1810), whose *Braes of Balquhither*, *Lass o' Arranteenie*, and other songs have the true music, he was himself a musician Tannahill ranged over many other fields, producing much humorous and familiar verse, but he is essentially a lyrist The national lilt is heard in some of the songs of Allan Cunningham, otherwise known for his industry in collecting, and also in mischievously manipulating, popular verse and ballad The work, earlier in date, of Hector MacNeil is also remembered, especially his *Scotland's Scaith* (1795), a lively tirade against the love of liquor These and others have been dimmed by Burns, none the less, they are a bright little constellation.

CHAPTER XVI

THE ELDER ROMANTICS

I

MUCH has been written, and admirably written, about William Wordsworth (1770–1850) on the 'growth of his mind', and the inner crisis recorded in the *Prelude*, on the sudden flowering, and singular slow fading, of his inspiration, on his ties with Coleridge, on his abnormal sensibility to natural things, and his mystical vision, on his psychology, and his traces of metaphysic, and on his influence over other poets All these are matters for long, delicate discussion, I prefer, in these few lines, to emphasise the artistry of his best writing. Wordsworth lives by the hard, basaltic strength of form that he found for his experience, and not least for his happier and gentler experience He forces himself on every open mind, however unwilling or alien in its sympathies, just as he forced himself, after many days, on his own generation Come back to him, year after year, and he *wears* It is an old story that his good work and his bad are much intermixed, often in the same poem The good work itself is on many levels, and of a wonderful variety It has often been 'selected', and by this time may almost be said to have selected itself

II

There is little of it in the *Evening Walk* or *Descriptive Sketches*, as they were published in 1793, both works were afterwards revised Even here the conventional diction and couplet do not conceal the minute, if still too literal-minded, observation of nature There is more power, and many a sign of the underlying intellectual conflict, in

the tale *Guilt and Sorrow* and in the murky tragedy of the *Borderers* In the *Lyrical Ballads, with a Few Other Poems* (1798), Wordsworth has joined forces with Coleridge. The volume is the result of the triple alliance sealed in the Quantock hills, with Dorothy Wordsworth for the third member Among the 'other poems' is *Tintern Abbey*, which from one point of view is the fine flower of eighteenth century meditative poetry In Akenside and Thomson there are clear traces of an intimate, rapturous feeling for natural beauty, and also of the sense of 'something far more deeply interfused', and Wordsworth uses the same kind of blank verse as theirs, only more nobly sustained and cleared of frigid diction The poem is also an epitome of the long inner history for which he had not yet found the words In the ballads, he sets himself to make poetry out of the 'real language of men', artistically chosen The men were to be simple, often peasant, speakers, and when Wordsworth speaks in person he aims at an equal simplicity and 'reality' This means that he tries to sail as near as he can to the rocks of prose and still to be justified in his use of verse Much of what the reviewers said about his failures is quite true Most of *Goody Blake* and of the *Idiot Boy* must be handed over to them, and in *Simon Lee*, which was afterwards much altered, Wordsworth could not edit out all the weaknesses These doubtful cases (such as the *Thorn*) were analysed long afterwards by Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria* (1817), and with them, Wordsworth's conception of 'real language', which had been left ambiguous It is not clear whether he had referred only to diction, or also to the order of the words, which, as Coleridge shows, is affected by the use of verse, 'metre paves the way to other distinctions'. But these criticisms leave untouched such work as 'It is the first mild day of March', the *Lines Written in Early Spring*, or *Expostulation and Reply*, the style of all these being, on its own level, pure and perfect Not less pure, and marked by a high and passionate intensity, is that of the *Forsaken Indian Woman* and of 'Her eyes are wild'

> 'My father cares not for my breast,
> 'Tis thine, sweet baby, there to rest'.
> 'She talked and sung the woods among,
> And it was in the English tongue.'

The English tongue, indeed, it had never sounded just that note before No matter whether it is the real language of men, the point is that it is the real language of poets Wordsworth's greatest poem of this kind is the *Affliction of Margaret* ——, written in 1804 The 'poor widow who lived in the town of Penrith' is here endowed with the speech of genius

> —Or hast been summoned to the deep,
> Thou, thou and all thy mates, to keep
> An incommunicable sleep

III

It is agreed that Wordsworth was at his best during the years 1797 to 1808 More *Lyrical Ballads* had appeared in 1800, and many new *Poems* in 1807 The *Prelude*, not printed till 1850, was also, in its first shape, written during this period As to the sequel, the anthologist has to find his account in the *Excursion* (1814), the *White Doe of Rylstone* (1815), *Laodamia*, and the host of later lyrics, sonnets, and meditations Wordsworth wrote on, and flashed out, to the last, but the mass of grey featureless work is ever on the increase He survived his own genius, but he lived to enjoy, without surprise, the firstfruits of his fame I may notice briefly, with many omissions and without heed of dates, the three chief divisions of his poetry, which run into one another but still are tolerably well marked These are the lyrical, the heroic, and the reflective

All ballads, it has been truly said, are lyrical, but the lyrical power is at its highest pitch in the ballads that are dramatic, of the kind that I have just quoted When Wordsworth speaks himself, it is often in the vein of reminiscence In well-known words he describes the revival in 'tranquillity' of an emotion formerly experienced. We do not doubt the intensity of this 'recollection', charged as it is with prolonged and often painful brooding Still, it is at one remove from the original experience, as in *Daffodils* or *Beggars*, and although it is meditation that has brought the perfect form, the beauty is plainly of a different order from that of Shelley's more immediate song The reflective or ethical element intervenes, deepen-

ing the idea yet lowering the flame The cry, for instance, of the two lines ' My heart leaps up when I behold A rainbow in the sky ' at once becomes a text, as the poet looks before and after The experience, however, is often immediate, and seems to have been recorded at once , as in the lines *To a Highland Girl*, and in those *To H C , Six Years Old* (Hartley Coleridge) , in these cases the poet adds a prophecy, thinking, in the former poem, of his *future* memory of the joyous apparition

The long-drawn-out chant of the great irregular ode, *On the Intimations of Immortality in Early Childhood*, is not everywhere sustained The third and fourth verses contain some false rhymes and jigging, nay almost skittish measures The address, in the eighth, to the child as a ' mighty prophet ' is, as Coleridge suggests, somewhat beyond the occasion ; little language is left for describing Isaiah or Ezekiel But the ode as a whole has a majesty of harmonised language and movement that makes us think of Milton , nor did Milton ever *rhyme* a period of such compass and so exalted as that which begins ' O joy ! that in our embers ' Wordsworth's memories of childhood, and the solace upon which he falls back in compensation for their loss, are sincere and quite literally meant , and in the note written in his old age he justly defends his poetic use of the idea of pre-existence The Horatian *Ode to Duty*, more rigid in style, is perfectly chiselled , and the lines on the ' glad hearts ' that are duteous by instinct connect themselves with Wordsworth's feminine figures, Lucy and the Highland girl , who seem to him to be the last word of the visible nature whence they spring

IV

Another kind of lyric is seen in the *Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle* and in the martial parts of the *White Doe*. Wordsworth is here a master of the lay, and his blood is up, and we think of the youth who had been eager to fight in France But most of his heroic verse is in sonnet-form, and political in subject Much of it, again, belongs to the year 1802 *On the Extinction of the Venetian Republic*, *To Toussaint L'Ouverture*, ' Milton, thou shouldst be living at this hour ',' and the sonnets written near Calais They are full of Wordsworth's patriot passion and regret, and they

form part of his inner biography Also many are built in perfect symmetry, on the Italian model which Milton had revived, the sonnet to Milton is a faultless example This structure had been skilfully used by Thomas Warton, William Lisle Bowles, and not a few other poets of the last age [1] In 1802 came also 'Earth has not anything to show more fair', which hangs, as a master-picture, beside 'The World is too much with us', of four years later In 1806 Wordsworth wrote the two sonnets on the ship, the three *To Sleep*, and *Personal Talk* The sonnet became his favourite, chosen form for the record of a single thought or impression. He wrote hundreds, and some of the later ones ('Surprised by joy', and the first on King's College Chapel) have the old quality One freedom he often allows himself, the use of a new second inner rhyme in the second quatrain, as in 'It is a beauteous evening' Sometimes, as in 'Surprised by joy', the tide of feeling, and therefore the sentences, overflow the edges of the metrical sections Wordsworth's heroic poetry is linked closely with that in which meditation is predominant The slow rolling rhymes of the *Happy Warrior* suggest those of Spenser in his portrait of the Good Courtier In *Laodamia* the aim is to rival the dignity and stillness of the antique, and the effect is not unlike that of statuary

V

Much of Wordsworth's reflective writing is in blank verse, likewise such narrative as *Michael* and the *Brothers* The pace is now slow and measured, unlike that of the lyrical ballads The feeling, though profound, cannot be

[1] There are, for example, two by the gifted young Thomas Russell (1762-1788), one of which makes us rub our eyes and ask 'Is not this Wordsworth, in his reminiscent mood?' It begins, 'Oxford, since late I left thy peaceful shore', and ends,

> But most those Friends, whose much-loved converse gave
> Thy gentle charms a tenfold power to please

The other, *Supposed to be Written at Lemnos*, is inspired by the *Philoctetes* of Sophocles It is one of the best produced in the eighteenth century, and is worthy of Wordsworth in his classical vein

> Hope still was his in each low breeze, that sighed
> Through his rude grot, he heard a coming oar,
> In each white cloud a coming sail he spied.

called melancholy. The actors are long departed, their whole life-history, however grievous, is seen as something remote, all has been harmonised by that greatest of poets, Time Nothing can show the strength and solidity of the poet's workmanship better than *Michael*, where the plainer parts are no less dignified than the solemn parts, and the effect is final The *Brothers* is still quieter in tone, the tale told is less dramatic, and both these stories, like those of Crabbe, leave a sharp sense upon the mind of the passage of years They are not for the young, whose business is anything but retrospect

In the *Prelude, or Growth of a Poet's Mind*, there is a good deal of external narrative, and much of this is prosaically done Often the use of metre is barely to be justified. But we read on, for Wordsworth, whether at Cambridge or in London, has an eye for manners and humours He is not above noticing the 'learned pig', or the 'bachelor that loves to sun himself', or the effigy of the quack-doctor. Still, there are dreary flats, and blank verse has to be a metre of all work, too often allowed to look after itself. The style unluckily is heaviest at some of the critical points in the story It does not cope very well with the political matter The account, interesting as it is, of the poet's disenchantment and of the fading, long firmly resisted, of his revolutionary zeal must be read rather for its matter than for its form, also that of his brief sojourn in the pit of Godwinian rationalism, when he 'yielded up moral questions in despair' There are, it is true, passages in the highest style, and yet,—to be heretical,—I think that too much has been made of these 'crises', which the self-engrossment and self-importance of the writer lead us to over-emphasise They were undergone by the Wordsworth about whom we care least, and the Wordsworth for whom we care most, the great poet, speaks loudest and clearest in the earlier books The first two and the fourth ('Summer Vacation') rise again and again to the height of *Tintern Abbey* The words are found for the intangible tremors and visitings of the awakening mind, when it is alone with nature

> I heard among the solitary hills
> Low breathings coming after me, and sounds
> Of undistinguishable motion, steps
> Almost as silent as the turf they trod

In time these feelings cease to be purely solitary, the poet comes to see that his fellows are part of nature, and to sympathise with their fates There is, moreover, an

> enduring joy
> From the great Nature that exists in works
> Of mighty Poets,

and the friendship with Coleridge, the affection of Dorothy, the ties of home complete the chain To these influences Wordsworth comes back, after his 'crisis', and in them he finds his solution This long history was far behind when he began to write the *Prelude*, it was behind him at the date of *Lyrical Ballads* The full material for study of the *Prelude* has only of late been published Wordsworth worked at his text for a whole generation, and a mass of his drafts and changes can be read beside the final version of 1850 The earlier ones, though less finished, are often fresher and more alive The book outgrew its original purpose It was to have been a 'prelude' to a great philosophic poem, of which only the *Excursion* and the fragment called the *Recluse* were done Much of the *Recluse*, which was first printed in 1888, is on Wordsworth's higher plateau of thought and execution The *Excursion*, in spite of some very lofty passages, and some moving stories, is heavy going But all three poems must be read to judge of Wordsworth's gifts He revived the great metaphysical style in our poetry and extended its powers Yet some of the happiest passages are those in which he takes a rest from introspection and didactics and simply dreams Once he refreshes himself among the Roman woods and rivers

> and the goat-herd lived
> As calmly, underneath the pleasant brows
> Of cool Lucretilis, where the pipe was heard
> Of Pan, invisible god, thrilling the rocks
> With tutelary music, from all harm
> The fold protecting

VI

Wordsworth, we have seen, often waited to recapture the poetic emotion, Coleridge caught it on the wing Of the two, he has the stronger lyrical impulse, it is felt throughout his four greatest poems, the *Ancient Mariner*, *Christabel*, *Kubla Khan*, and *Dejection*. All these were composed

during the years 1797–1803 The same gift reappears in the two songs of the play *Zapolya* (1817), 'A sunny shaft did I behold' and 'Up, up, ye dames, ye lasses gay', and it never dies out At the other extreme is Coleridge's meditative verse, where he comes nearer to Wordsworth and often writes under his influence and in his manner in 'This lime-tree bower my prison', the *Nightingale*, and the lines *To a Gentleman* These last were originally addressed to Wordsworth after hearing him read the *Prelude* Much of Coleridge's writing, of this kind, is essentially *soft* poetry, with

> murmurs musical, and swift jug jug,
> And one low piping sound more sweet than all

It is soft to the point of weakness, but then the weakness finds faultless expression Sights and sounds, he says in *Frost at Midnight*, 'stirred and haunted me With a wild pleasure' His frame was no less responsive to painful impressions, so that he remains, in a special sense, the poet of suffering It is all the keener when he suffers in a dream or vision, and as the result of a vehement moral regret This feeling is dramatised in the *Ancient Mariner*, in the *Pains of Sleep*, in the lines in *Christabel* on a broken friendship, it is uttered directly The commentary is found in Coleridge's life, and in the letters which are full of sad but beautifully exact self-analysis He has left little to be said by the critics who moralise on his shattered career, a story I need not tell

VII

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834), like Wordsworth, printed some verse of little note before their partnership began But the lyric note is already audible in *Lewti*, with its cloud-scenery, and there is the sensuous reverie of the *Eolian Harp*, with its 'flitting phantasies' that 'traverse my indolent and passive brain' These are but auguries (The *Ancient Mariner*, published in the *Lyrical Ballads* of 1798, is the one poem of any length in which Coleridge's 'shaping spirit of imagination' is in full command In the final version, where certain archaisms are removed, and other changes made for the better, it is as nearly perfect as may be in design and detail The poem was planned

in accord with the famous programme of the two friends, each of whom has described the division of labour In brief, Wordsworth was to take his matter from common or humble life, and to throw over it a 'colouring of imagination', Coleridge was to take a preternatural subject, and so to dramatise it as to make it seem real,—real by virtue of that 'willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith' The words have become classical, and the aim was achieved It has been shown that behind the *Ancient Mariner* there is a mass of memories drawn from much reading, memories of scenes, images, and phrases All are wrought, by a mental alchemy, both conscious and unconscious, into a complex and harmonious effect (The poem, as it stands, and without regard to these origins, can be studied without end, for its foundation in the popular ballad, the metre and diction of which are glorified almost out of recognition, for the skill with which the shooting of the albatross is kept as the *point de repère* of the drama, and for the union of pure fantasy with a definite evolution of the story and of the moral theme Moral it is, though never didactic, everything is passed through the imagination The crime, the punishment, the torture, the relief, the expiation, and the partial absolution, form the fabric of the fairy tale What releases the Mariner from his oppression is the reawakening in him of the sense of beauty, of the emotions of pity and sympathy, at the sight of the water-snakes

> A spring of love gushed from my heart,
> And I blessed them unaware!

This is the turning-point, the colour and music of the poem are here at their richest, and throughout are consummate We need not shake our heads too much over Coleridge and his failures, the *Ancient Mariner* is one and entire, and of a species apart)

The first two of the fragments that make up *Christabel* are without peer or parallel, not only in their witch-music, but as a study of the spell of silence that is imposed, by an evil power of fascination, upon an innocent soul But it looks as though Coleridge, himself fascinated by this idea, had begun to shape it without any clear notion either of the motive or the sequel No reason is given for the doings of Geraldine, that will serve even in the land of dreams. It

is otherwise in the *Ancient Mariner*, where all, in its own enchanted world, is distinct and intelligible. In the third part of *Christabel* the scene is that of the chivalrous lay, and the confusion is deepened, nor does the alleged ending, reported by Coleridge's friend Gillman, help us further The music, indeed, is always there The four-beat measure, with its elastic allowance of unstressed syllables, is an old one, though Coleridge thought that he had invented it, but he makes it wholly new, and its harmonies are found haunting Scott, Byron, and Rossetti In the dream-poem *Kubla Khan*, as in the *Mariner*, have been traced many memories, or sub-memories, of books, but the dream is here the artist, and, in spite of the interruption of the poet by the 'person on business', the work is complete and unflawed It is pure vision, and there is no story to be challenged The ballads of the *Dark Ladie* and the *Three Graves*, though telling us much of the poet's processes, must be called miss-fires His methods are still better seen in *Love*, for his changes in the text have been preserved Glowing as it is, the picture of the 'beauteous Genevieve' is touched with the mawkishness that is always a danger with Coleridge

In the ode *Dejection*, on the contrary, his stronger genius triumphs, in the very act of lamenting its own decay. He has sinned against it, and sees no hope of making reparation. The ode falls off, and almost falls down, towards the end, but in each of the central stanzas, irregularly rhymed, the long, superbly harmonised period comes to a satisfying close Coleridge, as it proved, was a 'too quick despairer'. He was thirty when he wrote *Dejection* and was to live till sixty-two, and his poetic faculty, though for long periods asleep, was never extinct There are lyrics like the *Knight's Tomb*, and those in *Zapolya*, also the *Garden of Boccaccio* (1828), a thing of clear grace and beauty There is poetry, too, in *Remorse*, the tragedy acted in Drury Lane, it is a recast of the earlier *Osorio*

But Coleridge returned more and more to prose In his letters, in his 'table talk' and 'jottings,' in his volumes of discourses, in his lectures, inspiration is never far away Many a stray sentence on natural sights and sounds, on his own sensations and afflictions, is exquisite in perception and rhythm The secret of his greatness in literary criticism

is the *inwardness* of his comments He remembers, and can put into words, the creative process When he speaks of Shakespeare, or Wordsworth, or the old divines, or of the varieties of prose style, it is with the intelligence of the artist and psychologist Coleridge also has a vein of hard sense, and illuminates Fielding and Defoe His intellectual influence is no less strong, though hard to define It was he who breathed life into the revolt against the empirical and rationalistic spirit, and his share in the conservative reaction, his speculations on church and state, will always arrest the historian of the English mind It was perhaps his engrossment with philosophy, quite as much as opium, that turned him away from poetry His son Hartley (1796–1849) inherited some of his critical power, and also ranks high among the English sonneteers He was more of a 'Lake poet' than his father, full of the quieter spirit of the region *Night* ('The crackling embers on the hearth are dead') is in the mood of Wordsworth's *Personal Talk*, and *November* is a delicate autumn landscape

VIII

Hartley Coleridge's best sonnets outlast, it must be feared, the long grandiose epics of the laureate, Robert Southey (1774–1843) *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801), the *Curse of Kehama* (1810), and the rest, are not wholly barren, but their interest is little more than historical Southey, a devoted and omnilegent man of letters, was no *vates*, his strength lies in the pure and simple prose of his lives of Wesley and Nelson, and of that pleasant miscellany, *The Doctor* His familiar ballads, *St Michael's Chair* and the *Old Woman of Berkeley*, are admirably spirited, the fiend, in the *Devil's Walk*, is a figure of fun, and not too dreadful, and the rats in *God's Judgment on a Wicked Bishop* do more gruesome damage than those in the *Pied Piper* The *Holly Tree* and *Brough Bells* are friendly, unambitious, and beautiful little poems

IX

There is a certain kinship, and also some give-and-take, between these 'Lake poets' and Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832) The *White Doe of Rylstone* is a lay, full of Wordsworth's

gentler sentiment and also of Scott's diction They all make ballads and lays Scott, in turn, had heard *Christabel* recited, and in the *Lay of the Last Minstrel* he tries to catch its changing measures Most of his good verse is either ballad, or lay, or lyric He owed much to the folk-ballad, and repaid the debt in his *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802–3) This is our second great treasury, the third and greatest is that of Child (Ch V) Scott not only gathered and saved some of the best versions of the best ballads, he worked upon them as an artist A masterpiece like the *Wife of Usher's Well* he left untouched When a good old version needed mending, he mended it, as in *Kinmont Willie*, with the utmost skill *Thomas the Rhymer* he presents in three parts, the first being the true old ballad The second is 'adapted', it is Scott's mosaic made up from old traditions, and well reproduces the popular style The third is 'modern', in the manner of his own lays,—a manner that indeed shows somewhat poorly beside the other This, too, is true of his *Cadyow Castle*, *Gray Friar*, and other original pieces, and of the translations from Burger, *Lenore* and the *Wild Huntsman*, which had kindled his interest in the beginning

X

The lays were dashed off in a heat, and the poetry comes and goes fitfully, in the earlier lays it never dies out They were all inspired by more than one of Scott's enthusiasms The first was for history, especially Scottish and mediæval The story of Bruce or of James the Fifth he saw for the romance that it really was Next, he was versed in all the lore of chivalry, he knew about dress and armour, about the etiquette of the tourney and the duel, the scenery of courts and castles, and the code of honour and gallantry Thirdly, he drew on the old rhymed romances made familiar to the public by his friend George Ellis, their measures rang in his ears On all this Scott imposes a style of his own, with many a loose end and *cliché*, but very swift and telling and sonorous nevertheless, a style meant to be shouted aloud rather than coldly perused His dealings with magic and with crime are not very effective. The *Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805) is none the better for the goblin-page, or *Marmion* (1808) for the hero-forger. But

here we forget everything for the sake of Flodden Field and the lovely lyrics *Rokeby* is also studded with songs, but the civil wars left Scott somewhat colder He recovers his power in the *Lord of the Isles* (1815), the story of the Bruce, but he had now begun the novels, and the vogue of Byron was tempting him to desert the lay Meantime he had made another, the *Lady of the Lake* (1810), that wears better than all the *Giaours* and *Laras*, with its well-kept secret and with the delicacy and chivalry of the treatment The poetic prefaces to the cantos in *Marmion* have a different kind of charm Scott speaks of himself and his friends, he pictures the old Christmas jollities, or the old thorn-tree relates the stag-hunts that it had witnessed, or the poet regrets that he cannot rival the Breton lays, or that Dryden never chanted of the Round Table He touches his highest point in the lines on Pitt, 'Now is the stately column broke'.

XI

The songs in the lays and novels, like those in Shakespeare's plays, are always part of the story or in tune with it Such are the snatches of Madge Wildfire, which include *Proud Maisie*—a song worthy of Shakespeare In the *Lady of the Lake* every ditty from 'Soldier, rest' down to 'My hawk is tired of perch and hood' suits the particular pause in the action Once or twice, as in the *Dreary Change*, Scott speaks for himself, but most of his songs are impersonal, concerned with the joy of sport or battle or foray They are of all degrees of merit, including the highest. *Lochinvar* and *Rosabelle* are excellent in the middle kind There are rattling cavalier songs, and there is one upon 'a great football match on Carterhaugh' The passion and uproar of a team, or of a clan, or of a gang, always sets Scott going His wildest chorus is *MacGregor's Gathering*, with the burden 'Gather, gather, gather, Grigalach,' dying into the distance His rarer lyrics are in every mouth the *Pibroch* and *Coronach* with their piercing pipe-notes, *County Guy* with its softer Southern beauty, and 'Where shall the lover rest'.

Scott could sing to the last, there are mottoes to show it in his latest novels, when he was killing himself that he might honour his debts. Like the seaman in his *Pharos Loquitur*, he 'scorns to strike his timorous sail'.

XII

Scotland produced other good writers of lay and lyric. The *Queen's Wake* (1813) of James Hogg, the 'Ettrick Shepherd', contains, in Scots, the high-grotesque ballad of the *Witch of Fife*, through which the wind whistles loud, and also *Kilmeny*, with its sweet and flowing and somewhat sentimental melodies, the tale of the maiden who was carried from earth to a fairy paradise, and then back to earth, and then back to 'the land of thochte agene'. Hogg, in his ramping lyrics *Donald M'Gillivry*, the *Village of Balmaquhapple*, and elsewhere, proves himself one of the best of the vernacular singers, and in his 'Lock the door, Lariston', there is an admirable rush and spirit and clamour Many of his good things are to be found in the *Mountain Bard* (1807) and the *Forest Minstrel* In his *Jacobite Relics of Scotland* (1819, 1821) he cheerfully mixes work of his own, in a way not easy to sift, amongst the antiques that he rescues Hogg is also a surprising ventriloquist, in the *Poetical Mirror* (1816) he catches the tones of Scott, Wordsworth, and Coleridge so nearly that parody verges upon poetry

The language of Thomas Campbell (1777–1844) is apt to be conventional or happy-go-lucky, and in spite of some energetic lines, his old-fashioned *Pleasures of Hope* (1799) and *Gertrude of Wyoming* must be described as extinct poems. His great virtue is in the rhythm of his battle-songs and romantic lyrics It is all his own, and in the *Battle of the Baltic* and the *Song of the Greeks* it has the precious quality of *exciting*

> Again to the battle, Achaians!
> Our hearts bid the tyrants defiance!

In *Hohenlinden* and 'Ye Mariners of England', there is the same effect, though of a blunter kind, and so with *Lord Ullin's Daughter* and *Lochiel's Warning* The *Soldier's Dream* is finer work, and the *Beech-Tree's Petition* is pretty and delicate, in the eighteenth-century style Campbell was a liberal-minded, public-spirited person, and in his *Specimens of the British Poets*, if not very critical, he is remarkably catholic

Another Scot, John Gibson Lockhart (1794–1854), the biographer of Sir Walter, novelist, and editor of the *Quarterly Review*, wrote one solemn lyric which has the note of

greatness, 'When youthful faith has fled', so justly cherished by Carlyle He was also a notable translator, and his *Spanish Ballads*, collected in 1823, are still fresh to the ear The long lines of the *Penitence of Don Roderick* and of *Lady Alda's Dream* roll and ring gallantly, but Lockhart's nicer handiwork is seen in *Count Arnaldos*, in the *Song of the Galley*, and best of all in the *Wandering Knight's Song*

My ornaments are arms,
My pastime is in war,
My bed is cold upon the wold,
My lamp yon star

To these names may be added that of the half-Scottish Thomas Babington Macaulay The *Epitaph on a Jacobite* is a poem of finished beauty, in the 'classical' style, and the heroic couplet once more shows its nobler capacities The *Battle of Naseby* and the *Lays of Ancient Rome* (1842), outlive the censure of critics who ask from them what they do not profess to offer Anyone can see what sort of poetry the *Lays* are not

And in the vats of Luna,
This year, the must shall foam
Round the white feet of laughing girls
Whose sires have marched to Rome

How common, obvious, unshaded! You would not write such stuff if you could? But *could* you? Are you too great, or too subtle? Well, but try.

XIII

No English poet, not even Milton, really *reproduces* the antique, if he tries, the result is a *pastiche* He can appropriate something of its form and temper to express his own vision and his own sentiment, and this is the achievement of Walter Savage Landor (1775–1864), in his *Hellenics*, epigrams, and lyrics His peculiar cleanness and distinctness of outline are learned in this school He aims at a Greek severity, or a Greek delicacy, giving himself, as he says, 'the toil Of smoothing under hardened hand, With Attic emery and oil' But his debts to Greek cannot be disentangled from his debts to Latin, which he used as a second mother-tongue, and we must fall back on Swinburne's epitaph

> And through the trumpet of a child of Rome
> Rang the pure music of the flutes of Greece

Landor's own voice, a proud and resonant voice, is heard everywhere behind that of Agamemnon, or Silenus, or the numberless personages of his prose *Imaginary Conversations* Idylls in verse like the beautiful *Hamadryad* and its sequel *Acon and Rhodope*, whatever they may owe to the Sicilian poets, are essentially Landorian, as well as modern and 'romantic', and a product of the age of Keats or Tennyson

These *Hellenics* were first collected in 1846 and 1847, many had been written long before, and many originally in Latin They are tales or scenes of middle length drawn from old mythology or tragic story, and not, like Tennyson's *Tiresias* or Browning's *Artemis Prologizes*, dramatic monologues The *Last of Ulysses*, *Cupid and Pan*, the *Madness of Orestes*, are typical titles None are more perfectly executed than the *Hamadryad*, *Enallos and Cymodamia*, and the short *Death of Artemidora* These are also the best known, and as an example of Landor's habitual large style and loftily sustained if slightly stiff blank verse may be quoted some of the lines *To Corinth*, which are less familiar

> Queen of the double sea, beloved of him
> Who shakes the world's foundations, thou hast seen
> Glory in all her beauty, all her forms,
> Seen her walk back with Theseus when he left
> The bones of Sciron bleaching to the wind,
> Above the ocean's roar and cormorant's flight,
> So high that vastest billows from above
> Show but like herbage waving in the mead,
> Seen generations throng thy Isthmian games,
> And pass away, the beautiful, the brave,
> And them that sang their praises. But, O Queen,
> Audible still, and far beyond thy cliffs,
> As when they first were uttered, are those words
> Divine which praised the valiant and the just

Landor's lyrics and epigrams range over many years Those addressed to 'Ianthe', Sophia Jane Swift, afterwards Mme de Molandé, are both early and late The lines 'Years, many party-coloured years' are no less concise and final than those 'On the smooth brow and clustering hair'. The verses written in old age have a majestic quality of their own 'I strove with none' is the most famous, like many others, it proclaims the writer's apartness of temper.

'I hate the crowd', he announces, it is the attitude of another classicist, Ben Jonson, and in Landor is no less genuine, though not without the same element of pose and arrogance His praises of his friends, of the elect, multiply in his later years At various times he does honour to Wordsworth, Southey, Lamb, Hood, and Robert Browning; always with peculiar grace and felicity One of his most deeply felt and stately elegies is addressed *To the Sister of Elia* The span of his literary production is lengthy indeed. *Gebir*, a kind of romantic epic, appeared in the year of *Lyrical Ballads; Last Fruit Off an Old Tree*—and it was not the last—in 1853 In his tragedies, of which the chief are *Count Julian* (1812) and *Andrea of Hungary* (1839) there is no lack of striking situation, or of dignified verse, or of grasp of character, but alas, in the result they are heavy, and Landor's talent was not dramatic Probably the eight lines of *Rose Aylmer* outlast, even in the memory of students, the thousands that swell out his dramas. Landor's younger brother, the Rev Robert Eyres Landor, was a true scion of the stock and a poet of kindred yet highly original talent He was long forgotten, but has of late received more of his due He buried himself away, and his poems too, suppressing them too effectually, but there are pages of great beauty and power in his tragedies *Count Arezzi* and the *Earl of Brecon* (1841) His tales, or fantasies, the *Fountain of Arethusa* and the *Fawn of Sertorius*, ought to be reprinted for their strong imaginative prose

XIV

Sir Henry Taylor's long history play—really a dramatised novel in blank verse—*Philip van Artevelde* (1834) is a poem of living interest, by no means one of the once-admired, respectable works that are mentioned only in histories On a heroic and coloured story of Froissart Taylor grafts, besides much else, a love-romance, and out of the 'damsel' barely mentioned by Froissart he creates a true heroine, the high-souled and loyal Elena. In 1381 Philip, son of the murdered statesman Jacob van Artevelde, quits his leisure to lead the distressed burghers of Ghent, conquers Ghent and much of Flanders, rules justly, beyond the standards of his age, and is at last defeated and killed by

the French The characters are all clear and sharp We may feel that there are more brains than poetry in this drama, which is laden with politics, and there are many flats, but there is much *diffused* poetry, and a level gravity of language not unlike Massinger's The tone is kept subdued, in accord with the programme of Taylor's preface. He is a careful, conservative, and interesting critic up in arms against the Byrons and Shelleys, whose subject-matter, he objects, is fantastic and fails to address the intelligence In *Edwin of Deira* he is less careful of history and less afraid to let himself go, the curses of the fanatical Dunstan are refreshing after much high discourse In these plays, and in his comedy the *Virgin Widow*, Taylor also reveals a gift of elegant lyric

Sinks the sun with a smile,
Though his heart's in his mouth,
And night comes the while,
With a sigh from the South

Like them, love, are you,
In your coming and flying,
For you smiled me adieu,
And you welcome me sighing
(*Edwin the Fair*, I, x)

It remains to mention the last and one of the best of the long line of Miltonic poems, the translation by Henry Francis Cary of the *Divine Comedy* It was published as a whole in 1814, the *Hell* had appeared in 1805 But Cary is really a belated writer of the previous century His blank verse is good and dignified and varied, though somewhat stiff with inversions, and is free from conventional 'diction' His accuracy is still praised by scholars Dante is dimmed in any translation, but Cary, in his close tracing, preserves not only the meaning but much of the plainness and strength of the original His work can be read as poetry

Two writers may just be named here who are remembered —be it hoped ever-freshly, for single poems Blanco White, for his high-wrought sonnet upon *Night*, and Charles Wolfe, for that simple classic, so perfect in its rhyhm, the *Burial of Sir John Moore*.

CHAPTER XVII

THE YOUNGER ROMANTICS

I

BYRON (George Gordon, sixth Lord Byron, 1788–1824) was smitten by the critics for some harmless verses, *Hours of Idleness*, and the angry boy lashing wildly out retaliated with *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (1809), a poem in the measure and manner of Pope, or rather of Gifford He travelled, and produced the first two cantos of *Childe Harold* (1812), this was his true maiden oration in rhyme The stanza is that of the *Faerie Queene*, it is telling, rapid, and eloquent, often bombastic, without a trace of Spenser's reverie or music The poem is a diary of scenes and figures noted in the Southern lands There are pictures of the bull-fight, the Turk, and the Albanian, there is a mounting ardour for the cause of Greek emancipation Also there appear, as yet in outline, the features of the public Byron, the *alter ego*, the 'world's tired denizen', the sufferer with the vulture at his breast The eye for colour and for manners, which makes half the fortune of *Don Juan*, is already alert Then, 'finding himself famous', Byron poured out his exotic lays, dispossessing Scott in that industry the *Giaour* (1813), *Bride of Abydos*, *Corsair*, *Lara*, *Siege of Corinth*, and *Parisina* All these appeared before the catastrophe which quickened his genius In 1816 he left England and his wife for good In these lays there is a fierce energy, much vehement and rhetorical matter that is easy to forget, a halfpenny-worth of story, and now and then a splendid interlude Such are the pictures of the siege of Corinth and the overture to the *Bride of Abydos*, and in *Parisina* there is a tragic situation Better still are the death-scene in the *Prisoner of Chillon*, written after Byron's departure, and the desperate ride in

Mazeppa (1819), a poem with a saving dose of irony His final tale in verse, the *Island* (1823), the South Sea idyll of Torquil and Neuha, shows that his feeling for natural beauty was unspoilt

Before quitting England Byron had already written many of his best lyrics 'When we two parted', *Euthanasia*, 'And thou art dead, as young and fair' (1812), 'She walks in beauty' (in the *Hebrew Melodies*) and 'There's not a joy the world can give' Soon afterwards came the poems to Augusta Leigh, the most finished and the most deeply felt of all, and later, in *Don Juan*, the martial chant of the *Isles of Greece* We must not compare this with the songs in *Hellas* on the same theme, or, indeed, ever expect from Byron the iris that hangs around Shelley's frailest pieces Byron's mind, for all his *Weltschmerz*, real or theatrical, was essentially concrete and definite, and his lyric is *reasoned* lyric Palgrave pointed this out long ago, in respect of the lines *To Thyrza*, and it is true of most of Byron's verse, however discursive or wilful He is full of the logic of feeling, he is for ever arguing, with himself or with the world, about his grief and his exile, or on absence or estrangement And he remains a poet, nay a singer, it was Goethe who said that Byron had 'a song his very own' Much of his lyric, indeed, is of no account, but often, as though by luck, he can strike out a cunning melody

> Though the night was made for loving,
> And the day returns too soon,
> Yet we'll go no more a-roving
> By the light of the moon

The rest of Byron's post-exilic verse falls into two broad classes, his serious poems and his medleys These often interlace, in point of date, but there is a steady set of his talent towards the serio-comic style which most fully and finally expresses it The graver works open with the third and fourth cantos of *Childe Harold* (1816, 1818) and with these can be grouped the *Dream* and the *Prophecy of Dante* (1821), also *Manfred* (1817) and *Cain* (1821), the only two of Byron's dramas that need here be mentioned In these cantos of *Childe Harold* there is a new eloquence, born of suffering and anger Often it is strained, and monotonous as a drum beaten too long But under all the posturing and declamation we are led, more and more, to recognise Byron's

radical honesty of soul He really longs to get away from his *ego* and to mingle his spirit with that of the hills and deserts, and he dreams of the freedom of death.

> When elements to elements conform,
> And dust is as it should be, shall I not
> Feel all I see, less dazzling, but more warm?

Touched he may be, for the moment, by Wordsworth or Shelley, but his mood is not the same as theirs Only, no doubt, for the moment, for 'this', Byron goes on, 'is not my theme' His theme, when it is not himself, is Rousseau, or Venice, or the Tuscan poets, or the old Roman worthies, or the sea He finds his refuge in history and letters rather than in nature or religion. As for the poetry, it goes with a rush, through many stumblings and recoveries, hit or miss the work of an improviser, not of an artist But it has the qualities of passion and distinctness, and often it comes right The apostrophes to Venice and to Byron's far-off daughter, the lines on the tomb of the Scipios and the 'Niobe of nations', remain fast in the memory In the *Prophecy of Dante*, with its rickety style and its mishandled *terza rima* (Dante's measure), there are bursts of clear poetry, something more than rhetoric In the *Dream* Byron writes with unusual purity and correctness, he recalls how in the hour of his wedding to Anne Milbanke he was thinking of Mary Chaworth The historic dramas, such as *Sardanapolus*, are seldom dramatic, and tend to dullness *Manfred*, with its adaptation of the motive of *Faust*, is the most personal and intense of Byron's longer poems, and is full of his memories, distorted no doubt by his imagination But he is never at his best in blank verse, and the whole conception is wavering and obscure. *Cain* has much more structure and reality, and, although a byword for horrid lapses in style and prosody, it has a beauty of its own It is of interest as Byron's most determined wrestle with high speculative verse The scepticism is of an elementary kind, but there are echoes of the large tradition of Marlowe and Milton:

> *We* must bear,
> And some of us resist, and both in vain,
> His seraphs say, but it is worth the trial,
> Since better may not be without

The cut and parry between Lucifer and Cain is excellent sword-play, but the language of Lucifer in *Dr Faustus* is in another world of poetry.

II

For Byron England was the East wind and Italy the sun. Italy unbent him, took him, as much as might be, out of himself, and made him a humorist He fell naturally into its free, unedifying habit of life. Italy also taught him (with a hint or two from the bright vivacious *Whistlecraft* of John Hookham Frere) his true and predestined mode of narrative. It was that of the medley, which had flourished, in many forms, from Pulci down to Casti, and Byron seized at once, in *Beppo* (1818), on the octave stanza, which is the historic medium for work of the kind He uses to the full, and abuses, the trick of anticlimax The last line or couplet lets down the stanza with a jerk, the serious poetry suddenly drops into a snarl, or a jest, or simply into a pleasant douche of matter of fact This method allows the whole of Byron, all the many Byrons, good and bad, to find expression, at whatever cost of discord, and the discord is an expression of the man When he is really stirred, and carried away by the beauty of his vision, as in the idyll of Juan and Haidee, he may spare us the bathos for many verses in succession But irony and realism are never far off The cheapest part of *Don Juan* (1819–1824) is the sententious comment It is often vulgar, and it is difficult to admire a patrician who is without breeding Poetry is abundant in the earlier cantos, while Juan is in Spain or on the island, is almost absent in the Russian scenes, while he is kept by the Empress Catherine, and revives when he is back in England,—a new-old hunting-ground for Byron's satire There is a true recovery of beauty in the pictures of Aurora Raby and of the country house with its 'lucid lake' and sloping woods *Don Juan* is a rhymed novel without a plan, into which the gold and dross of the writer's mind are flung indiscriminately Some passages are wrought up from books, such are the accounts of the shipwreck, with its cannibal derelicts, and of the siege of Ismail. The detail here is ruthless, the style close packed and often prosaic. The *Vision of Judgment* (1823), a classic of its own species,

is Byron's greatest satire The jibes at Southey, ready to write the life of Satan 'in two octavo volumes, nicely bound', the diplomatic passages between Satan and Michael, who exchange 'a glance of great politeness', yet with 'a high, immortal, proud regret In either's eye', and the touches of kindness in the denunciation (itself quite ignorant) of George the Third —in all this we may think that we find the real, the normal, the ultimate Byron But not quite so, he ended, as he had begun, with lyric, and at Missolonghi, three months before his end, he said his last word

> Seek out—less often sought than found—
> A soldier's grave, for thee the best,
> Then look around, and choose thy ground,
> And take thy rest

Byron and Byronism overran Europe until far into the century, there is a vast literature of translation, imitation, and comment He became the poetic voice of the revolutionary spirit, political and individual At home his influence waned sooner The English poets, Matthew Arnold and Swinburne, turned on him and pointed out his fitfulness, his want of art, of literary tact, and of ear But they also praised him well, and once more may be quoted the tribute to Byron's greatness, to 'the splendid and imperishable excellence of sincerity and strength'

The verses of Thomas Moore, his friend and biographer, are now mostly faded leaves Of his rhymed romance, *Lalla Rookh*, the title is remembered A few of the *Irish Melodies* (1807–1834) survive as literature Read them, and their sentiment and tinkle now seem a long way off All the more surprising are the handful in which Moore still strikes home, where his skill as a musician serves him well as a poet and teaches him a subtlety of verbal sound and an elusive lovely rhythm which to Byron are unknown The tones are high, but not shrill, mournful, yet a certain dignity is preserved My selection would include 'Oft in the stilly night', 'When in death I shall calm recline', the first two verses of the *Irish Peasant to his Mistress*,—who is Erin, and, above all, the ten lines of 'In the mid hour of night'

> And as Echo far off through the vale my sad orison rolls,
> I think, O my love! 'tis thy voice, from the Kingdom of souls
> Faintly answering still the notes that once were so dear

On another level (but we are loth to lose them) are 'Tis the last rose of summer' and 'Go where glory waits thee'. Though an emigrant and a haunter of English drawing-rooms, Moore often catches what he calls the 'tones of national complaint',—a cry rather than a language—that run through much Irish verse He also poured out light satiric rhymes, the *Twopenny Post-Bag* and the *Fudge Family in Paris*, in the form of imaginary letters These are lively enough, even to the point of deadliness, and Moore flits over the social pond like a bird, pouncing on the insects and the smaller fry

III

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822) was not markedly precocious He had indeed written *Queen Mab* and other boyish verse, in which there is the promise of beauty, but his first real lyric is 'Away! the moor is dark beneath the moon' (1814) The chief mark of his poetry for the next three or four years is self-absorption It for ever reflects the wavering image, cast upon the clouds, of a sick and solitary man, who tries to forget himself in the beauty of outward things, or in the Universal Mind that *agitat molem*, or in a love that is unattainable Well for us that this malady found immortal words, and well for Shelley that he was at last to be convalescent! *Alastor, or the Spirit of Solitude* (1816) in firm and harmonious blank verse, is the story of a mental wanderer, who at first is at peace amidst lovely natural scenes But he is troubled by the apparition of an ideal woman, and in the pursuit of her he perishes Laon, in the *Revolt of Islam* (1818) (originally entitled *Laon and Cythna*, and revised) is seen escaping from this vicious circle, he has already the religion of humanity, and the liberation of the Golden City typifies that of the whole race This is Shelley's longest poem The verse is often of transcendent beauty, and the stanza of the *Faerie Queene* reveals new secrets But the work as a whole, with its daydreamy incoherence, is a squandering of genius In *Prince Athanase* there is another solitary

> His soul had wedded wisdom, and her dower
> Is love and justice, clothed in which he sate
> Apart from men, as in a lonely tower,
> Pitying the tumult of their dark estate

Shelley would not finish this story, he found, justly enough, a certain 'morbid character' in such a separation of the dreamer from his kind So, in the shorter poems of the period, he seeks to lose himself in the voice of 'Constantia singing', or in the grandeur of Mont Blanc, and in the *Stanzas Written in Dejection near Naples* his despair seems to touch bottom. Many other songs and fragments complete our assurance that Shelley, in his own region, is our supreme lyrical poet. The lyrical beat, indeed, is felt in all his verse and prose But in this earlier work, so intensely rarefied, we miss the other Shelley, who in fact was there all the time, the Shelley of the letters and of every day, friendly, natural, and playful, the Shelley who could manage Byron In *Julian and Maddalo* we just begin to see him, playing with Allegra, the child of Count Maddalo, who is Byron

> For after her first shyness was worn out,
> We sate there, rolling billiard-balls about

This is blessedly concrete, after so much planing, and that with a dizzy pilot, in the abysses of the clouds In the *Lines Written among the Euganean Hills* the poet is again alone, this time in a 'green isle', gazing in spirit on the Italian cities that have lost their freedom, he paints the dawn, and he longs to be interpenetrated with the elements The poem is beautifully shaped, but the inner discord is unsolved In *Prometheus Unbound* (1820) the solution is given it is the beatific vision of a society renewed, where love is the ruling principle The symbol of this is the bursting of the earth into beauty and delight

Shelley reaches grandeur in the first three acts, with their memories of Æschylus and Milton The picture of the crucified Christ and the exultant speech of the Spirit of the Hour, and many of the lyrics, are among the summits of his poetry But there is no real drama, nor is the intelligence satisfied—contrast the hard and intricate thinking of *Samson Agonistes*. There is a poor enough *coup de théâtre*, though the stage is vast. Jupiter, the symbol of the cruel current theology, and of every other obstacle to mental freedom, is overset by the mysterious Demogorgon But in the fourth act, which was added as an afterthought, Shelley earns the title of a seer It is a string of triumphal chants in salutation of a new world that is 'good, great and joyous, beautiful

and free' There is no longer the painful 'beating in the void' After all, when he wrote the poem, Shelley was still only twenty-seven, and behind all that troubled early verse lie the ferment natural to his years, the embroilment of his marriages, and his break with England and with society His quick recovery is more remarkable than the disease He now went on to still more arduous work, and in 1819 came the *Cenci*

This is often said to be the greatest English tragedy since Jacobean times, but, with all respect to the shades of Dryden and Otway, that is not very high praise Shelley was steeped in Shakespeare and Webster, the subject—the outrage of Count Cenci, the revenge of Beatrice his daughter, and her condemnation to death—might have befitted Cyril Tourneur But the Count's proclamations of his own villany become ludicrous, and, indeed, Shelley long retained his somewhat puerile taste for images of horror and corruption. Beatrice is a true creation Her resolution and resource, her will and cunning—all born of despair—and her essential purity shine out plainly, and her last speeches are in the greatest dramatic style Here, as in the unfinished *Charles the First*, Shelley shows an unsuspected grasp of the conditions of a play.

IV

As though the writing of the *Cenci* had cleansed his bosom, Shelley took his holiday in the *Witch of Atlas* The octave stanza is well suited to such a riot of airy and playful fantasy 'Light', he says of the Witch, 'is the vest of flowing metre she wears' The old solitude is now peopled with gay and ethereal and happy figures, there is no 'purpose' or lesson The poem follows its own law and is faultless in design, unlike *Epipsychidion* (1821), in which some dissipation of power can hardly be denied This transcendental chant of free love, addressed to Emilia Viviani prisoned in a convent, is full of a Platonism that would have surprised Plato The union of the pair is imagined as actual, not merely spiritual, and there is a vivid and most splendid picture of their bower

Shelley thought well of his *Adonais* (1821), and it has more weight and substance than any other of his poems.

All is concentration, and clear structure, and sustained passion The only fault is the tirade against the wicked journalist who, as Shelley erroneously thought, had been the death of Keats There is a strain of high oratory throughout *Adonais*, which suggests the influence of *Childe Harold*, an impression strengthened by the peculiar swing of the Spenserian stanza It is not in the least like Spenser's movement, and it is much more compact, and less fluid, than in the *Revolt of Islam* Shelley uses the old scheme of a lament followed by a consolation, but the traditional shepherds become the desires and dreams that hover by the bier The mourners are Sidney and Chatterton and other poets cut off too early The consolation, with a true instinct, is not too precisely defined It is only certain that Adonais lives on—by his work and in the memories of men —as 'made one with Nature'—and yet as in some sense keeping his personality, in 'the abode where the Eternal are' In the poem itself, indeed, Keats (as has often been said) has no clear identity, but it is no fault, in a work with such a purpose, that it is not a portrait In these passages Shelley, like Wordsworth in his great ode, is a master of high speculative verse, and, like Wordsworth, he does one of the hardest things in the world—he makes that kind of verse lyrical

Little need be said of his vein of harsher humour and somewhat rabid satire In *Peter Bell the Third* he turns and rends the older, duller Wordsworth, the supposed political apostate, and in the *Mask of Anarchy* he does the like by Castlereagh, the supposed villain on the international stage There is not much fun left to-day in these sallies. But one difficult, long, unfinished serious poem remains, the *Triumph of Life*, framed on the pattern of Petrarch's *Trionfi*, and also full of memories of Dante As in *Prince Athanase*, the measure is the *terza rima*, and it has become a rushing, overflowing stream Only now and then is the thought securely restrained, as in Dante, within the bounds of the tercet And the thought is very obscure, it would take long to discuss the problems involved, the exact meaning of the car of Life, with its train of captives who include the great conquerors and some of the great philosophers, and the significance of the showman, Rousseau, and of his message But everything points to the lost conclusion having been,

as in *Prometheus Unbound*, optimistic, and to Life having 'triumphed' after all.

V

The rest of Shelley's original verse is lyrical, in essence if not always in form The drama *Hellas* (1822) was written to celebrate the independence of Greece, and this is taken as a type and augury of the liberation of mankind There are glorious and ringing paeans, 'Worlds on worlds are rolling ever', 'The world's great age begins anew', with echoes of the *Nativity Ode*

> So fleet, so faint, so fair,
> The Powers of earth and air
> Fled from the folding star of Bethlehem

Shelley's song here becomes more palpable, partly through his use of definite names, Argo, Saturn, Tempe, on which the imagination can fix But during these last years he moves with greater ease than ever amongst the four elements His most perfectly built and harmonised ode is that *To the West Wind*, with its, now characteristic, note of hopefulness. The *Skylark* and the *Cloud*, for all their charm, are of another order The *Cloud* is like an Old English riddle, where the unnamed speaker, or object, is inanimate Shelley to the last was in full song, and any catalogue here must be incomplete All his moods, old and new, find utterance. In the *Sensitive Plant* he reverts to his drearier imagery, and ends with the 'pleasant' yet 'modest' creed that life and death are a 'mockery' In general, the tone is more buoyant Why try to enumerate the short enduring poems that everyone knows—the incomparable *Bridal Song*, and *Love's Philosophy*, and 'Life of life', and 'Swifter far', and the rest? Or the group of friendly and companionable epistles, to Maria Gisborne and to Jane Williams, and the *Boat on the Serchio*? Somewhat apart is the ode on the death of Napoleon, where the vital energy of the conqueror is conceived as passing back into the earth and requickening her, and it passes also into the rhythm

Shelley made many translations, which are often no more than paraphrases, but they are always poetry the chorus from *Faust*, the Homeric *Hymns*, the gay *Cyclops* of Euripides, scenes from Calderón, passages from Dante.

No poet since Gray had been more deeply nourished on the great poetry of the past, nor was Shelley, like Gray, weighed down by his reading His conversance with the Greeks and Milton could only confirm his native purity of style, for pure it is, in point of diction and idiom, even where it becomes diffuse, or indistinctly dazzling In the *Defence of Poetry* (written in 1821) he makes a religion out of high literature, in prose or verse He calls it all 'poetry', and the poets are the guardians of the ideal commonwealth. From Plato's *Ion* Shelley accepts the view of inspiration, which suits well enough his own habit of mind The poet is an instrument, an 'Æolian harp', for the music that descends from heaven, 'the mind in creation is as a fading coal', which an 'inconstant wind' blows into 'a transitory brightness' Shelley, however, who constantly revised his verse, was not ignorant of the hard work of the artist, who fans, nay who guides the flame, and in no English poet, when we count the results, is the brightness less 'transitory'.

VI

Still, his native gift was the 'music that falls from the air', and here, in his own age, he has but one companion This is his admirer, Thomas Lovell Beddoes (1803–1849):

> Far away
> As we hear
> The song of wild swans winging
> Through the day,
> The thought of him, who is no more, comes ringing
> On my ear

Beddoes is no understudy of Shelley, he is often more like Edgar Allan Poe, often his words are parted, by that thinnest film which makes all the difference, from a pure series of beautiful sounds *Dream-Pedlary*, and several of his other lyrics, have this character Many of them occur in his plays the *Bride's Tragedy* (1822), the *Second Brother*, and *Torrismond* Another tragedy, *Death's Jest-Book*, Beddoes kept on the stocks for years and never completed. None of these are really plays, the characters are fantastic, but the poetry is again and again magnificent Beddoes well knew the risk of mimicking, after the manner of Joanna Baillie and others, the Jacobean dramatists 'These re-

animations', he remarks, 'are vampire-cold'. But he was himself steeped in Webster and Tourneur, and in their fierce tragical meditations upon death and its emblems Often their spirit, and even their power, seems to be reborn in him, and there is a breath of inspiration even in Beddoes's long screeds of rant and extravagance. He has also images of beauty

> I love flowers too; not for a young girl's reason,
> But because these brief visitors to us
> Rise yearly from the neighbourhood of the dead,
> To show us how far fairer and more lovely
> Their world is . .

Still, the strength of Beddoes is in his scores of lyrics. Some of them, certainly, have the sound (to take words of his own) of a 'mad sexton's bell' 'Old Adam, the carrion-crow', or *Lord Alcohol* His wandering solitary life, his studies in medicine (which find their way into his verse), and his suicide, are all in keeping

VII

The primary gift of John Keats (1795–1821) is an extraordinary alertness of the poetic senses His friend Severn is reported as saying that

> Nothing seemed to escape him, the song of a bird and the undernote of response from covert or hedge, the rustle of some animal, the changing of the green and brown lights and furtive shadows . .

He 'particularly' loved 'the violent passage of wind across a great field of barley'. There is nothing wrong with the poetry of the senses if it has this kind of foundation, if the poet loses himself in the object, and finds words for its beauty, instead of merely dwelling on his sensations and rolling them over on his 'palate fine'. Then he is prone to linger among voluptuous images, and his style becomes enervate Keats, we know, did not escape this risk His reading as well as his temperament (not to mention the early influence of Leigh Hunt) exposed him to it. Some of the Elizabethans and Jacobeans aroused his genius, but they gave him no poetic discipline. Spenser filled his head with lovely melodies and visions ('For large white plumes are dancing in mine eye') · but a boy could not be expected

to study Spenser's sure and constant style Nor could he learn such a style from Chapman, although, as it happens, he comes near to it in the sonnet on Chapman's *Homer*. Another favourite, William Browne, with his rambling couplets, was also a tempter All such 'sources', which deeply affected Keats's early language and verse, have been closely studied But they are more than literary sources, for to him nature and poetry and fine art all come from the same storehouse of beautiful things, all are equally *immediate* to his sense, all, as it were, interchangeable. In an early work he exclaims,

> In the calm grandeur of a sober line
> We see the waving of the mountain pine,

and then later, in the *Ode to Psyche*, we hear that

> branchèd thoughts, new-grown with pleasant pain,
> Instead of pines shall murmur in the wind

Pictures of Claude or Titian pass, transmuted, into his verse, and in Chapman's *Homer*, in the Elgin marbles, in vases and sarcophagi, in Sandys's *Ovid* and in Lemprière, in all things Greek that were accessible, he found inspiration Severn says that the polytheism of Greece was a 'religion of joy' to him Clearly, the poetry of the senses, enriched by all these influences of nature, art, and letters, soon begins to be enlarged into the poetry of thinking and intellectual experience Still, in Keats's earlier verse so much wealth leads to a heaping-up and dazzle of imagery which defeats itself This is evident in the *Poems* of 1817, and in *Endymion* (1818) In the third and last volume, the *Poems* of 1820, one of the treasures of the language, such faults are disappearing, and Keats produces his greatest work Much other verse, early and late, good and bad, was published at various dates after his death

Nothing in the volume of 1817, unless it be the sonnet on Chapman, could be called perfect, but there are many auguries of perfection Of the other sonnets, the best sustained is 'The poetry of earth is never dead', and several, which soon fall off, start without a fault 'Small, busy flames play through the fresh-laid coals', 'Keen, fitful gusts are whisp'ring here and there' In 'I stood tiptoe upon a little hill' and in *Sleep and Poetry* is shadowed

forth, though faintly, the conception of the poet's progress which is found in the revised *Hyperion* and runs all through Keats's life and his letters These two early pieces, like the *Epistles* to his friends and his brother George, are in the heroic couplet, somewhat loosely knit, and so are the four thousand lines and more of *Endymion*

The famous myth, profusely decorated, is most confusedly related, and has a vague parable, or 'huge cloudy symbol', behind it. Keats cannot be said to have thought out his symbolism, though scholars have sought to do so. Probably the Moon, and Cynthia (by Endymion long unrecognised), and the Indian maiden, are all embodiments of ideal beauty, and at last they are seen to be identical What is certain is the scattered opulence, the fitful coming and going, of high poetry there are stretches of clear lovely narrative and a thousand jewels of phrase But the lyrical parts are by far the greatest the ode to Pan, and the chant of the Indian maiden on Bacchus and his crew. In this last there is a wild leaping energy of rhythm like that of the first chorus in the *Bacchae* of Euripides

> I saw the whelming vintage hotly pierce
> Old Tartary the fierce!

The ode to Pan shows to the full the power of Keats to lose himself in the life of nature, in the 'yellow girted bees' and in the 'dreary melody of bedded reeds' His own criticism of *Endymion*, in the noble preface and his letters, disarms every other

VIII

Of the three tales in the volume of 1820, *Lamia* is the most eloquent The heroic couplet has recovered nerve, and runs even to rhetoric, it is plain that Keats had been studying Dryden's versification There are magical passages like the shimmering picture of festal Corinth at nightfall Yet the story does not work out well, for the sympathies are distracted They are asked to repudiate both Lamia, the serpent-bride, and Apollonius with his 'cold philosophy', who causes her to 'melt into a shade' There is some rhetoric, again, in *Isabella, or the Pot of Basil*. a lovely plaint, though ever and again upon the verge (to use the word of Keats about his *Endymion*) of mawkishness.

But nothing can be more intensely realised than the forest scene, where Isabella disinters the buried head of her murdered lover, or than her mourning over the basil-plant I own to finding the imagination better satisfied in the *Eve of St. Agnes*, with its pure, intense, and vibrating colours, and I can find here no over-sweetness All is in harmony, and the key-verse is at the end, when the vivid present is suddenly thrown into the remote past 'Ay, ages long ago These lovers fled away into the storm' If we think of Chaucer's *Troilus* and of Morris's *Jason*, this peculiar time-relation seems to be of the essence of Romance

Many of the odes and sonnets betray the impulse of the poet to escape from actual life and his inner distractions into the contemplation of something beautiful and permanent. 'Away! away! for I will fly to thee', the *Ode to a Nightingale* records the failure, and is Keats's fullest confession of this impulse The *Ode on Melancholy*, however, accepts the deeper kind of pain which comes, fully 'tasted', in the 'very temple of Delight', while in the *Grecian Urn* the figures in relief, of the lovers and the worshippers, endure arrested there for ever, before there can be any disappointment of a 'heart high-sorrowful and cloyed' In the *Ode to Maia* (called a fragment, and yet it is complete) the poet longs for the contentment of the Greek and Sicilian bards In the *Ode on Indolence* (which Keats did not print, and indeed it is the weakest of all), Ambition, Love and Poesy all have faded, and he falls back upon bodily, 'honied indolence'. It may be by chance that in the *Ode to Autumn*, where the poet is wholly absorbed in the picture and does not name himself, the handiwork is, by common consent, without a flaw, while this cannot be said of any of the others, except the *Ode to Maia* and some of the verses in *Endymion* But in one sonnet, where he does speak of himself, 'When I have fears', Keats is again at his best, and the conclusion has a Shakespearian ring and grandeur

> then on the shore
> Of the wide world I stand alone, and think
> Till love and fame to nothingness do sink

'Bright star', for all its splendid beginning, does not maintain itself so well None of the remaining sonnets are on the level of these two, but I would single out, as the next best, and also as giving glimpses of the younger Keats,

'After dark vapours', *On a Picture of Leander*, and the *Floure and the Lefe*, not forgetting the lofty Miltonic exercise, 'As from the darkening gloom' This, like many others, has the Miltonic structure, but Shakespeare's form, as in 'When I have fears', is used by Keats with equal mastery

There are many learned valuable studies of his language and his metres, and every one of his worthier poems calls for close comment Everywhere is seen his habit of 'loading every rift' and concentrating on the effect of the single line and phrase. His underlined copy of Shakespeare shows that he liked the passages with great 'riches in a little room' Hence his verse is seldom, like Shelley's, rapid, except in the gay trochaic pieces *Fancy*, *Robin Hood*, the *Mermaid Tavern*, and 'Bards of Passion and of Mirth' are all in the spirit of *L'Allegro* and in quick time, not so the odes and sonnets and tales and *Hyperion* Nor yet the two ballads, for both *La Belle Dame sans Merci* (which was carefully improved into its present perfection) and the admirable, though less mystery-laden, *Meg Merrilies* go slowly So do the short lines of the *Eve of St Mark*, a fragment that is one of Keats's best legacies It is all pure beauty, touched with humour, with no trace left of confusion or over-richness As critics have said, it carries on the 'mediæval' tradition from Chatterton to William Morris, but this only means that the poet, with Chaucer and old illuminated manuscripts in his memory, creates something of his own that is not mediæval at all Keats says, 'I think it will give you the sensation of walking about an old country town on a coolish evening'. What old poet ever wrote with such a purpose? In song (as distinct from ode and ballad) Keats has left little that is very good except 'In a drear-nighted December', with its double rhymes thrice repeated, which remind us of some Elizabethan lyrics and of Swinburne He also tried the drama, but *Otho the Great*, except for some stray lines, is of little account In the short scrap, *King Stephen*, there is no little grip of martial and vigorous verse, and we remember how Keats once beat an usher who had 'boxed' his brother.

IX

Hyperion, his great essay in the heroic and epic style, is, like *Endymion*, a mythical story with a parable behind it; but the outline is now clear and the meaning no longer cloudy The fallen Titans lament, like Milton's fallen angels, in human tones, but there is no fierceness or Satanic diplomacy, and all is high pathos Keats says that he dropt the story because there were too many Miltonic inversions and that at length he had 'stood on his guard against Milton'. But there are not many such inversions, and the work is by no means too Miltonic Probably the difficulty was to make an end and to find something adequate for Apollo, the dethroner of Hyperion, to do, and the poem declines towards the close But the philosophy set forth in the speech of Oceanus is distinct Each dynasty in the universe overthrows the last by virtue of superior strength and beauty, and to this process there may be no end Keats re-wrote part of the work, though not for the better, and added a new prelude with new symbols Here he embodies, with some obscurity of detail but in his greatest manner, the conception, which had always haunted him, of the spiritual progress to which he aspired The first stage is the passive ecstasy of the senses, the last, attained after much torment, is that of complete unison with the joys and troubles of mankind The letters, in truth, show this progress in Keats They show the whole man, facet after facet, immensely friendly and fraternal and generous, with, at first, a streak of commonness and the faults of adolescence, full of inspired intuitions concerning life and poetry, dying in Rome at twenty-five, fighting against illness and also against 'Love unconquered, the limb-loosener, the bitter-sweet and resistless'[1] The printing of the letters to Fanny Brawne has been much deplored, but some of them show Keats at his best. He did not live to write as he wished a poem containing the fullness of his experience, but we may be well content with him as he is, a profound interpreter of beauty.

X

Something of this power, as well as its misguidance, Keats confessedly owes to his senior and early friend, James

[1] Sir Sidney Colvin, *Keats*, 1918, p 332 (from Sappho).

Henry Leigh Hunt (1784–1859), who long outlived him, and who is best remembered for his prose essays Hunt was a catholic lover, taster, and communicator of good literature His verse, all but a few short pieces and stray pages, is spoilt by various slatternly habits of which no more need be said, and by over-soft indulgent imagery But the fatal sentence of Keats, 'He makes beautiful things hateful', must not blind us to the occasions on which Hunt keeps them beautiful In his play, the *Legend of Florence*, and even in the *Story of Rimini*, where the tale of Paolo and Francesca is vulgarised to death, there are passages of true romantic charm The sonnet on the Nile and the well-known *Abou Ben Adhem* also reward the seeker after salvage A younger and closer friend of Keats, John Hamilton Reynolds, who long survived him, is to be remembered for his gay mischievous skits and parodies in *The Fancy* (1820) and for his sonnet on *The Nonpareil*, the boxer His *Garden of Florence*, a tale drawn, like *Isabella*, from Boccaccio, is dyed in Keats-like imagery

There is something of Keats in that pleasant 'bard of fancy and of mirth', Thomas Hood (1799–1845), and the fancy in his longer romantic pieces, such as the *Two Swans* and the *Plea of the Midsummer Fairies*, often betrays its discipleship Never high-inspired, it is graceful, and melodious, and silvery But Hood is at his best in a few sincere unaspiring lyrics with a certain antithetical turn to them Such are the beautiful *Deathbed*, and the courageous 'Farewell Life!' Nearest of all these to pure song are the lines 'The Autumn is old', of which the full virtue is not felt till the last words

> The rivers run chill,
> The red sun is sinking,
> And I am grown old,
> And life is fast shrinking,—
> Here's enow for sad thinking!

Hood also aimed at more obvious and telling effects, of horror or ghostliness, in the *Dream of Eugene Aram* and the *Haunted House*, in the *Elm Tree* they are more subtle, but these pieces, except *Eugene Aram*, are loosely spun out There are also his militant and pathetic verses The *Bridge of Sighs* is almost as bad poetically as it is generous and compassionate in motive, the *Song of the Shirt*, on the contrary, with its excellent pulsing rhythm, is a first-rate

piece of popular fighting verse in a good cause Hood's gay and punning humour is, I suppose, much out of date, but let us not be too superior, *Faithless Sally Brown* and *Faithless Nelly Gray* hold their place, and the finish of the *Season* is beyond reproach

> Boughs are daily rifled
> By the gusty thieves,
> And the Book of Nature
> Getteth short of leaves.

XI

I will not pretend to define the romantic spirit, or romance As in the ride to the Dark Tower, there are too many warnings by the way It is only certain that the attempt must not be made too solemnly Few of these passionate, high-flying poets are always serious Hardly one but tries his hand at wit or humour Sometimes he keeps it in a separate compartment from his graver verse, often he turns the edge of his satire *against* romance and sentiment, oftener still, he interweaves jest and earnest more or less harmoniously There are demure pleasantries even in the *Prelude*, but Wordsworth, wiser than Keats and Coleridge, seldom yields to levity, except (and then without any luck) in *Peter Bell* Even Shelley has his fling of wild mirth in *Peter Bell the Third*, and in his *Letter to Maria Gisborne* he is seen at play Moore, the melodist, has his *Fudge Family*, and Beddoes has his perpetual Dance of Death Byron in his greatest work mingles poetry and jeers, rejoicing in the risk of a wanton discord The lighter rhymers and satirists have, in turn, their graver hours, which sometimes reveal the springs of their humour The pure fun of James and Horace Smith in their *Rejected Addresses* (1812) is of the genial kind, and their parodies of Crabbe and Byron, of Scott and Wordsworth, survive The lyrics of Shelley's friend, Thomas Love Peacock, range from the *War-Song of Dinas Vawr* to 'Beneath a cypress shade', and are full of jollity and irony, of romance and of mockery at romance Like his prose, they have a classic finish

Another scholar and ironist, Winthrop Mackworth Praed (1802–1839), began as a Cambridge prize poet, at ease in Greek and Latin verse. His talent was soon visible in the *County Ball*, in which the humours of the scene are lightly

skimmed. Next came a batch of romances (the *Bridal of Belmont*, the *Red Fisherman*), a medley of pure poetry, sharp social sketches, and the *unheimlich*, all turned and rhymed impeccably With Praed we are sure of good finish, as of good manners He is at his best from 1828 to 1832, in his *Every-Day Characters* *Peter Quince* and the *Belle of the Ballroom* are first-rate , and for economy of line, humanity, and humour, the *Vicar* is put to shame by nothing in Addison or Goldsmith The whole of an innocent and picturesque life is set before us in a few stanzas Slighter things, but no less rapid and witty, are *Good Night to the Season* and *A Letter of Advice* Everywhere in Praed there is a sense, not too painful, of the vanity of the Fair and the transience of mortal things, whether the scene be a country parish or the House of Commons Some of his political skits have the same cutting edge What he can do in another style may be seen in the little-known *Runaway* .

Dark clouds are shading
The day,—the day ,
Sunlight is fading
Away,—away ,
I've won from the warden
The key,—the key ,
And the steed's in the garden
For me,—for me

A pleasant forerunner of Praed is Henry Luttrell His *Advice to Julia* (1820) is a brilliant drawing of the parks, and the clubs, and the hurrying outer life of London, and of the operations of a coquette in those surroundings.

XII

There was much mock-Elizabethan writing at this time ; but the tragedies of Joanna Baillie, Sheridan Knowles, and Milman the historian have perished Over one drama, the *Joseph and his Brethren* (1824) of Charles Jeremiah Wells, Swinburne has sounded the loud timbrel, on the strength of a few passages of luxurious and vehement blank verse. George Darley (1795–1846) well deserves his recent revival. He abounds in fitful power of song and force of rhythm, and in rich whimsical fancy In his *Sylvia* (1827) and *Nepenthe* (1836) these gifts are freely scattered , but his best lyric is

still 'It is not beauty I demand', which at first was mistaken by Palgrave for a seventeenth-century piece, and indeed it is much more than a *pastiche* Darley's criticism has true poetic gusto, as his essay upon Beaumont and Fletcher shows The true Caroline note is heard also in Lamb's lines *On an Infant Dying as Soon as Born*, but his simple, beautiful, and confidential *Hester* and *The Old Familiar Faces* bear, like a few of his sonnets, no trace either of imitation or of date

Another genuine poet, whom living poets have rediscovered, John Clare (1793–1864), was in his fate a companion of Smart and Collins, but among the verses that he wrote, during his last twenty years, in his asylum, are some of his purest, sweetest, and most original Such are the *Dying Child*

> His eye glanced at the white-nosed bee,
> He knew those children of the Spring . .

and *Clock-a-Clay* [lady-bird], and *Autumn* ('I love the fitful gust') There are here a few of the Northamptonshire words which in Clare's earlier volumes (*Poems*, 1820, the *Village Minstrel*, 1821, the *Shepherd's Calendar*, 1827) sprinkle the page suddenly and have their full poetic value *quawking* for crows cawing, *chelp* for chirp, *chumbling* for gnawing (of a mouse) Clare calls himself a 'peasant', and although he was unfit for a peasant's job he has a peasant's, and also a poet's, intimacy with the smallest things of nature, birds, flowers, hedges, and brooks This, and writing, were his consolations for a hard and broken life How Clare gradually works free from his obvious models may be seen in verses like the *Woodcutter's Night-Song*, *Building a Cottage*, and the *Firetail's Nest*

CHAPTER XVIII

THE FIRST VICTORIANS

I

THERE have been many vicissitudes in the poetic fame of Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809–1892) After a long delay he found himself, in 1850, Laureate, and on a pinnacle where he was to remain until his death Later, he was the principal sufferer from the revulsion against the so-called 'Victorian' spirit, he was accused of cheapness, of insularity, in his social and ethical ideas There is still matter for debate, but Tennyson's talent as an artist is now more clearly defined There is much in his *Poems* of 1842 which he never surpassed and which time is not likely to erode Many of the contents are selected from the volumes he had published in 1830 and 1833 They are often improved, and some, like *Mariana in the South*, the *Lady of Shalott*, and *Œnone*, are recast *Fatima* and the *Ballad of Oriana* remain, they are frank, direct, and passionate, and reflect Tennyson's natural temper All this, and the new poems still more clearly, showed that an original artist, an heir to Keats and Coleridge, had arrived At first he has little desire to instruct, he is intent on the expression of pure beauty and fantasy He is a born recorder of landscape, and he is a master of sound In the *Lotos-Eaters* the theme, like the music, is Spenserian, the mariners ask for 'rest after stormy seas', and the mood is that of a luxurious yet melancholy *détente*, bodily and spiritual The rolling Homeric finale, added in 1842, corrects any excess of languor. *Œnone* is full of scenery and plaintive music But there is the warning voice of Pallas,—'And, because right is right, to follow right', and it is the voice

of the ethical Tennyson In *A Dream of Fair Women* the method is different, each stanza is a separate poem, closely packed and eloquent, in the nature of an epigram, and perhaps we admire the style of Rosamond and Cleopatra too much to care greatly about *them* In the *Palace of Art*, also an earlier piece, and largely re-written, there is the same sonority and surpassing beauty of colour But it is a thesis-poem, and apparently the soul which is absorbed in so much beautiful art *must* needs be selfish, and *must* be called upon, some day, to purge 'its guilt'

The new work of 1842 contains some pure romance of the old kind In *Sir Galahad* it is the romance of holiness, in *Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere* the note is that of spring and happiness, with no hint of the tragedy to follow No one will find any flaw in these lyrics, but as for 'great poetry', we must be jealous of the term I would use it of the songs 'Break! Break! Break' and 'Come not, when I am dead', and also of *Ulysses*, which is great both in its governing idea and in its execution It is Tennyson's chief triumph in high ethical verse But it teaches no civic or domestic morality, let us never be too old to be young and to seek new adventure, though 'it may be that the gulfs will wash us down'!—as they did Ulysses, in the story which the poet had found in his Dante In *Tithonus*, on the contrary, there is no counsel offered All is pure beauty and *desiderium* the lament of a mortal, infinitely old, who has thrown away the blessing of mortality The poem, though not printed till 1860, was written long before As for the *Vision of Sin*, for all its strength of workmanship, it strikes me, judged as a picture of a decomposed old sensualist, as wholly beyond nature, or at least as a subject rather for the author of *La Cousine Bette*, and the final 'vision', not quite fairly, is left magnificent and indistinct Again, *Love and Duty*, so loftily imagined and elaborately wrought, somewhat baulks the imagination by its abstract treatment, we crave, too suspiciously, for circumstance, and ask whether and why the duty was indeed a duty. There is nothing ambiguous about the young and desperate sincerity of *Locksley Hall*, and the touches of absurdity make it only the more convincing There is much other new treasure in the book of 1842 the soliloquy, *St Simeon Stylites*, the first, and with *Lucretius* the finest, of Tennyson's

many pathological studies, the song 'Flow down, cold rivulet', and *Will Waterproof's Lyrical Monologue*, his most humorous and genial composition, where all things are seen through the 'vinous mist' and 'through a kind of glory'. Not to prolong this piecework, I turn briefly to his four largest poems, the *Princess* (1847), *In Memoriam* (1850), *Maud* (1855), and *Idylls of the King* (1842–1888).

II

There was plenty of fun, not always drawing-room fun, in Tennyson, in the *Princess* he is at play, and almost rampant He is ready for any twirl of phrase, or cantrip of rhythm, in his blank verse, he gives a loose to fantasy, and is amused with his mock-exaggeration of his own ornaments and similes There is melody and sparkle everywhere, and we can forget the solemn discourse which the sick youth, uttering the opinions of Tennyson on the nature of the sexes, administers to the heroine—a better man than himself The songs were added in 1850, and those in blank verse stanza, 'Tears, idle tears' and 'Now sleeps the crimson petal', are a new species of lyric which has sprung at once into perfection Tennyson now and then has Shelley's gift of conveying a pure emotion that is but half-defined *In Memoriam*, like the earlier *Two Voices*, is an introspective rather than properly an elegiac or philosophic poem Tennyson reasons with himself, through many years, upon his loss, and he watches his half-realised pains and doubts till they are coined into words They culminate in the mystic vision of reunion with his friend, Arthur Hallam This is the core of the matter, the pictures of scenery and the seasons and the student days and of Hallam's virtues, the musings on the ruthlessness of nature and on the hopelessness of life unless it survives the body,—all grow out of this self-analysis The scattered musings are framed into a kind of unity, *ex post facto*, which gives *In Memoriam* its structure Some of it is as difficult as Donne, so nice are the transitions, so condensed is the manner. It may be strange to compare Tennyson with Pope, but here, and in all his more abstract verse (such as the *Ancient Sage*) he has the same instinct for close pointed statement and tireless burnishing. As with Pope, the wonderful

surface covers a varying depth of soil Compare 'O thou that after toil and storm', and its advice to the reader to keep his sister from too much thinking, with the stately 'Love is and was my lord and king' Or with the passages in which Tennyson starts from his true point of vantage, his vision of natural things 'When rosy plumelets tuft the larch', 'To-night the winds begin to rise', 'Now fades the last long streak of snow' *In Memoriam*, be it said, records a keener personal feeling for the lost than either *Lycidas* or *Adonais* The measure, the 'closed quatrain', is an old one, and had been used by Lord Herbert of Cherbury and others, but its peculiar ring, now associated with Tennyson, seems almost independent of the user

Maud must be read in the light of the poet's lifelong interest in strange cases and morbid psychology In *Lucretius* (1868) he employs for this purpose the blank verse monologue, a form of which, like Browning, he is a master. Tennyson in his wild and hectic passages inherits much from the so-called 'spasmodics' (Ch XIX) who are so intolerably mocked in the *Firmilian* (1854) of William Edmonstoune Aytoun But *Lucretius* is full of grandeur, not least in the passages that have the *De Rerum Natura* behind them, The spasmodic element is felt also in *Maud*, the boldest, strangest, and best conceived of Tennyson's long poems The tale is invented, and not too clearly told—but then the teller is distraught, and it is told in a series of lyrics of which the changing measures keep tune with the changing moods At the bottom of this 'monodrama', when stript of its music, is a good sound melodrama But are we much *moved* by anything in *Maud* except the four lines, 'O that 'twere possible ' out of which the story sprang? What holds us is rather the delighted skill of the musician, first and last, from 'Cold and clear-cut face' down to 'My life has crept so long on a broken wing'

Not content with lyric, Tennyson dreamed always of some great heroic parable embodying his lifelong thoughts on 'the Reality of the Unseen' For this nothing short of Milton's measure would serve, and he wrote, in twelve books, the *Idylls of the King* They are most fairly judged as separate poems, each in its own right Written at intervals over many years, they are fitted or forced into a framework without real unity. Arthur, the spokesman of

the poet's doctrine, loses most of our sympathy at the climax In his farewell to Guinevere he shows himself either more or less than a man But Arthur has been too much derided by critics, for he ends well, and indeed may be said to have begun his career by dying For the *Morte D'Arthur*, afterwards entitled the *Passing of Arthur*, appeared in 1842, a worthy companion to *Ulysses* It is the first of Tennyson's direct dealings with Malory, and, for all its decoration, it is the nearest of the *Idylls* to Malory, being in the plainer heroic style not too much teased or elaborated Of the rest, the *Holy Grail* stands apart in variety of sustained power and in depth of mystical beauty, and, so, in human and pathetic interest, do the poems on Enid and on Elaine But everywhere in profusion—perhaps in confusion—are seen the characteristic gifts of colour and cadence The danger of the style is to be pompous—the word must out And throughout the *Idylls* we are left with the memory of curious and lovely detail rather than with the sense of artistic unity

III

But Tennyson has many styles, for better or worse. In *Dora*, and in *Enoch Arden* (1864), there is a good deal of forced, of really artificial, simplicity There is the impassioned and superheated writing of *Rizpah*, and the whirl of dazzling images in the *Voyage of Maeldune* What never fails is the command of rhythm

These varieties reappear in Tennyson's later volumes, and here it is the poems classically inspired that show most of his former power Such is the 'Hellenic', *Tiresias*, and the twenty lines *To Virgil* and the nine of *Frater Ave atque Vale* are worth all the lengthy *Columbuses* and *Despairs* Tennyson's usage of other poets has been much studied by the learned He is of the clan of Gray and Milton a tireless appropriator, a born harmoniser, of poetic reminiscences Every line in the apostrophe to Virgil is thus suggested, and this is perhaps Tennyson's greatest short poem Of lyric more direct and simple in its 'clear call', *Early Spring* and *Crossing the Bar* are late and perfect examples The *Revenge* is a feat of another kind, it may be noticed how Tennyson's *rapid* measures, trochaic or anapæstic, are in fact powerful and slow, owing to the weighted

stresses ; as with a boat, stayed for a moment in the trough of a gathering wave. The humorous pieces in dialect like the *Northern Farmer*, the alcaics on Milton, and the translations from Homer and from Old English, show a surprising variety of wordcraft and versecraft Tennyson's blank verse is as leisurely as Homer's hexameter is impetuous , but his two short experiments show how he could sustain, with fidelity to the sense, a true epic style,—not Homer's indeed, but his own If I say nothing of Tennyson's plays, *Queen Mary*, *Becket*, and the rest, it is not that they lack for poetry , but the poetry is of the now familiar kind ; and, in spite of much accomplishment, there is not often the vital spark of drama Tennyson's elder brother, Frederick, left some interesting verse, much of it on classical themes , the younger, Charles Tennyson-Turner (1808–1879), a retiring country parson, is like Hartley Coleridge an admirable sonneteer of the quiet kind He writes, often as one bereaved, on children and their doings , on flowers and the hues of clouds , or on the ' steam threshing-machine ', and wishes that Virgil could be there to describe it Tennyson-Turner is very successful in varying the accepted arrangements of rhyme in the sonnet form

IV

With the decline of the drama the novel had succeeded to its pride of place , but the poets, too, had begun to quarry in the field of human character The verse of manners and satire had reached a certain kind of perfection Crabbe found tragedy, comedy, nay, even romance, and Wordsworth revealed the deeper significance, in the fates of humble and unregarded persons The scene for most of these writers was contemporary English life, but soon it was extended Byron, the brilliant showman, had ranged over Europe Landor and Tennyson re-interpreted the beauty of the antique , and in the gallery of Tennyson are mediæval knights and saints as well as country squires and Lady Psyches All this meant ever new conquests of poetic territory. ¶ The achievement of Robert Browning (1812–1890) was to open out, for poetry, a wider world, as yet untouched, of character and situation , to present ' Karshish, Cleon, Norbert, and the fifty ', and to make them speak Each

of them tells his own story and exposes his soul, for the most part unawares, to the hearer This is ordinarily the function of drama, and Browning wrote seven dramas, full of power and brains and poetry, but they are too hard for a general audience and teasing to the reader The simplest, the most beautiful and intelligible, are *Pippa Passes* and *Colombe's Birthday*, and the earliest, *Strafford* (1837), has been successfully revived But Browning's true line is the dramatic monologue, it is an old species and goes back to the Pardoner and the Wife of Bath, it had been used by Drayton, and Pope, and many others It may be lyrical in form, and in his monodramatic lyrics, some seventy in number, Browning's mastery and originality shine out Here he is almost safe to be a poet He also uses blank verse, and some of his greatest work is in blank verse But here he is not so safe, and there is much waste matter He can also tell a tale in verse, by direct narrative, excellently He attempted, with more dubious results, philosophic poetry Browning wrote incessantly for nearly sixty years, and during about half that space was in his prime, from the *Bells and Pomegranates* (1841–6), in eight parts, down to the *Ring and the Book* (1868–9) The landmarks between are the collected *Poems* of 1849, *Christmas-Eve and Easter-Day* (1850), the fifty *Men and Women* (1855), and *Dramatis Personae* (1864) This central period was preceded by *Pauline*, *Paracelsus*, and *Sordello*, all full of interest to the determined student It was followed by no less than sixteen volumes, of which the same can be said in the two series of *Dramatic Idyls* (1878–9) and in many a stray snatch, the old fire is rekindled In *Balaustion's Adventure*, a "transcript' of the *Alcestis*, with a commentary, there is a marked renewal of beauty

V

Most of the reproaches hurled against Browning are true, and also stale He can be arid, interminable, over-allusive, he can play exasperating tricks with language and grammar; and he can be harsh, where harshness is not required for an artistic effect All this is insufferable, but we can turn it over to the mercies of the parodists, who include Swinburne and Calverley Yet the harshness is only an

abuse of one of Browning's greatest gifts,—I mean the right use of discords Here, as in many other ways, he is akin to Donne, who also employs the lyrical and dramatic monologue The discord may be wanted for an ominous picture

> those two hills on the right,
> Crouched like two bulls locked horn in horn in fight,
> While, to the left, a tall scalped mountain Dunce,
> Dotard ! (*Childe Roland*)

Or, more commonly, to express the strain of one of those moral conflicts in which Browning delights , a *case*, in which some fateful choice has to be made , or, having been made, is matter for satisfaction, or remorse, or misgiving

> Do you see ? just my vengeance complete,
> The man sprang to his feet,
> Stood erect, caught at God's skirts, and prayed !
> —So, *I* was afraid !
>
> (*Instans Tyrannus*)

Or, in the higher mood ·

> Then, welcome each rebuff
> That turns earth's smoothness rough,
> Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go !
> Be our joys three-parts pain !
> Strive, and hold cheap the strain ,
> Learn, nor account the pang , dare, never grudge the throe !
>
> (*Rabbi Ben Ezra*)

Women and Roses, *Rudel to the Lady of Tripoli*, are enough to show that Browning does not lack for sweet and flowing numbers , still this arrest in the rhythm is never far away. His lyrics are as a rule too heavily charged with thought, or too much clogged with consonants, to have the character of song Yet if not exactly an inventor of harmonies, he is a great inventor of new and expressive metres They range from the brief trochaics of *A Woman's Last Word* and *In a Year* to the weighty trisyllabic rollers of *Saul* and *Abt Vogler*

> Then, the chorus intoned
> As the Levites go up to the altar in glory enthroned
> But I stopped here . for here, in the darkness, Saul groaned

These lyric measures are seldom repeated, indeed every poem of Browning's, whether good or not, is at least unique in its governing idea or emotion Dip into the *Earthly Paradise* or *Songs Before Sunrise*, and any dozen passages will have a certain uniformity of tone With Browning nothing can be predicted Only, after the death of Mrs. Browning in 1861, there is audible a sterner note In the *Prospice* and *Rabbi Ben Ezra* of *Dramatis Personae* there is a grandeur, accompanied by a starkness of language and contempt of mere melody, which is new, although long before, in *A Grammarian's Funeral* and in *Saul*, it had been plainly prophesied

VI

Most of the *Ring and the Book*, Browning's greatest venture, is a feat of intellect rather than a poem, and, in spite of the blank verse, much of the interest is that of a novel The twenty-one thousand lines are seldom tedious, such is the poet's agility and vivacity There are ten monologues, each telling the same tale in a different light, the speakers are the actors in the tragedy, various gossips and advocates, and finally the Pope By him, at last, the whole truth of the affair is cleared, and justice done The exquisite speech of Pompilia, the innocent victim, the second eruption of Guido, the miscreant now condemned, some pages in the confession of the priest Caponsacchi, the rescuer of Pompilia, and the poet's own prologue and epilogue these are the triumphs of the *Ring and the Book* The old yellow *book*, which Browning found, set out the bare documents of an actual Roman murder case long ago They are hammered at by the poet-artificer, and purged of their alloy, 'till, justifiably golden, rounds my *ring*', not fully rounded, however, until the Pope has spoken. Browning's dedication to his dead wife, his 'lyric love', occurs in the overture itself an unrhymed lyric

As I have said, his special art is to keep out of the way, and to sink his identity in that of a supposed speaker None the less, a definite strain of idealism, and an emotional creed, pervade his work, and many pens have expounded them His temper, sometimes still miscalled 'optimistic', is better termed courageous 'God's in his heaven, All's

right with the world', is simply a dramatic lyric spoken by Pippa the mill-girl Browning may believe, like the speaker in *Love among the Ruins*, that 'Love is best', though in the epilogue to *Fernshtah's Fancies*, he doubts whether it may not be an 'iris' deluding us as to the realities His view of life is severe and probationary, and in *La Saisiaz* —which is very rough poetry—it is seen to depend upon a faith, not orthodox in cast but still secure, in survival But Browning's greatness in his craft is in no way staked on the value of his philosophy

VII

The poetry of Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1809–61) explains the honour and devotion offered to her in *One Word More* and 'O lyric Love', and her humility about her own performance adds a last grace to her character Her eye for nature and for children is seen in *My Doves* and *Hector in the Garden*, her passion for Greek and for the old poets, in the *Dead Pan*, for Italy and freedom, in *Casa Guidi Windows*, and for the oppressed and unprivileged, in the long blank verse novel, *Aurora Leigh*, now hardly readable We must regret that Mrs Browning has more genius than skill, and is an artist only rarely and by happy chance Little of her work, so ardent, so exalted, can escape the epithet of amateurish Her unlucky adoption of mere assonance and consonance, instead of perfect rhymes, affects only a few poems, not so her general uncertainty of style The chief exceptions are found in some of her forty-four *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1847), which are addressed, under that simple disguise, to her husband Such are 'How do I love thee? let me count the ways', and 'When our two souls stand up erect and strong', and the whole series, to be criticised only with respect, shows a high courage *Legacies*, a sonnet to her blind tutor in Greek, Hugh Stuart Boyd, is in form perhaps her best The popular *Cry of the Children* and *Cowper's Grave* are more worthy of Mrs Browning's heart than of her hand.

VIII

Is it an illusion outliving youth, or is it not true, that Matthew Arnold (1822–88) is of all the Victorian poets the

best to live with, and the least dependent on a passing taste? His verse is not copious, nearly all of it is found in a few thin volumes, issued between 1849 and 1855, and often revised, and in the *New Poems* of 1867 Not much of it has faded, the tragedy of *Merope* (1858), which was written overmuch to prove a critical theory, has suffered most, together with some of the youthful pieces But among these are the various poems to 'Marguerite', which read now as sincere and fresh as ever The suffering is personal, not simply intellectual, and the sense of loneliness (not the 'tired child' loneliness of Shelley) is the key-note It is expressed in the beautiful and well-known 'Yes, in the sea of life enisled', but more subtly in *Isolation*:

> 'Thou hast been, art, shalt be, alone'
> Or if not quite alone, yet they
> Which touch thee are unmating things,—
> Oceans and clouds and night and day,
> Lorn autumns and triumphant springs,
> And life, and others' joy and pain,
> And love, if love, of happier men

If Marguerite was not a real girl, the dream was as real as truth *Isolation*, except for the backward glance in the *Terrace at Berne*, seems to be the last word of this love-episode, a profound one but never quite happy, and ending in a changed and sterner temper towards life and the world, and these now become the objects of the poet's austere, never acrid, melancholy

I will not try to set forth Matthew Arnold's debts to Wordsworth, and Goethe, and the Greeks, still less his critical theories These, however, determine some of his best poetry The subject of *Sohrab and Rustum* is Persian, that of *Balder Dead* is Norse, but they are really 'Hellenics', and more truly so than *Ulysses* Depth of human interest, firm design, severity of treatment, and the clear, high epical style—these are the aims, and despite a certain formality, which is observable in the studied similes, they are attained The beautiful decoration in *Sohrab and Rustum*, perhaps, takes our attention from the story, we dwell more on it than on the 'subject', and decidedly, 'all' here does *not* 'depend upon the subject' The *Fragment of Chorus of a Dejaneira* and *Dover Beach* have the same kind of dignity, fairly to be called Greek But the melancholy is modern,

and it is equally so in *Empedocles on Etna* The musings of the philosopher (in verse as rugged as Browning's) alternate with the lovely harpings of Callicles in the valley. Matthew Arnold likes a setting of happy landscape for sad or grave meditations, in the *Scholar-Gipsy* and *Thyrsis* it is that of home, and the Oxford countryside, in these poems, survives all depredations They are also Matthew Arnold's best memorial in verse, he has put off the gown, and yields himself to his dreams and memories, and he has found, moreover, his sweetest-sounding instrument Much of the beauty to the ear depends on the short lines ('And scent of hay new-mown') interspersed among the long, and we remember, once more, how Dante thought such lines the *next* in nobility to the heroic kind

Matthew Arnold's ear was not infallible, he is capable of singular asperities, but these he quite forgets in the *Forsaken Merman*, and in *Requiescat*, a faultless elegiac song The *Stanzas to the Grande Chartreuse* and *Obermann Once More* are in a bolder, more oratorical tone, and some of the stanzas are like epigrams, self-contained and final The poet seeks for mental peace among the hills, or dreams of a cure for the old malady of melancholy, it is to be found in the hope of a new dawn for the world-order, and of 'a mighty wave of thought and joy Lifting mankind amain' The vision, in essence, is the same as Shelley's, although to Shelley Matthew Arnold liked to turn his deaf ear In another group of poems, *Rugby Chapel* and *Heine's Grave*, there are many jolting passages, but the style and verse are the predestined form for the troubled, strenuous mood

> Hark! through the alley resounds
> Mocking laughter! a film
> Creeps o'er the sunshine, a breeze
> Ruffles the warm afternoon,
> Saddens my soul with its chill!
> Gibing of spirits in scorn
> Shakes every leaf of the grove,
> Mars the benignant repose
> Of this amiable home of the dead

The keynote of much of Matthew Arnold's verse is struck in the title of the sonnet on Giacopone di Todi, *Austerity in Poetry*, and in the sonnets themselves this note prevails That on Shakespeare stands above the rest, but the models

are Milton and Wordsworth, and not Shakespeare One line in the poems on Rachel the actress, 'Germany, France, Christ, Moses, Athens, Rome', well sums up the streams of 'culture' in which Matthew Arnold sought to plunge his mind After 1867 he wrote almost wholly in prose, though he had long been discoursing on poetry as well as making it, and he remains, with every abatement made for caprice and for an humorous addiction to formulae, a critic in the company of Dryden and Coleridge He turned aside into theology and social preaching, but a poet in spirit he remained He valiantly tried to make a kind of fusion of poetry and religion It was a little at the expense of both, but he insisted, with memorable force, on the poetic element *in* religion In *Thyrsis* he laments that the voice of his friend Arthur Hugh Clough, tired with the 'contention' of the world, had lost its 'happy, country tone' Clough (1819–1861) is certainly not at his best in the long *Dipsychus*, or in the other verse that records his doubts and religious waverings, but rather in the sixteen lines of 'Say not the struggle nought availeth', which express, on the contrary, his hope and faith In fact, when not thus distracted, he was by nature a delicate humorist, satirist, and observer The *Latest Decalogue* has a finish like Pope's The *Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich*, written in 1848, with its Oxonians and Highlanders, is an idyll full of youth and health, and with the sound of waters in its broken, tumbling lines—'hexameters' not even by courtesy The pastoral lyric *Ite domum, saturae*, with its refrain calling to the cows, is sheer melody, and shows what an admirable poet Clough might have been, with a happier, a less anxious temper of mind The classical spell, in truth, was now in full operation, and some verses in the *Ionica* (1858, 1877) of William Johnson Cory, the Eton master, rest directly upon the Anthology 'Now, Dorian shepherd, speak,' he exclaims in *An Invocation*, 'Two minds shall flow together, the English and the Greek" In *Heraclitus*, too, and in *A Dirge*, Cory has succeeded, the grace and pathos of these three poems have kept them alive, so far

IX

The verse of Charles Kingsley is scanty, but he has to his credit one excellent Hellenic, *Andromeda*, which was

published with other poems in 1858 It is something of a literary exercise, with its Homeric similes and epithets, but it is full of colour and motion and shows genuine plastic skill Kingsley comes as near as may be to managing the measure loosely called the English hexameter He avoids its traps, and almost persuades us that it can carry the grand heroic style

Blissful, they turned them to go but the fair-tressed Pallas Athene
Rose, like a pillar of tall white cloud, toward silver Olympus
Far above ocean and shore, and the peaks of the isles and the main-
land,
Where no frost nor storm is, in clear blue windless abysses,
High in the home of the summer, the seats of the happy Immortals,
Shrouded in keen deep blaze, unapproachable

The pictures of the gale and of the sea-nymphs have the same kind of brilliancy, and the verse goes no less swiftly Kingsley's other studious poems, *Saint Maura* and the *Saint's Tragedy*, are more suggestive of Tennyson and the current fashions He wrote lyrics of the telling popular kind, very generous and indignant, some of them 'connected with 1848–9' and with the social enthusiasm of the time, one of these is to be found in *Alton Locke* There is more direct poetry in his *Sands of Dee* and *Three Fishers*, which have the quality of songs, and as such have lasted But Kingsley's younger brother, Henry the novelist, has left one little poem more moving than any of these

Magdalene at Michael's gate tirled at the pin
On Joseph's thorn sang the blackbird, 'Let her in! let her in!'

There are spirited Lancashire rhymes by Edwin Waugh; but no English versifier in dialect, apart from Clare and Tennyson, has earned more than local honours except William Barnes His *Poems of Rural Life in the Dorset Dialect* (1844, 1859, 1862) are a clear mirror of the birds and beasts and flowers, of the sports and legends and woomgs, of all the bright surface and play of things, in his own corner of the shire *Blackmwore Maidens*, *Hay-Meakèn*, the *Wold* (old) *Waggon*, the *Blackbird*, are titles that suggest his field of observation Barnes uses the native speech as his mother-tongue, tunefully and with easy fluent grace He was a linguist and a somewhat whimsical scholar, a country

parson, his semi-phonetic spelling is easy to make out and conveys the soft intonation:

> When zummer's burnèn het's a-shed
> Upon the droopèn grasses head,
> A drevèn under sheady leaves
> The workvo'k in their snow-white sleeves,
> We then mid yearn to clim' the height,
> Where thorns be white, above the vein,
> An' air do turn the zunsheen's might
> To softer light too weak to burn—
> On woodland downs we mid be free,
> But lowland trees be company

The charm does not all evaporate even if this be turned into ordinary English. Another man of the West Country, Robert Stephen Hawker, the vicar of Morwenstow, is a poet of more power and compass, born with a streak in him of mediævalism, and full of fervour and the fighting instinct. He has the genuine 'sense of wonder', and of unquestioning acceptance of mystery:

> All things were strange and rare, the Sangraal
> As though it clung to some ethereal chain
> Brought from high heaven to earth at Arimathie

The *Quest of the Sangraal* (1864) may have its share of deliberate 'quaintness', in its abrupt language and rhythm; but it is not imitative, and not sentimental. There is the same energy in the ballad *Queen Guennivar's Round*, and Hawker's strength is in his martial Cornish lays. *Sir Beville* is a good specimen, and the refrain of the *Song of the Western Men* has rung in all ears. Hawker told Macaulay, who uses the statement in his *History*, that this verse, 'And shall Trelawny die ' was sung by the miners in 1688 in defence of Sir John Trelawney, Bishop of Bristol. The fact is by no means established, nor is Hawker above suspicion, but the song is none the worse for that. There is more freedom of imagination, and more music too, in another mediævalising romancer, Sebastian Evans, whose *Brother Fabian's Manuscript* (1865), like his *Judas Iscariot's Paradise*, is too little remembered. His sister, Anne Evans, as her *Tirly-Wirly* and other pieces prove, had a gentle but authentic gift of song.

X

The line of devotional poets continues, from Cowper to Christina Rossetti Many hymns of Reginald Heber, James Montgomery, and Frederick William Faber have their place assured in worship, and though a tolerable hymn may be and often is poor poetry, still few that have won their fame in the churches are barren of poetic quality, while in a few it is very high Many a hymn is saved, as poetry, chiefly by its verbal rhythm, I mean, its rhythm as *read*, independently of the musical setting which embodies that and more The most striking examples are the translations of John Mason Neale from the Latin and Greek, and here it is the rhythm of the learned tongue that gets into and glorifies the English Neale had also an excellent fount, to use a printer's term, of language His beginnings are good, and are well sustained, 'Brief life is here our portion' for *Hic breve vivitur*, 'The Son of God goes forth to war', for *Vexilla Regis prodeunt* 'Jerusalem, my happy home' is but one of many examples Most of John Keble's *Christian Year* (1827) demands to be judged as poetry, not as hymnody His own saintly temper pervades the book, which is the voice of the Anglican votary, retired within himself and away from the conflict Much of it is tinged, in obvious ways, by Gray or Wordsworth, and Keble's inspiration easily runs low, though in such a hymn as 'When God of old came down from heaven' it is bolder But we wait, above all, for the true and gentle touches of nature for openings like 'Red o'er the forest peers the setting sun', which lead up to the theme Keble, as his Latin lectures show, was a penetrating critic, on orthodox lines, of the art of poetry

The verse of John Henry Newman, especially that of early date, is marked by force of nature and of troubled feeling more than by qualities strictly to be called poetical There are manifest exceptions to this rule not only 'Lead, kindly Light', written in 1833 in the Straits of Bonifacio, but the beautiful 'Death was full urgent with thee, sister dear', and the Sophoclean chorus, 'Man is permitted much'. The *Dream of Gerontius*, composed in 1865 when Newman had freed his mind by the *Apologia*, is a document of deep spiritual interest rather than a great poem or even a very good one.

The lyrics are bare and prosaic, the blank verse, but for a few shining passages, is heavy and touched with pedantry. One chant, be it quickly added, is in the same category as 'Lead, kindly Light', and is yet sharper in its intensity.

Take me away, and in the lowest deep
  There let me be,
And there in hope the lone night-watches keep,
  Told out for me
There, motionless and happy in my pain,
  Lone, not forlorn,—
There will I sing my sad perpetual strain,
  Until the morn

Among other poets of the Anglo-Catholic, or Catholic, movement Isaac Williams, with his *Altar* and *Cathedral*, should be remembered, also Newman's follower, Faber, who with his 'Hark, hark, my soul' and many other lyrics is established in the hymnals Some of his verses upon the country round Oxford are of a rarer stamp, and like a very good water-colour sketch

XI

Far from these, and indeed from all groups and schools, are the few great lyrics of Emily Jane Bronte (1818–48) The last that she wrote, 'No coward soul is mine', is the greatest, together with the *Old Stoic*, and near to these come *Remembrance* and the lines 'Sleep brings no joy to me'.

Sleep brings no strength to me,
  No power renewed to brave,
I only sail a darker sea,
  A wilder wave

Sleep brings no wish to fret
  My harassed heart beneath:
My only wish is to forget
  In endless sleep of death

Matthew Arnold refers to Emily Brontë as the poet who had spoken to him with most passionate accents 'since Byron died', and she has something of Byron's straining after the infinite, only it is mortally sincere, and wholly free from Byron's appetite for display It is the poetry of mental pain and solitude, and of a courage that refuses

any other stay than the assurance of being absorbed into the eternal Personality Emily Brontë seems to have struck out her best and most enduring poetry as if by chance, it is found amidst a mass of work which is remarkable in more obvious and customary ways But there are few intenser expressions in our poetry of the cravings of a spirit in prison. The form is seldom spontaneous, it is hewn out and hard-won, like the temper of which it is the expression.

CHAPTER XIX

THE MID-VICTORIANS

I

THERE are few more rigorous craftsmen than the painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–1882) He was three parts Italian, though London-born, and his translations from Dante's *Vita Nuova*, from many other early Italian poets, from Leopardi, and from Villon, fit the originals like a skin Some of his youngest poetry is his best The *Blessed Damozel*, in its first shape, appeared in 1850 in the *Germ*, that fugitive sheet in which a noted band of artists proclaimed the cult of simplicity and truth to nature The *Poems* of 1881 contain Rossetti's final sifting and recension of his verse The total is not large, there is none of the incurable too-muchness of Swinburne and Browning. Every line must be packed tight with poetic thought and the frailest lyric must be constructed, according to Rossetti's sound creed of 'fundamental brainwork'. In the result, the style, whether plain or sumptuous, has the air of being hammered out, and the tendency is towards congestion of the language and clogging of the rhythm Rossetti, however, is a true and powerful artist, with an unsleeping conscience. He can draw new virtues out of familiar metres Like Donne he wishes to strip his thought and feeling naked, but he cares, more than Donne, for the beauty and studious placing of his words Like Donne, again, Rossetti hunts down a fancy or shadowy image with a kind of logic A poem like *Love's Nocturn*, though it is hardly to be analysed, is not therefore indistinct, there is the same effect in the *Stream's Secret*, and in *Plighted Promise* In *Sudden Light* a new turn is given to the common experience of a strange place appearing familiar ('I have been here before'). The

poet fancies that he had been there of old with the lady who is now lost to him, and he concludes

> Has this been thus before?
> And shall not thus time's eddying flight
> Still with our lives our loves restore
> In death's despite,
> And day and night yield one delight once more?

Other lyrics, like the virginal *First Love*, are less introspective, some, like the *Wood-Spurge*, are half symbol and half reverie Rossetti's foremost love-poem is the *House of Life*, a sequence of 101 sonnets of various date, recording his passion and bereavement It is well known how he buried a packet of his verse with his wife, and how he afterwards had the wisdom to regain it The two sections of the *House of Life* are termed 'Youth and Change' and 'Change and Death' There is much verbal mannerism, but the series is one of the greatest in English The flame in the shrine is tended with religious devoutness, and there is no opposition between sense and spirit The transcendental side of love is dwelt upon, without any such intrusion of philosophic theory as we find in Spenser's *Amoretti* There is a great variety of style in these sonnets *Love Enthroned* is a glowing treatment of abstractions, Youth and Death, Hope and Fame and Life, *Silent Noon* paints the English wild-flowers and the reposing lady, *Love and Hope* celebrates constancy at all costs, *Willowwood*, 'I sat with Love', is an old myth beautifully renewed, the *Sun's Shame* is a Shakespearean recital of the world's evils, and the *One Hope* is the hope of reunion after death This may possibly be Rossetti's last word as a love-poet, the first may be the *Blessed Damozel*, a masterpiece which was more than once revised for the better, and which speaks to the imagination better than the picture which it inspired The physical scene, certainly, is not wholly distinct, and the *double* past, that of the earthly union and of the vision itself, makes for a slight confusion None the less the poem, with its mingled effect of nearness and remoteness, remains Rossetti's freshest and loveliest

The sonnets on existing pictures, whether the poet's own or those of others, are intended as translations into words of the painter's purpose, giving both part of what he has expressed, and something of what his art cannot

express *Found*, and *For a Venetian Pastoral by Giorgione*, are as good examples as any of the two kinds The language, however, has a hectic strain which is absent in the pictures Of the sonnets upon poets, *Chatterton* sums up the boy's nature and his fate with extraordinary skill, and of the rest, the Miltonic *On Refusal of Aid Between Nations* is Rossetti's single and splendid excursion into what may be called public poetry Some of the ignorant in his own day reproached him as an over-sensuous writer In reality, much of his best work is deeply spiritual, or markedly ethical, and some of it is even didactic He may have been too much cut off from the open world, and, at times, absorbed in the 'song of the bower' But *The Choice* is a lofty sermon, and *Soothsay* recalls the gnomic passages in Old English *Mary's Girlhood*, *Ave*, and *World's Worth* portray, though doubtless rather by force of dramatic sympathy than from within, the spirit of religious peace In *Dante at Verona* there is the stern accent of Dante's own letters It is possible to find some false notes in *Jenny*, but the scene of the pretty light lost sleeping girl is profoundly presented

Most of Rossetti's narrative poems are ballads, though *A Last Confession*, with its Italian fierceness, is a dramatic monologue of the kind made familiar by Browning *Rose Mary* is a lay rather than a ballad, and the verse is the sweetest and most rapid that Rossetti ever wrote There is a background of chivalry and magic, on which is traced a story of guilt, punishment, expiation, and forgiveness *Stratton Water*, the nearest in manner to the folk-ballad, is somewhat of a *pastiche* But in all there is the same energy and the same care for design *Sister Helen* keeps at white-heat, though it be rather longer than the imagination will stand In the *White Ship* and the *King's Tragedy* (the tale of Catherine Bar-lass) there is a not too happy mixture of the popular style with Rossetti's peculiar dialect, but there is the central fire in both, and much magnificence of rhythm.

II

The poetry of Christina Georgina Rossetti (1830–1894) appears, unlike that of her brother, to have written itself. The striving for perfection is perfectly well concealed. Miss Rossetti's artistry can be trusted, and her station among our poets, not merely among women poets, is secure. As

for her ' style ', it is the style of pure spring water We may feel at first that one draught of it is very like another , but in fact there are several springs, each of them abundant and with a different ' race ' to it Most of her nine hundred English poems are short , most of them are sad , and most are religious Those written in happy mood, although in a minority, are yet fairly numerous , and of these again some are in the devotional strain, while others, a well-marked group, are secular, playful, fantastic, and in tone even childlike In the mass of little pieces called *Sing-Song* the matter is infantine, though the form is without fault For the pageant of the *Months*, that lovely series of concerted lyrics, the audience is rather older , and still more artful and simple are the carols for Christmas and Easter

Goblin Market is a revel of colours and sweet tastes and irregular easy melodies Its girls and bad goblins and ensnaring fruits are not the excuse for a sermon , the ideas of temptation, and malice, and self-sacrifice are like musical themes, and are gaily treated In the *Prince's Progress*, a story closing in a dirge, there is again that richness of colouring and of romantic feeling for which we are always watching in Miss Rossetti She is loth to let herself go, so severe is the call of the inner and spiritual life, so tyrannical the conscience Happily, the inner life also has its permitted raptures , and these are chanted in such verse as *Birds of Paradise, A Processional of Creation*, and the garland entitled *New Jerusalem and its Citizens* But the habitual tone is one of self-distrust, self-effacement, humility, and anxious melancholy Miss Rossetti had bad health , she was an Anglo-Catholic devotee, whose whole being (apart from family affections) was centred on the religious life, on its fears and hopes , and she twice, it appears, rejected marriage for reasons of conscience , the religious faith of her suitors did not harmonise with her own Her brother and biographer, William Michael, states that the sonnet-series *Monna Innominata*, a record of a love foregone, is ' an intensely personal utterance ' It has Miss Rossetti's usual nicety of form , and she moves, here and elsewhere, through the snares of the sonnet with complete ease Doubtless the poems that she valued most are those that express her deepest piety If her rightness of expression did not seem so instinctive we should call it another mark of her self-

discipline Nothing would better bring out her lyrical power than a close study of her versification The brief measures of *Dreamland*, the labouring pace of *Uphill*, the truly majestic rolling monorimes of *Marvel of Marvels* and of *Passing Away*, are random examples It is needless to quote from these, or from the still more familiar 'When I am dead, my dearest', or from the multitude of poems in which Miss Rossetti shows her Shelleyan power of giving precise form to the most fragile and elusive emotions In one short thing, based upon a supposed incident in the Mutiny, *In the Round Tower at Jhansi*, she goes out of her ordinary range, and nobly touches the *lyra heroica*.

III

The arts and crafts of William Morris (1834–1896) included, besides dyeing, weaving, and printing, the production of verse and prose in tireless abundance The wearing power of his poetry is harder to judge than that of his carpets The quality, at first sight, is so even, so far above anything common or careless, that one thing seems almost as good as another Another wall-paper, another poem,—so much the better One *less*, or a dozen,—well, there is still plenty left, of much the same kind and value On looking closer the differences come out, from the mass of beautiful, slightly monotonous performance emerge unique things, each with a definite identity The best of them are either short, or are passages out of larger wholes Morris's bigger poems are sadly prolix all, that is, but the first, the *Life and Death of Jason* (1867), which is just not too long The *Earthly Paradise* (1868–1870), with its twenty-five separate stories, *Love is Enough* (1872), and *Sigurd the Volsung* (1876) all suffer in the same way But in each of the four, besides the general high workmanship, there is a fresh, original, and striking design, such as we should expect from this great inventor of patterns

Rossetti remarked that the 'passionate lyric quality' of Morris's early work in his first volume, the *Defence of Guenevere and other Poems* (1858), reappears, with 'much more mature balance', in *Love is Enough*, implying perhaps, what is true, that this quality, during the years intervening, is somewhat in abeyance Certainly in *Jason* and the *Earthly*

Paradise the young rough wine of 1858 may seem to have mellowed only too much, and the 'passionate' element, even in the lyrical parts, to have been tamed down The change has perplexed the critics, and it is unexplained, though more gradual than may appear One aspect of it may be noticed The fates of Medea, or of King Acrisius, and even of the man who perished through 'the writing on the image' are thrown back in time they are shown as troubles of ever so long ago, disasters in an old book, matters for a comfortable melancholy not to be told of in a style that hits too hard But the defiance of Guenevere, the valour and bloodshed in *Sir Peter Harpdon's End*, are in present time, and the effect is immediate, the words are not smooth, or the rhythm Robert is butchered, with brutal circumstance, Jehane is carried off, and *this*—

> This was the parting that they had
> Beside the haystack in the floods

Concerning Geffray Teste Noire, another episode from Froissart, has the same stamp, like *King Arthur's Tomb* and the *Defence of Guenevere*, and both of these are most un-Tennysonian The beautiful or strange experiments in the volume are too many to recite —*Rapunzel*, *Golden Wings*, the *Blue Closet*, the folk-ballad *Welland River*, and, not least, *Summer Dawn* with its lingering measure, 'Pray but one prayer for me 'twixt thy closed lips' a poem written from the heart, with nothing 'mediæval' or 'literary' about it In his last book of verse, *Poems by the Way* (1891), Morris uses variations of this pensive tune The *Message of the March Wind* and *Mother and Son* are his masterpieces of this order

Orpheus and the Sirens and the other lyrics in *Jason*, melodious as they are, cannot have cost the poet so much blood But the tale itself, unrolling at leisure yet not tardily, is of a new species The Elizabethans, so abounding in poetry, are seldom good narrators There had been no long, sure-footed, mythological story in verse since Chaucer and his Scottish followers Keats left one of his Greek tales in confusion, and the other one a fragment *Jason* is clear and holds out to the end, without pause or strain Poetry never fails, although the speeches are less distinct and successful than the pictures The harpies, the Hesperids, the

escape of Jason and Medea, her transformation of the ram,—there are endless such bright tapestry designs, all in a 'land of clear colours' In the *Earthly Paradise* the pictures are, in proportion, rarer, there is more sweet, protracted discoursing by the poet and his personages The tales of Bellerophon and Gudrun are pocket epics, and tedious, the *Lovers of Gudrun* is a dilution of one of the greater sagas, the *Laxdœla* There is more edge in the mediæval subjects, the *Proud King* and the *Writing on the Image* The tone for the whole work is set by the prologue in which the tired Northern wanderers commune with the stranded Greeks Of the classic stories the *Son of Crœsus* is the most compact. Morris, like Spenser, looks back to Chaucer as his master, and, whatever he may lack, he has his share of Chaucer's staying power, the power of keeping always melodious and always in the right key of language

In *Love is Enough, or the Freeing of Pharamond, a Morality*, he retires awhile into the very fastness of Romance, the dream of the lover who is blind to the world of men But as Chaucer in his *Troilus* perceived, this subject cannot be kept up long without artistic relief, and Pharamond, to whom all but his lady are shadows, and Azalais the shadowy lady, muse on and on without mercy in the drawling, loosely alliterative measures There is much charm by the way, and the concentric plan of *Love is Enough* is original and amusing The 'morality' is performed before an emperor and empress, is presented by Love in person, is introduced by 'Music', and is watched by two homely lovers who talk and comment Some of the songs ('Love is enough while ye deemed him a-sleeping') are among Morris's sweetest Then, as though refreshed by this sojourn in the 'land of heart's desire', he came out of it, and put his strength into the dark violent legend of the *Volsunga Saga* His daughter tells us that *Sigurd* was the work that 'he held most highly and wished to be remembered by' He revised it with a care of which the reward is an admirable spontaneity and freedom of movement

I must not dwell on the long chapter of his devotion to the 'Muse of the North' He translated sagas, in an idiom which sought to echo their own, and which recurs in his own prose romances The scenery of Iceland, where he travelled, and the spirit of the sagas, left the deepest mark on his mind.

Sigurd, though its ten thousand lines are too many, is his chief monument The subject has a murky grandeur, the driving forces in the action are sub-human By wicked spells and potions the noble actors, Sigurd, Brynhild, and Gudrun (who is not the Gudrun of *Laxdœla*) are tied up into an impious relationship of which the only issue is death upon death An inherited curse is fulfilled on the innocent and the guilty, and their doom, a symbol of the break-up of the world-order, is divined from the first In contrast to the tragic matter is the buoyant rush of the lines and the living brilliance of the pictures, whereby the immense poem, with its unwieldy matter, is kept going

Swinburne speaks of William Morris as of one 'who in hatred of wrong Would fain have arisen a redeemer By sword or by song' His labours as a prophet and reformer crown his career, but seldom inspire his better verse His vision of a purer order and of a cleaner England, without poverty or oppressive institutions and peopled by a handsome race, is expressed fully in his prose This, in his romances, in the *Dream of John Ball*, in *Hopes and Fears for Art*, is lucid and delicate, with an archaic tinge that we learn to like The same ideal glimmers in his poetry, but the direct propaganda of *The Day is Coming* and *All for the Cause* is nothing more than strenuous verse Morris translated all the *Æneid*, all the *Odyssey*, and (with unusual ill fortune), all *Beowulf* Of these the *Odyssey*, which is in the *Sigurd* metre, is nearest in effect to the original, and they are all the pastimes of a hand that never wearied.

IV

Nor could anything stanch the flow of Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837–1909) His fame was assured in 1865 by *Atalanta in Calydon*, he was in his prime down to 1882, when *Tristram of Lyonesse* was published Besides much else, he produced two series (1866, 1878) of *Poems and Ballads*, *Songs Before Sunrise* (1871), his second Greek tragedy, *Erechtheus* (1876), and three plays on Mary Stuart, one of which, *Bothwell*, exceeds fifteen thousand lines All this time he was the glory of the young, who are the real public of the poets He might seem to stand for youth itself, for freedom of passion, for the passion of freedom, and for an

irresistible music. The glory has faded, for youth has turned elsewhere, but it lasted long, and Swinburne never stopped writing More volumes poured out, more tragedies, more new, surprising, and impeccable metres, now and then came something memorable, such as the *Tale of Balen* in 1896. In general (and the peril had been plain from the first), little is left of this later work but the prodigious instrumental skill Often there is an excellent subject, but somehow the result is a flood of rigmarole, and we are aware of an inner void This is never true of Swinburne's critical prose, which is extravagant only on the surface His judgments on the old dramatists fill many volumes, for range and insight, they are simply the best we have, nor can his early book on William Blake, as a masterpiece of interpretation, ever be outmoded

Swinburne's language flows from the purest fount He was nourished on the ancient classics, on the English classics, and above all on the Authorised Version He had a perfect ear and was a mighty inventor of lyrical measures, there is no surer or more brilliant instrumentalist in English Yet the salvage of his poetry, though not small in itself, is small in proportion to the mass For all their skill of conduct the two Greek plays leave, as tragedies, a faint impression. Even in the famed choruses there is a waste of words But this we forgive for the glory of sound and motion, and for a certain electrical quality that time cannot alter. It comes and goes, but it is maintained, in *Atalanta*, throughout the splendid interchanges of the Chorus with Meleager.

> Would God ye could carry me
> Forth of all these,
> Heap sand and bury me
> By the Chersonese,
> Where the thundering Bosphorus answers the thunder of Pontic seas

'Before the beginning of years' and 'When the hounds of spring' are also in stanza Well, after fifty years we may smile at the 'brown bright nightingale amorous' and the Maenad and the Bassarid, nor did we ever take them too seriously But 'ah the singing, ah the delight, the passion!',—this has not vanished, nor the music of the long billowing strophes in *Erechtheus* Swinburne's other choric odes, to Athens or to Victor Hugo, sound mechanical beside

them. His sapphics and choriambics have less matter and meaning than Tennyson's 'experiments' in classical measures, but in glory of passionate sound they have no equal, among feats of this kind As to song pure and simple, in the *Oblation* ('Ask nothing more of me, sweet') and in the sixteen lines of 'Love laid his weary head' Swinburne wrote what may outlive many of his later volumes Some of these lighter and briefer lyrics are certainly the most enduring Many are in short lines, *Anima Anceps*, *A Match*, *Ex-Voto* In the first *Poems and Ballads* there is much about the passing of love, and the call of the poppied sleep The desire of a youth to die and be extinguished is expressed to perfection in the *Garden of Proserpine*, and it is heard, more rhetorically yet in its fullest force, in *Ilicet*

Swinburne poured out lavishly his eulogies of the living and memorial verses to the dead The lyrics addressed to Landor and Mazzini and the *Adieux à Mary Stuart* are plain, concise, and severe, also the sonnet to Cardinal Newman, a salute of honour from the camp of the pagans Among the sonnets to the old dramatists the most distinct and happy are those to Beaumont and Fletcher and to John Day A few verses in the grand style, welcome and articulate amid the whirl of sound, can be picked out from the first ode to Victor Hugo and from the elegy on Baudelaire

Many of Swinburne's passions may be called literary, but his love for wild English nature and for the sea is personal and physical The *Forsaken Garden* and *Winter in Northumberland*, though never definite in *drawing*, give the very atmosphere of the place and weather In the *Lake of Gaube* he records his own raptures as a swimmer The sea is hymned in the finale of *Tristram of Lyonesse*, as Love is in the still greater overture The great story, we may fear, is almost washed away in the torrent of words But in the *Tale of Balen* the 'golden moorland side' and the 'rioting rapids of the Tyne' are the setting for a clear narrative that rides on gallantly, the poet, as he says,

> Reining my rhymes into buoyant order
> Through honied leagues of the northland border

It rides on, with the shadow cast before it, to the innocent mutual fratricide of Balen and Balan

I have said nothing of the amorous element in the first

Poems and Ballads that fluttered the public of the day, of 'Faustine, Fragoletta, Dolores', and of the snake-eyed, sea-green-eyed, and also cat-eyed, Félise These poems are sincere, headlong, wonderful of course in rhythm, and finally a little absurd, intended, in part, to curdle the blood of the *bourgeois* In any case, Swinburne put all this behind him, as he tells us in the *Prelude* to *Songs Before Sunrise* There is great poetry in that *Prelude*, and also, surely, in the *Pilgrims*, where the 'lady of love' is now humanity itself, marching on to its ideal goal through willing self-sacrifice The volume is inspired by the political visions of Mazzini and the recent liberation of Italy, and among the Italian poems *A Marching Song* and *Siena* are pre-eminent *Hertha* is a lofty lyrical celebration, loose enough in its thinking, of the universal life-force a kind of lay pantheism The *Hymn of Man* and *Before a Crucifix* are powerful tirades, the lines to *Walt Whitman in America* have some of the rhythm of the Atlantic Swinburne has no very distinct creed, his early nihilism gives way to a more aspiring and hopeful temper, and the transcendental strain of *Songs Before Sunrise* never entirely leaves him

His numerous plays are full of curious interest, though his fame cannot rest upon them Some, like *Locrine*, are on British legend, of the three on Queen Mary the early *Chastelard* is the freshest, and all are carefully based upon the documents The *Sisters* is modern and realistic, and in the last, the *Duke of Gandia*, on a Borgia murder, there is the same deliberately bare and simple style Swinburne's many imitations of the folk ballad, some of which were posthumously published, do not want for fire, as imitations, they are only too elaborate and accurate, without the loose ends and lapses of the popular muse.

V

The natural habit of Morris and Swinburne is to overflow and expand The habit, we saw, of Rossetti is to concentrate, to say once for all what he has to say, at whatever cost of over-crowding, and his simplicity, when it comes, is hardly won This way of working is shared by more than one poet of his group His friend Dr Gordon Hake, whose reputation ought in my belief again to emerge, adopts it

with beautiful effect in the *Cripple* and the *Blind Boy*, both everyday and pathetic subjects In his stinging parable, *Old Souls*, the tinker, the itinerant soul-mender, is Christ in disguise, to whom the dwellers in the ballroom and the chapel, unaware of their need, alike refuse their custom The same union of the simple and the intricate, and the same grip on language is found, on a larger scale, in some of the work of Coventry Patmore (1823–1896) He wrote in the *Germ* , and his *Angel in the House* (1854–1856), with its sequel the *Victories of Love*, was a great popular success Of his odes to the *Unknown Eros*, published after he had joined the Church of Rome, many were too hard for his public , but they are Patmore's chief performance The *Angel in the House* describes one of those virtuous and happy marriages that seem to have no history The comic flatness of some of the detail earned the rampant parodies of Swinburne But Patmore did not care, he had his definite purpose Others had besung ' free ' or pagan love , he would sing the love that was blest by the law, the church, and the world The ' song of the bower ' should be heard, high and clear, in a deanery The *Angel in the House* becomes an impassioned idyll, and a delicate emotional drama

In *Amelia*, another happy couple visit the grave of the man's former beloved , Patmore makes no false step in telling the story His odes make a louder challenge He is here akin to the seventeenth century poets, at their best and worst He can be as abstruse and wiredrawn as Crashaw and very far from the ' Uranian clearness ' for which he prays But the Uranian Love is there, highly celebrated Love was Patmore's religion , and he easily and consciously confounds the distinctions between religious and earthly passion The phenomenon, and its dangers, are familiar to the reader of mystical verse and prose It takes a very great writer to escape the dangers Patmore's vehement sincerity, at least, is evident But the odes where this ingredient is absent are the more satisfactory and the better done The simple humanity of *Toys*, the *Azalea*, and *Departure* strikes home , the form is classical, and the impression of strain and violence given by some of the ambitious odes is no longer felt. Even there, be it said, Patmore shows himself a master of his complex, irregular rhythms

VI

The reticent and by no means copious verse of Canon Richard Watson Dixon (1833–1900) began to appear in 1861, but was little known until a selection was published in 1909 by Robert Bridges Dixon had been an associate of the 'Pre-Raphaelite' brethren, and the manner and colouring of Rossetti are visible in his *Christ's Company*, still, he is none the less original, and aims always at concision and sharpness of image In the long unequal *Mano* (1883) he uses the *terza rima* and catches something of Dante's severity in handling it He also wrote tales in rhyme, and notable pieces of more abstract cast such as the *Ode on Conflicting Claims* His strength, however, lies in very brief lyrics, like 'Why fadest thou in death?', and 'The feathers of the willow' has taken its place beside the best songs of Tennyson In *Fallen Rain* and the *Fall of the Leaf* the pencillings of scenery and weather are no less exquisite Dixon is also eminent for his history of the English Church from 1529 to 1570

The lyrical gift of Digby Mackworth Dolben, the young Etonian, was already in flower when he was drowned, in 1867, still a boy He was both a Grecian and a fervent Anglo-Catholic, and his verse has been edited by Robert Bridges, who calls the lines 'He would have his lady sing' a masterpiece They certainly have the true initiate rapture, and the glowing hues, and the preciousness too, that belong to the school.

> And all the far pleasance
> Where linkèd angels dance,
> With scarlet wings that fall
> Magnifical, or spread
> Most sweetly overhead
> In fashion musical,
> Of cadenced lutes instead

'The world is young to-day', one or two hymns, and one version from Sappho, are an earnest of Dolben's talent

An admirer, who was almost a disciple, of Patmore, another spirit 'naturally Catholic', Francis Thompson (1859–1907), won much fame through his *Hound of Heaven*, first published in 1893, he had already been hailed, too quickly, as a poet of the highest rank by some readers of his *Sister Songs* (1895) and his *New Poems* (1897).

Thompson, with his early hardships, his somewhat defenceless charm of character, and his intensity of religious ardour, is a moving and attractive figure The *Hound of Heaven* is highly imagined the human soul in its desperate flight is pursued and at last overtaken by divine love, and the movement of the irregular verse is so swift and powerful as almost to carry us over the infelicities Like the seventeenth century poets who are plainly Thompson's congeners, or ancestors, he can start magnificently, and then all too suddenly drop 'I had formed my style', he says, 'before I knew Cowley, whom I really did curiously resemble' The more curious and obvious resemblance is to Crashaw Too much need not be made of the pranks of diction on which the critics fell so easily After all, they generally mean something and it is rather pleasing to hear how the sunset 'sublimed the illuminous and volute redundance' of a small girl's hair Thompson suffers, rather, from a strange and constantly interrupting wrongness of poetic style, from a richness that knows no control and becomes turgid But the spilth of undoubted genius is always an ungrateful topic Thompson is often splendid, and comes right, if seldom for very long The musical *Making of Viola* is an example, likewise the overture to the *Victorian Ode*, and that to the *Ode after Easter* 'Cast wide the folding doorways of the East'

There is no such energy, and no such excess, in the plaintive liquid numbers of Arthur O'Shaughnessy (1844–1881). His chief works are *An Epic of Women* (1870), *Lays of France* (1872), and *Music and Moonlight* (1874) The *Lays, Eliduc* and others, tell some of the stories of Marie de France, in diluted form, and in thin, sweet, and even language O'Shaughnessy's lyrics have an accurate and effortless melody, the wave-like trisyllabic feet and double rhymes often seem an echo of Edgar Poe 'We are the music-makers' is universally known, and the effects are no less subtle in the *Fountain of Tears* O'Shaughnessy has his full share of the gift, not uncommon in the best Irish poets, of having less to say than might seem to be possible, but then it is just that little, a mere web of musical emotions, that may be indestructible There is something of the same quality in the verse of his friend, the blind Philip Bourke Marston (1850–1887), whose *Garden Secrets* are full of innocent rare fancy and of nice melody.

VII

I now revert to some earlier writers of another school Three years before Tennyson's *Poems* of 1842, the immense *Festus* of Philip James Bailey, a work full of shapeless speculation, started on its course , and, in 1843, came the epical *Orion* of Richard Hengist Horne The resolute seeker can find beauty, or scattered 'beauties', in the former poem, and many more in the latter Both are marked by the peculiar fever and inflation of language which the historians have called 'spasmodic', and by the same vice are touched two writers of far more genuine power, Sydney Thompson Dobell (1824–1874), and his friend Alexander Smith Dobell's lyrical talent is much diluted and diffused, though once at least, it triumphs in the ballad *Keith of Ravelston*. There is hardly a note in the poem of the true supernatural folk-ballad Set it by the *Wife of Usher's Well*, and the artifice—a beautiful and legitimate artifice, indeed—appears at once Dobell often attempts these effects of mystery and shadow In colloquial verse like *Tommy's Dead* he can be simple and moving He is seen at his happiest in the volume *England in Time of War* (1856) Alexander Smith (1830–1867) writes far more tangibly, and his literary 'spasms' were only a youthful malady The *City Poems* of 1857 reveal an equal passion for the town and the country and much poetic skill in depicting both In *Glasgow* the mood of Wordsworth may be said to be inverted The summer and the sea are well remembered, but as a foil to the beauty 'sad and stern' of the dark streets Perhaps Alexander Smith's special gift is the accurate and graceful notation of open-air scenes and manners He has often a simplicity and humanity, and also a clear finish, that make us think of Goldsmith His prose meditations in *Dreamthorp*, a book that has held its place, are those of a poetic soul and observer, and give him high rank among the pensive essayists.

VIII

I paced the silent and deserted streets
In cold dark shade and chilly moonlight grey;
Pondering a dolorous series of defeats
And black disasters from life's opening day,

Invested with the shadow of a doom
That filled the spring and summer with a gloom
Most wintry, black, and drear,
Gloom from within as from a sulphurous censer
Making the glooms without for ever denser,
To blight the buds and flowers and fruitage of my year.

The lines are from the *Insomnia* of James Thomson (1834–1882) a shorter and later poem, and more concentrated, than his *City of Dreadful Night* (1870–1874) The mood in both is the same, and the heavy tolling effect of the double rhyme is characteristic The language seems to be beaten out, often roughly, rather than carved out, and in the *City* there is a deliberate placing of Latin polysyllables, that add to the funereal effect

An everlasting conscious inanition,
We yearn for speedy death in full fruition,
Dateless oblivion and divine repose

The final picture of Melencolia, from Durer, is the climax of a series of visions, drawn out so long as to deaden the imagination, but individually magnificent Thomson's native bent was all for beauty, gaiety, and romance The gaiety is seen in the lightsome verse of *Sunday at Hampstead* and *Sunday up the River* The romance and beauty are seen in the well-told tale of *Weddah and Om-el-Bonain*, and still better in the *Naked Goddess*, a poem free from the streak of commonness that injures some of Thomson's work The sources of his 'pessimism' are partially explained in *Vane's Story*, a dream-story containing some personal confessions Thomson lost a girl whom he loved, he had an almost lifelong struggle, he fell to alcohol, and his outlook, in the end, was upon absolute darkness He was long an ally of Bradlaugh, the fighting atheist, who showed him signal kindness If he had not cast off every shred of theology it is clear that English poetry might have missed the utterance of a nihilism which is rooted in experience and beside which Swinburne's mere craving for the 'poppied sleep' sounds thin and juvenile The modes and colours of Thomson's imagery are much affected by De Quincey, the third of whose Ladies of Sorrow, 'the defier of God', and also 'the mother of lunacies, and the suggestress of suicides', dominates the *City of Dreadful Night* His despair was genuine, and yet, perhaps, it was less funda-

mental than that of the young Jewess, Amy Levy, who killed herself in 1889 In her small volume *A London Plane-Tree* there is no theory, no attitude or demand for sympathy, only a cry from within and a native sense of form *In the Mile End Road*, *Last Words*, and *Youth and Love* are perhaps her chief title-deeds Another poetess, Margaret Veley (1843–1887), though in no way desperate like Amy Levy, has a vein of deep melancholy, tempered by an humorous bitterness, and her workmanship is remarkably precise and lucid *A Japanese Fan* (1876) is a very brief masterpiece, a finished epitaph on a love-passage that is dead and demands to be buried

IX

The Persian carpet of Edward FitzGerald (1809–1883) wears so well after seventy odd years and in any light that we can scarcely believe it was ever ignored But it is an old tale how the first edition (1859) of the *Rúbaiyát of Omar Khayyám*, one of the most perfect of English poems, was unearthed by Rossetti and his friends The hundred and one quatrains that we know had been more than once revised, and were originally only seventy-five Each of them, like the stanzas of Gray's *Elegy*, remains in the memory as an independent *poemetto* FitzGerald worked freely on the verses of the old astronomer, paraphrasing, or 'conflating' several units, or merely taking a hint or phrase. The pattern, or symphonic arrangement, is his own and not Omar's, but the quatrain, with its rhymeless third line, is an adaptation of the Persian measure It is hard to see where FitzGerald studied for his majestic cadences Another translation from the Persian, the *Bird-Parliament*, points to a close reading of Dryden There was much in the *Rúbaiyát* (though its ideas are universal) that came particularly home to the poets of the mid-century the frank, though never hectic, vindication of the senses and of the call of beauty, the even sharper awareness of the transience of youth and spring, and the scepticism that is ready to question even itself For Omar-FitzGerald each of us is a shadow-shape, a pawn in the game, that soon vanishes into nothingness, and yet the poet offers a gay or fierce defiance to the problematical Master, or Potter, or Eternal Sáki, who deals on such incredible terms with his creatures,

and offers them heaven or hell, so that at last, in scorn, he is offered their 'forgiveness' All this is harmonised, not into logic but into art FitzGerald dealt no less freely with some other Persian writers and with several plays of Calderón His letters to his friends are in a rank apart, along with Lamb's and Cowper's.

X

A different East is mirrored in Sir Alfred Comyn Lyall's *Verses Written in India* (1889) An eminent public servant and scholar, and a soldier who had served in the Mutiny, Lyall penetrated far into the hostile Indian mind No Englishman will read unmoved *Theology in Extremis*, where the speaker, solely for the honour of the 'old countree', refuses to save his life by renouncing, for Islam, the Christian faith in which he does *not* believe Lyall has several of these soul-searching situations, more than once founded on actual events Another poem is *Amor in Extremis*, and *in extremis* might be the motto of the volume The Rajput and the Afghan, driven to bay, monologue against the foreign conqueror, and there are few more pointed expressions of racial hate than *Badminton at Delhi* Lyall's verse, although he evidently studied Swinburne, inclines to roughness, but is always full of vitality There is no such poetic force, though much grace and accomplishment, in Sir Edwin Arnold's *Light of Asia* (1879), which introduced the life and gospel of the Buddha to many readers But the East is infinite, and in a fuller review there would be more to say of Mrs Adela Florence Nicolson, who wrote under the name of 'Laurence Hope' The *Garden of Kama* (1901) and *Indian Love* depict the play of the Oriental passions with much force and freedom, if with some monotony, and in some of the stories there is a dramatic sense that reminds us of Lyall. Laurence Hope is little remembered, but poems like *His Rubies*, the *Song of Jasoda*, and *Hira Singh's Farewell to Burmah* ought to be saved

CHAPTER XX

LATER POETRY (I)

I

SELECTION must now be still more jealous The average level of formal accomplishment rises, and the volume of verse with some claim to be called poetry increases immensely We remember Boswell's dialogue with Johnson, who had 'talked slightingly' of Hamilton of Bangour

> When I urged that there were some good poetical passages in the book, 'Where (said he) will you find so large a collection without some?'

Also it becomes less and less possible to offer a general view of the state and outlook of the art Reputations are not fixed, and living authors are not here considered In this chapter, then, and the next, the grouping is not easy I will first, after a note on one poet who links this chapter with the last, touch on four of larger range, George Meredith (1828–1909), Thomas Hardy (1840–1928), Robert Seymour Bridges (1844–1930), and Charles Montagu Doughty (1843–1926)

The 'one poet' is the retiring Lord De Tabley, John Byrne Leicester Warren (1835–1895), whose verse calls for a careful and not too scant anthology He has plain affinities with the great Victorians He produced two Greek plays, *Philoctetes*, *Orestes*, in orthodox, accomplished form, many a Hellenic, *Iphigeneia*, *Phaeton*, and monologues in lucid blank verse Of these, one of the most original is *A Strange Parable*, spoken by a man walking through dry places when the spirit has gone out of him

> Weary was I of all my fellows' ways,
> And lonely on the summits I was best

De Tabley is far from the crowd, his execution is never loose or cheap There may be a risk, when he is on the heights, of a certain sameness of accent, which leaves us only too respectful It is otherwise when he comes down into the valleys and to natural things *A Frosty Day* is like a poem by John Cunningham (Ch XIV), there is the same notation, minute and correct, and no less poetical, of birds and flowers and skies

> When the rusty blackbird strips
> Bunch by bunch, the coral thorn,
> And the pale day-crescent dips
> New to heaven, a slender horn

The *Dirge of Day* is fuller-toned, and in the higher mood:

> What sepulchre hath Day,
> And where entomb her clay?
> Deck her in death-array, and lay her down
> In wood-earth silver-brown
> And o'er her head beneath the iron sky
> Let leaves in amber drifts go rustling by
> With drop of chestnut ball,
> And ash-keys for a pall,
> And boughs that weeping sway
> Across the grave of Day!

In the *Pilgrim Cranes*, nature is seen through the eye of the mourner, *A Song of Faith Forsworn* and the beautiful *Leave-Taking* are lyrics of pure regret, without any landscape. Lord De Tabley's first volume appeared in 1859, his collected poems in 1903.

II

Meredith wrote much verse, and like Hardy preferred it to prose for the expression of intimate feeling Far more often than Hardy, he is defeated by the genius of the language, to which he offers violence What the critics said from the first about his irremediable quaintness and strangeness and knack of just missing fire, need not be repeated We generally have to mine for the gold in Meredith But in his greatest poem, *Modern Love* (1862), it lies on the surface The fifty poems, each of sixteen lines, are put together like a sonnet-sequence, the drama has unity of action, and the action is almost wholly inward and mental A deceived man struggles to revive his departed

love for his wife, and his sufferings make him a clairvoyant of hers A passing reconciliation only deepens the rift He seems to say that their fault had been a passionate *égoïsme à deux*, which has punished itself He dreams of action, of the world of ideas, but in vain He finds, also in vain, distraction for a moment with another lady who is gracious The wife's lover, a *muta persona*, crosses the scene It is she who finds the solution, she takes poison, and knows that she has expiated

> Thus piteously Love closed what he begat:
> The union of this ever diverse pair!

There is something Shakespearean in the frankness, the passion, and also in the savage sallies of *Modern Love*, Meredith is, as ever, freakish in his language, but he has lines and passages in the highest tradition

> They say, that Pity in Love's service dwells,
> A porter at the rosy temple's gate

> I claim a star whose light is overcast,
> I claim a phantom-woman in the past

One at least of these poems, 'We saw the swallows gathering in the sky', is close to perfection of form

In the same year came excellent vernacular ballads, *Juggling Jerry*, the *Old Chartist*, which recall the roadside scenes in the novels The gathering entitled *Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth* (1883) contains the final form of *Love in the Valley*, in every sense Meredith's happiest lyric, some lovely lines, however, from the earlier sketch (1851) are dropped The classical poems, *Phœbus with Admetus* and *Melampus*, which, like the later *Phaéthôn*, are full of the 'joy of earth' and the writer's immense vitality, show great technical mastery The elaborate rushing verse comes out right in a difficult experiment. He sings of Phœbus

> In the light of him there is music thrô' the póplar and ríver-sédge,
> Rénovàtion, chírp of broóks, húm of the fórest—an ócean-sóng

In the *Woods of Westermain* (which are those of Surrey), 'enchanted woods' and full of messages to the poet, he begins to develop, in his strained, exalted manner, and in

mystical terms, his peculiar religion, in which the Earth, the mother of all, the lovely one, the consoler, is the half-personified goddess In *Ballads and Poems of Tragic Life* (1887) the subjects are romantic and heroic, there is again a formidable energy, seen at its utmost in the shattering onset of the *Nuptials of Attila* But energy is not enough to make poetry, and Meredith's language becomes more and more difficult and congested His most solemn and confidential verse is to be found in *A Reading of Earth* (1888), and here there is a marked recovery of felicity and beauty He had been bereaved, three years before, of his second wife, and in *A Faith on Trial* the 'pure white cherry in bloom', the 'forest's white virgin' with its woodland companions, brings him, under the tutelage of 'Earth', in sight of a consolation, stern in its rejection of the ordinary 'legends', but resting on a 'dream of the blossom of Good' in the world, and on a glimpse of 'the great Over-Reason' In the brief *Change in Recurrence*, and above all in the *Dirge in Woods*, there is a simpler perfection, and in some other lyrics of various dates, *Youth in Age* and *Song in the Songless*, the note is that of a bird George Meredith certainly preserved 'youth in age', and some lines on *Milton*, made for the tercentenary of 1908, show unabated freshness Meredith at the moment (1932) is less in fashion, but these are work that should outwear the fashion

III

The fiction of Thomas Hardy covers the period from 1871 to 1898, but he was a poet all his days Many of the *Wessex Poems* of 1898 go back more than thirty years, and after the *Collected Poems* of 1919 came several volumes more His shorter pieces, numbering many hundreds, are enough to prove his genius, apart from the *Dynasts* (1904–8) They have not always the classic ease of his best prose, the language, the wrought metal, bears many a mark of the tool, and the close insistent thinking is somewhat inimical to song There is a constant slight oddness of grammar and word-arrangement, but we come to like it, and though obscurity is rare, what is called by painters 'tightness' may be felt in a stray example

Heart-halt and spirit-lame,
City-opprest,
Unto this wood I came
As to a nest,
Dreaming that sylvan peace
Offered the harrowed ease—
Nature a soft release
From man's unrest

Hardy has many such expressive compounds, and sprinkles in rare words, dialectal, technical, or learned, as he needs them He can be sweet and flowing whenever he will, and his tunes are beautiful and his own Fast or slow, simple or intricate, they are ever the natural voice of the mood They seem to come by ear alone, not aided (like those of Bridges) by the learning of the prosodist Hardy has a liking for long melancholy lines, and emphatic, unusual double rhymes they can sound like Edgar Allan Poe's

As I lay awake at night-time
In an ancient country barrack known to ancient cannoneers,
And recalled the hopes that heralded each seeming brave and bright time
Of my primal purple years,

Much it haunted me that, nigh there,
I had borne my bitterest loss—when One who went, came not again,
In a joyless hour of discord, in a joyless-hued July there,—
A July just such as then

Many poems are in short lines, sometimes very short, the following is characteristic

I climbed to the crest,
And, fog-festooned,
The sun lay west
Like a crimson wound

Like that wound of mine
Of which none knew,
For I'd given no sign
That it pierced me through

The numerous lyrical ballads are mostly of a tragical or mournful cast, like episodes from the novels cast into rhyme The admirable *Fire at Tranter Sweatley's* with its triumphant last word, 'She said, "I declare, I stand as a maiden today" ', is, for once, a tragi-comedy Not so the *Mock Wife* (1925) where the dying man, unaware that

his absent wife is under accusation as his poisoner, begs her for a last kiss It is given in pity, as his senses fail him, by a 'buxom woman not unlike' her, and he ends contented But most of the lyrics are spoken in the first person, though the author warns us that they are 'in a large degree dramatic or personative in conception' Thomas Hardy seems to have studied Browning closely, but in his lyrics there is by no means the same variety of 'personation' The supposed speaker, again and again, is a born inveterate regretter The ever-baffling concept of Time haunts him like a passion. The present is a text for musing on the past, or on the might-have-been The beloved, or the friend, is dead, or love has been missed, or estranged, or extinguished, or false to its trust The voice, in most cases, is that of the man, and the woman is the inflicter of his suffering, though not always, for the world is also full of Marty Souths whose passion is ignored There can be, indeed, a happiness which is real, and which lives while memory itself is alive, but how long is that? In *Her Immortality*, a ballad exquisite in its simplicity, the widower is dissuaded from suicide by the pleading of the ghost.

'A shade but in its mindful ones
Has immortality,
By living, me you keep alive,
By dying you slay me

'*In you resides my single power*
Of sweet continuance here,
On your fidelity I count
Through many a coming year'

A few poems chronicle a happy hour marred by none of these afterthoughts The speaker finds his delight in the 'sunburnt grace' of *A Market-Girl*, or an old man carries in his breast a vision that nothing can impair Once at least, in *To Meet, or Otherwise*, Hardy speaks on the classic text 'Not Heaven itself upon the past has power' 'It will have been', he exclaims of a former good time, 'Nor God nor Demon can undo the done' But his true refuge, cold as it may seem, is hinted when *The Absolute Explains* Time, the great despoiler, is after all a 'mock', considered in the light of eternal Being, and the present is 'phasmal', while the past, with its loves and laughters, is ever *there*,

'fadeless, fixed', and the lost lady 'still shines on'. As to this Being, we hear that 'the "Fourth Dimension" fame Bruits as its name', the poem was written in 1922. But Hardy is careful to say that 'cohesion of thought' is not to be looked for in his chronicle of moods This utterance on Time is subsequent to the *Dynasts*, in which he had sought to present at once the pageant, the drama, and the rationale, if any, of the great chapter of world-history enacted during the years 1805–1815.

IV

History itself provided the unity of action The external episodes are the great battles from Trafalgar down to Waterloo in Spain, in Russia, in Austria, in Belgium The inner drama passes chiefly in the mind of Napoleon, but also in that of Pitt, of Nelson, of Villeneuve, and of scores of subsidiary figures With its 'one hundred and thirty scenes', the *Dynasts* is one of the two great poetic ventures of the present century, the *Testament of Beauty* being the other We can by now begin to judge how far Hardy's conception is realised Not all of the drama is in verse, and the prose is of the writer's best There are the living dialogues of the citizens, sailors, country folk, and street-walkers Also there are the stage directions, they are the scene-painting that throws the action into relief The observer (for the play is only for 'mental performance') in turn planes far aloft, 'till the huge procession on the brown road looks no more than a file of ants crawling along a strip of garden-matting', or he descends to the level of the maskers, over whom 'a strange gloom begins and intensifies, and only the high lights of their grinning figures are visible'. Much of the warfare is staged in this way, its full power is seen in the vision of the retreat from Moscow It cannot be said that all the verse in the *Dynasts* is poetry There are passages on tactics, and recitals of names, that are severe travelling, as though Shakespeare's list of those who fell at Agincourt should be continued through whole pages The poet, who studies his documents with care, is at times hindered by them, like Ben Jonson in his Roman plays But these things are forgotten in the rapidity and large conduct of the whole 'When some great occasion is presented to him', the death of Nelson or the last speech

of Napoleon after Waterloo, Hardy responds The tone, as is right, leans towards the colloquial in the passages of diplomacy and statecraft, but the swift, map-ranging imagination seizes every chance of escape

> Ay, where is Nelson? Faith, by this late time
> He may be sodden, churned in Biscay swirls,
> Or blown to polar bears by south-west gales,
> Or sleeping amorously in some calm cave
> On the Canaries' or Atlantis' shore
> Upon the bosom of his Dido dear,
> For all that we know!

The metaphysical commentary is furnished by the 'overworld', with its band of Spirits—Spirits of the Years, the Pities, Spirits Sinister and Ironical They are, says the author, 'contrivances of the fancy merely', and claim only a sufficient 'dramatic plausibility', no system is propounded More than one solution is left possible The 'Impercipient' or immanent force drives the puppets towards a predestined purpose, but the purpose has no value, or visible sense This is the message of the Ironies. Only Napoleon guesses that some power *a tergo* is propelling him These ideas recur in Hardy's lyrics But there are also the Pities, and they have the last word They speak for the irrepressible hopes of mankind Perhaps the Impercipient will wake up, 'Consciousness the Will informing, till It fashion all things fair' The poet himself appears to hope against hope But he has no doubt that the fall of Napoleon is a relief to the world, he rejoices in no merely dramatic way over the saving of England In any case, the 'machines' vastly widen the horizon of the drama They are not always good poets, their lyrical style can be deplorable and their discourse crabbed Yet they can also sound 'a note in the ranks of a clarion'

> O woven-winged squadrons of Toulon,
> And fellows of Rochefort,
> Wait, wait for a wind, and draw westward
> Ere Nelson be near!

If the metaphysical parts of the *Dynasts* ever seem intrusive, there is the song of the sergeants to turn to

> When we lay where Budmouth Beach is,
> O, the girls were fresh as peaches,

With their tall and tossing figures and their eyes of blue and brown

V

Many of the best of Bridges' shorter poems appeared between 1873 and 1893, most of his dramas, from 1883 to 1896 In 1913 he became laureate, following on the facile Alfred Austin, and for a while printed little verse There were murmurs in the vulgar press over his economy, but he was biding his time He had long practised his severe and graceful prose, had written the best short commentary on Keats, and had analysed, for the first time with precision, the later versification of Milton Bridges was much concerned with reformed spelling, just pronunciation, and 'pure English', but above all with the theory and use of metre He made some difficult experiments in purely 'quantitative' verse, which to my own ear are little more than freakish But he was to settle down, in *October and Other Poems* (1920) and afterwards, to the measure adopted for the *Testament of Beauty* (1929) He wrote lyric, in the regular forms, to the end, and of these he is a master The *Testament* is the last word of his philosophy and experience, he was eighty-five when it appeared For fifty years he had been saluted and recognised by all who could observe, he now had a sudden taste of a wider fame, and he had accomplished his large design, the fruit of many years, just in time

His plays are often called 'scholarly',—generally a polite word, when it is applied to poetry, for dull They are by no means that, though a certain pallor may be thought to hang over parts of *Prometheus the Firegiver*, *Nero*, and the romantic *Palicio* Certainly there is more life in the *Christian Captives* and in *Humours of the Court*, both of them freely adapted from Calderón Wherever there is a chance of song, or of natural description, or of heroic utterance, then the language 'takes gayer colours, like an opal warmed'. In *Achilles in Scyros* (1890) and *Demeter* (1905) the opal brightens visibly The finale of the *Odyssey* is dramatised with a happy skill in the *Return of Ulysses* But everywhere there is 'scholarship' in the sense of pure and sifted language, of clear structure and conduct The blank verse has the same qualities, and is beautiful and always individual.

See, while the maids warm in their busy play,
We may enjoy in quiet the sweet air,
And thro' the quivering golden green look up
To the deep sky, and have high thoughts as idle
And bright, as are the small white clouds becalmed
In disappointed voyage to the noon
There is no better pastime

(*Achilles in Scyros*)

Bridges' 'shorter poems', as gathered up and arranged by himself, are safe in any company of their peers They are lyrics, more or less reflective Their mark is extreme purity of style, united with a subtle and deeply considered music The writer can almost be identified by the peculiar cadence of his openings 'Wanton with long delay the gay spring leaping cometh', 'The storm is over, the land hushes to rest', 'Gáy Róbin is seen no more' The happy fertility in double rhymes, the use of the old ending, 'goeth', are Elizabethan features, and the shiftings of accent are characteristic

Spring góeth áll in white,
Crówned with mílkwhite máy,
In fleécy lócks of líght
O'er heáven the white cloúds stráy

As an observer of sights and sounds Bridges is in the direct line of Tennyson and Matthew Arnold, less of a coiner of curious phrase than the one, more of a singer than the other From his early sonnets down to the *Testament of Beauty*, he is the scholar rejoicing in the spring, also in the autumn and the *Winnowers*, and in *North Wind in October*, who 'beareth A cloud of skirmishing hail The grievèd woodland to smite' In *London Snow* the measure has the impress of the falling and veering flakes Nature, on the whole, is happy, and always gives happiness even when she is not In Thomas Hardy she is more often stern, and of an indifference that would be called cruel if it could be supposed to be conscious The best of Bridges' many love-lyrics have a triumphal sound 'Awake, my heart, to be loved, awake, awake!' is a glorious paean, and even the mournful ones are solemn rather than desperate in tone In 'Assemble, all ye maidens', an elegy as perfectly conducted as Herrick's bright ode on Corinna, the funeral committal ends with a consolation to the lover who has gone first 'Rejoice, for thou art near to thy possession' 'Angel spirits of sleep'

is pure dream, and would go well with one of Blake's designs Many of the later poems, such as *Fortunatus nimium*, do not fall behind these

VI

(A great enjoyer, therefore, and vowed to the service of beauty at all points, Bridges in his *Testament* sets himself to ask what is the place of beauty in his religion He has a religion to offer,) he is, like Browning and George Meredith, one of the older, more hopeful, more courageous 'Victorians', and the last of them (Where is the conception of beauty to fit into our final creed? How, in the race and the individual, has the sense of it developed? By what stages has it been embodied in art and letters, Greek, Catholic, Renaissance, and modern? What, likewise, has been the history of the idea of love, which has developed at the same time? What has been the part of human reason in this double evolution, and what is its function in shaping the ideals of mankind? It would be idle to try to give the poet's answer in a few sentences, but a key-passage may be found in the lines

> Beauty is the highest of all these occult influences,
> the quality of appearances that thru' the sense
> wakeneth spiritual emotion in the mind of man
> And Art, as it createth new forms of beauty,
> awakeneth new ideas that advance the spirit
> in the life of Reason to the wisdom of God)

It is natural to compare such a large venture with the *Prelude* Both are long philosophic poems, and both start from the writer's most private experience But Bridges is describing the growth of an idea in history, and its position among human values, not the 'growth of a poet's mind'. Such an argument hardly admits of unity of treatment, and it takes a mazy course It is embarrassed, partly by the attempt, always troublesome, to expound history and psychology together, and also by the formal divisions of the book These are 'Selfhood', 'Breed' (which includes sex and much besides), and 'Ethic' Our ancestors would have called the *Testament* a 'Gothic' composition, like a great church, the work of many periods, with many side-chapels, glowing windows, inscriptions, and stretches of

naked wall These last are the pages of abstract discourse, by which a philosophic poem has to be tested There is the same problem in Lucretius, and in *Paradise Lost* The natural medium for philosophy is prose In the poem, are such passages kept going, if at all, by sheer force of style ? In the *Testament*, I think, the result is doubtful There are pages of very noble speculative verse, like that in the 'introduction', 'Wisdom hath hewed her house' Others, like that on the hiving bees, are weighed down by the pedantry of words like 'proliferateth', 'differentiated', 'coadaptation', 'organic socialism' The last lines of the book, 'Truly the soul', which are a summary of the whole matter, are very scholastic Often we wish for Bridges' admirable prose But it has to be said that much of the *Testament* is avowedly in the tone of prose, of talk, talk at once familiar and imaginative, talk cast into a peculiar elastic metre, which rises and sinks in pitch, and on the success of this medium much, of course, depends

> My well-continued fanciful experiment
> wherein so many strange verses amalgamate
> on the secure bedrock of Milton's prosody
> (*Poor Poll*, 1925)

It is 'the writer's latest manner, still [1928] peculiar to himself' The lines are 'loose Alexandrines', 'neo-Miltonic syllabics' The exact formula is still being discussed, I think that one can be found, but will not here dwell on prosody Read with the natural accentuation, and there are not many problems Start with the regular line of twelve

> Euphrátes' flówery márshes, áll his eárthly tóys,

allow for plenty of shifted or weakened beats and runs of light syllables between

> As with an óld bláck beár that hath climbed on theír treé

In spite of difficult lines, the metre *moves* There are many long swelling periods, which can be compared even with Miltonic blank verse, and these occur most frequently when the poetry is of the rich and concrete kind No other instrument had given the poet 'ample verge and room enough' to be ironical, descriptive, expository, or colloquial, at his pleasure. Many of the finest passages are detachable,

poems within a poem the opening landscape, the final sunset scene with its solemn movement, the praise of the odours of flowers, the praise of the poetry of wine, praise of the courage of the soldier, and the long magnificent picture of the diggings in Mesopotamia (which leads up, somehow, to a tirade against socialism) The whole work shows that the powers and the spirit of the writer were at their strongest in his late old age The lines in *Tapestry*, written when he was seventy-seven, are significant the world to him was still

> The decorated room wherein my spirit hath dwelt
> from infancy a nursling of great Nature's beauty
> which keepeth fresh my wonder as when I was a child

And elsewhere, speaking of his early days, he describes a ruling passion

> What led me to poetry was the inexhaustible satisfaction of form, the magic of speech, lying as it seemed to me in the masterly control of material, it was an art which I hoped to learn

VII

Somewhat late in life Doughty published his eleven volumes of blank verse, beginning in 1906–7 with the six of the *Dawn in Britain* He had at last won general fame by his classic of exploration and description, *Arabia Deserta* (1888) This was written in a many-coloured prose, invented and yet thoroughly well harmonised, of which the aim had been ' to redeem English from the slough into which it had fallen since the days of Elizabeth ' [1] Doughty thought to apply a similar principle to verse He ransacked old writers for expressive and forgotten words, his idol was Spenser, or ' Colin ', ' whose art ', he says, ' it is my endeavour to restore ' He too, like Spenser, would create for poetry a great new dialect There was some irony in this devotion, for Doughty's faults are just those of which ' Colin ' is incapable The old vocabulary that he imports does little harm, it is often very effective, and also amusing If it is very large and needs a glossary, so too is the mass of writing over which it is sprinkled But we could hardly, without losing all sense of style, inure ourselves to Doughty's twisted grammar, with its violent inversions and ellipses. One

[1] D G H[ogarth], *Geographical Journal*, lxvii, 384 (April, 1926)

saving and pervasive influence, however, is that of the Authorised Version Doughty's verse is markedly linear, with little freedom of overflow or movement, and at its worst is wooden It would be needless to say so much, if he were not the poet that he is No asperities can hide the largeness of his conceptions, his ardour for heroism and goodness, or his rapture in the presence of beauty 'Piscator', in the *Clouds*, is fishing by the Dove while the enemy ravages the country elsewhere [1]

> I view the high procession of the Months,
> Beginning with sweet Springtimes [*sic*] budded boughs,
> When clothes the Earth Herself, with tender green,
> And starring, in refreshed late winter sod,
> Pied daisies and glad celandine be seen
> When hangs the white flower blowing then in thorn,
> Leap glad-eyed children thither, gathering posies,
> Sweet violet, cicely, dainty ladies'-smocks,
> With jacinth, medleyed in the thicket grass .
>
> . I trooping flocks see go in yonder bent,
> And hear the swunken plough-swain cheer his team
> And so, without offense, to God or man,
> I find the holiday hours, to entertain,
> When I come fishing hither, of the time,
> That lies before me (short now stair it is,
> Not many steps more,) to a welcome grave

There are many such interludes in the immense *Dawn in Britain*, the most heavily cumbered of these poems It is a dogged chronicle of history and legend from the capture of Rome by the Gauls down to the reign of Boudicca, or Boadicea The idyll, in the last book, of Pudens, the converted Roman, and Rosmerta, the Christian maiden, and the lay in the fourth book of the Gaul Carvilios to the Sun-God, light up the long journey In *Adam Cast Forth* (1908) the climax is the birth of a first child to Hawwa, who is Eve Adam has at last rejoined her, after long wandering as a blind man, and in his mind's eye he sees his happy posterity

> I behold
> Men singing, and wives clapping their white hands,
> Amongst the vines, whereas, on shoulders, some
> Bear clusters forth in baskets, of ripe grapes
> Others I see, which under fruitful boughs,

[1] Doughty's commas and semicolons are often not grammatical, they merely mark emphasis and pause

In circuit sit where crowned with flowers, those eat,
And with loud voice, shout for the summer fruits!
Other, where harvest is, crop yellow ears,
And do, with songs, before the Lord, rejoice

The *Cliffs*, 'a drama of the time' (1909), relates the invasion of Britain by the 'Persanians' It is more than a threat, when ballooners land and kill a Crimean veteran Two enemy officers, one brutal, one Teutonically philosophical and more compassionate, discuss and censure Britain But in the end their fleet sails off The poem is a solemn warning of the grievous scenes enacted in the *Clouds* (1912) The 'Eastlanders' are now masters of part of the country, and the 'airwolves' are about The youth of Britain, betrayed by their unprepared rulers, are gallant and all but defenceless The 'Proeme' asks why it is supposed that Britain, four or five times conquered, could not be conquered again, unless she awakes? As in the *Cliffs*, the scenes of real life are distinct and tragical Farmers, clergy, soldiers, peasants, a wandering carpenter, move on the stage, the verse comes near to the talk of prose There are interludes a recital of the English poets, a chant on the Welsh fairies by a bard. A coin of Claudius is found with the legend *Britannia capta:* it is a link with the *Dawn in Britain* This amazing forecast of a calamity that might well have happened is Doughty's most imaginative work more so than the shapeless *Titans* (1916) and *Mansoul*, or the *Riddle of the World* (1920). There are happy festive scenes in the *Titans*, the cosmogony, the Æschylean picture of the beginning of culture, the world-war, are the staple of the poem *Mansoul* defeats description The Earth-Goddess, Cædmon, Zarathustra, Confucius, 'Jéshua' or Jesus, and the hordes in Belgium, jostle as in a dream At last looms out the image of a great spiritual cathedral, with many altars The creed is worded in terms like the 'All-One', or the 'Unsearchable Who'; and the riddle is answered by the counsel to follow righteousness and the golden rule In *Mansoul*, for all its confusions, Doughty's use of language is less wilful than usual But he still sets many a hedge of cactus round his pleasances These experiments, in the hand of a true poet, have their value 'thus far', they cry to his fellows, 'or not so far!'

The same remark is prompted by the verse of the Jesuit, Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–1889). He was an associate

of Patmore, of Dolben, and of Bridges (who edited his work) Hopkins is deliberately and invincibly queer, carries ellipse and compression to the limit, revels in new compounds, likes subtle alliterations, and difficult rhymes with a difficult theory behind them All this is worth facing, and I quote a passage from *Duns Scotus's Oxford* to show him in his good hour

Towery city and branchy between towers,
Cuckoo-echoing, bell-swarmed, lark-charmèd, rook-racked, river-rounded,
The dapple-eared lily below thee, that country and town did
Once encounter in, here coped and poisèd powers

Hopkins has an abnormal perception of sights and colours and sounds, and his coinages are attempts to find words for them His prose notes on various cloud-effects show the same procedure He gives the verbal melody which the note of the cuckoo has started in his brain, ringing over the 'hollow hollow hollow ground' Also he has a deep vein of metaphysical poetry In *Justus quidem tu es, Domine*, he argues passionately with God, and pleads his own inutility He emulates Donne (it can hardly be by chance) in a phrase like 'Time's eunuch', and in his curtness and intensity of speech The *Loss of the Eurydice* shows also Hopkins's command of heroic lyric, and here he is simpler

VIII

The stories, or 'yarns', of Thomas Edward Brown (1830–1897), the Manx poet, mystic, and Clifton master, are in the succession of Crabbe and Wordsworth admirable things, though over-expansive in sentiment and lacking in the severity of those predecessors *Betsy Lee* (1873) and other *Fo'c's'le Yarns* are written chiefly in Manx English, which is easy to follow, and often in regular verse, *Mary Quayle* and *Bella Gorry* are in ordinary English They are all simple island tales, full of magnanimities and pathos, and *Mary Quayle*, with its interludes of broken rhythm, has a natural and powerful setting of stormy weather The dialectal *Peggy's Wedding* contains a most graphic monologue by a bitter-tongued bride who comes back, on the evening of her wedding, disgusted from the hovel of her old skin-flint husband. It is broad astringent comedy without any

sentiment, and perhaps Brown's most satisfactory yarn *Aber Stations* is a wild, irregular, and often beautiful chant of a bereaved father Brown's range is wide in *Canticle*, in *Euroclydon*, and especially in *My Garden* he shows his command of brief lyric, the *Peel Life-Boat* is great in the heroic-colloquial style, and in *Epistola ad Dakyns* is seen his impulse, somewhat Wordsworthian in expression but in feeling most authentic, to absorb himself in nature

> And every hill from me shall shoot,
> And spread as from a central root,
> And every crag and every spur
> To me its attitude refer
> And I shall be the living heart,
> And I shall live in every part,
> With elemental cares engrossed,
> And all the passion of the coast

With a little more curb on his genius, Brown would have left a more distinct mark on poetry

IX

Some other writers of talent may be named, who gave themselves no fair chance with posterity One is Robert, first Earl of Lytton (1831–1891), Viceroy of India The son of the novelist, he wrote as 'Owen Meredith', and poured out songs, fables, and satires, also long verse romances (*Lucile*, *Glenaveril*), which had better have been in prose Among the best of these works are the very pleasant phantasmagoria *King Poppy* (1892), and the lyrical *Cintra* with its emotional drama There is much dispersed poetry in Lytton, and more in the Hon Roden Noel (1834–1894) In *A Little Child's Monument* (1881) are some pages of passionate elegy, in which the writer's grief is beautifully controlled, like the expression, and there are songs of much sensuous charm in *Livingstone in Africa* Again, there is Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (1840-1922), the born rebel and anti-British Egyptian nationalist, with a mettle like one of his own Arab horses The *Love Sonnets of Proteus* (1880) are Byronic in their fervour and passion and also in their emphasis; but there is more to hold the mind in *Esther and Love Lyrics* (1892) *Esther* is the tale, told in fifty-three sonnets, of an innocent youth who is captured by a strolling actress, 'Dear passionate Esther, soulless but how kind!' She

tires of him after a little, it is all very frank and headlong; and the humours of the Lyons fair and the strange house are vivid Some of Blunt's lyrics have a finished beauty, 'O for a day of Spring' and *A Nocturne* Much of his political verse is little but ardent rhetoric In contrast is the carefully pondered form of the *Sonnets of the Wingless Hours* (1894) by Eugene Lee-Hamilton 'I wrought them', he says, 'like a targe of hammered gold', and indeed some of them may be compared to Heredia's *Les Trophées* The writer long lay crippled on his back in Florence He recovered, but was again cast down by the loss of a child, and this trouble he laments, with no less despair, and with no less care for form, in the volume *Mimma Bella* (1909)

X

It is time, though only a few names can be chosen from the multitude, to go back to the long line of Irish writers. Moore, so thin and modish in most of his 'melodies', catches more than once the celebrated 'wail', the genuine 'keening', of his people It is heard, and much more loudly, in poet after poet of the century in Jeremiah Joseph Callanan, one of the first notable translators from the Irish in John Banim, with his *Soggarth Aroon* (which signifies 'Priest dear'), more sentimentally, in Lady Dufferin's *Lament of the Irish Emigrant*, and, embittered by patriot wrath and rhetoric, in Thomas Davis of the *Nation* and his crowd of friends The most piercing of all these voices is that of the fated James Clarence Mangan (1803–1849), a wanderer and something of a wreck, but a linguist, an accomplished metrist, and with more primary poetic power than any Irishman of his time Mangan translated much from the German, but his real work is in his renderings or adaptations from the Gaelic and in a few poems of his own In *Dark Rosaleen* and in many a *Lament* we feel the truth of his cry, 'O, there was lightning in my blood!' Mangan's passion is often merely oratorical, but it is there. Not that he is always miserable, in the *Woman of Three Cows* and *Prince Alfrid's Itinerary* he shows us another side of the racial genius There is the cheerfulness and concrete observation that is seen in many Old Irish poems

Gold and silver I found, and money,
Plenty of wheat and plenty of honey,
I found God's people rich in pity,
Found many a feast and many a city

Different again is the traditional happy-go-lucky style, found in the earlier *Groves of Blarney* of Richard Alfred Millıken But the foremost Irish poet of his day was Sir Samuel Ferguson (1810–1886) In his *Lays of the Western Gael* (1865), in the epical *Congal* (1872), and in *Poems* (1880) he stirred up afresh the enthusiasm for the historic and legendary past In *Congal* the metre is the fourteen-syllabled couplet of Chapman's *Iliad*, and there is a far-off Homeric effect in the battle-pieces and in the elaborated similes—the best things in the poem Not exactly inspired, it is powerful and spirited, and workmanlike too, though the lines are often rugged with excess of consonants *Conary*, another adapted legend, is in blank verse, and the story is like a saga Conary, king of all Ireland, perishes gallantly in his burning house amid his enemies Ferguson's qualities are best seen in his shorter pieces, they are strength, rapidity, and fierceness The *Welshmen of Tirawley* goes at a gallop, and the vendetta code is not the simple one of our Border ballads Blood and outrage are atoned for not by blood but by a deadly humbling, under the shelter of the Brehon law, of the offender's pride The *Fairy Thorn* is melodious and beautifully vowelled, and in the *Fair Hills of Ireland*, the gayer tune is heard again 'the butter and the cheese do wonderfully abound'

The poets who surround and follow Ferguson are many, the most notable, of the same generation, being Aubrey de Vere (1814–1902) and William Allingham (1824–1889) Each of them, in spite of many English ties and friendships, kept his birthright as an Irish poet Much of De Vere's verse is derivative,—Wordsworthian or Shelleyan, the sonnets of his father, Sir Aubrey de Vere, had well earned the praise of Wordsworth But the son, in his *Legends of St Patrick* (1870) and elsewhere, draws on the native spring. Allingham, a careful craftsman, is known for his charming miniature-work like the *Fairies* ('Up the airy mountain') and for his moving *Emigrant's Adieu to Ballyshanny*—the poet's native Ballyshannon There is a light and happy rhythm in his holy tale of the *Abbot of Inisfālen*, who,

in following a 'little white singing-bird,' lost sight of the centuries passing, and returned home to strangers to die Once absolved, his soul vanished, as a second white bird in company with the first

After 1890 the 'Gaelic revival', nationalist, linguistic, lyrical, and dramatic, took a new lease of strength I do not speak here of the living, but from Edward Walsh down to scholars of our own day there have been gifted translators The most original poet, John Millington Synge (1871–1909), has left a mere fistful of pieces, all short, and all full of his fiery and humorous essence Most are written in a revolt against the 'poetry of exaltation', which was rife around him It was prone, he says, to be too remote from 'ordinary things', and, he adds, 'it may almost be said that before verse can be human again it must learn to be brutal' In *A Question* and the *Passing of the Shee* he shows the way, and, having relieved his soul, he presently sings with the lark, 'friend of Ronsard, Nashe, and Beaumont', and bids it celebrate a certain birthday, 'my Lady-day' The anthologists of fifty years hence ought also to remember one or two tender lyrics of Mrs Katharine Tynan Hinkson, and her tuneful *Children of Lir*, the *Living Chalice* of Miss Susan Mitchell, and John Todhunter's *Aghadoe*, with its outlaw passion

XI

The light verse of a former age is perhaps a matter less for a sketch of this kind than for a *Balade of Dead Wits* with the burden 'The jest that died when it was born' Where are the skits of William Maginn, and the *Bon Gaultier Ballads* of William Edmonstoune Aytoun, and Francis Sylvester Mahony's *Reliques of Father Prout*? But there is life still in Richard Harris Barham's *Ingoldsby Legends* (1837–1847), with their acrobatic rhymes Barham has a sense of the horrible-grotesque, and in one ditty, 'As I lay a-thynkynge', he is a poet The *Bab Ballads* (1869) of Sir William Schwenk Gilbert (1836–1911), and the series of long-living humorous operas that he wrote with the musician, Sir Arthur Sullivan, for partner, are not untouched by vulgarity, but they abound in sharp satire, and the operas are a precious record of surface affectations and

passing crazes Gilbert's phenomenal facility in unexpected rhyme and catching metre is not his only gift, *Sans Souci*, and some other lyrics, are on the brink of being poetry In many other pleasantries there is the salt of scholarship as in the *Paradise of Birds* (1870), by William John Courthope, the accomplished and philosophical author of the *History of English Poetry* (1895–1910) The *Paradise* is a brilliant fantasy at the expense of sham romance and the 'advanced' thinking of the hour There is no less skilful and funny parody, and much bitter but fugitive political satire, in the *Recaptured Rhymes* (1882) and *Saturday Songs* of Henry Duff Traill, the Tory journalist (1842–1900) There is also the melancholy that comes upon the wit and busy man of affairs who is something of a dreamer too The *Ant's Nest*, suggested by the sight of a trampled colony, expresses this mood

> What commonplaces merciful
> The brain from madness keep,
> And lull—so we but let them lull—
> Until we fall asleep

The *Versesnda Translations* (1862) of Charles Stuart Calverley, *alias* Blayds, and his *Fly Leaves*, contain perfect mimicries of Browning and the literary balladmongers, besides other small things All these have a classic finish, and are not entirely play The same may be said of another Cambridge wit, cut off too early, James Kenneth Stephen, who in *Lapsus Calami* (1896) worthily continues the tradition 'Nonsense verse' also claims mention, but it is a mean title for the haunting melodies and concocted words of Edward Lear, or for the rhymes of 'Lewis Carroll'

It is humour rather than wit, humour with an underplay of not too sentimental feeling, that lives longest Here the master is Thackeray The *Mahogany Tree*, *Willow-Tree*, and *Ballad of Bouillabaisse*, have this double strain. Thackeray wrote serious heartfelt lyrics like that *To Mary*, Cockney ditties, Irish or pseudo-Irish ditties, and versions of Béranger His ear, in all these performances, is of the nicest, and he is clearly in the lineage of Praed It is continued by Frederick Locker-Lampson *London Lyrics* (1857–1893) may be styled little poetry, but little poetry, good and lasting, is almost as hard to find as great. *Cupid on the Crossways* and *To My Grandmother* are examples;

Piccadilly and *St James's Street* catch the fleeting essence of the eighteenth century, its manners and humours, and this is a characteristic of the school of Thackeray Locker-Lampson's *Lyra Elegantiarum* is still our best anthology of harmless social verse

XII

The tradition of elegance and lightness reappears in another shape at the end of the century It is associated with the names, in especial, of Andrew Lang (1844–1912), Henry Austin Dobson (1840–1921), and Edmund, afterwards Sir Edmund, Gosse (1849–1928) Classical scholar, historian, student of folklore, and light-wristed journalist, Lang also left a mass of verse It is all so easily done and so even and well turned that a choice is difficult The sonnet on the *Odyssey*, *St Andrews*, *Tusitala*, and the *Ballad on the Choice of a Sepulchre* are popularly known *Calais Sands*, with its duel and mourning lady, is just as good Lang is at his happiest amongst books and bookmen, and his balades on *Railway Novels* and the like outlive their topics

Well he describes the master of this miniature art the 'scent of dead roses' and the 'toss of old powder' that are to be felt in 'the volume that Dobson has done' The volume was called *At the Sign of the Lyre*, published in 1885 Austin Dobson was already known for his *Vignettes in Rhyme* (1873) and *Proverbs in Porcelain* (1877) He rhymed well to the end, but was latterly noted for his prose, as an authority without a rival on the modes of life, the *belles lettres* and art, of the century of Goldsmith His verse is essentially a recovery of the past, felt intensely *as* the past Beau Brocade and the Marquise are seen, with their smiles and gestures and ribbons, are heard, too, speaking in their own voices, as ghosts are seen and heard More solid are the 'characters' of Johnson and Fielding Dobson was humble about his work, his ideal was that of the *Ars Poetica* 'See that thy work demand The labour of the file' He writes in the spirit of Gautier and in the manner of Herrick

> All passes, ART alone
> Enduring stays to us,
> The Bust outlives the throne,—
> The Coin, Tiberius,

Even the gods must go,
Only the lofty Rhyme
Not countless years o'erthrow,
Not long array of time

(*Ars Victrix*)

Austin Dobson's best verse is like the 'coin' he speaks of; it has a safer chance than masses of more exalted ambitious work, alloyed and ill-designed His serious pieces are equally well finished In the lines *For Edmund Gosse* he sighs that 'Fame is a food that dead men eat', and falls back on friendship

For truly, when a man shall end,
He lives in memory of his friend,
Who doth his better part recall,
And of his fault make funeral

Gosse, who lived long, was a critic of sharp sensibility, delicate of touch and versed in the literature of many countries He had a passion for lucid form, and he was early a champion of the 'closed' Gallic measures, the balade, roundel, triolet, and the rest Like Lang and Dobson, he practised them deftly, his *Ballad of the Upper Thames* and the *Garden of Christ's* are among the proofs *Firdausi in Exile* (1885) is probably his most satisfactory long poem. a tale told simply and yet with much richness of fancy The Persian singer is banished by the caprice of the Sultan, who at last repents and sends him a load of treasure, but it comes too late, Firdausi is dead The titles of other volumes by Gosse, *On Viol and Flute* and *In Russet and Silver* (1894) well suggest their qualities But his prose chapter of autobiography, *Father and Son* (1907) is his best memorial

XIII

The most interesting invention of William Ernest Henley (1849–1903), the critic and journalist and ultra-Tory, and inspirer of his fellow-penmen, is the *character* in verse It was a new genus The 'London types', the barmaid and flower-girl and guardsman, the nurse and surgeon and scrubber of the wards, are sharply etched, straight from the life, in a diction defiantly near to prose, the form is often a sonnet, or a lyric in short rhymeless lines *Operation* and *Vigil*, in the series *In Hospital*, give Henley's own experience,

and in the same style, and they render to perfection the report of the senses, when these are exalted by physical pain Of another kind are the *London Voluntaries*, in irregular blank verse These are very sounding, very gorgeous, and yet somehow fall short of rightness, they are hard to read aloud The lyrics 'England, my England' and 'Out of the night that covers me' so much quoted and so sincere, have to my ear something of Henley's frequent excess and *bravura* 'Bring her again, O western wind' shows his truer and quieter genius He took his part, skilfully enough, in the triolet and balade industry, the refrain of his 'diploma piece' is 'I loved you once in old Japan'

These writers, on the whole, speak to the literary class, a few of the lyrics of Robert Louis Stevenson (1850–1894) speak also to men everywhere, to the Scot and the wanderer and the reader for pure pleasure and refreshment The *Vagabond* and the *House Beautiful*, 'Blows the wind to-day' and *Requiem*, have now long been tried and cherished His verse, an interlude in his prose, is not profuse, *A Child's Garden of Verses* (1885), *Underwoods* (1887), and *Ballads* (1890) can all be held in one hand As in his prose, he is all for economy, very close workmanship, sifted, slightly curious language, and a studious and beautiful rhythm He has a religious passion for the niceties of sound in words, and prefers a metre that fills the ear In these respects his next heir is James Elroy Flecker (Ch XXI) Stevenson studied the poets from whom he could learn these things, but his best lyrics, like *Requiem*, are none the less spontaneous, a cry from the heart In the *House Beautiful* there are pleasant suggestions of Andrew Marvell 'God's bright and intricate device Of days and seasons doth suffice' In the verses for the young—some of which, indeed, are *to* children, and *of* them, and not really *for* them—Stevenson draws on the memories of a born poet, who is already an adventurer.

CHAPTER XXI

LATER POETRY (II)

I

OF the new poets who came to the fore in the last decade of the century, none was more ambitious, more resonant and telling, than John Davidson (1857–1909), romancer, playwright, critic, and sceptical philosophiser He falls too soon into emphasis and propaganda, yet he has poetic power, momentum, and a daring fancy He wrote many ballads, *Of Heaven, Of Hell, Of a Coward*, the most brilliant is the *Ballad of a Nun* Here Our Lady, in pure pity, personates the absent sister who at the lure of the blood has fled the convent, has in desperation given herself away, and has returned haggard and repentant The subject, like that of the *Ordeal*, a grimmer story, illustrates Davidson's defiant temper of mind, and also his power of swift, succinct and coloured narrative He has, besides, a passion for nature, and in *Fleet Street Eclogues* (1893, 1896) he does not, like Alexander Smith, celebrate the 'stern' beauties of the city, but muses, amid its noise and vice, with affection on the country These eclogues are Davidson's best production, he published various *Testaments*, extremely oratorical, and containing some curious, grandiose speculations but little true poetry

One feature of this decade was a growing devotion to extreme nicety of workmanship, usually upon a small scale There was a good deal of cant about 'art', held up as a kind of religion, and some of it may have been due to the writings of Walter Pater, carefully misunderstood Yet poetry on the whole was the gainer, and several highly disciplined poets and poetesses appear, each of whom has left a little that is excellent One of these, Ernest Dowson (1867–1900) did but a short day's work A student of Horace

and Verlaine, his ideal is that of Meleager, a finished grace and melody 'Goddess, the laughter-loving, Aphrodite, befriend!', he cries, and he catches the emotion of the moment, and its instinctive rhythm, with complete honesty. His goddess, however, is not only the Pandemian Aphrodite In *Cynara*, a lyric that bids fair to live, the vision of the lady to whom he has been 'faithful in his fashion' intrudes among the kisses that he is buying from another Dowson's lines *To One in Bedlam* ('With delicate, mad hands, behind his sordid bars') recall, in their strength of sympathy, those of Philip Ayres that I have quoted before (p 228) In his little show, *The Pierrot of the Minute*, his hand is at its lightest, as the loves and troubles of a Pierrot require Another writer of that time, no less sedulous in the quest of form, but less of a natural poet than Dowson, is Lionel Johnson (1867–1902), also shortlived an Irishman and patriot with an English schooling, a convert to Rome, a careful critic and steeped in books In his *Oxford Nights* he gives a charming familiar picture of himself in youth, a collegian among his favourite eighteenth-century authors It is more natural writing than his vehement, accomplished 'Celtic' pieces, *To Morfydd* and *Ways of War* Johnson is essentially a studious poet, the anthologies still quote his lines *By the Statue of King Charles at Charing Cross*

The verse of Oscar Wilde (1856–1900) has little of the native quality that will long serve to float his comedies Most of his volume of 1881 is in the nature of *pastiche*, but there is lyrical beauty in his *Requiescat* In the *Ballad of Reading Gaol* (1898), a poem of tragic experience inspired by the execution of a fellow-prisoner, Wilde is passionate and sincere in his horror, and is all the more sincere for the false notes in which he abounds 'The kiss of Caiaphas', 'They starve the little frightened child', and the tilts against the prison governor and doctor, are the absurdities of fever. Some of the poem is in the style and on the level of Hood's *Eugene Aram*, but the model intended is the *Ancient Mariner*, with its atmosphere of guilt and nightmare, its echoed rhymes and key-phrases, and its music. Oscar Wilde, when all is said, was a true man of letters, with an intense though not a very original instinct for form, and in his ballad he does now and then go home, attaining expression when he speaks, and speaks profoundly, from

himself, as in the lines that have passed into currency, 'For he who lives more lives than one More deaths than one must die'.

II

Towards 1900 many highly gifted women poets were on the scene, and I will speak of six Under the name of 'Michael Field' two ladies, Miss Katharine Harris Bradley (1846–1914) and her niece Miss Edith Cooper (1862–1913) wrote and published, nearly always in the closest partnership. Their talent, somewhat embarrassed by its own fertility, is dispersed through more than twenty volumes They first attracted notice in 1884 by *Callirrhoe*, the prelude of many more dramas, classical, mythological, and historical, and of much other verse, lyrical, narrative, reflective. Direct, as distinct from simply fervent and skilful poetry, is most easily found in Michael Field's lyrics, as in the brief beautiful dirge

> Bury her at even
> In the wind's decline,
> Night receive her
> Where no noise can ever grieve her!
> Bury her at even,
> And then leave her

In 1907 both writers joined the Church of Rome, much of their later verse is devotional, charged with the pent feeling of a late conversion There is evidence upon which some of their work can be discriminated Miss Bradley's muse is perhaps the bolder and less under control, and at times takes us back to the religious Carolines

> O soul, canst thou not understand
> Thou art not left alone,
> As a dog to howl and moan
> Thy master's absence? Thou art as a book
> Left in a room that He forsook,
> A book of His dear choice

Miss Cooper's manner seems to be habitually more reserved, but she is capable of a *macabre* invention. In *A Dance of Death*, a lovely girl is skating a dance figure, the ice breaks and half-swallows her, but snaps together, and beheads her. What ensues, and who is she? Why,

Salome's head is dancing on the bright
And silver ice O holy John, how still
Was laid thy head upon the salver white,
When thou hadst done God's will!

Michael Field's profusion is in contrast with the thrift of Mrs Alice Meynell (1850–1922) Her first book of verse, *Preludes*, is dated 1875, her *Later Poems* appeared in 1902. Mrs Meynell's critical prose can be charged with 'preciousness', but it is fastidious and also sharp-edged Like her poetry it is pervaded with a passion for the artful and long-sought and perfect phrase The hidden values of words and of their echoes must be brought out if the last shade of the idea is to be rendered In the justly famed sonnet *Renouncement* almost every line has its slight strangeness, the emotion is held back, and only in the close, 'I run, I run, I am gathered to thy heart', is it released There is the same kind of beauty in 'My heart shall be thy garden', and in *A Letter from a Girl to her Own Old Age*,—perhaps Mrs Meynell's most imaginative conception She is also an elegist, she finds a certain consolation for loss in the general pageant of the world, her own life may be 'left dim', yet she knows that still 'the morning crowns the mountain-brim'

The funeral note of Mary Coleridge (1861–1907) is no less remote from commonplace

Plant not the lily here!
  No lily lies below
The crimson rose to her was dear,
And the summer of the year,
  Not the snow

Sing no lament!
  She loved a merry song
For her the birds were sent
To her the humming of the golden bees,
And the murmur of the trees
  Shall belong

(*Eleanor*)

In another dirge, 'I shall forget you, O my dead', the lament is not so much for the lost as for the inevitable fading of memory Miss Coleridge likes to explore remote moods, and sometimes, as in the poem *Jealousy*, dark situations. There is an element of the sinister in her fancies Her

poems do not always explain themselves; they were not published in her lifetime under her name, and the final selection consists of less than two hundred and fifty pieces, nearly all lyrical and brief, and full of rare handiwork

In another even more recluse poetess, Charlotte Mary Mew (1870–1928), who lived a straitened life, there is a low long-drawn note of melancholy, most sincere and not in the least literary Her scanty verse is in the *Farmer's Bride* (1915) and the *Rambling Sailor* (1929) In *Exspecto Resurrectionem* she calls on the 'King' who has the key of the dark room in which she is 'piteously alone' not to leave her unregarded In *Moorland Night* she lies on the grass without a wish that her heart should beat any longer Or, again, she cries,

> Smile, death! See, I smile as I come to you
> Straight from the road and the moor that I leave behind,
> Nothing on earth to me was like this wind-blown space,
> Nothing was like the road, but at the end there was a vision
> or a face,
> And the eyes were not always kind

These lengthy lines are favoured by Miss Mew, and suit her customary mood Like Mary Coleridge, she can be obscure and elusive, and, also like her, simple and direct, with a definite gift of song, and sometimes she is less than half melancholy

> Love, love, my dear, to-day,
> If the ship in is in the bay,
> If the bird has come your way
> That sings on summer trees,
> When his song faileth,
> And the ship saileth,
> No voice availeth
> To call back these

Some genuine heroic verse is to be found in the *Gísli Súrsson* (1900) of Miss Beatrice Helen Barmby, in her translations from Old Norse, and in her shorter poems on Norse subjects The ballad of *Bolli and Gudrún* gives in twenty-four lines the essence of the great *Laxdale Saga*, diluted by Morris in the *Earthly Paradise* *Gísli Súrsson* is a noble dramatisation of *Gíslasaga* The actors are bound together by blood or marriage or by fostering, and are involved in a mutual vendetta, too complicated for short description.

Gísli, who has avenged a murder, is outlawed and at last slain fighting against fifteen men He and his wife Aud are epical figures, clearly drawn, and there is as little as may be of modern sentiment It would be needful to quote at length to show the force and high execution of this poem, which appears to have been forgotten.

III

In Herbert Trench (1865–1923) there was as brave a poetic purpose as in any man of his generation He could be too ambitious, but in the *Battle of the Marne*, the best of his longer odes, there is the march and dignity to which he aspired

> Nightlong the marshfire Death hangs flickering
> Above the pale-lipped middle of the line,
> Watching—from Verdun wall to Paris wall—
> Whether we stand or fall,
> Whether the European liberties
> Pass into dust
> Like a thing temporal
> That dureth no long while
> Or shall outlast us all
> These are the claims august,
> And this the fate that shall be settled there

Trench seems to have studied George Meredith, a dangerous model, he is best when he is short and simple, in 'She comes not when Noon is on the roses', in *Trees*, and in the song, 'Her, my own sad love divine'

> 'Lovely songs when I am dead
> You will make for me, but how
> Shall I hear them then?' she said,
> 'Make them now, O make them now!'

The *Song for the Funeral of a Boy* is a short ode of signal beauty, and the *Musing on a Great Soldier* a moving piece of homage

Another generous planner, Maurice Hewlett the novelist, produced in 1916 his *Song of the Plow*, in twelve books It is the 'English chronicle' of the English labourer history, as seen from the point of view of 'Hodge', his rights and wrongs, beginning with early times, and ending with honours paid to the myriads who had volunteered in the Great War Hewlett knows his countryman and his countryside, and

glows with sympathy, and he has poetic instinct He is hampered, however, by his chosen technique The work is not only in *terza rima*, itself a difficult form, but in short lines with their frequent rhymes, and these give trouble, and entail many inversions Also the diction is tinted with archaic words and idioms Hewlett's *Flowers in the Grass* (1920) is easier writing, and this is his best book *Chesilbury* and the *Gypsy Girl* are happy instances of what he calls his 'Wiltshire plainsong' Though he is a student of Thomas Hardy, Wiltshire would seem to be a more cheerful place than Wessex In the *Maid and the Farmer's Wife*, the maid, who has borne a child to the farmer, is aided by a gypsy He takes the infant to the farmer's wife, successfully asks her compassion for a stray, stating that the mother is dead, and remembers that, happily, there *is* a girl at hand who is prepared to nurse it

IV

This record has already reached the time of war; and several of the few poets who remain to be mentioned were among the fallen Their good work would have been safe in any case, and it needs no appeal to our sense of loss But it has this feature though by no means all concerned with battle, it is written by those who saw or shared in the business, it is first-hand stuff The army, for the first time, was not only professional, but drawn greatly from the educated class, the men who could use words But where do we find this in our poetry before? Perhaps in the *Battle of Maldon*, conceivably in some of the fighting ballads Now is reported, by the sharers, the actual glamour and devotion, the actual strain and weariness, and the fierce revulsion and 'disenchantment'

One of the older victims, Philip Edward Thomas (1878–1917), who turned rather late to verse, may well be thought of as the voice of the Southern Midlands Like Clare, he is close to the earth and to all rural things, but he does not use dialect, and was a trained man of letters, a delicate and instructed critic The village folk, the 'keeper's tree' with its victims, the musical names of the country flowers and hamlets, figure in his poems He sings of *Rain* and of *Roads*, and, in his happiest piece, of *Words*, which he

thinks of as invisible in the air around him, the soul of the scene, and he calls upon them to 'choose' *him* for their instrument Thomas wrote well on Richard Jefferies, and while not in the same sense a mystic, he too retreats away from, or rather through, things seen into solitary places of the mind In *Lights Out* he comes to the 'border of sleep', the final sleep, asking that 'I may lose my way and myself' *The Unknown* is the lady of whom he has 'no news' and who 'may not exist', but whom he follows to the last Thomas is of no school, his lines, often somewhat irregular, and best when they are brief, follow the natural undulations of his thought, like talk that has found its cadence unconsciously

Another true poet of the country and of *English Hills*, who outlived the deluge, John Freeman (1880–1928), is apt to betray more effort in his 'words' and this perhaps is the expression of the inner conflict and sense of regret that distinguish him 'The weight of the superincumbent hour' is heavy upon Freeman Even in *Early June* autumn is foreseen, and the half-bright day in *November* is made welcome There are many poems of retrospect and self-reproach *When Childhood Died*, and addresses to his mother (*You that Were*) Or his old unhappy thoughts go round and round in his head like the *Caterpillars* on the rim of Fabre's earthen pot There are war poems like *Armistice Day*, an occasion that brings up no triumphant mood But all such melancholy implies an extreme delight in nature and beauty, and a capacity for happiness that often finds expression Freeman is best known as a tree-worshipper, of the great five, elm and oak, beech and ash and yew, only *one*, he says, knows which is dearest to him It is perhaps, in fact, the beech, which he celebrates at length He rejoices too in the *Unloosening* of winter, and in the fairness of the *Body* of a woman played over by the firelight Freeman's rhythms, though some at first sight are casual, are closely studied, and, if I am not quite misled, this retiring poet will live as long as many, and those no mean ones, who are more conspicuous His external life, we are told, was that of a competent and trusted man of business, in the office of a 'friendly society'.

V

The war cut off young poets of many ranks and calling, and the Irishman, Francis Ledwidge (1891–1917), was a labourer on the land, a nomad, an unwilling shopman, and a willing soldier He had next to no schooling, but he was born for letters, and picked up an allowance of culture which happily failed to deaden his talent He tried classical subjects, and in verses on Maeve and her companions he paid his dues to the 'Gaelic revival' Everywhere there are lines of great beauty, and the poetic instinct But Ledwidge's true scene was the open, bird-thronged countryside—not specially Irish in character—with its waters and valleys He has a gift for the sudden, gently startling epithet and phrase that shows immediate perception He sees the 'woodbine lassoing the thorn', and the 'wobbling water' in the brook, and hears the gate singing its 'anvil song' in the wind In the poem *God's Remembrance* these traits are united with a deeper turn of imagination, which shows what was lost in Ledwidge He dreams of himself as a thought in the mind of God, but 'now long forgotten', like a little star in the distance

The shining figure of Rupert Brooke (1887–1915), dying of fever in Scyros at twenty-seven, became to the war generation a symbol of the armies of departed youth The handful of sonnets that culminate in the *Soldier* were printed in December, 1914, a few months before his death They do not depend for their beauty on circumstance, or on our image of the man They are in the great sonnet-lineage, not very regular in shape, but fully accomplished, and with a rapid leap in the verse Over the 'rich dead' Rupert Brooke sounds the Last Post nobly, and is ready himself to go under at the summons In the *Soldier* he rings the changes on the words *England*, *English* We cannot know whether the bugle would have remained his chosen instrument He might have explored further the vein of *Heaven*, where the fish muse upon *their* God, 'squamous, omnipotent, and kind',—a perfect study of ichthyomorphism Or that of *Tiare Tahiti* and *Fafaïa*, written under the spell of the South Seas, where the loves seem so easy, all that heart can wish, in the warm nights among the fireflies, but we know that they are incomplete and transient. The *Old*

Vicarage, Grantchester, with its homesickness and its familiar humour, shows another possible line of development

In Wilfred Owen (1893–1918), who was killed on the Sambre a week before the Armistice, was sacrificed a poet of no less gift though of another temper He has seen hell in the trenches and draws his conclusions, and he has no doubt that Christ taught

> Passivity at any price Suffer dishonour and disgrace but never resort to arms Be bullied, be outraged, be killed, but do not kill

His verses, like his letters, give the reason With anger, with irony, and above all with pity, he reports, at once literally and with maturing imaginative power, all that is dreadful, and all that is irksome

> Our brains ache, in the merciless iced east winds that knive us . .
> Wearied we keep awake because the night is silent
> Low, drooping flares confuse our memories of the salient . .
> Worried by silence, sentries whisper, curious, nervous,
> But nothing happens
> Watching, we hear the mad gusts tugging on the wire,
> Like twitching agonies of men among its brambles
> Northward, incessantly, the flickering gunnery rumbles,
> Far off, like a dull rumour of some other war
> What are we doing here ?

These lines are from *Exposure*, in *The Chances* (written in Cockney) with its ending 'Jim's mad', in *Apologia pro Poemate meo*, and in many other pieces, the tone is similar The poet has 'made fellowships' which are not those of 'happy lovers in old song' but are 'bound with the bandage of the arm that drips, Knit in the webbing of the rifle-thong' It will be seen that in *Exposure*, as often elsewhere, instead of rhyme there is consonance Baffling at first, this device, in Owen's hands, is managed with cunning, and it is, at least, far more hopeful and possible in English than the Spanish assonance (where only the vowels rhyme) into which Mrs Browning sometimes deviates Owen, an artist by instinct, can, of course, rhyme perfectly when he will, like Flecker, he was conversant with French poetry, and with its insistence on the line-ending The last word in this stanza from *Greater Love* is a stroke of genius.

Your voice sings not so soft,—
Though even as wind murmuring through raftered loft,—
Your dear voice is not dear,
Gentle, and evening-clear,
As theirs whom none now hear,
Now earth has stopped their piteous mouths that coughed . .

Owen's strongest though not his most perfect poem is *A Strange Meeting* he talks in a 'tunnel' with the dream-shade of a man whom he has bayoneted, and finds that they are of the same mind about 'the pity of war' He was, we are told, preparing a book of verse 'to strike at the conscience of England with regard to the continuance of the war'

An intense and subtle imagination is just hatching itself in the verses of the young Jew, Isaac Rosenberg, who was killed in 1918 The realism of *Louse Hunting* and of *The Immortals* (which is on the same topic) is balanced by the play of imagery in *Dead Man's Dump:*

None saw their spirits' shadow shake the grass,
Or stood aside for the half-used life to pass
Out of those doomed nostrils and the doomed mouth,
When the swift burning iron bee
Drained the wild honey of their youth

Rosenberg struggled up into the Slade School and started to paint, but his destiny would have been poetry, probably of a strongly intellectual kind He left fragments of ambitious symbolic work, but had already found the way of simplicity:

Your body is a star
Unto my thought,
But stars are not too far
And can be caught—
Small pools their prisons are

Others of the sacrificed have left, each of them, one or two well-remembered poems It must suffice to name Charles Hamilton Sorley, the Marlburian, whose talent was seen early, with his *Song of the Ungirt Runners* and his lines *To Poets*, Edward Wyndham Tennant, with his *Home Thoughts in Laventie*, John McCrae, known for his *In Flanders Fields*, R E Vernède, who celebrated *The Indian Army;* and the American subject, Alan Seeger, of whom his augury 'I have a rendezvous with Death' proved true. Many of

these were young men under age, with a gaiety of spirit equal to their valour, all of them, and more, have the poetic accent.

VI

In *Gates of Damascus* and the *Golden Journey to Samarkand* the verse of James Elroy Flecker (1884–1915) suggests a Mogul inlay of gems in marble and the gems are the Eastern names, *Aleppo*, *Famagusta*, *Lebanon*, or the other uncommon or resounding words in which he rejoices

> In thirty days this ship was far
> Beyond the land of Calcobar,
> Where men drink dead men's blood for wine,
> And dye their beards alizarine

Flecker's devotion to the emphasis and fullness of his rhyme is French rather than English, and may well have been prompted by his study of Leconte de Lisle and Heredia. He came to favour long ringing lines with the inner rhymes variously adjusted

> Shower down thy love, O burning bright! for one night or the other night,
> Will come the Gardener in white, and gathered flowers are dead, Yasmín

Many such poems show that the marble is not cold the appeal *To a Poet a Thousand Years Hence*, and *Rioupéroux* But Flecker's avowed aim was what he called 'Parnassian', to be not 'intimate', analytic, or enigmatic, but 'objective', that is, to give exact as well as glowing form to his picture, and a strong, a no less exact, reverberation to his lines His poetry, in a sense, is popular, and it has, though in a rarer way, the qualities of Macaulay's *Battle of Naseby* On occasion he relapses into mere sound, as when 'harping planets talk love's tune with milky wings outspread', but these defects are purged away, and the chorus at the end of his drama *Hassan* remains, of all his poems, longest on the ear Flecker stayed for some years in Turkey and Syria as an official, and though he captures the East on its coloured and voluptuous side, he does not commit the mistake of being too serious, he takes every-

poems', he says, 'I feel that there should be a most vigilant humour in the pomp and parade of nicely chosen words'

The verse of the novelist David Herbert Lawrence (1885-1930) began to appear just before the war His strong point is his veracity and courage, Lawrence cares for no man, and faithfully sets down his fiercest impressions and imaginings The erotic element is violent, and finds peculiarly inartistic expression when he falls to dilating on the loves of the reptiles It is also, whenever really purged by the imagination, a main source of his power One sequence describes the foreign journey of a young man with his mistress, a married woman, the changes are rung on the text *odi et amo*, the tension, the rapture, the bitter sweetness of the affair are firmly rendered But Lawrence is at his best in gentler themes, of what is called 'still life' *Gloire de Dijon* describes the woman bathing herself in the sunlight, it is like a very good small painting In an earlier series, the writer is teaching a class, he is very weary, but in *The Best of School* and *A Snowy Day in School* he gives an exact and poetic impression of 'the faces of the boys in the brooding, yellow light', and of what the faces say There is the same quietude in some of Lawrence's war poems, the *Embankment by Night*, or the *Attack* (in which the soldier emerges from the wood into the moonshine). *Piano* is another short and impeccable thing, like the lines in which Lawrence commemorates his mother

> Why does the thin grey strand
> Floating up from the forgotten
> Cigarette between my fingers,
> Why does it trouble me?
>
> Ah, you will understand,
> When I carried my mother downstairs
> A few times only, at the beginning
> Of her soft-foot malady,
>
> I should find, for a reprimand
> To my gaiety, a few long grey hairs
> On the breast of my coat, and one by one
> I watched them float up the dark chimney

These lines illustrate also Lawrence's technique, rhyme is here mixed with blank lines, and more than half his verse is rhymeless, and more or less irregular or 'free'. It is often

successful, but the discipline of measure is always a benefit to his vehement and passionate talent

The verse of Harold Monro (1879–1932), the poet and cherisher of poetry, so lately lost, is truly metaphysical, in the sense that he tries to go past appearances to the consciousness, or the reality, that is behind them, an instinct that operates in two directions, outward and inward Monro thinks himself, humorously, into the mind of a dog or a cat (*Hearthstone*, *Cat's Meat*), or even, like Charles Dickens, into that of a pot or kettle or gas-jet, or again, into the life of *Trees*

> (Can you feel the dew ?)
> The wind will cuff you with his fist
> The birds will build their nests in you
> Your circulating blood will go
> Flowing five hundred times more slow

There is much of this mood in the volume *Children of Love* (1914), and the title-poem, with more charm of sound than Monro always cares to provide, records the silent converse between the 'holy boy', Jesus, and 'impudent Cupid'. The point of view of Iscariot had already been set forth in *Judas* (1908) In *Real Property* (1922), and *The Earth for Sale* (1928) the poet turns back into himself, to the underworld of dreams It is his 'real estate', in which the 'old, natural brightness of the heart' has free play In *Midnight Lamentation* and elsewhere he muses on the baffled effort, only stopped by death, of lovers to be truly united.

> I cannot bear the thought
> You, first, may die,
> Nor of how you will weep,
> Should I
> We are too much alone,
> What can we do
> To make our bodies one:
> You, I, I, you ?
> . I cannot find a way
> Through love and through,
> I cannot reach beyond
> Body, to you
> When you or I must go
> Down evermore,
> There'll be no more to say
> —But a locked door.

Harold Monro inclines, if not towards prose, to this stript and natural language, in its natural order, leaving it to find, as it does, its natural melody

VII

Dante tells us that the great topics of poetry for which and which alone the greatest language is appropriate, are *salus, amor, virtus*, defining them as valour in arms, the fire of love, and the guidance of the will A French critic asks, What has a poet to say of love? what of death? and of nature? No one omits *amor* The reader may put these five topics together, and, looking back at the record, so rich and so continuous, of the English Muse, consider how each of them has fared, first and last, at her hands He will find them all, and all greatly represented, though with varying strength at different periods I leave him to the task, hoping that the present outline may offer some first aid Probably the tradition has been strongest, least unbroken, in the poetry of *virtus* There can be no formal peroration to the story I have begun to tell, for it is never ended, and the living voice of poetry is loud to-day, with a youth that is ever renewing

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