THE ARCHETYPAL FABLE

AN INQUIRY INTO THE FUNCTION OF TRADITIONAL SYMBOLISM IN THE POETRY OF EDWIN MUIR

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Fay Fullard Humphris has most kindly composed an emblematic painting which illustrates the place and significance of heraldic imagery in Muir's symbolic world. A photographic copy of this painting, in black and white, is included in the Appendix.

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INTRODUCTION

> The severe Schooles shall never laugh me out of the Philosophy of Hermes ... that this visible world is but a picture of the invisible, wherein, as in a pourtrait, things are not truely but in equivocall shapes, and as they counterfeit some more reall substance in that invisible fabrick.
>
> Sir Thomas Browne, Religio Medici, I, 12.

Edwin Muir's poetic vision is bound up with that belief in a twofold structure of reality that in European culture has been called Platonist but which is so ancient and widespread that no one can determine its origins. Though no longer fashionable in a time when materialist philosophies flourish and even Christian clerics are busy "de-mythologizing" their faith, it has been the potent source of our greatest poetry and perhaps, as Kathleen Raine believes, of all true poetry.[1] Those who hold this conviction regard the sensible world as the reflection of an "intelligible" or spiritual world which gives meaning and purpose to life, and they see the objects of nature as images that evoke the ideal forms of a divine reality. For poets, as for traditional men, this belief is less a metaphysic than an intuitive way of apprehending and ordering experience, a "learning of the imagination"[2] inherited from ancient and mysterious sources. To Muir it came directly and spontaneously in the symbolic images of

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[1] Kathleen Raine, Defending Ancient Springs (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1967), p. 110.

[2] Ibid., pp. 107, 110.

dreams, and the fact that he entitled the first version of his autobiography The Story and the Fable[3] testifies to the importance, both for his life and his poetry, of his belief in two corresponding orders of experience.

With this in mind, the discourse that follows commences with a brief outline of the "story" of Muir's own personal experience and then proceeds to examine, with reference to his poetry, the general form of the "fable" which gave it universal significance. Since the story and the fable are linked by certain traditional or mythic symbols, such as Eden, the Fall, the Journey and the Marriage, these are studied in terms of their origin in Muir's individual experience as well as their function and development in his poetry. At appropriate points in the enquiry, comparisons are drawn with certain other poets who have made special use of such symbols. In the last chapter, what arises in the course of the discussion is measured against a critical perspective formulated by the "myth critics"[4], in an attempt to find a framework of literary theory that most appropriately accommodates the kind of poetry Muir wrote. Finally, six selected poems are analysed in some detail to illuminate the relevance of the present study to an understanding of Muir's poetry.

This study has grown slowly over the course of the

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[3]London: Harrap, 1940.

[4]Graham Hough traces the development of this approach to literature in An Essay on Criticism (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1966), Chap. 20, and, despite certain reservations, cites Northrop Frye as the author of an impressive system of myth criticism, the broad outline of which he says is "bound to become a part of our normal critical apparatus" (ibid., p. 150). Consideration is taken of Frye's system, together with works by Edwin Honig and Angus Fletcher.

past four years, springing originally from the writer's obscure feeling that Muir's archetypal symbols reflect, whether consciously or unconsciously, an ancient and relatively coherent body of traditional symbolism less generally familiar to the modern reader than those aspects of it embodied in the Book of Genesis and in standard classical mythology. Preparation of material for this dissertation had been largely completed before Kathleen Raine's collection of essays entitled Defending Ancient Springs was published, and her essays "On the Mythological" and "On the Symbol"[5] had not yet come to the present writer's attention. Had they done so, it is possible that considerable time spent in exploring the relation between literary symbolism, neo-Platonism, medieval alchemy, Jung's Archetypes and the metaphors of the analogical cosmos might have been spared, and the preparation of material facilitated, or at least pursued with more confidence.[6] Similarly, the views of the myth critics were

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[5] Op. cit., pp. 105 - 138.

[6] Another work, not available at the time, which has since corroborated the present writer's line of enquiry is Daniel Hoffman's Barbarous Knowledge : Myth in the Poetry of Yeats, Graves, and Muir (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), from which the following passage is quoted: "As a poet who seeks his truths in 'dreams and fantasies' Edwin Muir summons the phantoms of his own unconscious life with the certainty that these are not merely the tormented or triumphant imaginings of one particular man, but take their forms and reveal their meanings as part of the inheritance of the race. In his Autobiography Muir has much to say about his dreams and their sources in childhood memories stirred up by later conflicts. It is quite clear that the images of animals, of struggles, of journeys, of recurrent visitations in certain landscapes attained to by great effort and endured with a sense of inevitability - all these materials are akin to those patterns of memory which Jung has proposed as the archetypes, residing not in exterior experience but inherently in the human mind. It is clear, too, that a workable correlation exists between such a theory of psychology and the Platonic conception of reality, a conception particularly attractive to a poet who inherits the intellectual attitudes of late Romanticism" (pp. 227 - 228).

taken into account only at a late stage in the development of the argument so that the enquiry made in the second, third and fourth chapters into the images of the lost paradise, the woman, and the quest was undertaken largely without prior knowledge of the extent to which myth criticism would bear it out.

What is original in the present study, at least as far as the writer is aware, is the attempt to make a comprehensive examination of the archetypes that represent the stages of Muir's fable, adding to a study of the more significant symbols of Eden and the Fall, usually noted by commentators on his work, such motifs as may be termed the quest, the sacred marriage, the apocalypse, etc. Furthermore, a tentative enquiry has been made into the relation of the concept of the paradise of childhood to the doctrine of archetypes or innate ideas and to neo-Platonist aesthetic theory in so far as this helps to illuminate Muir's position. This, in turn, has led to a development of the comparison of Muir with Vaughan, Traherne and Wordsworth which has been suggested by various commentators and, indeed, by Muir himself.[7] Finally, the systematic application of the principles of myth criticism to Muir's poetry has not, to the present writer's knowledge, been attempted by anyone else so far.

As an explanatory note, it should perhaps be added that the term "archetypal", as it is employed in the title to qualify the word "fable", is intended to be understood in

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[7]Edwin Muir : An Autobiography (rev. ed., London: Hogarth Press, 1954), p. 179.

the widest sense, embracing both Platonic and Jungian interpretations and also suggesting the congruence of Muir's fable with the theory of archetypal patterns in literature formulated by the school of myth criticism. Since these connotations are dealt with as they arise, the term does not require more precise definition at this stage.

CHAPTER I

THE SEARCH FOR UNITY

> I have said before
> That the experience revived in the meaning
> Is not the experience of one life only
> But of many generations - not forgetting
> Something that is probably quite ineffable.
> T.S. Eliot, "The Dry Salvages II".[1]

The co-ordinating theme of Muir's poetry is the search for the lost experience of unity of being. States of inner division, though probably universal, are considered to be particularly acute in contemporary European culture, for, as D.G. James, in a book on the poetic imagination, has remarked:

> It is a commonplace of reflection that the modern world, issuing from the unity of Catholicism in the Middle Ages, became a scene in which the different modes of experiencing reality were set in conflict. Where previously, philosophy, art and the entire conduct of life were unified in the Catholic view of the universe and the place of man in it, the modern world is one in which there is no stabilized centre around which our varied activities may move and to which they may be related.[2]

This relatively recent disruption of the inner unity of human experience has sharpened, while tending to obscure for most people, the age-old dichotomy that was traditionally

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[1] Collected Poems 1909 - 1962 (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1963), p. 208.

[2] D.G. James, Scepticism and Poetry (London: Allen and Unwin, 1937), p. 243.

felt to exist between the body and the soul. Even more confusing, contemporary attitudes frequently deny such a dichotomy altogether, interpreting inner conflict as a collision between contradictory impulses rather than as a dislocation between two orders of existence. In so doing, they have largely vitiated the ultimate significance of personal moral struggle. Certain psychological theories, such as those of Freud and Jung, have re-shaped the traditional warfare between flesh and spirit into a drama involving two aspects of mind and personality which are called Ego and Unconscious; Jung, in particular, has emphasized man's need to integrate the individual rational ego with the daemonic powers and intuitive wisdom of the "racial unconscious". In poetry, this fundamental disjunction in human experience has been seen as arising from the opposing elements of inward and outward awareness that can only be reconciled by bringing the bodily eye and the mind's eye into perfect focus.[3]

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[3]This is what Wordsworth means by the "harvest of a quiet eye" ("A Poet's Epitaph") and the realisation that the individual mind and Nature are exquisitely "fitted" to each other. See Preface to The Excursion (1814), ll. 63-71.

Similarly, Rilke speaks of a "double sphere" of dream and reality, which must be achieved by calling up subjective images to match the perceived objects that surround us:

> "Mag auch die Spieglung im Teich
> oft uns verschwimmen
> Wisse das Bild.
>
> Erst in dem Doppelbereich
> Werden die Stimmen
> Ewig und mild." ("Sonette an Orpheus").

"Even if the reflection in the pond often blurs for us, know the picture. Not till the double-sphere will the voices be eternal and mild." (Trans. J.M. Cohen, Poetry of This Age [London: Arrow Books, 1959], p. 54). On the other hand, Yeats's gyres and phases of the moon appear to be an elaborate projection of the varying tensions between subjective and objective experience which can find equilibrium only in the "dance of the opposites".

Muir's own painful experience of inward conflict and his urgent desire for healing and integration gave him a keen insight into both ancient and modern ways of interpreting and expressing what he came to see as a universal human condition; yet, in the final analysis, it was his own intuitions, his dreams and memories, that provided the impetus for his spiritual recovery as well as the inspiration for his poetry.

Those familiar with Muir's autobiography are aware of the events that made his concern with inner division so agonisingly acute. Nevertheless, a brief recapitulation will help to lend perspective to the themes of division and unity that will recur throughout this discussion. During the earlier part of his life, Muir was exposed to more than ordinarily painful shocks to his sense of identity and of the inner coherence of his experience. One of these disturbances was the violent confrontation between two distinct stages of European history. From a childhood rooted in a remote island community where traditional patterns of conduct, the ancient bonds of kinship, and a living relation with both the natural and the supernatural worlds still nourished the imagination, he was transplanted, during the most vulnerable period of his adolescence, to the hostile soil of industrial Glasgow as it was at the turn of the century.[4] This dislocation in his life experience accounts for much that is individual in his poetry and may

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[4]Muir, An Autobiography, pp. 90 - 93.

be responsible, in part, for his marked preoccupation with historical time. The sudden substitution of the simple pieties of his home in Orkney by the impersonal and rootless ways of Glasgow, with its "mean men and terrible children",[5] induced in him a figurative astigmatism, often expressed in his poems as a feeling of the distortion of images and of things being in the wrong place.[6]

But, long before this disruptive transplantation, there had been another terrifying experience of the anxiety and alienation that must come to all children, in one form or another, but which, in his case, occurred so late and was in such sharp contrast to the peace and harmony of his infancy that it eventually became the central motif of his vision of life and the prime symbol of his poetic myth. This experience of "the Fall" is examined in some detail in Chapter II, where it will be seen to have laid down a foreboding pattern of guilt and separation that the course of subsequent events would implacably follow. Not only were the happy islands of childhood to be lost forever, but, within a short period, four members of his close-knit family, of which Edwin was the youngest, were to wither away in the bitter airs of Glasgow. The sudden death of his father,

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[5] Ibid., pp. 91 - 92.

[6] See "The Three Mirrors", "The Window", "Hölderlin's Journey", etc. This was later to be set in contrast with the healing experience of things being "in their place", by which he meant something similar to Traherne's vision of childhood: "All things abided eternally as they were in their proper places " (Centuries of Meditations, III, 3), and the recovered experience of Felicitie: "You never enjoy the World aright, till you see all things in it so perfectly yours that you cannot desire them any other way : and till you are convinced that all things serve you best in their proper places" (Centuries of Meditations, I, 38. [Dobell, 1908]).

the experience of his brother Willie's illness, during which Edwin shared the older boy's secret awareness of his approaching death from tuberculosis, the agonising spectacle of his brother Johnnie's protracted death from a brain tumour, and above all, the thought of his mother's private torment as she grieved for a husband and a son and nursed Johnnie through savage attacks of pain while concealing the first symptoms of her own fatal disease, were too much for the eighteen-year-old youth to bear. In poor health himself, he desperately threw up a great dyke against the advancing flood of grief and loss and, creeping behind its bleak shelter, yielded up the memory of his family and his own past.

This repression of sorrow and guilt (for guilt is usually bound up in some way with mourning for our family), together with his denial of the formative influences of childhood, resulted in a severe recoil of his developing emotional and imaginative powers, a retreat from life that condemned him for many years to a lonely, frustrated existence and dogged submission to drab clerking posts amongst squalid and even disgusting surroundings.[7] Two experiences of religious conversion of the revivalist type that, in adolescence, had helped to contain emotional turmoil and a growing sense of alienation from the world now seemed entirely spurious, and his attachment to evangelical Christianity was repudiated for ever.[8] For a time, Socialism took its place, and, on one occasion,

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[7] E.g. the bone factory at "Fairport" (ibid., pp. 130 - 132).

[8] Ibid., pp. 85 - 89.

a May Day procession, complete with banners, brought him a dreamlike experience of identification with all men everywhere, seeming to transfigure a degraded humanity into an incorruptible state of glory.[9] But such exalted moments were rare and soon faded. His real self seemed to lie under an evil spell, bound in a timeless world of shadows, while another false self dealt with the trivial business of daily existence and compensated for inward and outward servitude with intellectual speculations culled from the translated works of Nietzsche and with political and economic schemes for social justice.

How long this bondage would have continued had the spell not been broken through the happy chance of his meeting and marriage with Willa Anderson, one does not know; but freedom is fearful to one who has lain long in prison, and his recovery of emotional health was slow and difficult. Only after an incomplete course of psychoanalysis[10] did the great weight of repressed fear and guilt, grief and pity begin to roll away and leave him free to search for his own original identity and unity. His poetry, which he began to write seriously at the comparatively late age of thirty-five, consists largely of meditations upon or projections in fable form of the stages of this search. Honest, restrained, even austere at times, these meditations are entirely lacking in bitterness or self-pity. The brittle ironies of We Moderns[11] and the surprisingly savage epigrams

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[9] Ibid., p. 114.

[10] Ibid., pp. 157 - 159.

[11] Published under pseudonym "Edward Moore" (London: Allen and Unwin, 1918). This work, now unobtainable, is discussed by Peter Butter in Edwin Muir : Man and Poet (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1966), pp. 59 - 65.

published in The New Age[12] during his Nietzschean phase have given way in the poetry to a humble acceptance of paradox as he has learned to universalize his own personal experience. As he travelled backwards in time on his journey of self-discovery, he began to recognize half-obliterated landmarks of the long pilgrimage of mankind. His own island childhood, shining at last from the midst of the clouded landscape of memory, became the childhood of the human race, and he realized that individual experience becomes meaningful in the degree to which it is seen as a parable that both reveals and conceals the truth of a wider reality.[13] Growing out of this insight, many of his poems take the form of parables with a polysemous texture in which the ostensible situation or narrative is a sign of several other layers of analogical meaning.[14]

Muir's search for unity ranges over a scale of experience from the immediate subjective condition to the most abstract metaphysical concepts. He reflects upon the division between intellect and imagination, between necessity and freedom, guilt and innocence, between the self in childhood and in maturity, between conscious and unconscious mental powers, between man and man, psyche and cosmos. Central to all these divisions is the Platonic separation between two orders of reality, seen in traditional terms as matter and spirit, time and eternity. Some commentators

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[12]He contributed to The New Age during the first World War, when it was edited by A.R. Orage, who recognised and encouraged Muir's gifts.

[13]See Muir's account of the story and the fable (An Autobiography, p. 49).

[14]E.g. "Troy", "The Enchanted Knight","Telemachos Remembers".

on Muir's poetry, notably Kathleen Raine,[15] have made particular mention of his "double vision", in the sense of his recognition of that other dimension that so much modern thinking ignores.[16] In the beginning, however, double vision had been no more than a symptom of the painful inward splitting induced by psychic distress. Only when this split came to have an outward counterpart in the cosmic division between matter and spirit could he bring the double view into focus and accept it as a necessary condition of vision in depth.

Muir's account of his analysis by Maurice Nicoll[17] some fifteen years after his traumatic bereavements suggests that its extreme painfulness may have been due not only to the tenacity of his resistance (as he himself suspected)[18] but also to the fact that it forced him to take up the bitter task of mourning at precisely the point at which he had cast it down so long before. His emotional re-awakening from inward paralysis could only come about through a return to the stage at which the arrest had occurred, for there is no

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[15]Kathleen Raine, "The Journey from Eden", New Statesman, 23rd April, 1960, p. 595.

[16]The Scottish psychiatrist, R.D. Laing, considers that "our civilisation represses ... any form of transcendence. Among one-dimensional men, it is not surprising that someone with an insistent experience of other dimensions, that he cannot entirely deny or forget, will run the risk of being destroyed by the others, or of betraying what he knows" (The Divided Self [Penguin Books, 1965], p. 11).

[17]Nicoll later became a follower of Ouspensky and Gurdjieff and a successful writer of books on their elaborate philosophy of time and of self-development. See The Mark (London: Vincent Stuart, 1954).

[18]Muir, An Autobiography, p. 158.

time in the unconscious, as Freud observes in his writings and Muir testifies in his poetry. A vivid dream that he experienced in Germany seventeen years after his mother's death expresses the healing and reviving power of the natural release of his grief,[19] and is referred to in Chapter III in connection with the resurrection of the feminine image in Muir's imagination. "The Enchanted Knight"[20] and "The Charm"[21] describe in fable form a condition of extreme paralysis of natural feeling, and suggest that this state is associated with a refusal to mourn. In the former poem (originally entitled "The Trance") the state of death-in-life is presented as a scene from a fairytale in which the spell cast upon the knight permeates the poem with a feeling of catatonic or trance-like lethargy. Yet there is, at the same time, a peculiarly precise awareness of physical surroundings, the detail of which is woven into the trance and becomes the decoration of a world of fantasy. The rust on the knight's armour has formed a design that resembles the flowers of an autumn field, and the spider's web that stretches from his "sharp breastplate to his iron hand" is a "phantom shield". The ploughshare driving nearer is merely a flying shadow on the plain, and footsteps pounding past his ear bring only the image of armies passing in endless line or the forms of ancient friends to whom he cannot respond. A bird's cry is a "long-lost voice" belonging to a

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[19] Ibid., p. 108.

[20] Edwin Muir, Collected Poems (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), p. 74. (Hereafter referred to as CP.)

[21] Ibid., p. 218.

world of action and genuine sensation that remains cut off from him.

> But if a withered leaf should drift
> Across his face and rest, the dread drops start
> Chill on his forehead. Now he tries to lift
> The insulting weight that stays and breaks his heart.

This concluding stanza portrays the profound anxiety that attends the impulse to return to normal reality. Though the drifting leaf is a much slighter stimulus than the driving plough, the pounding footsteps, or the bird's cry, in touching his face it makes a more intimate contact, and possibly arouses associations of passing time, the dying year, and death itself. It makes the knight suddenly afraid of his endless trance; but he is even more afraid of the world to which he knows he should return.[22] The weight of armour on his limbs is really the weight upon his heart that paradoxically both stills and breaks it. It is "insulting" because the spell is an affront to his sense of being and of personal identity; but there is also a suggestion that the breaking of the heart could shatter the spell, if pride would only permit the utter abandonment of grief.

Professor Butter has rightly remarked that it is not necessary to bring in any knowledge of Muir's life in order to respond to this poem; it acts on the imagination because it is clearly visualized and "suggests a spiritual state of alienation".[23] One may wonder, however, whether the introduction, in the first line, of "La Belle Dame Sans

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[22]The first word of the poem, "lulled", is itself equivocal, since a mother "lulls" her babe to sleep but we may be "lulled" into a false sense of security.

[23]P. Butter, Edwin Muir, Writers and Critics Series (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1962), p. 64.

Merci" (which, with its echoes of Keats and of an older chivalric tradition, seems a not entirely successful intrusion) is related to Muir's feeling that it was the withholding of pity, particularly for his mother, that was crucial in the development of his emotional illness.[24] What is only obliquely hinted at in "The Enchanted Knight" is much more explicit in a later treatment of the numbing of the heart in "The Charm", also presented as a scene from a fable. This time the poet seems less immediately involved and is seeing the tranced condition in a wider perspective. Language and rhythm are more vigorous and the romantic image of La Belle Dame is replaced by the classical figure of Helen, who has offered the victim a drug that can take "All memory and all grief away". When this drug takes effect, the drinker's perception of his surroundings begins to function at one remove and the outside world becomes both uncontrollable and meaningless.

> The crystal spheres on Helen's brow
> Took and gave back the coloured world,
> Yet only seemed to smile or glare
> At nothing but the empty air.
> The serving women crossed the floor,
> Swept by a silent tempest, whirled
> Into the light and through the door.
> This he saw and nothing more,
> While all the charities, unborn,
> Slept soundly in his burdened breast.

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[24] R.P. Blackmur remarks that, with the exception of "the modern and moody word 'insulting'", this poem is a "rune in old ballad form to express and purge the nightmare of the White Goddess" ("Edwin Muir : Between the Tiger's Paws", Kenyon Review, Vol. XXI, No. 3, [Summer, 1959]) p. 419. If we take this to mean the vengeance exacted for failure to pay dues to the primordial image of the woman and all the intuitive powers she confers upon her devotees, we may accept it as a valid insight into the meaning of the poem.

What are these crystal spheres? Since they are clearly not the prophetic globes of the crystal gazer but seem to "smile or glare", they resemble eyes that reflect equivocal images of the outside world without relating them to any inner reality.[25] Neither Helen nor her serving women have any natural existence or relationship to the observer, and, indeed, the evil enchantment is so powerful that a man could look upon the death of his own son, "killed at his feet", without the slightest alteration of his "dreaming gaze".

> But far within him something cried
> For the great tragedy to start,
> The pang in lingering mercy fall,
> And sorrow break upon his heart.

The "great tragedy" is life itself, which can only be experienced fully by one who has confronted grief, guilt and death and so become capable of joy, innocence and fullness of being.

While it may be thought that Muir's early experiences were exceptional in many respects, they actually subjected him, though in a more sudden and extreme form, to the very kinds of alienation that are characteristic of the modern condition.[26] The amputation of those deep spiritual roots that draw nourishment from the past, the impersonalities of a mass civilisation that make a man feel orphaned and alone amongst thousands of his fellows, the cold determinism of

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[25]This is Muir's way of expressing the false vision of the alienated self (which implies the corollary that the experience of unity is associated with the coalescence of inner and outer images).

[26]Muir's realisation of this fact is expressed in poems like "Impersonal Calamity", "The Interrogation", "The Good Town", etc.

positivist philosophies that regard the mysterious world of nature as something merely to be explored and manipulated - these have all contributed toward making us strangers to ourselves and to one another. Many who have known no other kind of life wrestle blindly with their intuition that something has gone wrong, and end in self-deception or cynicism.[27] But Muir had identified his trouble. His personal experience had bridged more than two centuries of European life, enabling him to combine in himself, though at the cost of great personal suffering, the simple imaginative world of traditional values and the perilously confused world of modern experimentation. If his split was deeper and more painful than ours, his insight was keener, and his devotion to the work of reconciliation more unswerving.

Probably the most potent factor in revealing to Muir that his own dilemma was a small but faithful reflection of a universal one was the powerful upsurge of unconscious psychic contents, in the form of extraordinarily vivid dreams and visions, that accompanied his experience of psychological analysis. The analyst, though influenced by Jung, seems to have been baffled by the mythic character of the symbolic images rising to the surface of his patient's mind, and was not unnaturally alarmed at such a profuse outpouring of unconscious material experienced in the form of long sequences of waking vision.[28] He therefore discouraged any cultivation

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[27] See "The Usurpers", CP., p. 187.

[28] In fairness to Maurice Nicoll, it should be added that at this time (1920), Jung had not yet developed his theory of archetypes, but had emphasized the compensatory function of the unconscious, and Nicoll himself had published a book elucidating this view. See Maurice Nicoll, Dream Psychology (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1917).

of such subjective events, and Muir was left in the main to interpret them for himself. He recorded them meticulously and later included an account of them in his autobiography. Astonishing and exhilarating as they were to him, he was most deeply impressed by the fact that they completely lacked "all that is usually meant by human".[29] In fact, they were remarkably similar to the kind of dream that Jung has since described as archetypal. Noting that most ordinary dreams can be interpreted with the help of the dreamer's own associations, Jung claims that "when it is a matter of obsessive dreaming or of highly emotional dreams, the personal associations produced by the dreamer do not usually suffice" to explain them, for in such cases elements are present that do not arise from individual experience but are mental forms that "seem to be aboriginal, innate, and inherited shapes of the human mind".[30] He contends that just as the human body still bears traces of the general anatomical pattern of primitive mammals, so the dream pictures of the modern mind may show a relation to the primordial images and mythological motifs produced by the immensely ancient primitive psyche that was still close to that of the animals.[31] Freud had already recognized the presence in certain dreams of what he called "archaic remnants". It is such elements that Jung calls "archetypes",

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[29] An Autobiography, p. 167.

[30] Man and his Symbols, ed. C.G. Jung (London: Aldus Books, 1964), p. 67.

[31] Muir possessed a vivid sense of this ancient relationship to the animals, which is referred to in Chapter IV. He also speaks of the "animal soul" in his account of his dreams (op. cit., p. 166).

by which he means not fixed images but tendencies to form varying representations of certain basic motifs; spontaneous manifestations, in fantasies and symbolic images, of innate urges that occur as mysteriously as the impulse of birds to migrate, and which astonish us when they appear in our consciousness. Instances of such archetypes are the various phases of the hero myth, rituals of initiation (including submission to death and re-birth and the sacred marriage) and motifs of transcendence (represented by symbolic images such as pilgrimage, winged dragons, entwined serpents, bird-flight, etc.).[32]

Muir himself was aware that his waking dreams had "come" to him in some such way, for he felt that "it was not I who dreamt it, but something else which the psychologists call the racial unconscious and for which there are other names".[33] And indeed there are marked similarities in these dreams to the archetypal motifs of transcendence that Jung interprets as symbolic representations of the difficult process by which the Self seeks wholeness and fulfilment through re-integrating the conscious ego with the intuitive powers of the unconscious.[34] Though one cannot consider all such similarities here, one dream sequence in particular deserves mention since it centres upon images noticeably similar to those that Jung observed in certain symbolic

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[32]Condensed from Man and his Symbols, pp. 67, 69, 110 - 135, 149 - 157.

[33]An Autobiography, p. 164.

[34]e.g. the dragon (ibid., p. 160), entwined serpents (p. 161), flight (p. 162), re-birth (p. 164).

paintings made by a woman patient in 1928 (some eight years after Muir's dream), which led him eventually to formulate his theory of archetypes.[35] One of the images painted by this woman comprises a sun or sphere in conjunction with serpents[36] and recalls Muir's description of similar imagery.

> I was standing beside a little mountain pool fringed with rushes. The sky had the whitish bruised look which it sometimes has before sunrise. As I looked at it I saw two little clouds like scraps of paper floating towards each other, and for the first time I was afraid, I could not tell why. The two clouds met, blazed up, and turned into an angry sun. The sun began to revolve across the sky. As it revolved, two serpents, one red and the other yellow, broke through its crust and began a furious locked battle. Still revolving, bearing the battling serpents with it, the sun burst into flames and in a moment turned to ashes. Black now, it went on wheeling across the paper-white sky.[37]

In the remainder of the sequence, the sphere stopped and sent out legs, climbing spider-like down an invisible thread towards the dreamer, who now saw it to be a fabulous creature with an armoured body and a head that was part woman and part bird. The dreamer found himself to be naked and armed with a broadsword, with which he struck the creature on the brow. As this produced no effect, he thrust the sword in at the joint of the armour and twisted

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[35] He found that these images, unconsciously employed to express a process of inward transformation, closely resembled the mystical symbols of the Hermetic and alchemical tradition and that other patients in similar circumstances also appeared to produce them spontaneously. See C.G. Jung, Collected Works, trans. R.F.C. Hull (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959), Vol. IX, Part I, entitled The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious, pp. 295 - 313.

[36] See reproductions in ibid., Pictures 3, 4, 5, 9, 10, following p. 292.

[37] An Autobiography, p. 161.

it furiously. Thereupon the mail burst open and something with white wings, robed in white, fluttered into the sky, while the torn armour closed itself and disappeared into the ground. The entire sequence seemed to Muir to have an apocalyptic significance. The sun seemed to be "a fantastic image of time", and "the battle with the wheeling sun, which, after running through all its revolutions, becomes the sphinx, is the last battle with time" that finally releases the spirit into eternity.[38] If, however, one permits oneself the liberty of fitting some of Jung's psychological interpretations to Muir's imagery, one may see the angry sun as a symbol of the self rejecting its own elements of feeling and intuition and burning itself out to a death-like state of extreme opposition.[39] This could well be an accurate reflection of Muir's psychic condition at about this time. But there are cosmic implications as well. The sun, climbing down an invisible thread like a spider, recalls the Indian image of the sun as a spider or "cosmic weaver"

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[38] Ibid., p. 165.

[39] The battling serpents are possibly a form of the entwined or coupling serpents in the emblem of the Hermetic caduceus; their colours, red and yellow, represent feeling and intuition (Jung, op. cit., pp. 311, 379). The black sun in the white sky, suggesting opposition, recalls Blake's black sun surrounded by black and white spiders in the "infinite Abyss".

"By degrees we beheld the infinite Abyss, fiery as the smoke of a burning city; beneath us, at an immense distance, was the sun, black but shining; round it were fiery tracks on which revolv'd vast spiders, crawling after their prey ... I now asked my companion which was my eternal lot? he said: 'between the black and white spiders'" ("The Marriage of Heaven and Hell," The Poetical Works of William Blake, ed. John Sampson [London: Oxford University Press, 1934], pp. 256 - 257).

binding the world to itself,[40] while the second part of the dream sequence, as Muir himself understood, suggests that the sphinx's riddle of the nature of the divided self can be solved if it is seen in terms of flesh and spirit, and so offers the possibility of self-transcendence.[41] These spontaneous mythological images fulfilled the function of ordering and expressing the profound transformation that was taking place in Muir's subjective life, and simultaneously gave him the enduring belief that dreams, myths and fables enshrine the eternal truths of man's nature and destiny. The conviction of "immortality"[42] that came to him at this time was not connected with any systematic doctrine, but was a way of describing an experience of the expansion of the self into a non-temporal and non-spatial order of being. Jung observes that such a feeling accompanies a break-through into the world of the unconscious, and may be aroused by participation in religious ritual or the initiation ceremonies of the mystery religions;[43] but, whether one calls it the collective unconscious, the Anima Mundi, or the world of spiritual reality, the fact is that Muir felt freed of the limitations of everyday conscious personality and had entered

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[40] See Mircea Eliade, The Two and the One, trans. J.M. Cohen (London: Harvill Press, 1965), pp. 171 - 173.

[41] These images were to be employed in "The Ballad of the Soul" and "The Fall", but one feels that their personal significance for Muir outweighed their utility as elements in his poems.

[42] An Autobiography, p. 170.

[43] Jung, The Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious, pp. 117, 136, 142.

into a sense of freedom and timelessness completely different in quality from the false timelessness of emotional paralysis. This is reflected in his poetry, where the unreality of "The Charm" or of the first part of "The Labyrinth" -

> For in the maze time had not been with me;
> I had strayed, it seemed, past sun and season and change,
> Past rest and motion, for I could not tell
> At last if I moved or stayed;

is a sort of perversion of the vital moment of vision in "The Annunciation", where the angel and the girl are locked in a mutual gaze of spiritual love and are transported beyond normal time-bound existence.

> Outside the window footsteps fall
> Into the ordinary day
> And with the sun along the wall
> Pursue their unreturning way.
> Sounds' perpetual roundabout
> Rolls its numbered octaves out
> And hoarsely grinds its battered tune.
>
> But through the endless afternoon
> These neither speak nor movement make,
> But stare into their deepening trance[44]
> As if their gaze would never break.

How like, and yet how utterly unlike, the immobility in "The Enchanted Knight" and the tranced gaze into the crystal spheres in "The Charm" this mystical state is. Such moments of "higher consciousness", as Eliot has called them, resemble the timeless experiences that seem to come naturally to poets in early childhood.[45]

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[44] "The Annunciation", CP., p. 223.

[45] One thinks of Thomas Traherne : "The corn was orient and immortal wheat, which never should be reaped, nor was ever sown. I thought it had stood from everlasting to everlasting" (Centuries of Meditations, III, 3).

My childhood all a myth
Enacted in a distant isle;
Time with his hourglass and his scythe
Stood dreaming on the dial,
And did not move the whole day long
That immobility might save
Continually the dying song,
The flower, the falling wave.
And at each corner of the wood
In which I played the ancient play,
Guarding the traditional day
The faithful watchers stood. [46]

This "traditional day" differs from the "ordinary day" ("The Annunciation") chiefly in that time stops and the sun seems to stand still; in such passages a condition of stasis characterises the experience of being at one either with a world of spiritual love or with the world of natural beauty. In a late poem, this mystical power of stopping the process of temporal life seems to be recovered almost at will.

I see you stand at your window and softly arrest
Tree, bird and man and the nightward hastening sun
In an endless stasis, and what was given before
You opened your eyes upon the changing earth
Is there, and for a moment you are at home. [47]

This is in marked contrast to the poisoned stasis of deadlock found in "The Enchanted Knight", for, where formerly the poet's whole inward life was arrested, in the true vision the universe itself is lifted into the eternal day of unified being. The first state expresses conflict, the second transcendence.

To sum up those elements of Muir's personal experience that are of particular significance for his poetry, one may say that the special quality of his verse,

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[46] "The Myth", CP., p. 144.

[47] "Dialogue", CP., p. 275.

which has little in common with contemporary trends, can perhaps be attributed to the unusual circumstance that his sensibility was bred upon a few simple but grandly patterned images and his imagination nourished by traditional ballads and folktales and scriptural and classical myth.[48] When this essentially pastoral sensibility was confronted with the meaningless multiplicity of impersonal modern objects,[49] and subjected to the shock of a fourfold bereavement, it found itself unable to order its sensations and feelings in any patterns that corresponded to its inner configurations. The resulting mental and emotional split seemed total, until his healing visions convinced him of the enduring validity of inborn images behind and beneath the flux of human history. The timelessness and completeness of his original world of infancy, his "fall" into self-consciousness and moral conflict, and his search for a new synthesis, were the separate acts of a great mythic drama of Eden, the Fall and the Promise that links each individual life with the life of the universe; and the painful split itself was the shadow of that Platonic structure of appearance and reality, the actual and the ideal, that characterizes all traditional cosmologies and forms the twin pillars supporting the world of art and poetry. But

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[48]Helen Gardner chose Muir as the subject of her W.D. Thomas Memorial Lecture for two reasons, one of them being the fact that he "left school at fourteen and never attended a university. He was something that is becoming rarer and rarer under our new educational system : a self-educated man. ... He was quite outside the professional pattern of most poets of this century" (University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 1961) p. 5).

[49]See Edwin Muir, The Estate of Poetry (London: Hogarth Press, 1962), pp. 7, 8, for an account of the way in which "secondary objects" isolate us from the natural world.

these insights were only to grow upon him gradually. In his autobiography, he tells us that he had been writing verse for ten years before he realised that he was writing a "poetry of symbols drawn from memory",[50] and then only when it was pointed out to him.

Muir's poetic vision is given to us, then, in terms of an archetypal world of traditional symbolic images instead of the actualities of contemporary life. Amongst his most characteristic images we find not the tube-train or the gas-works but the stylised forms of heraldic art : mountain and hill, forest and plain, castle and harvest field, hound and quarry, fabulous beasts and pastoral animals, and the strangely static battle scenes of allegory. Even in a poem entitled "The Wayside Station", Muir admits only the crawling serpent of smoke from the engine before turning to the sky, the landscape, and the wakening farmhouse rousing to the ache of daily existence, for only images stamped and humanised by ancestral experience seem valid currency to him.[51] In the same way, his diction is the common language of English literature: direct, without syntactical complexity, easily understood by any ordinarily literate person. There is no straining after originality or special effects, only the sincere (occasionally too earnest) attempt to communicate an authentic personal vision which penetrates beyond the immediate

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[50] Muir, An Autobiography, p. 208.

[51] "Muir possessed a birthright rare in the modern world, and perhaps irrecoverable, in being able to write for his tribe, to speak with the voice of the ancestors" (Kathleen Raine, Defending Ancient Springs, p. 10).

surface of life. By the modesty of his means and the honesty and charity of his intention, he is able to remind us that this vision is also our common heritage.[52]

> All we have seen it; while we look we are
> There truly, and even now in memory,
> Here on this road, following a falling star.[53]

Yet, for many moderns, the traditional images Muir employs may seem to have suffered an irreversible attrition. Robert Graves, in an early poem entitled "In Procession", tells how this dilemma prevents him from making any authentic poetic use of those images that appear on the edges of sleep. He sees them, nevertheless, and lists them in deliberately ironical juxtapositions so that they deteriorate into nursery rhyme and nonsense verse, the rhythmic unreason of children's songs, the "Land of Whipperginny". Yet they are precisely similar to the images that Muir employs for an entirely serious purpose.

> The Carnival wagons
> With their saints and dragons
> On the scroll of my teeming mind,
> The Creation and Flood
> With our Saviour's Blood
> And fat Silenus' flagons ...[54]

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[52] "He compels our assent not by the force of an argument but by the clarity with which he has illuminated a part of the deepest truth our culture can give us" (Daniel Hoffman, Barbarous Knowledge: Myth in the Poetry of Yeats, Graves and Muir [New York: Oxford University Press, 1967], p. 255).

[53] CP., p. 174. See Appendix D.

[54] Robert Graves (Penguin Books, 1957), p. 44. This recalls Muir's "The Solitary Place".

> "O certain prophecy,
> And faithful tragedy,
> Furnished with scenery of sorrow and strife,
> The Cross and the Flood
> And Babel's towers
> And Abel's blood
> And Eden's bowers."
> (CP., p. 81.)

There are many more similarities of imagery between Graves's poem and Muir's work as a whole, e.g. the procession itself, the mountain, banners, horsemen, rare beasts, the goat horned with gold (see Muir's "Archaic goat with silver horn" in "The Island") and even the Town of Hell itself (see "On Saturday nights in every street in Hell" in "Milton").

Graves regrets that, on waking, he lacks the courage to renew his speech with these images,

> But cowardly I tell
> Rather of the town of Hell
> . . . . . .
> Where between sleep and sleep I dwell.

Muir, however, by virtue of his early life in Orkney, is still able to speak of the ancient forms that appear in dreams. In "Day and Night", he describes how, in childhood, he learned from the night:

> only what I knew,
> Knew, yet never had been told;
> A speech that from the darkness grew
> Too deep for daily tongues to say,
> Archaic dialogue of a few
> Upon the sixth or seventh day.
> And shapes too simple for a place
> In the day's shrill complexity
> Came and were more natural, more
> Expected than my father's face
> Smiling across the open door,
> More simple than the sanded floor
> In unexplained simplicity. [55]

Early experience had taught him to respond naturally to the symbolic utterances of the dreaming mind, so that, in later life, he was able to find wholeness in the dialogue between the ego and the unconscious, and to bear witness to this discovery with simple dignity. His constant endeavour to blend the two voices of darkness and daylight precluded the assumption of any pose or "mask"; indeed, he deplored the cultivation of personality in this sense, and the qualities to which his friends and acquaintances testify[56] - his

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[55] CP., p. 240.

[56] See Peter Butter, Edwin Muir : Man and Poet (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1966) for personal accounts of such impressions, e.g. those of Mrs. Oeser and Tom Scott (pp. 156, 157).

gentleness, his peculiar radiance, his muted voice, and the extraordinary integrity T.S. Eliot felt in him[57] are faithfully reflected in his poetry.

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[57]"His personality made a deep impression upon me, and especially the impression of one very rare and precious quality. There have been other encounters in my life with men who have left me with the impression of this particular quality, including several men whom I have never come to know well. They have been those men of whom I should say without hesitation that they were men of complete integrity. And as I have grown older, I have come to realise how rare this quality is ... I stress this unmistakeable integrity, because I came to recognise it in Edwin Muir's work as well as in the man himself" (Preface to Edwin Muir : Selected Poems, ed. T.S. Eliot [London: Faber and Faber, 1965]).

CHAPTER II

CHILDHOOD AND THE LOST PARADISE

> Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen.
>
> Revelation 2 : 5.

> Make him know his childhood again; the unconscious and the wonderful and the saga-cycle, infinitely rich in darkness, of his forebodeful opening years.
>
> Rainer Maria Rilke.

When Muir came, many years later, to look back upon his first attempts to write poetry, he said:

> I must have been influenced by something, since we all are, but when I try to find out what it was that influenced me, I can only think of the years of childhood which I spent on my father's farm in the little island of Wyre in Orkney, and the beauty I apprehended then, before I knew there was beauty... I do not know whether in others the impressions of the first seven years of their lives remain so vivid and lasting, or if it is good that they should. In any case we need a symbolical stage on which the drama of human life can play itself out for us, and I doubt whether we have the liberty to choose it. The little island was not too big for a child to see in it an image of life: land and sea and sky, good and evil, happiness and grief, life and death discovered themselves to me there; and the landscape was so simple that it made these things simple too.[1]

When he and his wife moved from London to Europe in the summer of 1921, he was just beginning to recover from his long "illness". Three early poems, "October at Hellbrun", "Autumn in Prague"[2] and "When the Trees Grow Bare on the High Hills", which are the fruit of this development, seem filled

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[1] Muir, An Autobiography, p. 206.

[2] See Appendix A.

with the delicate, brooding peace of convalescence. During this period, reviving memories of childhood reminded him that he had once possessed a sense of undivided identity and of complete harmony with the natural world, a feeling of "immortality" undisturbed by the passage of time or the process of change and decay. Of the early poems which were retained in Collected Poems 1921 - 1958 (some of those rejected had expressed a vague, romantic nostalgia for the past), the first two are based directly on genuine early memories. The first, entitled simply "Childhood", presents the small boy's view of his island landscape with all its separate objects lapped in the harmony which sprang from his sense of unity with his home and parents.

> Long time he lay upon the sunny hill
> To his father's house below securely bound.[3]

From this hill he gazes out upon the dark islands lying in mist upon the "silent, changing sound" and, although from this vantage point they all appear joined together, he knows that they are actually separated by "unseen straits". In imagination, he sees their shores, with the light shining upon the sand, and he walks joyfully from one to another through the clear, shallow waters. A passing ship moves so slowly that it seems motionless and the whole world timeless; the coming of evening is heralded only by the length of the shadows cast by the grass and the sound of his mother's voice.

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[3]His father's house became a symbol of the centre of identity, e.g. the house in "The Journey Back" and "The Sufficient Place", and it reappears in "Abraham". Its significance as a link between the story and the fable is doubtless reinforced by Muir's recollection of his father's Sunday prayers, which always included a reference to "an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (ibid., p. 26).

The grasses threw straight shadows far away
And from the house his mother called his name.

The ending of the poem not only echoes the link with home that was established in the beginning but evokes a sense of the mystery of one's own identity that the calling of one's name often conjures up in early childhood. The unity of time and space that enfolds this infant world is linked with the knowledge of himself as part of the close kinship of his family, and the poem comes full circle in an awareness of home, balanced between the father and the mother, which embraces a vision of the world gathering together its disparate parts (the dark islands upon the sound and the voyage that appears motionless) into an "image of forever, one and whole".[4] Everything Muir had lost and now knew that he yearned for was to be found again preserved inviolate in the storehouses of memory, precious images which were to be projected in imagination upon the whole of his later experience, gathering it into mythic patterns and neutralising his fear of disorder and alienation, of the ultimate meaninglessness of contemporary culture.[5]

The second poem, "Horses", is an early instance of this kind of projection in action, for it presents an experience in which farm animals seen in adulthood are suddenly clothed with the numinous power they had for the poet in childhood. The "lumbering horses in the steady

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[4]This phrase is taken from Muir's last poem, "I Have Been Taught", in which his debt to his parents and the past is again acknowledged.

[5]Something of this childish vision from the hill on the island reappears in the mythic image of the "gods" in "The Labyrinth".

plough", so solid and commonplace, become in that instant terrible, "wild and strange". Their conquering hooves seem to move in an archaic "ritual"; they are "cherubim" whose eyes gleam with an "apocalyptic light".[6] Once again, movement ("their hooves like pistons") is oddly combined with a sense of "standing still", and when this other-worldly vision fades, the poet is left longing

> for that dread country crystalline
> Where the blank field and the still-standing tree
> Were bright and fearful presences to me.

It is a world of the mythopoeic imagination that combines contrary feelings ("bright and fearful") in a mysterious new synthesis.[7] This point will be taken up again in Chapter IV when one comes to consider the function of Muir's emblems.

A glance at a later poem will help to illustrate the development of Muir's sense of the healing power of childhood memories and his affirmation of the permanent validity of images first recognised in infancy. "The Sufficient Place",[8] from the collection Journeys and Places (1937), opens with the injunction to "see" that the winding, silver roads lead in "to this still place like evening". Some focus of experience is being asserted here; the house, the hill and the feeling of evening recall the remembered landscape of "Childhood", but now the addition of tall trees, heavy

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[6] Despite derivative elements, this poem conveys a fresh and immediate sense of a primitive kind of imagination at work on ordinary images, and already includes some of the aspects of myth that are considered in Chapters IV and V.

[7] In recording the mixed feelings of terror and love that he felt for his father's horses when very small, Muir comments that this combination of emotions "added up to worship in the Old Testament sense" (An Autobiography, p. 22).

[8] CP., p. 86.

with "summer foliage" and crowded with birds (which certainly do not belong to Orkney but are traditional symbols of spiritual maturity), links actual memories with the archetypal images of dreams.[9] The parental figures are not simply the felt presences of the earlier poem but have become generalised allegorical images or symbols.

> Within the doorway stand
> Two figures, Man and Woman, simple and clear
> As a child's first images.

Inside the house is a room where "All's sufficient"; it is a place of spiritual replenishment to which the world comes in and goes out again. Like Kafka, Muir often employs the image of a room or house to symbolise a psychological state, though in Kafka's experience it was never possible to reach any centre of wholeness and unity from which to draw strength.[9a] The house, the figures in the doorway, the room within, are Muir's still centre, his "home", where the circling tumult of temporal life is caught up into the peace and harmony of imaginative vision. He specifically calls it "the Pattern" and "the Archetypes" which, by some magical process, can "change" one's eyes and make "a summer silence / Amid the tumult". Although not entirely successful, this poem is of interest for its

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[9] Muir once dreamed of his home as being surrounded by great trees with dark, thick leaves (An Autobiography, p. 64).

[9a] Ralph J. Mills comments on Muir and Kafka: "What K doesn't know and Muir learns before our eyes in his poetry is that the castle is just next door and requires an alteration within us for entrance : a movement costly to make because our own weight is terrible to lift" ("Edwin Muir : A Speech from Darkness Grown", Accent, XIX, [Winter 1959], p. 56).

definite statement of the position Muir had arrived at by this time.[10] One notices that the "silver roads" are contrasted with "these roads", emphasizing the polarity of the ideal and the actual and Muir's sometimes uncertain tenure of both orders,[11] and that the still centre is able to arrest a cyclic movement that is "wild" at the periphery but winds in toward the mid-point.

It is apparent that at this stage Muir was no longer unconscious of the "symbols drawn from memory" that governed his poetry and had come to understand their function of ordering the chaotic elements of experience. Already, in Variations on a Time Theme (1934) he had related his own childhood to the myth of Eden and begun to explore the parallels between individual experience and the Old Testament stories.[12] But though he had discovered that early childhood held the key to the imaginative ordering of experience, it was not an easy task to recover the pure vision enclosed at the very heart of memory. This was partly because it had been overlaid by custom and education but chiefly because the unity and timelessness

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[10]His awareness of his own use of symbolism must have dated from about 1931.

[11]A similar poem, "The Return", first published in The Listener in 1947, is based on a dream, and seems to express a painful conflict between the profound desire to rest permanently in the peace and harmony of the centre and the need to follow the road of this world to the end (CP., p. 166).

[12]"A child in Adam's field I dreamed away
My one eternity and hourless day
Ere from my wrist Time's bird had learned to fly,
Or I had robbed the Tree of which I die,
Whose boughs rain still, whose fruit wave-green
shall fall
Until the last great autumn reddens all."
("Variations on a Time Theme III," CP., p. 42).

of the infant world are bound up with a state of "innocence" that cannot last.[13] The necessity to become conscious of one's own separate individuality in relation to people and things and to take moral responsibility for one's own actions and feelings brings conflict within the developing personality and division between the self and the surrounding world. This is the "fall into time". In his autobiography, Muir has given a moving account of this crisis in his own life which provided his primary symbol of the Fall from Eden.[14]

He outlines three stages of early childhood which take place before school-going age, at which time, he says, "a part of our childhood stops for good". For him, there was the earliest memory of all, in which he seemed to be lying in a cradle, watching the motes dancing in a beam of sunlight and feeling his mother's pervading presence. Then there was the "petticoat stage": that of the toddler "moving safely among enormous presences", and this, in turn, was followed by the trouser stage, which brought the knowledge that he was a boy, not a girl, "no longer in the world where there is no marriage or giving in marriage". During this third stage, the child's original vision of the world is lost, harmony is shattered, and "contradiction enters life". In Muir's case, an illness,

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[13] One wonders whether this state is more marked under traditional conditions; the modern formula-fed infant, forced to fit into the clock-watching routines of the contemporary world, can hardly have much unity and timelessness to surrender.

[14] E.g. It appears in the poetry in various forms: as the loss of vision in "The Three Mirrors", "The Window" and "The Young Princes", as the disintegration of society in "Scotland 1941" and "The Good Town", and as exile after the fall of Troy in "A Trojan Slave."

the painful death of a friendly neighbouring farmer, and an obscure feeling of foreboding combined to make this crisis particularly terrifying. His sense of guilt may, he thinks, have had its origin in a child's brooding curiosity about sex, "natural in itself but coloured with guilt by the thoughts of their elders". This strange simultaneity of innocence and guilt was to be recreated in a poem entitled "The Gate",[15] where two children are corrupted by their uneasy perception that adults, in attempting to protect a child's innocence, are putting on masks "over their tell-tale faces", and it was to develop eventually into the paradoxical sense of the creative embrace of good and evil which emerges in poems like "Oedipus" and "One Foot in Eden". The adult's judgment of sin is accepted on trust by a child, so that he is filled with a fear and guilt that he cannot explain, much less confide to his parents. In the seven-year-old Edwin's mind, this floating anxiety became attached to his father's prohibition against touching a poisonous sack of sheep-dip. He could not be certain that he had not touched it, and went about in constant fear of death, washing his hands many times a day until they appeared wasted and transparent. His mother often looked anxiously at him, sensing his isolation.

> And I had actually gone away into a world where every object was touched with fear, yet a world of the same size as the ordinary world and corresponding to it in every detail : a sort of parallel world divided by an endless unbreakable sheet of glass from the actual world.

It was like "a clear cloud or bubble" surrounding him, and

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[15] CP., p. 110.

"when that film dissolved, the world my eyes saw was a different world from my first childish one, which never returned again."[16] In fact, although the glassy barrier had soon melted away, he had already experienced the ominous foretaste of that psychic split that was to overtake him in early maturity.

This first experience of guilt was very beautifully recreated in Muir's novel, Poor Tom,[17] where it is associated with a little girl from a neighbouring farm with whom the child, Mansie, had played secret games of innocent sexual curiosity. To him it now seemed a "sin of awful dimensions", but it was only in the adult world that he felt guilt; "in the other country where he lived with his playmate there was no evil". Hence, it was a "fabulous sin", belonging to another order of values, and not a sin to him, only to his elders or to a shadowy figure that might be God. During adolescence, this memory became more shameful, since it now had projected upon it the awakened sexuality of puberty, and, seen in this light, it even possessed something of "the disgrace of impotence". Eventually, as the memory itself faded

> all that remained was a thickly woven cloud, corporeally oppressive, and both bright and dense, like a golden nightmare weighing on his mind. Yet at the same time he felt that this cloud lay deeper in childhood than any other memory he could summon; lay there, ring-shaped, in an almost terrifyingly secure and still zone, at that very heart of childhood into which it is perilous even for children to venture too far. Its radiance was richer than the light on the little green hill behind the house where he had lain so often and watched the ships passing over the sound in the shadow of the black islands - passing so slowly that he could discern no motion in them, and yet saw, with a feeling of wonder, that they had moved.[18]

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[16] This account is condensed from An Autobiography, pp. 34 - 35.

[17] London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1932.

[18] These quotations are all taken from ibid., pp. 110-112.

In such passages, one can see the actual memory of an early emotional experience undergoing development into a traditional mythic symbol of the loss of primal innocence. It becomes joyful as well painful, secure though perilous, and full of strange meaning, for behind the wall of shame lies hidden the golden memory of the lost Eden, where the figures of Mansie (surely his name is equivalent to little Adam?) and the little girl play forever in original spontaneity and freedom. Once again, one finds the suggestion that mythic symbols have a cryptic power of combining contrary feelings in new and significant syntheses. The image of the cloud reappears in the poem of that name,[19] where it is associated with the recognition that the image of fallen man:

> the face once broken in Eden,
> Beloved, world-without-end lamented face,

is bound up in love, grief, and hope with our true identity. The image of the cloudy ring enclosing the symbolic memory evolves, later in the book, into the perfect circle of mystical experience that surrounds Mansie in the presence of Tom's body,[20] and is also related to the "grassy ring" in the poem entitled "The Ring".[21]

Another memory belonging to this period, which develops in Poor Tom into something very like an emblematic device and thus presumably illuminates Muir's sense of the reconciling power of emblems, is the incident concerning the

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[19] "The Cloud", CP., p. 245.

[20] This experience is referred to again in Chapter IV of the present discussion.

[21] CP., p. 113.

new-born lambs. In his autobiography, Muir describes it as follows:

> I have a picture of my mother taking me by the hand one green spring day and leading me to the yard at the back of the house to see two new-born lambs. Some bloody, wet, rag-like stuff was lying on the grass, and a little distance away the two lambs were sprawling with their spindly legs doubled up. Everything looked soft and new - the sky, the sea, the grass, the two lambs, which seemed to have been cast up without warning on the turf; their eyes still had a bruised look and their hoofs were freshly lacquered. They paid no attention to me when I went up to pat them, but kept turning their heads with sudden gentle movements which belonged to some other place.[22]

Some pages later, he adds:

> With my first sight of the two lambs that foreign, dirty-red, rag-like stuff is associated like a stain, and I still cannot seem them without seeing it.[23]

Yet, in Poor Tom, this picture has become a simplified and healing image, quite free from distressing or disgusting elements. Mansie's mother, allowing him out for the first time after an illness, had taken him to see the new lamb.

> As between two folds of cloud he could still see the black lamb beside its mother against the spring sky ... the lamb seemed both surprised and glad to be on the earth. And suddenly as though it had come for this, a black lamb cast up without warning on the green sward, it charmed him out of his nightmare, and he saw the young sky and the great world outspread.[24]

It is not difficult to see in this black lamb on a green ground a conventionalised heraldic image symbolic of the child's own subjective state and expressing both transcendence of the conflict between guilt and innocence and reconciliation with the source of love. Such an image might well have developed in

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[22] An Autobiography, p. 31,

[23] Ibid., p. 36.

[24] Poor Tom, p. 115.

the poetry into the traditional symbol of Christ as sacrificial victim had it not been for Muir's strongly ambivalent emotions in this regard.[25]

Mourning for the lost world of childhood, that had disappeared with the first fear of death and the advent of the glassy barrier, was surely the emotional root that blossomed imaginatively into that strange and poignant poem, "The Child Dying",[26] which is filled with such stark apprehension of approaching dissolution. One feels that it carries much the same allegorical overtones as Blake's "The Little Boy Lost" and seems to echo its appeal to the father who leaves the child behind. Some of the actual elements of the poem show a relation to Muir's own experience; for instance, in the first stanza, "beyond all doubt" and "miracle" seem to recall his account of the child's taking on trust the incomprehensible judgments of the adult world, an act which is somehow necessary before a more mature stage

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[25]This attitude is considered in some detail in Chapter IV of the present study. As it is, within two years of the publication of Poor Tom, one finds heraldic emblems appearing in "Variations on a Time Theme X" (CP. p. 52), but they are the dragon and the lion, presented as primordial images that are still faithful guardians of the mythic meaning of death and rebirth, even though they have lost their transforming power in the popular imagination. Here it is the lion, a traditional symbol of resurrection, who "was crucified", while the death of the dragon is a Hermetic symbol of spiritual transformation. Soon after this, Muir wrote "The Original Place" (CP., p. 85) which ends with a statement of the existence of an inscrutable "stronghold" at the centre of temporal reality which can never be overthrown since it marks the point where eternity intersects time.

> "There the hero was slain
> That bleeds upon our shields."

But it is not a lamb. That image only appears in the form of the mild flocks of millennial pastures.

[26]CP., p. 178.

of life can supervene. At the same time, the extinction of the child's view of the universe robs the eternal world of its substance and the actual world of its splendour.

> Father, father, I dread this air
> Blown from the far side of despair,
> The cold, cold corner. What house, what hold,
> What hand is there? I look and see
> Nothing-filled eternity,
> And the great round world grows weak and old.
>
> Hold my hand, oh hold it fast -
> I am changing! - until at last
> My hand in yours no more will change,
> Though yours change on. You here, I there,
> So, hand in hand, twin-leafed despair -
> I did not know death was so strange.

While the poem evokes a powerful sense of the painful bewilderment aroused by the act of dying in a life that has scarcely yet begun, familiarity with Muir's thought and experience suggests that it can also be regarded as a kind of parable of the divided human creature seen symbolically as a developing conscious adult and a dead child fastened together in mutual loss and despair. Such an additional dimension of meaning need not detract in any way from the pathos of the child's fear and distress, for he is actually slipping away out of the only world he knows.[27] It is also consistent with Muir's recollection of the anguish of this experience and with his placing of it in the fable. In the mythopoeic world, the death of a child is the death of all childhood everywhere.

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[27]The separation from the universe is a fall into non-being, the very antithesis of Traherne's recovered experience of Felicitie:

> "You never enjoy the world aright till the sea itself floweth in your veins, till you are clothed with the heavens, and crowned with the stars, and perceive yourself to be the sole heir of the whole world, and more so, because men are in it who are everyone sole heirs as well as you" (Centuries of Meditations, I, 29).

Muir's preoccupation with the need to achieve inner completeness by resurrecting the dead childhood world and uniting it with the everyday adult one[28] had already been expressed in the form of an extended parable in his novel, The Marionette.[29] This tale is set in Salzburg where Muir himself had a striking experience of renewed freshness of vision and the almost terrifying immediacy of perceived objects this brings with it. It concerns the relationship between Martin Scheffer and his son, Hans. Martin scarcely ever saw his young son, whose mother had died at his birth, and he hated to be reminded of him. As the child grew, it became apparent that he was feeble-minded, and the father's sensitiveness and shame only increased his former neglect.

> He dropped the fact of Hans' existence into an abyss and in his consciousness the child lay slain and buried. [Italics mine]. He dropped into the same abyss his memories of his wife.[30]

Hans avoided everybody and liked empty rooms, only loving certain things in the garden: flowers and inanimate objects. His anxiety and isolation were so great that his own face in the mirror appeared vacant and hostile, and he usually feared

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[28]The parallel between this idea and psychological theories of the need to re-integrate the conscious ego with the buried intuitive powers of the unconscious is apparent enough.

[29]Edwin Muir, The Marionette (London: Hogarth Press, 1927). This novel was completed during the Muirs' stay in Menton. Willa Muir remembers that, after finishing it, "he had the same feeling of release that he had after recounting his visions to me in London" (Belonging - A Memoir [London: Hogarth Press, 1968], p. 134). In 1929, in a letter to Sydney Schiff, Muir mentioned his recent discovery of Kafka's Das Schloss, saying, "It appeals particularly to the part of me which wrote The Marionette" ("Some letters of Edwin Muir", Encounter, Vol. XXVI, No. 1, [January, 1966], p. 8).

[30]Ibid., p. 13. One notices a parallel here with Muir's own repression of childhood memories and of grief at his mother's death.

everything that moved; "a lizard scuttling across the stones would make the place insecure. He saw nature as a terrifying heraldry".[31] Alienation from himself and others as well as from the natural world is revealed in this fear of movement, which is the very signature of the world of time.[32] On Hans's fourteenth birthday, the housekeeper, Emma, who loved him, insisted that the father should recognise his son's existence. The boy entered his father's study carrying a new soldier doll that Emma had given him, and Martin was filled with pity. This emotion, an important one to Muir since it had been proscribed by Nietzsche but had played a significant role in his own recovery,[33] caused Martin to re-live the whole painful episode of his wife's death, and this release of feeling, together with the recognition that Hans was her child, too, helped to reconcile him to his shame.[34] From this moment, he began to make attempts to foster some kind of relationship with his son, and the remainder of the book deals with his efforts to overcome the boy's fears and enable him to enter the real world represented by Salzburg itself. He did this by encouraging the imaginary life of Hans's dolls and then of the moving dolls of the marionette theatre, chief of which were Gretchen and Faust.[35] Hans's increasing

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[31] Ibid., p. 7.

[32] Cf. "Eternity is the measure of a permanent being; while Time is the measure of movement" (Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, Fourth Article).

[33] See "Variations on a Time Theme IX" and Chapter III of the present study.

[34] Ibid., Chapter II.

[35] Ibid., Chapter V. The significance of these two dolls is referred to in Chapter III of the present study.

identification and relationship with the figures in this imaginary world, together with certain vivid dreams, helped to break down his isolation so that father and son were finally united in a positive companionship, which, as Professor Peter Butter suggests, represents a necessary balance between dream and reality.[36]

Though this novel is a fascinating projection of Muir's own experience of schizoid alienation and of his recovery from it, it is not projected far enough. Professor Butter is justified in saying of Muir:

> He did not have the kind of imagination which a novelist needs, and found it difficult to create living individual characters and a solid fictional world. He tells us that the characters possess such and such qualities, but when he comes to show them in action he gives them, the central ones, his own sensibility, and they live with their creator's life rather than with a fictional life of their own.[37]

Nevertheless, the writing of the novels seems to have served a necessary purpose in Muir's development, providing a catharsis in which long-pent suffering was finally purged and leaving him free to turn more confidently to the creation of poetry. Despite the fact that they are not really successful as works of fiction, they contain such sustained passages of fine prose and reveal such power to convey subjective experience that they should not be lightly dismissed.

It was not merely in psychological terms that Muir came to understand the significance of achieving a synthesis of adult empiricism and childlike vision. His friend, John Ferrar Holms, the J.F.H. of the poem (CP., p. 91), whom Muir

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[36] Edwin Muir : Man and Poet, pp. 116 - 117.

[37] Ibid., p. 114.

greatly admired and who had a strong influence upon him when he was still breaking free from neurotic inhibitions, helped him to formulate some of his intuitive insights. Holms was interested in seventeenth century literature, perhaps on account of his familial connection with the Ferrars of Little Gidding, and Muir tells us:

> He held Traherne's and Vaughan's and Wordsworth's theory of childhood which was bound up with his belief in immortality; in time he converted me to it, or rather made me realise that my own belief was the same as his.[38]

As this "theory" is associated with the neo-Platonist doctrines so congenial to Muir's outlook and experience, it may be illuminating to consider just what it was and to examine any significant similarities between Muir and the three poets he mentions. This teaching, which was fairly widespread during the seventeenth century, having become available mainly in the form of the Hermetic writings or through the newly translated works of Jakob Boehme,[39] insisted upon the innocence of early childhood and celebrated this period as a time in which the soul has clearer spiritual perceptions than it can have in adult life. The following passage from the Hermetica illustrates the general point of

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[38] An Autobiography, p. 205.

[39] The Corpus Hermeticum, ca. 2nd Century A.D., was a collection of Platonist writings which had been translated by Ficino in 1471. The first treatise of the Corpus, entitled The Poemander, was translated into English by Dr. Everard in 1649. It was believed at the time to be of immense antiquity. A series of English translations of Boehme's works had begun to appear soon after his death in 1624. (Désirée Hirst, Hidden Riches : Traditional Symbolism from the Renaissance to Blake, [London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1964], p. 83).

view:

> Look at the soul of a child, my son, a soul that has not yet come to accept its separation from its source; for its body is still small, and has not yet grown to its full bulk. How beautiful throughout is such a soul as that! It is not yet fouled by the bodily passions; it is still hardly detached from the soul of the Kosmos.[40]

That this way of thinking contrasted with the Puritan emphasis on original sin is clear from a comparison with Milton.

> Assuredly we bring not innocence into the world, we bring impurity much rather; that which purifies us is triall, and triall is by what is contrary.[41]

Yet there were Puritans who subscribed to the idea that Eden exists within the mind of childhood and can be recovered by the regenerate soul. Peter Sterry, Cromwell's chaplain, was a Platonist who could write of:

> the Divine Presence in the Creation, the Earthly Paradise; in the midst of man stood this Paradise; In the Midst of this Paradise man walk'd,[42]

employing a paradoxical reversal of imagery that affirms a mystical coincidence of inner and outer elements of experience.

The poetry of Henry Vaughan (1621 - 1695) was

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[40] Hermetica, Libellus X., quoted L.C. Martin in "Henry Vaughan and the Theme of Infancy", Seventeenth Century Studies Presented to Sir Herbert Grierson, ed. J. Dover Wilson (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1938), p. 247.

[41] Areopagitica, ed. Edward Arber for English Reprints (London: 1869), p. 45.

[42] From "A Catechism", quoted Louis L.Martz in The Paradise Within: Studies in Vaughan, Traherne and Milton (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1964), p. 33.

strongly influenced by the ideas of his twin brother, Thomas, who was learned in many ancient traditions, including neo-Platonism, the Corpus Hermeticum, the Caballa, and the symbolism of alchemy, which had aroused the interest of certain scholars of the time. In Euphrates, or the Waters of the East (1655), Thomas Vaughan suggests that a child may be spoiled by education, adding that

> the naturall disposition of Children, before it is Corrupted with Customes and Manners, is one of those things about which the Ancient Philosophers have busied themselves even to some curiosity.[43]

This was to be echoed when Traherne came to describe how the pure vision of childhood becomes clouded by the "customs and manners of men" and the "dirty devices of this world".[44] Henry Vaughan, in Olor Iscanus, translated Boethius's Metrum 5 thus:

> Happy that first white age! when wee
> Lived by the Earth's meere Charitee.[45]

Later, in his famous poem, "The Retreate", this became:

> Happy those early dayes! When I
> Shined in my Angell-infancy
> Before I understood this place
> Appointed for my second race
> Or taught my soul to fancy ought
> But a white celestial thought
> . . . . . .
> But felt through all this fleshly dresse
> Bright shootes of everlastingnesse.[46]

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[43] Quoted in Seventeenth Century Studies, p. 253.

[44] Centuries of Meditations, III, 3, 7.

[45] Quoted in Seventeenth Century Studies, p. 246.

[46] The Metaphysical Poets, ed. Helen Gardner (The Penguin Poets Series; Penguin Books, 1957), p. 265.

That Vaughan was borrowing from a complex of ideas fairly common at the time is illustrated by a quotation from Felltham's Resolves (ca. 1623):

> The Conscience, the Caracter of a God Stampt in it, and the apprehension of Eternitie, doe all proue it a shoot of everlastingnesse (1631 edition, p. 197).[47]

In such writings, the neo-Platonic theory of innate ideas is linked with the Christian concept of the divine image, so that the infant is regarded as being born with a natural awareness of truth and goodness, and an experience of unity with a divine order. From such perceptions spring the child's conviction of "immortality", which is part of the sense of being at one with the universe in its eternal reality.[48] The passing of the organic feeling of childhood is thus seen as corresponding to Adam's loss of Paradise, but Christian Platonists believed that the divine image stamped upon the soul at birth, even though buried beneath the ruins of the Fall, could yet be recovered by spiritual discipline and the arousal of the powers of memory.[49]

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[47] Quoted in Seventeenth Century Studies, p. 251.

[48] Jung's interpretation of the archetype of the child found in myth and folktale includes the idea that the child "is born out of the womb of the unconscious, begotten out of the depths of human nature, or rather out of living Nature herself. It is a personification of vital forces quite outside the limited range of our conscious mind; of ways and possibilities of which our one-sided conscious mind knows nothing; a wholeness which embraces the very depths of Nature. It represents the strongest, the most ineluctable urge in every being, namely the urge to realise itself"(The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious, p. 170).

[49] Louis L. Martz has shown that this idea is related to Augustine's view of the interior illumination at the centre of the mind or memory which works toward knowledge through the guidance of the divine Light (op. cit., preface). See St. Augustine, Confessions (Penguin Books, 1961), Book X, 20, 21, pp. 226 - 228.

M.H. Abrams, in tracing the development of Platonist aesthetic theory during and after the Renaissance, points out that the belief in innate Ideas corresponding to the eternal and unchanging Ideas of transcendent Being led to a replacement of the metaphor of art as a mirror held up to nature by a concept of the work of art as a joint product of the perceived object and the projected feeling of the observer. This was expressed in the metaphor of the mind of the artist as a lamp casting its own radiance upon the object of sense. When a particular dogmatic system or cosmology maintains a correspondence between transcendent and innate ideas, as the medieval world view had done, a balance between the inner and outer elements of experience is preserved; but, without this safeguard, the turning of the eye inward to the archetypes present in the mind itself may cause art to become too subjective and too remote from the external world of sense experience.[50] Consequently, such a tendency became apparent when the doctrine of innate ideas was revived during the Romantic period, and is particularly noticeable in the prophetic books of William Blake.[51] The German Romantic philosophers (of whom Jung is the natural heir) placed the innate ideas "in the tumult of human passions or the strange depths of the unconscious",[52] and the poets influenced by

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[50] M.H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp : Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 43.

[51] What appears to be Blake's own account of the innate ideas or primordial images is to be found in "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell" (The Poetical Works of William Blake, ed. John Sampson [London: Oxford University Press, 1934], p. 255), where they take the form of the dragons, vipers, eagles and lions that shape the energies of the Unconscious mind in the "Printing house in Hell". They may well have an affinity with the more static forms of Muir's heraldic emblems.

[52] Abrams, op. cit., p. 44.

them, who include Wordsworth and Shelley, projected subjective life and passion onto natural landscapes.

During the seventeenth century, however, it was still possible to believe in a correspondence between mind and nature that was part of the pre-ordained harmony of God's creation in which man could be regarded as a microcosm and each individual life as an image of the life of mankind. Thomas Traherne (1637 - 1674), whose poems and prose meditations were discovered in 1895 and attributed to him by Bertram Dobell in the early years of the present century, also followed closely in the Christian Platonist tradition. Recalling his own early vision of the world, he could say: "I saw all in the peace of Eden... All Time was Eternitie, and a perpetual Sabbath" or "All things abided eternally as they were in their proper places".[53] Traherne believed that the lost Paradise of infancy can be recovered through spiritual regeneration, so that man may realise his chief end, which is to enjoy God's creation, as it really is, in the mystical unity of "Felicitie". In such visionary states, the God indwelling in the human soul is felt to be merged with the divine power revealed in the universe; to express such double awareness, he sometimes employed the Platonic metaphor of the self as a sphere or hollow orb which is able to contain "infinit space" and to reflect every object in the realm of nature. In the final stanza of "On News", this metaphor combines both the "infant eye" and the "ring" enclosing the natural universe.[54]

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[53] Centuries of Meditations, III, 2. Muir would make use of the same imagery (Eden, Sabbath, proper place) to express his own childhood memories or mystical experiences.

[54] This recalls both Wordsworth's "quiet eye" and Rilke's "double sphere", referred to in Chapter I.

> But little did the Infant dream
> That all the Treasures of the World were by:
> And that himself was so the Cream
> And Crown of all, which round about did lie.
> Yet thus it was. The Gem,
> The Diadem
> The Ring enclosing all
> That stood upon this earthly Ball;
> The Heavenly Eye
> Much wider than the Skie
> Wherein they all included were,
> The Glorious Soul that was the King
> Made to possess them, did appear[55]
> A small and little thing.

Vaughan had also made use of the image of an endless ring, in the traditional allegorical manner, as an emblem of eternity:

> I saw Eternity the other night
> Like a great Ring of pure and endless light[56]
> All calm as it was bright,

but Muir, in his verses in terza rima entitled "The Ring",[57] speaks of a kind of fairy ring that has been broken into and desecrated by Nature, now no longer an embodiment of divine reality but merely physical and animal. This ring represents the old organic cosmos that Traherne believed in; for Muir, characteristically, it is a world of kinship and kingship.

> Long since we were a family, a people,
> The legends say; an old kind-hearted king
> Was our foster father, and our life a fable.

Within its compass lies the treasure of traditional symbols (or innate ideas) that once linked the story of our lives with the universal fable. It is in this breaking of the ring that we find the difference between Muir and the seventeenth century

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[55] The Metaphysical Poets, p. 291.

[56] "The World", ibid., p. 271.

[57] CP., p. 113.

Platonists, for, though it was rapidly coming to an end, they still lived in the organic world of the ancients and of the Middle Ages, filled with the beauty and order of the great chain of Being and echoing to the music of the spheres. For Muir and the moderns, there is no "Ring enclosing all"; each poet is now constrained to construct his own magic circle, counting himself fortunate if memory yields recollections of how it once felt to stand within it.[58] Where Muir is exceptional is in his inspired recall of a traditional childhood that was much closer to the seventeenth century than to the present.

To see Wordsworth in relation to the neo-Platonic doctrine of childhood, one has first to remember that, with the close of the seventeenth century, the remains of the medieval and Renaissance cosmology were swept away and the allegorical and emblematic modes which were its natural expression came to be regarded with contempt. Locke denied the innate ideas, seeing the human mind as a tabula rasa which passively receives impressions of the external world.[59] From this time onwards, the old balance between body and soul, inward and outward reality, was disturbed, so that some thinkers emphasized matter at the expense of mind, and vice versa. The philosophical systems arising from the new ideas tended towards the opposite

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[58]Cf. Coleridge's "Kubla Khan":

"Weave a circle round him thrice
And close your eyes with holy dread
For he on honeydew hath fed
And drunk the milk of Paradise."

[59]Hence Blake's fury at Locke's widespread influence, since it denied the inborn power of the creative imagination:

"I turn my eyes to the Schools and Universities of Europe,
And there behold the Loom of Locke, whose woof rages dire,
Wash'd by the water-wheels of Newton : black the cloth
In heavy wreaths folds over every Nation."
(Jerusalem, 15, ll. 14 - 17).

It attempts to weave a fabric of the woof of outward experience without the warp of inborn ideas.

extremes of Realism and Idealism. Bishop Berkeley, in response to Locke, stated that if we know nothing but our own sensations, then we have no proof that the external world exists at all. Hume went further in saying that we cannot demonstrate the existence of matter or of mind either. We know only that sensations, impressions and thoughts succeed each other; we cannot even prove that the self exists. Kant believed that there is an external world beyond ourselves, but asserted that we can never know what it is really like, since the mind receives impressions and forms patterns according to its own nature, not according to external reality. Even Space and Time are only the forms into which Mind fits sensations; they have no independent existence. This kind of Idealism persisted into the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries in the thought of Bradley although scientific influences had given rise to the positivist philosophies of Comte and Mach. In modern psychology, the divergence between the behaviourist and psychoanalytic traditions has sprung from a similar tendency to emphasize either the outward or inward view of human experience. All such theories have reflected the progressive disintegration of man's traditional idea of himself; in the light of such developments, the almost obsessive dualism that one finds in Muir's poetry can be seen as the determination to affirm and to bring into a true equipoise both mind and matter, internal and external reality, time and eternity, and, in so doing, to realise the true nature of human identity.[60] Indeed, a serviceable balance

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[60] "The Solitary Place" (CP., p. 80) seems to contain a refutation of philosophical idealism, especially in the final paragraph. One also finds traces of the vitalist philosophy of Bergson in such poems as "The Journey Back 2". See Appendix C.

between the inner and outer worlds does seem to involve the necessity of postulating innate mental patterns linked by some kind of correspondence to eternal patterns of reality which are reflected in the natural universe. The medieval doctrine of man as a small scale sign (microcosm) of a large scale order (macrocosm) had once provided a basis for such a theory of correspondences, but, since such doctrines had come to be derided by the new thinkers of the eighteenth century, they were forced underground, to be preserved in the more occult form of the writings of Boehme and Swedenborg, from whence they were re-introduced into English poetry by Blake, who firmly announced a return to double vision.[61]

> Now I a fourfold vision see
> And a fourfold vision is given to me;
> Tis fourfold in my supreme delight
> And threefold in soft Beulah's night
> And twofold Always. May God us keep
> From Single Vision & Newton's sleep.[62]

Wordsworth and Coleridge, inheriting the philosophical and psychological systems that had flourished in the eighteenth century, felt repelled by the new mechanical universe and by the deistic image of God as a glorified "watch maker". They sought some divinity that could be thought of as indwelling in the human mind as well as in the natural creation, and they became familiar with the writings of the Cambridge Platonists in which God, Man and

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[61] See William York Tindall, The Literary Symbol (Indiana University Press, copyright Columbia University Press, 1955), Chapter II.

[62] From a letter to Thomas Butts, 22 November, 1802. In the same poem, he also says:

> "For double the vision my eyes do see
> And a double vision is always with me.
> With my inward eye 'tis an Old Man grey
> With my outward, a Thistle across my way."

Nature were held together in a living relation, and in which childhood was given special significance as a source of genuine spiritual insight. Wordsworth's own early experience made him particularly sympathetic towards such a theory, but, since well over a century of thought and history had intervened, in which the dissolving harmonies of the great Chain of Being had been finally silenced, his interpretation of such traditional ideas would necessarily be more complex. For him, the correspondences between man's faculties and the structure of the universe were no longer the definite ones once celebrated in allegory and metaphor, but vaguer analogies based on personal associations and powerful feelings. He subscribed to the metaphor of mind as a fountain and saw poetry as a "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings", but he anchored his aesthetic theory to the external world by declaring that he had always endeavoured to look steadily at his subject and that the emotion was "recollected in tranquillity", the spontaneity of its overflow being the reward of a prior process of deliberate thought. This thought connected the feeling with matters really important to men and so rendered the poem significant to his audience.[63]

Muir's "devotion for Wordsworth"[64] probably stemmed originally from Holms's influence, but it must undoubtedly have thriven upon a distinct congruence between that great poet's thought and experience and Muir's own. In addition to their common adherence to a double vision that links the

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[63] Abrams, op. cit., p. 47.

[64] An Autobiography, p. 205.

visible world of nature with the invisible world of subjective experience, and their loyalty to it in the face of popular dissent, there are a number of striking parallels in the actual course of their lives. Both, like Vaughan, spent their early childhood amid scenes of natural beauty and in the traditional order of a rural community far removed from the confusion and squalor of industrial cities. Both came to realise that the source of their imaginative life lay in the memory of this early period, its deepest origins concealed in the preconscious state of unity with the mother's mind and person, in which there is no distinguishable boundary between the phenomenal world and the child's inward apprehensions of it. Unlike Vaughan and Traherne, who believed that this early experience is a universal birthright of divine origin, each came to understand that his birthright was mediated to him by love - at first the free gift of the mother alone ("the heart / And hinge of all our learnings and our loves" [The Prelude, V, l. 258]), and later a reciprocal relation with other members of the family as well. For this reason, Wordsworth and Muir were both aware of the sense of unity with nature as a "filial bond", an occasion of "natural piety", which in adult life became more in the nature of an espousal. Wordsworth had much to say on those "firstborn affinities that fit / Our new existence to existing things"[65] and the thought that "Hath no beginning".[66]

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[65] The Prelude (1850), Bk. I, l.555.

[66] Ibid., Bk. II, l.232.

> From early days
> Beginning not long after that first time
> In which, a Babe, by intercourse of touch
> I held mute dialogues with my mother's heart,
> I have endeavoured to display the means
> Whereby this infant sensibility,
> Great birthright of our being, was in me
> Augmented and sustained.[67]

Muir's autobiography contains many passages of similar import,[68] and, indeed, the first edition of it is largely an account of the "growth of a poet's mind". Though he does not usually refer directly in his poetry to his mother's influence, he projects it in symbolic form, especially in what may be referred to as his "anima" poems (to be discussed in Chapter III) or in the description of certain dreams. In Muir's case, the image of the mother was to be transmuted into the image of the wife, though still serving the same function of relating him to the natural world. In "The Confirmation", addressed to his wife, he suggests that she corresponds to an inner image which he had been waiting to match, so that, just by being herself, she recovers for him, in a more mature form, his early apprehensions of the world.

> Your open heart,
> Simple with giving, gives the primal deed,
> The first good world, the blossom, the blowing seed,
> The hearth, the steadfast land, the wandering sea,
> Not beautiful or rare in every part,
> But like yourself, as they were meant to be.[69]

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[67] Ibid., Bk. II, ll. 266 - 272.

[68] See the memory of the motes dancing in the beam of sunlight and his mother's presence (An Autobiography, p. 18). Also: "Where all was stationary my mother came first; she certainly had always been with me in a region which could never be known again....Our first childhood is the only time in our lives when we exist within immortality" (ibid., p. 25).

[69] CP., p. 118.

Wordsworth's change from filial to conjugal metaphor is more deliberately employed in the service of a theory of the poetic imagination. Abrams refers to the remarkable passage from the conclusion to the first book of "The Recluse" in which Wordsworth announces this great undertaking as a "spousal verse", in other words, as Abrams says, "a celebration of the marriage of mind and nature, and the consequent creation (or procreation?) of a living perceptual world".[70] He proclaims:

> How exquisitely the individual Mind
> (And the progressive powers no less
> of the whole species) to the external World
> Is fitted : - and how exquisitely too -
> Theme this but little heard of among men -
> The External World is fitted to the Mind:
> And the creation (by no lower name
> Can it be called) which they with blended might
> Accomplish.[71]

Immediately, one is made aware of the great difference between these two poets. Wordsworth speaks as a "dedicated spirit", one who has felt the power of poetic genius stir within him, and who is ready to probe

> The incumbent mystery of sense and soul,
> Of life and death, time and eternity,[71a]

or to tell of artistic creation in swelling tones, whereas Muir's voice is quiet and modest, tentatively exploring his experience as it arises from circumstance, dream, or memory, and constantly falling back into an anxious sense of the opposition between imagination and ordinary awareness. He is a man learning to live and turning his lessons over and

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[70] Abrams, op cit., p. 66.

[71] Preface to The Excursion (1814), ll. 63 - 71.

[71a] The Prelude (1850), Bk. XIV, ll. 286 - 287.

over in the meditations that make up so much of his verse. On the relation of the mind to the external world, he, too, has faith in their affinity, but none of the oracular confidence of the great Romantic poet. He relates the child's mind to the inherited wisdom of the racial unconscious, with its mythic images and "archaic dialogue", and attempts to recover this natural wisdom in middle age.

> A man now, gone with time so long -
> My youth to myself grown fabulous
> As an old land's memories, a song
> To trouble or to pleasure us -
> I try to fit that world to this,
> The hidden to the visible play,
> Would have them both, would nothing miss,
> Learn from the shepherd of the dark,
> Here in the light, the paths to know
> That thread the labyrinthine park,
> And the great Roman roads that go
> Striding across the untrodden day.[72]

For him, the correspondence between mental forms and the shapes of the phenomenal world is often obscure and mysterious, only to be understood through myth or symbol and expressed in the form of parable. The "shepherd of the dark" is presumably Hermes, guide of dreams, who had power to lead souls through the gloom of the underworld and back to the light. (If so, the association with the doctrines of the Hermetic tradition might well be intentional.) In the case of Wordsworth, the mental forms that are so "exquisitely" fitted to the universe are usually deeply felt emotions, often associated with moral promptings and sometimes with a feeling of "holy calm". So sublime are these feelings and of such profound import that only the most beautiful or awesome natural scenery can match

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[72] "Day and Night", CP., p. 240.

them. The quaintly fashioned medieval chart of the traditional country of the soul, with its Heaven and Hell and its Earthly Paradise, no longer serves to guide him through a visionary landscape that has become the vast and cloudy image of a night scene from the top of Snowdon, when the naked moon shines out upon the vapours of the dark abyss and all the waters roar with "one voice".[73] Although Muir's antiquarian instinct responds naturally to the fabulous ciphers of the traditional maps, the old landmarks are often too deeply eroded to guide the traveller. Consequently, in both poets, the fitting of the unseen to the visible forms of experience seems to lack the joyful and trusting, truly childlike recognition of a Vaughan or Traherne, to whom such congruence is a sign and guarantee of God's loving providence as well as of the enduring harmony at the heart of His creation. Yet it was just such an insight into the relations between God, Man and Nature that both Wordsworth and Muir longed to recapture.[74]

Another link between these two poets is that both of them recall the experience of fear in childhood and its relation to a sense of guilt. For Wordsworth, these emotions were not too painful at the time to prevent a shudder of delight, not unlike the thrill of fear aroused in Muir by his father's horses. Indeed, the occasion of the stealing of the boat on the lake of Esthwaite, when the "huge peak, black and huge", like a living thing strode after him, and the time when, having rifled another boy's snare, he heard low

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[73] The Prelude (1850), Bk. XIV, ll. 40 - 60.

[74] Cf. "I think of Giotto the Tuscan shepherd's dream,
Christ, man and creature in their inner day."
("The Incarnate One", CP., p. 228).

breathings coming after him, were actually nourishers of the imagination, feeding his anthropomorphic sense of the living and voluntary power of nature. Muir, in an essay entitled "The Poetic Imagination", refers to these very instances as an illustration of how Wordsworth's imagination was involved with things recollected, so that, in the instance of the huge peak, it was wakened by a terrifying experience and reawakened when he recalled it in writing The Prelude.

> Practical intelligence could have told him by then that the huge cliff that pursued him was a childish delusion, but he was not content with that. The experience was real, and he gave it that uncommon attention which is due to real and inexplicable things... In The Prelude we see the imagination working at two stages, first on the incident itself, and then on recollection, where it takes on a universal significance.[75]

What Muir refers to here as the awakening and re-awakening of the imagination is the operation of two phases of imaginative projection : in the first stage, the child's self-condemnation was projected outwards upon the peak or upon the ambient air stirring behind him; then, upon recollection, the entire reciprocal experience of a feeling being reflected in the world around him was accepted and projected upon the structure of the universe itself, giving rise to the conviction that the mind is fundamentally "fitted" to Nature, a metaphysical concept that may well be a true insight, despite the delusory aspects of the original experience.

Although Muir's own early experience of fear and guilt was so prolonged and intense that it was actually injurious to his imagination and feelings, producing the numbing effect of

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[75]Edwin Muir, Essays on Literature and Society (rev. and enlarged ed.; London: Hogarth Press, 1965), p. 222.

the glassy barrier, it, too, was involved with projection. Awareness of transgression had taken shape in the fantasy of the poisoned hands and this, in turn, had aroused an urgent fear of approaching death, bitter indeed to one who had so lately enjoyed the infant's sense of immortality. When recollected in maturity, these experiences, worked upon and projected by the imagination, yielded a universal significance central to Muir's poetic view. For him, this significance was not so much a theory of poetic genius as part of the spiritual drama of the whole of mankind. His imagination, like that of the seventeenth century Platonists, was focused upon the figural correspondence between individual experience and the Hebrew myth of Genesis. Adam, once innocent and immortal, had eaten of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and was cast out from the peace and unity of Eden to become a wanderer in the earth and to taste the pains of mortality. The "fable" is, in one sense, a great traditional projection of the development of human consciousness, and the Fall is part of it: an ancient mythic symbol expressing an early crisis in the lives of all men worthy of the name, that is, created in the divine image.[76] Where Vaughan longed to "travell back" to that state in which he originally came,[77] and where Traherne, having passed through his crisis of "want and horror"[78] and having learned to live by a saintly

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[76]In both Wordsworth and Muir, then, the imagination works by projection, conforming to the neo-Platonist aesthetic theory that the object perceived is illumined by the mind, which casts its own radiance upon it. In Wordsworth, the projected ray is cast full upon natural objects; in Muir, it is frequently cast upon a backcloth of myth.

[77]"The Retreate," The Metaphysical Poets, pp. 265, 266.

[78]Traherne, Centuries of Meditations, III, 23.

rule of spiritual discipline, seemed to have become able freely to enjoy a sense of unity with the universe in the mystical experience of Felicitie, Muir accepted exile as a necessary part of the pilgrimage toward the land of the Promise, though not without many a longing backward look. Wordsworth finally accepted exile, too.

Lionel Trilling, in an essay on "The Immortality Ode", argues that the entire loss of the "visionary gleam" of childhood was not regarded by Wordsworth as the loss of poetic power; though he no longer saw in this way, he had submitted to a new control, which was a moral and a humanizing one. A deep distress had humanized his soul, saving him from being "housed in a dream", and relating him more closely to the sorrows and struggles of mankind.[79] Trilling identifies the "visionary gleam" as the perfect union of the self with the universe, relating it to Ferenczi's account of the infant's inability to distinguish between self and external things.[80] He points out the ambivalence in Wordsworth's response to the diminution of this power, both resisting and accepting it as a condition of growth. "He is not saying farewell to poetry; he is saying farewell to Eden, and his ambivalence is much what Adam's was, and Milton's, and for the same reasons".[81] Though the original power has fled, the child hands on the "primal sympathy" to the

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[79]Lionel Trilling, The Liberal Imagination (London: Mercury Books, 1961), p. 137.

[80]Cf. Rousseau's concept of the "state of nature" in children and primitives, and Nietzsche's account of the Dionysian experience in The Birth of Tragedy.

[81]Ibid., p. 148.

hampered adult through the power of memory. "The sympathy is not so pure and intense in maturity as in childhood, but only because another relationship grows up beside the relation of Man to Nature - the relation of man to his fellows in the moral world of difficulty and pain".[82] This is the theme of Muir's poem in blank verse, "Adam's Dream", in which alienation from humanity is gradually overcome until Adam dreams that he is amongst them,

> and saw each face
> Was like his face, so that he would have hailed them
> As sons of God but that something restrained him.
> And he remembered all, Eden, the Fall,
> The Promise, and his place, and took their hands
> That were his hands, his and his children's hands,
> Cried out and was at peace, and turned again
> In love and grief in Eve's encircling arms.[83]

Muir's own ambivalence towards the loss of Eden will be considered in Chapter IV.

There is also a distinct similarity between Wordsworth and Muir in their immediate response to exile: the period of loss and despair, "change and subversion", that each had undergone. Both had been forced to assimilate a sensation of terror and dismay at the "deformities of crowded life" in a great city, where even neighbours were strangers, and the streets were filled with "mean shapes" and "trivial forms". For Wordsworth, the French Revolution, in its

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[82] Ibid., p. 151.

[83] CP., p. 212. In this poem, the recovery of relationship to mankind is related to the acceptance of the hands that, when contaminated with guilt, had been an instrument and symbol of isolation. Muir often employs hand imagery to express alienation or reconciliation. See: "The Child Dying", "The Private Place", "The Unattained Place", etc.

subsequent course, combined with the conflict involved in Britain's declaration of war upon France (which must have exacerbated his feelings of guilt and remorse towards Annette Vallon and her child) brought agonising disillusionment both with himself and with his hopes for the future of mankind. He suffered

> a sense,
> Deathlike, of treacherous desertion, felt
> In the last place of refuge, my own soul.[84]

For Muir, the destruction wrought upon his family by the contagions of Glasgow re-activated his early fears of separation and death together with the associated feelings of guilt and contamination. The repression of emotions too painful to be borne was later to seem an act of treachery and betrayal against all that was most truly his own.[85] Just as Wordsworth turned in his distress to intellectual speculations, political theory, and the views of Godwin, losing all confidence in the truth of the imagination, so Muir turned to Socialist doctrine and the writings of Nietzsche.[86] Each later recovered the sense of his true direction through the faith and encouragement of a "beloved woman", namely Dorothy Wordsworth and Willa Muir, and, much as friendship with Coleridge stimulated and guided Wordsworth at this period

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[84] The Prelude (1850), Bk. X, ll. 413 - 415.

[85] Cf. "Pity the poor betrayer in the maze" ("Effigies 2", CP., p. 234).

[86] This is not to suggest that Nietzsche's writings are purely intellectual, but his speculations did arrive at a point of total scepticism concerning any fundamental relation between mental events and physical phenomena, and this was, perhaps, a terrible projection of the disintegration that finally overtook him. This scepticism Muir was later to reject with all his strength.

of his development, so the fertilising influence of Holms helped to direct Muir away from his former "denial of poetry and the past". Wordsworth had felt the same revulsion:

> an emptiness
> Fell on the Historian's page, and even on that
> Of Poets, pregnant with more absolute truth.
> The works of both withered in my esteem.[87]

Even Nature was subject to the "microscopic view", his only delights being those of "outward sense", until recovery brought a renewed awareness of his own imaginative powers and of their source in the remembered experience of childhood.

> I had felt
> Too forcibly, too early in my life,
> Visitings of imaginative power
> For this to last.[88]

Recalling those strangely significant "spots of time" in which he had felt most deeply that the mind was "lord and master", he recognised that the inward powers take precedence over the perceptions of outward sense in establishing a true vision of eternal reality, enabling one to seek

> the gifts divine
> And universal, the pervading grace
> That hath been, is, and shall be.[89]

Muir's recovery was linked with the memory of the "child's original vision of the world" restored to him through the transcendental dreams and visions that accompanied his treatment by analysis.

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[87] The Prelude (1850), Bk. XI, ll. 90 - 93.

[88] Ibid., Bk. XI, ll. 251 - 254.

[89] Ibid., Bk. XII, ll. 42 - 44.

> I think of this picture or vision as that of a state in which the earth, the houses on the earth, and the life of every human being are related to the sky overarching them; as if the sky fitted the earth and the earth the sky. Certain dreams convince me that a child has this vision, in which there is a completer harmony of all things with each other than he will ever know again.[90]

This image of harmony (which again suggests the perfect sphere or circle of the Platonists) was broken for Muir far sooner than for Wordsworth, and the long struggle with "contradiction" was entered upon early in life, never to be finally resolved except in rare moments of visionary contemplation. Yet the "original vision" had been a deeply human one, more so than Wordsworth's "mighty forms" and "noise of waters". Instead of roaming half the night on the mountainside or hanging over crags in a strong wind, while no-one appeared to suffer any anxiety on his account (and Wordsworth was grateful for such freedom), Muir awoke to consciousness in a simple pastoral scene peopled with the beloved figures of kinsfolk and filled with an underlying sense of the raw, vivid existence of animals. His landscape of memory was composed of an island, a farmhouse, a green mound, the wide sea scattered with neighbouring islands, a distant tower, and the over-arching sky. The long northern winters helped to tighten the close family circle and, although secular literature was frowned upon (so that Muir lacked the books Wordsworth enjoyed), old songs and ballads, tales of the supernatural, and the playing of the fiddle supplemented the regular readings from scripture, giving him his undying reverence for the ancient tradition of

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[90] An Autobiography, p. 33.

oral poetry that he was to see disappearing everywhere in the world. In place of Wordsworth's splendid freedom, Muir early learnt the formal beauty of traditional patterns that shape communal life : the spring sowing, harvest, a country wedding, the young man who "came home to die", and the funeral procession passing on foot through fields that were deserted out of respect for the dead. Though this last scene was a melancholy one, it nevertheless granted him a deep sense of "wonder and acceptance", just as the rituals connected with animal life - the serving of the cow, the ringing of the bull or the killing of the pig - imbued him with a strange feeling of the mixture of guilt and necessity in man's relation with the animals and of the way in which ritual actions resolve such conflicts. The memory of such traditional rites, restored to him in maturity, was to yield intimations of the way in which ambivalence and contradiction may themselves become woven into a harmonious pattern of mortal existence.

Both Vaughan and Wordsworth, after their experiences of loss and moral crisis, returned to spend the remainder of their lives amongst the hallowed scenes and sheltering mountains of childhood. Traherne tended his parish and farmed the glebe-lands of his rectory in the fair countryside of Herefordshire. But Muir, whose recovery was longer deferred than theirs, was to spend the larger part of his life in the towns and cities of Britain and Europe, earning his living by translating and reviewing literature, and later by teaching. He was seldom wholly free from anxiety, either financial or related to concern for his wife's health. The long road of this world was often a toilsome one for him, though he

never entirely lost sight of the "winding roads" of the gods, walking "high in their mountain land".[91] His poetry was composed in the little time left over from routine commitments, and the best of it was written in his late fifties and sixties - the fruit of the constant extending and refining of his insights, from which was distilled a deeply pondered wisdom, serene and radiant, that seemed the mature counterpart of the clear vision of childhood. It is tempting to suggest that his development continued throughout his life because he never ceased to pursue the distant and longed-for goal of that perfect unity that he had known once and believed to exist eternally in the divine order of things. We do not know why Wordsworth's poetry seemed to lose power after the glorious achievement of his great period. Perhaps he had said it all; but, it is possible, as Charles Williams contended, that the deterioration was bound up with his conviction that he had acquired the "philosophic mind", and therefore ceased to work out in the poetry itself the reconciliation of life's "discordant elements".[92] Be that as it may, it is certain that Muir's poetic gift, though late in developing and limited in range, remained stubbornly faithful to its own authority, slowly assimilating the divided elements of his experience into the synthesis of its own myth.

His familiarity with, and personal knowledge of, modern conceptions of the unconscious mind allowed him to

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[91] "The Journey Back 6", CP., p. 174. See Appendix D.

[92] Charles Williams, The English Poetic Mind (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932), pp. 166 - 167.

understanding:

> The days gone by
> Return upon me almost from the dawn
> Of life: the hiding places of man's power
> Open. I would approach them, but they close.[96]

Yet he affirms what Coleridge regarded as the distinctive power of the creative imagination:

> there is a dark
> Inscrutable workmanship that reconciles
> Discordant elements, makes them cling together
> In one society.[97]

He sees it here as the producer of harmony within the mind itself, and one recalls Muir's more tentative account of a power that seeks to restore psychic equilibrium:

> I think there must be a mind within our minds which cannot rest until it has worked out, even against our conscious will, the unresolved questions of our past; it brings up these questions when our will is least watchful, in sleep or in moments of intense contemplation.[98]

This reconciling power is at its most dynamic in both poets when it achieves the mystical union of the self with the surrounding universe, bringing all things within the scope of a single act of the imagination. Wordsworth, in his moment of apocalyptic awareness, saw the eternal, unchangeable and infinite reality underlying the changing face of the world, and saw it in terms of the "mighty forms" and "noise of waters" of his childhood. On the Simplon Pass, such awesome images, appearing again before his bodily eye, became the "types and symbols of Eternity", welding together movement

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[96] The Prelude (1850), Bk. XII, ll. 277 - 280.

[97] Ibid., Bk. I, ll. 341 - 344.

[98] An Autobiography, p. 44.

and stasis, mutability and changelessness.

> The immeasurable height,
> Of woods decaying, never to be decayed,
> The stationary blasts of waterfalls
> . . . . . .
> The unfettered clouds and region of the heavens,
> Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light -
> Were all like workings of one mind, the features
> Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree,
> Characters of the great Apocalypse,
> The types and symbols of Eternity,
> Of first, and last, and midst, and without end.[99]

In this glimpse of the eternal and infinite, the demonic forces of nature and of the human mind, forever at strife, are merged and blended in the harmony of the divine order. With Muir, such harmony is usually expressed in the scriptural symbols of apocalypse that came so naturally to the seventeenth century Platonists; it is the "harvest", or "the day", or a millenial dream of Canaan, a "radiant kingdom" that "flowers and shines".[100] Though his world is rent from top to bottom by contradiction, torn between light and darkness,[101] there is an "eternal dialogue" of peace that is symbolised by the "Sabbath of Sabbaths",

> the day where all are gathered together,
> Things and their names, in the storm's and the lightning's nest,
> The seventh great day and the clear eternal weather.[102]

There are always people and animals in Muir's radiant kingdom, just as we find them, redeemed and reconciled, in the visions of Isaiah. We see them at a distance in his dream of

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[99] The Prelude (1850), Bk. VI, ll. 624 - 640.

[100] "The Transfiguration", CP., p. 199.

[101] Cf. "Oedipus", CP., p. 189.

[102] "The Days", CP., p. 210.

"the gods" in "The Labyrinth"; they are closer in "Moses", with "byre, barn and stall, sweat-sanctified smell of peace"; in "The Transfiguration", they seem more like the allegorical creatures in a medieval painting, and, finally, in "The Horses", these animals are once more reconciled with man after a cataclysmic war. There is nothing here of the lofty isolation characteristic of the great Romantics, or of that inner citadel of solitude in Wordsworth's soul where the aged Michael was to stand forever alone beside his unfinished sheepfold. Was it that the "humanization" had been incomplete after all, that those enigmatic, solitary figures who appear in Wordsworth's poetry are emblems of some unassimilated part of his experience, some guilt left unpurged? Despite the marriage of minds with Dorothy, despite domestic bliss at Grasmere, Lucy was in her grave, just as Coleridge's damsel with a dulcimer would appear in dreams no more. Muir had not been humanized by his deep distress; his imagination had been humanized once for all, in the beginning, in Eden. It was exile that had frozen his gentle heart, and healing tears of pity that finally washed away its brittle protective covering, so that, in his own inward landscape of sea and islands, Orpheus was forever re-united with his lost bride, and the wanderer, Odysseus, was turning homeward to Ithaca and the faithful Penelope.[103]

With this reflection, one turns to the role played by the image of woman in Muir's search for unity, a topic that will be considered in the following chapter.

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[103] See "Orpheus' Dream" (CP., p. 216) and "The Return of Odysseus" (CP., p. 114).

CHAPTER III

THE IMAGE OF WOMAN

Siehe, innerer Mann, dein inneres Mädchen.

Rainer Maria Rilke.

During Muir's period of psycho-analysis in London in 1920, he dreamed, for the first time in many years, of his birth place - the island of Wyre. Part of this strange and wonderful dream unfolded as follows:

> I was walking along a brown path level with the sea, picking great light violet-hued, crown-shaped flowers, which withered at once in my hands.[1] I came to a little chapel or shrine on the shore. On one wall a brown clay image was hanging: a weather beaten image of an old woman naked to the waist, with sun-burned wrinkled dugs. I went up to the image, and as if I were fulfilling some ritual pressed one of the nipples with my finger. A trembling flowed over the figure and, like a wave running across another in counter-motion, the texture changed; the clay quivered and rippled with life, all the marks of age vanishing in that transparent flood; the breasts shone smooth and round, and rose and fell with living breath. At the same time at the centre of my breast I felt a hot tingling fire, and I knew that a yellow sun was blazing there, and with its beams which filled my body with light and soft power, was raising the image from the dead. The figure came down from the wall, a dark brown girl, and stood beside me.[2]

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[1] These flowers apparently represent the nostalgic longing for the past which pervaded some of Muir's rejected early poems. In this dream, it is recognised as fruitless.

[2] An Autobiography, p. 64. Muir comments that this dream, which opened with a sea voyage to his old home but which never reached there, was "offering me something else instead, re-animating another image of whose existence I did not know."

Not long afterwards, while accustoming himself to a new life in Germany, he had another dream which referred directly to his mother's death and released the pent-up grief he had been unable to express before. In this dream, he is called to the bedside of his dead sister (whom he understands to be a dream-substitution for his mother), but instead of joining the mourners, he leans on the mantelpiece and weeps freely for a long time until his tears cease of themselves. Approaching the bed at last, he gazes at the pale face and closed eyes.

> As I looked I thought I saw a faint glow tinging her cheeks, it deepened, and in a moment she was burning in a fire. The glow appeared to come from within her: but I knew that it flowed from a warm, limpid and healing point in my own breast. Her eyes fluttered and opened, she held out her hand, and I turned to the others, crying, 'Look, I have brought her to life'. But at these words, a terrible fear came over me, and I hastily added, as if to blot them out and destroy them, 'Look! God has brought her to life!'[3]

Muir interpreted this second dream as confirming that his mother had come to life again in his own mind, together with his past, his love of poetry, and his belief in immortality. The experience of the warm, life-giving power in his own breast, common to both dreams, seems to point to a powerfully creative interaction between the dreamer and the revived image, which is associated with the recovery of love and intimate human relationship. Professor Peter Butter has

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[3] An Autobiography, pp. 108 - 109. In the light of the previous chapter, it would seem that the image is re-animated by the projected life from the glowing point within the dreamer's breast, so that the dream presents a paradigm of the neo-Platonist metaphor of the mind as a lamp. That God is hastily brought into this scheme suggests a belated acknowledgment of the creative role of the divine Mind, which is reflected in the mind of the poet.

rightly remarked that this image of resurrection refers also to the buried part of Muir's own nature. "The intuitive feminine part of himself, in Jungian terms his anima, was coming to life".[4]

These dream images were not employed anywhere in Muir's poetry in their original form, although the second dream was described in The Marionette, where it marks a healing crisis in the development of the relationship between the idiot-boy, Hans, and his father, Martin, both of whom, as indicated in the previous chapter, seem to represent alienated aspects of one subjective personality. Hans's dream concerns Gretchen, a marionette from the puppet theatre, who dies and is resurrected as a real girl in exactly the same way as the girl in Muir's dream.[5] The image of the sun glowing within the breast appears in a slightly altered form at the end of "The Place of Light and Darkness", where it refers to the reconciliation of the visions of time and eternity.

> He goes on
> Bearing within his ocean-heart the jewel,
> The day all yellow and red wherein a sun
> Shines on the endless harvest lands of time.[6]

It is interesting to note that in the original published version of this poem,[7] the last two lines read as follows:

> The day all yellow and red where Christ the Sun
> Shines on the endless harvest lands of time.

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[4] Edwin Muir : Man and Poet, p. 80. It will be suggested in Appendix A that "Autumn in Prague" is, in one sense, an early anima poem.

[5] The Marionette, pp. 150 - 151. [6] CP., p. 80.

[7] Published under the title of "The Harvest" in Modern Scot, V, Jan., 1935. One notes that the colours, yellow and red, are the same as those of the serpents in Muir's vision (referred to in Chapter I). They also recall the scarlet and gold of his baptismal suit (An Autobiography, p. 18).

As in the second dream quoted above, there appears to have been some conflict between attributing the creative and visionary power to a divine source and claiming it as the fruit of inner psychic forces.[8] If, however, divinity is regarded as immanent as well as transcendent, and Christ is understood as a traditional symbol of the reborn and re-integrated self, in whom temporal and eternal existence is reconciled, then the original version becomes entirely appropriate to the whole conception of the poem.

As has already been touched upon in Chapter I in connection with "The Enchanted Knight", while the image of the woman lay unacknowledged in the buried part of the poet's mind, it became the agent of emotional paralysis, an evil genius of alienation. But when the acceptance of guilt and the full experience of grief released the imprisoned and imprisoning image, then love, creative imagination, and a recovered sense of wholeness and identity were revived with it. It is this feeling of joyful liberation that lies at the core of "Orpheus' Dream",[9] in which the elements of classical myth are transposed into Muir's subjective landscape, recreating an experience that is both personal and universal. Unlike Rilke, to whom the irrevocable loss of Eurydice is the essential condition of artistic creation,[10] Muir's Orpheus, recovering his lost bride in the underworld

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[8]It is possible that the conflict produced in the young Muir by his parents' religious objections to secular literature lies at the root of this difficulty. See An Autobiography, p. 76.

[9]CP., p. 216. This poem was first published in 1951 under the title "Eurydice."

[10]See "Orpheus, Eurydice, Hermes." This is in keeping with Rilke's insistence on the need to allow the objects of perception to become images steeped in the rich darkness of the Unconscious.

of dream-images, emerges to find her incarnated in the world of physical reality. Only in a living relationship of love and forgiveness can they discover their identity and follow the natural movement of their lives.

The abruptness of the opening statement: "And she was there", suggests a sudden revelation after long expectation and conveys the "given" quality of her presence. This underworld is not the classical halls of Hades, but Muir's childhood landscape lost in an ominous region of nightmare. The dreaming mind is a frail boat drifting in despair amongst "perilous isles" far from the borders of waking experience, when suddenly it stops because of "her" presence, and is almost overwhelmed with a joy (he uses Traherne's word, "felicity") that seems to transcend conscious existence.

> As if we had left earth's frontier wood
> Long since and from this sea had won
> The lost original of the soul,
> The moment gave us pure and whole
> Each back to each, and swept us on
> Past every choice to boundless good.

Had the lost bride of the divine singer been submerged until this moment beneath the waters of dream? And does their reunion mean that the "lost original of the soul" is a conjunction of masculine and feminine elements - an ancient symbol of psychic and spiritual wholeness? Is "the moment" an instant of time linked with a timeless experience of innocence and unity, transcending all moral conflict ("past every choice"), re-integrating the will ("swept us on") and restoring a spontaneous response to the "good", understood in Plato's sense? The final stanza opens with a triumphant statement of release from guilt and separation and of the actualisation of love in all

its reconciling aspects. This experience grants them courage to look back compassionately upon the symbolic image of Eurydice, which appears as an insubstantial shadow ("poor ghost") of the living reality. Yet the unchanging mythic image still remains "in her silver chair", fixed in the underworld of the poetic imagination, so that, although she is merely a poor ghost to the poet and his beloved, the poem itself balances image and reality, leaving both imprinted equally upon the reader's mind.

Two earlier poems had been concerned with a connection between the loss of the image of the beloved woman and a condition of disordered vision. Both of these appeared in the volume, Journeys and Places, published in 1937. Entitled "Tristram's Journey" and "Holderlin's Journey",[11] both are in the ballad form that came naturally to a poet nurtured on the Scottish ballads. Professor Butter comments on the first of these that the story is taken from Chapters 17 - 21 of Book IX of Malory's Morte d'Arthur and that Muir's intention is made clear by the way he modifies the original tale. Tristram, believing Iseult to be false, rides away from Tintagel and becomes deranged, living as a wild man amongst shepherds. He is captured and brought unrecognized to the castle, where, one day, he is made known to Iseult through being recognized by her brachet. Professor Butter adds: "In the poem the brachet is the means not just of making him known to Iseult, but of restoring him to a knowledge of himself and to contact with the outside world".[12]

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[11] CP., pp. 64, 66.

[12] Butter, Edwin Muir : Man and Poet, p. 121.

While Muir did attribute a special significance to the life of the animals and often regarded them as symbolizing the natural feelings, one should not allow this to obscure the possibly greater significance in the poem of Iseult's recognition of Tristram. It is surely this moment of mutual recognition that finally restores him to himself and to contact with waking reality, and such an interpretation would be in keeping with Muir's usual treatment of the feminine role as it is defined in this chapter.

The poem is of particular interest for the way in which the economy of language, the conventional imagery and the emphasis upon action natural to the ballad form are used to dramatize a subjective experience. Upon leaving the castle, Tristram rides first into the forest, where he begins to lose the sense of time and the normal apprehension of the outside world.[13] From the second to the seventh stanza there is a progressive blurring of images and a distortion of perspective, together with an increased disturbance of time relations. Soon the inability to distinguish between object and image gives place to the loss of all images, including the memory of Iseult herself.[14] In rage and bitterness, he tears branches from the "clashing trees" until

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13 "And hill and plain and wood and tower
Passed on and on and turning came
Back to him, tower and wood and hill,
Now different, now the same.

There was a castle on a lake,
The castle doubled in the mere
Confused him, his uncertain eye
Wavered from there to here."

14 "But now he searched the towers, the sward,
And struggled something to recall,
A stone, a shadow. Blank the lake,
And empty every wall."

calm returns to him and he finds refuge with shepherds, rounding up their flocks and sleeping with their dogs at night. When he attacks and overcomes three of Mark's knights, the king has him brought to Tintagel as a captive, but again he is unable to distinguish between real persons and their pictured forms upon the tapestry.[15] Just as in "The Enchanted Knight" and "The Charm", the shapes of life seem to him no more than moving figures in a dream in which he himself remains paralysed; but, once again, as in "The Enchanted Knight", it is a touch upon the face that arouses the will to respond.[16] It is as Tristram leans (and surely he must be leaning over Iseult, who lies in a swoon) that he comes to himself and recovers the clear vision of reality. Focus and perspective return; the "misted grass" clears "blade by blade"; the round walls harden, and he is in his "place" (which again recalls Traherne's image of things in their "proper places"). It is interesting to notice that grass, as in the early poem "Childhood",[17] is once more associated with an experience of unity and identity, and that the remembered elements of ~~his~~ the poet's own life are linked with a traditional story to create a dream-like narrative of mysterious significance.

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15 "He woke and saw King Mark at chess
And Iseult with her maids at play,
The arras where the scarlet knights
And ladies stood all day."

16 "None knew him. In the garden once
Iseult walked in the afternoon.
Her hound leapt up and licked his face,
Iseult fell in a swoon.

There as he leaned the misted grass
Cleared blade by blade below his face,
The round walls hardened as he looked
And he was in his place."

17 "The grasses threw straight shadows far away
And from the house his mother called his name."

"Hölderlin's Journey", in the same ballad measure, deals with a similar theme of madness associated with the loss of the beloved, but in this case the story is based on an actual episode in the life of the German poet, whose work Muir greatly admired. In 1802, Hölderlin was working as a tutor in Bordeaux when he suddenly left without any explanation and walked all the way back to his mother's house in Nürtigen, where he appeared, some two months later, in a state of severe mental disturbance - the prelude to the onset of permanent insanity in 1807. Little is known of this strange journey, but it is linked with the fact that Susette Gontard, his beloved "Diotima", was dying in Frankfurt during the same period. Muir makes his own use of the story, suggesting that loss of the real woman led to the ascendancy of dream images in Hölderlin's mind.[18] The first and last stanzas of the poem serve as introduction and conclusion to the tale, which is told by Hölderlin himself in the remaining thirteen stanzas. He describes the journey as taking him first through a landscape of deceptive appearances, a "maze of little hills" (an image derived from one of Muir's own dreams) where he and Diotima seek each other in vain; from there he enters a wood, where a mouldering gate is flanked by pillars topped with deer's heads. Here he sees a living deer gazing upon

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[18]Daniel Hoffman, commenting on this poem, says that Platonism and Jungian archetype pass dramatically into one another in "Hölderlin's Journey": "Like Socrates, like Hölderlin, Muir has learned from Diotima that we attain to knowledge of the Forms by passing from love of the beautiful to love of the idea of beauty. Her death then means the extinction of the Platonic possibility, a 'broken mind', the end of the imagination's power to unite created things with uncreated perfection" (Hoffman, Barbarous Knowledge, p. 228). One feels, however, that Muir is more concerned with the incarnation of the inborn images than with the ascent from the concrete to the abstract.

its stone replica as though upon its own death, and suddenly he knows that Diotima is dead.[18a] When he reaches the mountains, he sees everything displaced or distorted in one of Muir's characteristic descriptions of disordered vision mirrored in a cracked and flawed landscape.[19] A relentless, mechanical determinism is suggested by this kind of seeing in a stanza that employs the word "iron" in every line and evokes an insane world with the sinister image of swallows gliding on iron wheels.[20] The bells that might once have rung for weddings, and had been heard faintly ringing in the maze of hills, are tolling now for a burial; but by this death the living reality and the pictured image have become "confounded" in one, translated into a stationary and timeless world of symbol. In an essay on Hölderlin, Muir has remarked that after his mental breakdown his "symbolism became more significant, for it expressed his immediate experience",[21] and C.M. Bowra considers that Hölderlin's great hymns, composed between 1802 and his final collapse in 1807, are not the product of mental disorder but "rather the products of an iron control of threatening chaos".[22] Muir conveys precisely the sense of an iron

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[18a] These images are possibly related to Hölderlin's own simile ~~between~~ connecting the grieving poet and a stricken deer or stag ("getroffene Wild") in "Menon's Klagen Um Diotima."

[19] " 'What made the change? The hills and towers
Stood otherwise than they should stand,
And without fear the lawless roads
Ran wrong through all the land."

[20] " 'Upon the swarming towns of iron
The bells hailed down their iron peals,
Above the iron bells the swallows
Glided on iron wheels."

[21] Muir, Essays on Literature and Society, p. 87.

[22] C.M. Bowra, Inspiration and Poetry (London: Macmillan, 1955), p. 132.

control of threatening chaos in the latter part of his poem, except for the concluding stanza, which is a moving reminder that acceptance and gratitude became Muir's own chosen way of affirmation, even in the midst of suffering.

> So Hölderlin mused for thirty years
> On a green hill by Tübingen,
> Dragging in pain a broken mind
> And giving thanks to God and men.

That Muir's concern with the idea of madness arising from loss of the beloved woman sprang from something in his own experience is confirmed by Mrs. Willa Muir, who, in a letter to the present writer, says that before their marriage Muir was himself in danger of a schizoid breakdown.[23] Yet this motif in his poetry is far from being merely the projection of a personal crisis. The profound transformation of his own life, seen in relation to what he divined of Hölderlin's agony as being that of a mind broken upon the cross of contradiction ("on a green hill by Tübingen"), seemed to reflect the human truth that the great healing images which constitute the fundamental matter of myth and poetry must be incarnated in the lives of those who would become whole. If this entails setting life before art, Muir accepts the necessity. For him, relationship with the beloved, as one saw in "The Confirmation", restores those "firstborn affinities", learned through the infant's communion with the mother, that link the natural world with the inward world of dreams and give us true perceptions of reality.

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[23] "When I first met him he was in great danger of being a split personality, indeed, he was already partly split, and would have become a schizophrenic, instead of a whole man, as he finally did" (Willa Muir, in a letter dated 3/2/67).

A rather baffling poem which may be illuminated by considering the significance Muir attributes to the feminine image as creative symbol and psychic reconciler, is "Then".[24]

Two commentators have suggested different interpretations. Raymond Tschumi sees it as an evocation of the past of Scottish history built on "the antithesis of cold cruelty and wounded sensibility revolting against blood and shaking the wall of enmity and struggle".[25] J.C. Hall refers to it as a "picture of the first anonymous unheavals of life."[26] It may be argued, however, that diction, tone and imagery convey a feeling of buried conflict, a nightmare of deep psychic and even sexual frustration expressed in words such as: "angry shadows", "wall", "groan", "buried", "sweated", "tortured wood", "big drops", "blood", and "lull". These suggestions, together with the opening statement,

> There were no men and women then at all,
> But the flesh lying alone,

seem to imply that without the interchange of bi-sexuality, either literal or figurative, there can be no creative tension of the opposites but only savage inner warfare and a sterile release of energy. The poem evokes a peculiar atmosphere, suffocating and claustrophobic, in which images fail to take shape upon a wall that seems solid yet shakes and groans; these abortive images finally ooze out in anonymous blood-marks.

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[24] CP., p. 94.

[25] Raymond Tschumi, Thought in Twentieth Century Poetry (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951), p. 87.

[26] J.C. Hall, "Edwin Muir : An Introduction," Penguin New Writing 38 (1949), p. 114.

In this painful struggle, the only hope of resolution seems to lie with "mute maternal presences" who haunt the wall, unable to express the healing power of their compassion.[27] What seems to be the expression of a powerful experience of repressed rage and frustration could, at the same time, reflect a primordial struggle towards the conception of images in some remote past of the evolving mind, or even suggest a prophetic dream of the animal soul, foreshadowing the fighting men and keening women of Norse Saga. Nevertheless, one cannot overlook the suggestion in the final stanza that the tears of women might have gathered up the formless images, brought them into being, and made them meaningful again.

In "The Old Gods", the maternal presences reappear in the guise of the Earth Mother, that divinity of the ever-changing world of nature once worshipped by the men of pagan antiquity.

> Goddess of caverned breast and channelled brow
> And cheeks slow hollowed by millenial tears,
> Forests of autumns fading in your eyes,
>
> Eternity marvels at your counted years
> And kingdoms lost in time, and wonders how
> There could be thoughts so bountiful and wise
>
> As yours beneath the ever-breaking bough
> And vast compassion curving like the skies.[28]

This tranquil sonnet, addressed to the archetypal deities of a matriarchal culture who have survived their sacred loci, suggests that, for Muir, it was mercy and pity (feared by

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[27] "If there had been women there they might have wept
For the poor blood, unowned, unwanted,
Blank as forgotten script.
The wall was haunted
By mute maternal presences whose sighing
Fluttered the fighting shadows and shook the wall
As if that fury of death itself were dying."

[28] CP., p. 120.

Nietzsche and once despised by himself) that chiefly characterized the maternal image. She was a Mater Dolorosa,[29] a Demeter seeking her lost child, rather than a creator and destroyer like Cybele or the Hindu divinity, Kali. Hence, although Muir's feminine image may be thought to bear some family resemblance to Robert Graves's triple White Goddess, particularly as she appears twice as a remote agent of emotional paralysis (La Belle Dame and Helen), in her true form she is loving, faithful and forgiving: a type of the patient wife and mother, never of the capricious, cruel mistress. A comparison of Muir's "Return of Odysseus" or "Telemachos Remembers" with Graves's fine poem, "Ulysses", throws into sharp relief the essential differences between the two poets' experience and treatment of this symbol.

In "Telemachos Remembers", Penelope's daily task of weaving and then unravelling her tapestry is recalled by her son in such a way that the impatience and incomprehension of the child he once was is mingled with the insight of mature understanding. He tells of the painfully slow process by which she created her woven images, "horse and chariot, spear and bow", that always remained incomplete, mere fragments of the preconceived design.[30] He marvels at the patience that

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[29] One naturally recalls the sufferings patiently endured by Muir's own mother in Glasgow. F.A. Lea suggests that Nietzsche's rejection of pity was partly an expression of his need to break free from his ties with his over-solicitous, over-pious widowed mother, whose puritanical religion was responsible for his strong feelings of guilt and his ambivalence towards Christ. See The Tragic Philosopher: A Study of Friedrich Nietzsche (London: Methuen, 1957), pp. 133, 321. It is a significant coincidence that Hölderlin, too, had an over-pious mother, responsible for his mixed attitude to Christianity: an allegiance to Dionysos which only later gave way to a difficult acceptance of Christ.

[30] "And what at last was there to see?
A horse's head, a trunkless man,
Mere odds and ends about to be
And the thin line of augury
Where through the web the shuttle ran."
(CP., p. 219)

kept her at her weary task for the twenty years of Odysseus' absence, and understands at last the significance of her sacrifice. Instead of obeying the impulse to create a perfect artwork, she had woven a tissue of living values: "pride and fidelity and love". Characteristically, Muir does not hesitate to affirm old-fashioned virtues or to give them their traditional names. Like many of his other poems, this one can be interpreted in several ways for which the literal meaning, though existing in its own right, is simply a parable or metaphor. For instance, it can be taken as an illustration of Yeats's view of the opposition between "perfection of the life" and "perfection of the work", or Penelope can represent the intuitive wisdom of the imagination that continues faithfully to produce its fragmented dream symbols despite the incomprehension of the estranged intellect. On a more metaphysical plane, Penelope may personify the soul itself, patiently accepting the limitations of the world of Becoming as a necessary preparation for the unity of the world of Being. But even where Muir's image of the woman may be regarded as a vehicle of abstract personification, she is still, at the same time, a part of his deepest experience and often the symbol of his own soul.

Graves's Ulysses, unlike Muir's, fears and distrusts the woman even while pursuing her with forever unappeased appetite. He is unable to distinguish between Penelope and Circe, "wife or whore".

> Their counter-changings terrified his way:
> They were the clashing rocks, Symplegades,[31]
> Scylla and Charybdis too were they.

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[31] Robert Graves (The Penguin Poets, 1957), p. 73.

There is no single true anima here; she is "multiplied into the devouring Sirens' throng", to whom he is bound by the recurring demands of the flesh.

> One, two and many : flesh had made him blind,
> Flesh had one pleasure only in the act,
> Flesh set one purpose only in the mind -
> Triumph of flesh and afterwards to find
> Still those same terrors wherewith flesh was racked.

There is in this poem no sense of deeper resonances of meaning beyond the purely psychological implications of Ulysses' wanderings, which correspond to those revealed in the rest of Graves's poetry.[32] Love is constantly threatened by neurotic fears, by infidelity, jealousy, and other more obscure conflicts. At this stage, Graves had not yet developed his mythic system of the White Goddess in which he would project and unify his own divided experience, but he had explored the psychoanalytic views of Dr. Rivers and had subscribed to a theory of poetry as the resolution of internal conflict. In a critical essay on some of Graves's early work, Muir made the following comment:

> We are conscious that each poem is a theme chosen, but subject and mind are not fused, it is not an experience that is registered but an hypothesis... Mr. Graves is forcing the natural growth of poetry with his intellect. The impulses of the unconscious have become categories rather than energies, so that they never achieve an organic expression, only a schematized one, and the poet is prepared for them in advance. ... We feel a truth in poetry when there is an organic correspondence between the external image and the inner conflict or desire.[33]

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[32] See "Sick Love", "Vanity", "Full Moon", "Song of Contrariety", "A Love Story", etc.

[33] Edwin Muir, Transition (London: Hogarth Press, 1926), pp. 170 - 171.

Elsewhere in the same collection, in an "Essay on Contemporary Poetry", Muir says:

> Nothing is wholly real until it finds an image as well as a formula for itself. For the image is the record that a conception has been steeped in the unconscious and there accepted by the deeper potencies of the mind.[34]

The difference between Muir and Graves at this stage is well illustrated by their respective uses of the image of the dragon. For Muir, the dragon in "The Fall", in "Variations X", or in "The Journey Back II", is a spontaneous dream-image from the great memory of the mythopoeic imagination, bearing all the mystical significance of an ancient tradition; whereas, in "Vanity",[35] Graves's dragon merely stands for unresolved conflict and neurotic fear.

Daniel Hoffman has shown that Graves's subsequent development (about 1948) of the mythic system of the White Goddess did provide him with a genuine symbolic counterpart to his own sexual and imaginative conflict, which gave it universal significance.

> Barbarous as it seems in summary, the great value of this mythic pattern to Graves is that it elevates to divine, eternal and archetypal significance the experience of love as it may be known to the individual sensibility.[36]

He adds:

> Graves is grappling with latent dispositions of human character that have been overlain by a few dozen centuries of social life. Call his theory atavistic, yet none can deny that he restores to an indestructible and necessary part of human experience its original mystery, spiritual energy, guilt and wonder ....[The muse-women to whom the poet is alternately the bringer of fruition and the sacrificed victim] serve him much as the idea of chivalric love served the writers of

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[34] Ibid., p. 195.

[35] Op cit., p. 65.

[36] Hoffman, Barbarous Knowledge, p. 211.

> the Petrarchan tradition..., His love poems may be taken as mythical re-tellings of human love and as human re-enactments of myth. Of course, these categories are interchangeable, in that the mythical lovers are the archetypes or originals of the living poet and his Muse, whose present passion is the real subject of such reconstructed mythical poems.[37]

In Muir's poetry, although myth has much the same general function as in Graves's later work, the feminine image is not central to it, and she has little in common with Graves's atavistic goddess. Far from being the mistress of the bards, with all-too-specific Celtic physical attributes (sea-blue eyes, long gold tresses and rowanberry lips), or a fatal muse demanding submission, she suggests a closer kinship with Dante's Beatrice or with Boehme's Virgin Sophia, a symbolic figure, partly derived from Jewish mystical literature, which, like the paradise of childhood, is related to the Hermetic tradition. Jakob Boehme held the doctrine that Adam, when he first lived in Paradise, contained within himself the feminine element (Sophia) and was evenly balanced between light and darkness, the two great principles of "contrarium" from whose dialogue proceeds creation. Tiring of the unity of Paradise, Adam slept and turned his imagination away from God. In this sleep, Eve was created from him, and he was no longer a purely spiritual being but a divided one. This first "fall" was followed by the second fall into disobedience and death, but Boehme believed that man can be redeemed in Christ and will be restored at the last day to Adam's original form. By means of his Christology, Boehme avoided the denial of man and the created universe that is often found in neo-Platonist

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[37] Ibid., pp. 213 - 214.

mysticism. He also believed that woman's role is to help save man by bringing him to a renewed communion with the maiden Sophia.[38] The idea of an original hermaphrodite or androgyne is ancient and widespread. Mircea Eliade says:

> Androgyny is an archaic and universal formula for the expression of wholeness, the co-existence of the contraries, or coincidentia oppositorum. More than a state of sexual completeness and autarchy, androgyny symbolises the perfection of a primordial non-conditioned state.[39]

This is clearly the meaning of the alchemical symbol of the hermaphrodite (half king and half queen)[40] which has been of such interest to Jung and which is related to his theory of the anima, the female archetype who represents feminine elements in man's nature. In Muir's experience, this feminine image is awakened by his contact with a real woman and so restores him to original unity of being. This unity is the keynote of his very fine love poems, all of which celebrate spiritual wholeness and harmony. In the early months of Muir's marriage, when he was experiencing his extraordinary waking visions, there had been a climactic episode in the

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[38]This account is condensed from Désirée Hirst, op. cit., pp. 93 - 95. It calls to mind the "lost original" in Muir's poem "Orpheus' Dream." Cf. Maud Bodkin's reference to the image of woman as cosmic principle (Archetypal Patterns in Poetry: Psychological Studies of Imagination (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), p. 155.

[39]Mircea Eliade, Myths, Dreams and Mysteries, trans. Philip Mairet (London: 1960), p. 174, quoted Angus Fletcher, Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode (New York: Cornell University Press, 1964), p. 356n. In another work, Eliade refers to the interest shown by the German Romantics in this symbol, as expressing the type of the perfect man of the future. Ritter, a friend of Novalis, developed a whole philosophy of the androgyne. Schlegel dealt with it in his essay "Uber die Diotima", and Franz von Baader, influenced by Boehme, attributed great significance to the symbol of androgyny (The Two and the One, trans. J.M. Cohen [London: Harvill Press, 1965], p. 101).

[40]Graves uses the phrase "hermaphrodizing love", together with Hermetic images, in "The Terraced Valley", but, characteri tically, the experience is an abortive one.

first of them which actually resembled the alchemical image of the winged hermaphrodite, though he does not appear to have been aware of this similarity. In the dream, he saw countless angels flying over a stretch of water in which they were reflected. Suddenly, he found himself amongst them, and someone took his hand : it was his wife. They flew together for a while until he noticed that the wing on his shoulder next to her had fallen off and that her corresponding wing had disappeared too, leaving them "mounting the air on two wings."[41] Twenty years later, in a period of illness and financial worry, during which his wife underwent an almost fatal operation and a very protracted convalescence, he began to write poems that were filled with the certainty that their love had an eternal validity transcending the ravages of time and the tempests of earthly existence. Also about this time, he had experienced the moment of mystical insight in which his hitherto rather vague belief in God and immortality became specifically Christian in character.[42] Increased understanding of the significance of incarnation and redemption helped him to accept this world as more than merely a distorted reflection of a true eternal one, so that it became a place in which all things move toward an ultimate fulfilment.

In the first love poems there are certain echoes of Donne, particularly in the choice of titles - "The Annunciation", "The Confirmation", "The Commemoration", in a reference to the relation between bodies and souls, and in the idea of two voices forming one speech or song.[43] There are few sensory images in

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[41] An Autobiography, p. 162.

[42] Ibid., pp. 246 - 247.

[43] See Donne, "The Extasie"; cf. "this dialogue of one" with Muir's "monologue of two."

these poems; they achieve their effect through rhythm and tone and the weaving of words into a pattern of song, tender and serene. In "The Commemoration", the song seems to swing alternately between a joyful announcement of spiritual riches and a retreat into privacy.

> Invisible virtue now
> Expands upon the air
> Although no fruit appear
> Nor weight bend down the bough,
> And harvests truly grown
> For someone or no one
> Are stored and safely won
> In hollow heart and brow.
>
> How can one thing remain
> Except the invisible,
> The echo of a bell
> Long rusted in the rain?
> This strand we weave into
> Our monologue of two,
> And time cannot undo
> That strong and subtle chain.[44]

The "monologue of two", a reversal of Donne's "dialogue of one", reappears in the last stanza of "Song : Why should your face so please me?" which is a celebration of inward harmony and peace.

> And yet I still must wonder
> That such an armistice can be
> And life roll by in thunder
> To leave this calm with you and me.
> This tranquil voice of silence, yes,
> This single song of two, this is
> A wonder.[45]

In 1949, when the Muirs were living in Rome, the great Christian symbols portrayed everywhere came upon him like a revelation, and he was confronted with the Madonna image, still revered as it had been for centuries in Catholic Europe. This gave him the inspiration for a second poem entitled "The Annunciation",[46] in which flesh and spirit, earthly love and

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[44] "The Commemoration," CP., p. 119.

[45] "Song," CP., p. 147.

[46] CP., p. 223.

visionary contemplation are caught up together in a single timeless moment of unified vision. The spiritual eye of the angel and the bodily eye of "the girl" are fused in a mutual gaze; like lovers, they tremble with the mystery of conception that in due time will issue in creation, the incarnation of the divine image.

Many years before, when Muir had first begun to discover a pattern running through the contradictions of his experience and to realise that he could impose an imaginative order upon his life by matching it with the great Biblical symbols that seemed to be stages in the fable of man's existence, he found that the central ones were Eden and the Fall. But the deeply implanted root symbol and matrix of his imaginative world was Eve, mother of all living.

> They say the first dream Adam our father had
> After his agelong daydream in the Garden
> When heaven and sun woke in his wakening mind,
> The earth with all its hills and woods and waters,
> The friendly tribes of trees and animals,
> And earth's last wonder Eve (the first great dream
> Which is the ground of every dream since then) -
> They say he dreamt lying on the naked ground,
> The gates shut fast behind him as he lay
> Fallen in Eve's fallen arms, his terror drowned
> In her engulfing terror, in the abyss
> Whence there's no further fall, and comfort is -[47]

As the mother, she had once taught him the nature and name of all the things that lay around him in his islanded Eden, and, like Wordsworth's mother, had bound them together with a strong cord of love, joy and compassion. As the wife, her faith and love had restored to him the images of the natural world, from which he had become so deeply estranged, and had reconciled him to the "holy wisdom" (Sophia) of his own soul. Without either her memory or her presence, Muir could say with Othello : "chaos is come again."

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[47] CP., p. 210.

CHAPTER IV

PSYCHE AND COSMOS

> O Nature and O Soul of Man! how far beyond
> all utterance are your linked analogies!
>
> Herman Melville, Moby Dick.

In the foregoing chapters, some attempt has been made to show how Muir's search for unity and identity led him back to the past, restoring the "infant sensibility" with its intimations of immortality, and reviving the feminine image that was to re-awaken his emotional and intuitive powers. It remains to take account of the accompanying process by which he gathered together the fragments of his broken image of the universe, recovering a traditional cosmology that helped to restore the order of his inner world.

Muir himself regarded a consistent metaphysical viewpoint as profoundly relevant to the writing of poetry, and the understanding of a poet's beliefs as a vital part of the appreciation of his work. This is clear from his early critical essays, in one of which he discusses Graves's early poetry, and makes his point by a comparison with Donne.

> Donne furnished the scholastic, Catholic mansion anew, transforming it so that from the inside at any rate it seemed something completely novel; yet the original edifice remained. But Mr. Graves, in whose mind the theories of Professor Freud, Dr. Rivers, Butler and Sir James G. Frazer jostle one another, has no cosmos in which to assemble them; the age provides none, and it is the lack of a framework of reality which makes his fancies remain merely fancies where Donne's are as concrete as ornaments on a great design.... Without an unconditional belief in the immortality of the soul, and in time and eternity as its two states, poetry such

> as [Donne's] could not be written. It is then the lack of any metaphysical foundations to Mr. Graves's fancies which makes them so singularly cold, so unconvincing... Donne's hypotheses started from problems which he had resolved by experience or by faith; Mr. Graves's start from this premise or that, and in general from the unresolved problems of the age. Poetry of this kind may be witty, ironical, or suggestive, but it is not serious enough for its purpose, it is not effectual. For the pressing need of any age of transition is to cease to be one, to attain to a resolution of its problems, not to poetize them. [1]

In an even earlier essay, entitled "A Plea for Psychology in Criticism", he states that a radical criticism must look, in a work of art, for the man who expresses himself through it, not as a social figure, but "as he is before God, the man in his relation to reality". The critic should be able to discover what in the writer is unique and what is universal, and these are to be found in the traditional paths of criticism - in style, subject-matter and conception, seen as symbols or symptoms of the artist's mind.[2] Clearly Muir does not here mean psychology in the narrow sense, but rather in the original sense of the study of the soul of man in its relation to ultimate things. Perhaps one is justified, then, in making a modest attempt to examine his own work in such a light.

Since Muir was primarily a philosophical poet, even a tentative analysis of his metaphysical standpoint could involve almost the whole of his verse; nevertheless, a brief survey of certain selected poems, with passing reference to others with similar themes, which is all that can be accomplished in the present chapter, should suffice to illuminate the general framework of his thought.

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[1] Transition : Essays on Contemporary Literature (London: Hogarth Press, 1926), pp. 190, 192.

[2] Latitudes (London: Andrew Melrose Ltd., 1924), p. 97.

There can be little doubt that the key to Muir's world view lay in his experience of dreams and visions and his faith in their significance, not only for his own life, but for the human condition in general. Like Blake, he believed that, to see the world as it really is, it must be contemplated in the light of this kind of visionary imagination, which creates a new heaven and a new earth, that is to say, a new reality both in ourselves and in the objects we perceive. Deprived of the light of the mythic imagination, we sink into "Single Vision & Newton's Sleep", in which we see only the fallen world of the senses and know only division within the self. Since Muir's poem "The Three Mirrors"[3] gives an explicit account of the fall from the original vision of childhood into the world of division and conflict and of the subsequent recovery of a reconciled view of reality, it makes a convenient starting point for one's enquiry. Here, the primary vision is expressed in the simplest images of man's natural life, making a peaceful and secure order, untroubled by mortality.

> Father and mother and child,
> The house with its single tree,
> Bed and board and cross,
> And the dead asleep in the knoll.

Again one recognises the symbols of Muir's still centre: house, tree, man and woman, with the child at the heart of it, while hand in hand with the material necessities of bed and board goes the symbolic image of the cross, accepted merely as a sign of the faith in unseen things that underlies such traditional harmonies. But the vision of the fallen world soon supervenes, and all is transformed into a reluctant

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[3] CP., p. 140.

awareness of change and chance, choice and conflict, where each is answerable for his own actions and the world of dream is broken in upon by the inexorable laws of space, time and causality. This is what Muir referred to as the "reality of the categories",[4] the fragmentation of primordial unity into a multiform structure of polarities, such as good and evil, life and death, waking ego and dreaming fancy, which gives rise to that state of inner division that, to him, was so acutely painful, though it is common to all men. In the poem, the child-like vision is shattered by a sudden and terrifying confrontation with grief and guilt by which the sources of intuitive knowledge are closed off from consciousness.

> The mountain summits were sealed
> In incomprehensible wrath.

The peaceful scenes of infancy are distorted by an "angry law", which changes both the face of nature and the mind of the child himself. "Sad towns" appear, glinting like broken stones; hunting roads circle a "flying hill" in pursuit of the "quarry".[5] Everything lies askew, even the dead who once slept in the grassy mound and now lie in the tomb. For with guilt come death and disorder, an anarchic vision in which good and evil lie locked together where once all was "virtue undefiled". However, there remains a third mirror, which, if only the poet could look into it, would show evil and good no longer in enmity, but

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[4] An Autobiography, p. 233.

[5] Muir frequently employs the image of hound and quarry in the same sense as Eliot used "the boarhound and the boar", as opposites that are "reconciled among the stars."

Standing side by side
In the ever-standing wood,
The wise king safe on his throne,
The rebel raising the rout,
And each so deeply grown
Into his own place
He's be past desire or doubt.

As Muir often uses the image of a wood to localise some subliminal tract of the inner landscape, the "ever-standing wood" suggests the permanent symbols of the racial memory, where those figures from folklore, the wise king and the rebel, being antithetical images with a social or collective significance, point to a necessary tension and balance that give order and coherence to the common life of humanity. Anarchic disorder is banished and all things take their accepted places in a new hierarchic pattern woven from the images of the mythic imagination.[6] When this occurs, inward chaos is similarly restored to harmony.

Although this new mode of perception achieves a reconciliation of the polarities by means of traditional symbolic images, it is not easily mastered. It seems to be conditional ("If I could look") upon the acceptance of spiritual warfare between the true identity and the false self, and it arises from the transcendence of that conflict. This, apparently, is the significance of the altering tensions between the two selves in poems like "The Private Place".[7] Here, the other self is seen at first in the position of enmity.[8]

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[6]Cf. "The Emblem" (CP., p. 230) and "The Trophy" (CP., p. 116).

"Sharing the secret trophy with each other;
And king and rebel are like brother and brother
Or father and son, co-princes of one mind,
Irreconcilables, their treaty signed."

[7]CP., p. 82.

[8]"Few poets are more terrifyingly aware of our inner enemy, in all his disguises, than Mr. Muir" (G.S. Fraser, "Inwardness", Observer No. 8403, 22 June, 1952, p. 7, quoted R.B. Hollander in "A Textual and Bibliographical Study of the Poems of Edwin Muir" [unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1962], p. 162.

He is a "stranger", a "deaf usurper"; in his dullness and indifference,[9] he is a personification of the natural inertia that hampers the soul in its movement toward regeneration. He

> lives in household quiet in my unrest,
> And of my troubles weaves his tranquil nest.

Yet this antithetical presence may become an ally as well as an enemy, if only he is confronted, in traditional terms, as the self that must die in order to be re-born.

> Come then, take up the cleansing blade once more
> That drives all difference out. The fabled shore
> Sees us again. Now the predestined fight,
> The ancestral stroke, the opening gash of light:
> Side by side myself by myself slain,
> The wakening stir, the eyes loaded with gain
> Of ocean darkness, the rising hand in hand
> I with myself at one, the changed land,
> My home, my country.

In these lines the stress falls upon the key words - fabled, predestined, ancestral stroke, gash, light, eyes, loaded, hand-in-hand, one, changed land, etc. The rather stiff heroic couplets of the first paragraph have given way to a smoother flow, being softened by caesura and enjambment, as the power of legendary terms affords release from the formerly claustrophobic imagery. More ancient and primitive than those of Christian tradition, these mythic terms express a dream-like experience of recovered unity that carries a suggestion of Norse myth, perhaps of the self-immolation and resurrection of Odin, god of war and poetry, whose return to life was aided

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[9] Cf. "Indifference" in "Variations on a Time Theme IX" (CP., p. 50).

by the power of the runes.[10] Inner unity is projected in an altered view of the surrounding world, "the changed land,/ My home, my country"; but this state is only a temporary possession. Time steals bit by bit "this boundless treasure/ Held in four hands";[11] the state of division gradually returns; the wheel comes full circle with a renewal of fretful bondage to the usurper, and the poem ends with an unresolved feeling of an endlessly repeated cycle of "strife and the aftertaste of strife". There is no final transcendence of conflict in this eternal recurrence which is unable to free itself from the finite dimension of time.

As in the frequently anthologised poem, "The Combat",[12] where a similarly endless repetition of strife between the savage pride of an aggressive will to power and some seemingly helpless, suffering thing is translated into the vivid though bizarre world of isolated dream images, and as one has already noted in "Then",[13] the pattern is one of alternating battle and inertia, without progression. Yet, at some point, Muir had become aware that the tension of the opposites, both within the psyche and woven into the texture of the universe itself, need not be the deadlock of battle, but can become a creative embrace or dialogue : even a kind of aesthetic play.

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[10] Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology (London: Paul Hamlyn, 1959), p. 261.

[11] Another example of hand imagery, which contrasts with "the bound and battling hands" in the following poem, "The Unattained Place" (CP., p. 83). The latter image recalls Nietzsche - "Therefore strove I long and was a wrestler that I might one day get my hands free for blessing" (Also Sprach Zarathustra, 48).

[12] CP., p. 179.

[13] CP., p. 94.

Like Blake, he came to the realisation that "without contraries is no progression",[14] and this insight seems to be linked with his visionary experience of eternal or divine things.[15] If time is no longer the sole reality, but is seen as the moving image of eternity, that is, if the cosmos is composed of a spiritual as well as a material order, then moral conflict is no longer merely a tightly interiorized opposition, but becomes the warp and weft of a universal creative process.

THE GODS: Evidence of the liberating power of visionary experience is to be found in "The Labyrinth",[16] where inner division is projected upon the universe, and the enclosed twilight existence of the maze is balanced by the knowledge of another dimension, here called "the gods". Although something still remains of the circular pattern observed in certain of the poems mentioned above, it seems to have assumed some hint of a spiral form and hence some hope of progression. The first paragraph of this dramatic monologue in blank verse is composed of 45 lines, of which the first 34½ lines form one long, winding sentence that constantly returns upon itself or interrupts itself with parenthetic statements. The initial line:

Since I emerged that day from the labyrinth,

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[14] "Without contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate are necessary to human existence" ("The Argument," The Marriage of Heaven and Hell).

[15] Mystics commonly attest that the experience of divinity is to be found beyond the "coincidence of contradictories" (F.C. Happold, Mysticism [Penguin Books, 1963], p. 46).

[16] CP., p. 163.

seems to promise an account of release into the daylight world, but the promise is immediately belied by a return to the recreated memory of existence in the maze, with its similarly "swift recoils" and its smooth corners that are not turning-points at all but mere disturbances in the sense of time and place, matching a parallel disturbance in the image of the self.

> I almost feared
> I'd meet myself returning at some smooth corner,
> Myself or my ghost, for all there was unreal
> After the straw ceased rustling and the bull
> Lay dead upon the straw and I remained,
> Blood-splashed, -

One wonders why the unreality follows the death of the bull, and why it is simply a bull and not the composite monster, part animal and part human, of the legend of Theseus and the Minotaur. Presumably it represents the natural life of the passions that have been regarded as purely animal, and therefore repudiated, leaving the narrator in the state of a disembodied spirit.[17] A numbing of the senses is suggested by the observation that "the straw ceased rustling", since, though it indicates that the bull's death-throes are over, there is some displacement of attention from the central fact onto associated details, and then the final silence. The splashes of blood recall the blood-marks of internal conflict that ooze from the wall in "Then", though this time no hope of salvation comes from "mute, maternal presences". With the

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[17] An anonymous reviewer has noted that Muir's poetry is "difficult to explore or scrutinize, not because of any complexity in vocabulary or syntax - the expression is often disarmingly direct - but because of the thoroughly indirect, almost labyrinthine meaning of the moods, mental states and recollections he is trying to convey" ("Spiritual Transformations", Times Literary Supplement, Ll, 4th July, 1952, p. 432).

image of a spirit seeking its body, we are abruptly returned to the point at which the monologue began - "ever since I came out/ To the world", but we are vouchsafed only a glimpse of the natural creation - of sea, sky and hills, the paradoxical image of "still fields swift with flowers", people, birds and animals, all in the "movement" that distinguishes the world of time, before once again a parenthetic sentence within the main one throws us back into the labyrinth with the recollection that time did not exist there. The third repetition of "since I came out" disappoints us finally with the statement that the anti-vision of the labyrinth often over-takes the narrator, making the whole world seem part of a Kafka-esque image of deceiving streets and vacant ante-chambers with neither purpose, destination nor exit. The entire paragraph itself is without issue from a circling movement that constantly drags the speaker back into a whirlpool of obsessive thoughts and equivocal images. Even the emergence from the maze is not an act of will or discovery, but, like Yeats's gyres, is merely the reversal of the continuous motion that robs him of autonomy.

> the maze itself
> Revolved around me on its hidden axis
> And swept me smoothly to its enemy,
> The lovely world.

The psychic pattern is still antithetical; the inward debate that follows is argument rather than dialogue, and the deadlock is broken only by revelation: a true vision that counteracts the false one.

> I could not live if this were not illusion.
> It is a world, perhaps; but there's another.
> For once in a dream or trance I saw the gods
> Each sitting on the top of his mountain-isle.

In this dream, the mountain summits are no longer "sealed in incomprehensible wrath", and when the divine order is perceived there, ordinary human life can be observed going on below in a peaceful and secure rhythm. The unified view from the hill in "Childhood" is here overlaid upon an image of the moving world which includes the Homeric gods as symbols of reconciled vision. The mazy utterance of the first paragraph is replaced by firm statement and a clear, though distant, perception[18] of a world of varied and spontaneous action contained by traditional rituals and festivals:

> the little ships sailed by
> Toy multitudes swarmed in the harbours, shepherds drove
> Their tiny flocks to the pastures, marriage feasts
> Went on below, small birthdays and holidays,
> Ploughing and harvesting and life and death.

But the gods,

> as large and bright as clouds
> Conversed across the sounds in tranquil voices
> High in the sky above the untroubled sea,
> And their eternal dialogue was peace
> Where all these things were woven, and this our life
> Was as a chord deep in that dialogue,
> As easy utterance of harmonious words,
> Spontaneous syllables bodying forth a world.

From this vision, then, comes transcendence, reconciliation of conflict, and poetry. It reflects a distinctively Hellenic cosmos, an organic world in which divine, human and animal life all take their place in the Neo-Platonic Chain of Being, and art is the spontaneous expression of a Pythagorean harmony,

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[18] A.C. Boyd has noted that reading Muir's poems is "not unlike looking at life through binoculars: one turns the knob and the scene becomes sharper and sharper - and more remote" (Britain Today No. 123, July 1946, pp. 39 - 40, quoted Hollander, "op.cit.", p. 159).

inherent in the design of the universe, that is echoed in the mind of man. Such an image was a familiar one to German Romantic writers. As a symbol of primordial unity and spontaneity, it had power to compel the imagination of Schopenhauer, Goethe, Hölderlin, Wagner and Nietzsche, and would certainly have been familiar to Muir from these sources at least. Yet, it was not merely a borrowed concept. More than a compensatory fantasy, as it might well have been for some of them, it was very like his own experience of those islands of childhood where life and death, seed-time and harvest and man's relation to the animals were all made secure and acceptable by seasonal ritual and the consciousness of supernatural presences.

> That was the real world; I have touched it once,
> And now shall know it always.

Not only the true world in the Platonic sense, it is also one that once actually surrounded the poet - hence the justification for the word "touched". But though the world of the maze is now recognised as a "lie", he knows that, without the "bird-wings" (a traditional symbol of transcendence) of the poetic imagination, he would be imprisoned within it.

The poem could very well end here, but there is a final paragraph of three lines in which the labyrinth returns with an echo of Wordsworth's "weight of custom".

> Oh these deceits are strong almost as life.
> Last night I dreamt I was in the labyrinth,
> And woke far on, I did not know the place.

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[19]"Heavy as frost and deep almost as life" ("Ode on the Intimations of Immortality in early Childhood").

It is not easy to determine the point and significance of this addition; nor does it seem a particularly satisfactory conclusion to the poem. What is of interest for this discussion, however, is the indication that a small gap has appeared in the circumference of the circle of conflict that brought the poems previously considered round to their beginnings again, for this time the poet wakes "far on" in a place he does not know. The circle is beginning to take the form of a spiral and so to hint at the first signs of progression.

Before proceeding with an account of this development, however, something more needs to be said of the affinity between Muir's vision of "the gods" and the cult of Hellenism in German literature. We know that Muir had once steeped himself in the writings of Nietzsche, and that Nietzsche himself had been deeply indebted to Schopenhauer, who claimed to be the first philosopher to give art an adequate place in his philosophy.[20] He believed that the artistic genius is able to transcend his own individuality and to apprehend and depict the Platonic Ideas directly, thus enabling the spectator or hearer to participate in his own pure timeless contemplation. Nietzsche's The Birth of Tragedy was an original re-working of the ideas of Schopenhauer and Wagner, the latter having devised his own version of the myth of the Golden Age, in which he maintained that man was once "whole", that is, his faculties once worked in unison and he lived in unconscious harmony with

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[20] Lea, The Tragic Philosopher, p. 23. The following note on Schopenhauer, Wagner and Nietzsche has been condensed from pp. 23 - 39 of this work.

nature. His natural speech was art, particularly the drama; therefore this phase had occurred in Greece. Later, the Greek was to fall into alienation from nature, becoming the self-conscious "bondslave of his own abstractions" and losing his intuitive powers. This coincided with the introduction of slavery[21] and continued throughout the Christian era, but man can regain his lost wholeness by a conscious re-discovery of his unity with the natural world.[22] Nietzsche became profoundly absorbed in the image of the Hellenic world, but, rejecting Wagner's theory of Greek oneness with nature, held that the Greeks employed the Homeric dreamworld to hold up a transfiguring mirror to life and so justify the pain of existence as an aesthetic phenomenon. In his view, the sense of identity with the "primordial unity" was achieved by arousing something like the collective unconscious mind through Dionysian music and ritual. He believed that the true philosopher, as well as the poet, tries to make "the total chord of the universe re-echo within himself"[23] and so achieves a harmony between the external and the internal worlds. Influenced by Heracleitus, he saw the primordial unity as a "playful child",[24] continuously drawing the world of Becoming out of the eternal interaction or dialogue of opposing forces.

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[21]Such ideas have apparently influenced Muir's parable-poem, "A Trojan Slave" (CP., p. 72).

[22]Cf. "The Horses," CP., p. 246.

[23]Ibid., p. 45, quoted from Nietzsche, Philosophy during the Tragic Age of the Greeks, 3.

[24]Cf. Muir's frequent use of words like "play" and "toy" in his poems, e.g., "toy treasury," "toy multitudes".

Hölderlin, whose work deeply impressed Muir, developed a symbolism based on a dreamworld of the Homeric gods, and, more recently, Rilke, following Nietzsche, tried to re-create the whole outer world within his own imagination, saying:

> Not till the double-sphere will the voices be eternal and mild.[25]

The relation of this tradition to Muir's experience of the fall from unity and spontaneity, as well as to his vision of the eternal dialogue of the gods and of art as an expression of harmonious life, is clear enough. Like the Romantics, he longed to recover an organic world-view; but, where most of them, in their reaction against the moralistic reformed Christianity of their day, failed to recognise that such a harmonious cosmos had been familiar to medieval Catholic Europe as well as to the culture of the Renaissance, Muir knew better. He was aware that, in losing the top half of the Chain of Being, or, in other words, in becoming inured to the separation of faith and reason introduced with Baconian scientism in the seventeenth century, we have forfeited a sense of oneness with the universe, that "our fathers"[26] took for granted and we are therefore unable to recover the "over-arching sky" that completes the child's original vision of the world. A considerable number of his poems, some of them founded on a sense of paradox, focus upon the idea that the reality of some lost dimension is attested by an obscure sense of its absence, by symbolic dreams, or by

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[25] From Sonette an Orpheus. This extract is translated and quoted by J.M. Cohen in Poetry of This Age, p. 54.

[26] See "The Ring"(CP., p. 113).

a sudden intuition of an ampler world of experience.[27]

The flaw in the Hellenic cosmology, however, lies in its cyclic view of time as the revolving image of eternity and consequently in its inadequate philosophy of history.[28] Christian tradition has always counterbalanced Greek influence with the Hebraic conviction that the divine purpose is revealed in human history, which had a beginning and will have an end, and that man is called upon for a voluntary response to this purpose. Muir's poem, "Oedipus",[29] reflects the important transition-point at which the harmonious cosmos of Hellenic philosophy begins to give way to the dynamic creation of Hebrew prophecy, and the poet is turning from the timeless contemplation of the divine order, which yields the peace of gnosis, or total understanding, towards the impossible acceptance of moral responsibility before a deity who offers the peace that passes understanding. This poem is examined in detail in Appendix B, where it is shown that the underlying poetic pattern has changed from a successive alternation of conflicting states to a simultaneous grasp of psychic contradiction, issuing in resolution and transcendence. The mythical figure of Oedipus, walking through darkness and light, is used to illustrate a movement[30] in which vision and spiritual

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[27]"Yet from that missing heaven outspread,/Here all we read" (CP. p. 84). See also: "The Human Fold" (CP., p. 99), "Scotland 1941" (CP., p. 97), "The Usurpers" (CP., p. 187), "The Covenant" (CP., p. 132), "Scotland's Winter" (CP., p. 229), "The Road" (CP., p. 223).

[28]"The Recurrence" (CP., p. 102) deals with the impossibility of redemption in a cyclic movement of time.

[29]CP., p. 189. See Appendix B.

[30]The characters of myth "are like shapes moving in another world. We feel indeed that the pattern of their movements has a profound relevance to our own lives, but we do not imaginatively transport ourselves into theirs" (C.S. Lewis, An Experiment in Criticism [Cambridge University Press, 1961], p. 44).

blindness, innocence and guilt, have ceased to be the horns of a hopeless dilemma and have become the twin poles of a creative interchange or dialogue between the natural and divine orders. From seeing the world with the eyes of the gods, in "The Labyrinth", the poet has reached the point where he can now see himself through their eyes:

> I have judged
> Myself, obedient to the gods' high judgment,
> And seen myself with their pure eyes, have learnt
> That all must bear a portion of the wrong -

Wrath is no longer incomprehensible, and the static deadlock has given way to the idea of a progress or journey, which readily combines with the scriptural image of the children of Israel wandering in the wilderness.

THE COVENANT: Like the Christian Platonists of the seventeenth century, Muir often seems to hold an uneasy balance between the Hellenic and Hebraic world views, but it is the latter doctrine of creation and covenant,[31] exile and return, that saves him from negation of the world of time and mutability As with the religious writers of that period, such as Herbert, Vaughan and Traherne, Hebraic images are made real for him by the imaginative contact with the English Bible that was part of his childhood experience, and they therefore help to overcome

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[31] "In essence, the Covenant-idea gives a meaning and value to life in this world, quite different from that fostered by Hellenic thought patterns.... It is the Hebraic alternative to the logos. The logos offers illumination, the recognition that the nature of things corresponds to the nature of the mind. The excitement is that of seeing one's own reflection, so to speak, in the mirror of nature. The Covenant leads us back to a dramatic encounter, a confrontation of our own individuality with a transcendent otherness - an I/Thou confrontation" (Harold Fisch, Jerusalem and Albion : The Hebraic Factor in Seventeenth Century Literature [London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964], p. 108).

ambivalent attitudes towards such doctrines induced by his rejection of Calvinist interpretations. For instance, Muir had been deeply disturbed by the dogmas of election and reprobation (which represent a polarisation of the Covenant-idea), as well as by predestination, and, perhaps for this reason, never really saw "the promise" as the mighty act of a transcendent God but rather as the intuitive promptings of prophetic vision.[32]

It is not possible to point to any chronological development of such insights in the poetry itself, because Muir's general view of life was largely established when he started to write it. Much of his verse is retrospective, showing development in style and form rather than in content, for he constantly meditates upon the stages of his struggle for self-realisation, looking back at the same experiences for fuller or different meanings, and re-creating them in various ways.[33] Indeed, his work often reminds one of Kierkegaard's dictum that, though life must be lived forwards, it can only be understood backwards. In addition, one feels that, in time of severe stress, Muir tended to fall back into a neurotic state of anxiety and conflict, for which the poems themselves offered a resolution. Consequently, different levels of insight appear at all stages of his poetry, and

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[32]See "Abraham" (CP., p. 221). Cf. Blake : "God only Acts & Is in existing beings or men."

[33]"He wanted to experience again, like someone learning a lesson, all that he had already experienced; for it seemed a debt due by him to life from which he had turned away" (Muir, Poor Tom, Chapter 27, p. 254). This quotation, which expresses some kind of resolution in Mansie's experience, sums up the intention of much of Muir's work.

poems based on the figural correspondence between the individual spiritual life and the Old Testament story are to be found even in his earliest collections.[34] "Variations on a Time Theme VI" was originally called "In the Wilderness" and possesses a lyrical quality Muir did not often display. Beginning "Forty years this burning/ Circuitous path", the movement of this poem already hints at the development outlined above with reference to "The Labyrinth" and "Oedipus" by making its way from a seemingly endless circuit, through a moment of timeless contemplation which is followed by the memory of shame and guilt, towards intuitions of fulfilment and faith in ultimate deliverance - all of which is seen in terms of the stages of the journey through the wilderness. The troubled story, based on scripture yet reflecting mam's life in time as well as Muir's personal experience, is linked by the pattern of rhythm, rhyme and diction to an underlying mood of dream-like serenity, so that doubt and certainty seem somehow to coincide.[35] In this sense, the poem serves as an overture to a large part of Muir's canon, and is an indication of the unity of his work.

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[34] E.g. "The Ballad of the Flood", in First Poems (1925), where Noah strongly resembles John Knox and expresses the Calvinist attitudes Muir found so objectionable, and Variations on a Time Theme (1934), "No. III" (CP., p. 42), which was originally entitled "Autobiography".

[35] "And we have loved these lonely shapes
At their disconsolate play,
Have looked up to the stony capes
Battered with scalding surf of sand
Like sailors watching after many a day
Their home hills rising from the spray.
Where is our land?" (CP., p. 47).
The sense of paradox is conveyed by combining the opposing symbols of sea and desert.

With the idea of the journey in the wilderness[36] came the associated ideas of the promise and the millennial dream of Canaan. Like "The Labyrinth" and "Oedipus", "Moses"[37] is a dramatic monologue; but this time the poet speaks in the first person plural as the representative of all the children of Israel. Moses' vision is not their vision, though they know what he saw when he went up to view the promised land. This great dream shows a closer picture of man in tune with nature than that of the "toy multitudes" of the islands, perhaps because it is bound up with the hope of salvation. Moses saw "mild prophetic beasts", a "sacred lintel" and gliding and glittering vineyards.

> And in the midst the shining vein of water,
> The river turning, turning towards its home.
> Promised to us.

The slow, tranquil, yet inevitable movement of the river suggests an ultimate conclusion unerringly sought; the words "turning, turning" recall the circle, once closed, that has now become a winding, forward motion, and seem, at the same time, to cancel the "burning, burning" memory of shame in "Variations VI";[38] the sudden brevity of "Promised to us" asserts complete trust in the compact. Moses smelt the "homely smell of wine and corn and cattle", the peace, "sweat-sanctified",[39] that is the reward of labour, and saw the tribes

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[36] It is noteworthy that his next volume of poems, published in 1937, was entitled Journeys and Places, thus emphasizing the alternation of progress and stasis.

[37] CP., p. 129. [38] CP., p. 46.

[39] Such olfactory imagery is rare in Muir's verse, probably being matched only by the "searching scent of roots" in "Variations VI," the "scent of the ancient leather" in "Variations I," the "comfortless smell of casual habitation" in "Variations V," and the "smell of guilt" in "Oedipus." The phrase "smell of peace" carries an echo of Milton. See Paradise Lost, XI, l, 3

With the idea of the journey in the wilderness[36] came the associated ideas of the promise and the millennial dream of Canaan. Like "The Labyrinth" and "Oedipus", "Moses"[37] is a dramatic monologue; but this time the poet speaks in the first person plural as the representative of all the children of Israel. Moses' vision is not their vision, though they know what he saw when he went up to view the promised land. This great dream shows a closer picture of man in tune with nature than that of the "toy multitudes" of the islands, perhaps because it is bound up with the hope of salvation. Moses saw "mild prophetic beasts", a "sacred lintel" and glittering vineyards.

> And in the midst the shining vein of water,
> The river turning, turning towards its home.
> Promised to us.

The slow, tranquil, yet inevitable movement of the river suggests an ultimate conclusion unerringly sought; the words "turning, turning" recall the circle, once closed, that has now become a winding, forward motion, and seem, at the same time, to cancel the "burning, burning" memory of shame in "Variations VI";[38] the sudden brevity of "Promised to us" asserts complete trust in the compact. Moses smelt the "home smell of wine and corn and cattle", the peace, "sweat-sanctified",[39] that is the reward of labour, and saw the tribes

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[36] It is noteworthy that his next volume of poems, publis in 1937, was entitled Journeys and Places, thus emphasizing alternation of progress and stasis.

[37] CP., p. 129.

[38] CP., p. 46.

[39] Such olfactory imagery is rare in Muir's verse, proba being matched only by the "searching scent of roots" in "Va tions VI," the "scent of the ancient leather" in "Variation the "comfortless smell of casual habitation" in "Variations and the "smell of guilt" in "Oedipus." The phrase "smell peace" carries an echo of Milton. See Paradise Lost, XI,

arrayed in white robes beside the river, their

> *dark heads whitened by the desert wave,
> The Sabbath of Sabbaths come and Canaan their home*.

This is another kind of timeless contemplation into which the toil and striving of temporal life have been gathered up and redeemed. But "we", who only have ordinary vision and only dream "common dreams", saw nothing more than the wars, local troubles, and petty jealousies involved in settling the land; and neither we nor Moses himself could see the actual future as it is recorded by the historian or experienced by posterity, although its seeds were sown that day and the outcome was already determined by the causal chain of historical process. The "great disaster, exile, diaspora" was inevitable in the nature of things; the "plot of ground pledged by the God of Moses" was bound to be "trampled by sequent tribes", and the elements of Moses' dream of peace and unity scattered about the world. Nevertheless, his vision, the "day" that only he saw, now stands "becalmed in time forever:/White robes and sabbath peace, the snow-white emblem".[40]

Like Vaughan's "White Celestiall thought",[41] this great dream embodies some intimation of that pure eternal Being of which life on earth reflects merely broken fragments.

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[40]This is the second time in the Collected Poems (1960) that Muir uses the word "emblem" (the first being in "The Little General") though he had been using emblematic imagery, and, in "Variations X," had suggested that the mythical beasts of heraldry link past, present and future, inhabiting their own eternity in the midst of the temporal process.

[41]"The Retreate," The Metaphysical Poets (Penguin Books, 1957), p. 265. Cf. Shelley's "white radiance of Eternity" in "Adonais."

Part of our heritage from the past, it is present in moments of revelation, and still haunts the imagination with hope for the future.[42] Thus it creates a unity in time, and is an epitome of that new reality, central to Judeo-Christian cosmology, that is both "now and not yet".[43] The poem suggests that great prophetic images of this sort remain with us as symbolic rallying points amidst the din of human endeavour, reconciling time and eternity, and reminding us of an ideal reality.

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[42] Professor Norman Cohn, in his book The Pursuit of the Millennium (London: Secker and Warburg, 1957), demonstrates that the popular crusades and chiliastic revolutionary movements of medieval Europe were firmly based on millennial traditions, and considers that modern totalitarian movements have much in common with them, although the "basic phantastic phantasies" are no longer expressed in terms of Judeo-Christian eschatology.

[43] "According to the Christian view, a right relation to God in this world does imply the present possession of a great deal of ultimate good, but all present realisation of good is imperfect, and for the complete realisation, the Christian must look to the future. 'Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be'. It is the combination of the 'now' and the 'not yet' which characterises the Christian Weltanschauung" (Edwyn Bevan, Symbolism and Belief [Fontana Books, 1962], p. 104).
That Muir realised the danger of attempts to establish the New Jerusalem in time is apparent in his parable-poem, "The City" (CP., p. 107), where the pilgrimage to Jerusalem ends in fanaticism, violence and ruin - a possible reference to Scottish theocratic movements.
See also "Abraham" (CP., p. 221), which, besides expressing the power of faith and intuitive wisdom to collaborate with the future, sums up the paradox of "now and not yet" in the final phrase - "alien Canaan".

"He died content and full of years, though still
The Promise had not come, and left his bones,
Far from his father's house, in alien Canaan."

This is the more moving if we recall the mood of "Childhood": "To his father's house below securely bound," and Muir's recollection of his father's prayers, with their reference to "an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."
See also:

"There's no harvest,
Though all around the fields are white with harvest."
("The Journey Back 7.")

THE EMBLEMS: In the same collection[44] as "Moses", a poem entitled "The Covenant"[45] presents another kind of compact, and links the mythical creatures of heraldry with the archetypal dreams of the collective unconscious[46] as well as with the idea of man as the focal point of the chain of being.[47] This idea differs from the Hebraic notion that God created man out of dust and "chose" him. At least, the emphasis is different.

> The covenant of God and animal,
> The frieze of fabulous creatures winged and crowned,
> And in the midst the woman and the man -
>
> Lost long ago in fields beyond the Fall -
> Keep faith in sleep-walled night and there are found
> On our long journey back where we began.

This covenant is the neo-Platonic one; therefore, the "fields beyond the Fall" is not a scriptural image so much as a

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[44] The Voyage (1946). [45] CP., p. 132.

[46] Such images actually appeared in Muir's own dreams and visions, and had particular significance for him. John Press comments:

> "One of the marks by which we recognise a poet is his ability to stamp the images he uses - no matter what their source - with the indelible mark of his imagination.... Think... how Edwin Muir incorporates the heraldic images, the labyrinths, and the symbols of Incarnation which he finds everywhere in Rome into his mythological universe" (The Fire and the Fountain [Oxford Univ. Press, 1955], pp. 194, 195).

[47] The "fabulous creatures winged and crowned" are symbols of the union of matter and spirit. Alchemy "asserts the union of spirit, symbolised by the eagle, or by mercury, with the serpent, or sulphur, matter. This union forms the dragon or winged serpent out of a conflict between opposites. The 'mortification' or death of the dragon was necessary before the resurrection could take place which alone produces the philosophers' stone" (Hirst, Hidden Riches : Traditional Symbolism from the Renaissance to Blake, p. 124). Jung identifies the alchemical symbol of the philosopher's stone with his concept of the totality of the self and with the "new man" of Christian symbolism (Man and His Symbols, pp. 205, 210). Nietzsche combined the images of eagle and serpent in Also Sprach Zarathustra, Prologue, 10, as a symbol of pride of life reconciled with spiritual wisdom (Lea, The Tragic Philosopher, p. 347).

representation of a state of mind, a golden age before the dawn of self-consciousness and inward division, which possibly existed in the remote past of mankind as well as in the childhood of each individual. Thus it resembles Wagner's idea of ancient Greece as enjoying an unconscious state of union with nature. The "fabulous creatures" are symbols of this original unity which appear in dreams: primordial images that correspond to the innate ideas of neo-Platonist tradition.[48] Denial of such images by the adherents of materialist ideologies ("The Cloud", "The Usurpers") or by iconoclastic sects such as Scottish Calvinism ("Scotland 1941", "The Incarnate One") filled Muir with despair.

> What jealousy, what rage could overwhelm
> The golden lion and lamb and vault a grave
> For innocence, innocence past defence or cost.

In the millennial prophecies of Isaiah, the wild beast and the lamb lie down together, and the antitheses are reconciled in a new synthesis of peace and innocence. This is another function of the emblems (as one saw in "The Three Mirrors") namely, to reconcile conflict and ambivalence, much as the horses of Muir's childhood combined fear and attraction in a numinous feeling of

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[48] As one has noted in Chapter II, Blake's creatures in the "printing house in hell" have the same significance. The image of the dragon appears several times in Muir's work. In "The Journey Back 2", the death of the dragon suggests the end of a mythical epoch, but in "Variations X" we are clearly dealing with symbols of death and rebirth.

> "Ignorant that the dragon died
> Long since and that the mountain shook
> When the great lion was crucified."

Perhaps the emblems themselves, through death in the ordinary world, have achieved immortality in the dream world of the visionary imagination.

sacred awe. In other words, this kind of imagination synthesizes and unites experience according to innate psychic patterns which overcome contradictory emotions and ideas and set them vibrating in harmony. One of the deepest sources of conflict in Muir was the opposition between the desire to return to lost innocence, "innocence past defence or cost", and the need to accept responsibility for oneself and one's world. For him, nature cannot be accepted as it appears on the surface, but only when its "heraldic crest" shines out again, proclaiming its noble spiritual ancestry. When that is lost, as it is in a scientific materialist or existentialist world view, then the "weariless wave" of time or the flood of everyday reality roofs everything with its "sliding horror", cutting off the over-arching sky of childhood and vaulting a "grave for innocence". The animal forms are then no longer winged and crowned, but merely "hoofed and horned".[49] (This conflict was finally resolved in the very successful poem, "The Animals",[50] where they are seen as a stage of God's creation, inhabiting their own kind of eternity.) Horses have a special role in this area of Muir's symbolism, since even in early childhood they were clothed with an aura compounded of ambivalent emotion : they aroused both fear and attraction, the awe called forth by sacred things.[51] In "The Horses",[52] they return to a new, free fellowship in man's

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[49]See "The Shades" (CP., p. 112) and "The Ring" (CP. p. 113).

[50]CP., p. 207.

[51]Muir, An Autobiography, p. 22.

[52]CP., p. 246.

world, which has been scoured by an apocalyptic war, and they bring a release of unmixed emotion. It is important to notice that, in doing so, they lose their emblematic quality. Seen at first as "fabulous steeds set on an ancient shield", they wait, "stubborn and shy", to be recognized as "creatures to be owned and used". Though they had approached with a frightening drumming of hooves and a wave of charging heads, they offer a "free servitude" that "still can pierce our hearts". As with all Muir's parables, both psychological and spiritual meanings lie close beneath the literal surface of this poem.

The prevalence of animal forms amongst Muir's emblems brings to mind the significance attributed by some anthropologists to the totems of primitive peoples. J.B. Priestley, in Man and Time, quotes A.P. Elkin on the beliefs of Australian aborigines. He states that the aboriginal hero-myths all refer to an "eternal dream time" which is "all-at-once instead of one thing after another". In this dream time, past, present and future co-exist as aspects of one reality, and each of the cult-totems of these people is a "door into the eternal dream time", which can be opened by the appropriate ritual.[53] Muir's unusually sensitive awareness of man's remote past[54] may well have been stimulated by the particularly rich prehistoric remains still existing in Orkney, and is referred to in his autobiography,[55] where he speaks of "an age when animal and

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[53] J.B. Priestley, Man and Time (London: Aldus Books, 1964), p. 140. Cf. Blake: "If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, infinite" (The Marriage of Heaven and Hell).

[54] See the imagery in "The Journey Back" 2 and 3, etc.

[55] Muir, An Autobiography, pp. 46, 47.

man and god lived densely together in the same world - the timeless crowded age of organic heraldry", a fabulous past of "heraldic men and legendary beasts"; he adds that "our unconscious life goes back into it".[56] His own emblems, like the totems, often serve either as links between time and eternity ("Variations X") or as a means of ordering images in an hierarchic and ritualistic pattern. (See "The Emblem".)[57]

INCARNATION: Was this to be the whole of Muir's mythological universe : the emblems as reconciling signs of a transcendent order, the moments of timeless contemplation, the faith in ultimate deliverance which had power to exorcise "time and time again" and offer instead the paradoxical experience of "now and not yet"? Where does one find a place in all this for the love and forgiveness, the sense of the word made flesh that appears in poems like "Orpheus' Dream" and "The Annunciation"? We know that some time in 1939 Muir suddenly recognised himself as a Christian, though not an orthodox one, nor one who could be affiliated to any church.[58] We know, also, that the balance between Hellenic thought and Hebraic insights characteristic of Christian Platonism, and similar to Muir's own, was firmly poised upon the central doctrine of Incarnation. It seems that specifically Christian religious experience was, for

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[56] In taking notice of Muir's reaction against Nietzsche, one should not overlook the attitudes held in common, e.g., "I have discovered for myself that the old humanity and animality, yea, the collective primeval age, and the past of all sentient being, continues to meditate, love, hate and decide in me, - I have suddenly awakened in the midst of this dream, but merely to the consciousness that I just dream, and that I must dream on in order not to perish" (F. Nietzsche, The Joyful Wisdom, 54, quoted Lea, The Tragic Philosopher, pp. 168 - 169).

[57] CP., p. 230.

[58] Muir, An Autobiography, pp. 246, 247.

Muir, largely private and tentative, at least until life in Rome in 1949 overwhelmed him with the sense of a society still rooted in the past of Christendom and saturated at all levels in Christian symbolism.[59] By this time he was already sixty-one years old, and, though his autobiography bears witness to the profound effect this experience had upon him, it was not easy to assimilate new elements into his work. There is evidence of ambivalence towards Christian doctrine at all stages of his poetry, as will appear in the course of this discussion, and this may well be due, not only to aversion to the arid literalism ("iron texts") of Scottish Calvinism, but also to an emotional difficulty in contemplating the Passion and Crucifixion, which may have been too closely associated in his mind with the dying agony of his brother, Johnnie.[60] It is of interest to note that the first reference to Christ in the final collection of poems appears in "Variations IX", where the "homespun fiend, Indifference", the false self who represses the true one, is distinguished by his ability to "stare at beauty's bosom coldly/ And at Christ's crucifixion boldly".

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[59] "I think of Giotto the Tuscan shepherd's dream,
Christ, man and creature in their inner day.
How could our race betray
The Image, and the Incarnate One unmake
Who chose this form and fashion for our sake?"
("The Incarnate One", CP., p. 228).

[60] An Autobiography, pp. 102, 103. Evidence in support of this supposition is to be found in Poor Tom, Chapter 22, where the approach of Tom's fatal disease is likened to a Bellini painting of the Passion, in which the soldiers approach on a winding road, so that they will disappear and then reappear much closer, heralding the final hour of resignation "to his agony, to the fabulous waterless regions." This last stage is "so hateful to human eyes that even the involuntary object of the metamorphosis can hardly be contemplated without a faint but deep feeling of aversion" (p. 222).

In "The Recurrence",[61] written and published after the "conversion" experience of 1939, belief in the cyclic movement of time, which had become Nietzsche's way of affirming life, is recognised as a negation both of the need for redemption and of the reality of Christ's sacrifice on the Cross.

> Else the Actor on the Tree
> Would loll at ease, miming pain,
> And counterfeit mortality.

If we place these lines beside the final paragraph of "Oedipus", where the narrator identifies himself as a "walking riddle" who has "acted out this fable", the ambiguity of the word "Actor" in "The Recurrence" becomes all the more pointed, and we cannot avoid the conclusion that Muir, at this stage, saw the crucifixion as something performed once for all in time, and therefore different, both in quality and function, from the myths and symbols that illuminate the mystery of man's life in all ages. This insight was expanded in "Robert the Bruce",[62] a poem in ballad measure, in which the king speaks to Douglas from his death-bed. He acknowledges that the imaginative ordering of images is not enough. Though the actions of the past assume a living pattern in the popular memory, just as his own life and death will do, it is not enough that his murder of Comyn, or Wallace's defeat, should merely become the necessary elements in that pattern. Without redemption, personal guilt could only be extinguished by the final passing away of time itself, which, though it brings order out of chaos, cannot redeem what has been done ill.

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[61] CP., p. 102.

[62] CP., p. 115.

'But that Christ hung upon the Cross,
Comyn would rot until time's end
And bury my sin in boundless dust,
For there is no amend

'In order; yet in order run
All things by unreturning ways.
If Christ live not, nothing is there
For sorrow or for praise.'

Beyond the responsibility discovered in "Oedipus", beyond even the simultaneous grasp of contradictory forces, there still lies the need for salvation. The coincidence of the contradictories holds only in the moment of timeless contemplation; real life is a matter "for sorrow or for praise", and is therefore subject to judgment.[63] There is no return to lost innocence;[64] only love and forgiveness can redeem the past.[65]

It is fair to say, however, that Muir never really convinces us that he experienced Christ as his personal saviour. He toyed with the idea in "Prometheus", seeing it as some possibility in the future, just as he did in "The Journey Back I".

I could break my journey
Now, here, without a loss, but that some day
I know I shall find a man who has done good
His long lifelong and is
Image of man from whom all have diverged.[66]

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[63] "To Franz Kafka" (CP., p. 233) shows how this insight has overcome aversion to election and reprobation.

[64] See "The Way" (CP., p. 166).

"I must retrace the track.
It's lost and gone.
Back, I must travel back!
None goes there, none."

See also "The Other Oedipus" and "The Other Story" (CP. pp. 217, 241).

[65] See "Song : Love gathers all" (CP., p. 201), "Prometheus" (CP. p. 214), "The Difficult Land" (CP. p. 237), etc.

[66] CP., p. 170.

It is noticeable that this image is perilously close to one of lost innocence, and finds its full expression in "The Transfiguration",[67] where the description of a glimpse of the redeemed creation, a "radiant kingdom", is really the "clear unfallen world" that will return finally at the second coming of Christ. Then the crucifixion will be undone and the cross dismantled,

> And Judas damned take his long journey backward
> From darkness into light and be a child
> Beside his mother's knee, and the betrayal
> Be quite undone and never more be done.

This poem, like a number of Muir's other long poems, is too loosely woven and could well be condensed, but it has some compelling passages and much of the serene radiance that pervades all his reconciling visions. That it is only partially successful may also be due to the fact that the reconciliation is not a true synthesis, but a retreat to the beginning again, without progression. Whatever may have been the emotional basis for this position,[68] it is apparent that Muir's emphasis upon immortality instead of resurrection weighed down the scales on the side of Platonism,[69] and his attempts to include Christ in his cosmology were seldom successful: the first Adam never quite gave way to the second Adam. Muir admitted as much in the long meditation, "Soliloquy",[70] another monologue, ostensibly by a first-century Greek

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[67] CP., p. 198.

[68] Willa Muir speculates on this in Belonging, Chapter 18(i).

[69] Willa Muir records an occasion in Rome when her husband and W.H. Auden spent an evening in conversation. "Wystan Auden ... argued the case for the resurrection of the body while Edwin argued for the immortality of the soul, in a happy antiphony that went on for hours" (Belonging, p. 255).

[70] CP., p. 194.

who admits that his thirty-year-old memories of Jerusalem upon Good Friday "Trouble me still". It is the poet's own testimony:

> I have picked up wisdom lying
> Disused about the world, available still,
> Employable still, small odds and scraps of wisdom,
> A miscellaneous lot that yet makes up
> A something that is genuine, with a body,
> A shape, a character, more than half Platonic
> (Greek, should I say?) and yet of practical use.

He goes on to record his profound "dismay" at time and mortality, his acquaintance with antique symbols,

> And temples and curious caverns in the rocks
> Scrawled thick with suns and birds and animals,
> Fruit, fire and feast, flower-garlanded underworld,
> Past reading,

his search for identity and his glimpses of eternity; but, "All this is insufficient". The vision of evil and of human suffering seems to demand something more, yet

> My heart is steady,
> Beats in my breast and cannot burn or break,
> Systole and diastole for seventy years.

The poem ends with an invocation:

> Light and praise,
> Love and atonement, harmony and peace,
> Touch me, assail me; break and make my heart.

This is as far as he can go - an acknowledgment of the old need to grieve, to accept the tragedy of life, to open the floodgates of pent emotion.

A number of Christian poems appeared in the following volume, <u>One Foot in Eden</u> (1956); those that were subsequently withdrawn from the final collection were concerned with the theme of the marriage of heaven and earth, with the exception of "The Lord", a sonnet which asserts personal allegiance in

an ambiguous way, since the poet dissociates himself from those

> Who say that lord is dead, when I can hear[71]
> Daily his dying whisper in my ear.

The poems retained were, significantly enough, "The Incarnate One", "The Killing"[72] (a faintly repellent account of the crucifixion, given by a "stranger", in which the turning heads of the three victims recall Mansie's description of his brother's suffering in Poor Tom, and where the ending of the poem expresses sceptical curiosity concerning the alleged divinity of the chief victim), and "Antichrist".[73] The last-named poem, which, like the others, is concerned with a false understanding or a denial of the true nature of Christ, is of particular interest because of the associations of its theme. This eschatological symbol has always been connected with the second coming and the onset of the millennium. Traditionally, the Antichrist precedes the "last days", appearing as a pseudo-messiah, who seems to be full of virtue and benevolence, but is, in reality, a cruel tyrant, an embodiment of anarchic and destructive power, whose "signs and lying wonders" deceive the whole world.[74] One recalls, too, that Nietzsche, as his final disintegration approached, referred to himself as the Anti-christ, Dionysus, or the Crucified, and that Muir had once dreamed of Nietzsche upon the cross in a self-crucifixion of pride, not love.[75] Hence, we seem to be dealing with a

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[71]Cf. Nietzsche : "God is dead."

[72]CP., p. 224.

[73]CP. p. 226.

[74]Cohn, The Pursuit of the Millennium, p. 19.

[75]Muir, An Autobiography, p. 128.

perverted image of the self as well as of the Saviour.

> He walks, the enchanter, on his sea of glass,
> Poring upon his blue inverted heaven
> Where a false sun revolves from west to east.
> If he could raise his eyes he would see his hell.

It is like the deliberate, blasphemous reversals of black magic, a false and sinister copy of goodness and truth.

> He heals the sick to show his conjuring skill,
> Vexed only by the cure; and turns his cheek
> To goad the furious to more deadly fury,
> And damn by a juggling trick the ingenuous sinner.

In a sense, he is the opposite of the Christ of "The Transfiguration", and corresponds to the false self, the "betrayer in the maze",[76] and also to the maze itself, since he, too, is "the Lie; one true thought and he's gone". He personifies the shadow of unresolved emotional conflict that sometimes obscures Muir's image of Christ and forbids a real encounter.

But if Muir fails, in his poetry, to approach Christ as the suffering redeemer upon whom all men may lay those burdens they have taken up under the law, he is not denied the bright image of the Logos, the God who became man in order that man may become divine; and he is aware of the workings of some power that he identifies as "grace".[77] "Thought and Image"[78] is essentially a logos poem which combines the chief elements of the Heracleitan doctrine[79] with the central image of Christ in

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[76] "Effigies 2", CP., p. 234.

[77] An Autobiography, p. 281.

[78] CP., p. 132.

[79] Heracleitus believed that by searching out his own nature he could discover "the Logos, the divine truth by which all things come to pass. His belief rested on the assumption that man is, as it were, a small-scale representation of the universe. His Logos was the thought which is the divine life of the universe. ... Change is perpetual, but the Logos, disclosed in wisdom and order, remains". It also contains within itself the opposites of good and evil, which are fundamentally united (E.W. Barnes, The Rise of Christianity [London: Longmans Green and Co, 1947], p.52).

something like the medieval synthesis with its characteristic use of figura. The ballad measure and the stark elemental imagery reinforce the medieval feeling while the meaning seems to operate on at least three planes at once. The birth, life and death of Christ seem to be seen as types of the experience of the soul in its descent into the realms of matter and in its subsequent regeneration, but also as types of three stages in "the growth of a poet's mind". With remarkable economy and compression, all these meanings are suggested by arranging and re-arranging a few basic images[80] into three main patterns. First of these is the primal state of unity with nature.

> On bread and wine his flesh grew tall,
> The round sun helped him on his way,
> Wood, iron, herb and animal
> His friends were till the testing day.

The "testing day" that follows is the state of alienation, the cross of contradiction, corresponding to Wordsworth's period of "change and subversion".

> Then braced by iron and by wood,
> Engrafted on a tree he died,
> And little dogs lapped up the blood
> That spurted from his broken side.
>
> The great bull gored him with his horns,
> And stinging flies were everywhere,
> The sun beat on him, clinging thorns
> Writhed in and out among his hair.

Finally, there is the loosening of the "great knot" and the gathering of the images, both natural and divine, into the storehouses of memory, the "invincible shade" of the anima mundi.

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[80] E.g., beast, insect, herb, stone, earth, wood, iron, sun, etc.

> All that had waited for his birth
> Were round him then in dusty night,
> The creatures of the swarming earth,
> The souls and angels in the height.

Here all things take their places again in the great chain of Being, with Christ, as the divine man, at the centre of an hierarchic macrocosm. This order is matched in the microcosm of the individual mind when the true self assumes its rightful position at the mid-point of the circle of experience and is no longer swept helplessly around the circumference.

Looking back over this analysis, one finds that, in its own way, Muir's spiritual odyssey seems to follow the same shape as Dante's. The closed circles of Hell yield before the combined influence of the poetic imagination and the image of the beloved woman, giving way to the winding purgatorial ascent, at the summit of which lies the earthly paradise.[81] Beyond this again, appears the perfect circle of eternal unity and transcendent being, a mystical vision that had once been described in Poor Tom:

> Though he knew that he was standing here in the parlour with his dead brother, something so strange had happened that it would have rooted him to a place where he desired far less to be: the walls had receded, and soundlessly a vast and perfect circle - not the provisional circle of life than can never be fully described - had closed and he stood within it. He did not know what it was that he divined and bowed down before: everlasting and perfect order, the eternal destiny of all men, the immortality of his own soul; he could not have given utterance to it, although it was so clear and certain; but he had a longing to fall on his knees.[82]

From such experiences come the hints of love and praise, acceptance and gratitude, that are expressed in those poems where

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[81] It is possible to make a schematic diagram of this pattern. See figure on p. 134, which includes heraldic motifs borrowed and adapted from the emblematic painting in the Appendix.

[82] Poor Tom, Chapter 27, pp. 251, 252.

A. Labyrinth, Maze, Circles of Hell: Inward Division.

B. Time, Wilderness, Fallen World.

C. Emblems, stylised symbols expressing reconciliation of contradiction.

D. Anima, Sophia, the lost Bride : Conjunction and Integration.

E. The Centre, Eden, Canaan, the Sufficient Place, Harvest or Sabbath. (Tree becomes a Cross when seen from the circumference.)

F. Transcendence, Circle of Eternity (Circle of Hell seen from the Centre).

all conflict is transcended and Muir celebrates an inward state of spontaneous feeling and fullness of being.

> I gather to my heart
> Beast, insect, flower, earth, water, fire,
> In absolute desire,
> As fifty years ago.
>
> Acceptance, gratitude:
> The first look and the last,
> When all between has passed
> Restore ingenuous good
> That seeks no personal end
> Nor strives to mar or mend.
> . . . . . .
> Now that I can discern
> It whole or almost whole,
> Acceptance and gratitude
> Like travellers return
> And stand where first they stood.[83]

Some corroboration of the metaphysical attitudes just traced in Muir's poetry can be found in his critical essays, where we find them conceptualised and elaborated in general terms with characteristic simplicity and lucidity. It is not possible to quote as fully as one might wish, but one may draw attention to certain statements that bear out the themes of moral conflict and spiritual progression, as well as that of reconciliation by means of incarnated symbols, which have been considered above.

In his essay, "The Natural Man and the Political Man",[84] Muir draws a distinction between the traditional "man of myth and religion" and the new "natural man dovetailed into a biological sequence and a social structure." The difference is that the former was only human in the complete sense when he had "put on" the spiritual man - a process conceived

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[83] "A Birthday", CP., p. 157.

[84] Essays on Literature and Society, pp. 150 - 164.

symbolically as a rebirth - and had become "conscious of his unique place in the world and in time". The existence of the new man in the body of the old implies a moral struggle which for centuries was accepted as the essential character of man. This is "the man of Dante and Shakespeare, and of Balzac and Tolstoy.... He occupies a country of his own with unique rights and needs, quite apart from the biological sequence". If for the traditional man the individual's life was a conflict, for the modern man it has become a development entirely contained within the natural and social environment. This new view, says Muir, results in a reduction of the image of man, making it more realistic, but depriving it of "ultimate significance to the imagination", and he goes on to show how the history of the modern novel reflects this simplification of the idea of man. He points out, however, that "history and experience tell us that life is a development, not merely a struggle poised on its own centre, changing nothing. The struggle is an essential means for accomplishing the development."[85] The view of the nineteenth century evolutionists, who misconceived the nature of the struggle by regarding it merely as a function of development: the struggle for existence or the adaptation to environment, eliminated the "living mind", the "individual in whom alone the struggle attains self-consciousness", and hence the moral significance of life itself.

In another essay, entitled "Hölderlin's Patmos",[86] one notices that Muir's comments reveal an attention to those

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[85] Ibid., p. 161. This corresponds to the development from cycle to progress, reflected in Muir's poetry.

[86] Ibid., pp. 92 - 103.

concerns in the poem which were nearest to his own preoccupations. He calls it "one of the first modern poems in that it envisages human life in historical terms", and states that it marks a turning point in Hölderlin's imaginative interpretation of history and time, which in his earlier poetry had been symbolised by Greece and the Homeric gods. This interpretation had pictured man's history as a cycle of alternating ages of light and darkness, his own period being one of darkness in which man's task was patiently to preserve the light that was no longer manifest. The three versions of "Patmos" record Hölderlin's attempt to include Christ in his personal hierarchy and the "intense vacillation of mind"[87] that attended this endeavour. Towards the end of the third version there appears an image "of God's quiet sign in the thundering sky and Christ standing beneath it His life long" that "transforms from beginning to end the conception of history as a cycle of light and darkness".[88] Muir remarks that Hölderlin's belief in Christ was clearly different from the orthodox, and it did not force him to deny the ancient gods, who return in the last verse of the poem. "Nevertheless, Christ was the one symbol which united for him the two truths which he perceived in existence: a truth transcending time, and a truth immanent in time: permanence and alternation."

All this is seen as being intimately connected with Hölderlin's conception of poetry as a redeeming sign; in

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[87] Ibid., p. 93. One is reminded here of Muir's own ambivalence towards Christ.

[88] Ibid.,p. 101. This recalls Yeats, who wrote in essentially the same tradition, but whose gyres of interior conflict and historical cycle were never redeemed through being gathered into a Christo-centric universe. Of his two great masters, he followed Nietzsche in this rather than Blake.

his own words, "a staff of song shining downwards, for nothing is common". Muir's comment is as follows:

> By song here he obviously does not mean poetry in general, but rather something resembling Blake's Imagination, which he conceives as the instrument of a process that in this world is history and in eternity is the Father's will. It was the function of poetry to seize that unity and make it known as an imaginatively coherent whole. Such glorification of poetry is sometimes regarded as a romantic delusion, along with Wordsworth's and Coleridge's conception of the imagination with which it has much in common. But it has also much in common with Dante's and Milton's and, above all, Plato's conception of poetry.[89]

Elsewhere in the same essay, Muir says of Hölderlin:

> In the essence of his genius and in his attitude to what he regarded as the chief problem of existence - the ways by which God makes himself known to men - he was nearer to Wordsworth than to any other writer. Like Wordsworth he was concerned with Man, not with the men of his own or any other civilization or age. But while Wordsworth found God in nature, Hölderlin found him in history, in time. To divine the workings of God in history is what we call prophecy. The prophet in the narrower sense foresees these workings in the future; Hölderlin saw them in the past as well, in the universal story of mankind. It is this perception that gives the prophetic part of his poetry its unique intonation, as of a single voice speaking to the gods in a solitude. His utterance is like that of a man accounting to himself for things which he cannot tell to others. The impression of vastness produced by his poetry is due to the fact that the past with all its powers - gods, heroes, emanations - was as real to him as the present. The past was not something that could be thrown into contrast, or paralleled, with the present, as in the poetry of Mr. Eliot and Mr. Pound. It widened the present in a striking and incalculable way, and this expansion gives us a sense of a vast whole, a universal dispensation which is the life of mankind from beginning to end. As all prophecy looks to the fulfilment of time, this vastness is a normal element in prophetic writing, and is the source of its vagueness and grandeur.[90]

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[89] Ibid., p. 103. This account resembles the Logos idea of poetry as a reflection of the Divine Word which, when spoken in time and space, gives rise to the phenomenal world. In Christian terms, this world is the poem made by the Son to the glory of the Father. See Appendix F.

[90] Ibid., pp. 93, 94.

This description of Hölderlin's prophetic poetry might very well serve for what in Jungian terms would be called the archaic voice of the collective unconscious: the World Spirit, that was, is, and shall be. It is also a significant statement of a concept of the poetic imagination (to which Muir himself evidently subscribed) that is akin to the "divine madness" Plato spoke of.[91]

In yet another essay on Hölderlin,[92] Muir refers to the symbolism and language of his later poetry as being "like fragments of a different kind of speech, simple, inexplicable, constant, incapable of being replaced by any rational explanation of them", which gives the poetry not only a baffling depth but a "certain radiant monotony".[93] He specifically relates some of these characteristics to the poet's madness: his "unique rearrangement of his shattered world", and states that, since Hölderlin's poetic imagination is related to dreams, it resembles "a good deal of romantic poetry and almost all mystical poetry" in that it has little to do with the contemporary world, or, at most, regards the contemporary world as the Old Testament prophets regarded it: as falling short of its vision. "The real assumption of this kind of poetry is that human existence can be changed, or rather will be changed; just as the assumption of dramatic poetry is that

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91 "And now that time grows shorter, I perceive
That Plato's is the truest poetry,
And that these shadows
Are cast by the true."
(From Muir's last poem, "I Have Been Taught", CP., p. 302).

92 "Friedrich Hölderlin," Ibid., pp. 86 - 91.

93 "Radiant monotony" is a phrase that applies to much of Muir's own work.

human existence is unchangeable. There seems to be no compromise between these two views".[94]

To put this into more familiar terms, one might say that the poetry of apocalypse and the poetry of tragedy are fundamentally dissimilar, as one may see exemplified in the notorious failure of Romantic tragedy. Perhaps this is what Coleridge meant when he said that everyone is born either a Platonist or an Aristotleian: either the spiritual or the bodily eye is dominant, so that poetry may spring either from the prophetic dream or from a mimesis of life in all its beauty and horror, its abiding imperfection. Christian Platonism has attempted to strike a balance with its emphasis upon the Incarnation, but, in keeping with its mystical character, it has traditionally given preference to the spiritual eye. Much the same might be said of Muir's poetic vision, which, while attempting to bring the inner and outer worlds into an equal focus, usually reveals the dominance of the inward eye of dream and memory.

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[94] *Ibid.*, p. 91.

CHAPTER V

MYTH AND ARCHETYPE

> The saner and greater mythologies are not fancies; they are the utterance of the whole soul of man, and as such inexhaustible to meditation.
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> I.A. Richards, Coleridge on Imagination.

In the previous chapter, some emphasis was laid on Muir's concern with ritualistic action, with mythic forms that make man's presence in the universe both comprehensible and satisfying to the imagination, and with certain hieratic images or motifs (emblems) that reconcile ambivalent emotions through their power of combining innate psychic elements in new and harmonious patterns. In addition, it was noted that certain statements made in his critical essays suggest that he was consciously writing in a non-mimetic mode related to dream and prophecy. The question that now arises is how one may place these observations in some critical perspective which can relate Muir's intentions and poetic practice to literature as a whole and to a particular tradition in poetry. What is it in Muir's symbolic patterns that recalls the Cambridge Platonists and the German Romantics, and presents him at times in the guise of a latter-day witness to the cosmologies of Blake, Milton, Spenser or Dante?

Perhaps one may find a lead in contemporary interest in archetypal criticism, a method which attempts to examine

the relation of literature to myth. Graham Hough has recently pointed out that the main traditions of literary criticism, derived from Aristotle, have tended to neglect this connection, though interest in it is as old as Plato's Phaedrus, was continued by the neo-Platonists and the mythographers of the Renaissance, and was later revived by Herder and the German Romantics. Recent interest in myth derives partly from the work of Frazer, Freud and Jung, and partly from the philosophy of Ernst Cassirer, which has been made available to the general reader through the writings of Suzanne Langer.[1] Cassirer does not accept mimetic or expressive theories of art, but sees it as essentially formative. He holds that there is no reality for man until he has created it in symbolic form.[2] Such developments have paved the way for a new approach to literature which sees it as

> a symbolisation of ancient and deep-rooted tendencies of the human mind - tendencies which have had their primary expression in myth. On this view, the literary mimesis of empirical experience is only a screen for older and far more deeply rooted psychic material.[3]

Northrop Frye, whom Hough regards as the main exponent of this method of criticism,[4] claims that literature springs originally from the largely extra-literary world of "myth proper" (stories

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[1] Graham Hough, An Essay on Criticism (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1966), p. 140.

[2] Ibid., p. 129.

[3] Ibid., p. 142.

[4] Although Hough's assessment of Frye's work is qualified by a number of important reservations, he considers that the broad outline of his system is "bound to become part of our normal critical apparatus" (ibid., p. 150).

of gods and divine beings), which is itself a verbalisation of two more primitive ways of shaping experience : ritual and dream.[5]

Indeed, the concept of ritual seems to figure prominently in this kind of criticism, though it is variously interpreted, perhaps nowhere as clearly as in the account of its relation to myth outlined in a work of comparative religion: The Myth of the Eternal Return by Mircea Eliade. In this book, the author sets out to describe the way in which the "archaic mind" of all cultures conceives reality. Since his thesis is particularly illuminating of Muir's central dilemma - the acceptance of "time", it is proposed to give a highly condensed summary of it before proceeding with the rest of our enquiry into myth criticism. In brief, then, the archaic mind is said to conceive reality in terms of a Platonic structure, of which the following are the main elements.

1. The visible world has a double, an extra-terrestrial archetype existing on a higher cosmic plane.

2. Natural objects and human actions only become "real" through participating in a reality that transcends them, that is, by imitating a celestial archetype.[6]

3. Every creative act repeats the original cosmogonic act: the Creation of the World.

4. Every purposive action acquires meaning in so far as it is a ritual imitating an action performed "in the beginning" by gods, heroes or ancestors.

5. Absolute reality is represented by "symbols of the centre",[7] the sacred mountain at the navel of the world where heaven, earth and hell meet. These

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[5]Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 106.

[6]Mircea Eliade, The Myth of the Eternal Return, trans. Willard Trask (New York: Pantheon Books, 1954), p. 4.

[7]Ibid., p. 12.

symbols may be fountains, trees of life and immortality, or any "consecrated places" such as temples and holy cities, or "sacred times" which represent a return to the mythical time when the ritual was first performed.

6. Any ritual unfolds in "consecrated space" and "sacred time", that is, in the world of myth.

7. By means of ritual, everything is given a form that makes it "real"; everything is constantly being transformed from chaos into cosmos.

8. The road to the centre is traditionally a "difficult road": a pilgrimage, a perilous voyage, a wandering in a labyrinth, a search for the centre of the self. It is a passage from the profane to the sacred, from the ephemeral to the eternal, the human to the divine.[8]

9. "In so far as an act (or an object) acquires a certain reality through the repetition of paradigmatic gestures, and acquires it through that alone, there is an implicit abolition of profane time, of duration, of 'history'; and he who reproduces the exemplary gesture thus finds himself transported into the mythical epoch in which its revelation took place."[9]

10. Primitive man tolerates history with great difficulty. His conception of reality permits the constant regeneration of time, the return to the beginning, the casting off of sin. This pattern of repetition is the "paradise of the archetypes". In this tradition, man himself becomes archetypal and paradigmatic, and is most "real" when he ceases to be an individual in the modern sense.[10]

Eliade concludes that for modern man, exposed to the irreversibility of historical time and to the burden of personal guilt, the fall from the paradise of the archetypes is irretrievable. In this situation, Christianity is the only possible religion.[11]

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[8] Ibid., p. 18. [9] Ibid., p. 35. [10] Ibid., p. 34.

[11] Ibid., p. 162. In Christian doctrine, redemption has taken place once for all and embraces the whole of time; only the final apocalypse or "Judgment" makes all things new again. It is significant that in Christian symbolism the cycle of return has become infinite in eternity where "the beginning and the end are one", so that the symbolic pattern remains the same, although it now no longer excludes but is able to contain within itself the concepts of time and history. Temporal events are made meaningful by a system of figural interpretation which links people and incidents in terms of a divine purpose existing in the mind of God. See Erich Auerbach's account of figura in Mimesis, trans. Willard Trask (Princeton University Press, 1953), p. 64.

This analysis of the "archaic mind", which is really another name for the mind of what Muir has called the "man of myth and religion", does help to clarify his painful confrontation with time and the historical perspective by enabling us to see it in terms of the struggle of the mythopoeic imagination to absorb and transfigure empirical experience. The contemplation and imitation of archetypal images and actions transports the poet into the timeless world of myth where the opposing elements of subjective and objective reality co-exist in perfect harmony and the hopes and desires of mankind are consummated.[12] Eliade's account also illuminates Muir's comment that Hölderlin's image of Christ transforms the cycles of history from end to end,[13] and explains why Muir himself turns from the Hellenic to the Hebraic vision of time.

When Northrop Frye refers to "dream" as an aspect of myth, he means the vision of recovered innocence and harmony that, in Eliade's terms, is achieved by the return to the paradise of the archetypes. Combined with the imitation of symbolic ritual and expressed in verbal form, it becomes the myth from which literature is said to be derived. Frye's critical theory (which is not opposed to other forms of criticism but attempts to provide a framework for all types of literary scholarship) is based on the premise that the poet's medium is words and his shaping tool metaphor. By their means, he conjures up shapes of formal beauty out of the welter of experience and, in so doing, bridges the ever-widening gulf

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[12]This apparently bears out the observation made in the previous chapter that Muir's emblems, like the totems of the Australian aborigines, permit entry to the "eternal dream time." On a more sophisticated plane, the Platonist, in acts of contemplation, makes a movement of love (eros) toward what is good, beautiful and eternal.

[13]Muir, Essays on Literature and Society, p. 101.

between "dream" and empirical existence with its daily frustrations and its subjection to the process of growth and decay.[14] If he is a purely mythopoeic writer, like Blake, his metaphysical position is one of Idealism. The objects of the actual world are assimilated into the world of the imagination,[15] which is infinite and eternal, since its only boundaries are the limits of the conceivable, and memory, desire and hope, which are the subjective forms of past, present and future, co-exist within it. If he works in a representational mode, he is metaphysically a Realist, and sense impressions of natural objects and actions are his primary concern. In mythic writing, images and actions are stylised and conventional, yet full of numinous power and significance, like the images in dreams. In naturalistic writing, they are more numerous and varied, but are limited by the "probabilities" of actual existence. These are the two extremes of apocalyptic insight and direct mimesis: mutually exclusive ways of seeing, between which Muir said there "seems to be no compromise".

Literature as a whole, however, may be seen as occupying an uninterrupted scale between the one pole and the other, with the greatest poetry of all usually occupying the middle ground.[16]

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[14]This idea is explicit in Muir's sonnet, "The Transmutation"

"And we be poised between the unmoving dream
And the sole moving moment."

(CP., p. 154).

[15]Blake's vision of Albion as "One Man" containing the entire liberated universe is a symbol of the totality of experience existing within the mind alone. Hence his objection to Wordsworth's concept of mind and nature being "exquisitely fitted" to each other.

[16]Muir's own poetry, though springing from mythic vision, is, in fact, based on the painful struggle to accept the external world, which he usually calls "Time". He insists upon its independent existence (cf. final paragraph of "The Solitary Place CP., p. 81), but it is anarchic, "fallen", until shaped by symbolic forms.

The universe of poetry is built out of the various verbal forms that the poets of any culture, or even of all cultures, have created by combining, in various proportions, the elements of the two opposing worlds of the actual and the ideal. Archetypal critics see this universe as a coherent totality held together by a structure of "linked analogies"[17] and identifying symbols by which the "dark inscrutable power" of the creative imagination reconciles all discordant elements troubling the interior harmony of the mind. What are these linked analogies that are regarded as the source of the archetypal images that literature shares with myth? Fundamentally, they are part of an archaic structure of correspondences, familiar to all men everywhere, between the movements of the heavenly bodies, the seasonal cycles of the solar year, and the rhythms of human, animal and vegetable life. Winter and summer, night and day, the waning and waxing of the moon, seed-time and harvest, birth and death, the moral strife between the powers of light and darkness, the quest for a "harmonious human form of things" that will give meaning to life, order to the mind and peace to the heart - these are the original images and movements of the creative imagination, the primary metaphors of art and religion alike. Frye claims that such images form a "grammar of symbolism" which the critic can learn from an examination of literature as a whole. It has existed immemorially in the "correspondences" of sympathetic magic; it reappears in classical mythology, in the esoteric symbolism of Hebrew and Orphic mysticism, and in the mundus symbolicus of the Renaissance. If

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[17]The present writer has borrowed this phrase from Herman Melville: "O Nature and O Soul of Man! how far beyond all utterance are your linked analogies! not the smallest atom stirs or lives on matter, but has its cunning duplicate in mind" (Moby Dick [New York: Dent, 1907], p. 271).

it seems to lean heavily upon what C.S. Lewis has called the "discarded image" of the Pythagorean cosmos, the latter is itself an imaginative rather than a scientific construct, and is surely not anterior but subsequent to the analogues of the Chain of Being.[18] Since the mythic process of shaping experience is built upon the repetition of paradigmatic actions that reflect the recurring cycles of the natural world, and since its goal is the reconciliation of conflict between the dreaming mind and the external forms of man's physical environment, Frye asserts that the archetypal criticism of poetry "rests on two organising rhythms or patterns - one cyclical, the other dialectic".[19]

Recalling that one's exploration of Muir's poetic cosmos has revealed precisely these two patterns of cycle and dialectic, usually in the form of the poet's struggle to lift the circles of the temporal world into a spiral and enter the timeless world of "eternal dialogue", one is doubtless justified in pursuing Frye's analysis a little further; but, since it is idle to pretend that one can survey a comprehensive critical system in the space of a few pages, one is obliged, at the usual risk of over-simplification, to content oneself with extracting certain structural principles that seem to apply most significantly to Muir's work.

It has already been noted that the main body of literature lies between the two poles of myth and naturalism, representing both a displacement of myth in a human direction and a

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[18]Frye says, "Not many people have clearly understood that cosmology is a literary form, not a religious or scientific one" (Fables of Identity : Studies in Poetic Mythology [New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1963] , p. 52).

[19]Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, p. 106.

conventionalisation of naturalistic content in an ideal direction.[20] The nearer any work is to myth, the closer it is to the permanent conventions and structures of poetry; the nearer it is to pure representation, the more the basic structures are overlaid by historical influences and the preoccupations of contemporary literary fashion. Frye has distinguished various "modes" that represent typical positions on the scale between myth and naturalism, all of which may take primitive and popular forms as well as sophisticated literary forms. Nearest to myth proper is the "romantic mode", represented by the popular forms of ballad and folktale and by the romantic epic, where the action takes place in a magical world in which the ordinary laws of nature are often suspended. Next comes the "high mimetic mode" of national epic, tragedy, or the conventions of courtly love, where the hero has exceptional qualities but is subject to the social order and the natural law. The "low mimetic mode" presents ordinary people and common situations; while the "ironic mode", though representing an extreme of frustration or even absurdity, is considered to be returning toward myth since there is an implied comparison with, or a direct parody of, an ideal condition.

Frye applies the same categories to more thematic literature, in which the writer communicates directly with his audience. Closest to myth in this field is the oracular poetry of the prophet or "mouthpiece of the gods", usually found in sacred writings. Next comes the poet as wandering minstrel or "exile with the word-hoard," exploring the boundary

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[20] Ibid., p. 137.

between two worlds, contrasting memory and present reality. The high mimetic mode is represented by the courtier-poet, a master of decorum and lover of beauty; the low mimetic by the poet as an individual of exceptional imagination and sensibility; while the ironic mode finds expression in the poet as craftsman (symboliste, imagist, etc.).[21] It will be observed that these scales correspond in some respects to a chronological development from ancient to modern; but if one measures Muir's work as a whole against this kind of scheme, one finds that it occupies an area significantly close to myth. He is a scarred wanderer (Odysseus), an exile, whose muse is memory ("My childhood all a myth"), exploring the border between dream and reality. His tales and ballads take a legendary form, but are, in fact, a projection and embodiment of subjective states that probe this borderland. Approaching myth proper, one finds the vision of "the gods" ("The Labyrinth"), the dream poem ("The Combat"), and oracular poems like "The Journey Back" II and VI and "The Poet". The world of romance is evoked by a great deal of imagery characteristic of this mode - a besieged castle, a secret postern, horses and hounds, archers, heraldic banners, towers, forests, men in armour, Tristram and Merlin. There is very little of the high mimetic style (one has already noted Muir's difficulty with tragic vision), though the dignity of his sonnets and love poems might belong here, and almost nothing of the everyday situations of the low mimetic. His subjectivism is not individualistic but emphasizes the universal condition of an Everyman. The ironic mode is represented in Muir's poetry by the reverse side of myth, a

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[21]The foregoing account has been condensed from Anatomy of Criticism, pp. 33 - 61.

false world of perverted images and frustrated epiphanies, which will be referred to again later. There is no real concern with craftsmanship as such, but an implicit rejection of the idea of poem as autonomous creation or exquisite artefact.

Archetypal critics claim that if one stands far enough back from the surface of any literary work, the basic mythopoeic design becomes discernible, and that this design is some form or phase of the quest myth[22]: what Eliade calls the "difficult road" toward the centre of "absolute reality", where consciousness expands to embrace a total vision of existence. Frye maintains that as the poetic universe extends outwards from this centre, one can distinguish four main stages of the quest which are represented in literature by four fundamental modes of narrative : the comic mode, characterised by integration, recognition and consummation; the romantic mode which concerns the adventures and battles of the hero; the tragic mode, characterised by suffering and death; and the ironic mode, which reflects the extreme of isolation and frustration.[23] By standing back and taking a comprehensive view of Muir's poetry, one has already traced a fragmented and episodic pattern corresponding in outline to this archetypal design of the journey in search of identity and integration. Setting out from the Eden of childhood, he falls into a labyrinth of imaginative and emotional paralysis,

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[22]See Fables of Identity, pp. 16 - 18, and Anatomy of Criticism, pp. 187.

[23]Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, pp. 162. These are analysed in detail in pp. 163 - 239.

passes swiftly through a death and rebirth phase (treating it as a conventional ritual in "The Private Place"), then struggles on through the wilderness with growing hope and understanding until he finally glimpses the centre in the vision from Pisgah, in the archetypal house of "The Sufficient Place", or in the regenerated world of "The Transfiguration".

The fictional world in which these actions take place seems to contain four symbolic regions and is roughly analogous to the fourfold mythical cosmologies of Dante, Milton and Blake.[24] In some respects, Blake's system, with its circle of destiny and its ordinary world split between the contraries, is closest to Muir's subjective universe, since it represents four states of consciousness or degrees of imaginative vision, which have been interpreted by Frye in Fearful Symmetry : A Study of William Blake.[25] Ulro stands for the condition of the isolated individual immersed in the world of sense impressions and brooding upon his own abstractions. Generation is the ordinary twofold world of subject and object, organism and environment. It is a fallen world, bounded by time and space, and subject to the moral struggle between the "contraries". Beulah is an unfallen state of love and wonder resulting from the conjunction of the male and female principles and leading to imaginative awakening. It is a

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[24] Jung has said that "the Self normally expresses itself in some kind of fourfold structure" (Man and His Symbols, p. 185). In Dante, the four regions are the upturned circles of Hell, the spiral mountain of Purgatory, the Earthly Paradise at the summit, and the heavenly spheres. In Milton, the traditional metaphorical regions - Hell, Fallen World, Paradise and Heaven - are more widely separated in space and time. Blake calls them Ulro, Generation, Beulah and Eden.

[25] Princeton University Press, 1947.

lower paradise, a threefold vision of lover, beloved and creation, sometimes seen as father, mother and child. Eden, for Blake, is the fiery city of the spiritual sun, a vision of the "four living creatures" who represent the unified imagination, the creative energy of pure poetic genius.[26] In Muir's world, one can trace the outlines of a similar structure, consisting of a lowest state termed the labyrinth, maze, or Hell ("The Strange Return"), an ordinary fallen state called Time, the "grove", or the "difficult land", an unfallen state called Eden, Canaan, or "the Promise", which is usually represented either by "father, mother and child" or by the sacred marriage ("Orpheus' Dream"), while the highest sphere, often called Eternity, is either remotely discerned as the "over-arching sky", or referred to as the ineffable experience of "Being" or 'Sabbath".

Such stages of imaginative perception can in turn be related to conventional clusters of archetypal imagery. Frye states that undisplaced myth is concerned with gods or demons and with two contrasting worlds of "total metaphorical identification"[27] that in religious symbolism are called heaven and hell. They are represented by archetypes of apocalyptic or demonic imagery respectively, the latter often being a parody or perversion of the former.[28] They can be schematized in accordance with the categories of the chain of being, as illustrated in the table on page 154.

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[26] Ibid., pp. 48, 49. See also Frye, "The Keys to the Gates", Some British Romantics : A Collection of Essays, ed. James V. Logan (Ohio State University Press, 1966).

[27] This refers to the tendency for such images to be symbols of multiplicity in unity, and to approach the source and essence of either all good or all evil (Anatomy of Criticism, p. 139).

[28] A famous instance of such a perversion in literature is Dante's Satan, whose three cannibalistic faces are a parody of the Trinity and of the Mass.

Polarised Archetypal Imagery

Order of Reality	Apocalyptic Imagery	Demonic Imagery
Divine and Human	Archetypes of community, symposium, order, love. Victorious hero, Bride.	Tyranny or anarchy. Hero isolated or betrayed. Harlot, witch, "terrible mother".
Animal	Pastoral animals, flock of sheep, lamb, dove, etc.	Beasts and birds of prey.
Vegetable	Garden, grove, tree of life, vine, rose, lotus, etc.	Sinister forest, heath, wilderness, tree of death.
Mineral	City, temple, house, precious stone. Geometrical images, such as "starlit dome".	Ruins, deserts, rocks, stone. Sinister geometrical images, such as maze, wheel, cross.
Unformed Matter	River, traditionally fourfold.	Sea, flood, snow.

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[29]This table has been adapted from Frye's account in Fables of Identity (pp. 19 - 20), where he refers to such images as exemplifying comic and tragic vision. It corresponds, however, to his discussion of apocalyptic and demonic imagery in Anatomy of Criticism (pp. 141 - 150).

At the centre of apocalyptic vision, these images become symbols of pure unified being, which in Christian tradition identify Christ as One God, One Man, One Lamb, One Tree of Life (or Vine of which we are the branches), and One Corner-stone, which the builders rejected. Here, He is united with his Bride in the New Jerusalem.[30] Between the mythic poles of Heaven and Hell lies the world of ordinary life, represented in literature by greater or lesser degrees of mimetic realism, which are embodied in what Frye calls the "analogical imagery" of innocence (parental figures, children or chaste youth, pastoral animals, horses and hounds of romance, fountains, castles, towers or cottages), nature and reason (city, king, mistress, proud animals such as lion and eagle, disciplined rivers, banners), and experience (metropolis, farms, workers, fewer animals, sea, etc.).[31] Contemporary literature is concerned mainly with analogies of experience or with the ironic mode that tends towards demonic vision, where the organising ideas are those of frustration and isolation.

As one would expect with a mythic poet writing in the contemporary world, Muir's demonic scenes are far more frequent than his apocalyptic ones, though it is the latter that linger radiantly in the memory.[32] He turns naturally to the conventional apocalyptic imagery : the community of "tribes", the prophetic beasts and millennial herds, the over-arching tree, the sacred lintel and the river in "Moses"; a symposium of gods, "toy multitudes", shepherds, flocks and marriage feasts in

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[30] See Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, p. 141.

[31] Ibid., pp. 151 - 155.

[32] Herein lies his similarity to and difference from Traherne.

"The Labyrinth"; or Man, Woman,, birds, tree, house in "The Sufficient Place". The image of the precious stone as a symbol of total vision or total dream appears in

> O Merlin in your crystal cave
> Deep in the diamond of the day,[33]

while the tree and the river re-appear in various forms throughout his work.[34] Demonic images take the form of an anarchic landscape with roads running "wrong", towns like "broken stones",[35] the ruins in "Variations V", desert, rock and wilderness, the killing beast in "The Combat", the "betrayer in the maze", the sinister forest and proud beasts in "The Grove", the crosses in his distressing scenes of crucifixion, and the wheel of destiny in "The Wheel" and "Variations VIII". The demonic form of the feminine image is reflected obliquely as witch (La Belle Dame) in "The Enchanted Knight" and as adulteress (Helen) in "The Charm". Snow and ice are Muir's favourite symbols for the "cold abstraction" that represents the opposite of the mythic imagination.[36] All these images clearly show a close relation to Frye's lists of archetypal imagery of the apocalyptic, demonic and "innocent" variety. Some poems combine both kinds of imagery or embody a transition from one kind to the other, as in "The Good Town", "The Narrow Place", "The Window" or "The Desolations".

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[33] CP., p. 73.

[34] E.g. tree in "The Mythical Journey", "The Narrow Place", "The Strange Return"; river in "Variations VI", "The River", "The Days", "The Wayside Station", etc.

[35] "The Three Mirrors", CP., p. 140.

[36] E.g., "The One has far to go/ Past the mirages and the murdering snow" ("The Incarnate One", CP., p. 228). See also "Scotland's Winter".

"The Mythical Journey"[37] is a particularly interesting example of this kind of admixture of imagery, since its theme appears to be the making of Muir's own sort of poetry. It begins with demonic imagery related to the basic conflict in Norse mythology between the frost giants and the summer sun, and also to Muir's symbolic equation of "north" with cold abstraction and "south" with harmony and form (a favourite symbolic polarity in German Romantic literature). The Gothic images of the witch's house, the roofless chapel and wheel of fire are abandoned for a vision of the sun and the "free summer isles"; but the ship cannot pause here, for its destination is the world of reality: "the towering walls of life and the great kingdom", where the poet seeks for a pattern and a meaning in a landscape reminiscent of Hölderlin's journey. The pattern exists already and seeks him at the same time as he searches for it. When he at last finds it, it is a "vision/ Of the conclusion without fulfilment". Like Hölderlin's Diotima, it is already dead, glittering in a "crystal grave". Yet it is the tree of life, something like Yggdrasil, the Norse tree of the world, but also "the mountainous tree of Adam/ Planted far down in Eden", on which the dead are like "fallen stars", leaves on the "sad boughs" of a dying symbol. But, to the poet, it is a true vision, for the gods are exchanging their eternal dialogue. From this dying vision springs the poet's own "living dream", beneath whose branches

He builds in faith and doubt his shaking house.

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[37] CP., p. 62.

As previously indicated, the major part of Muir's poetry is concerned with the attempt to reconcile the actual and the ideal, the story and the fable, in such a way that anarchic vision is transfigured, either by symbolic forms or by faith and love,[38] and this world can be accepted as a place where

> Strange blessings never in Paradise
> Fall from these beclouded skies.

Such an intention corresponds to the social and cultural ends of archetypal poetry in that it employs traditional images common to all men in the attempt to communicate a "harmonious human form of things". But this harmonious form cannot be established without reference to an over-riding unifying ideal, which shines eternally in the prophetic dreams of mankind, and which Frye calls myth. The movement towards myth in literature is a movement towards "an area of converging significance... the still centre of the order of words" which imitates an order of nature as a whole.[39] This is the goal of the quest, where literature "imitates the total dream of man" and "the archetypal symbols of the city, the garden, the quest, the marriage are no longer the desirable forms that man constructs inside nature, but are themselves the forms of nature". The poem becomes a microcosm of the whole poetic universe and all symbols are

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[38] Examples of such poems are: "The Unattained Place", "Telemachos Remembers", "Outside Eden", "The Journey Back 7", "The Difficult Land", "In Love for Long", "The Great House", "The Transmutation", "One Foot in Eden", and "The Annunciation" (CP., p. 223) where inner and outward eye come into perfect focus.

[39] Frye comments that, without a centre, conventional analogies would be merely an endless series of associations without any real structure (Anatomy of Criticism, p. 118).

"united in a single infinite and eternal verbal symbol" which is the total creative act of the Logos.[40] The point at which the poet's imitation of the cyclic world of nature comes into alignment with his apprehension of the undisplaced apocalyptic world is what Frye calls the "point of epiphany". Its conventional settings are the mountain tops, islands, towers, lighthouses, stairways and ladders familiar to us in scripture (Sinai, Pisgah, Jacob's ladder, the Mount of the Transfiguration, the island of Patmos) and in poetry (Dante's Earthly Paradise, St. George's vision from the mountain of contemplation in Book I of The Faerie Queene, Yeats's and Eliot's winding stairs).[41] Thus Wordsworth on the Simplon Pass saw the changing forms of nature as the "workings of one mind", the "Characters of the Great Apocalypse/ The types and

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[40] Ibid., pp. 119 - 121. This is the unifying idea of Muir's poem, "The Days". (See Appendix E.) A similar concept is suggested by Rilke's description of the function of the poet as revealing a perspective of reality like that of "an angel, containing all time and space, who is blind and looking into himself." (Quoted Frye, ibid., p. 122.) Rilke is closer to the subjective Idealism of Blake than to the more medieval attitude of Muir, who sees poem as imitation of God's world. This is why Rilke's Eurydice returns to the underworld, whereas Muir's is recovered.

[41] Ibid., p. 203. Eliot's winding stair in "Ash Wednesday III" appears to contain traces of the first three stages of vision: 1) hell - "toothed gullet"; 2) the struggle of the contraries - hope and despair; 3) Beulah - conjunction of contraries, feminine image, awakened imagination. The fourth stage is merely invoked.
Vaughan's point of epiphany is also a hill:

> "And yet, as Angels in some brighter dreams
> Call to the Soul, when man doth sleep:
> So some strange thoughts transcend our wonted theams
> And into glory peep.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Either disperse these mists, which blot and fill
> My perspective (still) as they pass,
> Or else remove me hence unto that hill [italics mine]
> Where I shall need no glass."

(From: "They are all gone into the world of light", The Metaphysical Poets, p. 275).

symbols of Eternity". Because he wrote in a mimetic style, we hear the thwarting winds and blasts of waterfalls and endure the sick sight of the raving stream, all of which tends to crowd out the apprehension of the "still centre", though it confronts us with a terror and majesty appropriate to the theme. Muir, closer to Spenser than to Wordsworth at the point where mutability touches permanence, calls it "the seventh great day and the clear eternal weather".[42] His apocalypses, as one has already noted, take the conventional form of the mythic-romantic mode,[43] employing a pastoral imagery that is pictorially clear, yet stylised and remote from the world of normal experience. Things are not described so much as named, for the reader is expected to be equipped to supply the matching images and significances from the imaginative store of his cultural inheritance. This is much like the landscape of the ballads, which is full of conventional imagery immediately recognised and responded to by the audience.[44] Similarly, in his use of scriptural figure and classical myth, his own treatment is intended to be supplemented by traditional meanings, either to lend greater resonance, to emphasize his own points of departure, or even to serve as a basis for his own commentary. In addition to Muir's

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[42] "The Days", CP., p. 208. Cf. Spenser: "grant me that Sabaoth's sight".

[43] Pisgah, Transfiguration, "mountain-isles", Eden set upon a hill.

[44] Willa Muir refers to this kind of stereotyped imagery in the early ballads as part of traditional "oral stylization". Hair is always yellow; combs are golden, armour bright and water wan. Epithets, phrases and whole stanzas may become part of an expected formula (Living with Ballads [London: Hogarth Press, 1965], p. 183).

genuinely apocalyptic epiphanies, there are analogous climactic moments that occur within the natural order and celebrate a consummation of love or a conjunction of imaginative with actual experience. One finds instances of these in "The Horses", "The Annunciation" (CP., p. 223), "A Birthday", "In Love for Long" and "Why Should Your Face So Please Me?".

But there are also false, frustrated or ironic epiphanies[45] which express, or comment upon, contemporary resistance to self-transcendence and mystical insight. Two traditional demonic parodies - Antichrist and the Tower of Babel - are employed by Muir in "Antichrist" and "The Tower".[46] The first poem has already been considered in the previous chapter, where one found that it suggested a false selfhood and a perverted vision of reality. Seen in terms of myth criticism, it can now be recognised as the reversed image of the goal of the quest. "The Tower" takes the form of an episode from a fable in which an anonymous speaker tries to account for the loss of reality, identity, and poetry that has come about with the building of the tower whose shadow divides the land. One recalls that the scriptural account of Babel states that prior to this act of hubris "the whole earth was of one language and one speech", an idea that Blake took to refer to a universal grammar of symbolism. "The Conquerer" describes an abortive revelation suggestive of the

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[45] Frye mentions such ironic epiphanies as appearing at the centre of demonic vision (Anatomy of Criticism, p. 239).

[46] CP., pp. 226 and 278.

apocalyptic image of the second coming. It is an apparently simple little poem full of ambiguous and enigmatic statement, one of a number of poems, collected after Muir's death, that betray a sense of threatening chaos in the world of the H-Bomb.[47] The poem itself could almost be a cryptic comment on an emblematic picture of the Apocalypse of St. John.

A similar device, with the comment made more explicit, is employed in "The Rider Victory", where an equestrian statue[48] is the central image or emblem. The rider reins in his horse midway upon a bridge between two realms. The passage is free; his "waiting kingdom" lies before him; yet the charger, checked in his course, rears up as though confronted by a solid wall or barrier. So poised, man and beast remain fixed, statues with "stony eyes" that poet and reader may perhaps regard as monuments to the arrest of the quest for poetic form, symbols that have been deprived of their traditional function. The word "Victory" in the title is, of course, ironic. This poem may perhaps offer some insight into the basis of the peculiarly static character of Muir's own world of myth and romance, which, instead of being inhabited by symbolic forms in fluent interaction, is so often a flat scene filled with emblematic forms in fixed attitudes. It suggests that his traditional symbols may have been reduced to this condition by our self-induced blindness ("stony eyes") to the other world of dream. On the other hand, fixed figures in a flat scene are characteristic of primitive (or naive) art, or may express the

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[47] E.g. "Impersonal Calamity", "The Last War", "After 1984", "The Day Before the Last Day", etc.

[48] This image is a variation upon the horse and rider motif in "Variations II" (CP., p. 40).

immobility that attends visionary contemplation. Such poems exhibit the kind of contemplation and interpretation of a single metaphor that a Herbert or a Vaughan, transported into the twentieth century and cut off from an audience that once understood emblem poems, might attempt.[49]

If the emblematic method was natural to an age that still retained a "sense of the dual meaning of things" and a corresponding taste for allegory,[50] it may be true to say that the more coherent one's view of reality, the more extended or continuous one's metaphors are likely to be. When the continuous metaphor is developed into a full scale narrative, we have true literary allegory. When it is simply a focus for contemplation and reflection, we have an emblem poem. Although Frye has little to say on the subject of allegory, there are other critics of this school who see it as a mode of symbolism closely related to myth. Edwin Honig considers that allegory lies close to the border between myth, religion and the more sophisticated assumptions of philosophy, since, like other symbolic fictions, it arises from the "need to give transcendent expression to these problems we call social and metaphysical".[51] In his view, epic, allegory, satire and pastoral all appear to incorporate a symbolic shape that typically includes such elements as the quest for selfhood and social integration, a renewal through love and death, or some form of initiation followed by acceptance of responsibility, all of which culminate in a realisation of

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[49]Cf. Henry Vaughan, "The Waterfall," The Metaphysical Poets, p. 282.

[50]Rosemary Freeman, English Emblem Books (London: Chatto and Windus, 1948,) p. 2.

[51]Dark Conceit : The Making of Allegory (Northwestern University Press, 1959), p. 173.

identity and of integration with the universe.[52] Honig observes that in the territory of this myth there is

> a common meeting ground for Plato's Ideas, Aristotle's Causes, Kant's Categories, Freud's Id-Ego-Superego, and Jung's Archetypes. [Symbolic fictions] accept the invitation of myths to rediscover old ways of feeling and belief, the ever-new sense of the body of the world discoverable in a single individual body, in a single human experience.[53]

This is very much what Muir means by the "fable" that illuminates the story of each individual human life and gives man his "place" in the universe. In Honig's view, true literary allegory reveals a fundamental way of thinking about man and the universe, and "converts problematic issues into the metaphors of its own design".[54] Narrative and meaning are not naive or artificial equivalents, but figure each other as parts of the same transcendent unifying ideal. The notorious "disjunction" between image and abstract idea that repels so many modern detractors of allegory is frequently a projection of our own loss of the analogical cosmos of myth and Christian typology rather than an inherent defect in allegory itself.

Wherein lies the distinctive quality of allegory in relation to other forms of symbolic fiction? Honig finds it in a "twice-told tale written in rhetorical, or figurative, language and expressing a vital belief".[55] The twice-told tale recreates a "venerable or proverbial antecedent"[56] as a basic

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[52] This is the "quest myth" again, that one has found to correspond to the basic pattern of Muir's poetry.

[53] Honig, op. cit., p. 174.

[54] Ibid., p. 182. [55] Ibid., p. 12.

[56] One is reminded of Eliade's "repetition of an archetype", and of Muir's poem : "Twice Done, Once Done".

"Even a story to be true
Must repeat itself."

(CP., p. 134).

pattern which can be given a new emphasis or significance. The figurative language makes possible the simultaneous presentation of old and new meanings, and the belief is the whole idea which supports the parabolic method and provides the reason for the re-telling. Narrative, figurative method, and belief all work together in what Honig calls a "metaphor of purpose", by which he means some ideal, similar to the medieval anagoge, which is the central concept and unifying theme of the work.[57]

Honig's definition is helpful when one comes to consider the special quality of Muir's treatment of classical myth (Oedipus, Orpheus, Odysseus, Prometheus) and scriptural typology (Adam, Abraham, Moses, Israel in the wilderness, Eden, Canaan, the Incarnation). Not merely projections of subjective experience, all such poems are repetitions of old tales embodying metaphysical assumptions and a particular imaginative vision of a world that is an image of an ideal reality. Although Muir does not create a sustained work of

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[57]Rosemond Tuve, whose field is medieval allegory, bears out a number of Honig's opinions. She considers that allegory strictly defined is concerned with "matters of ultimate or metaphysical import" (p. 31), that it employs "the great expected ancient images" (p. 49), is intended to strengthen the reader in "right belief" (p. 41), and portrays "men faced with the death of the soul or learning what its freedom depends upon" (p. 51). The "great public images (quest, pilgrimage, marriage, death, purgation, for example)" which allegory employs are not equivalents for abstract concepts but are the closest we can come to a body of meaning experienced by all, but too difficult to state in full (p.22). Such figures cease to operate symbolically "if man's life does not symbolically speak also of an order of reality not seen" (p. 172). These pages all refer to Allegorical Imagery (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966). Once again, we notice the "ancient images", the concern with ultimate things, the quest myth, and the Platonic structure of a world where things seen reflect an order of things not seen, that distinguish Muir's poetic view.

symbolic fiction, his fables and parables seem to constitute the fragments of an allegory that corresponds in all essential respects to the traditional mythic pattern of the quest for "salvation". This may be one reason why it is so difficult to select a single poem that is fully representative of Muir's work. Though one feels his presence in all his poems, one needs to be familiar with them all to enter his world completely. Honig maintains that, while Christian analogy gave allegory its most elaborate formulation, the allegories of all periods dramatize similar problems concerning the nature of man, and employ myths and archetypes to portray universal human strivings.[58] Like Frye, he notes that archetypal situations seem to involve "the dynamic interplay of two broad antagonistic principles... which engender the dichotomies of art".[59] These may be interpreted as the patriarchal principle, expressing such concepts as law, justice, reason and the conquest of nature, and the matriarchal principle, expressing love, mercy, repentance, fecundity and freedom. Such a dichotomy corresponds to the traditional distinction between classical and romantic tendencies in literature and probably to Muir's distinction between prophetic and mimetic poetry as well. Light and darkness symbolism, based on the most fundamental of all natural polarities, is part of the same archetypal interplay of opposing forces which Frye regards as a basic rhythm in mythic writing and which is so prominent in Muir's work, both in the form of polarised imagery and of antithetical ideational entities.

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[58] Honig, op. cit., p. 57.

[59] Ibid., p. 35.

Honig also suggests that the dream-like quality usually found in allegorical narrative, even when not introduced by the dream convention, serves a deliberate intention, since the freedom from pressures of strict chronology and verisimilitude, typical of dreams, is a way of making a fiction illustrate something of transcendent import "in an irrational but self-contained manner that calls for interpretation", just as dreams do.[60] Further, the unfolding of basic oppositions is much more distinct in dreams, which arise directly from underlying conflict, than in rationalised conscious experience (cf. "The Combat"). The allegorical hero, like a dreamer, enters the dream world with the whole burden of his personal problems of conscience (cf. "Oedipus") and stands on the threshold between two orders of existence, sensing that some significant action impends. (Dante's dark wood and Bunyan's dream are such threshold-symbols.) In doing so, he becomes "an exponent of cultural experience"[61] who undergoes certain ordeals and comes to understand some typical or universal problem. In modern allegory, there is a more realistic portrayal of the hero's surroundings, and the traditional patterns of imagery and action are correspondingly more obscured. Honig regards the increasing ambiguity of allegory as a consequence of "the destruction of the rigid base of cultural authority upon which allegory traditionally depended and... the relatively greater stress put upon the

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[60] Ibid., p. 62.

[61] Ibid., p. 85.

autonomy of the artist since the Reformation".[62] Muir, unlike many of his contemporaries, was by temperament and experience deeply antipathetic to an ethos in which cultural authority is deposed and the work of art is regarded as an autonomous artefact. He is his own allegorical protagonist not only embarking upon the perennial quest for self-realisation and a unified vision of the cosmos, but also contending with a fractured culture that no longer subscribes to the traditional doctrines underlying such symbolisations of experience. Thus, although his poems faithfully reflect the conventional images and actions of the quest, they are merely fragments turned over and over and brooded upon with a painful awareness that the pattern can no longer be completed and the symbolic actions must be arrested in the empty air. It is the true mythical moments of expanded consciousness, the epiphanies that all true allegory tends towards, that transform his fragments into the significant elements of an individual vision that is never private but part of man's most ancient and potent imaginative experience.

Honig's study includes much more of interest in relation to modern allegory that one could usefully apply to Muir, but there is no time to consider it here if one is to include

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[62] Kafka is cited as one of the modern allegorists in whose work the quest becomes a series of "involuted responses" to experience leading to "an unanswerable mystery, as though the appropriate key had been lost" (ibid., p. 87). Muir's sonnet to Kafka emphasizes the paradox of the quest for meaning, or for salvation, in a half-world that does not accept the great polarities of "Judgment".

> "But you, dear Franz, sad champion of the drab
> And half, would watch the tell-tale shames drift in
> (As if they were troves of treasure) not aloof,
> But with a famishing passion quick to grab
> Meaning, and read on all the leaves of sin
> Eternity's secret script, the saving proof."
> (CP., p. 233).

some account of the views on allegory of another American critic, Angus Fletcher. He acknowledges a debt to Honig,[63] though his own study, Allegory : The Theory of a Symbolic Mode, is more concerned with the psychological functions of allegory (which he relates to the psycho-analytic theory of obsessive - compulsive rituals) than with its social and cultural purposes. His interpretation need not detain one, though it may well have some relevance to Muir's deeper motivations. One's interest in Fletcher's analysis is primarily directed towards his account of the rhetorical elements that characterise the allegorical quality in any symbolic fiction, since it provides one with a useful instrument for isolating some of the most distinctive aspects of Muir's poetic method. He distinguishes the chief characteristics of the allegorical mode under five main categories: agency, imagery, action, causation and thematic intention, though it is not necessary for any particular work to satisfy all five criteria. It is proposed to give a necessarily brief summary of each of these criteria in turn, followed by a comment in which each is related to similar features in Muir's poetry or prose.

I. AGENCY. The allegorical agent is typically a personification of a concept or a real person treated as a walking idea (p. 31). While he may be more complex and plausible than this, he is not so much a naturalistic person as "a generator of other secondary personalities" (p. 35). Such a character "Projects" a number of other protagonists who react against

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[63] Allegory : The Theory of a Symbolic Mode (Cornell University Press, 1964), p. 12.

or with him in such a way as to reveal the different facets of his own nature. Although his severely limited way of acting is bound up with his iconographic meaning, Fletcher maintains that this fated, obsessed behaviour is not merely the result of rigid thematic control, as many critics suppose, but is due to the presence of powerful underlying anxiety and ambivalence which can only be discharged by ritualised symbolic action. He uses the term "daemonic" to describe the protagonists of allegory since this suggests the quality of being divided as well as obsessed (p. 59). Naturally, this is not the same as Frye's use of "demonic".

Whether these characteristics are due to the psychic factors Fletcher suggests, or whether they are merely linked with the dream-like paradigmatic actions of Eliade's archaic or mythic mind, there is no doubt that much of Muir's poetry is marked by anxiety and ambivalence, and that a number of poems are built on the fixed, somnambulistic actions of characters who are separate aspects of the divided self. One has noticed this in the ritual fight of "The Private Place", the seesaw interaction of Indifference and Pity in "Variations IX", and the tranced movement of "Tristram's Journey". Even in the "Ballad of Hector in Hades", Hector and Achilles seem two aspects of one self taking part in a weighted dream-like drama of flight, which is full of predestined cosmic significance.

> I run. If I turned back again
> The earth must turn with me,
> The mountains planted on the plain,
> The sky clamped to the sea.

The menacing effect of "planted" and "clamped" is matched by

the narrowing of the field of vision:

> I only see that little space
> To the left and to the right,

and the preternatural clarity of visual effects so often found in allegorical paintings:

> The little flowers, the tiny mounds
> The grasses frail and fine. [64]

In "Oedipus", the action is similarly circumscribed, part of it even taking place

> at that predestined point
> Where three paths like three fates crossed one another,
> Tracing the evil figure,

and the whole is explicitly acknowledged as the ritualistic "acting out of a fable".[65] "Effigies I" actually describes the brittle but rigid control of thought and action, prompted by anxiety and ambivalence, that gives rise to the peculiarly inflexible agency Fletcher refers to.

> His glances were directive, seemed to move
> Pawns on a secret chess-board. You could fancy
> You saw the pieces in their wooden dance
> Leap in geometrical obedience
> From square to square, or stop like broken clockwork
> When silence spoke its checkmate. Past that arena
> Stretched out a winding moonlight labyrinth,
> A shining limbo filled with vanishing faces,
> Propitious or dangerous, to be scanned
> In a passion of repulsion or desire. [66]

Here, Muir is sufficiently free from this state of mind to describe it objectively. It is also, of course, an account

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[64] "Ballad of Hector in Hades", CP., p. 24.

[65] "Oedipus", CP., p. 189.

[66] "Effigies I", CP., p. 233.

of what Frye calls "demonic" vision, the kind of perception that belongs to Blake's Ulro, where imagery tends towards sinister geometrical shapes. Fletcher considers that allegorical action is typically "geometrical" or diagrammatic in effect.[67]

II. IMAGERY. The type of allegorical imagery is an "isolated emblem" (p. 88) placed on the picture plane without any clear location in depth. Perspective is often violated with regard to the relative size of images, producing a "tapestried effect". Because the relations between the images are not naturalistic, but belong to the logic of the underlying theme, the imagery tends to become surrealistic. It does not create a mimetic world. Most important of all, images are microcosmic or "kosmoidal" because they signify a universal order and are symbols that imply a rank in a cosmic or social hierarchy, for example, in Menenius Agrippa's fable of the body politic in Coriolanus (p. 108).

This idea of "kosmoidal" imagery is consistent with Honig's view of allegory as revealing a fundamental way of thinking about man and nature as parts of a transcendent unifying ideal. It also agrees with Frye's view of the cultural function of archetypal poetry in presenting a harmonious human form of things that is able to reconcile the actual and the ideal. One naturally recalls Muir's sonnet, "The Emblem", which explicitly announces that his "scant-acre kingdom" of antique symbols gives onto "space and order

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[67] Allegory, p. 179. In the previous chapter, it was possible to make a diagram of Muir's poetic world. Again, this may be due to the conventional patterns of archetypal poetry.

magistral" where all things are.

> In their due place and honour, row on row.
> For this I read the emblem on the shield.[68]

Perhaps the most extreme examples of Muir's use of the isolated surrealistic imagery Fletcher describes are to be found in "The Road" and "The Toy Horse".[69] In the former poem, the imagery consists of a circular road forming the boundary of the "country of Again" (clearly a concretised idea) together with a motley assortment of objects including archers on every side, time's deer, a busy clock that never tells the hour, hunter and quarry, a disproportionately enormous lion who occupies the centre of the picture, bones, a runner, a tree, a ship, and a man lying on his own tomb - all of these caught at different stages of action and representing a profound disturbance of normal time relations. The whole presents the cosmic idea of the eternal recurrence and expresses the poet's final negation of it. It is not, however, a coldly intellectual bodying forth of abstract concepts, but an artistically successful symbolic projection of a problem in which the poet's emotions are deeply and ambiguously engaged. Diction and rhythm gradually overcome the distracting variety of the images and bring the poem to a powerful and ironical climax. In "The Toy Horse", the "Bible beast" is a kind of icon, possibly a concrete symbol of the idea of "figura". He is described as a wooden idol with hoofs soundlessly moving in a kind of clockwork action.

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[68] CP., p. 231.

[69] CP., pp. 61 and 202.

He appears between rock and plain, moving from East to West, with his "little Kingdom" at his feet, and Eden and Canaan beside him. He steps over the pages of a great book, yet his way is "stationary". There is something riddling and enigmatic about this poem, but it presents a picture in which the beginning and the end of time somehow coincide. Muir's favourite symbol of the horse as representing a perennial life force is here linked with the image of the world as God's book.[70] The turning leaves of the book suggest the passage of history, and the poem itself seems to make a statement in which the Hebraic idea of time is reconciled with the co-existence of past, present and future in eternity. Intended for contemplation as a poem of mystical meaning, its connecting links are highly concentrated conceptual ones for which the dreaming mind finds no purely linguistic equivalents. Nevertheless, the bizarre effect of the images remains dominant.

It is noticeable that Muir is often tentative and apologetic about his emblems, suggesting that they are part of his collection of "toys" - small period pieces, at the same time as insisting upon their enduring validity.[71] One thinks of Vaughan's and Herbert's unselfconscious use of the emblematic method in a time when the taste for allegory was

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[70] This symbol was originally a logos formula of the cosmos visualised as a rationally comprehensible document. In the Seventeenth century it became involved with Hebraic motifs and the Book of Nature was thought of as God's book and linked wit the Bible (Fisch, Jerusalem and Albion, p. 217).

[71] The word "toy" may also be associated with the mythopoei play of childhood as an analogue of poetry and with the Heracleitan idea of the primordial unity as a playful child drawing the world of becoming out of the strife of the opposites - a notion very close to Cassirer's conception that there is no reality for man until he has created it in symbol form.

still fashionable. Rosemary Freeman has pointed out that Vaughan's emblematic technique is most apparent in the way he handled abstract ideas as if they were tangible and visible objects. For instance, "Fancy and Woe" hang round his worldlings in "The World" apparently as concretely as the lute, as if they were pictorial signs of folly.[72] Muir achieves a similar effect in "An Island Tale", where an emotion becomes a visible object.

> She had endured so long a grief
> That from her breast we saw it grow,
> Branch, leaf and flower with such a grace
> We wondered at the summer place
> Which set that harvest there. But oh
> The softly, softly yellowing leaf. [73]

In the mind's eye such an image assumes the form of a painting by Max Ernst or Salvador Dali. In addition to such examples of surrealistic effects, there is a great deal of traditional allegorical imagery in Muir's poetry, in the form of emblematic motifs of castles, towers, animals, wheat sheaves, the wheel of fortune, armed men, and so on.

III. ACTION. Allegorical action is symbolic, bearing some resemblance to religious ritual or to the compulsive rituals of neurotic behaviour that permit formalised expressio to forbidden impulses which are rigidly inhibited at other times. Allegories tend to resolve themselves into either of two fundamental patterns, which may be called battle and progress (p. 151):

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[72] English Emblem Books, p. 151.

[73] "An Island Tale", CP., p. 266.

a) Progress is to be understood primarily in the sense of the questing journey, but it may take the form of the introspective journey, a procession, a pageant of the Seven Deadly Sins, a Dance of Death, a medieval "complaint" which lists the ways in which the world is falling to pieces, or a cosmogony - a catalogue of the stages of Creation (pp. 154, 155).
b) Battle is exemplified by the psychomachia or "fight for mansoul". The effect is one of symmetry and balance, of a static conflict caught at a given moment of time (p. 159). It may also appear in the subtler form of a debate or dialogue, where the symmetrical effect is retained. This observation is borne out by Rosemary Freeman's comment that battles in The Faerie Queene are always heraldic and "curiously static despite apparent fury". A duel takes place in a series of positions, not in consecutive action, and the imagery suggests two supporters for a shield, such as the Lion and the Unicorn.[74]

It is noticeable that where Fletcher emphasizes these two patterns of battle and progress in allegorical action, Frye sees a structure of cycle and dialogue in mythic organisation. It may be that the difference is mainly one of emphasis and terminology, possibly arising out of Fletcher's greater concern with the inward drama of conflict and resolution; Muir's patterns (which were traced in the previous chapter) seem to combine the two, for they reveal a structure of battle related to cyclic recurrence and of progress related to dialogue. As this was examined in some detail, it

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[74] Freeman, English Emblem Books, p. 108. She also says: "Heraldry is a characteristic expression of this emblematic habit of thinking."

must suffice here simply to list certain other examples of the two forms that appear in his work. "Ballad of the Flood", "The Mythical Journey", "Tristram's Journey", "Hölderlin's Journey", "The Voyage", "The Journey Back" I and II are all examples of the quest. "The River", "The Good Town" and even "Scotland 1941" are based on the journey in reverse and can be seen as instances of the reduction from cosmos to chaos: the falling to pieces of the world. ("Complaint of the Dying Peasantry" laments the stripping away of the Scottish imagination that once produced the ballads.) "The Grove", for all its individual treatment, is based on an allegorical pageant of exotic vice ("Sweet silk-tunicked eunuchs") uncharacteristic of Muir, with a train of kosmoidal images:

> Crowns, sceptres, spears and stars and moons of blood,[75]
> And sylvan wars in bronze within the shield.

"The Days" is pure cosmogony. (See Appendix E.) "The Combat" is unmistakeably a battle with the symmetrical form Fletcher indicates, although one of the contestants seems to have undergone an ironic metamorphosis. While the killing beast, though strangely composite, is crested and arrayed in royal hues, retaining much of the mythical splendour of heraldic monsters, his enemy is a shabby creature, brown and battered, helplessly displaying two small paws. It is a horrifying vision of polarised motivation, a sado-masochistic struggle that offers no resolution. The inequality of the conflict seems modern, but the symbolism is none the less allegorical for having lost its medieval confidence, and the balance of

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[75] "The Grove", CP., p. 108.

power is as taut as ever. One has already examined the ritual nature of the fight in "The Private Place", and the painful sense of frustration in the endlessly repeated struggle of "Then"; one can now see that poems which are written in the form of a dialogue ("The Original Place", "The Way") or which include passages of inward debate (as in "The Labyrinth" and "Oedipus") reflect a similarly balanced structure of deadlock. In "Oedipus", one finds a tense combination of battle, in the form of inward debate, and ritual progress.

A further point of interest in this part of Fletcher's discussion is his contention that these two forms of allegorical action have syntactic parallels. Progress is frequently expressed by parataxis, a series of predications with little or no qualification by subordinate clauses, and the symmetry of balanced elements in "battle" is often reflected by anaphora, the repetition of the same word or phrase in successive clauses (pp. 162 - 168). Whether or not one accepts Fletcher's association of these syntactic forms with allegory as such,[76] the reader familiar with Muir's

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[76]There is a similar syntax in Blake's songs, e.g., "A Poison Tree". Erich Auerbach, noting that Augustine introduced an urgent tone and the use of parataxis into the classical style, connects it with the dramatisation of an inner event. He says of Augustine that "no one ever more passionately pursued and investigated the phenomenon of conflicting and united inner forces, the alternation of antithesis and synthesis in their relations and effects" (Mimesis, p. 62). Parataxis is characteristic of the Biblical style and of much ancient poetry. Anaphora, as a pattern of repetition, may be part of the oral tradition that gave rise to the iterative technique which Mrs. Muir refers to in her account of the ballads, and which characterised the style of epics, sagas and Old English poetry. Muir would certainly have been aware of it in this form, and perhaps have been led to use it for his own reasons.

verse will be able to multiply instances of both these syntactical structures, often in the same poem. In "The Town Betrayed", for instance, the first stanza combines parataxis and anaphora:

> Our homes are eaten out by time,
> Our lawns strewn with our listless sons,
> Our harlot daughters lean and watch
> The ships crammed down with shells and guns.

The anaphora is more obvious in the fourth stanza, where it is indeed employed to reflect a stylised battle action.

> Far inland now the glittering swords
> In order rise, in order fall,
> In order on the dubious field
> The dubious trumpets call.

Parataxis dominates the seventh, where it matches the retreat from cosmos to chaos.

> Our cattle wander at their will.
> Today a horse pranced proudly by.
> The dogs run wild. Vultures and kites
> Wait in the towers for us to die. [77]

Paratactic order is noticeable in "Variations IV" and anaphora in the use of "if" in the second paragraph of "The Unattained Place", and in many other examples too numerous to mention here. One of the most noticeable things about Muir's use of language is his predilection for repetition and for verbal antithesis. Many instances of the former spring to mind at once, such as "till and till", "turn and turn", "sleeps and sleeps", "rejection bred by rejection breeding rejection", "the dagger strike, strike and strike", "falling, falling", "turning, turning", "burning, burning", all of which are taken

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[77] "The Town Betrayed," CP., p. 76.

from different poems. Sometimes the repetitions are more widely spaced, even appearing in separate poems, but readily noted by the observant reader. The verbal antitheses seem to be central to his poetic method, which in no way conforms to the modern taste for ambiguity and multiplicity of meaning achieved through clusters of images. They may well be a reflection of the archetypal pattern of battle or dialogue arising out of the mythic sense of polarities referred to by both Frye and Honig, but one does feel with Muir that his inner division is usually too extreme, too tense, to be collapsed ironically into a single image. He swings from the apocalyptic to the demonic image, or extends his polar opposites to their utmost limit in the effort to create a mystic exchange out of a condition of stasis.[78] When he achieves the mystical union of the "contradictories", his allegory emerges into vision and myth. In more intellectual moods, he resorts to a verbal balancing act which reveals the same static symmetry as the forms of battle. Examples of this can be found almost anywhere in the Collected Poems: "united and disunited", "unfriendly friendly universe", "fellow-foe", "where strength is weakness", "safe and outcast", "content and discontent", "hate and love", "to do and undo", "pursuer and pursued", "systole and diastole", "impatient patience", etc. Sometimes the balancing act turns

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[78]Perhaps this is part of the significance of the rather cryptic lines:

"And so I build me Heaven and Hell
To buy my bartered Paradise."
("The Fall", CP., p. 70).

into a juggling of words whose dazzling pattern becomes a song.[79] In "The Law", the antitheses perform a ceremonial dance, gravely turning to show themselves as the two sides of the same coin.

> Where grace is beyond desert
> Thanks must be thanklessness;
> Where duty is past performance
> Disservice is only service;
> Where truth is unsearchable
> All seeking is straying.

The poem concludes with an acceptance of mystery and paradox.

> If I could hold complete
> The reverse side of the pattern,
> The wrong side of Heaven,
> Oh then I should know in not knowing
> My truth in my error.[80]

But Muir's paradoxes are never merely displays of sophistication or virtuosity; they are in deadly earnest. By the same token, his metaphors, like those in Plato's myths, are too extended to be the kind of poetic metaphor whose "liveliness" Aristotle commended.

IV. CAUSATION. Since Fletcher does not regard allegory as coldly conceptual, he sees it as "emotive utterance with an internal structure of great force", the causal connections of which are magical rather than logical (p. 180). Plots are governed by "chance" and are ritualised or symmetrical.[81]

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[79] E.g. "This that I give and take" (CP., p. 254) and "Sunset ends the day" (CP., p. 201). See also "The Heart Could Never Speak". (Appendix F.)

[80] "The Law", CP., p. 106.

[81] Such characteristics can, of course, be seen merely as the natural reflection of a stylised, non-mimetic mode of symbolism. Fletcher's interpretation is governed throughout by his theory of ritual.

There are echoes of sympathetic magic in the exact parallels of double plots, and of contagious magic in the power of names, objects, clothing, ornaments, etc., which serve as "talismans". The fear of contagion, or sin, is relieved by pilgrimage to places free of contagion, which Fletcher regards as corresponding to Eliade's "symbols of the centre". Their opposite is Hell, or some demonic place such as Spenser's Cave of Despair or Prometheus' Rock, where the hero is reduced to acute anxiety or alienation.

One is familiar with this kind of organising structure in Muir's journeys, apocalypses and labyrinthine states of anxiety and ambivalence, but has not yet considered his "magical" sense of the poetic power of spells, runes, and the "names" that conjure up symbolic forms.[82] The "crystal spheres on Helen's brow" in "The Charm" have the sinister power of imposing a kind of hypnotised vision upon the beholder, while Odysseus' brooch in "Penelope in Doubt" is a talisman or identifying object that could very well be Muir's own personal emblem.[83] Prometheus' Rock, which Fletcher mentions as the opposite of a symbol of the centre (in Frye's terms, an "ironic epiphany") represents for Muir, as for Kafka in his Parables, a resolution of conflict through the final death of the spirit and the extinction of creative fire. His poem, "The Grave of Prometheus" (CP., p. 216), expresses the strange, empty peace of ultimate defeat, a resolution not

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[82] The word "name" often suggests the essence of anything in Muir's terminology, e.g. "things and their names" ("The Days"). See also "simple spells" in "The Island".

[83] This brooch consists of the hound and doe motif (the battling contraries) set in a golden circle. When the central motif is "lost", only the circle remains as a symbol of eternity and mystical vision ("Penelope in Doubt", CP., p. 277).

by transcendence but by slipping down into death.

The Marionette, which is a novel quite as allegorical as any of Kafka's, since large-scale symbolic meanings can be read into the narrative, is basically a version of the quest which lays great stress upon imitation and ritual. The two protagonists, father and son, can be seen as the split-off aspects of one selfhood which have to be re-integrated. The idiot-boy, Hans, develops towards adulthood and a more normal sense of reality largely through his imitation of the Faust-Gretchen relationship he sees performed at the puppet-theatre in Salzburg. This performance, and Hans's imitation, in which he wears a Faust costume and involuntarily repeats the words of love and contrition he does not yet understand, are described in great detail. Fletcher would regard this as a kind of sympathetic magic; in Eliade's terminology, which is probably much closer to Muir's intentions, it is the "repetition of an archetype".

V. THEMATIC INTENTION. Fletcher states that allegorical themes are dualistic, reflecting the opposition of absolutes such as Good and Evil, Faith and Doubt, and so on, and are expressed by a dualistic ordering of agents and imagery (p. 222). He concedes that this may be due to philosophic dualism, such as the light/darkness polarity of gnosticism; though he himself, in accordance with his psychological emphasis, considers that allegorical literature always expresses an acute mental conflict between "diametrically opposed feelings" (p. 224).

There is no doubt at all that Muir's work does reveal underlying anxiety and emotional ambivalence and does reflect a light/darkness duality refracted through seemingly endless planes of thought and experience; but one may prefer to follow

Frye and Honig in accepting the latter as typical of archetypal structures, a characteristic of mythic writing that arises from a particular way of seeing the condition of man in relation to his universe, rather than interpret it in terms of individual psychic economy. This need not preclude one's being indebted to Fletcher for an account of certain qualities, which might be termed allegorical (or perhaps, more properly, mythic), that particularly distinguish Muir's style, as well as for his demonstration that the parabolic mode of symbolism is not simply a calculated matching of images to conceptual thought, but can be one in which the fixed relations between theme and image are themselves thrown up to the surface from a hidden vortex of powerful emotion. The literary qualities he describes are remarkably consistent with the tendencies of Eliade's "archaic mind", which have already been related to Muir's concept of the traditional "man of myth and religion", so that, looked at in this light, the limited, "obsessive" actions of Fletcher's allegorical agents are the paradigmatic gestures of the archetypal man who becomes more "real" in so far as he repeats mythical actions (as Muir does those of Oedipus, Odysseus or Orpheus) and ceases to be an individual in the modern sense (hence Muir's Adam and Everyman). The isolated kosmoidal images are objects which become more "real" through being seen as signs of a transcendent cosmic order. The symbolic rituals bring about the return of the mythical time of the "beginning", or the approach to the absolute reality of the "centre", in which both sin and temporal duration are abolished, and all things are made new again.

Do our unconscious minds still repeat this infinitely serious ritual play of the childhood of mankind, a mythopoeic

form of symbolisation that must never be outgrown since it brings cosmos out of chaos, being out of becoming, and eternity out of time? There is little doubt that Muir thought so. He had heard the "archaic dialogue" upon the sixth or seventh day,[84] and he believed that our unconscious life goes back into the fabulous past of "organic heraldry".[85] For him, the ancient tradition of oral poetry, still discernible in heroic epic, Norse saga and the Scottish ballad, was especially significant, for it speaks directly out of what Willa Muir calls the archaic "underworld of feeling" from which fables and legends arise.[86] Muir's own dreams and visions tapped this underworld, communicating an oracular meaning or speaking with an intuitive "voice/ That calmly said, 'Rejoice'".[87] He had somehow to reconcile this calm voice with all the clamour of waking life, grasp Eliot's "moment in and out of time", before he could see "Time" as preserver as well as destroyer, the mother of those traditional virtues - love, forgiveness, fidelity, courage, patience and pity - that

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[84]"Day and Night", CP., p. 239. [85]An Autobiography, p. 47.

[86]In Living with Ballads, Mrs. Muir finds similarities between the Scottish ballads and ancient epics that she attributes to the "archaic world of feeling" (p. 54). She lists these elements as: the power and importance of mothers (p. 55), echoes of an ancient world when men and animals lived in communion (p. 57), the prevalence of journeying and fighting themes (pp. 61, 62), and the iterative technique natural to an oral tradition (p. 65). She also refers to "the ambivalence of the imaginative world where the beggar is as the king"(p. 100). One must assume that her husband shared her interest in and knowledge of such matters, particularly as in his first Charles Eliot Norton Lecture - "The Natural Estate" - he speaks of the simplified "ancestral vision" of the peasantry who produced and kept alive the traditional ballads (The Estate of Poetry, pp. 13, 14).

[87]CP., p. 279. There is an echo here of Yeats.

"Out of cavern comes a voice,
And all it knows is that one word 'Rejoice!'"
("The Gyres").

redeem man's life on earth.[88] When this happened, the tense opposition between the ideal and the actual resolved itself into a fruitful embrace;[89] apocalyptic and demonic absolutes receded and gave place to a new twofold reality that reflects a truly human condition. In "One Foot in Eden", the poet still stands upon the threshold between dream and waking, but his gaze is turned outward upon the world of everday existence where the antitheses of good and evil are no longer stretched to their limits but are seen as the wheat and tares that must grow together until harvest. The emblematic symbol - the "armorial weed in stillness bound/ About the stalk"[90] - reconciles the opposites, for now the weed winds around the corn stem instead of standing upright as the negative pole from which the spark of vision must leap across. The archaic world of fear and desire, constantly purged by ritual action, recedes into the background, where it lingers simply as a sense of traditional values binding together the whole of human life. "Outside Eden" expresses the same kind of acceptance in the attitude of a small remnant who are still faithful to ancient traditions though they know they are forever fallen from the paradise of the archetypes. Rooted in this world, they gaze away from it, and, in doing so, learn to love it more truly. Demonic vision is abolished; that is, the crooked landscape can finally be accepted as our home, and apocalyptic insight becomes a distant ideal.

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[88] See "Telemachos Remembers", CP., p. 219.

[89] Cf. "the doe between the tiger's paws" ("In Love for Long", CP., p. 159).

[90] CP., p. 227.

Their knotted landscape, wrong and clear
As the crude drawings of a child,
Is to them become more dear
Than geometrical symmetry.
Their griefs are all in memory grown
As natural as a weathered stone.
Their troubles are a tribute given
Freely while gazing at the hill.
Such is their simplicity,
Standing on earth, looking at heaven.[91]

In a late poem, written in America, Muir is even able to include the Church in his acceptance of this world, relating it to the inborn images without the mixed emotions that formerly attended his idea of established religion.

Someone inside me sketches a cross - askew,
A child's - on seeing that stick crossed with a stick,
Some simple ancestor, perhaps, that knew
Centuries ago when all were Catholic,
That this archaic trick
Brings to the heart and the fingers what was done
One spring day in Judaeato Three in One.[92]

Feeling, action and abstract thought ("heart", "fingers", "Three in One") are united in time and space ("One spring day in Judaea") by an ancient symbol ("archaic trick") that still works its spell, not only as a metaphor for poetry but also as a sign to live by. This is what Muir's traditional symbols meant to him, as they did to the men of bygone ages.

CONCLUSION: In summing up the main ideas arising from this final chapter, one finds that the following significant points emerge.

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[91] CP., p. 213.

[92] "The Church", CP., p. 263.

1) Myth criticism presumes that there is a traditional body of symbolism or basic metaphor which links the rhythms of man's mind and life with those of the visible world.[93] Such fundamental correspondences provide an elemental structure of image and action upon which pre-scientific cosmologies and the medieval model of the universe were once constructed.

2) The world of literature is in turn fleshed out upon the bones of this mythic universe, reflecting the same symbolic images and narratives.

3) The mythic mind believes this universal form to be itself a refracted image of the one, true, eternal reality made known to it in prophetic dreams. But, as man's experience of life, with its hardships, failures, and the loss of what is dear to him, progressively tarnishes the image of the everyday world, he feels the need to heave it[94] back into re-alignment with his vision of ideal reality. Primitive men could do this through periodic rituals of renewal which accomplished the return to the "paradise of the archetypes". These rituals were seen symbolically as death and rebirth, the difficult journey to the centre, or the marriage that refertilises the waste land.

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[93] Cf. Eliot in "East Coker".

> "Keeping time,
> Keeping the rhythm in their dancing
> As in their living in the living seasons
> The time of the seasons and the constellations
> The time of milking and the time of harvest
> The time of the coupling of man and woman
> And that of beasts."

[94] This phrase is borrowed from Muir's lines:
"heave the groaning world/ Back in its place again".
("The Good Town", CP., p. 186).

4) Modern men, committed to the methodologies of science and logic and bound by their records of the unreturning passage of history, find the actual and the ideal worlds too far apart to be re-united in this way. They may even accept the ordinary "fallen" world as the only one there is. If so, they live in Blake's Ulro, a world of single vision and the death of the prophetic imagination. But if a man can glimpse again the ideal world of "the gods", he has both warp and woof upon which to weave his vision of life or his world of poetry.[95]

5) If, for Western man, the ideal and the actual are so much further apart than they have ever been, Christianity still offers a resolution of his dilemma by showing him the divine become human: the God-Man who brings redemption and overcomes the world by submitting to all the suffering and evil it can muster. This may appear to be a contradiction, but the further the two worlds of "dream" and reality have withdrawn from each other, the profounder the paradox that must link them together.[96]

6) It is this universal situation, with all its shifting permutations and combinations of dream and reality, that Muir explores in his poetry, sometimes by imitating old myths, or by making his own fables and emblems link both worlds, sometimes attempting a conceptual pattern of abstract words, and

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[95]Hence Yeats's gyres and Hermetic symbols, his "artifices of eternity", and Eliot's "point of intersection of the timeless with time".

[96]On this view, it is not sufficient to repeat the cosmogonic acts performed by the god ab origine (dividing of light from darkness, etc); one must take up one's cross also.

sometimes expressing the joyful experience of radiant insight or the final acceptance of an imperfect world redeemed by love and faith. All of it reflects a single underlying theme - how to unite the inward world of dream and memory with the outward world of daily existence and allow a man to recognise who he is in what kind of reality.[97] His personal experience of inner division is the great mythic dichotomy written small and clear; his "story" is the incomplete and often baffled imitation of the "fable", only known in its entirety to the divine mind that creates all things. All of his poetry is cut from the same homespun cloth: an archetypal fabric woven with ancient motifs of the distance between Eden and the fallen world, of exile and return, of Eve as mother and bride, and of the goal of the quest, which is the bringing into alignment of subject and object, mind and nature, dream and thing.

One may well wonder to what extent Muir was aware of the correspondence between his own symbols and the traditional pattern outlined by myth critics. He does not tell us; but it would seem that he was only intermittently aware of the archetypal universe his poems create, that he glimpsed it fitfully in dreams or in moments of vision, but never laid hold of it in the way that Yeats elaborated his phases of the moon and cycles of history or Graves plotted the ramifications of his "one story" of the White Goddess. Like Yeats and Graves (who also stood apart from the technical innovations introduced by Eliot and Pound), he needed a time-honoured myth to universalise and resolve the conflicts of his own experience. Unlike them, who, despite an early acquaintance with folklore, had

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[97] Regarded by Frye, Honig and Fletcher as the significance of the quest myth which is the basic structure of myth and allegory.

been bred in an essentially rationalist climate, he did not feel called upon to codify and validate his myth intellectually. One did not have to demonstrate one's equations in a home where the father's prayers invoked "an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens", and where the bed-time stories of mermaids and witches were drawn directly from local and family experience. One simply knew or believed, and that was enough. The elemental simplicity of his early world and the mysteriously significant images of his dreams had been given to him, and he accepted them as intimations of a pattern woven into the life of things that needs no theoretical justification.[98] His own experiences of mythic vision had seemed to him to carry a transcendental meaning, and he had recognized in them certain ancestral or racial motifs, such as death and rebirth, the jewelled hoard of the dragon, a king enthroned, and winged figures.[99] What had come to him from the involuntary sources of dream seemed to echo the antique images and movements of scriptural and classical myth, of saga and folktale, popular legend and traditional ballad, and to lead into another reality that is felt rather than seen or known.

He believed that this reality reflects a divine unity of essential Being from which all things emanate and to which all return; and this belief, as we have seen in Chapter II, involves some such hypothesis as the innate ideas of neo-Platonism. Where Jung's theory of archetypes, though similar in conception, simply assumes the existence of inherited

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[98] "Our first intuition of the world expands into vaster and vaster images, creating a myth which we act almost without knowing it" (An Autobiography, p. 48).

[99] An Autobiography, pp. 160, 162, 164.

psychic structures from which significantly constant symbolic forms arise, the innate ideas are part of a perennial metaphysical belief in a true and divinely ordained correspondence between "Reality" and the world of appearances. Once committed to such a belief in the existence of two worlds - a true, eternal one and a temporal one which reflects it in multiple ephemeral forms - one has entered the analogical universe of the traditional "man of myth and religion" that faded with the passing of the high Renaissance, but which is still the foundation of the poetic world of metaphor. So much Muir felt and acknowledged, as we know not only from his poems but also from his autobiography and from certain of his critical essays, but he resisted any temptation to analyse and codify the articles of his faith. Nor should one lose sight of the fact that the development of his intellectual powers had been partly fostered by modern ideologies and that he had once fallen into the "cold abstraction" that denies the dreaming imagination of childhood. Both elements contended in his own breast, and the bitter war between them is recorded in his poetry. Hence, he knew better than most the dangers of the rationalising intellect and preferred to obey the intuitive promptings that are supported by old songs and sagas, by the epics and sacred writings of past generations of men who lived closer to instinctive feelin than we do.[100]

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[100]This is the wisdom of the poet. The critic, however, can hardly avoid some systematisation and theoretical analysis if he is to demonstrate the significance and clarify the method and message of the poet.

Honestly reflecting his situation as one in whom the ancient and the modern were uncomfortably juxtaposed and as an intuitive poet speaking to a sceptical world of which he was himself an integral part,[101] he declined to promulgate a supposedly seamless system out of what he knew to be merely surviving fragments. Of his faith in the total reality - the "image whole"[102] - he was usually reticent, just as he was of his maturer insights into the truth of Christianity. All he was prepared to say in his autobiography is characteristically tentative.

> I do not know the fable or anybody who knows it. One or two stages in it I can recognize: the age of innocence and the Fall and all the dramatic consequences which issue from the Fall. But these lie behind experience, not on its surface; they are not historical events; they are stages in the fable.[103]

Elsewhere, describing the view from the Monchsberg near Salzburg, he spoke of the image of the quest:

> Why, seen from a distance, do the casual journeys of men and woman, perhaps going on some trivial errand, take on the appearance of a pilgrimage? I can only explain it by some deep archetypal image in our minds of which we become conscious only at the rare moments when we realize that our own life is a journey.[104]

If one has been able to bring evidence to show that Muir's intuitions of the "stages of the fable" bear striking resemblances to an ancient symbolic tradition believed by the myth critics to underlie the creative insights of all the

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[101] He frequently uses the phrase "they say" or "it's said" when stating a position in his poetry.

[102] "And gather an image whole" (CP., p. 149). "An image of forever/ One and whole" (CP., p. 302).

[103] An Autobiography, p. 49.

[104] Ibid., p. 217.

poets and prophets, he himself was content to tell in his own fashion of his partial journeyings upon the difficult road of salvation and of the half-obliterated signposts he found and recognized upon the way.[105] He was guided to such a recognition by the images given to him in dream and reverie rather than by any systematic enquiry into archetypal patterns, except indirectly through his interest in ballad, saga and epic. In one of those paradoxes that seemed to him to express the nature of things, he both knew and did not know.

> Make me to see and hear that I may know
> This journey and the place toward which I go;
> For a beginning and an end are mine
> Surely, and have their sign
> Which I and all in the earth and the heavens show.
> Teach me to know.[106]

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[105] The sonnet, "Too Much" (CP., p. 163), is a direct statement of the recovery of the saga pattern in and through the dazzled sight of his poetry.

[106] "If I Could Know", CP., p. 252.

APPENDIX A

AUTUMN IN PRAGUE

The ripe fruit rests here,
On the chill ground,
In the sterile air,
All meanings have fallen into your lap,
Uncomprehending earth.

The stubble shines in the dry field,
Gilded by the pale sun.
The trees, unburdened, with light limbs,
Shiver in the cold light.
In the meadow the goat-herd,
A young girl,
Sits with bent head,
Blind, covered head,
Bowed to the earth,
Like a tree
Dreaming a long-held dream.

The gossamers forge their cables
Between the grasses,
Secure,
So still the blue air hangs its sea,
The great sea, so still!
The earth like a god,
Far withdrawn,
Lies asleep.

AUTUMN IN PRAGUE

This poem differs in certain respects from most of Muir's other verse and seems to be an expression of a mood to which he did not return. It belongs with two other poems : "When the Trees grow bare on the High Hills" and "October at Hellbrunn", which were written during the same period of convalescence from his "long illness", and, like them, it employs an elusive kind of symbolism that is much less explicit than that of his later work, perhaps because it is not consciously related to the fable.

It is an idyll, a little landscape filled with the poet's mood. It commences with the evocation of a few sharply defined images of autumn, each isolated from the other in a separate short line.

> The ripe fruit rests here
> On the chill ground
> In the sterile air.

The season has come to a stand, poised in a tranquil balance between the rich growth of summer and the approaching dissolution of winter. Though the "ripe fruit" seems to be in tension with the "sterile air", there is no sense of strain but rather of the perfect completion of a process as it rests on the "chill ground". The fruit is both a focus for the imagination and a link between the elements of earth and air. No longer purely a self-contained image, it becomes a symbol of "all meanings" that have fallen into the lap of the "uncomprehending earth",

which the poet now addresses directly. Something has been brought to fruition, nourished, perhaps, by a soil that cannot encompass its ultimate significance, but which now receives it again as an involuntary gift.

In the next paragraph, the focus alters to include other images : the dry field, where, though the harvest has been gathered in, the stubble still shines, "gilded by the pale sun", and trees "unburdened" (of leaves or fruit), though the word also suggests a liberation from guilt or some other painful emotion. They shiver (from exposure, or in expectation?) with light limbs in the "cold light". Now the dry field gives place to the meadow, an area of natural growth, not of cultivation, where "the goatherd" sits. Suggestions of animal and human life are added to the elemental and vegetable imagery, and the use of the definite article seems to make the girl an inevitable figure. She has become the significant shape at the centre of the picture, seemingly overlaid upon the image of the ripe fruit and assuming its symbolic import. She sits with covered head bowed to the earth. She is "like a tree" (a rooted organic life in which the sap retreats in winter in order to renew itself?), dreaming a "long-held dream". Is she part of the process that creates the fruit and the meaning? As a goatherd, she is a peasant, a figure from folklore, who tends and commands the animals (the natural life of the impulses?); but here she seems quiescent and her charges do not appear. They are merely implied.

The final paragraph moves to a closer focus in the grasses (an image that in "Childhood" and in "Tristram's

Journey" is linked with a woman's presence).

> The gossamers forge their cables
> Between the grasses
> Secure.

The frailty of gossamer contrasts with the strength suggested by "forge", "cables", and "secure". The threads span the grass blades, seeming to hold everything in balance and to support the mood of tranquillity. If one examines the word "gossamer", one finds that it is a contraction of goose-summer, the autumn season when this filmy substance most often appears, and that the German version is either mädchensommer or altweibersommer, the summer of young girls or old wives. This association would help to link gossamer with the central image of the young girl as well as with the pervading influence of the season.

"Secure" is the only word in the poem that has a line to itself, suggesting the importance not only of an emotional state but of the holding in balance, the holding still for an endless moment of the ever-changing processes of nature.

> So still the blue air hangs its sea,
> That great sea, so still.

This perfect stillness is associated with a mysterious mingling of the elements of air and water; the blue air "hangs its sea" as though "that great sea" (an all-encompassing, living sea of myth?) had welled up and taken the place it once had in the firmament before the "dividing of the waters" in the first chapter of Genesis. The mythic feeling is confirmed by the final statement that the earth "like a god/ Far withdrawn/ Lies asleep". Ordinary reality has retreated into a kind of

trance, perhaps a winter sleep of renewal, that makes it "like a god", that is, translates it into the terms of mythic vision.

The poem is essentially the projection of an inward state upon a landscape, and the localisation implied in the title (unusual for Muir) suggests that it was an actual landscape. There is a progression from natural images and proximity to the earth (with the poet even addressing it directly) towards a purely mythic kind of apprehension, with the figure of the goatherd at the centre. Natural desires are quiescent. The mood suggests the fragile peace of convalescence, when the battle for life has finally been won, but the life process itself has not yet been resumed.

The initial images of "chill ground" and "sterile air", in conjunction with "ripe fruit", do not suggest a negative significance so much as a state of purification and completion which echoes the final lines of "When the Trees grow bare":

> Attainment breathes itself out [1]
> Perfect and cold.

The sense of withdrawal of the sap, combined with the feeling that it is preparing for a renewal of life, is taken up in "October at Hellbrunn", which describes a scene in a park where marble images link reality and reflection and a growing sense of the weight of the earth issues in a release of tension.

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[1] "When the Trees grow bare", CP., p. 22.

> And breaking through the silence of the park,
> Farther a hidden fountain flings its sound.[2]

The three poems clearly go together, suggesting a release from conflict followed by a peace that precedes a resumption of creative life. Yet the symbolism seems intuitive, somehow "blind", like the girl with her covered head. It has nothing of the allegorical quality apparent in so much of Muir's other work.

The focus upon the figure of the girl has a quality reminiscent of symbolic paintings that Jungians have called "soul landscapes". In their terms, the girl would be the anima, not yet fully awakened and united with the self (but a muse, nevertheless), and her invisible charges would be the "animal soul" or instinct.[3] If we regard the girl as representative of the intuitive and imaginative powers of the poet, then, in this pastoral setting, she is a kind of embryo of the apocalyptic or millennial vision that is still to come, bringing images of a harvest of fruits and grain, and of people and animals living in harmony. Perhaps this is her "long-held dream". She is in complete contrast to the miller's daughter in "Scotland's Winter" (CP. p. 229), who is the same kind of image placed in the ironic or "demonic" context of "poor, frozen life". She, too, was once a figure in ballad and folklore, but she has lost the dream; the waters of myth have congealed into ice and no longer well up into the firmament. With her "frozen fingers soldered to her basket", she

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[2] "October at Hellbrunn", CP., p. 23.

[3] See Jung, Man and His Symbols, p. 187.

Seems to be knocking
Upon a hundred leagues of floor
With her light heels, and mocking
Percy and Douglas dead
And Bruce on his burial bed.

In both poems, a state of mind is symbolised by a season of the year, and the central image is a young woman.

The "ripe fruit", seen as a symbol of poetry or imaginative creation, recalls Hölderlin's association of his poetry with harvest and the fruits of autumn. One thinks of his poem, "To the Fates".

Nur einen Sommer gönnt, ihr Gewaltigen!
Und einen Herbst, zu reifem Gesange mir.

(Grant me just one summer, you mighty ones, and one autumn to ripen my song.)[4]

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[4] "An die Parzen", The Penguin Book of German Verse, ed. Leonard Forster (Penguin Books, Ltd., 1957), p. 290.

APPENDIX B

OEDIPUS

I, Oedipus, the club-foot, made to stumble,
Who long in the light have walked the world in darkness,
And once in the darkness did that which the light
Found and disowned - too well I have loved the light,
Too dearly have rued the darkness. I am one
Who as in innocent play sought out his guilt,
And now through guilt seeks other innocence,
Beset by evil thoughts, led by the gods.

There was a room, a bed of darkness, once
Known to me, now to all. Yet in that darkness,
Before the light struck, she and I who lay
There without thought of sin and knew each other
Too well, yet were to each other quite unknown
Though fastened mouth to mouth and breast to breast -
Strangers laid on one bed, as children blind,
Clear-eyed and blind as children - did we sin
Then on that bed before the light came on us,
Desiring good to each other, bringing, we thought,
Great good to each other? But neither guilt nor death.

Yet if that darkness had been darker yet,
Buried in endless dark past reach of light
Or eye of the gods, a kingdom of solid darkness
Impregnable and immortal, would we have sinned,
Or lived like the gods in deathless innocence?
For sin is born in the light; therefore we cower
Before the face of the light that none can meet
And all must seek. And when in memory now,
Woven of light and darkness, a stifling web,
I call her back, dear, dreaded, who lay with me,
I see guilt, only guilt, my nostrils choke
With the smell of guilt, and I can scarcely breathe
Here in the guiltless guilt-evoking sun.

And when young Oedipus - for it was Oedipus
And not another - on that long vanished night
Far in my night, at that predestined point
Where three paths like three fates crossed one another,
Tracing the evil figure - when I met
The stranger who menaced me, and flung the stone
That brought him death and me this that I carry,
It was not him but fear I sought to kill,
Fear that, the wise men say, is father of evil,
And was my father in flesh and blood, yet fear,
Fear only, father and fear in one dense body,
So that there was no division, no way past:
Did I sin then, by the gods admonished to sin,
By men enjoined to sin? For it is duty
Of god and man to kill the shapes of fear.

These thoughts recur, vain thoughts. The gods see all,
And will what must be willed, which guards us here.
Their will in them was anger, in me was terror
Long since, but now is peace. For I am led
By them in darkness; light is all about me;
My way lies in the light, they know it; I
Am theirs to guide and hold. And I have learned,
Though blind, to see with something of their sight,
Can look into that other world and watch
King Oedipus the just, crowned and discrowned,
As one may see oneself rise in a dream,
Distant and strange. Even so I see
The meeting at the place where three roads crossed,
And who was there and why, and what was done
That had to be done and paid for. Innocent
The deed that brought the guilt of father-murder. Pure
The embrace on the bed of darkness. Innocent
And guilty. I have wrought and thought in darkness,
And stand here now, an innocent mark of shame,
That so men's guilt might be made manifest
In such a walking riddle - their guilt and mine,
For I've but acted out this fable. I have judged
Myself, obedient to the gods' high judgment,
And seen myself with their pure eyes, have learnt
That all must bear a portion of the wrong
That is driven deep into our fathomless hearts
Past sight or thought; that bearing it we may ease
The immortal burden of the gods who keep
Our natural steps and the earth and skies from harm.

OEDIPUS

This dramatic monologue in blank verse commences like a legal testament or confession - "I, Oedipus", introducing the narrator not as the former King of Thebes but as "the clubfoot", a man with a congenital defect whc is "made to stumble". The word "made" is ambiguous, since he may either be created or forced to be one who stumbles, or perhaps both. The first paragraph defines a man who does not merely stand before us, but seems, in the rhythms of the verse, to be limping onward, each swinging stride followed by the dragging motion of the lame foot. Stress, alliteration, and the frequent repetitions and reversals of antithetical abstract words with related metaphorical meanings create the sense of a tangled web of contradiction through which he fights his way. He presents himself as one

> Who long in the light have walked the world in darkness,
> And once in the darkness did that which the light
> Found and disowned.

He is a man torn between extremes, confronted with the bewildering psychological truth that the urgent pursuit of any particular value exposes one the more helplessly to the power of its opposite. Loving the light "too well", he has unwittingly committed a deed of darkness. Given this paradox, it follows that innocence might be recovered through confronting guilt, though it can never be the original innocence, but another

kind lying on the far side of sin.

> I am one
> Who as in innocent play sought out his guilt,
> And now through guilt seeks other innocence,
> Beset by evil thoughts, led by the gods.

The pendulum motion that has been swinging from light to darkness and back again begins to modulate into a tension between guilt and innocence, evil thoughts and the wisdom of the gods.

The second paragraph plunges us into the narrator's memory of the sinful act on the "bed of darkness". But he tries to avoid the acceptance of moral responsibility. Light and darkness slide into the antitheses of knowledge and ignorance, sight and blindness, and the verb "know" is repeated in different forms and balanced with its opposite. Before the light struck, they "knew" each other "too well" (extremes again) on the bed in the room that is now "known" to all; yet they were strangers "unknown" to each other. They were "clear-eyed and blind as children", intending only good, yet bringing guilt to each other, and death to her. If one sins without intention and without knowledge of one's fault, can one justly be called to account?

This question is pursued in the third paragraph, which opens with a repetition of the "yet" that introduced the question in the previous paragraph. Perhaps there are absolutes exempt from contradiction. If darkness had been darker "yet" (another repetition of sound with a different meaning), an "endless dark past reach of light", a total ignorance of moral value, would the original innocence have lasted forever? But Oedipus is faced with the same paradox

that light, knowledge, and spiritual insight create darkness, blindness, and sin by making us conscious of them. We seek the light though we must cower before its dazzling beam. Memory is compounded of light and darkness; it is filled with a "stifling web" of contradiction in which his once blissful ignorance is horribly overlaid with subsequent knowledge of guilt. In the light cast backward by such knowledge, "she" is not only dear but "dreaded", too, and he is overwhelmed by recurring obsessive thoughts, a choking horror of "guilt, only guilt", the "smell of guilt", a terror of suffocation in "the guiltless, guilt-evoking sun".

But this is not all. He must also acknowledge the youth he once was, who, "on that long vanished night/ Far in my night", killed a stranger who happened to be his father. This paragraph, too, beginning with a feeling of the inevitability of catastrophe ("at the predestined point/ Where three paths like three fates crossed" - which perhaps refers to the predetermined pattern of father, mother and child), builds up to a frantic crescendo of repeated sounds and reversed pairs of words before resolving into a question that again attempts to justify sin. Was it wrong to attack a menacing stranger who had aroused his fear? There is an intricate play upon the words "father" and "fear" and upon their literal and metaphorical meanings. Fear is the father of evil; it is right to "kill the shapes of fear" -

> My father in flesh and blood, yet fear,
> Fear only, father and fear in one dense body,
> So that there was no division, no way past.

One observes that we have here in this embodied fear a

projected mental image which eclipses the objective reality in a deceptive coalescence, presenting only one shape to be destroyed. It is, in fact, a false coincidence of bodily and imaginative sight, not the true unified vision, born of love, that Muir constantly strives to achieve.

The final paragraph opens with the admission that these thoughts, which recur so obsessively, are "vain". (Perhaps they are part of the "evil thoughts" acknowledged in the first paragraph.) Over against them is the vision of the gods, who see all things in their true relation, "And will what must be willed, which guards us here". Their anger and Oedipus' terror were simply two different sides of the same pre-ordained pattern, "that now is peace". The images of light and darkness, which return here, are no longer the alternating limits of a pendulum but have become mysteriously simultaneous. "For I am led/ By them in darkness; light is all about me."

The movement of the verse slows and steadies; its direction is more certain, and the uneven stress is replaced by a more fluent rhythm. Blindness and spiritual insight are held in balance, allowing Oedipus to look into that "other world" where his archetypal self, "King Oedipus the just, crowned and discrowned", appears as though in a dream. Contradiction is gathered up and reconciled. The opposites co-exist, and, to achieve this effect, the lining creates a kind of dialogue, a suggestion of antiphony.

> Innocent
> The deed that brought the guilt of father murder. Pure
> The embrace on the bed of darkness. Innocent
> And guilty.

No longer "Oedipus, the clubfoot", a defective individual arraigned before the moral law, he sees the crowned image of his ideal self which is bought and paid for with the image of his own guilt, so that together they form a paradoxical symbol of mankind, an "innocent mark of shame", a "walking riddle", the acting out of "a fable" in which a man judges himself according to the divine standard, and, by submitting to the conviction of sin, learns to share the gods' "immortal burden" of guarding man's life on earth and preserving the two orders of reality to which he belongs. The urgent, stumbling movements of the first line of the poem become the "natural steps" of the last when they are guided by divine powers and the opposites are held in the simultaneous grasp of paradox.

Despite the form of the dramatic monologue, Muir is not portraying an individual tragic hero, but a type such as Adam or Everyman, almost an emblem of original sin and its corollary of redemption. His Oedipus, suffering Muir's own claustrophic fear, guilt and confusion, emerges from conflict with the absolute judgments of the moral law into a state closely resembling what Christians mean by grace.[1] He is man at the heart of Muir's universe, entangled in a web of inner contradiction, understanding himself best in the symbolic

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[1]The same transition is expressed in the final stanza of the late poem, "The Brothers" (CP., p. 272), and summed up in the contrast between the ambiguous word "observed" and "vision", with its echoes of Blake's image of innocence.

"I have observed in foolish awe
The dateless mid-days of the law
And seen indifferent justice done
By everyone on everyone.
And in a vision I have seen
My brothers playing on the green."

terms of dream and myth, and longing for the moment of vision in which, when seen with the eyes of the "other world", the tangled web becomes a complete and harmonious pattern of significant images. He knows that, before he can give his affirmation to life, he must accept his fallen state, for the vision of innocence springs up with the knowledge of guilt, and from the tension between the two grows the full humanity of individual responsibility.

The narration that carries these meanings is not only based on the re-telling of a mythic tale, but it is mythic in the sense that there is no naturalistic detail and no specific location in time and space. Everything happens in a symbolic world where the persons perform figurative actions in the guise of father, children, strangers or gods, either where three paths cross, tracing an "evil figure", or upon a "bed of darkness". Sensuous imagery is reduced to a minimum; emotion is the overwhelming primitive fear or horror of nightmare; all is stark and dream-like, a paradigmatic drama mimed by faceless actors. The central image is that of a crippled man, stumbling through an archetypal world of light and darkness, gods and men, the two opposing dimensions of which are finally reconciled in a vision of mutual responsibility.

The poem is a striking example of Muir's use of a classical myth to express what is both a personal and a universal condition. The elements of his own preoccupation with inner contradiction are given unity and focus through being projected upon the essential features of a timeless story that provides them with an impersonal framework. Within

this framework, there is room for the varying interpretations to which Muir's work so often lends itself, though it resists too dogmatic an assertion of any particular implication. The poem may be enriched for us by the reflection that early intimacy with the mother is of vital significance for emotional and imaginative life, and so is the ability to come to terms with the role of the father. Muir, with a proper sense of taboo, does not name the mother/bride as such, but his treatment is full of the feeling that the image of the mother lies behind that of the wife and that both are symbolic of a potent source of either creativity or destructiveness in man's nature. In addition, Oedipus' lack of recognition of his parents may have a particular significance in relation to Muir's own re-discovery of the importance of the past and the parental figures for the development of full identity. Certainly we are made aware of the endless potentiality of myth for yielding genuine insights into man's nature, for this Greek legend can be used to probe far more mysterious recesses of human action than those which any rational discussion of, say, Greek notions of hamartia can penetrate. At the same time, it can accommodate concepts as old as the Christian doctrine of original sin and as new as contemporary theories of depth psychology.

It is noticeable that Muir is more concerned with meaning in this poem than with the creation of a literary artefact. The statement: "I've but acted out this fable", which may seem intrusive to some readers, implies the importance of repeating an archetype, or, in Honig's terms, re-telling an old tale, for the sake of the metaphysical

assumptions and cultural values it embodies. In this connection, it is interesting to consider Kerényi's account of the function of myth:

> Mythology, like the severed head of Orpheus, goes on singing even in death and from afar. In its lifetime, among the peoples where it was indigenous, it was not only sung like a kind of music, it was also lived.... It was a form of expression, thought and life.... Archaic man... stepped back a pace before doing anything, like the toreador poising himself for the death stroke. He sought an example in the past, and into this he slipped as into a diving bell in order to plunge, at once protected and distorted, into the problems of the present. In this way his life achieved its own expression and meaning.[2]

Muir actually seems able to slip back into this kind of archaic consciousness and to synthesize it with the modern mind. As Kerényi adds, the true teller of myths or even the re-creator of mythologems also "steps back into primordiality" in order to tell us "what originally was". In this way, he re-experiences his own origins from which he continually creates himself.[3]

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[2] C. Kerényi and C.G. Jung, Essays on a Science of Mythology, trans. R.F.C. Hull (New York: Pantheon Books, 1949), p. 5.

[3] Ibid., pp. 10, 11.

APPENDIX C

THE JOURNEY BACK 2

Through countless wanderings,
Hastenings, lingerings,
From far I come,
And pass from place to place
In a sleep-wandering pace
To seek my home.

I wear the silver scars
Of blanched and dying stars
Forgotten long,
Whose consternations spread
Terror among the dead
And touched my song.

The well-bred animal
With coat of seemly mail
Was then my guide.
I trembled in my den
With all my kindred when
The dragon died.

Through forests wide and deep
I passed and as a sleep
My wandering was.
Before the word was said
With animal bowed head
I kept the laws.

I thread the shining day;
The mountains as in play
Dizzily turn
My wild road round and round.
No one has seen the ground
For which I burn.

Through countless wanderings,
Hastenings, lingerings,
Nearer I come,
In a sleep-wandering pace
To find the secret place
Where is my home.

THE JOURNEY BACK 2

This poem seems to express another kind of "step back into primordiality", for it is not the re-telling of a traditional tale but an oracular kind of speech apparently arising immediately from the archetypal depths. It is difficult to give a prose paraphrase of it because it gains its effects through rhythm and tone, a few primeval images and a series of enigmatic utterances. By such means, one is given the impression of a flowing and winding movement, now swift, now slow, and a tranced voice speaking of a journey from a remote source towards an intuitively felt goal. What is it that is moving blindly yet unerringly towards its "home" - some life force, the racial unconscious, or the prophetic imagination that expresses itself in dreams and visions?

Whatever it may be, it has been scarred by immensely ancient cosmic convulsions ("blanched and dying stars") which aroused "terror among the dead" (presumably past life existing in such far-off times) and left their mark upon ancient song. But the scars are "silver" and seem to link the stars and the song, the constellations of the outer and inner spaces.

In this primordial epoch, the dragon was a tutelary figure or guide, a "well-bred animal" (possibly a reference to the winged and crowned symbolic creatures who express a union of matter and spirit in "The Covenant") with "coat of

seemly mail". This brings in associations of knightly and heraldic values, of a courtly moral order that still lay in the future but which was to express its own significance in such emblems.

> I trembled in my den
> With all my kindred when
> The dragon died.

The image of a den suggests that this primitive psyche was still close to the animal world, while "kindred" may refer to its shared, collective nature. The death of the dragon suggests not only the end of a mythical epoch but also the symbolic death and re-birth of the dragon, which expresses a transmutation process in the psyche itself.

The fourth stanza develops the sense of a pre-verbal mind moving in a somnambulistic dream through dense forests of preconsciousness.

> Through forests wide and deep
> I passed and as a sleep
> My wandering was.
> Before the word was said
> With animal bowed head
> I kept the laws.

This seems to represent a stage of the ordering of experience by dream and ritual, before these have been verbalised into myth.

In interpreting his own visions, Muir had once suggested the possibility of prophetic dreams existing in the "animal soul", though he admitted the fancifulness of the notion. What is not so fanciful is the possibility that the dreams of the animal soul survive in the modern psyche. Arthur Koestler has recently advocated a theory which attempts

to account for the age-old human experience of inner division in terms of faulty co-ordination between ancient brain structures, similar to those of reptiles and animals, and the enormously developed recent structures, capable of language and conceptual thought, that co-exist in the brain of Homo Sapiens.[1]

In the fifth stanza, the dark, subterranean movement seems to break out into the light of conscious experience.

> I thread the shining day;
> The mountains as in play
> Dizzily turn
> My wild road round and round.

This intuitive movement becomes a thread linking consciousness together, like the "clear cord of water" in "The Days", but its calm wanderings are drawn irresistibly into the cycles of temporal life: the "wild" turning we recognize from so many other poems. This threatening chaos is anchored by a sudden clear statement like that of an exile in a strange land.

> No one has seen the ground
> For which I burn.

The final stanza is a partial repetition of the first one, almost bringing the poem round to its beginning, but the emphasis is now more strongly upon approach to the goal and the quest seems to have reached a point closer to home. Consequently, one recognizes the spiral pattern referred to in Chapter IV.

There seems to be some progression in this poem from past to future and from memory to prophecy, although the

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[1]Arthur Koestler, The Ghost in the Machine (London: Hutchinson and Co., Ltd., 1967), p. 277.

whole is held in the timeless dimension of a dream world. In some ways, it appears like an evolutionary process felt from the inside, a vitalist image reminiscent of Bergson's concept of creative evolution. Hence it is a form of the quest apprehended in terms of the intuitive wisdom of the racial unconscious which passes blindly from generation to generation in a paradoxical combination of spontaneous movement and predetermined order. In this poem, underlying order and serenity are strongly emphasized both by the rhyming stanza pattern and the deliberate diction. Muir's ancestral voices, unlike Coleridge's, do not ascend from the midst of tumult and they do not prophesy war. They are still and small, calling up from the primeval waters the images of the traditional order into which he was born.

APPENDIX D

THE JOURNEY BACK 6

They walk high in their mountainland in light
On winding roads by many a grassy mound
And paths that wander for their own delight.

There they like planets pace their tranquil round
That has no end, whose end is everywhere,
And tread as to a music underground,

An ever-winding and unwinding air
That moves their feet though they in silence go,
For music's self itself has buried there,

And all its tongues in silence overflow
That movement only should be melody.
This is the other road, not that we know.

This is the place of peace, content to be.
All we have seen it; while we look we are
There truly, and even now in memory,

Here on this road, following a falling star.

THE JOURNEY BACK 6

If, in the previous poem, one is aware of an intuitive movement towards a "ground" that no one has seen, in this one that ground has become perceptible in a moment of higher consciousness. The two poems are complementary; in each there is a winding movement, largely subterranean in the first but in the second lifted up into the perfect circle of Being. Terza rima, that Muir had used before in "The Ring", is again employed to channel the circular flow, though this time the conventional final line completes the rhyme scheme and brings the poem back to earth.

The presences of this visionary world, simply referred to as "they", are reminiscent of the gods in "The Labyrinth" and also of Hölderlin's "Himmlichen" (heavenly ones). "They walk high in their mountainland in light" recalls the opening lines of "Hyperions Schicksallied".

> Ihr wandelt droben im Licht
> Auf weichen Boden, selige Genien!

(You walk up there in the light on soft ground, blessed Genii![1]

Muir's heavenly ones also walk high in the light, but in a "mountainland", a dream world raised above the level of waking reality, where the "winding roads" are the serene archetype of which the wild turnings of the world of time

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[1] "Hyperion's Song of Fate", The Penguin Book of German Verse, p. 289.

are a distorted reflection. They pass by grassy mounds, an image that usually seems to suggest to Muir the imagination of childhood linked with the buried secrets of the ancestors. Such barrows are regarded in Irish folklore as the homes of the sidhe or fairy people. Amongst them are "paths that wander for their own delight", an image of pristine freedom and spontaneity that contrasts with the first line of the second tercet: "There they like planets pace their tranquil round". These words, and their rhythm, imply measured movement and a fixed orbit, bringing in associations of cosmic order and possibly of Dante's vision of the Love that moves the celestial bodies. (The terza rima also recalls Dante.) The "tranquil round" they traverse has no end, yet its "end is everywhere"; hence it is an infinite circle to which all things are related.

The heavenly ones tread (there is an increase in deliberation from "walk" to "pace" to "tread") as though to "music underground", which moves their feet in an intricate dance since it is an "ever-winding and unwinding air", though it pours itself out in silence. The essence of music has "buried" itself there, perhaps immersed itself in some more material substance through which it becomes the earthly music that we know. Music is central to this poem, although it is unheard. It is linked with the music of the spheres, and with the idea that music is the purest art because it is free of all dualism, either of inner and outer experience or of form and content, and is therefore a direct expression of the primordial unity. Music moves in time, but in eternity it must be a simultaneous harmony perceived more directly

than through the physical ear: "all its tongues s in silence overflow/ That movement only should be melody". . The motion of the heavenly ones is known to us as melody, bu but in the visionary world it is a silent chord, a perfect u unity. One thinks of Eliot's lines in "The Dry Salvages V":":

> Music heard so oo deeply
> That it is not heard at all, but you are the the music
> While the music lasts.

And so the poem falls back to the plane se of ordinary existence, to "this road". The heavenly ones w walk on the "other road", inhabiting the "place of peace, co content to be". It is a world of reconciliation, harmony and ful fulfilment, which "all we" have seen, although we walk on "t "this road", and "while we look we are/ There truly". In oth ther words, we are transported to this realm in acts of cont contemplation. "We are", emphasized by its position at the end nd of the line and taking up the suggestions of "content to be' be", refers to pure Being as well as serving as the verb comple plemented by "there". Even when the moment of contemplation ion has passed, the powers of memory enable us to recapture the ne experience, or, as the image fades, at least to keep faith wi with what it signifies.

"Here on this road, following a falling ng star". Consonance and dissonance in "following" and "falli lling" capture the sense of faith balancing fading vision, and nd the star, vanishing into the dark void, is a small, bright ght but transient image of the eternal light of the mountainland nd that illumines the opening scene of the poem.

It is in the affirmation of inspiration on and direction upon "this road" that Muir's poem differs most nt markedly from

Hölderlin's, which ends with a painful sense of man's headlong jarring fall into time and uncertainty.

Doch uns ist gegeben
Auf keiner Stätte zu ruhn,
Es schwinden, es fallen
Die leidenden Menschen
Blindlings von einer
Stunde zur andern,
Wie wasser von Klippe
Zu Klippe geworfen,
Jahrlang ins Ungewisse hinab.

(But on us it has been laid never to rest in any place; suffering human beings dwindle and fall headlong from one hour to the next, hurled like water from precipice to precipice down through the years into uncertainty.)[2]

How does the ancestral wisdom of the unconscious, speaking in "The Journey Back 2", become raised up into the prophetic vision of mystical insight that is grasped for a moment in poem 6? It is certainly something to do with the "song" and "the blessing" that transfigure the fallen world into the "kingdom" in poem 5. Yet, in some ways, "Variations on a Time Theme X", written more than a decade before, forges a link between the two kinds of experience. It presents a consciousness of the waking world in which we are confronted with ancient signs and emblems, the traditional symbols of art, that express transcendence of contradiction in the eternity of the imagination. These hieratic emblems, cast up from the fabled seas of dream, move calmly in procession up the "mountainside" towards the world of light. In them, the great memory of myth and man's intimations of his ultimate spiritual destiny are embodied and made one.

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[2] "Hyperions Schicksallied", The Penguin Book of German Verse, p. 290.

APPENDIX E

THE DAYS

Issuing from the Word
The seven days came,
Each in its own place,
Its own name.
And the first long days
A hard and rocky spring,
Inhuman burgeoning,
And nothing there for claw or hand,
Vast loneliness ere loneliness began,
Where the blank seasons in their journeying
Saw water at play with water and sand with sand.
The waters stirred
And from the doors were cast
Wild lights and shadows on the formless face
Of the flood of chaos, vast
Lengthening and dwindling image of earth and heaven.
The forest's green shadow
Softly over the water driven,
As if the earth's green wonder, endless meadow
Floated and sank within its own green light.
In water and night
Sudden appeared the lion's violent head,
Raging and burning in its watery cave.
The stallion's tread
Soundlessly fell on the flood, and the animals poured
Onward, flowing across the flowing wave.
Then on the waters fell
The shadow of man, and earth and the heavens scrawled
With names, as if each pebble and leaf would tell
The tale untellable. And the Lord called
The seventh day forth and the glory of the Lord.
And now we see in the sun
The mountains standing clear in the third day
(Where they shall always stay)
And thence a river run,
Threading, clear cord of water, all to all:
The wooded hill and the cattle in the meadow,
The tall wave breaking on the high sea-wall,
The people at evening walking,
The crescent shadow
Of the light-built bridge, the hunter stalking
The flying quarry, each in a different morning,
The fish in the billow's heart, the man with the net,
The hungry swords crossed in the cross of warning,
The lion set
High on the banner, leaping into the sky,

The seasons playing
Their game of sun and moon and east and west,
The animal watching man and bird go by,
The women praying
For the passing of this fragmentary day
Into the day where all are gathered together,
Things and their names, in the storm's and the lightning's
nest,
The seventh great day and the clear eternal weather.

THE DAYS

"The Days" is a logos poem about the symbolic shaping of reality. This theme is expressed in terms of the coming to consciousness of the natural world and suggests, by implication, the process by which a poem comes into being. One may see it as a repetition of the archetype of creation, a cosmogonic ritual which relates the imaginative conception of images, or Platonic Ideas, to the structural elements of the myth of creation in Genesis.

The verse is free, with lines of irregular length and a flowing rhythm, but many lines are linked by a series of end-rhymes which will be referred to later. Effects are achieved mainly by the phrase or sentence and by the larger movements of the verse; hence, the poem as a whole does not respond well to the kind of close analysis that examines it word by word.

The initial word, "issuing", suggests a continuous process, a fluid outpouring, which is arrested almost at once by the stressed monosyllable, "Word", and is transformed into the idea of ordered progression evoked by the measured tread of the three stresses in the "seven days came." Rank and identity within an hierarchic order are established by the third and fourth lines : "Each in its own place/ Its own name", though this impression seems intended merely to provide a foundation and framework for what is to follow,

since it is not sustained in the succeeding sentence.

Here the sense of order and progression is dissipated by the "first long days", which seem to represent the indistinct beginnings of a temporal world. They are ordinary days in contradistinction to the traditional, symbolic days of Creation which spring from the eternal shaping thought of the divine Word, and they introduce a world devoid of organic life ("nothing there for claw or hand"). The spring is "hard and rocky"; its "burgeoning", which normally implies budding and shooting vegetation, is "inhuman". Something must be growing and moving, yet there are no signs of life as we know it. The seasons are "blank", perhaps because the cycles of natural process reveal nothing of the growth and decay of living forms which should distinguish them one from another. There is a "vast loneliness", though no one is there to feel it. This suggestion of human personality and experience, expressed chiefly in terms of its absence, is supported by the "journeying" of the seasons and their act of seeing. They "saw water at play with water and sand with sand", that is, they witnessed only the separate play of elements which had not yet mingled in a creative dialogue. This image, despite its suggestions of freedom and spontaneity, is strangely forlorn, matching the dominant impression of emptiness and sterility.

The following sentence commences with the image of waters, which seems unrelated to the water in the previous line, while the statement: "The waters stirred", immediately dispels all sense of sterility. One is in the mythic world, associated with the first chapter of Genesis, where the earth is without form, and void, and darkness is upon the face of

the deep; but it is not the Spirit of God that moves upon the face of the waters. They stir of their own accord in response to the "wild lights and shadows" cast from "the doors". There is something incongruous in this civilised human image of doors in such close proximity to primordial chaos. Perhaps it refers to the "doors of perception" of the Platonic Ideas; but, in any case, it replaces the barren evolutionist vision of primordiality with a mythic one. Shadows accompany the lights; lengthening and dwindling upon the heaving waters, they seem to reflect a complex image coming into focus and revealing both a distinction and a relation between earth and heaven. (In the scriptural account, the establishing of day and night and of the firmament called heaven corresponds to the first and second days of creation.) In this part of the poem, the earth and the seas (which are separated on the third day in Genesis) are somehow intermingled so that the advent of plant life (which also appears on the third day) is the "green shadow" of a forest driven over the water, a meadow floating and sinking in "its own green light". The fifth day of Creation, in which fish, fowl and animal life are created, is represented by the "lion's violent head/ Raging and burning in its watery cave" and by the tread of the stallion soundlessly falling on the flood. These two images, which, like the green plants, are mythic shapes, wavering and dream-like, rather than ordinary concrete images, introduce a much more definite and dynamic sense of progression, for now the animals pour "onward, flowing across the flowing wave." This free movement gathers up the suggestions of "issuing" in the first

line of the poem, and recalls an intensely vital Tintoretto painting of the Creation, in which the creatures of the air fly wildly forth from God's hand across the surface of the waters.

Then man's shadow falls on the water, and, with it, the reflection of all earth and heaven "scrawled with names". The advent of self-consciousness (man's own reflection in the mythic imagination) and the exclusively human power of naming things gives meaning and significance to the images of the natural world. The focus becomes clear and sharp ("pebble and leaf"); each object seems to tell a tale, to form part of a neo-Platonic cosmos of signatures,[1] and then the "seventh day" is called forth as the crown and consummation of the conception of meaningful images, which is expressed here in the Hebraic concept of "the glory of the Lord". This symbolises transcendence and is imaged in scripture as the "shekinah" or refulgent light of the divine presence. In the mythic world that Muir creates in this part of the poem, progression sweeps unhindered towards the contemplation of total reality in a single, simultaneous act of the imagination, and, at this point, the first phase of the poem comes to an end.

In the second phase, there is a change in tense from past to present and a different kind of progression of images unfolds itself. Whereas the first kind are archetypes mirrored in the waters of the mythic imagination, where they form an organic microcosm, "now we see in the sun" (that is, all humanity perceives in the light of consciousness) a differently ordered world disposed upon the dry land. But we

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[1] Sir Thomas Browne, in common with other seventeenth century Platonists, saw Nature as a "universal and publick manuscript" (Religio Medici, Part I, Sect. XVI.)

are able to see it in this way precisely because the hierarchic images have already been inwardly conceived. One thinks of Cassirer's view that reality exists for man only when he has created it in symbolic form. In this more sharply defined but more everyday reality, the waters have withdrawn, the mountains of the third day appear, and there is a river, a "clear cord of water", threading "all to all". This image recalls the function of the tranced movement that breaks out into consciousness in "The Journey Back 2" and the "shining vein of water" in "Moses". The images thus threaded together create an illusion of the natural world as opposed to the mythic one, but they are primarily emblematic in effect and represent some interaction of the separate "days" or categories of creation. Some, like the wooded hill and the cattle in the meadow, are harmoniously combined; others, such as the hunter stalking the flying quarry, express conflict and contradiction. The sea is no longer a "flowing" wave, but one that breaks against the "high sea-wall". The image of people walking at evening stirs a faint recollection of the scriptural image of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day; the "crescent shadow/ Of the light-built bridge" is the rainbow, a sign of the covenant and a curved multi-coloured reflection of the link between appearance and reality that springs from the original white light of eternity. The "fish in the billow's heart" is an emblem of spontaneity and harmony, balanced, but not cancelled, by the contrary image of the "man with the net". The "hungry swords crossed in the cross of warning" is an heraldic image expressing a more sinister conflict: a state of opposition within the same rank and order of creation.

The rhyme pattern in this part of the poem seems to link ideas of unity and harmonious order with those of division, for example, "all to all" and "high sea-wall", "walking" and "stalking", "different morning" and "cross of warning", the "man with the net" and the "lion set" on the banner (an emblem of transcendence), the "seasons playing" a game of opposites and the "women praying". The image of the seasons "playing/ Their game of sun and moon and east and west" suggests a creative tension which is clearly in contrast to the slackness of the earlier image of the "blank seasons in their journeying". The animal watching man and bird go by seems to express, in emblematic terms, a combined idea of stasis and progress which takes up the significance of the lion on the banner leaping into the sky. The "women praying" are related to Muir's other images of women as agents of unity. In this context, they are caught up in an act of intercession for some revelation or epiphany : "the day where all are gathered together", a moment of total vision in which "things and their names" (natural objects and their ideal counterparts, external and internal reality) are united in "the storm's and the lightning's nest", a supernal realm where the clashing elements of earthly experience are reconciled and laid to rest. At this climactic moment, the poem returns to the sacred time of myth in which the Lord first called forth the "seventh great day". As it does so, it soars above the turbulent rack of the storm into the "clear eternal weather".

The latter part of this poem in particular, with its procession of emblems and its repetition of the definite

article, reveals the paratactic order and the general loosening of texture which often characterize Muir's movements toward total synthesis. The poem as a whole presents a development from a chaotic and barren kind of perception to mythic vision and, finally, to the symbolic ordering of a world which springs originally from "the Word" (the shaping thought in the divine Mind) and ends in the "single infinite and eternal verbal symbol"[2] of Sabbath. It is a more completely imagined and distanced treatment of the three phases of vision represented earlier in "The Three Mirrors", and it exemplifies the process of transformation of chaos into cosmos, culminating in the abolition of historical duration. In this area of Muir's poetic world, the sinister aspect of divided experience disappears; its sting is drawn, and the need for redemption from guilt is no longer relevant. In one sense, the poem imitates the way in which poetry gives form to things and names them in a timeless contemplation; in another sense, it is curiously reminiscent of a seventeenth century model for meditation in which the mind ascends to God "by the ladder of created things".[3] More significantly for the purposes of this dissertation, it is a ritual imitation of the progress towards a centre of absolute reality, a return to the sacred time of the original creative act, and a Platonic ascent from multiplicity to a single unified symbol.

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[2]Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, p. 121.

[3]Fisch, Jerusalem and Albion, p. 49.

APPENDIX F

"THE HEART COULD NEVER SPEAK"

The heart could never speak
But that the Word was spoken.
We hear the heart break
Here with hearts unbroken.
Time, teach us the art
That breaks and heals the heart.

Heart, you would be dumb
But that your word was said
In time, and the echoes come
Thronging from the dead.
Time, teach us the art
That resurrects the heart.

Tongue, you can only say
Syllables, joy and pain,
Till time, having its way,
Makes the word live again.
Time, merciful lord,
Grant us to learn your word.

"THE HEART COULD NEVER SPEAK"

This poem, which was probably written towards the end of Muir's life and which remained unpublished till after his death,[1] is more concerned with the feeling and being that give rise to poetry than with seeing. The emphasis is upon the incarnation of verbal symbols in the human world of suffering and regeneration, and the whole poem takes the form of a song, a closely contained musical expression of emotional and intellectual equilibrium.

Each of the three short rhyming stanzas is composed of six trimeters and each comprises some gnomic utterance followed by an invocation to Time which serves as a refrain. Imagery is limited; the words are few and mainly monosyllabic; in fact, only ten words in all contain more than one syllable. The key words are constantly repeated, while the refrain varies in each stanza. Concrete terms like "heart", "tongue" and "word" are employed in a universally metaphorical sense and are combined with abstractions like "time" and "art" to make a fundamental and readily translatable statement about life, poetry, the incarnation of meaning, and the education and renewal of the natural feelings. The untranslatable part of the poem lies in the delicate balance of sounds, which is achieved through rhythm and rhyme, and

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[1] See CP., p. 8.

in the calm musical tone, which reflects an underlying unity of thought and emotion.

In the first stanza, the separate lines interact in a kind of antiphony, a compressed dialogue which creates a tension of opposites. These lines call for a fairly full paraphrase. The heart (the poet's emotion or the world of human feeling) could never speak (express itself, utter its truths or be transmuted into poetry), but that the Word (language, creative thought, poetry or the eternal Logos) was spoken (incarnated, uttered in space and time, made flesh). "Word", with a capital letter, surely refers to the divine Logos, which, when spoken in space and time, gives rise to the phenomenal world. It recalls the silent chord which, when heard in time, becomes a melody in "The Journey Back 6". It also suggests the Word "made flesh", the Christ who dwelt among us. We hear the heart break (there is a world of human pain and a poetry of human and divine suffering : tragic poetry, words from the Cross) here with hearts unbroken (which speaks to us while we ourselves are still unscathed or indifferent). These two lines express a complex idea, more complex than the above paraphrase can indicate, with great economy and effect by repeating three key words: hear, heart and break. "Hear" and "here" are the same sound with different meanings, while "break" and "unbroken" are the same word used in positive and negative senses. The invocation: "Time, teach us the art/ That breaks and heals the heart", suggests that there is a skill in transmuting grief and pain into maturity and wisdom that only life in time can teach us. The breaking and the

healing are complementary aspects of one profound experience[2] responded to in the same way as Wordsworth responded when he said, "A deep distress hath humanized my soul".

In the first stanza, the equipoise between positive and negative meanings and feelings is emphasized by the reciprocal pattern in the lining. In the second stanza, enjambment creates a sense of continuity and flow which matches the idea of movement backwards and forwards in time. Here the heart (the poet's own and that of humanity) is apostrophized and reminded that it would be dumb if "the word" (human language) were not spoken in time (through the generations) so that "echoes come/ Thronging from the dead". Language moves through time; its sounds and meanings are enriched by the distilled experience of past lives and by the imaginative shaping of the old poets. Since the echoes come "thronging" from the dead, they are not merely sound waves reflected from the walls of a distant tomb, but words and feelings approaching in crowds, gathering about us in the present, escaping from their own death, and re-vitalizing contemporary language and emotional experience. Words can create a unity of past and present, of life and death. The refrain once again invokes Time, but now as the teacher of an art that not only breaks and heals but resurrects the heart.

The third stanza apostrophizes the poet's tongue (the mother tongue, an inherited language of learnt words), reminding it that it speaks only a set of syllables without

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[2] A fulfilment of the frustrated experience expressed as "the insulting weight that stays and breaks his heart" in "The Enchanted Knight".

authentic personal content until the deeply felt experience of each human life and each succeeding generation "makes the word live again" and re-charges the tension between such poles of emotion as "joy and pain". The phrase, "time, having its way", suggests an intimate human action, an expression of personal will or desire, perhaps a relationship like that of a lover and his passive or reluctant mistress. One is reminded momentarily of Muir's image of time (in the sonnet "Love in Time's Despite") as an unfeeling lover with a subtle and keen embrace. In the invocation which follows, Time is addressed as much more than an artist and teacher; it is now a "merciful lord", a noble master to whom one owes fealty and who, in return, grants boons to his humble subjects. The boon the poet asks on our behalf is Time's "word", a language of continuity, relationship and new life that embodies the perennial wisdom of the heart. This wise, magnanimous lord is a far cry from Muir's other, demonic image of Time as the betrayer and destroyer who ceaselessly bears away into the past all that one holds dear.

The disciplined form of the poem imposes a necessary compression of thought and language, curbing any expansion of theme and requiring each word to carry maximum metaphorical reference. It would seem that such a close-knit conjunction of form and content occurs naturally when Muir needs to express "acceptance and gratitude": the rare moment of equilibrium between the actual and the ideal, for it is then that he breaks into his songs and incantations [3] with their surface texture of paradox, their slow, swinging rhythms, and their underlying mood of joy or serenity.

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[3] E.g. "The Poet", "In Love for Long", "Song : Sunset ends the day".

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