CARLYLE, TENNYSON, AND THE APOCALYPTIC TRADITION

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ABSTRACT

One of the major aims of this dissertation is to
demonstrate that modern apocalypticism, however rationally
justified it may appear to be, is the product of desires
comparable to those which prompted our forebears to espouse
apocalyptic beliefs. Apocalypticism springs from a persis-
tent desire to see the present world order replaced by a
perfected world order, a desire to render sacred the pro-
fanity of existence. The modern predilection to view the
world in ironic terms has, however, rendered us incapable
of attaining a sacramental vision, and we are thus victims
of an ironic apocalypticism, which deals only in terms of
destruction, not of regeneration, and we look to the future
with gloomy foreboding rather than millennial hope. This,
then, is the death-wish of modern culture, and the major
part of the dissertation is concerned to show how the sac-
ramental vision of Romanticism, which was itself in the main-
stream of the Christian apocalyptic tradition, became trans-
formed in the nineteenth century into the ironic apocalyptic-
ism of the present day. The first chapter opens with a dis-
cussion of the nature of apocalyptic belief and traces its
development up to the beginning of the nineteenth century.
The central chapters examine in detail the careers of two
writers--Carlyle and Tennyson--who started out from a funda-
mentally Romantic position, but who gradually moved towards

a nihilistic vision of a world ruled by flux, which paved
the way for the development of an ironic, non-sacramental
vision. In the final chapter, the development of this ironic
vision in the twentieth century is traced, and the dissert-
ation concludes with an examination of current trends, and,
in particular, of a neo-Romanticism, which seeks to rein-
state a sacramental vision.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CONTENTS

NOTES ON REFERENCES AND EDITIONS

Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from the writings of Carlyle are taken from The Works of Thomas Carlyle, Centenary Edition, ed. H.D. Traill (London: Chapman & Hall, 1896-1901). The following abbreviations are used to identify quotations:

CME (Critical and Miscell-
   aneous Essays)

FR (The French Revolution)

HHW (Heroes and Hero-Wor-
   ship)

LDP (Latter-Day Pamphlets)

PP (Past and Present)

SR (Sartor Resartus)

All quotations from the poetry of Tennyson are taken from The Poems of Tennyson, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Longman, 1969). The following abbreviations are used:

CA (Coming of Arthur)

GL (Gareth and Lynette)

MG (Marriage of Geraint)

GE (Geraint and Enid)

BB (Balin and Balan)

MV (Merlin and Vivien)

LE (Lancelot and Elaine)

HG (Holy Grail)

PE (Pelleas and Ettarre)

LT (Last Tournament)

G (Guinevere)

PA (Passing of Arthur)

Dates given in parentheses after the first reference to a particular work indicate the date of first publication.

THE APOCALYPTIC TRADITION

1. The Roots of Apocalyptic

It is a commonplace that we live in an "apocalyptic" age, an age in which "the sense of an ending" dominates our thought.[1] While the assertions of evangelists and cult leaders, attractive as they may be to an ever increasing audience, are regarded, on the whole, with a "clerkly scepticism," over all of us hangs, from time to time, the uneasy suspicion that the latter days of the world may indeed have arrived.[2] There is said to be an "apocalyptic tradition" in modern literature, a distinctly "apocalyptic" trend in modern thought, and, in the century of total war, it seems we have ample grounds for believing that our "apocalyptic" fears have not only a different form but also a far greater warrant than the apocalyptic fears (or hopes) of our ancestors.[3] It is easy to find justification for such a view. Unlike our ancestors, we do not look to an apocalyptic conflagration for the fulfilment of a divine plan, for it would be arbitrary, nor do we look to it for ultimate regeneration, for it would be simply destructive. For our ancestors, a divine reality lay behind the dross of appearance, but for us there lurks only le Néant. Yet, for

all these differences, there is a fundamental continuity
between our apocalypticism and that of our ancestors, or,
for that matter, that of present-day evangelism. Our fears
are not the product of the threat of total war, nor of our
experience of it, although they are fuelled by it. The root
of these fears lies much deeper. To understand the apocal-
ypticism of our century, therefore, it is necessary to look
beyond the reaction to its immediate causes, and to place
it within a tradition from which it seems so consciously to
divorce itself.

The word "apocalypse" comes from the Greek <u>apokal-
ypsis</u>, meaning "revelation." Through its association with
the Revelation of St. John the Divine, however, it has come
to signify a specific kind of revelation--of the events
which will bring the present world order to an end, and of
the new world order which will replace it. Although, in
this sense, it is Biblical in origin, its usage is no long-
er confined to the sequence of events described in the Book
of Revelation, for not only has our attitude to the end of
the world changed, but also we have come to realize that
the apocalyptic pattern of Christianity is a variant of a
pattern which, in different guises, is common to all cul-
tures. The Christian apocalypse does, however, differ from
earlier apocalyptic myths in that it declares that the end
of the world will occur once only, and will be followed by

a never-ending period of felicity. All of the apocalyptic
myths which preceded it, including that of the Greeks, dev-
eloped out of a cyclical rather than a finite view of his-
tory, and proposed that every historical cycle would end in
an ekpyrosis, or total conflagration, which would be foll-
owed by the advent of a new historical cycle.[4]

Mircea Eliade has written that "myths of the End of
the World implying, as they do in clearer or darker fashion,
the re-creation of a new Universe, express the same archaic
and extremely widespread view of the progressive 'degradat-
ion' of a Cosmos, necessitating its periodical destruction
and re-creation."[5] Elsewhere, in discussing the origins of
this belief, he declares that "the End of the World in the
past and that which is to take place in the future both re-
present the mythico-ritual system of the New Year festival
projected on the macrocosmic scale and given an unusual de-
gree of intensity."[6] Apocalyptic myths, therefore, are ex-
pressions of the same psychological need which gives rise
to annual rituals of renewal, difficult though it may be
for us to see any connexion between the making of New Year
resolutions and our apocalyptic fears. Man is under an im-
perative to render sacred the profanity of existence. His
need to renew himself, to be reborn, and to impose a mean-
ing onto his individual progress from womb to grave, and
onto the chaos of history, is an inescapable condition of

his existence.

Modern apocalypticism, like Christianity, maintains the conviction that the end of the world will be final, yet it is distinctive in that it visualizes no future world order.[7] Even though it differs from other apocalyptic myths in this way, however, comparison of modern apocalypticism with these myths does raise some interesting questions. Apocalyptic myth, as defined by Eliade, derives from a dissatisfaction with the present world order, from a feeling that its progressive "degradation" has brought it to the point where it must be destroyed and replaced by a new order. We may then ask whether our apocalyptic fears are of a totally different nature or whether they grow out of a similar dissatisfaction with the present world order--out of a desire to see it come to an end, even if no successor to it can be envisaged. Can it be possible that our apocalyptic intimations are an expression not of fear, but of desire?[8] Before we can hope to find an answer to these questions, we must turn to consider the origins of our apocalypticism, with a view to arriving at a clearer definition of it.

2. Judaeo-Christian Apocalyptic

The classical was the last in a long line of civilizations which maintained a cyclical view of history.[9] Greek myth, it is true, presented the idea of a progressive degeneration from a remote golden age, but in the spheres

of philosophy and historical speculation it was believed

that history was a ceaseless movement from bad to better

to best to worse to worst to better and so on. As M.H. Ab-

rams points out, some Greek theorists went so far as to

propose a theory of eternal recurrence.[10] Chrysippus, for

example, believed that every historical cycle would end

with an ekpyrosis and would be followed by a new historical

cycle in which

> again there will exist Socrates and Plato and every man,
> with the same friends and fellow citizens, and he will
> suffer the same fate and will meet with the same exper-
> iences and undertake the same deeds. . . . And there
> will be a complete restoration of the whole . . . and
> the same things will be restored without end.[11]

Judaeo-Christianity broke decisively with this

tradition. History became linear and finite, and the end of

the world an event which would occur once only. There was

another difference. Whereas before it had been believed

that cosmic regeneration would be accompanied by the regen-

eration of the entire race or of all mankind, it was now

believed that regeneration would be selective, that only

the elect would come to live in eternal bliss. As Mircea

Eliade points out, Judaeo-Christian eschatology "represents

the triumph of a sacred history. For the End of the World

will reveal the religious value of human acts, and men will

be judged by their acts."[12]

The apocalyptic literature of the Jews really came

of age only about one hundred and fifty years before the

birth of Christ, with the composition of the Book of Dan-
iel.[13] However, its origins can be traced back to the great

prophets of the sixth, seventh, and eighth centuries B.C.,

and even to the description of the flood in Genesis, which,

although not transcribed until around 850 B.C., draws on a

much older mythic tradition. Flood myths are among the most

common of all apocalyptic myths and that presented in the

Book of Genesis conforms more closely to the prototypical

apocalyptic pattern we have been discussing than to the

apocalyptic myth which eventually emerged out of Judaism.

The flood in Genesis is the result not of a divine plan

but of the wickedness of man and the anger of God at this

wickedness. It does not usher in an age of eternal bliss

but simply a regenerated version of the old order where

"the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth"

(Gen. 8: 21).[14] It also takes place in the remote past

rather than in the future, as is generally the case with

non-Judaeo-Christian apocalyptic myths--after all, if one

apocalypse is the same as another, it makes more sense to

refer back to a previous one than to envisage a future one.

While the description of the flood in Genesis does share

many features with foregoing apocalyptic myths, however, it

differs from them in one significant respect. Instead of

destroying and restoring the entire race, God spares Noah

and his kindred and makes them inheritors of the regenerat-

ed world. Noah is chosen because he has "walked with God"
(Gen. 6: 9) and resisted the temptations of the world. The
idea of a chosen people, who will be saved by adherence to
the Law of God, is central to Judaism, as it is, in a mod-
ified form, to Christianity, and it was the basis upon
which the distinctive apocalyptic of the Judaeo-Christian
tradition was founded.

The first of the great prophets, Amos, appeared
around the middle of the eighth century B.C. He was an in-
habitant of the northern kingdom of Israel, which at this
time was enjoying a period of peaceful and complacent pros-
perity. It was widely believed that this prosperity "antic-
ipated the coming of a great day of Yahweh, a final climax
of history when Yahweh would vindicate his people and crown
them with glory and honor."[15] This apocalyptic enthusiasm
ignored both the growing power of the Assyrian Empire and
the social and religious corruption the chosen race had
fallen into in their abuse of their new-found prosperity.
Amos did not ignore these signs, however, and became con-
vinced that God's punishment of Israel was not far off. In
his prophecy, he moves from a denunciation of the social
injustice and religious corruption of his age to visions of
the doom of Israel. Although he ends with a vision of the
restoration of Israel, his emphasis is on the imminent de-
struction of the kingdom.

The basic elements of Amos's prophecy can be found
in all of the prophetic works written subsequently, al-
though the emphases of these works often differed consider-
ably. Hosea, a younger contemporary of Amos, wrote at a
time when the condition of Israel had deteriorated, yet his
prophecy has a sympathetic and plaintive tone which con-
trasts with the severity of Amos's vision. In his lament
over Israel's unfaithfulness to God and vision of the ul-
timate restoration of the kingdom, he employs, for the
first time, the metaphor of marriage to express the relat-
ionship between God and his chosen people, one of the most
common images in later prophecy. Isaiah, an inhabitant of
the southern kingdom of Judah, also believed that the
wrath of God would be visited upon the land, yet he was
more optimistic than either Amos or Hosea about the event-
ual restoration of the kingdom. His mystical conception of
the Holy City of Jerusalem was to play a major part in lat-
er apocalyptic prophecy, and in the New Testament he is
hailed as the greatest of the prophets because of his re-
peated messianic assertions. In contrast, Jeremiah, who
lived in the following century, through the dark years
which culminated in the second Babylonian exile, preached
a message of doom and disillusionment which was hardly re-
lieved by the promise of return from exile. Unlike Amos,
Hosea, or Isaiah, he was concerned almost exclusively with

religious corruption and dealt little with social evils. Yet, despite these differences in attitude, all of these prophets attacked the corruption, impiety, and materialism of their society and predicted its imminent collapse. Although their writings cover a period of some two hundred and fifty years, the first predating the collapse of the northern kingdom and the last antedating the return from the second Babylonian exile, their prophecies have a marked consistency.

One feature of this consistency is the characterization of the imminent destruction of the kingdom. This destruction will come as a result of the sins and impiety of the people. It will be "the day of the Lord," a very different affair from that anticipated by the optimistic millenarians of Amos's time:

> Woe unto you that desire the day of the LORD! to what
> end is it for you? the day of the Lord is darkness and
> not light.   (Amos 5: 18)

It will not consist simply of the destruction of the kingdom by enemy forces, for to these will be joined the destructive forces of the natural world:

> Thou shalt be visited of the LORD of hosts with thunder, and with earthquake, and great noise, with storm
> and tempest, and the flame of devouring fire.
>   (Isa. 29: 6)

In their more elevated moments, the prophets declare that, before the restoration of the kingdom, nothing short of a total apocalypse will occur. Jeremiah ironically echoes the

first chapter of Genesis in his vision of impending doom,

implying that the world must be created anew before the

hoped for millennium arrives:

> I beheld the earth, and, lo, it was without form, and
> void; the heavens, and they had no light.
> I beheld the mountains, and, lo, they trembled, and all
> the hills moved lightly.
> I beheld, and, lo, there was no man, and all the birds
> of the heavens were fled.
> I beheld, and, lo, the fruitful place was a wilderness,
> and all the cities thereof were broken down at the
> presence of the LORD, and by his fierce anger.
> For thus hath the LORD said, The whole land shall be
> desolate; yet will I not make a full end.
>
> (Jer. 4: 23-27)

Isaiah sees a similar catastrophe as the necessary prelude

to the establishment of the New Jerusalem:

> . . . the windows from on high are open, and the found-
> ations of the earth do shake.
> The earth is utterly broken down, the earth is clean
> dissolved, the earth is moved exceedingly.
> The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and
> shall be removed like a cottage; and the transgression
> thereof shall be heavy upon it; and it shall fall, and
> not rise again.
> And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord
> shall punish the host of the high ones that are on
> high, and the kings of the earth upon the earth.
> And they shall be gathered together, as prisoners are
> gathered in the pit, and shall be shut up in the pris-
> on, and after many days shall they be visited.
> Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed,
> when the LORD of hosts shall reign in mount Zion, and
> in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously.
>
> (Isa. 24: 18-23)

The prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the other

prophets clearly foreshadow the apocalyptic writings of

Daniel and St. John the Divine, yet they are distinct from

them. They are admonitory rather than fatalistic, and thus

tend to concentrate on an impending doom which may yet be averted rather than on ultimate regeneration. And, although they do contain visions of total apocalypse, their main emphasis is on a disastrous, yet temporary, disruption of civilization. In the Book of Daniel, written in the middle of the second century B.C., these emphases have shifted considerably. By this time, Palestine was again under foreign domination. It was ruled by Antiochus Epiphanes, the Seleucid King of Syria, whose ruthless persection of those Jews who refused to abandon their religion led to the Wars of the Maccabees and was the driving force behind the apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel. The unknown author of these prophecies deals with the conditions of his time only by implication, for he sets his narrative in the time of Nebuchadnezzar. Yet, although he attempts to conceal his message by this device and by the extensive use of allegory--understandable, considering the circumstances under which the book was written--its drift is clear. The end of the world is no longer a possibility but a certainty; it will not be confined to one locality but will be universal. And with this in mind he concentrates not on the impending destruction but on eventual restoration. In a dream, he sees four great beasts come out of the sea (Dan. 7: 3), representing the four civilizations of the world--Babylonian, Median, Persian, and Seleucid. He then describes how these

are overthrown:

> I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the
> Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as
> snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his
> throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as
> burning fire.
> A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him:
> thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thous-
> and times ten thousand stood before him: the judgement
> was set, and the books were opened.
> . . . .
> I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the
> Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to
> the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before
> him.
> And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a
> kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages,
> should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting domin-
> ion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that
> which shall not be destroyed.   (Dan. 7: 9-10, 13-14)

This represents the consummation of history and the init-

iation of an everlasting kingdom in which the faithful shall

awake to everlasting life:

> And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great
> prince which standeth for the children of thy people:
> and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was
> since there was a nation even to that same time: and at
> that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that
> shall be found written in the book.
> And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth
> shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to
> shame and everlasting contempt.
> And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of
> the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness
> as the stars for ever and ever.   (Dan. 12: 1-3)

In the Book of Daniel the main elements of what was

to become Christian eschatology are present. The world is

dominated by a demonic power, growing ever more pernicious.

But its doom has been pronounced and it will shortly be

swept away by a catastrophic cosmic convulsion which will

spare only those chosen by the Lord to establish an ever-
lasting kingdom upon earth. In the century and a half be-
tween the writing of the Book of Daniel and the birth of
Christ, apocalyptic prophecy flourished, becoming ever
more militant as the Jewish nation continued to decline.
In the prophecies of Ezra and Baruch, written during the
first century B.C., the figure of the Messiah, who had
been a mystical personification in the writings of the
prophets and even in the Book of Daniel, becomes the Lion
of Judah, a superhuman warrior who will lead his people to
final victory. According to Josephus, messianic prophecy
had gained such a hold on the popular imagination by the
first century A.D. that it precipitated the suicidal re-
bellion against Roman occupation that led to the capture of
Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70.[16]
And it was out of the wild speculations of a savagely
oppressed yet indomitable nation that Christianity was
born.

The New Testament, with the exception of the Book
of Revelation and the cryptic apocalyptic prophecies in the
Synoptic Gospels and the First Epistle of Paul to the
Thessalonians, is not apocalyptic in the sense that the
later prophecies of the Old Testament are.[17] To some ex-
tent, this may reflect the bias of the Church Fathers who
compiled it. By the time Christianity became the official
religion of the Roman Empire, chiliasm had come to be re-

garded as a virtual heresy and Origen, one of the most influential of the Church Fathers, had substituted an eschatology of the individual soul for a collective millennial eschatology.[18] Indeed, it has been suggested that the only reason for the inclusion of the Book of Revelation in the canon was an erroneous belief that it had been written by St. John the Evangelist.[19] This official disapproval of chiliasm has been a feature of Christianity ever since, yet it has never succeeded in dispelling the apocalyptic fervour bequeathed to Christianity by its earliest adherents.

The most tangible element of this legacy is the Revelation of St. John the Divine. It was written around 95 A.D., during the persecutions of the Emperor Domitian. St. John, exiled to Patmos, drew on both Judaic and Christian sources to present his vision of the imminent collapse of the Roman Empire and the establishment of the New Jerusalem. In its sublimity and sense of exultation, the Book of Revelation is not only the culmination of the Judaeo-Christian apocalyptic tradition, but also its most powerful expression:

> And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.
> And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.
> And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

> And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and
> there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor cry-
> ing, neither shall there be any more pain: for the for-
> mer things are passed away.   (Rev. 21: 1-4)

Among those most affected by St. John's prophecies

were the Montanists, a rigorously ascetic group of religious

ecstatics who went into retreat in Phrygia in the middle of

the second century A.D. to await the coming of the Lord. By

the end of the century, the cult had spread throughout

Christendom and included in its ranks Tertullian, the most

famous theologian of the age. He reported that a walled

city had been seen in the sky over Judea and took this as a

clear sign that the New Jerusalem would soon descend from

heaven.[20] However, in the following century, due to the

failure of apocalyptic expectation and the opposition of a

growing number of theologians, Montanism collapsed.

The extreme millenarianism of the Montanists was

not to be seen again for several centuries, yet apocalyptic

speculation by no means disappeared in the interim.

Although the early Church Fathers denounced apocalyptic be-

lief, they found themselves unable to counter it and sought

to minimize it by projecting the millennium into a remote

future. Lactantius declared that it would occur two hundred

years after his birth (A.D. 260?) and Hippolytus (d. A.D.

236) set the date in the sixth century.[21] Later theologians

rejected literal interpretation of the Book of Revelation,

arguing that "the Revelation of John was not to be under-

stood as prophecy of the last events of history, but rather
as an allegory of the conflict between good and evil in the
present life of the Church. Attempts to determine the time
of the End of the world were ruled out with an appeal to
'It is not for you to know the times or dates' (Acts 1:
7)."[22] The greatest opponent of literal apocalypticism was
St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430), who argued that "there
was no essential relation between God's plan for salvation
and the destinies of secular kingdoms and empires."[23] This
doctrine formed the basis for apocalyptic exegesis through-
out the early middle ages, and, as the Church developed
from a persecuted cult into a powerful institution, its ad-
herents relinquished hopes of an imminent millennium and
pledged themselves to serving God's kingdom upon earth.

One consequence of St. Augustine's distinction be-
tween the realms of sacred and secular history was the re-
instatement of a cyclical view of history. This view did
not supplant the finite pattern of history proposed by the
Bible, but supplemented it. The pattern of sacred history,
although predetermined, was beyond human comprehension,
while the pattern of secular history, with a providentially
governed circularity, was not. This crucial distinction,
effectively establishing a dual tradition of Christian
historiography, is often ignored in discussions of the
historical perspective of Christianity. As Henry Kozicki

says, "critics sometimes represent the Judaic-Christian vision of history as progressive and (thus) exhilarating and the Greco-Roman as cyclic and (therefore) depressing and pessimistic. But the idea of disastrous cyclicity always has gone along comfortably with millenarianism."[24] Sir Thomas Browne, for example, declared that

> All cannot be happy at once, for because the glory of one State depends upon the ruine of another, there is a revolution and vicissitude of their greatness, and must obey the swing of that wheele, not moved by intelligences, but by the hand of God, whereby all Estates arise to their Zenith and vertical points, according to their predestined periods. For the lives not onely of men, but of Commonweales, and the whole world, run not upon an Helix that still enlargeth, but on a Circle, where arriving to their Meridian, they decline in obscurity, and fall under the Horizon againe.[25]

Apocalyptic writings continued to be produced throughout the early middle ages, and there is ample evidence to suggest that they exercised a considerable hold over the popular imagination.[26] However, the apocalypticism of this period was not essentially proto-revolutionary in character. In contrast to the apocalypticism of the early Christian era and of the late middle ages, which sought to overthrow existing institutions, its purpose was, on the whole, to support such institutions. As Bernard McGinn says, in the early middle ages "apocalypticism was a way in which contemporary political and social events were given religious validation by incorporation into a transcendent scheme of meaning."[27]

But, as the year 1000 approached, deep-rooted apoc-

alyptic preoccupations began to be transformed into renewed
expectations of an imminent apocalypse. This was the year,
after all, in which St. Augustine had implied that the
Christian millennium would end, by declaring that it "had
begun with the birth of Christianity and was fully realized
in the Church."[28] In the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, the entries
for the latter part of the tenth century are filled with
accounts of unnatural disasters and apocalyptic portents,
indicating that "the compilers still held to the ancient
belief that the world would end in the tenth century."[29] As
the millennium drew near, large masses of people fled from
the cities to prepare themselves for the coming end.[30] When
the year passed without incident, it was declared that the
calculations had been wrong and that the world would end in
1033 or 1065.[31] It was out of the frustration of apocalyp-
tic expectation that the Crusades were born.[32] The New Jer-
usalem had not descended, yet the vision did not fail. It
sustained a vast, ill-equipped army in its fanatical quest
for a Jerusalem which was, in Norman Cohn's words, "no mere
earthly city but the symbol of a prodigious hope."[33] As Ray
C. Petry has written,

> The social leverage of the crusaders, with all their
> more obvious cultural attachments, was fundamentally
> derived from the postulates of Christian eschatology
> and Messianism. These doctrinal fulcrums operated for
> the princes of the Church, feudal lords, and humble
> bearers of the Cross alike. There was a common psychol-
> ogy that pervaded papal propaganda and the strange mag-
> netism of Bernard's sermonic exhortation. It was also
> basic in the frenzies of the Children's Crusade. This

arose from highly varied applications of Christian teaching on the impending Kingdom and the last days.[34]

From this point on, the nature of apocalypticism underwent a gradual transformation. Whereas the apocalyptic myths of the early middle ages had been essentially conservative, designed to support spiritual and secular institutions by giving them a transcendental dimension, the apocalyptic myths of the late middle ages acquired a revolutionary aspect. The key figure in this transformation was Joachim of Fiore (c. 1135-1202), whose millennial expectations were focused on the apocalyptic regeneration of the Church, which, he declared, would occur in 1260.[35] The implication of Joachim's belief was that the Church was an unregenerate institution, and this implication fuelled the numerous attacks on the Church throughout the ensuing centuries.[36] Joachim himself was an orthodox Catholic, yet his writings were a major force behind the reforming zeal which swept over Europe at the end of the middle ages, when the Pope became, for many, a type of Antichrist.

The rise of revolutionary apocalypticism in the late middle ages established a pattern which has been a feature of Western civilization ever since. Just as the apocalyptic myths of the early middle ages sought to consolidate the static, hierarchic, and (in the sense that it was seen as divinely ordained) impersonal feudal order, so the apocalyptic myths of the late middle ages sought to under-

mine this order and by doing so established an order in

which change was a constant. Here we find validation for

the idea of progress (in both an evolutionary and a revol-

utionary sense) and, because of the shift in emphasis from

the impersonal to the personal, for the idea of social

equality. In the late middle ages, man became an agent. In

the early middle ages, everything had been seen as an

entity, and cause and effect, the basis of empirical thought,

were excluded from the world view.[37] Isidore of Seville

(d. 636), for example, delineated a universe of discrete and

minimally related objects; the only relationship worthy of

consideration was that between the individual object and

God.[38] There was no conception of a world governed by

chance; everything was necessary, everything was controlled

by God. Nothing could be contingent, and it was man's duty

to believe that. There were no mediating steps between

events, no sequence, no pattern of response. In the late

middle ages, however, the world gradually came to be viewed

as process, and organized according to the will of man

rather than that of God. This was due partly to the redis-

covery of Aristotle, whose ideas of cause and effect were

for a time branded as heretical, and partly to a growing

rift between the social framework of feudalism and develop-

ing social needs. Both factors contributed to the trans-

formation of apocalypticism, and this, in turn, helped to

create the new world view.

It should be pointed out that the transformation of apocalypticism in the late middle ages did not manifest itself solely in a literal millenarianism, as Norman Cohn implies that it did in his Pursuit of the Millennium.[39] Allegorical interpretations of apocalyptic prophecy remained the norm, yet, just as the notion of Christ the King of Glory, which can be found, for example, in The Dream of the Rood, gave way to the notion of the human, suffering Christ, which can be found in numerous late medieval lyrics and plays, the Book of Revelation came to be seen as an allegory of the individual soul rather than of the Church Triumphant. We can see this, for example, in an early Renaissance poem, Fulke Greville's Caelica (1633):

> The Flood that did, and dreadful Fire that shall
> Drowne, and burne up the malice of the earth,
> The divers tongues, and Babylons downe-fall,
> Are nothing to the mans renewed birth;
> First, let the Law plough up thy wicked heart,
> That Christ may come, and all these types depart.
>
> When thou hast swept the house that all is cleare,
> When thou the dust hast shaken from thy feete,
> When Gods All-might doth in thy flesh appeare,
> Then Seas with streames above the skye doe meet;
> For Goodnesse onely doth God comprehend,
> Knowes what was first, and what shall be the end.[40]

Throughout the second millennium of the Christian era the date of the Second Coming has been fixed and refixed with a frequency which it would be tedious to document, and in literature the influence of the Book of Revelation

has virtually outweighed the influence of the rest of the
New Testament put together. It is hardly an exaggeration to
say that there is a distinct apocalyptic tradition in West-
ern literature of the past one thousand years. Late mediev-
al works as diverse as Piers Plowman, Pearl, Chaucer's
House of Fame, Malory's Morte D'Arthur (1485), and Dante's
Divine Comedy all contain significant apocalyptic elem-
ents.[41]   Book I of Spenser's Faerie Queene (1590), signifies,
according to M.H. Abrams, "the historical advent of Christ,
whose coming victory over the dragon and marriage to the
bride will herald the restoration of Eden to all mankind,"
while "in another dimension . . . it signifies the quest,
temptation, struggle, triumph, and redemptive marriage to
the one true faith which is acted out within the spirit of
every believing Christian."[42]   Although it seems that Spen-
ser is here following the orthodox interpretation of the
New Jerusalem as an allegory of a personal spiritual state,
it is possible that widespread expectation that the world
would end in 1588, two years prior to the publication of
the work, contributed to the immediacy of its presentat-
ion.[43]

It seems even more likely that the failure of sim-
ilar expectations in the mid-seventeenth century left its
mark on two works of a profoundly apocalyptic nature--Mil-
ton's Paradise Lost (1667) and Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress
(1678).[44]   Milton's poem takes for its theme the entire

pattern of Biblical history and, although the event which
will complete that pattern is touched on only at rare in-
tervals, the work is full of apocalyptic references. Its
very structure recalls that of the Book of Revelation,
with Satan substituted for the Beast and millennial promise
for millennial realization. Milton does not predict the
time of the Second Coming nor does he speculate at any
great length on its precise nature. Yet his humanized apoc-
alyptic vision does owe a considerable debt to the Book of
Revelation. Michael Fixler writes that, "the imagery and
themes of the Apocalypse so permeated the depths of his im-
agination that he derived as many literary images from the
Book of Revelation as from the three Synoptic Gospels to-
gether."[45] This apocalyptic element in Milton's poem played
an important role in the revaluation of the apocalyptic
tradition at the end of the following century.

The other major work to emerge from the aftermath
of the Puritan Revolution was The Pilgrim's Progress. Bun-
yan's allegory of the individual soul striving to attain
the Heavenly Jerusalem came to have, among many Nonconform-
ists, a significance second only to that of the Book of
Revelation. Its militant Puritanism and its unshakeable
conviction of the inevitability of the downtrodden individ-
ual's victory over the forces of a corrupt world, provided
he maintain his faith, place it in the mainstream of the

apocalyptic tradition. While Bunyan confines himself to the apocalyptic rebirth of the individual, as opposed to Spenser and Milton, who also deal with the historical apocalypse, the social implications of his work were considerable. As Roger Sharrock says, Puritanism "in the mid seventeenth century . . . was a fiery religious and social dynamic resembling contemporary Marxism more than modern Fundamentalism."[46] The book developed out of a movement which viewed society as evil and was determined to change it. Later Nonconformists, many of whom embraced millenarianism, found in Bunyan's allegory a major source of inspiration.

In the aftermath of the Puritan Revolution, millenarianism fell into general disfavour.[47] However, as Ernest Sandeen points out,

> churchmen did not return to the Augustinian position. In harmony with the Lockean tradition of rationalism and optimism, a new eschatology, most influentially stated by the Salisbury rector Daniel Whitly, emphasized the continued success of the church, the steady improvement of man and society, and the eventual culmination of Christian history in the coming of a literal millennium.[48]

Apocalyptic themes continued to appear in literature, although they were generally of an extremely formal character, as in Dryden's "To the Pious Memory of Anne Killigrew" (1685) and Pope's The Messiah (1712), or were favoured for their sublimity, as in Young's "The Last Day" (1713) and Night Thoughts (1742-45). Other examples can be found in Thomson's The Seasons (1744), Cowper's The Task (1785), and

49
Handel's oratorio <u>Messiah</u> (1742).

The apocalyptic pattern of <u>The Seasons</u> is worth ex-
amining in some detail, since it modifies the traditional
pattern significantly and foreshadows the radical modific-
ations made to it in the Romantic era. In the opening book
of the poem, <u>Spring</u>, Thomson looks back to the spring of
the world, when "the first fresh dawn . . . waked the
gladdened race / Of uncorrupted man" (11. 242-243) and man
50
was in harmony with nature. This has changed, for

                     Now the distempered mind
     Has lost that concord of harmonious powers
     Which forms the soul of happiness; and all
     Is off the poise within: the passions all
     Have burst their bounds; and Reason, half extinct,
     Or impotent, or else approving, sees
     The foul disorder.   (11. 275-281)

This inner discord is reflected in the external world of
nature, for "in old dusky time, a deluge came" (1. 309).
Since this apocalyptic event,

     The Seasons . . . have, with severer sway,
     Oppressed a broken world: the Winter keen
     Shook forth his waste of snows; and Summer shot
     His pestilential heats. Great Spring before
     Greened all the year; and fruits and blossoms blushed
     In social sweetness on the self-same bough.
     . . . .
     But now, of turbid elements the sport,
     From clear to cloudy tossed, from hot to cold,
     And dry to moist, with inward-eating change,
     Our drooping days are dwindled down to naught,
     Their period finished ere 'tis well begun.
                               (11. 317-322, 331-335)

This process of oscillation is reflected in the structure
of the poem itself, and from it emerges something which re-

futes the nihilism implied in this passage. Although the
subject matter of the poem imposes a cyclical pattern onto
it, its oscillatory mode works against and eventually tran-
scends this pattern. At the end of <u>Winter</u>, seasonal change
becomes a metaphor for man's life:

                              Behold, fond man!
    See here thy pictured life; pass some few years,
    Thy flowering Spring, thy Summer's ardent strength,
    Thy sober Autumn falling into age,
    And pale concluding Winter comes at last
    And shuts the scene. Ah! whither now are fled
    Those dreams of greatness? those unsolid hopes
    Of happiness? those longings after fame?
    Those restless cares? those busy bustling days?
    Those gay-spent festive nights? those veering thoughts,
    Lost between good and ill, that shared thy life?
    All now are vanished! Virtue sole survives--
    Immortal, never-failing friend of man,
    His guide to happiness on high. And see!
    'Tis come, the glorious morn! the second birth
    Of heaven and earth! awakening Nature hears
    The new-creating word, and starts to life
    In every heightened form, from pain and death
    For ever free.   (ll. 1028-1046)

This metaphor is sustained throughout the poem's conclusion
but there is no suggestion that its apocalyptic implications
extend to the world of external nature. The seasons will
continue their "mysterious round" (<u>Hymn</u>, l. 21) as before
and, although the "bounded view" (<u>Winter</u>, l. 1067) of man
may deem them evil, they are, to the eye of reason, "but
the varied God" (<u>Hymn</u>, l. 2). Nature, in other words, can
only be transfigured by the exercise of reason, by a capac-
ity to see in it the workings of a beneficent God:

                          I cannot go
    Where Universal Love not smiles around,

> Sustaining all yon orbs and all their sons;
> From seeming evil still educing good,
> And better thence again, and better still,
> In infinite progression.
>
> (Hymn, ll. 111-116)

The apocalyptic pattern of the Judaeo-Christian tradition has, as we have seen, exercised a strong influence over the development of Western thought. On the whole, its allegorical application to the life of the Church or to the life of the individual has assumed supremacy over a literal application. It has never lost its potential for being transformed into a dynamic social myth, however, whenever the existing social myth has become inadequate. It originated in the aspirations of a downtrodden people, convinced of their inherent superiority and, throughout the second millennium of the Christian era, whenever a significant proportion of the population has felt itself to be oppressed or dispossessed, it has acquired a new relevance. It has also had a less obvious, but more permanent, effect on the course of Western civilization. Thomson's paean to infinite progression expresses one of the fundamental concepts underlying Western thought, a concept which depends on the rectilinear, finite historical perspective bequeathed to us by the Judaeo-Christian tradition and on the incorporation of that perspective into a view of the world as process.

In our own day, however, the idea of progress has, to all intents and purposes, disappeared, and our culture

is pervaded not by the benign optimism of Thomson, but by
a desperate nihilism. This nihilism is, to a large extent,
the expression of a wish to see the apocalypse come, a
wish less fervent but no less fatalistic than that which
motivated the Montanists and the Crusaders. As M.H. Abrams
has said, "much of our literature of absurdity and black
comedy is a form of black apocalypse--grotesque visions of
an ultimate violence which destroys not to renew but
simply to annihilate a world which is regarded as an aff-
ront to being, revealing behind its disintegrating fabric
not a new heaven and earth but le Néant, nothing at all."[51]
But to see how we moved from the benign optimism of Thom-
son to contemporary nihilism we have to go back to the end
of the eighteenth century and the Romantic redefinition of
the apocalyptic tradition.

3. Romantic Revaluation

What happened to the English Romantic poets in the
wake of the French Revolution is comparable, in many ways,
to what happened to Milton in the wake of the Puritan Rev-
olution. He too expected the millennium to come, and when
it did not he reformulated his apocalyptic vision and turn-
ed to consider the possibility of attaining "a paradise
within thee, happier far."[52]   By the end of the eighteenth
century, the millenarianism which had lain practically dor-
mant since Milton's time resurfaced. The revolutions in

America and France seemed to indicate that the millennium
was at hand.⁵³ Many Nonconformists conceived of this mill-
enium in traditional Christian terms, yet, alongside these
expectations, there was a new strain of millenarianism, a
belief in apocalypse by revolution rather than revelation,
which owed more to the eighteenth century than to the sev-
enteenth. It was the Goddess of Reason rather than Jehovah
who was to be the providential force behind the events
which would transform the world. It was to be a secular
millennium.

These hopes were short-lived. The ideals of the
French Revolution were swept aside as it degenerated into
anarchy, terror, and despotism. The disorientation this
produced in those who had looked for the transfiguration of
the world necessitated a revaluation of apocalyptic expect-
ation similar to that which Milton had made. Yet Milton's
solution was inapplicable to the failure of a secular mill-
ennium. The solution had to be reformulated. Milton had
fallen back on a belief in individual regeneration; the
Romantic poets also turned their view towards the individ-
ual, yet without abandoning their belief in the possibility
of social regeneration. They transformed their belief in
apocalypse by revolution into a belief in apocalypse by im-
agination.⁵⁴ The revolutionary mode of imaginative percept-
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ion they proposed would, they declared, create a new world.

Thomson, we recall, had proposed a similar imaginative apocalypse; the difference is that, whereas Thomson had not implied the extension of this mode of perception beyond the individual, the Romantic poets saw in it the future regeneration of mankind. In Wordsworth's Prelude (1850), for example, Imagination plays a role analogous to that of Milton's Redeemer, who offers hope to the entire world, rather than just to the individual.[55]

And so the Romantic poets took on a prophetic role, recasting the traditional pattern of salvation in a form which had been revealed to them in the golden hours of revolutionary hope. They preached that man was a fragmented being, alienated from himself, from other men, and from nature. This was the true consequence of the fall. They declared that his only hope lay in an effort at reintegration, a recovery of "joy," and showed how the pattern of disintegration and reintegration had manifested itself in their own lives. Rejecting the notion of progress, they developed a cyclical formula, in which man, after suffering disintegration, would return to the initial stage of unity, but on a higher level. Because reintegration would achieve a higher form of unity than that which existed before disintegration, disintegration was necessary. Experience had to be embraced, for innocence was insufficient, representing potential rather than achievement, Beulah rather than

Jerusalem. Thus, the revolt of Milton's Satan against the primal unity of heaven represented for the Romantics a positive movement towards reintegration on a higher level. Reintegration on an individual level was the basis for its fulfilment on a social or historical level. The congruence between the reintegration of the individual and the reintegration of mankind is made clear in Blake's figure of the archetypal man in Jerusalem. As M.H. Abrams says, "in the apocalypse which concludes Jerusalem, the recovery by the mythical man of his fourfold unity is equated with every individual man's recovery of his flexible, imaginative, and creative power of unifying vision."[56] Coleridge declared that this cyclical pattern was the guiding principle behind the cosmos: "Doubtless, to his eye, which alone comprehends all Past and all Future in one eternal Present, what to our short sight appears strait is but a part of the great Cycle."[57]

Yet, adequate as Romantic idealism may have been as a substitute for the revolutionary hopes which had been so rudely dashed, it contained inadequacies which resulted from its basis in revolutionary idealism and which became ever more glaring with the passage of time. Coleridge urged man to shake off dejection and commit himself to joy, for

> Joy . . . is the spirit and the power,
> Which, wedding Nature to us, gives in dower

A new Earth and new Heaven,

yet, as the memory of revolutionary hopes faded, this became
increasingly difficult to achieve.[58] In "Dejection: An Ode,"

from which the above passage is taken, Coleridge admits his

inability to attain a state of joy and "sees no possibility

of recovery from his personal crisis of isolation, apathy,

and creative sterility."[59] It quickly became apparent that

the regeneration of mankind would not be accomplished by the

exercise of individual creative imagination, and from this

realization it was necessary either to fall back on the pre-

cepts of Christianity, or, if this was felt to be no longer

possible, to attempt to come to terms with alienation and

despair. The Romantic assertion that man was an alienated

being, living in a fragmented world, survived the collapse

of the belief in an ultimate return to unity and, in many

cases, undermined the validity of Christianity as an alt-

ernative to this belief. For the second generation of Rom-

antic poets, the return to unity came to be synonymous

with death. In the apocalyptic vision at the end of Shell-

ey's Prometheus Unbound (1820), man, who had been "a many-

sided mirror, / Which could distort to many a shape of err-

or" (IV, 382-383), recovers unity through a recovery of

love.[60] However, in Adonais (1821), written about two years

later, the image of the distorting mirror acquires a new

significance:

> Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
> Stains the white radiance of Eternity,
> Until Death tramples it to fragments.--Die,
> If thou wouldst be with that which thou dost seek!
> (ll. 462-465)

Whereas, in Prometheus Unbound, unity is achieved through love, in Adonais Shelley implies that it can only be found in death. In his final, uncompleted poem, The Triumph of Life (1824), life is seen as a force which corrupts the spirit of man and to which, it seems, all must succumb.[61] The transcendent vision presented in the poem cannot be sustained and must end in despondency. The desolation of Shelley's vision represents the ironic consequence of Romantic idealism which was to permeate nineteenth-century thought. Through all the attempts made during the century to revitalize Christianity and to forge new social myths this sense of desolation runs like an undercurrent.

4. Apocalypse and the Victorians

Generally speaking, the purveyors of millenarianism have maintained that their convictions spring directly from divine revelation. From a more detached point of view, however, it can be seen that millenarian beliefs, although expressed in terms of a transcendent reality, are likely to be grounded in a far more mundane sense of crisis. Psychological crisis, proceeding from a breakdown of harmonious interaction between the individual and his external environment, will tend to express itself in millenarian terms

when the crisis is the result of wide-ranging changes in
the individual's social context which threaten to destroy
the social structure with which he identifies himself, and
thus to destroy his social identity. The individual will
then be inclined to withdraw from the complexities and con-
tradictions of his social situation and formulate an alter-
native social model, an idealized version of one which has
existed in the past. Such nostalgia becomes millenarianism
when this idealized model is projected into the future.
Thus, millenarian dreams are the product not of divine rev-
elation (except in a very Romantic sense) but of a recon-
struction in crisis of an imagined past. And the millenari-
an, confident of the validity of his vision, waits or works
for the destruction of the society which he has repudiated.

Yet such heady optimism is, on the whole, short-
lived, for millenarian dreams never seem to become realities,
even though they may be the agents of radical social change,
as in the case of the English and French Revolutions. The
millenarian will be left with shattered hopes, in a world
forever fallen, his vision crushed by the Satanic forces of
that world. Such a sense of desolation, expressed by Shell-
ey in The Triumph of Life, can perhaps best be described as
ennui, and it is ennui which, three years before Shelley's
death, Schopenhauer, with prophetic insight, defined as the
62
spirit of the new age.   Alongside the bitter memory of

frustrated ideals there grew up a new social order, a grey urban world, a world of machines and progressive alienation. For the pragmatist it may have been an age of progress, but many an idealist came to view it as an age of regression. The soul of man was being eroded by the onslaught of mechanism and a soulless barbarism lay just ahead. Indeed, many welcomed the prospect of violent dissolution--Gautier, for example, who exclaimed, plutôt la barbarie que l'ennui-- while at the same time devising elaborate fantasies about the past.[63] These two desires were closely linked, as can be seen in Morris's News from Nowhere (1890). By the end of the nineteenth century there was, as George Steiner says, "a terrible readiness, indeed a thirst, for what Yeats was to call the 'blood-dimm'd tide.' . . . Intellect and feeling were, literally, fascinated by the prospect of a purging fire."[64] Rupert Brooke spoke for a whole generation when he called the men who were to die on the fields of France "swimmers into cleanness leaping, / Glad from a world grown old and cold and weary."[65] At the beginning of the century Shelley and Schopenhauer had been isolated voices declaring that the individual could be reborn only in death. At its end, their vision had been adopted and applied not only to the individual but also to the society of which he was a part.

The apocalypticism of the late nineteenth century

was not, however, characteristic of the century as a whole.
The first truly apocalyptic work, in England at any rate,
was Carlyle's Latter-Day Pamphlets, which appeared in 1850.
Carlyle had been moving towards the position he adopted in
this work ever since he had abandoned optimistic millenar-
ianism in the early 1830s, but Latter-Day Pamphlets marked
a new departure. Between the death of Shelley and the pub-
lication of this work the sense of ennui had run like an
undercurrent, but only sporadically developing to the pitch
at which it could be transformed into violent denunciation.
What overt apocalypticism there had been was either unequi-
vocally Christian or of a fairly conventional type, attempt-
ing a vague sublimity rather than anything very profound.
Carlyle's French Revolution (1837) is the major exception,
but even there the ennui-driven apocalypticism of Latter-
Day Pamphlets is no more than hinted at.

In literature the note struck by Byron in his
nightmarish fantasy, "Darkness" (1816), was echoed by Thom-
as Campbell in "The Last Man" (1823) and by Mary Shelley in
her novel, also entitled The Last Man (1826). Byron's vivid
depictions of the apocalyptic destruction of ancient em-
pires also had a considerable influence on later writers.
Many of Tennyson's contributions to Poems by Two Brothers
(1827) are in this vein, as are Bulwer Lytton's Last Days
of Pompeii (1834) and Edwin Atherstone's Last Days of Her-

culaneum (1821) and <u>Fall of Nineveh</u> (1828). In art, the
paintings of John Martin, which represented "vast perspect-
ives of the lost cities of the ancient world . . . seen at
the apocalyptic hour of their destruction," were immensely
popular in the first half of the nineteenth century, famil-
iarized as they were by reproduction in the "annuals"
which, as Winifred Gerin shows, even found their way into
the parsonage at Haworth.[66] She adds that, for the Brontë
children, "the inordinate <u>feeling</u> awakened by the reading
of Byron could alone be satisfied in the framework of a
universe as conceived by Martin."[67] Martin's work was
strongly Biblical in character, and this tendency can also
be seen in the paintings of Francis Danby, Samuel Colman,
and Washington Allston, as well as in several of the later
works of Turner, such as <u>Shade and Darkness--The Evening of
the Deluge</u> (1843) and <u>The Angel Standing in the Sun</u> (1846).

The apocalyptic element of Martin's paintings found
a sterner echo in the prophecies of men such as Edward
Irving (1792-1834) and John Cumming (1807-81), both of whom
had a large following. Millenarianism had an enormous vogue
in the early Victorian period, as can be seen from the re-
ports of the conferences organized by Henry Drummond at Al-
bury between 1826 and 1828.[68] Many more examples of millen-
arian fervour could be given, but the reaction of Sydney
Dobell (1824-74), the author of <u>Balder</u> (1854), to the Crim-

ean War gives a sufficient indication of the influence of
the prophetic message.[69]   When the war broke out in 1853, he

wrote that "never before have so many omens combined to
fulfil the picture of the last days."[70]   In the following

year he declared that

> Never, since first human eyes looked across it, was
> that great ocean [of the future] more tremendously omin-
> ous--more surely heaving with destructive forces, or
> blacker with impending thunder--than it lies to-day to
> your sight and to mine; and not to ours only, but to
> that of all but the blind--wise and simple, small and
> great--as the murmur of the whole earth bears witness.
> . . . However dark that prospect may be, dear sister,
> may we each live to see the other safely over it. For
> me, I thank God to have been born in so grand a time,
> and to belong to the generation upon which--perhaps--
> "the ends of the age are come"; but I sometimes fear it
> will be no idle sight-seeing, and that we had need
> trust and pray earnestly that none who are near and
> dear to us may suffer to make up the show. God grant,
> indeed, it may be otherwise, and that some good day in
> His Providence we all may meet, one by one, and two by
> two, upon the further shore.[71]

In 1855, he recorded a dream in which he claimed to have

witnessed the fall of Sebastopol, with the evening star ex-

panding and scorching the earth as the seals were opened.

He elaborated upon this in a letter to his sister:

> . . . how near the end may be! the end that is of the
> present arrangement of society; for the more I think on
> the matter, the more I feel convinced that the coming
> Theocracy, under Christ, is not to be a thousand years
> only, but more than three hundred thousand.
>   Ask Papa if he has heard that Sebastopol is
> Greek for Armageddon. Sebasto, the august, polis,
> city--Greek. Arma, the august, geddon, city--Hebrew. It
> may be a coincidence only, but it is interesting to
> know that Armageddon relates to some one of the mighty
> cities of the world.[72]

It is hard to overemphasize the influence the Bible

had on nineteenth-century thought. It was Evangelicalism

which ensured the primacy of the Biblical paradigm in the

nineteenth century, and, although writers such as Carlyle

and George Eliot rejected Christianity as such, they re-

mained true to many of the precepts of Evangelicalism.

Evangelicalism taught that history was providential, gov-

erned by "an immanent God protecting or chastising his

people."[73] The age was evil, and, as evil was the result of

sin or impiety, the blame lay squarely on the shoulders of

the individual rather than on some abstract principle of

social organization. Thus, like the Romantics, the Evangel-

icals believed that the road to social regeneration lay

through individual regeneration. At the same time, however,

they held a providential view of history and preached that

civilization was heading to its doom, drawing elaborate

parallels between the social abuses castigated by the

prophets of the Old Testament and the conditions of their

own age. Their God was not primarily a God of Love but a

stern Jehovah, and they appealed to that most basic of hum-

an emotions--fear. Perhaps the most crucial text for the

Evangelicals was the Book of Revelation, and, forced down

the throats of uncomprehending children "with thunder and

gusto," it left an impression which could never be erased.[74]

Both Edmund Gosse and D.H. Lawrence recalled that they had

an intimate knowledge of the book before they were old

enough to understand it, and Lawrence declared that "it has

had . . . more influence, actually, than the Gospels or the

great Epistles."[75] Even those who were not subjected to this

kind of over-exposure were deeply influenced by the ethical

stance of Evangelicalism. As Barbara Lovenheim says, the

Victorians

> could never forget its vivid doctrinal lessons, nor
> could they escape its rigorous definition of virtue and
> vice; its zeal for reform; its Providential sense of
> history; and its severe pronouncements of doom. . . .
> They continued to draw upon the apocalyptic paradigm in
> order to both define and defend their fears. Only, in-
> stead of using it to express their utopian hopes, they
> used it to express their fears of violence and dissol-
> ution. Consequently, the apocalyptism which emerged in
> the Victorian age was cosmic, moral, and stimulated by
> the Biblical traditions of the Old and New Testament
> prophecies. However, unlike traditional apocalyptic
> literature, it was negative rather than positive, in-
> spired by fear rather than hope, and oriented toward a
> day of everlasting doom rather than a day of everlast-
> ing light. While in the beginning of the century "apoc-
> alypse" might have signified a vision of dazzling
> splendor, by 1840 or so it signified a vision of horr-
> or.[76]

Although Evangelicalism was rampant in the 1830s

and 1840s it was accompanied by little of the bleak apocal-

ypticism which was predominant by the end of the century.

In a sense, this is surprising, for these were lean years,

when social injustice was greatly in evidence and revolut-

ion seemed ever imminent. By 1850, things had improved

dramatically and England had entered on a period of pros-

perity, in which the lots of both rich and poor grew

steadily better. Yet 1850 was the year in which violent

apocalyptic denunciations began to make themselves heard,
with the publication of Latter-Day Pamphlets. This apparent
inconsistency can, I think, be accounted for in two ways.
First, the economic boom was accompanied by the rapid
growth of a spirit of smug self-congratulation, which was
exposed most tellingly by Dickens. This was clearly anath-
ema to the idealist. Second, it seems that it took a long
time for contemporaries actually to come to grips with what
was going on around them--not only to perceive it, but also
to develop a definite attitude towards it. Things were,
after all, moving at an unprecedented rate, as one of
Thackeray's characters was made to remark:

> It was only yesterday, but what a gulf between now and
> then. Then was the old world. Stage-coaches, more or
> less swift riding horses, pack horses, highwaymen, Dru-
> ids, Ancient Britons, . . . all these belong to the old
> period. I will concede a halt in the midst of it and
> allow that gunpowder and printing tended to modernize
> the world. But your railroad starts a new era. . . . We
> who lived before railways and survive out of the ancient
> world, are like Father Noah and his family out of the
> Ark.[77]

This process of assimilation is clearly indicated in Rus-
kin's Modern Painters, which appeared in five volumes be-
tween 1843 and 1860. The first volume deals with nature and
art, and their capacity to elevate the soul of man. In the
last, the problems of society, virtually ignored in the
first volume, have become the central issue, and, in the
same year that it was published, Ruskin wrote Unto this
Last, a Carlylean condemnation of the age. Ruskin, seeming-

ly oblivious to his immediate surroundings in the 1840s,
was virtually incapable of considering anything else by the
1860s, believing as he did that England was on the verge of
"a great political crisis."[78] And in 1884 he delivered a
lecture on The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century, in
which, as John Rosenberg says, "he purged the unspent port-
ion of his wrath in a raging, apocalyptic denunciation of
the whole century, from its fouled skies to its festering
cities."[79]

But, as I said earlier, it was Carlyle who was the
first to arrive at a genuinely apocalyptic vision in the
Victorian period, the first to pronounce the inevitable
doom of his society. The visions developed by Ruskin, Dick-
ens, Arnold, and Morris owed much to his. His influence,
especially in the middle years of the century, was enor-
mous. George Eliot wrote of him in 1855:

> It is an idle question to ask if his books will be read
> a century hence: if they were all burnt as the grandest
> of Suttees on his funeral pile, it would be only like
> cutting down an oak after its acorns have sown a forest.
> For there is hardly a superior or active mind of this
> generation that has not been modified by Carlyle's
> writings: there has hardly been an English book written
> for the last ten or twelve years that would not have
> been different if Carlyle had not lived.[80]

Carlyle's idealized vision of feudal society and of the
heroic leader was immensely attractive to his contemporaries,
trapped as they were in a world ruled by mammon and medio-
crity. Carlyle had little faith in democracy as such, em-

phasizing instead the voluntary regeneration of the individual as the only means to social regeneration. At the outset, his belief in the correlation between individual and social regeneration was couched in the language of Romantic idealism, but, as his vision clouded, optimism gave way to bitter anger. The regenerated individual or hero had to compel society towards regeneration, by the imposition of military dictatorship if necessary. Even if such an action could not ultimately save society it could redeem the individual from a living death in the trammels of ennui--the individual had to attempt to impose his will onto society at whatever cost. The Carlylean work ethic, of which this concept of heroism is an extreme version, was, as much as anything else, a manifestation of the desire to escape from the clutches of the nineteenth century, even to destroy that society. Ruskin says as much in his defence of labour:

> . . . for us of the old race--few of us now left,-- children who reverence our fathers, and are ashamed of ourselves; . . . we, who feel as men, and not as carnivorous worms; we, who are every day recognizing some inaccessible height of thought and power, and are miserable in our shortcomings,--the few of us now standing here and there, alone, in the midst of this yelping, carnivorous crowd, mad for money and lust, tearing each other to pieces, and starving each other to death, and leaving heaps of their dung and ponds of their spittle on every palace floor and altar stone,--it is impossible for us, except in the labour of our hands, not to go mad.[81]

It is not unfair to accuse Carlyle of ignoring or even condemning positive trends within his society. If one

were to base an analysis of Victorian England solely on an examination of his writings, one would come up with a picture of an age of triumphant _laissez-faire_. This would be a distorted picture to say the least, because it would have failed to have taken into account the mass of social and economic legislation which began with the first effective Factory Act of 1833. But, inaccurate as the account Carlyle gives of his society may be in this respect (and in this respect it is at least as accurate as the extreme liberal view of the nineteenth century as an age of triumphant progress), it is extremely accurate in another respect. Carlyle summed up, if not the spirit of his age, at least the spirit of a great many of his contemporaries. He did not like the nineteenth century; he felt downtrodden and alienated, filled with the conviction that a glory had passed away from the earth. Quite naturally, he turned to the Biblical paradigm to castigate society and found in that paradigm clear indications that society was doomed. He never went so far as to express an eagerness at the prospect of its dissolution, but the desire is implicit in _Latter-Day Pamphlets_ and in the social tracts which followed it. Industrial, urban society was an affront to being, a demonically inspired conspiracy to anaesthetize and pervert the soul of man. In the _ennui_-filled literature of the late nineteenth century, a longing for violent dissolution be-

came not only explicit but also terrifyingly insistent.
William Morris, who had taken the teachings of Carlyle to
heart, summed this mood up in a letter he wrote to Lady
Burne-Jones in 1885:

> I have no more faith than a grain of mustard-seed in
> the future of "civilization," which I know now is doom-
> ed to destruction, probably before very long: what a
> joy it is to think of! And how often it consoles me to
> think of barbarism once more flooding the world, and
> real feelings and passions, however rudimentary, taking
> the place of our wretched hypocrisies.[82]

In the chapters which follow I will trace the devel-
opment of apocalypticism in the writings of two major nine-
teenth-century figures--Carlyle and Tennyson. Carlyle, as I
have indicated, can be regarded as the pioneer of nineteenth-
century apocalypticism. By 1850, however, he had developed
the attitudes which were to remain with him for the rest of
his life. After 1850, his pessimism deepened, but it did
not really change. It was left to a younger generation to
develop the ideas which were implicit in his writings--to
carry them to their logical conclusion, as it were. And, as
I round off my discussion of Carlyle with an examination of
Latter-Day Pamphlets, it may seem to the reader that I
should then have turned to Ruskin or Morris to show how his
ideas were developed, rather than to Tennyson, whose proph-
etic voice is generally considered to have been rather un-
substantial. The reason for my choice is two-fold. First,
the writings of Ruskin and Morris, significant and original

as they are, do little more than expand what is implicit in

Carlyle's writings with regard to apocalypticism. Second,

Tennyson is not the "idle singer of an empty day," but, as

many of his contemporaries testified, an oracular visionary

with a power and profundity equal, if not superior, to that

of Carlyle.[83]   J.A. Froude, for example, declared that many

Victorians were

> determined to have done with insincerity, to find
> ground under their feet, to let the uncertainty remain
> uncertain, but to learn how much and what [they] could
> honestly regard as true, and to believe that and live
> by it. Tennyson became the voice of this feeling in
> poetry, Carlyle in what is called prose.[84]

Walt Whitman, writing in response to the appearance of

"Locksley Hall Sixty Years After" (1886), declared that

> the course of progressive politics (democracy) is so
> certain and resistless . . . that we can well afford
> the warning calls, threats, checks, neutralizings, in
> imaginative literature, or any department, of such deep-
> sounding and high-soaring voices as Carlyle's and
> Tennyson's. Nay, the blindness, excesses, of the prev-
> alent tendency--the dangers of the urgent trends of our
> times--in my opinion, need such voices almost more than
> any.[85]

F.W.H. Myers, who sees Tennyson's development as "coinciding

with, or sometimes, anticipating, the spiritual movement of

the age," describes him as

> a prophet, meaning by that term much more than a self-
> inspired mystic, an eloquent visionary. I know not how
> else to describe a service which humanity will always
> need. Besides the savant, occupied in discovering ob-
> jective truth--besides the artist occupied in repre-
> senting and idealising that truth--we need some voice to
> speak to us of those greatest, those undiscoverable
> things which can never be wholly known but must still
> less be wholly ignored or forgotten.[86]

Myers goes on to indicate why, even in his own day, the

deeper import of Tennyson's poetry was frequently ignored:

> Tennyson's prophetic message has been so delicately
> interwoven with his metrical and literary charm, and
> has found, moreover, its most potent expression in
> poems so recent in date, that it has not often, I
> think, been adequately recognised, or traced with due
> care from its early to its later form.[87]

And, beside Myers's comments, let me quote once more that

undeservedly notorious comment of W.H. Auden:

> Tennyson had the finest ear of any English poet; he was
> also undoubtedly the stupidest; there was little about
> melancholia that he didn't know; there was little else
> that he did.[88]

While this kind of thing needs little comment, it does in-

dicate a twentieth-century reluctance to admit that Tenny-

son had anything of lasting importance to say, even though

he may have been a consummate artist. Until recently, most

criticism of Tennyson has concentrated on the stylistic

rather than the intellectual aspects of his art. E.D.H.

Johnson, writing in 1968, noted that "earlier studies tend

to concentrate on the poet's thought, while more recently

attention has shifted to the formal properties of his

art."[89] More recently, however, several studies have app-

eared which attempt to reinstate Tennyson as one of the

foremost thinkers of his age, the arguments of which are

based on a thorough stylistic appreciation of the poetry,

rather than on prose paraphrases of it, as was the case

with much nineteenth-century criticism. Two studies in

particular are worthy of note—A. Dwight Culler's <u>The Poet-</u><u>ry of Tennyson</u> (1977) and Henry Kozicki's <u>Tennyson and Clio</u> (1979). The differences between Tennyson and Carlyle are superficial rather than fundamental, but, in the obliqueness of his approach and his concentration on the individual sensibility, Tennyson provides insights into aspects of nineteenth-century consciousness which Carlyle leaves large-ly unexplored. Thus, their visions are complementary, and, if Carlyle can be seen as the pioneer of nineteenth-century apocalypticism, Tennyson can, I think, be seen as its most perceptive chronicler. Both Carlyle and Tennyson started out from a fundamentally Romantic position as optimistic millenarians. By tracing their subsequent development of a bleak apocalypticism not too far removed from our own, we can, I think, reach a clearer understanding of the trans-formation of vision which occured in the nineteenth cent-ury, of the reasons for that transformation, and of the continuities and discontinuities between the Romantic and modern sensibilities.

II

CARLYLE: THE NEO-CALVINIST VISION

Although Thomas Carlyle was brought up in an atmos-
phere of rigid Calvinism, his introduction to rationalism
and materialism led him to an early abandonment of the Cal-
vinist faith and its eschatological doctrines. By the age of
twenty-three, he "found spread before him the perfect symm-
etry of the world-machine, possibly not requiring a creating,
and certainly not an intervening, God."[1] From a Calvinist
point of view such an idea would have been seen as demonic-
ally inspired, a sure indication of predestined damnation,
and Carlyle's Calvinist legacy was too strong to enable him
to forget that fact. While, on an intellectual level, he
felt compelled to admit the validity of rationalist theories,
at a deeper level he felt that this admission entailed the
rejection of an implacable God and a compact with the Devil.
Haunted by nightmares of a mechanistic universe, he heard
the voice of the Devil confirming the contract: "Behold,
thou art fatherless, outcast, and the Universe is mine."[2]
This conflict eventually led to his breaking of the contract
in a revolt against materialism, and redefinition of the
universe in terms of German thought. Carlyle's debt to and
adaptation of German thought in his twenties and early thir-

49

ties is well documented and is a crucial factor in any
3
assessment of Carlyle. However, by the time of <u>Sartor</u>

<u>Resartus</u> (1833-34), his first major work, he was already

beginning to cast doubt upon the validity of that inherit-

ance. In 1830 he wrote:

> I have now almost done with the Germans. Having seized
> their opinions, I must turn me to inquire <u>how</u> true are
> they? That truth is in them, no lover of Truth will
> doubt: but how much? And after all, one needs an in-
> tellectual scheme (or ground plan of the Universe)
> drawn with one's own instruments.[4]

<u>Sartor Resartus</u> is, as much as anything else, an attempt to

develop such an intellectual scheme, to break away from the

influence of German thought. In the years which followed,

Carlyle's dependence on German thought declined rapidly. By

1840 he had developed an intellectual scheme which was ess-

entially neo-Calvinist, an extension of the creed he had

started out with. In spite of his apparent rejection of

Calvinism, and of his recognition that Christianity was no

longer the vital religion it once had been, the tenets of

Calvinism were central to Carlyle's thought throughout much
5
of his life.

The Ecclefechan Burgher Church, where Carlyle re-

ceived his early religious education, was the product of
6
dissension within the established Church of Scotland. As

a Secession Church, it preached a more uncompromising Cal-

vinism than the established church, and, because of its

origins, laid a greater emphasis on the duty and integrity

of the individual, and of the relationship of the Bible to individual morality. Its religion was of an extremely emotional variety--"there were sacred lambencies, tongues of authentic flame from heaven, which kindled what was best in one," Carlyle wrote of its services years later.[7] It spoke to the hearts and souls of men, teaching them of the awful power of a retributive God and of the stern duties he had imposed on his chosen people. Its truths were embodied for Carlyle in his father, John Carlyle. "Religion was the polestar for my father," Carlyle later wrote; "rude and uncultivated as he otherwise was, it made him and kept him 'in all points a man.' . . . And was not nature great, out of such materials to make a man?"[8] Yet, at the same time, he seems to have shared many of the characteristics of a stern Jehovah:

> we had all to complain that we durst not freely love
> him. His heart seemed as if walled in . . . it seemed
> as if an atmosphere of fear repelled us from him. . . .
> Till late years . . . I was ever more or less awed or
> chilled before him.[9]

Carlyle's father believed unwaveringly that "man was created to work--not to speculate, or feel, or dream," and that "his true world lies beyond the world of sense, is a celestial home."[10] The eschatological convictions he gained from Calvinism were substantiated by his own experience. He saw that "the lot of a poor man was growing worse and worse; that the world would not and could not last as

it was; that mighty changes of which none saw the end were
on the way."[11] For John Carlyle, the Bible was the only
source of wisdom; its proverbs and cadences informed his
speech, and the precepts of its dispensation informed his
entire being. In 1866, Carlyle recalled a story which had
been told to him by his father many years earlier, which
indicates the imaginative hold the symbolism of prophecy
had gained over him:

> [In Muirkirk] on the platform of one of the furnaces
> a solitary man (stoker if they call him so) was in-
> dustriously minding his business, now throwing in new
> fuel and ore, now poking the white-hot molten mass
> that was already in. A poor old maniac woman silently
> joined him and looked, whom also he was used to and
> did not mind. But after a little, his back being to-
> wards the furnace mouth, he heard a strange thump or
> cracking puff; and turning suddenly, the poor old
> maniac woman was not there, and on advancing to the
> furnace-edge he saw the figure of her red-hot, semi-
> transparent, floating as ashes on the fearful element
> for some moments! This had printed itself on my fath-
> er's brain; twice perhaps I heard it from him, which
> was rare, nor will it ever leave my brain either.[12]

The Biblical analogue is clearly the burning fiery furnace
of Daniel, but the imaginative appeal of the incident lies
in its graphic illustration of the ever-burning fires of
hell, to which Carlyle made pointed references throughout
his life.

The influence of his father on Carlyle's subsequent
development was certainly considerable. Notwithstanding his
superficial rejection of Calvinism, he remained convinced
that the world was controlled by a retributive force, and

that, just below the flowery earth-rind of the world, lay
the ever-burning fires of hell. The neo-Calvinism which
emerged from his quest for redefinition was an extension of
his father's creed, rather than a supersession of it. In
its dethronement of an anthropomorphic God, and its reloc-
ation of the deity within the self, it represented the
continuation of a process of redefinition which had been
initiated by the Reformation. The central principle of Car-
lyle's thought stemmed from his belief that the world was
governed by invisible and ineluctable forces, which man
could either recognize and submit to or set himself in
proud opposition to and suffer the consequences. As his
society had chosen the latter course, Carlyle saw his role
as one of alerting it to the dangers of its choice before
it was overtaken by retribution.

Carlyle's programme for reform was straightforward.
Given the degeneration and obsolescence of established
forms of religion, the individual had to achieve concordance
with the Divine Will by rejecting the values of his society
and searching for the guiding principles of the universe
within himself. This would lead to individual rebirth, and
this, in turn, would enable the individual to lead society
towards its rebirth, by forcing it to realign itself with
the Divine Will. Although this belief informs all of Car-
lyle's writings, it underwent a significant modification in

the course of his career, as he moved from optimism to pessimism. At the beginning of his career, when he was still under the spell of the Germans, his belief in the ability of the heroic individual to effect a fundamental change in the orientation of his society was strong. By the end of his career, his belief in the necessity of individual regeneration and enterprise was undiminished, but coupled with this belief was the conviction that the heroic individual could be no more than an alienated figure in a society committed to its own destruction. The movement from optimism to pessimism was accompanied by the movement away from the influence of German thought. Conditioned from an early age to perceiving the world in apocalyptic terms, a conditioning strengthened by his experience of nineteenth-century society, he found in German thought the voice of apocalyptic hope. His early writings carry the conviction that the regeneration of society is imminent, but, as the influence of German thought declined, and he turned to consider what he saw as the ever-worsening condition of society, confidence slowly gave way to despair, and a vision of regeneration to a vision of retribution and destruction.

Although there is a fundamental continuity between Carlyle's early education and his mature thought, his interest in German thought was not simply an interregnum, an excursion which served only to confirm the validity of his

earlier faith. His neo-Calvinism was the product of inter-
action between Calvinism and German thought. The German
thinkers he came into contact with gave him a means whereby
he was able to reinterpret a system of belief which had
withered under the onslaught of rationalism. "Goethe," he
claimed, "taught me that the true things in Christianity
survived and were eternally true; pointed out to me the
real nature of life and things--not that he did this dir-
ectly; but incidentally and let me see it rather than told
me."[13]

The history of Carlyle's life from the time he arr-
ived in Edinburgh at the age of thirteen to the time when,
some ten years later, he came into contact with German
thought, can almost be seen as a microcosm of European in-
tellectual history between the seventeenth and early nine-
teenth centuries. He had been brought up in an isolated
community, where life was a struggle against penury, and
where religious beliefs differed little from those of the
seventeenth century--the kind of beliefs regarded as super-
stitious and fanatical by the philosophers of the Enlight-
enment. The study of classical literature which Carlyle
undertook in his first year at university was of little
significance in terms of his intellectual development, but
when, in his second year, he encountered John Leslie, Prof-
essor of Mathematics, it was a different story. As Ian

Campbell says, "there is every indication that Carlyle's first spiritual awakening came long before the 'Rue St Thomas de l'Enfer' of Sartor Resartus. It came in the dingy mathematical classroom of Edinburgh University."[14] Mathematics, Carlyle wrote, "shone before me as the noblest of all sciences."[15] From this point on, the religious faith he had inherited from his father began to lose its hold over him, until, as he said, "far more pregnant enquiries were rising in me, and gradually engrossing me, heart as well as head."[16] By the age of nineteen, he had renounced his avowed intention of entering the ministry, having found it increasingly difficult to reconcile the truths he had perceived in Newtonian physics with the dictates of Calvinism. He later recalled that his father "was never visited with doubt. The old theorem of the universe was sufficient for him; and he worked well in it."[17] For Carlyle, however, the old theorem had little connexion with the ideas which dominated his mind at this time. As Emery Neff says, "the simple, self-contained, abstract system of Newtonian physics was the ideal [he] sought for in every department of thought."[18] This shift in orientation parallels that which occurred in Europe at the beginning of the eighteenth century, when, under the influence of Locke and Newton, there was a turning away from seventeenth-century metaphysics and towards a rational metaphysics based on a synthesis of the

findings of the empirical sciences. Carlyle's later atti-
tude to the eighteenth century is significant in this con-
text. He saw its philosophy as a necessary reaction against
the preceding orthodoxy of Christianity, which had become
anachronistic in an age of empirical enquiry. He insisted,
however, that it could only be a reaction, not a viable or-
thodoxy, and that, its reactive function having been ful-
filled, it should be abandoned to make way for the new or-
thodoxy which it had helped to foster.

At the heart of any orthodoxy or system of belief
must lie a philosophy of history, and one of the fundamental
characteristics of the new orthodoxy which developed in
Germany at the end of the eighteenth century was its propos-
ition of a radically different philosophy of history from
that which had sustained Christianity.[19] In the seventeenth
century, when the empirical sciences began to effect a rad-
ical transformation of man's view of the world, it seemed to
many that Christianity, unable to assimilate the world view
proposed by the empirical sciences, would succumb to mater-
ialism. But unwillingness to acquiesce in this transformat-
ion led to the formation of a theory which proposed a way
out of the dilemma. The drawing of a distinction between
intuition and intellect provided the means whereby the
conflicting claims of religion and empiricism could reason-
ably co-exist. Descartes was the pioneer of this distinct-

ion, and his influence can be seen in Kant's distinction
between mathematics and metaphysics and in Carlyle's dis-
tinction between mechanism and dynamism. While it may not
be a wholly satisfactory solution, it reflects a persistent
unwillingness to accept the exclusively deterministic view
of the universe which Locke and Newton prepared the way
for. However, in the eighteenth century, especially in
France, many realized that the formulae of Christianity
served not to lead the individual to God, but to bolster
the power of an anachronistic élite, and they felt compell-
ed to oppose Christianity and espouse non-theological, det-
erministic principles. It was the philosophy of history
which grew out of this reaction which prepared the way for
that developed in Germany at the end of the eighteenth
century.

Voltaire, one of the most representative figures of
the Enlightenment, espoused a wholly deterministic philos-
ophy of history. He rejected the idea that history involved
the implementation of a divine plan, and with it any sense
of unity or continuity within the historical process.[20]
While he remained a nominal Christian, his view was that
"the whole philosophy of Newton leads necessarily to the
knowledge of a Supreme Being who has arranged everything
and created everything freely."[21] This view led inevitably
to a denial of innate moral principles and an espousal of

determinism: "everything has a cause; therefore your will

has one. One cannot will, therefore, except as a consequence

of the last idea that one has received."[22]   But, at the same

time that Voltaire espoused determinism, he was, through his

belief in human reason, able to see history as a movement

away from superstition and towards enlightenment. Voltaire's

"sceptical" view of history, although it was rejected by

the German philosophers who influenced Carlyle, nevertheless

prepared a way for their formulations by rejecting a phil-

osophy of history which had become anachronistic.

At the same time that Voltaire was preaching deter-

minism, however, a non-deterministic philosophy of history

was slowly developing. Vico and Herder suggested that cul-

tures were subject to organic laws of birth, growth, and

decay, while Rousseau introduced the idea of the general

will.[23]   Important as these developments were, it was in

Germany that the new historical consciousness came to

fruition. The seminal figure in this development was

Immanuel Kant. Although Kant did not develop a systematic

philosophy of history himself, he laid the foundations on

which such a philosophy could be constructed. He saw his

function as that of effecting a reconciliation between the

world of mechanistic causality revealed by Newton and the

idea of freedom. As Father Copleston says, "Kant submitted

to critical examination both rationalism and empiricism

and worked out his own philosophy, not as a synthesis of these two, but as a triumph over them."[24] He saw empiricism as inadequate because of its exclusion of a priori knowledge, but, at the same time, rejected dogmatic metaphysics as an alternative because of its inability to stand up to empirical criticism. Kant's "Copernican Revolution" was the proposition that objects conform to our knowledge, rather than vice-versa. This did not mean that he believed that the mind created objects, but rather that it imposed on them its own forms of cognition, determined by the structure of sensibility and understanding. This theory of a priori knowledge demonstrated the hollowness of dogmatic metaphysics, as well as the limitations of scientific knowledge, and left the way open for what Father Copleston calls "a rationally legitimate, though scientifically indemonstrable, belief in freedom, immortality, and God. The great truths of metaphysics are then placed beyond the reach of destructive criticism by the very act of removing them from the position of conclusions to worthless metaphysical arguments and linking them with the moral consciousness which is as much a fundamental feature of man as his capacity for scientific knowledge."[25]

The German philosophers who succeeded Kant, taking their lead from his idea that time is "not something objective and real," but "the subjective condition, necessary

because of the nature of the human mind, of co-ordinating

all sensibilia by a certain law," proceeded to formulate

metaphysical explanations of history.[26]   For the German

Idealists, history was a revelation or symbol of the Divine

Will, with Periodicity, or the alternation of progressive

and regressive epochs, as its fundamental law.From this

principle emerged the doctrine of Palingenesia, in which

the world is seen as a "Phoenix ever renewing itself by

resurrection from the ashes of time's destruction."[27]

The ideas of Periodicity and Palingenesia, which implied,

if not a rejection, at least a qualification of the recti-

linear historical scheme found in the Bible, provided the

basis for Carlyle's mature interpretation of history. Un-

like his friend Edward Irving, who remained true to the

letter of his Calvinist upbringing, and achieved notoriety

by preaching that the latter days were at hand, Carlyle,

while remaining true to the spirit of Calvinism, revised

his apocalyptic ideas in the light of German Idealism.[28]

He found in the concept of fiery periodicity something

which satisfied his need for a doctrine which could accomm-

odate the apocalyptic imperatives of Calvinism, while not

violating the demands of reason.

By his early thirties, Carlyle had passed through a

rejection of Calvinism, and an espousal of materialism,

finally emerging with a philosophy which, while transcending

materialism, was, to all intents and purposes, an adaptation

of Calvinism. As C.F. Harrold says, Carlyle was "the born

Calvinist, seeking to reconstruct, largely from German

thought, a belief in the transcendent sovereignty of Right

and in a world of immanent divine law."[29] A fuller analysis

of Carlyle's "reconstruction" of Calvinism will be given in

the discussion of The French Revolution; for the moment we

will turn to consider two important essays written in the

years immediately preceding the composition of Sartor Res-

artus--Signs of the Times (1829) and Characteristics (1831).

It is not at all surprising that Carlyle should

have seen the relevance of the concept of palingenesia to

his society. He had been acquainted from childhood with the

sufferings of the poor, and shared the common conviction

that they were caused by injustice and oppression. Resent-

ment and revolutionary sentiment had long smouldered in the

hearts of the working classes, and Carlyle's father, although

not inclined to rebellion against his lot, had believed that

"there was something vicious to the bottom in English and

Scotch society, and that revolution in some form or other

lay visibly ahead."[30] Carlyle's experiences in Edinburgh,

where he saw the machinery of injustice and oppression

operating at first hand, only served to convince him further

of the truth of his father's conviction. Carlyle was not

alone in his belief that society was on the verge of great

and unprecedented changes. As Patrick Brantlinger says, the years leading up to the passing of the 1832 Reform Bill "seemed to all observers to represent an especially crucial, apocalyptic turning point in the progress of nations."[31] The spirit of reform which grew in response to this conviction was opposed by Carlyle on the grounds that it sought to transfer power from the old aristocracy to a new aristocracy of industrialists, with a creed of laissez-faire, which would leave the working classes in a worse position than before. Accordingly, in Signs of the Times he put forward his own views.

At the beginning of the essay, Carlyle summarily dismisses the apocalyptic claims of both the Evangelicals and the Utilitarians:

> At such a period it was to be expected that the rage of prophecy should be more than usually excited. Accordingly Millenarians have come forth on the right hand, and the Millites on the left. The Fifth-monarchy men prophesy from the Bible, and the Utilitarians from Bentham. The one announces that the last of the seals is to be opened, positively, in the year 1860; and the other assures us that "the greatest-happiness principle" is to make a heaven of earth, in a still shorter time. We know these symptoms too well, to think it necessary or safe to interfere with them. . . . Left to themselves, they will the sooner dissipate, and die away in space. (CME, II, 58-59)

He then turns to consider the spirit of his age, which he calls an "Age of Machinery, in every outward and inward sense of that word" (CME, II, 59). Although he acknowledges the benefits which have derived from mechanism in the ex-

ternal sphere, he claims that society, instead of confining

it to that sphere, has given it universal application, and

thus become the servant of mechanism rather than its master:

> Not the external and physical alone is now managed by
> machinery, but the internal and spiritual also. Here
> too nothing follows its spontaneous course, nothing is
> left to be accomplished by old natural methods. . . .
> For the same habit regulates not our modes of action
> alone, but our modes of thought and feeling. Men are
> grown mechanical in head and in heart, as well as in
> hand. They have lost faith in individual endeavour, and
> in natural force, of any kind. Not for internal perfect-
> ion, but for external combinations and arrangements,
> for institutions, constitutions,--for Mechanism of one
> sort, or other, do they hope and struggle. Their whole
> efforts, attachments, opinions, turn on mechanism, and
> are of a mechanical character.   (CME, II, 60, 62-63)

This tendency he traces back to the baleful influence of

Locke, whose "whole doctrine is mechanical," failing to

touch on "the grand secrets of Necessity and Freewill, of

the Mind's vital or non-vital dependence on Matter, of our

mysterious relations to Time and Space, to God, to the

Universe" (CME, II, 64). The consequence of this is that

"men have lost their belief in the Invisible, and believe,

and hope, and work only in the visible; or, to speak in

other terms: This is not a Religious age. Only the material,

the immediately practical, not the divine and spiritual,

is important to us" (CME, II, 74). Yet there is, Carlyle

asserts, "a science of Dynamics in man's fortunes and nat-

ure, as well as of Mechanics. There is a science which

treats of, and practically addresses, the primary unmodif-

ied forces and energies of man, the mysterious springs of

Love, and Fear, of Wonder, of Enthusiasm, Poetry, Religion,
all of which have a truly vital and _infinite_ character"
(CME, II, 68). More startling than this declaration, how-
ever, is the assertion that the signs of the times are
signs of epochal death, and thus hold out hope for mankind.
Having dismissed the apocalyptic claims of the Evangelists
and Utilitarians at the beginning of the essay, he concludes
with a statement of his own millenarian convictions:

> Indications do we see in other countries and in our own,
> signs infinitely cheering to us, that Mechanism is not
> always to be our hard taskmaster, but one day to be our
> pliant, all-ministering servant; that a new and brighter
> spiritual era is slowly evolving itself for all men.
> . . . That great outward changes are in progress can be
> doubtful to no one. The time is sick and out of joint.
> Many things have reached their height; and it is a wise
> adage that tells us, "the darkest hour is nearest the
> dawn." . . . The thinking minds of all nations call for
> change. There is a deep-lying struggle in the whole
> fabric of society; a boundless grinding collision of
> the New with the Old. The French Revolution, as is now
> visible enough, was not the parent of this mighty move-
> ment, but its offspring.   (CME, II, 81-82)

The apocalyptic tone of this passage, together with the
reference to the French Revolution, clearly indicate that
Carlyle saw in his society the seeds of apocalyptic change.
It is left unclear, however, whether he believes this
transition will occur in a relatively peaceful manner or in
the frenzied manner of the French Revolution. Instead of
resolving this problem, he embraces a transcendent vision
of history and implies that the regeneration of the individ-
ual will lead to the regeneration of society:

> On the whole, as this wondrous planet, Earth, is jour-
> neying with its fellows through infinite Space, so are
> the wondrous destinies embarked on it journeying through
> infinite Time, under a higher guidance than ours. For the
> present, as our astronomy informs us, its path lies to-
> wards Hercules, the constellation of Physical Power: but
> that is not our most pressing concern. Go where it will,
> the deep HEAVEN will be around it. Therein let us have
> hope and sure faith. To reform a world, to reform a nat-
> ion, no wise man will undertake; and all but foolish
> men know, that the only solid, though a far slower re-
> formation, is what each man begins and perfects on him-
> self.   (CME, II, 82)

This notion, which was to remain one of the corner-

stones of Carlyle's philosophy, was derived from the organic

analogy between the life of the individual and the life of

society which he had discovered in German philosophy. How-

ever, Carlyle goes beyond the Germans by implying that in-

dividual regeneration will be reflected in social regenerat-

ion, almost as a matter of course. In his unpublished

History of German Literature, written in 1829, he makes much

the same point:

> To the perfection and purifying of Literature, of
> Poetry, Art, all eyes are turned; for in these times
> the deepest interests of men seem to be involved in it;
> the ashes and fast-burning fragments of the whole Past
> lie there, from which, amid clouds and whirlwinds, the
> Phoenix Future is struggling to unfold itself.[32]

The implication is clear. The "Phoenix Future" will emerge

not from violent revolution but through the influence of

regenerated souls such as Goethe and, presumably, Carlyle

himself. But, however valid such a noble view of literary

endeavour may be, and however laudable its optimism about

human nature, the fact remains that, in Signs of the Times,

Carlyle evades the implications of his analysis of society.
He moves from an analysis of the tendencies within his soc-
iety to the conclusion that in the "boundless grinding coll-
ision of the New with the Old," which generated the French
Revolution, "a new and brighter spiritual era is slowly
evolving itself" (CME, II, 82, 81). Instead of examining the
immediate consequences of this conclusion, however, he moves
to what amounts to a transcendental evasion of it.

Although the conclusion to Signs of the Times may
strike us as evasive, especially in the light of Carlyle's
later social criticism, it has to be seen in the context of
the period in which it was written. In 1829, Carlyle shared
the almost universal conviction that the French Revolution
had been a phenomenon which would not be repeated. Goethe,
probably the major literary influence on Carlyle in the years
leading up to 1829, wrote in that year that the nineteenth
century "is not just the continuation of the preceding one,
but seems destined to be the beginning of a new era. For
such great events as shook the world in the opening years of
this century cannot remain without great consequences, even
though the latter, like grain from seed, grow and ripen
slowly."[33] Although Carlyle, in Signs of the Times, does not
emphasize the slow growth of the new era as Goethe does, it
is clear that he anticipates that future change will be
gradual rather than cataclysmic. For both Carlyle and

Goethe, the period of cataclysmic upheaval had ended, and, although society had a long way to go before it entered the new era, nothing so earth-shattering as the French Revolution would happen again.

In July, 1830, however, revolution again flared up in France. As Karl Löwith says, "the symptomatic significance of the July Revolution was that it showed that the chasm of the French Revolution had closed only in outward appearance; in reality the world stood at the beginning of a whole 'Age of Revolutions,' in which the masses were to win from the upper classes an independent political power."[34] For Goethe, it was as if a new barbarism had emerged--"the basis of bourgeois society and its social life seemed to him to be destroyed, and he viewed the writings of St. Simon as the ingenious outline for a radical abolition of the existing order."[35] Carlyle's reaction was somewhat different. As Hill Shine says, in March, 1830, he had

> stated his belief that a deeper view of the world was
> about to arise in him. He now felt that, having got
> rid of materialism as a result of his German studies,
> he was about to put aside his preoccupation with German
> philosophy, morals, and aesthetics, valuable as they
> had been, and turn to a broader interpretation, a
> fuller ground plan of the universe.[36]

In July, the month of the revolution, he received an unexpected parcel from the Saint-Simonians, containing a laudatory review of Signs of the Times, and a selection of Saint-Simonian publications.[37] Although the Saint-Simonians were

in many ways less dogmatic than their founder, Saint-Simon

himself was a materialist, who "believed that man was a

machine, like all other parts of nature," and "credited

Locke with having established a general law of human per-

fectibility," and, inevitably, their writings were tainted

with this bias.[38] In view of this, it seems hard to compre-

hend why Carlyle reacted as positively as he did to the re-

ception of this parcel.[39] He did, it is true, dismiss their

ideas on religion and certain other matters as false, but,

in spite of this, he found in their writings the deeper

view of the world he had been searching for. Set before

him was the ground plan of a philosophy of history which

went far beyond that of the Germans.[40]

Although the philosophical orientation of the

Saint-Simonians represented a break with contemporary Germ-

an thought, their philosophy of history can also be seen as

a continuation of the German tradition. Carlyle had been

greatly influenced by Goethe's characterization of history

as an "unceasing oscillation between faith and negation,"

and had applied this principle, in Signs of the Times, in

his distinction between mechanism and dynamism.[41] In the

writings of the Saint-Simonians, he found the principle

given a far wider application. The Saint-Simonians saw

history as governed by a law of progressive periodicity,

in which period followed period in a kind of upward spiral.

Each period consisted of two epochs--one organic and one

critical. An organic epoch was characterized by the operat-

ion of an inner directive principle, and was fundamentally

religious. A critical epoch, on the other hand, was scep-

tical, undetermined and irreligious, and arose when the

principle of the preceding organic epoch had ceased to

correspond to scientific fact and social need. The old

order crumbled, with negation and egotism the order of the

day. From its ashes a new organic epoch arose, initiating

a new period. In terms of European history, the Saint-Simon-

ians saw the Christian era, which arose out of the ashes of

the Roman Empire, as an organic epoch. The transition to

a critical epoch began with Luther, but "not until the

violent social crisis of the French Revolution was the

eternal decree executed against the social order that was

based upon the medieval theological system and feudalism.

Eighteenth century liberalism, individualism, and democracy

were valuable only to help demolish the old institutions

and the creeds."[42] The Saint-Simonians believed that, in

their own day, with the old order effectively destroyed,

the attitudes associated with the work of destruction had

been transformed into mere negation and egotism, and that

"the task of the present . . . is constructively to pre-

pare the organization of the new system which is to arise

out of the ruins of the old one."[43]

In the essay <u>Characteristics</u>, the influence of the Saint-Simonians is strong. Whereas the social criticism of <u>Signs of the Times</u> had been founded on a distinction between mechanism and dynamism, that of <u>Characteristics</u> is founded on an analogy between the life of the individual and that of society. This analogy is announced at the outset:

> The healthy know not of their health, but only the sick: this is the Physician's Aphorism; and applicable in a far wider sense than he gives it. We may say, it holds no less in moral, intellectual, political, poetical, than in merely corporeal therapeutics; that wherever, or in what shape soever, powers of the sort which can be named vital are at work, herein lies the test of their working right or working wrong.   (<u>CME</u>, III, 1)

The distinction suggested here is one between organic or healthy epochs and critical or unhealthy epochs. After pursuing the implications of this principle in terms of the individual, Carlyle turns to society, which also

> has its periods of sickness and vigour, of youth, manhood, decrepitude, dissolution and new birth; in one or other of which stages we may, in all times, and in all places where men inhabit, discern it; and do ourselves, in this time and place, whether as coöperating or as contending, as healthy members or as diseased ones, to our joy and sorrow, form part of it. (<u>CME</u>, III, 12-13)

Carlyle follows the Saint-Simonians in designating his age as one of dissolution, echoing their belief that the Christian era, grown critical and mechanistic, is drawing to a close:

> Religion, like all else, is conscious of itself, listens to itself; it becomes less and less creative, vital; more and more mechanical. Considered as a whole, the Christian religion of late ages has been continually dissipating itself into Metaphysics; and threatens now to disappear, as some rivers do, in deserts of barren

sand. (<u>CME</u>, III, 23)

However, he asserts that the destruction of the old is no

longer necessary, and must give way to the affirmation of

the new:

> To the better order of . . . minds any mad joy of Denial
> has long since ceased: the problem is not now to deny,
> but to ascertain and perform. Once in destroying the
> False, there was a certain inspiration; but now the
> genius of Destruction has done its work, there is now
> nothing more to destroy. The doom of the Old has long
> been pronounced, and irrevocable; the Old has passed
> away: but, alas, the New appears not in its stead; the
> Time is still in pangs of travail with the New. Man has
> walked by the light of conflagrations, and amid the
> sound of falling cities; and now there is darkness, and
> long watching till it be morning. The voice even of the
> faithful can but exclaim: "As yet struggles the twelfth
> hour of the Night: birds of darkness are on the wing,
> spectres uproar, the dead walk, the living dream.--
> Thou, Eternal Providence, wilt cause the day to dawn."
> (<u>CME</u>, III, 32)

Yet, although the Old has been destroyed, the transition to

the New will not be smooth:

> In Practice, still more in Opinion, which is the pre-
> cursor and prototype of Practice, there must needs be
> collision, convulsion; much has to be ground away.
> (<u>CME</u>, III, 32)

This sounds like the rhetoric of revolution, but the revo-

lution Carlyle envisages is a spiritual one:

> Innumerable "Philosophies of Man," contending in bound-
> less hubbub, must annihilate each other before an in-
> spired Poesy and Faith for man can fashion itself to-
> gether. (<u>CME</u>, III, 32-33)

Again, Carlyle fails to confront the practical consequences

of his conclusions. In spite of the July Revolution, and of

his contact with the Saint-Simonians, he does not touch on

the issue of whether the new dawn in England will be accompanied by violent revolution or not. He implies that it will not be, but, given the example of two French Revolutions, and his failure to examine the possibility of revolution in England, the implication is rather unconvincing, and his unconcern rather alarming.

Carlyle's orientation in Characteristics, as in Signs of the Times, is religious rather than political. As Barbara Lovenheim says, "he is more interested in the vision and rhetoric of transformation than the actual process of destruction."[44] In these essays, Carlyle is attempting to create, out of his personal experience and the historical realities of his age, a myth which operates at both a personal and an individual level, a myth of apocalyptic rebirth to supersede that of Christianity. Yet, while he is penetrating in his analysis of the tendencies of his society, he is less than convincing in his attempts to generate myth from that analysis. He too often sounds like the Millenarians he condemns at the beginning of Signs of the Times. These essays are flawed, not so much by Carlyle's attempts to create myth, but by his attempts to generate it from material which resists such an attempt. By confining himself largely to the realm of politics, he is often forced into the language of revolution while trying to urge individual regeneration, and only manages to steer

clear of sounding like an avowed revolutionary by drawing
heavily on the language of Biblical prophecy. In Sartor
Resartus (1833-34), his next major work, he shifted his
attention from society to the position of the individual
within society. By doing so, he was enabled to explore the
implications of his ideas much more fully.

The chief advantage of the mode Carlyle adopts in
Sartor Resartus is that, by juxtaposing the voices of a
German philosopher and an English editor, he is able to
set up a continual dialogue within the work, in which each
voice qualifies the other. It would not be true to say
that the book represents an encounter between a philosophic-
al system Carlyle wholeheartedly endorsed and the uncept-
ive British public. The editor, for example, can be both
impercipient and pedantic, and Carlyle, through his use of
irony, ensures that we do not ignore this trait. Neverthe-
less, it is the editor who accuses Teufelsdröckh of indiff-
erence, an accusation which has to be borne in mind in any
assessment of Teufelsdröckh's philosophy. This means that
Carlyle is able to put forward ideas with which he may be
in partial agreement without committing himself to them, and
is also able to qualify them or to suggest troubling impli-
cations without rejecting them. In this sense, Sartor Res-
artus presents a more qualified vision than Signs of the
Times or Characteristics. At the same time, however, this

vision is more soundly based, and, ultimately, more uncompromising in its attitude to individual and social regeneration.

The first book of Sartor Resartus introduces us to the ideas of Diogenes Teufelsdröckh, and, in particular, to his philosophy of clothes. His central thesis is that "clothes have made Men of us; they are threatening to make Clothes-screens of us" (SR, p. 31). The clothes metaphor which runs through the work is sustained by Carlyle's ability to make it function in different ways. On the one hand, clothes represent the formulae which are generated in an organic epoch as an external reflection of its inner principle, and are removed in the ensuing critical epoch to be replaced by formulae which reflect the inner principle of a new organic epoch. On the other hand, they represent the mechanism which, when confined to the external sphere, gives man mastery over his environment, but which, when applied to the internal sphere, transforms him into a machine--a "Clothes-screen."

Teufelsdröckh believes that dogmatic metaphysics have "proved so inexpressively unproductive! The secret of Man's Being is still like the Sphinx's secret: a riddle that he cannot rede; and for ignorance of which he suffers death, the worst death, a spiritual" (SR, p. 42). He goes on to assert, in Kantian terms, "that the WHERE and WHEN, so mysteriously inseparable from all our thoughts, are but

superficial terrestrial adhesions to thought; the Seer may
discern them where they mount up out of the celestial
EVERYWHERE and FOREVER" (SR, p. 43). These ideas had al-
ready been employed in Signs of the Times and Characterist-
ics, but whereas, in those works, Carlyle had proceeded
directly from them to a consideration of society, in Sart-
or he does not. Instead, he examines Teufelsdröckh's biog-
raphy, to discover how these ideas have developed, and how
they relate to the individual, and only moves on to con-
sider society when this examination is complete. The account
of Teufelsdröckh's rebirth, which occurs in Book II, thus
provides a context within which to assess the ideas of soc-
ial rebirth which are discussed in Book III.

Teufelsdröckh, after his appearance as an infant in
a manner which suggests his divine origin, experiences an
idyllic childhood before being thrust into a world of mat-
erialism. He describes his university education thus:

> We boasted ourselves a Rational University; in the high-
> est degree hostile to Mysticism; thus was the young vac-
> ant mind furnished with much talk about Progress of the
> Species, Dark Ages, Prejudice, and the like; so that all
> were quickly enough blown out into a state of windy arg-
> umentativeness; whereby the better sort had soon to end
> in sick, impotent Scepticism; the worser sort explode
> . . . in finished Self-conceit, and to all spiritual in-
> tents become dead.--But this too is portion of man's lot.
> If our era is the Era of Unbelief, why murmur under it;
> is there not a better coming, nay come? As in long-
> drawn systole and long-drawn diastole, must the period
> of Faith alternate with the period of Denial; must the
> vernal growth, the summer luxuriance of all Opinions,
> Spiritual Representations, and Creations, be followed
> by, and again follow, the autumnal decay, the winter

dissolution. For man lives in Time, has his whole
earthly being, endeavour and destiny shaped for him by
Time: only in the transitory Time-Symbol is the ever-
motionless Eternity we stand on made manifest.

(SR, pp. 90-91)

The speculation which Teufelsdröckh's account of his univ-

ersity education leads into is drawn from a passage in

Goethe, of which Carlyle thought so highly that he para-
45
phrased it in at least three other works.   Its inclusion

at this point indicates the intimate relationship which

exists between the growth of the individual and the growth

of society, and the way in which an understanding of the

latter must develop from an understanding of the former.

Teufelsdröckh attempts to find release from negat-

ion and mechanism through love, but, after rejection by

Blumine, he is plunged headlong into despair:

> We behold him . . . in a state of crisis, of transition:
> his mad Pilgrimings, and general solution into aimless
> Discontinuity, what is all this but a mad Fermentation;
> wherefrom, the fiercer it is, the clearer product will
> one day evolve itself? Such transitions are ever full of
> pain: thus the Eagle when he moults is sickly; and, to
> attain his new beak, must harshly dash-off the old one
> upon rocks.   (SR, p. 128)

He is tortured by the nightmare vision of a world from which

God has withdrawn, and which is governed by the inexorable

laws of mechanism:

> To me the Universe was all void of Life, of Purpose, of
> Volition, even of Hostility: it was one huge, dead,
> immeasurable Steam-engine, rolling on, in its dead in-
> difference, to grind me limb from limb. O, the vast,
> gloomy, solitary Golgotha, and Mill of Death! Why was
> the Living banished thither companionless, conscious?
> Why, if there is no Devil; nay, unless the Devil is
> your God?   (SR, p. 133)

Teufelsdröckh's despair, like the sickness of the eagle--

a symbol of the spiritual principle and heroic nobility--is
a necessary stage in the process of spiritual rebirth.[46]

Just as the eagle, in order to develop a new beak, must

harshly dash off the old one, so Teufelsdröckh has to re-

ject the world-view which he has learned in order for a new

one to emerge:

> The Everlasting No had said: "Behold thou art fatherless,
> outcast, and the Universe is mine (the Devil's)"; to
> which my whole Me now made answer: "I am not thine, but
> Free, and forever hate thee!"
>   It is from this hour that I incline to date my
> Spiritual New-birth, or Baphometic Fire-baptism; perhaps
> I directly thereupon began to be a Man.   (SR, p. 135)

This fire-baptism, however, only leads to greater unrest,

and, although this unrest has "a fixed centre to revolve

about" (SR, p. 135), Teufelsdröckh is unable to complete

the process of rebirth through his own efforts, for he is

motivated by defiance and rejection. His "Indignation and

Defiance" (SR, p. 135) gradually wear themselves out, how-

ever, and he lapses into indifference. This indifference is

positive, in that it represents a submission to the Divine

Will. From this submission comes rebirth:

> The hot Harmattan wind had raged itself out; its howl
> went silent within me; and the long-deafened soul could
> now hear. I paused in my wild wanderings; and sat me
> down to wait, and consider; for it was as if the hour
> of change drew nigh. I seemed to surrender, to renounce
> utterly, and say: Fly, then, false shadows of Hope; I
> will chase you no more, I will believe you no more.
> And ye too, haggard spectres of Fear, I care not for
> you; ye too are all shadows and a lie. Let me rest
> here: for I am way-weary and life-weary; I will rest

> here, were it but to die: to die or to live is alike to
> me; alike insignificant. . . . Here, then, as I lay in
> that CENTRE OF INDIFFERENCE; cast, doubtless by benign-
> ant upper Influence, into a healing sleep, the heavy
> dreams rolled gradually away, and I awoke to a new
> Heaven and a new Earth. The first preliminary moral
> Act, Annihilation of Self . . . had been happily
> accomplished, and my mind's eyes were now unsealed, and
> its hands ungyved.   (SR, pp. 148-149)

Here, then, in the language of Revelation, we have the patt-

ern of individual rebirth which is the imperative underly-

ing all of Carlyle's writings. The individual rejects the

attitudes of criticism and negation which have been fostered

in him, but remains motivated by rejection, and ultimately

reaches the dead-end of indifference, through inability to

attain an affirmative vision. At this point, he is redeemed

by the Divine Will and is reborn. If this pattern is applied

to society, the French Revolution can be seen as the Ever-

lasting No, which henceforth provides a focus for social

disenchantment. This social unrest gradually wears itself

out and declines into indifference, at which point the

Divine Will, overseeing the historical process, ushers in

a new Heaven and a new Earth. This pattern provides the

basis for Carlyle's apocalyptic view of society, and explains,

in part, why he ignores the possibility of further revolut-

ionary activity in Signs of the Times and Characteristics--

society had reached its "centre of indifference" and rebirth

is imminent. However, by the time of Sartor, he has begun to

qualify this optimistic millenarianism, while at the same

time laying greater stress on the need for individual re-
birth. In his subsequent writings, these tendencies were to
become ever more marked.

In the third book of Sartor, Carlyle presents Teuf-
elsdröckh's view of society. Teufelsdröckh sees mankind as
labouring under the same burden as that which he had to bear
before his declaration of the "Everlasting No":

> In Earth and Heaven he can see nothing but mechanism,
> has fear for nothing else, hope in nothing else: the
> world would indeed grind him to pieces; but cannot he
> fathom the Doctrine of Motives, and cunningly compute
> these, and mechanise them to grind the other way?
> (SR, p. 176)

But, although mankind has not yet pronounced the Everlasting
No--even though the French Revolution has come and gone--
forces are at work to shape a new society:

> The World . . . as it needs must, is under a process of
> devastation and waste, which, whether by silent assid-
> uous corrosion, or open quicker combustion, as the case
> chances, will effectually enough annihilate the past
> Forms of Society; replace them with what it may.
> (SR, p. 187)

The fatalism implied in this passage, even though it is
qualified elsewhere in the work by reference to the Divine
Will, stands in contrast to the optimism of the earlier
essays. While it remains no less certain that society is
undergoing a major transformation, destruction and annihi-
lation are emphasized, while the society which will event-
ually emerge becomes an unknown quantity. Later in the
work, Teufelsdröckh states:

> In the living subject . . . change is wont to be grad-
> ual: thus, while the serpent sheds its old skin, the
> new is already formed beneath. Little knowest thou of
> the burning of a World-Phoenix, who fanciest that she
> must first burn-out, and lie as a dead cinerous heap;
> and therefrom the young one start-up by miracle, and
> fly heavenward. Far otherwise! In that Fire-whirlwind,
> Creation and Destruction proceed together; ever as the
> ashes of the Old are blown about, do organic filaments
> of the New mysteriously spin themselves: and amid the
> rushing and the waving of the Whirlwind-Element come
> tones of a melodious Deathsong, which end not but in
> tones of a more melodious Birthsong. (SR, pp. 194-195)

As Albert La Valley says, Carlyle is here moving towards a

vision of a universe of absolute change, in which the self

can find no stability.[47] Although a progressive view of

history is still espoused, the vision of flux and destruct-

ion which creeps into Sartor Resartus represents a move-

ment towards a pessimistic view of society, in which the

regenerated individual is alienated. It is in this work

that we find for the first time the prophecy of apocalyptic

destruction which will come to dominate Carlyle's later

writings:

> Wait a little, till the entire nation is in an electric
> state; till your whole vital Electricity, no longer
> healthfully Neutral, is cut into two isolated portions
> of Positive and Negative (of Money and of Hunger); and
> stands there bottled-up in two World Batteries! The
> stirring of a child's finger brings the two together;
> and then--What then? The Earth is but shivered into im-
> palpable smoke by that Doom's-thunderpeal; the Sun
> misses one of his Planets in Space, and thenceforth
> there are no eclipses of the Moon!   (SR, pp. 228-229)

The glorious dawn is no longer imminent, although violent

insurrection seems to be:

> It is the Night of the World, and still long till it be
> Day: we wander amid the glimmer of smoking ruins, and
> the Sun and the Stars of Heaven are as if blotted out
> for a season; and two immeasurable Phantoms, HYPOCRISY
> and ATHEISM, with the gowl, SENSUALITY, stalk abroad
> over the Earth, and call it theirs.   (SR, p. 235)

Albert La Valley writes:

> As at the end of "Signs of the Times" and "Character-
> istics," the voice of the social prophet emerges as the
> most clearly relevant, but in Sartor, unlike the earlier
> essays, the sense of a fatality engulfing society,
> ready to doom it, is kept alive and emphasized. The
> "upbeat" voice prevails only in the prophet's achieve-
> ment of his complete inward vision. . . . The celebrat-
> ion of society's regeneration in "Signs of the Times"
> and "Characteristics" has disappeared. If society is to
> purge itself, it will be through revolution, for Teuf-
> elsdröckh has, after a week of silence, been propelled
> back into the social dimension by the Parisian Three
> Days, the Revolution of 1830.[48]

It was to the earlier French Revolution that Carlyle

turned his attention after the composition of Sartor. He had

come to realize the inadequacy of simply opposing dynamism

to mechanism, in both the individual and the social sphere.

In Sartor, Carlyle acknowledges that the vision of the re-

generated man can alienate him from society, and that the

pattern he had imposed on society in the earlier essays was

too simple to accommodate social reality. It was natural,

then, for him to turn to what he called "the crowning Phen-

omenon of our Modern Time" (FR, I, 212) to give expression

to a social vision which could no longer be contained by

pungent generalizations.

The vision of The French Revolution (1837), like

that of Sartor, derives much of its force from the constant

process of qualification within the work. Although Carlyle does not juxtapose two distinct narrative voices as he does in _Sartor_, he employs a narrative voice which continually shifts its point of view. Nevertheless, he convinces us of the consistency of the work by demonstrating implicitly that the material it deals with could not be treated adequately by adherence to a single point of view. Throughout the work, he hovers between a vision of the French Revolution as "the Death-Birth of a World" (_FR_, I, 213) and a vision of it as a retributive force. This dual vision reflects Carlyle's dual inheritance--of German and French views of historical periodicity and palingenesia on the one hand, and of the stern dictates of Biblical prophecy on the other. Thus, a dialectic is set up, a dialectic which is never resolved, even though the vision of retribution becomes more dominant as the work progresses.[49]

Barbara Lovenheim believes that, in the course of writing The French Revolution, Carlyle's vision underwent a radical transformation:

> Even though Carlyle approached the Revolution with the enthusiasm and optimism he had displayed in his writings of 1828-1833, in the course of writing his study he was forced to modify, if not entirely relinquish, his confidence in historical resurrection.[50]

To support this view, she points to the pronounced Biblicalism of the work, which becomes more and more evident as it progresses. She attributes this transformation not only to the nature of the material Carlyle was dealing with, but also

to the political unrest during the years in which Carlyle
wrote the work.[51] Although this interpretation is essentially
sound, it is, I think, carried too far. Lovenheim proposes
that, in the course of writing the work, Carlyle totally
abandoned the ideas of historical periodicity and the Divine
Will, and adopted the mantle of Jeremiah--in other words, he
started writing the history of the Revolution with one set of
ideas and finished it with a different set. While there is a
definite shift of emphasis during the course of the work, the
transformation is not this radical. Carlyle's attitude at the
beginning of the work is not one of unclouded optimism, nor
does he succumb to pessimism in its final pages. Furthermore,
the shift in emphasis cannot be attributed to growing pessi-
mism alone. It can also be attributed to Carlyle's applicat-
ion of what Hazlitt called "gusto"--the accommodation of
style to subject matter.[52] Thus, it is natural that Volume
One of The French Revolution--The Bastille--should reflect
the optimism felt in that blissful dawn, while Volume Three
--The Guillotine--reflects the evil and terror of the period
it deals with. The shift in emphasis can also be attributed
to Carlyle's divided sympathies. While he admired the dynamic
energy manifested in the Revolution, and its refusal to put
up with shams, he was opposed to its radical and democratic
tendencies, and fearful that the experience of the Revolution
would be repeated in Britain. Thus, his purpose in the work

was three-fold--to pay tribute to the spirit he saw mani-
fested in the Revolution, to expose its negative aspects,
and to provide a warning to his own society. Naturally, diff-
erent phases of the Revolution did not serve all three of
these purposes equally well--tribute was more appropriate to
the early stages of the Revolution, admonition and condem-
nation to the latter.

At the beginning of Volume One, Carlyle proceeds to
an analysis of pre-Revolutionary France, centering his ob-
servations upon the death of Louis XV, whose terror at the
prospect of imminent dissolution reflects his failure to
have comprehended the meaning of life. Carlyle, contemplat-
ing Louis's end, and anxious to expose the root of his err-
or, inserts into his narrative a passage which opposes a
transcendental view to Louis's blind materialism, and pro-
vides a perspective from which the Revolution can be judged:

> Ours is a most fictile world; and man is the most fing-
> ent plastic of creatures. A world not fixable; not fath-
> omable! An unfathomable Somewhat, which is Not we; which
> we can work with, and live amidst,--and model, miracul-
> ously, in our miraculous Being, and name World.--But if
> the very Rocks and Rivers (as Metaphysic teaches) are,
> in strict language, made by those outward Senses of ours,
> how much more, by the Inward Sense, are all Phenomena of
> the spiritual kind: Dignities, Authorities, Holies, Un-
> holies! Which inward Sense, moreover, is not permanent
> like the outward ones, but for ever growing and changing.
> (FR, I, 6)

This sounds very much like the "clothes-philosophy" of Teuf-
elsdröckh, but it goes beyond that philosophy in two import-
ant ways. First, it proposes a more uncompromising idealism

than does <u>Sartor</u>, and, second, it emphasizes the idea of
flux, merely hinted at in the earlier work. The statement,
"all Phenomena of the spiritual kind . . . are for ever
growing and changing," while it does not necessarily ex-
clude the idea of periodicity, certainly does not suggest
it. It suggests, rather, a world of perpetual flux and re-
volution, of unceasing construction and destruction, or,
as Carlyle would say, of "Death-Birth." The transcendental
world view here is not accompanied by the assurance of
periodic alternation as it was in <u>Signs of the Times</u> and
<u>Characteristics</u>. It is as if the idea of organic and crit-
ical periods has been transformed by a transcendent ideal-
ism, which, through its annihilation of time, merges fire-
creation and fire-destruction into a single entity. The
idea of periodicity does play a role in <u>The French Revolut-
ion</u>, but it is much qualified. Throughout the work, Carlyle
emphasizes the ways in which destruction and construction
go on at the same time, and can often be seen embodied in a
single act. Given such a lack of distinction, we are left
with a world of eternal flux, the tides of which can only be
stemmed by the single-mindedness of a Napoleon.

It is not until the last volume, however, that the
idea of flux comes to dominate the work. In the first volume
Carlyle only hints at it. The overall tone of the first vol-
ume reflects the optimism felt in the early stages of the

Revolution, as well as Carlyle's heartfelt endorsement of
the refusal, by the French people, to have anything more to
do with shams. However, in his discussion of pre-Revolution-
ary France, he does not find the seeds of rebirth so much as
the seeds of chaos. It is a society which "no man has Faith
to withstand . . . to begin by amending himself" (FR, I, 14).
When it collapses, "the whole daemonic nature of man will
remain" (FR, I, 14), and there will be "a waste wild-welter-
ing Chaos;--which has again, with tumult and struggle, to
make itself into a world" (FR, I, 38). The chaos which will
engulf France will be retributive as much as purgative, a
judgement on the evil which has accumulated--"ye and your
fathers have sown the wind, ye shall reap the whirlwind"
(FR, I, 48).

Carlyle's attitude towards the meeting of the
States-General in 1789 is, therefore, deeply ironic. While
he approves of its "deep-fixed Determination to have done
with shams" (FR, I, 149), he sees it as an insubstantial
body, a collection of men

> without life-rule for themselves--other life-rule than
> a Gospel according to Jean Jacques! To the wisest of
> them, what we must call the wisest, man is properly an
> Accident under the sky. Man is without Duty round him;
> except it be "to make the Constitution." He is without
> Heaven above him, or Hell beneath him; he has no God
> in the world.   (FR, I, 148-149)

Nevertheless, he sees 4 May 1789 as

> the baptism-day of Democracy. . . . The extreme unction
> day of Feudalism! A superannuated System of Society
> . . . is now to die: and so, with death-throes and
> birth-throes, a new one is to be born. What a work, O
> Earth and Heavens . . . and from this present day, if
> one might prophecy, some two centuries of it still to
> fight! Two centuries, hardly less, before Democracy go
> through its due, most baleful, stages of Quackocracy;
> and a pestilential World be burnt up, and have begun to
> grow green and young again.   (FR, I, 133)

Here the prophecy that two centuries of "death-throes and

birth-throes" were entered upon in 1789 again brings Carlyle

close to the idea of perpetual flux, while the prophecy that

during this period the world will be burnt up brings him

close to the apocalyptic despair of his later works. When we

recall that this passage was written less than five years

after Signs of the Times, we can see how radically the vis-

ion of imminent rebirth has been transformed into a vision

of rebirth indefinitely deferred, troubled by flux and de-

generation.

After examining the fragile expedient of the States-

General, Carlyle turns to a consideration of the forces that

now emerge from the abyss, from the daemonic nature of man.

Carlyle asserts that, once these forces have been unchained,

nothing can stop them growing "by law of Nature" (FR, I, 239)

and ultimately claiming precedence. A States-General cannot

curb the spirit roused by such men as Camille Desmoulins:

> "Let universal Paris, universal France, as with the
> throat of the whirlwind: 'To arms!'" "To arms!" yell
> responsive the innumerable voices; like one great voice,
> as of a Demon yelling from the air . . . and rest not
> till France be on fire!   (FR, I, 175-176)

This is a retributive as much as a purgative force; Carlyle's prophecy to the nobility of the ancien régime--"ye and your fathers have sown the wind, ye shall reap the whirlwind" (FR, I, 48)--is to be fulfilled. Carlyle's attitude to the eruption of daemonic, retributive forces towards the end of the first volume of the History is a mixture of detached criticism and heartfelt endorsement. This dual vision rests on the conviction that the Revolution is "a great Phenomenon: nay, . . . a transcendental one. . . . the Death-Birth of a World!" (FR, I, 212-213). This can be seen in the following passage:

> O poor mortals, how ye make this Earth bitter for each other; this fearful and wonderful Life fearful and horrible; and Satan has his place in all hearts! Such agonies and ragings and wailings ye have, and have had, in all times:--to be buried all, in so deep silence; and the salt sea is not swollen with your tears.
> Great meanwhile is the moment, when tidings of Freedom reach us; when the long-enthralled soul, from amid its chains and squalid stagnancy, arises, were it still only in blindness and bewilderment, and swears by Him that made it, that it will be free! . . . Forward, ye maddened sons of France; be it towards this destiny or towards that! Around you is but starvation, falsehood, corruption, and the clam of death. Where ye are is no abiding.   (FR, I, 183-184)

The abrupt transition from one point of view to another in this passage illustrates dramatically Carlyle's intention at this stage in his narrative. He sees the French people as unregenerate (FR, I, 14), bent on destruction and retribution, rather than on regeneration. Yet, while he sees this Satanic purpose as pernicious in itself, in the context of

the French Revolution he sees in it the retributive purpose of the Divine Will. This emphasis on retribution contrasts with the emphasis of Signs of the Times, which was on transition. Here, Carlyle stresses that a society which has followed evil courses will bring down the wrath of God upon its head. The abrupt transitions from one point of view to another which occur throughout the work serve to jolt the reader out of the comfort of a partisan interpretation of the Revolution and to push him toward a transcendental view. Yet it is no longer an idealistic view of historical periodicity which is urged on him, but the implacable laws of a Jehovah. The vision of The French Revolution is heavily indebted to the philosophers of history Carlyle had come into contact with, yet he has moved beyond them, towards a vision of a world governed by flux, in which construction and destruction do not proceed in alternate cycles but occur simultaneously. A vision of a world governed by contrary forces is a transcendent vision, but the forces themselves are not transcendent. They merely illustrate, or generate, a transcendent entity. Carlyle came to believe that history illustrated the operation of a transcendent force closely related to that of Calvinist theology. It is in The French Revolution that the neo-Calvinist vision which informs all his subsequent works takes shape.

In Volume Two of The French Revolution, we see

attempts being made to divert the wrath of God, to transform
it into a settled order of government. The Constitution is
an attempt to vault in "the bottomless fire-gulf . . . with
rag-paper" (FR, II, 12), while Marat, "the mere sample . . .
of what is coming . . . upwards from the realms of Night"
(FR, II, 18), bides his time. The dominant feeling in France
is still one of hope, and, "in the death tumults of a sink-
ing society . . . only the birth-struggles of a new unspeak-
ably better Society" (FR, II, 34) are seen. However, because
of the enthronement of Satan in the hearts of the French,
the projected society is based on nothing more than "Freedom
by Social Contract" (FR, II, 38-39). Although this is "a
better faith than the one it . . . replaced" (FR, II, 39),
it is a chimera,

> like gossamer gauze, beautiful and cheap; which will
> stand no tear and wear! Beautiful cheap gossamer gauze,
> thou film-shadow of a raw material of virtue, which art
> not woven, nor likely to be, into Duty; thou art better
> than nothing, and also worse!   (FR, II, 59)

Such a faith is contrary to the Will of Heaven, as the cold
rain which falls on the Champs de Mars during the Feast of
Pikes indicates. It can only foster the growth of the daem-
onic forces now rising from the abyss. By the end of Volume
Two, France has been transformed into a Satanic principali-
ty. The National Assembly is "a fuliginous confused Kingdom
of Dis, with . . . Tantalus-Ixion toils, . . . Fire-floods,
and Streams named of Lamentation" (FR, II, 242), Sanscullot-
ism is "the black, bottomless" (FR, II, 243-244), the Jacob-

ins' Church "recalls those dread temples which Poetry, of old, had consecrated to the Avenging Deities" (FR, II, 245), and Paris is "Pandemonium, or City of all the Devils" (FR, II, 288).

It is in the third volume of The French Revolution that Carlyle's admonitory message comes across most forcibly. In dealing with the most chaotic stage of the Revolution, he is able, through the subtle use of dialectic, to educe a significance from its events which the application of a simple theoretical model would be unable to produce. He is concerned to show that, in the latter stages of the Revolution, the daemonic and divine faculties of man were exposed, and were seen to be essentially indivisible. He had suggested this earlier, when he coined the name Diogenes Teufelsdröckh, but here the idea is given far wider application. Volume Three opens with the assertion:

> Very frightful it is when a Nation, rending asunder its Constitutions, and Regulations which were grown dead cerements for it, becomes transcendental; and must now seek its wild way through the New, Chaotic,--where force is not yet distinguished into Bidden and Forbidden, but Crime and Virtue welter unseparated, . . . Sanscullotism reigning in all its grandeur and in all its hideousness: The Gospel (God's-message) of Man's Rights, Man's mights or strengths, once more preached irrefragably abroad; along with this, and still louder for the time, the fearfulest Devil's-message of Man's weaknesses and sins; --and all on such a scale, and under such aspect: cloudy "death-birth of a world": huge smoke-cloud, streaked with rays as of heaven on one side; girt on the other as with hell-fire! (FR, III, 2)

Here again we have a powerful image of a world of flux,

swaying violently between two poles--death-birth, daemonic-divine, strength-weakness, and so on. Man has become "enveloped in an ambient atmosphere of Transcendentalism and Delirium: his individual self is lost in something that is not himself, but foreign though inseparable from him" (FR, III, 121). He has surrendered himself to the forces of Chaos, and "Chaos, or the sea of troubles, is struggling through all its elements; writhing and chafing towards some Creation" (FR, III, 157). The French people, given over to fanaticism and frenzy, have become as the whirlwind of an avenging deity, and, as in the Biblical Apocalypse, the reign of Satan is established upon earth. The National Convention becomes "a kind of Apocalyptic Convention, or black Dream become real" (FR, III, 70), sending forth "Death on the Pale Horse" (FR, III, 71); its members are like "Phantoms in the hour of midnight; most spectral, pandemonial" (FR, III, 102). The report of the trial of Marie Antoinette is "dim, dim, as if in disastrous eclipse; like the pale kingdoms of Dis! Plutonic Judges, Plutonic Tinville; encircled, nine times, with Styx and Lethe, with Fire-Phlegethon and Cocytus named of Lamentation" (FR, III, 194-195). Terror becomes the order of the day, with a blood-frenzied mob lynching, guillotining, and cannibalizing like fiends unchained. "Alas, then," asks Carlyle, "is man's civilisation only a wrappage, through which the savage nature of him can still burst, infernal as

ever? Nature still makes him: and has an infernal in her as well as a Celestial" (FR, III, 247).

It is this dual aspect of nature which emerges most forcibly in the final volume of The French Revolution, and it indicates how Carlyle has moved away from the idea of a providential will towards ideas of an indifferent or potentially hostile God and of a world ruled by flux. The French Revolution is, for Carlyle,

> a thing without order, a thing proceeding from beyond and beneath the region of order, [which] must work and welter, not as a Regularity but as a Chaos; destructive and self-destructive; always till something that has order arise, strong enough to bind it into subjection again. Which something . . . will not be a Formula, with philosophical propositions and forensic eloquence; but a Reality; probably with a sword in its hand.
> (FR, III, 114-115)

Society, then, is incapable of self-regeneration, and, left to itself, must "work and welter . . . as a Chaos." The old analogy between the individual and society has disappeared, to be replaced by the belief that order must be imposed upon society by the individual. The order that the individual imposes will be a "Reality," presumably forged out of his own inner struggle and rebirth. It is a "Reality" incommensurable with that which controls the Revolution, the infernal-celestial "Nature" which proceeds from "beyond and beneath the region of order." This notion is in opposition to the idealism Carlyle had earlier espoused, and reflects the Calvinist belief that man has to struggle against and

impose order upon a hostile environment.

In the final volume of The French Revolution, the emphasis is not, therefore, on the regenerative aspect of the Revolution. Although it plays its part in regeneration, it is capable only of destroying shams; left to itself, it remains a destructive force, subject to unceasing change, throwing up new shams and pulling them down again. Its blind fury can only be quelled by the harsh imposition of order upon it:

> For arrangement is indispensable to man; Arrangement, were it grounded only on that old primary Evangel of Force, with Sceptre in the shape of Hammer! Be there method, be there order, cry all men; were it that of the Drill-sergeant! More tolerable is the drilled Bayonet-rank, than that undrilled Guillotine, incalculable as the wind. (FR, III, 288)

Carlyle draws from the Revolution the conclusion that a society founded on shams will inevitably be consumed by chaos. However, chaos, while it can reveal the divine-daemonic nature of man, cannot, by itself, institute a new order. That new order must be imposed upon it by the likes of a Napoleon. Carlyle appeals to his society to draw inferences from these observations:

> This inference, for example, among the first: That "if the gods of this lower world will sit on their glittering thrones, indolent as Epicurus' gods, with the living Chaos of Ignorance and Hunger weltering uncared-for at their feet, and smooth Parasites preaching, Peace, peace, when there is no peace," then the dark chaos, it would seem, will rise;--has risen, and, O Heavens, has it not tanned their skins into breeches for itself? That there be no more Sansculotism in our Earth for a thousand years, let us understand well what the first

was; and let Rich and Poor of us go and do otherwise.
(<u>FR</u>, III, 313)

Carlyle himself was soon to draw further inferences, however, as his conviction that society was becoming increasingly chaotic, increasingly subject to the law of flux, deepened.

In <u>Sartor Resartus</u>, the myth of periodicity, of alternation between organic and critical periods, had succumbed to a transcendent vision, in which opposition was resolved into unity--death-birth, daemonic-divine. This vision necessarily implied a constant tension between two poles, or, in other words, eternal flux. The belief in an imminent millennium was, therefore, negated, and Carlyle began to see in his society a degenerative tendency which did not hold in itself the seeds of regeneration. He wrote to his brother, John, in 1837:

> No man in such a case can calculate the hour and the year; but to me it is very clear, all this cursed <u>pluister</u> of Lies and Misery is coming tumbling into incoherent ruin, and will grow a great deal more miserable than it ever was.[53]

This tendency could only be stemmed, as he saw it, by the imposition of order upon intransigent material by a divinely inspired individual--divinity being no longer identifiable with "Nature," but opposed to it. In the works that followed <u>The French Revolution</u>, he pursued this theme with increasing urgency, adopting a prophetic role to warn society of the abyss it was approaching through fostering the anarchic

forces of democracy.

The most blatant instance of growing social unrest in England was the Chartist movement, which came into being in 1838, and campaigned for universal suffrage and Parliamentary reform.[54] The enormous support given to the Chartists was largely due to the severe economic depression which hit England in 1836, and lasted until 1842.[55] When their Charter was rejected by Parliament, the Chartists staged mass demonstrations in Birmingham and other industrial cities. Although these demonstrations were quickly suppressed, many saw in them the seeds of revolution. Carlyle was convinced that society would rapidly be plunged into chaos if the demands of the Chartists were met, yet equally convinced that failure to respond to their grievances would have a similar outcome. Out of this fear of revolution, he produced Chartism (1839). Throughout this essay, he draws parallels between the condition of England and that of pre-Revolutionary France. The workhouses created by the Poor-Law Amendment Act are "Poor-Law Bastilles," while those who passed the Act are likened to "the perfumed seigneur delicately lounging in the Oeil-de-Boeuf" (CME, IV, 131). The Irishman is likened to a "Sanspotato" (CME, IV, 136), who, "in his squalor and unreason, in his falsity and drunken violence, [is] the ready-made nucleus of degradation and disorder" (CME, IV, 139). Yet, while Carlyle decries and

fears this revolutionary potential, he sees in it the embodiment of divine retribution: "England is guilty towards Ireland; and reaps at last, in full measure, the fruit of fifteen generations of wrong-doing" (CME, IV, 138). Turning to the French Revolution, Carlyle asserts that "he who would understand the struggling convulsive unrest of European society, in any and every country, may read it in broad glaring lines there, in that the most convulsive phenomenon of the last thousand years" (CME, IV, 150). It is by considering well the example of that Revolution, he continues, that England may escape its own violent conflagration:

> These Chartisms, Reform Bill, Tithe Bill, and infinite other discrepancy, and acrid argument and jargon that there is yet to be, are our French Revolution: God grant that we, with our better methods, may be able to transact it by argument alone! (CME, IV, 149-150)

The primary lesson that Carlyle draws from the French Revolution is that the democratic government which was instituted at the outset of the Revolution

> had to cease from being a free Parliament, and become more arbitrary than any Sultan Bajazet, before it could so much as subsist. It had to purge out its argumentative Girondins, elect its supreme Committee of Salut, and guillotine into silence and extinction all that gainsaid it, and rule and work literally by the sternest despotism ever seen in Europe, before it could rule at all. Napoleon was not president of a republic; Cromwell tried hard to rule in that way, but found that he could not. These, "the armed soldiers of democracy,' had to chain democracy under their feet, and become despots over it, before they could work out the earnest obscure purpose of democracy itself.
> (CME, IV, 159)

What Carlyle means by the "earnest obscure purpose of demo-
cracy" is somewhat vague, for he regards democracy as a
"self-cancelling business" (CME, IV, 158), "the consummation
of No-government and Laissez-faire" (CME, IV, 159), and looks
forward to the establishment of "government by the wisest"
(CME, IV, 159). What he seems to mean is that the clamour
for universal suffrage is, in fact, nothing other than a
series of "bellowings, inarticulate cries as of a dumb
creature in rage and pain," which "to the ear of wisdom
. . . are articulate prayers: 'Guide me, govern me! I am
mad and miserable, and cannot guide myself!'" (CME, IV,
157). Thus, the wise man should be able to interpret demo-
cratic urges in terms of their true significance, rather
than in terms of their superficial content, and, by opposing
the avowed demands of the populace, grant them what they
require--wise leadership. If, on the other hand, democracy
continues to develop, through the combined efforts of a
middle class committed to a policy of laissez-faire and a
working class determined to redress its grievances by
force, while the upper classes do nothing but shoot part-
ridges, then, Carlyle declares, chaos and revolution will
engulf England.

In the lectures, On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the
Heroic in History, which Carlyle delivered in 1840, he dev-
elops the idea that government by the wisest is the funda-

mental law of human society and has been established by divine decree. Although this belief may seem to have little to do with the ideas on periodicity which Carlyle had earlier expressed, it is essentially a revision of those ideas in light of the idea of eternal flux, which had earlier threatened to overwhelm them. As this revised belief forms the basis of Carlyle's subsequent writings, it is worth examining its genesis in some detail. In Signs of the Times and Characteristics, Carlyle had asserted that society was undergoing a process of rebirth, directed by the hand of divine providence. During the 1830s, however, he became more and more convinced that the forces which controlled the world were the indifferent ones of eternal flux. Nevertheless, he clung to a belief in a reality which transcended both the visible world and these invisible forces. Perception of this transcendent reality, he claimed, was the only way in which the forces which ruled the world could be overcome and controlled. A society based on this reality would be stable, but a society seeking to base its actions and beliefs on some other principle would be unable to control the forces of flux and would succumb to them. France in the late eighteenth century had succumbed to these forces through its reliance on shams, and Carlyle saw his society following the same road to ruin. In contrast to his earlier optimism, he did not come to see, in the overwhelming of

society by destructive forces, the promise of inevitable
rebirth. Left to themselves, these forces would eventually
wear society down and destroy it. The only way to halt de-
generation is for society to submit to the will of a div-
inely inspired leader, an heroic individual who has submitt-
ed his will to the Divine Will, and is thus capable of opp-
osing the forces of flux. Hero-worship becomes the means
whereby society is awakened to transcendent reality, per-
ception of which is the necessary prelude to regeneration:

> In times of unbelief, which soon have to become times
> of revolution, much down-rushing, sorrowful decay and
> ruin is visible to everybody. For myself, in these
> days, I seem to see in this indestructibility of Hero-
> worship the everlasting adamant lower than which the
> confused wreck of revolutionary things cannot fall.
> The confused wreck of things crumbling and even crash-
> ing and tumbling all round us in these revolutionary
> ages, will get down so far; no farther. It is an eter-
> nal corner-stone, from which they can begin to build
> themselves up again. That man, in some sense or other,
> worships Heroes; that we all of us reverence and must
> ever reverence Great Men: this is, to me, the living
> rock amid all rushings-down whatsoever;--the one fixed
> point in modern revolutionary history, otherwise as if
> bottomless and shoreless.   (HHW, p. 15)

But society does not, according to Carlyle, see this to be
true until it has been pointed out by the hero's imposition
of his will upon it:

> It is not to taste sweet things, but to do noble and
> true things, and vindicate himself under God's heaven
> as a god-made man, that the poorest son of Adam dimly
> longs. Show him the way of doing that, the dullest
> daydrudge kindles into a hero.   (HHW, p. 70)

The belief that hero-worship transforms the worshipper into
a hero is reiterated throughout the lectures, and it is

related to the idea that "the earnest obscure purpose of democracy" can only be achieved by "the armed soldiers of democracy," who "chain democracy under their feet, and become despots over it," in order to make man free (CME, IV, 159):

> In all this wild revolutionary work, from Protestant-ism downwards, I see the blessedest result preparing itself: not abolition of Hero-worship, but rather what I would call a whole World of Heroes. If Hero mean sincere man, why may not every one of us be a Hero? A world all sincere, a believing world: the like has been; the like again will be,--cannot help being.
>
> (HHW, p. 127)

This sounds very much like a return to the optimism of Signs of the Times and Characteristics, but, although confident promises of a new society, based on the indestructibility of hero-worship rather than periodicity, do recur throughout the work, this confidence is by no means maintained consistently. Thus, the vision of these lectures is inconsistent. While Carlyle never wavers in his conception of the hero, his attitude towards the future of society oscillates between optimism and despair. In contrast to the passage quoted above, we find passages like this:

> We will hail the French Revolution, as shipwrecked mariners might the sternest rock, in a world otherwise all of baseless sea and waves. A true Apocalypse, though a terrible one, to this false withered artificial time; testifying once more that Nature is preternatural; if not divine, then diabolical; that Semblance is not reality; that it has to become reality, or the world will take-fire under it,--burn it into what it is, namely Nothing! Plausibility has ended; empty Routine has ended; much has ended. This, as with a Trump of Doom, has been proclaimed to all men. They are the wisest who will learn it soonest. Long confused gener-

ations before it be learned; peace impossible till it
be! The earnest man, surrounded, as ever, with a world
of inconsistencies, can await patiently, patiently
strive to do <u>his</u> work, in the midst of that.

(HHW, pp. 201-202)

One of the problems encountered in attempting to de-
fine Carlyle's vision in these lectures, and elsewhere, lies
in his concept of Nature. Earlier, I drew a distinction be-
tween the forces of eternal flux which govern the world and
the divine vision which can transcend those forces. Although
this distinction, which owes a debt to traditional Christian
doctrine, is implied by Carlyle, he never actually makes it,
and, in fact, uses the word "Nature" in various contexts to
define both the forces of flux and the forces which can tran-
scend them--or, in other words, Nature and Supernature. What
this indicates is a conflict in Carlyle's vision between
Romanticism and Christianity. Romanticism fostered a belief
in "Natural Supernaturalism," in which a fusion of opposites
creates a unity which transcends those opposites. Christian-
ity, on the other hand, posits a deity who is not the prod-
uct of any such fusion, but stands above the fallen world
of opposition and mutability. It is clear that any system
which attempts to reconcile these two beliefs, without the
subordination of one to the other, will run into major
difficulties. However, Carlyle's dual inheritance led him
to an attempted fusion of the two, which, in fact, ends in
confusion, since he never made any thoroughgoing attempt to
reconcile them. One consequence of this was that he came to

see the "Nature" of Romanticism, based on flux and tension,
and manifested in such events as the French Revolution, as
a daemonic force, and the "Nature" (or "Supernature") of the
Divine Will, transcending the fallen world, and manifested
in the heroic individual, as a celestial force. This, how-
ever, did not lead him back to Christianity, for he was
unable to reject the idea that the "Nature" of Romanticism
was divine. What he was left with was, in effect, a dys-
functional Romanticism, in which the daemonic and the div-
ine, forever inseparable elements of what he called "Nat-
ure," failed to produce from the tension between them any-
thing but a dialectic of confusion and despair. Man, for
Carlyle, was stranded in a world of semblance, alienated,
and only able to save himself from total despair by pati-
ently striving to do his work, "surrounded, as ever, with a
world of inconsistencies" (HHW, p. 202).

In Past and Present (1843), Nature and God appear to
be almost synonymous, and it is from the tension inherent in
this identification that the fundamental ambiguity of the
work springs. As in Sartor Resartus, there is a dialectic
process at work in the book, in this case a vacillation be-
tween optimism and despair, which never finally resolves
itself. Although this stems from an identification of
Chr nity and Romanticism, this identification, and its
failure chieve synthesis, does not represent a failure

of vision on Carlyle's part. As we have seen, his character-
istic mode is dialectical, and a failure to reconcile elem-
ents within his work is part of its point. He does not
leave us with a vision of a totally meaningless universe,
but with a vision of a world full of uncertainties and in-
scrutable purposes in which the individual must strive to
remain true to an inner vision. For Carlyle, this struggle
did lead to despair, but he never fully submitted to the
vision of man irrevocably alienated within a meaningless
cosmos which developed in the latter half of the nineteenth
century. For him, the hope always remained that the indiv-
idual could impose order on the world, shape it in his own
image. That he came increasingly to see this as possible
only through the implementation of a military dictatorship
reflects his growing awareness of the magnitude of the
forces which opposed such an attempt.

The overall tone of Past and Present is one of
urgency. Carlyle adopts the mantle of the prophet of God--and
Nature:

> A God's-message never came to thicker-skinned people;
> never had a God's-message to pierce through thicker in-
> teguments, into heavier ears. It is Fact, speaking once
> more, in miraculous thunder-voice, from out the centre
> of the world;--how unknown its language to the deaf and
> foolish many; how distinct, undeniable, terrible and yet
> beneficent, to the hearing few: Behold, ye shall grow
> wiser, or ye shall die! Truer to Nature's Fact, or inane
> Chimera will swallow you.   (PP, p. 29)

The road to wisdom must start, of course, with the regener-
ation of the individual: "Thou shalt descend into thy inner

man, and see if there be any traces of a soul there; till
then there can be nothing done" (PP, p. 26). It is up to
the individual whether society will be transformed or
whether it will be plunged into the abyss, for, at the
"centre of the universal Social Gangrene" is the man who
"has lost the soul out of him" (PP, p. 137). He must recov-
er it, or else society is doomed. Throughout Past and Pres-
ent, Carlyle utters apocalyptic prophecies, but stresses
that the nature of the apocalypse to come will be determin-
ed by human actions. The only thing certain is that an apoc-
alypse will occur. For it to be glorious, man must prepare
the way for it:

> One wide and widest "outline" ought really, in all ways,
> to be becoming clear to us: this namely: That a "Splen-
> dour of God," in one form or other, will have to unfold
> itself from the heart of these Industrial Ages . . . or
> they will never get themselves "organised"; but continue
> chaotic, distressed, distracted evermore, and have to
> perish in frantic suicidal dissolution.   (PP, p. 250)

Personal regeneration involves the revival of hero-worship:

> Yes, friends: Hero-kings, and a whole world not unhero-
> ic,--there lies the port and happy haven towards which,
> through all these stormtost seas, French Revolutions,
> Chartisms, Manchester Insurrections, that make the
> heart sick in these bad days, the Supreme Powers are
> driving us. On the whole, blessed be the Supreme Powers,
> stern as they are! Towards that haven will we, O
> friends;let all true men, with what of faculty is in
> them, bend valiantly, incessantly, with thousand-fold
> endeavour, thither, thither! There, or else in the
> Ocean-abysses, it is clear to me, we shall arrive.
> (PP, p. 36)

How, it may be asked, is there any chance of arriving in
the Ocean-abysses, when the Supreme Powers are driving us

towards the happy haven? The answer is that Carlyle is
again working in a dialectical mode, changing in mid-para-
graph from asserting that we are being driven towards a
glorious millennium to declaring that we will have to get
there by our own efforts or not at all. So, while the Div-
ine Powers do drive us towards that goal, if we choose to
oppose them, they will wreak their vengeance on us.

Carlyle's grievances against his society in Past and
Present are largely the same as those voiced in Chartism:
"Man has lost the soul out of him" (PP, p. 137), "has his
head filled with the notion that he is, shall be, or by all
human and divine laws ought to be 'happy'" (PP, p. 153),
and with his "Enlightened Philosophies" dismisses "Enthusi-
asms, Self-sacrifice, Heaven, Hell and suchlike" as some-
thing belonging to the "old stupid times" (PP, p. 187). Yet
man is "miserable, . . . heart-worn, weary, yet isolated,
unrelated, girt-in with a cold universal Laissez-faire"; he
dies slowly all his life long, "imprisoned in a deaf, dead,
Infinite Justice, as in the accursed iron belly of a Phal-
aris' Bull!" (PP, pp.210-211). "Aristocracy has become
Phantasm-Aristocracy, no longer able to do its work, not in
the least conscious that it has any work to do" (PP, p.
140). Deprived of leadership, society becomes "nomadic"
(PP, p. 277) and man is "cut off, . . . left solitary" in
"a world alien," with "neither superior, nor inferior, nor
equal, united manlike" to him (PP, p. 274). Carlyle sees

amid all this "a handwriting as of MENE, MENE" (PP, p. 178), and exhorts those wallowing in the "Hell of England" (PP, p. 270) to bestir themselves, ironically recalling Satan's address to the fallen angels in Paradise Lost (I, 330): "Awake, O nightmare sleepers; awake, arise, or be forever fallen" (PP, p. 272).

The way to deal with a society rushing headlong towards the abyss was clear to Carlyle. Just as "you do not allow a palpable madman to leap over precipices . . . and keep him, were it in straight-waistcoats, you that are wise" (PP, p. 212), you should not allow a mad society to follow its inclinations, but restrain it, using force if necessary. Carlyle calls on heroes to arise and bind society, to direct it towards a noble goal. No longer hopeful that heroic leadership can come from a do-nothing Aristocracy, he looks to the Captains of Industry to form a new Aristocracy, and to carry out the measures he describes in the last section of Past and Present. He proposes that labour should be organized on "the principle of Permanent Contract instead of Temporary"--"the basis from which all organisation has hitherto grown up among men, and henceforth will have to grow" (PP, p. 277). This done, "some 'Chivalry of Labour,' some noble Humanity and practical Divineness of Labour, will yet be realised on this Earth" (PP, p. 296); "bubble periods, with their panics and commercial crises, will again become infrequent; steady modest industry will

take the place of gambling speculation" (PP, p. 271). He

looks to the military to provide the model for the principle

of organization:

> I could conceive an Emigration Service, a Teaching
> Service, considerable varieties of United Services, of
> the due thousands strong, all effective as this Fight-
> ing Service is; all doing their work, like it;--which
> work, much more than fighting, is henceforth the nec-
> essity of these New Ages we are got into! Much lies
> among us, convulsively, nigh desperately struggling to
> be born. (PP, p. 262)

If the final vision of Past and Present is one of qualified

optimism, it is because of the confidence Carlyle places in

those who have shown that they can work. Work is exalted

throughout the book as the only form of nobility--a verit-

able revelation of the divine upon earth:

> Unstained by wasteful deformities, by wasted tears or
> heart's-blood of men, or any defacement of the Pit,
> noble fruitful Labour, growing ever nobler, will come
> forth,-- the grand sole miracle of Man; whereby Man has
> risen from the low places of this Earth, very literally,
> into Divine Heaven. . . . All martyrs, and noble men,
> are gods of one grand Host; immeasurable; marching
> everforward since the beginnings of the World.
>
> (PP, p. 298)

Carlyle's next major social pronouncement, Latter-

Day Pamphlets, was published in 1850. Although its message

does not differ substantially from that of Past and Present,

its tone, as the title suggests, is much more pessimistic.

In large part, this increased pessimism can be attributed to

the impact upon Carlyle of the events of 1848, when "all

Europe exploded, boundless, uncontrollable. . . . Not since

the irruption of the Northern Barbarians has there been the

like. Everywhere immeasurable Democracy rose monstrous,
loud, blatant, inarticulate as the voice of Chaos" (LDP,
p. 5). The Year of Revolutions testified "too sadly on
what a bottomless volcano, or universal powder-mine of
most inflammable, mutinous chaotic elements, separated from
us by a thin earth-rind, Society with all its arrangements
and requirements everywhere, in the present epoch, rests!"
(LDP, p. 7) Surveying the contemporary scene, Carlyle sees
only the process of flux at work:

> In such baleful oscillation, afloat as amid raging
> bottomless eddies and conflicting sea-currents, not
> steadfast as on fixed foundations, must European Soci-
> ety continue swaying, now disastrously tumbling, then
> painfully readjusting itself, at ever shorter intervals,
> --till once the new rock-basis does come to light, and
> the weltering deluges of mutiny, and of need to mutiny,
> abate again.   (LDP, p. 8)

However, England,

> alone of all, not yet sunk into open Anarchy, but left
> with time for repentance and amendment; she, wealthiest
> of all in material resource, in spiritual energy, in
> ancient loyalty to law, and in the qualities that
> yield such loyalty,--she perhaps of all may be able,
> with huge travail, and the strain of all her faculties,
> to accomplish some solution.   (LDP, p. 31)

It is not, of course, to parliamentary reform, enfranchise-
ment, and "benevolent philanderings" (LDP, p. 27) that Car-
lyle looks for salvation, for they can only lead to "a
speedy finale far different from salvation" (LDP, p. 214).
From such sources come only cries of "Supply-and-Demand,
Leave-it-alone, Voluntary Principle, Time will mend it:--
till British industrial existence seems fast becoming one

huge poison-swamp of reeking pestilence physical and moral;

a hideous <u>living</u> Golgotha of souls and bodies buried alive"

(<u>LDP</u>, p. 27). These are the cries which dominate the vision

of <u>Latter-Day Pamphlets</u>. If these "days of endless calam-

ity, disruption, dislocation, confusion worse confounded,"

Carlyle says, "are not days of endless hope too, then they

are days of utter despair" (<u>LDP</u>, p. 1). However much virtue

there may be in "if," it does not save Carlyle's vision

from despair. The future of England is seen in terms of de-

generation rather than regeneration.

The land Carlyle describes is a spectral wasteland,

similar to that which Browning's Childe Roland was to

traverse:

> A terrible <u>new</u> country this: no neighbours in it yet,
> that I can <u>see</u>, but irrational flabby monsters (phil-
> anthropic and other) of the giant species; hyaenas,
> laughing hyaenas, predatory wolves; probably devils,
> blue (or perhaps blue-and-yellow) devils, as St. Guth-
> lac found in Croyland long ago. A huge untrodden hagg-
> ard country, the "chaotic battle-field of Frost and
> Fire"; a country of savage glaciers, granite mountains,
> of foul jungles, unhewed forests, quaking bogs;--
> which we shall have our own ados to make arable and
> habitable, I think!   (<u>LDP</u>, pp. 46-47)

In such a landscape, Carlyle takes on the mantle of an

Ezekiel:

> Like the valley of Jehoshaphat, it lies round us, one
> nightmare wilderness, and wreck of dead-men's bones,
> this false modern world; and no rapt Ezekiel in proph-
> etic vision imagined to himself things sadder, more
> horrible and terrible, than the eyes of men, if they
> <u>are</u> awake, may now deliberately see.   (<u>LDP</u>, p. 313)

And the ears of men, if they are awake, may hear, in the

"expatriated vanities and prurient imbecilities" of modern

literature, a

> canaille of all the loud-sounding levities, and general
> winnowings of Chaos, marching through the world in a
> most ominous manner; proclaiming . . . : "Twelfth hour
> of the Night; ancient graves yawning; pale clammy Pusey-
> isms screeching into their winding-sheets; owls busy in
> the City regions; many goblins abroad! Awake, ye living;
> dream no more; arise to judgement! Chaos and Gehenna are
> broken loose; the Devil with his Bedlams must be flung
> in chains again, and the Last of Days is about to dawn!"
> <div align="right">(<u>LDP</u>, p. 191)</div>

While Carlyle reiterates the assertion, throughout

<u>Latter-Day Pamphlets</u>, that hero-worship must return to the

world if it is to be saved, his hope that it will return

all but succumbs to a vision of universal desolation and

impending doom, hardly distinguishable from that of an

Evangelical Christian prophesying the end of the world.

While there are still heroes, there are none to heed them;

they must struggle through and against the world, alienated

from it, threatened by it, like Bunyan's pilgrim, powerless

to effect change, with their eyes fixed on a heavenly rather

than an earthly goal:

> With pious valour this free man walks through the roar-
> ing tumults, invincibly, the way whither he is bound.
> To him in the waste Saharas, through the grim solitudes
> peopled by galvanised corpses and doleful creatures,
> there is a loadstar; and his path, whatever those of
> others be, is towards the Eternal. . . . He will retire
> . . . into deserts and rocky inaccessibilities, compan-
> ion to wild beasts, to the dumb granites and eternal
> stars, far from you and your affairs. You and your
> affairs, once well quit of him, go by a swift and ever
> swifter road.   (<u>LDP</u>, pp. 251-253)

In the final pages of the work, even this brand of heroism succumbs to pessimism. In a passage prophetic of attitudes which were to become dominant in the latter years of the century, Carlyle abandons the notion that the heroic can again rule in the world, and declares that, in the face of universal degeneration, ennui is the only legitimate response:

> The restless gnawing ennui which, like a dark dim ocean-flood, communicating with the Phlegethons and Stygian deeps, begirdles every human life. . . --is it not the painful cry even of that imprisoned heroism? . . . be thankful for your ennui; it is your last mark of manhood; this at least is a perpetual admonition, and true sermon preached to you. From the chair of verity this, whatever chairs be chairs of cantity. Happiness is not come; ennui, with its great waste ocean-voice, moans answer, Never, never. That ocean-voice, I tell you, is a great fact, it comes from Phlegethon and the gates of the Abyss; its bodeful never-resting inexorable moan is the voice of primeval Fate, and of the eternal necessity of things. . . . Mount into your railways; whirl from place to place, at the rate of fifty, or if you like of five hundred miles an hour: you cannot escape from the inexorable all-encircling ocean-moan of ennui. No: if you would mount to the stars, and do yacht-voyages under the belts of Jupiter, or stalk deer on the ring of Saturn, it would still begirdle you. You cannot escape from it, you can but change your place in it, without solacement except one moment's. That prophetic Sermon from the Deeps will continue with you, till you wisely interpret and do it, or else till the Crack of Doom swallow it and you. Adieu. Au revoir. (LDP, pp. 335-337)

It is this feeling of ennui which dominates Latter-Day Pamphlets. The vision of a nobler future is overwhelmed by the vision of a contemptible present. The hero envisaged by Carlyle in the work has, as Albert La Valley says, "gained in power, in absolutism, in titanic will, but this increase

is purely theoretical and visionary, for, practically, he has become more powerless than ever."[56] The doom of the world has been pronounced, and the true man can only tire himself with sackcloth and ashes and betake him to the deserts of ennui.

Carlyle survived the writing of Latter-Day Pamphlets by thirty-one years and, during this period, his gloom and pessimism slowly deepened. Thirteen of these years were devoted to the monumental biography of Frederick the Great, in which he set forth "the ideal of a real toughening and hardening of self that can be cherished and viewed as a conquest by the heroic individual over the society that attempts to alienate and kill his prophetic voice."[57] Carlyle's social pronouncements were few and far between in these years, but those that he did make, such as the Inaugural Address at Edinburgh in 1866, show that the desperate vision of Latter-Day Pamphlets remained with him for the rest of his life:

> Look where one will, revolution has come upon us. We have got into the age of revolutions. All kinds of things are coming to be subjected to fire, as it were: hotter and hotter blows the element round everything. . . . It is evident that whatever is not inconsumable, made of asbestos, will have to be burnt, in this world. Nothing other will stand the heat it is getting exposed to.
>   And in saying this, I am but saying in other words that we are in an epoch of anarchy. . . . Man is becoming more and more the son, not of Cosmos, but of Chaos. (CME, IV, 447)

III

TENNYSON, 1809-1847: THE DIALECTICS OF GRADUALISM

Although Tennyson and Carlyle may seem, on the face
of it, to be poles apart, Tennyson's poetry reflects the
same concerns which inform Carlyle's fiery prose.[1] The fig-
ure which dominates Tennyson's poetry is that of the apoc-
alyptic marriage. In its purest form, this figure can be
seen at the end of The Princess (1847) and In Memoriam
(1850), and in The Coming of Arthur (1869), yet it also
serves as a controlling metaphor for Tennyson's attempts to
reconcile past and present, heroism and democracy, and God
and man. Ultimately, Tennyson's efforts to conceive of an
apocalyptic reconciliation of warring elements within the
world failed. He came to see that the only reconciliation
possible was one between the individual and God. Thus, re-
generation on an individual level would not lead to the re-
generation of society, only to the union of the individual
with God. The regenerated individual remained an alienated
being in a world forever fallen.

Yet, Tennyson, like Carlyle, did not propose that
man should withdraw from the world in despair as Percivale
does in the Idylls of the King (1857-85). He asserted that
man could achieve regeneration only through self-realizat-

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ion and had to work in the world in order to attain this self-realization. As he conceived of God in terms of the highest attributes of man, self-realization was the process by which the individual could apprehend the nature of God and achieve union with Him.

Before he left Somsersby for Cambridge at the age of eighteen, Tennyson was largely cut off from the outside world and the poems he wrote during this period derive their inspiration almost exclusively from his immediate environment--from the world of literature and the tribulat-ions of his family group.[2] "Armageddon" (1931), written in his early teens, shows the influence of a chiliastic Evangelicalism similar to that which Carlyle was exposed to in his youth, yet, as Dwight Culler says, it also shows that, even at this age, Tennyson was "moving away from the more graphic version of Christianity in which he had been raised toward a liberal or Broad Church position which re-jected all forms, creeds, or definitions of the divine."[3] The apocalypticism to which he was exposed in his youth did leave a permanent mark on him, however. Jacob Korg comments on the frequency with which his poems "fall into a pattern of sudden and disastrous change, describing power passing into impotence, ripeness into decay and maturity into death, not by the natural action of time, but through swift and inexplicable catastrophe."[4] Culler argues that Tennyson

ultimately returned to his early apocalypticism, declaring
that he began "as a catastrophist under the shadow of Mil-
ton and the great Romantics, . . . moved in his middle
years toward uniformitarianism but then, as darkness settled
over his vision, moved back toward catastrophism again."[5]

"Armageddon" is ostensibly a vision of the imminent
destruction of the world by a providential God, but it is
set in a remote, mythical landscape and is actually about
the soul of the prophetic visionary. The persona of the
poem declares, "Yea! in that hour I could have fallen down /
Before my own strong soul and worshipped it" (II, 50), and,
although the poem ends with the world heaving "with tumult-
uous throbbings on the vast / Suspense of some great issue"
(IV, 33-34), the reader is left with the impression that
this "great issue" will not be the Battle of Armageddon but
the seer's communication of his vision to the world. As
David Goslee says, in the "central vision . . . he is no
longer . . . even aware of Armageddon; his visionary power
allows him personally to upstage it."[6] Here, then, is a
foreshadowing of the conviction which was to grow upon
Tennyson at Cambridge, that the words of the inspired poet
could lead the world onward to the achievement of its
millennial potential. He was never to be quite so unequi-
vocally Biblical again and, if we reconsider "Armageddon,"
it is not hard to see why. Although it is inspired by the

imagery of the Biblical Apocalypse, its message hardly
squares with Biblical tradition. At the heart of the poem is
the seer's vision of a divine force which can be used by man
to achieve his inner potential. At the end of the poem,
there is no anticipation of the fiery destruction of the
world, only the implication that the world will be renewed
by heeding the message of the visionary.

The mode of "Armageddon" is pseudo-Miltonic; in The
Devil and the Lady (1930), written at about the same time,
Tennyson employed the mode of Jacobean comedy. Apart from its
technical accomplishment, this unfinished play is remarkable
for its adolescent treatment of themes which were to occupy
Tennyson for the rest of his life. The doting, jealous hus-
band and the unfaithful wife participate in actions which
reveal their motives and between them moves the devil, whose
chief function is to meditate on these actions and on the
nature of man. These two early works can be seen, in the
light of Tennyson's later poetry, to complement each other,
but at this stage they exist in total isolation one from the
other. The visionary, with his unformulated message, remains
on his promontory, inhibited, like St. Simeon Stylites, by
the evangelical imperative; human relationships take place
far below and, tied to the outmoded conventions of Jacobean
comedy, fail to reach any satisfactory outcome. Thus, the
comedy ends not with the ringing of marriage bells but with

an abrupt "have at ye, Sirs!" (III, iii, 63), which would

be alarming if the reader did not already feel that it had

nowhere else to go.

The other poems written by Tennyson at Somersby are

shorter and less ambitious than these two works. Many of

them are laments for fallen empires and all of them express

sadness at the passing of time. Although Tennyson later de-

clared that this "passion of the past" was not derived from

"books and philosophies," but a Wordsworthian sense of

"divine farewell" ("The Ancient Sage" (1885), ll. 219, 218,

225), it seems reasonable to conclude that it came largely

from his retreat from the pressures of life at Somersby

into the golden world of history and myth. Besides, much

contemporary literature, that of Byron and Scott, for

example, was filled with historical nostalgia. In these

poems, Tennyson began to formulate the historical paradigm

which was to remain with him throughout his life. His

fascination with empires during their decline or after

their fall reveals a cyclical view of history, similar to

that proposed by Sir Thomas Browne.[7] By the time he wrote

these poems, Tennyson had abandoned the evangelical view

that secular history is congruent with divine history.

Without rejecting the Biblical pattern of history, he had

discovered that it operated on a different plane from

secular history, which was governed by the laws of flux. At

this stage, his historical consciousness was still largely
inchoate, the product of romantic escapism and self-indulg-
ent melancholia rather than philosphical speculation. When
he went up to Cambridge, however, he found that the notion
of historical periodicity was being widely debated and,
given this stimulus, his historical consciousness rapidly
matured.[8]

Put simply, the philosophy of history that Tennyson
developed at Cambridge was this. Secular history is governed
by the same laws of flux which determine individual exist-
ence. Each epoch rises and falls and is succeeded by another
ad infinitum. At a predetermined moment, with no reference
to this pattern, divine history will enter the realm of
secular history and terminate its existence, establishing
a non-temporal rule over all creation. This moment is in-
calculable because of man's bounded consciousness, due to
his existence in time. To presume to understand the sequence
of divine history is an act of blasphemy and is thus doomed
to failure. Although man is, by nature, subject to the laws
of flux, he has the ability to control the process of flux
and, by controlling it, to transcend it. To control it, he
first has to gain knowledge of the laws which govern it and
then direct it by the exercise of his higher faculties. In
the realm of secular history, this man is the hero and,
given the natural tendency of secular history to meaningless

recurrence, it is he who imposes onto it a progressive form by directing man to achieve the potential of which his higher nature is capable.

In the early 1830s, Tennyson felt that his age was singularly unheroic, yet, like Carlyle, he believed that the world was on the brink of an epochal change, during which his heroic utterances would help to mould a new society. Deprived of the adulation of his Cambridge associates, this idealism did not survive long, but the philosophy of history upon which it was based remained fundamentally the same until the end. There were basic problems with Tennyson's conception of the hero, however. For a start, Tennyson was against any form of revolutionary activity.[9] He did, it is true, play a minor role in the abortive Spanish uprising of 1830, but he would have seen this as a defence of violated liberty, rather than as a revolution on the French model. He was a supporter of such insurrections throughout his life, writing occasional defences of them, the two earliest being the lines "Written During the Convulsions in Spain" and an "Exhortation to the Greeks" (1827), the latest being "Montenegro" (1877). Signs of revolutionary activity in England in the months leading up to the passage of the Reform Bill in 1832 were not looked on favourably by him, although, unlike Carlyle, he welcomed the Bill's passage.

While Tennyson fully endorsed the need for change

in English society, he insisted that it should be gradual.
The extension of liberty to all he saw as the ultimate goal
of human endeavour, yet he was fully aware that any attempt
to speed up the process of such extension would be self-
defeating and end in tyranny. It was in England that he saw
most hope for the realization of the ideal of liberty and
he looked with scorn and fear on those who wanted to dis-
mantle England's time-honoured mechanism for the gradual
extension of liberty. He gave voice to these feelings in
"Hail Briton" (1949), which, as Dwight Culler says, "gives
a slightly liberalized version of the thought of Burke."[10]
The salutation of the title is not intended as a tribute
to British power but to the tradition of free speech, which
he felt was threatened. In the poem, he looks back to the
previous generation, who lived in "an hour of rest" (l. 21):

> A stiller time thy fathers saw
>   When each man by his hearth could sit,
>   And lightly round his will were knit
> The cords of order and of law.
>   (ll. 25-28)

He interrupts this reverie to point out the disadvantages
of this kind of stability:

> But in the land diseases grew
>   From want of motion which is meet,
>   And power that still should change and fleet
> Had festered in the hands of few.   (ll. 29-32)

The worst consequence of this stagnation has been the pre-
cipitate haste with which many now want to sweep aside
this legacy, not merely lopping off the rotten branch, but

uprooting the reverend oak of the English constitution. Eng-
land is at the mercy of

> Men loud against all forms of power,
>   Unfurnisht foreheads, iron lungs,
>   And voluble with windy tongues
> To compass all things in an hour.
>
> Still changing, whom no change can please,
>   Despotic hearts reviling kings,
>   They deal with names and know not things
> And handle types of emptiness. (ll. 49-56)

These men, if they are allowed to pursue their visionary
utopia, will drag society down to a dependence on the laws
of flux. As such they are anti-heroes, dismantling the work
of the heroes of the past. One of these heroes is Hampden,
and it is with him that Tennyson compares them:

> Not such was Hampden when he broke
>   Indignant from a single life,
>   A single voice before the strife
> That, as it were a people, spoke:
>
> In whom the spirit of law prevailed
>   To war with edicts, and increased
>   By losing, but the mission ceased
> In Chalgrove, and the glory failed.
>   (ll. 57-64)

Hampden differs from the modern anti-hero, who attempts to
shake "the trust / Of all prerogative to dust" (ll. 66-67),
in that he was, in Henry Kozicki's words, "an embodiment of
general social change brought about by all the people."[11]
Basing his convictions on historical precedent, he attempt-
ed to further the progress of democracy by implementing
gradual reform. The anti-hero, concerned only with achieving
the final goal of democracy, seeks to destroy the existing

constitution and, by doing so, to destroy the only means by which democracy can be attained.

In the poem, "I loving freedom for herself" (1969), Tennyson spells out this message even more plainly. Aware that imminent change of a radical nature is inevitable, he declares that society can look to it with hope only if the nation's leaders are heroic enough to superintend it, rather than merely succumbing to it and abandoning the constitution:

> I trust the leaders of the land
>   May well surmount the coming shock
> By climbing steps their fathers carved
>   Within the living rock.
>
> The state within herself concludes
>   The power to change, as in the seed,
> The model of her future form,
>   And liberty indeed.
>
> A mightier change may come to pass,
>   Than ever yet their fathers saw
> To those that change by just degrees
>   With reason and with law.
>   (ll. 13-24)

If reason and law are not maintained in the face of rapid change, if, in other words, the nation's leaders perceive this change as a benign historical force which will rush them forward to an imagined millennium, then society is doomed. As the tendency of secular history is to a meaningless recurrence, progress within history has to be maintained in the face of the historical imperative, for it is at odds with it. If it is not maintained, it will be

eroded by the forces of flux. Although these forces can be
seen as essentially indifferent, they become malignant as
soon as the heroic will comes into contact with them, for
they threaten to cancel out the imposition of that will
upon history. Thus, Tennyson asks,

> What baser than a land that falls
>   From freedom crying on her name
> Through cycles of disastrous change
>   To forge the links of shame?
>
> The full-drawn circle meets itself--
>   The waves are laid, the winds are gone:
> The tyranny of all begins
>   The tyranny of one.   (11. 29-36)

Tennyson's belief that the role of the hero in the
modern world was to further the progress of democracy left
him in a dilemma, for such a belief implied the obsolescence
of the traditional heroic ideal. Ulysses has to give way to
Telemachus and the visionary poet of Armageddon has to
descend from his mountain peak to work within the narrower
field of social reform. Thus, there is an unresolved dial-
ectic in Tennyson's early poetry, between a belief in the
gradual extension of democracy and a belief that such an
extension entails the eclipse of the heroic ideal and signi-
fies movement towards a less noble form of social organiz-
ation. In poems such as "The Lady of Shalott" (1832) and
"The Palace of Art" (1832) Tennyson attempted to express
this dialectic tension in terms of his own heroic mission.
It was clear to him that he had to descend from lofty isol-

ation, to effect a marriage between his prophetic soul and
the hostile world of immediate social reality, yet he feared
that the latter would engulf the former.

In "The Dying Swan" (1830) this dilemma is made
clear. The poem is set in a gloomy, featureless, and opp-
ressive landscape, which can be taken as a metaphor for
contemporary society:

> The plain was grassy, wild and bare,
> Wide, wild, and open to the air,
> Which had built up everywhere
> An under-roof of doleful gray.
> (ll. 1-4)

In the midst of this desolation runs a river "with inner
voice" (l. 5), bearing a dying swan, whose song translates
this "inner voice" into a "lament" (l. 7). In the second
stanza our attention is directed away from the plain to the
"crowning snows" (l. 12) of distant peaks, from whence, it
may be presumed, the river has descended. As in Shelley's
"Mont Blanc" (1817), these peaks represent the source of
poetic inspiration, while the river and the swansong which
emanates from it represent the translation of this inspir-
ation into terms comprehensible to society. The swansong
has the effect of revivifying the landscape, which is de-
described in anthropomorphic terms. A willow weeps, the wave
sighs, a swallow chases itself "at its own wild will" (l.
17), and, although the "tangled water-courses" (l. 19)
sleep, they are "shot over with purple, and green, and

yellow" (1. 20). At the beginning of the third stanza the
effect of the song on the landscape is expressed directly:

> The wild swan's death-hymn took the soul
> Of that waste place with joy
> Hidden in sorrow.   (11. 21-23)

And then, in a sudden transition, the controlling metaphor
of the poem generates a simile which reveals its tenor:

> But anon her awful jubilant voice,
> With a music strange and manifold,
> Flowed forth on a carol free and bold;
> As when a mighty people rejoice
> With shawms, and with cymbals, and harps of gold,
> And the tumult of their acclaim is rolled
> Through the open gates of the city afar,
> To the shepherd who watcheth the evening star.
>   (11. 28-35)

Thus, we are left with a picture of a society revivified by
the poet's song and fulfilling its heroic potential. Yet
this is merely implicit in the poem and, at the same time,
it is heavily qualified. The swan is dying, the poem is
rooted in the world of poetic myth, and the transition to
social reality is not wholly convincing. Besides, the
society described seems to belong to the pages of the Old
Testament rather than to the nineteenth century. Neverthe-
less, "The Dying Swan" is, as Dwight Culler points out, the
most optimistic of the poems dealing with the role of the
poet in society which Tennyson wrote in the early 1830s.[12]

    "The Lady of Shalott" is a more thoroughgoing
attempt to deal with this problem. On one level an allegory
of the poetic soul, it is, on another level, an exploration

of the theme of marriage. Hallam Tennyson declared, on his
father's authority, that "the key to this tale of magic
'symbolism' is of deep human significance, and is to be
found in the lines:

> Or when the moon was overhead,
> Came two young lovers lately wed;
> 'I am half sick of shadows,' said
> The Lady of Shalott."[13]

It is the metaphor of marriage which sustains the entire
poem. On a literal level, the Lady leaves her bower stirred
by the prospect of union with Lancelot. The seeming im-
plausibility of this union is, as Dwight Culler says, under-
cut by "one image of powerful sexuality, . . .

> The helmet and the helmet-feather
> Burn'd like one burning flame together,

which suggests that, like the human lovers, union for them
is possible."[14]   On a metaphorical level, it is the poetic
soul which leaves its Palace of Art stirred by the prospect
of involvement in the social sphere. However, the literal
meaning of the poem does not serve a purely metaphorical
function. The poem's strength is derived from the recognit-
ion of congruity between the poet's achievement of an hero-
ic role within society and the achievement of marital union
upon which an heroic society must be founded. In each case,
the figure of the apocalyptic marriage is implicit, and in
each case consummation is thwarted by the opposition of the
very thing with which union is desired. As David Shaw says,

at a certain level, "the poem is about thwarted transition:

the failure to develop a merely potential existence into an

actual one."[15] Thus, the hostile natural environment through

which the Lady travels and which destroys her can be seen as

a symbol for social hostility to the heroic endeavour. When

society is eventually confronted with her (in the 1832 vers-

ion of the poem) it finds only the words pinned to her

breast which signify the failure of her vision. As Paul

Turner says, "she does not influence, but merely puzzles

her unimaginative readers:"[16]

> They crossed themselves, their stars they blest,
> Knight, minstrel, abbot, squire and guest.
> There lay a parchment on her breast,
> That puzzled more than all the rest,
>   The wellfed wits at Camelot.
> 'The web was woven curiously
> The charm is broken utterly,
> Draw near and fear not--this is I,
>   The Lady of Shalott.'   (ll. 168-171)

As Dwight Culler says, the "wellfed wits" can only recog-

nize that the Lady is "a visitant from a world they [do]

not understand--a world of the sacred, the divine, the mag-

ical."[17] They are unable to respond to the visitation with

anything but bemusement. Thus, "The Lady of Shalott" can be

seen as a poem of protest against a society which has de-

generated too far to apprehend the means of its own recovery.

Even at this stage in Tennyson's career we can see that he

is already questioning the viability of the heroic quest in

the modern world.[18]

There is no indication in "The Lady of Shalott,"
however, that the Lady should remain in her tower, nor that
the poet should remain aloof from society. Her embowered
existence is, it is true, extremely compelling. As Dwight
Culler says, "had she lived in reality she would have been
confined to one single existence, but living vicariously in
her imagination she can participate in all forms and con-
ditions of life."[19] Yet the world she imagines is, for all
its appearance of reality, as unreal as the figures on
Keats's urn. The Lancelot she sees riding through an arcad-
ian landscape bears no relationship to the knight who re-
ceives her at the end of her journey.[20] She inhabits a
world without change and the world she attempts to enter
when she crosses to her window is not the real world but
the timeless world of her imagination, the world which, as
Dwight Culler says, she has evolved out of her "conscious-
ness."[21] This world is destroyed by direct confrontation
with the real, mutable world, and its destruction is signi-
fied by one powerful and concise image--"she saw the water-
lily bloom" (1. 111).[22] This does not mean that Tennyson
denies significance to the imaginative vision which has
been woven into the tapestry, any more than Keats would
have denied significance to the figures on his urn. It is
an inadequate vision, but only because it lacks a viable
connexion with the outside world. However, Tennyson implies

that the outside world is even more inadequate because of
its lack of connexion with this vision. The Lady creates,
in effect, a vision of an organic society, complete with
heroic knight, yet, when she attempts to relate her vision
to society, "the charm is broken utterly" (1. 169). Tenny-
son must have felt himself to be made of sterner stuff than
his mournful maiden, yet his recognition that the duty of
the heroic individual to lead his society was a thankless
task in the unheroic nineteenth century does emerge from
the poem.

"The Palace of Art" is thematically related to the
"Lady of Shalott," although in this poem Tennyson is con-
cerned to show the fate of the poetic vision when it remains
consciously aloof from society. The anthropomorphized soul
reigns, like Lucifera in Spenser's House of Pride, in splen-
did isolation and indifference. The palace stands as a monu-
ment to the achievements of mankind, yet these achievements
serve as a model for aesthetic contemplation rather than
action. The soul declares,

> I take possession of man's mind and deed.
>   I care not what the sects may brawl.
> I sit as God holding no form of creed,
>   But contemplating all. (11. 209-212)

The floor of the palace is patterned "with cycles of the
human tale / Of this world" (11. 146-147), yet, instead of
employing the historical knowledge thus vouchsafed to her,
the soul treads over these designs to reach her throne. She

declares that "'tis one to me" if "the world have peace or
wars" (ll. 183, 182), and looks down with scorn on a society
reeling back into the beast:

> O God-like isolation which art mine,
>   I can but count thee perfect gain,
> What time I watch the darkening droves of swine
>   That range on yonder plain.
>
> In filthy sloughs they roll a prurient skin,
>   They graze and wallow, breed and sleep;
> And oft some brainless devil enters in,
>   And drives them to the deep.   (ll. 197-204)

Yet this proud isolation leads to despair, as she realizes
that she has not only alienated herself from mankind but
also from God. She is described as

> A star that with the choral starry dance
>   Joined not, but stood, and standing saw
> The hollow orb of moving Circumstance
>   Rolled round by one fixed law.
>   (ll. 253-256)

Her inner disharmony is projected onto the palace, which is
transformed into a Gothic mausoleum, where she comes on
"corpses three-months-old at noon" (l. 243). One of the
scenes depicted on the walls of the palace is of

> . . . an English home--gray twilight poured
>   On dewy pastures, dewy trees,
> Softer than sleep--all things in order stored,
>   A haunt of ancient Peace.   (ll. 85-88)

It is to such a place that she now begs to be transported:

> "Make me a cottage in the vale," she said,
>   "Where I may mourn and pray."
>   (ll. 291-292)

In one sense, this represents a drastic limitation of visi-
on, just one of the numerous modes of existence which the

decorations of the palace suggest. Yet, in a more important sense, it is an extension of vision, for it signifies a willingness to work in the world rather than to remain aloof from it.

However, the descent from the palace is only a transitional stage, for the soul hopes to return to the palace with others when she has purged her guilt (1. 296). The palace still represents the sum total of human achievement and its destruction in the pursuit of social amelioration would be a negative step. Yet the palace should be for use, not for aesthetic enjoyment. It is possible to see in this allegory of the poetic soul a reflection of Tennyson's view of reform. The soul, in its supreme isolation, resembles the French aristocrats who withdrew from the world of social reality into the changeless world of pure aesthetic enjoyment. As a result of this withdrawal, society, deprived of leadership, degenerated into "darkening droves of swine" (1. 199) who became possessed with "some brainless devil" (1. 203) and rose up to tear down the palace of art.Tennyson suggests that such a fate could have been averted if the aristocrats had descended to the realm of social reality and implies that this could have been the prelude to an extension of the benefits of the palace to a greater number than before. The poem is thus a blueprint for social reform and a warning that the apocalyptic dest-

ruction of French society will be visited on England if its
leaders oppose themselves to reform. As the poem was pub-
lished in the same year that the Reform Bill was passed,
this significance would hardly have escaped the notice of
Tennyson's contemporaries as they read the lines:

> When she would think, where'er she turned her sight
>   The airy hand confusion wrought,
> Wrote 'Mene, mene,' and divided quite
>   The kingdom of her thought,   (ll. 225-228)

and recalled the words of Daniel to Balshazzar (Dan. 5: 23-
27). Dwight Culler notes that, "whereas in the early apoc-
alyptic poems Nineveh and Babylon are destroyed in their
pride, Tennyson hesitates to invoke this doom on England"
in this poem, yet he adds that "that doom will befall it if
the great of the land do not take heed. In particular, it
will befall it if the Reform Bill is not passed."[23]

One of the primary concerns of the poems in the
1830 and 1832 volumes is society's unwillingness or inabil-
ity to recognize its own inadequacy. It is hostile not only
to the poetic vision of lost unity but also to the human
love by which unity can be regained. Nevertheless, their
tone is not essentially pessimistic; reading them, we sense
that Tennyson felt them to be heralds of a higher form of
social organization. Yet, although they do establish a dial-
ectic with the existing social organization, this dialectic
is weakened by the existence of an unresolved dialectic
within the poems themselves, which tends to ambiguity.

While they look forward to the dawning of a new heroic era, this affirmative vision is undercut by a recognition that this transition will render obsolete the traditional heroic forms, and, to some extent, these poems are laments for this obsolescence. In the poems written immediately after Hallam's death in 1833, this dialectic conflict comes into prominence. Typically, the protagonist of the poems from this period is not the forlorn maiden failing to achieve connexion with the outside world but the aged hero, whose heroic ideals have become redundant in an age of democratic progress.

In "The Two Voices" (1842) the protagonist recalls a time

> When, wide in soul and bold of tongue,
> Among the tents I paused and sung,
> The distant battle flashed and rung.
> (ll. 124-126)

At this time he was filled with the desire

> To search through all I felt or saw,
> The springs of life, the depths of awe,
> And reach the law within the law:
> . . . .
> In some good cause, not in mine own,
> To perish, wept for, honoured, known,
> And like a warrior overthrown.
> (ll. 139-141, 148-150)

Although this attempt failed, he retains his faith in the heroic ideal:

> I cannot hide that some have striven,
> Achieving calm, to whom was given
> The joy that mixes man with Heaven.
> (ll. 208-210)

Instead of involving himself in society, however, he chooses
to cherish this heroic ideal and withdraw, like the soul in
"The Palace of Art." Yet the tower to which he withdraws has
already suffered the destruction warned of in the earlier
poem:

> Were this not well, to bide mine hour,
> Though watching from a ruined tower
> How grows the day of human power?
> (ll. 76-78)

As in "The Palace of Art," despair comes as a result of this
self-imposed isolation. History becomes meaningless, since
everything is seen as relative:

> Forerun thy peers, thy time, and let
> Thy feet, millenniums hence, be set
> In midst of knowledge, dreamed not yet.
>
> Thou hast not gained a real height,
> Nor art thou nearer to the light,
> Because the scale is infinite.
> (ll. 88-93)

At the end of the poem, divine grace intervenes and the
protagonist is shown how the heroic ideal can manifest
itself in the modern world. No longer a fearless warrior,
the modern hero is a paterfamilias walking "with measured
footfall firm and mild" (l. 413) to church, between "the
prudent partner of his blood" (l. 415) and the product of
"their double love secure" (l. 418). In the promise they
give of a regenerated world, the protagonist perceives the
continuity between this family group and the traditional
heroic ideal:

> These three made unity so sweet,
> My frozen heart began to beat,
> Remembering its ancient heat.
> (ll. 421-423)

And, as he blesses the group, the voice of despair gives way to one of hope--"I see the end, and know the good"(l. 432).

"The Two Voices" is an inconsistent poem, flawed by Tennyson's determination to resolve the ambiguity which provides its impetus. "Ulysses" (1842) on the other hand succeeds because of its refusal to resolve the ambiguity which lies at its centre. The poem is set at a critical moment within an historical epoch, the stage at which national identity no longer needs to be forged by heroic endeavour. It is wise democratic government that has to take its place. This is Telemachus's role, for Ulysses, conditioned by the traditional heroic ideal, cannot rid himself of an aristocratic disdain for his subjects. He can only "mete and dole / Unequal laws unto a savage race" (ll. 3-4), while Telemachus can use "slow prudence to make mild / A rugged people, and through soft degrees / Subdue them to the useful and the good" (ll. 36-38). Yet the poem is not about this process of social amelioration but about Ulysses' determination to do some further "work of noble note" (l. 52). Although it seems that he can no longer benefit society by pursuing an heroic goal, he feels he can benefit himself. He seeks a transcendent knowledge, "beyond the

utmost bound of human thought" (1. 32), a knowledge forever denied to Telemachus, who is "centred in the sphere / Of common duties" (11. 39-40). Like the protagonist of "The Two Voices," Ulysses maintains the heroic ideal in the face of its obsolescence, yet he chooses not to retreat into a ruined tower, but to pursue the heroic ideal even if that ideal can no longer work effectively within society. In this, he resembles the Lady of Shalott. But, whereas the Lady had made a fatal identification between the world of her imagination and the "sphere of common duties," Ulysses has no difficulty in distinguishing between the two. What he goes in search of will have no reference to the social order Telemachus is in the process of creating. The implication is that society, although it may be realizing the ideal of liberty through a gradual extension of democratic government, will no longer be guided by the divine force embodied in the hero. The hero has to go forward alone and attain the transcendent vision which society has turned its back on. The consequence of this is that society will lose touch with the heroic aspirations upon which it is founded and decline through an increasing subjection to the laws of flux.

However, the poem is cast in the form of a dramatic monologue and Ulysses' attitude towards the alienation of the heroic individual and the degeneration of society can-

not be taken as a reflection of Tennyson's beliefs. The poem
expresses an unresolved dialectic between Ulysses and Tele-
machus and to identify Tennyson with either character would
be to misread the poem.[24]   The poem does not ask the reader
to choose between Ulysses and Telemachus, but to recognize
that the choice of either would be wrong. Both characters
have positive and negative qualities. Ulysses is heroic, but
he is also egocentric and disdainful; Telemachus is a compe-
tent politician, but he is unheroic. The unstated implicat-
ion is that the positive qualities of both men have to be
combined, for each can complement the other's inadequacies.

"Ulysses" has always been regarded as one of Tenny-
son's finest poems, yet it is also one of his most problem-
atic, and critics are sharply divided with regard to its
meaning. Some critics, taking their lead from Tennyson's
comment that the poem "was written soon after Arthur Hall-
am's death, and gave my feeling about the need of going for-
ward, and braving the struggle of life perhaps more simply
than anything in 'In Memoriam,'" have seen it as a semi-
autobiographical statement.[25]   Others have seen it as an ex-
ploration of themes similar to those which had concerned
Tennyson in poems such as "The Palace of Art," yet, even
here, no consensus has been reached. Dwight Culler, for ex-
ample, argues that a synthesis between the Ulyssean and
Telemachean ideals is achieved in the poem, and that each

man adopts the other's virtues. [26] E.J. Chiasson, on the
other hand, sees Ulysses as a kind of anti-hero, and argues
that Telemachus is a Hallam-figure. He claims that Tenny-
son recognized "that Ulyssean determination and courage,
necessary as they are at certain junctures, are to be valued
only if they contribute to the good life, personal and soc-
ial." [27] These two conflicting interpretations both contain
an element of truth, but both are, I think, inadequate.
Culler's argument ignores the crucial factor of Ulysses'
departure, the final separation of the Ulyssean and Tele-
machean ideals, which seems to indicate the disappearance
of the heroic ideal from the world. Chiasson's view of
Ulysses is similarly inadequate, for he assumes that, since
Ulysses is not wholly admirable, everything he stands for,
including the heroic ideal, is not particularly admirable
either. Implicit in the poem is the idea that the wise gov-
ernment of Telemachus has to be rooted in the heroic ideal
upon which the state is founded, or else the state will
lose its dynamic inner principle and decay. Ulysses' dep-
arture can thus be seen as an abandonment of the state to
the forces of decay--but there is a final irony. Is Ulysses'
departure a negative action, a dereliction of his duty to
preserve the heroic ideal in a democratic age, or is it the
only course open to him? James Kincaid feels that it is the
latter. The poem, he declares, "seems to insist absolutely

on the final separation of the individual from communal
values; the only hope for the existence of the self is in
isolation."[28] Such an assertion does not seem to be justifi-
ed by the poem, however. It could be argued that the poem
does incline towards the latter point of view, but the form-
er is not discounted. In its delineation of an ancient soci-
ety at the moment at which the forces of disintegration
came into play, the poem speaks to a society at an histori-
cal turning point as critical as that which it describes,
but its message is by no means clear. On the one hand, the
poem can be seen as a warning to society of the consequences
of abandoning the heroic ideal in its pursuit of democratic
government. On the other, it can be seen to imply a determ-
inistic attitude towards the rise and fall of civilizations
which looks forward to the cultural pessimism of the Idylls
of the King.

"Morte d'Arthur" (1842) also takes as its theme the
departure of the aged hero, yet treats it very differently.
Whereas Ulysses departs from a superficially stable society,
Arthur has been ousted as leader by a society which has
already reeled back into the beast, and he is left mortally
wounded on the field of his last battle. His only surviving
retainer, Sir Bedivere, carries him to "a chapel nigh the
field, / A broken chancel with a broken cross" (11. 8-9),
an image of desolation which suggests that society's reject-

ion of the hero entails a rejection of God. Much of the poem
is devoted to Bedivere's reluctance to carry out the King's
order to cast Excalibur into the mere. This sequence defines
the attitudes of the two men towards the passing of an hero-
ic era. Bedivere, who believes that the King has only given
the order because he "is sick, and knows not what he does"
(l. 97), wants to retain the sword as a curiosity to "please
the eyes of many men" (l. 91). In other words, he wants to
hang onto the external trappings of a defunct ideal--its
"clothes" as Carlyle would call them--even though the spirit
has passed out of them. Arthur, however, realizes that
these trappings must be discarded lest they "corrupt the
world" (l. 242). In his parting words to Bedivere, he att-
empts to convey to him the spirit by which the heroic order
he established was animated. He directs his attention not to
the past but to God. Bedivere does not understand the King's
meaning, however, for, as he watches the barge slowly disapp-
ear, he retreats into the obsolete heroic ideal, "revolving
many memories" (l. 270), rather than resolving to forge a
new heroic ideal. The design of "Morte d'Arthur" is thus
very different from that of "Ulysses." The representative
of the obsolete heroic ideal is not the departing hero but
the retainer who stays behind. There is no Telemachus-figure
in the poem, for society is leaderless. The authorial point-
of-view implicit in "Ulysses" is made explicit in Arthur's

pronouncements. Also implicit in "Ulysses" is the relevance of its theme to contemporary society. Again, this is made explicit in "Morte d'Arthur" by the use of a framing device.

In the introduction to the poem, the narrator is sitting round a wassail-bowl on Christmas Eve with a group of friends. They are talking of "how all the old honour had from Christmas gone" (1. 7), a point on which they all seem in agreement. The Parson starts "taking wide and wider sweeps" (1. 14) at "the general decay of faith / Right through the world" (11. 18-19). His defence of an obsolete form of Christianity sends the narrator off to sleep, which implies that such a defence is as likely to cause the decay of faith as anything else. While the Parson refuses to accept the present, the poet Everard Hall has turned his back on the past. Accordingly, he has burnt his twelve-book Arthuriad, and, when asked to give his reason for doing so, he replies,

> Why take the style of those heroic times?
> For nature brings not back the Mastodon,
> Nor we those times; and why should any man
> Remodel models?   (11. 35-38)

Here, then, we have a modern Ulysses and a modern Telemach- us, symptomatic members of a society in crisis, a fact ob- scured by the geniality of their surroundings, but no less real for that. While Hall reads the fragment of his epic which Francis, the fourth member of the party, plucked from the flames, the Parson sleeps. When he finishes, the Parson

wakes to grunt "Good!" (l. 276) and Francis mutters, "like
a man ill-used, /'There now--that's nothing!'" (ll. 284-
285), yet the narrator is moved by the tale, even though he
fails to grasp its true significance. However, his dream
later the same night provides a sequel to Hall's poem, as
he conceives of the return of Arthur and wakes to hear the
church bells ringing to celebrate the birth of the proto-
typical hero, the embodiment of the changeless heroic
ideal:

> There came a bark that, blowing forward, bore
> King Arthur, like a modern gentleman
> Of stateliest port; and all the people cried,
> "Arthur is come again: he cannot die."
> Then those that stood upon the hills behind
> Repeated--"Come again, and thrice as fair;"
> And, further inland, voices echoed--"Come
> With all good things, and war shall be no more."
> At this a hundred bells began to peal,
> That with the sound I woke, and heard indeed
> The clear church-bells ring in the Christmas-morn.
> (ll. 293-303)

"Ulysses" and "Morte d'Arthur," along with several
of the poems written immediately after Hallam's death, deal
almost exclusively with masculine figures, yet the theme of
marriage still persists in the emphasis on the necessity of
conjunction between the old heroic ideal and the new spirit
of reform. The shift away from the direct application of
the marriage metaphor, however, parallels a shift to a
greater historical awareness and a clearer definition of the
role of the hero in the modern world. Whereas in "The Lady
of Shalott" the synthesis proposed is between society and a

transcendent artistic vision, in these two poems the trans-
cendent artistic vision is replaced by a vision of the old
heroic ideal. This substitution leads to greater objectiv-
ity, for, whereas in "The Lady of Shalott" Tennyson had
naturally tended to range himself on the side of the trans-
cendent artistic vision, he is now enabled to move between
the conflicting claims of past and present "as in a strange
diagonal" (The Princess, conclusion, 27).

Along with this growing awareness comes an increas-
ing concentration on the interaction of past and present in
the modern world. The image which dominates Tennyson's
treatment of society in the late 1830s and 1840s is that of
the great house--a symbol for and a reflection of the state
of England. The great house represents the feudal past, but,
as Tennyson makes clear, this legacy will be perverted and
destroyed if it fails to wed itself with the modern demo-
cratic spirit. In the "great house" poems, he explores the
theme of marriage between the aristocratic representative of
the feudal past and the humble representative of the common
people, which alone can ensure the survival of the aristo-
cratic line. At the same time, he stresses that the achieve-
ment of this union is no easy matter. In "The Beggar Maid"
(1842), which presents the prototypical marriage of high and
low, and in "Lady Clare" (1842), in which the low-born maid-
en is given an aristocratic education because of mistaken

identity, successful union is achieved. In all the other
poems dealing with this theme, this is not the case. In
"The Lord of Burleigh" (1842) the aristocrat conceals his
identity in order to woo a village maiden. After their
marriage he reveals his identity and her love turns to des-
pair. Although she grows to be "a noble lady" (1. 75), "the
burthen of an honour / Unto which she was not born" (11.
79-80) weighs upon her and, grief-stricken, she dies. In
"Walking to the Mail" (1842) a similar marriage is discuss-
ed. The nobleman in this case is Sir Edward Head, a modern
Ulysses, who,

       Vexed with a morbid devil in his blood
       That veiled the world with jaundice, hid his face
       From all men, and commercing with himself,
       He lost the sense that handles daily life--
       That keeps us all in order more or less--
       And sick of home went overseas for change.
                                     (11. 13-18)

One reason for his despair is a paranoid fear of reform and
revolution, but an even more compelling reason is his rel-
ationship with his wife, "a woman like a butt, and harsh as
crabs" (1. 41). However, we are told that at one time "you
could not light upon a sweeter thing" (1. 44) than she. Her
transformation was due to her being

                    . . . the daughter of a cottager,
       Out of her sphere. What betwixt shame and pride,
       New things and old, himself and her, she soured
       To what she is.   (11. 51-54)

     In contrast to the aristocrats who have married be-
low their station are those who are vehemently opposed to

such unions, and they fare no better. First, there are the
high-born coquettes, such as Lady Clara Vere de Vere, whose
passionless pride has reduced her to a state similar to
that of the soul in "The Palace of Art":

> I know you, Clara Vere de Vere,
>   You pine among your halls and towers:
> The languid light of your proud eyes
>   Is wearied of the rolling hours.
> In glowing health, with boundless wealth,
>   But sickening of a vague disease,
> You know so ill to deal with time,
>   You needs must play such pranks as these.
>   (ll. 57-64)

The speaker, who is infatuated with her, urges her to "pray
Heaven for a human heart" (l. 71), not that she may recip-
rocate his passion, but that she may use her inheritance to
alleviate the social condition of the poor about her lands.
Second, there is the inflexible old farmer of "Dora" (1842)
who, even though he belongs to the lesser gentry, maintains
a feudal idea of marriage which precipitates a tragedy as
devastating as that presented in "Aylmer's Field" (1864)
almost thirty years later. Because the farmer's son refuses
to marry his cousin he is disinherited and marries, "half
in love, half spite" (l. 37), a labourer's daughter. He
falls on hard times and, after the birth of their first
child, dies "heart-broken" (l. 49). The farmer breaks down
when confronted with his grandchild and adopts him. Thus,
the family line is maintained and, perhaps, reinvigorated,
but only after death has cast a deep shadow over it.

In "Lady Clara Vere de Vere" and "Dora" the heroic
ideals embodied in the idea of the great house have been
perverted into a rigid code which violates human feelings.
In "Walking to the Mail" and "Audley Court" (1842) the
great house stands as a forlorn symbol of the dereliction
of the ideals it embodies. Yet, when a new mercantile élite
moves into the great house, as in "Edwin Morris" (1851),
the worst aspects of the feudal ideal are linked with the
worst aspects of the modern world. The thwarting of the
marriage plans of Edwin Morris and Letty Hill, and her sub-
sequent marriage to

>   . . . sixty thousand pounds,
> To lands in Kent and messuages in York,
> And slight Sir Robert with his watery smile
> And educated whisker,   (ll. 126-129)

display a materialism to which even a degenerate feudalism
is preferable. It is hard to resist the conclusion that in
these "great house" poems Tennyson offers little hope for
the future, merely recording the collapse of a system which
would have to be maintained in order for regeneration to
occur. Although they can be seen as poems of protest, the
voice they raise against the age is feeble and seemingly
resigned to the eclipse of the heroic ideal. The sense of
ennui which they exhibit can be partially accounted for by
the external facts of Tennyson's life at this time. No
longer was he the heroic poet standing amid a group of
youthful admirers, but a man whose romantic designs were

being thwarted because of his failure to achieve material
success. At the same time, he came from the disinherited
branch of his family and was a poor relation of the gentry
at Bayons Manor. He was thus forced to contemplate not the
coming dawn of an heroic age but the bleak unheroic present.

An inability to come to terms with society and a
desire to escape to a world "secure of change" ("To J.S."
(1832), l. 76) were characteristics of Tennyson throughout
his career, but were probably felt more deeply at this time
than at any other. In 1839 he wrote, "to me that far-off
world seems nearer than the present. The present is always
something unreal and indistinct, but the other seems a good
solid planet, rolling round its green hills and paradises to
the harmony of more steadfast laws."[29] As a result, many
of these "great house" poems, firmly rooted in the present,
appear half-hearted, with little or no attempt at a reso-
lution of the problems they raise. While Tennyson fought
against the quietistic conception of the apocalyptic marri-
age he delineated in "St. Agnes' Eve" (1836), he found it
so difficult to envisage the triumph of the marital ideal
in the actual world that he all but succumbed to despair.
Many of the poems which appeared for the first time in the
1842 volumes deal with contemporary society in a manner so
objective as to often appear simply detached. There are
several exceptions to this rule, however, the most signifi-

cant of which is "Locksley Hall" (1842).

In "Locksley Hall" Tennyson is enabled to present a
complex vision of contemporary society and of its effect on
the individual through his use of a mentally unbalanced
narrator. The mode of the poem is an overtly dialectical
one, in which the narrator jumps from idea to idea by an
unpredictable process of association which frequently leads
to contradiction and casts an ironic light on his whole
narrative. At the beginning of the poem he is contemplating
Locksley Hall and recalling the optimism he felt when he
lived there as a youth:

> Here about the beach I wandered, nourishing a youth sub-
>   lime
> With the fairy tales of science, and the long result of
>   Time;
>
> When the centuries behind me like a fruitful land reposed;
> When I clung to all the present for the promise that it
>   closed;
>
> When I dipt into the future far as human eye could see;
> Saw the Vision of the world, and all the wonder that
>   would be. (11. 11-16)

This vision of the future, however, had been based on the
prospect of marital union:

> Love took up the glass of Time, and turned it in his
>   glowing hands;
> Every moment, lightly shaken, ran itself in golden sands.
> (11. 31-32)

With the loss of this love, due to social pressures similar
to those in "Edwin Morris," the vision of the future
crumbled, and the narrator was left cursing "the social lies

that warp us from the living truth" (l. 60). He declares
that he must either mix himself "with action" or "wither by
despair" (l. 98), but immediately reflects that action is
impossible in a world in which "every door is barred with
gold, and opens but to golden keys" (l. 100). Reverting to
a vision of the heroic ideal, he imagines that he would be
"content to perish, falling on the foeman's ground" (l.
103), but realizes that, in the modern world, "the nations
do but murmur, snarling at each other's heels" (l. 106).
He then addresses the "wondrous Mother-age" (l. 108) and
asks to feel again "the wild pulsation that I felt before
the strife" (l. 109). He then goes on to describe his
earlier vision:

> For I dipt into the future, far as human eye could see,
> Saw the Vision of the world, and all the wonder that
>   would be;
>
> Saw the heavens fill with commerce, argosies of magic
>   sails,
> Pilots of the purple twilight, dropping down with costly
>   bales;
>
> Heard the heavens fill with shouting, and there rained a
>   ghastly dew
> From the nations' airy navies grappling in the central
>   blue;
>
> Far along the world-wide whisper of the south-wind rush-
>   ing warm,
> With the standards of the peoples plunging through the
>   thunder-storm;
>
> Till the war-drum throbbed no longer, and the battle-
>   flags were furled
> In the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world.

> There the common sense of most shall hold a fretful
>   realm in awe,
> And the kindly earth shall slumber, lapt in universal
>   law.   (ll. 119-130)

He declares that he has maintained his belief that "through the ages one increasing purpose runs" (l. 137), but adds that his disappointment in love has left him with a "jaundiced eye" (l. 132). Thus, he can take little solace from this belief. The progress of mankind has little relevance to the alienated individual:

> Knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers, and I linger on the
>   shore,
> And the individual withers, and the world is more and
>   more.
>
> Knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers, and he bears a
>   laden breast,
> Full of sad experience, moving toward the stillness of
>   his rest.   (ll. 141-144)

His vision of the dawn of a new social order, which recalls Carlyle's description of the French Revolution as a "death-birth," is couched in terms of animalistic savagery:

> Slowly comes a hungry people, as a lion creeping nigher,
> Glares at one that nods and winks behind a slowly-dying
>   fire.[30]   (ll. 135-136)

Obviously there is to be no conjunction of the decaying feudal order and the spirit of democracy here. Confronted by this realization, he expresses the desire to escape from the pressures of his society, echoing not only Ulysses but also his lotos-eating companions:

> Here at least, where nature sickens, nothing. Ah, for
>   some retreat
> Deep in yonder shining Orient, where my life began to
>   beat.
> . . . .
> Or to burst all links of habit--there to wander far away,
> On from island unto island at the gateways of the day.
>
> Larger constellations burning, mellow moons and happy
>   skies,
> Breadths of tropic shade and palms in cluster, knots of
>   Paradise.
>
> Never comes the trader, never floats an European flag,
> Slides the bird o'er lustrous woodland, swings the trail-
>   er from the crag;
>
> Droops the heavy-blossomed bower, hangs the heavy-fruited
>   tree--
> Summer isles of Eden lying in dark-purple spheres of sea.
>
> There methinks would be enjoyment more than in this march
>   of mind,
> In the steamship, in the railway, in the thoughts that
>   shake mankind.   (ll. 153-154, 157-166)

He is forced to reject this scheme when he recalls that he
is "the heir of all the ages, in the foremost files of
time" (l. 178). However bleak the present may be, and how-
ever bleak the future may appear, he cannot retreat from
"the tide of time" ("Recollections of the Arabian Nights"
(1830), l. 4). And so he rouses himself to declaim the
lines which are often cited as an example of Tennyson's
complacent progressivism:

> Not in vain the distance beacons. Forward, forward let us
>   range,
> Let the great world spin for ever down the ringing
>   grooves of change.   (ll. 181-182)

Yet the narrator is not Tennyson and, in the closing lines
of the poem, he turns his back on the past and on the great

house which symbolizes its achievements and contemplates

with grim satisfaction its impending destruction. This re-

volutionary conclusion, bred of desperation and couched in

the language of apocalyptic prophecy, does not portend a

reinvigorated society but simply leads the narrator back to

a rejection of the past:

> Comes a vapour from the margin, blackening over heath and
> holt,
> Cramming all the blast before it, in its breast a thun-
> derbolt.
>
> Let it fall on Locksley Hall, with rain or hail, or fire
> or snow;
> For the mighty wind arises, roaring seaward, and I go.
> (11. 191-194)

Thus, "Locksley Hall" is a profoundly ironic poem,

presenting the total separation of the spirit of the past

and the spirit of the present which spells doom for the

future. As Paul Turner says, Tennyson believed that, "if

the old are too reactionary, and the young too radical, the

result will be generally disastrous."[31] The past, symboliz-

ed by Locksley Hall, has rejected change and will thus be

swept away by it. But there is no indication that this

change will be positive, for the idealistic aspirations

associated with change have become negative, destructive

forces, because they have been thwarted by the spirit of

the past. Henry Kozicki, in his discussion of "Locksley

Hall," fails to take this irony into account and suggests

that the poem signifies an abandonment of gradualism in

favour of the idea of palingenetic fire-birth developed by
Carlyle in The French Revolution.[32] He argues that, while
Tennyson maintains "the idea that only through a fusion of
past and present can the meaning of history obtain," he
adopts the "belief that the fusion must be a violent one in
order to materialize true paradigmatic form for society."[33]
This assumes a correspondence between Tennyson and his narr-
ator which is not justified by the poem. In the same way
that Carlyle's dramatization of the French Revolution
serves as a warning to society rather than a blueprint for
social change, Tennyson's dramatization of the frustrated
idealism of his narrator warns society of the apocalyptic
destruction it will bring upon itself if it continues along
its present course.

If "Locksley Hall" can be seen as Tennyson's French
Revolution, then The Princess can be seen as his Past and
Present. Like Past and Present, The Princess offers a syn-
thetic as well as an admonitory vision. The poem is again
dominated by the symbol of the great house and the theme of
marriage, yet it stresses fusion rather than opposition.
Whereas the earlier "great house" poems had been set ex-
clusively in the present, in The Princess Tennyson reverts
to the pattern he had adopted in "Morte d'Arthur," framing
a tale of the mythic past within a description of a con-
temporary social gathering.

The prologue to the poem is set in the grounds of
Vivien-place, which Sir Walter Vivien has opened to the pub-
lic for the day. The narrator, a house-guest of Sir Walter,
describes the house as a veritable storehouse of the past:

> . . . on the pavement lay
> Carved stones of the Abbey-ruin in the park,
> Huge Ammonites, and the first bones of Time;
> And on the tables every clime and age
> Jumbled together;
> . . . .
> and higher on the walls,
> Betwixt the monstrous horns of elk and deer,
> His own forefathers' arms and armour hung.
> (11. 13-17, 22-24)

Yet the house is not simply a monument to the past, but
also a place where the spirit of democracy can take root.
The crowd which has gathered in the grounds, however, is
concerned not with the past but with the scientific demon-
strations which have been arranged for their entertain-
ment. The narrator, along with a group of other house-
guests and their hosts, finds the sight "strange . . . and
smacking of the times" (1. 89) and withdraws with them to
the Abbey ruins. After conversing on various topics, the
narrator draws their attention to "the feudal warrior lady-
clad" (1. 119), and to the female ancestor of Sir Walter's
who "drove her foes with slaughter from her walls" (1. 123).
Lilia, inspired by her story, expresses a desire to "build /
Far off from men a college like a man's" (11. 134-135). This
gives rise to some amusement among the men in the party,
but Sir Walter's son freely admits that "he longed at coll-

ege, only longed, / All else was well, for she-society" (ll. 157-158). The tale which follows takes as its starting point Lilia's vision of a women's college and places in opposition to this the male longing for "she-society." In the course of the tale, the attitudes of both the male and the female protagonists are shown to be inadequate because of a failure to take into account the aspirations of the opposits sex. Ultimately, resolution is achieved by the subordination of the ideals of both sexes to the ideal of marriage.

The two protagonists of the tale, the Prince and the Princess, are characterized by a tendency to view the world in transcendental terms. This sets them apart from their respective associates and prepares the way for the transcendent vision which is achieved at the end of the tale. The Prince is subject to weird seizures and he describes one of these thus:

> On a sudden in the midst of men and day,
> And while I walked and talked as heretofore,
> I seemed to move among a world of ghosts,
> And feel myself the shadow of a dream.
> (I, 15-18)

As Dwight Culler says,

> Tennyson was attempting in these seizures to create
> something analogous to the trancelike experience which
> he knew as a boy and which he always associated with
> poetic power. . . . His seizures are, in a sense,
> simply this, that the vision of ideal beauty, which is
> the most intense reality he knows, is not embodied in
> the world about him, and, on the other hand, the world
> is comparatively unreal.[34]

Paul Turner, who argues that the Prince's seizures were in-
tended to recall "the Platonic doctrine that our world is a
shadow of the real world," declares that they "are visions
of a metaphysical truth, that the world of Time is an ill-
usion."[35] The Princess, although not subject to seizures,
also perceives the world in transcendental terms, as her
speech on time indicates:

> For was, and is, and will be, are but is;
> And all creation is one act at once,
> The birth of light: but we that are not all,
> As parts, can see but parts, now this, now that,
> And live, **perforce**, from thought to thought, and make
> One act a phantom of succession: thus
> Our weakness somehow shapes the shadow Time.
> (III, 307-313)

One significant feature of these visions is that they und-
ermine the assumptions on which the roles played by each of
the protagonists are based. The Prince's seizures transform
him into a "draggled mawkin" (V, 25) who is laughed at in
his father's court and falls helplessly in battle. The
Princess's view of history and her acceptance of the limit-
ations of human vision invalidate both her denial of her
reproductive function and her conviction that her ideas are
an embodiment of divine law.

The Prince and Princess are opposed not only in
sexual but also in historical terms. The Prince inhabits
the world of the past, the Princess that of the future, and
neither gives much thought to the present. In his seizures
the Prince walks among "a world of ghosts" (I, 17), while

the Princess looks to the women of the future. So, even
though the two protagonists do possess a kind of transcend-
ent knowledge, it is limited by their respective environ-
ments. Thus, the reconciliation which occurs at the end of
the tale is historical as well as sexual. Indeed, the sex-
ual conflict in the tale comes about as a result of hist-
orical conflict, for the Prince and the Princess have been
conditioned by opposed yet inadequate historical perspect-
ives. The world of the past is embodied in the two aged
kings, the fathers of the Prince and Princess. The Princ-
ess's father is "a little dry old man, without a star, /
Not like a king" (I, 116-117), who has relinquished control
not only over his daughter but also over his kingdom. He
regards his daughter's ideas with gloomy foreboding, yet
admits that, desiring a quiet life, he left her to her own
devices (I, 137-145). The Prince's father, on the other
hand, resembles a bluff country squire and is convinced that

> Man is the hunter; woman is his game:
> The sleek and shining creatures of the chase,
> We hunt them for the beauty of their skins;
> They love us for it, and we ride them down.
> (V, 147-150)

The world of the future is embodied in the Princess and in
her tutors, Lady Psyche and Lady Blanche. Their rejection
of the past is as strong as is the desire of the two kings
to remain in it:

> But trim our sails, and let old bygones be,
> While down the streams that float us each and all

> To the issue, goes, like glittering bergs of ice,
> Throne after throne, and molten on the waste
> Becomes a cloud: for all things serve their time
> Toward that great year of equal mights and rights,
> Nor would I fight with iron laws, in the end
> Found golden: let the past be past; let be
> Their cancelled Babels: though the rough kex break
> The starred mosaic, and the beard-blown goat
> Hang on the shaft, and the wild figtree split
> Their monstrous idols, care not while we hear
> A trumpet in the distance pealing news
> Of better, and Hope, a poising eagle, burns
> Above the unrisen morrow.   (IV, 51-65)

As Henry Kozicki points out, the problem with the Princess

is that,

> in her intense progressivism, she is immobilized in the
> future, facing away from the historically formative
> eternity ever at the doors. She is unable to work last-
> ingly in the present because she "overlooks" it, rising
> "upon a wind of prophecy / Dilating on the future" with
> "the passion of the prophetess."[36]

It is the Prince who attempts to forge a reconcili-

ation between these two worlds. He points out to Lady

Psyche that, if the Princess applies the letter of her law

to him and his companions and has them executed for enter-

ing the college, the destruction of the college will foll-

ow. In other words, if the new order seeks to destroy the

old, it too will be destroyed in the process:

> . . . what follows? war;
> Your own work marred: for this your Academe,
> Whichever side be Victor, in the halloo
> Will topple to the trumpet down, and pass
> With all fair theories only made to gild
> A stormless summer.   (II, 211-216)

The Prince also criticizes the callous anti-feminism of his

father, yet he is not without a taint of it himself. His

role as mediator is flawed not only by this but also by his

feebleness. Both these faults are comically reflected in his unselfconscious transvestism. It is the Prince's in-adequacy as mediator, combined with the Princess's inflex-ibility, which eventually leads to armed confrontation. In the battle, the Prince is wounded and the Princess reluct-antly nurses him. At the same time, she becomes aware of her maternal instincts, and, with the Prince no longer able to maintain the role he has adopted throughout the tale, the two protagonists achieve reconciliation through a mut-ual recognition of their true natures, unobscured by false conditioning. The true agent of reconciliation, however, is the child, the symbol of future hope. It is he who provides a substantial basis for the transcendent historical vision which the Prince reveals to the Princess at the end of the tale:

> Yet in the long years liker must they grow;
> The man be more of woman, she of man;
> He gain in sweetness and in moral height,
> Nor lose the wrestling thews that throw the world;
> She mental breadth, nor fail in childward care,
> Nor lose the childlike in the larger mind;
> Till at the last she set herself to man,
> Like perfect music unto noble words;
> And so these twain, upon the skirts of Time,
> Sit side by side, full-summed in all their powers,
> Dispensing harvest, sowing the To-be,
> Self-reverent each and reverencing each,
> Distinct in individualities,
> But like each other even as those who love.
> Then comes the statelier Eden back to men:
> Then reign the world's great bridals, chaste and calm:
> Then springs the crowning race of humankind.
> May these things be!   (VII, 263-280)

This is the Prince speaking, however, not Tennyson, and when he finishes the Princess replies, "I fear / They will not" (VII, 280-281). Her final words, a few lines later, are, "Never, Prince; / You cannot love me" (VII, 317-318). Thus, at the end of the tale, the Prince still seems to bear the mark of naïve idealism, the Princess that of frigid inflexibility, and the reader is left wondering how valid the Prince's prophecy is. As James Kincaid says, "the poem . . . ends on a question mark."[37]

In the poem's conclusion we return to the grounds of Vivien-place, and the narrator is asked to dress the tale up poetically. This leads to a dispute between the men and the women as to whether it should be rendered mock-heroically or heroically:

> Then rose a little feud betwixt the two,
> Betwixt the mockers and the realists:
> And I, betwixt them both, to please them both,
> And yet to give the story as it rose,
> I moved as in a strange diagonal,
> And maybe neither pleased myself or them.
> (ll. 23-28)

This diagonal movement means that the tale, as retold by the narrator, is founded on an unresolved dialectical tension, which reflects the perpetuation of opposed yet inadequate visions of history in the modern world. The poem is not so much a celebration of the fusion of past and present through the agency of human love as an ironic exploration of the likelihood or unlikelihood of such a fusion being achieved.

The dialectical method employed in the poem is anything but straightforward. While the men are identified as "mockers" at the end of the poem, and the women as "realists," these identifications are undercut by the roles assigned to each in the telling of the tale. As Henry Kozicki points out, the women's "intercalary lyrics, which interrupt the flow of narrative, identify them with the prince's interest in the past. . . . The men, on the other hand, carrying the narrative forward and disdaining the past, become identified with Ida."[38]

Yet, even though the narrator employs irony in his presentation of the tale, he is subject to the ironies operating in the poem as a whole, and this becomes apparent in the conclusion. The "Tory member's elder son," whom the narrator rebukes for his unprogressive ideology, is usually regarded as a blind reactionary, yet his sentiments are identical to those which Tennyson expressed in "Hail Briton" and the political poems of the early 1850s. Britain, the elder son declares, has maintained

> Some sense of duty, something of a faith,
> Some reverence for the laws ourselves have made,
> Some patient force to change them when we will,
> Some civic manhood firm against the crowd.
> (ll. 54-57)

France, on the other hand, has succumbed to revolution, and

> The gravest citizen seems to lose his head,
> The king is scared, the soldier will not fight,
> The little boys begin to shoot and stab,
> A kingdom topples over with a shriek

> Like an old woman, and down rolls the world
> In mock heroics stranger than our own.
> <div align="right">(ll. 59-64)</div>

The narrator rejects the elder son's assessment of the English constitution, declaring that "ourselves are full / Of social wrong" (ll. 72-73). He argues that "maybe wildest dreams / Are but the needful preludes of the truth" (ll. 73-74), thus aligning himself with the revolutionary ethos. His beliefs, unlike those of the eldest son, are based on a very flimsy foundation. He declares that, "For me, the genial day, the happy crowd, / The sport half-science, fill me with a faith" (ll. 75-76). Like the ideals espoused by the Princess, this is one of those "fair theories only made to gild / A stormless summer" (II, 215-216) which Carlyle, in The French Revolution, compared to

> gossamer gauze, beautiful and cheap; which will stand no tear and wear! Beautiful cheap gossamer gauze, thou film-shadow of a raw material of virtue, which art not woven, nor likely to be, into Duty; thou art better than nothing, and also worse.   (FR, II, 59)

Like the Princess, the narrator regards the world of the past scornfully and maintains a providential view of progress:

> This fine old world of ours is but a child
> Yet in the go-cart. Patience! Give it time
> To learn its limbs: there is a hand that guides.
> <div align="right">(ll. 77-79)</div>

Ironically, this progressivism entails a submission to the destructive nature of the historical process, a submission which can only lead to social degeneration. By the same

token, we cannot accept the narrator's estimate of Sir Walter as "the apotheosis of the interpenetration between the ancient feudal rights and those of the Reform Bill that Tennyson had so welcomed."[39] The narrator regards his opening of the park "some dozen times a year / To let the people breathe" (ll. 103-104) as an admirable example of democratic progress, yet it recalls the practice of Friend Prudence in Past and Present, who "keeps a thousand workmen; has provided conversational soirées; playgrounds, bands of music for the young ones; went even 'the length of buying them a drum'; all which has turned out to be an excellent investment" (PP, p. 279). The implication is that the crowds who have flocked to the park cannot breathe for the rest of the year because they have to slave away in city smoke to maintain the idle classes in their idleness. The extension of occasional privileges to them merely serves to strengthen the status quo.

Thus, the historical optimism both of the Prince and of the narrator is undercut by the inadequacy of their visions. The Prince sees his marriage to the Princess as a type of the apocalyptic marriage and the narrator sees Sir Walter as a symbol of democratic progress. Tennyson does not deny the value of either vision, but he does point to the dangers of believing in the inevitability of historical progress, implying that such a belief leads to degeneration

rather than progress. Thus, the poem ends not on a note of
optimism but on one of extreme ambiguity:

> But we went back to the Abbey, and sat on,
> So much the gathering darkness charmed: we sat
> But spoke not, rapt in nameless reverie,
> Perchance upon the future man: the walls
> Blackened about us, bats wheeled, and owls whooped,
> And gradually the powers of the night,
> That range above the region of the wind,
> Deepening the courts of twilight broke them up
> Through all the silent spaces of the worlds,
> Beyond all thought into the Heaven of Heavens.
>
> Last little Lilia, rising quietly,
> Disrobed the glimmering statue of Sir Ralph
> From those rich silks, and home well-pleased we went.
> (ll. 106-118)

The retreat of this company to a ruined abbey to dream of
the future man may strike us as picturesque, but, beneath
this veneer, there lies a bleak vision of the fate of soc-
iety. These are the inheritors of the past, yet, instead
of building on that past through heroic involvement, they
ignore the world of contemporary reality and retreat to a
mouldering edifice to dream about an imaginary future.
Slowly the forces of darkness overtake them, and, as they
return to the great house, the heroic icon, still glimmer-
ing, is disrobed. If it were not for this final gesture,
we could say that the forces of the night had triumphed,
that the poem offered an unremittingly bleak picture of
the fate of society. However, the disrobing of "the glimm-
ering statue of Sir Ralph" recalls Carlyle's "clothes phil-
osophy" and suggests the making of a conscious decision to

reject the trappings of the past, a decision not implied
elsewhere. In Sartor Resartus, such a rejection is the nec-
essary prelude to the creation of a new heroic ideal, yet,
in The Princess, the incident is related almost as an
afterthought, with no indication that the members of the
party give any thought to its significance or have any in-
tention of forging a new ideal. Indeed it is possible, Car-
lyle notwithstanding, to interpret this action as a stripp-
ing of meaning from the past rather than as a rejection of
its anachronistic encrustations. As James Kincaid says,
"almost everything in The Princess carries with it contrary
signals: positive acts are negative; victories are also de-
feats. This complex dualism is apparent throughout the poem
in its images and themes, perhaps most obviously in its
action."[40] It is a profoundly ambiguous poem, and, in its
failure to resolve the dialectical forces at work within
it, seems almost to deny the possibility of such a resolut-
ion. Such a denial, in the context of Tennyson's historical
vision, is tantamount to a denial of meaning within the
historical process, an acceptance of the ultimate triumph
of a disastrous cyclicalism. Having reached this impasse,
Tennyson was forced to change direction, to abandon his
search for reconciliation within the historical process and
to seek to transcend that process.

IV

TENNYSON, 1850-1892: "CHAOS, COSMOS! COSMOS, CHAOS!"

As M.H. Abrams says, one of the central tenets of
Romanticism is the belief that man "is divided within him-
self, . . . divided from other men, and . . . divided from
his environment; his only hope for recovery . . . is to
find the way to a reintegration which will restore his unity
with himself, his community with his fellow men, and his
companionability with an alien and hostile outer world."[1]
In Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Re-
collections of Early Childhood" (1807) reintegration is
achieved by an acceptance of human suffering as a means by
which a meaningful pattern can be perceived in the past.
Essentially, the ode is not about immortality or childhood
but about the way in which the individual can achieve re-
birth through joy. In Coleridge's "Dejection: An Ode,"
which was inspired by the first four stanzas of Wordsworth's
ode, joy is described as

              . . . the spirit and the power,
    Which wedding Nature to us gives in dower
      A new Earth and a new Heaven,
    . . . .
    And thence flows all that charms or ear or sight,
      All melodies the echoes of that voice,
    All colours a suffusion from that light.
                            (ll. 67-69, 73-75)

It is this recovery of joy which provides the theme
of In Memoriam (1850), that complex and obscure poem which
was seventeen years in the making and which, as Henry Koz-
icki says, has seemed to many critics to endorse "a profane
millenarianism."[2] Tennyson himself said that the poem was
"too hopeful, . . . more than I am myself," which seems to
indicate that he was not entirely happy with the structure
he imposed upon his "book of elegies" in 1850.[3] However,
this optimism is only fully apparent in the concluding
sections of the poem and it is these sections, dealing with
historical progress, which are the weak element in a work
which concerns itself primarily with the pattern of indiv-
idual rebirth. The problem is that the earlier sections of
the poem do not justify its conclusion; indeed, they seem
to deny its premises. By 1850, Tennyson was already beginn-
ing to discern a correspondence between the regenerated and
the alienated individual. In The Princess he had all but re-
jected the idea that meaning could be discerned within the
historical process, yet, in In Memoriam, he indicates that
the regeneration of the individual in some way ensures the
regeneration of society. The assertion is not very convinc-
ing and it has the effect of obscuring the central issues
of the poem.

This relative failure probably reflects the manner
in which the poem was composed, with no thought of an all-
embracing structure being imposed upon the individual lyrics

4

until most of them had been written. Given this somewhat

random method of composition, it is surprising that the

final result is as coherent as it is. Tennyson said that

his organization of the poem was intended to reflect that

of the _Divina Commedia_ and added that the divisions of the

poem are made by the three Christmas Eve sections (XXVIII-
5
XXX, LXXVIII, CIV-CV). Each Christmas Eve serves as a re-

current intercession of the divine and, as such, provides

the persona with insights which he then develops in the

following year and which then enable him to gain new in-

sights on the following Christmas Eve. Each intervening

group of sections is characterized by a particular mood,

so that the poem falls into four distinct parts. In the

first part (I-XXVII) the sense of loss is all-pervasive; in

the second (XXXI-LXXVII) the persona attempts to find some

connexion between the past and the present, between the

Hallam he knew and the transfigured Hallam; in the third

(LXXIX-CIII) he abandons this attempt and sets out to dis-

cover the meaning of the past, "recreating" the Hallam he

knew; in the last (CVI-CXXXI) he finds that he no longer

needs to rely on the forms of the past, for he has discov-

ered its meaning within himself and can look to the future

with hope. As A.C. Bradley says, in the last part of the

poem, "the dead friend is regarded not only as a friend,

but as a type of the nobler humanity to come, and as mingled
6
with that Love which is the soul of the universe."

As with "Morte d'Arthur" and The Princess, Tennyson employs a framing device in In Memoriam. The persona of the prologue and epilogue differs from the persona (or personae) of the poem itself, for he is the superintendent of the historical reconstruction which occurs within the poem.[7] He refers to the sections of the poem as "wild and wandering cries, / Confusions of a wasted youth" (prologue, ll. 41-42) and "as echoes out of weaker times" (epilogue, ll. 22). He adds that he has "grown / To something stronger than before" (epilogue, ll. 19-20) and thus is capable of perceiving a pattern in the process of individual rebirth. The prologue consists of a definition of the faith which the persona has gained. He begins by addressing the "Strong Son of God, immortal Love" (l. 1), rather than an anthropomorphic projection, and declares that, since knowledge of Him is forever denied to man, He can only be apprehended through faith. The persona's faith has not been achieved through the agency of mystical visions, however, but through the contemplation of human mortality:

> Thou madest Death; and lo, thy foot
> Is on the skull which thou hast made.
>
> Thou wilt not leave us in the dust:
> Thou madest man, he knows not why,
> He thinks he was not made to die;
> And thou hast made him: thou art just.
> (ll. 7-12)

It is the acceptance of mortality, combined with the recognition that man is capable of formulating beliefs that

transcend the fact of death, which has enabled the persona

to create the figure of an anthropomorphic deity:

> Thou seemest human and divine,
>   The highest, holiest manhood, thou:
>   Our wills are ours, we know not how;
>   Our wills are ours, to make them thine.
>   (ll. 13-16)

Tennyson declared that "our highest view of God must be

more or less anthropomorphic," and that God "has revealed

Himself through the human attribute of the highest self-

sacrificing love; in the freedom of the human will; and in

the immortality of the soul."[8] The persona echoes these

sentiments in his declaration that "merit lives from man to

man, / And not from man, O Lord, to thee" (ll. 35-36).

Faith, then, cannot be attained by attempts to discern a

meaningful pattern within history, for such attempts are

negated by the imperative of human mortality, the most

immediate reminder of the hostility of natural forces to

the synthetic imagination. Faith can be attained only by

the realization of individual potential, a recognition of

the divine within man, and an extension of this unifying

consciousness to an unknowable God and an imposition of it

upon the chaos of history.

The first part of the poem is pervaded by the sense

of loss, and by the grief which the persona first tries to

escape from and then resigns himself to, realizing that

grief provides the one stable point in his existence. Like

Wordsworth's ode, the poem starts off with a recollection

of a time when a divine order was perceptible in the uni-

verse:

> I held it truth, with him who sings
> To one clear harp in divers tones,
> That men may rise on stepping-stones
> Of their dead selves to higher things.
> (I, 1-4)

This vision of individual development recalls the vision of

historical progress in "I loving Freedom for herself":

> I trust the leaders of the land
> May well surmount the coming shock
> By climbing steps their fathers carved
> Within the living rock.   (ll. 13-16)

This progressive ideal had been projected onto Hallam, and,

with his death, it has been cancelled out. It has been re-

placed by the numbing recognition that man is ultimately

subject to the indifferent processes of growth and decay.

Sorrow tells him that the hollowness he feels in his heart

is reflected in Nature, "a hollow form with empty hands"

(III, 12), the arbitress of human destiny. This spurs him

to a rejection of both Nature (II) and grief (III, IV). He

conceives of grief in terms of guilt and sin (VII, 7; V, 1)

and from his stoic attempt to resist grief springs inner

turmoil. He becomes divided from knowledge of himself (XVI,

16) and, torn between "calm despair and wild unrest" (XVI,

2), his

> . . . fancy fuses old and new,
> And flashes into false and true,
> And mingles all without a plan.
> (XVI, 18-20)

This confusion is most apparent in his attitude to the dead
Hallam, whom he consistently attempts to revive in his
imagination, grasping at any shred of evidence which sugg-
ests that he is not totally dead. As Hallam's body is
brought back to England by sea, the persona imagines that
his "noble breast / . . . heaves but with the heaving deep"
(XI, 19-20), which imparts a kind of mimic life to him.
He dreams of his arrival in port with "no hint of death in
all his frame" (XIV, 18) and gains consolation from the
thought that "from his ashes may be made / The violet of
his native land" (XVIII, 3-4). The persona is incapable of
coming to terms with Hallam's loss and can conceive of it
only in physical terms (VII, 5; XIII, 1-4), not in spirit-
ual. The realization that Hallam is formless (XXII, 15),
or, at best, a handful of dust (XVII, 19), empties the world
of all meaning. This pervasive sense of emptiness extends
even to the past and leads the persona to doubt whether he
ever perceived a divine order in the world and to suspect
that he merely imagined that he did in retrospect (XXIV).
The first part of the poem ends with the persona's resig-
nation to grief and his realization that grief at least
gives some meaning to his life:

> I hold it true, whate'er befall;
>   I feel it, when I sorrow most;
>   'Tis better to have loved and lost
> Than never to have loved at all.
>   (XXVII, 13-16)

At this point, the first Christmas Eve occurs. The persona is troubled by the sound of the bells which announce the birth of Christ (XXVIII, 17) and bring him "sorrow touched with joy" (XXVIII, 19). Although he has renounced the wish that his "hold on life would break" (XXVIII, 15), grief is still all pervasive and the shadow of death looms over him. However, at the end of section XXX he reaches the conclusion that the dead

> . . . do not die
> Nor lose their mortal sympathy,
> Nor change to us, although they change;
>
> Rapt from the fickle and the frail
>   With gathered power, yet the same,
>   Pierces the keen seraphic flame
> From orb to orb, from veil to veil.
> (XXX, 22-28)

This perception alleviates his despondency and provides the basis for the ensuing part of the poem (XXXI-LXXVII), which is heralded by the voice of Hope:

> Rise, happy morn, rise, holy morn,
>   Draw forth the cheerful day from night:
>   O Father, touch the east, and light
> The light that shone when hope was born.
> (XXX, 29-32)

In the second part of the poem the persona seeks to establish some connexion between the living Hallam and the dead Hallam, yet, as E.D.H. Johnson says, this "search for meaning . . . [has] no other effect than to involve the mind in the heart's distress."[9] The persona ultimately realizes the impossibility of achieving any reconciliation

between the known and the unknown. Out of the dialectical
tension of this part of the poem, however, springs the per-
sona's recognition of his individual worth, which forms the
basis for his acquisition of joy in the third part of the
poem. His initial attempt to give substance to the idea of
individual immortality leads him to draw from the story of Laz-
arus the conclusion that the dead, though formless, do not
suffer essential change (XXXIII). He then proceeds to find
evidence for individual immortality in his own experience
and concludes that the individual must be immortal because,
if he is not, then life is meaningless and suicide is the
only positive course of action (XXXIV). He reflects, how-
ever, that the evidences of Nature do seem to indicate that
life is meaningless, but evades the implications of this not-
ion by declaring that some solace can be found in poetry
(XXXVIII). His attempt to find some basis for the assumpt-
ion that Hallam has not been essentially transformed leads
him next to compare Hallam's departure from the world to
the departure of a girl from her home on her wedding day.
He soon realizes that there is no similarity between these
two departures (XL, 21) and admits that there is no evid-
ence to suggest that Hallam's loss is not permanent. In the
face of this realization, he can only maintain the hope
that love will survive (XLIII, 13). He then hits on the
idea that the fall of man into consciousness may serve the

function of preparing him for the life to come (XLV), in which the "eternal landscape of the past" (XLVI, 8) will be resurrected. Once again, however, he finds no evidence to support this theory. He cannot know whether death will re-merge the individual "in the general soul" (XLVII, 4) or not, and has to fall back on the doubtful trust that "some-how good / Will be the final goal of ill" (LIV, 1-2).

In the ensuing sections he gains valuable insights, yet, because of the limitations of his vision at this stage, he cannot build upon them. They have to be transformed by the grace of God; this happens symbolically on the second Christmas Eve. He perceives that evidence for immortality cannot be derived from Nature (LV, LVI) and that the desire for such immortality derives from the Godlike in man. Thus, God and Nature are at strife. However, he cannot attain knowledge of God (LV) and, therefore, cannot gain any evidence for immortality. He is left with a faint trust in "the larger hope" (LV, 20) and, although he still regards this as an inadequate basis for faith, it indicates the course his future development will take. For the moment, he still longs to find some connexion between himself and the absent Hallam. Returning to the idea of marriage, he describes the hopeless love of a low-born maiden for a noble-man, in an attempt to comprehend the gulf which exists be-tween him and Hallam (LX). In section LXIV, he describes

the gulf which exists between the heroic leader, who has
risen from a lowly state, and his childhood friend, whose
lot has not changed. These two attempts to impose meaning
on the absent Hallam fail, however, because the persona's
memory of Hallam has become mingled with sorrow and death
(LXX). He even retreats into sleep, which he calls "Death's
twin-brother" (LXVIII, 2), in an attempt to recreate the
past; this recreation, however, just like all his earlier
attempts to impose meaning on the past, is inadequate, for
he must awake to sorrow. At the end of the second part of
the poem he finally accepts the worthlessness of all human
endeavour and the futility of attempting to generate mean-
ing by the imposition of fictional constructs on an intran-
sigent reality. At the same time, however, he reaffirms his
determination to keep his love alive, and it is this determ-
ination, together with the necessity of finding meaning in
love alone, which precipitates his spiritual rebirth.

The second Christmas Eve (LXXVIII), unlike the
first and the third, is accompanied not by the sound of
bells but by silence. The persona's "wild unrest" (XVI, 2)
has evaporated, to be replaced by "the quiet sense of some-
thing lost" (LXXVIII, 8). He fears lest this mood be the
prelude to forgetfulness, to acquiescence in meaningless-
ness, yet it leads to his comprehension of the meaning of
love. As E.D.H. Johnson says, "the attitude of stoic resig-
nation with which Tennyson greets the second Christmas

season is prelude to the recovery of hope in the third part
of the poem."[10] In the third part (LXXIX-CIII) the persona
abandons his fruitless attempt to discover meaning in the
transformed Hallam and focuses his attention on the Hallam
he knew. In this calm confrontation with the past he discov-
ers the basis for his love, which, he realizes, was a love
for Hallam's Godlike attributes. By the end of part three,
he no longer vainly yearns for renewed physical contact with
Hallam, for he has achieved spiritual union with him.

At the beginning of part three the persona specu-
lates on what Hallam would have become had he remained alive
and on the manner in which he would have reacted to the
death of his companion (LXXX, LXXXIV). The persona is unable
to derive any consolation from these speculations, however,
because they violate temporal imperatives and spring from a
"backward fancy" (LXXXIV, 46) which breaks "the low beginn-
ings of content" (LXXXIV, 48). Yet he is very close to per-
ceiving the true meaning of his love for Hallam. In section
LXXXII he maintains that life is a chrysalis state from
which the soul is released at death. However, the belief
that "transplanted human worth / Will bloom to profit,
otherwhere" (LXXXII, 11-12) is incapable of subduing "the
wrath that garners" (LXXXII, 14) in his heart, for death
has, he declares, "put our lives so far apart / We cannot
hear each other speak" (LXXXII, 15-16). He still has to

make the final connexion, to realize that Hallam's "human
worth" has been "transplanted" in his own being, to "bloom
to profit" there. This realization comes in section LXXXV:

> Whatever way my days decline,
> I felt and feel, though left alone,
> His being working in mine own,
> The footsteps of his life in mine;
>
> A life that all the Muses decked
> With gifts of grace, that might express
> All-comprehensive tenderness,
> All-subtilising intellect. (LXXXV, 41-48)

At the same time he realizes that his love for Hallam

> . . . masters Time indeed, and is
> Eternal, separate from fears:
> The all-assuming months and years
> Can take no part away from this.
> (LXXXV, 65-68)

It is the loss of Hallam which has led to his comprehension
of the essence of his love for him. In his awareness of
love for the Godlike in man as the primary fact of his
being, he has arrived at a firm basis for faith and for the
recovery of joy. Nature is no longer desolate, for it is
revivified by its association with Hallam (LXXXIX, C). The
persona now prays for Hallam to return not as "a visual
shade of some one lost" (XCIII, 5) but as "the Spirit him-
self, . . . / Spirit to Spirit, Ghost to Ghost" (XCIII, 6,
8). This occurs in section XCV, the trance vision which, it
has been argued, marks the turning point of the poem.[11]
While this section can be seen as a turning point, it is
important to define the nature of the experience it records.

Henry Kozicki argues that <u>In Memoriam</u>

> shows the persona moving into happiness not through per-
> ceptions of design nor through mystical trances, but
> rather through his developing consciousness, his willed
> construction of "meaning" in the disastrous past, and
> his faith in a God that is totally unknown except
> through this consciousness and this past.[12]

Dwight Culler, in his discussion of section XCV, argues that

> it is not that Tennyson's spirit [is] set at peace by
> union with Hallam, rather that he [achieves] that union
> because his spirit is at peace. Moreover, that state of
> inward quietude [is] achieved, not suddenly, but by a
> long process of ordering and cleansing and restoring the
> imagination.[13]

Thus, the persona's trance vision is no more fortuitous than

the transcendent vision which concludes <u>The Prelude</u>, and,

like that vision, it is the product of calm reflection.

Unlike the weird seizures of the Prince, the persona's trance

does not come "on a sudden in the midst of men and day" (I,

15), but is meticulously prepared for. The setting is the

same as for section LXXXIX, which recalls Hallam's visits

to Somersby, but the tone is totally different. The land-

scape of section LXXXIX is full of restless movement; the

landscape of section XCV is one of "calm that [lets] the

tapers burn / Unwavering" (XCV, 5-6), as in a temple. In

this setting the persona attempts to recreate his union

with Hallam by reading his "noble letters" (XCV, 27), an

attempt which, as Dwight Culler says, springs from a desire

to achieve "mystical union, through the intercession of

Hallam, with Absolute Reality."[14] This union is achieved,

even if only momentarily, to be "stricken thro' with doubt"
(XCV, 48):

>A hunger seized my heart; I read
> Of that glad year which once had been,
> In those fallen leaves which kept their green,
>The noble letters of the dead:
>
>And strangely on the silence broke
> The silent-speaking words, and strange
> Was love's dumb cry defying change
>To test his worth; and strangely spoke
>
>The faith, the vigour, bold to dwell
> On doubts that drive the coward back,
> And keen through wordy snares to track
>Suggestion to her inmost cell.
>
>So word by word, and line by line,
> The dead man touched me from the past,
> And all at once it seemed at last
>The living soul was flashed on mine,
>
>And mine in this was wound, and whirled
> About empyreal heights of thought,
> And came on that which is, and caught
>The deep pulsations of the world.
>
>   (XCV, 21-40)

It is the persona's attachment to the Godlike, hero-
ic aspects of Hallam's being which enables him to emulate
and ultimately embody those qualities within his own being
and reaffirm his faith. Up to this point, he has associated
the loss of the man in whom he saw God reflected with the
loss of God. He now realizes that his love for Hallam was a
means for arriving at the love of God, and that Hallam's
faith has provided a model for his own:

>He fought his doubts and gathered strength,
> He would not make his judgement blind,
> He faced the spectres of his mind
>And laid them: thus he came at length

> To find a stronger faith his own;
> And Power was with him in the night,
> Which makes the darkness and the light,
> And dwells not in the light alone.
>   (XCVI, 13-20)

In the final section of part three (CIII) the persona, having achieved spiritual wisdom, drops "his earthly hopes and powers" and focuses exclusively on his spiritual union with Hallam. Tennyson declared that he is wrong to do this, for "his earthly hopes and powers will still be of use to him."[15] Nevertheless, if the poem were to end at this point it would make perfect sense in the light of Tennyson's growing awareness that the regenerated individual is an alienated being. Indeed, the end of the third part of the poem bears more than a passing resemblance to the end of the Idylls of the King. Hallam, as a type of Arthur, welcomes the persona aboard "a great ship" (CIII, 40), and the persona, falling on Hallam's neck (CIII, 44), merges with him and sails off:

> And while the wind began to sweep
> A music out of sheet and shroud,
> We steered her toward a crimson cloud
> That landlike slept along the deep.
>   (CIII, 53-56)

However, In Memoriam, the poem which Tennyson regarded as "too hopeful, . . . more than I am myself," does not end on this note.[16] In the fourth part of the poem the persona imposes the pattern of individual growth and rebirth upon history, declaring not only that the reborn individual has the ability to impose his will upon history but also that

the cumulative effect of such impositions will be to lead

society toward an ultimate accord with the will of God.

The third Christmas Eve is celebrated on new, un-

hallowed ground (CIV) and the persona, in keeping with his

rejection of the forms of the past, chooses not to cele-

brate it in the traditional manner:

> But let no footstep beat the floor,
>   Nor bowl of wassail mantle warm;
>   For who would keep an ancient form
> Through which the spirit breathes no more?
>
> Be neither song, nor game, nor feast;
>   Nor harp be touched, nor flute be blown;
>   No dance, no motion, save alone
> What lightens in the lucid east
>
> Of rising worlds by yonder wood.
>   Long sleeps the summer in the seed;
>   Run out your measured arcs, and lead
> The closing cycle rich in good.
>   (CV, 17-28)

It is the spirit of Christmas, like the spirit of Hallam,

which is important, not the "old clothes" in which it has

been dressed and which now serve only to obscure its mean-

ing. The persona looks forward to "the Christ that is to

be" (CVI, 32), rather than back to the Christ "that died in

holy land" (LXXXIV, 42). And, as he hears the bells of the New

Year ringing out not only "the grief that saps the mind, /

For those that here we see no more" (CVI, 9-10) but also

"the feud of rich and poor" (CVI, 11), they acquire a mill-

ennial significance: "Ring out the thousand wars of old, /

Ring in the thousand years of peace" (CVI, 27-28).

In the fourth part of the poem (CVI-CXXXI) the per-

sona rejects the "barren faith" (CVIII, 5) which entails a
rejection of society and gives the pattern of individual
regeneration a social application. As E.D.H. Johnson says,
"his vision [is] cleared and his purpose steadied by the
perception of a god which will enlist the altruistic devo-
tion enjoined on him by Hallam's example."[17]

> I will not shut me from my kind,
>   And, lest I stiffen into stone,
>   I will not eat my heart alone,
> Nor feed with sighs a passing wind:
>
> What profit lies in barren faith,
>   And vacant yearning, though with might
>   To scale the heaven's highest height,
> Or dive below the wells of Death?
>   (CVIII, 1-8)

To retreat from the world into an illusory union with God
is, he declares, mere solipsism, for the individual cannot
conceive of anything higher than the Godlike qualities he
himself possesses: "What find I in the highest place, / But
mine own phantom chanting hymns?" (CVIII, 9-10) Thus, the
persona recalls those qualities which rendered Hallam God-
like in his eyes and asks himself what use Hallam would have
put them to in the world. He concludes that he would have
been

> A life in civic action warm,
>   A soul on highest mission sent,
>   A potent voice of Parliament,
> A pillar steadfast in the storm,
>
> Should licensed boldness gather force,
>   Becoming, when the time has birth,
>   A lever to uplift the earth
> And roll it in another course,

```
        With thousand shocks that come and go,
          With agonies, with energies,
          With overthrowings, and with cries,
        And undulations to and fro.
                              (CXIII, 9-20)
```

Here, the chaos of history, which the persona had earlier
turned away from, in his realization of its opposition to
the will of God, becomes the raw material which the Godlike
attributes of man must shape into accordance with His will.
The movement from the past conditional to the future tense
in this passage causes the dislocation of its primary sub-
ject, and Hallam, the man who would have done these things,
merges into the hero of the future, who will do them. The
persona, with his "vague desire / That spurs an imitative
will" (CX, 19-20),is attempting to create a role for himself
rather than indulging in the wishful fantasies of section
LXXXIV. Hallam becomes a model not only for the persona's
development but also for that of mankind:

```
        I would the whole world grew like thee,
          Who grewest not alone in power
          And knowledge, but by year and hour
        In reverence and in charity.
                              (CXIV, 25-28)
```

In the last part of In Memoriam, the dialectical
opposition between God and Nature persists. Nature is form-
less and insubstantial (CXXIII) and God is absent from it
(CXXIV, 5-8). Yet "human love and truth" (CXVIII, 3), where-
in God resides, are not part of "dying Nature's earth and
lime" (CXVIII, 4). The God within man is able to perceive
the ultimate triumph of the divine over Nature (CXVII), and,

even though history may appear to be cyclical, the regener-
ated individual is able to interpret this apparent cyclical-
ism in terms of "vast eddies in the flood / Of onward time"
(CXXVIII, 5-6). The assumption underlying these convictions
is that man will attain union with the divine (CXVIII). The
chaos of history is equated with the inner chaos which the
persona has experienced through the loss of Hallam, the
type of the coming man. Just as the persona has grown "to
something greater than before" (epilogue, 1. 20) because of
this descent into chaos, so too will society grow through
revolutionary upheaval, which the persona seems to regard
as inevitable;

> And all is well, though faith and form
>   Be sundered in the night of fear;
>   Well roars the storm to those that hear
> A deeper voice across the storm,
>
> Proclaiming social truth shall spread,
>   And justice, even though thrice again
>   The red fool-fury of the Seine
> Should pile her barricades with dead.
>
> But ill for him that wears a crown,
>   And him, the lazar, in his rage:
>   They tremble, the sustaining crags;
> The spires of ice are toppled down,
>
> And molten up, and roar in flood;
>   The fortress crashes from on high,
>   The brute earth lightens to the sky,
> And the great Aeon sinks in blood,
>
> And compassed by the fires of Hell;
>   While thou, dear spirit, happy star,
>   O'erlook'st the tumult from afar,
> And smilest, knowing all is well.
>   (CXXVII)

"All is well" seems a peculiarly inadequate reaction to the
apocalyptic vision presented in this section, yet it is the [18]
sentiment which dominates the idyllic epilogue to the poem.
In the epilogue, Tennyson employs the figure of the apocal-
yptic marriage, yet embodies it in a middle-class context
in which the only external element is the soul which draws
"from out the vast" (l. 123) and enters the bridal chamber
to form "a closer link / Betwixt us and the crowning race"
(ll. 127-128). The tension between a vision of the world
consumed by fire and a vision of it ruled by domestic tran-
quility is not resolved and this undercuts the optimism of
the poem's conclusion. Indeed, as James Kincaid points out,
the epilogue is "essentially disconnected from [this] mag-
nificent but deeply troubled poem. . . . Instead of a gen-
uine conclusion, we are given a series of skillful but in-
adequate substitutes." [19] Humphry House goes as far as to
say that "the optimistic, progressive view of the world and
of life, that in the poem ultimately triumphs, is . . .
shallow, even emotionally insincere." [20] It could be argued
that Tennyson intended the historical attitude of his per-
sona to contain an element of paradox. After all, the per-
sona does come to see Hallam in a paradoxical way at the
end of the poem:

> Known and unknown; human, divine;
>   Sweet human hand and lips and eye;
>   Dear heavenly friend that canst not die,
> Mine, mine, for ever, ever mine.
>
>   (CXXIX, 5-8)

But this paradox is justified by the development of the persona's attitude to Hallam throughout the poem. His historical vision is not paradoxical but downright contradictory. It lacks a substantial basis in the poem itself. What is justified by the poem is a vision of history as essentially chaotic but with the hero having the capacity to impose order upon it. Such a vision does not guarantee that the heroic guidance of history will not ultimately succumb to chaos. Meaning, therefore, resides in the Godlike attributes of the heroic or regenerated individual, and to attempt to find meaning within the historical process is to follow a chimera. This was a realization Tennyson was soon to come to.

In The Princess and In Memoriam, the prospect of impending doom is viewed with a considerable degree of detachment. In retrospect, it is possible to detect a fundamental paradox in the co-existence of a belief in imminent upheaval and a belief in the continuance of a slowly evolving organic society. There would be no problem if Tennyson indicated that revolution or evolution were the two options facing society, but he does not do this. He implies instead that the future will be both revolutionary and evolutionary in character. This rather unsatisfactory attitude can be partially attributed to his perception of an intrinsic dissimilarity between England and France. England has a "strength of common sense / That saved us many times" ("Hail Briton,"

ll. 41-42) which France, with "the red fool-fury of the
Seine" (CXXVII, 7) lacks. Therefore, the evolutionary dest-
iny of England can be worked out alongside the revolution-
ary destiny of France. But the assumption upon which this
appealing notion rested, namely that England was a funda-
mentally stable, united, and organic society, capable of
resisting alien pressures from both internal and external
sources, was a false one, as Tennyson was well aware. There-
fore, his historical optimism was justified not by histori-
cal reality but by a transcendent vision of the organic
society England could become if it actively accepted its
destiny. Obviously this optimism was very tenuous, so ten-
uous, in fact, that in In Memoriam it appears rather in-
congruous.

In the years immediately following the publication
of In Memoriam several factors combined to shake this ten-
uous optimism to its foundations.[21] The burgeoning of the
British economy in the 1850s encouraged the widespread app-
lication of the principle of laissez-faire, which extended
into the political sphere. The deaths of Peel and Welling-
ton were followed by a period of weak and ineffectual gov-
ernment, during which the threat of French invasion was
treated with indifference and the Crimean War with incomp-
etence. Tennyson saw laissez-faire as the root of all the
evils in his society, and, by the time he started work on

Maud in 1854, he was already convinced that it had doomed

England to a rapid descent into anarchy.

The threat of French invasion in 1852 and the luke-

warm reaction to it by the powerful industrialists who had

risen to political prominence since 1832 evoked in Tennyson

a response of unprecedented vehemence:

> Though niggard throats of Manchester may bawl,
>   What England was, shall her true sons forget?
> We are not cotton-spinners all,
>   But some love England and her honour yet.
> And these in our Thermopylae shall stand,
> And hold against the world this honour of the land.
>   ("The Third of February, 1852" (1852), ll. 43-48)

It is in the poems written at this time that we find the

first truly apocalyptic pronouncements on England's Future:

> O Grief and Shame if while I preach of laws
>   Whereby to guard our freedom from offence--
> And trust an ancient manhood and the cause
>   Of England and her health of common sense--
> There hang within the heavens a dark disgrace,
> Some vast Assyrian doom to burst upon our race.
>   ("Suggested by Reading an Article in a Newspaper"
>   (1852), ll. 37-42)

If this doom was to be averted, there had to be a revival of

the heroic. However, the Godlike men whom Tennyson calls

upon to engage England's historical destiny are not really

in evidence in these poems, while the ungodlike ones are.

The only Godlike man who does appear is the Duke of Well-

ington, and he is dead. The "Ode on the Death of the Duke

of Wellington" (1852) is, as much as anything else, an app-

eal for the new generation to emulate his example, yet there

is no actual indication that it will. At the same time,

Tennyson became so pessimistic about social developments that
he began to develop the idea that, even if the individual
were capable of transforming himself into a hero in the face
of general opposition to the heroic ideal, he would be in-
capable of operating as a hero within society because of the
strength of the opposition. In "Will" (1855), for example,
the hero is seen as an alienated being who "suffers, but
. . . will not suffer long / . . . the loud world's random
mock" (ll. 2-4). In "The Charge of the Light Brigade" (1854)
the implication is that, if you are a hero, you will get
killed through the incompetence or stupidity of the unhero-
ic individuals who lead society.

All of these concerns came to a head in Maud (1855).
According to Lowell, Tennyson called it "the antiphonal
voice to 'In Memoriam,'" and, whereas that poem had been too
optimistic, Maud is, if anything, too pessimistic.[22] The
tension between a view of the world consumed by revolution
and a view of it ruled by domestic tranquility, which is
left unresolved at the end of In Memoriam, is absent from
Maud, in which society is seen in the bleak terms estab-
lished by Carlyle in his Latter-Day Pamphlets. The persona
of Maud does, it is true, achieve regeneration of a kind,
and he does see this regeneration as somehow connected with
regeneration on a social level. His conviction is not echoed
in the poem, however, which presents a picture of universal
desolation and of a society in which the regenerated individ-

ual is powerless. Accordingly, we see the persona, at the
end of the poem, sailing away from society, like Ulysses or
the persona of "Locksley Hall," to embrace the "purpose of
God" (III, 59). Although he is going to fight for his country
there is a strong element of withdrawal in his departure for
the Crimea, and it appears that this departure is the only
positive course of action open to him.

The starting point of Maud is the suicide of the
persona's father. This recalls the starting point of In Mem-
oriam, but, whereas Hallam's death had been due to irrevoc-
able natural forces, the death of the persona's father in
Maud is due to social pressure. Thus, it is not only Nature
which is at strife with God in Maud, but also a society
ruled by natural laws. According to Christopher Caudwell,
Tennyson, "like Darwin, and even more Darwin's followers,
. . . projects the condition of capitalist production into
Nature (individual struggle for existence) and then reflects
the struggle intensified by its instinctive and therefore
unalterable blindness back into society, so that God--symbol
of the internal forces of society--seems captive to Nature--
symbol of the external environment of society."[23] The inab-
ility of the persona's father to adapt to his society is
reflected in the persona, who rages against a world where
"civil war" (I, 27) is the order of the day. The persona is
unable to transcend the forces of his society and, thus,
sees mankind as "ashes and dust" (I, 32) and salvation as

possible only through the pursuit of apocalyptic destruction (I, 47-48). However, this view of mankind as inherently evil is tempered by a desire to flee from this vision and from mankind (I, 64, 76). It is this confusion which forms the basis of the persona's sensibility and dictates the nature of his relationship with Maud. Indeed, his relationship embodies this confusion, for, while Maud represents the anima figure to whom he flees for escape from his desolate vision, she also comes from the family which destroyed his father and thus precipitated this vision. The first stirrings of his passion for Maud are, therefore, "ghostlike, deathlike" (I, 95) and lead to the desire to "flee from the cruel madness of love" (I, 156). Yet his desire for Maud is as inescapable as his desire to revenge himself on Maud's brother, which is, in fact, a driving force behind his passion. Put in these terms, it is clear why his relationship with Maud is doomed to failure and why, at the moment of his greatest passion for Maud, he should kill her brother.

The cynicism he resolves on (I, 29-32), together with his rejection of society (I, 150-155), is, in effect, a repression of his awareness of his own nature. Because of his treatment by society, he has, as he dimly recognizes at the beginning of the poem, adopted its characteristics of jealousy, envy, rage, avarice, and pride. His projection of these characteristics outside himself means that his subsequent actions are based on an illusory sense of his own nat-

ure, while his repressed passions guide him toward their own fulfilment. When they do finally break through, at the end of Part One, they destroy his sense of his own nature and precipitate the psychological collapse which, in turn, precipitates his rebirth. His withdrawal from the world is comparable to that of the soul in "The Palace of Art," yet, in this case, it is based not on aesthetic desire but on an inability to live successfully within the world. Nevertheless, he does become increasingly detached from the world and from his own passions and begins to see the world in terms of absolutes, divided between spirituality and bestiality. This process begins in canto five, when he hears Maud singing a ballad about a time when men were prepared to die for their country, in contrast to the sordid greed of the present. This sets up a paradox, for Maud becomes identified not only with the present but also with the past. The persona resolves this paradox by splitting Maud into a physical entity, "neither courtly nor kind" (I, 188) and a spiritual entity, meek, selfless, and pure--"a voice" (I, 189). As his doubts about Maud diminish and eventually disappear, she becomes an exclusively spiritual entity, and it is upon her brother that the negative qualities he initially associates with her are displaced:

> And fair without, faithful within,
> Maud to him is nothing akin:
> Some peculiar mystic grace
> Made her only the child of her mother,
> And heaped the whole inherited sin

>   On the huge scapegoat of the race,
>   All, all upon the brother.
>   (I, 480-486)

This displacement is enhanced by the brother's opposition to
the relationship between the persona and Maud, and his plans
to marry her to a wealthy industrialist. In canto ten the
persona's love for Maud quickens into a condemnation of this
suitor and the social corruption he represents. At this stage
he is still conscious of his "dark mind" and he expresses the
wish to undergo personal regeneration:

>   Ah God, for a man with a heart, head, hand,
>   Like some of the simple great ones gone
>   For ever and ever and ever by,
>   One still strong man in a blatant land,
>   Whatever they call him, what care I,
>   Aristocrat, democrat, autocrat--one
>   Who can rule and dare not lie.
>
>   And ah for a man to arise in me,
>   That the man I am may cease to be!
>   (I, 389-397)

Clearly, then, his love for Maud has led to the
perception of meaning, even though this meaning cannot be
found in himself or in society. He has begun to perceive a
spiritual reality which, he believes, is capable of trans-
forming both himself and society--namely, the heroic ideal.
In the ensuing cantos, however, he gradually loses sight of
his unregenerate nature and buries his "dead body of hate"
(I, 780) in himself, instead of seeking regeneration through
confrontation with it. His perception of a spiritual reality
leads to the assumption that his relationship with Maud sig-
nifies the achievement of a type of apocalyptic marriage, in

which both parties have been transformed. The assumption
ignores both the social forces embodied in Maud's brother
which oppose their union and the rage which the persona
feels against society. He believes that his love is an ex-
pression of pure spirituality while all the time it is be-
coming more carnal. In the latter cantos of Part One the
use of blood and associated images such as red roses becomes
increasingly prominent. The "soul of the rose" (I, 882) en-
ters the persona's blood and he links, by implication, the
coursing of his blood "to the long-wished-for end" (I, 603)
and the flowing of the rivulet "From the lake to the meadow
and onto the wood, / . . . To the woody hollows in which we
met / And the valleys of Paradise" (I, 886, 892-893). The
"woody hollows" ("woody" echoing the insistent "would die"
of canto eighteen (XVIII, 642, 644)) recall the "dreadful
hollow" of canto one (I, 1), which is linked with blood,
death, and the persona's dark mind. In other words, his
repressed passion has taken control of his love for Maud
and is directing it towards the fulfilment of revenge for
his father's death. There is no spirituality left in his
love for Maud at this stage, as his definition of it in
terms of the vegetable world, in canto twenty-two, indic-
ates. He is unaware of this, however. When his passion
breaks through its thin rind of repression and he kills
Maud's brother, he recognizes that the spiritual image of
Maud he has built up is but "a lying trick of the brain"

(II, 37), and he is brought face to face with his own unre-

generate nature. He can no longer maintain the illusion that

his nature differs from that of the rest of mankind, and he

calls on God to destroy His creation:

> Arise, my God, and strike, for we hold thee just,
> Strike dead the whole weak race of venomous worms,
> That sting each other here in the dust;
> We are not worthy to live.   (II, 45-48)

This nihilism is replaced, in canto two of Part Two, by

introspection. The persona flees to Brittany and meditates

on a shell "undestroyed amid the storm [which] perhaps sym-

bolises to him his own first and highest nature preserved
                                  24
amid the storms of passion."   It also symbolizes his fear

of impending psychological collapse, for, although the

shell has withstood

> . . . the shock
> Of cataract seas that snap
> The three-decker's oaken spine,
>   (II, 73-75)

it can now be "crushed with a tap" (II, 69), because it is

"void of the little living will / That made it stir" (II,

62-63). Like the shell, the persona's mind has undergone

tremendous upheavals, yet, with the failure of the will, it

is now terrifyingly vulnerable. He is forced to recognize

that the spiritual image of Maud

> . . . never came from on high
> Nor ever arose from below,
> But only moves with moving eye.
>   (II, 83-85)

It is the shock of this recognition which unbalances his

mind. He hopes that "a spark of will" (II, 104) will remain, but this is not to be, for in canto five of Part Two his dark heart becomes "a handful of dust" (II, 241).

In canto four of Part Two, the persona attempts to recall the bliss he felt during his courtship of Maud, but is unable to do so because of his inability to dissociate it from the illusory spiritual image of her which he has created, and which has been transformed into "a hard mechanic ghost" (II, 82). This recalls the failure of the persona in In Memoriam to find meaning in the present by attempting to retreat into the past. It is only in Part Three of the poem, when the persona finally comprehends the true meaning of his love for Maud, that he achieves regeneration. For the moment, he cannot escape the feeling that his love was an illusion which precipitated the eruption of his savage nature. This leads him to the conclusion that human endeavour is worthless, and he lapses into madness, believing that he is, in fact, dead. This belief is the fulfilment of his obsession with death and with this fulfilment the way is clear for him to see both this obsession and the world in a clearer light.

In Part Three the persona is still preoccupied with death and social corruption, but, instead of being controlled by passion and fear, he is able to place these concerns within the context of "the purpose of God" (III, 59). He

achieves this new perspective through the reappearance of
the spiritual image of Maud, in circumstances similar to
those of canto three in Part One. When the vision appeared
to him in Part One, he fixed his eyes on the ground--a
symptom of his obsession with death and the grave--and thus
made the fatal connexion between physicality and spiritual-
ity which led to the dénouement of Part One. In Part Three,
however, he raises his eyes to the heavens, to see Maud
"like a silent lightning under the stars / . . . divide in
a dream from a band of the blest" (III, 9-10) and speak "of
a hope for the world in the coming wars" (III, 11). In
other words, he finally comprehends the spiritual signif-
icance of his love for Maud--a significance he had dimly
apprehended in his response to the battle-song of canto
five in Part One, but subsequently ignored. He realizes
that this vision of Maud is "but a dream" (III, 15), yet it
signals his awakening to "the better mind" (III, 56). He
finally joins with "a loyal people shouting a battle cry"
(III, 35), and, as he does so, the "dreary phantom" (III,
36) of Maud departs from him. Through his symbolic death
he has been reborn and enabled to transform his fears into
positive forces. The poem which opens with the lines:

> I hate the dreadful hollow behind the little wood,
> Its lips in the field above are dabbled with blood-red
>   heath,
> The red-ribb'd ledges drip with a silent horror of
>   blood,
> And Echo there, whatever is asked her, answers "Death."
>   (I, 1-4)

ends, in the original version, with the positive transform-
ation of this image:

> And now by the side of the Black and Baltic deep,
> And deathful-grinning mouths of the fortress, flames
> The blood-red blossom of war with a heart of fire.
> <div align="right">(III, 51-53)</div>

Yet, although the persona achieves rebirth, there is little
indication of rebirth on a social level. He does, it is
true, declare that

> . . . many a darkness into the light shall leap,
> And shine in the sudden making of splendid names,
> And noble thought be freër under the sun,
> <div align="right">(III, 46-49)</div>

yet this is the persona speaking and his affirmation is
undercut by the ironic manner in which he is presented. At
this point he is, as Tennyson said, "sane but shattered,"
and the charge that he goes off to the Crimea simply as a
means of honourable suicide, which has frequently been
made, is not wholly unjustified.[25] While the persona achieves
the necessary precondition for heroism--individual rebirth--
he has been "shattered" in the process and seems incapable
of projecting his will outside himself, incapable of any-
thing, in fact, except embracing "the doom assigned" (III,
59). The implication is that the heroic individual will, in
the course of achieving the heroic vision, be so enfeebled
by the pressures of the anti-heroic society he must fight
against that, in the end, he will be incapable of imposing
any order upon that society and will be filled only with a

desire to escape from it.

Thus, only five years after the unsubstantial optimism of In Memoriam, Tennyson seems to have succumbed to the pessimism and ennui which characterize Carlyle's Latter-Day Pamphlets. Yet although Tennyson may have come to feel, by the mid-1850s, that society was slipping downward to an ever-increasing dependence on natural laws and that the heroic ideal was swiftly being eroded, he could not accept that the regenerated individual, the bearer of the heroic ideal, should abandon his society. The ultimate irony of Maud is that the persona's "withdrawal" is, at the same time, an engagement of historical destiny. Although this engagement seems doomed to failure on the social level, it is, nevertheless, a positive action, in a way that withdrawal to lotos-land would not be.

Looking back over Tennyson's career, we can see that behind all his attempts to bridge the gulf between physical and spiritual reality lay a fundamental awareness that the phenomenal world is unreal and that the only reality is spiritual. In "The Ancient Sage" (1885), which Tennyson called an expression of his personal feelings, the sage describes the phenomenal world as the "phantom walls" of an "illusion" (l. 181), and goes on to recall the "Passion of the Past" (l. 219) he felt as a boy:

> The first gray streak of earliest summer-dawn,
> The last long stripe of waning crimson gloom,
> As if the late and early were but one—

> A height, a broken grange, a grove, a flower
> Had murmurs 'Lost and gone and lost and gone!'
> A breath, a whisper--some divine farewell--
> Desolate sweetness--far and far away--
> What had he loved, what had he lost, the boy?
> I know not and I speak of what has been.
> (ll. 220-228)

"The Ancient Sage" is a late poem and expresses an attitude to the world which Tennyson, throughout much of his career, had resisted. He had tried to perceive the historical process in a meaningful way, not just out of a sense of moral obligation but also because the thought that the world was illusory filled him with despondency. His son recorded that Tennyson

> passed through 'moods of misery unutterable,' but he eventually shook them off. He remembered how, when in London almost for the first time, one of these moods came over him, as he realized that 'in a few years all its inhabitants would be lying horizontal, stark and stiff in their coffins.'[26]

Thus, he fought against the perception which was vouchsafed him in his youth in an attempt to maintain psychological equilibrium. His poetry, up to and including Maud, is a record of his struggle to perceive a meaning within the historical process, while all the time he was dimly aware that meaning existed only outside history. The idea that the world is an illusion was not, of course, new. What was new was the loss of a divine referent outside history, or, at any rate, loss of contact with it. Carlyle believed that this loss was due to the association of the divine referent with forms within the world--"clothes," as he called them--

which had gradually lost their metaphorical function and become purely self-referential. His solution was to seek the divine within himself and to fashion new "clothes" for it. The palingenesic paradigm which he established and which could operate effectively at an individual level did not work so well, however, when it was applied to society. The anachronistic Christian paradigm, on the other hand, had worked equally effectively at an individual and at a social level, as Carlyle pointed out in Past and Present. Thus, it is more accurate to say that the sense of loss which haunts the writings of Carlyle and Tennyson is due to an inability to perceive or to create a reflection of the divine within the world, rather than to a loss of the divine. From this loss sprang alienation--alienation of the individual from society and alienation of man as a social being from man as a spiritual being--or, as it has been called, dehumanizat-ion. In the twentieth century we have grown accustomed to this kind of alienation, but for Carlyle and Tennyson it was something unaccustomed, something prodigious which had arisen from the ashes of a synthetic world view, something at odds with the world view they had grown up with. Neither of them fully accepted it, although their attempts to en-visage a "rehumanization" of mankind were gradually eclipsed by the sense of ennui. In Tennyson's last major work, the Idylls of the King (1857-85), the possibility of social re-

generation under an heroic leader all but succumbs to a vision of universal decay, where the only salvation possible is an individual one.

One of the problems associated with interpretation of the Idylls of the King arises from the extended period of time over which its composition was spread. It is generally accepted that the second group of idylls (composed between 1868 and 1874) reflects a profounder despair than the first group (composed between 1854 and 1859).[27] This has led to doubts as to whether the Idylls can be regarded as a unified work or not. The practice of composing long poems over an extended period of time was usual for Tennyson, however. The composition of In Memoriam was spread over seventeen years (1833-50) and the composition of Maud over twenty-two (1833-55). One of the reasons for the success of this procedure lies in Tennyson's use of a consistently dialectical mode, which gains an added dimension when poems or fragments from one period are juxtaposed with those from another. This tendency can be seen reflected in "Locksley Hall Sixty Years After" (1886), in which a dialogue is set up with a poem written almost fifty years earlier. This dialectical principle achieves its fullest expression in the Idylls, and it is its operation within the poem, rather than the method of composition, which poses the biggest interpretative problem.

One way to approach this problem is to regard the poem as an expressionistic work. A good definition of what I mean by this term is to be found in Wilhelm Worringer's Form in Gothic, one of the major stimuli behind twentieth-century expressionism:

> The dualism of Gothic man is not superior to knowledge . . . but prior to knowledge. It consists partly of vague sentiment, partly of bitter experience of facts. His dualistic sufferings have not yet been transformed into reverence. He still strives against dualistic inevitableness and endeavours to overcome it by an unnatural enhancement of sensibility. The feeling of dualistic distraction . . . leaves him neither rest nor peace. . . . With his joyless fear of the world, he stands as a product of earthly unrest and metaphysical anxiety. . . . And as rest and clear vision are denied him, his only resource is to increase his restlessness and confusion to the pitch where they bring him stupefaction and release. The need in Northern man for activity, which is precluded from being translated into a clear knowledge of actuality and which is intensified for lack of this natural solution, finally disburdens itself in an unhealthy play of fantasy. Actuality, which Gothic man could not transform into naturalness by means of a clear-sighted knowledge, was overpowered by this intensified play of fantasy and transformed into a spectrally heightened and distorted actuality. Everything becomes weird and fantastic. Behind the visible appearance of a thing lurks its caricature, behind the lifelessness of a thing an uncanny, ghostly life, and so all actual things become grotesque. . . . Common to all is an urge to activity, which, being bound to no one object, loses itself, as a result, in infinity.[28]

This definition of Gothicism, or expressionism, works very well as a description of the Idylls. Tennyson himself compared the poem to "shot-silk with many glancing colours," and, as John Rosenberg says, "nothing in the poem is as it seems, and nothing seems to be what it is. . . . The deeper one penetrates the Idylls, the more one perceives that its

interrelations are inexhaustible, that each of its parts re-
flects the infinite complexity of the whole."[29] Allan Danzig

argues that

> . . . the Blakean distinction between contrary and neg-
> ation is basic to Tennyson's perception of the world and
> thus to his poetry. Every quality, every manifestation
> of the sensual world, inevitably implies its contrary.
> It follows that, so long as life continues, this pair
> may not finally be resolved to a third term of synthe-
> sis. Rather they exist in constant dialectic tension;
> they do not destroy each other, as do negations. Life
> and death, reality and appearance, the unity and multi-
> plicity of "the Mystic": man must recognize and accept
> their mutual existence, not seeking to simplify them by
> denying one or the other. He must give each its due un-
> til, balanced, "like, unlike, they sing together / Side
> by side." Thus he achieves a necessary harmony, an app-
> arent stability in a world he yet knows as a bewildering
> flux of multiplicity."[30]

The "meaning" of the Idylls depends on an intricate network

of prefigurations and correspondences in which dreams and

visions play a more decisive role than actual events and

where the relations of time and space succumb to fantasy

and hallucination. As Norbert Lynton says, a central feature

of expressionistic art, from Altdorfer to Kandinsky, is its

apocalyptic anxiety.[31] Expressionism reflects a view of a

world out of touch with the human psyche or the divine

nature of man, a world moving toward apocalyptic conflagrat-

ion. The second group of Idylls is more expressionistic

and apocalyptic than the first group, yet this does not

imply a fundamental change of direction. The entire poem is

expressionistic and Worringer's comments on Gothicism point

a way through its complexities.

With this in mind, I would suggest that to discover
the "meaning" of the poem we should not look for causal re-
lationships within it but for a method of organization by
which disparate elements are juxtaposed so as to suggest
correspondences between them and to lead us to the percept-
ion of underlying principles. Thus, Guinevere's sin does
not cause the collapse of Camelot any more than do Merlin's
weakness or Arthur's unrealistic idealism. All of these
factors play a part in the conflict between sense and soul
upon which the poem is founded, and this conflict not only
fails to resolve itself but also frets itself into decay.
At the end of the poem, the illusion of meaning within the
world upon which this conflict depends has evaporated and
man is left in a seemingly meaningless cosmos, standing with
faint hope on the fringes of infinity.

The conflict between sense and soul is reflected in
the conflict between a Nature "red in tooth and claw" (In
Memoriam, LVI, 15) and the order which Arthur imposes on it.
As Paul Turner says,

> Arthur's cultural experiment is a garden created in a
> vast expanse of wild country, and always liable to be
> invaded or overgrown by nature in the raw. The image,
> which may perhaps be traced to . . . Horace's gardening
> metaphor "you may expel nature with a fork, but it will
> keep on coming back," anticipates Thomas Huxley's use of
> it in Evolution and Ethics (1894) to express the eternal
> opposition between the "cosmic" and the "ethical pro-
> cess."[32]

The impression given by the Idylls is that the natural or

cosmic process will inevitably triumph over the ethical. As

Philip Eggers says, " Tennyson shows nature in the <u>Idylls</u> as

a force corresponding to the spirit of evil in a Manichean

universe, impelling man downward into bestiality."[33]   Barbara

Lovenheim argues that

> one is forced to conclude that in Tennyson's world vis-
> ion, the human will is of negligible value. It is only
> able to transcend the tragic process of history through
> self-assessment and self-knowledge. It may ultimately
> be able to master the self, but it can never master
> fate.[34]

Nevertheless, Tennyson is concerned with the nature of the

historical process in the <u>Idylls</u>, and is at pains to show that

man can only achieve self-knowledge through active partici-

pation in this process. As Clyde Ryals says, "in knowing

that the world cannot be saved <u>and</u> facing its terrors the

self has victory."[35]   Arthur makes this point at the end of

<u>The Holy Grail</u>, in lines which Tennyson regarded as the

spiritual centre of the <u>Idylls</u>.[36]   The historical paradigm

employed by Tennyson in the poem is very similar to that

developed by Hegel in his <u>Philosophy of History</u>. Tennyson

obtained the first English translation of this work in 1857,

but it is likely that he was already familiar with Hegel's

ideas by this time.[37]   Julius Hare, Tennyson's tutor at Cam-

bridge and a mentor of the "Apostles," was influenced by

Hegel's philosophy of history, although he was somewhat

guarded in his assessment of it. In 1829 he wrote that

"even by Hegel the historical process is regarded too much

a mere natural evolution, without due account of that fost-
ering superintendence by which alone any real good is elic-
ited."[38] Although Tennyson may have agreed with Hare in the
earlier stages of his career, by the time he came to write
the Idylls, his faith in the existence of a "fostering sup-
erintendence" had all but given way to a deterministic
pessimism. Philip Eggers argues that the historical vision
of the Idylls is even more pessimistic in its determinism
than Hegel's, for while Hegel saw historical dialectic as
an agent of growth, Tennyson saw it as a sign of decay.[39]
Dwight Culler's observation that "Tennyson is not giving
us the whole story of Arthur's reign but only its final
days," giving us, in effect, his Decline and Fall of the
Roman Empire, would seem to bear this out.[40] A determinist-
ic attitude is conveyed most forcibly by the use of a
seasonal metaphor in the poem, which, as Barbara Lovenheim
says, "gives us little cause to think that events could have
been other than they were."[41]

As a prose draft of around 1833 shows, Tennyson
originally conceived of the Arthurian legend in terms that
are reminiscent of "The Palace of Art." In this draft, King
Arthur, like the lordly soul, dwells on the Mount of Camel-
ot amid "gardens and bowers and palaces . . . in glory
apart," while the Saxons, the predecessors of "the darkening
droves of swine" ("Palace of Art," l. 199), ravage the land

"and ever [come] nearer and nearer."[42] The Mount is "the

most beautiful in the world," yet "underneath it [is] hollow"

and there is "a prophecy that the mountain and the city on

some wild morning [will] topple into the abyss and be no

more."[43] This apocalyptic prophecy, which recalls the "Mene,

mene" of "The Palace of Art" (1. 227), indicates that Tenny-

son intended from the outset to write an Arthurian poem

which would have a contemporary relevance similar to that of

"The Palace of Art." He had already published one Arthurian

poem--"The Lady of Shallot"--in which Camelot is portrayed

as decadent, and he was shortly to write the "Morte d'Arthur,"

which depicts the ultimate collapse of the kingdom. In both

poems, the relevance of the Arthurian legend to contemporary

society is unmistakable.

When Tennyson returned to the Arthurian legend in

the 1850s, his vision of society had darkened considerably.

His main concern in the Idylls is not to warn society of the

consequences of its actions, but to demonstrate that society

is governed by inexorable laws, which the individual cannot

alter, but which he must recognize in order to achieve self-

knowledge. An admonitory note is struck from time to time in

the poem, however--most blatantly in the valedictory lines

"To the Queen," added in 1873--and this creates a dialectic-

al tension within it,reflecting an uncertainty as to whether

society can be reinvigorated once it has entered into a de-

cline. Even though there is this uncertainty, however, the

poem is dominated by a pessimistic mood of historical deter-
minism.

While it may be possible to overestimate Tennyson's
debt to Hegel's Philosophy of History in the Idylls, a con-
sideration of Hegel's ideas reveals many parallels between
his work and Tennyson's. As Henry Kozicki says, "Tennyson
may well have found in Hegel what his own thinking was mov-
ing toward: a unified explanation, at once pragmatic and met-
aphysical, of the interplay of God, the historical process,
and heroic man during a complete historical cycle."[44] Koz-
icki goes on to summarize the Hegelian principle which he
sees working in the Idylls thus: "all states pass inexorably
into oblivion, through the very agencies that brought them
into being."[45] Hegel declares that "a nation is moral--virt-
uous--vigorous while it is engaged in realizing its grand
objects, and defends its work against external violence dur-
ing the process of giving to its purposes an objective ex-
istence."[46] Once external dangers have been eliminated, how-
ever, the nation "realizes its potentiality--makes itself its
own deed, its own work--and thus it becomes an object to it-
self."[47] At this point, "Spirit is at war with itself," and
those who have brought the nation into being begin to sense
that they have been "fortifying a position for Right and
Order against themselves."[48] Henry Kozicki shows how this
historical paradigm operates in the Idylls:

Camelot rises in an apocalyptic condition of natural an-
archy when oppositions are very real. Heroes enlist un-
der Arthur as representative of world spirit bringing
historical form and, microcosmically, they subordinate
the "self-will of caprice and passion" to the higher
faculty. . . . This unity deteriorates when a time of
golden rest and "custom" arrives, because external chall-
enges have been eliminated. . . . Heroic passions, being
immutable, . . . begin to eat inwardly to produce an ex-
istence on the level of "self." . . . Now, instead of
knights like Gareth, "free" in perfect service, Geraint
wanders self-imprisoned (although finally saved), Balin
maddens and dies in fratricide, and Merlin immobilizes
himself in Brittany. Dialectical variations from the
spiritual mean appear in Pellam and Vivien: asceticism
and sensuality. The vows, also heroically immutable, are
transferred to historically destructive objects: the
Grail and women like Ettarre. Camelot produdes its dial-
ectical opposite in Pelleas's Round Table of the North.
The contradictions in the historical condition can be
held no longer and Camelot falls in apocalypse back into
the natural anarchy from whence it arose.[49]

Thus, the poem which was originally conceived in terms simi-
lar to those of "The Palace of Art" grew, in the course of
its composition, into something very different. While "The
Palace of Art" is concerned with warning society of the dan-
gers of ignoring the providential imperative, the Idylls
comes close to espousing an historical determinism, where
redemption can only be achieved on an individual level.

An admonitory element is, as I indicated earlier,
present in the poem, however, and it does create a dialect-
ical tension within it, yet it carries little force. A far
more significant dialectical pattern is that which concerns
the nature of the historical process. Like Hegel, Tennyson
sees history in dialectical terms. In The Coming of Arthur
this dialecticism is expressed in a straightforward oppos-

ition between Camelot, the harbinger of order, and the natur-
al anarchy which surrounds it. Yet the myth which sustains
the creation of Camelot and enables it to triumph over ext-
ernal opposition becomes a destructive force once that opp-
osition has been defeated. As Hegel says, when the nation
no longer has any external battles to fight, "the essential,
supreme interest" has vanished from its life, "for interest
is present only where there is opposition."[50] In other
words, Camelot begins to fight against itself, because it is
sustained by the principle of opposition--and if there is
nothing else to oppose it must oppose itself.

The historical determinism which follows on from
this dialectical view of the historical process does not
mean, however, that Tennyson saw the cosmos as meaningless.
Over and above the dialectical forces in the poem stands a
transcendent reality, vague and indeterminate to be sure,
but nonetheless real. Yet, as Arthur's speech at the end of
The Holy Grail makes clear, man should not retreat from the
world, like Percivale, to commune with that reality, but work
in the world. He has to engage the dialectical forces of
the historical process in order to perceive this transcendent
reality. The establishment of Camelot is, above all else, an
engagement of these forces. Arthur's attempt to impose a
sacramental vision on the world is, in historical terms,
futile, because, once this imposition has been made, it

breeds its opposite. This, then is Arthur's "folly," but it is a folly which leads him to wisdom. His illusory fancy that he can make

> Figs out of thistles, silk from bristles, milk
> From burning spurge, honey from hornet-combs,
> And men from beasts   (LT, 11. 356-358)

is rooted in a false identification of the secular and spiritual realms. When Camelot is destroyed in a dialectical war against itself, he has to choose between one or the other reality. He can, like Balin, Pelleas, Tristram, and Gawain, reject the sacramental vision in favour of a cynical espousal of the self-destructive belief that the dialectical processes of the world constitute the only reality, and that the cosmos is therefore meaningless. On the other hand, he can persist in his "folly" and maintain the sacramental vision in the face of its negation by the world, by reference to a divine instinct within himself. And this is what he does. He forges, out of the wreck of his historical aspirations, a transcendent vision which ultimately redeems him.

If we except the "Morte d'Arthur," the first idyll in order of composition is Merlin and Vivien (1857), and it is in this idyll that the central crisis of the poem occurs, providing a focus for the idylls grouped around it. Tennyson went to great pains to ensure that it became the central idyll. In 1873, when it was the fourth idyll in a group of ten, he declared that, "I must have two more idylls at least to make Vivien come later in the Poem, as it comes in

far too soon as it stands."[51] He eventually solved the prob-
lem by dividing Geraint and Enid (1857) into two parts and
adding Balin and Balan (1885). Many critics have seen Mer-
lin and Vivien as a watershed in the poem, but it has not
been generally regarded as the nucleus around which the
poem revolves. Henry Kozicki, for example, sees a major
shift of focus between the five idylls which precede Merlin
and Vivien and the five which follow it, yet he declares
that the idyll has "little to do with the mechanism of de-
cline and fall either historically or metaphysically, for
Merlin's loss seems to cause nothing."[52] However, he under-
mines his argument by going on to say that the idyll shows
"the self-engulfment of the most powerful figure in the
poem," who is a type of "the 'aged persona' that appeared
last in poems written at the time of the 1833-34 'Morte d'
Arthur.'"[53] Elsewhere he declares that the idyll portrays
"the lotos death of the old historical form through its hero's
withdrawal into self."[54] In one sense, it is Merlin, not
Arthur, who is the hero of the Idylls, just as it is the
persona of In Memoriam, rather than Hallam, who is the hero
of that poem. As John D. Rosenberg shows, Hallam and King
Arthur "are virtually indistinguishable"; in addition, Tenny-
son associated himself with Merlin on several occasions.[55]
In this way, Merlin can be seen as the poetic persona of the
Idylls, the agency through which order is generated. He diff-

ers from the persona of In Memoriam, however, in that he
achieves no final victory, but rather succumbs to despair.
With his withdrawal from the poem, the forces which threaten
order begin to engulf it, and at the end of the poem only a
dim recollection of Merlin's "weird rhyme, / 'From the great
deep to the great deep he goes'" (PA, ll. 444-445) is left.
Although Merlin is, like Ulysses, a representative of the
heroic ideal who withdraws from involvement in the histori-
cal process, he is a poet rather than a warrior, and Came-
lot, the result of his heroic endeavour, is "built / To mus-
ic" (GL, ll. 272-273). Camelot embodies the heroic ideal
which Merlin has to defend, and which Arthur has to draw on
in order to establish an organic society. Merlin abandons
the ideal in the face of the human corruption which threatens
it, and leaves Arthur powerless to deal with this corrupt-
ion.

Merlin and Vivien marks the point of no return in
the Idylls, the point at which the "Vivien-principle" ass-
umes supremacy over the "Arthur-principle." Her triumph is
dependent on Merlin's conviction of impending doom:

> Then fell on Merlin a great melancholy;
> He walked with dreams and darkness, and he found
> A doom that ever poised itself to fall,
> An ever-moaning battle in the mist,
> World-war of dying flesh against the life,
> Death in all life and lying in all love,
> The meanest having power upon the highest,
> And the high purpose broken by the worm.
>   (MV, ll. 187-194)[56]

As Fred Kaplan points out, Vivien

> is a projection of Merlin's melancholy, vanity, and
> frustration as artist. And his defeat at her hands is a
> symbolic representation of the defeat of the imagination
> in the tradition of Romantic poetry. So "Merlin and Viv-
> ien" is not only about the war between sense and soul,
> sloth and intellect--but also about the failure of the
> poetic imagination.[57]

She is a projection of his latent desire to withdraw into

himself and abandon society to the forces of corruption and

apocalyptic conflagration. This latent desire is embodied

in the charm which he eventually allows Vivien to cast over

him, in his final submission to the vision of impending doom

which she represents:

> Even such a wave, but not so pleasurable,
> Dark in the glass of some presageful mood,
> Had I for three days seen, ready to fall.
> And then I rose and fled from Arthur's court
> To break the mood. You followed me unasked;
> And when I looked, and saw you following still,
> My mind involved yourself the nearest thing
> In that mind-mist: for shall I tell you truth?
> You seemed that wave about to break upon me
> And sweep me from my hold upon the world,
> My use and name and fame.   (MV, ll. 292-302)

Just as Arthur's establishment of an organic society

is dependent on Merlin's idealistic projection, so is Viv-

ien's destruction of that society, by the exposure of the

malignancy within it, dependent on Merlin's apocalyptic

projection. Arthur and Vivien are embodiments of the forces

of creation and destruction within history. Merlin's actions

can be interpreted in Hegelian terms. When he brought Cam-

elot into being, he was establishing a principle of order

in opposition to the natural anarchy of the realm. By the
time of this idyll, Camelot has triumphed over this natural
anarchy and has lapsed into a torpor of "golden rest" (MV,
l. 140), in which, as Hegel says, "the essential, supreme
interest" has "vanished . . . , for interest is present only
when there is opposition."[58] With the absence of opposition,
Merlin develops a bitter pessimism which feeds on his earlier
idealism and expresses itself in an opposition to the very
thing he has founded. In other words, he wishes to see Came-
lot destroyed.

Vivien is an inversion of Arthur, a Satanic rather
than a Godlike figure, and, like Arthur, she can be seen as
an absolute force removed from the realm of ordinary moral-
ity which everybody else in the poem, Merlin included, is
confined to. The similarity between Arthur and Vivien is re-
inforced by the association of both with the wave and fire
imagery which symbolizes historical change within the poem.
In The Coming of Arthur Bellicent describes Arthur's nativ-
ity in the following terms:

> And down the wave and in the flame was borne
> A naked babe, and rode to Merlin's feet,
> Who stoopt and caught the babe, and cried "The King!
> Here is an heir for Uther!" And the fringe
> Of that great breaker, sweeping up the strand,
> Lashed at the wizard as he spake the word,
> And all at once all round him rose in fire,
> So that the child and he were clothed in fire.
>   (CA, ll. 382-389)

Halfway through the Idylls the force of this wave has slack-

ened and a fiery new wave, symbolized by Vivien and repres-
enting the war of Camelot against its own inner principle,
[59]
is gaining impetus. However, the positive force with
which the poem opens, and which becomes enfeebled as it pro-
gresses, differs from the negative force which overtakes it
in one significant way. In one sense, the kingdom is founded
on an illusion, an illusion which becomes increasingly dan-
gerous. When it is revealed to be an illusion--a revelation
prompted by Vivien--the high ideals which it has engendered
become transformed into nihilism. It is, therefore, this
illusion which precipitates the collapse of the kingdom,
just as it enabled it to be established in the first place.
Yet the poem does not present a picture of total meaning-
lessness. Merlin's vision, it is true, does succumb to mean-
inglessness, but this is because he is confined to the
realm of historical dialectic and ends in blind despair.
Arthur's vision does not succumb to the forces of history.
What does succumb to these forces is his attempt to impose
this vision on history.

In the first idyll, The Coming of Arthur (1869),
Arthur brings order to the realm he inherits, taming both
the savagery of nature and the remnants of the old order
which oppose him. This done, he sets out to consolidate his
victory by marriage to Guinevere. Although this desire is
rooted in physical attraction, he conceives of the marriage

in apocalyptic terms. In other words, he wants to render
his achievement transcendental, to establish a New Jerusal-
em rather than just a temporal kingdom. He believes that,
with Guinevere at his side, he will "Have power on this dark
land to lighten it, / And power on this dead world to make
it live" (CA, ll. 92-93). Accordingly, his marriage is de-
scribed in paschal and apocalyptic terms:

> Then while they paced a city all on fire
> With sun and cloth of gold, the trumpets blew,
> And Arthur's knighthood sang before the King:--
>   "Blow trumpet, for the world is white with May;
> Blow trumpet, the long night hath rolled away!
> Blow through the living world--'Let the King reign.'"
> (CA, ll. 478-483)

Yet this apocalyptic celebration is founded on illusion, on
a confusion between the secular and the spiritual realms,
and this is indicated by several details within the idyll
itself. First, we are informed on two occasions that the
Arthurian ideal will triumph only "for a space" (CA, ll. 16,
514). Second, there is Leodogran's dream, which offers a
very different vision to that of Arthur. As Donald Hair
says,

> the dream is a transcendentalist's dream of earthly
> things as insubstantial shadows and spiritual things as
> reality. It is a dream that asserts the value and vital-
> ity of the ideal, even though it is realized in imperfect
> ways.[60]

This dream falls into two parts. In the first part, Leodo-
gran sees a "phantom king" (CA, ll. 429) obscured by mist
on a high promontory. The land beneath him is filled with

fire and death and little attention is paid to his pronounce-
ments. This vision of apocalyptic destruction disappears in
the second part of the dream--"and the solid earth became /
As nothing, but the King stood out in heaven, / Crowned"
(CA, 11. 441-443). Thus, the vision which prevails at the
end of the Idylls, with the land destroyed by apocalyptic
conflagration and Arthur received in triumph in the spirit-
ual realm is planted in the midst of a very different ap-
ocalyptic vision, one which, on the face of it, is more
positive, but which is illusory. Bleak though Leodogran's
vision may seem, it reflects the only truly positive force
in the poem, a force not threatened by dialectical oppos-
ition.

The second idyll, Gareth and Lynette (1872), appears,
on the face of it, to be a straightforward description of
the triumph of the Arthurian ideal in the early days of his
reign, when "Arthur and his knighthood . . . / Were all one
will" (CA, 11. 514-515). Yet, as John D. Rosenberg argues,
Tennyson's intentions in this idyll are essentially parodic,
and Dwight Culler demonstrates that it takes place several
years after the establishment of Camelot, when external opp-
osition has been defeated and decline has already set in.[61]
It is a time of rest troubled only by illusions and it is
illusion which dominates Gareth and Lynette. Gareth is sus-
tained not by the Arthurian ideal but by a faith which is

fully developed before he reaches Camelot, and which enables
him to "create" both Camelot and the Arthurian ideal. Both
creations are illusory, however, as illusory as the threat
posed by the four knights Gareth sets out to subdue. At the
same time, Gareth himself is an illusory creation, a model
of chivalrous behaviour to be sure, but, as John D. Rosen-
berg points out, a model "endowed with no life beyond the
literary convention to which [he is] confined and which
Tennyson chooses to undercut."[62] Gareth and Lynette implies
that the Arthurian ideal is illusory and can only triumph
within the confines of illusion and unreality.

But, while illusion dominates the idyll, reality
encroaches upon it and foreshadows the ultimate collapse of
Camelot. The four knights whom Gareth sets out to overthrow
have "sucked their allegory" (GL, l. 1169) from the emblem-
atic representation of "the war of Time against the soul of
man" (GL, l. 1168) carved by the holy hand of a hermit. The
threat they pose is illusory, for they have "taken but the
form" (GL, l. 1170) of the allegory, but, after their de-
feat, the emblematic representation, which indicates the
triumph of time, remains. The implication is that man can
only triumph over the illusion of time, not over its real-
ity. As Dwight Culler says,

> the fact that the fourth knight, Death, turns out to be
> a blooming boy does not indicate that the fears of
> Death are groundless once one has conquered the sins of
> this life but merely indicates the anticlimactic charac-
> ter of the whole enterprise.[63]

Another encroachment occurs in Merlin's speech to Gareth as he enters Camelot. It is significant that Gareth is angered by what he considers an attempt to delude him. He is incapable of comprehending the "confusion, and illusion, and relation" (GL, 1. 281) upon which Merlin's vision is founded, and this reveals his blindness to the complexities of experience and his incapacity to achieve anything but an illusory victory over the forces of time. Merlin points out that

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                            . . . the King
Will bind thee by such vows, as is a shame
A man should not be bound by, yet the which
No man can keep.              (GL, 11. 265-268)
```

This highlights not only Merlin's disillusionment, even at this stage of the poem, but also Gareth's unreality. The implication is that Gareth is not a man at all, but only a character in a fairy-tale. His idealism is founded on illusion and can attain only illusory goals.

In the third and fourth idylls, The Marriage of Geraint (1857) and Geraint and Enid (1857), the dangers of illusion become more apparent. At the beginning of Geraint and Enid, the following lines appear:

```
O purblind race of miserable men,
How many among us at this very hour
Do forge a life-long trouble for ourselves,
By taking true for false, or false for true;
Here, through the feeble twilight of this world
Groping, how many, till we pass and reach
That other, where we see as we are seen!
                              (GE, 11. 1-7)
```

These two idylls were originally published as one, with the

title _Enid_, together with _Nimuë_, which later became _Merlin_
and Vivien. The subtitle given to the two idylls was _The_
True and the False, which has generally been taken to refer
to the distinction between the true Enid and the false Nim-
uë, or Vivien. However, as this passage makes clear, the
subtitle has a wider significance. It also refers to the
confusion between reality and illusion within "the feeble
twilight of this world" (_GE_, 1. 5). The passage implies
that man is constantly subject to delusion in the world,
and it points us, as does Leodogran's dream, towards the
realm of truth which Arthur sails off to at the end of the
poem.

The Geraint idylls, which focus on Geraint's del-
usive conviction that Enid has been unfaithful to him,
trace the steady growth of division within Camelot. As Hen-
ry Kozicki says, Geraint's "fault is a failure of will in a
bad time, when the court is secure and opulent."[64]   At a
deeper level his retreat from Camelot into the unregenerate
wilderness is not only a rejection of the ideals which Cam-
elot embodies, but also a suicidal quest, as can be seen
from his reckless behaviour. Now that the Arthurian ideal,
to which he has sworn allegiance, has nothing to oppose
except itself, Geraint goes in search of opposition, a
search which is, in effect, a quest for self-annihilation.
These two idylls also establish a pattern which, as it dev-

elops in subsequent idylls, becomes ever more threatening to
the stability of the kingdom. After Arthur has established
order in his realm, he seeks to give his achievement a spir-
itual dimension and does this by his symbolic marriage to
Guinevere. However, this spiritual dimension, which becomes
the basis for idealistic aspiration, is founded on illusion.
The physicality of the marriage (to say nothing of the way-
ward sensuality of Guinevere, which can be seen as a perver-
sion caused by Arthur's unrealistic spiritualization of his
union with her) undermines its symbolic value. When Arthur's
knights begin to see the illusory nature of the ideal they
reject not only the illusion but also their allegiance to
Arthur and to his real achievement in creating order in the
kingdom. Thus, Geraint's retreat into an unregenerate wild-
erness is a rejection of everything Arthur stands for, not
just of the illusion which has started to crumble. It is also
a retreat into suicidal despair, and this becomes clear when
Balin makes a similar retreat in the fifth idyll. Geraint,
however, is enabled to rouse his will and oppose the forces
he has abandoned himself to because of the constant solic-
itude of his wife. The characters who appear in subsequent
idylls will not be so lucky.

The troubling implications of the Geraint idylls
become explicit in the fifth idyll, Balin and Balan (1885).
As John D. Rosenberg says, Balin and Balan are twin halves

of a split personality, warring against itself. Balan is

Gareth-like, and, while he is more substantial than Gareth,

he remains a shadowy figure to whom the Arthurian ideal is

not a matter of Queen-worship but simply of maintaining

order in the realm. Balin, by far the more substantial of the

two brothers, is an exaggerated version of Geraint, and his

idealism is a paranoid bulwark against the destructive pass-

ion which is unleashed when the illusory ideal is shattered.[65]

He becomes a Wood-demon, and, by doing so, destroys not only

himself but also Balan. Thus, Balin's destructive impulses

prove stronger than the constructive impulses of Balan. The

disillusioned idealist destroys both his more practical

counterpart and himself. So, if Balin and Balan are seen as

twin halves of a split personality, then this personality

is destroyed by being torn between two extremes. The intro-

duction of Pellam and Vivien in this idyll also suggests

that the kingdom will be destroyed by a similar conflict

between extremes. As Henry Kozicki says,

> from the start, a Pellam was incipient in the quest for
> purity and a Vivien in the sexual desire on which Arthur
> built the state. Each claims a freedom--one a cloistered
> virtue on the plane of active providence, the other a
> self-indulgence on the plane of ordinary providence. But
> each is destructive (opposing but mirroring malevol-
> ences) to the development of universal spirit, for the
> one represents historical formlessness and the other the
> forms of mere cyclic nature, the real. They go to the
> same end but repel each other.[66]

The quest for purity and sexual desire are held together at

the beginning by their subordination to an all-encompassing

ideal. This reconciliation is illusory, however, and cannot survive the disappearance of external opposition. It is the perception of this illusion which precipitates the development of these two forces into antagonists. Camelot is founded on a paradox which slowly erodes it as the two elements of the paradox develop their separate identities. Merlin will follow Vivien, the knights will follow Pellam, and Camelot will crumble into a vestigial ruin.

Balin's journey is a journey into inner darkness, a journey also made by Geraint. Gareth makes no such journey, but he is unbelievable; he is an incomplete man, the Balan part of the Balin-Balan composite. The death of Balan signifies the triumph of the Geraint-principle over the Gareth-principle. Despair overtakes duty, and in the next idyll, Merlin and Vivien, it engulfs the most powerful character in the kingdom. The cause of this engulfment is the fatal power of illusion. Tennyson implies that man is not capable of avoiding illusion. Arthur's establishment of order is not illusory, nor is it founded on illusion. However, Arthur falls victim to illusion, seeing his marriage to Guinevere in unrealistically apocalyptic terms. The implication is that man must succumb to illusion and cannot evade the consequences of disillusionment. In the first five idylls, it is true, there are indications that the consequences of disillusionment can be evaded. Geraint evades them and Balin seems

only to fail to do so because of his depressive sensibility.
But, with the abandonment of Merlin to despair in the sixth
idyll, it seems that they cannot be evaded. By the time of
the final idyll Arthur himself has succumbed to something
close to suicidal despair.

In the last five idylls the illusion created by
Arthur no longer sustains the kingdom. The conflict confined
in the first five idylls to individuals gradually engulfs the
whole of society. In Henry Kozicki's words, "Camelot makes
war on its own inner principle."[67] Throughout these idylls,
Lancelot, the warrior whom Arthur "loved / And honoured most"
(CA, ll. 446-447), gradually usurps him, presiding over the
grotesquely parodic Last Tournament and eventually fighting
against him. In the seventh idyll, Lancelot and Elaine
(1859), the relationship between Lancelot and Guinevere be-
comes, for the first time, an established fact. Just as the
marriage of Arthur and Guinevere provides the major point
of reference in the first five idylls, so it is this guilty
relationship which provides the major point of reference in
the last five. In Lancelot and Elaine Camelot has become the
degenerate court already depicted in "The Lady of Shalott,"
and, to underline this parallel, Tennyson returns to the
theme of that poem in this idyll.

At the beginning of the idyll, Arthur's discovery of
a dead king's crown is recalled, together with the prophecy
which he heard at the time: "Lo, thou likewise shalt be

King" (LE, 11. 55). This prophecy has sinister reverberat-
ions. We are told that this king died with his brother in a
Balin-Balan type of conflict. The implication is that Arthur
will fall in a similar kind of conflict, an implication which
lends weight to Arthur's declaration on the eve of his final
battle that "the king who fights his people fights himself"
(PA, 1. 72). We are also told that Arthur has removed nine
jewels from the crown to award them at an annual tournament.
Lancelot has won all but one of the jewels, the one being
presented at the tournament described in this idyll. His
intention is to win all the jewels and present them to
Guinevere, which he succeeds in doing. This reflects his
symbolic usurpation of Arthur. However, Guinevere throws
the jewels away when she receives them because of her jeal-
ousy at Lancelot's supposed affection for Elaine. As the
gift of the jewels suggests a form of marriage compact,
this act signifies her refusal to reject her vows to Arthur
and set the seal on her relationship with Lancelot. Thus,
although the relationship between Lancelot and Guinevere
does provide the central point of reference in the last
five idylls, it is a relationship which Guinevere and, as
we are told later, Lancelot both fight against.

However, Lancelot and Guinevere have both made a
decisive break with Arthur by the time this idyll opens.
Guinevere regards his idealism with scorn (LE, 11. 120-139)
and Lancelot deceives him by arriving at the tournament in

disguise. This deception is a reflection of his mode of behaviour at this stage, a mode which is essentially self-destructive. His sin with Guinevere has "marred his face, and marked it ere his time" (LE, 1. 246), and driven him into the wilderness which reflects his degenerate state of mind:

> His mood was often like a fiend, and rose
> And drove him into wastes and solitudes
> For agony, who was yet a living soul.
> (LE, 11. 250-252)

In the tournament he is gravely wounded because of the failure of his fellow knights to see through his disguise. His defeat at their hands is a foreshadowing of the apocalyptic wave which will break over Camelot:

> They couched their spears and pricked their steeds, and thus,
> Their plumes driven backward by the wind they made
> In moving, all together down upon him
> Bare, as a wild wave in the wild North-sea,
> Green-glimmering toward the summit, bears, with all
> Its stormy crests that smoke against the skies,
> Down on a bark, and overbears the bark,
> And him that helms it. . . .   (LE, 11. 477-484)

Opposed to all these destructive forces is Elaine, but, as in "The Lady of Shalott," the positive force she represents is destroyed. It is not only Elaine's love which is doomed but also the possibility of Lancelot being redeemed by it. His life is ruled by a self-consuming conflict:

> The shackles of an old love straitened him,
> His honour rooted in dishonour stood,
> And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true.
> (LE, 11. 870-872)

As Clyde Ryals says, in returning to the theme of "The Lady of Shalott" in this idyll, Tennyson

implies once again that the antagonism between the tower of self and the city of society is too great and cannot be overcome. On earth there is but constant war between good and evil.[68]

This implication foreshadows the impending collapse of Camelot; it is no coincidence that the barge conveying the dead Elaine suggests Arthur's coming death. When she arrives at Camelot she is surmised to be "the Fairy Queen . . . come to take the King to Fairyland" (LE, 11. 1247, 1249) and Lancelot sees her barge as "a blot upon the stream" (LE, 1. 1381), thus employing an image which recurs at the end of The Passing of Arthur. Arthur is alone in wishing that Lancelot could have married Elaine. The rest of the court is filled with a cynicism typified by Gawain and deem her unworthy of Lancelot even before they have seen her. The mood of the idyll is set by the love of Lancelot and Guinevere, which has become "dead love's harsh heir, jealous pride" (LE, 1. 1387). Yet, at the end of the idyll, a new note is struck. Lancelot's melancholy leads him to resolve to break with Guinevere, and, although he does not succeed in doing so until much later, we are told that he will die "a holy man" (LE, 1. 1418). Thus, the emphasis at the end of the idyll shifts from the impending destruction of Camelot to the ability of the individual to achieve salvation. As chaos overtakes the kingdom in the ensuing idylls this positive element slowly rises into prominence.

In the next idyll, The Holy Grail, the disintegrat-

ion of the kingdom becomes even more apparent as the knights renounce their allegiance to Arthur and pursue a chimeral vision. It is the eruption of sin within the court which prompts the knights to adopt an ascetic idealism which is as destructive as the sensuality it reacts against. As Lawrence Poston says, "Tennyson repeatedly shows that the recoil from passion is fully as dangerous as passion itself; asceticism . . . is simply the far side of lust."[69] Dwight Culler points out that the Grail quest originates "in the frustrated sexual desires of a young woman who [has] been disappointed in love and gone into a nunnery."[70] As Guinevere realizes, it is a madness which has been visited on the court for its sins. By pursuing the vision of the Grail, the knights follow not only the lead of Pellam, who traces his lineage back to Joseph of Arimathea (BB, 11. 98-99), but also that of Merlin. The vision of the Grail appears when Galahad sits in Merlin's enchanted chair, the chair in which "no man could sit but he should lose himself" (HG, 1. 174). Galahad justifies his action in Biblical terms, declaring that, "If I lose myself, I save myself" (HG, 1. 178), but this is ironic in view of Merlin's earlier loss of self. Arthur is not present when the vision appears, but sees it from afar and fears that Camelot is being consumed "in unremorseful flames of rolling fire" (HG, 1. 261). This is, of course, what is happening, and, when he discovers that his knights have interpreted the vision in a different way, he declares

that it is "a sign to maim this order which I made" (HG, l. 297). He reminds his knights that they have a duty to perform in the world, a duty to follow the fire of God which informs the Arthurian ideal rather than the "wandering fires" (HG, l. 319) of the wilderness.

The quest for the Grail, undertaken individually, signifies the retreat of each knight from the obligations imposed upon him into his own inner being. Galahad, the holiest of the company, passes from the world and becomes one with the infinite, Percivale, perceiving the phantasmal nature of the world, withdraws into the contemplative life, Lancelot goes mad, Bors is unmanned by his discovery of the resurgence of paganism, and Gawain abandons himself to lust. The retreat of each breeds conflict and confusion in the kingdom and this is reflected in the disjointed nature of the narrative itself. As Dwight Culler says, "Camelot is transformed into the Tower of Babel simply because it no longer speaks with the single authoritative voice of Arthur but with the contending voices of the individual knights."[71] In The Holy Grail things fall apart and Camelot is racked by a fierce gale which recalls that which occurred at the end of Merlin and Vivien. The major point of reference in the idyll is Percivale's vision of the world as phantasmal, a place of sand and thorns which man has to retreat from in order to discover meaning. This is reinforced by the fact that Percivale himself has become a phantasm by the time of

the tale's telling. As John D. Rosenberg says, the idyll

> is twice removed from the present. . . . As we overhear
> the posthumous voice of Percivale the present seems vis-
> ibly to recede before our eyes, and the ghastly heaps of
> stone which greet the returning knights appear even more
> ruinous, for the narrator who describes them is now him-
> self a ghost.[72]

But, just as the dominant mood of Lancelot and Elaine is

undercut at the end of the idyll by reference to Lancelot's

eventual conversion, so is Percivale's resolve to withdraw

from the world into the contemplative life undercut by

Arthur's final speech. In this speech, Arthur admits that

the world is phantasmal and that reality resides with the

infinite, yet he insists that man has a duty to perform in

the world:

> And some among you held, that if the King
> Had seen the sight he would have sworn the vow:
> Not easily, seeing that the King must guard
> That which he rules, and is but as the hind
> To whom a space of land is given to plow.
> Who may not wander from the allotted field
> Before his work be done; but, being done,
> Let visions of the night or of the day
> Come, as they will; and many a time they come,
> Until this earth he walks on seems not earth,
> This light that strikes his eyeball is not light,
> This air that strikes his forehead is not air
> But vision--yea, his very hand and foot--
> In moments when he feels he cannot die,
> And knows himself no vision to himself,
> Nor the high God a vision, nor that One
> Who rose again: ye have seen what ye have seen.[73]
>   (HG, ll. 899-915)

This shows Arthur's growing awareness of the illusory nature

of the world, yet this does not lead to his withdrawal from

the world. His attitude reflects Tennyson's conviction that

man can only come to know himself and, hence, his relation

to the infinite by working in the world. Even if his work

will be negated by the forces of the world, this work is

the necessary prelude to union with the infinite. Tennyson's

belief in the ethical nature of work can be seen in the ad-

vice he gave to a young man about to go up to university:

> If a man is merely to be a bundle of sensations, he had
> better not exist at all. He should embark on his career
> in the spirit of selfless and adventurous heroism;
> should develop his true self by not shirking responsib-
> ility, by casting aside all maudlin and introspective
> morbidities, and by using his powers cheerfully in acc-
> ordance with the obvious dictates of his moral conscious-
> ness, and so, as far as possible, in harmony with what
> he feels to be the Absolute Right.
>
>> Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control,
>> These three alone lead life to sovereign power.
>> Yet not for power (power of herself
>> Would come uncall'd for) but to live by <u>law</u>,
>> <u>Acting</u> the law we live by without fear;
>> And, because right is right, to follow right
>> Were wisdom in the scorn of consequence.
>
> It is motive, it is the great purpose which consecrates
> life. The real test of a man is not what he knows, but
> what he is in himself and in his relation to others.
> For instance, can he battle against his own bad inher-
> ited instincts, or brave public opinion in the cause of
> truth? The love of God is the true basis of duty, truth,
> reverence, loyalty, love, virtue and work. I believe in
> these although I feel the emptiness and hollowness of
> much of life.[74]

The ninth idyll, <u>Pelleas and Ettarre</u> (1869), which,

according to Tennyson, describes "the breaking of the storm,"[75]

is strongly parodic. As an anti-romance, it can be seen

as a parody of <u>Gareth and Lynette</u>, but, as has been pointed

out, it also presents a gloomy version of the Geraint and

Enid story and of the Lancelot-Guinevere-Arthur triangle.[76]

Pelleas comes from "the waste islands" (PE, 1. 82), seem-
ingly the only place where the beauty which once suffused
Camelot can now be found. Pelleas projects "all the young
beauty of his own soul" (PE, 1. 79) not onto Camelot and
the Arthurian ideal as Gareth had done, but onto Ettarre,
an action which recalls Arthur's fatal misapprehension of
Guinevere. Ettarre considers him a fool, but, in the hope
of having a champion at Arthur's court, flatters him in a
manner reminiscent of Vivien's flattery of Merlin. Pelleas
is transfigured by his love for Ettarre, and, when he
reaches Camelot, his face shines

> . . . like the countenance of priest of old
> Against the flame about a sacrifice
> Kindled by fire from heaven.
> <div align="right">(PE, 11. 137-139)</div>

His appearance astounds the knights, an indication of their
forgetfulness of the fire from heaven which formerly de-
scended upon Arthur. Pelleas's worship of Arthur does not
spring directly from his own innate nobility, as Gareth's
had done, but is filtered through the medium of his love for
Ettarre. His idealization of her becomes the illusory basis
for his espousal of the Arthurian ideal.

Pelleas can be seen as a type of Arthur who is
transformed, in the course of the idyll, into an antitype,
"a scourge . . . / To lash the treasons of the Table Round"
(PE, 11. 553-554). The battle between him and Arthur in The
Last Tournament (1871) signifies the war of Camelot against

itself. As Henry Kozicki says, the "ferocious disregard for rules of war" in this battle "suggests a furious self-recog-nition in this mirror image of Camelot."[77] Even though Pell-eas, the Red Knight, is defeated, it is his nihilistic vision which now guides Arthur's knighthood. At the beginning of The Last Tournament, Dagonet, the fool whom Gawain has made "mock-knight of Arthur's Table Round" (LT, l. 2), is pres-ented. Although Gawain's action reflects the corruption which has overtaken Camelot, Dagonet is, in fact, the truest knight in Arthur's company at this stage. He declares himself to be "the wisest knight of all" (LT, l. 248), and, in his description of Arthur as "my brother fool, the king of fools" (LT, l. 354), provides a sad commentary on the degeneration of the Arthurian ideal. At the end of the idyll, he and Arthur are left in sole possession of Camelot, and Dagonet's blatant folly casts the less obvious folly of the King into perspective. Arthur's folly has been his conviction that he can, through his union with Guinevere, make

> Figs out of thistles, silk from bristles, milk
> From burning spurge, honey from hornet-combs,
> And men from beasts.   (LT, ll. 356-358)

It is in this idyll that Arthur becomes aware of his failure and begins to recognize the folly of his belief in the poss-ibility of social regeneration. When he departs to overthrow the Red Knight, Lancelot assumes control in Camelot, symbol-ically usurping the King. His major function as mock-king is to preside over the Tournament of the Dead Innocence. The

prize at this tournament is the necklace of a foundling

which, under the influence of Guinevere's death-giving ster-

ility, died shortly after its introduction to the court. It

is Tristram, another degenerate Lancelot, who wins the prize,

even though he violates the conventions of the tournament.

Lancelot, filled with the world-weary conviction that "the

glory of our Round Table is no more" (LT, 1. 189), lets

these violations pass. Tristram replies to Dagonet's accus-

ation that he has broken the music of the Round Table by

declaring, "I came late, the heathen wars were o'er, / The

life had flown, we sware but by the shell" (LT, 11. 269-270).

Indeed it is only the shell of the Arthurian ideal which re-

mains, and Tristram's cynicism is in the ascendent. Part of

the reason for this sad change, as Tristram explains to

Isolt, is that Arthur's knighthood, aware that men "are not

angels here / Nor shall be" (LT, 11. 693-694), have asserted

their right to be free from the impossible constraints

placed on them by Arthur. This desire to be free from rather

than to be free to entails a rejection of moral obligation

and a reversion to a state of savagery and moral nihilism.[78]

It is, as we are reminded over and over again in the Idylls,

a self-destructive desire which, when it becomes the social

norm, leads to the collapse of order. Arthur perceives the

imminence of such a collapse in the behaviour of his knights

during the attack on the Red Knight's court (LT, 11. 454-

485).

As R.B. Wilkenfeld says, the mood in the last two
idylls is "sombre and elegiac" and "Tennyson develops some
sense of partial recovery from the profound despair and
brute violence that mark the tenth idyll."[79] The eleventh
idyll, Guinevere (1859), can be seen as a parody of The
Coming of Arthur. Lancelot and Guinevere, the two pillars
of Arthur's kingdom, have betrayed him and he is left def-
enceless against the resurgence of the forces of nature.
In this idyll, the trump sounds not to celebrate his wedd-
ing to Guinevere but to announce his final departure from
her, and he is viewed in terms not of his emergence from
the great deep but of his return to it. The erosion of the
Arthurian ideal has been caused by the progressive with-
drawal of Arthur's knights from their allegiance to him,
and their abandonment to self-destructive forces. Their
withdrawal was a consequence of the perception of the ill-
usory nature of the Arthurian ideal. In Guinevere it is
Arthur who experiences this disillusionment and it leads
him to the suicidal melancholia which has already overtaken
the rest of the court. He says to Guinevere,

> Thou hast not made my life so sweet to me,
> That I the King should greatly care to live;
> For thou hast spoilt the purpose of my life.
> (G, 11. 448-450)

Arthur's reaction to this sense of depression is somewhat
different from any we have previously encountered, however. He
does, it is true, go off to fight in a battle which he re-

gards as suicidal (PA, ll. 70-74), yet he does not abandon
his love for Guinevere. In other words, he does not abandon
his folly. He still believes that his order could have been
maintained had it not been for Guinevere's sin, and it is
this persistence which redeems him. His refusal to abandon
his illusory ideal in the face of its negation by the forces
of nature is, in effect, a refusal to abandon his duty to
God. It is this allegiance which provides him with the means
to come to self-knowledge and, thus, to comprehend his rel-
ation to the infinite. As R.B. Wilkenfeld says,

> Arthur's realm was populated by fools, and it is no
> surprise to discover he was, himself, the greatest fool
> of all. He endured and that was his greatness; he died
> for his vision and that was his folly. Yet although he
> has to "pass on and on" and go "from less to less and
> vanish," it is into "light" that he vanishes. . . . The
> light of the "new sun" bringing in the "new year," ill-
> uminates both the triumph and the defeat of the Order--
> a triumph and defeat stunningly concentrated in the over-
> arching, multiplex concept of the "fool."[80]

To see Arthur's upbraiding of Guinevere as a ref-
lection of Tennyson's own feelings is, however, as false as
to see The Coming of Arthur as a blueprint for the estab-
lishment of a terrestrial New Jerusalem. The apocalyptic
vision of The Coming of Arthur is undermined by Leodogran's
dream, virtually the sole intrusion of reality into the
idyll. As the illusion has crumbled, so has this reality be-
come ever more insistent. In Guinevere it is predominant.
The dream is recalled in the sister's story of the troubled
prophet (G, ll. 275-305) and by details such as Arthur's

ghostlike appearance at the end of the idyll. In a sense,
Arthur is right to associate Guinevere's sin with the coll-
apse of the kingdom, yet, in his failure to comprehend the
reason for her sin, he misses the significance of the ass-
ociation. As John D. Rosenberg says, "Arthur is never more
blind . . . than when he concludes his denunciation of
Guinevere, 'And all through thee!'"[81] Guinevere's withdraw-
al from the Arthurian ideal into the trammels of lust was
due to her inability to live up to an impossible ideal. The
realization that she was less worthy than Arthur led her to
the conclusion that she was absolutely evil since Arthur
was, she believed, absolutely good. It was this conviction
which led her to behave as she did. She tried to convince
herself, in other words, of the validity of her own self-
assessment. Her sin was not due to an inherent flaw of
character, as her ultimate elevation to the position of
abbess "for her good deeds and her pure life" (G, 1. 687)
shows. Her conversion is due to her realization that Arthur
is "the highest and most human too" (G, 644). She ceases to
regard him as an embodiment of absolute virtue and realizes
that, while he is the most noble of men, he is also the most
deluded. This realization enables her to perceive the mix-
ture of good and evil in herself and to substitute a posi-
tive illusion for the negative one which led to her de-
structive self-abasement. Thus, she repents and looks for-
ward to a coming apocalyptic marriage in heaven, "where be-

yond these voices there is peace" (G, 1. 692).

The final idyll, The Passing of Arthur (1869), is
an expansion of the "Morte d'Arthur," yet it achieves a
very different effect from the earlier poem. In the "Morte"
Tennyson had implied, by giving a narrative frame to the
poem, that the brand of heroism exemplified by Arthur could
work effectively in the world. In The Passing of Arthur the
frame has disappeared along with this implication. Arthur's
vision can only be achieved in death, for the world is fun-
damentally and irrevocably opposed to the heroic ideal. Nev-
ertheless, the vision can only be fulfilled in death if it
has been striven for in life. Striving for it does not mean
contemplating its fulfilment in the manner of Percivale. It
means actively working towards it by an imposition of the
will onto the flux of history, even though this cannot ul-
timately affect the historical process.

Thus, man must work towards the realization of his
vision even though he realizes the essential pointlessness
of such an action in terms of the world. However, striving
for such a realization is not pointless because it enables
the individual to attain self-knowledge. The unstated impli-
cation is that the individual is justified in any action
which furthers his inner development and elevates him to
the rank of hero in a meaningless cosmos. Tennyson's react-
ion to the Governor Eyre case reveals his willingness to

subordinate means to ends and echoes Carlyle's similar re-
action to the case. [82] It is something of a twentieth-cent-
ury commonplace that the world is meaningless. What is far
less common is the idea that, given this meaninglessness,
any action which can be seen in terms of heroic determinat-
ion is automatically justified. While this idea has been in-
corporated into the philosophies of Communism and National
Socialism, both of which can be seen as millenarian doc-
trines, it has, in what is generally referred to as "the
West," succumbed to what Paul Fussell has described as an
essentially ironic vision. [83] Today, Cecil Rhodes and the
ideals he embodied seem part of a totally alien culture,
and one that it is difficult to view with much sympathy.
But to condemn the attitudes towards the role of the hero
in society held by Tennyson and Carlyle in the latter stages
of their careers out of hand does little to further our un-
derstanding either of them or of their society. The Idylls
of the King is permeated by the fear that society is on the
brink of apocalyptic conflagration, and this fear is much
more in evidence in the group of idylls composed between
1868 and 1874 than in the group composed between 1854 and
1859, a clear indication of growing pessimism. It is this
conviction which gave rise to the desperate appeal for heroic
endeavour. The ominous epilogue to the poem, To the Queen,
sums up the pessimism which informs the poem, despite its
attempt to provide a balanced picture:

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                                    . . . take withal
Thy poet's blessing, and his trust that Heaven
Will blow the tempest in the distance back
From thine and ours: for some are scared, who mark,
Or wisely or unwisely, signs of storm,
Waverings of every vane with every wind,
And wordy trucklings to the transient hour,
And fierce or careless looseners of the faith,
And Softness breeding scorn of simple life,
Or Cowardice, the child of lust for gold,
Or Labour, with a groan and not a voice,
Or Art with poisonous honey stolen from France,
And that which knows, but careful for itself,
And that which knows not, ruling that which knows
To its own harm: the goal of this great world
Lies beyond sight: yet--if our slowly-grown
And crowned Republic's crowning common-sense,
That saved her many times, not fail--their fears
Are morning shadows huger than the shapes
That cast them, not those gloomier which forego
The darkness of that battle in the West,
Where all of high and holy dies away.   (ll. 45-66)
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In a discarded passage from the epilogue Tennyson went even

farther than this, declaring that, were he "to 'play Tiresias

to the times,' he could foretell only civic disorder, law-

lessness, the betrayal of old values, and 'fierce Transit-

ion's blood-red morn.'"[84]   The heroic individual becomes an

alienated being in a doomed society, vainly appealing for

the preservation of old values and justified in whatever

steps he may take to postpone that doom.

This is one way of summing up the Idylls of the

King. Yet this poem of "shot silk with many glancing col-

ours," the meaning of which depends on the interaction of

its conceptual components--dialectical opposition, illusion,

and transcendence--can be seen, like "Ulysses," as an admon-

itory work, an indirect critique of nineteenth-century soc-

iety, an analysis of the process by which a particular soc-
iety came to disintegrate.[85] In this case, the initiative

behind the process would be Arthur's blind confidence in the

imminence of a secular millennium, a confidence shared by

many in the nineteenth century. The connexion between such

confident millenarianism and social degeneration had been

a major theme of prophetic literature since the time of

Amos, and, in the Idylls, Tennyson does give a vivid des-

cription of the consequences of unwarranted optimism. This

is not to say that Arthur is a bad leader. Quite the cont-

rary, yet his prodigious qualities of leadership are under-

mined by a fatal blindness to the nature of the world.

Barbara Lovenheim suggests that, through Arthur's blindness

to Guinevere's adultery, "Tennyson seems to be suggesting

that any governing body or leader who cannot 'see' the real

needs and imperfections of his people is doomed to fail."[86]

I implied earlier that only through such blindness, through

an illusory belief in the individual's ability to reform the

world, can man achieve salvation. Seen in this way, Arthur's

blindness is a positive rather than a negative quality.

However, if we see the Idylls as a prophetic work in the

tradition of Amos, it is decidedly negative. So we have two

conflicting approaches to the poem's meaning, both of which

seem at least partially valid. What this suggests is that

the poem is founded on a dialectical principle, a fundamen-

tal uncertainty as to the possibility of social regenerat-

ion. Tennyson does, to be sure, incline towards the view that society cannot be redeemed, but he does not go so far as to state this as a conviction. The poem rests on a belief that society will, if it continues along its present course, soon come to "the darkness of that battle in the West, / Where all of high and holy dies away." Tennyson seems to feel, with Carlyle, that society will continue along this course and that civilization is doomed, but he does not see this process as necessarily irreversible. According to Charles Tennyson, the poet's grandson, Tennyson "became more and more oppressed with doubts about the usefulness of his own work and the future of humanity" in his later years, "obsessed by the thought that the world was standing on the brink of a revolution such as had never been seen before-- 'a last dim battle in the West' which, if it came, would be world wide."[87] In a comment he made to his son in 1886, however, he qualified this pessimism somewhat:

> You must not be surprised at anything that comes to pass
> in the next fifty years. All ages are ages of transit-
> ion, but this is an awful moment of transition. It seems
> to me as if there were much less of the old reverence
> and chivalrous feeling in the world than there used to
> be. I am old and I may be wrong, for this generation has
> assuredly some spirit of chivalry. We see it in acts of
> heroism by land and sea, in fights against the slave
> trade, in our Arctic voyages, in philanthropy, etc. The
> truth is that the wave advances and recedes. I tried in
> my 'Idylls' to teach men these things, and the need of
> the Ideal. But I feel sometimes as if my life had been
> a very useless life.[88]

Thus, the dialectical mode of the Idylls reflects an un-

certainty coloured by pessimism, rather than a conviction
of impending doom. That Tennyson saw the wrath of God being
visited upon his society through the operation of malignant
forces similar to those delineated in the poem is certain.
He did not believe its fate to be sealed, yet the shooting
of Niagara which Tennyson, along with Carlyle, saw in the
social changes of the later nineteenth century, bred in him
a despair which is reflected not only in the Idylls of the
King but also in other poems written between 1855 and 1892.

Two poems which appeared between the composition of
the first and second groups of Idylls--"Aylmer's Field"
(1864) and "Lucretius" (1868)--are among the most important
of these. In "Aylmer's Field" there is a return to the
themes of the English idyls which appeared in the 1840s.
Yet, if we compare the poem to these idyls, we can see that,
troubled though the vision which informs them might be, it
is nowhere near as bleak as the vision in this poem. The
aged custodians of the great house prevent their daughter's
marriage to the brother of the vicar, thus precipitating
her death and his suicide. Their deaths trigger the literal
collapse of the great house amid the echoes of apocalyptic
execration hurled by the vicar from the pulpit. Its ruins
are taken over by animals and it soon reverts to an "open
field" (1. 853). This poem, set at the time of the French
Revolution, describes not only the utter breakdown of any
possibility of reconciliation between warring elements in

society but also the commitment of the custodians of the old order to a self-destructive opposition to change. Averill, the vicar, is, like Pelleas and the persona of "Locksley Hall," an agent of the wrath of God who inspires the peasants in his congregation with revolutionary ardour and sends Lady Aylmer shrieking into a swoon at the feet of her husband, who wanders

> . . . as a footsore ox in crowded ways
> Stumbling across the market to his death,
> Unpitied; for he groped as blind, and seemed
> Always about to fall, grasping the pews
> And oaken finials till he reached the door.
> (11. 819-823)

Tennyson, ever opposed to revolution, was never more hostile to it than he became in the 1860s, yet, as "Aylmer's Field" shows, he was well aware of the reasons for revolutionary change. The old order, by failing to seek regeneration, fosters a new, animalistic order which assumes control when the old order collapses.

The passing of the Second Reform Bill in 1867, which was accompanied by economic crisis and widespread demonstrations, must have seemed to Tennyson to mark the beginning of a social usurpation by a class which the nation's leaders had been reluctant either to assist or to lead. His fears at this time are reflected in "Lucretius." As Henry Kozicki says, "Lucretius's Rome was characterized by the breakdown of law and order, a great extension and adulteration of the franchise, a vast unemployed proletariat numbering perhaps

300,000, the corruption and ineffectuality of the senate,
and the rise of demagogues."[89] In Tennyson's poem this
social breakdown is reflected in the breakdown and suicide
of Lucretius, which is caused by the administration of a
love potion to him by his wife, Lucilia. Yet, although this
indicates the triumph of sense over soul in a manner which
Tennyson would have seen as applicable to his own age,
where a rise in sexual licence went hand in hand with the
rise of social conflict, Lucretius is not presented simply
as a noble being overpowered by animalistic forces. His
life has been devoted to the pursuit of "sacred everlasting
calm" (1. 110), and it is this which drives Lucilia to her
desperate action. Thus, Lucretius, in a roundabout way, de-
stroys himself. As in the Idylls of the King, the quest for
purity within the world produces a sensual, destructive
force which overwhelms it. Lucretius himself compares the
havoc created among "those tender cells" (1. 22) of his
brain by the "tickling" of "the brute brain within the
man's" (1. 21) to the civic tumult of his age:

> How should the mind, except it loved them, clasp
> These idols to herself? or do they fly
> Now thinner, and now thicker, like the flakes
> In a fall of snow, and so press in, perforce
> Of multitude, as crowds that in an hour
> Of civic tumult jam the doors, and bear
> The keepers down, and throng, their rags and they
> The basest, far into that council-hall
> Where sit the best and stateliest of the land?
> (11. 164-172)

Lucretius's quest for purity is a reflection of a similar

pursuit in the social sphere by the nation's leaders, and
his neglect of and eventual destruction by the forces of
sensuality reflects their neglect of and eventual destruction
by the mob. Thus, the poem can be seen as an attack on a
nation which maintains a complacent belief in the inevitab-
ility of progress in the face of growing anarchy, a nation
which can ask, as Lucretius does with his dying breath,
"What is duty?" (l. 280).

By the 1880s, Tennyson's pessimism had become even
more pronounced, and this is reflected in his poetry,
which also shows a greater concern with the realm beyond
"our bourne of Time and Place" ("Crossing the Bar" (1889),
l. 13). He maintained the belief that

> The man remains, and whatsoe'er
>   He wrought of good or brave
> Will mould him through the cycle-year
>   That dawns behind the grave.
>   ("The Charge of the Heavy Brigade: Epilogue"
>   (1885), ll. 73-76)

yet, in poems such as "Locksley Hall Sixty Years After"
(1886) and "The Dawn" (1892), he implies that a better soc-
iety will only be achieved after a chaotic interregnum,
which will totally annihilate the existing order and may
last for thousands of years. In "Despair" (1881) he again
tackles the question of suicide. The headnote to the poem
explains that

> A man and his wife having lost faith in a God, and hope
> of a life to come, and being utterly miserable in this,
> resolve to end themselves by drowning. The woman is

drowned, but the man rescued by a minister of the sect
he had abandoned.

Three days later the man explains the reasons for his action

to the minister:

> See, we were nursed in the drear night-fold of your fat-
>   alist creed,
> And we turned to the growing dawn, we had hoped for a
>   dawn indeed,
> When the light of a Sun that was coming would scatter the
>   ghosts of the Past,
> And the cramping creed that had maddened the peoples
>   would vanish at last,
> And we broke away from the Christ, our human brother and
>   friend,
> For He spoke, or it seemed that He spoke, of a Hell with-
>   out help, without end.
>
> Hoped for a dawn and it came, but the promise had faded
>   away;
> We had passed from a cheerless night to the glare of a
>   drearier day.   (ll. 21-28)

Despair has proceeded, then, from the rejection of an an-

thropomorphic deity in favour of a secular millenarianism. The

poem expresses Tennyson's conviction that this kind of sub-

stitution can only lead to despair, for man is essentially

alienated from the phenomenal world. He must seek union

with the infinite by a quest for the divine within himself

and a projection of his divine faculties onto an unknowable

deity. A purely mundane view of existence can only lead to

the perception of ultimate meaninglessness:

> Why should we bear with an hour of torture, a moment of
>   pain,
> If every man die for ever, if all his griefs are in vain,
> And the homeless planet at length will be wheeled through
>   the silence of space,
> Motherless evermore of an ever-vanishing race,
> When the worm shall have writhed its last, and its last
>   brother-worm will have fled

> From the dead fossil skull that is left in the rocks of
>   an earth that is dead?   (ll. 81-86)

This horrific vision is one which runs through Tennyson's
writings in the 1880s, reflecting his revulsion from a
world whose processes had finally come to seem totally
arbitrary. The effect of evolutionary and geological theor-
ies in opening up tracts of time unsuspected by previous
generations is nowhere more apparent than in utterances
such as these, which seem to deny any possibility of dis-
covering meaning within history. Tennyson does, however,
tackle the problem of historical meaning in "Locksley Hall
Sixty Years After." In this poem, the persona of "Locksley
Hall" returns to tell us that "the fires of youth, the
follies, furies, curses, passionate tears" (l. 39) have
"gone like fires and floods and earthquakes of the planet's
dawning day" (l. 40). This suggests that he has experienced
some kind of apocalyptic rebirth, but he goes on to declare
that the only products of the "fires that shook me once"
have been "silent ashes" (l. 41). World-weariness has re-
placed desperate idealism:

> Gone the cry of 'Forward, Forward,' lost within a growing
>   gloom;
> Lost, or only heard in silence from the silence of a tomb.
>
> Half the marvels of my morning, triumphs over time and
>   space,
> Staled by frequence, shrunk by usage into commonest comm-
>   onplace!
>
> 'Forward' rang the voices then, and of the many mine was
>   one.

Let us hush this cry of 'Forward' till ten thousand years
    have gone.   (ll. 73-78)

The world has succumbed to the forces of flux, to the "sickening game" of "Chaos, Cosmos! Cosmos, Chaos!" (l. 127). The persona fears that man is reeling "back into the beast again" (l. 148) and he knows that, whatever happens, he will not live to see "the stormy changes" of the world usher in "a changeless May" (l. 156). He sees history as a sickeningly meaningless process of "Evolution ever climbing after some ideal good, / And Reversion ever dragging Evolution in the mud" (ll. 199-200). In the face of such meaninglessness, the only comfort which the persona can offer his grandson, the inheritor of Locksley Hall, is to "Follow Light, and do the Right--for man can half control his doom-- / Till you find the deathless angel seated in the vacant tomb" (ll. 277-278).

"The Dawn," one of Tennyson's last poems, is also one of his most pessimistic. The idea for the poem came from Plato's Timaeus, in which Solon is told by an Egyptian priest that the Greeks

>are young in soul . . . for therein [they] possess not a single belief that is ancient and derived from old tradition, nor yet one science that is hoary with age. And this is the cause thereof: There have been and there will be many and divers destructions of mankind of which the greatest are by fire and water, and lesser ones by countless other means.[90]

Tennyson expanded the implications of this passage into a dialectic which runs through the poem. On the one hand, the

speaker declares that the "noon of man" (1. 20), even though
it be "a million summers away" (1. 25), is approaching. On
the other hand, he implies that civilizations never get be-
yond the stage of infancy before being destroyed, and that,
each time this happens, a new start has to be made. He seems
to believe that England, which he associates with Tyre,
Babylon, Rome, and even Dahomey, notorious in the nineteenth
century for mass human sacrifice, is on the verge of apoc-
alyptic destruction. At the end of the poem this dialectic
is left unresolved, and he asks, "what will our children
be, / The men of a thousand, a million summers away?" (11.
24-25). The extension of historical speculation into an
unimaginably remote future is tantamount to a denial of
meaning within history, at least in so far as it concerns the
individual. The old order has crumbled and in the ensuing
chaos the individual can only find meaning within himself,
or in the one clear call which summons him to the boundless
deep from whence he came.

V

THE APOCALYPTIC LEGACY

1. Carlyle and Tennyson: The Millenarian Illusion

Although Carlyle and Tennyson both started out as
optimistic millenarians, interpreting the degeneracy of
their age as a sign that a brighter epoch was about to dawn,
they gradually became convinced that the course of western
civilization was drawing to a close, and that a new barbar-
ism would soon engulf the world. This movement from millen-
arianism to what we may term apocalypticism was a predict-
able, if not inevitable one. The millenarianism they derived
from Romanticism, which was reinforced by Evangelicalism
and theories of historical periodicity, laid the basis for
the apocalyptic visions they subsequently developed. It im-
parted to them a sense of destiny which informed both their
hopes and their fears. While the revolutionary climate of
the times had a profound influence on the nature of the
apocalypticism they developed, it did not generate it. Their
optimistic millenarianism depended upon a transcendent vis-
ion of society, and the failure of this vision to become a
reality led to a condemnation of society and a search for
transcendence within the self.

One trait shared by Tennyson and Carlyle was a dep-

endence on dialectical modes of expression. This dependence

is a crucial factor in defining the nature of the apocalypt-

icism they developed. From the later writings of both men

there emerges the picture of a world governed by flux, by

irreconcilable but inseparable forces, a world both demonic

and divine. In such a world, meaning can only proceed from

a willed perception of meaning, or, in Tennyson's words,

from "what is highest within us."[1] Furthermore, transcend-

ence, in these terms, can only be achieved by an engagement

of opposition, a confrontation with the dialectical forces

of the world. As Blake says, "without contraries is no pro-

gression. Attraction and repulsion, reason and energy, love

and hate, are necessary to human existence."[2] Ruskin defined

the aesthetic of transcendent dialecticism in his descript-

ion of the Gothic spirit:

> It is that strange disquietude of the Gothic spirit that
> is its greatness; that restlessness of the dreaming mind,
> that wanders hither and thither among the niches, and
> flickers feverishly around the pinnacles, and frets and
> fades in labyrinthine knots and shadows along wall and
> roof, and yet is not satisfied. The Greek could stay in
> his triglyph furrow, and be at peace; but the work of the
> Gothic heart is fretwork still, and it can neither rest
> in, nor from, its labour, but must pass on, sleeplessly,
> until its love of change shall be pacified for ever in
> the change that must come alike on them that wake and
> them that sleep.[3]

Gothicism and Romanticism, from the point of view of

the writers we have been discussing, share a tendency to

view the individual as a reservoir of unlimited possibilities

with an innate capacity to achieve union with the infinite.

Set against him, however, are the delusive forces of the phenomenal world, a world from which meaning can be educed only through a willed perception of its dialectic, self-cancelling nature. If a passive attitude is adopted towards the world any attempt to discover meaning will be thwarted; the shunning of passivity is, however, no light matter, and, as it involves opposition to the forces of the world, the world inevitably comes to be viewed as malignant. A perception of the world as malignant and a desire to engage the forces of opposition are essential features of millenarianism. At the same time, they lead to the conviction that the phenomenal world is an affront to being, and that, as a self-cancelling entity, it is appropriate that it should destroy itself and remove the barrier between the individual and transcendent reality. This, then, is a sublimated death-wish, and such a wish is a latent factor not only in millenarianism but also in Romanticism. Shelley said as much at the beginning of the nineteenth century and Schopenhauer went even further when he declared that the human will

> could not bear to continue through endless time the same actions and sufferings without true gain, if memory and individuality were left to it. It throws them off; this is Lethe; and through this sleep of death it re-appears as a new being, refreshed and equipped with another intellect; "A new day beckons to a newer shore![4]

In these terms, both millenarianism and Romanticism, when applied optimistically to the phenomenal world, can be seen as fundamentally inconsistent--one cannot redeem the

irredeemable. Yet this inconsistency serves only to underline the emotional appeal of such ideas--the individual desires to inhabit a world which is in harmony with his conception of transcendent reality, a world which will enable him to achieve union with such a reality. He must, however, if he faces the issue squarely, come to the realization that millenarianism--whether of the spiritual or the secular variety--is founded upon an illusion, and that his desire is not directed at the phenomenal world but at a transcendent reality.

While such a desire may be a constant element in human nature, it seems reasonable to suppose that it will increase or decrease in intensity according to the individual's sense of harmony with the phenomenal world. The more meaningless the phenomenal world appears to him to be, whether because of inherited patterns of thought or because of widespread social dislocation, the stronger the desire will be. The Victorians not only inherited ideas of transcendent reality from Romanticism and Evangelicalism; they also lived through an era of unprecedented and often disturbing social change and unrest. That Carlyle and Tennyson should have come to view their society in apocalyptic terms is hardly surprising. That they should have rejected secular millenarianism in favour of a vision of the transcendent faculties of the individual marks their recognition of the fundamental inconsistency inherent in millenar-

ianism. They accepted, as it were, the meaninglessness and
irredeemability of the world, which became more glaring to
them as the century progressed, and, turning inward, sought
to commune with a reality beyond the bourne of Time and
Place.

2. Carlyle and Victorian Apocalypticism

There is no doubt that Carlyle contributed a great
deal to the apocalypticism which developed in the nineteenth
century. He made a decisive impact not only on Tennyson but
also on virtually every other mid-nineteenth-century writer,[5]
as well as on many who came to maturity much later. Among
those most deeply indebted to him were Dickens, Matthew
Arnold, Kingsley, Mrs. Gaskell, Ruskin, Disraeli, Morris,
and Lawrence.[6] But the nature of his influence has to be
defined. There seems little doubt, for example, that Tenny-
son would have developed along roughly the same lines as he
did if Carlyle had not written, and, to a certain extent, the
same holds true for the other writers I have mentioned. Will-
iam Oddie, in his discussion of Carlyle's influence upon
Dickens, suggests that Carlyle "offered an imprecise but
consistent structure of ideas and opinions that happened to
overlap . . . with many of Dickens's disparate and disorg-
anised feelings about particular issues and about life in
general," and that "this structure of ideas presented him
with a nucleus around which his own ideas could form and

also, perhaps, with a mirror by which he could recognise

their shape." This, I think, sums up the nature of Carl-

yle's influence on his contemporaries admirably. He did not

present them with any radically new ideas; rather, he art-

iculated their feelings and gave them a coherent framework

within which they could develop their own ideas.

That Carlyle was the first to be able to sum up the

spirit of the age in the way that he did may have been

partly due to his thorough knowledge of French and German

literature and philosophy, but, for his contemporaries, this

was not where his appeal lay. The hero of Charles Kingsley's

Alton Locke (1850) indicates where Carlyle's significance

lay for the majority of his readers:

> I know no book which at once so quickened and exalted
> my poetical view of man and his history, as that great
> prose poem, the single epic of modern days, Thomas
> Carlyle's "French Revolution". Of the general effect
> which his works had on me, I shall say nothing: it was
> the same as they have had, thank God, on thousands of
> my class and of every other. But that book above all
> first recalled me to the overwhelming and yet ennobling
> knowledge that there was such a thing as Duty; first
> taught me to see in history not the mere farce-tragedy
> of man's crimes and follies, but the dealings of a
> righteous Ruler of the universe, whose ways are in the
> great deep, and whom the sins and errors, as well as the
> virtues and discoveries of man, must obey and justify.[8]

It was, in other words, the neo-Calvinist vision which

Carlyle developed in The French Revolution, the vision of a

world ruled by a providential force, which affected his con-

temporaries most profoundly, and while his later, increas-

ingly apocalyptic pronouncements continued to exert an in-

fluence on the course which many writers followed, it was
this initial revelation which was his most enduring legacy.
In order to examine the nature of Carlyle's relationship to
his contemporaries in more detail and also to gain a broad-
er picture of Victorian apocalypticism I will turn now to
the work of two very dissimilar writers--Charles Dickens
and Matthew Arnold--both of whom can be discussed in the
light of their debt to Carlyle.

Charles Dickens, as many critics have shown, was
deeply influenced by Carlyle.[9] His early works show little
in the way of direct influence, although Oliver Twist (1837-
38) and Barnaby Rudge (1840-41) both deal with familiar
Carlylean themes--the workhouses created by the Poor Law of
1834 and revolutionary fervour. As Michael Goldberg says,
however, "the first and unmistakable evidence of Carlyle's
influence on Dickens' writing is to be found . . . in A
Christmas Carol and The Chimes."[10] In A Christmas Carol
(1843) the prophetic voice of Christmas Present warns,
"This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them
both, and all of their degree, but most of all beware this
boy, for on his brow I see that written which is Doom, un-
less the writing be erased."[11] A Christmas Carol is, for all
its air of good humour, an unrelenting attack on the prin-
ciple of laissez-faire, as well as a dire warning of its
consequences. Shortly after writing it, Dickens declared
that society was "approaching the period when, being incap-

able of reforming itself, it will have to submit to being
reformed by others off the face of the earth."[12]

In <u>Dombey and Son</u> (1847-48), which, as A.E. Dyson
says, embodies "the nightmare vision that Dickens was com-
ing to have of nineteenth-century capitalism," the attack
on <u>laissez-faire</u> is even more unrelenting than in <u>A Christ-</u>[13]
<u>mas Carol</u>. Yet while the novel is, as Michael Goldberg
says, "a stark Carlylyean parable on the sacrifice of hum-
anity demanded by the money fetish," Dickens is also con-
cerned to expose the inadequacies of the ways of the past.[14]
Steven Marcus argues that <u>Dombey and Son</u> is, above all,
about the need for change.[15] The principal agent of change
in the novel is the railway, and, even though this is a
product of the society which he condemns, Dickens sees
railway construction as a positive development. Barbara
Lovenheim argues that Dickens portrays the railway as an
agent of apocalyptic change, yet she goes on to point out
that

> while this description suggests that Dickens was att-
> empting to applaud the benefits of the new industrial
> order, the action of the novel proper seems to challenge
> and defy this optimism. The unfortunate fate of almost
> all the characters in <u>Dombey</u>, both those associated with
> the aristocratic past and those associated with the in-
> dustrial present, suggests that the new industrial world
> is no more successful in establishing human happiness
> than the one it has replaced.[16]

Steven Marcus sees in this inconsistency a fundamental am-
biguity of purpose:

> In Dombey and Son, we can see how deeply divided Dick-
> ens has become. On the one hand he is affirming the
> changing world symbolized by the railroad, and on the
> other condemning the society which produced it. That
> society has in every way grown more uncongenial to the
> life of feeling and moral decency.[17]

The deep division which Marcus sees in Dombey and Son is,

however, more apparent than real, for Dickens can be seen

to be following the example set by Carlyle's Past and Pres-

ent in his depiction of society. In that work, Carlyle's

condemnation of a do-nothing aristocracy and a middle class

committed to laissez-faire is coupled with an appeal for

leadership, and for this he looks to the Captains of Indust-

ry. Carlyle condemned railway development because it was

in the hands of men like George Hudson, whom he castigates

in Latter-Day Pamphlets, rather than under the supervision

of such captains. That it was an agent of change was beyond

question; whether the change would prove in the end to be for

the better or for the worse remained to be seen. Dickens

portrays the railway as an agent which can be used to effect

positive change, but which, in the hands of laissez-faire

industrialists, can only perpetuate a corrupt system.

In Bleak House (1852-53) Dickens' indictment of soc-

iety deepens in intensity. The promise held out by the rail--

way in Dombey and Son has all but disappeared, and, by the

introduction of Esther Summerson into the novel, he implies

that the individual has, in some measure, to withdraw from

society in order not to be destroyed by it. Dickens' attack

on society is focused on the Courts of Chancery, which

Carlyle had condemned in Past and Present (p. 261), and

which serve, as Michael Goldberg says, "as an index to a

wholesale institutional malaise throughout Victorian soci-
ety."[18]   John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson suggest that the

novel renders in fictional terms Carlyle's portrait of

England in Latter-Day Pamphlets, in which he declares that,

> in the smoke of this universal, and alas inevitable and
> indispensable revolutionary fire, and burning-up of
> worn-out rags of which the world is full, our life-
> atmosphere has (for the time) become one vile London
> fog, and the eternal loadstars are gone out for us!
> (LDP, p. 51)

They go on to suggest that

> in Bleak House [Dickens] set himself to translate this
> diagnosis into the terms of his own art, choosing in-
> dividual characters and groups of characters to repres-
> ent "the great dumb inarticulate class", those who re-
> garded social iniquities as inevitable, and the rose-
> water philanthropists; finding symbols in the images of
> fog and fire; and representing by a plot the way the
> evil spreads upwards till it impinges "on all classes
> to the very highest".[19]

Perhaps the most potent symbol of England in the novel is

the figure of Krook, who is described as

> short, cadaverous, and withered; with his head sunk
> sideways between his shoulders, and the breath issuing
> in visible smoke from his mouth, as if he were on fire
> within. His throat, chin, and eyebrows were so frosted
> with white hairs, and so gnarled with veins and puck-
> ered skin, that he looked from his breast upward, like
> some old root in a fall of snow.[20]

Krook's death by spontaneous combustion serves as a prophecy

of the consumption of a decadent society by the fires of

discontent. Two comments made by Dickens in 1855 make the

parallel between Krook and England clear, at the same time

as they underline the apocalyptic nature of the novel:

> I am hourly strengthened in my old belief, that our
> political aristocracy and our tuft-hunting are the
> death of England. In all this business I don't see a
> gleam of hope. As to the popular spirit, it has come to
> be so entirely separated from the Parliament and the
> Government, and so perfectly apathetic about them both,
> that I seriously think it a most portentous sign.[21]

> There is nothing in the present time at once so galling
> and so alarming to me as the alienation of the people
> from their own public affairs. . . . And I believe the
> discontent to be so much the worse for smouldering, in-
> stead of blazing openly, that it is extremely like the
> general mind of France before the breaking out of the
> first Revolution, and is in danger of being turned by
> any one of a thousand accidents . . . into such a
> devil of a conflagration as has never been beheld
> since.[22]

Hard Times (1854) and A Tale of Two Cities (1859)

are, by common consent, the two works which show most

clearly the influence of Carlyle on Dickens. Of the former

Dickens wrote to Carlyle, "I know it contains nothing in

which you do not think with me," and in the preface to the

latter he wrote that "no one can hope to add anything to

the philosophy of MR. CARLYLE'S wonderful book" in dealing

with the French Revolution.[23] Hard Times is primarily an

attack on Utilitarianism, yet, as Michael Goldberg points

out, Dickens' "attacks on wrongheaded schooling, abstract

theories about human welfare, and the faulty arithmetic of

social salvation were ways of dramatizing his profound

disquiet about the dominant shaping forces of his civilizat-

ion."[24] Raymond Williams, however, sees Dickens' identific-

ation with Carlyle in Hard Times as essentially negative.
He argues that

> there are no social alternatives to Bounderby and Grad-
> grind: not the time-serving aristocrat Harthouse; not
> the decayed gentlewoman Mrs Sparsit; nowhere, in fact,
> any active Hero. Many of Dickens' social attitudes can-
> cel each other out, for he will use almost any reaction
> in order to undermine any normal representative posit-
> ion. . . . The only reservation is for the passive and
> the suffering, for the meek who shall inherit the earth
> but not Coketown, not industrial society.[25]

This may seem somewhat harsh, but it does point to a basic
dissimilarity between Carlyle and Dickens. Carlyle's prim-
ary concern is with the hero, Dickens' primary concern is
with human goodness and the preservation of integrity in a
hostile world. The concern with human goodness also domin-
ates A Tale of Two Cities, yet along with it Dickens pro-
vides a stern warning to society of the inevitable conse-
quences of its actions. In the final chapter of the novel
he declares that

> there is not in France, with its rich variety of soil
> and climate, a blade, a leaf, a root, a sprig, a pepp-
> ercorn, which will grow to maturity under conditions
> more certain than those that have produced this horror.
> Crush humanity out of shape once more, under similar
> hammers, and it will twist itself into the same tortur-
> ed forms. Sow the seed of rapacious licence and opp-
> ression over again, and it will surely yield the same
> fruit according to its kind.[26]

By the late 1850s, Dickens had become convinced that
the times were ripe for revolution. As Edmund Wilson says,
he came to believe that "if the British upper classes . . .
[did] not deal with the problem of providing for the health
and education of the people, they [would] fall victims to

the brutal mob."[27] But, as in pre-Revolutionary France, no
change of heart seemed likely, and, in the last decade of
his life, Dickens' pessimism deepened. As Barbara Lovenheim
says,

> Although his last novels . . . lack the fiery quality
> of his earlier books, they are even more pessimistic,
> and they contain a more resonant and desperate apocal-
> yptism. The civilization presented in these last novels
> is beyond hope; it is not only waiting for a giant and
> climactic conflagration, but a near and imminent death.[28]
> It is civilization after the deluge.

While there can be no doubt that Carlyle made a pro-
found and lasting impression on Dickens, it is possible to
overestimate the extent of his influence. There seems little
reason to believe that Dickens' views would have been rad-
ically different if he had not come into contact with Car-
lyle. The pessimism and sense of imminent doom he developed
in his later years were conditioned rather than caused by
his reading of Carlyle. As William Oddie says, Dickens "re-
sponded to no part of Carlyle's doctrine that did not find
an echo--sometimes slightly distorted--in his own heart."[29]
What Dickens did gain from Carlyle was the ability to pre-
sent a more coherent and more comprehensive view of society
than he might otherwise have done. As William Oddie goes on
to say,

> It is in the various social interconnections of his
> novels that we see Carlyle's essential contribution. He
> would still have distrusted Exeter Hall, despised a do-
> nothing aristocracy, felt pity for the plight of the
> under-privileged and the uneducated in a ruthless and
> competitive world, hated the cant and lack of charity of
> some ministers of the gospel, and admired the energy and

initiative of the enlightened Captain of Industry; but he would almost certainly not have drawn the same connections of cause and effect, and established the same antitheses between them, as he did in <u>Bleak House</u>.[30]

To sum up, Dickens' view of society as a network of complex interrelations, ultimately subject to a providential law, clearly owed much to Carlyle's influence, while his basic ideas and attitudes, although similar in many ways to those of Carlyle, did not. And it was almost certainly the comprehensive vision of Carlyle's writings which appealed most strongly to other social novelists--to George Eliot, for example, who, as Raymond Williams says,

> is unrivalled in English fiction in her creation and working of the complication and consequence inherent in all relationships. From such a position in experience she naturally sees society at a deeper level than its political abstractions indicate, and she sees her own society, in her own choice of word, as "vicious". Her favourite metaphor for society is a network: a "tangled skein"; a "tangled web".[31]

With Matthew Arnold the question of Carlyle's influence is somewhat more problematic. Barbara Lovenheim, who discusses Arnold's development of apocalypticism in terms of Carlyle's influence, sees in Arnold's career the familiar pattern of youthful idealism followed by a gradually deepening pessimism.[32] Attractive as such a theory may be, however, it is demonstrably false. If we look at Arnold's poetry, for example, the only two works which stand out as expressions of optimistic millenarianism are "Obermann Once More" (1867) and "Bacchanalia; or, the New Age" (1867), both written in the early 1860s, a period in

which, according to Lovenheim, Arnold believed that England was "on the verge of a fatal epochal disaster."[33] If we turn to the poetry he wrote in the late 1840s, a period in which she claims that he was an optimistic radical, we not only look in vain for any evidence of this, but we also find evidence to the contrary. In "To a Republican Friend--Continued" (1849), for example, he dismisses the prospect of a secular millennium and declares that man is "o'ershadowed by the high / Uno'erleaped Mountains of Necessity" (11. 6-7).[34]

In the last decade of his life Arnold did, it is true, express a sense of cultural pessimism similar to that expressed by Carlyle, yet in the earlier stages of his career he pursued a course in many ways diametrically opposed to that of Carlyle. The works he produced prior to the late 1850s were suffused with feelings of powerlessness and enn-ui, occasioned, it is frequently argued, by his father's death; subsequently these feelings gave way to a confident meliorism, tinged with millenarian ideals, which can be seen in a somewhat modified form in Culture and Anarchy (1869), and which did not wholly disappear for nearly twenty years. This disparity between the careers of Carlyle and Arnold would not be so remarkable if Arnold had been ignorant of or hostile to Carlyle's ideas. However, Arnold was not only deeply impressed by Carlyle, but also displays a fundamental kinship with him.[35] The disparity between their careers does

not form an obstacle to reaching an understanding of nine-
teenth-century apocalypticism, however; on the contrary, it
helps us to a deeper appreciation of it. It indicates that
the development of optimistic millenarianism or of bleak
apocalypticism was not primarily dependent on social cir-
cumstances, but on something more intangible--in Arnold's
case, upon the way in which he adapted to the providential
imperatives of the Evangelical tradition.

The most decisive influence on Arnold was that of
his father, Dr. Thomas Arnold (1795-1842). He was a man of
heroic self-determination and high moral principle, a
Carlylean hero, according to Thomas Hughes, who viewed
history as a revelation of divine law.[36] In the last decade
of his life he became convinced that the world was heading
for destruction. In 1831 he declared that "we are engulfed,
I believe, inevitably, and must go down the cataract," and
in 1839 he reflected gloomily that

> My sense of the evils of the times, and to what pros-
> pects I am bringing up my children, is over-whelmingly
> bitter. All in the moral and physical world appears so
> exactly to announce the coming of the 'great day of the
> Lord,' i.e. a period of fearful visitation to terminate
> the existing state of things, whether to terminate the
> whole existence of the human race neither man nor angel
> knows.[37]

Yet Dr. Arnold was not simply an Evangelical alarmist. He
had a profound sense of the injustices prevalent in his soc-
iety and was committed to their reformation. The greatest
evil, as he saw it, was "the unhappy situation in which the

poor and the rich stand towards each other," and he declared

that this "evil is in our hearts quite as much or more than

in our outward condition."[38] He was vehemently opposed to

the principle of _laissez-faire_, which he called

> one of the falsest maxims which ever pandered to human
> selfishness under the name of political wisdom. . . .
> We stand by and let this most unequal race take its own
> course, forgetting that the very name of society implies
> that it shall not be a mere race, but that its object
> is to provide for the common good of all.[39]

This is all very Carlylean--indicating that Carlyle's ideas

were not, as has sometimes been supposed, strikingly orig-

inal--and it is not surprising that Arnold, given the rever-

ence in which he held his father, should have been attract-

ed to Carlyle. However, Arnold's father died when Arnold

was nineteen, and this bereavement left him not with a sense

of stern resolution but with a feeling of impotence, _ennui_,

and regret which lasted for well over ten years. It is hard

to resist a psychological interpretation of this phenomen-

on, and, while I will not enter into the complexities of

the issue, it seems fairly clear that Arnold took many years

to come to terms with his relationship to his dead father,

and that his inability to do so coloured his attitudes.

"Rugby Chapel" (1867), which was written in the late 1850s,

indicates that at this period Arnold was finally coming to

terms with his father's legacy and establishing a sense of

his own identity, and this may have been a decisive factor

in his development of an optimistic millenarianism in the

early 1860s.

In his early poetry, Arnold expresses an <u>ennui</u>-filled sense of alienation from his age. There is, it is true, the early Newdigate prize-poem on "Cromwell" (1843), which celebrates "A life--that wrote its purpose with a sword, / Moulding itself in action, not in word!" (ll. 221-222) in the manner of Carlyle's <u>On Heroes and Hero Worship</u>, but Arnold's later would-be heroes, in such poems as "Mycerinus" (1849), "The Sick King in Bokhara" (1849), and <u>Empedocles on Etna</u>[40] (1852), are cast as impotent saviour-kings. Indeed, Empedocles' "fire-baptism," unlike that of Teufelsdrockh, leads only to his death. Arnold believed that his age was a profoundly troubled one, yet saw in it "a blankness and barrenness" rather than the seeds of epochal change."[41] However, he was familiar with writers such as Senancour, to whom he pays tribute in "Stanzas in Memory of the Author of 'Obermann'" (1852), and felt keenly his inability to aspire to a transcendent vision of history. This inability he attributed to the chaotic nature of his age:

> What shelter to grow ripe is ours?
> What leisure to grow wise?
>
> Like children bathing on a shore,
> Buried a wave beneath,
> The second wave succeeds, before
> We have had time to breathe.
>
> Too fast we live, too much are tried,
> Too harassed, to attain
> Wordsworth's sweet calm, or Goethe's wide
> And luminous view to gain.   (ll. 72-80)

In "To a Republican Friend--Continued" he not only declares

his disbelief in the possibility of a secular millennium,

but also paints a cynical view of human nature:

> Nor will that day dawn at a human nod,
> When, bursting through the network superposed
> By selfish occupation--plot and plan,
>
> Lust, avarice, envy--liberated man,
> All difference with his fellow-mortal closed,
> Shall be left standing face to face with God.
> (ll. 9-14)

For Arnold it was the "strange disease of modern life, /

With its sick hurry, its divided aims" ("The Scholar Gipsy"

(1853), ll. 203-204), which militated against the develop-

ment of a transcendent vision. Modern man is a desperate,

alienated being, he declares in "To Marguerite--Continued"

(1852), and the historical process is no more than "the

turbid ebb and flow / Of human misery" ("Dover Beach" (1867),

ll. 17-18)--

> And we are here as on a darkling plain
> Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
> Where ignorant armies clash by night.
> ("Dover Beach," ll. 35-37)[42]

The feeling of failure, powerlessness, and _ennui_

which characterizes the poems we have been discussing dis-

appeared from Arnold's writings during the 1860s, however,

and in "Obermann Once More" the lassitude of "Stanzas in

Memory of the Author of 'Obermann'" is replaced by an opt-

imistic millenarianism. This change of heart, I would sugg-

est, was due to a change in Arnold's relationship to soc-

iety rather than to actual social change.[43] The 1860s were,

after all, a decade of growing pessimism for Carlyle, Tenny-
son, and Dickens. I suggested earlier that Arnold's develop-
ment of an optimistic millenarianism in this decade was
largely due to a coming to terms with his father's influence,
to a positive revaluation of his relationship to his fath-
er's heroic qualities. This may be stating the matter some-
what bluntly, but I think, nevertheless, that the nature of
Arnold's attitude to society in the 1840s and 1850s can be
indicated by Callicles' description of Empedocles:

> 'Tis not the times, 'tis not the sophists vex him;
> There is some root of suffering in himself,
> Some secret and unfollowed vein of woe,
> Which makes the time look black and sad to him.
> (Empedocles on Etna, I, i, 150-153)

In the 1860s, to pursue this analogy, Arnold succeeded in
eradicating this "root of suffering," and, in this context,
it is interesting to note that in his essays On the Study
of Celtic Literature (1867) and Obermann (1869) he detected
and criticized a similar basis for social disaffection in
two of his literary mentors--Byron and Senancour.[44]

Arnold's feeling that "the world's great order"
("Obermann Once More," l. 293) was about to dawn was accom-
panied by a movement from withdrawal to commitment and from
poetry to prose. In 1869 he published Culture and Anarchy,
and, although the mood of the work is not one of unbounded
optimism, it is a world away from the ennui-filled desper-
ation of his earlier poetry. It is also a world away from
Carlyle's Shooting Niagara, which had been published two

years earlier, both in the urbanity of its tone and in its

assurance that England will undergo "revolution by due

course of law."[45] The work does, however, echo many of Car-

lyle's ideas. Arnold declares that society is "mechanical

and external," and given over to laissez-faire, or, as he

calls it, "doing as one likes."[46] These two features are,

moreover, intimately related--"the worship of the mere

freedom to do as one likes," he goes on to say, "is worship

of machinery."[47] Such freedom leads to anarchy, and it is

to "culture" that Arnold looks "to counteract the tendency

to anarchy which seems to be threatening us."[48] "Culture,"

for Arnold, is synonymous with the "will of God."[49] It is

derived from our "best self," which is "the truest friend

we all of us can have; and when anarchy is a danger to us,

to this authority we may turn with sure trust."[50] It repre-

sents, moreover, "the universal order which seems to be in-

tended and aimed at in the world," and it behoves those who

have discovered their "best selves"--Carlylean heroes, per-

haps--to take the reins of power.[51] As none of the three

classes of British society are motivated by the "will of

God," Arnold calls on the "remnant" from each class, "per-

sons who are mainly led, not by their class spirit, but by

a general humane spirit, by the love of human perfection,"

to form the nucleus of a new democratic system.[52] If such

a "revolution by due course of law" does not come about, he

warns, the consequences of class-motivated power-seeking

will reduce the country to a state of total anarchy. [53] The

conflicting aspirations of an entrenched aristocracy, a

greedy middle-class, and a disenfranchised but inchoate and

resentful populace have to be subsumed under strong state

control.

Even though <u>Culture and Anarchy</u> is an affirmative

work, Arnold does not ignore the dangers which confront

society. His belief that England would enter a new age of

strong government gradually dwindled in the 1870s and by

1880, as Patrick McCarthy says,

> forces were set in motion that . . . threatened Arnold's
> hope that England could make a peaceful gradual transit-
> ion to the age of popular rule. . . . It seemed to
> Arnold that demagoguery, anarchy, and rebellion had been
> loosed upon the land. He called for coercion, censor-
> ship of the press, and Conservative rule as the only
> means of saving England from becoming part of the immense
> procession of ages, . . . countless communities [which]
> have arisen and sunk unknown.[54]

Thus, Arnold did eventually develop a sense of apocalyptic

doom similar to that of Carlyle, but his manner of arriv-

ing at it was very different. In a sense, however, this

difference is superficial. Throughout his career, Arnold

viewed his age as anarchic and applied to it ideas of imma-

nent providentiality, of "the universal order which seems

to be intended and aimed at in the world."[55] Exactly the

same could be said of Carlyle. If we compare <u>Culture and</u>

<u>Anarchy</u> with <u>Shooting Niagara</u> we find that, different though

the attitudes of the two men to the political crisis of the

late 1860s were, they both applied the same criteria to it.

We thus have the curious configuration of two men applying
the same paradigm to the same circumstances, yet reaching
markedly different conclusions. This indicates that the
conclusions were not solely dependent on social circumstances
but owed much to the standpoint of the individual. Arnold
was, for a start, twenty-seven years younger than Carlyle,
and was only nine when the first Reform Bill was passed.
This, we recall, was the period when Carlyle's optimistic
millenarianism was at its zenith. Moreover, Arnold seems to
have been dominated and enfeebled for many years by his
father's stern self-determination, only coming to terms with
it in the late 1850s. If, as I have suggested, the provi-
dential sense of history inherited by the Victorians was
such that it led the individual to embrace an optimistic
millenarianism, and then, with the failure of hope, to succ-
umb to an apocalyptic pessimism, it does not seem unreason-
able to assume that Arnold's optimism in the 1860s was of a
similar order to that of Carlyle in the early 1830s. The
1867 Reform Bill did, after all, represent as significant a
watershed in British political history as the 1832 Reform
Bill, and it has to be borne in mind that, while Carlyle had
reached the age of thirty-seven by 1832, Arnold was still
only forty-five in 1867. Carlyle's optimistic millenarian-
ism, therefore, can hardly be termed youthful, nor can
Arnold's conversion be regarded as excessively belated.
What emerges from the comparison of Carlyle and Arnold is

of significance in attempting to discover the genesis of
Victorian apocalypticism. Both men viewed their society as
anarchic and vicious, but, in early middle age, both became
convinced that a new and infinitely better society was about
to emerge from the ruins of the old.one. Subsequently, the
anarchic tendencies they had seen as signs of hope grew pro-
gressively worse and they abandoned their optimism for cul-
tural pessimism. However, Arnold's development lagged over
thirty years behind Carlyle's and the zenith of his optimism
coincided with the nadir of Carlyle's. This seems to indicate
that the optimistic millenarianism and subsequent apocalypt-
icism of both men were derived from the historical paradigm
they inherited rather than from detached social analysis.
Neither of them could escape the chaotic, unstable world he
inhabited, both desired to return to an ordered and harmoni-
ous age, and both imposed a variant of the millennial dream
onto the age, proclaiming that a new era was about to dawn.
But, as they both came to realize, the age was one of con-
stant change, and fixity was nowhere to be found.

3. The Apocalyptic Legacy

While the preceding discussion of Matthew Arnold
should put us on our guard against seeing the Victorian
age as one in which cultural pessimism gradually deepened
across the board, it also indicates that the development of
a bleak apocalypticism in the nineteenth century can be seen

as a consequence of the Evangelical or pseudo-Evangelical

view of providential design within history which many Vic-

torians held. Such an historical perspective inevitably re-

inforced the basic human need for order and stability, and

when it came into contact with the historical realities of

the nineteenth century--a century of rapid and constant

change--it led quite naturally to pessimism and despair.

By the last quarter of the nineteenth century,

pessimism and despair had become virtual commonplaces of

intellectual discourse. While there were some who did not

follow the general trend--William Morris, for example, who

maintained a qualified millenarianism to the end--the mood

of the late nineteenth century was, on the whole, one of

ennui-filled despair. As Bernard Bergonzi says, there was a

general feeling that the nineteenth century "had gone on

too long, and that sensitive souls were growing weary of

it."[56] James Thomson's The City of Dreadful Night, perhaps

the supreme late-nineteenth-century statement of apocalyptic

despair, appeared in 1874, and, three years later, cultural

pessimism was so prevalent that James Sully could attack it

in a work entitled Pessimism: A History and a Criticism.[57]

George Gissing's New Grub Street (1891) provided a harrowing

illustration of the author's conviction that the evils of

society were part of "a cosmic necessity too powerful for

human resources to resist."[58] Lionel Johnson wrote that

>   . . . our world is done:
> For all the witchery of the world is fled,
> And lost all wanton wisdom long since won.[59]

And, taking their lead from Walter Pater, the poets of the
'nineties sought a transcendent vision not in order to im-
part it to the world but in the hope of escaping the press-
ures of the world. Even in this, they failed. The individ-
ual, it seemed, was trapped within the sordid confines of
mean necessity, like the pathetic, frustrated beings in
John Davidson's "Thirty Bob a Week" (1894).

The best-known late-nineteenth-century pessimist is
Thomas Hardy. It is not surprising to find that Hardy
started out as an optimist, but it may be somewhat surprising
to find that this optimism was based on an amalgam of the
philosophies of Darwin and Comte.[60] As J.H. Buckley says,
Comte had been anathematized by many writers because of his
belief that progress involved the ascendancy of "the posi-
tive facts of science" over "creative art," which "belonged
to the lost childhood of the race."[61] To look back to that
"lost childhood" often seemed the only means of escape from
the "world of inhuman values and of little apparent harmony
or purpose" presented by the new sciences.[62] Yet, for all
his positivism, Hardy was never content with the existing
state of affairs. In 1867 he looked forward hopefully to

> A century which, if not sublime,
> Will show, I doubt not, at its prime,
> A scope above this blinkered time,
>   ("1967" (1867), 11. 7-9)

yet, in the aftermath of the Second Reform Bill, his vision
slowly darkened.[63] The moody and qualified meliorism of "The

Darkling Thrush" (1902) is a world away from his earlier

optimism; he had become, as he said in "In Tenebris (I)"

(1902), one who waited looked to the future with "unhope"

(1. 24). In his last and most pessimistic novel, Jude the

Obscure (1896), a trace of his earlier optimism survives in

Jude's belief that his and Sue's ideas are fifty years

ahead of their time, yet this does not prevent Jude from

agreeing with the doctor that Father Time's nihilistic

actions represent "the beginning of the coming universal
wish not to live."[64]

Fifteen years before Jude the Obscure was published,

Ruskin, in the first essay in the series Fiction, Fair and

Foul, had traced the morbid violence of much contemporary

fiction to what John Rosenberg calls "a kind of death-wish

engendered by the tedium, depersonalization, and anxious
rootlessness of modern urban culture."[65] In this essay, Rus-

kin, who grew, in his later years, even more pessimistic

than Carlyle about the fate of England, describes urban life

as a "hot fermentation and unwholesome secrecy . . . in the

smoking mass of decay" and adds that

> the disgrace and grief resulting from the mere trampling
> pressure and electric friction of town life, become to
> the sufferers peculiarly mysterious in their undeserv-
> edness, and frightful in their inevitableness. The power
> of all surroundings over them for evil; the incapacity
> of their own minds to refuse the pollution, and of their

own wills to oppose the weight, of the staggering mass
that chokes and crushes them into perdition, brings
every law of healthy existence into question with them,[66]
and every alleged method of help and hope into doubt.

Thus,

the thoroughly trained Londoner can enjoy no other
excitement than to which he has been accustomed, but
asks for that in continually more ardent or more vir-
ulent concentration; and the ultimate power of fiction
to entertain him is by varying to his fancy the modes,[67]
and defining for his dulness the horrors, of Death.

Ruskin admits that "it might have been thought . . . that

the denial of their natural food to human feelings would

have provoked a reactionary desire for it; and that the

dreariness of the street would have been gilded by dreams

of pastoral felicity," but declares that "experience has

shown the fact to be otherwise."[68] Although Ruskin is per-

ceptive in his definition of the nature of much late-nine-

teenth-century literature, this last statement is somewhat

misleading.

Alongside the rise of naturalism in the late nine-

teenth century, there was an ever increasing tendency to

withdraw, if not into a changeless past, at least into a

seemingly changeless world of aesthetic contemplation. As

W.B. Yeats noted, "there are 'stars' in poem after poem of

certain writers of the 'nineties as though to symbolize what

is inviolate and fixed."[69] John Reed, in discussing Richard

Le Gallienne, declares that, for him, as for many of his

contemporaries, "an esthetically 'recollected' past prom-

ised attractive refuge because through its speechless art

it provided sensations subject to the reflective will."[70]
Yet such withdrawal was not always taken with the sole aim
of shielding the individual from the pressures of his age.
Even at the very end of the century, as Reed says, writers
were still able to project "the interests of memory into
aspirations for the future," even though many "were aware
that their elegant poetic regrets for an ideal past were,
in reality, 'lying dreams of history.'"[71]

For many, it was Socialism which held the key to a
brighter future. Le Gallienne looked forward to "an imminent
return to Simplicity--Socialism the unwise it call," and
Oscar Wilde, in The Soul of Man Under Socialism (1891) proph-
esied the coming of a "peaceful utopia where pleasure would
reign."[72] William Morris was better known as an advocate of
Socialism, and, along with Ruskin, he had a decisive impact
on the future course of Socialism in Britain. In News from
Nowhere (1890) he envisages a catacysmic transition to a
socialist state, in which the urban-industrial complex of
nineteenth-century Britain is replaced by a post-industrial,
quasi-medieval system.

News from Nowhere is one of a number of utopian
works that appeared in the late nineteenth century. The
visions of the future presented in many of these works
often differed considerably from Morris's. Basically, how-
ever, they fall into three categories. First, there are
those which envisage the collapse of industrial society and

the establishment of a post-industrial society. Into this category fall News from Nowhere, W.H. Hudson's A Crystal Age (1888), and Richard Jefferies' After London; or Wild England (1885). Into the second category fall those works which envisage a utopia in which technology has been harnessed to create an ideal society. Such a work is Winwood Reade's The Martyrdom of Man (1873), which is unmistakably Darwinian in its vision of the coming race:

> These bodies which we now wear belong to the lower animals; our minds have already outgrown them; already we look upon them with contempt. A time will come when Science will transform them by means which we cannot conjecture. . . . Disease will be extirpated; the causes of decay will be removed; immortality will be invented.[73]

It is man, however, not nature, who will superintend the perfecting of mankind, for "men will master the forces of Nature; they will become themselves architects of systems, manufacturers of worlds. Man will then be perfect; he will then be a creator; he will therefore be what the vulgar worship as a god."[74] To the twentieth-century mind, this "glorious" vision of technological man, with unlimited genetic and biological control over the future of the race, is a frightening one, and we are likely to regard Reade's book as misguided, if not downright dangerous. In one sense, however, the book is an expression not of optimism but of a cultural pessimism allied to a death-wish. Reade declares that, for all the technological achievements of the nineteenth century, "Earth . . . is now a purgatory," and, in

his attitude of contempt towards "these bodies which we now wear," and his desire to see man become "what the vulgar worship as a god," it is difficult not to detect a subconscious longing to escape not only from the trammels of late Victorian society but also from the physical world.[75]

Edward Bellamy's Looking Backward: 2000-1887 (1888) also falls into the second category of utopian fictions, although his vision is different from Reade's. Bellamy was an American, but his work had a considerable impact in Britain, provoking from William Morris not only a savage review but also the savage rebuttal of News from Nowhere.[76] Bellamy's vision of Boston in the year 2000 is of a highly organized socialist megalopolis, in which technology has been harnessed to social equality. To Morris, as, indeed, to the twentieth-century reader, Bellamy's utopia seems to take no account of liberty on the one hand nor of creativity on the other. As Morris says, "a machine-life is the best which Mr. Bellamy can imagine for us on all sides."[77] The utopianism of Reade and Bellamy is inspired by an intense dissatisfaction with the organization of society in the late nineteenth century, yet it embodies an implicit faith in the virtue of technological progress, which was, for many, as much anathema as the laissez-faire capitalism with which technology was associated. It is worth pointing out that The Martyrdom of Man was to find a negative echo in Aldous Huxley's Brave New World (1932), while Looking

Backward was to find one in George Orwell's 1984 (1949). The
two most widely known dystopias of the twentieth century are
thus unequivocal condemnations of the technological utopian-
ism of the late nineteenth century.

The third category into which late-nineteenth-century
utopian fictions can be divided contains works which are
essentially satirical dystopias, such as Edward Bulwer-Lytt-
on's The Coming Race (1871) and Samuel Butler's Erewhon
(1872). In Bulwer-Lytton's novel the hero enters a mine
shaft and discovers himself in a subterranean world which
gives the appearance of having been designed by John Martin.
He finds it inhabited by a people called the Vril-ya,
descendents of earthlings who have, through their discovery
of a mystical force known as vril, developed a civilization
superior in many ways to that on the surface. Not only are
the Vril-ya physically stronger than earthlings, but they
are also organized into a model republic, in which technol-
ogy, the basis of their system, is supervised by a benign
dictator known as the Tur. Yet their civilization is by no
means ideal. Having eliminated conflict, they have also
eliminated history and poetry, and their emotional life is
non-existent. They are totally passionless, concerned only
that the system should continue to maintain them in the
comfortable hebetude to which they have become accustomed.
Bulwer-Lytton informs us that at some remote point in the
future they will emerge from their subterranean world and

exterminate the human race, but this hint of apocalyptic doom is subordinate to the novel's main purpose, which is to demonstrate the insufficiency of a scientific utopia.

Samuel Butler's Erewhon, which appeared in the following year, is even less apocalyptic than The Coming Race, yet it is interesting to note that Butler's satire concerns not a society dependent on machinery, but a society which is devoid of machinery, and which has set its face not only against technological progress but against all progress. Here, then, is the organic, stable, non-industrial society which many Victorians used as a hypothetical standard to judge their own chaotic age. The trouble is that the Erewhonians not only lack any moral consciousness but also live lives of virtually unrelieved dulness, constricted not by their environment but by the mechanistic habits of thought which have been handed down to them. Their whole system of conduct is based on hypothetical or abstract reason (or "unreason"), which ensures that there is no originality of thought. One of the most ludicrous results of this is that illness is treated as a crime while crime is treated as a sickness. Erewhon is a satire on late Victorian society, but it is more than that. Butler, by implication, ridicules the idea that society is as it is because of the presence of machinery, and indicates that the reformation of mankind cannot be achieved by retreating into a pre-industrial system, but has to emanate from the individual.

When we turn to the first category of utopian

fictions and to Richard Jefferies' After London; or Wild

England, we find a very different kind of vision. Like

Erewhon, however, After London can be seen as a rebuttal of

the kind of utopianism which Morris expressed several years

later in News from Nowhere, with its implicit assumption

that man, once freed from the constraints of industrial

society, would be able to form a society based on mutual

trust and goodwill. Jefferies' novel is little regarded

today--J.H. Buckley calls it "deservedly forgotten"--yet

it is one of the most remarkable documents in the history

of late-nineteenth-century apocalypticism.[78] The setting

for the novel is England after the deluge--literally, in

this case, for a vast lake has formed in the midlands of

the country, and along its shores are dotted feudal settle-

ments, heavily defended against the hordes of savages

settled farther inland. William Morris declared that, when

he read the novel, "absurd hopes curled round my heart,"

but Jefferies' England is, in its brutality and meanness, a

world away from the socialist utopia of News from Nowhere.[79]

After London is, admittedly, an uneven work, but it

does contain two passages of real narrative power. The

first of these is the description of the triumph of nature

with which the novel opens. Jefferies tells us little of

the circumstances surrounding the collapse of England and

the emigration of those wealthy enough to be able to afford

it, but one thing is certain--the collapse is total. Nature
repossesses the land and those who remain in it revert to
barbarism. This England is no pastoral utopia, populated as
it is by wild beasts and savages. Interestingly enough,
Brian Aldiss sees a clear connexion between Jefferies'
description of nature coming back into its own and evolut-
ionary thought. He declares that the moral of the story is
that, "if mankind does not prove fit enough to rule the
world he arrogantly claims as his, then nature will return
and overwhelm him. It has its connections with the guilty
fear of the Disraelian 'two nations' theme, that the supp-
ressed and oppressed will rise up again."[80]

The action of the second part of the novel takes
place after a considerable amount of time has elapsed. A
rudimentary form of social organization, confined to isol-
ated communities, has been established. After the day-to-day
life of one of these communities has been described in
detail, there follows an account of a journey round the un-
explored shores of the lake by the son of the ruler of the
community. There is little in the second part of the book
which is up to the standard of the first part, but there is
one section which surpasses even the first part in narrative
intensity. This is the description of the explorer's visit
to the site of London. The city has been transformed into a
spectral marsh lit only by a dull red glare, and, as the

explorer journeys into its ghastly recesses, his skin
blackens and his head begins to reel with the noxious vap-
ours emanating from below the surface. He comes upon the
charred remains of those who have ventured into the marsh
before him, and, enfeebled by the poisonous atmosphere of
the place, barely manages to make his escape into the clear
waters of the lake. Jefferies creates here as chilling a
wasteland as any in Victorian literature, a near-hallucinat-
ory vision of the end of western civilization.

After London is a fascinating novel, worthy of more
attention than it has received, yet it is not easy to grasp
Jefferies' intentions in it. Although he seems to regard
the collapse of civilization and the return of nature with
satisfaction, he harbours no illusions as to the kind of
society which will emerge from the ruins. When it is not
downright barbaric, it is, for the most part, mean, narrow-
minded, and bloodthirsty. It seems that Jefferies is prep-
ared to see nineteenth-century civilization destroyed at
any cost. He realizes that a perfect society cannot be
created by placing human beings in a natural environment
and expecting them to organize themselves according to an
overriding feeling of brotherly love. Jefferies' explorer
is, in many ways, as alienated by reason of his idealism
and high aspirations as he would have been in the nineteenth
century, and his life is certainly more fraught with danger.
But in one respect he has an advantage over his nineteenth-

century couterpart. The society he lives in is in its form-
ative stages, and there is the unstated implication that he
can help it to develop in a positive way, a possibility not
open to the nineteenth-century idealist. His election as
ruler of the shepherd tribes at the end of the novel sugg-
ests this possibility, but, as I said before, the most strik-
ing features of the work are its visions of social collapse
and apocalyptic doom.

W.H. Hudson's A Crystal Age, which appeared in 1888,
is a far more coherent work than After London, yet, although
it paints a far more idyllic picture of the future than
Jefferies' novel, its underlying intentions are similar.
The narrator is a discontented young man who is rendered
unconscious when he falls into a ravine and only regains
consciousness many centuries later. The society he finds on
waking is a very different one to that which he has been
accustomed to. As in After London, society is organized into
isolated communities, but there the similarity ends. People
live in great houses, living in harmony with the natural
world and cultivating their aesthetic sensibilities. Each
house is ruled over by a father and a mother and it is to
them alone that the propagation of the species falls. All
of the other inhabitants are quite happy with this arrange-
ment, however, as love, in the romantic sense, is unknown
to them. At the end of the novel, the narrator, dejected by
this lack of passion, poisons himself. Although Hudson's

utopia seems flawed by lack of passion, there are indicat-

ions that the fault lies in the character of the narrator,

who confesses that he was a complacent philistine in the

nineteenth century, and whose passion for Yoletta, one of

the women of the house he takes up residence in, is compared

to that of a hungry animal, eager to devour its victim.[81]

Throughout the novel, Hudson's desire for a world

devoid of change, founded on steadfast laws, is apparent.

It is announced by his choice of epigraph:

> Then gin I thinke on that which Nature sayd,
> Of that same time when no more change shall be
> But stedfast rest of all things firmely stayd
> Upon the pillars of Eternity.[82]

In the book from which the father of the house reads to the

assembled company, the collapse of the former civilization

is attributed to its restless nature and to the affront it

offered to the dictates of eternal law:

> In the past men sought after knowledge of various kinds,
> asking not whether it was for good or evil: but every
> offence of the mind and the body has its appropriate
> reward; and while their knowledge grew apace, that better
> knowledge and discrimination which the Father gives to
> every living soul, both in man and in beast, was taken
> from them. . . . But they knew not their poverty and
> blindness, and were not satisfied; but were like ship-
> wrecked men on a lonely and barren rock in the midst of
> the sea, who are consumed with thirst, and drink of no
> sweet spring, but of the bitter wave, and thirst, and
> drink again, until madness possesses their brains, and
> death releases them from their misery. . . . But their
> vain ambition lasted not, and the end of it was death.
> The madness of their minds preyed on their bodies, and
> worms were bred in their corrupted flesh . . . and the
> Mother of men was thus avenged of her children for
> their pride and folly, for they perished miserably,
> devoured of worms. . . . Of the human race only a small
> remnant survived, these being men of a humble mind, who

had lived apart and unknown to their fellows; and after long centuries they went forth into the wilderness of earth and repeopled it.[83]

After having spent some time in the house, the narrator begins to look back on his former life as "a repulsive dream" and to wonder how he "had ever found that listless, worn-out, luxurious, do-nothing existence endurable."[84] Towards the end of the novel he identifies the dominant mood of the late nineteenth century as apocalyptic:

> In that feverish, full age--so full, and yet, my God, how empty!--in the wilderness of every man's soul, was not a voice heard crying out, prophesying the end? . . . A little while, the thought said, and all this will be no more; for we have not found the secret of happiness, and all our toil and effort is misdirected; and those who are seeking for a mechanical equivalent of consciousness, and those who are going about doing good, are alike wasting their lives; and on all our hopes, beliefs, dreams, theories, and enthusiasms, "Passing away" is written plainly as the Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin seen by Belshazzar on the wall of his palace in Babylon.[85]

This longing for dissolution is something the narrator has not shaken off, however, as his later suicide demonstrates.

News from Nowhere, although similar in many ways to the fantasies of Jefferies and Hudson, is a different kind of work. In it, Morris describes a society in which the pressures of division have given way, after the overthrow of capitalism, to a socialist utopia. The England he depicts is a decentralized, essentially agrarian state, inspired by medieval ideals of harmony and order. While there are factories in this utopia, Morris, as Jack Lindsay says, "is not concerned to elaborate these aspects of the new society or

the ways in which the forms of association operate in the productive and social spheres," but concentrates on "purely human aspects."[86] This is not as serious a weakness as Morris's inability to reconcile his vision of a stable, harmonious society with the forms of growth and movement within the society, which, at the same time as they prevent stagnation, also threaten social equilibrium. It is too easy to criticize Morris's vision, however, and, in doing so, to lose sight of his heroic attempt to envisage a society in which all forms of competition and conflict have been eradicated and in which man is no longer an alienated, fragmented being. But it is necessary to realize that this vision is, essentially, the expression of a desire for a world secure of change, a desire to retreat into a changeless past. Morris's desire to see nineteenth-century civilization destroyed is no less fervent than Jefferies', but, whereas Jefferies seems to want destruction at any cost, Morris's desire is palliated by the idealistic conviction that a new, unspeakably better society will arise out of the ruins of the old.

An optimism of a totally different kind can be found in the writings of H.G. Wells, many of whose utopian fantasies are similar to those of Bellamy. His imagination was fired by the prospect of apocalyptic conflagration, and, as J.C. Garrett notes, "he loved to elaborate the grisly details of Armageddon. Having disfigured the world beyond

recognition through his imaginary wars of destruction, he

then proceeded, with equal relish, to describe the reorgan-
ization and tidying up of our shattered planet."[87] However,

Garrett goes on to point out that

> it is important to recognize the central characteristics
> of Wells's mind as revealed in his Utopias: he is pre-
> occupied with physical comfort; he is enchanted by mech-
> anical devices and technological processes; he has a
> compulsive attachment to standardization; he is enthrall-
> ed by systems of organization and control. . . . Many
> readers also remembered that a favourite theme of Wells
> had been the eugenic selection and breeding of superior
> individuals; they remembered that on more than one occ-
> asion he had recommended the sterilization of the crim-
> inal and dull-witted. It was clear that, whatever were
> the attractions of Wells's scientific, socialized
> World State, it would treat human beings as if they were
> things, or digits in statistical tables; that instead of
> freedom Wells was proposing the restrictions of a per-
> fectly sanitary prison.[88]

But, alongside this alarming optimism, which was attacked by

E.M. Forster in The Machine Stops (1928) and by Aldous Hux-

ley in Brave New World, Wells was affected, throughout his

life, by a pessimism equally apocalyptic in scope, which fin-

ally triumphed over his faith in a technological millennium.

In The Time Machine (1895), the Time Traveller returns with

news not only of a coming "golden age," in which a decadent

élite, the Eloi, fall victim to the "automatic civilization"

they have created, and to the Morlocks, who have been forced

into underground servitude to maintain this civilization,
but also of the ultimate desolation of the world.[89] Faced

with the realization that "the growing pile of civilization

[is] only a foolish heaping that must inevitably fall back

upon and destroy its makers in the end," the Time Traveller eventually leaves nineteenth-century England for good.[90]

A similar dissatisfaction with the present can be seen in <u>Tono-Bungay</u> (1908), a savage and comprehensive indictment of English society. On Bladesover, the great house in which the narrator's mother works, "the hand of change rests . . . , unfelt, unseen; resting for awhile, as it were half reluctantly, before it grips and ends the thing for ever."[91] As the novel progresses, Bladesover becomes a symbol for England, a land drifting towards disaster. Similarly, the radio-active "quap" with which the narrator vainly tries to shore up his uncle's business empire becomes a symbol of "atomic decay," of "the ultimate eating away and dry-rotting and dispersal of all our world."[92] At the end of the novel the narrator sails down the Thames estuary on a destroyer as darkness falls over England:

> And now behind us is blue mystery and the phantom flash of unseen lights and presently even these are gone, and I and my destroyer tear out to the unknown across a great grey space. We tear into the great spaces of the future and the turbines fall to talking in unfamiliar tongues. Out to the open we go, to windy freedom and trackless ways. Light after light goes down, England and the Kingdom, Britain and the Empire, the old prides and the old devotions, glide abeam, astern, sink down upon the horizon, pass--pass. The river passes--London passes, England passes. . . .[93]

For the narrator, the destroyer represents the only reality he has found. All else is "crumbling and confusion, . . . change and seemingly endless swelling."[94] But this reality is not, as he claims, simply the transcendent, inhuman real-

ity of science, "irrelevant to most human interests," for, in the form in which he perceives it, it has one function--to destroy.[95]

The bleak apocalypticism of the last section of Tono-Bungay may have been influenced by Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness (1902), which also takes the Thames estuary as the setting for the narrative sections which frame Marlow's tale. The narrator declares that "nothing is easier for a man who has, as the phrase goes, 'followed the sea' with reverence and affection, than to evoke the great spirit of the past upon the lower reaches of the Thames."[96] He refers to the cavalcade of English history, but Marlow interrupts with the statement that "this also . . . has been one of the dark places of the earth" as a prelude to the tale of his journey to the "heart of darkness."[97] By the time he has finished the tale, darkness has fallen, and he sits apart, "indistinct and silent, in the pose of a meditative Buddha."[98] The Thames, flowing "sombre under an overcast sky," seems to the narrator to be leading "into the heart of an immense darkness."[99]

Francis Ford Coppola's film adaptation of Heart of Darkness, set in war-torn Vietnam rather than colonial Africa, emphasizes the apocalyptic nature of Conrad's work, which is, nevertheless, apocalyptic enough in its own right. In Heart of Darkness Marlow returns to England having glimpsed a savage reality which gives the lie to the

fragile sense of reality which sustains western civilizat-
ion. In Coppola's Apocalypse Now (1979), Willard, Marlow's
counterpart, returns to Saigon having glimpsed a similar
reality and performed a sacrificial ritual which contrasts
sharply with the meaningless war he has been involved in.
In both works, civilization is seen as decadent and meaning-
less, and meaning can only be discovered in a primitive and
terrifying confrontation with the "heart of darkness." Such
a recourse to primitivism is, in effect, the expression of
a desire to see western civilization, in all its stupendous
and spurious effrontery, overthrown.

Much apocalyptic imagining of the past one hundred
years has been bound up with primitivism, which has been
viewed as both a hostile and a beneficent force. The echo
in the Marabar Caves in E.M. Forster's Passage to India
(1924), for example, is, for all its vagueness, as potentially
menacing as the rough beast which W.B. Yeats sees slouching
towards Bethlehem in "The Second Coming" (1921). In The
Waste Land (1922), however, T.S. Eliot, who again uses the
Thames as the setting for parts of his poem, takes a differ-
ent point of view, juxtaposing the fragmented vestiges of
western civilization with a primitivism which can be red-
eemed from darkness by the positive vision of the Upanishads.
Similarly, D.H. Lawrence sought to recover a primitive, in-
tuitive vision, and in his last work, Apocalypse (1931),
stripped the Book of Revelation of what he considered to be

loathsome Judaeo-Christian encrustations to reveal its dark
and "pagan splendour."[100]

If there is one thing which seems to characterize
all, or almost all, of the apocalyptic visions we have been
discussing, it is that they deal with the resurgence of the
repressed. In some cases this coming resurgence is viewed
with fear; in others it is viewed with hope. Either way, it
is viewed as something which has to happen because the act
of repression has set up a disequilibrium within the cosmos,
a disequilibrium which has to be righted one way or another.
The agency behind this repression is, invariably, nineteenth
century civilization, characterized by urban, industrial,
and, especially in the latter part of the century, colonial
expansion. As the century wore on, those who felt a sense
of disequilibrium became more and more convinced that this
civilization could not recover equilibrium through its own
efforts. It was set, in fact, not to unite and harmonize
but to disunite and disharmonize, to exacerbate the already
existing disequilibrium. It could not, therefore, be reform-
ed. It had to be abolished, and this would be effected by
the resurgence of those forces which it had repressed. For
many Victorians, these forces were represented by the work-
ing classes, but they were also represented by nature, the
heroic individual, and primitivism. The list could be ex-
tended, but I think it is clear that, however much individ-
ual visions may have differed from one another, there is a

common element to them all. They all start from the premise
that modern civilization is an aberration, a degrading and
dehumanizing force, which is doomed to destruction.

4. Apocalyptic Visions in an Apocalyptic Age

Apocalypticism, as I argued earlier, has its roots
in a fundamentally Romantic conception of man as an innate-
ly divine, potentially superhuman being. It can also be
seen as an expression of the sublimated death-wish inherent
in Romanticism. This applies equally to the bleak, ennui-
filled apocalypticism which characterized the late nine-
teenth century and to the optimistic millenarianism which
survives even today, despite the pessimism which pervades
our culture. Ours is, indeed, an apocalyptic age, and our
apocalypticism is not only more profound but also more pre-
valent than that of the Victorians. We seem to live, as
George Steiner says, in a "post-culture," filled with an
aching nostalgia for the "golden time" of the nineteenth
century, the century whose apocalypticism we have inherit-
ed.[101] It may seem, in the century of total war, nuclear
proliferation, and global pollution, that our apocalyptic-
ism is no more than a balanced appraisal of the evidence
which confronts us, while that of the Victorians was simply
an exaggerated fear of social revolution. But, as I have
shown, the apocalypticism of the Victorians was not, in
essence, a response to the rise of the working classes or

to any other development which threatened the existing soc-
ial order, but the expression of a detestation of that soc-
ial order. With our ironic perspective on the world, we may
seem to have little in common with the Victorians, and their
stern emphasis on the dictates of the providential imperat-
ive, but, as D.C. Muecke suggests, this may not be the case:

> In our conscious life we have all the "innocent unaw-
> areness" of the typical victim of irony who assumes
> that things are what they appear. This makes us all
> unconscious hypocrites living a "life of continuous
> and uninterrupted self-deception." . . . The things that
> we say happen to us against our will may really be things
> which secretly we will to happen. We may have our reasons
> for accidentally breaking our leg, getting hopelessly in
> debt, falling sick, or, as a nation, getting involved in
> a war; even the thought of universal nuclear suicide is
> undeniably attractive.[102]

An integral part of our apocalypticism is a sense
of alienation. To say that modern man is an alienated being
is to do little more than reiterate a tired cliché, yet it
is essential to define the nature of this alienation. Erich
Fromm defines alienation as "a mode of experience in which
the person experiences himself as an alien. He has become,
one might say, estranged from himself."[103] Lewis Feuer de-
clares that

> Alienation lies in every direction of human experience
> where basic emotional desire is frustrated, every dir-
> ection in which the person may be compelled by social
> situations to do violence to his own nature. "Alienat-
> ion" is used to convey the emotional tone that accom-
> panies any behavior in which the person is compelled to
> act self-destructively.[104]

The concept of alienation can be traced back to Calvin, who
saw man as alienated from God because of original sin.

"Spiritual death," he wrote, "is nothing else than the alienation of the soul from God, we are all born as dead men, and we live as dead men, until we are made partakers of the life of Christ."[105] Secularized in the late eighteenth century, alienation became a central concept in the writings of Hegel and the early Marx, and, as Lewis Feuer says, it has become "the key ethical concept of our age."[106] Northrop Frye suggests that, in the modern world,

> the root of . . . alienation is the sense that man has
> lost control, if he ever had it, over his own destiny.
> The master or tyrant is still an enemy, but not an
> enemy that anyone can fight. . . . In a world where the
> tyrant-enemy can be recognized, even defined, and yet
> cannot be projected on anything or anybody, he remains
> part of ourselves, or more precisely of our own death-
> wish, a cancer that gradually disintegrates the sense
> of community.[107]

Frye thus identifies the death-wish which permeates our culture as a desire to destroy a world we cannot reform. The ennui-filled sense of alienation which leads to such negativism can only be opposed, according to Sir Herbert Read, by heroic self-affirmation, for

> the death wish that was once an intellectual fiction
> has now become a hideous reality and mankind drifts
> indifferently to self-destruction. To arrest that drift
> is beyond our individual capacities; to establish one's
> individuality is perhaps the only possible protest.[108]

Frye goes on to give another definition of modern alienation, one that is perhaps even more telling:

> In earlier times the sense of alienation and anxiety
> was normally projected as the fear of hell. . . . In
> our day this fear is attached, not to another world
> following this one, but to the future of our own
> world.[109]

George Steiner makes much the same point:

> Whether or not our intimations of utter menace are
> justified is not the issue. They permeate our sensibil-
> ity. It is inside them that the post-culture conducts
> its fragmentary, often contradictory business.[110]

Thus, we conceive of the future in apocalyptic terms, and,
I would suggest, part of the reason for this is that these
are the terms in which we wish to conceive of it. It is in
this way that our death-wish can find expression. By envis-
aging an apocalyptic future our inchoate resentment against
the world can take shape.

The dominant cultural assumption of our age is that
civilization, as we know it, is doomed. J.B. Priestley,
writing in 1974, declared that "there's a slithering down
of civilization. The whole scientific and industrial civil-
ization which began in the 16th century is coming to an end.
It won't last. Something will take its place."[111]   Jacob
Bronowski concludes his study, The Ascent of Man, with the
following remarks:

> The ascent of man will go on. But do not assume that it
> will go on carried by Western civilization as we know
> it. We are being weighed in the balance at this moment.
> If we give up, the next step will be taken--but not by
> us. We have not been given any guarantee that Assyria
> and Egypt and Rome were not given. We are waiting to
> be somebody's past too, and not necessarily that of our
> future. . . . If we do not take the next step in the
> ascent of man, it will be taken by people elsewhere,
> in Africa, in China.[112]

Earlier in the century, John Maynard Keynes saw in the
turmoil of post-war Europe "the fearful convulsions of a
dying civilization," while Bertrand Russell, in 1920, de-

scribed the west as "doomed."   Behind much of this cul-
tural pessimism lies the conviction that western civilizat-
ion has become so irredeemably pernicious that it deserves
to perish. Thomas Hardy, writing in the aftermath of World
War One, declared that he did not think "a world in which
such fiendishness is possible to be worth the saving.
Better let western 'civilization' perish, and the black and
yellow races have a chance."   D.H. Lawrence, writing from
Germany in 1924, stated that "the positivity of our civil-
ization has broken. . . . The old spell of the old world has
broken, and the old, bristling, savage spirit has set in."

Perhaps the clearest example of this kind of cul-
tural pessimism is to be found in the writings of H.G. Wells.
As Warren Wagar notes, in 1902 Wells "predicted a colossal
war among the nations which, he hoped, would end in the
seizure of real power throughout the world by a new breed
of men conscious of the fatal futility of nationalism and
tough-mindedly prepared to reorganize the world in a 'larger
synthesis.'"   But, when the two colossal wars of our cent-
ury failed to usher in the new world order he hoped for, he
announced, in Mind at the End of Its Tether (1945), that
"the end of everything we call life is close at hand and
cannot be evaded. . . . There is no way out or round or
through the impasse. It is the end. . . . Homo sapiens, as
he has been pleased to call himself, in his present form, is
played out."   Wells was fascinated by violence, and, even

when he became convinced that violent dissolution would not

be the prelude to a new age, he was prepared to accept the

demise of life on earth rather than see it perpetuated in

its present state. He did not say this in so many words--he

claimed to be describing irreversible cultural trends--but

it seems that he looked forward to the prospect of a purg-

ing fire, even if that fire would purge man from the face

of the earth. Wells's apocalypticism was clearly the pro-

duct of desire rather than detachment, of ideological bias

rather than impartial observation.

Wells was not alone in his prophecies of doom. As

George Watson says,

> Catastrophe is the master-myth of two literary generat-
> ions, from D.H. Lawrence's Rainbow (1915) and Women in
> Love (1920), W.B. Yeats's 'Second Coming' (1920) and,
> two years later, Joyce's Ulysses and Eliot's The Waste
> Land. It ends climactically, not with a whimper but a
> bang: with the Marxist apocalyptics of W.H. Auden and
> others in the Thirties.[118]

D.H. Lawrence, writing in 1928, declared that the catast-

rophe had already happened:

> Ours is essentially a tragic age, so we refuse to take
> it tragically. The cataclysm has happened, we are among
> the ruins, we start to build up new little habitats, to
> have new little hopes. It is rather hard work: there is
> now no smooth road into the future: but we go round, or
> scramble over the obstacles. We've got to live, no matt-
> er how many skies have fallen.[119]

In a preface he wrote for Dostoyevsky's The Grand Inquisitor

in 1930, Lawrence declared that a laissez-faire economy led

to the making of "the terrible mad mistake that money is

life," and thus "to a condition of competitive insanity and

ultimate suicide."[120] Fifteen years earlier, in "Within the
Sepulchre," he had defined even more precisely the death-
wish he saw lurking at the heart of his society. In the
modern democratic state, he wrote,

> the tacit utterance of every man . . . is 'Apres moi le
> Deluge'. . . . Circumscribed within the outer nullity,
> we give ourselves up to the flux of death, to analysis,
> to introspection, to mechanical war and destruction, to
> humanitarian absorption in the body politic, the poor,
> the birth-rate, the mortality of infants, like a man
> absorbed in his own flesh and members, looking for ever
> at himself. It is the continued activity of disintegrat-
> ion--disintegration, separating, setting apart, invest-
> igation, research, the resolution back to the original
> void.[121]

For Lawrence, the only hope lay in individual regeneration,
in a renewal of contact with the life-force which society,
in its obsession with death, had rejected. Yet his scorn
for "humanitarian absorption in the body politic, the poor,
the birth-rate," and his fascination with the process of
fiery renewal display a kind of death-wish which may be
more compelling than that he saw around him, but which, in
many ways, is no less alarming. He was, after all, convinced
that England had "a long and awful process of death to go
through."[122]

Even though the formulations of Wells and Lawrence
may seem somewhat extreme today, their sense of cultural
decadence and apocalyptic destiny is still with us, and,
like it or not, the work which, perhaps more than any other,
fuelled their apocalypticism--Oswald Spengler's Decline of
the West (1918)--is, as Northrop Frye says, "inseparably

part of our perspective."[123] Spengler's cyclical theory of history was not original, nor was his claim that the west had entered a period of decline during the nineteenth century, similar to that which the Roman Empire had experienced in its latter days. As J.H. Buckley points out, the book presents little more than "a recapitulation of concepts of decadence current in the nineteenth century."[124] Cultures, Spengler argued, can be described in seasonal terms—an idea Tennyson had already employed in the Idylls of the King. Thus, the middle ages were the "springtime" of the west, "summer" had been heralded in by the Reformation, and "autumn" by Kant and Goethe. In the nineteenth century, "winter" had set in, as mechanism and materialism had crushed the spiritual principle upon which the west had been founded.

The impact the book made when it appeared was due partly to the force with which Spengler presented his argument and partly to the timing of its appearance. F. Scott Fitzgerald, whose novel, The Great Gatsby (1925), was inspired by The Decline of the West, declared that Spengler's work presented the "dominant supercessive idea" of the new age.[125] Limited though Spengler's vision is, Fitzgerald's assessment is essentially valid. The idea of decadence pervades contemporary culture, conditioning our response to the future, and, inevitably, conditioning the future. Even if we are not prepared to accept the deterministic, organic analogy which Spengler applied to culture, we are forced to won-

der, with George Steiner, whether "the phenomenology of enn-
ui and of a longing for violent dissolution is a constant
in the history of social and intellectual forms once they
have passed a certain threshold of complication."[126] We
have, almost without knowing it, become accustomed to view-
ing history in cyclical rather than linear terms and to
viewing ourselves as the bewildered inheritors of a civil-
ization which is fast approaching its epochal death. Even
though we may view the coming end as terminal, we do not
conceive of it as the culmination of a linear process but
as the ultimate retrogression of a cyclical one.

Whether or not our civilization is doomed to per-
ish like that of Rome, our attitudes do bear an uncanny re-
semblance to many of those expressed in the latter days of
the Roman Empire. Saint Cyprian, for example, writing in
the third century A.D., warned of impending doom in terms
that sound very familiar today:

> The world has grown old and lost its former vigor. . . .
> Winter no longer gives rain enough to swell the seed,
> nor summer sun enough to toast the harvest. . . . The
> mountains are gutted and give less marble, the mines
> are exhausted and give less silver and gold. . . .
> There is no longer any justice in judgments, competence
> in trades, discipline in daily life. . . . Epidemics
> decimate mankind, . . . the Day of Judgment is at
> hand.[127]

Saint Cyprian has, as L.S. Stavrianos points out, many
counterparts today. Like him, we "foresee climactic cata-
strophe, soil and mineral depletion, and global famine,
. . . and to these familiar plagues . . . add modern horr-

ors: unbreathable air, unpotable water, lifeless oceans,

lakes, and rivers, and overhead the Damocles sword of the

hydrogen bomb."[128] At the same time, we lament "the lapse

of time-honored traditions--in this case law and order,

hard work, rugged individualism, and orthodox values and

life-styles."[129]

Our culture is as mechanistic as that of the nine-

teenth century, if not more so, and, even though there has

been a widespread revulsion from mechanism, this has not

led, generally speaking, to a reaffirmation of the dynamic

principle, but to an apathetic, ennui-filled longing for

dissolution. This leaves mechanism in the ascendant, because

of the tacit assumption that there is no alternative to

mechanism except annihilation. Thus, the death-wish of mod-

ern culture complements rather than opposes the mechanistic

principle. While mechanical habits of thought threaten to

unleash the forces of destruction, those who have reacted

against mechanism look forward, on the whole, to the con-

flagration. In reality, then, this rejection of mechanism

is not a rejection at all, but an acquiescence in it, an

acquiescence which is by no means comfortable but which

seems inescapable. As Paul Tillich says, "twentieth-century

man has lost a meaningful world and a self which lives in

meanings out of a spiritual center."[130] Theodor Roszak goes

further by declaring that the "single vision" demanded by

"urban-industrialism and the technocratic politics it
breeds" renders the dynamic or transcendent impulse "sub-
versive"--God has "become an enemy of the new industrial
state . . . and it is single vision that underlies the de-
spair, the anomie, the irresponsible drift, the resignation
to genocide, the weakness for totalitarian solutions,
which make radical, enduring change in our society imposs-
ible."[131]   The empirical sciences have also played their
part in the development of the mechanistic consciousness,
for, as Warren Wagar says,"biology has located man among
the higher apes; Pavlovian psychology has reduced him to a
machine, and Freudian psychoanalysis to a jungle of in-
stincts and irrational inhibitions in which the conscious
reasoning ego barely survives."[132]

Confronted by this mechanistic impasse, many con-
temporary cultural critics argue that only by transcending
the false limitations we have imposed upon our consciousness
can we hope to attain a more positive vision. Central to
the thought of many of these critics is a philosophy of
history which seems, on the face of it, much like that of
Spengler, yet, as Warren Wagar says, they put the cyclical
concept of history "to radically new uses that preserve its
obvious merits, and yet subordinate it to a life-affirming
vision of world order."[133]   In other words, history is seen
not in terms of a series of self-contained cycles but as an
upward spiral. According to Warren Wagar, the leading ex-

ponents of this helical theory of history, Arnold J. Toyn-

bee and Pitirim A. Sorokin, "hold out . . . the possibility

of something very much like the Millennium, and perhaps

even an absolute transcendence of the whole cyclical rhythm

of the past."[134] For Toynbee, the signs of "breakdown" in

western civilization do not necessarily mean that the west

will simply disintegrate as earlier civilizations have

done. For a start, he claims that when civilizations have

disintegrated in the past they have given rise to "higher

religions," such as Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism,

Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam, which

> disengage the "spiritual presences higher than man"
> from "the highly integrated life of some particular
> local community," with the supremely important result
> that the realm of God, or absolute spirit, "comes to be
> thought of as coextensive, not with some state or some
> regional civilization, but with the entire Universe,
> while Its worshippers come to feel themselves members
> of a church that, in principle and in intention, em-
> braces all men."[135]

Toynbee argues that, given this religious impulse and the

contraction of the world into a "global village," the way

is clear for man to forge a world state, not by conquest,

but "by federation, by voluntary association, and in a

spirit of love and good will."[136] The millennial dream once

realized, "the vain repetitions of the heathen" will come

to an end, for "this union sacrée in the face of imminent

self-destruction will be, if it is achieved, man's finest

achievement and most thrilling experience up to date."[137]

Spengler's ideas are also echoed by "neo-primitiv-
ist" thinkers such as L.S. Stavrianos. Stavrianos predicts
that western civilization will be engulfed by a dark age
comparable to that which engulfed the Roman Empire. Unlike
Spengler, however, he views this prospect with hope rather
than with despair. He writes that

> the Western world today is reexperiencing the decay and
> despair of its early post-Roman centuries, but it is
> also reexperiencing their sense of creative renewal and
> anticipation. Just as green shoots took root among the
> ruins of imperial Rome, they are growing now amid the
> wreckage of contemporary civilization. But to see to-
> day's green shoots we must discard the perspective of
> many modern observers who, like their Roman predecess-
> ors, perceive only darkness about them.[138]

Stavrianos goes on to predict that "aristo-technology" will
give way to "demo-technology," "boss control" to "worker
control," "representative democracy" to "participatory demo-
cracy," and "self-subordination" to "self-actualization."
He warns, however, that the transition will not be a com-
fortable one for western man, for it is the Third World
which now spearheads the forces of change, just as it was
the barbarians who spearheaded those forces in the latter
days of the Roman Empire. Stavrianos's message of hope may
seem a somewhat dubious one, and his proposition that west-
ern civilization cannot reform itself but must collapse, to
be succeeded by a dynamic "barbarism," well argued though
it is, is open to serious criticism. Nevertheless, his ideas
are in the mainstream of the apocalyptic tradition. His
division of the global community into two camps--the wealthy

but decadent west and the downtrodden but dynamic Third

World--is reminiscent of Carlyle's division of England into

two nations, while his prophecy of an impending barbarism,

although optimistic rather than pessimistic, also recalls

Carlyle. He is, in effect, a latter-day William Morris,

looking forward, as Morris did, to "barbarism once more

flooding the world, and real feelings and passions, however

rudimentary, taking the place of our wretched hypocri-
139
sies."

While the visions of Toynbee and Stavrianos are

rooted in meta-historical analysis, other cultural critics,

such as Judson Jerome, Theodore Roszak, and William Irwin

Thomson, tend toward a mystic or visionary approach. Their

basic premise is that a revolution of consciousness is

occurring and their work is suffused with the conviction

that any attempt to come to terms with this revolution by

applying rationalistic concepts to it would be an exercise

in futility. It is generally assumed that the heyday of

revolution of consciousness theories came in the late 'six-

ties, but in actual fact most of the statements made at

that time were of a somewhat shallow and ephemeral nature,

and most of the discussions which are worthy of serious att-

ention have appeared in the last ten years. Unfortunately,

the legacy of the 'sixties has given revolution of conscious-

ness theories somewhat of a bad name. George Steiner, for

example, writing in 1971, declared that "there are current-

ly, particularly in the United States, some fashionable,
silly theories about total revolutions of consciousness."[140]

Yet in the same work, In Bluebeard's Castle, he goes on to

say that

> our ethics, our central habits of consciousness, the
> immediate and environmental membrane we inhabit, our
> relations to age and to remembrance, to the children
> whose gender we may select and whose heredity we may
> programme, are being transformed. As in the twilit time
> of Ovid's fables of mutant beings, we are in meta-
> morphosis.[141]

Jerome, Roszak, and Thompson are not so much utopians as

neo-Romantics, affirming the spiritual principle of man in

a world which, having neglected that principle in favour

of a mechanistic cynicism, can only affirm its own death-

wish. In reading them we are reminded of the millenarian

optimism of Blake, Shelley, and the early Carlyle, and of

their belief in the illimitable potential of mankind.

Judson Jerome, proclaiming himself to be an anarch-

ist, writes that

> prophets of this disposition do not predict the future
> so much as they intuit the meaning of the flow of time.
> The world they describe is one of open-ended possibil-
> ities. . . . Some scientists have described conscious-
> ness as nothing but a rear-view mirror, a sort system
> for the past disappearing behind us. But in the world-
> view I am describing it is also an awareness of the
> élan vital welling under us, the wisdom of the surfer
> making the infinite, instantaneous, subrational choices
> that maintain balance and direction in accord with our
> sense of the movement of overwhelming evolutionary
> power, guessing the future on the basis of our gross
> yet definite sympathy with the intention of the wave.[142]

Jerome thus places his faith in intuition rather than rat-

ionalism, and calls on mankind to "unleash the new anarch-

ism with its promise not of chaos but of the supreme order-
liness and dependable rhythm of nature."[143] He optimistic-
ally declares that, "whether it be through drugs, or yoga,
or meditation, or biofeedback mechanisms or other means of
extending awareness, we seem to be on the verge of regain-
ing a capacity to relate to natural processes from which we
have been excluded, like black sheep returning to our
Edenic home."[144] Jerome's vision may be somewhat simplist-
ic, but he is worth citing because he clearly expresses the
basic tenets of the new Romanticism. Intuitive awareness is
to replace rational consciousness, and intuitive awareness,
which can be equated with the sacramental vision, entails a
reintegration of man with nature. Nature, in this sense, is
interpreted very broadly. Thompson, for example, writes
that "the landscape of the New Age is not a regressive . . .
fantasy of nineteenth-century American agrarian life. We
are not going back to what Marx called 'the idiocy of rural
life'; we are going back to nature with the consciousness
of civilization behind us and the adventure of planetizat-
ion in front of us."[145] And, although the universe thus
envisaged is "in perpetual flux, perpetual evolution," nat-
ure is not the demonic-divine force which Carlyle took it
to be in The French Revolution.[146] The demonic is equated
with the "single vision" of rationalism and mechanism, a
vision which man can shake off.

Theodore Roszak uses the Gnostic myth of apocatast-

asis to convey his vision of the future:

> In the Gnostic myth, the apocatastasis is the illumin-
> ation in the abyss by which the lost soul, after much
> tribulation, learns to tell the divine light from its
> nether reflection. So a new reality replaces (or rather
> embraces) the old and draws the fallen spirit up, wiser
> than if it had never fallen. For us, this means an awak-
> ening from 'single vision and Newton's sleep', where we
> have dreamt that only matter and history are real. This
> has been the bad, mad ontology of our culture, and from
> it derives that myth of objective consciousness which
> has densified the transcendent symbols and persuaded us
> to believe in the reality of nothing that cannot be
> weighed and measured--not even our own soul, which is
> after all a subtle dancer. So long as that myth rules
> the mind, not even the most humanely intentioned among
> us will find any course to follow but roads that lead
> us deeper into the wasteland. But the mind freed of
> that myth may begin to find a project as vast as re-
> pealing the urban-industrial dominance not only feasible
> but necessary.[147]

Roszak argues that "urban-industrialism is a failed cultural

experiment," dependent on the "secularized myth of progress"

which we have to reject if we are to rediscover the "meta-

physical issues which science and sound logic have for the

last two centuries been pleased to regard as closed."[148]

His characteristic optimism is tempered by an awareness

that the myth of progress retains its deadly grip on civil-

ization, driving it towards "technocratic elitism, affluent

alienation, environmental blight, nuclear suicide."[149] The

recovery of the sacramental vision is threatened by the

entrenched anti-sacramental vision of materialism and by the

cynicism which reacts against materialism. Roszak makes it

clear that he is not,

as has become so much the morbid fashion among western
intellectuals since the _fin de siècle_, rejecting the
pursuit of secular progress in favor of a wholesale cyn-
icism. Such cynicism, being legitimately unacceptable
to society at large as a basis for life, has only in-
creased the desperation with which the millions cling
to that myth despite their inadmissible misgivings. We
must remember Blake's warning.

> Man must & will have Some Religion: if he has not
> the Religion of Jesus, he will have the Religion of
> Satan & will erect the synagogue of Satan, calling
> the Prince of the World, God, and destroying all
> who do not worship Satan under the name of God.[150]

One of the most dynamic figures in the new Romantic

movement is William Irwin Thompson, the founder of the

Lindisfarne Association. The aim of this association is "to

create, on a higher plane with the most advanced scientific

and spiritual thought . . . , the planetary meta-industrial

village."[151] Much of his writing shows a strong commitment

to spiritual mysticism--this, for example, which recalls

Carlyle in the palingenetic analogy it draws between indiv-

idual and cultural regeneration:

> Our entire civilization is dying. But what is death?
> Consider the yogi: when he stops his heart consciously,
> he is dead by technical definition, but actually he is
> reborn, for in taking the energy out of the cardiovascul-
> ar into the central nervous system, he experiences
> ecstasy and enlightenment. He does not die, he dances
> his death. So now we need to dance out the death of in-
> dustrial civilization and experience, not its painful,
> apocalyptic destruction, but its joyous millennial de-
> structuring. And if we cannot, then we will not create
> our destiny, but be forced to endure our fate.[152]

But his mysticism is allied to a profound awareness of cul-

tural realities, and it is his tireless eclecticism which

makes him such a commanding figure among contemporary cul-

tural critics. In addition to the Lindisfarne Association,
he has been closely involved with the Findhorn Foundation
in Scotland, and, in writing of this community, he sketches
out a blueprint for twenty-first-century culture, which
bears a striking resemblance to the architectural fantasies
of Hundertwasser:

> In this moment of late winter we can see that prein-
> dustrial and postindustrial are coming together to put
> an end to industrial civilization. . . . Urbanization
> and nationalism have reached their limits to growth
> along with industrialization, so the culture of the
> presently emerging future is one of decentralization
> of cities, miniaturization of technology, and planeti-
> zation of nations. In the twenty-first century, the
> trees shall be great, the buildings small, and the
> miniature machines in just proportion to man. Animism
> and electronics are the landscape of the New Age, and
> animism and electronics are already the landscape of
> Findhorn.[153]

Central to the philosophy of the new Romantics is
the belief that human consciousness is undergoing a massive
transformation which we can, if we choose, resist, but which
we cannot prevent. Twenty-first-century man will be a being
in harmony with nature, no longer alienated, his soul no
longer crushed by the "single vision" of rationalism and
materialism. But, one hundred and fifty years ago, Carlyle
was saying much the same thing:

> Indications do we see in other countries and in our own,
> signs infinitely cheering to us, that Mechanism is not
> always to be our hard taskmaster, but one day to be our
> pliant, all-ministering servant; that a new and brighter
> spiritual era is slowly evolving itself for all men.
> . . . That great outward changes are in progress can be
> doubtful to no one. The time is sick and out of joint.
> Many things have reached their height; and it is a wise
> adage that tells us, "the darkest hour is nearest the
> dawn." . . . The thinking minds of all nations call for

change. There is a deep-lying struggle in the whole
fabric of society; a boundless grinding collision of
the New with the Old. The French Revolution, as is now
visible enough, was not the parent of this mighty move-
ment, but its offspring.   (CME, II, 81-82)

Does this mean, then, that the optimism of latter-day

Carlyles such as Thompson will prove as groundless as

Carlyle's was? Maybe so. But the axiom that history repeats

itself is, at best, a half truth. Carlyle's age was, on the

whole, characterized by the doctrine of progress; ours is

characterized by a death-wish which is the ghastly counter-

part of the doctrine of progress. Yet, through the vicissi-

tudes of the past two hundred years, there have been those

who have raised their voices in protest against the dominant

materialism of their times, affirming that man is a spirit-

ual being, who, when robbed of spiritual nourishment, will
                                              154
adopt, as Blake said, "the Religion of Satan."   And there

are signs that things may be changing, that Thompson may be

right to assert that consciousness is undergoing a major

transformation. After all, did not Carlyle say that it

would take two hundred years from the outbreak of the French

Revolution for democracy to "go through its due, most bale-

ful, stages of Quackocracy; and a pestilential World be

burnt up, and [begin] to grow green and young again" (FR, I,

133)?

        Yet it seems that we are involved in a desperate

race against time, a race we have to win if western civili-

zation is to survive at all. And, while we may talk of a

general transformation of consciousness we have to admit

that the west seems, on the face of it, to have sunk into

a torpor of affluent alienation. The idea that consciousness

is being transformed has millennial overtones and is very

attractive, but it is also nebulous. There is nothing nebu-

lous, on the other hand, about "the forces of Satan." The

global community of the present day resembles, in many ways,

pre-Revolutionary France. It is even divided into three

estates--the First Second, and Third Worlds--held in antag-

onistic alliance by a burgeoning technocracy and threatened

by nuclear proliferation. Os Guiness declares that our cult-

ure is experiencing a "temporary lull," a "vacuum in thought

and effective action," which can be interpreted either as

the calm before the storm or as a cultural paralysis inspir-
                    155
ed by fear.   Whichever way we look at it, we know instinct-

ively that things cannot go on as they are. Mighty changes

are on the way, and, while we may hope they will be for the

better, we fear they will be for the worse. Yet, as George

Steiner asks,

> Who, in the closing phases of the Thirty Years War,
> when, as chroniclers put it, there were only wolves for
> wolves to feed on in the empty towns, foresaw the near
> upsurge of cultural energies and the counterbalancing
> strength of the Americas? It may be that our framework
> of apocalypse, even where it is low-keyed and ironic,
> is dangerously inflationary. Perhaps we exaggerate both
> the rate and vehemence of crisis--in international aff-
> airs, where there has, on the large scale, been a quart-
> er-century of peace under unlikely conditions; in the
> ecology, which has been savaged before (witness the man-
> made Sahara) and has recovered; in society and personal
> consciousness, both of which have known previous moments

of extreme challenge. A thread of hysteria runs through our current "realism."[156]

It may well be that we are on the brink of discovering a "new world"--a new dimension of reality which will render our present modes of thought as obsolete as the empirical sciences have assumed the occult sciences to be. The Columbuses of our day have not only pushed back the frontiers of space but have also journeyed into hitherto unsuspected recesses of the human brain, revealing in each case a reality often more akin to that envisaged by the mystic than to that of the materialist. As Northrop Frye says, "we may be, if we survive, the primitives of an unknown culture, the cave men of a new mental era."[157] To use an analogy from modern astronomy, we seem to be entering a "black hole," a dimension of future time in which there are no recognizable landmarks, a dimension in which we cannot even recognize ourselves. For George Steiner, this "black hole" is the last door in Bluebeard's Castle:

> We cannot turn back. We cannot choose the dreams of
> unknowing. We shall, I expect, open the last door in
> the castle even if it leads, perhaps because it leads,
> on to realities which are beyond the reach of human
> comprehension and control. We shall do so with that
> desperate clairvoyance, so marvellously rendered in Bar-
> tok's music, because opening doors is the tragic merit
> of our identity.[158]

Perhaps the last word should be left to Tennyson, who, a century and a half ago, summed up the need to voyage into the unknown with unflinching courage:

Push off, and sitting well in order smite
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die.
It may be that the gulfs will wash us down:
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.
Though much is taken, much abides; and though
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven; that which we are, we are;
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.
                    ("Ulysses," ll. 58-70)

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Lorna Mosk Packer, whose discussion of the poem focuses on the figure of sexual union in the poem, makes this point: "Reality in this poem takes on a specialized meaning: knowledge of truth becomes by way of Christian logic knowledge of love, but more particularly, knowledge of sexual love. And yet the poet is not at all convinced that this kind of human experience may be acquired without destroying the creative capacity of the artist." ("Sun and Shadow: The Nature of Experience in Tennyson's 'The Lady of Shalott,'" <u>VNL</u>, XXV (Spring, 1964), 4-8.)

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Culler, <u>Poetry of Tennyson</u>, p. 46.

20
In the 1842 version of the poem. In the 1832 version, he does not even appear at the end of the poem, or, if he does, is undifferentiated from the rest of the "wellfed wits."

21
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39
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  James Knowles, "Aspects of Tennyson, II (A Personal Reminiscence)," _Nineteenth Century_, XXXIII (1893), 182; Hallam Tennyson, _Memoir_, I, 297.

4
  Hallam Tennyson, _Memoir_, I, 304,

5
  Ibid., I, 304-305; Tennyson's description of the structure of _In Memoriam_, which I have used as the basis for my discussion of the poem, has been elaborated upon by A.C. Bradley (_A Commentary on Tennyson's "In Memoriam_," 3rd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1910), pp. 20-35) and E.D.H. Johnson ("_In Memoriam_: The Way of the Poet," _VS_, II (1958), 139-148; reprinted in John Dixon Hunt, ed., "_In Memoriam_": A Casebook (London: Macmillan, 1970), pp. 188-199). However, James Knowles recorded that Tennyson also said that the poem was organized into nine parts (see Bradley, _Commentary_, p. 35n.), and several critics have found this scheme to be more satisfactory (see, for example, Martin J. Svaglic, "A Framework for Tennyson's _In Memoriam_," _JEGP_, LXI (1962), 810-825). For a discussion of other accounts of the poem's structure, see Joseph Sendry, "_In Memoriam_: Twentieth-Century Criticism," _VP_, XVIII (1980), 105-113. For a discussion of Dantean elements in the poem, see James A. Taaffe, "Circle Imagery in Tennyson's _In Memoriam_," _VP_, I (1963), 125-131; Turner, _Tennyson_, pp. 127-130.

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  Bradley, _Commentary_, pp. 34-35.

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  Tennyson said that the poem was not to be read as "an actual biography," and added that "'I' is not always the author speaking of himself, but the voice of the human race speaking thro' him" (Hallam Tennyson, _Memoir_, I, 304-305).

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