

THE LYRIC VISION OF W.H. DAVIES:  
PASTORAL, THE UNINTELLIGIBLE UNIVERSE, COMMUNITY

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This study has not been submitted for a degree at any other university.

I.A. Rabinowitz

## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The Complete Poems of W.H. Davies (London: Jonathan Cape, 1963; rev. 1968) has been used throughout this study. Accordingly, unless otherwise stated, all citations of poem numbers and pagination refer to this text.

Critical literature on the work of W.H. Davies is restricted in quantity and limited in scope. There are few comprehensive assessments of Davies as poet, autobiographer, novelist, or raconteur. Apart from such sources as Richard J. Stonesifer's full-length critical biography<sup>1</sup> (1963), Lawrence Hockey's biographical monograph<sup>2</sup> (1971), and Thomas Moulton's anecdotal and historical appreciation<sup>3</sup> (1934), critical material must be drawn from contemporary reviews, isolated articles in magazines such as The Catholic World and The Fortnightly Review,<sup>4</sup> and specific chapters in surveys of the poetry of the early twentieth century,<sup>5</sup> although Davies is frequently alluded to passim in literary histories which deal with this period. Many of these studies favour biographical exposition and evaluation rather than descriptive analysis and discursive interpretation. A

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<sup>1</sup>W.H. Davies : A Critical Biography (London: Jonathan Cape, 1963).

<sup>2</sup>W.H. Davies, Writers of Wales (n.p.: University of Wales Press on behalf of the Welsh Arts Council, 1971).

<sup>3</sup>W.H. Davies (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1934).

<sup>4</sup>For example, Petronius Applejoy, "Davies Fits The Modern Dilemma", The Catholic World, September 1939, pp. 671-679.

<sup>5</sup>For example, Darrell Figgis, "Mr. William H. Davies", in Studies and Appreciations (London: J.M. Dent, 1912), pp. 138-147.

detailed chronology of Davies's works is included in Stonesifer's discussion.<sup>1</sup>

This thesis is not attempting to trace a line of development for two reasons. First, the Complete Poems gives no indication of date of composition or publication of particular poems, and the present writer has access only to the dates of publication of individual volumes as external evidence of a chronology, internal evidence being confined to such infrequent references as "the birds of steel" in Poem no. 236, p. 260. Secondly, the lyrics themselves do not, on the whole, evince much stylistic and thematic development, and the concern of this study is with recurrent themes and techniques dispensed throughout the oeuvre.

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<sup>1</sup>Stonesifer, W.H. Davies : A Critical Biography, pp. 233-234.

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CHAPTER I

THE LIFE OF W.H. DAVIES

(i)	Newport	1
(ii)	America	6
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	A brief survey of the publication of the poems and of their critical reception	12

(i) Although William Henry Davies is generally regarded as a Welshman, his lineage evinces considerable admixture. His mother, Mary Ann, the daughter of Ann and Gomer Evans of Newport, was of Welsh extraction, but his father, Francis, was the son of Francis Boase Davies, master mariner and native of Cornwall, and Lydia Adams Davies who had come earlier from Somerset.

One of Davies's closest friends, Brian Waters, theorizes that Davies

was neither Welsh nor English, but an ancient Briton in whom the tribal character of the Silurian Stock has persisted into the present century--a type frequently recognizable in Mornmouthshire.<sup>1</sup>

As further testimony to Davies's English predilections, Waters adds that

he knew no word of Welsh, he was not carried away by the sentiments of others and mass emotionalism was foreign to his nature.<sup>2</sup>

By way of a corollary to this, Waters maintains that "his emotions and sympathies were his own and he translated them into his poetry".<sup>3</sup>

The imaginative tension between domesticity and restlessness which is observable in much of Davies's poetry can, in part, be related to his early experiences in Newport. His paternal grandfather, who, if we are to believe what we are told in Davies's prose,<sup>4</sup> "would frequently pause and startle the silent hour with a stentorian

<sup>1</sup>Brian Waters, The Essential W.H. Davies (London: Jonathan Cape, 1951), p. 20.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>For a discussion of the autobiographical status of The Autobiography and other primary sources, see pp. 6-8 of this chapter.

voice addressed to indifferent sleepers -- 'Do you know who I am? Captain Davies, master of his own ship'",<sup>1</sup> kept a tavern called the Church House in Newport, Mornmouthshire, and it was here, on April 20th, 1871, that Davies was born:

It was through being born in a public house that I became acquainted with the taste of drink at a very early age, receiving sips of mulled beer at bed time, in lieu of cocoa or tea, as is the custom in more domestic houses. So that after my school days were over, I required but very little inducement to drink.<sup>2</sup>

Davies's father died in November 1874,<sup>3</sup> and within a year his mother remarried. The resulting transition, although recorded dispassionately in the Autobiography, marks the inauguration of a pattern of situational movement which characterized the greater part of the poet's life:

At last the old people being tired of business and having a little property, retired into private life; my father, whom I cannot remember, being dead, and my mother remarrying the second time, much to the old folk's annoyance. Their own children having all died, they kindly offered to adopt us three children, the only grandchildren they had; and my mother, knowing that such would be our future benefit, at once agreed. When we were settled in private life our home consisted of grandfather, grandmother, an embecile brother, a sister, myself, a maidservant, a dog, a cat, a parrot, and a canary bird.<sup>4</sup>

These events precipitated Davies into a setting redolent of the natural cycle of the sea -- the sea being bodied forth through the sidereal habits of his grandfather who "would open the front door to look at the stars or to inform himself from what latitude

<sup>1</sup>W.H. Davies, The Autobiography of a Super-Tramp (1908; rpt. London: Jonathan Cape, 1968), p. 20. (Hereinafter referred to as Davies, The Autobiography.)

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>3</sup>R.J. Stonesifer, W.H. Davies. A Critical Biography (London: Jonathan Cape, 1963), p. 15. (Hereinafter referred to as Stonesifer, Davies.)

<sup>4</sup>Davies, The Autobiography, p. 21.

the wind blew"<sup>1</sup> before opening the kitchen door "to see that his family were comfortable, as though he had just made his way from the hurricane deck to enquire after the welfare of passengers in the cabin",<sup>2</sup> and through the marmoreal distillations of the sea which lined the walls of his home.<sup>3</sup>

His grandmother seems to have exerted a less profound if more subtle influence on the development of his sensibilities. Although she had read only one novel in her life, The Children of the Abbey, "and had been severely punished by her mother for doing so",<sup>4</sup> she "strongly recommended Milton's Paradise Lost and Young's Night Thoughts"<sup>5</sup> to her grandson. Davies's early interest in reading and writing can, in part, be attributed to his friendship with "a boy companion, named Dave, who was a great reader, had enough self-confidence to recite in public, and was a wonderful raconteur of tales".<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. "The Child and the Mariner", Poem no. 114, pp. 161-166, ll. 20-31:

"In this old captain's house I lived, and things  
That house contained were in ships' cabins once;  
Sea-shells and charts and pebbles, model ships;  
Green weeds, dried fishes stuffed, and coral stalks;  
Old wooden trunks and handles of spliced rope,  
With copper saucers full of monies strange,  
That seemed the savings of dead men, not touched  
To keep them warm since their real owners died;  
Strings of red beads, methought were dipped in blood,  
And swinging lamps, as though the house might move;  
An ivory lighthouse built on ivory rocks,  
The bones of fishes and three bottled ships".

<sup>4</sup>Davies, The Autobiography, p. 28.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

Through him, the young Davies "became a reader, in the first place, with an idea of emulating his cleverness, which led to a love of literature for its own self".<sup>1</sup>

Davies's admiration of Byron can be traced to his friend's dramatic assumption of the personality of the poet; Dave soon tired "of these doings", but the influence of Byron was more lasting on the youthful poet:

It was the first time for me to read verse with enjoyment. I read Shelley, Marlowe, and Shakespeare, indifferent to Wordsworth, but giving him since the attention of wiser days.<sup>2</sup>

That some of his early decisions were not always "wise" is suggested by his account of his schooldays. He was a satisfactory pupil until, while leading a gang of young "robbers", he was apprehended and sentenced to twelve strokes with the birch rod, disgraced in the eyes of his grandparents, and deprived of his freedom. This ended his schooldays. His grandparents, "being afraid of a re-organisation",<sup>3</sup> restricted his movements severely:

When I was allowed out for an hour's play, strict injunctions were given me not to leave our own door, and this was not much to my liking. In the dark winter evenings I would sit with my grandfather, my brother and sister, painting ships or reading before a large fire that was never allowed to burn below its highest bar.<sup>4</sup>

He secured his release from this confinement by hiring himself out to an ironmonger before entering the picture frame trade as an apprentice. Here, because of his interest in literature, he found it difficult to accept the proffered ideal of craftsmanship:

<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

The fact of the matter was that I was reading deep into the night and, having to be up early for work, was encroaching on Nature's allowance of sleep. Owing to being young and conceited and not being satisfied at having knowledge concealed, I showed at this time some parts that made older and wiser people of both sexes prophesy good results in my manhood. Having no knowledge of metre and very little of harmony I composed and caused to be printed a poem describing a storm at night, which a young friend recited at a mutual improvement class, making after mention of the author's name, when I was publicly congratulated. Some time after this I--having surreptitiously visited the playhouse on more than one occasion--boldly read out an article to the same class entitled --'In defence of the stage'.<sup>1</sup>

In a small village adjoining Newport, in the second year of his apprenticeship, Davies met a young woman "who was very clever" and "a great reader of fine literature".<sup>2</sup>

His awareness of his own poetic sensibilities, diffuse until this time, was consolidated into a lasting imaginative directive by her attention--followed, perhaps inevitably, by a sense of remoteness and separation:

It was to her hands, after I had enjoyed her conversation on several occasions, that I submitted a small composition of my own. Her encouragement at that early time has been the star on which these eyes have seldom closed . . . She was the first to recognise in my spirit something different from mere cleverness, something she had seen and recognised in her books but had never before met in a living person. I had known her only six months when she died, but her words of encouragement have been ringing in my ears ever since they were first uttered.<sup>3</sup>

However, in the last year of his apprenticeship, before turning twenty-one, he "threw off all restraint, found some excuse for leaving",<sup>4</sup> worked in Bristol for six months, and "deadened all literary ambition"<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 28-29.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

while abandoning himself to the vagrant allurements of an unfamiliar context--before his misdirection was curtailed by the death of his grandmother and the disposal of her estate:<sup>1</sup>

When my grandmother died, I joined home with mother and her second family, but after a month or two of restlessness, I sought the trustee, got an advance from him of some fifteen pounds, and full of hope and expectation embarked for America.<sup>2</sup>

(ii) Davies's life in America is chronicled in The Autobiography of a Super-Tramp, parts of Beggars, parts of The True Traveller, The Adventures of Johnny Walker, Tramp, parts of his novel, Dancing Mad, and, of course, in some of his poems. However, the use of these works as biographical sources underscores many of the problems associated with the determination of authorial intention in both "fictional" and "autobiographical" genres. The selection and disposal of material in a work of art, even in cases where this material is specifically biographical, prohibits the work from being seen as the instrument of purely empirical statements. From this point of view, the status of an "autobiography" becomes problematic, although both Stonesifer and Moulton seem to accept the Autobiography as a biographical document.

In a note to the first chapter of his biography of Davies, Stonesifer seems to be mindful of the possibility of a disjunction

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<sup>1</sup>Davies's grandmother had ordered that her estate be placed in the hands of Jacob Waite, the deacon of the church. He was to discharge the duties of this office by dividing the estate equally among the three children, on a weekly basis. From this point, Davies, who could now count on a weekly income of ten shillings, became a man of independent means. In his preface to the Autobiography, Shaw rather facetiously alludes to this circumstance:

"He was a man of independent means--a rentier--in short, a gentleman."

G. Bernard Shaw, Preface to The Autobiography of a Super-Tramp, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

between the "life situation" and the aesthetically defined world of an "autobiography":

I am here following the chronology of events given to us in the Autobiography. However, Brian Waters tells me that Davies told him as they walked the streets of Bristol together on one occasion that he had spent the years of his apprenticeship in Bristol rather than Newport. 'The Autobiography', Waters remarks, 'is after all an impressionistic account of his life.'<sup>1</sup>

However, in a later note, Stonesifer negates this rider by checking a chronological theory against a statement made in the Autobiography:

Mr. Lawrence Hockey has established the date of Lydia Davies's death as March 1893, and Davies tells us himself in the Autobiography that he sailed to America in the June following that event.<sup>2</sup>

The biographical status of an "autobiography", then, is related to the specific premises of the commentator. It is not, self-evidently, a document of historical "fact", but fulfils an exegetical purpose according to the conceptual framework of the observer:

Even when a work of art contains elements which can be surely identified as biographical, these elements will be so re-arranged and transformed in a work that they lose all their specifically personal meaning and become concrete human material, integral elements of a work. . . G.W. Meyer has shown how much the professedly autobiographical Prelude differs from Wordsworth's actual life during the process the poem purports to describe.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, biographical inferences based upon more directly fictive material such as Beggars, and The Adventures of Johnny Walker, Tramp, are interpretative rather than descriptive:

<sup>1</sup>Stonesifer, Davies, p. 235.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>René Wellek and Austin Warren, Theory of Literature (Harmondsworth: Peregrine Books, 1963), p. 78.

It is practically impossible at this date to supply much detail in addition to that which Davies gives us. We must be content to read between the lines, to project the simple statements that Davies gives us into completeness.<sup>1</sup>

Thomas Moulton maintains that Davies made two trips to America. Davies's count of the number of times he crossed the Atlantic is blurred by narrative considerations of his setting and, although the Autobiography establishes a cameo of the type of incident likely to be encountered on such a journey, it offers only imprecise numerical corroboration. Davies arrived in New York in June 1893, at the time of the depression of the 'Nineties, and, "being anxious to see the different states of America",<sup>2</sup> journeyed to Connecticut. Finding himself unable "to get employment at once",<sup>3</sup> and having resolved "to be independent of the bounty of strangers",<sup>4</sup> he decided, rather inconsequentially, to ask the way to Chicago. Fortuitously, his informant was the professionally indifferent Brum, "a notorious beggar, who made himself at home in all parts of the country, from the Atlantic to the Pacific coast, and from the Northern parts of Canada to the Gulf of Mexico".<sup>5</sup> Brum invited Davies to join him in beating his way to Chicago, explaining that he was a tramp and that "beating one's way meant stealing rides on freight trains".<sup>6</sup>

His life-style was to become the medium through which many of Davies's subsequent experiences were perceived:

<sup>1</sup>Stonesifer, Davies, p. 26.

<sup>2</sup>Davies, The Autobiography, p. 33.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Stonesifer, Davies, p. 28.

The easy and sumptuous way of his catering made me indifferent to all manual labour. In that country, where food was to be had for the asking, where it often went begging to be received, and people were not likely to suffer for their generosity, I became, under Brum's tutorage, a lazy wretch with but little inclination for work.<sup>1</sup>

Between June 1893 and March 1899, the month Davies suffered the accident that consolidated and, in a sense, effected his commitment to poetry, he lived and travelled with the hobos of America. Despite his earlier aversions he mastered the craftsman-like techniques of begging, assimilated the personal dignity of the professional tramp, and learned the esoteric vocabulary of the unemployed.

The imaginative capacity revealed in the Autobiography is tethered not to the natural world but to the sense of community achieved by the homeless, to the specialized activities by which they are able to maintain a sense of personal definition within a fluid environment, and to the vagaries of a wanderer's existence:

In my travels in America I had seen many a fine sight of prairie, pine forest and waterfall, but they have made no deep impression on my mind, and I can hardly account for the reason of [sic] this. Seeing that my imagination refuses to work on them at the present day, when I am in a more settled state, I do not think it was because of my unsettled life.<sup>2</sup>

After intentionally serving a thirty-day jail sentence for vagrancy, in order to avoid exposure during a severe winter, Davies found temporary employment as a woodcutter. In the summer of 1894, while picking fruit on a farm near St. Joseph, Michigan, he decided to return to England, joined the crew of a cattle boat, and reached Liverpool a few weeks later--returning after a few days to Baltimore. By his own account, he crossed "the Atlantic some eighteen times"<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Davies, The Autobiography, pp. 35 - 36.

<sup>2</sup>W.H. Davies, Nature (London: Batsford, 1914), p. 5.

<sup>3</sup>Davies, The Autobiography, p. 72.

before ending his American sojourn by returning to Newport. Between crossings, he wandered through Arkansas, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas, idling along railroads, retracing his steps, sleeping in the open air on the Mississippi levee, and navigating down the river in order to reach Memphis.

After about five years in America, during which time "he was cut off from home and every human responsibility",<sup>1</sup> "read no books",<sup>2</sup> and "met no people of character or consequence",<sup>3</sup> aimlessness gave way to introspection:

I was certainly getting some enjoyment out of life, but now and then the waste of time appalled me, for I still had a conviction that I was born to a different life. . . . For my old grandmother had left me one third profit of a small estate. . . . and during these five years I had not drawn one penny, therefore having over a hundred pounds entered to my account. . . . It was this knowledge that made me so idle and so indifferent to saving; and it was this small income that has been, and is in a commercial sense, the ruin of my life. . . . One Sunday, I had bought a weekly paper, wherein I read an appreciation of the poet Burns, with numerous quotations from his work. My thought wandered back to the past, the ambition of my early days, and the encouraging work of my elders.

'Ah!' I said, with a sigh, 'if during these five years I had had the daily companionship of good books, instead of all this restless wandering to and fro in a strange land, my mind, at the present hour, might be capable of some little achievement of its own.'

These thoughts haunted me all day, and that night a great joy came over me; for after my thoughts had tugged and pulled at my heart, all pointing in the one direction, which I saw was towards England, I settled with myself to follow them to that place. So, that night I resolved to leave Chicago early the following day, beat my way to Baltimore, work a cattle boat to either Liverpool or London, and from one of these places make my way back to where I belonged.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Waters, The Essential W.H. Davies, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Davies, The Autobiography, pp. 120-121.

But the fulfilment of this intention did little to stabilize Davies's existence. An advertisement extolling the growing opportunities of the Klondyke persuaded him to cross the Atlantic once again, this time as a steerage passenger on a crowded ship.

After travelling from Montreal to Renfrew in March 1899, he and a companion, "Three-fingered Jack", attempted to jump aboard an express bound for Winnipeg. Because of his companion's physical disability, Davies allowed him to jump first. "Three-fingered Jack" did not move quickly enough to allow Davies to jump while the train was moving slowly, and the delicate manoeuvre failed:

Taking a firmer grip on the bar, I jumped, but it was too late. . . My foot came short of the step, and I fell, and, still clinging to the handle bar was dragged several yards before I relinquished my hold. And there I lay for several minutes, feeling a little shaken, whilst the train passed swiftly on into the darkness. . . . Sitting down in an upright position, I then began to examine myself, and now found that the right foot was severed from the ankle.<sup>1</sup>

In Renfrew, Davies's leg was amputated above the knee; within six weeks he was ready to leave, and by June he was back in Newport, "crippled, penniless and without the prospect of home or assistance".<sup>2</sup>

At this point it is possible for biographical projection from the text of the Autobiography to become more fanciful than conjectural. Davies had been precipitated into an interregnum which demanded a marshalling of ideas and a definition of aims:

All the wildness had been taken out of me, and my adventures after this were not of my own seeking but the result of circumstances.<sup>3</sup>

Although in the Autobiography Davies conceptualizes the transition

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 141.

<sup>2</sup>Waters, The Essential W.H. Davies, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup>Davies, The Autobiography, p. 146.

in terms of a movement from body to spirit, it may be rather capricious to assert that "his body had been crippled, but his mind had been set free".<sup>1</sup>

(iii) The once fugitive yearning for "better things" shaped itself through affliction, became purposive in the sudden cessation of activity, and declared itself in his decision to travel to Lambeth to "devote [his] time to study, living on eight shillings per week".<sup>2</sup> A blank verse tragedy, The Robbers, followed two months later. In a Lambeth lodging house, now almost in his thirtieth year, he worked on "a very long poem"<sup>3</sup> (a bestiary), a sequence of "a hundred sonnets, writing five and sometimes six a day",<sup>2</sup> "another tragedy, a comedy, a volume of humorous essays",<sup>5</sup> and hundreds of short poems. By starving himself for two weeks he amassed the thirty-five shillings needed to defray the expenses of printing two thousand copies of his poems and attempted to peddle them from door to door. All these works failed to meet with approval.

His life at this time is chronicled principally in the semi-autobiographical Beggars (1909), A Poet's Pilgrimage (1918) and the Autobiography (1908). Equipped with a pedlar's certificate, he travelled through England in order to save money needed to facilitate publications of his poems. He was hindered in his work by having to

<sup>1</sup>Stonesifer, Davies, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup>Davies, The Autobiography, p. 151.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 153.

bargain with charitable organisations for the replacement of his artificial limb, by poverty, hunger, the public squalor of his living conditions, and the constant fear of domestic and civil harassment:

Another reason why I could not enjoy books then was owing to a low and insufficient diet, which kept my blood too cold to sit in a room where the windows were wide open. The consequence was that I often returned a very interesting book after an hour's reading, so as to take a walk and get warm; a book which would, if I had a cosy little room of my own, be read through at one sitting, though it took far into the night. And when summer came, I wanted to read in the open air, but had no friends to recommend me as a book-borrower.<sup>1</sup>

His urban income was supplemented by the application of begging techniques learned in England and America. London shoppers saw him begging in the street, "a shabbily dressed little man, rather like a ruffled blackbird",<sup>2</sup> intoning verses and singing hymns.

In January 1905, after receiving money from Newport, Davies arranged the printing of his first volume of poems, The Soul's Destroyer and Other Poems. He received his first printed copy "in the first week of March":<sup>3</sup>

The printer had sent thirty copies or more to the various papers, and I was now awaiting the result, which at last came in the shape of two very slim reviews from the North; a Yorkshire paper saying that the work had rhymes that were neither intricate nor original, and a Scotch paper saying that the work was perfect in craftsmanship rather than inspired. . . . Although I still had confidence that the work contained some good things, I began to think that there must be some glaring faults which made the book, as a whole, impossible to review. The first thought became my first belief when other notices did not follow.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>W.H. Davies, Beggars (London: Duckworth, 1909), pp. 184-185.

<sup>2</sup>R.L. Hine, Confessions of an Un-common Attorney (London: J.M. Dent, 1945), p. 163, cited by Stonesifer, Davies, p. 57.

<sup>3</sup>Davies, The Autobiography, p. 227.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 227-228.

Serious thoughts of destroying the work were dispelled by a consideration of the practical difficulties involved in burning two hundred books. He thought of tramping again but, "in one of these bitter moments",<sup>1</sup> "swore a great oath that these copies, good or bad, should maintain [him] until the end of the year".<sup>2</sup> He decided to send the books to successful people, hoping for payment not for praise. He received three answers, "two containing the price of the book",<sup>3</sup> and one from a charity organisation. Although the subsequent interview with the institution ended in disappointment and humiliation, he continued to circulate his copies in this way. The first critic to receive a begging letter and a copy of the book, St. John Adcock, "recognised that though there were crudities and even doggerel in it, there was also in it some of the freshest and most magical poetry to be found in modern books". He arranged to meet the author, and asked him for permission to publish an article in the Daily Mail concerning his unusual career. Adcock describes him, at this time, as "a short, sturdy young man, uncommunicative at first, as shy as a squirrel, bright-eyed, soft of speech, and with a general air about him of some woodland creature lost and uneasy in a place of crowds".<sup>4</sup>

Shaw replied to one of the begging letters and sent him money for eight copies to be sent to "such critics and verse fanciers as he knew of, wondering whether they would recognise a poet when they

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 228.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>St. John Adcock, Gods of Modern Grub Street (London: Sampson, Low, Marston & Co.), pp. 67-68, cited by Stonesifer, Davies, pp. 63-64. No date given in source.

met one".<sup>1</sup> After Adcock's article appeared, in the same week as an article by Arthur Symons, "readers began to send in money for copies of the book, and fashionable ladies began to call at the Farmhouse, leaving engraved calling cards when they found Davies out or too shy to meet them".<sup>2</sup> Davies was photographed in three different attitudes, compared to Crabbe, Wordsworth and the Elizabethans by early reviewers, and given the designation "the Tramp-poet" in the British Museum catalogue. The Bookman maintained that The Soul's Destroyer contained some of the most beautiful poetry of the day, calling "The Lodging House Fire" "one of the finest reveries in the language",<sup>3</sup> while The Athenaeum urged the poetry-reading public to give the book "the welcome it deserves"<sup>4</sup> and The Academy saw "a poet of the air and sunshine, sinewy, adventurous, sincere: one vocal only by the aid of elementary education".<sup>5</sup> Edward Thomas, writing in the Daily Chronicle, drew attention to the relationship between Davies's world and the steadiness of his poetic vision:

He has travelled: he knows Wales, London, America, and Hell. These things and many more his poems tell us; and to see him is to see a man from whom unskilled labour in America, work in Atlantic cattle boats, and a dire London life, have not taken away the earnestness, the tenderness, or the accent of the typical Mommouthshire man. His greatness rests upon a wide humanity, a fresh and unbiased observation, and a noble use of the English Tongue.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>G. Bernard Shaw, Preface to The Autobiography of a Super-Tramp, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup>Stonesifer, Davies, p. 65.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>4</sup>The Athenaeum, September 2nd, 1905, p.300, cited by Stonesifer, Davies, p. 66.

<sup>5</sup>Newman Howard, "The Poet in the Doss-house", The Academy, LXIX (September 16th, 1905), p. 943.

<sup>6</sup>Cited by Stonesifer, Davies, p. 69.

Having accumulated a little money through the sale of The Soul's Destroyer, Davies left London and returned to Newport, where he moved into a large house with a view of the Severn and the Bristol Channel--disregarding several warnings concerning the danger of living next door to one's landlady. After one week's occupancy, while working on The Autobiography of a Super-Tramp, he was served with a solicitor's notice ordering him to "quit within one week".<sup>1</sup> The experience left him bewildered and embittered; an impression of needless victimization marred his health--to be retained in later years as a vitiating afterglow of eccentricity. Within a few weeks, however, Edward Thomas offered him a place in his cottage. Although the project was interrupted by similar problems of tenure, Thomas managed to find Davies a cottage in the Weald near Sevenoaks, Kent.

Encouraged by Shaw, Davies continued his Autobiography:

← The title of Super-Tramp was chosen on account of its sponsor's recent success, Man and Superman. The work did not meet with immediate acceptance, and was first published by the generous financial backing of £60 from Mrs. Shaw. Never was literary speculation more amply justified, for though the book did not head the list among the season's best sellers, it achieved the more durable and satisfying success of selling steadily throughout the author's lifetime.<sup>2</sup>

During these first months at Kent, he selected material for his second volume, New Poems, which was published in March 1907. Perhaps because the biographical interest generated by his first work had waned, subsequent critical response, although favourable, was rather muted and oblique. He lived alone, cultivating his own thoughts, and finding "those thoughts sweeter companions than any to be found in human societies".<sup>3</sup> His joy in being able to give "his whole heart to

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<sup>1</sup>Davies, The Autobiography, p. 241.

<sup>2</sup>Waters, The Essential W.H. Davies, p. 12.

<sup>3</sup>Davies, Nature, p. 1.

nature",<sup>1</sup> to participate in the foliate coolness of "tree settlements"<sup>2</sup> across the Weald, extended his natural responsiveness into an imaginative obedience which allowed him to be "deeply interested in the trembling of one blade of grass, caused by some little insect making its way towards the light".<sup>3</sup> His "objection to destroying life"<sup>4</sup> prompted him to keep a "free house"<sup>5</sup> open to all the birds and insects who wished to enter--although the "big black cloud"<sup>6</sup> of hungry birds that rose every time he opened a door or window soon became a torment to him:

Of course it was not the value of the bread that worried me, although at that time I was a very poor man. What worried me was that I could not break the bread fast enough to satisfy them, and, my time being taken up in that way, I had no chance to study and write my book. . . . these hungry birds began to haunt me, and I kept on going to the window to see if they were still there, and of course they were.<sup>7</sup>

Before he left the Weald, however, his life was sometimes marked by imaginative participation in the assumptions governing his literary milieu. He accompanied Thomas on several visits to London, and was introduced to such figures as Ashley Gibson, Ralph Hodgson, Gordon Bottomley, John Freeman and Walter de la Mare. Edward Garnett introduced Davies to his circle of friends--W.H. Hudson, Hilaire Belloc, John Galsworthy, Joseph Conrad and John Masefield. He was now a fully

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 47-50.

established author, although his financial condition had scarcely improved:

I shall never forget the day when I was compared to the great Daniel Defoe. At that time I could not spare money for a pair of stockings, so I tore an old shirt in strips and wound them round my feet, as tramps often do. Several times I noticed that people glared down at the feet of the second Daniel Defoe, but I could not think how they could possibly know of my self-made stockings. . . looking on the ground I saw, to my amazement, that one of the toe-rags, which had unwound itself, was lying in sight but still attached to my boot. . . .

. . . . .  
Of course, we know very well that nothing can be done for genius. . . . If we give him twenty pounds, what will he do with it? Will he open a fish shop or buy a milk round? Not he; he has not the sense to do anything of the kind. The idiot will buy books, and idle his time away at writing, and his twenty pounds is soon gone, and the money is wasted.<sup>1</sup>

Between July 1909 and the beginning of 1914 he lived in the town of Sevenoaks itself, assembling a new volume of poetry and, at the suggestion of his publisher, attempting to reflect some of the more sensational aspects of his tramping experiences in prose. The title poem of this collection, Farewell to Poesy, articulates a despondent apprehension of imaginative failure linked to a time-consciousness foreign to his vision. His commitment to prose narratives and periodical articles undermined the liberating conception of literature as an end in itself which had dominated his vision--modifying it to meet the demands intrinsic to the notion of literature as a means to an end.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Davies, Beggars, pp. 290-291.

<sup>2</sup>Internal evidence in chapter XI of A Poet's Pilgrimage, "Tintern Abbey", suggests that Davies left Sevenoaks for a walking tour in England and Wales in 1912, although in Later Days he reports that he "had now been living in London for some time". It may be conjectured, therefore, that at this point Davies attempted to renew his imaginative expectancy through recalling the rhythms of response provided by the countryside.

W.H. Davies, A Poet's Pilgrimage (London: Andrew Melrose, Ltd., 1918), p. 166.

W.H. Davies, Later Days (1925; rpt. London: Jonathan Cape, 1929), p. 85.

Before Edward Thomas and Edward Garnet received aid for him from the Royal Literary Fund and the Civil Pension List in 1911, he published a novel, A Weak Woman, another volume of poetry, Songs of Joy (1911), and wrote many autobiographical articles for journals dedicated to the "sociological casebook" predilections of the age.

Shortly after the first plans for Georgian Poetry 1911-1912 were formulated on September 20th, 1911, Davies was chosen as a contributor. He was now to attain a measure of financial security. But the connotations of the new designation, "Georgian", although initially benign, were to place him within a framework of critical censure. However, many of the derisive epithets designed to pillory a literary coterie, being anchored in generalizing rather than particularizing premises based not on contributions but on contributors, can be seen as the insubstantial by-products of a spurious critical apparatus, and when Davies returned to London in 1914 he encountered the more rewarding corollaries of his association with Georgianism:

He found a new world waiting for him in which he could mingle with the great in London's most fashionable drawing rooms, sit to England's finest artists, and be regarded everywhere as something of a celebrity. A good deal of that fame came from his appearances in the Georgian anthologies.<sup>1</sup>

He enjoyed the companionship of literary men for their conversation, "particularly on evenings in the gay and public atmosphere of the downstairs at the Café Royal, and he was a member of a small coterie, that included W.H. Hudson and Edward Garnett, who met regularly at the Mont Blanc in Soho".<sup>2</sup> The First World War did not interrupt his poetry, for he was prevented from active participation by age and disablement. But he was not aloof from its horrors; the

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<sup>1</sup>Stonesifer, Davies, p. 102.

<sup>2</sup>Waters, The Essential W.H. Davies, p. 12.

city distilled the tragic deception of war through its assertion of order in the midst of mandatory dissolution and inversion.<sup>1</sup> However, in contrast to the tenets of Georgian "realism", he did not subscribe to the view that poetry should receive the imprint of violence in order to be valuable. A poem such as "Come, let us Find" is not a refusal to perceive disruption, but an affirmation of the autonomy of the human imagination as it enters into the natural cycle through the medium of the song lyric:

And early on a summer's morn  
 As I go walking out with you,  
 We'll help the sun with our warm breath  
 To clear away the dew,  
     My love,  
 To clear away the morning dew.<sup>2</sup>

To an awareness of song as a poetic medium can be traced his ability to read his poetry at charity gatherings during the war. In Later Days he records the way in which these readings allowed him to become acquainted with London's most exclusive society:

<sup>1</sup>See "The Holly on the Wall", Poem no. 228, p. 254:

"Play, little children, one and all  
 For holly, holly on the wall.  
 You do not know that millions are  
 This moment in a deadly war;  
 Millions of men whose Christmas bells  
 Are guns' reports and bursting shells,  
 Whose holly berries, made of lead,  
 Take human blood to stain them red,  
 Whose leaves are swords, and bayonets too,  
 To pierce their fellow-mortals through.  
 For now the war is here and men--  
 Like cats that stretch their bodies when  
 The light has gone and darkness comes--  
 Have armed and left their peaceful homes:  
 But men will be, when there's no war,  
 As gentle as you children are.  
 Play, little children, one and all,  
 For holly, holly on the wall."

<sup>2</sup>Poem no. 235, p. 259, ll. 15-20.

My readings for charity had now led me into another kind of life, where I met some interesting people. One of the most brilliant hostesses was Lady Cunard, whose luncheons were often attended by the Prime Minister and his family, by Balfour and others.<sup>1</sup>

Being sensitive to the spirit of competitiveness which surrounded his friendship with literary men, his closest friends at this time were artists--Jacob Epstein, Nina Hammett, Augustus John, Harold Knight, Harold Gilman, William Rothenstein, Walter Sickert and William Nicholson.

Between 1916 and 1921, when he moved from his rooms in Great Russell Street to "more comfortable quarters at 13 Avery Row, Brook Street",<sup>2</sup> he continued to publish his poetry in periodicals such as The Literary Digest, The Living Age, New Republic, The English Review, and the New Statesman. A Poet's Pilgrimage, appearing in 1918, was followed by Forty New Poems and Raptures. During 1919 he published nothing, although he assembled poems for his next volumes, The Song of Life, The Captive Lion, and The Hour of Magic. In 1912, he became the editor of Form, "an ill-fated venture with Austin Spare which quickly folded up, but which occupied much of his time for some months".<sup>3</sup> In Brook Street, Davies attempted to settle down to some substantial work, but was hindered in this by prolonged attacks of rheumatism and other ailments. He fell seriously ill in the spring of 1922, and, while hospitalized, met his future wife, Helen Payne, "a twenty-two year old Sussex girl".<sup>4</sup> Towards the end of 1922 he

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<sup>1</sup>Davies, Later Days, p. 142.

<sup>2</sup>Stonesifer, Davies, p. 134.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 134.

moved to East Grinstead, Sussex, to establish a home which would accord with his wife's preference for the country and with her wish to protect him from the distractions of London. After his marriage, on February 5th, 1923 in East Grinstead, he and his wife moved to Sevenoaks, then to Oxted, "and finally in 1931 to Nailsworth, a few miles from Strand in Gloucestershire, close enough to his native soil for Davies to feel at home and yet far away enough for him to achieve the privacy that he sought".<sup>1</sup>

Between 1924 and his death on September 26th, 1940, he published Secrets, The Song of Love, A Poet's Calendar, Ambition, Poems 1930-31, The Lover's Song Book, Love Poems, The Birth of Song, and The Loneliest Mountain. Although the quality of his poetry was stringently questioned by the new critics of the age, and the product of his attempt to consolidate his ideas into a philosophical system, The Song of Life, was widely censured as Georgian banality, he was awarded the degree of Doctor in Litteris, honoris causa by the University of Wales in 1929.

Although "he was loth at first to sever himself entirely from London life",<sup>2</sup> Later Days records his joyful vision of the countryside, and his two long essays, My Birds and My Garden, confirm the comfort and contentment of his later years:

The thought of living with young Dinah in the green country, far from London, had been my one passion during my illness. All my thoughts were set on that great change. One day I was thinking of green leaves, and woods with their own heaven of bluebells; and pools, where I might see the kingfisher dive and brighten his jewels with water. And what dreams I had of passing more trees than human beings and hearing more birds than human voices. Even the night before I had seen in my dreams a tree heavy with red cherries and flaming in a garden.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>2</sup>Waters, The Essential W.H. Davies, p. 14.

As I looked every cherry turned into a small, red bird, with leaves for wings. And the next moment all those little birds flew up like one, and away; higher and higher went their little crimson cloud, like Elisha's of old, when he ascended into Heaven in a chariot of fire.<sup>1</sup>

In 1938, shortly before he moved into his fourth and final home in Nailsworth, he suffered a stroke which confined him to his garden. To Brian Waters he talked of "writing another book to be called A Last Gossip",<sup>2</sup> although he knew "that he had begun the final chapter of his life".<sup>3</sup> He died on September 26, 1940.

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<sup>1</sup>W.H. Davies, Later Days (1925; rpt. London: Jonathan Cape, 1929), p. 216.

<sup>2</sup>Waters, The Essential W.H. Davies, p. 19.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

CHAPTER II

THE LITERARY SCENE

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The chapter that follows is not put forward as an exhaustive study of Georgianism, but as a survey enumerating some of the chief aspects of the movement and relating Davies to his literary setting.

(i) In contrast to other poetic movements in the period between the Edwardian Decade and the beginning of the Second World War, Georgianism did not begin with a theoretical declaration of its intentions. Its primary aim was to counteract a general neglect of modern poetry; its secondary aim was to revitalize what was considered to be the oppressive enervation characteristic of the poetry of the Edwardian Decade and the 'Nineties.

Although purposive and assertive, the beginnings of the movement were informal:

Edward Marsh, at that time secretary to Winston Churchill at the Admiralty, was an amateur of the arts. He had no professional connexion with poetry, but was impressed with the work of certain of the younger poets, notably Rupert Brooke, who was recently down from Cambridge and about to make a name for himself in literary circles. The older poets, Bridges, Hardy, Masefield, and a few others were well-established, but there seemed to be little interest in the work of their juniors.<sup>1</sup>

Marsh and Brooke decided to intervene in the pattern of the times by issuing a collection of modern poems aimed at stimulating an audience attuned to lethargic response. The result, Georgian Poetry 1911-1912, succeeded through a combination of the personalities of its inventors and the spirit of the age. Marsh, in his position as a civil servant of importance, was able to move freely through social contexts which would have proved intractable to the younger poets. Brooke, less encumbered by rank and less timid by inclination, was able to enlist the support of his peers. Together they created and maintained a

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<sup>1</sup>James Reeves, ed. Georgian Poetry (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), xi.

sophisticated publicity campaign which had the effect of arousing a willing sense of expectancy in the audience of the times.

In reaction to the aestheticism of the 'Nineties, the pre-Georgian reader had become habituated to "realism" in prose fiction. Socialist doctrines, reflected in such fiction, had the effect of making the audience conservative in its literary tastes -- as if cultural modifications required the compensatory stability of traditional poetry. By a sanctioning of the false distinction between "representational" and "imaginative" art, realism was equated with prose fiction, while "fancy" came to be linked to poetry. Sensitive to the charges of "irrelevance", the original contributors to Georgian Poetry attempted to restore a sense of actuality to poetry -- balanced by a genuine imaginative assertiveness.

For example, Rupert Brooke's "The Old Vicarage, Grantchester" combines the vocabulary of realism with the smoother melody of the discursive lyric:

Oh, damn! I know it! and I know  
 How the Mayfields all golden show,  
 And when the day is young and sweet,  
 Gild gloriously the bare feet  
 That run to bathe . . . .  
     Du lieber Gott!  
 Here am I, sweating, sick and hot,  
 And there the shadowed waters fresh  
 Lean up to embrace the naked flesh.  
 . . . . .  
 But Grantchester! ah Grantchester!  
 There's peace and holy quiet there,  
 Great clouds along pacific skies,  
 And men and women with straight eyes,  
 Little children lovelier than a dream,  
 A bosky wood, a slumbrous stream,  
 And little kindly winds that creep  
 Round twilight corners, half asleep.<sup>1</sup>

However, as will be discussed in this chapter, many Neo-Georgians

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<sup>1</sup>Rupert Brooke, "The Old Vicarage, Grantchester", Georgian Poetry 1911-1912 (London: The Poetry Bookshop, 1912), pp. 33-35, ll. 13-106.

failed to realize that realism could not be tied to a selection of "unpoetical" items of diction and a sprinkling of commonly avoided subjects. Thus, without the pressure imposed by an imaginative commitment to a particular subject, Martin Armstrong's couplets do not provide for the delicate traces of certain beauty which are allowed to permeate Brooke's lines. Although direct comparison is, to some extent, countermanded by the differences in scope and intention, the inflexible linear norm of Armstrong's narrative poem "Miss Thompson Goes Shopping", indicates the dimensions of the territory separating the original Georgians from their later counterparts:

Then on she went, as one half blind,  
For things were stirring in her mind;  
Then turned about with fixed intent  
And, heading for the bootshop, went  
Straight in and bought the scarlet slippers  
And popped them in beside the kippers.<sup>1</sup>

As has been mentioned, many poets attempted to modify the spirit of the times and the mood of the audience by formal declarations of intention and by specific doctrines of poetic method. Although Georgianism did not begin as a movement or coterie but as a way of securing a hearing for a group of young poets, and was thus, originally, a descriptive label,<sup>2</sup> it was announced with certain connotative overtones. In his preface to Georgian Poetry 1911-1912, Edward Marsh drew a parallel between the modern poetry about to be heard and the poetry of the great ages of the past:

<sup>1</sup>Martin Armstrong, "Miss Thompson Goes Shopping", Georgian Poetry 1920-1922 (London: The Poetry Bookshop, 1922), p. 19, ll. 153-158.

<sup>2</sup>The adjective "Georgian" was originally proposed by Marsh. Brooke, although initially sceptical, accepted the term after Marsh had maintained that the word held connotations of freshness and vitality, and that the incipient reign of George V was as full of hope as the new poetry.

This volume is issued in the belief that English poetry is now once again putting on a new strength and beauty.

Few readers have the leisure or the zeal to investigate each volume as it appears, and the process of recognition is often slow. This collection, drawn entirely from the publications of <sup>the</sup> past two years, may if it is fortunate help the lovers of poetry to realize that we are at the beginning of another "Georgian period" which may take rank in due time with the several great poetic ages of the past. It has no pretension to cover the field. Every reader will notice the absence of poets whose work would be a necessary ornament to any anthology not limited by a definite aim. Two years ago some of the writers represented had published nothing, and only a very few of the others were known except to the eagerest 'watchers of the skies'. Those few are here because within the chosen period their work seemed to have gained some accession of power.

Thus, although mainly denotative, the term was allowed to carry certain connotative properties. Further, the term became tethered to the mood of spiritual buoyancy which pervaded the attitude of the times, and, for a short period, "Georgian" indicated an affective rather than a specifically poetic or intellectual position. The first Georgian revolt was founded on premises similar to those adopted by D.H. Lawrence in his attempt to liberate the present from the burden of the past by invalidating the notion of carpe diem which had become a reflex of the age:

This collection [Georgian Poetry 1911-1912] is like a big breath taken when we are waking up after a night of oppressive dreams. The nihilists, the intellectual, hopeless people -- Ibsen, Flaubert, Thomas Hardy -- represent the dream we are waking from. It was a dream of demolition. Nothing was, but was nothing. Everything was taken from us. And now our lungs are full of new air, and our eyes see it is morning, but we have not forgotten the terror of the night. We dreamed we were falling through space into nothingness, and the anguish of it leaves us rather eager.

But we are awake again, our lungs are full of new air, our eyes of morning. The first song is nearly a cry, fear and the

pain of remembrance sharpening away the pure music. And that is this book. . . . We were in prison, peeping at the sky through loop-holes. The great prisoners smashed at the loop-holes, for lying to us. And behold, out of the ruins leaps the whole sky. It is we who see it and breathe in it for joy. God is there, faith, belief, love, everything. We are drunk with the joy of it, having got away from the fear. In almost every poem in the book comes this note of exultation after fear, the exultation in the vast freedom, the illimitable wealth that we have suddenly got. . . . Nothing is really wrong. . . . The great liberation gives us an overwhelming sense of joy, joie d'être, joie de vivre. . . . The joy is sure and fast. It is not the falling rose, but the rose for ever rising to bud and falling to fruit that gives us joy. We have faith in the vastness of life's wealth. We are always rich : rich in buds and in shed blossoms. There is no winter that we fear. Life is like an orange tree, always in leaf and bud, in blossom and fruit.<sup>1</sup>

To be "Georgian" was to be "modern" in the sense of being open to the freshness and joy of the universe, to abandon the effete scepticism of the poets of the 'Nineties, and to hold definite and positive beliefs about life and art. Davies's "A Greeting"<sup>2</sup> asserts an open-ended, responsive view of life and voices the change from a passive to an active standpoint which is a characteristic of the original Georgians:

Good morning, life -- and all  
 Things glad and beautiful.  
 My pockets nothing hold,  
 But he that owns the gold,  
 The Sun, is my great friend --  
 His spending has no end.

Hail to the morning sky,  
 Which bright clouds measure high;  
 Hail to you birds whose throats  
 Would number leaves by notes;  
 Hail to you shady bowers,  
 And you green fields of flowers.

Hail to you women fair,  
 That make a show so rare  
 In cloth as white as milk --

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<sup>1</sup>D.H. Lawrence, "The Georgian Renaissance", Rhythm, Vol. II (March, 1913), rpt. in Selected Literary Criticism, ed. by Anthony Beal (London: Mercury Books, 1961), pp. 72-74.

<sup>2</sup>Poem no. 117, p. 167.

Be't calico or silk:  
 Good morning Life -- and all,  
 Things glad and beautiful.

In the second Georgian anthology, Georgian Poetry 1913-1915, the strictly chronological criterion of admission which governs the earlier volume is coloured by a touch of coterie. In his preface to the anthology, Edward Marsh draws lines of demarcation which are not wholly temporal, and justifies the omission of G.K. Chesterton, T. Sturge Moore, Ronald Ross, Edmund Beale Sargant, and Robert Calverley Trevelyan on the grounds of their allegiance to an "earlier poetic generation":

A few of the contributors to the former volume are not represented in this one, either because they have published nothing which comes within its scope, or because they belong to an earlier poetic generation, and their inclusion must be allowed to have been an anachronism. <sup>1</sup>

Herbert Palmer, commenting on the first Georgian Revolt, links the "definite aim" mentioned by Marsh in the first volume to the preservation of the Romantic or Wordsworthian tradition in Georgian poetry:

The anthology was 'limited by a definite aim,' and it chiefly seemed to be this: the revival or preservation of the Wordsworthian tradition, particularly as exemplified or stressed in the writings of those chosen. Thus one feature of the poetry was its open-airness and naturalness. So when Professor G. Bullough . . . tells us that Georgian poetry was equivalent to the poetry of the opening century and that, identified with it as one of its significant tendencies, was a 'scholarly tradition going back through Tennyson and Wordsworth to Milton and the Elizabethans, refining on old themes and forms' I think he is only partially right. This new poetry was not particularly Shakespearian or Elizabethan, though much of Masfield's work (somewhat avoided in the Georgian volumes) constituted an awkward exception. . . . This new poetry constituted a definite break with nearly everything known as 'Victorian' -- which meant that the Elizabethan note, which, though transmuted, had been strongly cultivated by the Victorian poets, was somewhat in the background. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Edward Marsh, Preface to Georgian Poetry 1913-1915 (London: The Poetry Bookshop, 1915).

<sup>2</sup>Herbert Palmer, Post-Victorian Poetry (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1938), pp. 75-76.

Although the motto<sup>1</sup> of Georgian Poetry 1911-1912 can be seen as an expression of the Romantic conception of the poet, the ethically neutral tone of many of the poems is not suggestive of an overriding concern for the imagination as an informing principle of existence. Clearly, Francis Thompson's "An Anthem of Earth" is closely related to the Romantic tradition, whereas Wilfred Wilson Gibson's "The Hare", although descriptive of the reflections of a sentient observer in the natural world, is not shaped by a similar capacity to reveal the interpenetration of the observer, the observed, and the moral-metaphysical universe:

What large effluence,  
Not sole the cloudy sighing of the seas,  
Nor thy blue-coifing air, encases thee  
From prying of the stars, and the broad shafts  
Of thrusting sunlight tempers? For, dropped near  
From my removed tour in the serene  
Of utmost contemplation, I scent lives.  
This is the efflux of thy rocks and fields,  
And wind-cuffed forestage, and the souls of men,  
And aura of all treaders over thee;<sup>2</sup>

In contrast to Thompson's expansive and unifying vision, Gibson's manner of proceeding is governed by the <sup>logic</sup>~~lyric~~ of sequence and contiguity:

The sky was cloudless overhead,  
And just alive with larks asinging;  
And in a twinkling I was swinging  
Across the windy hills, lighthearted.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>For what is it to be a poet? It is to see at a glance the glory of the world, to see beauty in all its forms and manifestations, to feel ugliness like a pain, to resent the wrongs of others as bitterly as one's own, to know mankind as others know single men, to know Nature as botanists know a flower, to be thought a fool, to hear at moments the clear voice of God. Dunsany.

<sup>2</sup>Francis Thompson, "An Anthem of Earth," The Works of Francis Thompson, Vol. II (London: Burns and Oates, n.d.), p. 105, ll. 7-16.

<sup>3</sup>Wilfred Wilson Gibson, "The Hare," Georgian Poetry 1911-1912, p. 96, ll. 105-108.

As in the earlier comparison between Brooke and Armstrong, differences in range and intention must be taken into account. Further, an evaluative method which infers the general from the particular is severely limited in scope. Nevertheless, the comparison serves to indicate that Palmer's hypothesis of Georgian Romanticism is incomplete. Romanticism in Georgian poetry is usually limited to material and components, to certain hallmarks such as the theme of childhood and the rural condition, and is seldom the decisive determinant of sustained poetic vision. To be sure, John Drinkwater's poem, "Reciprocity", displays a concern for the tranquillity of the natural world and invokes natural objects as spiritual constants which are inviolably secure. However, the poem argues for the essentially non-moral nature of the universe while presenting the contradiction between the aspirations of the speaker and the promptings of reason. In this, the poem declares itself to be at least one step removed from Romanticism. Natural objects have an accepted "Romantic" status which does not require visionary affirmation. As fully-fledged poetic "givens", the "skies and meadows" of Drinkwater's poem cannot elicit the persuasive reflexes of Romanticism:

I do not think that skies and meadows are  
Moral, or that the fixture of a star  
Comes of a quiet spirit, or that trees  
Have wisdom in their windless silences.  
Yet there are things invested in my mood  
With constancy, and peace, and fortitude,  
That in my troubled reason I can cry  
Upon the wide composure of the sky,  
And envy fields, and wish that I might be  
As little daunted as a star or tree.<sup>1</sup>

While the characteristic voice of the poets of the 'Nineties is one of yearning and persuasion, the tenor of Georgianism is derived

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<sup>1</sup>John Drinkwater, "Reciprocity," Georgian Poetry 1916-1917 (London: The Poetry Bookshop, 1917), p. 145.

from ostensive definition. Instead of establishing an idea within an unstructured ambit of suggestion, Georgianism tends to demonstrate the presence of a state of wonder or astonishment by a process of direct naming and unmediated signification -- reinforcing the primary existential statement through a verbal arrangement such as "I see", "I am", or "There is". For example, Harold Monro's "Solitude" attempts to render silence as an intelligible power which, like the domestic artifacts it throws into relief, can be isolated and recorded:

When you have tidied all things for the night,  
And while your thoughts are fading to their sleep,  
You'll pause a moment in the late firelight,  
Too sorrowful to weep.

The large and gentle furniture has stood  
In sympathetic silence all the day  
With that old kindness of domestic wood;  
Nevertheless the haunted room will say:  
'Some one must be away.'

The little dog rolls over half awake,  
Stretches his paws, yawns, looking up at you,  
Wags his tail very slightly for your sake,  
That you may feel he is unhappy too.

A distant engine whistles, or the floor  
Creaks, or the wandering night-wind bangs a door.

Silence is scattered like a broken glass.  
The minutes prick their ears and run about,  
Then one by one subside again and pass  
Sedately in, monotonously out.

You bend your head and wipe away a tear.  
Solitude walks one heavy step more near.<sup>1</sup>

Solitude, to Monro, is a recoverable condition which can be mollified by recalling the permanence of domestic accommodations. For Lionel Johnson, however, silence, though known as a perennial consequence of existence, resists intelligible enquiry:

I know you : solitary griefs,  
Desolate passions, aching hours!  
I know you : tremulous beliefs,  
Agonised hopes, and ashen flowers!

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<sup>1</sup>Harold Monro, "Solitude", *Georgian Poetry 1916-1917* (London: The Poetry Bookshop, 1917), p. 81.

The winds are sometimes sad to me;  
 The starry spaces, full of fear:  
 Mine is the sorrow of the sea,  
 And mine the sigh of places drear.

Some players upon plaintive strings  
 Publish their wistfulness abroad:  
 I have not spoken of these things,  
 Save to one man, and unto God.<sup>1</sup>

The impulse to clarify and thus to dismantle the chimeras of the Age of Decadence characterizes Georgianism as a revolt of negation. Herbert Palmer, discussing the features of the Georgian aversion to fin-de-siècle verse, lists the collective anathemas of the first contribution to Georgian Poetry under the following headings:

- (1) Very little nostalgia and no wild yearning.
- (2) Everywhere restraint in the diction.
- (3) Avoidance of poetic licence.
- (4) Avoidance of all hackneyed Victorian rhythms of the quick or tumpy-tum type.
- (5) No carnal influences due to French poetry.
- (6) Avoidance of the queer, the bizarre, the difficult, the obscure, and the vernacular.
- (7) Avoidance of the phrase, of any strongly coloured or aggressive group of words, especially those kinds likely to distract from attention to the poem as a whole.
- (8) Avoidance of symbolism, not necessarily the symbolism of the 'French Symbolists', but the symbolism of such poets as Blake and Francis Thompson and St. John of the Apocalypse.
- (9) Avoidance of strictly Christian themes.

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<sup>1</sup>Lionel Johnson, "The Precept of Silence", in Poets of the 'Nineties, ed. by Derek Stanford (London: John Baker, 1965), pp. 160-161.

- (10) Avoidance of national and patriotic themes.
- (11) Avoidance of both rhetoric and rhapsody.
- (12) Avoidance of plangent and crashing rhythms.
- (13) Avoidance of all verbal cheapness and facility.
- (14) Emphasis upon Nature, upon Country Life.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to being the product of poetic revolt by negation, the disposition outlined above can be seen as a natural consequence of the termination of the age of the Victorian poet-prophet. Arnold had died in 1888, Browning in 1889, and Tennyson in 1892. Francis Thompson, though he lived until 1907, had not published since 1897. The deaths of Beardsley in 1898 and of Dawson and Wilde in 1900 brought the Age of Decadence to a close. Robert Bridges continued to produce valuable poetry during the Edwardian Decade, but the poetry-reading public paid little attention to him until his appointment as Laureate in 1913. Hardy, whose verse drama, The Dynasts, was "almost unanimously considered to be the most majestic poetic creation of the age",<sup>2</sup> was not clearly affirmed as a poet by the Edwardian public.

Unlike the novel and drama, which were, on the whole, dedicated to a representation of "social reality", poetry had isolated itself from the demands of the ideas current in the social and ethical conceptions of the age. The moral and metaphysical concerns of the external world could not be reflected by a poetic whose inflexible internal policy of aestheticism had destroyed its power to rebel:

As the nineties drew to a close, the fin de siècle spirit had so attenuated English Verse that the once vital Romantic-Victorian poetic stream had dwindled to a mere trickle of ennui

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<sup>1</sup>Palmer, Post-Victorian Poetry, pp. 76-78.

<sup>2</sup>F. Swinnerton, The Georgian Literary Scene (London: Heinemann, 1935), p. 265.

and langour, of inert pessimism or spiritless hedonism, and exquisitely-chiselled small verses on the vanity and nothingness of human existence. Aestheticism was well-nigh dead of its own anaemia . . . Despairing of a poetry which had despaired of itself, the literate Edwardian was almost forced to turn to stage and novel for literary sustenance.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, because Edwardian poetry could not become an adequate vehicle for the transmission of ideas, a new poetry which would be capable of both reflective commentary and remedial insight was demanded by the Edwardian public. Georgian poetry, in its iconoclasm and responsiveness, accorded with the notion that a new mode of perception was being introduced into everyday life:

The present is a time fermenting with tremendous change, the most tremendous of all changes, a change in the idealistic interpretation of the universe. . . . To any man with brain and spirit active and alert, the present is a time wherein the world, and the destiny of man in the world, are ideas different from anything that has ever been before. If there is any resemblance at all . . . the present resembles more the time of the pre-Socratic Greek philosopher . . . than any other time. These disturbing periods, indeed, seem to recur regularly, in vast pulsations, through man's history. They are exciting but fearfully exacting times for the poet.<sup>2</sup>

Much anti-Georgian criticism invokes the so-called failure of Georgianism to meet the demands of "reality", despite the fact that, in their collective desire to undermine the aesthetic apparatus of the poets of the 'Nineties, the early Georgians were motivated by a commitment to the "reality principle". Although the post-war Georgians, or Neo-Georgians, dominated by J.C. Squires's\* idea of "right-mindedness", tended to lapse into lunar reverie and benevolent detachment, the early Georgians fulfil the demands of actuality in their consistent attempts to record, in straightforward diction, the processes of cognition and recognition which validate man's claim to

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<sup>1</sup>R. Ross, The Georgian Revolt (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), p. 32.

<sup>2</sup>Lascelles Abercrombie, "John Drinkwater. An Appreciation", Poetry Review, I (1912), 169. Cited by Ross, The Georgian Revolt, pp. 39-40.

vitality and joy. Thus, for the original Georgians, the concept of beauty is never formulated through a desire to "escape", but is established as a principle which affirms existence and reinstates a belief in the validity of everyday experience. It is to this concept of beauty, felt as a power capable of transforming the minutiae of experience into a controlling faith, that Ralph Hodgson dedicates "The Song of Honour":<sup>1</sup>

I climbed a hill as light fell short,  
 And rooks came home in scramble sort,  
 And filled the trees and flopped and fought  
 And sang themselves to sleep;

.....

I stared into the sky,  
 As wondering men have always done  
 Since beauty and the stars were one,  
 Though none so hard as I.

.....

So pure and wide that silence was  
 I feared to bend a blade of grass,  
 And there I stood like stone.

There, sharp and sudden, there I heard --  
Ah! some wild lovesick singing bird  
Woke singing in the trees?

At this point, through the controlling faith provided by landscape and song, the speaker invokes a cross-section of humanity in order to relate his belief to certain constants in the experience of mankind. As each verse celebrates a particular measure of existence -- the sailor, the fighter, the lover, and the child -- the poem becomes a universal hymn to the variegated beauty of a purposive cosmos. Beauty is thus not consolatory but assertive.

Clearly, if Hodgson's poem is removed, prima facie, from its Georgianism -- its ideational context of active delight in the enumeration of the existential possibilities of mankind -- it is

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<sup>1</sup>Ralph Hodgson, "The Song of Honour", Georgian Poetry 1913-1915 (London: The Poetry Bookshop, 1915), pp. 143-149.

extremely vulnerable to attack. Like many Georgian poems in praise of beauty,<sup>1</sup> "The Song of Honour" is inseparable from the determining spirit of Georgian positivism which facilitated the rejection of fin de siècle poetry.

(ii) Discussing the poetic antecedents of the Georgian movement, Vivian De Sola Pinto cites Rupert Brooke's "Grantchester" as the type of the Georgian poem, and characterizes it as a particular version of pastoral:

This is a pastoralism which is not, like the pastoralism of the Elizabethans, the creation of a vivid, ideal way of living, the heightening of elements in contemporary life. Rather it is poetry that deliberately turns away from the contemporary situation (the lies, the truths, and pain) and uses the day-dream of an unspoiled English countryside as an anodyne. It is the fantasy of an upper middle class which feared reality and refused to face the modern crisis at the very moment when it was assuming dimensions that threatened to disrupt the whole of the European social structure. . . . There is promise of a better poet here than the day-dreamer of Grantchester, but even snoring, sweating Germans are viewed from the angle of a superior British upper middle class, which finds in them the sort of whimsical humour that it might find in a monkey at the Zoo.<sup>2</sup>

For De Sola Pinto, only "two poets of this period succeeded in creating a more genuine and satisfying pastoralism than the 'over-vegetated' fantasies of the Drinkwaters and the Freemans."<sup>3</sup> In this generalization, De Sola Pinto shows himself to be a critical recipient of the epithets of Georgian denigration which became the stock-in-trade of opponents of Georgianism in the nineteen-thirties,<sup>4</sup> and which

<sup>1</sup>For example: James Stephens's "Deirdre"; Rupert Brooke's "Beauty and Beauty", W.H. Davies's "The Moon", and Harold Monro's "Lake Leman".

<sup>2</sup>Vivian De Sola Pinto, Crisis In English Poetry 1880-1940 (London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1951), pp. 133-134.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>4</sup>See Roy Campbell's Satire, The Georgiad (1931) I. iv. ll. 1-14, for a passage which presents a playful and mischievous cameo of the Georgians' single-minded pursuit of pastoral gratifications.

persist in the reductionist rhetoric of some modern criticism -- "week-end poets", "moon-in-June school", "tree-worshippers", and "escapists". Although he excludes Edward Thomas and Edmund Blunden from censure "because, for both, the English countryside was a living reality and not merely a pleasant view from the window of a week-end cottage",<sup>1</sup> De Sola Pinto uses the "reality principle" as a criterion by which to condemn the Georgian aspiration towards an alternative mode of existence as a banal and mechanical impulse to escape into the benignly sequestered pastures of England.

Before this refutation can be examined in terms of pre-War Georgian poetry, it may be appropriate to offer a few remarks concerning the pastoralism of the fourth Georgian anthology, Georgian Poetry 1918-1919, a volume which in its "sameness and lack of passion made critics and reviewers sniff contemptuously".<sup>2</sup> Herbert Palmer, commenting on the post-War Georgian anthologies, echoes De Sola Pinto's condemnation, and levels his criticism against the isolation of the Georgian sensibility:

Now we are definitely confronted by the poetry of escape, not only from the ardours and horrors of War, but also from the demands and decisions of the Peace that followed it. Here are copious selections from more than forty books by more than twenty poets, and they seem to conspire together to suggest that nothing unusual has happened, or if it has happened that it had much better be forgotten.<sup>3</sup>

In a sense, criticism of this type fulfils the dictum that "strictly presented, a pastoral Age of Gold in which the miseries of human life are carefully concealed is all too likely to appear to be a 'never-

<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Palmer, Post-Victorian Poetry, p. 209.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 208.

never' land with a fatal irrelevance to human actuality".<sup>1</sup>

Although for the "Age of Gold" the contributions to Georgian Poetry 1918-1919 substitute the chiaroscuro of a Keatsian dream-veil, the sentiments expressed are undeniably remote from the clamouring exigencies of post-War Europe. Almost to a man, the poets of this volume seem to be mesmerized by the attractions of gloomy vistas and shaded bowers -- images which attest to an imaginative desire to screen off an area of experience by the interposition of an amorphous fabric capable of softening and fusing remembered experience into new perception.

Gordon Bottomley, for example, writes of a time

When the slow moonlight drips from leaf to leaf  
Of that sharp, plummy gloom, and the hour comes  
When something seems awaited though unknown,<sup>2</sup>

while Francis Brett Young unfolds a landscape of slumbrous illusion:

Between that old garden and seas of lazy foam  
Gloomy and beautiful alleys of trees arise  
With spire of cypress and dreamy beechen dome,  
So dark that our enchanted sight knew nothing but the skies:  
Veiled with a soft air, drench'd in the roses' musk  
Or the dusky, dark carnation's breath of clove:  
No stars burned in their deeps, but through the dusk  
I saw my love's eyes, and they were brimmed with love.<sup>3</sup>

In "The Sunken Garden", Walter De la Mare evokes an arbour of enchantment "latticed from the moon's beams".<sup>4</sup> John Drinkwater's "moonlit

<sup>1</sup>E. Audra and Aubrey Williams, eds., Alexander Pope. Pastoral Poetry and An Essay on Criticism, Vol. I of The Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope, ed. by John Butt (London: Methuen & Co.Ltd., 1961. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), p. 49.

<sup>2</sup>Gordon Bottomley, "Littleholme", Georgian Poetry 1918-1919 (London: The Poetry Bookshop, 1919), p. 12, ll. 43-45.

<sup>3</sup>Francis Brett Young, "Prothalamion", Ibid., p. 18, ll. 9-16.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 39, l. 11.

apples of dreams" lie "under the gloomy beams" gathering "the silver streams / Out of the moon . . .",<sup>1</sup> while the speaker in John Freeman's "O Muse Divine" follows an elusive muse into a "green lonely land" until she disappears in "deep-shadowy hedges".<sup>2</sup> The current of twilight flowing through these poems reappears in a poem by Harold Monro which magnifies the diminutive world of the goldfish-bowl by a process of sympathetic humanization:

Glowing a thousand centuries behind  
In pools half-recollected of the mind,  
Their large eyes stare and stare, but do not see  
Beyond those curtains of Eternity.

When twilight flows into the room  
And air becomes like water, you can feel  
Their movements growing larger in the gloom,<sup>3</sup>

Thus, in attempting to peer beyond the vistas of immediate and remembered experience, the Georgian sensibility seeks a fusion of daylight recognition and nocturnal intuition. It is through apperception, the process by which remembered experience is examined in terms of further imaginative experience, that the outdoor world acquires a pastoral capacity. In general, the rural condition is not, in itself, the object of pastoral aspiration but the means by which the speaker becomes aware of imaginative possibility. For this reason, many Georgian outdoor poems do not attempt to record the dimensions of the territory which separates man from the golden world. In a sense, the gap is implicit in the rural standpoint adopted by the speaker and is not defined through poetic argument. The rural condition is the inspirer but not the goal of imaginative desire.

<sup>1</sup>"Moonlit Apples", *Ibid.*, p. 50, ll. 9-11.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 59, ll. 13-20.

<sup>3</sup>"Goldfish", *Ibid.*, p. 100, ll. 6-12.

Davies's pastoralism (a topic discussed in the fourth chapter of this study) is an expression of a desire for return and re-definition which is directed through an intuition of the country as an ever-present source of beatitude. For many Georgians, however, the country is valued primarily as a source of those promptings which lead to intimations of an unrealized yearning for the inaccessible domains of fancy.

As can be seen in Thomas Moulton's poem, "For Bessie, Seated By Me In The Garden",<sup>1</sup> where "white petals" embody the characteristics of a dream within a dream, the natural world elicits a time-bound consciousness of a timeless universe, and the speaker is content to remain within the sphere of newly-awakened associations which sustain imaginative appreciation. Because the vision is not preceded by a sense of antithesis and does not lead to further recognition or affirmation, the poem is not carried forward into a focus which betokens pastoral resolution:

To the heart, to the heart the white petals  
 Quietly fall.  
 Memory is a little wind, and magical  
 The dreaming hours.  
 As a breath they fall, as a sigh;  
 Green garden hours too languorous [sic] to waken.  
 . . . . .  
 Quietly, quietly the June wind flings  
 White petals, past the footpath flowers  
 Adown my dreaming hours.  
 . . . . .  
 As a breath, a sigh  
 Fall the petals of hours, . . .  
 . . . . .  
 To the years, other years, old and wistful  
 Drifts my dream.  
 Petal-patined the dream, white-mistful  
 As the dew-sweet haunt of dim whitebeam  
 Because of memory, a little wind . . .  
 . . . . .  
 Here Love is . . . Love only of all things outstays  
 The drift of petals, the drift of days,

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 107-109.

Petals of hours,  
 Of white-leafed flowers,  
 Petalled wings of the butterfly  
 Drifting, quietly drifting by  
 As a breath, a sigh . . . .<sup>1</sup>

In the absence of a controlling movement towards the possession of an alternative world, Georgian pastoralism can be seen as outdoor poetry which emphasizes the creative rôle of the natural world.

(iii) The Georgian conception of the sustaining power of the natural world is, of course, a corollary of Romanticism. In conjunction with a further Romantic premise, the idea of the perfectability of mankind, Georgianism provides the theoretical justification for the mood of spiritual buoyancy mentioned earlier in this chapter. The desuetude of Georgianism can, in part, be traced to the gradual erosion of the tenets of Humanism. Although Augustan Humanism denies the possibility of human perfection, Romantic Humanism maintains a belief in the creative intervention of man in the destiny of mankind. By subscribing to an anthropocentric view of history, the original Georgians were able to assent, as did Lascelles Abercrombie, that a new mode of perception was being introduced into everyday life.<sup>2</sup> Because the post-war rejection of the idea of perfectability is seen by T.E. Hulme as a rejection of Humanism, it must be noted at the outset of this discussion that Augustan Humanism accords with Hulme's view of human limitation in that the Augustan Humanist may be characterized as one who "either possesses or effects such broad and historical awareness of actual human nature as to justify grave doubts

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<sup>1</sup>Ellipses of full lines mine.

<sup>2</sup>See p. 35 of this study.

about the probability of any moral or qualitative 'progress':<sup>1</sup>

The Humanist believes that most human 'problems' cannot be solved, 'failures and defects' as Johnson says in Rambler 43, 'being inseparable from humanity' . . . . The Humanist is convinced that human nature, for all its potential dignity, is irremediably flawed and corrupt at the core . . . he will often conceive of this flaw by means of the myth of the fall of Man. <sup>2</sup>

For this reason, in order to avert the problems of shared terminology Georgian and Romantic Humanism will be qualified by the term "anthropocentric", while Hulme's theories and Augustan Humanism will be termed "theocentric". In their critical assessment of the poetry of the war years, Herbert Grierson and J.C. Smith summarize the stages which led to the decline of Georgianism in terms of a movement from an anthropocentric to a theocentric conception of the universe:

The war-poets whom we have named were all, in a sense, romantics, and all except Wilfred Owen wrote in traditional measures. Meanwhile among the new generation a revolt was preparing against all the standards that had governed English poetry since the Romantic Revival. It was not wholly or even mainly a literary revolution. We may describe it in the most general terms as a revolt against Humanism, against that anthropocentric view of life which had supplanted the theocentric conception of the Middle Ages. The leaders of the revolt maintained that Western Europe had taken the wrong turn at the Renaissance, which made Man, not God, the measure of all things, and had gone finally and fatally astray at the time of the French Revolution, when Rousseau cast adrift the last anchor that held men to the ancient faith, the doctrine, namely, of Original Sin.

No layman put the case against Humanism more pungently than Thomas Ernest Hulme (1883-1917). <sup>3</sup>

In Speculations, Hulme argues that the religious attitude reflects the impossibility of "expressing the absolute values of religion

<sup>1</sup>P. Fussell, The Rhetorical World of Augustan Humanism (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), p. 4.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>3</sup>Herbert Grierson and J.C. Smith, A Critical History of English Poetry (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1966), pp. 427-473.

and ethics in terms of the essentially relative categories of life".<sup>1</sup> Ethical values, he maintains, are not relative to human desires and feelings, "but are absolute and objective".<sup>2</sup> In the light of these absolute values, man must be judged to be limited and imperfect:

He is endowed with Original Sin. While he can occasionally accomplish acts which partake of perfection, he can never himself be perfect. . . . Certain secondary results in regard to ordinary human action in society follow from this. A man is essentially bad, he can only accomplish anything of value by discipline -- ethical and political. Order is thus not merely negative, but creative and liberating. Institutions are necessary.

Thus, in his refutation of anthropocentric Humanism, Hulme advocates a belief in the radical imperfection of man which is supported by a commitment to absolute ethical values. If a sense of the reality of these absolute values is absent, man becomes neither fundamentally good nor fundamentally evil. In a passage which could be a summary of the early Georgian creed, Hulme points out the consequences of a world view structured in terms of relative and flexible ethical values:

The problem of evil disappears, the conception of sin loses all meaning . . . under ideal conditions everything of value will spring spontaneously from 'free personalities'. If nothing good seems to appear spontaneously now, that is because of external restrictions and obstacles. Our political ideal should be the removal of everything that checks the 'spontaneous growth of personality'. Progress is thus possible and order a merely negative conception.<sup>3</sup>

By partially undermining the joyous framework of the original Georgians, Hulme's theories can be cited as a possible cause of Neo-Georgianism. In the poetry of the latter movement, the principle of human freedom

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<sup>1</sup>T.E. Hulme, Speculations: Essays on Humanism and the Philosophy of Art (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), p. 47.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 48.

which is evident in Davies's "A Greeting" is directed into a middle path which neither rejoices nor disputes. Poetry, remembering its delight in the cancellation of the problem of evil, is unable to accommodate in full the restrictive principles to which it now owes a measure of allegiance, and the prudent course between freedom and limitation becomes its dominant direction.<sup>1</sup> By substituting a principle of pre-ordained and absolute order for the Romantic notion of spontaneity, Hulme prepared the way for a conception of art which repudiated the semi-religious vagueness associated with Romanticism.

(iv) James Reeves, in his introduction to Georgian Poetry, maintains that although the word "Georgian" came into use purely as a descriptive term it concluded its tenure as a term of critical abuse:

By the beginning of the Second World War it was merely an archaism. It might on occasions be employed to describe some belated appearance of a kind of poem now unredeemably discredited; but by 1950 it could no longer be used with the certainty that it would be understood by anyone under twenty-five. 'The Georgians', if the phrase means anything at all to the younger generation of today, is as old world and as remote as the 'Nineties'. Yet there was a brief period during which the image of modern poetry in the minds of most educated readers was that presented by the Georgian Movement.<sup>2</sup>

At the onset of the movement, the norms of the audience belonged to a time long past, and their poetic sensibilities were "overlaid by a

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<sup>1</sup>For a centrally Georgian rejection of the idea of "prudence", see Lascelles Abercrombie's "The Sale of St. Thomas", where prudence is deemed a deadly sin because it

". . . refuses faith in the unknown powers  
Within man's nature; shrewdly bringeth all  
Their inspiration of strange eagerness  
To a judgement bought by safe experience;  
Narrows desire into the scope of thought."

Georgian Poetry 1911-1912, p. 20.

<sup>2</sup>James Reeves, ed. Georgian Poetry, xi.

thick veneer of conservatism that was at once academic and puritanical":<sup>1</sup>

Poetry was regarded as something inseparable from the worship of the classics, and especially the Victorian classics, Tennyson, Browning and Arnold. . . . Poetry had to be pleasant, dignified, moral, not difficult or introspective, and based on the pretence that the rhythms of suburban life were still those of the old England of the feudal countryside. It was the poetry of the school-prize bound in half-morocco. <sup>2</sup>

This observation is reinforced by Michael Roberts during a discussion of Hulme's critical tenets:

Poetry was expected to be the 'expression of a charming personality' or a metrical statement of poetic experience or of sentiments that were flattering to the reader . . . most English readers expected poetry to follow the romantic tradition of Shelley and Byron, and as long as that tradition were retained they were not sharply critical of the actual content of the poem. <sup>3</sup>

With the publication of Georgian Poetry 1911-1912, however, "people began to argue and even to quarrel about poetry as though it were really of some importance, and -- what is always a significant sign -- the charlatan began to lift an alert and interested head".<sup>4</sup> The poetic instauration which attended the publication of Marsh's anthology can be seen, therefore, as part of a general resurgence of interest in poetry as a shared medium of imaginative expression. Similarly, a summary of the decline of Georgianism should account for the waning of critical and public sympathy in terms of a failure of the poetic imagination.

<sup>1</sup>~~Vivian De Solo~~ Pinto, Crisis In English Poetry 1880-1940, p.117.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Michael Roberts, T.E. Hulme (London, 1938), pp. 206-207, cited by Ross, The Georgian Revolt, pp. 33-34.  
No publisher given in source.

<sup>4</sup>Edward Shanks, "The New Poetry, 1911-1925", Second Essays on Literature (London, 1927), p. 111, cited by Ross, The Georgian Revolt, p. 37.

No publisher given in source.

The original Georgians wrote of personal concerns, expressing individual perceptions through a conversational medium. The tonal relaxation which was achieved through this medium appeared to herald a new age of flexibility and freedom. However, the First World War established a watershed which separated the original Georgians from a life-style which nourished promise and lack of restriction. In its pre-War phase, it connoted, under Marsh's leadership, the new and definitive direction of English poetry. In its post-War phase, it began to assume the shape of conservatism by being opposed to movements such as Imagism and Vorticism (both to be discussed at a later stage in this chapter). The champion of Neo-Georgianism, or Georgianism in its post-War phase, J.C. Squire, failed to encourage the forward-looking position favoured by the early Georgians under the guardianship of Marsh. Instead, through the medium of The London Mercury, Squire attacked the newer movements and attempted to consolidate the earlier poetry into a literary canon of methods and intentions -- despite the fact that the pre-War Georgians, in consciously unlearning the literary influences which moulded their Victorian ancestors, intended to adhere to the principle of making through unmaking.

However, well before Squire's assumption of power, Georgianism had begun to display signs of fatigue. By 1915, the coterie spirit had been diagnosed by the more trenchant critics, and the Georgians' solid commitment to "realism" had been cited as an example of a mechanical reaction to the loftiness of Victorianism. As Victorianism gloried in beauty for its own sake, it was charged, so Georgianism delighted in the cult of the ugly. Further, one of the primary causes of the dissatisfaction with Georgianism can be traced to its association with the "anthology spirit". After the anthology boom of the war

years, public interest in all anthologies had dwindled. While Marsh disliked the idea of a literary coterie, his rejection of "manifesto poetry" limited the material from which his anthology could be compiled, and, although omissions are usual in any anthology, by 1918 the work of only twenty-eight poets had been represented in Georgian Poetry. The resultant "common manner" became the subject of many parodies. In December 1919, the reviewer for The Times Literary Supplement isolated a collective tendency of Georgianism in the following terms:

Some simple mood, perception, or admitted truth is taken and deliberately elaborated upon until it seems portentous; the means employed are tireless repetitions . . . cascading catalogues of nouns and adjectives, and often a repeated reference to secret knowledge of the world known only to the poet.<sup>1</sup>

What had once been a banner proclaiming vigorous escape from Victorian lethargy was now seen to be a pocket-handkerchief fluttering in the gratifying air of comfortable emotions. Because Marsh and his contributors were mistrustful of literary theory in its prescriptive sense, while paying homage to a conservative conception of poetry,<sup>2</sup> the Georgian anthology could not become the vehicle for the publication of poems written in support of "leftist" doctrines such as Futurism, Imagism, and Vorticism. Hulme's obiter dictum of order and austerity encouraged an ideal of precision and craftsmanship which sought to pare away all qualifications from the poetic impulse. Marsh's taste was conservative but catholic; opposed to Victorian "stuffiness", but wary of obscurity, while the "leftist" front, under the heading

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<sup>1</sup>The Times Literary Supplement, Dec. 11, 1919, p. 738.

<sup>2</sup>In accordance with his "centrist", conservative sympathies, Marsh objected to a line in Herbert Palmer's "Ishmael" because it would not scan, and refused to publish the poem.

of free verse, advocated the rejection of conventional verse forms and of archaic poetic diction.

Futurism, originally confined to the visual arts, was started by a group of Milanese painters such as Marinetti and Buzzi. Marinetti maintained that it would be in the interests of poetry to jettison conventional syntax, adjectives, finite verbs and typographical harmony. Further, he urged, the inclusion of mathematical signs would help to concretize meaning, while the poet's right to make and unmake his words should be fully exploited.

Vorticism centred its attack upon "sentimentalism" in poetry:

Our Vortex is not afraid of the Past : it has forgotten its existence. Our Vortex regards the Future as as sentimental as the Past. The Future is distant, like the Past, and therefor [sic] sentimental. . . . Everything absent, remote, requiring projection in the veiled weakness of the mind is sentimental.<sup>1</sup>

Pound's association with Vorticism led him to assert the primacy of the image in poetry. With Eliot, Aldington, and Dora Marsden, Pound established an Imagist poetic in the pages of the New Freewoman (June, 1913), and developed it in the Egoist (January, 1915). Contributions to the New Freewoman included Aldington, H.D., Amy Lowell, F.S. Flint, Skipworth Laurel, William Carlos Williams, and Rebecca West. Although Imagism differed from Futurism in that it saw the need for form in poetry, to bring content into control instead of allowing it to dominate the page, it condemned rhetoric and commended free forms in verse, images, and analogies. In its opposition to representational art, it was linked to both Futurism and Vorticism. Using the Imagist poetic, Rebecca West derides the contribut<sup>ors</sup>~~ion~~ to Georgian

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<sup>1</sup>Blast, I (1914), 147, cited by Ross, The Georgian Revolt, p. 65.

Poetry 1911-1912 as belated Victorians, reinforcing Hulme's notion of austerity in art:

Poetry should be burned to the bone by austere fires and washed white with the rains of affliction: the poet should love nakedness and the thought of the skeleton under the flesh. But because the public will not pay for poetry, it has become the occupation of learned persons given to soft living among veiled things and unaccustomed to being sacked for talking too much. That is why from the beautiful stark hide of Blake it has become the idle hussy hung with ornaments kept by Lord Tennyson, handed on to Stephen Phillips and now supported at Devonshire Street by the Georgian school.<sup>1</sup>

Both Middleton Murry and Katherine Mansfield insisted that art could not be democratic because it demanded a non-democratic quality -- intuition. Prompted by Hulme's conception of an ordered hierarchy of absolute values, Katherine Mansfield maintained that art as a private experience must have both individuality and a freedom to feel superior which is not possible in a social democracy. Poetry was to be formal and enjoyed by a gifted few. In substituting an elitist principle of exclusiveness for the Georgian desire to reinstate poetry as a popular medium of imaginative expression, the spokesmen for the new poetry widened the gulf between the optimism of poetry written within a favourable, pre-War universe and the distanced cynicism of the later poetry.

Although the matter is conjectural, it is possible that the First World War modified the spirit of early Georgianism, not only in terms of private tragedy, but in its deflection of public attention through the patriotic lens of war poetry. John Wain, in assessing the degree of the lyrical impulse in early Georgianism, indicates the validity of Marsh's initial belief in the "new strength and beauty" of English poetry:

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<sup>1</sup>Rebecca West, New Freewoman, I, No. 5, cited by Ross, The Georgian Revolt, p. 72.

If England could have been left in peace, the work of the Georgians would have revealed itself as adequate to the needs of a new genius, as the crude but strong work of Kyd and Marlowe was adequate to Shakespeare, or the eighteenth century tradition of fiction was ready for Jane Austen.

Two such geniuses did in fact appear. Both were Georgian in everything but name; both died in the war. Edward Thomas (1878-1917) and Wilfred Owen (1893-1918) are both major poets who take off from Georgianism. If their flight had been longer, there would have been no need of a modern poetic idiom, imported from France via America. <sup>1</sup>

Expanding his argument, Wain puts forward the hypothesis that the Great War destroyed the lyrical sensitivity of the early Georgians. Had the war not intervened, he argues, the lyricism of the early Pound might have merged with a Georgian poetry strengthened by Owen, Thomas, and Blunden. But, in the absence of the dominant voices of Georgianism, the Georgians

had to stand alone, their roots in poisoned soil, faced with the responsibility of devising a poetry that should ask the one remaining question:

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow  
Out of this stony rubbish?

Georgian poetry died with Thomas and Owen; its later form, under Squire, was not even a ghost. It died because its England died, and a new international poetry was all that could grow in the new international soil. <sup>2</sup>

(v) In the previous sections of this chapter, some of the more general literary and philosophical aspirations underlying the formation and development of Georgianism have been noted. An attempt will now be made to indicate the extent and significance of Davies's association with the Georgian group. The following brief account is not offered

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<sup>1</sup>John Wain, "Poetry", in The Twentieth Century Mind, Vol. I: 1900-1918, ed. by C.B. Cox and A.E. Dyson (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1972), p. 397.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.



as a definitive historical assessment, but as one of several means of locating and defining this poet's vision.

In 1912, Edward Marsh nominated Davies as a foundation-member of the Georgian school by asking him to become a contributor to the first Georgian anthology, Georgian Poetry 1911-1912.<sup>1</sup> Because, "as a general rule Marsh appears to have presented most of the poets" chosen to be contributors with "a fait accompli",<sup>2</sup> Davies did not submit his poems on the basis of personal preference, although he exercised a certain selectivity:

Having decided which of their poems he considered worthy of inclusion, [Marsh] then wrote for permission to reprint those poems only. The poets did not always agree with his selections.

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<sup>1</sup>Other "nominees" were Lascelles Abercrombie, Gordon Bottomley, Rupert Brooke, G.K. Chesterton, Walter De la Mare, John Drinkwater, James Elroy Flecker, W.W. Gibson, D.H. Lawrence, John Masefield, Harold Monro, T. Sturge Moore, Ronald Ross, Edmund Beale Sargant, James Stephens, and R.C. Trevelyan.

In The Quarterly Review (January, 1926, p. 145), Edward Shanks testifies to the initial incongruity of Marsh's selection:

"That first selection made by Mr Marsh included several writers who were afterwards acknowledged to be incongruous bedfellows.... There was James Elroy Flecker, who avowed Mr Housman as his master in style, but who, aiming at the creation of concrete beauty, really felt stronger affinities with the French Parnassians. Mr Harold Monro made odd excursions into a half-world of dreams merging into nightmare that had at moments a reality of its own. And there was the unassuming but very cunning naïveté of Mr W.H. Davies's small poems upon birds, bees, flowers, and children, which afterwards had a great deal to answer for. Also, there was Mr de la Mare, expressing, by symbols of magic and by magically subtle rhythms, a very human attitude towards life. In all of them, in their degrees, was the element of novelty, the new opening of the eyes. In these four whom I have just mentioned it was perhaps more natural, there was less conscious rebellion, than in the others. But no formula, however ingenious, can impose the unity of a school on the first Georgians who worked from different inspirations and in many cases were not personally known to one another."

<sup>2</sup>Ross, The Georgian Revolt, p. 121.

Though he gave willing assent to the reprinting of all the titles Marsh had chosen, W.H. Davies also appended an unsolicited suggestion: he specifically desired his 'Kingfisher' included. 'It is a better poem than any you name,' he told Marsh. Marsh agreed, and 'The Kingfisher' appeared in Georgian Poetry I.<sup>1</sup>

Apart from dubbing him, irrevocably, as a "Georgian", Marsh's miscellany contributed to the reduction, in the public mind, of Davies's stellar canon to a particular poetic constellation. Between 1912 and 1922, Davies contributed thirty-two poems to the five volumes of the anthology.<sup>2</sup> Of the thirty-two poems, fifteen may be categorized as "nature lyrics" which presented Davies's vision of a "flowery, green, bird-singing land".<sup>3</sup> Thus, it may be conjectured that the anthology helped to generate a conception of Davies as a "nature poet",<sup>4</sup> although he himself voices this notion in certain

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 121-122.

Accordingly, Davies is represented by "The Kingfisher", "The Child and the Mariner", "Days too Short", "In May", and "The Heap of Rags".

<sup>2</sup>Georgian Poetry 1913-1915: "Thunderstorms"; "The Mind's Liberty"; "The Moon"; "When on a Summer's Morn"; "The Hawk"; "Sweet Stay-at-Home"; "A Fleeting Passion"; "The Bird of Paradise".

Georgian Poetry 1916-1917: "The White Cascade"; "Easter"; "Raptures"; "Cowslips and Larks".

Georgian Poetry 1918-1919: "Lovely Dames"; "When Yon Full Moon"; "On Hearing Mrs. Woodhouse Play the Harpischord"; "Birds"; "Oh, Sweet Content"; "A Child's Pet"; "England"; "The Bell".

Georgian Poetry 1920-1922: "The Captive Lion"; "A Bird's Anger"; "The Villain"; "Love's Caution"; "Wasted Hours"; "The Truth".

<sup>3</sup>"In May", Poem no. 84, p. 139, l. 24.

<sup>4</sup>In 1925, the reviewer for The Spectator pointed out the limitations of this classification, and indicated its persistence in the public mind:

"Until we can appreciate properly that elusive and complicated character, we must make the popular mistake of looking upon Mr. Davies as a Nature poet. It is true that much of the paraphernalia of his technique consists in robins, sparrows, lambs, flies, clouds, and stones. But a little examination shows that he might equally well be classified as a Sea Poet, or as a Slum Poet, for we find that he also utilizes the shoutings and the harridan-shrieks of the New Cut; and the angry surge of the

poems.<sup>1</sup> Davies's awareness of this classification will be noted during a discussion of his inspirational theory.<sup>2</sup> At this point, the following lines from "The Song of Life" will serve to indicate his refusal to be intimidated by critics who pilloried some Georgians for being guilty of perpetuating banal over-simplification in the pages of the anthology:

I hear men say: 'This Davies has no depth,  
He writes of birds, of staring cows and sheep,  
And throws no light on deep, eternal things --'  
And would they have me talking in my sleep? <sup>3</sup>

However, "when the name 'Georgian' became a term of derision in the 1920's, almost an insult as hurled by the more extreme of the

rock-smashing waves. These things are the body of his work; but the real man is apart from them, and never surrenders himself to them out of pure love for them as symbols of nature, as for instance did Clare and Crabbe."

"The Unchanged Poet", review of Later Days, by W.H. Davies, in The Spectator, November 14, 1925, pp. 885-886.

<sup>1</sup>Davies confirms the validity of this tag in the following lines:

"Call me a Nature poet, nothing more,  
Who writes of simple things, not human evil;"

"Evil", Poem no. 367, p. 349, ll. 9-10.

In other poems, Davies opposes his conception of "simple things" to a riddling tendency which is not within his poetic range:

"But riddles are not made for me,  
My joy's in beauty, not its cause:  
Then give me but the open skies,  
And birds that sing in a green wood  
That's snow-bound by anemones."

"Rags and Bones", Poem no. 237, p. 261, ll. 16-20.

"I love the earth through my two eyes,  
Like any butterfly or bee;  
The hidden roots escape my thoughts,  
I love but what I see."

"Earth Love", Poem no. 340, p. 335, ll. 1-4.

<sup>2</sup>See Chapter III ii (B) of this study.

<sup>3</sup>Poem no. 286, p. 294, xiv.

modernists, Davies's work was frequently not included in the critical censure, at least not on the grounds of his sharing Georgian qualities",<sup>1</sup> and, although his work was often parodied,<sup>2</sup> even such redoubtable opponents of Georgianism as Pound and the Sitwells recognized the merit of his lyrics. Pound, writing in Poetry (1917-1918), presented Davies as a true lyricist:

Now I suppose that lyric<sup>3</sup> is not quite Elizabethan, in fact, I am sure that it is not. Lyric it certainly is.

I wonder what further concession we must make. Certainly Davies uses his verse as a vehicle for a philosophy as well as for communicating his mood. . . . The poem<sup>4</sup> is possibly sentimental. There are flaws in its technique. "But you know it's only about one thing in thirty I do that's any good," is the author's own summary criticism of his poems, so we may as well take the good with the flawed for a moment. Poet Davies is without any doubt, if one will but read enough of him for conviction. . . . there is here and there the fine phrase and the still finer simplicity. . . . Frankly I do not

<sup>1</sup>Stonesifer, Davies, p. 98.

<sup>2</sup>For example, E.V. Knox's parody, "Companions":

"When I go in to ask for ale  
 At Stratford pubs in lamplight gleam,  
 More sweet than any nightingale  
 The sounds of men do seem.  
 . . . . .  
 But when I see two men that fight  
 Outside a pub for all the world  
 As though they'd clench their hands more tight  
 Than bracken fronds uncurled.  
  
 Thereat my heart gives such a prick,  
 I feel the wound for months and months.  
 I take my library and stick  
 And leave West Ham at once.  
 . . . . .  
 The titmice perch upon my thumbs  
 And cock their heads to ask for food;  
 More sweet than any urban slums  
 Is then my solitude."

Cited by Ross, The Georgian Revolt, p. 216.

<sup>3</sup>"Sweet Youth", Poem no. 667, pp. 532-533.

<sup>4</sup>"Australian Bill", Poem no. 49, pp. 88-89.

think that most of Davies's poems are so good as the two just quoted. Yet sometimes he uses the "classic-English" manner to perfection. In Dreams of the Sea,<sup>1</sup> for example, are lines and strophes which I think we would accept without quaver or question if we found them in volumes of accepted "great poets".... Robustezza! This verse is not in the latest mode, but compare it with verse of its own kind and you will not find much to surpass it. Wordsworth, for instance, would have had a great deal of trouble trying to better it. The sound quality is, again, nearer to that of the Elizabethans than of the nineteenth-century writers....

There is a resonance and a body of sound in these verses of Davies which I think many vers-librists might envy.<sup>2</sup>

In his introduction to the Collected Poems of W.H. Davies (reprinted in The Complete Poems of W.H. Davies), Osbert Sitwell draws attention to the "many lovely poems, fresh and exquisite as flowers",<sup>3</sup> contained in the volume, and, in Aspects of Modern Poetry, Edith Sitwell invokes Herrick as a lyric touchstone by which to prove the beauty of Davies's songs:

An unfortunate cold blast of wind blew poetry into fashion. The result has been that persons who have never known even a minor experience, criticize the truth of experiences felt through the heart, seen through the eyes, of men who were born to knowledge.

Mr. Davies' poems are among the beauties of nature, and are therefore disliked by persons to whom travelling in the country means a ride upon a motor bicycle.

These lyrics are exquisite as are those of Herrick, but they are on a rather larger scale and their loveliness, even when many images are used, is never of an artificial nature.... And so he gives us the world as it is, but after it has been bathed in the radiance and dew of a strange innocence.... The beauty, indeed, lies more in the exquisite images -- those reflections in a lake, in the roundness of the dew-clear apple -- than in the texture, which often has a kind of homely and pleasing country roughness, like that of certain leaves -- raspberry leaves, for instance -- or of cool country sheets and of home-

<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 143, pp. 187-188.

<sup>2</sup>Ezra Pound, "William H. Davies, Poet", review of Collected Poems, by W.H. Davies, in Poetry: A Magazine of Verse, XI October-March, 1917-1918, pp. 100-102.

<sup>3</sup>Collected Poems of W.H. Davies (London: Jonathan Cape, 1943), xxviii.

baked bread.

.....  
 To Mr. Davies every flower holds the secret of Heaven . . .  
 There are moments when, reading Mr. Davies, we believe in  
 reincarnation. The following poem,<sup>1</sup> we feel, must have been  
 written by a poet living in the same age as Herrick, yet there  
 is nothing derivative in manner or feeling. The poem has been  
 born of the poet's blood.

.....  
 Mr. Davies almost invariably attains to an extraordinary comp-  
 ression, arriving at this largely by the means of a pure  
 outline, and also by the simplicity which is one of the great  
 beauties of his poetry. . . .

.....  
 Mr. Davies with his poems reminds me of a bird-fowler. Indeed,  
 once when I complained to him that a poem of my own was not  
 working out as I wished, he said: "You sit quietly, and it will  
 come. A poem is like a bird in a wood." . . .

.....  
 In these days, when any clotted and incompetent nonsense is  
 recklessly encouraged by the Press, as long as it is dressed  
 in overalls and masquerades as a messenger of the new age, it  
 is discouraging to find this great lyrical poet treated with a  
 certain indifference. But he has been consistently misunder-  
 stood and underrated from the first -- simply because he is on  
 traditional lines, and because his poems have a radiant innocence  
 and a rare physical beauty.<sup>2</sup>

As has been mentioned in the preceding chapter, the royalties  
 from Georgian Poetry allowed Davies to spend more time in London in  
 the company of literary friends, and, in 1914, "he took up in earnest  
 his new life as a literary man about town."<sup>3</sup> It is possible that  
 this new security within a literary milieu helped to provide the  
 stabilized urban perspective which is often associated with the pro-  
 duction of pastoral poetry, and the precarious balance between  
 rivalry and friendship which he encountered in London<sup>4</sup> may have called

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<sup>1</sup>"Smiles", Poem no. 129, pp. 176-177.

<sup>2</sup>Edith Sitwell, Aspects of Modern Poetry (London: Duckworth  
 1934), pp. 90-98.

<sup>3</sup>Stonesifer, Davies, p. 106.

<sup>4</sup>See Later Days, pp. 190-191.

forth a compensatory desire to return to "the soft green earth".<sup>1</sup>

Although many poems in the fourth Georgian anthology evince a diffuse, outdoor pastoralism, Davies's contributions maintain a more sharply individual lyricism and a wide range of topic. "The Captive Lion",<sup>2</sup> for example, a lament for irrecoverable loss of power, is balanced by the self-resolving movement of "Wasted Hours".<sup>3</sup> In October 1922, when Georgianism was being repudiated for its common manner, A. Williams-Ellis, writing in The Spectator, attempted to disengage Davies from the modern spirit, and, in November of the same year, the reviewer for The Times Literary Supplement isolated him as a consummate lyricist:

Since Rhyl is called the Venice of Wales, since M. Maeterlinck is called the Belgian Shakespeare, since, in fact, this form of the comparative method of criticism or of appreciation has been so much abused, one almost hesitates to call Mr. W.H. Davies the modern Herrick. But finally the comparison becomes unavoidable and will out. Here is the same simplicity, the same gusto, the same charm, the same sense of the decorative, the same inoffensive preoccupation with the things of the flesh. But perhaps the analogy really breaks down in calling Mr. Davies modern. He has modern friends, and most of his readers are modern, his like was not seen in the last hundred years, but he is not touched by the modern spirit. He has a certain type of freshness and verve and a lack both of profound feeling and of self-consciousness which attach him not to any particular age, but to a well-defined little company whose members are to be found in most ages. Perhaps the ages of Chaucer, of Spenser and of Herrick will afford us the greatest numbers of companions for the "Super-Tramp" turned poet.<sup>4</sup>

Among contemporaries Mr. Davies stands secure as a lyrical writer. He has to his name a great deal of confident, serene

<sup>1</sup>"Seeking Joy", Poem no. 124, p. 173, l. 11.

<sup>2</sup>Poem no. 273, p. 284.

<sup>3</sup>Poem no. 310, p. 314.

<sup>4</sup>A. Williams-Ellis, "Mr. W.H. Davies", review of The Hour of Magic and Other Poems, by W.H. Davies, in The Spectator, October 28, 1922, p. 604.

poetry . . . of its kind uncommonly near perfection.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, while part of Davies's canon accorded with the aspirations of the early Georgians, his work was not modified by the tenets of Neo-Georgianism. As a lyricist content to remain within the compass of lyric inspiration and, within this framework, willing to pursue a variety of themes (including an obverse vision of lyric failure), Davies stands aloof from the exigencies of literary fashion. While capable of projecting contemporary themes and values,<sup>2</sup> his imagination, in absorbing the burden of an older poetry, transforms experience through an eclectic lyricism.<sup>3</sup> Although there is very little evidence to suggest the influence of specific literary sources,<sup>4</sup> Davies can be placed within a heritage defined by Mediaeval and Elizabethan lyricism. For this reason, Mary C. Sturgeon's notion of Davies's autochthonism seems to be incomplete:

I should think that the work of Mr. Davies is the nearest approach that poetic genius could make to absolute simplicity. It is a wonderful thing, too, in its independence, its almost

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<sup>1</sup>"Mr. Davies' 'Album Verses'", review of The Hour of Magic and Other Poems, by W.H. Davies, in The Times Literary Supplement, November 2, 1922.

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, "The Birds of Steel", Poem no. 236, p. 260, and "That Golden Time", Poem no. 636, p. 507.

<sup>3</sup>See Chapter VII, pp. 247-260, of this study for a discussion of the term "lyric" in relation to Davies's poetry.

<sup>4</sup>On this point, Richard Stonesifer cites the observations of two of Davies's contemporaries:

"John Haines, in a letter to me dated January 31st, 1952, remarks that 'Davies was by no means so simple as one might suppose. He was really very well educated in poetry, if self-educated.' This is supported by a statement from Robert Graves to me: 'I remember . . . his bookcase full of poetry . . . especially 16th and 17th century -- someone had said that he was a Neo-Elizabethan, so he felt that he had to know all about the old ones.'"

Stonesifer, Davies, p. 248.

complete isolation from literary tradition and influence. People talk of Herrick in connexion with this poet; and if they mean no more than to wonder at a resemblance which is a surprising accident, one would run to join them in their happy amazement. But there is no evidence of direct influence, any more than by another token we could associate his realism with that of Crabbe. No, this is a verse which has "grewed", autochthonic if poetry ever were, unliterary, and spontaneous in the many senses of that word.<sup>1</sup>

In this hypothesis, Mary Sturgeon tends to overlook the generic determinant of Davies's vision. Almost by definition, "lyric" implies a traditional dimension, and, in a sense, the very fact that Davies evaluates poetry by means of this term implies an intuition of historical precedents.<sup>2</sup> In Elizabethan Lyrics, Catherine Ing distinguishes between two forms of lyric in terms of two general ways of interpreting lyric utterance:

The first begins from the ancient definition of lyric as 'a song for singing', the second from certain features of 'lyrical' poetry when it is composed by fine poets of a particular kind, particularly among the Romantics.<sup>3</sup>

Song lyric, she maintains, "retains something of a 'public' quality" because "it is intended for audible utterance".<sup>4</sup> Thus, song lyric presents emotions which are "in some degree generalized, as this is

<sup>1</sup>Mary C. Sturgeon, Studies of Contemporary Poets (London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., 1920), p. 53.

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, W.H. Davies, ed., Shorter Lyrics of the Twentieth Century 1900-1922 (London: The Poetry Bookshop, 1922), p.8:

"In reading modern anthologies, it has seldom been my delight to find something new to surprise me. Mrs. Meynell's 'Flower of the Mind' was worth doing if only to make known that wildly beautiful lyric called 'Tom o' Bedlam,' which makes me think that, had Shakespeare known it, it would not have remained anonymous."

<sup>3</sup>Catherine Ing, Elizabethan Lyrics: A Study of the Development of English Metres and their Relation to Poetic Effect (London: Chatto & Windus, 1951), p. 15.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

the most obvious way of protecting individual privacy",<sup>1</sup> and lyric simplicity can be seen as a consequence of an ancestry which emphasizes public performance:

For the same reason, and also because hearing a statement, especially in a form which expects musical qualities to be heard at the same time, gives less leisure for pondering its meaning than reading it, the diction and imagery will probably tend to be either simple and obvious, or familiarized by frequent use, or both. Lyric of this kind, therefore, is not usually original in any of the more obvious senses, and it is impersonal.<sup>2</sup>

Although Davies's most characteristic mode of lyric mimesis involves the presentation of a private utterance reflected in poetic form, he can be placed within the tradition of the song lyric for the following reasons: In both his pastoralism and the poems of community, Davies exteriorizes his vision through the medium of familiar items, unelaborate metrical and rhythmic figurations,<sup>3</sup> and diction of an uncomplicated kind. While this propensity does not, in itself, link his poetry to the tradition of the song lyric (as song lyric is capable of embracing a wide variety of metres and forms), it indicates that he is guided in his choice of poetic form by an intimation of the value of simple song as an inspirer of his themes<sup>4</sup> and as the

<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>The majority of Davies's poems are written in straightforward quatrains (often iambic tetrameter) which facilitate an unhindered development of poetic argument.

<sup>4</sup>Even a cursory glance at Davies's first lines serves to indicate the importance he attaches to a simple affirmation of the universality of song. For Davies, the untutored impulse which leads to song is always plangent:

A bird sings on yon apple bough, (1)

He comes with a song, (2)

Hear how my friend the robin sings! (3)

vehicle for the transmission of his vision. Further, his faith in the communicability of song implies a freedom from anxiety which arises from a sense of lyric as a desirable poetic form. Thus, by recreating, privately, the public conditions which nurtured an earlier lyricism (such as a common "pool" of familiarized imagery), Davies is able to combine an impression of spontaneity with a sense of inevitability which stems from the inherent expectancies of traditional lyric discourse.

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If I hear Robin sing in mirth,	(4)
In summer when the Cuckoo sings,	(5)
My song, that's bird-like in its kind,	(6)
Sing for the sun your lyric, lark,	(7)
Sing out, my Soul, thy songs of joy;	(8)
The bird that fills my ears with song,	(9)
This time of year, when but the Robin sings,	(10)
What little bird is this that sings?	(11)

(1) "The Calm", Poem no. 738, pp. 582-583; (2) "The Bee Lover", Poem no. 524, pp. 451-452; (3) "In the Snow", Poem no. 216, p. 247; (4) "A Safe Estate", Poem no. 725, pp. 573-574; (5) "When the Cuckoo Sings", Poem no. 733, p. 578; (6) "Bird and Brook", Poem no. 276, pp. 285-286; (7) "Raptures", Poem no. 206, p. 241; (8) "Songs of Joy", Poem no. 82, pp. 137-138; (9) "The Faithful One", Poem no. 581, p. 480; (10) "Starlings", Poem no. 466, pp. 423-424; (11) "From France", Poem no. 151, pp. 201-202.

CHAPTER III

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( A )

DAVIES'S AREA OF VISION AS SEEN IN  
CENTRALLY NON-FICTIONAL PROSE SOURCES

The vision which is perfected in poetry is a re-patterning of elements which have come together in the life of the poet. The poet, in obeying impulses of harmony and organization, stimulates into existence a unique world or "order" in which he places trust and faith. This is the world which can be seen in poetry--projecting from everyday life with a new radiance and significance. The swirls of song which mark the completion, through imagination, of these projections can be examined as unique and separate utterances. However, in order to see the relationship between the area of vision of the poet and the products of this commitment to a unique world, to see lyrics in the process of "becoming", a framework which provides a fusion of the biographical and the fictional must be provided.

(i) In his essay, "How it Feels to be Out of Work",<sup>1</sup> Davies records the movements of the drive towards independence which is prompted by the arrival of spring. After defending the point of view of the true tramp--the free traveller who does not seek work--he expands his rather dispassionate account of a "social situation" into a strangely muted but unrestrained panegyric on openness and freedom. A sense of "settledness" and untroubled yearning can be felt in these lines:

If they have had a thorough taste of the road they can never be relied on in after days. They hear the call of the road much the same as sailors working on the land hear the call of the sea. Such a man is not to be trusted even though he marries;

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<sup>1</sup>W.H. Davies, The English Review, 1 December, 1908, pp168-171.

for he is likely to welcome any slight provocation at home or work, and take to the road again, deserting wife and little ones. . . . It would be difficult to find a man in a respectable position that had been for a whole summer a free wanderer.

I really cannot imagine any better life on earth than to be free of all tasks and duties; free, morning and night, to rise at one's own pleasure. Nothing amuses me more than to read of the activities of our leading men; how they are always trying with all their might to make up the time they wasted as babes in their mother's arms, and in idle play in fields and streets.<sup>1</sup>

Although the above cannot be cited as biographical evidence, appearing as it does in the context of a series of articles dealing with the "labour problem", and clearly directed at the habitual responses of the "prejudiced" reader, it marks clearly the author's pattern of thought. In his essay, Davies describes the stages in the transition from the status of genuine job-seeker to that of true tramp. The transition is made empirically rather than as a result of introspection. The indigent traveller observes the external results of his poverty--"threepence and a parcel of food"<sup>2</sup>--and "begins to see that the life of a man out of work is not so terrible after all":<sup>3</sup>

A fine healthy appetite compensates for the low quality of his food; for he will now relish plain bread and cheese as he never relished the beef-steak and onions of his former days. Day after day he passes before strange eyes, and therefore has no need to study appearances. He loses all fret, and settles himself to a wandering life. He cannot fail to see how happy are the real beggars he meets on the road and in lodging-houses and he soon becomes indifferent to work.<sup>4</sup>

The perceptions which persuade him to modify his life-style are unequivocal. They are not directly tested in terms of a matrix of goals based upon imaginative fulfilment, but in terms of self-evident, bread-and-butter criteria. At this point, however, the dispassionate

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 169.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

tone of the discussion becomes significant. Davies has reduced the criterion of human action to its lowest universal denominator. He has answered the problem of unemployment, not by an analysis of causes, but by the implication that the problem, from the point of view of the subjects involved, is not a problem after all. The implication is that sociological theories, however discursive, tend to describe and analyse the sociologist's initial points of reference, instead of entering into the life-styles of those they purport to examine. By dismissing the framework, the "problem" of unemployment, he offers a resolution based upon special knowledge and experience.

The non-participant sociologist gathers his material from inferences based upon observable behaviour, under the assumption that behaviour is always a direct expression of experience. Davies, the participating subject, called upon to write about how it feels to be out of work, exposes the errors of this type of academic procedure by electing to concentrate his description <sup>of</sup> behaviour, and, by appearing to be confident that he has fulfilled the demands of his topic, emphasises the academician's neglect of the world of his subject.

This perspective does not, of course, result from the adoption of a consciously sophisticated policy of ironic treatment. Rather, it is as if, given a specific audience and certain materials, an ironic position is an inevitable reflex. From this centrally non-fictional prose source, it can be seen that, although Davies achieves simplicity of utterance, his method of estimating his topic is complex. He displays a keen awareness of point of view, distance, and tone, controlled by almost cunning foreknowledge of the reader's response.

These qualities can be observed in Davies's foreword to his anthology, Shorter Lyrics of the Twentieth Century, which will be discussed later in this chapter in terms of its critical premises. At this point, however, an example of a similar ironic position can be noted:

Patriotic poetry has been avoided, as it is seldom enjoyed by lovers of real poetry, and I am determined to run no risk of being offered a knighthood. Anthologies of the patriotic kind, made for schools, are mostly bad. Their idea is to foster a love of patriotism, and not of poetry. As if both these things could not be done at one and the same time by such lines as these:

"Oh, to be in England

Now that April's there," --

instead of the rhetorical jingle we so often read. However, these anthologies are in the hands of Professors, and the life of a Professor is usually a series of mistakes. What will our children think when they grow up and find that the poets whose lines they were forced to commit to memory were not the best poets of their day! . . . It is agreed that an anthology, to be good, must hold surprises. Some of the poems in this book have been discovered for the first time. Perhaps the reader will be interested in another surprise--the worst poets have charged the highest fees for the use of their work.<sup>1</sup>

In this passage, the way to irony is charted by deliberation. Davies, extremely conscious of his rôle as a poet, attempts to equip himself for duties as a critic by the expedient of statements which seem to run counter to conventional critical utterances. Again, he seems to speak from a position which is somehow more genuine than the academic pedestals of other anthologists--because, it is implied, being a poet himself he is only acting out the rôle of anthologist, and is not committed to the anthologist's formula:

In reading a great number of anthologies, I have come to the conclusion that most of the compilers work in this way: first, they think of a poet--let us say W.B. Yeats or John Masefield. Then, thinking that "Innisfree" or "Cargoes" must be their best lyrics, because they are their most popular, make these poems their first choice. But my first cry, on thinking of W.B. Yeats, was "A Faery Song", which I think is his most perfect poem, although it is not held in much esteem by anthologists.<sup>2</sup>

(ii) In other prose works such as My Birds, My Garden, and Nature, Davies displays an authenticity which does not require this buttress-like

<sup>1</sup>W.H. Davies, ed., Shorter Lyrics of the Twentieth Century, 1900-1922 (London: The Poetry Bookshop, 1922), pp. 7-8.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

use of obliquity. When writing from his personal vantage point, one of settledness and composure, he exorcises his deflecting awareness of the expectancies of the reader by concentrating upon the actualization of imagination--in the satisfying knowledge that he is fulfilling his poetic rôle alone. In these works, Davies displays an awareness of the ennobling power of a sense of simplicity in the movements of the natural world which enables him to attend to individual phenomena. By his abstracting the part from the whole, slowing it until a unique moment is made, the universe becomes a series of events which demand attention.

In Nature, Davies presents an account of the way in which attention to these events is related to a knowledge of their simplicity; showing that, if trust is placed in the right of these moments to exist, the observer gains channels through which to penetrate the secret life of the natural world:

A man who has sought human friends and been disappointed in them would do well to spend more hours in the fields and woods. For under these conditions he would begin to cultivate his own thoughts, and he would find those thoughts sweeter companions than any to be found in human societies--thoughts as pure and simple as the large eyes of cows into which he looks, and as happy as the little birds that hop or step around him.<sup>1</sup>

It is with this premise that Davies begins his observations. His commitment to the natural world is intentional and purposive. The products of his explorations are, in part, already contained in his formulation of a direction of action. Imagination is a product, in its germinal stages, of rational will. In his prose, a fictive organization which is close to an aesthetically untransformed world is displayed--revealing the roots of the informing process by which

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<sup>1</sup>W.H. Davies, Nature (London: Batsford, 1914), p. 1.

poetry is brought into being. In contrast to the image of creative power as Aeolian harp, in "The Poet's Horse"<sup>1</sup> Davies speaks of "wind and fire", suggesting that poetry is a blend of infusion and suffusion. The poet innervates the poetic object by a conscious extension of imagination, while the object reciprocates by becoming luminous and significant. Davies, conscious of the fact that his imagination is part of his poetic material, senses the design of a sequence in which his material can be disposed--consciously intervening in his as yet unordered poetic field, and preparing himself for joy through a premeditated openness. In this sense, he is like a sower certain of the sunlit shape of plants still below the earth, content in the knowledge that he has the skill to plant and to tend:

Under these pleasant conditions, I was in the mind to give all my thoughts to Nature, which I did at the very beginning. There were to be no weeds, but all flowers,<sup>2</sup> and I would have ears for the grasshopper as well as the lark.<sup>2</sup>

The poet is conscious of a need to be prepared to meet the demands of imaginative response. In itself, the response is spontaneous; related to the observer, it is a function of preparedness:

In my travels in America I had seen many a fine sight of prairie, pine forest and waterfall; but they have made no deep impression on my mind, and I can hardly account for the reason of [sic] this. Seeing that my imagination refuses to work on them at the present day, when I am in a more settled state, I do not think it was because of my unsettled life. Most likely it was natural prejudice, that I did not belong to that country and could not become a loving part of it.<sup>3</sup>

A deep sense of in-dwelling must precede imaginative response. When "loving interest" is awakened, imagination resumes its individualizing function:

<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 328, pp. 328-329, l. 2.

<sup>2</sup>Davies, Nature, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

When a man gives his whole heart to Nature, and has no cares outside it, it is surprising how observant he becomes and how curious he is to know the causes of things. He sees ten thousand motionless leaves, there being no wind, and yet his eyes detect the shaking of one leaf in particular, where some kind of life must be. And he can see and is deeply interested in the trembling of one blade of grass, caused by some little insect making its way towards the light. At last his observation becomes so keen, through loving interest, that he not only notices how grass is made to look fresher after rain, which is apparent to everyone, but he can even detect a freshness in the birds' voices, which escapes the ordinary man.<sup>1</sup>

It has been noted that a state of imaginative readiness must precede creative activity, and that this readiness is intentional. But one may argue that the intentionality is itself unwilled. The poet can decide to be prepared, to intervene in the landscape which confronts him, only if he becomes conscious of a diffuse and pervasive sense of dwelling which results from the passive observation of certain objects. The pre-creative imagination is, therefore, not willed. A state of passivity which depends upon environmental forces is responsible for creative activity. This pre-creative state is not a form of poetic imagination; it is the precondition of an essentially willed imaginative power--a sense of safety and harmony which facilitates imaginative extension. Once conscious of this sense, the poet does not feel that it is a contradiction of the freedom of the imagination to control and direct his responses for specific purposes. The primary component of Davies's poems is the spontaneous, simple statement; but the poem is an intentional artifact. Biographically, Davies's decision to write poetry has its roots in the relationship between emotional preparedness and rightness of purpose, and it is possible that each poem in its genesis re-enacts this decision: a sense of purpose, a conscious intention, a sense of the limits of the writer's poetic area, and a period

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

of trial and recasting in which spontaneity achieves lyric power. The imaginative reciprocity which results from this power can be seen in the images of joy with which Davies records his stay in the Weald:

On one occasion, when I was writing a long letter, a bee came and settled on the top of my pencil, and there he remained all through the time of composition, which was about half an hour, in spite of how I shook the pencil in the act of writing. Such a letter was bound to be sweet and cheerful, for who could write an ill-natured one under such conditions. I had always hated letter-writing, and always will, but that letter was a pleasure to write; and, so as the bee should enjoy his strange position as long as possible, I made it one of the longest letters I have ever written. I mention this incident to show that not only was I deeply interested in the life around me, but that the little lives were also interested in me, and in what belonged to me. In fact, I have often walked or sat for half an hour or more with a butterfly sleeping on my sleeve, or hanging from the collar of my coat. And I always took great care that these little things, so confident and blind to danger, should have their pleasure out, and not be disturbed until they were ready to go of their own accord. I felt it a great pleasure to wait their convenience, for I knew that their lives would not be as safe in Nature's hand as in mine.<sup>1</sup>

The preconscious intuition of unity between observer and observed enables the poet to enter into the life of the object, by entering into his own life. A sense of balance allows him to give and to receive, to endow each object with the glow of an intellect not defeated by notions of implausibility:

One summer's day, when I was walking along the hedgerow, I saw a gold bug. I do not mean a fly that was yellow, or the colour of gold, but one that was really made in parts of that solid metal. When it tried to soar it came slowly to earth, because of its weight; and so it was quite plain that parts of its body were made of solid gold.<sup>2</sup>

Reality has been tested from a personal criterion, not from the viewpoint provided by general opinion. It is in this sense that Davies's vision can be likened to the pre-verbal thinking of childhood. One may

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 18-19.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

conjecture that, in this stage, the child confirms actuality by experience alone; knowing nothing of the limits imposed by thinking through the accepted categories of words.<sup>1</sup>

This is not to say, however, that Davies's vision is naïve. Rather, it is child-like in the sense that its objects are defined in wonder, remembered in delight, and voiced in the belief that the order to which they belong is consonant with the general experiences of mankind. The freedom from anxiety with which such phenomena are recorded suggests that Davies does not regard moments of wonder as symptoms of a fugitive and inaccessible sensibility. Because he does not doubt the validity of the process by which he actualizes Nature, his responses, although private and self-sufficient, are rarely qualified by a desire to be confirmed by external opinion. By being certain of his song, he remains untroubled by the manner of his perceptions:

One day, when I opened a book, the white pages and the black print looked so cold, hard and ugly, that I closed it at once and let my eyes return to the warmer and softer beauties of Nature. I knew very well that the book contained pleasant thoughts, but my eyes refused to supply them to my mind, not liking the form of their delivery. The fact of the matter was that my mind was teeming with its own fancies, which, like young children, were the happier for being by themselves, without being mixed with their elders--the greater fancies of other minds.<sup>2</sup>

It is in the self-fulfilling imagination of childhood that Davies places his trust. As will be discussed in the penultimate section of this chapter, his inspirational and evaluative theory is based upon the notion of wonder, the flare of brightness which illuminates true poetry. However, the direct critical statements which define the aesthetic

<sup>1</sup>See "Fancy", Poem no. 81, pp. 125-137, ll. 304-305:

"A little child that has no speech at all  
Is happy with a sound none understand;"

<sup>2</sup>Davies, Nature, p. 37.

context within which his poems are written are largely superseded by prose passages in which the idea of the diffident imagination of childhood is a primary component:

I can't say that I enjoy human society, although I like to be thought well of, and to leave a good impression wherever I go. It gives me greater joy to be alone in a meadow than to be surrounded by my own kind, even when I know for certain that I am with true friends who are devoted to me. . . . The only part of the human family I take any delight in is in children. I find men mostly dull, and women only like big children with the imagination rubbed out, and that makes all the difference.<sup>1</sup>

This argument is expanded in a later prose work, My Garden:

Even at this very hour, as a man over sixty years of age, I have a dream that I would not mention to an adult, for fear of his or her ridicule, but I would mention it to any child and be certain of approval. It is the dream of a wild green bank in a far corner of my garden. But I would no more think of saying this to a professional gardener than I would of gazing at the moon when surrounded by children at play. I know the half-sneer that would come into his face, as he thought to himself: 'This man wants a wilderness, and not a garden!' And, judging by other people's gardens, with their Roses, Tulips, Geraniums, Irises, and other gorgeous flowers--what would they think of my green bank of grass, with its Primroses, Violets, and other wild flowers? But the child would understand. Its young imagination is not bound together by dry facts, and it does not see life close enough to think anything would be impossible. To the child life is one big question mark; and it is this questioning spirit that makes the world so wonderful and the child so happy. For it seems to me that every time a question is answered a certain amount of romance goes out of our life, and we are no happier in our knowledge. It is the sadness of old age that it asks few questions and can feel the silence of the grave.<sup>2</sup>

(iii) After introducing the reader, through the image of the questioning child, to the imaginative background which frames his participation in the life of a garden, Davies particularizes the power of creative interpenetration by singling out a specific area of involvement:

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>2</sup>W.H. Davies, My Garden and My Birds (London: Jonathan Cape, 1939), p. 15, M.G.

Note: The arrangement of this double volume is as follows: My Birds, pp. 1-128 (indicated in this thesis by the letters M.B.), followed by My Garden, pp. 13-127 (indicated in this thesis by the letters M.G.).

Some of them require little moisture indeed, and can almost live on dew. Even a passing wind, that refuses to release a single drop of rain, can breathe on one of these little flowers and save its life for another day.<sup>1</sup>

In this image, he presents a concern for the time-span of individual growing things. The interior life of a plant is exposed by projection and imagination. He has assessed the flower's need, the power of the rain and the life-cycle of the plant. In addition to this, the imaginative identification which precedes participation of this type can, in certain cases, provide a delightful vehicle for personification tempered by fancy:

I have just seen my first bee of the year, enjoying his first day out, after sleeping in a stone wall all through the winter--and his movements appear to be a bit wayward and jerky. This may be as much due to wonder as to the long idleness of his wings. It will be understood that he not only has to practise crawling and flying, but is also having a great struggle with his memory, missing a number of things that were here when he left for his long winter's sleep, and seeing others that he had quite forgotten. It will probably take him several days to recover his normal state as a well-behaved bee in body and mind.<sup>2</sup>

But the almost mythic sapidity which clothes the objects of his vision is not theoretical or systematized. As will be demonstrated during an extended survey of his poetry, although Davies exteriorizes certain themes through specific images, and, in this sense, works within an accessible symbology, he does not offer a sophisticated "pattern" of agencies in the formal, literary sense. However, the genesis of his imagery is consonant with lyric sources in that its most significant premise, the richness of the English countryside, provides a back-cloth which is at once familiar and unforeseen. The natural objects which are chosen to exteriorize his vision are drawn from a durable intimation of personal kinship, an association of

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 17, M.G.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

experiences derived from the sense of well-being which accompanies his observations. The friendly robin, the bee in coat of mail, the owl, the hedgerows, and the violets and primroses of his faraway bank in the corner of a garden have a maieutic function in that they suggest a pastoral harmony which is independent of time. Although a detailed analysis of the poetic figurations of this perspective must be deferred, a discussion of material intrinsic to the rural mode may clarify the relationship between Davies's area of vision and the world of his poetry.

Davies's prose works contain many references to the contrast between simple and complicated life-styles. For example, after the passage in Nature quoted earlier in this chapter, Davies alludes to the city-dweller in terms of his context of inauthenticity:

When he has led this kind of life for a time, he begins to take a dislike to crowds; not so much perhaps for the endless chatter that is continually going on, as for the way in which people try to outshine each other and draw attention to their own particular bodies and possessions. He begins to see that they are all forced plants, flaunting and large; and he looks in vain for the modest human violet that shrinks from the human gaze. . . . Although I am now living in a small town, in a house surrounded by many others, and not in a lonely cottage in a green lane--yet, for all that, every word was written under the trees.<sup>1</sup>

In his partially autobiographical novel, Dancing Mad,<sup>2</sup> the protagonist, Norman Beresford, an honest and plain-speaking man, exchanges an urban condition made intolerable by his wife's reckless commitment to the world of London's clubs for a life of rustic exile in America. In his attempts to rid his house of the treacherous pitfalls of sophistication, Norman displays a quiet strength which is in direct contrast to his wife's social intemperance. The two contrastive worlds

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<sup>1</sup>Davies, Nature, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>W.H. Davies, Dancing Mad (London: Jonathan Cape, 1927).

are polarized in opposition, placed in geographic isolation, and shown to be inexorably incompatible -- Norman losing his life in Flanders, after his wife's death. The fact that Davies resists all opportunities of effecting a resolution, placing obstacle after obstacle in the path of reconciliation, suggests that, in his vision, the two tendencies are irreconcilable.

Although the contrast between the rural and the urban modes presented in this work is only one condition of pastoral, it utilizes two premises which are essential in the pastoral world: that transition to a rural environment is not an act of regression but an attempt to re-establish a golden world, and that a world once good is still perfectible.

In that the circumstances of his life allowed him to renew his links with rustic values while, for the most part, he was writing his poetry in an urban centre, Davies was drawn towards the spiritual locus of pastoral -- an awareness of the relationship between town and country which takes place within the context of an urban environment, and provides a criterion by which the unnaturalness of mankind can be judged and confirmed. Perhaps, however, his most significant biographical circumstance, his years of exposure to the "tooth-and-claw" existence of the tramps of America, nourished a literary pastoral attitude which, in drawing attention to the goodness inherent in rural simplicity, remembers the terror of animality lurking below literary recollection.

His encounters with the bestial opposition of the pastoral world are recurrent themes in all his prose works. In Later Days, an autobiographical miscellany of short essays on diverse incidents, he prefaces his account of a roadside camp in America with a statement of his principle point of view:

Let us not judge life by its number of breaths, but by the number of times that breath is held, or lost, either under a deep emotion caused by love or when we stand before an object of interest or beauty.<sup>1</sup>

Through this perspective, he is able to transform material which, in his words, is "common ditchwater",<sup>2</sup> into a graph which charts his wonder as an observer. He does not attempt to elevate his material to an expected level, but uses it as a steady analogue of his responses. Whatever is described, it is implied, has a specific place in that it is the objective precursor of a moment of wonder.

( B )

TRANSFORMATION OF MATERIAL INTO POETRY:

DAVIES'S THEORETICAL STATEMENTS

(i) The means by which aesthetically indifferent material is transformed can be discussed with reference both to the products of the transformation and to the stated aesthetic theory of the poet. In this section, a brief survey of Davies's critical premises will be attempted, preparatory to an analysis of the poems themselves.

In his foreword to Shorter Lyrics of the Twentieth Century, 1900-22, Davies presents an overview of his poetic theory. As has been discussed in the first section of this chapter, conversational asides which run counter to conventional critical utterances are included in order to maintain a balance between whimsical rhetoric and magisterial resonance:

There are quite a number of poets at the present time who are writing descriptive verse of a high order, which is to be seen

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<sup>1</sup>Davies, Later Days, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

in most of our anthologies. But their work begins and ends in description, and neither casts any light on their own minds nor on humanity in general. These poets seem to lead easy and placid lives, without having any burning sympathies to make themselves great as men. A man can be a great man without being a great poet, but I doubt whether there was ever a great poet who was not a great man. Most of these poets are teetotallers, I believe, and lack the sympathy and generosity of men that drink. Christ, to perform a miracle of our greatest wonder, did not turn water into tea, coffee or cocoa, but into wine!

There can be no serious argument about free verse. The only thing that can be said is that a number of people are using it who are not poets at all. But the same thing can be said of a far greater number who use the traditional form of verse. Whitman proves himself, in quotation, a great poet, no matter what form he adopted. Lovers of the traditional form must not be blind to the beauty of "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking", or "Loved in the Flood of thy bliss O Death". Nor must the lovers of free verse forget Whitman's greatness when he used rhyme in the old traditional form, like this:

But O heart! heart! heart!  
 O the bleeding drops of red,  
 Where on the deck my Captain lies,  
 Fallen cold and dead.<sup>1</sup>

In emphasising the relationship between great poetry and great men, Davies reveals a conception of poetry which is related to the ancient notion of the poet as vates, a man whose communication with his inner being is made possible by a process of intuitive divination. Although he does not explore this point by employing the language of aesthetics, his rejection of poetry "which begins and ends in description" in favour of that which is illuminated by the "burning sympathies" of experience demonstrates his allegiance to the interior magic of poetry--that singing quality which he called the "blue light" in poetry. Although his terminology may be regarded as imprecise by the standards of contemporary formal criticism, his point of view is decisive and unassailable on its own ground: the goodness of a poem stems from the spiritual generosity by which the poet apprehends his universe. Simple moods of optimism and wonder, as reflections of the

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<sup>1</sup>Davies, Shorter Lyrics of the Twentieth Century, 1900-1922, pp. 8-9.

beneficent song of life which plays within the spirit of man, are the tutelary geni of the poet. The song in the mind, modulated to lyric gravity, can become a suitable vehicle for all poetic utterance. In this sense, even politically-orientated poetry can be distilled into a pattern which echoes the movements of the mind towards comprehension--a pattern which can be suggestive of the greater harmony to which the poetic voice aspires.

Davies's dislike of much socially-descriptive poetry of the 1920's, which "seemed to regard melancholy and defeatism as profundity",<sup>1</sup> derives from his rejection of poetry that "did not sing":

This was poetry that did not sing--not, at least, in the way he thought poetry should sing. Regarding the lyric as the highest form of poetry, he judged all poets on that simple basis--a system of evaluation that would have cut him off from the new poetry even if he had been able to understand what these poets were saying.<sup>2</sup>

In 1922, in answer to a series of questions formulated by Harold Monro, dealing with the status of poetry in modern society, Davies reinforces his repudiation of those he had come to regard as the new poetasters:

Yes, I think poetry is necessary to everybody, because it gives a new value to everything we see or do. All things are better for being seen through the eyes of a poet. No man should be allowed to have a second glass of ale or port if he does not murmur before he drinks--'Is it not beautiful!' Its particular function is that it is more intense than any other kind of literature. It strikes with a greater force, because it is more concentrated. No, I don't think there is the least chance of poetry being displaced by prose, unless the prose writers become greater and the poets become weaker.

<sup>1</sup>Stonesifer, Davies, p. 145.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

The greatest danger to poetry is, is--well, damn it all--an alarming increase in the number of bad poets!<sup>1</sup>

Davies's commitment to a creative principle, the transforming process by which the poet's material accretes intuitive significance, is emphasized in his epilogue to The Romance of the Echoing Wood, by W.J.T. Collins:

It is true that certain young men of our generation, who find the songs of birds distracting, and are made sick by the smell of flowers, are beginning to despise these things, and are calling for new subjects. They say that birds as subjects for literature are played out, and the moon has now had its day. They forget that it is not the moon that makes a poet--it is the poet that makes the moon.<sup>2</sup>

It has been shown that, although Davies's aesthetic theory is intuitive rather than formal, it is consistent in its recognition of the function of the imagination. By emphasizing the intuitive faculty it aligns itself to the major premises and processes of Romanticism:

The object is perceived vividly, usually with great specificity; the husk is then dissolved, and when the phenomenon has at last become 'spiritualized' it passes into the core of the subjective intelligence.<sup>3</sup>

There are, however, significant contradictions. Davies has inherited free-floating Romantic characteristics which are not directly dependent on the body of ideas responsible for precipitating the Romantic attitude. Although, as a poet of the twentieth century he is an involuntary recipient of such notions as the uniqueness of the human

<sup>1</sup>W.H. Davies, cited by Harold Monro, "Three Questions Regarding The Necessity, The Function, and The Form of Poetry", The Chapbook - A Monthly Miscellany, XXVII (July, 1922), 7.

For the questions which prompted this summary of the nature and significance of poetry, and for selected examples of answers provided by other writers, see Appendix A, p.261.

<sup>2</sup>Cited by Stonesifer, Davies, p. 145.

<sup>3</sup>Earl R. Wasserman, "The English Romantics", Studies in Romanticism, IV (1964-1965), 25.

personality, the perfectibility of human nature, and the reality of mental impressions, which can be traced to Locke and Rousseau, his informal critical inclinations prevent him from undertaking a discursive investigation of the contemporary modifications of the philosophical enquiry which determined the Romantic position. It is possible that more characteristic of Romanticism than the umbrella-term "imagination" is the spirit of challenge and enquiry which substantiates itself in the poetry of the nineteenth century. While elements of the Romantic legacy can be noted in both his poetry and his criticism (for example, a belief in the imaginative capacity of childhood), his aesthetic perspective is largely eclectic.

(ii) Although critically undogmatic in the theoretical sense, Davies, as has been shown, expresses tenacious opinions through a colloquial medium which sometimes tends to obscure his commitment to the ideals of literary craftsmanship. Davies's earliest biographer, Thomas Moulton, records a conversation with the poet which discloses a critical decisiveness often camouflaged by the persona of his written statements.

In describing his method of composition, Davies isolates four inspirational stages : an inert, waiting stage associated with anticipatory movements towards the realization of an idea; a moment of imaginative seizure in which a pattern of thought resolves itself into verbal construction, usually linear and linked to the conceptual halo of a specific word; ~~an~~<sup>a</sup> balancing incubatory period; and an individualizing phase in which the magic embedded in a particular word or phrase is extended into the <sup>e</sup>grater metaphoric framework it provides. The relevant passage follows:<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The original punctuation has been retained.

A bird is busy in the brown distance. "The starlings chuckling over stolen fruit," he quotes, resuming our easy, musing talk; and, stooping, gathers some of the scattered fruit . . . "They pock the face of all my golden pears." . . .

"Those two lines are an example of how a thought shapes itself when it first comes to me . . . "It came like that as we walked here yesterday, and it may lead to a complete lyric . . . You ask me how I write. Well, there you are! I wait for a thought, an idea. I never make any attempt to write until it comes to me-- I simply go on with this quiet country life, content to wait, knowing for certain that it will come sooner or later."<sup>1</sup>

"Not always, of course, does a thought lead to a complete lyric. There must be something in it of unique value to a poet. Many a thought fades into nothing. But sometimes even a single word, let alone a couple of lines, is enough. That word 'pock', now. The bit of verse I have quoted was centred in the one word. It mustn't be 'pick.' I dare say the printer will think 'pock' a misprint and change it to 'pick'!"

"In the poem you may write, then," I said, "the magic word will be pock. The authentic poet is revealed in an original usage like that."

"The magic of the right word!" he exclaimed.

"The poet who is able to employ it makes those starlings his own, all birds and beasts are his creatures. You can easily test the poets who have never been content to follow in a tradition. Take an illustration--"

"Take yourself as the illustration," I interrupted, "when you write, say, of the cuckoo. Most poets have accepted the conventional idea of the cuckoo, but I remember that you have heard it shouting. Cheeky in its joy. Not Wordsworth's unseen, mysterious bird, but the brazen fellow that comes right into your garden and shouts!"<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>In "Starlings", Poem no. 466, p. 423, these lines appear in their final version:

"This time of year, when but the Robin sings,  
Shall I reproach those Starlings, chuckling near?  
What Spring-like green is in their feverish haste  
To pock the face of my half-ripened pear!

When I remember my own wilful blood,  
The waste, the wildness of my early years--  
Shall I not chuckle with those birds, when they  
With wicked music waste my sweetest pears?"

<sup>2</sup>See "The Cuckoo", Poem no. 515, p. 447:

"When I was sitting near a stream,  
And watched the waves that came in turns  
To butt the rocks that kept them in,  
Breaking their milk-white horns--  
'Twas then a Cuckoo, full of joy,

[No stanza break]

He answered: "That is what I mean when I say that the poet must see things with his own eyes, hear them with his own ears; not with the eyes and ears of those who have written before him."<sup>1</sup>

Davies's attitude towards poetic balance is developed when, in a later stage of his discussion, he describes the selective principles which control composition. If the opening lines of a poem are judged to radiate a particular lyrical strength, and thus require "some living up to",<sup>2</sup> the remainder of the poem can be elevated by its association with the first section. Conversely, the poetic harmony established in a later section is able to intensify the afterglow of an earlier section. In this way, each unit of the lyric becomes a potential "carrier-wave" for the resonances of any other unit-- creating, in its pattern of suggestion, a silent form which captures and re-absorbs.

In his reported conversation, after citing his poem "Mangers",<sup>3</sup> Davies clarifies his observations:

---

No man had seen in any place,  
Perched on a tree before my eyes,  
And shouted in my face!"

<sup>1</sup>Thomas Moulton, W.H. Davies (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1934), pp. 137 - 139.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>3</sup> "Who knows the name and country now,  
Of that rich man who lived of old;  
Whose horses fed at silver mangers,  
And drank of wine from troughs of gold?  
  
He who was in a manger born,  
By gold and silver undefiled--  
Is known as Christ to every man,  
And Jesus to a little child."

Poem no. 464, pp. 422-423.

My own feeling about this poem is that the first stanza is good, but the second is better. The light of the second, however, throws back onto the first verse and gives it equal radiance.<sup>1</sup>

But the emanation of poetic ideas which will allow the suggested form to materialize is not a product of willed intention:

I have only written two poems during this past summer, and of these there is one that I am not satisfied with, for the reason I have just given--that a good opening needs living up to.

"These butterflies in twos and threes,  
That flit about in wind and sun--  
See how they add their flowers to flowers  
And blossom where a plant has none!"<sup>2</sup>

The idea is all right. But to go on with the expression of the idea after such an opening requires something out of the ordinary. In a similar way four lines detached from an unsatisfactory remainder may stay in my mind for a long time without being completed afresh. But I would never force that completion. It will come of itself--maybe suddenly, when least expected. I believe that a good idea for a poem is never actually wasted. Be sure it will come to fruition at the fitting moment. . . .

. . . . .  
I am a very quick worker. Often a lyric is completed in a few minutes. It flows as naturally as a stream. All my less-than-best have been laboured, and no amount of striving can put them among my best. What is more, I know that no poem with which I ever had trouble will ever go among my best.

When I have finished a poem I have finished for the day. I never write more than one a day--it haunts me, you see, after I am supposed to have done with it! . . .<sup>3</sup> If the poem seems to me an especially good one, I find I can't write next day either, nor for several days. Not even if I wrote a lyric in

<sup>1</sup>Moult, W.H. Davies, p. 141.

<sup>2</sup>The completed poem, "Flying Blossoms", Poem no. 512, p. 446, reads as follows:

"These butterflies, in twos and threes,  
That flit about in wind and sun--  
See how they add their flowers to flowers,  
And blossom where a plant has none.

Bring me my hat of yellow straw,  
To greet them on this summer's morn--  
That they may think they see in me,  
Another crop of golden corn!"

<sup>3</sup>The original punctuation has been retained.

an hour early one morning would it be of any use to write again that day.<sup>1</sup>

The suggested form, too, is the result of a preconscious activity. Although the germinal decision to write is a product of willed intention, the poem chooses both its hour of expression and the medium through which it will be expressed:

My lines flow naturally into this, that, or the other verse-form. I cannot remember being so attracted by a particular form that I have chosen it deliberately; I am content to be chosen by it, just as I have been content to allow the different phases of my verse--Nature, philosophy, religion, and so on--to follow one after the other.<sup>2</sup>

Here, Davies expresses his faith in the unifying power of the "thought form", the configuration of rhythm and tone which etches lines of force and impression onto the unawakened foreground of the poem. James Sutherland, in order to clarify his conception of the "thought form", cites the observations of George Darley:

Every true poet has a song in his mind, the notes of which, little as they precede his thoughts--so little as to seem simultaneous with them--do precede, suggest, and inspire many of these, modify and beautify them. The poet who has none of this dumb music going on within him, will neither produce any by his versification, nor prove an imaginative and impassioned writer: he will want the harmonizer which attunes heart, and mind, and soul, the main-spring that sets them in movement together. . . . A good system of rhythm becomes, therefore, momentous both for its own sake to the reader, and because it is the poet's latent inspirer.<sup>3</sup>

The song in the mind, as an inspirer, is, in a sense, more important to the poet than to the poem. Davies, working within the safety of this pattern, is kept "in a state of vague and undefined

<sup>1</sup>Moult, W.H. Davies, pp. 142-145.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>3</sup>George Darley, Introduction to the Works of Beaumont and Fletcher Vol. 1. (London: Routledge, 1862), p. xxxviii, cited by James Sutherland, The Medium of Poetry (London: Hogarth Press, 1934), p. 73.

emotion"<sup>1</sup> which anticipates poetic transformation. In a similar way, his familiar and unpretending symbology provides a stabilized area which consubstantiates the "thought form", the verse form, and the poetic object--even when indirection is the primary component of the poem:

Always, though, natural objects have been my symbols--which doubtless explains why certain of the aforesaid critics, having noted the continued use of Nature in my work, have persisted in their belief that I am nothing else than a Nature poet still. Another reason may be that, as a poet, my philosophical verses carry no cribbed, cabined, and confined view of life. A poet's outlook cannot be definite in the hidebound sense of the term. His moods change so often--and if they did not it would be a case of farewell to poetry!<sup>2</sup>

Further, in pointing out the mutability of the poet's outlook, Davies draws attention to the fallacies inherent in the process of critical categorization:

There was a time, I remember, when the critics assumed that I was simply and solely a Nature poet. They had overlooked my being a revolutionary poet also, and it wasn't long before they were surprised into saying: 'What shall we do with this man Davies, whom we dismissed as a mere Nature poet? Why, he can write other kinds of poetry as well!'

Perhaps it was the desire to do bigger things, that could not be labelled, that made me write my stronger poems as a reaction from the joyous ones.<sup>3</sup>

(iii) Davies's repudiation of the evaluative criticism of his age is extensively illustrated by his essay, "Poets and Critics". In describing the steps by which fame is acquired, he questions the meteoric ascent of poetic reputations:

Rome was not built in a day, and it takes a hundred years and more to make a poet. First, we have to discover one quality in the poet, and then decide whether it is genuine or not. It

<sup>1</sup>Sutherland, The Medium of Poetry, p. 82.

<sup>2</sup>Moult, W.H. Davies, pp. 145-146.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

may take years to do this. Then comes another critic who discovers a second quality, which goes through the same process. Then comes the third critic, with his discovery of a third quality, and so on. Finally, we have the last critic, who, with the reins of several good qualities already in his hand, finds a little more fresh matter; and it is then decided that the poet is out as a full team to take the road of time, without any more question as to his fitness. But this sometimes takes so long that even now we are not sure that Shakespeare is given credit for all his qualities.

When we consider this matter we must look with some suspicion at the question of living poets, and the position assigned to them by their critics. What has this tin hat which we place on the head of a living poet, to do with the deathless laurel? This tin hat casts such a halo around the poet's head that even the wisest are for the time being deceived by the false light. All this comes from mentioning a poet's name so many times--often when there is no necessity to mention his name at all--that we come to think at last that his name is necessary to our soul as bread is to our body.<sup>1</sup>

The theory of accretion which is presented in the first paragraph of this essay accords with the Johnsonian precept of evaluation through "length of duration and continuance of esteem":<sup>2</sup>

What mankind has long possessed they have often examined and compared, and if they persist to value the possession, it is because frequent comparisons have confirmed opinion in its favour. . . .

The reverence due to writings that have long subsisted arises therefore not from any credulous confidence in the superior wisdom of past ages, or gloomy persuasion of the degeneracy of mankind, but is the consequence of acknowledged and indubitable positions, that what has been longest known has been most considered, and what is most considered is best understood.<sup>3</sup>

Running counter to the unassailable test of continued experience, Davies contends, is the modern tendency to justify critical statements

<sup>1</sup>W.H. Davies, "Poets and Critics", The New Statesman September 8, 1923, p. 619.

<sup>2</sup>Samuel Johnson, Preface, in The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson. Volume VII: Johnson on Shakespeare, ed. by Arthur Sherbo with an introduction by Bertrand H. Bronson (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1968), p. 60.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 60-61.

in terms of the criterion of originality rather than truth. The critic is no longer obedient to the demands of a normative approach; instead, he manipulates his material until it is capable of accommodating personal preconceptions and popular opinion:

That there are a number of bad poets, we admit; but that there are a number of bad critics is not so well known. Where these bad critics show their failure is in quotation; but some of us are too wise to be taken in when critics quote indifferent verse with approbation; and when they say timidly, after quoting, "But this is by no means the poet at his best," we recognise at once the friendly puff.

.....  
 Critics as a rule try to say something original, and in a good many cases the truth does not matter. It seems curious that no reviewer has called Thomas Hardy a poet of joy. No doubt this will come, for a critic can prove anything by quotation. If he does not like a poet he quotes him at his worst; and if he is inclined to be friendly, he quotes the poet at his best.<sup>1</sup>

Even the generally favourable critical reaction to his own work does not weaken his scepticism. By describing the attacks of two critics whose assessments are directly contrastive, he emphasises the fluidity of evaluation, and suggests that critical opinion should not be placed beyond scrutiny:

As I have had so little cause to complain of reviewers, perhaps I ought not to have written an article on this subject. My work has been attacked three times, I believe. The first attack was from a well-known literary editor who said, on reading my first book, that he had wasted half-a-crown on it, and he could not find one line good enough to quote. But since then he has said that he buys and saves all my first editions, as he is certain that each little book will some day be worth its weight in gold. But what makes the other two attacks amusing is that my two critics are in direct opposition on the same point. One man has for years, as my different volumes appear, attacked me with the same thought on each occasion. It is this: that my lyrics are perfect, such as they are; but the matter in them is so similar that they are not of much account. The second critic claims that I write good lines occasionally, but none of my lyrics are perfect.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Davies, "Poets and Critics", p. 619.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

The fanciful concluding paragraph, re-used in Later Days, in which Davies descants upon his literary reputation to a company of appreciative spirits, illustrates both his recognition of the part played by personality in the growth of popularity and his conviction that he had written poetry which entitled him to a measure of fame:

It is quite certain that my fame will last. If I am not immortal as a poet, I shall be immortal as the greatest literary fraud of the twentieth century. As I believe we have some kind of life beyond the grave, I have often imagined myself as a literary fraud in the regions of the dead and surrounded by questioning spirits. One will ask: "How did you manage to deceive the public for so many years that you were thought to be a good poet?" Another spirit, who had been an artist in his day, will say: "How did you manage to persuade the master artists of your day that you were the one poet worthy of their brush?" Another, a politician this time, will want an answer to this: "How did you manage to persuade the government to give you a civil list pension?" And when I have all these spirits seated comfortably around me, I will recite my verses--the verses that fooled the greatest people of my day. And what laughter there will be. Perhaps at that very moment we will be joined by another spirit, who has lately visited the earth, who will say to me: "By the way, the Westminster Bladder has just mentioned your name. One of the critics has been warning a certain popular poet that he must not take himself too seriously, but remember that fate of W.H. Davies, whose work is now forgotten, and whose only title to fame is that he deceived for a number of years the greatest people of his day." None of the spirits will laugh more heartily than myself at this. When I recite the following lines, how amused they will be:

Oh for my greater days to come,  
When I shall travel far from home:  
On seas that have no shade in sight,  
Into the woods that have no light;  
Over the mountain's heads so tall,  
Cut by the clouds to pieces small;  
Across wide plains that give my eye  
No home or tree to measure them by:  
And all the wonders I shall see  
In some old city new to me.

But when I come to these other lines:

What sweet, what happy days had I  
When dreams made time eternity.<sup>1</sup>

When I come to this the hilarity will be so great that I shall

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<sup>1</sup>"The Time of Dreams", Poem no. 408, pp. 391-392, ll. 17-32.

not be heard when I say: "This is the rubbish that fooled the twentieth century".<sup>1</sup>

In considering this essay, it should be noted that from October to January, 1921-1922, Davies and Austin O. Spare had edited Form, a periodical issued quarterly from 1916 to 1917, which had been discontinued because of the war. In its revised form, however, the periodical was discontinued after only three issues, closing publication because of lack of support in January 1922.<sup>2</sup> The tone of recriminatory cynicism which, despite a modulating counterpoint of capricious humour, pervades "Poets and Critics" may be related to the brittle collapse of this venture. In the first of these editorials, Davies sketches a rather clumsy vignette of literary acrimony which becomes a vehicle for the publication of two of his poems.<sup>3</sup>

In the second editorial, after providing a framework which utilizes the same figures, he attacks the spiritlessness of a poetry enfeebled by the demands of prudence:

When we read the following poem, we were so shocked by its naked passion that we felt certain no other responsible editor,

<sup>1</sup>Davies, "Poets and Critics", p. 619.

<sup>2</sup>Stonesifer, Davies, p. 172.

<sup>3</sup>In his critical study of Davies, Stonesifer draws attention to the incongruity of these editorials:

"The three editorials which Davies did for this periodical are interesting because of the light that they throw on his prose talent. Davies was much too simple as a man for the sophisticated business of editing a literary organ, and as Robert Graves puts it, 'he found himself being pompous from embarrassment . . . These articles were Bill playing an awkward part; essentially he always remained the same.' Certainly they are as unlike anything else that Davies did as can be imagined. I reproduce them here because they are difficult to secure in the original and they have not heretofore been reprinted."

Stonesifer, Davies, p. 173.

The first editorial, as reproduced by Stonesifer, is quoted in full in Appendix B, pp. 262-263.

either in Great Britain or America, could dare to print it. Then why do we do so? We print it because of our Englishman's sense of fair play.

At the same time, we should like to remind our correspondent that, although such things were written in the days of Elizabeth, we have passed that naughty period now, and become more respectable. That the Elizabethan poets wrote in pot-houses and taverns diviner poetry than comes from our private libraries and drawing rooms is not to be argued here. Our literature and art are now in the hands of passionless old professors and solemn young men of pure, flesh-despising intellect; and it is their sacred duty to protect the public from any work of art that shows warm blood or too much pride in strong guts.

Taking these serious old professors and young high-brows for our editorial pattern, we will not promise our correspondent to print any more full-blooded poetry of this kind. . . . Having uttered this warning, we print Pooch Bah's poem.<sup>1</sup>

At this point Davies printed his poem, "The Portrait":

She sends her portrait, as a swallow,  
To show that her sweet spring will follow,  
Until she comes herself, to share  
With me a pillow and her hair.  
To this fine portrait of my Dear,  
With nothing but dead matter near,  
I whisper words of love, and kiss  
The cardboard dewy with my bliss.  
This is her hair, which I will bind  
Around my knuckles, when inclined  
To bandage them in skeins of gold.  
There are her lips, in paper mould,  
Which when I touch appear to move,  
As conscious of my burning love,  
There are her eyes, now hard and set,  
And opened wide, which love will shut.  
Lord, is my kiss too poor and weak  
To make this portrait move and speak,  
And close these eyes in fear of this  
Strong love of mine, half bite, half kiss?  
This kiss that would in fierce delight,  
Burn on her soft white flesh, and bite  
Like a black fly, when stiff and old,  
He's blind, and dying of the cold!  
Now, when I rest awhile from kissing,  
My room looks lonely with her missing,  
Now empty seems that chair, where she  
Could sit this night and smile to see  
Her own light fingers work with grace  
Straight cotton into cobweb lace.  
Or when they rub that small gold band

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<sup>1</sup>Form, No. 2, Vol. I (November and December, 1921), pp.41-42, cited by Stonesifer, Davies, p. 17.

That makes her mine, on her left hand.  
 O that my love were sitting there,  
 Before me in that empty chair  
 Rocking the love-light, where it lies  
 Cradled for joy in her two eyes.  
 Till in the flesh she comes to kiss  
 Be happy, man, that she sends this --  
 Her own dear portrait, as a swallow,  
 To show that her sweet spring will follow.<sup>1</sup>

In his last editorial, Davies attacks the spirit of intrigue which threatens to destroy the autonomy of poetry, reprimands the critics for not possessing gifts which are commensurate with their positions, and points out the pitfalls of an inflexible literary expectancy:

The trouble of [sic] being an editor is that certain people, having a grievance, think to use our pages to attack their contemporaries. We have made one effort to prevent personal spite, and that is that every article written for this magazine will be signed. There will be no stabbing in the back. Again, why should we encourage this spirit, which destroys ourselves as well as our enemies? Let the poet do his work, without envy of other, and take this for his motto:

Have pity on my enemy  
 Again  
 And yet again, my triumph gives  
 Him pain.<sup>2</sup>

We are well aware of the position of certain men who, without any solid gifts, have secured the position of leaders of criticism: but these men can safely be left to time, and God help the writer they favour! Not only that, but the way to kill a writer is not to abuse him, but to overpraise him. As soon as a writer becomes verminous with friends, he is damned. If we had any intention of bringing a man down from a high to a low state, we would praise him extravagantly, and not abuse him. Of course, this would not damn him forever, for his good things, if he had written any, would survive his death. But it would certainly kill him for the rest of his life. No amount of power or friendship can keep a bad poet going for many years, and no amount of spite or envy can keep a good poet down. We could mention several instances of this, in the literature of the present day. All this can be left to Time, who has a terrible way in dealing with these matters.

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<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 318, pp. 318-319.

<sup>2</sup>"Joy", Poem no. 314, p. 316, ll. 9-12.

We have been very much struck by a poem lately sent to us, in which is shown in a realistic way how Time alters a character, so that we find it difficult to believe it is the history of one person. Some people will not like it, because of its realism, saying that it is not a fit subject for poetry. If this poem were written by Thomas Hardy, it would find admirers; but if W.B. Yeats wrote it, the world would think he had gone mad. Which means, that we expect certain authors to do a certain kind of work, and, when they depart from that rule, we see no merit in their efforts: which shows how foolish we are. This poem is called:

A WOMAN'S HISTORY  
By Ebenezer Winkle.<sup>1</sup>

Here Davies presented his own poem, "A Woman's History".<sup>2</sup>

In the foregoing, a survey of Davies's prose works and critical premises had been attempted in order to determine some of the pre-occupations which are central to his vision. Unenriched by the speculative interior of poetry, his critical statements cannot, in themselves, be accepted as revelations of this vision. However, they indicate concerns which are paralleled by the persuasive imagery of many of his poems and, as such, can be regarded as the directional determinants of his point of view. For example, as will be discussed during an examination of Davies's pastoralism, the poet makes full use of imagery in its evaluative capacity, namely, the assessment inherent in the umbrae of traditional items which reflects the attitude of the writer.

The areas of concern which have emerged from the amalgam of tendencies embedded in Davies's criticism constitute, in a sense, a gloss on the scale and significance of this type of imagery. The areas which have been revealed, such as the amendment of critical

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<sup>1</sup>Stonesifer, Davies, pp. 175-176.

<sup>2</sup>Poem no. 326, p. 324.

values, the limitations of verse which is descriptive without being intuitive, the value of song, the symbolic significance of natural objects, and the radiance of poetic balance, are the untransformed antecedents of a poetic order.

## CHAPTER IV

### DAVIES'S PASTORALISM

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- (i) We were expelled from Paradise, but Paradise was not destroyed. In a sense our expulsion from Paradise was a stroke of luck, for had we not been expelled, Paradise would have had to be destroyed.<sup>1</sup>

That the child is destined to become the man is an unassailable truth of experience. That the childhood of mankind has been unequivocally exchanged for a condition which approximates to adult sophistication is a contention capable of awakening a variety of attitudes ranging from complacency to alarm. Man, fixed in terms of his very nature by both space and time, has shown himself to be incapable of resignation in the face of this fixity. The product of this refusal, literary pastoralism, declares itself in both generic and affective commitments to the idea of looking away from a temporal or spatial centre towards an alternative mode of existence. In this sense, pastoral both reflects and fulfils a human need.

As no single literary production can be singled out as an embodiment of all the features of the kind, a discussion of pastoralism must begin with definitions which partially anticipate further definitions -- a paradox which provides the organizing principle of this chapter. Although the primary concern of this chapter is to examine Davies's poetic vision in terms of pastoralism, pastoralism itself will be discussed in terms of Davies's poetry. The following definitions of pastoral which precede the discussion will, in a sense, cede to the cumulative definition provided by the chapter as a whole.

In attempting a discussion of modern pastoral, it is necessary to distinguish between pastoral as a literary kind, and pastoral as

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<sup>1</sup>Franz Kafka, Parables and Paradoxes (New York: Schocken Books, 1958), p. 29.

a reflective attitude in literature -- the first category containing partially prescribed modes such as the pastoral elegy, and embodying specific conventions; the second declaring itself pastoral through elements such as point of view and attitude. Unlike the villanelle which, although originally pastoral in subject matter, remains a fixed form, traditional pastoral cannot be characterized by "outer form" alone. For this reason, the procedure outlined by Wellek and Warren serves as a useful starting point for differentiation:

Genre should be conceived, we think, as a grouping of literary works based, theoretically, upon both outer form (specific metre or structure) and also upon inner form (attitude, tone, purpose -- more crudely, subject and audience). The ostensible basis may be one or the other (e.g. 'pastoral' and 'satire' for the inner form; dipodic verse and Pindaric ode for outer); but the critical problem will then be to find the other dimension, to complete the diagram.<sup>1</sup>

Although specific features of the traditional pastoral such as the rural singing match, the overt allusion to Arcadia, and the figure of the shepherd, while sometimes thematically implicit, are absent in modern pastoral, certain cardinal points in the poetic perspective, in both ancient and modern dress, must be found to be present before a poem can be termed pastoral. One such constant has been suggested by Greg:

What does appear to be a constant element in the pastoral as known to literature is the recognition of a contrast, implicit or expressed, between pastoral life and some more complex type of civilization. At no stage in its development does literature, or at any rate poetry, concern itself with the obvious, with the base scaffolding of life : wherever we find an author interested in the circle of prime necessity we may be sure that he himself stands outside it. It was left to a later, perhaps a wiser and sadder, generation to gaze with fruitless and often only half sincere longing at the shepherd-boy asleep under the shadow of the thorn, lulled by the low monotonous rustle of the grazing flock. Only when the shepherd-songs ceased to be the outcome of unalloyed pastoral conditions did they become distinctively pastoral. It is therefore significant that the

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<sup>1</sup>Wellek and Warren, Theory of Literature, p. 231.

earliest pastoral poetry with which we are acquainted, whatever half-articulate experiments may have preceded it, was itself directly born of the contrast between the recollections of a childhood spent among the Sicilian uplands and the crowded social and intellectual life of Alexandria.<sup>1</sup>

Theocritus, in his *Idylls*, looks through time towards his Sicilian boyhood, and, in doing so, constructs a rural landscape with the capacity to match, through natural objects, the mood of splendid harmony which characterizes the figures of his distant recollections. While his reapers are occupied in formulating friendly challenges, in singing love songs, and in echoing maxims of the field, the sense of time accommodates itself to the activities which take place, and an atmosphere of rural plenty stays the hand of change. As in Book VII of *Paradise Lost*, when time, in response to Raphael's description of creation, is suspended into expansiveness, song-time, not diurnal time, becomes the yardstick of action:

And the great light of day yet wants to run  
 Much of his race though steep; suspense in heav'n  
 Held by thy voice, thy potent voice he hears,  
 And longer will delay to hear thee tell  
 His generation, and the rising birth  
 Of Nature from the unapparent deep.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, from its beginning, pastoral explores the relationship between universal time and imaginative time, recalling the temporal dimensions of the prelapsarian universe as a measurement of both consolation and anguish. The contrast between the Urban and Rural modes of existence becomes, in a sense, the spatial correlative of the distinction between a universe governed by time and a universe liberated from time. As a result of this contrast,

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<sup>1</sup>Walter W. Greg, *Pastoral Poetry and Pastoral Drama* (London: A.H. Bullen, 1906), pp. 4-5.

<sup>2</sup>John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Bk. VII, ll. 98-103, in *Milton: Poetical Works*, ed. by Douglas Bush, (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 342.

there arises an idea which comes perhaps as near being universal in pastoral as any -- the idea, namely, of the 'golden age'. This embraces, indeed, a field not wholly coincident with that of pastoral, but the two are connected alike by a common spring in common emotion and constant literary association. The fiction of an age of simplicity and innocence found birth among the Augustan writers in the midst of the complex and luxurious civilization of Rome, as an illustration of the principle enunciated by Professor Raleigh that 'literature has constantly the double tendency to negative the life around it, as well as to reproduce it'.<sup>1</sup>

Although the notion of a golden age of rustic simplicity and harmony provided the dramatis personae for the allegorical pastoral, in which contemporary affairs are discussed by personages in the guise of shepherds, "in modern pastoral, the figure of the shepherd, whether idealized or real, vanishes entirely, his place being taken by some relatively simple figure, sometimes the worker, more usually the child".<sup>2</sup> This notion of pastoral substitution is the primary component of contemporary explorations such as William Empson's discussion of "The Child as Swain", and the "Mock-Pastoral as the Cult of Independence" in The Beggar's Opera.<sup>3</sup>

However, in order to establish a path through the "maze of historical and aesthetic development",<sup>4</sup> before the figures of contemporary pastoral can be examined, the way in which Davies's vision reflects the general components of the pastoral perspective must be indicated.

The search for an alternative position is a function of the

<sup>1</sup>Greg, Pastoral Poetry and Pastoral Drama, pp. 5-6.

<sup>2</sup>Peter V. Marinelli, Pastoral, vol. XV of The Critical Idiom, ed. by John D. Jump (London: Methuen, 1971), p. 6.

<sup>3</sup>William Empson, Some Versions of Pastoral (London: Chatto & Windus, 1950), pp. 195-294.

<sup>4</sup>Greg, Pastoral Poetry and Pastoral Drama, p. 1.

universal law of necessity which separates man from the ideal world. In contrast to some theistic precepts which stress obedience to the law of necessity as a means towards the repossession of an ideal state, pastoral implies recovery by imaginative opposition -- "the yearning of the fixed soul to escape, if it were but in imagination and for a moment, to a life of simplicity and innocence".<sup>1</sup> The burden of world-weariness which is sounded in Wordsworth's sonnet "The World is too much with us" can be seen as an important thematic principle in Davies's poetry. In his critical study of Davies's poetry, Richard Stonesifer demonstrates the close relationship between Wordsworth's sonnet and the thought-pattern of certain poems, citing "Leisure",<sup>2</sup> "The Bird of Paradise",<sup>3</sup> "A Happy Life",<sup>4</sup> "Traffic",<sup>5</sup> and "This World"<sup>6</sup> as primary examples:

He went to school to Wordsworth's sonnet 'The World is too much with us', and echoes from that sonnet resound throughout his work as from few other poems. Philosophically, no other single poem can be said to form the basis of so much of his poetry.<sup>7</sup>

Although an evaluation of this contention must be deferred, it can be noted that two of these poems, "A Happy Life" and "Traffic", record the opposition between Town and Country, the first in terms

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>2</sup>Poem no. 86, pp. 140-141.

<sup>3</sup>Poem no. 186, pp. 225-226.

<sup>4</sup>Poem no. 45, pp. 84-85.

<sup>5</sup>Poem no. 403, p. 369.

<sup>6</sup>Poem no. 163, p. 210.

<sup>7</sup>Stonesifer, Davies, p. 219.

of the necessity to ruralize the urban in order to allow imaginative penetration, the second in terms of a direct statement of rural preference. As will be exemplified later in this chapter, through a discussion of specific poems, the Urban-Rural polarity is the central focus of Davies's pastoralism. It is, above all, through the utilization of this theme that Davies achieves a sense of pastoral as a "view of life, an ethos or informing principle".<sup>1</sup>

(ii) As a fictional mode, pastoral embodies an essentially comic vision which stresses integrity, harmony, and community. However, because pastoral involves antithesis, it can become the persuasive vehicle for a critical survey of the tragic vision. If this premise is accepted, pastoral can be seen as an intermediate mode which contains both comic and tragic elements. In his discussion of the comic mode, Northrop Frye locates pastoral in terms of its comic vision -- indicating a dichotomy between the pastoral perspective and the tragic vision:

The mode of romantic comedy corresponding to the elegiac is best described as idyllic, and its chief vehicle is the pastoral. Because of the social interest of comedy, the idyllic cannot equal the introversion of the elegiac, but it preserves the theme of escape from society to the extent of idealizing a simplified life in the country or on the frontier (the pastoral of popular modern literature is the western story). The close association with animal and vegetable nature that we noted in the elegiac recurs in the sheep and pleasant pastures (or the cattle and ranches) of the idyllic, and the same easy connection with myth recurs in the fact that such imagery is often used, as it is in the Bible, for the theme of salvation.<sup>2</sup>

However, it is possible that the dichotomy is based upon the distinction between pastoral as a formal kind and pastoral as an

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<sup>1</sup>Marinelli, Pastoral, p.9.

<sup>2</sup>Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (New York: Atheneum, 1968), p. 43.

informing attitude (a distinction noted earlier in this chapter). The pastoral kind, which includes the Idylls of Theocritus, the pastoral elegy, Lycidas, Sydney's Arcadia, and Shakespeare's forest comedies, presents a clear opposition to the tragic kind which embraces Marlowe's Dr. Faustus, Macbeth, and Oedipus Rex. But the pastoral attitude, as it reveals itself in the pastoral tragicomedy of The Tempest, where the Nature-Nurture antithesis is examined in terms of a pastoral focus which tempers the tragic power to destroy, involves the capacity to become the vehicle for a "negative capability" which mediates and partially resolves the tension between tragic revelation and comic integration. Davies's "The Forsaken-Dead" can be seen as an example of this tragicomic vision.

Here, the tragic archetypes of the wasteland, the ruin, and the "deserted settlement"<sup>1</sup> are brought within the pastoral compass of the lamb and the echoing green. The pastoral world of creative repose and harmony provides a criterion by which to evaluate an historical process which has achieved the tragic repose of silence and desertion:

Here will I sit upon this fallen tree,  
Beside these ancient ruins, ivy-crowned,  
Where Nature makes green mosses ooze and spread  
Out of the pores of their decaying walls --  
Here will I sit to mourn that people gone.  
Where are they gone that there's no maiden left  
To weep the fall of this sweet village lost,  
Down where its waters pass the empty mills?  
No living thing except one tethered lamb,  
That hath been crying full an hour in vain,  
And, on that green where children played their games,  
Hath browsed his circle bare, and bleats to see  
More dewy pastures all beyond his reach.<sup>2</sup>

The tragic or Dionysiac vision is strengthened by the dithyrambic tone which suggests both fragmentation and the harmony of prophetic

<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 22, p. 58, l. 2.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., ll. 8-20.

utterance.

Pastoral, therefore, when viewed as an informing principle, is a source of a potentiality which is reflected in poetic argument. The harmonizing vision which is central to this notion of pastoral has a formal correlative -- the song lyric -- which will be examined during the discussion of specific poems which follows this introduction. However, before attempting an inductive discussion of certain poems, it is necessary to place this pastoral perspective within the wider context of the pastoral tradition.

One characteristic of pastoral is that it involves a movement from the urban (retreat) to the rural (private re-definition), as well as a return to the urban or social situation. The urban situation allows the discovery of an imaginative or creative capacity which, in turn, becomes the ability to control the urban experience. However, because it is tied to the process of rural regeneration, the new capability is impermanent. As the ability to control the urban experience decays, the drive towards the rural mode increases. In this way, a cyclical pattern is established. The pastoral experience, therefore, is seldom the product of an unequivocal antithesis. A principle of tension governs the objects to which it refers.

This aspect of pastoral ambivalence is a primary component of Marvell's "The Garden".<sup>1</sup> Here, two versions of pastoral, the pastoral of solitude and the pastoral of the self, are exemplified -- the latter version, the pastoral of the self, being the antecedent dimension of what William Empson terms "The Cult of Independence".<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The Poems of Andrew Marvell, ed. by Hugh Macdonald (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1952), pp. 51-53.

<sup>2</sup>Empson, Some Versions of Pastoral, pp. 195-250.

Because these modes are related to the conterminous "Nature-Nurture" and "Urban-Rural" antitheses, and because they are, in themselves, important aspects of Davies's pastoralism, a brief discussion of "The Garden" will be helpful.

The poem opens with an evaluative statement of the vanity of active achievement within the world of the victor, the statesman, and the poet -- utilizing the "gnomic commonplaces of the pastoral of innocence"<sup>1</sup> in order to indicate a contrast between the world of strife and the world of botanical repose:

How vainly men themselves amaze  
To win the Palm, the Oke, or Bayes;  
And their uncessant Labours see  
Crown'd from some single Herb or Tree,  
Whose short and narrow verged Shade  
Does prudently their Toyles upbraid;  
While all Flow'rs and all Trees do close  
To weave the Garlands of repose.

The trigonometric imagery of "short and narrow verged Shade" is suggestive of the qualities which urge the figures of the active world towards the acquisition of the symbols of fame. The emblems which stand at the apex of achievement are seen in terms of a truncated shadow whose base becomes a measure of the value of the activity. In contrast to this, the plants of the garden enter into their own woven shadows, and produce the ordered completeness of "Garlands of repose". The implication is that the plants fulfil themselves by being themselves, whereas those who would achieve fame must cast aside their sense of personal fulfilment in the attempt. The solitude of the garden is an alternative to this loss of self. Here, in the company of other plants, grow the distillations of peace and innocence, the "sacred Plants" which are not found in the brittle

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<sup>1</sup>Renato Poggioli, "The Pastoral of the Self" in Pastoral and Romance, ed. by Eleanor Terry Lincoln (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1969), p. 54.

soil of the "Companies of Men".

At this point, the general principle of withdrawal from society is replaced by an examination of the particular motivation -- the desire to secure a contemplative solitude which does not circumscribe the poetic imagination. The natural world of the garden, at once innocent and civilized, permits the sinless celebration of beauty without inviting the distraction of human love. The specific motivation is analysed in universal terms, and persuasion is achieved by way of mythological and historical precedents:

No white nor red was even seen  
 So am'rous as this lovely green.  
 Fond Lovers, cruel as their Flame,  
 Cut in these Trees their Mistress name.  
 Little, Alas, they know, or heed,  
 How far these Beauties Hers exceed!  
 Fair Trees! where s'eer your barkes I wound,  
 No Name shall but your own be found.

When we have run our Passions heat,  
 Love hither makes his best retreat.  
 The Gods, that mortal Beauty chase,  
 Still in a Tree did end their race.  
Apollo hunted Daphne so,  
 Only that She might Laurel grow.  
 And Pan did after Syrinx speed,  
 Not as a Nymph, but for a Reed.

Two antithetical methods are used -- negation of history and confirmation of myth through distortion of emphasis. In contrast to other lovers, the speaker engraves only the names of the various trees -- transferring certain conventions of the pastoral of love into devices of the pastoral of solitude. The transformation facilitates a substitution of inanimate for animate which allows the sensibilities of the lover to become the sensibilities of the solitary. In a manner which is typical of pastoral, the poem, therefore, implies a consciousness of pastoral antecedents, and the universal perspective reinforces, by opposition, the solitary condition of the speaker. In its treatment of the mythic world, the poem proceeds through a process of comparison by inversion. In his discussion of the poem, Renato

Poggioli analyses this procedure in terms of anticlimax and expectancy:

Having thus changed his love objects from human creatures into botanical ones, the poet compares himself to those gods who pursued a maid or nymph only to see her transformed into a flower or a plant. Marvell builds this comparison into a striking anticlimax: reversing the meaning of the fables to which he refers, he treats the botanical metamorphosis by which they end as if it were a consciously expected or willfully provoked outcome: the fulfillment, rather than the frustration, of the god's desire. In brief, if a god persecuted a maid or nymph, it was only because he wanted to see the creature he loved metamorphosed into a vegetable being.<sup>1</sup>

Poggioli's interpretation is significant in that it exposes a characteristic feature of pastoral argument -- the ideational capacity to embrace a large area of literary and mythic experience in order to substantiate pastoral claims. A similar process of "pastoral justification" can be seen in the persuasive arguments of Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" and in the concordia discors of Windsor Forest, where Pope advocates a traditional theory of peace which is based upon a conception of the cosmic law of compensatory tension and relaxation. Because it is central to the nature of pastoral to telescope criteria of value into the associations of a particular spatial or temporal position -- Arcadia, Eden, the country, childhood -- it is usually an argued form. Although, in Davies, persuasion is a function of obliquity belied by simplicity, similar patterns of argument are implicit in his material. For this reason, pastoral is an ideal vehicle for the employment of imagery in its evaluative capacity. In this sense, a simple catalogue of artifacts becomes, as in "This Green Orchard",<sup>2</sup> an evaluative matrix which pinpoints the demerits of a particular position.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 55-56.

<sup>2</sup>Poem no. 546, pp. 462-463.

In "The Garden", however, persuasion is achieved by the systematic cutting-away of conventional association and the substitution of the personal for the general point of view. For example, in the first two lines of the fourth stanza, the conventional colour equation of "Love" : "white" and "red" is replaced by

So am'rous as this lovely green.

Further, the fifth stanza establishes, by indirection, a diagrammatic portrait of the "I" of the poem. As the mellow richness of the garden is proved by the unobstructed ripening of its fruit, the "I" acquires the individualizing properties of weight, height, corporeality, and movement:

What wond'rous Life is this I lead!  
Ripe Apples drop about my head;  
The Luscious Clusters of the Vine  
Upon my Mouth do crush their Wine;  
The Nectaren, and curious Peach,  
Into my hands themselves do reach;  
Stumbling on Melons, as I pass,  
Insnar'd with Flow'rs, I fall on Grass.

After being extended through a terrestrial dimension, the cumulative tendency to substitute reaches its logical conclusion in the idea of annihilation by imaginative penetration of the mind:

Annihilating all that's made  
To a green Thought in a green Shade.

The argument of the poem has projected a vision of the solitary mind in the context of the limited space of the garden. However, by stressing the individual dimensions of the observer, the argument anticipates the transition from solitude to spiritual self-fulfilment which is completed in the following stanza. The solitary mind, now free to act upon the promptings of the natural world, guides the soul into rapturous communion with its source -- the soul becomes a bird whose principle of existence, spiritual truth, is suggested by the coexistence of a self-reflective and responsive capacity embedded in

the prismatic imagery of light. In catching and retaining the emanations of the great source of light, the soul achieves the true end of contemplation:

There like a Bird it sits, and sings,  
Then whets, and combs its silver Wings;  
And, till prepar'd for longer flight,  
Waves in its Plumes the various Light.

Although the bird, as an emblem of artistic self-consciousness, is often utilized in its negative sense by Davies, as in "The Kingfisher", the contexts of its usage indicate concerns which are related to the Pastoral of the Self. As will be discussed in greater detail in this chapter, Davies's pastoral vision rejects the notion of the cultivation of the self, but affirms the premises of the solitary which are established in "The Garden", although this repudiation of self is often qualified by a tonal ambivalence.

In "The Garden", the demands of the solitary and the demands of the self are reconciled through the image of Eden which reminds the reader that the loss of solitude, through the creation of Eve, heralded the fragmentation of the self. The adoption of this premise allows Marvell to argue for the solitary condition:

But 'twas beyond a Mortal's share  
To wander solitary there:  
Two Paradises 'twere in one  
To live in Paradise alone.

Because his awareness of the responsibilities of the solitary condition in the non-literary world has not been completely transformed into Myth or Idea, Davies is prevented from setting out an unequivocal argument in support of the "Cult of Independence". It is as if his private knowledge of the fact that self-fulfilment cannot be achieved within a social vacuum forces him to fall short of a purely imaginative construction of an ideal world. His ideal is usually a function of a world which has aired its golden credentials in the actualization of a moment of wonder:

When I did wake this morn from sleep,  
 It seemed I heard birds in a dream;  
 Then I arose to take the air --  
 The lovely air that made birds scream;  
 Just as <sup>(a)</sup>green hill launched the ship  
 Of gold, to take its first clear dip.

And it began its journey then.  
 As I came forth to take the air;  
 The timid stars had vanished quite,  
 The Moon was dying with a stare;  
 Horses, and kine, and sheep were seen  
 As still as pictures, in fields green.

It seemed as though I had surprised  
 And trespassed in a golden world  
 That should have passed while men still slept!  
 The joyful birds, the ship of gold,  
 The horses, kine and sheep did seem  
 As they would vanish for a dream.<sup>1</sup>

For Davies, creativity is undermined by selfishness, and independence is valid only when it contributes to imagination. In many poems, such as "A Happy Life",<sup>2</sup> "In the Country",<sup>3</sup> "The Philosophical Beggar",<sup>4</sup> and "In May",<sup>5</sup> Davies tabulates the virtues of the solitary condition but concludes with a partial retraction which is based upon the need for social intervention. In this sense, many of his poems enact the progression of withdrawal-redefinition-return mentioned earlier in this discussion.

(iii) The aspiration towards redefinition, once projected through Arcadia, becomes, in the modern idiom of pastoral, a capacity to

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<sup>1</sup>"Early Morn", Poem no. 39, p. 81.

<sup>2</sup>Poem no. 45, pp. 84-85.

<sup>3</sup>Poem no. 68, p. 106.

<sup>4</sup>Poem no. 80, pp. 117-125.

<sup>5</sup>Poem no. 84, p. 139.

inhabit the ordinary country landscapes of the modern world, daily contracted by the encroachment of civilization and as a consequence daily more precious as a projection of our desires for simplicity.<sup>1</sup>

The tensions of experience which are revealed in Davies's statements of the Town-Country antithesis, and the sense of partial retraction which characterizes his commitment to independence, may be related to tensions enacted in the non-literary situation. In his discussion of the conditions of pastoral, Frank Kermode singles out the necessity for "a sharp difference between two ways of life, the rustic and the urban":<sup>2</sup>

Considerable animosity may exist between the townsman and the countryman. Thus the 'primitive' may be sceptical about the justice of a state of affairs which makes him live under rude conditions while the town-poet lives in polite society. On the other hand, the town- or court-poet has a certain contempt for the present (sometimes very strong) and both primitive and court-poet write verse which reflects these attitudes.<sup>3</sup>

The tension embedded in this polarity becomes the thematic principle governing "The Two Loves":<sup>4</sup>

I have two loves, and one is dark  
 The other fair as may be seen;  
 My dark love is Old London Town,  
 My fair love is the country green.  
 My fair love has a sweeter breath,  
 A clearer face by day; and nights  
 So wild with stars that dazzled I  
 See multitudes of other lights.  
 My dark love has her domes as round  
 As mushrooms in my fair love's meadows.  
 While both my loves have houses old,  
 Whose windows look cross-eyed at shadows.

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<sup>1</sup>Marinelli, Pastoral, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>Frank Kermode, ed., English Pastoral Poetry: From The Beginnings to Marvell (London: George G. Harrap & Co.Ltd., 1952), p. 14.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Poem no. 398, p. 366.

Here, although the cumulative judgement affirms the validity of the country, the qualities of the urban situation are not annulled. The first two lines of the poem establish a mechanism by which the contraries can be weighed against each other. The delicacy of this balance is confirmed by a linear structure which ensures an equal disposal of items. In the first quatrain, the properties of city and country are measured as the paired opposites of "one" and "the other" as well as the paired epithets of "dark love" and "fair love". Here, the evaluative pointer of the scale rests on zero. Similarly, in the third quatrain, "dark love" is balanced by "fair love", and equilibrium is established by "both my loves". Only in the middle quatrain is the equipoise disturbed. Here, the properties of the "fair love" are adumbrated, and, for a moment, the pointer moves towards the positive side of urban values. Because the balance is altered only at the mid-point of the poem, equilibrium can be restored as the poem closes. Formally, therefore, the poem embodies a rhythm of assessment which is analogous to the counting rhythm of many Davies lyrics.<sup>1</sup> A similar pattern of thematic organization establishes a sense of balanced opposition in "City and Country",<sup>2</sup> where the first quatrain lists the properties of the city, the second quatrain lists

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<sup>1</sup>Many Davies lyrics possess rhythms which transcend the metrical. In most cases, they confer upon the poetic argument a logical sequence which facilitates thematic development. For example, the counting rhythm which can be seen in "Her Body's a Fine House" (No. 294), "For Sale" (No. 438), "Three Score and Ten" (No. 568), and "The Last Years" (No. 624) is often an organizing principle which both indicates poetic argument and establishes the path towards poetic closure. The presence of these rhythms will be indicated in the course of discussion.

<sup>2</sup>Poem no. 643, p. 512.

the contrary qualities of the country, and the concluding quatrain links the items to a distinction between public and private responses:

The City has dull eyes,  
The City's cheeks are pale;  
The City has black spit,  
The City's breath is stale.

The Country has red cheeks,  
The Country's eyes are bright;  
The Country has sweet breath,  
The Country's spit is white.

Dull eyes, breath stale; ink spit  
And cheeks like chalk -- for thee;  
Eyes bright, red cheeks; sweet breath  
And spit like milk -- for me.

The "I-Thou" distinction which is achieved in the concluding stanza has been anticipated by the direct personification of the first two quatrains. The country becomes an analogue of the speaker, while the city is given an equal value as a persona. In an extremely delicate way, therefore, the poet relates the Urban-Rural opposition to the distinction between Public and Private modes of response. The independent observer is given rural attributes because the country has been described in terms of the observer. This process of transference is central to Davies's pastoral point of view. The observer, or speaker, by providing a focus of rural values, is able to become his own "relatively simple figure".<sup>1</sup> In the absence of the interpolated figure of the shepherd, the child, or the swain, the speaker fulfils a pastoral function by being an embodiment of simplicity and innocence. Because of this, the significance of the tone of many poems is heightened.

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<sup>1</sup>Marinelli, Pastoral, p. 6.

(iv) Because the figure of the tramp-poet embodies the traditional virtues of the wanderer-as-commentator, Davies's semi-autobiographical poems draw their pastoralism from two sources -- the interior innocence derived from the speaker, and the rural characteristics inherent in the figure of the wanderer. Before this notion of the "innocent speaker" is examined through specific pastoral examples, it will be helpful to examine a poem which, in its treatment of a crisis of vision, measures the significance of the pastoral voice:

The Child and the Man

Dreaming I was a child,  
And met a man,  
My fears of him were wild --  
Away I ran.

The man ran after me:  
'Why run away,  
My little boy,' said he --  
'From me this day?'

I looked with my eyes sad,  
When I was caught;  
His face seemed not so bad  
As I first thought.

'I am yourself,' said he:  
'It gives me pain  
To see you run from me --  
Don't run again.'

'Poor man,' said I, 'what made  
You look so strange?  
No wonder I'm afraid,  
At such a change.'

He sobbed too much to speak,  
He could not tell;  
And then my heart did break  
With sobs as well.<sup>1</sup>

The poem presents a sequence of confrontations between child and man, beginning with a vision of childhood which emanates from an adult dream-perspective. From this point, the poem records the

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<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 708, pp. 561-562.

developmental stages leading to the man's backward glance into the world of the child. Because of this circularity, the poem formulates answers to questions such as 'How did I, a child, respond to the perception of myself as a man?', 'How do I, a man, respond to the perception of myself as an adult?' and 'Did my intuitive knowledge of my destiny transform me into a man?' These questions are tethered to a central existential problem of development which asks: 'If I had not been captured, when still a child, by a sense of the sadness of the adult world, would I have avoided the loss of vision which is the source of my present crisis?'

In suggesting these questions, the poem presents an argument which examines the core of the pastoral position mentioned earlier in this discussion -- the idea of looking away from a temporal or spatial centre towards an alternative mode of existence. But, by linking this pastoral reflex to the individual chronology of a child's vision of man, it reverses a characteristic method of attaining consolation through imaginative withdrawal, and poses the problem of whether it is inevitable that the wonder of childhood should yield to the experience of doubt and sadness which frames the adult world-view. At the same time, the corollary of this question is delineated: If this process is accepted as an inevitable feature of development, is the significance of the condition of childhood undermined?

If these questions are abstracted from the poetic form, no answers can be postulated. However, when seen in terms of poetic sequence and development, the problems which are central to this crisis of vision contain the seeds of resolution. The centripetal tendency of the tone is the primary agent of poetic resolution.

The alternating trimeter and dimeter lines, turning on a sequence of alternating rhymes, maintain an effect of self-containment

which is the first indication of a possibility of resolution. However, set against the sense of equilibrium afforded by this balance is a thought-form which establishes itself in the second and fourth quatrains. Unlike the first, third, and fifth quatrains which, because of the presence of run-on lines, read as rhymed couplets in which each line has five stresses, these quatrains enact the problematic nature of the argument by presenting a fragmented current of thought:

The man ran after me:  
 'Why run away,  
 My little boy,' said he --  
 'From me this day?' (ii)

'I am yourself,' said he:  
 'It gives me pain  
 To see you run from me --  
 Don't run again.' (iv)

The relationship between these two quatrains is reinforced by the duplication of the 'a' rhymes, and by an almost parallel grammatical construction. Unlike many of Davies's lyrics, the poem does not follow a principle of serial generation such as the developmental progression of infancy-youth-maturity-old age as in "A Woman's History"<sup>1</sup> or the arithmetic progression of first-second-third as in "Her Body's a Fine House".<sup>2</sup> Rather, it follows a principle of incremental complication of point of view which charts the results of the confrontation of the twin currents of the argument. In outline, the components of the poem can be seen as follows:

<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 326, pp. 324-325.

<sup>2</sup>Poem no. 294, p. 306.



He sobbed too much to speak,  
 He could not tell;  
 And then my heart did break  
 With sobs as well.

In a sense, the child has affirmed the life of the adult, and, in doing so, has received an intimation of the validity of his own time-bound existence. At this point, because the vantage-point of a dream is partly broken by the vocal content of the quatrain ("sobbed too much", "sobs as well"), the distinction between man and child is obscured and the adult joins the child in a process of mutual affirmation of existence. The dreamer awakens to the consoling sound of shared experience.

The relationship between child and man which is outlined may be conceptualized in terms of Martin Buber's description of the relational process as a dialogue between subject and object -- the "I-Thou" combination. The "I" of Davies's pastorals corresponds to the "I" which establishes the world of "Thou" in contrast to the world of "It". This "I" believes in the "simple magic of life, in service in the universe, and the meaning of that waiting"<sup>1</sup> which allows the experience of "that 'craning of the neck' in creatures"<sup>2</sup> which sees life in the process of becoming. The tragic "I", however, is not uttered in combination with a "Thou", but implies the abstract world of "It" -- an otherness which is not seen as a whole but as an abstract, fragmented system of parts. Davies's notion of an "evil mood" is related to this tragic vision:

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<sup>1</sup>Martin Buber, I and Thou, trans. by Ronald Gregor Smith (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1959), p. 15.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

My mind has such a hawk as thou,  
 It is an evil mood;  
 It comes when there's no cause for grief,  
 And on my joys doth brood.  
 Then do I see my life in parts;  
 The earth receives my bones,  
 The common air absorbs my mind --  
 It knows not flowers from stones.<sup>1</sup>

The "I" which informs Davies's poems of community (which may be described as the "I" of comedy) is often an "I" which is attempting to free itself from an "I-It" relationship by entering into a mood of shared experience and mutuality. At times, as in the love songs, the "I" fulfils itself in the world of "Thou", and the "Thou", in turn, modifies the "I". As in "The Hospital Waiting Room", the "I" of comedy is always aware of the possibility of relationship, although the possibility is always qualified by the fallibility of human perception:

We wait our turn, as still as mice,  
 For medicine free, and free advice:  
 Two mothers, and their little girls  
 So small -- each one with flaxen curls --  
 And I myself, the last to come.  
 Now as I entered that bare room,  
 I was not seen or heard; for both  
 The mothers -- one in finest cloth,  
 With velvet blouse and crocheted lace,  
 Lips painted red, and powdered face;  
 The other ragged, whose face took  
 Its own dull, white and wormy look --  
 Exchanged a hard and bitter stare.  
 And both the children, sitting there,  
 Taking example from that sight,  
 Made ugly faces, full of spite.  
 This woman said, though not a word  
 From her red painted lips was heard --  
 'Why have I come to this, to be  
 In such a slattern's company?'  
 The ragged woman's look replied --  
 'If you can dress with so much pride,  
 Why are you here, so neat and nice,  
 For medicine free, and free advice?'  
 And I, who needed richer food,  
 Not medicine, to help my blood;

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<sup>1</sup>"The Hawk", Poem no. 168, p. 214, ll. 9-16.

Who could have swallowed then a horse,  
 And chased its rider round the course,  
 Sat looking on, ashamed, perplexed,  
 Until a welcome voice cried -- 'Next!' <sup>1</sup>

Unlike the tragic and the comic "I", the pastoral "I" involves a vision which fulfils itself by being itself. Where no pastoral speaker is present, the speaker's tone suggests an innocent tranquillity which, by its imaginative passivity, is capable of resolving the problematic by a simple statement of the problem itself.

The child's ability to generate a condition of tranquil grace which imposes an order upon the disparate elements of adult experience is the central theme of "Named".<sup>2</sup> Here, the child's utterance places the existence of the man within a ceremonial context which confers a sense of time and place upon the undirected energy of the speaker. The solemn child becomes the medium through which the divine will is summoned and expressed:

As I marched out one day in spring,  
 Proud of my life and power --  
 I saw an infant, all alone,  
 Kissing a small, red flower.  
 He looked at me with solemn eyes,  
 As only children can,  
 And -- in a voice that might be God's --  
 He called distinctly -- 'Man!'  
 Though I had been the Pope of Rome,  
 Our English King or Heir,  
 A child has called in God's own way,  
 And I have answered -- 'Here!'

As in "Trees",<sup>3</sup> the adult is seen in a state of restlessness and flux, while the child presents an opportunity of equilibrium which, by a process of osmotic absorption, draws the turmoil of adult

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<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 193, pp. 230-231.

<sup>2</sup>Poem no. 595, p. 487.

<sup>3</sup>Poem no. 269, p. 281.

experience into a condition of diffuse obedience which promotes imaginative responsiveness:

They ask me where the Temple stands,  
 And is the Abbey far from there;  
 They ask the way to old St. Paul's,  
 And where they'll find Trafalgar Square.

As I pass on with my one thought  
 To find a quiet place with trees,  
 I answer him, I answer her,  
 I answer one and all of these.

When I sit under a green tree,  
 Silent, and breathing all the while  
 As easy as a sleeping child,  
 And smiling with as soft a smile --

Then, as my brains begin to work,  
 This is the thought that comes to me:  
 Were such a peace more often mine,  
 I'd live as long as this green tree.

The child's naming capacity corresponds to the identifying and controlling functions of the poetic imagination as it transforms the raw energy of "wind and fire"<sup>1</sup> into an ordered whole -- a traditional conception which recalls Theseus's definition of the poetic imagination in A Midsummer Night's Dream.

The ceremonial greeting which takes place in "Named" is, in a sense, an example of the spontaneous regeneration of the imaginative will which is an echo of the primary creative act. Through the agency of the child, a liberating sense of affirmation is dispersed through both the world of natural objects and the world of man. Because the act of naming is contiguous to the expression of love, loving becomes an alternative term for naming, and, for the duration of the naming word, a pastoral condition of Eden is recreated.

(v) It is perhaps significant that Davies's most direct

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<sup>1</sup>"The Poet's Horse", Poem no. 328, pp. 328-329.

definition of the child as a "sort of alien scattered from the clouds"<sup>1</sup> is embodied in "C is for Child",<sup>2</sup> a poem which, by setting its theme within an alphabetical sequence of titles, confirms the sense of ordered placement which is a characteristic element in Davies's notion of the condition of childhood. The child inhabits a remnant of a world of perfect diapason projected from a celestial universe. The described process of transition is suggested by an indirect portrait of a newly-formed butterfly whose chrysalis, although discarded, is sensed as a protective covering which encloses the perfect potentiality of an earlier existence.

The idea of birth and development as a gradual process by which earthly imperfection is substituted for an earlier condition of celestial harmony is not, of course, an isolated notion in the history of poetic ideas, but a spiritual commonplace which informs the poetry of many ages. In defining the child through the attribution of earlier and later conditions of existence, Davies aligns himself to a Platonic tradition which fulfils itself in poems such as Vaughan's "The Retreat" and Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood", and provides the dominant imaginative and spiritual postulates of The Prelude by anchoring Wordsworth's conception of the harmonizing power of the natural world to an assumption of perfectibility.

Although the imaginative presence of such well-established cognates tends to bracket Davies's poem as a thematic "poor relation", the lightness of his restatement is the product of a specific poetic

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<sup>1</sup>William Wordsworth, The Prelude, Bk. VII, l. 350, in Wordsworth: Poetical Works, ed. by Thomas Hutchinson, rev. Ernest De Selincourt (1936; rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 542.

<sup>2</sup>Poem no. 370, p. 351.

design. Wordsworth's ode, in keeping with its form, unfolds a wide-ranging and discursive argument, the reflective tone of which allows both associative recall and conceptual elaboration:

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:  
 The Soul that rises with us, our life's star,  
   Hath had elsewhere its setting,  
   And cometh from afar:  
 And not in utter nakedness,  
 But trailing clouds of glory do we come  
   From God, who is our home:  
 Heaven lies about us in our infancy!  
 Shades of the prison-house begin to close  
   Upon the growing Boy  
 But He beholds the light, and whence it flows,  
   He sees it in his joy;  
 The Youth, who daily farther from the east  
   Must travel, still is Nature's Priest,  
   And by the vision splendid  
   Is on his way attended;  
 At length the Man perceives it die away,  
 And fade into the light of common day.<sup>1</sup>

Davies's song lyric attempts to comprehend a human condition by isolating the moment of transition itself. While Wordsworth redistributes the passage of time through personal recollection, Davies suspends the transitional point by charting the immeasurable half-motion of a butterfly-like child:

See how her arms now rise and fall,  
 See how, like wings, they beat the air:  
 An arm to balance either foot,  
 She moves, half-fluttering, here and there.

The incantatory opening lines suggest the child's way of pointing to an image in order to place it within a hesitatingly flexible universe. The diagrammatic representation of the child enacts the manner in which she relates to two forces of her experience -- a residual passivity which has its source in the self-containment of

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<sup>1</sup>William Wordsworth, "ODE. Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood", st. V, ll. 58-76, in Wordsworth: Poetical Works, ed. by Thomas Hutchinson, rev. Ernest De Selincourt, (1936; rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 460.

the past, and an active will which claims its vitality from the present. In the first verse of the poem, the two forces are balanced in opposition, and the resultant equipoise suspends the child in a non-gravitational field which is dependent upon both the terrestrial present and the celestial past.

The second verse does not continue the diagrammatic method of the first verse. Instead, it detaches itself from the portrait of childhood as a condition of equilibrium and emphasizes the irrecoverable nature of the transition:

And still these motions will suggest  
 A different life that's left behind  
 In early days, remote and strange;  
 Felt in that little unformed mind  
 For one short season, after birth --  
 Before her feet are claimed by Earth.

Here, the argument of the poem moves from external, visual detail to internal, spiritual analysis. The gap between observable behaviour and private experience is bridged by the phrase "will suggest" in the first line of the second verse. The retrospective glance into the previous verse which attends this phrase becomes the key to the thematic structure of the poem. The spiritual significance of the first verse, felt initially as an imaginative possibility only, is doubly re-affirmed. The physical properties of the child are understood as analogues of a spiritual condition. Characteristically, Davies's simplicity of treatment conceals the operation of a deliberately withheld obliquity which liberates a distinctive tenor of poetic vision -- a paradoxical ambiguity of position and viewpoint which demands careful examination. The paradox is confirmed by the progression of the argument. Ostensibly, the next three lines of the poem are directly descriptive of a physical condition. However, the way in which poetic closure is achieved suggests that an alternative,

interpretive reading is coextensive with the primary, surface reading. The simple closural power of the final line indicates the presence of a gravitational resonance which has its source in the first verse of the poem. While the first verse sings of the delicate physical balance of the child, the second verse prepares a touchstone to demonstrate a moment of spiritual brilliance, and the first verse emanates an opposing vision of the butterfly drifting delicately in its irreversible glide to earth.

A similar expression of the movement from perfect integration to unilateral restriction can be seen in "The Dreaming Boy".<sup>1</sup> Here, Davies replaces a statement of the essential characteristics of the first condition -- "The same move shuts together eye and mind" -- by an expression of the principle determinant of the second -- "From hands that come to cage them till they die". The imagery of transition sounds an urgent warning as the heedless boy approaches the condition which will annihilate his dreams. As in "The Child and the Man" and "C is for Child", Davies seems to be interrogating a crux of vision. By declaring his faith in the innocent vision of childhood in a voice which is a compound of admonition and encouragement, the poet restates the experiential conundrums encountered in "The Child and the Man": Should childhood faith be annulled in order to protect it from sudden submission to the prison-house of maturity? Is this conjectural stratagem worthwhile? If obfuscation of imaginative vision is accepted as an inevitable consequence of maturation, surely it is vital that the threatened flame of childhood wonder be preserved?

Davies's development of the magical world of childhood in "The Dreaming Boy" is, in a sense, both the measure of his refusal

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<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 167, pp. 212-213.

to accept the cynicism implied by his formulation of such a riddle and the confirmation of the value of nourishing childhood wonder:

Oh, that sweet magic in thee, happy boy!  
 It makes a golden world for all things young.  
 Thou with an iron ring, a piece of bone,  
 A rusty blade, or half a yard of rope,  
 Art richer than a man with mines and ships.  
 The child's fresh mind makes honey out of soot,  
 Sweeter than age can make on banks of flowers;  
 He needs but cross a bridge, that happy boy,  
 And he can breathe the air of a new world.  
 Sweet children, with your trust in this hard life --  
 Like little birds that ope their mouths for food  
 From hands that come to chain them till they die.<sup>1</sup>

The time sequence which precedes this description of the "golden world" is determined by historical precedents which link the age of childhood to a particular age in the development of mankind:

To thee the world is still unknown and strange;  
 Still full of wild romance, as in those days  
 Ere England launched her forests on the sea.<sup>2</sup>

The sense of universality which derives from this sequence is strengthened by the mythic content of the following lines:

Thou wilt discover in far mountains caves  
 Deserted, lamps left burning for thy feet,  
 And comfort in them more than kings are worth.  
 Aye, many a gate will open at thy call,  
 And wise men will come forth to welcome thee,  
 And bells will ring for pleasure in thy ear.  
 Great monsters in dark woods, with mighty mouths  
 That swallow their own faces when they yawn,  
 And mountain bears that carry on their backs  
 Rough, shaggy coats whose price compares with silk --  
 Will fall by thy strong, right, all-conquering arm.  
 And who can stop thee; who can turn thee back?  
 Not giants, though they stand full twenty feet,  
 And sit too tall for common men to stand.<sup>3</sup>

The poet's magic casement opens onto a fabled, olden world, a world derived from the imaginative capacity of childhood and from

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., ll. 34-45.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., ll. 17-19.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., ll. 20-33.

an impulse arising from the collective aspirations of mankind. Eden is viewed as a temporal dimension which particularizes itself in the individual consciousness of childhood.

Because the theme of the loss of the golden world is a component of many of Davies's lyrics, it will be helpful to examine a poem which embodies this theme as an organizing principle.

#### Music

Let Fortune gift on gift bestow  
 When Music plays it bringeth woe  
 For something dearer Time hath ta'en,  
 Which never can be ours again.  
 The aged beggar-man hath heard,  
 And tear-drops trickle down his beard  
 For loss of kinder looks and home,  
 And days that never more can come.  
 Here in this smoky capital,  
 With scarce aught seen but grimy wall  
 And human faces -- bring to me,  
 Music, the things of old: the bee  
 Humming as Summer's months were three,  
 Winter had nine; bring birds and flowers,  
 And the green earth of childhood's hours,  
 With sparkling dews at early morn;  
 The murmuring streams; and show the corn;  
 And break its golden roof to show  
 Poppies and blueflowers where they grow.  
 O happy days of childhood, when  
 We taught shy Echo in the glen  
 Words she had never used before --  
 Ere Age lost heart to summon her.  
 Life's river, with its early rush,  
 Falls into a mysterious hush  
 When nearing the eternal sea:  
 Yet we would not forgetful be,  
 In these deep, silent days so wise,  
 Of shallows making mighty noise  
 When we were young, when we were gay,  
 And never thought Death lived -- that day.<sup>1</sup>

The golden world is given a spatial as well as a temporal dimension. As in "C is for Child", the primal world of childhood is associated with a musically structured cosmos whose power is indirectly proportional to age. To the time-bound adult consciousness, music is

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<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 25, pp. 61-62.

an external force which recalls an era of spiritual community, while, to the child, music is an interior power which complements and shapes all action. The bee, "Humming as Summer's months were three", fulfills its purpose within an ordered universe of seasonal harmony. The well-tempered earth of "childhood's hours" permits, in proper visual proportion, a roof of golden corn, a floor of blossoming flowers, and, at a specific hour, a mantle of "sparkling dew". It is through such stylized and stable imagery that a condition of timeless and universal peace is suggested. Poetic point of view is achieved through the presentation of natural objects which do not demand the attention of image-by-image examination. Instead, in the rarefied air of a simple beauty which is easily named and easily apprehended, an ordinary landscape declares itself present to the senses. For those who have lost the opportunity or the capacity to conform to the promptings of a familiar pattern of rural and domestic associations, music provides both the medium through which to recover a condition of grace and the means by which to lament its passing.

In relating music to an earlier condition of celestial grace, Davies utilizes some of the traditional commonplaces of the laudes musicae. In an essay on poems in praise of music, James Hutton outlines a passage, from Macrobius's fifth century commentary on the Somnium Scipionis of Cicero, which, besides demonstrating the transformation of the Pythagorean and Platonic doctrines of sphere-music into the Neo-Platonic idea of the Soul as a reflection of the harmonious design of the universe, provides a valuable gloss on the poem:

3. Plato's Sirens on the spheres denote music, since siren means a singing goddess; by the nine Muses theologians indicate the sounds of the eight spheres plus the harmony of

all. . . . Because heaven sings, music is employed at sacrifices (strophe and antistrophe in hymns signify the movement of the heavens); and at funerals, because the soul is returning to heaven, the source of music. It captivates every living soul, however, barbaric, inspiring to virtue or softening to pleasure, because the soul brings to the body a memory of the celestial music. . . . And what wonder if it controls men, when even birds, as nightingales and swans, practise music, and some are lured into snares by it, while flocks are quieted by piping? No wonder, since they share in the world-soul, which also gives motion and sound to the spheres. . . .

4. Explanation of the music of the spheres. Of the three musical genera, enharmonic, diatonic, and chromatic, the diatonic is best assigned by Plato to the world-harmony. We cannot hear this harmony because of the incapacity (angustiae) of our ears. <sup>1</sup>

Although Davies's idea of a world-harmony cannot, of course, be seen as evidence of direct acquaintance with the Somnium Scipionis or Macrobius's commentary (contrast, for example, Chaucer's The Parliament of Fowls), he is indebted, in a general sense, to the philosophical heritage responsible for the transmission of this notion. His delight in birds, such as the nightingale, who "practise music" within the greater harmony of an ordered universe is expressed in many lyrics.<sup>2</sup> As will be indicated in the final section of this chapter, Davies's intuition of cosmic patterning informs his belief in the possibility of integration within the natural world.

For Davies, the shibboleth of originality of form and topic must give way to the originality of individualized restatement within

<sup>1</sup>James Hutton, "Some English Poems in Praise of Music", in English Miscellany. A Symposium of History, Literature and The Arts, ed. by Mario Praz, Vol. II (Rome: Edizioni Di Storia & Letteratura, 1951), pp. 11-12.

<sup>2</sup>See "Wasted Hours", Poem no. 310, p. 314; "Day's Black Star", Poem no. 42, pp. 82-83; "The Power of Music", Poem no. 91, pp. 144-145; "The Wonder-Maker", Poem no. 144, pp. 188-189; "Early Spring", Poem no. 156, pp. 204-205; "The Moon", Poem no. 170, p. 215; "Raptures", Poem no. 206, p. 241.

lyric design. As landscape is suggested through the safety of stylized imagery, so music is described in traditional terms. Clearly, Davies's lyric spontaneity is a product of his willingness to restate traditional poetic topics which would be excluded by the imposition of narrow criteria of uniqueness.

(vi) An instance of the way in which traditional material transforms simple imagery is provided by "The Milkmaid's Song".<sup>1</sup> In this poem, a traditional topic is yoked to a seemingly rough-and-ready catalogue of items<sup>2</sup> which emphasize the imperturbable felicity of the bucolic world:

A Milkmaid, on a Summer's day,  
Was singing, as she milked away.  
The heavy, sullen cows had come  
Racing when her voice called them home.  
A three-legged stool, a pail that glows,  
To sit and sing, and milk her cows.  
Her cheeks were red, her eyes were bright,  
And, like that milk, her neck was white.  
The birds around her tuned their throats --  
In vain -- to take her perfect notes.  
The cow gave up the last milk-drop,  
And tarried till her song should stop.  
'Wilt marry me, sweet Maid?' I said.  
She laughed in scorn, and tossed her head.  
And she had milked the crimson flood  
E'en to my heart's last drop of blood.

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<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 641, pp. 510-511.

<sup>2</sup>Richard Stonesifer, in W.H. Davies: A Critical Biography (London: Jonathan Cape, 1963), p.248, describes "The Milkmaid's Song" as Davies's "worst poem", but does not adduce an argument in support of his evaluation. Unlike Stanley J. Kunitz ("The Simplicity of Wonder", Poetry: A Magazine of Verse, XLVIII (April-September, 1936), 233), who sees Davies's pastoral figures "plainly in their green dewy places" and experiences an attendant "pleasure of recognition", Stonesifer is, perhaps, deterred by the absence of an explicit correspondence between poetic figuration, topic, and poetic items -- an indirect relationship requiring an imaginative awareness of the timeless riches of traditional pastoral.

However apparently loosely connected, the sequence of closed, octosyllabic couplets is linked to a tight pattern of alternating phrases which tend to magnify the charming dominance of the milkmaid. In the first couplet, the primary activities of singing and milking are established in direct terms. The correlation between these activities and the natural setting of the poem is secured by the presentation of items which reflect aspects of the activities. For example, the "pail that glows", an object whose presence and appearance is a natural consequence of the second activity, is related to an attribute of the central figure through the phrase "her eyes were bright". The qualities of the milkmaid are revealed through a process of minimal definition which relies on the cumulative power of all items. Because of this phenomenon, the area of reference of each adjective is expanded. The whiteness of the milkmaid's neck, tied by simile to the activity of milking, implies the perfection of her song, while the phrase, "her cheeks were red", anticipates the closing confrontation with the listener.

As mentioned above, the milkmaid's control over her setting is emphasized by the ordered repetition of phrases of possession -- "her voice", "her cows", "her cheeks", "her neck", "her eyes", "her perfect notes", "her song", "her head". With the exception of the fourth couplet, each epithet is preceded by a brief description of her immediate setting. The transition from the non-human to the human world is effected through the progression of song. The concord of response which governs couplets two and six is interrupted by the incomplete reciprocity of the fifth couplet. The milkmaid's song cannot be matched. Although the disparity is minimal because context carries the harmony into its area of reference, the couplet marks the first suggestion of a shift in perspective. The unfulfilled aspirations

of the natural world foreshadow the exclusion of the listener from the universe which has been established by the power of song. While the activity of singing changes to the action of laughter, the idea of milking is altered to subsume the idea of unrequited love.

By reducing the lyric to its primary colours, Davies enlarges the possibilities of fulfilment and completion which are established by the theme of song. A sense of primitive fruition (which would be masked by the retention of rural detail) is provided by the disposal of items. For example, a process of self-fulfilment by partial re-statement is enacted within the confines of two couplets. In the first couplet, "milked" is implied by "Milkmaid", while, in the third couplet, "sit" is implied by "three-legged stool". The "heavy sullen cows" of the second couplet are described as having reached their destination through the phrase "had come" -- indicating completion and fulfilment. In this way, the unburdened imagery of the poem becomes the inspirer of suggestion without complexity. Although pastoral appurtenances such as reed pipes and sheephooks are absent, the pastoralism of the poem is assured by the presence of the figure of the milkmaid, the warm, outdoor setting, the rural ditty, and the amatory perspective. Because the poem invites the pastoral tradition into its argument, it is capable of fusing extremely simple images into a larger area of reference. In presenting his primary poetic colours, Davies relies upon the interior suggestiveness of the lyric form as well as the exterior associations of pastoral.

(vii) As has been mentioned in the second section of this chapter, the pastoral experience is seldom the product of an unequivocal antithesis. The attitude of pastoral ambivalence which is revealed

in "The Kingfisher"<sup>1</sup> is established by a thought-form which is governed by the Nature-Art antithesis. Although aspects of a Pastoral of Solitude enter into the theme of the poem, the argument tends to assert a Nature-Nurture distinction which emerges as an evaluation of the rural condition:

It was the Rainbow gave thee birth,  
 And left thee all her lovely hues;  
 And, as her mother's name was Tears,  
 So runs it in thy<sup>2</sup> blood to choose  
 For haunts the lonely pools, and keep  
 In company with trees that weep.

Go you and, with such glorious hues,  
 Live with proud Peacocks in green parks;  
 On lawns as smooth as shining glass,  
 Let every feather show its marks;  
 Get thee on boughs and clap thy wings  
 Before the windows of proud kings.

Nay, lovely Bird, thou art not vain;  
 Thou hast no proud, ambitious mind;  
 I also love a quiet place  
 That's green, away from all mankind;  
 A lonely pool, and let a tree  
 Sigh with her bosom over me.

The natural thought-form of the poem -- position, contradiction, and resolution -- allows the idea of the kingfisher to be defined, re-established in the negative, and resolved according to the findings which result from the opposition. The primary definition of the kingfisher, while emphasizing its condition of harmony with the world of nature, implies the existence of incipient discord. The image of the rainbow, an arc bridging a freshened world, is linked to the idea of life and creation. The tension embedded in the image of a rainbow spun out over the sky, dependent upon external forces of climate and

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<sup>1</sup>Georgian Poetry 1911-1912 (London: The Poetry Bookshop, 1912), p. 63. (First Edition, published December, 1912).

<sup>2</sup>The reasons for preferring the reading "thy" to "my" in line four are set out in Appendix C, pp. 264-265.

atmosphere, and therefore fragile and vulnerable to change, anticipates the argument of the poem. The kingfisher's capacity to withstand changes of context is to be tested by the positions of the poetic argument.

In the opening definition of the creation of the kingfisher, there is a unity of opposites; a meeting of the contrary forces of strength and fragility, colour and transparency, ethereality and corporeality. Although these contraries are partially resolved by the kingfisher's placement -- the product of a lineage which has blended these forces before birth -- the bird can be seen as a creature subject to change. The suggestion is that the kingfisher, even when placed in a setting of natural innocence, contains a complexity which requires testing by experience. As the tranquil product of conflict, the kingfisher is obedient to the laws of its creation:

And, as her mother's name was Tears,  
 So runs it in thy blood to choose  
 For haunts the lonely pools, and keep  
 In company with trees that weep.

The kingfisher's mother, the rainbow, has transmitted the properties of tears, and, in a sense, abandoned her child to a beauty which is nourished by isolation. The sense of abandonment to beauty is expressed in the second line of the poem, "And left thee all her lovely hues", where "left" is suggestive of the process of transmission and the consciousness that the kingfisher is separate and distinct.

But the mother has provided for her child by giving it the predisposition "to choose / For haunts the lonely pools". The abandonment is justified by the kingfisher's innate capacity to dwell in surroundings which are, in a sense, part of its genealogy. The tears, the rainbow, and the kingfisher, represent three points of distillation of the setting, and the kingfisher is the terminal point of a greater

condensation which includes the "lonely pools" and the "trees that weep". Because the second verse of the poem initiates a process of testing by altering the kingfisher's context, it is necessary to examine the nature of the interdependence described in the first verse.

The rainbow is the celestial distillation of a "human" force ("her mother"), and the end-product of an unchanging process of growth and natural transmission. The world of art which is offered in the second verse is a sign of the speaker's desire to enter into the world of the kingfisher, and is thus a measure of the speaker's capacity to comprehend the natural world on its own terms. While the speaker is educated by the kingfisher, the argument of the poem evaluates the significance of a condition of ordered cultivation. The kingfisher inhabits a world of colourful disarray and interpenetration. Like the rainbow, it is an example of the re-ordering of two different principles unified by the variations of the natural cycle. The sun is the medium through which the rainbow, and therefore, the kingfisher, is brought into existence. The rainbow is the medium through which invisible light reveals its constituents.

In the second stanza, the kingfisher is offered a world of cultivated pride and responsiveness:

Go you and, with such glorious hues,  
 Live with proud Peacocks in green parks;  
 On lawns as smooth as shining glass,

The observer is to test the bird against a foreign context, to measure its capacity to dwell within a negative world. However, before the test can be seen as conclusive, the observer must define his own notions of negation. The world offered is designed to contradict the world established in the first stanza, but it cannot be seen as contradictory by the observer until the kingfisher (or his thinking about

the kingfisher) has been tested. The second verse is thus a way of discovering the negative attributes of an alternative world such that the observer can acquire new knowledge. Because the alternative mode is presented as one to be investigated and not as a previously investigated condition, a distinct tonal ambivalence arises. The observer senses the joy of being responsive to exposure, and, because of this, the test is made more severe. As the natural objects presented in the first stanza are transmitted into objects created by the human world, and the kingfisher is exposed to a new richness, the lines gain an expansive freshness. The artifacts of cultivation are not to be denied by a formal, continued argument but by the enactment of a problem of the imagination. The two-rhyme structure of the first verse is preserved, but each rhyme-word is given an additional point of harmony. "Hues", "wings", and "kings" have terminal alliteration, while the medial vowels of "parks", "glass", and "marks" are assonantal. The idea of transmutation rather than abrupt change is reinforced by the rhyme structure. The "b" rhyme of verse one becomes the "a" rhyme of verse two, suggesting gradual differentiation rather than sudden transition. The frequency of "s" sounds is preserved in the second verse, accompanying the developmental status of the argument in the second stanza. In terms of argument, the relationship between the two verses is one of contradiction, while, from a formal point of view, the relationship is one of partial coincidence and partial negation.

The voice which urges a change of context suggests that the kingfisher's beauty is contradicted by privacy and seclusion. Further, it suggests that the bird should share the life of the peacock by being open to public observation:

Let every feather show its marks;  
 Get thee on boughs and clap thy wings  
 Before the windows of proud Kings.

At the same time as the voice urges the kingfisher to convert its tranquillity into the activities of performance and display, the "lonely pools" of the first verse are converted into "the windows of proud kings", and the fragile moisture spanning the green world is converted into the "shining glass" of lawns. In this way, the natural objects presented in the first verse are sublimated into the refractory artifacts of the cultivated world. These conversions, linked to the presence of a human observer, become suggestive of the permanence of fame and reputation. Because the reader has received the full imprint of the sense of natural dwelling established by the first verse, he has, in a sense, learned more about the nature of contradiction than the observer who, although capable of recording the sense of dwelling, has not merged with it at this point. The lyric voice of the first stanza assures the reader that the in-dwelling of the kingfisher is a pattern for what is valuable in human life. The observer, however, is still engaged in the process of discovery.

It is significant, therefore, that the third verse begins, without mediation or qualification, in the negative:

Nay, lovely Bird, thou art not vain;  
 Thou hast no proud, ambitious mind;

The lyrically creative voice of a watcher, rather than an innovator, returns. In contradicting the negative world established by the second verse, and affirming the positive world of the first verse, the voice obeys the circular thought-form of the lyric. By being contained in the expectancy of lyric movement, the affirmation is closer to re-discovery than to discovery. That the world offered in verse two can be swept away by a single word, and with such

simplicity, suggests that this answer is potentially present throughout the poem. Embedded in the melody of the first stanza is the idea of eventual resolution and affirmation. The lyric has answered a question by presenting one, and has affirmed an ever-present answer through melody. Further, the way in which the alternative proposal is cancelled suggests that the alternative world presents a greater contradiction than is initially intuited by the reader -- that the opposition is not a vigorous test but a turn of thought.

In the final verse, the observer is given the ability to tell the kingfisher that this projection would have been a denial of life, suggesting that the safety of dwelling can be achieved only within the context prepared for it by the sources of its creation. The brief harmony established by the vision of the alternative world suggests the presence of a characteristic temptation on the part of the observer to substitute cultural expectations for a natural inclination towards simplicity. The transition from "Bird" to "I" is facilitated by the gradual humanization of the bird in the second verse. Although this is formulated for the purposes of presenting a counter-argument, it anticipates the movement from "observed" to "observer" which takes place in the final stanza. By entering into the life of the kingfisher, the observer offers it the ambiguities of his own experience. By noting the impact of this projection upon his imaginative sense of the kingfisher, the observer is able to cancel the significance of the cultivated world on behalf of the kingfisher and himself. A characteristic tension of pastoralism -- that one condition is always a function of a second condition -- is fulfilled by the fact that the tranquil world of nature is capable of yielding to a more complex world in terms of imaginative possibility.

Although the primal world of the kingfisher is reaffirmed when the lyric voice returns to the contexts described in the first verse, the argument stresses the ambivalence of experience by placing the observer within the meditative context of rural solitude:

I also love a quiet place  
That's green, away from all mankind;  
A lonely pool, and let a tree  
Sigh with her bosom over me.

At this point, the observer and the kingfisher exist on parallel terms. The "lonely pool", the sighing tree, and the sense of seclusion allow the observer to be seen in the primary context of the kingfisher. Humanization is achieved through transpositions of material which emphasize the reflective nature of the observer. "Lonely", in the natural world, becomes "away from all mankind", and "weep", by being transmuted into "sigh with her bosom over me", links a new, human category to the diffuse personification of the opening verse.

As has been noted in the second section of this chapter, where Davies's idea of independence was examined in terms of Marvell's notion of the condition of solitude, Davies does not adduce an unequivocal argument in support of the solitary mode of existence. The image of maternal benevolence which closes "The Kingfisher" is, perhaps, an indication of Davies's ambivalent attitude towards this condition. The essential component of Davies's attitude seems to be related to the notion of freedom of choice and to the capacity "to choose / For haunts the lonely pools" without constraint or obligation, rather than to a specific conception of the value of isolation. In contrast to many of the poems which will be discussed in the following chapter, poems in which the speaker enters into a solitude beyond the range of call, Davies's pastoral poems are informed by a positive view of the relationship between the human observer

and the natural world. In the certainty that freedom of choice leads to an affirmatory alternative world, Davies's pastoralism protects him from the brutal awareness of the ruins of time which characterizes poems such as "The Daisy",<sup>1</sup> "The Posts",<sup>2</sup> and "This Night".<sup>3</sup> The irrefutable knowledge of mortality, that men are "dying children",<sup>4</sup> is resolved by a capacity to turn towards an imaginative or spiritual constant. For example, in both "The Ways of Time"<sup>5</sup> and "Thunderstorms",<sup>6</sup> the poetic argument is directed towards an affirming principle of experience after an examination of the phenomena of loss and deprivation:

The Ways of Time

As butterflies are but winged flowers,  
Half sorry for their change, who fain,  
So still and long they lie on leaves,  
Would be thought flowers again --

E'en so my thoughts, that should expand,  
And grow to higher themes above,  
Return like butterflies to lie  
On the old things I love.

Thunderstorms

My mind has thunderstorms,  
That brood for heavy hours:  
Until they rain me words,  
My thoughts are drooping flowers  
And sulking, silent birds.

<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 54, pp. 92-93.

<sup>2</sup>Poem no. 94, p. 146.

<sup>3</sup>Poem no. 188, p. 227.

<sup>4</sup>"An Early Love", Poem no. 145, pp. 189-190, l. 3.

<sup>5</sup>Poem no. 16, p. 53.

<sup>6</sup>Poem no. 115, p. 166.

Yet come, dark thunderstorms,  
 And brood your heavy hours;  
 For when you rain me words,  
 My thoughts are dancing flowers  
 And joyful singing birds.

The readiness to turn towards an imaginative constant is not restricted to poems which embody the poetic "I" of the meditative lyric. The argument of an amatory pastoral such as "This Green Orchard",<sup>1</sup> where the natural world is invoked through a plurality of vision, displays a similar tendency to alight upon a mental territory which has been given idyllic status:

The healthiest place for love is here,  
 And not in any room;  
 Out in this old, green orchard, with  
 The apple trees in bloom.  
 For here we see no idle hooks;  
 No empty shelf or box,  
 To set love's thoughts on sable scarves,  
 Or stoles of silver fox.  
 The first sweet lovers known to life,  
 Had nothing more than this:  
 Shall we, far richer, when compared,  
 Be poorer in our bliss?

However, the poetic argument is atypical in that it demonstrates the negative properties of the cultivated world in terms of the requirements of love. As can be seen in "Where We Agree"<sup>2</sup> "To-morrow"<sup>3</sup> and "To-night"<sup>4</sup> the power of love is capable of tempering the demerits of sophistication. Although the speaker in "This Green Orchard" enjoins his mistress to renounce the material tokens of love in favour of Nature's innocent bounty, the more tractable amorist of

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<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 546, pp. 462-463.

<sup>2</sup>Poem no. 538, p. 458.

<sup>3</sup>Poem no. 542, p. 461.

<sup>4</sup>Poem no. 543, p. 461.

these ~~three~~ poems expresses his confidence in love as a force capable of overriding the power of desirable objects. "Where We Agree", for example, while drawing upon material derived from the parallel antithesis which exists between natural and artificial forms, emphasizes the compatibility of vision which arises through love. In contrast to "The Kingfisher", where the disparity of viewpoint between the kingfisher and the observer demands gradual education towards imaginative affirmation of an alternative world, a process which utilizes similar natural and artificial equivalents, "Where We Agree" suggests that differences of situational and material preference are subordinate to the unifying recognition of human worth which is brought about by love:

Give her her ribbon, belt or scarf --  
 To match my rainbow in the sky;  
 Let her prefer her looking-glass,  
 When dewdrops meet me, eye to eye.  
 Give her her pretty flowers or stars,  
 Embossed in silk and figured lace;  
 While I prefer their living forms,  
 Set in a green or azure place.  
 Give her her choice, and give me mine,  
 Remembering still Love's greater worth --  
 That she and I prefer each other  
 To any thing in Heaven or Earth.

A similar mutuality of perspective is implied by the relationship between "To-morrow" and "To-night". After "To-morrow" has explored the "wild orchard" in terms of its capacity to become a tribute to love, asking

What can I find in my wild orchard,  
 To please your pretty eyes to-morrow;<sup>1</sup>

"To-night" formulates an equivalent rhetorical position with reference to the urban condition:

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<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 542, p. 461, ll. 1 - 2.

What can I find in the city shops,  
To please your pretty eyes to-night;<sup>1</sup>

The catalogue of possibilities which follows each question is an index of the speaker's unselfish commitment to the gratification of an alien sensibility. The rural tableau established by "To-morrow" is peopled with natural objects which have gained the status of loyal companions to a mood of security and gratitude. For example, in constructing a simile which emphasizes the bee as setting a scale of vision for the speaker, Davies emphasizes the familiar minutiae of a stabilized vision:

A bee as big as a little bird;  
Flowers red or white, pink, blue or yellow?  
Or a bird as small as the bumble bee --

In this construction, the image of the bee describes an arc which establishes the dimensions of the poetic vision. The equations of quantity implied by the simile generate a sense of a familiar territory, which rewards repeated scrutiny because these equations superimpose dimensions of spatial comparison and mobility of perspective on its everyday features. As in "Following a Bee"<sup>2</sup> where the bee leads the observer through the "high walls of grass" towards the secluded violets of April, the "bumble bee" defines an area of significance for the speaker by exerting a familiarizing influence which is the cumulative product of poems such as "My Lady Comes",<sup>3</sup> "The Bee Lover",<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 543, p. 461, ll. 1 - 2.

<sup>2</sup>Poem no. 622, p. 500.

<sup>3</sup>Poem no. 719, pp. 569-570.

<sup>4</sup>Poem no. 524, pp. 451-452.

"A Drinking Song",<sup>1</sup> and "Stings".<sup>2</sup> Thus, the area of vision which is defined by "To-morrow" may be characterized as one which reveals the imaginative flexibility of familiar items. Conversely, although "To-night" purports to affirm the cultivated world because of the demands of love, there is little evidence of enrichment of perspective or significance. The tone of whimsical indulgence which presents

A lovely gown that's made of silk,  
Soft to the hand, and gossamer-light?  
A little book with silver clasps,  
With golden words on all its pages?

cedes to the detached irony of

Two bowls of glass, wherein the lights  
Flit here and there, like birds in cages?  
A dog to wind up like a clock,  
That's made to growl, and then to yap?  
Or Cupid as a fountain, made  
To piddle in his mother's lap?

In this respect, it is significant that the frequently recurrent image of the caged bird<sup>3</sup> is related to an image which has acquired the tendency to express antipathy through its rôle in "The Hill-side Park"<sup>4</sup> -- the man-made cupid and its well adjusted fountain. In contrast to the visual flexibility of "To-Morrow", "To-Night" discloses a world of static construction and limitation which is heralded by the "silver clasps" of the fifth line, reinforced by the image of piscine incarceration in the seventh line, and completed

<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 4, pp. 26-27.

<sup>2</sup>Poem no. 571, p. 475.

<sup>3</sup>See poems no. 139, pp. 183-184; no. 48, pp. 87-88; no. 187, p. 227; no. 57, pp. 97-98; no. 176, pp. 219-220.

<sup>4</sup>Poem no. 11, pp. 34-35.

by the images of mechanical fatuousness which close the poem.

"The Hill-side Park"<sup>1</sup> provides a direct statement of Davies's conception of the Nature-Art antithesis. In its repudiation of the world of gardens, the poem invents a dominant Neo-Classical position while following a convention of the Renaissance Pastoral:

When Marvell, at the end of our period [Elizabethan] wrote about a mower's hatred of gardens, he was representing the world of Nature, the uncultivated, the pure, by the untamed, uncorrupted fields; and the world of Art, the civilized, the cultivated, the sphere in which men had meddled with Nature, by the garden. He was, of course, simplifying for his own purposes a difficult philosophical opposition between Art and Nature, but he is none the less putting, with considerable subtlety, a point of view which was frequently expressed in the Renaissance, and which recurs with some persistence in the history of our literature.<sup>2</sup>

Although Davies appears to reject methodized Nature, his use of the closed heroic couplet implies the presence of an imaginative allegiance to the idea of well-wrought design. An awareness of the full range of the pastoral tradition, albeit an unselfconscious insight, allows the poet to hold back the curtain of contemporary values in order to glimpse the satisfactions of an age less perturbed by the spectre of urban encroachment. Although the couplets fulfil their primary rôle in mirroring the expressed theme of fatuous artificiality, an unobtrusive deftness of construction, reinforced by the eighteenth century notion of a Distant Prospect which closes the poem, tempers the tone of censure with a suggestion of praise:

Some banks cropped close, and lawns smooth mown and green,  
Where, when a daisy's guiltless face was seen,  
Its pretty head came sacrifice to pride  
Of human taste -- I saw upon the side  
Of a steep hill. Without a branch of wood  
Plants, giant-leaved, like boneless bodies stood.  
The flowers had colonies, not one was seen

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<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 11, pp. 34-35.

<sup>2</sup>Kermode, English Pastoral Poetry, p. 37.

To go astray from its allotted green,  
 But to the light like mermaid's faces came  
 From waves of green, and scarce two greens the same.  
 And everywhere man's ingenuity  
 On fence and bordering: for I could see  
 The tiny scaffolding to hold the heads  
 And faces overgrown of flowers in beds  
 On which their weak-developed frames must fall,  
 Had they not such support upright and tall.  
 There was a fountain, and its water's leap  
 Was under a full-quivered Cupid's keep.  
 And from his mother's lip the spray was blown  
 Upon adjusted rock, selected stone;  
 And so was placed that all the waters fell  
 Into a small ravine in a small dell,  
 And made a stream where that wee river raved,  
 As gold his locks and margent amber paved --  
 This park, it was a miracle of care,  
 But sweeter far to me the prospects there:  
 The far beyond, where lived Romance near seas  
 And pools in haze, and in far realms of trees.  
 I saw where Severn had run wide and free,  
 Out where the Holms lie flat upon a sea  
 Whose wrinkles wizard Distance smoothed away,  
 And still sails flecked its face of silver-grey.

(viii) A particular aspect of the Nature-Art antithesis, the Town-Country opposition, has been discussed briefly in the third section of this chapter in order to establish the nature of Davies's pastoral "I". In this section, an attempt will be made to comment upon the significance of this theme in terms of Davies's equivocal commitment to the rural condition.

"Love's Rivals",<sup>1</sup> a poem which records the commonality of the world of Nature and the world of Art, provides a useful starting point for discussion:

What glorious sunsets have their birth  
 In Cities fouled by smoke!  
 This tree -- whose roots are in a drain --  
 Becomes the greenest Oak!  
 No hand's more gentle than a thief's,  
 Greed has the brightest eyes;  
 And by their straight, clear, honest looks,  
 Great villains live on lies!

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<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 553, p. 466.

Yet Love, whose source is sweet and pure,  
 Still makes no question why  
 A thief should have more gentle hands,  
 Or Greed a brighter eye.

As in "The Kingfisher", the world of Art is seen as being capable of enhancing the world of Nature. Although the opening paradox initiates a general series of aphorisms which point to an ambiguous quality in common experience, it may be isolated as a significant expression of imaginative duality.

For example, in "The Soul's Destroyer",<sup>1</sup> a city pastoral<sup>2</sup> in which the speaker moves through a mental landscape born of the random accumulation of art working through time, the clamouring city is ruralized by a persistent intuition of the open serenity of the country which is deepened by the angular geography of London:

One morning I awoke with lips gone dry,  
 The tongue an obstacle to choke the throat,  
 . . . . .  
 Then thought of home and of the purer life,  
 Of Nature's air, and having room to breathe,  
 A sunny sky, green fields, and water's sound;  
 Of peaceful rivers not yet fretful grown  
 As when their mouths have tasted Ocean's salt;  
 And where the rabbits sit amid their ferns,  
 Or leap, to flash the white of their brown tails.  
 . . . . .  
 I heard the city roaring like a beast  
 That's wronged by one that feared an open strife  
 And triumphed by his cunning -- as I walked.  
 It followed on for hours with rushing sound,  
 As some great cataract had burst all bounds  
 And was oncoming with its mingled pines --  
 The fallen sentinels -- to choke the sea.  
 Once in awhile the sound, though not less near,  
 Seemed distant, barred by dwellings closely joined,  
 But at a corner's turn heard full again;  
 Yet lessened soon and sure to softer ways  
 Of a low murmuring -- as though it found

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<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 14, pp. 41-52.

<sup>2</sup>Defined by Marinelli as a work which presents 'memoirs of a terrifying urban development of which the discovery of evil is the central focus.'<sup>3</sup>

Marinelli, Pastoral, p.78.

Anger was vain, and coaxed for my return.  
 All day walked I, and that same night, I scorned  
 The shelter of a house, lay peaceful down  
 Beneath the glorious stars; beneath that nest  
 Of singing stars men call the Milky Way; <sup>1</sup>

The principle of imaginative interdependence between City and  
 Country, that

...one who lives for long in London Town  
 Doth feel his love divided 'tween the two -- <sup>2</sup>

is expanded in "A Strange City".<sup>3</sup> Here, the urban experience is  
 given a validity which, in some respects, dulls the glow of the  
 natural world. Like the topographical poem in which the danger of  
 a distant prospect is converted by an intuition of safety into a  
 consciousness of the sublime, "A Strange City" stabilizes the in-  
 calculable vistas of mythic experience until a consoling vision of  
 the human condition is achieved:

A wondrous city, that had temples there  
 More rich than that one built by David's son,  
 Which called forth Ophir's gold, . . . . .  
 . . . . .  
 I looked with awe on iron gates that could  
 Tell bloody stories if they had our tongues.  
 . . . . .  
 I saw in fancy fowl and green banks there,  
 And Liza's barge rowed past a thousand swans.  
 . . . . .  
 And yet, methought, when first I entered there,  
 Into that city with my wondering mind,  
 How marvellous its many sights and sounds;  
 . . . . .  
 How common then seemed Nature's hills and fields  
 Compared with these high domes and even streets, <sup>4</sup>

But the pattern of affirmation followed by rejection which characterizes  
 Davies's apprehension of the urban condition is not abandoned.

<sup>1</sup>"The Soul's Destroyer", ll. 97-136, pp. 44-45.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., ll. 23-24, p. 42.

<sup>3</sup>Poem no. 149, pp. 197-200.

<sup>4</sup>"A Strange City", ll. 1-69, pp. 197-199.

Inevitably, after the observer has assimilated the marvels of the city, the angle of his gaze is decreased until it accommodates harsh reminders of indigence and despair. The visual items which precede the revelation of despair prefigure the new dimensions of the observer's area of vision:

My eyes grew tired of all that flesh and stone;  
And, as a snail that crawls on a smooth stalk,  
Will reach the end and find a sharpened thorn --  
So did I reach the cruel end at last.<sup>1</sup>

Further, before wonderment becomes disenchantment, an image of petrification signals the decay of the observer's ability to respond to the "solemn courtyards":<sup>2</sup>

I heard the drums and soft brass instruments,  
Led by the silver cornets clear and high --  
Whose sounds turned playing children into stones.<sup>3</sup>

After the sinister embrace "of an enchantress who / Would still detain her knight gone cold in love"<sup>4</sup> has presaged the invocation of a poisoned darkness which closes the poem, an unequivocal assessment of the urban condition is presented:

I saw that City with fierce human surge,  
With millions of dark waves that still spread out  
To swallow more of their green boundaries.  
.....  
How sick I grew to hear that lasting noise,  
And all those people forced across my sight,  
Knowing the acres of green fields and woods  
That in some country parts outnumbered men;  
.....  
If I must be fenced in, then let my fence  
Be some green hedgerow; under its green sprays,  
That shake suspended, let me walk in joy --<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., ll. 56-58, p. 199.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., l. 29, p. 198.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., ll. 40-42, p. 198.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., ll. 46-47, p. 198.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., ll. 78-112, pp. 199-200.

Although the poem closes with a direct rejection of the City, it can be seen that a zone of affirmation overlaps a zone of disillusionment, in that imaginative vision, given the buoyancy of historical insight, is capable of gathering splendour amid confusion.

Even in the absence of this faculty, however, the poetic imagination is able to free itself from an urban context by alighting upon a plane of rural profusion. Although the harshness of the city remains unaltered, a poem such as "In Spring-Time"<sup>1</sup> suggests that the restrictive pressure of the urban experience can become a catalyst which provokes an intense awareness of the natural world:

There's many a pool that holds a cloud  
 Deep down for miles, to float along;  
 There's many a hedge that's white with may,  
 To bring the backward birds to song;  
 There's many a country-lane that smells  
 Of beanfields, through the night and day:  
 Then why should I be here this hour,  
 In Spring-time, when the month is May ?

There's nothing else but stone I see  
 With but this ribbon of a sky;  
 And not a garden big enough  
 To share it with a butterfly.  
 Why do I walk these dull dark streets,  
 In gloom and silence, all day long --  
 In Spring-time, when the blackbird's day  
 Is four and twenty hours of song ?

The poem opens with an image of visual aperture which prefigures a similar index of perception in the first line of the second verse. In juxtaposing cloud and pool, the first line of the poem measures the circumference of the vision of the natural world which informs the first verse. Similarly, the "ribbon of a sky" which opens the second verse establishes the dimensions of the area of perception which forms its topic. The illimitable distance which separates the cloud from its reflection, a quantity whose ethereal axis runs "deep

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<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 342, pp. 336-337.

down for miles", is an index of the imaginative territory which is to be explored. In contrast to this boundlessness, the stony lintel which intercepts the sky of the second verse anticipates the enforced "gloom and silence" of the closing lines.

The network of pools, hedges, and country lanes which reticulates the first verse supports a vision of clouds, birds, and beanfields acquiring brightness, melody, and fragrance. The first group of items (pools, hedges, country lanes) is given the rôle of assimilating, retaining, and extending the visual, auditory, and olfactory properties of the second group (clouds, birds, beanfields). Reinforcing this sense of potentiality, of energy poised to meet energy, is an implication of linear growth which derives from the horizontal tendency of the verse itself. While the clouds "float along"<sup>1</sup> the interstices of air and water, the "hedge" sends a brightening tangent towards the country lanes. Thus, two patterns, one which disposes items in an arrangement which ensures maximal extension, and one which provides the necessary sense of space for growth, combine to promote an expansive vision of the profusion of the natural world.

The urban perspective which is explored in the second verse of the poem is introduced by a rhetorical question which establishes a temporal consciousness. In contrast to the blackbird's unrestricted "four and twenty hours of song", the "I" of the poem delimits experience by linking it to a specific hour. In this way, the closing lines of the first verse herald the images of constriction which exteriorize the speaker's estimation of the City's "dull dark streets".

As has been mentioned, the image of a "ribbon of a sky" is a negation of the open image of reflected cloud which begins the poem.

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<sup>1</sup>Italics mine.

However, the most significant marker of the speaker's attitude at this point is raised in

And not a garden big enough  
To share it with a butterfly.

In vitiating a desire to participate in the life of the butterfly, the city annihilates a primary tenet of Davies's poetic vision: the idea of mutual communion between the self and the natural world, directed through a hallowing of everyday experience. <sup>u</sup>Urban restriction does not permit the empathy of

Say what you like,  
All things love me!  
I pick no flowers --  
That wins the Bee.  
  
The Summer's Moths  
Think my hand one --  
To touch their wings --  
With Wind and Sun.<sup>1</sup>

or the imaginative interpenetration of

No house of stone  
Was built for me;  
When the Sun shines --  
I am a bee.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, for Davies, the butterfly is an emblem of the perfect freedom implicit in such communion -- a graceful distillation of liberty which projects the sweetness of trust and love, as in the following lyrics:

To a Butterfly

We have met,  
You and I;  
Loving man,  
Lovely Fly.  
  
If I thought  
You saw me,  
And love made  
You so free

---

<sup>1</sup>"Nature's Friend", Poem no. 37, pp. 78-79, ll. 1-8.

<sup>2</sup>"The Elements", Poem no. 105, p. 153, ll. 1-4.

To come close --  
 I'd not move  
 Till you tired  
 Of my love.<sup>1</sup>

#### The Example

Here's an example from  
 A Butterfly;  
 That on a rough, hard rock  
 Happy can lie;  
 Friendless and all alone  
 On this unsweetened stone.  
 Now let my bed be hard,  
 No care take I;  
 I'll make my joy like this  
 Small Butterfly;  
 Whose happy heart has power  
 To make a stone a flower.<sup>2</sup>

But the indifferent and obstructive stone of city streets cannot absorb the imprint of the butterfly or retain the blackbird's song. When, in "The Example", the butterfly transfers the inflorescence of its living joy to "rough, hard rock", the observer is imbued with a sense of reciprocity which leads to imaginative emulation. In the context of the city, however, emulation takes the form of passive recall. In order to counteract this passivity, the natural world of "In Spring Time" is reflected through images of activation, exuberance, and growth.

While the anaphoraic pattern of the first verse<sup>3</sup> suggests a flourishing landscape of hedgerows which augment the melody of a "flowery, green, bird-singing land",<sup>4</sup> the bare statements of the

<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 639, p. 509.

<sup>2</sup>Poem no. 83, p. 138.

<sup>3</sup>Provided by the repetition of the introductory phrase "There's many"; the parallel syntax which follows this phrase; the aural harmony of "to float", "to song", "to bring"; the chiming of "that's white", "that holds", "that smells"; and the terminal repetition of "may".

<sup>4</sup>"In May", Poem no. 84, p. 139, l. 24.

second verse disclose a sombre wasteland of shuttered thoroughfares which harbour "gloom and silence". As can be seen in "The House Builder",<sup>1</sup> the idea of silence and the deprivation of melody is, for Davies, an analogue of despair:

The Rain has lost more music keys,  
 One harp the less for Summer's Breeze;  
 The Sheep have lost one of their shades,  
 The Cows one place to rub their sides;  
 The crash has come, the Oak lies now,  
 With all its ruined branches, low.  
 And I am filled with angry pain;  
 . . . . .  
 Where this Oak stood a house must be,  
 Not half so fair as a green tree;<sup>2</sup>

Here, the exfoliation of the countryside, filtered through the Romantic image of leaves as Aeolian harp, represents the destruction of imaginative reciprocity. Intact, the oak is perceived as a link between the passivity of earth and the elemental energy of rain and sky. Further, in overspreading the fresh tranquillity of natural pastures, its protective canopy implies an inviolable moral order which corresponds to Davies's idea of the sanctity of life. That the interplay of wind and leaf is an emblem of the creative act is shown in the contrast between the builder who sees "no beauty in the bark"<sup>3</sup> and the speaker who hears "the bird's notes clear":<sup>4</sup>

The crash that made my last hope fall,  
 Was music to that builder's soul.  
 . . . . .  
 What is this life, if we forget  
 To fill our ears when Nature sings,  
 Our eyes search for her lovely things? [sic]

---

<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 649, pp. 516-517.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., ll. 1-12, pp. 516-517.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., l. 15.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., l. 22.

Of which she keeps a wondrous store,  
And charges us our love, no more.<sup>1</sup>

The Oak's response, in pressing sap and breathing leaves, to the unconfined passions of the sky emerges as a natural order which bestows a sense of dwelling upon "Sheep" and "Cows". The speaker's response to "leaves drinking rain"<sup>2</sup> emerges as a realization of melody and natural fruitfulness. Thus, through the mediation of the Oak, the speaker receives an intimation of gentle order which corresponds to a belief in the value of creative song. As a lifeless column of "ruined branches", the Oak provides only "planks" which shut out the song of birds and which satisfy the urban predilections of a builder who would

. . . rather sit inside walls four,  
With plaster roof and wooden floor,  
Than under a green tree and hear,  
As I have done, the birds' notes clear  
Among the leaves in Summer. . . .<sup>3</sup>

In defining the oak as an axis of harmony whose presence confers a sense of song and place, Davies utilizes an aspect of the theme of Urban-Rural disjunction which forms the primary focus of "The Old Oak Tree".<sup>4</sup> Here, the contrast between the commodious virescence of the natural world and the unsustaining aridity of the urban condition is exteriorized through a similar idea of dwelling. While the oak

Within whose hollow trunk a man  
Could stable his big horse with ease.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., ll. 13-28.

<sup>2</sup>"The Rain", Poem no. 32, p.75.

<sup>3</sup>"The House Builder", Poem no. 649, p. 517, ll. 19-23.

<sup>4</sup>Poem no. 125, p. 174.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., ll. 3-4.

is able to house and to protect and so is excluded from any form of moral censure, the city is held responsible for a pattern of starvation, exposure, and madness. In contrast to the closing vision of arboreal repose arising from the guiding architectural metaphor of a house among the leaves, a condition which provides for the recognition of celestial harmony, the

. . . homeless children lying down  
And sleeping in the cold, night air --  
Like doors and walls, in London town.<sup>1</sup>

are seen (in terms of similar imagery) as victims of a Medusa-like city which dehumanizes its inhabitants. Thus, the idea of dwelling, a characteristic analogue of reciprocity between the observer and the natural world,<sup>2</sup> is capable of absorbing the dissimilar attributes of a particular polarity.

Before examining a poem which presents a harmonized vision of the possibility of an ideal relationship between two modes of existence, "An Old House in London",<sup>3</sup> a further note on the stringency of this polarity is necessary. Both "Fancy"<sup>4</sup> and "In the Country"<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., ll. 14-15.

<sup>2</sup>See "In June", Poem no. 744, p. 589:

"I'll enter in June's cool house,  
.....  
When I am in the sun can knock  
Its roof or side, and knock in vain;"

and "The Green Tent", Poem no. 62, pp. 101-102:

"Summer has spread a cool green tent  
Upon the bare poles of this tree;"

<sup>3</sup>Poem no. 70, pp. 107-108.

<sup>4</sup>Poem no. 81, pp. 125-137.

<sup>5</sup>Poem no. 68, p. 106.

When I stand here alone at night,  
 And see but nothing hear --  
 The silence of so many stars  
 Is almost pain to bear.

Yet if I heard one creak in Heaven,  
 One little break or move --  
 What would become of Faith and Hope,  
 And of the Gods we love?

If but one star cried out at night,  
 To burst like any pod --  
 Where shall we find, in all the Heavens,  
 A chapel for our God? <sup>1</sup>

In relating ethical abstractions to a principle of cosmic organization, Davies clarifies his notion of a moral universe. Through their association with a cosmic organization which implies a moral order, his "Bass-singing, belted bee",<sup>2</sup> "Tom Tit clinging upside down",<sup>3</sup> and "That little hunchback in the snow",<sup>4</sup> the robin, partake of a friendly colloquy which raises them to the level of co-workers in a munificent land. Thus, to Davies, solitude encourages the standpoint of mutuality which promotes genuine address within the context of the natural world. It is in the fulfilment of his notion of "staring", a mode of perception which will be discussed during an examination of Davies's vision of community, that the validity of the rural condition is confirmed.

The full significance of the unifying power which proceeds from the adoption of this standpoint is demonstrated in "An old House in London".<sup>5</sup> Here, a country home is seen as an ordering principle

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<sup>1</sup>"Sound and Light", Poem no. 529, p. 454.

<sup>2</sup>"The Song of Love", Poem no. 407, p. 377, xxxiv.

<sup>3</sup>"To Play Alone", Poem no. 511, p. 446, l. 1.

<sup>4</sup>"In the Snow", Poem no. 216, p. 247, l. 2.

<sup>5</sup>Poem no. 70, pp. 107-108.

which, by fenestration, imposes design and harmony upon its precincts -- unifying artifact and natural world:

And thou didst like a lighthouse raise  
 Thy windows, that their light could show  
 Across the broad, green calm below;  
 And there were trees, beneath whose boughs  
 Stood happy houses, sheep and cows,  
 And wilful brooks, that would not yield  
 To hedges, to mark out each field,  
 But every field that they passed through  
 Was by them cut and counted two.  
 From thy back windows thou couldst see,  
 Half-way between St. Paul's and thee,  
 Swans with their shadows, and the barge  
 Of state old Thames took in his charge.<sup>1</sup>

In indicating the possibility of a symbiotic relationship between man-made object and the world of nature, the poem accords with the equivocal perspective of "The Hill-side Park" mentioned earlier in this chapter. Through the mediation of "Fancy",<sup>2</sup> the observer reinstates a condition of mutual affirmation which corresponds to the ordering impulse of the creative imagination. In conjunction with the connotations of guardianship implied by the "lighthouse", the delicate sense of balanced illumination which emanates from the house may be regarded as an index of the function of human observation. Harmonized by this sentinel, the Urban-Rural antithesis shows itself to be one of degree rather than one of kind. As the old house enhances the beauty of a natural prospect, an ideal of aesthetic balance is achieved. Although this intimation of balance is hypothetical in that it is activated by a temporal consciousness which senses an age

When Southwark was a lonely waste;  
 And Larks and Blackbirds sang around,<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 108, ll. 8-20.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 107, l. 1.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 107, ll. 4-5.

a mellifluent period in sharp contrast to the discordant clamour of the present, imaginative theory is, in a sense, substantiated by poetic form. While the first twenty lines record an undimmed vision of past perfection, the remaining twenty lines, which describe the present condition of the area, contain references to the past -- suggesting the possibility of an imaginative trace of the past continuing into the present. At line twenty-three, for example, "green meadows", a phrase which echoes the "green meadow-land" of the second line, serves as a reminder of tranquillity. Similarly, a later reference to "green lanes" rekindles a sense of openness and "green calm". Although, in themselves, these indices do not palliate present despair, they anticipate an affirmatory concluding couplet which restores the validity of an imaginative recreation of the past:

Thou that didst hear, in thy first hours,  
Birds sing, and saw the sweet wild flowers.

Thus, at closure, an impression of the fruitfulness of past melody outweighs an apprehension of loss, and the bearer of distant harmony, having established a listening-post in bygone fields, retains an intimation of the durability of an alternative world.

As has been noted, for Davies the validity of a particular mode of existence is confirmed by the way in which it provides for a standpoint of empathy and mutuality. As defined in "The Dumb World", Davies's conception of empathy emerges as a capacity to comprehend the sentience of an object of contemplation through a process of imaginative transference and projection:

The shot that kills a hare or bird  
Doth pass through me; I feel the wound<sup>1</sup>

It is by means of this capacity that Davies is able to perceive the

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<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 65, p. 103, ll. 11-12.

gap between natural dwelling and enforced displacement in terms of the non-human world. As in "The Kingfisher" and "A Swallow that Flew into the Room",<sup>1</sup> where natural placement measures incongruity, "Sheep"<sup>2</sup> explores the consequences of isolating dweller from dwelling.

When I was once in Baltimore,  
A man came up to me and cried,  
'Come, I have eighteen hundred sheep,  
And we will sail on Tuesday's tide.

'If you will sail with me, young man,  
I'll pay you fifty shillings down;  
These eighteen hundred sheep I take  
From Baltimore to Glasgow town.'

He paid me fifty shillings down,  
I sailed with eighteen hundred sheep;  
We soon had cleared the harbour's mouth,  
We soon were in the salt sea deep.

The first night we were out at sea  
Those sheep were quiet in their mind;  
The second night they cried with fear --  
They smelt no pastures in the wind.

They sniffed, poor things, for their green fields,  
They cried so loud I could not sleep:  
For fifty thousand shillings down  
I would not sail again with sheep.<sup>3</sup>

As a variation on the theme of Urban-Rural polarity in the form of a literary ballad, or rather, a partial imitation of a popular ballad, "Sheep" deploys an argument which is at once simple and precise. While the narrative "I" recounts the circumstances of the episode, incremental repetition and the employment of stock descriptive phrases such as "the salt sea deep" and "green fields" create an impression of proverbial discourse and acknowledged truth. The relationship between balladic structure and a poetic "I" whose imaginative scope extends from shepherd-narrator to popular raconteur provides

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<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 645, p. 513.

<sup>2</sup>Poem no. 88, p. 142.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

for a balanced suspension of pastoral elements within a sense of the picaresque.

In contrast to Davies's more characteristic mode of lyric mimesis, where a private or contemplative utterance overheard by the self is reflected in poetic form, "Sheep" is a representation of a discourse which attempts to absorb the rhetoric of public performance. For this reason, as a "plotted" sequence of events, the poem embodies simple visual and temporal indices which clarify its movement. Thus, in the two quatrains which form the introduction, an indication of the first speaker's initial position is followed by the second speaker's statement of an anticipated, future position. Here, the visual distance indicated in "From Baltimore to Glasgow Town" is linked, through "Tuesday's tide", to a temporal counter which begins the sequence of "the first night" and "the second night" in the fourth quatrain. Through the influence of these specific markers of space and time, statements such as "We soon had cleared the harbour's mouth" and "We soon were in the salt sea deep" in the third quatrain are unqualifiedly immediate. Following from the sum of these suggestions is an impression of a well-stationed narrative by which a movement from introduction (quatrains one and two) to resolution (quatrain five) through complication (quatrains three and four) is achieved.

By emphasizing sequential progression rather than cyclical accretion, Davies establishes formal conditions which help develop a pastoral perspective. The separation of sheep from pasture, a theme which is examined in the two quatrains which close the poem, is anticipated by the mention of the place names in the second quatrain. Further, the contrast between the detached and indifferent tone of this formulation and the tone of sympathetic involvement which closes the poem is heightened by the positional difference between

the second speaker and the final narrator. In a sense, the substitution of sea for land, directed through the transitional image of "the harbour's mouth", provides the clearest example of the incongruity Davies deplors. Unlike the urban condition, the sea cannot be pastoralized; an elemental disparity rules out the possibility of imaginative reconciliation.

In contrast to poems such as "An old House in London" and "The Soul's Destroyer", where a block of lines analysing the urban situation is followed by another block examining the rural condition, "Sheep" summarizes an antithesis in two kernel statements:

They smelt no pastures in the wind.

They sniffed, poor things, for their green fields,

Because the idea of dislocation is noted as an inevitable consequence of everyday transactions, and is thus a truth of experience, displacement is seen in terms of a movement which continues beyond the province of poetic argument. The closing sense of resolution derives not from an implication of remedial intervention but from the narrator's imaginative recognition of an unforeseen plight. In the spontaneity of sharing an aspiration to return, and by noticing, and so naming, the incongruity, the observer restores the sheep to their lost pastures. Although in "A Child's Pet",<sup>1</sup> a lyric which uses roughly similar material, the narrator is aware of the confusion of his flock, the absence of spatial and temporal cues tends to diminish the severity of the disorientation:

When I sailed out of Baltimore,  
 With twice a thousand head of sheep,  
 They would not eat, they would not drink,  
 But bleated o'er the deep.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 271, pp. 282-283.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., ll. 1-4.

It is through the mention of "pastures in the wind" in the parallel poem, "Sheep", that the poet achieves a clear appraisal of the validity of dwelling. In isolating a pastoral reflex of the non-human world, a yearning which attempts to transcend mandatory constraint by turning towards a remote but dependable alternative world, Davies indicates the significance of pastoralism as imaginative purview. In agreement with the sheep who align themselves to a memory of the wind-borne fragrance of "green fields", and with the "golden face" of the sunflower which

. . . turns towards the Sun  
And follows face to face.<sup>1</sup>

the pastoralist, like the speaker in "Beggar's Luck",<sup>2</sup> claims the soundness of a harmonized universe as his true place of rest.

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<sup>1</sup>"The Song of Love", Poem no. 407, p. 389, xci.

<sup>2</sup>Poem no. 527, p. 453.

"Where did you sleep in the Country, Lad?  
'It was a field of hay.'  
Did you sleep soundly there, and well?  
'Till after break of day.'

Where did you sleep in the City, Lad --  
Where did you rest your bones?  
'They gave me neither straw nor feather,  
And drove me away with stones.' "

CHAPTER V

BEYOND THE RANGE OF CALL : DAVIES'S  
APPREHENSION OF AN UNINTELLIGIBLE UNIVERSE

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O dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon,  
 Irrecoverably dark, total eclipse  
 Without all hope of day!

. . . . .  
 The sun to me is dark  
 And silent as the moon,  
 When she deserts the night,  
 Hid in her vacant interlunar cave.<sup>1</sup>

(i) In "An Evaluation of the Poetry of W.H. Davies", Louis Kronenberger expatiates on the pitfalls of allowing the beauty of "pure song" to be "swallowed up" in a collected edition "in which no selective fact whatever has been manifested":<sup>2</sup>

The W.H. Davies I had savored hitherto seemed like a simple, winsome fellow with a heart close to nature, loving little things and seeing large things in them, and singing in a fresh and happy voice that sometimes broke with artless charm. Nor is the W.H. Davies of these many pages altogether different from what I had supposed him. The man is as likable as he appeared to be; as much in love with life and in tune with nature; as sweetly humane and as vibrantly indignant. . . . If Davies has a child's sense of beauty, he has not a child's easy way of ignoring squalor. He hates what he has seen of poverty and injustice, and cries out constantly with a moral fervour that takes by surprise those of us who remember him best as writing playfully about bees and butterflies, or prettily about flowers, or whimsically about love.

Thus in this man whom we think of only as a minor poet there is a genuine concern with the major subject-matter of life. Unfortunately, however, Davies altogether lacks the poetic vision and power to cope with it. It is not that he is naive (and he is very naive); it is that whenever he seeks to be a large-scale poet he becomes hopelessly crude. A sentimentalist to begin with, he turns at once into a moralist defeated by his own sincerity. Neither the note of pathos nor the much deeper note of tragedy is ever piercingly sounded; a vision of life is never clearly projected; there is for much the most part only clumsiness or didacticism. "Oh, who can love thy slums with starving ones!" is how Davies sometimes writes, and it would perhaps be impossible to write worse.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>John Milton, Samson Agonistes, in Milton: Poetical Works, ed. by Douglas Bush (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 521, ll. 80-89.

<sup>2</sup>The New York Times Book Review, {July 21st, 1935}, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

While many "realistic" poems which deal with social deprivation and remedial action are irredeemably flawed in terms of diction and construction,<sup>1</sup> and are therefore incapable of generating a comprehensive poetic vision of the "mind-forg'd manacles" which exclude mankind from Eden, Davies's "tragic vision" of an unintelligible universe which suffers from the depredations of time and the inflexible rule of fate projects a coherent view of the terror of spiritual fragmentation which is a fundamental concern of the tragic mode. In his treatment of this theme, Davies utilizes two distinct conceptions of the ruins of time : the idea of the irreparable effects of the passage of time in terms of spiritual, imaginative, and physical deterioration, projected through traditional images of necrosis, transience and flux; and the notion that love, memory, and the poetic imagination are capable of remedying or counteracting temporal pressure. If the first conception fulfils the demands of a definition of the "tragic mode"<sup>2</sup> which incorporates a version of agon (here, as confrontation of the self and the inexorable onslaught of time), pathos (as engulfment by time), and sparagmos (as mortification), the second conception corresponds to the anagnorisis of

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<sup>1</sup>For example, from The Soul's Destroyer : "Saints and Lodgers", Poem no. 13, pp. 38-41; "Wondering Brown", Poem no. 24, pp. 60-61; "'Scotty' Bill", Poem no. 19, p. 55.

In addition : "Hope Abandoned", Poem no. 31, pp. 66-74; "The Homeless Man", Poem no. 742, pp. 586-588; "Strange People", Poem no. 739, pp. 583-584; "Brothers", Poem no. 722, pp. 571-572; "The Rev. Ebenezer Paul", Poem no. 716, pp. 567-568; "The Two Spirits", Poem no. 706, pp. 560-561; "My Old Acquaintance", Poem no. 211, pp. 244-245.

<sup>2</sup>"It is generally accepted that the rites from which Greek Drama grew were those of the god Dionysus. The pattern of his life, death and resurrection contained the following main episodes: his agon, or conflict with his enemy: his pathos, or suffering, downfall and defeat: then what might be called the triumph or revelation of Evil, (Death), his death and sparagmos, the tearing to pieces and scattering of his dismembered body: finally his resurrection and

the tragic cycle in its recognition of the life-affirming power of love. Thus, because they are generated by an awareness of time, and are, therefore, interfused with the pathos of a time-bound existence, the love poems which will be discussed in this chapter are isolated from those amatory lyrics which are born of an essentially comic vision stressing community, integration and symposium. "A Fleeting Passion" (No. 164), for example, relates the transience of the joy of love to a disparity of vision which emphasizes the theme of temporal spoliation:

Thou shalt not laugh, thou shalt not romp,  
 Let's grimly kiss with bated breath;  
 As quietly and solemnly  
 As Life when it is kissing Death.  
 Now in the silence of the grave,  
 My hand is squeezing that soft breast;  
 While thou dost in such passion lie,  
 It mocks me with its look of rest.

But when the morning comes at last,  
 And we must part, our passions cold,  
 You'll think of some new feather, scarf  
 To buy with my small piece of gold;  
 And I'll be dreaming of green lanes,  
 Where little things with beating hearts  
 Hold shining eyes between the leaves,  
 Till men with horses pass, and carts.

The poetic design of another love poem, "The Doll" (No. 358), reinforces the opposition between the playful dalliance of youth and the earnest considerations of age. Here, the youthful Dinah, toying amorously with her "live doll", provides the occasion for a meditation which negates the simplicity of

She takes two cushions to attack  
 Me, and her kisses close my eyes;  
 She combs my hair, that still is black.

---

reintegration, his anagnorisis or recognition, which might be described as the second revelation, the triumph of Good, (Life)."

F.G. Butler, An Aspect of Tragedy (Grahamstown: Rhodes University, 1953), p. 3.

by presenting a catalogue of the features of decrepitude:

The cushion-fights will soon be done,  
 He'll need a pillow for his head;  
 And fingers, not your kisses, love,  
 Must close his eyes, when he lies dead.  
 You'll not sit laughing on his knee  
 To comb his hair when white as snow,  
 Or when a few thin hairs remain  
 Of all its tangled blackness now.

(ii) The principle that the scourge of time can be masked by the power of beauty and song, as love diminishes an overmastering awareness of mortality,<sup>1</sup> is formulated in the second verse of "The Posts",<sup>2</sup> where the visual relationship between the skeletal permanence of the posts and the abstraction of distance becomes a device which bears a vivid memento mori:

A year's a post, on which  
     It saith  
 The distance -- growing less --  
     To Death.  
 Some posts I missed, beguiled  
     By song  
 And Beauty, as I passed  
     Along.  
 But sad am I to think  
     This day  
 Of forty posts passed on  
     My way.  
 For not one post I now  
     Must pass  
 Will 'scape these eyes of mine,  
     Alas!

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<sup>1</sup>See "Love and Immortality", Poem no. 684, pp. 545-546, ll. 13-18:

"Love, only Love, can change my mind;  
 I for that passion great will claim  
 Immunity from time and space,  
 From floods of water and of flame;  
 A perfect immortality  
 Must qualify that love in me."

<sup>2</sup>Poem no. 94, p. 146.

As the interval between the present and the moment of death is diminished, the significance of each "post" is extended. While the interval between the present and the moment of birth adjusts to the content of experience and is, therefore, a record of accommodation, the distance to death is edged with the stark emblems of its immediacy. The conversion of thematic abstractions into visualizable items is paralleled by the formal features of the poem. Verses one, three, and four, being concerned with a description of distance which emphasizes the inflexibility of the rule of mortality, proceed without verbal repetition. In order to suggest retrievability of movement, however, the third line of the second verse establishes circularity by restating the lyric "I" of the first line of the verse. This repetition negates, for a moment, the general linear progression of the poem and suggests the uncharted patterns of aesthetic experience which oppose the irrefutable logic of death.

A similar point of view is presented in "Worm-Proof",<sup>1</sup> a dialogue between Time and Victim in which the latter staves off the onslaught of time by donning the armour of imagination:

'Have I not bored your teeth,' said Time,  
 'Until they drop out, one by one?  
 I'll turn your black hairs into white,  
 And pluck them when the change is done;  
 The clothes you've put away with care,  
 My worm's already in their seams --'  
 'Time, hold your tongue, for man can still  
 Defy you with his worm-proof dreams.'

In contrast to the note of defiance sounded here, "Down Underground"<sup>2</sup> is a poem which can be seen as an indirect blazon or lyric which itemizes a lady's features through the mediation of a larger image. It offers only the stoic consolation that the surreptitious and

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<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 279, p. 288.

<sup>2</sup>Poem no. 351, p. 341.

invincible foe has been unmasked (but not defeated) by imaginative vigilance:

What work is going on down underground,  
 Without a sound -- without the faintest sound!  
 The worms have found the place where Beauty lies,  
 And, entering into her two sparkling eyes,  
 Have dug their diamonds up; her soft breasts that  
 Had roses without thorns, are now laid flat;  
 They find a nest more comfortable there,  
 Than any bird could make, in her long hair;  
 Where they can teach their young, from thread to thread,  
 To leap on her white body, from her head.  
 This work is going on down underground,  
 Without a sound -- without the faintest sound.

In its sustained description of the sequence of putrefaction, "Down Underground" aligns itself to the metaphoric basis of the tragic vision of engulfment which harbours images

drawn from storms : storms which envelop both sea and land in destructive fury -- wind, water, thunder, lightning; images of shipwreck, washaway, inundation, drowning. . . . images of fire, burning, scorching, thirst, drought. . . . metaphors taken from the animal world, springing either from our fear of the tooth and the claw, or, more likely, the terror of our consciousness for the unconscious dog beneath the skin : the terror of reverting to bestiality; and images springing from a terror of disease and maiming, of an intimate decay, of the disintegration and putrefaction of the grave. <sup>1</sup>

Although the helminthic <sup>2</sup> imagery of Jacobean tragic drama provides the

<sup>1</sup>Butler, An Aspect of Tragedy, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup>Images of helminthic corruption are frequent in Davies's lyrics. See, for example, "Speed", Poem no. 618, p. 498; "Brothers", Poem no. 722, pp. 571-572; "The Vagabond", Poem no. 528, p. 453; "Uncertainty", Poem no. 440, pp. 409-410; "Property", Poem no. 419, pp. 397-398.

"Think, Man of Flesh, and be not proud  
 That you can fly so fast:  
 The little Worm can creep, creep, creep,  
 And catch you up at last --"  
 ("Speed", ll. 1-4.)

"For see the worms! They bubble here  
 In pools upon his flesh:  
 They wag the beard that's on his chin --  
 This body is not fresh."  
 ("Brothers", ~~Poem no. 722, pp. 571-572~~, ll. 17-20.)

clearest illustration of the last part of this hypothesis, The Grave<sup>1</sup> (circa 1100), an early Middle English poem which expresses the terror of mortality without implying a compensatory eschatological framework, can be seen as a precursor of a tragic awareness of "intimate decay":

For you a house was built before ever you were born,  
 Earth marked out ere you came from your mother.  
 Yet it was not prepared, nor its very depth measured,  
 Nor yet was it certain how long it should be.  
 Now men bring you where you must and shall lie;  
 Now men measure you, and the ground thereafter.  
 This house you have is not raised up high,  
 But low and even when you lie there within it.  
 And low are the sills, and low the walls;  
 Close to your breast the roof is reared.  
 All cold shall you lie in that dwelling of earth,  
 All darkness and dimness; the den will decay,  
 Dwelling without door and all dark within.  
 Long will you be locked there; only Death has the key.  
 Hateful that earth-house and loathly to live in;  
 There you shall lie and be eaten by worms.  
 Thus you are laid away, leaving your dear ones,  
 Never a friend will journey to see you,  
 Or seek to find how you like that abode,  
 Or open the door and come down to join you,  
 Thus soon you will rot and be hateful to see . . .  
 Soon shall your head be deprived of its hair,  
 And all the fairness of your locks be minished;  
 Soft fingers shall fondle them never again.

(iii) To clarify the notion of a "tragic awareness" which forms the major premise of this chapter requires a brief survey of imagery which suggests (in Davies) that the speaker's position is beyond the range of call or consolation. The terms of reference for this notion are derived from the internal dimensions of the oeuvre, and are, therefore, relative rather than absolute principles of interpretation. Davies achieves a tragic dimension which is proportionate to the dominant pastoral and comic strain of his vision. In contrast to

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in this form in George K. Anderson, The Literature of the Anglo-Saxons (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 189.

the readily apprehended pastoral world, furnished with domestic animals (sheep, robin, ox, cow, cuckoo), temperate geographical items (river, grove, park, garden, field) and artifacts of order (city, farmhouse), Davies's vision of an "otherness" is exteriorized through the correlatives of anarchy (infanticide, murder), predacious creatures (~~the~~ hawk, ~~the~~ worm), and ungovernable physical and abstract items (fire, sea, time, darkness). It is by means of the distinct contrast between Davies's primary vision of the intelligibility of lyrical beauty and his bafflement in the face of the traps to be found in existence that a tragic perspective is achieved. Because existence can be affirmed and celebrated with the simplicity of

How precious is this living breath,<sup>1</sup>

the suggestion of total annihilation leads to tones of open bewilderment and unanswerable torment. In contrast to the self-integrating movement embedded in Davies's pastoralism, the interrogative tone of a poem such as "The Worms' Contempt"<sup>2</sup> does not foreshadow resolution. As a gnomic utterance which proceeds by way of generalizations about the human condition, the poem presents a series of questions and corresponding answers which makes no provision for a counter-argument implying deliverance:

What do we earn for all our gentle grace?  
A body stiff and cold from foot to face.  
If you have beauty, what is beauty worth?  
A mask to hide it, made of common earth.

What do we get for all our song and prattle?  
A gasp for longer breath, and then a rattle.

What do we earn for dreams, and our high teaching?  
The worms' contempt, that have no time for preaching.

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<sup>1</sup>"Life", Poem no. 630, p. 504, l. 6.

<sup>2</sup>Poem no. 629, p. 504.

In its undeviating movement towards a cynical abnegation of the validity of existence, "The Worms' Contempt" accords, in one sense, with Hugh L'Anson Fausset's contention that

of that poetry which is like a dream remembered on waking, a telling of secrets whispered by the subconscious into the ear of the conscious, [Davies] has nothing to give. <sup>1</sup>

The world of "endless night" which engulfs Davies's area of vision in poems such as "Down Underground" and "The Worms' Contempt" is the polar opposite of the "daylight world"<sup>2</sup> which Fausset regards as Davies's proper poetic province:

His is a daylight world, precisely seen and richly tasted. The avid delight in being, the sharp focus of his senses, shared with the wild creatures that he loves, are never dimmed by abstract motives, although they are ruled by a crafty mind. <sup>3</sup>

Because a common element of the extreme is implicit in both worlds, the validity of Fausset's contention is not undermined by the macabre descent of darkness which informs such poems as those just mentioned. Fausset, however, tends to overlook the power of Davies's commitment to wonderment as the intuitive inspirer of song -- an allegiance which allows Davies to blend the precision of a daylight shutter with the mystery of remembered vision. The "abstract motive" of imaginative penetration and harmony is the poetic secret of many lyrics whose ostensible intention is to celebrate the natural world. For example, although "When and Where"<sup>4</sup> employs the question and answer pattern

<sup>1</sup>"Mr Davies's Poems", The Bookman, vol. 75, (December, 1928), p. 164.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Poem no. 460, p. 420.

of "The Worms' Contempt", the extended image it projects of gracefully intuitive self-resolution is provided not by the closing answer but by its central invocation of the wonder of wind, song, and sky:

What man was in the Moon last night?  
 Her silver ore lies scattered here!  
 What time I go, or where I work,  
 Not even Love knows when or where.  
 Who hears a voice inside the Wind's,  
 Has heard a poet chant his verse;  
 For any jewels in his song,  
 Look to a Rainbow for their source.  
 The gold-dust on my leaves of song  
 Proves where my morning's work was done;  
 For I'm the man -- that spot and speck --  
 That worked in gold, inside the Sun!

As redolent of wonder as an Anglo-Saxon Riddle,<sup>1</sup> "When and Where" recalls the inspiration of night by emphasizing the brightness of poetic fulfilment which is its end.

In contrast to the imagery of contentment which suggests invitation and glowing exposure, the imagery of estrangement suggests rebuttal and concealment. While the luminous colours of morning are locked into the prismatic harmony of

Come, lovely Morning, rich in frost  
 On iron, wood and glass;  
 Show all your pains to silver-gild  
 Each little blade of grass.<sup>2</sup>

the tragic vision asserts itself through the medium of images of enervation and unchecked depletion:

<sup>1</sup>For example:

"The wave, over the wave, a weird thing I saw,  
 through-wrought, and wonderfully ornate --  
 a wonder on the wave -- water became bone."

Michael Alexander, ed., The Earliest English Poems (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), p. 100.

<sup>2</sup>"Silver Hours", Poem no. 461, p. 421, ll. 1-4.

Back to that fire again,  
 Ten hours I watch it now,  
 And take to bed dim eyes,  
 And fever's brow.

Ten hours I give to sleep,  
 More than my need, I know;  
 But I escape my mind  
 And that fire's glow.

For listen: it is death  
 To watch that fire's glow;  
 For, as it burns more red  
 Men paler grow.

.....

Pile on the coke, make fire,  
 Rouse its death-dealing glow;  
 Men are borne dead away  
 Ere they can know.

I lie; I cannot watch  
 Its glare from hour to hour;  
 It makes one sleep, to wake  
 Out of my power.

I close my eyes and swear  
 It shall not wield its power;  
 No use, I wake to find  
 A murdered hour

Lying between us there!  
 That fire drowsed me deep,  
 And I wrought murder's deed --  
 Did it in sleep. <sup>1</sup>

Here, in equating wastefulness and sleep, the argument of the poem makes no provision for the intervention of a spirit of renewal or correction. The speaker is submerged in powerless and mesmeric submission to a force which sustains life while ~~accentuating~~<sup>attenuating</sup> it to the point of inert dependence. Growth, a governing principle of Davies's nature lyrics, is deprived of its positive associations and becomes an emblem of stealthy decay in

For listen : it is death  
 To watch that fire's glow;  
 For, as it burns more red  
 Men paler grow.

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<sup>1</sup>"The Lodging House Fire", Poem no. 12, pp. 36-38, ll. 17-48.

Here the integrating possibilities of the idea of warmth are lost in the sense of relentless damnation and febrile ennui. To succumb to the irretrievability of a "murdered hour" is to forfeit a belief in the rewards of the creative will.

In order to explore the tragic significance of this conception of loss, it will be helpful to examine, in detail, a lyric which sets the abstractions of "warmth" and "growth" in a similar framework of deprivation, but which, at the same time, asserts a characteristic sense of optimistic resolution:

#### Wasted Hours

How many buds in this warm light  
Have burst out laughing into leaves!

And shall a day like this be gone  
Before I seek the wood that holds  
The richest music known?

Too many times have nightingales  
Wasted their passion on my sleep,  
And brought repentance soon; [sic]  
But this one night I'll seek the woods,  
The Nightingale and Moon.<sup>1</sup>

Being set in a context of depletion of energy, the idea of growth as expressed in "The Lodging House Fire" is not completed and, therefore, is not capable of suggesting vivifying enlargement or extension. In "Wasted Hours", however, an argument which rests on a sense of loss is balanced and refuted by the combined force of items which advance the idea of potential energy and renewal.

The poem opens with a phrase which expresses the diversity and number of buds. Through the implied observer, "How many" suggests both limitless<sup>ness</sup> and a corresponding sense of human limitation. The second line embodies a similar duality. The phrase "laughing into leaves" has transitional as well as positional implications. In the

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<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 310, p. 314.

first sense, "laughing into leaves", though the connective word "into", indicates a process of becoming, of modification, and of growth. In the second sense, the phrase suggests a natural process which is based upon external forces -- the petals of the bud, responsive to the breeze, melting into a woody background of tree and leaf. The first implication suggests the growth of bud into leaf and into petal. The second implication suggests the protectiveness of the natural context and an awareness of the joy of an alteration in the pattern of the tree as well as an awareness of the tree's readiness to receive the bud in a new way. The sense of the phrase "this warm light" colours both lines -- establishing a connection between the warmth of growth and the warmth of natural acceptance.

This connection is important to the central theme of acceptance. For Davies, acceptance implies a capacity to sustain a sense of recovery within the knowledge of limitation and loss. In fulfilling and satisfying a sense of growth, the closing lines show that an intimation of recovery has not been beyond the range of appeal.

A second binding element exists in the aural connection between "bud" and "bursts", "light" and "laughing into leaves". The first two lines are responses to the past and present occasioned by the words "warm light". The "warm light" consoles the speaker because it carries the warmth of remembrance of growth and life, but, because an experience has been missed, this is only partially satisfying. There is, at this point, therefore, a substantial element of loss.

The next three lines introduce the "I" of the poem through a rhetorical question which points to the possibility of creative

intervention. Two elements confer a wholeness of form upon the first stanza : first, a rhetorical exclamation which gives rise to an expectancy of expansion and development, and, secondly, a rhetorical question ("shall a day") which anticipates the answering movement of the second stanza. The parallel construction of the opening lines of each stanza supports the sense of lyric circularity which is to contribute to closural resolution. The auditory capacity of "laughing into leaves", when related to the mellifluous song of the "nightingales", augments the sudden serendipity of this closing promise.

However, this resolution is not arrived at simply. It is checked temporarily by a minor complication, namely, the difference in implied movement between "nightingales" and "buds". While, in the first stanza, the unseen buds belong to the daylight consciousness of remembered experience, the nightingales are associated with a vespertine ethereality. Thus, whereas the transition between "buds" and "laughing into leaves" suggests an extension of natural properties by way of <sup>vegetable</sup> ~~botanical~~ growth, the transition from "nightingales" to "sleep" and "repentance" suggests annihilation of experience. At this point, therefore, although the seeds of resolution have been sown in the first verse, there is very little evidence of a controlling voice which would check the expansion of the idea of loss by proposing an anodyne.

The fourth line of verse one:

Before I seek the wood that holds

is restated in the fourth line of verse two:

But this one night I'll seek the woods,

At this point, the implication of active affirmation which informs the first verse of the lyric enters into its concluding argument.

As the poem harks back to foliate realms, the musicality of the first verse is confirmed by the naming of the "Nightingale", and the "warm light" is echoed in the presence of the "Moon". In retrospect, the unheralded presence of the moon is sensed throughout the poem; prefigured thematically by "light", "sleep", and "nightingales"; anticipated in rhyme by the lyric expectancy derived from a chiming of the end words "gone", "known", "soon", and "woods". Further, the sibilance of six out of ten end words helps suggest a stanzaic symmetry which completes the congruence of identity between the two verses.

Arising partly from this congruence and partly from the addition of a new item of beauty, the "Moon", to the progression "birds" -- "leaves" -- "music" -- "Nightingale" is a sense of composure which suggests that, even as he vows to participate in the joy of burgeoning bud and singing nightingale, the speaker witnesses their cumulative melody. Because the speaker operates from within the supreme confidence of his vision of the natural world, the opening intimation of deprivation is, in a sense, overtaken by a revelation of lyric fusion which,

. . . like a drop of dew that joins  
Two blades of grass together,<sup>1</sup>

concatenates recall and immediate experience, and substitutes creative harmony for despair. Thus, to the remedy of imagination, postulated in section (ii) of this chapter, can be added the remedy of lyric memory -- a poetic faculty whose source is the totality of the poet's ordered impressions and remembered experiences, all of which are refined and ready to take their place in that area which is called lyric poetry.

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<sup>1</sup>"Love, Like a Drop of Dew", Poem no. 330, p. 329, ll. 9-10.

Simply stated, lyric harmony, as the product of a particular type of organizing imagination, is, in itself, a vehicle for resolution. For Davies, the tragic consciousness is often associated with a failure of the imagination to project a thought-plan by which to comprehend a moment of time. Although, in "O is for Open", bewilderment has been recast as lyric utterance, the poem articulates Davies's prescience of a dislocated universe no longer moored to familiar constants of experience:

Is that dark patch a hill or cloud,  
 And which is Earth, and which is air?  
 Lord, when I see a world so vast,  
 This large, bewildering stretch of land;  
 The far-off fields, the clumps of woods,  
 The hills as thin as clouds beyond --  
 When I see this, I shrink in fear,  
 That if I once but close my eye,  
 The ends will sink, and leave me dazed  
 Before a monstrous, empty sky! <sup>1</sup>

A similar apprehension of cosmic discord and personal alienation can be seen in the dream-perspectives of "Dream Tragedies" and "A Lonely Coast":

I felt this earth did move; more slow,  
 And slower yet began to go;  
 And not a bird was heard to sing,  
 Men and great beasts were shivering;  
 All living things knew well that when  
 This earth stood still, destruction then  
 Would follow with a mighty crash. <sup>2</sup>

A lonely coast, where sea-gulls scream for wrecks  
 That never come; its desolate sides  
 Last visited, a hundred years ago,  
 By one drowned man who wandered with the tides:  
 There I went mad, and with those birds I screamed  
 Till, waking, found 'twas only what I dreamed. <sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 382, p. 357, ll. 3-12.

<sup>2</sup>Poem no. 146, p. 190, ll. 13-19.

<sup>3</sup>Poem no. 396, p. 365.

Without the common stability of a daylight world, the dream vision precipitates images of flux and isolation which are analogous to the tragic metaphors discussed in the first section of this chapter. When faced with a revelation of mutability and subliminal dislocation, Davies demands the consolation of light and the familiarity of common objects, as in the following lines:

The silence of those mighty heavens,  
That infant's cry, so weak in power,  
Made me half wish that Day had brought  
Her sparrow with his common flower. <sup>1</sup>

Again I wake and cry for light!  
My golden day has gone, <sup>2</sup>

As a means towards the organization of experience, song-creative imagination fulfils a similar rôle to that of daylight flower. In the certainty of song, potentiality becomes a fulfilment of purpose which leads to a clear conception of the relationship between poet and universe:

I am as certain of my song,  
When first it warms my brain,  
As woman of her unborn child,  
Or wind that carries rain.  
The child and rain are born at last,  
Though now concealed from sight --  
So let my song, unshaped and crude,  
Come perfect to the light. <sup>3</sup>

However, in the absence of song, when

. . . lips, like gills in deep-sea homes,  
Beat time, and still no music comes. <sup>4</sup>

the lyric-speaker envisages the substitution of a funereal reconditeness for the pellucidity of his "lyric home":

<sup>1</sup>"At Night", Poem no. 335, p. 333, ll. 9-12.

<sup>2</sup>"Day or Night", Poem no. 453, p. 416, ll. 1-2.

<sup>3</sup>"The Birth of Song", Poem no. 584, p. 481.

<sup>4</sup>"Thou Comest, May", Poem no. 192, p. 230, ll. 11-12.

When I am old, and it is spring,  
 . . . . .  
 And to translate the songs of birds  
 Will be beyond my power in words:

When Time serves notice on my Muse  
 To leave at last her lyric home,  
 With no extension of her lease --  
 Then to the blackest pits I come,  
 To see by day the stars' cold light,  
 And in my coffin sleep at night.

For when these little songs shall fail,  
 . . . . .  
 That toad's dark life must be my own,  
 Buried alive inside a stone.<sup>1</sup>

The passing of time corresponds to the waning of the creative imagination. While the "little boy" has

Unlicensed hours,  
 To run in fields  
 And roll in flowers.<sup>2</sup>

the speaker in "Again I Sing"<sup>3</sup> senses a temporal limitation which vitiates his perception of familiar objects in the natural world. With the passing of youth and the loss of expansive vision, "Nature" itself brings forward examples of an ensuing decay<sup>4</sup>, while, in youth, the natural world does not engender an intimation of the spoliations of time:

Nature sets no conspirators  
 Of withered things to lie in wait  
 And show thee with their faded charms  
 Thy coming state;  
 No dread example she sets thee  
 In dead things falling from a tree.<sup>4</sup>

The failure of imagination which attends the passing of time is "tragic" in that it deprives the self of familiar experiential constants,

<sup>1</sup>"When I am Old", Poem no. 150, p. 201.

<sup>2</sup>"The Boy", Poem no. 50, p. 89, ll. 4-6.

<sup>3</sup>Poem no. 159, p. 206.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., ll. 7-12.

and substitutes covert reminders of death for a simple receptivity to life:

Again I sing of thee, sweet youth:  
 Thy hours are minutes, they can hear  
 No challenge from stern sentinels,  
 To wake their fear;  
 You love the flowers, but feel no grief  
 Because their pretty lives are brief.

. . . . .  
 Thou seest no bones inside the earth,  
 Thy sweat comes not of toil, but play;  
 On thy red blossom no pale worm  
 Can work decay;  
 No toad can muddy thy clear spring --  
 Time is thy subject, thou his king! <sup>1</sup>

For Davies, the poetic imagination is a familiarizing power capable of restoring "common objects" and "common sounds" when perplexity impairs the quality of present experience:

I blessed sweet Fancy for her favour then;  
 That oft she robbed my outward eyes of power  
 To fill the mind with common objects, and  
 My ears of power to take in common sounds. <sup>2</sup>

It is the irrecoverable loss of the power to respond to simple sounds and objects that signals a tragic apprehension, for an intimation of the undeviating momentum of necessity is disclosed and isolated in the absence of familiar perceptions. Davies's conception of necessity is set out in <sup>the poem</sup> "Circumstance"<sup>3</sup>:

Down in the deep salt sea  
 A mighty fish will make  
 Its own strong current, which  
 The little ones must take;  
 Which they ~~must~~ follow still,  
 No matter ~~what~~ <sup>fast</sup> their will.

Here, in this human sea,  
 Is Circumstance, that takes

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., ll. 1-18.

<sup>2</sup>"Fancy", Poem no. 81, p. 126, ll. 24-27.

<sup>3</sup>Poem no. 698, p. 556.

Men where they're loth to go;  
 It fits them false and makes  
 Machines of master souls,  
 And masters of dull fools.

It is interesting to note that in this poem the destinal force is not related to a divine power, as can be seen, for example, in Boethius's conception of a central point or Simplicitas Dei which imposes a pattern of fate (The Consolation of Philosophy, Book IV), but to an abstract analogue of human hierarchy. Thus, in contrast to his pastoral vision of cosmic organization, Davies's idea of fate does not seem to provide for an intuition of universal harmony. For this reason, it does not confer a sense of universal intelligibility. Unlike the apprehension (defined in Davies's London poems) of flawed social and ethical values -- evils which are, to some extent, amendable -- the tragic apprehension is born of an insight into the operation of an inflexible rule of destiny. In distinguishing between "serious drama" and "tragedy", George Steiner clarifies this conception of tragic irrecoverability:

The tragic personage is broken by forces which can neither be fully understood nor overcome by rational prudence. . . . Where the causes of disaster are temporal, where the conflict can be resolved through technical or social means, we may have serious drama, but not tragedy. More pliant divorce laws could not alter the fate of Agamemnon; social psychiatry is no answer to Oedipus. But saner economic relations or better plumbing can resolve some of the grave crises in the dramas of Ibsen. The distinction should be borne sharply in mind. Tragedy is irreparable. It cannot lead to just and material compensation for past suffering. <sup>1</sup>

Although Steiner's hypothesis of irreparability as an informing principle of tragic drama is disputable because it does not allow for a redemptive movement towards a closing note of grace, it provides a valuable definition of the concept of necessity: "necessity is blind

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<sup>1</sup>George Steiner, The Death of Tragedy (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), p. 8.

and man's encounter with it shall rob him of his eyes, whether it be in Thebes or in Gaza".<sup>1</sup> Davies, deprived of the light of common objects, and without the familiarizing and guiding lodestar of the song-creative imagination, is powerless to chart a course through his ocean-universe.

- (iv) The endless complaint of the frailty of all earthly glory was sung to various melodies. Three motifs may be distinguished. The first is expressed by the question : Where are now all those who once filled the world with their splendour? The second motif dwells on the frightful spectacle of human beauty gone to decay. The third is the death-dance : death dragging along men of all conditions and ages.<sup>2</sup>

With some adaptation, this tripartite formulation outlining the vision of death in the Middle Ages may be transposed to subsume Davies's apprehension of death and the depredations of time. In order to clarify the ensuing discussion, it may be helpful to present four poems by Davies which can be seen as templets of this vision and which are related to these three motifs. Although he does not put forward an explicit statement of the ubi sunt motif, a version of this idea can be isolated in poems which deal with the theme of time and the obfuscation of the imagination. The following poem reflects a characteristic manner of proceeding, namely, an exposition of the validity of the imagination followed by an implied question asking "Where are my dreams?":

Sweet Poesy, why art thou dumb?  
 I loved thee as my captive bird,  
 That sang me songs when spring was gone,  
 And birds of freedom were not heard;  
 Nor dreamt thou wouldst turn false and cold  
 When needed most, by men grown old.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>2</sup>J. Huizinga, The Waning of the Middle Ages, trans. by F. Hopman (1924; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 134.

Sweet Poesy, why art thou dumb?  
 I fear thy singing days are done;  
 The poet in my soul is dying,  
 And every charm in life is gone;  
 In vain birds scold and flowers do plead --  
 The poet dies, his heart doth bleed.<sup>1</sup>

In relating this theme to the coldness of the tomb, "The Lament of Age"<sup>2</sup> links the failure of the imagination to an intimation of mortality:

Why must I dig this old mine still,  
 Deep in the dark, the damp, and cold,  
 Just for a speck or two outdoled!  
 It in my youth gave little toil  
 To find its top yield nugget gold.

My precious yields they came and went,  
 My mine worked out in every run:  
 I hear the young ones making fun,  
 Who must, alas! grow old and spent,  
 And lose their gold as I have done.

The top is rich enough for youth,  
 Who needs must dig as he grows old --  
 Deep in the dark, the damp, and cold;  
 Until he learns the woful truth --  
 The more he digs the less his gold.

O shafts and beams that propped upright  
 This mine for eighty years and more --  
 For I can count my years four score --  
 Now that my lamp gives feeble light,  
 Fall, that the earth may close me o'er!

Here, in contrast to the straightforward imagery of the pastoral lyrics, where poetic argument is stabilized by familiar thematic precedents, an elaborate controlling metaphor dictates the interior logic of the poem. In a sense, a primary intention of the argument is to justify the opening conception of time as an ever-deepening "mine" and to demonstrate its appropriateness as an analogue of the failure of the creative process. Thus, by evincing a self-reflective consciousness, the structure of the poem enacts its theme. In the

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<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 57, pp. 97-98.

<sup>2</sup>Poem no. 727, pp. 574-575.

absence of an uncomplicated means of securing a "top yield" of "nugget gold", the speaker substitutes a sophisticated metaphoric framework for the simplicity of argument which usually obtains in song lyric.

The second of Huizinga's themes, that of the frailty of human beauty, is illustrated by the following poem:

Ah, what is Beauty but vain show --  
 . . . . .  
 Worms form thy flesh, and 'tis that flesh  
 Makes thee so beautiful to see;  
 When dying thou refuse them food,  
 They'll help themselves to thee.  
 . . . . .  
 I see thee move like a vain horse  
 Whose neck is arched to his knee;  
 His head will soon drop there through age --  
 And age will so bend thee.  
 Age with his frost will warn thee soon,  
 And pinch and mark thee here and there;  
 Will dry thy lip, and dim thine eye,  
 And pull out thy long hair.<sup>1</sup>

In its portrayal of the inexorable ravages of time, "Vain Beauty" is related to a group of poems<sup>2</sup> which depict the third mediaeval theme cited by Huizinga, the dance of death, in terms of the reductive conception of "death the leveller". Davies's grasp of the inescapable truth that man's body is a "dying animal" is articulated in the following memento mori:

Beauty'll be no fairer than  
 Agèd dame so shrunk and wan,  
 Whom she looks on proudly. Now,  
 Did Death strike them sudden low,  
 Strike them down, a little while

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<sup>1</sup>"Vain Beauty", Poem no. 671, pp. 536-537, ll. 1-28.

<sup>2</sup>See "Speed", Poem no. 618, p. 498; "Kiss and Blow", Poem no. 477, p. 429; "The Joy of Life", Poem no. 365, p. 348; "The Snowflake", Poem no. 359, p. 345; "In the End", Poem no. 182, p. 223; "The Song of Love", Poem no. 407, pp. 371-391, XLIII-XLVIII.

Vanished Beauty's velvet smile,  
 Ugly grimmer she, and few  
 Mark the difference 'tween these two.  
 Nothing here shall arbitrate,  
 Chivalry intimidate,  
 Hour of doom, or change Death's laws;  
 Kings hire no ambassadors.  
 Death makes monarchs grinning clowns,  
 Fits their skulls for bells, not crowns.<sup>1</sup>

"The Lament of Age", "Vain Beauty" and "Death" exemplify the cardinal points of Davies's vision of death and the depredations of time. In these poems, Davies defines an intuition of "the mystery of mortal life"<sup>2</sup> by referring his perplexity to an axiomatic conception of the human condition. In this sense, his grief is formalized and is rendered partially intelligible. Although burdened by an intuition of acerbitas mortis, his sense of the passing of time finds consolation in the universality of his theme. As the primary concern of this chapter is to explore Davies's apprehension of an unintelligible universe, it will be helpful to examine a poem which demonstrates this sense of alienation in the face of perplexity before offering a more detailed assessment of his vision of transience and mutability.

In "The Dark Hour",<sup>3</sup> Davies sites his grief in a context of familiar items which have lost their power to console that grief:<sup>4</sup>

And now, when merry winds do blow,  
 And rain makes trees look fresh,  
 An overpowering staleness holds  
 This mortal flesh.

<sup>1</sup>"Death", Poem no. 5, pp. 27-28.

<sup>2</sup>"The Dark Hour", Poem no. 58, p. 98, l. 7.

<sup>3</sup>Poem no. 58, p. 98.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. "the hour when Death can strike", etc. in "The Song of Love", Poem no. 407, p. 378, XXXVII-XXXVIII.

Though I do love to feel the rain,  
 And be by winds well blown --  
 The mystery of mortal life  
 Doth press me down.

And, in this mood, come now what will,  
 Shine Rainbow, Cuckoo call;  
 There is no thing in Heaven or Earth  
 Can lift my soul.

I know not where this state comes from --  
 No cause for grief I know;  
 The Earth around is fresh and green,  
 Flowers near me grow.

I sit between two fair Rose trees;  
 Red roses on my right,  
 And on my left side roses are  
 A lovely white.

The little birds are full of joy,  
 Lambs bleating all the day;  
 The colt runs after the old mare,  
 And children play.

And still there comes this dark, dark hour --  
 Which is not born of Care;  
 Into my heart it creeps before  
 I am aware.

In its careful itemization of the conditions which encourage a revelation of simply joy, the poem can be read as a résumé of the vision of harmony which leads to lyric utterance. However, in contrast to the natural objects of poems such as "The Kingfisher"<sup>1</sup> and "In Spring Time",<sup>2</sup> natural objects which are endowed with a sense of potential extension which results in an interpenetration of qualities,<sup>3</sup> the "Rainbow" and the joyful "little birds" of "The Dark Hour" emerge as static reminders of a lost tranquillity. A pattern of isolation is established in the first quatrain of the poem. The contrast, in this quatrain, between the unchecked momentum of the "merry winds"

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<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 69, p. 107.

<sup>2</sup>Poem no. 342, pp. 336-337.

<sup>3</sup>See p. 132 and p. 148 of this thesis for a discussion of "extension" and "interpenetration" in these two poems.

and the stasis of "mortal flesh" held by an "overpowering staleness" is continued in the next three quatrains. While the wind-borne rain freshens the trees, the speaker submits to the weight of the "mystery of mortal life". In the third quatrain, Davies presents the most poignant avowal of his grief. If, in Davies, a particular moment of wonder can be singled out as an instance of transcendent joy, it is his response to "a rainbow and a cuckoo's song" in "A Great Time":

A rainbow and a cuckoo's song  
 May never come together again;  
 May never come  
 This side the tomb.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, given this supreme coincidence, the speaker in "The Dark Hour" remains unmoved. Having confronted the silence of the tomb, and having gained only a grim conviction of the transience of life, he returns to a reverie which places him beyond the range of consolation, and, instead of the call of well-loved objects, he overhears the call of death -- a sound explicit or referred to in a number of poems.<sup>2</sup> His awareness of mortality is such that even the ethereal promise of the rainbow is converted, by association, into a sign of the mutability of existence. The fourth quatrain inaugurates a pattern of conversion whereby the once familiar beauty of the speaker's "flowery, green, bird-singing land"<sup>3</sup> absorbs his sorrow. It is as if the physical proximity of the "fresh and green" earth to "mortal flesh" destroys his love for the natural world. This hypothesis is confirmed in the

<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 171, pp. 215-216, ll. 9-12.

<sup>2</sup>See "The Enemy", Poem no. 491, p. 436; "Here Am I", Poem no. 462, p. 421; "Uncertainty", Poem no. 440, pp. 409-410; "Come Away, Death", Poem no. 400, p. 367.

<sup>3</sup>"In May", Poem no. 84, p. 139, l. 24.

fifth quatrain, where, as the speaker indicates the precise location of the "two fair Rose trees" through the phrases "on my right" and "on my left", a sense of his physical presence is created and a shadow of corporeality is cast by means of indirection. Through an overpowering apprehension of the "fast corrupting clay"<sup>1</sup> which houses the spirit, the attributes of mortality are introduced into the natural world. Davies's conception of the mind-body relationship, as shown in a group of poems which explore this theme,<sup>2</sup> inclines to a form of Cartesian dualism which asserts that there is a fundamental distinction between material and non-material entities and that integration is therefore not possible. Thus, in describing moments of wonderment, when the "bird-like spirit flies" with the sound of "common leaves that hum all day",<sup>3</sup> and the soul

. . . rises on fine wings  
Into the Heaven's clear light;<sup>4</sup>

Davies is not exploring the possibility of temporal and spiritual unification but the possibility of spiritual liberation. Although this conception implies the possibility of transcendence, it does not preclude the possibility of temporal incarceration. Imprisoned in a "dark, dark hour", the soul cannot pierce its housing of "mortal flesh" and find a place of rest amid the beauty of familiar objects.

<sup>1</sup>"Body and Spirit", Poem no. 205, pp. 240-241.

<sup>2</sup>See "The Mind Speaks", Poem no. 635, p. 507; "Men that Think", Poem no. 626, pp. 502-503; "A Lullaby of Rest", Poem no. 573, p. 476; "Spirits and Bodies", Poem no. 540, p. 460; "Clocks", Poem no. 488, p. 434; "What Light", Poem no. 471, p. 426; "To a Fool", Poem no. 323, p. 322; "The Mind's Liberty", Poem no. 157, p. 205; "Dreaming of Death", Poem no. 688, p. 550.

<sup>3</sup>"When on a Summer's Morn", Poem no. 158, pp. 205-206, l.4, l.7.

<sup>4</sup>"The Bird Man", Poem no. 133, p. 180.

Further, it is implied, common objects would not nurture a liberating promise of imaginative fulfilment. The central <sup>crux</sup> ~~cause~~ of the poem thus, in a sense, contains a tautology : because the cause of grief is unknown, the poetic imagination can find no remedy for despair, and, because the poetic imagination <sup>has</sup> failed in its search for a remedy, the cause of grief remains unknown.

Because Davies does not explore death in terms of imaginative experience but as the terminal point of a process of temporal limitation, he does not attempt to analyse the failure of the poetic imagination as a mental phenomenon. Thus, his lyrics on death and the passing of time are aphoristic rather than discursive. "Parted"<sup>1</sup> and "Plants and Men",<sup>2</sup> lyrics which deal with the transience of existence, can be seen as examples of this gnomic tendency. A sententious utterance such as

Alack for life!  
Worn to a stalk since yesterday  
Is the flower with whom the bee did stay,  
And he was but one night away.  
Alack for life, I say.<sup>3</sup>

is not intended as an introspective exposition of the theme of mutability, but as a statement of acknowledged truth. Although the utterance is a truism in that its matter is clearly perceptible, its value lies in the fact that it is the product of a particular form of human recognition which attempts to resolve a traditional problem by means of formal discourse. In a sense, the source of the pronouncement is of more significance than the pronouncement itself. A single voice, moved to assert an ancient dilemma, states the dilemma

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<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 28, p. 64.

<sup>2</sup>Poem no. 165, p. 211.

<sup>3</sup>"Parted", ll. 1-5.

afresh. Similarly, the brief Herrick-like commonplace of tempus fugit achieves a peculiar dignity of form and style in the lines:

You berries once,  
 In early hours,  
 Were pretty buds,  
 And then fair flowers.  
 Drop, drop at once,  
 Your life is done;  
 You cannot feel  
 The dew or sun.  
 We are the same,  
 First buds, then flowers;  
 Hard berries then,  
 In our last hours.<sup>1</sup>

Foregathered in the concluding quatrain:

Sweet buds, fair flowers,  
 Hard berries then --  
 Such is the life  
 Of plants and men.

the analogy seems to prove itself in the brevity of a backward glance into a new conception of time which combines both botanical and human standards of measurement. As a summary of the theme of the poem, the closing quatrain repeats the items of the poetic argument, and, in this way, signals the consummation of both argument and poem. A longer, more discursive survey of the effects of time is provided by "The Poppy".<sup>2</sup> Here, the perfect consummation of the poppy in the flames of time is contrasted to the aftermath in man:

Sweet Poppy, when thy beauty's gone,  
 Thy leaves will fall, thy life be done.  
 . . . . .  
 Thou dost not shrink and dry at last,  
 To mock that beauty of thy past.  
 . . . . .  
 And when to-morrow we look there,  
 The place is clean where thy leaves were.

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<sup>1</sup>"Plants and Men", ll. 1-12.

<sup>2</sup>Poem no. 647, p. 515.

Thou dost not linger on, like man,  
Till thou art bent, and dry, and wan.

'So let me die when my charms fade,  
Like that sweet flower' -- said Beauty's maid.

'So, like that Poppy, let me die,'  
Said Genius -- 'when my springs go dry.'

The formalized structure of "Parted", "Plants and Men", and "The Poppy" indicates that Davies is able to comprehend death if it is seen as a terminal point which is beyond the range of intuition. Because he has limited the range of his imagination to existential observation, he is, at times, unperturbed by the mere fact of mortality:

I love the earth through my two eyes,  
Like any butterfly or bee;  
The hidden roots escape my thoughts,  
I love but what I see.

A tree has lovely limbs, I know,  
Both large and strong, down under earth;  
But all my thoughts are in the boughs,  
That give the green leaves birth.

My friend, his thought goes deeper down,  
Beneath the roots, while mine's above:  
He's thinking of a quiet place  
To sleep with his dead Love. <sup>1</sup>

For Davies, although death is inevitable, it need not mar the significance of everyday life.<sup>2</sup> Through its power to replenish life with common joys, imagination draws a bold line of demarcation between life and death. It is when this line is obscured by a glimpse of the loss of imagination that the speaker becomes prey to an awareness of

<sup>1</sup>"Earth Love", Poem no. 340, p. 335.

<sup>2</sup>See "Life is Jolly", Poem no. 140, pp. 184-185, ll. 17-24:

"This life is jolly, O!  
Let others know they die,  
Enough to know I live,  
And make no question why;  
I care not whence I came,  
Nor whither I shall go;  
Let others think of these --  
This life is jolly, O!"

mortality which shatters his conception of universal design.<sup>1</sup>  
 As a spiritual force which permeates life, the imagination, if contaminated by a sense of death, is able to darken the fabric of everyday existence, and thus impair the consoling power of a familiar terrain. A similar apprehension of "death in life" follows from perceiving a flaw in the pattern of an elemental relationship.<sup>2</sup>  
 To Davies, the child inherits the supreme gift of imaginative participation in the universe, and the perfectly harmonious relationship between child and universe is one which has been pre-ordained:

I saw this day sweet flowers grow thick --  
 But not one like the child did pick.

. . . . .

A hundred butterflies saw I --  
 But not one like the child saw fly.

I saw the horses roll in grass --  
 But no horse like the child saw pass.

My world this day has lovely been --  
 But not like what the child has seen.<sup>3</sup>

For this reason, "the presence of a child that's blind, / In a green garden, is far worse" than "the presence of a stiffened corse",<sup>4</sup> and,

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<sup>1</sup>"The White Horse" (Poem no. 413, pp. 394-395) can be singled out as a poem which assesses the imminence of death through imaginative projection. Here, "death in life" is located by means of an imprint of death which has become visible in an alternative world.

<sup>2</sup>See "On the Death of a little Child", Poem no. 679, pp. 542-543. Here, the child is seen as the source of ripples of song and laughter which are creative of domestic harmony. Death, then, is seen as a force which deprives the world of love and melody. This idea is confirmed in "Dead Born", Poem no. 677, pp. 541-542, where the child, in its perfect physical symmetry, represents a completion of universal design. A child "dead born" deprives its mother of the joy of fulfilling a great and universal bond, and is thus an analogue of spiritual fragmentation.

<sup>3</sup>"The Happy Child", Poem no. 102, p. 151.

<sup>4</sup>"A Blind Child", Poem no. 23, pp. 59-60, l. 5, ll. 7-8.

in the face of this type of universal contradiction, the poetic voice is stilled:

I see them all : flowers of all kind,  
The sheep and cattle on the leas;  
The houses up the hills, the trees --  
But I am dumb, for she is blind. <sup>1</sup>

The inarticulate despair which arises from the unintelligibility of this perception is reflected in a poem which deals with a similar estrangement of response, namely, "The Tugged Hand":<sup>2</sup>

I have no ears or eyes  
For either bird or flower;  
Music and lovely blooms  
Must bide their lighter hour;  
So let them wait awhile --  
For yet another day  
  
Till I at last forget  
The woman lying dead;  
And how a lonely child  
Came to his mother's bed  
And tugged at her cold hand --  
And could not make it play.

Here, although the cause of grief is known, the first verse presents a vision of alienation which is similar to the silent despair of "The Dark Hour".<sup>3</sup> The implied "darker hour" of this verse separates the speaker from the beauty of familiar items such as "bird", "flower", "lovely <sup>blooms</sup> birds" and "music". However, although the primary cause of grief is singled out in the second verse, the speaker indicates the presence of a more profound sorrow. The child who fails to elicit a response from the "cold hand" of "the woman lying dead" is seen as the passive victim of an inexplicable phenomenon.

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., ll. 17-20.

<sup>2</sup>Poem no. 620, p. 499.

<sup>3</sup>See also "The Dying", Poem no. 735, p. 580, ll. 9-12:

"That I, whom life showed nothing to make laugh,  
Shall grin at last and know no reason why;  
And have no smell when Summer brings her flowers,  
And have no ear for birds close where I lie."

This idea is communicated through the image of a "lonely child" attempting to "play". In a sense, there are two circumstances responsible for grief. The first emerges from the more obvious details of the situation : a dead mother unable to reciprocate her child's love. The second circumstance arises from the implied antecedents of the child's desire. The phrase "a lonely child" is ambiguous in that the loneliness can be seen both as a consequence of the mother's death and as a prior condition which is independent of the occasion. Following from the latter reading is a sense of affectionate, almost ritualized behaviour -- as if a mother had devised a special form of play to strengthen the natural bond of love. The speaker's sorrow is, therefore, based on his intuition of the bewilderment of a child who has been shown how to implement his love in a special way, and who is now deprived of the means of fulfilling this love. For Davies, the significance of this intuition lies in the parallel between his own way of finding a direction for love and the child's dependence upon his mother's response. Like the "lonely child", he has been given a personal and specialized way of achieving consolation through participating in the freely offered love of "birds" and "flowers". In the pathos of a bewildered and inarticulate child, the poem enacts the speaker's apprehension of the loss of the creative imagination. It is not the blunt fact of death but the intimation of the existence of its threshold in life, a beckoning vestibule opening into "Death's dark tunnel" of "endless night",<sup>1</sup> that leads to a premonition of total silence. When imaginative powers are stilled,

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<sup>1</sup>"The Song of Love", Poem no. 407, pp. 371-391, XLVIII.

Time yawns, and lo! he swallows Life in Death;<sup>1</sup>  
 and, in the absence of song, death becomes a terrifying void. The relationship between death and the fear of silence is the informing principle of certain amatory lyrics which view the man-woman relationship in terms of a movement towards the silence of the tomb. Like the caged bird unable to release its carefree song, the poetic imagination is oppressed by a surfeit of carnality:

And is there naught in life but lust? thought I;  
 Feeble my brain was then, and small, and weak;  
 She held it in her power, even as a bird  
 With his live breakfast squirming from his beak.  
 Man finds in such a Woman's breast the tomb  
 Where his creative powers must soon lie dumb;  
 To kiss the tomb in weakness, hour by hour,  
 Wherein she buries half his mental power.<sup>2</sup>

Because of this relationship, love can lead to a consciousness of death in the form of an apprehension of powerlessness and enervation.

As in "The Lodging House Fire", images of depletion prefigure "the silence of the grave", for instance, in:

That day she seized me like a bee,  
 To make me her weak blossom,  
 I felt her arms so strong that I  
 Lay helpless on her bosom.<sup>3</sup>

and in a poem quoted earlier in this chapter:

Thou shalt not laugh, thou shalt not romp,  
 Let's grimly kiss with bated breath;  
 As quietly and solemnly  
 As Life when it is kissing Death.  
 Now in the silence of the grave,  
 My hand is squeezing that soft breast;  
 While thou dost in such a passion lie,  
 It mocks me with its look of rest.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"The Song of Life", Poem no. 286, pp. 292-303, I.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., XXXII-XXXIII.

<sup>3</sup>"That Day She Seized", Poem no. 222, p. 251, ll. 1-4.

<sup>4</sup>"A Fleeting Passion", Poem no. 164, pp. 210-211, ll. 1-8.

That a certain detachment attends these utterances is indicated by the light-hearted parallel between silent bee and silent poet which is implicit in the following lines:

O you false knight in shining mail,  
 Who visited my early hours --  
 My days are numbered by our scorn,  
 Since Beauty spurns Love's flowers.

.....

But now the earth is peopled more,  
 And you have power to make love's choice;  
 You are much occupied these days,  
 I know it by your voice.

For when you lie on bosoms fair,  
In blissful moments, you are dumb;  
 Which proves to me your many loves,  
 Since you now seldom hum.<sup>1</sup>

(Italics mine.)

However, although distanced in tone, lyrics on the theme of death in love are too closely aligned to a vision of the waning of the poetic imagination to be seen as the products of a whimsical fancy. As verse exempla which embody ~~an~~ admonitions from a dying poet, they are, in a sense, didactic utterances. Davies's death lyrics are interfused with a sense of personal observation which sharpens the cutting edge of his rhetoric. Aesthetically, these verses are secondary lyrics because they lack the wonderment which is the ordering principle of Davies's song, and, in this sense, they attest the failure of the song-creative faculty. Nevertheless, certain poems which present the horror of death contribute to the timor mortis which pervades Davies's vision of time. In its staccato rhythms and dispassionate coarseness, "The Rat" presents a pithy summary of domestic strife and intimate decay:

'That woman there is almost dead,  
 Her feet and hands like heavy lead;  
 Her cat's gone out for his delight,  
 He will not come again this night.

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<sup>1</sup>"Violet to the Bee", Poem no. 743, pp. 588-589, ll. 1-24.

'Her husband in a pothouse drinks,  
 Her daughter at a soldier winks;  
 Her son is at his sweetest game,  
 Teasing the cobbler old and lame.

'Now with these teeth that powder stones,  
 I'll pick one of her cheek-bones:  
 When husband, son and daughter come,  
 They'll soon see who was left at home.<sup>1</sup>

In its mode of narration (strikingly reminiscent of the ballad, "The Two Corbies"),<sup>2</sup> the poem provides for a macabre irony which heightens the disjunction between the dying woman and her profligate or malicious family. The circumstances of "The Tugged Hand" have been reversed, and in the incantatory middle verse is enacted a ritual of desertion. The fact that the speaker is a "Rat", and that, at closure, the rat-ethic, although malevolent, becomes the moral norm of the poem (because the rat alone grasps the injustice of the situation), widens the implications of the theme. The chronicler's familiarity with domestic detail has the effect of converting phrases such as "in a pothouse", "at a soldier winks", and "his sweetest game", into a stylized representation of estrangement. "Husband", "daughter", and "son", each engaged in gratifying a selfish desire, are seen in positions which suggest habitually unreflective attitudes.

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<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 255, p. 273.

<sup>2</sup>"His hound is to the hunting gane,  
 His hawk, to fetch the wild-fowl hame,  
 His lady's ta'en another mate,  
 So we may mak our dinner sweet.

'Ye'll sit on his white hause-bane,  
 And I'll pike out his bonny blue een.  
 Wi' ae lock o' his gowden hair,  
 We'll theek our nest when it grows bare."<sup>3</sup>

(ll. 9-16.)

The Viking Book of Folk Ballads of the English-Speaking World,  
 ed. by Albert B. Friedman (New York: The Viking Press, 1963),  
 p. 25.

The parallel syntax of the first and second verses, along with the sustained inversions of the second verse, reinforces the significance of the maxims of domestic attribution which are enumerated, and a Blake-like insistency allows each expression to claim the validity of visionary experience.<sup>1</sup>

Like the snail who registers a vision of the daylight world, "with horns outstretched" to "feel the air around",<sup>2</sup> the rat has ears "cocked to every sound"<sup>3</sup> of the "Bower in endless Night".<sup>4</sup> For Davies, one of the principle means of illuminating this bower of spiritual darkness follows from the precepts of Christian humanism. Although in addressing the Lord he professes "no faith in thee nor Christ thy Son",<sup>5</sup> and eschews theology in its mystical sense, he enjoins on the man without faith (like himself) the revelatory effects of Christian parable and example:

Meanwhile he'll follow Christ, the man  
In that humanity he taught,  
Which to the poor and the oppressed  
Gives its best time and thought.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup>See Blake's "Auguries of Innocence", ll. 37-115:

"The Catterpillar on the Leaf  
.....  
The Soldier, arm'd with Sword and Gun,  
.....  
The Harlot's cry from street to street"

The Complete Writings of William Blake, ed. by Geoffrey Keynes (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 432-433.

<sup>2</sup>"When Leaves Begin", Poem no. 260, p. 275, ll. 5-6.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., l. 8.

<sup>4</sup>William Blake, "Auguries of Innocence", in The Complete Writings of William Blake, p. 431, l. 35.

<sup>5</sup>"Christ, the Man", Poem no. 92, p. 145, l. 2.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., ll. 9-12.

When I am sick and dark depression  
 Lies all around with chilly breath --  
 What herbs or drugs shall I prescribe,  
 To save me from the hands of Death;  
 What remedy can I then find  
 To bring relief to my sick mind?  
 The teachings of my Master, Christ,  
 Are all the herbs or drugs I need;  
 To help one poorer than myself,  
 That is a remedy indeed:  
 To give a joy where there is none,  
 Is magic that restores my own.<sup>1</sup>

In their collective failure to impart "a joy where there is none", the husband, daughter, and son of "The Rat" violate the ethical premises of Davies's vision of humanity, and, in this sense, they contradict his conception of cosmic design. As voiced in the following lines, the child's intuitive love, and the melody it inspires, is an emblem of selfless devotion which is central to Davies's assessment of human possibility:

They killed her lamb, and no one wept,  
 Save this small child, to find it gone;  
 O Lamb of God, and Lover of lambs --  
 This was the Little One.<sup>2</sup>

Her pretty dances were her own,  
 Her songs were by no other sung;  
 And all the laughter in her house  
 Was started by her own sweet tongue.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, the idea of the family, a concept which stands for the self-ordering principle of love, is an even more significant embodiment of universal patterning. For this reason, "The Rat" constitutes a clear example of Davies's apprehension of spiritual fragmentation.

Because it is familiar, common, and untutored, the child's gift

<sup>1</sup>"Sick Minds", Poem no. 494, p. 437.

<sup>2</sup>"Epitaph on a Child", Poem no. 484, p. 433.

<sup>3</sup>"On the Death of a little Child", Poem no. 679, pp. 542-543, ll. 1-4.

of love and melody implies the inherent benignity of the cosmos. The silence of the tomb is, therefore, related to an intimation of a world deprived of unrestrained melody. Like the snail "that builds / A silver street so fine and long",<sup>1</sup> song precipitates a path by which to retrace and comprehend experience. Without song, the protective and resonant housing of the poet's spirit remains unguided on its journey through time:

How slowly moved the snail, that builds  
A silver street so fine and long:  
I move as slowly, but I leave  
Behind me not one breath of song.<sup>2</sup>

For this reason, deprived of the bright air of "the open light"<sup>3</sup> in the darkness of an intimation of death, the poet aspires to an "ambitious end"<sup>4</sup> which allows him to hold "one green leaf in either hand"<sup>5</sup> as a reminder of his common joys, and to thrust "one wild hand . . . clutching at the Sun"<sup>6</sup> towards the familiar sky.

<sup>1</sup>"Wild Oats", Poem no. 316, p. 317, ll. 1-2.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., ll. 1-4.

<sup>3</sup>"X is for Expecting", Poem no. 391, p. 362, l. 5.

<sup>4</sup>"Dreamers", Poem no. 500, p. 440, l. 7.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., l. 8.

<sup>6</sup>"S is for Swimmer", Poem no. 386, pp. 359-360, ll. 11-12.

CHAPTER VI

DAVIES'S VISION OF COMMUNITY

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## Leisure

What is this life if, full of care,  
We have no time to stand and stare [.]

No time to stand beneath the boughs  
And stare as long as sheep or cows.

No time to see, when woods we pass  
Where squirrels hide their nuts in grass.

No time to see, in broad daylight,  
Streams full of stars like skies at night.

No time to turn at Beauty's glance,  
And watch her feet, how they can dance.

No time to wait till her mouth can  
Enrich that smile her eyes began.

A poor life this if, full of care,  
We have no time to stand and stare.<sup>1</sup>

(i) Davies's vision of community may be defined in terms of two modes of awareness : first, as a concern with relationships which follow from a sense of fulfilment and kinship in the human and natural worlds, and, secondly, as a sense of the gap between "what is" and "what could be" which is seen as bridgeable through the amendment of social circumstances. The first mode proceeds from an intimation of a world in which there is perfect accord between interior aspirations and external events, while the second is governed by the anthropocentric assumption of human perfectibility. A poetic templet of the first mode is provided by "All's Well", a poem which renders an intelligible <sup>view</sup>~~vision~~ of the human and non-human worlds in terms of a vision of potential fraternity completed by domestic integration:

The cat has her milk,  
The dog has ~~his~~ bone;  
The man has his ale,  
And ~~this~~ week's work is done,  
He sits at a fire,  
And <sup>he</sup> sees his young wife

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<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 86, pp. 140-141.

Give suck to her babe --  
All's well with his life.<sup>1</sup>

The second mode is evinced in a poem which projects an essentially comic vision of human fallibility, "Saints and Lodgers":

Ye saints, that sing in rooms above,  
Do ye want souls to consecrate?  
Here's 'Boosy' Bob, 'Pease Pudding' Joe,  
And 'Fishy Fat,' of Billingsgate.

Such language only they can speak,  
It juggles heaven and hell together;  
One threatens, with a fearful oath,  
To slit a nose like a pig's trotter.

. . . . .  
What use are friends if not to bear  
Our venom and malicious spleen!  
Which, on our life! we dare not give  
To foes who'll question what we mean.<sup>2</sup>

The term "comedy", derived from commedia, will be used, in this chapter, to denote a vision which senses the possibility of a movement from oppression to grace, in contrast to the irreparability of "tragedy". In this sense, the word is capable of subsuming the flawed social conditions which are presented in Davies's "doss-house" verses. In these poems,<sup>3</sup> the interaction between humble figures (representatives of Davies's sorties into "low-life") and their mean environment is judged with reference to socio-economic and political ethics,<sup>4</sup> and culpability is assigned to exterior conditions rather

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<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 587, p. 483.

<sup>2</sup>Poem no. 13, pp. 38-41, ll. 1-32.

<sup>3</sup>For example, "'Scotty' Bill", Poem no. 19, p. 55; "Wondering Brown", Poem no. 24, pp. 60-61; "Facts", Poem no. 26, pp. 62-63; "In a Lodging House", Poem no. 9, pp. 30-32; "The Homeless Man", Poem no. 742, pp. 586-588; "Saturday Night in the Slums", Poem no. 747, pp. 591-592; "The Den", Poem no. 162, p. 209.

<sup>4</sup>See "That Golden Time", Poem no. 636, p. 507, and "To a Working Man", Poem no. 685, p. 546.

than to an obscurely malignant destiny. Although, on the basis of their "realistic" detail and biographical tenor,<sup>1</sup> many of these poems were responsible for the critical accolades bestowed upon Davies after the publication of The Soul's Destroyer and Other Poems, they do not exteriorize a primary poetical disposition. The parti-coloured band of vagabonds and fallen women who regale each other with insults and with "coughs at night"<sup>2</sup> constitutes a negative vision of human happiness, and, to this extent, poems which depict the doss-house milieu help to define Davies's notion of the vita bona. However, in themselves, they provide only evidence of a clumsy versification and of a maundering preoccupation with nicknames and demotic raillery. For this reason, although some of these poems will be alluded to in the course of discussion, they will not be presented as significant examples of Davies's vision of community.

One of the principal foci of this vision emerges through a consideration of poems which invoke a particular imaginative stance -- "staring" -- as a way of securing an intimation of human purpose and universal order. This attitude is, therefore, related to the first mode of awareness (mentioned earlier in this discussion). Four poems,

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<sup>1</sup>See Newman Howard, "The Poet In The Doss-House", review of The Soul's Destroyer and Other Poems, in The Academy, September 16, 1905, p. 942:

"Let us penetrate through his environment into the heart of the man. A doss-house is a thing more gruesome than the luxurious would suppose. It is not peopled only by inebriates: the statistics of Mr. Charles Booth and others have long exploded that legend, though it still lingers. Men are beaten down by other things than drink -- Mr. Davies, for instance, drags a wooden leg through the world. We ourselves have visited a doss-house: not Mr. Davies'; that is in Southwark, and it is called the "Farmhouse": ours was in Whitechapel, up a street called Flower and Dean Street."

<sup>2</sup>"The Den", Poem no. 162, p. 209, l. 4.

"Leisure", "Starers",<sup>1</sup> "This World",<sup>2</sup> and "One Token",<sup>3</sup> can be singled out as lyrics which embody an explicit expression of this perspective, while, although unnamed as such, the outline of a "starer" is clearly discernible in "The Rainbow",<sup>4</sup> "The Meadow",<sup>5</sup> "The Evening Star",<sup>6</sup> "Ships and Stars",<sup>7</sup> "The Moon",<sup>8</sup> and in many other lyrics. "Leisure"<sup>9</sup> is perhaps the most comprehensive assessment of "staring" as an imaginative capacity in itself. Structurally, the poem embodies a sense of completion which confirms its theme. The opening question,

What is this life if, full of care,  
We have no time to stand and stare [.]

is answered in the concluding couplet:

A poor life this if, full of care,  
We have no time to stand and stare.

The exposition which leads to this affirmation of the validity of "staring" presents, in series, thematic distillations of imaginative constants shown to be central to Davies's vision : pastoral stability (couplet two), familiar items (couplet three), universal design

<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 152, p. 202.

<sup>2</sup>Poem no. 163, p. 210.

<sup>3</sup>Poem no. 332, p. 331.

<sup>4</sup>Poem no. 329, p. 329.

<sup>5</sup>Poem no. 345, p. 338.

<sup>6</sup>Poem no. 425, p. 401.

<sup>7</sup>Poem no. 465, p. 423.

<sup>8</sup>Poem no. 170, p. 215.

<sup>9</sup>Poem no. 86, pp. 140-141.

(couplet four), harmony (couplet five), and spontaneous extension (couplet six). "Staring", then, is a process which leads to an awareness which embraces a considerable range of imaginative experience and which gives rise to an intimation of indivisible unity. The first words of the five middle couplets, "No time", are linked to five infinitives which imply particular ways of preparing for aesthetic experience. Although the primary poetic stance is one of waiting, implicit in the argument is a movement which takes the observer from leafy woods to open grasses to daylight sky -- to rest within an image of human beauty. The poem, therefore, is concerned with listing the steps towards a vantage point in space which allows maximal use of time.

Before attempting a qualitative evaluation of "Staring" as a mental faculty, it will be helpful to examine a verse sentence which treats this special mode of perception as inborn and long-lasting and which suggests the nature of the experience:

The power was given at birth to me  
 To stare at a rainbow, bird or tree,  
     Longer than any man alive;  
 And from these trances, when they're gone,  
 My songs of joy come one by one.<sup>1</sup>

In tracing his "songs of joy" to the afterglow of a rapturous communion with "rainbow, bird or tree", Davies, albeit on a much smaller scale and with less profundity, invites an obvious literary comparison:

I have said that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings : it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity : the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of reaction, the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. In this mood, successful composition generally

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<sup>1</sup>"One Token", Poem no. 332, p. 311, ll. 1-5.

begins, and . . . the mind will, upon the whole, be in a state of enjoyment.<sup>1</sup>

In fact, the Wordsworthian mode of observation -- "to look steadily at my subject"<sup>2</sup>--, in its most literal sense and devoid of philosophical introspection, can be discerned in Davies's imaginative reflexes. Indeed, Wordsworth (his theories and practice), rightly or wrongly understood, can be cited as the Romantic progenitor of a collective disposition in twentieth century poetry. As the relationship between Wordsworth's disquisition and contemporary poetry has been widely acknowledged, a superficial investigation of this notion would be gratuitous. However, one difference between Wordsworth and Davies affords an insight into the latter poet's conception of imaginative observation. Whereas, for Wordsworth, the Man of Science can be likened to the Poet on the basis of a common commitment to truth, for Davies, scientific analysis opposes a personal preference which finds satisfaction in generalized nature:

As soon as I began to name a star,  
Or judge a ship by rigging, mast or spar,  
I, seeing more with eyes than with my mind,  
Had fears that I would soon go beauty blind.  
But now, not caring if the ship that's seen  
Is schooner-rigged, a barque or brigantine,  
I look beyond my eyes to where she rides  
Under a rainbow, beautiful; or glides  
Before the wind, on one side of her belly.  
And as young lambs or sheep all white and woolly,  
I see the stars in one flock nibbling go  
Across the Heavens, whose names I will not know.<sup>3</sup>

In his theories of scientific advancement, Wordsworth is, of course, responding to Baconian empiricism and to revolutionary idealism, and

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<sup>1</sup>William Wordsworth, Preface to Lyrical Ballads, in Wordsworth: Poetical Works, ed. by Thomas Hutchinson, rev. Ernest De Selincourt, p. 740.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 736.

<sup>3</sup>"Ships and Stars", Poem no. 465, p. 423.

his poetical practice embraces both a particularizing and a generalizing mode of appraisal. To Davies, an intuition of general patterning is, in a sense, an end in itself, and the singularity of a moment of wonder is measured against an intuition of plurality and diversity. By his own admission, his ornithological knowledge is slight:

I would like to say at the beginning of this book that my knowledge of birds is very limited, and that the inward urge to write it is all a matter of love, and of no scientific value.<sup>1</sup>

However, for Davies, lyric placement fulfils the same function as the specialized knowledge which would enable him to name (and so locate) the source of his wonderment. As has been noted earlier in this discussion,<sup>2</sup> Davies does not "judge life by its number of breaths, but by the number of times that breath is held or lost, either under a deep emotion caused by love, or when we stand before an object of interest or beauty".<sup>3</sup> Thus, Davies estimates the value of a particular moment of wonder by placing it in the context of the countless possibilities of wonderment offered by life itself. As his "songs of joy come one by one", so his "wild fruits of wonderment"<sup>4</sup> are ordered by counting rhythms in his lyrics which single out and enumerate moments of exultation and objects of delight. For this reason, "staring" does

<sup>1</sup>Davies, My Garden and My Birds, p. 13, M.B.  
Cf. Davies, Later Days, p. 39:

". . . I had a great disadvantage in not knowing [W.H.] Hudson's works. My love of birds, which probably excelled his or any other man's, could not be made the subject of conversation, like his extraordinary knowledge of their life and habits."

<sup>2</sup>Chapter III (A) iii, p. ?

<sup>3</sup>Davies, Later Days, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup>"Fancy's Home", Poem no. 87, p. 141, l. 9.

not culminate in spiritual epiphany but in a lasting intimation of unity within diversity. Although perforce abridged, the following selection is, to some extent, a representative sample of these counting figures:

Then came a golden cloud with three dark ones --  
Three pirates following a peaceful barque; <sup>1</sup>

. . . she hears  
Ten thousand bantering birds, as they  
Do hop upon her blossomed way. <sup>2</sup>

One hour in every hundred hours  
I sing of childhood, birds and flowers;  
. . . . .  
But in my ninety hours and nine  
I would not tell what thoughts are mine: <sup>3</sup>

Five hundred stooks, like golden lovers, lean  
Their heads together, in their quiet way,  
And but one bird sings, of a number seen. <sup>4</sup>

If these six letters came from birds,  
What gossip we would hear!  
The Thrush would tell me how he sang  
For twenty hours in twenty-four. <sup>5</sup>

One night I saw ten stars take wing --  
. . . . .  
The same ten thousand years ago,  
The same ten thousand years to come -- <sup>6</sup>

I'll send a thousand small blue waves <sup>7</sup>

From which a hundred tongues of water burst, <sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup>"The Jolly Tramp", Poem no. 29, p. 65, ll. 30-31.

<sup>2</sup>"Waiting", Poem no. 56, p. 95, ll. 14-16.

<sup>3</sup>"Confession", Poem no. 208, p. 242, ll. 1-6.

<sup>4</sup>"A Bird's Anger", Poem no. 275, p. 285, ll. 2-4.

<sup>5</sup>"Letters", Poem no. 452, p. 416, ll. 1-4.

<sup>6</sup>"Stars", Poem no. 713, p. 565, ll. 1-8.

<sup>7</sup>"S is for Swimmer", Poem no. 386, p. 359, l. 7.

<sup>8</sup>"The Rock", Poem no. 394, p. 364, l. 7.

A further group of selections serves to emphasize Davies's use of a statistical figure as a structural principle; for example, in the calendrical series of:

Ten Junes to hear the Nightingale,  
 Ten Aprils for the Cuckoo's coming;  
 And only ten more Februarys, Love,  
 To celebrate our wedding.  
 Come, happier thoughts, and cry 'Good Morrow'!  
 Though we but kiss three times a day,  
 Three hundred days and sixty five,  
 In every year, must come our way!  
 Think how these kisses too will make  
 One thousand and ninety-five a year!  
 And all the thousands that must follow  
 In ten years' reckoning up, my Dear!<sup>1</sup>

in the temporal sequence of:

A dog, that has ten years of breath,  
 Can count the number left to me,  
 To reach my seventy as a man.  
 In five years' time a bird is born,  
 Whose shorter life is then my own,  
 Reducing still the human span.<sup>2</sup>

and in an architectural metaphor<sup>3</sup>:

Her body's a fine house,  
 Three stories I have reckoned;  
 Her garter marks the first,  
 A belt of silk the second;  
 Her necklace marks the third,  
 And know -- before I stop --  
 The garden of that house  
 Is planted on the top.<sup>4</sup>

Counting leads to a form of communion as well as to a communication of form. In "Starers", where both cardinal and ordinal numbers are used to indicate the speaker's intimate love of natural objects, the

<sup>1</sup>"Three Score and Ten", Poem no. 568, p. 473.

<sup>2</sup>"The Lost Years", Poem no. 624, p. 501, ll. 1-6.

<sup>3</sup>See also "The Song of Love", Poem no. 407, p. 373, XI-XII.

<sup>4</sup>"Her Body's a Fine House", Poem no. 294, p. 306.

process of "staring" seems to impart an equivalent sense of "waiting" to the members of a variegated universe. As the speaker's gaze moves from "apples" to "flowers", and from "horses" and "snails" to "glow-worms" and "Moon", an impression of natural ordination is achieved:

The small birds peck at apples ripe,  
 And twice as big as them in size;  
 The wind doth make the hedge's leaves  
 Shiver with joy, until it dies.  
 Young Gossamer is in the field;  
 He holds the flowers with silver line --  
 They nod their heads as horses should.  
 And there are forty dappled kine  
 As fat as snails in deep, dark wells,  
 And just as shiny too -- as they  
 Lie in a green field, motionless,  
And everyone now stares my way.  
 I must become a starrer too:  
 I stare at them as urchins can  
 When seamen talk, or any child  
 That sees by chance its first black man.  
 I stare at drops of rain that shine  
 Like glow-worms, when the time is noon  
 I stare at little stars in Heaven,  
 That try to stare like the big Moon.<sup>1</sup>

"Staring" is reciprocal. While cows "lie in a green field, motionless", the diverse elements within the speaker's range of vision align themselves to a magnetic centre. Thus, in enumerating through staring, the speaker promotes a sense of community which brings cohesiveness to random impressions. "Staring" is valuable because it implies "staring back" into the natural world which has awakened response. In this sense, it is a pre-verbal, common language which allows the solitary observer to turn towards the natural world in the expectancy of sharing its unsolicited generosity. Through "staring", Davies approaches an affirmation of the divine revelation recorded by Adam in Paradise Lost:

'What call'st thou solitude? Is not the earth  
 With various living creatures, and the air

---

<sup>1</sup>"Starers", Poem no. 152, p. 202. (Italics mine.)

Replenished, and all these at thy command  
 To come and play before thee? Know'st thou not  
 Their language and their ways? They also know,  
 And reason not contemptibly; with these  
 Find pastime, . . .<sup>1</sup>

In "This World", Davies's admiration for "dumb creatures" results in an experience of their innocence which closes the gap between actuality and possibility, the present and the future. In sensing the openness of this world, the observer begins to assimilate its innocence:

Who dreams a sweeter life than this,  
 To stand and stare, when at this fence,  
 Back into those dumb creatures' eyes,  
 And think we have their innocence --  
 Our looks as open as the skies.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the starrer's presence in the country contributes to the sense of ordination which awakens his response. By looking fixedly over the "fence" which separates him from the "lambs with their legs and noses black",<sup>3</sup> he transforms natural innocence into human faith, adding his harmonized presence to the order of the natural world.

(ii) Davies's<sup>s</sup> delight in nature is often a consequence of knowing that his presence in the natural world cannot disrupt its tranquil movements, and that, in moments of wonder, his presence is, in fact, complementary. Many lyrics show that this knowledge is both spontaneous and certain. For example, in "Flying Blossoms", the speaker calls for a form of rustic caparison with which to greet (and

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<sup>1</sup>Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Bk. VIII, ll. 369-375, in *Milton: Poetical Works*, ed. by Douglas Bush (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 363-364.

<sup>2</sup>Poem no. 163, p. 210.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, l. 6.

attract) the "butterflies, in twos and threes, / That flit about  
in wind and sun":<sup>1</sup>

Bring me my hat of yellow straw,  
To greet them on this summer's morn --  
That they may think they see in me  
Another crop of golden corn!<sup>2</sup>

In this sense, his rôle in the natural world is to promote harmony  
as a co-worker in a contented universe. A bright day is enriched by  
the lustre of "common stones"<sup>3</sup> and by a desire to share joy:

Shall I be mean, when all this light is mine?  
Is anything unworthy of its place?  
Call for the rat, and let him share my joy,  
And sit beside me here, to wash his face.<sup>4</sup>

An intuition of partnership enables Davies to claim one summery area  
as his imaginative home. The "green tent" spread by summer measures  
the extent of this area, and universal joy signals that its time is  
drawing near:

Summer has spread a cool, green tent  
Upon the bare poles of this tree;  
Where 'tis a joy to sit all day,  
And hear the small birds' melody;  
To see the sheep stand bolt upright,  
Nibbling at grass almost their height.<sup>5</sup>

When dogs play in the sun outdoors,  
And cats chase sunbeams on the mat;  
When merry maidens laugh for joy,  
And young men cock their ears at that;  
And babes can see in panes of glass  
A better light than fire-grate has;  
. . . . .  
When such a time of year has come,  
The whole wide world can be my home.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 512, p. 446, ll. 1-2.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., ll. 5-8.

<sup>3</sup>"A Bright Day", Poem no. 513, pp. 446-447, l. 2.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., ll. 9-12.

<sup>5</sup>"The Green Tent", Poem no. 62, pp. 101-102, ll. 1-6.

<sup>6</sup>"The Start", Poem no. 241, pp. 263-264, ll. 1-18.

"The whole wide world" of summer with its familiar denizens invites the poet to celebrate his joy with the simplicity of song:

Stand with eyes fixed, the Cuckoo calls --  
 Let all the world go blind!  
 Should any search be made at all,  
 Let it be for the Wind!

At Birdland Corner, where I like,  
 And daffodils appear --  
 The hero of my life and dreams  
 Cries 'Cuckoo' every year.

. . . . .

And let my notes be cries of joy,  
 Too simple to despise;  
 That children from their cradles love,  
 And hearts grown old and wise.<sup>1</sup>

When on a summer's morn I wake,  
 And open my two eyes,  
 Out to the clear, born-singing rills  
 My bird-like spirit flies.

To hear the Blackbird, Cuckoo, Thrush,  
 Or any bird in song;  
 And common leaves that hum all day,  
 Without a throat or tongue.

And when Time strikes the hour for sleep,  
 Back in my room alone,  
 My heart has many a sweet bird's song --  
 And one that's all my own.<sup>2</sup>

Song, then, is both a medium of recording joy, and the means by which to return to the source of wonderment. In this sense, the memory of song perpetuates "Summer's harmony".<sup>3</sup> But, because song is an abstract form of patterning, it has even greater value as a source of revelation to the poet. In "Early Spring",<sup>4</sup> the observer, inspired by an intimation of the oneness of flight and song, enters into the skylark's consciousness of this unity. In melody, the bird seems to be free of the need

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<sup>1</sup>"My Life's Example", Poem no. 459, pp. 419-420.

<sup>2</sup>"When on a Summer's Morn", Poem no. 158, pp. 205-206.

<sup>3</sup>Blake, "The Birds", l. 9.

<sup>4</sup>Poem no. 156, pp. 204-205.

of wings, and its sensitivity to the resonance of its own song seems to bear it aloft. The transference from wing to song is cyclical. The power of song stems from the skylark's inward sense of the perfect oscillation of its form. Thus, flight leads to song, and song, in turn, leads to a sense of flight. The bird seems to sense its complete integrity, and, for a moment, skylark and observer are one:

How sweet this morning air in spring,  
 When tender is the grass, and wet!  
 I see some little leaves have not  
 Outgrown their curly childhood yet;  
 . . . . .  
 Here, with green Nature all around,  
 While that fine bird the skylark sings;  
 Who now in such a passion is,  
 He flies by it and not his wings;  
 And many a blackbird, thrush and sparrow  
 Sing sweeter songs than I may borrow.

Here, there is an implicit comparison between the song-borne skylark and the poet whose "bird-like spirit flies".<sup>1</sup> The poet's response to elemental patterning is bird-like in that it provides a sustaining vision which maintains his wonder and replenishes his power to soar. This sensitivity to pattern is strikingly depicted in the following lyric:

Till I went out of doors to prove  
 What through my window I saw move;  
 To see if grass was brighter yet,  
 And if the stones were dark and wet;  
 Till I went out to see a sign --  
 That slanted rain, so light and fine,  
 Had almost settled in my mind  
 Till I at last could see the wind.<sup>2</sup>

In "My Life's Example", although the cuckoo is shown to be the inspirer of the speaker's "life and dreams", the song of the wind has not been traced to its source:

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<sup>1</sup>"When on a Summer's Morn", Poem no. 158, pp. 205-206, l. 4.

<sup>2</sup>"Till I Went Out", Poem no. 226, pp. 253-254.

Should any search be made at all,  
Let it be for the Wind.<sup>1</sup>

The mental imprint of the "slanted rain", however, in its finely discriminated symmetry of form, is an emblematic reconstruction of the unseen motions of the wind. By settling into the speaker's pre-existent mental associations and by absorbing new qualities from imaginative similitude, the "slanted rain" codifies invisible currents of the wind. Like song, rain brings order to formless impressions. In "Till I went out", therefore, the speaker is able to recognize a new pattern (the wind) because of the harmonizing influence of a more familiar pattern (the rain). In the same way, the cuckoo, as an embodiment of wonder, is capable of leading an unresponsive listener into "rich and beautiful" realms of immortality:

Come, if thou'rt cold to Summer's charms,  
Her clouds of green, her starry flowers,  
And let this bird, this wandering bird,  
Make his fine wonder yours.

.....  
When I can hear the charmed one's voice,  
I taste of immortality;  
My joy's so great that on my heart  
Doth lie eternity,  
As light as any flower --  
So strong a wonder works in me;  
Cuckoo! he cries, and fills my soul  
With all that's rich and beautiful.<sup>2</sup>

Because his vision of nature has been trained by melody, the speaker in "A Merry Hour"<sup>3</sup> enters the natural world as a familiar inhabitant and not as an alien intruder. Although, in a sense, he trespasses on the hospitality of "Bees" and "Butterfly", his knowledge of their

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<sup>1</sup>"My Life's Example", Poem no. 459, pp. 419-420, ll. 3-4.

<sup>2</sup>"The Wonder-Maker", Poem no. 144, pp. 188-189.

<sup>3</sup>Poem no. 658, pp. 524-525.

habits reveals a sensitivity which suggests that he is acutely aware of their needs:

For Lord, how merry now am I!  
 Tickling with straw the Butterfly,  
 Where she doth in her clean, white dress,  
 Sit on a green leaf, motionless,  
 To hear Bees hum away the hours.  
 I shake those Bees too off the Flowers,  
 So that I may laugh soft to hear  
 Their hoarse resent and angry stir.<sup>1</sup>

Because Davies's "silver love is shared by all, / With every flower and bird",<sup>2</sup> a sense of perfect integration absolves him of the sin of purblind intrusion. "A Summer's Noon"<sup>3</sup> provides a clear example of this synthesizing love:

White lily clouds  
 In violet skies;  
 The Sun is at  
 His highest rise.  
 The Bee doth hum,  
 Every bird sings;  
 The Butterflies  
 Full stretch their wings.  
 The Brook doth dance  
 To his own song;  
 The Hawthorn now  
 Smells sweet and strong.  
 The green Leaves clap  
 Their wings to fly;  
 Like Birds whose feet  
 Bird lime doth tie.  
 Sing all you Birds,  
 Hum all you Bees;  
 Clap your green wings,  
 Leaves on the trees --  
 I'm one with all,  
 This present hour:  
 Things-far-away  
 Have lost their power.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., ll. 5-12.

<sup>2</sup>"Three Loves", Poem no. 576, p. 477.

<sup>3</sup>Poem no. 644, pp. 512-513.

Here, images of completion prefigure a closing sense of unity. In the first quatrain, the sun is at its apogee, and, in the second, the butterflies expand into full beauty, while the drone of the bee mingles with the song of every bird. In the fourth quatrain, the green leaves strain at their axes, and, in the fifth quatrain, birds, bees, and leaves are foregathered in an attitude of collective melody. With the presence of a responsive, human observer, each movement is set in a consciousness which imposes a temporal unity upon proximate objects.

In simple lyrics such as "A Summer's Morn", Davies records the significance of entering into the natural world through the power of love. By allowing flowers, bees, and birds to occupy his life-space in this world, he acquires an inclusive faith which gives him the freedom to speak for the objects and creatures he has discovered through love. In "Nature's Friend", a poem cited earlier in this study (during the discussion of the Town-Country antithesis),<sup>1</sup> Davies expresses his faith in the reciprocity of trust:

Say what you like,  
 All things love me!  
 I pick no flowers --  
 That wins the Bee.

. . . . .

The garden Mouse  
 Comes near to play;  
 Indeed, he turns  
 His eyes away.

The Wren knows well  
 I rob no nest;  
 When I look in,  
 She still will rest.

The hedge stops Cows,  
 Or they would come  
 After my voice  
 Right to my home.

---

<sup>1</sup>See p. 149 of this thesis.

The Horse can tell  
 Straight from my lip,  
 My hand could not  
 Hold any whip.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast to the world of man,<sup>2</sup> the natural world remains constant in its loyalty, and it is in the knowledge of shared trust that Davies's ideal of contentment is fulfilled. As a named abstraction, "contentment" is the principle which urges him towards a goal of otium cum dignitate in both the rural and the domestic worlds. For Davies, there are numberless examples of this ideal in the natural world, and the fruitful mellowness of the created universe is, in a sense, an archetype of ease and contentment.<sup>3</sup> Because contentment is often productive of "staring", it is beyond reproach as a mode of existence. With an image of contentment in mind Davies is able to enter into the life of the non-human world, as can be seen in the following lines:

Poor, luckless Bee, this sunny morn;  
 That in the night a Wind and Rain  
 Should strip this Apple-tree of bloom,  
 And make it green again.

You, luckless Bee, must now seek far  
 For honey on the windy leas;  
 No sheltered garden, near your hive,  
 To fill a bag with ease.<sup>4</sup>

This apple-tree, that once was green,  
 Is now a thousand flowers in one!  
 And, with their bags strapped to their thighs,  
 There's many a bee that comes for sweets,  
 To stretch each bag to its full size.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 37, pp. 78-79, ll. 1-24.

<sup>2</sup>See "Trust", Poem no. 616, p. 497.

<sup>3</sup>See "The Example", Poem no. 83, p. 138, and "Rich Days", Poem no. 179, p. 221.

<sup>4</sup>"A Luckless Pair", Poem no. 650, pp. 517-518, ll. 1-8.

<sup>5</sup>"The Birds of Steel", Poem no. 236, p. 260, ll. 1-5.

To some extent, a sense of trust and empathy derives from a process of humanizing the natural world by a projection of the self.<sup>1</sup> But Davies does not humanize nature at the expense of reducing the validity of the non-human world, and his sense of intrinsic order prevents him from re-shaping nature in his own image. If harmony is to be seen in the natural world, the links which constitute a chain of being must not be displaced. Since this pattern is the prototype of human happiness, man must attempt to comprehend the whole by understanding the part. For this reason, Davies is content to explore the minutiae of the created universe. A wealth of common items falls within the compass of his lyric vision, and "trees, blossoms, birds, and children"<sup>2</sup> are valued for the lasting sense of wonder they impart. As can be seen in the following lines, it is through the memory of wonderment that true contentment is achieved:

A jar of cider and my pipe,  
 In summer, under shady tree;  
 A book of one that made his mind  
 Live by its sweet simplicity:  
 Then must I laugh at kings who sit  
 In richest chambers, signing scrolls;  
 And princes cheered in public ways,  
 And stared at by a thousand fools.<sup>3</sup>

In "A May Morning", simple equations drawn from the primary colours of spring indicate the sense of equilibrium achieved by the speaker:

The sky is clear,  
 The sun is bright:  
 The cows are red,  
 The sheep are white;  
 Trees in the meadows  
 Make happy shadows. <sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>See "A Happy Life", Poem no. 45, pp. 84-85.

<sup>2</sup>"The Mint", Poem no. 278, p. 287, l. 4.

<sup>3</sup>"The Sluggard", Poem no. 73, p. 110, ll. 1-8.

<sup>4</sup>Poem no. 120, p. 170, ll. 1-6.

Each item in the natural world is named according to the activity it completes:

Birds in the hedge  
Are perched and sing;  
Swallows and larks  
Are on the wing:  
Two merry cuckoos  
Are making echoes.<sup>1</sup>

The speaker's "road", named as his personal thoroughfare in a contented world, preserves the delicate distance between the observer and the observed, and the dewy "road" which belongs to other creatures of nature follows a parallel course:

Bird and the beast  
Have the dew yet;  
My road shines dry,  
Theirs bright and wet;<sup>2</sup>

The speaker does not need to deviate from his linear vantage point in space and time, and his creatures do not stray from their hedges and pastures. Yet there is implicit conversation. As the observer walks, a new item presents itself to his gaze and adds its lustre to all other items. The bright sun in the first verse is the source of whiteness, redness and shadows. In the second verse, the "merry cuckoos" echo the melody of birds in the hedge and swallows on the wing. Thus, while moving through a resonant universe, and in drawing his vision over pliant strings, Davies completes a rural melody. Because he is content to be counted as a member of a natural order, his contentment is assured, and, as in the following lyric, all aspects of the natural world are valued for being possible sources of tranquillity:

Without contentment, what is life?  
Contented minds, like bees, can suck  
Sweet honey out of soot, and sleep,  
Like butterflies, on stone or rock.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., ll. 7-12.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., ll. 13-16.

. . . . .

Such quiet nights we'll have again,  
 And walk, when early morning comes,  
 Those dewy cemeteries, the fields --  
 When they are white with mushroom tombs.<sup>1</sup>

(iii) Human happiness, like song, is gathered from nature's storehouse, and Davies's ideal of the "good life" is always measured against an intimation of rural felicity. A high standard of perfection is set by the natural world. Although this standard can be matched in human merriment, the unruffled presence of nature calls attention to human fallibility. As a means of comparison, this sense of well-being, of man's rejoicing in beneficent nature, is often implicit in lyrics which deal with the man-woman relationship, where the contrast between natural items and humanly determined symbols of value (scarves, jewels, toys, and bangles) leads to protestation and complaint.<sup>2</sup> When autumn's mellow granaries are full, it is easy for man to garner joy:

When Autumn's fruit is packed and stored,  
 And barns are full of corn and grain;  
 When leaves come tumbling down to earth,  
 Shot down by winds or drops of rain:  
 Then up the road we'll whistling go,  
 And, with a heart that's merry,  
 We'll rob the squirrel of a nut,  
 Or chaffinch of a berry.<sup>3</sup>

And, when human acquisitiveness interferes with the simplicity of common joys, imagination singles out a compensating vision of the natural world:

See how those diamonds splutter and choke --  
 What greedy things they are for light!

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<sup>1</sup>"Without Contentment, what is Life?", Poem no. 297, pp. 307-308.

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, "The Power of Silence", Poem no. 201, pp. 236-237.

<sup>3</sup>"When Autumn's Fruit", Poem no. 298, p. 308, ll. 1-8.

That pearl, whose pulse less wildly beats,  
 Is far more restful to my sight.  
 Soon tired of these glittering toys,  
 With my delight and wonder gone --  
 I send my thoughts, like butterflies,<sup>1</sup>  
 To dream on some old spotted stone.

At its best, human society offers a sense of natural proportioning and ordination. Nature, harmonized by genial conventions, reminds man of the possibility of celebration and symposium. Most of Davies's drinking songs celebrate the wayfarer's secular ideal of conviviality. Davies is clearly writing in the tradition of the tavern song, of which every age has its versions, courtly and popular, and of which some analogous examples would be songs from Shakespeare's plays, Cavalier lyrics and folk songs. In Davies's merry songs, the relationship between Host (or Landlord) and Guest, and the ceremony of the occasion -- two traditional themes -- almost always take the form of the jovial irreverence of the wayside tavern:

The Harvest Home's a home indeed;  
 If my lord bishop drank ale there,  
 He'd want to kiss the beggar wench,  
 And change his gown with her, I swear.

The Harvest Home's a place to love,  
 There is no better booze on sale;  
 Angels in Heaven -- I take my oath --  
 Can find no better glass of ale.

There's courage in such booze as that:  
 Old Dicky drank but one small mug,  
 And then, to please the harvest girls,  
 Said, 'Look!' and swallowed a live frog.

The Landlord draws to suit my taste,  
 I never knew his wife to fail;  
 But, somehow, what the daughter draws  
 Is -- by my soul and body -- Ale!<sup>2</sup>

The successful bringing in of the harvest suggests the benevolence of a pleasant land, and provides an opportunity to sample the delightful

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<sup>1</sup>"Common Joys", Poem no. 617, p. 498, ll. 1-8.

<sup>2</sup>"The Harvest Home", Poem no. 96, p. 147.

fruits of an agricultural order. To join the festival is to emulate the "Bee":

A Bee goes mumbling homeward pleased,  
 He has not slaved away his hours;  
 He's drunken with a thousand healths  
 Of love and kind regard for flowers.  
 Pour out the wine,  
 His joy be mine. <sup>1</sup>

With the exception of "Whiskey",<sup>2</sup> Davies's drinking songs stress the importance of friendship and do not anatomize the "afterpain"<sup>3</sup> of celebration. As a product of nature's bounty, "Drink" demands respect:

Say that the House that makes our Laws  
 Is but an Infants' School;  
 Say that the World is old and doomed,  
 Where every man's a fool;  
 Say that the worms make skipping-ropes  
 Of Beauty's hair at last;  
 That Love must die, as Age comes cold --  
 To prove it was but Lust:  
 Say what you like, and I'll be calm,  
 No matter what I think;  
 But if you value blood and bones --  
 No disrespect to Drink! <sup>4</sup>

I'm none of those -- Oh Bacchus, blush!  
 That eat sour pickles with their beer,  
 To keep their brains and bellies cold;  
 Ashamed to let one laughing tear  
 Escape their hold.

For only just to smell your hops  
 Can make me fat and laugh all day,  
 With appetite for bread and meat:  
 I'll not despise bruised apples, they  
 Make cider sweet. <sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"A Drinking Song", Poem no. 4, pp. 26-27, ll. 1-6.

<sup>2</sup>Poem no. 749, pp. 594-595.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., l. 3. See also "Hope Abandoned", Poem no. 31, pp. 66-74, ll. 1-16.

<sup>4</sup>"Drink", Poem no. 519, p. 449.

<sup>5</sup>"To Bacchus", Poem no. 325, p. 323, ll. 1-10.

Like Herrick, Davies emphasizes the visual splendour of "wine":<sup>1</sup>

Oh for a glass of wine!  
A glass of ruby wine, that gives the eyes  
A light more wonderful than Love supplies.

Oh for a glass of ale!  
A glass of sparkling ale, where bubbles play  
At starry heavens, and show a milky way.<sup>2</sup>

When Davies calls for "honest boys"<sup>3</sup> to "quaff the sparkling ale",<sup>4</sup> he is mindful of the desirability of human comradeship and of the sense of the fulfilment it engenders. On certain occasions, a pot of ale is of special importance to the poet in that it provides for the honest affirmation of his songs:

A pot of ale, man owns the world:  
The poet hears his songs all sung,  
Inventor sees his patents sold,  
The painter sees his pictures hung.  
.....  
For what is better than to be  
A-drinking ale and singing songs,  
In summer, under some green tree?<sup>5</sup>

The ideal of community offered by the combination of "Summer's harmony" and friendly badinage is, in a sense, the positive counterpart of the

<sup>1</sup>See, for example, Herrick's "How he would drink his Wine":

"Fill me my Wine in Christall; thus, and thus  
I see't in's puris naturalibus:  
Unmixt. I love to have it smirke and shine,  
'Tis sin I know, 'tis sin to throttle Wine  
What Mad-man's he, that when it sparkles so,  
Will coole his flames, or quench his fires with snow?"

The Poetical Works of Robert Herrick, ed. by L.C. Martin  
(Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1956), p. 187.

<sup>2</sup>"Oh for a Glass of Wine", Poem no. 295, p. 307. See p. of this study for a further opinion by Davies concerning the beauty of "ale or port".

<sup>3</sup>"Come, Honest Boys", Poem no. 78, pp. 115-116, l. 2.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., l. 16.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., ll. 13-24.

"Bower in endless Night". Davies's frequent allusions to "Death" in these drinking songs suggests that he retains an apprehension of the inexplicable universe, and that his forgetfulness is only temporary.<sup>1</sup> When the speaker in "Ale" exhorts his audience to

. . . call Jack and Jim,  
And bid them drink with thee good ale;<sup>2</sup>

he is, to some extent, voicing a belief in the consoling power of human society. The speech of Coifi, in Bede's account of the conversion of King Edwin of Northumbria by Paulinus, provides a striking commentary on the temporal and spiritual significance of human symposium:

'Thus seems it to me, thou King, the present life of man on earth against that time which is unknown to us : it is as if thou wert sitting at a feast with thy chief men and thy thanes in the winter-time; the fire burns and the hall is warmed, and outside it rains and snows and storms. Comes a sparrow and swiftly flies through the house; it comes through one door and goes out another. Lo, in the time in which he is within he is not touched by the winter storm, but that time is the flash of an eye and the least of times, and he soon passes from winter to winter again. So is the life of man revealed for a brief space, but what went before and what follows after we know not.'<sup>3</sup>

The sparrow, warmed for a moment in the dwellings of men, does not deviate from its allotted trajectory. As in "The Posts",<sup>4</sup> where the

<sup>1</sup>See the following lines:

"The creeds remind us oft of Death;  
But man's best creed is to forget" (1)

"Say that the worms make skipping-ropes  
Of Beauty's hair at last;" (2)

"Time's first child, Life, doth live; but Death,  
The second, hath not yet had his breath." (3)

(1) *Ibid.*, ll. 17-18; (2) "Drink", Poem no. 519, p. 449, ll. 5-6;  
(3) "Ale", Poem no. 18, p. 54, ll. 17-18.

<sup>2</sup>Poem no. 18, p. 54, ll. 9-10.

<sup>3</sup>Michael Alexander, ed., *The Earliest English Poems* (1966; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), p. 64. (Translation by Alexander.)

<sup>4</sup>For a discussion of this poem see Chapter V, pp. 166-167 of this study.

speaker's intuition of the inevitability of death is suspended because he is

. . . beguiled  
By Song  
And Beauty . . .<sup>1</sup>

as he passes along, the excerpt suggests that the warmth of human association protects man from an overwhelming apprehension of the "otherness" which surrounds him. Further, it suggests that, in its transience, existence itself is a compound of moments of community, and that "life" is that stage in the passage of the soul which provides it with the opportunity to take part in a particular form of discourse. All attempts to look beyond this stage must fail, because human dialogue is, by nature, limited to its own sphere of activity.<sup>2</sup> Friendship, then, although fraught with temporal fallibility, is valuable when it is ordered by custom and governed by that rough-and-ready honesty which attends a sense of common purpose. This conception of community is applicable to Davies's notion of friendship. To this poet, the following commonplace is worthy of restatement because of the implications of its mode of utterance:

When I had money, money, O!  
My many friends proved all untrue;  
But now I have no money, O!  
My friends are real, though very few.<sup>3</sup>

The lilting cadence of this complaint underscores its significance as an assessment of human relationship. By voicing his dissatisfaction

<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 94, p. 146, ll. 5-7.

<sup>2</sup>See "The Philosophical Beggar", Poem no. 80, pp. 117-125, ll. 26-28:

"This world, this mystery of Time, of Life  
And Death, where every riddle men explain  
Does make another one, or many more --"

<sup>3</sup>"Money", Poem no. 52, p. 91, ll. 17-20.

through the common medium of song, the speaker implies the presence of a corresponding refrain in which the assent and testimony of mankind is recorded. In many lyrics, an impression of single voice and implied chorus helps to widen the speaker's frame of reference. In this sense, the truth of song is immediate, and the singer is both alone in his perception and confirmed in it by commonality. Although Davies's utterances are not "public", they are accessible in that they are open to verification by common insight. The theme of "Friends Unborn", a lyric which records Davies's faith in the aesthetic and moral power of song, provides an illustration of this implied chorus:

With this one friend -- I ask no more --  
 To love me till I die,  
 I sing my songs that, after death,  
 My friends may multiply.  
 To make this world, when I am gone,  
 Think all the more of me --  
 Each time a rainbow's in the sky,  
 Or bird is on a tree.  
 That God may say, when I am judged --  
 'This sinner did his duty:  
 Who made men worship Me the more,  
 By his great love of beauty.'<sup>1</sup>

Here, the value of poetry is proportionate to the human insight engendered by song. The sense of community achieved (in life) by the singer is perpetuated after death because of the durability of song. What can be applied to the poet's friends can be applied to the poet. On the basis of this assumption, to respond to song is to view the singer as a friend. The poet establishes an abstract friendship with all those who have sung before him, and his utterances are expressive of values which arise from this form of community. In singing, Davies thinks "all the more" of his intuited predecessors.

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<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 432, p. 405.

Thus, his poetry embraces their collective voice.

The immortality of song allows the singer to stave off the burden of death, and the inherent Carpe diem of the drinking song embraces "friendship", "wine", and "love" as indisputable routes to human happiness:

Ah, Life, we are no sooner dressed  
Than we must strip:  
Come, Bacchus, then, you wondrous boy,  
You god of laughter, peace and rest,  
With friendship smiling on your lip --  
There's nothing in this world can move  
Us like good wine and love. <sup>1</sup>

(iv) Davies does not meditate on the possibilities of transcendence which love may provide. Rather, the poet views love, at its most profound levels, as an unassuming form of human happiness which does not require noetic speculation. The man-woman relationship is mysterious, but the idea of love is too firmly rooted in the soil of ancient wisdom to be subjected to epistemological scrutiny. Davies's most comprehensive "philosophical" assessment of love, "The Song of Love",<sup>2</sup> evinces, in its tropology, a constant awareness of imagery

<sup>1</sup>"Drinking Song", Poem no. 292, p. 306.

In Davies's True Travellers: A Tramps [sic] Opera in Three Acts (London: Jonathan Cape, 1923), p.19~~A~~, this song is placed in a context of fellowship and good cheer. One of the characters, John Duffy, the "Landlord of a common Lodging-House", offers a libation:

"JOHN DUFFY Come, let us drink to his health. May he travel in comfort, and feel on his long journey as snug as a flea in a blanket.

.....

JOHN DUFFY Here's a jolly good health to you, my boy.

VOICES Good health.

JOHN DUFFY Drinking Song

Ah Life, [etc.]

Dick and Ralph shake hands with them all, and then leave"

<sup>2</sup>Poem no. 407, pp. 371-391.

traditionally applied to the province of love. Like a plant at "leafing time", love can be nurtured through the application of attention and sagacity. Given this unsophisticated treatment, it will thrive in any season. There are <sup>many</sup> seasonal and botanical allusions scattered throughout the one hundred quatrains of the poem, and, as in Davies's notion of friendship, the natural world measures the world of love. The following lines are typical:

The oak bears little acorns, yet  
 Is big in branch and root:  
 My love is like the smaller tree,  
 That bears a larger fruit.

In Spring, when it is leafing time,  
 We know what plants will live;  
 But love need never wait for spring,  
 To show its power to thrive.<sup>1</sup>

.....

Six months in friendship, side by side,  
 Like blades of grass we grew;  
 Love pinned us then together with  
 One diamond of his dew.

Since then our love has vaster grown,  
 Far up the branches reach;  
 Our smallest twigs as big as trunks  
 Of full-grown oak or beech.<sup>2</sup>

The natural world provides fitting examples of the balance between freedom and restraint which the lover-beloved relationship demands, and images of seasonal and acronychal stability are capable of conveying the sense of ordered mystery which is the seal of human happiness. In "Stings", for instance, the beginning of a new love is thus described:

Can I forget your coming, like the Moon  
 When, robed in light, alone, without a star,  
 She visits ruins; and the peace you brought,  
 When I with all the world was still at war.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., I-II.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., XV-XVI.

<sup>3</sup>Poem no. 571, p. 475, 11.5-8.

As this discussion will tend to emphasize recurrent modes of thought and expression in order to suggest the presence of a controlling disposition, it will be helpful, at this point, to clarify a particular theoretical premise of this study, namely, the idea of poetical development. The relationship between literary genesis and biographical circumstance is problematical. Richard Stonesifer, in his critical biography of Davies, detects a line of biographical development in the love poems:

Within this body of work two general divisions are obvious : there are, first, Davies's early love lyrics, sensuous, often earthy, almost invariably pagan in the healthy joy with which they celebrate the physical side of love; second, there are his later love poems, written just before or following his marriage . . . poems that reveal his mature and abiding passion in a real form . . .

What we have here, then, is a charmingly detailed history of one sensitive man's experience of love in all its usual forms, sacred and profane. This is its chief value to us. For here we can trace Davies's experience through the troubled days of hot-blooded youth and casual sex -- the days when, as he tells us in 'Return to Nature', he took 'hot dreams from harlot's [sic] faces' -- to the calm of old age; here we can see his development from an almost primitive greed of the senses to the experiencing of a love more spiritual than physical.<sup>1</sup>

Three factors seem to weaken the validity of these assumptions. First, although some poems refer overtly to the rewards and distractions of domestic love, and can therefore be placed in Stonesifer's second grouping,<sup>2</sup> certain poems which indicate the presence of a "mature and abiding passion" do not point to an experience of domestic love in the "non-poetic" world.<sup>3</sup> The following poem, "Rich or Poor", appeared

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<sup>1</sup>Stonesifer, Davies, p. 193.

<sup>2</sup>For example, "The Doll", Poem no. 358, pp. 344-345; "Z is for Zany", Poem no. 393, p. 363; "J is for Jealousy", Poem no. 377, pp. 354-355; "What Thoughts are Mine", Poem no. 256, p. 230.

<sup>3</sup>For example, "Where She is Now", Poem no. 301, p. 310; "Lovely Dames", Poem no. 219, p. 249.

in Songs of Joy, a volume published some twelve years before Davies's marriage to Helen Payne in 1923:

With thy true love I have more wealth  
 Than Charon's piled-up bank doth hold;  
 Where he makes kings lay down their crowns  
 And lifelong misers leave their gold.

Without thy love I've no more wealth  
 Than seen upon that other shore;  
 That cold, bare bank he rows them to --  
 Those kings and misers made so poor.<sup>1</sup>

Here, the source of "true love" may be found in imaginative experience, in biographical circumstance, or in both modes of realization.

Similarly, poems which can be placed in Stonesifer's second grouping may draw upon an imaginative hinterland which represents the sum total of recall, association, and inspiration. Immediate experience is "aesthetically indifferent", and, in its genesis, the work of art may turn towards all possible sources of imaginative material, before the creative will imposes a particular structure and direction upon the development of ideas.

Secondly, in the absence of documentary evidence, dates of composition must be inferred from the publication dates of Davies's individual volumes of poetry. Thus, while it can be established that a particular poem could not have been written after a certain date, any given poem in a volume may have been composed at any time before the publication of that volume, and, "just before or following his marriage", Davies may have selected "early" lyrics for inclusion in new collections. In the absence of temporal markers such as the name "Dinah"<sup>2</sup> (Davies's nickname for his young wife), chronological theories

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<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 95, p. 147.

<sup>2</sup>See "The Doll", Poem no. 358, pp. 344-345; "The Song of Love", Poem no. 407, pp. 371-391, VIII, LXXVII; "The World Approves", Poem no. 350, p. 340.

should be derived from clearly formulated principles of thematic interpretation and textual collation.

Thirdly, the biographical veracity of the poetic "I" is not self-evident. Although, in this study, the "I" of many lyrics has been subsumed under the terms "the poet" or "Davies", it cannot be fully equated with the man himself, the historical W.H. Davies. Thus, critical procedures which consider the biographical genesis of the work of art should separate speaker from writer, although the distance between them is variable and may at times be negligible.

For these reasons, the idea of marriage will be treated as one of many responses to the theme of love, and not as a poetical divide which separates "healthy joy" from "abiding passion". References to the fickleness and fallibility of love are to be found throughout the canon. "Where we Differ", for example, presents the "I-She" relationship as a paradigm of one-sided exclusion, and refers to ornamental artifacts in order to point out human acquisitiveness:

To think my thoughts all hers,  
 Not one of hers is mine;  
 She laughs -- while I must sigh;  
 She sings -- while I must whine.

She eats -- while I must fast;  
 She reads -- while I am blind;  
 She sleeps -- while I must wake;  
 Free -- I no freedom find.

To think the world for me  
 Contains but her alone,  
 And that her eyes prefer  
 Some ribbon, scarf, or stone.<sup>1</sup>

"A Change of Voice", a complaint against the restrictions of domestic love, emphasizes the rôle of guile in the transformation of tenderness into selfish security:

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<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 53, p. 92.

I heard a Lady near my door  
 Talking to one she knew:  
 Was this the voice I used to hear,  
 So tender, soft and true?  
 Was this the voice that charmed me once,  
 Before the Marriage vow?  
 But why should Man, securely bound,  
 Expect that accent now!  
 Why should she charm him as a wife,  
 Knowing she has him chained for life;  
 And why should she call him her 'Honey' --  
 Knowing the wretch has no more money?<sup>1</sup>

To the amorists of these poems, cupidity is the chief cause of estrangement in love. The presents of courtship lead to an expectancy which cannot be fulfilled. In "The Power of Silence", a disenchanted lover itemizes his lady's fondness for adornment, and, in "Love Me No More", the speaker complains of a similar partiality:

And will she never hold her tongue,  
 About that feather in her hat;  
 Her scarf, when she has done with that,  
 And then the bangle on her wrist;  
 And is my silence meant to make  
 Her talk the more -- the more she's kissed?<sup>2</sup>

Since Love cries out for money, still,  
 Where little is, or none --  
 Love me no more till I am dead,  
 And every penny gone.<sup>3</sup>

To a second group of lovers, disloyalty and fickleness outweigh all other causes of disruption. "Flirting"<sup>4</sup> and "Beauty's Revenge"<sup>5</sup> are of particular interest in that they reveal a characteristic manner of proceeding. While "Flirting" presents a light-hearted appraisal

<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 632, p. 505.

<sup>2</sup>Poem no. 201, pp. 236-237.

<sup>3</sup>Poem no. 580, p. 479.

<sup>4</sup>Poem no. 578, p. 478.

<sup>5</sup>Poem no. 687, pp. 549-550.

of an intimation of infidelity within a relationship which suggests domestic love, "Beauty's Revenge" describes the changing fortunes of an amourette in a tone of sombre disillusionment. In a sense, the song-like, trochaic gaiety of the former lyric rectifies the perturbation of its speaker. In the latter poem, a naive young man's newly-acquired awareness of feminine changeability is viewed in a rather more serious light. Because the situation in "Flirting" is, to some extent, a product of choice, it can be treated with a certain gay impulsiveness. For the young man, however, "Proud Margery"<sup>1</sup> represents an incomprehensible form of love. While the lover in "Flirting" is too much aware of the shadings of love to be dismayed at the idea of disloyalty, it is suggested that the lover in "Beauty's Revenge" is wounded by the fickleness of his beloved. Thus, the domestic complaint is sometimes far less anxious than the complaint concerning the adventures of youth.

Davies's comic vision treats the imperfections and distractions of domestic love as by-products of the sense of security which formalized love engenders. Because its conventions are intelligible, imperfections can be named and corrected. For Davies, there is inherent danger in love unformalized, and the unrestricted dreams which arise from this form of love can lead to an apprehension of transience which portends the "otherness" of tragic unintelligibility. His quasi-pastourelle, "A Dream",<sup>2</sup> represents an intermediate stage of awareness, a stage between unintelligibility and community. Stonesifer conjectures that the idea for the poem "might have come

<sup>1</sup>"Beauty's Revenge", Poem no. 687, pp. 549-550, l. 1.

<sup>2</sup>Poem no. 104, pp. 152-153.

to [Davies] as a result of attempting to ring a change <sup>on</sup> Keats' 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci';<sup>1</sup> and, in the course of his discussion of the love poems, names Herrick, Donne, Campion, Marlowe, and (indirectly) Edward Fitzgerald as Davies's major influences. Like all other aspects of authorial intention, literary analogies can be illuminating. However, as Stonesifer himself remarks, in this case "such influence-hunting . . . achieves little, for if Davies constantly reminds us of a score of Elizabethan or Caroline writers, he is never quite like them."<sup>2</sup>

An analysis of the essentialities of a particular poetic vision should, therefore, precede an explication of generic resemblances. "A Dream" records the progress of an encounter between adventurer and maiden, and, in its manner of presentation, the anecdote exteriorizes some fundamental features of Davies's conception of love:

I met her in the leafy woods,  
 Early a Summer's night;  
 I saw her white teeth in the dark,  
 There was no better light.

Had she not come up close and made  
 Those lilies their light spread,  
 I had not proved her mouth a rose,  
 So round, so fresh, so red.

Her voice was gentle, soft and sweet,  
 In words she was not strong;  
 Yet her low twitter had more charm  
 Than any full-mouthed song.

We walked in silence to her cave,  
 With but few words to say;  
 But ever and anon she stopped  
 For kisses on the way.

.....

O night of Joy! O morning's grief!  
 For when, with passion done,  
 Rocked on her breast I fell asleep,  
 I woke, and lay alone.

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<sup>1</sup>Stonesifer, Davies, p. 198.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 200.

Within the balladic structure of the poem, two main forms of "regulating punctuation" can be discerned. These elements, by imposing a mental pattern upon the events described in the poem, indicate an imaginative commitment to the idea of formalized love. The first form of ordination arises from the temporal sequence of the narrative. The encounter begins early on a "Summer's night", and ends at dawn. In "the dark" of this night, the maiden's charms are perceived with clarity and precision. As in "Smiles",<sup>1</sup> darkness highlights a girl's features and increases the palpability of her form. The primary colours and stylized forms ("so round, so fresh, so red") which emerge from the gloaming constitute a second form of ordination. In the second quatrain, the light reflected from the "lilies" illuminates and defines human beauty. Thus, the natural world becomes the medium through which a man-woman relationship is brought about. Although Davies is not given to symbolical excursion, his use of qualities associated with the natural world as indices of human beauty suggests that he senses a mysterious connexion between abstract idea and concrete form. In this poem, the idea of botanical freshness and repose is crystallized by the presence of a human figure, and the maid, in approaching the speaker, extends the brightness of the natural world.

Many lyrics on love describe human beauty by way of natural beauty. In "Beauty's Light", for example, the speaker describes the

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<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 129, pp. 176-177, ll. 1-8:

"I saw a black girl once,  
As black as winter's night;  
Till through her parted lips  
There came a flood of light;  
It was the milky way  
Across her face so black:  
Her two lips closed again,  
And night came back."

beauty of his beloved in terms of natural items such as berries and flowers, and celebrates the loveliness of her hair in the following terms:

I know not where the light turns on:  
 Whether that wondrous ball of hair  
 Had golden fire reflects upon  
 Her cheeks, creating sunbeams there,  
 I cannot tell; but it is sweet  
 Back of that column white as snow  
 To let my fingers link and meet  
 Under her hair falls, and to know  
 Her mine; where it feels warm; a nest  
 Just emptied by the birds at rest.<sup>1</sup>

In "Margery",<sup>2</sup> items such as butterfly, bird, wind, and trees, anticipate the fulfilment of love "in a garden green and still", and in "Rose",<sup>3</sup> the varying charms of a group of girls are reflected in images drawn from the natural world:

Jane's cherry lips can show  
 Their white stones in a row.  
 A soft June smile steals out  
 Of Mary's April pout.  
 Sweet creatures swim and play  
 In Maud's blue pools all day.<sup>4</sup>

As can be seen in these lyrics, Davies approaches human beauty through the familiarized world of nature. His conception of love is, therefore, refined by natural associations and enriched by the well-established iridescence of the created universe. "Kitty and I" provides a clear example of this mode of thought:

<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 2, pp. 23-24, ll. 11-20. See also, "The Flood", Poem no. 85, p. 140; "A Maiden and Her Hair", Poem no. 38, p. 80.

<sup>2</sup>Poem no. 15, p. 52.

<sup>3</sup>Poem no. 61, pp. 100-101.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., ll. 3-8.

The gentle wind that waves  
 The green boughs here and there,  
 Is showing how my hand  
 Waved Kitty's finer hair.

The Bee, when all his joints  
 Are clinging to a Blossom,  
 Is showing how I clung  
 To Kitty's softer bosom.

The Rill, when his sweet voice  
 Is hushed by water-cresses,  
 Is Kitty's sweeter voice  
 Subdued by my long kisses.<sup>1</sup>

Love, when approached through images of consistent joy, acquires a ceremonial perfection. In "The Battle", human beauty reveals itself as an emblematic representation of proportion, design, and gradation:

There was a battle in her face,  
 Between a Lily and a Rose:  
 My Love would have the Lily win  
 And I the Lily lose.

I saw with joy that strife, first one,  
 And then the other uppermost;  
 Until the Rose roused all its blood,  
 And then the Lily lost.

When she's alone, the Lily rules,  
 By her consent, without mistake:  
 But when I come that red Rose leaps  
 To battle for my sake.<sup>2</sup>

Here, the "harmonious confusion" of the natural world enters into the lover's conception of his mistress. By restating a human phenomenon (blushing) in terms of botanical and chivalric imagery the speaker widens his appreciation of the dynamism of love. A conception of the blazonry of romance enables Davies to confer a formalized status upon human beauty. When, in "My Lady Comes" a lover announces the approach of his beloved, the bee is expected to acknowledge her presence; and grasses, hedges, trees, and flowers respond

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<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 91, p. 229, ll. 1-12.

<sup>2</sup>"The Battle", Poem no. 40, pp. 81-82.

to her matchless beauty. It is as if, in a seemingly natural and instinctive way, Davies had rediscovered what J.B. Leishman has called "the pastoral hyperbole":<sup>1</sup>

Peace, mournful Bee, with that  
 Man's deep voice from the grave:  
 My Lady comes, and Flowers  
 Make all their colours wave;  
 And joyful shivers seize  
 The hedges, grass and trees.

My Lady comes, and leaves  
 Above her head clap hands;  
 The Cow stares o'er the field,  
 Up straight the Horse now stands;  
 Under her loving eyes  
 Flowers change to butterflies[.]

The grass comes running up  
 To kiss her coming feet;  
 Then cease your grumble, Bee,  
 When I my Lady meet;  
 And Arch, let not your stones  
 Turn our soft sighs to groans.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, when, in "A Dream",<sup>3</sup> the maiden's "gentle, soft and sweet" voice is described as a "low twitter", a conception of love as an extension of the harmony of the natural world can be discerned. Because this type of metaphor is not derived from a yoking of contraries, it is easy to overlook the "turn" of thought which lies behind the utterance. By placing his human figures in a context of seasonal and vegetable abundance, the poet is able to describe a human encounter while obeying an impulse to record the perfection of the natural world. In this way, the wonderment which he associates with his familiarized natural world is yoked to an idea of human love. For

<sup>1</sup>J.B. Leishman, The Art of Marvell's Poetry (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1966), pp. 224-237.

<sup>2</sup>Poem no. 719, pp. 569-570.

<sup>3</sup>Poem no. 104, pp. 152-153.

Davies, the natural world is "familiar" because the wonderment it inspires accords with his readiness to be inspired, and a capacity to be astonished is the governing premise of his view of the universe. A state of astonishment does not arise from discovery, but from the freshness of rediscovery. The dependability of wonder allows him to rediscover in common items the newness of a just-created universe.

Mr. Davies is astonished at everything the rest of us take for granted. What to the rest of us is the first primrose of spring is to him the first primrose in all the world. In other words, he is pure poet.<sup>1</sup>

Human beauty, when related to song and flower, and seen in terms of visual design, is empowered to be a source of timeless wonderment. Beauty, like the natural world, can be invoked as a timeless form of consolation:

Come, thou sweet Wonder, by whose power  
 We more or less enjoy our years;  
 . . . . .  
 Come to my heavy rain of care,  
 And make it weigh like dew; charm me  
 With Beauty's hair, her eyes or lips;  
 With mountain dawn, or sunset sea  
 That's like a thousand burning ships.<sup>2</sup>

The idea that beauty has its dwelling in the natural world, and that the birth of beauty is a process by which an imprint of loveliness is passed from nature to maiden before being refined in the temperance of true love, finds its clearest expression in "On What Sweet Banks".<sup>3</sup> This lyric provides human confirmation of the notion of wonderment

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<sup>1</sup>Sir John Squire, cited by Stanley J. Kunitz, "The Simplicity of Wonder", Poetry: A Magazine of Verse, April-September, 1936, p. 234.

<sup>2</sup>"Come, thou Sweet Wonder", Poem no. 198, p. 234.

<sup>3</sup>Poem no. 291, p. 305.

which is described in "Fancy's Home".<sup>1</sup> When, in response to the "shining wonder" of his loved one's eyes, the speaker of the former lyric asks:

On what sweet banks were thy pure fancies fed,  
 What world of smiling light has been thy home;  
 In what fair land of rainbows wert thou bred,  
 From what green land of cuckoos art thou come?

it is as if he expects in reply Fancy's response to the question:

"Tell me, Fancy, sweetest child, / Of thy parents and thy birth":

In a cottage I was born,  
 My kind father was Content,  
 My dear mother Innocence;  
 On wild fruits of wonderment  
 I have nourished ever since.

Through the presence of wonderment, love and beauty have their dwelling in the natural world. Thus, in the perfection of love, beauty inevitably returns to the temperate harmony of the rural world. This theme of "return" is the informing principle of "Come, let us Find",<sup>2</sup> a pastoral lyric which reflects a vision of the perfectibility of conjugal love. Although it is possible to name Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd To His Love" and other invitations of the kind found in England's Helicon as prototypes, the poem forgathers the principle foci of a vision which is essentially Davies's:

Come, let us find a cottage, love,  
 That's green for half a mile around;  
 To laugh at every grumbling bee,  
 Whose sweetest blossom's not yet found.  
 Where many a bird shall sing for you,  
 And in our garden build its nest:  
 They'll sing for you as though their eggs  
 Were lying in your breast,  
     My love --  
 Were lying warm in your soft breast.

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<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 87, p. 141.

<sup>2</sup>Poem no. 235, pp. 259-260.

'Tis strange how men find time to hate,  
 When life is all too short for love;  
 But we, away from our own kind,  
 A different life can live and prove.  
 And early on a summer's morn,  
 As I go walking out with you,  
 We'll help the sun with our warm breath  
 To clear away the dew,  
     My love,  
 To clear away the morning dew.

In a sense, this lyric embodies most of the forms of community noted earlier in this discussion. The idea of "staring" and "counting" can be discerned in the quatrain which opens the poem. Thus, the world implied by the reference to the cottage "That's green for half a mile around" provides for a relationship of sharing and mutuality. The argument of this quatrain can be seen as the first section of the poem. The remaining six lines of the first stanza relate to the descriptions of human beauty in "Beauty's Light"<sup>1</sup> and "The Flood",<sup>2</sup> and constitute the second section of the lyric. The second stanza, in stressing the ideal of the simple life, emphasizes the possibility of the human completion of "Summer's harmony", and a transitional section (ll. 11-14) anticipates the closing movement:

And early on a summer's morn,  
 As I go walking out with you,  
 We'll help the sun with our warm breath  
 To clear away the dew,  
     My love,  
 To clear away the morning dew.

Although the arguments of the two stanzas are closely intertwined, two voices can be overheard. The persuasive tone of the amatory voice which opens the poem meets, but does not merge with, the private and more introspective voice which guides the poetic argument to closure.

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<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 2, pp. 23-24, ll. 11-20.

<sup>2</sup>Poem no. 85, p. 140.

The first lines of each stanza reflect this distinction:

Come, let us find a cottage, love, (i)

.....

'Tis strange how men find time to hate, (ii)<sup>1</sup>

The imperative ("Come") in line (i), suggests a mood of aspiration. In line (ii), the verb form ("Tis") implies a movement towards definition and placement. This opposition is strengthened by the implied antitheses of "love" and "hate" and by the contrast between the two senses of the duplicated word "find". In the context provided by line (i), "find" signals invitation and the possibility of discovery, while, in line (ii), the word anticipates a sense of imperfection and limitation. Thus, each of the two lines presents a motif always implicit in pastoral, namely, the nostalgic contrast between innocence and experience. Line (ii), in turn, leads to a further condition of pastoral -- the ideal of solitude and the contemplative life. However, in contrast to the idea which is expressed in Marvell's "The Garden",<sup>2</sup> namely, the notion of solitude as spiritual and creative fulfilment, Davies's ideal embraces the possibility of community as imaginative fulfilment. For Davies, perfect community becomes a form of solitude in that the mutual restraints and obligations of conjugal love foster a sense of concord which promotes contemplation.

The seasonal, diurnal, and solar imagery of the second stanza, commingled with the presence of the human figures, helping the sun with their "warm breath" to dry up the dew, suggests the complete interpenetration of two worlds, the natural and the human. Thus, in

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<sup>1</sup>Italics mine.

<sup>2</sup>For a discussion of this poem, see pp. 101-106 of this study.

this stanza, a definition of the character and significance of the bond between man and man, and between man and nature, is set forth. In attempting to persuade his beloved to accept an ideal, the lover confirms and extends his understanding of human happiness. Like Antinous in Orchestra who "with fair manners wooed the queen to dance" by pointing to a universe of celestial harmony, the speaker unfolds a vision of natural ordination: the "grumbling bee" searching for his sweetest blossom, the glad birds building their nests in a garden of contentment. The epithet "grumbling" and the invitation to laughter admit possibilities of nonchalant humour and realism into this pastoral retreat, and with the lightest of touches the speaker creates a tonal variety which makes the ideal more than a passing fancy, and which is indifferent to irony. The conceit which concludes the first stanza:

They'll sing for you as though their eggs  
 Were lying in your breast,  
     My love --  
 Were lying warm in your soft breast

successfully suggests youth, fertility and renewal, and signals the dawning of "a different life". To "live and prove" the existence of a resplendent alternative world whose every dawn gives human love the opportunity to complete a pattern emanating from the sun, is to fulfil the highest ideals of community.

CHAPTER VII

LYRIC : A BRIEF DEFINITION AND AN EXAMINATION  
OF SOME ASPECTS OF PARTICULAR POEMS

In the foregoing chapters, certain themes and motifs have, it is hoped, emerged as indices of one poet's lyric vision. In order to identify the controlling premises of this vision, the mode of explication employed in this thesis has been largely descriptive in intention. Thus, normative criteria derived from personal aesthetic inclinations have seldom been used as principles of selection. Accordingly, no attempt has been made to judge the "value" of a Davies lyric in terms of other lyrics in the canon,<sup>1</sup> and no attempt has been made to rank or evaluate the poems according to external standards of comparison. However, impartiality might breed contempt. Many poems named and discussed in this study for their exegetical value are secondary utterances in that they are awkward in movement, listless in sentiment, and prone to bathetic excursions of a singularly dismal kind.<sup>2</sup> No excuse is made for not attempting to substantiate these allegations. It seems more fruitful to name some poems by Davies which attain to the highest ideals of lyric skill, and to attempt, in a concluding examination of certain poems, a brief "defence" of his lyric poetry. The following poems (from a list of about fifty) achieve, in the opinion of the present writer, a wholeness and a dignity which implies a seamless transformation of imaginative instinct and raw material into song lyric design: "Robin Redbreast"; "The Kingfisher"; "Fancy's Home"; "Days that have Been"; "Dreams of the Sea"; "The Moon"; "A Great Time"; "The Two Children"; "Raptures"; "Come let us Find"; "Love's

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<sup>1</sup>The edition used throughout this study, The Complete Poems of W.H. Davies, contains 749 poems.

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, "The Soul's Destroyer", Poem no. 14, pp. 41-52, ll. 133-143.

Caution"; "The Shadow"; "The Birth of Song"; "Named".<sup>1</sup>

There exist very few theoretical treatments of lyric, particularly of that form which may be designated the quintessence of lyric, the song. Accordingly, and because of the aims of this thesis, at this stage only a few points about the nature of lyric will be put forward.

Song lyric can be defined in terms of certain qualities which arise from the "resonance which may be present within an image of apparent simplicity".<sup>2</sup> It is generally a shortish utterance which casts an easily remembered shape, circular in design, and seemingly spontaneous in origin. The little poem, "The Birth of Song",<sup>3</sup> excellently illustrates these features, and, in the last two lines, Davies, in a sense, defines this illusion of spontaneity:

I am as certain of my song,  
When first it warms my brain,  
As woman of her unborn child,  
Or wind that carries rain.  
The child and rain are born at last,  
Though now concealed from sight --  
So let my song, unshaped and crude,  
Come perfect to the light.

Subliminal strains of song, formless and imperfect, are at once purified and organized at the moment of utterance. As has been noted in Chapter V of this study, "light", for Davies, refers to the medium

<sup>1</sup>"Robin Redbreast", Poem no. 34, p. 76; "The Kingfisher", Poem no. 69, p. 107; "Fancy's Home", Poem no. 87, p. 141; "Days that have Been", Poem no. 89, pp. 142-143; "Dreams of the Sea", Poem no. 143, pp. 187-188; "The Moon", Poem no. 170, p. 215; "A Great Time", Poem no. 171, pp. 215-216; "The Two Children", Poem no. 197, pp. 233-234; "Raptures", Poem no. 206, p. 241; "Come, let us Find", Poem no. 235, pp. 259-260; "Love's Caution", Poem no. 268, p. 280; "The Shadow", Poem no. 552, p. 465; "The Birth of Song", Poem no. 584, p. 481; "Named", Poem no. 595, p. 487.

<sup>2</sup>Kathleen Raine, Defending Ancient Springs (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 107.

<sup>3</sup>Poem no. 584, p. 481.

by which a sense of intelligibility can be wrung from a baffling universe. In these lines, "light" implies both the goal and the genesis of song. An imaginative allegiance to lyric indicates a belief in the stability and unity of the extra-lyric universe. This belief, possibly Platonic in origin, allows song lyric to be a distillation of a greater harmony. If an axiomatic principle of song can be abstracted from Davies's lines, it is this : for every song that comes "perfect to the light", an inward song which reflects celestial ordination must have been overheard by the singer. The inward song is, however, not always consistent in its power to inspire. When the song in the mind is obscured, dedication, craftsmanship, and a resurgence of faith in universal harmony re-create the preconditions of inspiration. Thus, spontaneity is the outcome of a purposive activity which paves the way for song, and the "light" which it reflects is, in a sense, a form of Weltanschauung.

In any successful poem, all parts are interlocked, and every item is meaningful; in song lyric, either transparently so <sup>or</sup> and in such a form that their <sup>of any item</sup> relevance <sub>is</sub> taken on trust. This interior correspondence can be seen as a miniature representation of the idea of universal hierarchy. Milton, in Paradise Lost, writing within the ancient orthodox tradition of European ethics, draws upon the implications of this idea for his conception of objective degrees of goodness and for his theory of divine creativity. The aesthetic, symbolic and imaginative value of the notion of universal correspondence is very great indeed, and many philosophical and theological inquiries have their source in this grand abstraction. Kathleen Raine, after naming this conception as "the law of correspondence", cites the observations of René Guénon:<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Kathleen Raine, Defending Ancient Springs, p. 112.

By virtue of this law, each thing, proceeding as it does from a metaphysical principle from which it derives its reality, translates or expresses that principle in its own fashion and in accordance with its own order of existence, so that from one order to another all things are linked together and correspond in such a way as to contribute to the universal and total harmony, which, in the multiplicity of manifestation, can be likened to a manifestation of the principial unity itself. For this reason the laws of a lower domain can always be taken to symbolize realities of a higher order, wherein resides their own profoundest cause, which is at once their principle and their end.

The entelechy of lyric form can be seen as a type of realization on a small scale of this "total harmony", and some of the most admirable definitions of lyric imply cosmic patterning as a tertium quid, intermediate between creative will and lyric discourse. The following observations on this point are by Kathleen Raine:

Beauty is a unity, a unification; and lyric form, as all poets know, comes from something 'given', precisely when imaginative inspiration is strongest. Such forms can, of course, be imitated, but that is quite another matter; although it may be that such dead imitations for a time brought lyric form into disfavour. However, a deeper reason for the disappearance of lyric form between the two wars . . . had probably much more to do with precisely that loss of access to the 'other' mind . . . Lyric form is in itself the supreme embodiment of archetypal order, the nearest to music and number; it is beauty itself informing words in themselves ordinary;<sup>1</sup>

Beauty, too, informs emotions which, while deeply felt, are "in themselves ordinary". In the following poem, a simple act of cognition releases an emotional flare which hovers over the exclamatory middle section, before being directed towards reflective invitation:

Robin on a leafless bough,  
 Lord in Heaven, how he sings!  
 Now cold Winter's cruel Wind  
 Makes playmates of poor, dead things.

How he sings for joy this morn!  
 How his breast doth pant and glow!  
 Look you how he stands and sings,  
 Half-way up his legs in snow!

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<sup>1</sup>Kathleen Raine, Defending Ancient Springs, pp. 174-175.

If these crumbs of bread were pearls,  
 And I had no bread at home,  
 He should have them for that song;  
 Pretty Robin Redbreast, Come.<sup>1</sup>

The poem compels because of the organization of its voices. The opening voice which declares the presence of the robin, besides establishing the trochaic norm of the poem, sets up a particular tonal and thematic expectancy. The theme of invitation and community which closes the lyric is anticipated by the first line. The simple opening annunciation, both naming and placing the robin, can be seen as a form of request. No further details are given, and, for this reason, a transformation of singing line into pervasive singing voice is effected. The path of song is smoothed by the repetition of such transmitting points as the phrase "how he sings". Thus, the voice which names, places, and points to the closing invitation is inseparable from the argument of the poem. A second mode of utterance, which can be described as a "visualizing voice", is concerned with linking the idea of song as an abstract source of wonder to the more concrete attributes of the bird itself. The image of a solitary robin on a leafless bough is, in itself, a mental distillation of ideas about causality, design, seasonal occurrence, attitude, and growth. The robin has chosen to alight upon a particular bough at a particular time, and the poet has chosen to remember. It is, perhaps, precisely this sense of time, place, and poet which, at first glance, confers a haiku-like inclusiveness upon the first two lines of the poem:

Robin on a leafless bough,  
 Lord in Heaven, how he sings!

However, the comparison is illusory. Time and place must be further

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<sup>1</sup>"Robin Redbreast", Poem no. 34, p. 76.

defined. In the middle quatrain, the presence of the robin is described through the phrases "his breast" and "his legs", phrases which flank the controlling point of the poem -- the idea of standing and singing. The place of standing is defined by the last line of the quatrain, and the time of singing measured by the phrase "pant and glow". Visible pulsations of joy "time" the duration of song; meanwhile, at a lower level of attention, the physical imprint of the robin "Half-way up his legs in snow" charts his passion in a similar way. By directing the speaker's wonder, the singing voice generated in the first line registers the bird's response to its song. Thus, two voices, one inviting community through the unimpeded movement of song, and one offering visible proof of the emotive value of melody, coexist in the lyric. To a certain extent, therefore, the lyric is both pure song and pure meditation, the first property arising from a response to song, and the second quality arising from a response to the idea of standing.

Catherine Ing, after distinguishing between lyric as a "song for singing"<sup>1</sup> and the "lyrical" poem "in which the reader expects to find a revelation of strong personal emotion, usually of an intimate kind",<sup>2</sup> emphasizes the limitations of this approach:

It is impossible to draw a clear line, on one side or the other of which every lyric must take its first place. There are many poems, notably some by Keats and Wordsworth, which remain on the border-line. When passages of poems largely non-lyrical are said to have a 'lyrical' quality, it is not always easy to judge which sense of the word is being used, and often either is valid. The two kinds have, in fact, much in common, and naturally, for, in spite of all their evident contradictions, the second grows directly and inevitably out

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<sup>1</sup>Catherine Ing, Elizabethan Lyrics : A Study of English Metres and their Relation to Poetic Effect, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

of the first. The musical brevity of song lyric cannot deal with narrative or with details of a situation, but it can convey emotion.<sup>1</sup>

"Robin Redbreast", although centrally a song lyric, reveals a reflective attitude which "grows directly and inevitably" from the singing line. A similar fusion of simple meditation and unobstructed song can be noted in "The Moon":<sup>2</sup>

Thy beauty haunts me heart and soul,  
 Oh thou fair Moon, so close and bright;  
 Thy beauty makes me like the child,  
 That cries aloud to own thy light:  
 The little child that lifts each arm,  
 To press thee to her bosom warm.  
 Though there are birds that sing this night  
 With thy white beams across their throats,  
 Let my deep silence speak for me  
 More than for them their sweetest notes:  
 Who worships thee till music fails,  
 Is greater than thy nightingales.

Child, moon, and birds coexist in light and song. The "little child that lifts each arm / To press" the moon to her "bosom warm" anticipates the lunar patterning of "white beams across their throats". The meditator is, however, distanced from these nodes of affinity. He does not cry "aloud to own" the moon's light, but regards its beauty in profound silence. In a sense, the theme of the poem is concerned with revealing the significance of silent song, and with ways of allowing "deep silence" to penetrate the void. The meditator possesses a "song in the mind", but has chosen not to exteriorize its inspiration. Rather, he allows child and bird to gather the visual splendour of the moon, while he attends to an inward image of beauty. The birds with "white beams", and the child "that cries aloud" are appointed as keepers of a vision, timeless recipients of an eternal

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>2</sup>Poem no. 170, p. 215.

beauty. In the knowledge that the child will always be sensitive to celestial harmony, and that birds will always sing, the speaker is able to rest in an unvoiced tribute to wonder. For this reason, when "music fails", a deeper appreciation of harmony replaces a desire to sing. In the concluding couplet of the poem, the idea of worship has been vested in the universe itself. The speaker, unable to articulate his appreciation in song, is confident in the belief that the child and the "birds that sing" will continue their praise. Further, the ambiguity of the phrase "till music fails" suggests that, if and when the birds stop singing, the speaker's inward song will still reflect their joy.

Because the thematic inclusiveness of this couplet is a product of all the visual and emotional signs of the poem as a whole, it may be helpful to enumerate some determining principles of the argument. Formal elements such as rhyme and alliteration unify the two verses. A minor point, but one worth noting, is that only one line, "Let my deep silence speak for me", lacks a "th" sound. This fricative is evenly distributed throughout the lyric, and it is of thematic importance in that the words "thee" and "thy" point to the subject of invocation, the moon. In the monosyllabic<sup>of the</sup> utterance

Though there are birds that sing this night  
 which begins the second verse, the "th" is closely related to a metrical principle, since it usually initiates the more lightly stressed syllables of the line. Because of its central position, this line condenses and reflects a regularizing alliterative current. A faint but appreciable interlocking of verses is achieved by the repetition of the "b" rhyme in line eight. The rhetorical unity which derives from the presentation of precise octosyllabics within a quatrain-plus-couplet construction pilots the argument to completion.

The integrity of form which mirrors the observer's clear grasp of beauty is, in turn, a representation of the poet's conception of the organized wholeness of thought which follows from the contemplation of the beautiful. In "Love's Caution",<sup>1</sup> a lyric which suggests aubade (though the parting is not at dawn), the poet presents a sequential progression of items, and links an impression of hierarchy to an ideal of human love:

Tell them, when you are home again,  
 How warm the air was now;  
 How silent were the birds and leaves,  
 And of the moon's full glow;  
 And how we saw afar  
 A falling star;  
 It was a tear of pure delight  
 Ran down the face of Heaven this happy night.<sup>2</sup>

In a multiform universe, the poet selects bird and leaf, moon, star, and heaven as the visible accomplishments of a joyful universe. In turn, each item suggests an ever-widening world. It is to the lovers that the universe turns for joy, and, in the first two lines of the poem, a coherent system of human thought is evoked. While the lovers watch the falling star, a jocund universe recognizes their love, and, as the scope of their vision increases to accommodate the "face of Heaven", a star seems to bridge the void which separates man from firmament. The phrase which opens the poem, "Tell them", claims a specific temporal and relational area for the utterance which follows. The "area" is located in time by the imperative form which suggests anticipation, and the We-They relationship which is implied by the command prefigures the sense of well-defined human values which follows from the phrase "are home again". The apparent simplicity

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<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 268, p. 280.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., ll. 1-8.

of the statement which follows this phrase,

How warm the air was now;

clothes a surprising "turn" of thought. The tension between past and present which is embedded in the collocation "was now" generates particular tonal and thematic implications. At a colloquial level, the straightforward sense of this phrase is assured. Yet, the sense of a strangely illuminating riddle persists. A similar tension can be noted in the closing line of the verse, where the phrases "ran down" and "this happy night", although not mutually exclusive, imply a delicate distortion of the concept of linear time. In the first two lines of the verse, it is as if the lover, in anticipating a future event, senses the timelessness of his love. His advice provides for many contingencies. By ~~his~~<sup>imagined</sup> telling "them" of the warmth and wonder of the air and sky, the night itself is prolonged, and the distinction between past and present becomes negligible. Further, the sense of tenderness implicit in the private rehearsal of a speech intended for public consideration enhances the closeness of the lovers. In a sense, the speaker tests the validity of the experience of love by "pretending" to overhear an intimate dialogue of reassurance. An impression of ceremony follows from the idea of lovers summarizing and refining personal intimations of a benign universe. The second verse confirms this suggestion of intimate ritual:

Our kisses are but love in flower,  
 Until that greater time  
 When, gathering strength, those flowers take wing,  
 And love can reach his prime.  
 And now, my heart's delight,  
 Good night, good night;  
 Give me the last sweet kiss--  
 But do not breathe at home one word of this!

The implied metamorphoses of "kisses" into flowers, and flowers into butterflies can be seen as yet another version of the private language

of anticipation in love. At once familiar and personal, these images create a sense of universal correspondence. However, the admonition which closes the poem calls for secrecy. While celestial harmony is seen as a topic fit for public discourse, the "last sweet kiss" must not be mentioned. Yet, the advice is not intended to lead to prevarication. Although stratagems are to be employed, the essential innocence of love is maintained, and there is no suggestion of collusion. To tell of the celestial recognition of human love is to imply the personal affirmation of that love.

The interdependence of human beauty and universal concord is such that many items in the human world are capable of suggesting qualities in the natural world, and vice versa. Thus, when the speaker in "The Shadow"<sup>1</sup> describes the relationship between sun and butterfly in terms of human love, a microcosm of obedience and correspondence is implied:

She flies from my shadow,  
 To her lover, the Sun;  
 Yet for her rare beauty,  
 I still follow on.

Her wings tipped with silver,  
 Jet-black, and of gold,  
 She flies to her lover,  
 From a shadow that's cold.

Stay, Butterfly, stay,  
 My Love's full of laughter:  
 Why fly from a shadow?  
 She still follows after!

The three main items in the lyric, shadow, sun, and butterfly, are closely intertwined at all stages of the argument. In the first two lines, as the shadow of the human observer reaches the butterfly, a movement towards the sun begins. This movement, in turn, initiates an impulse to follow beauty. The second and third verses amplify and

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<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 552, pp. 465-466.

particularize these movements. While the second verse restates the dynamics of the situation, the third verse introduces the idea of human love for the natural world. As the butterfly moves towards the sun, the shadow cast by the speaker is extended, and, as the shadow develops, the butterfly resumes its search for the sun. This cyclical correspondence is echoed in lyric form. The first two lines of the poem are remembered at closure, and the frequency of trisyllabic feet in the two-stress pattern of each line suggests a flitting movement which is almost emblematic of a butterfly's flight. The finely modulated line which opens "Raptures",<sup>1</sup>

Sing for the sun your lyric, lark,

establishes a similar anticipation of circularity. The trochaic inversion which begins this line has the effect of "weighting" the first syllable so that it accords with the stress given to the terminal word. "Sing", "sun", "lyric", and "lark", as items singled out by rhetorical accent, imply Davies's favourite universe, a world of human song and "Summer's harmony". In this universe, there are no lacunae of vision, and celestial concord refines all human desires, aims, and relationships, until man himself mirrors a natural world which is always obedient to the divine will. To march "out one day in spring"<sup>2</sup> into a dignified but joyful world of natural obedience, and to recognize that the harmony of the visible universe "cometh from afar",<sup>3</sup> is to be named as a member of this golden world. As has

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<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 206, p. 241.

<sup>2</sup>"Named", Poem no. 595, p. 487, l. 1.

<sup>3</sup>Wordsworth, "Ode: Intimations Of Immortality From Recollections of Early Childhood", l. 61.

been noted earlier in this study,<sup>1</sup> Davies's lyric, "Named",<sup>2</sup> places the speaker in a ceremonial context which leads to a momentary intimation of Eden. This poem is, perhaps, Davies's most explicit statement of the relationship between divine ordination and the everyday life of man. As such, it absorbs and reflects some of the cardinal points of the poet's lyric vision. For these reasons, it is desirable to give the poem in full for a second time:

As I marched out one day in Spring,  
 Proud of my life and power --  
 I saw an infant, all alone,  
 Kissing a small, red flower,  
 He looked at me with solemn eyes,  
 As only children can,  
 And -- in a voice that might be God's --  
 He called distinctly -- 'Man!'  
 Though I had been the Pope of Rome,  
 Our English King or Heir,  
 A child has called in God's own way,  
 And I have answered -- 'Here!'

The significance of this lyric stems from two "sources". The first, the universal background implicit in the idea of "naming", is shaped by the second, lyric organization of topic and theme. Instinctively and unerringly, Davies has travelled into an almost mythopoeic mode of thinking, and his intuition has been simplified<sup>fi</sup> by song. The lyric is straightforward in diction, style, and manner of proceeding. Yet, in its very simplicity, the presentation of the poem accords with its topic.

Naming is a simple act. In the Mosaic account of creation, the act implies both free will and hierarchy. In establishing dominion over the creatures of the universe, Adam expresses his obedience to the will of the Creator, and, in the world before the Fall, each

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<sup>1</sup>See Chapter IV, pp. 117-118.

<sup>2</sup>Poem no. 595, p. 487.

created thing is "good" in itself. Thus, in the primal act of naming, a mental impression of goodness is retained; each creature being judged as a fit companion for Man in a benign universe.

Although "Named" does not attempt to suggest such anterior conditions, through a sophisticated symbology, the "infant, all alone, / Kissing a small, red flower", and naming man as man, echoes the sublimely simple utterances of Adam. The message-like voice of the child, at once remote and clear, seems to pierce a universal stillness. As can be seen in "C is for Child",<sup>1</sup> a child, for Davies, occupies an intermediate stage between celestial harmony and terrestrial limitation. The word of a child, the word genuinely and purely spoken, is a form of logos -- calling into being a sense of the just-created universe, and conferring a sense of goodness and placement upon the everyday world. The child calls "in God's own way" because his word bridges the distance between man and the "small, red flower". The link between man and flower is, in a sense, a second form of naming. However, in contrast to the implications which arise from the idea of "naming" in itself, this link is a direct result of the lyric argument.

In the first lines of the poem, when the man marches out "one day in Spring" proud of his "life and power", the essential goodness of the undirected energy of the world is suggested. The contrast in size between man and infant is reinforced by the contrast between movement and stasis. The child's attention is directed towards the flower, while the man surveys a larger universe. It seems as if the child breathes in the scent of the flower he is kissing, then breathes it out in speaking to the man. The implicit synaesthetic

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<sup>1</sup>Poem no. 370, p. 351.

For a discussion of this poem, see Chapter IV, pp. 118-122 of this study.

translation of colour (redness) into sound (calling) suggests that, upon hearing himself named as "Man", the speaker begins to translate sound back into vision. The child's call isolates one "small, red flower" from all other aspects of spring, and some of the special fragrance of this flower is imparted to the man through the naming word. Thus, the undirected energy of the speaker is marshalled into a form of celebration. The child's call is not a product of constraint. It is an autonomous expression of an inborn obedience to natural harmony. For the child, the man seems to take his place in the scheme of spring. The gravity of his response to flower and man is a measure of his untutored openness, and his awe is reverential in its wonder. Thus, to be confirmed as a living being by the voice of one who has hallowed creation is to be invited to reply with the full dignity and power of one's being. For this reason, the speaker's answer is spontaneous. Because the man has been greeted by a voice which (to use Buber's cast of phrase) calls "I see you", he is able to name himself in similar terms. Now that he has been given a place in the universe, he replies in terms of his existential position -- "Here I am". The child has "stared" at the man, and, in so doing, has implied the full relational significance -- the community, the wonder, and the mutuality -- of this form of observation.

Like song, the child's call has made the self intelligible to the self, and has clarified the relationship between man and universe. For Davies, song is a form of naming and a form of invitation which, in its own way, calls out to the world in the knowledge that the world will answer "Here!"

## APPENDIX A (See p.79, Chapter III.)

Harold Monro's questions in The Chapbook are as follows:

1. Do you think that poetry is a necessity to modern man?
2. What in modern life is the particular function of poetry as distinguished from other kinds of literature?
3. Do you think there is any chance of verse being eventually displaced by prose, as narrative poetry apparently is being by the novel, and ballads have been by newspaper reports?

In contrast to Davies's simple and unequivocal affirmation of poetry as a "necessity", Clifford Bax, John Gould Fletcher, R. Randerson, and Ezra Pound offer aphoristic denials of the notion in answer to Question 1, while T.S. Eliot presents an oblique but summary rejection of Monro's terms of reference:

1. No. For the present, in the West, he is busied with a life to which neither poetry nor clean air is a necessity.

(Clifford Bax)

1. No art is ever a necessity to modern man, or any kind of man. Thousands of people exist who have never seen a painting by Rembrandt. Poetry is even less necessary than some other arts, for instance architecture.

(John Gould Fletcher)

1. No; if all the world's poetry-books were burned, life would not cease to be enjoyable.

(R. Randerson)

1. No. Neither is modern man a necessity.

(Ezra Pound)

1. No.

2. Takes up less space.

3. It is up to the poets to find something to do in verse which cannot be done in any other form.

(T.S. Eliot)

## APPENDIX B (See p.89, Chapter III.)

Davies's first editorial in Form, No. 1, Vol. 1 (October, 1921), pp. 5-6, as cited by Stonesifer, Davies, pp. 173-174, reads as follows:

The first thing I did, on undertaking the duties of an editor, was to hasten off to China by the first boat, to interview the great poet Ah Me. 'If I can only get a poem from him,' thought I, 'the success of my first number will be certain.' But when I reached Ah Me's house, and found the Master at home, I was told at once that he could only grant me ten minutes, as he had already been visited by the Pope of Rome, and was expecting the King of Spain's three daughters.

This news was disappointing, as I needed a little rest, after all my arduous labour to climb over the Great Wall of China, with my nose scratched, and my hands and knees too.

'Can you tell me, Ah Me,' I began, 'why the poet Ha Ha is being laughed at continually by He He?'

'He He,' answered Ah Me, ' -- no catch-ee.' From this remark I understood that He He was of no account; that a knowledge of his work was of no use to anyone; in other words -- it was no catch.

'Would you say that Pooch Bah is also no good?' I asked.

To which Ah Me replied, 'Pooch Bah, no good-ee.'

'Would you go so far as to say that Pooch Bah is no damn good?' I said.

To which Ah Me replied, 'Pooch Bah, no <sup>damn-ee</sup> good-ee.'

'But surely,' I insisted, restraining my excitement -- 'surely you would not go so far as to say that Pooch Bah is no bloody good?'

To which Ah Me replied in a firm voice, and without the least hesitation, 'Pooch Bah, no bloody good-ee.'

Saying this, Ah Me went to his bookshelves and, taking down a small volume of his own works, opened it at a certain page and, pointing to a short lyric, said in a quiet voice 'Look-ee a little while-ee at the book-ee.'

The little poem brought to my notice was called 'A Thought'; and, although the Chinese atmosphere is entirely lost in my translation, I feel certain that the philosophy will be clear to everyone.<sup>1</sup>

'I gather from this little poem,' said I, 'that Pooch Bah is too self-conscious, and that seems to be the fault of poets in every country, including Great Britain and Ireland.'

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<sup>1</sup>At this point, Davies printed his poem "A Thought", Poem no. 319, p. 320.

Hearing this, Ah Me nodded approval and said in a calm, deliberate voice: 'Poo Bah, he look-ee in the glass-ee too much-ee. Poo Bah, no good-ee. Poo Bah, no damn-ee good-ee. Poo Bah, no bloody good-ee.'

Not wishing to take up any more of Ah Me's valuable time, I said goodbye, but not before he had given me an original poem in manuscript. I flatter myself at having captured some of the spirit of the original, although my knowledge of Chinese is not much to be proud of. This is the poem, which, I hope, will add to the great number of Ah Me's western admirers. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Here Davies printed his poem "Her Merriment", Poem no. 313, pp. 315-316, substituting "Fe Fie" for "my love".

## APPENDIX C (See p.130, Chapter IV.)

"The Kingfisher", Poem no. 69, p.107.

In the edition of Davies's poetry used in this study, The Complete Poems of W.H. Davies (London: Jonathan Cape, 1963; rev. 1968), the first verse of "The Kingfisher" (Poem no. 69, p. 107) reads as follows:

It was the Rainbow gave thee birth,  
 And left thee all her lovely hues;  
 And, as her mother's name was Tears,  
 So runs it in my blood to choose  
 For haunts the lonely pools, and keep  
 In company with trees that weep.

(Italics mine.)

The version presented in the first Georgian anthology, Georgian Poetry 1911-1912, has been quoted in the text of this thesis for the following reasons:

(i) Although the present writer does not have access to any documentary evidence of authorial supervision, it seems unlikely that Davies would have allowed the retention of a textual error in the eighth edition of Georgian Poetry 1911-1912, published in October, 1913. While this hypothesis does not allow for the possibility of subsequent changes in authorial intention, the absence of a textual apparatus in the Complete Poems (and, therefore, of a more empirical standard by which to establish criteria of authority) argues for an interpretative method.

(ii) In "Moss and Feather" (Poem no. 447, p. 413), the placement of a kingfisher within a context of "Weeping Willows" accords with the variant reading of "The Kingfisher" given in the anthology, for in the latter poem the kingfisher, not the speaker, keeps "company with trees that weep":

"Pools but reflect his shape and form,  
 And nothing of his lovely hues;  
 Could he but see his jewels' light,  
 Would this Kingfisher choose  
 To live alone with Weeping Willows,  
 Diving, and making toys of billows?"

Further, "P is for Pool" (Poem no. 383, p. 358), singles out "a deep and lonely pool" as the kingfisher's habitat:

"I know a deep and lonely pool -- that's where  
 The great Kingfisher makes his sudden splash!"

Although the closing verse of "The Kingfisher" places the speaker within a similar context, the suggestion is that the ability to dwell within the sighing trees corresponds to the speaker's eventual recognition and affirmation of the inalienable kinship of the kingfisher and the natural world.

The validity of this type of external evidence is reinforced by certain internal features of the poem. Structurally, the poem moves from kingfisher (verse I) to speaker (verse II) by way of the idea of observation (verse III). The transitional stage of observation or exposure, where imaginative interpenetration between observer and observed is enacted, provides for the empathy of the utterance which opens the closing verse: "Nay, lovely Bird, thou art not vain;". The confirmatory "I" which effects the final resolution of the poem can be achieved only through a process of testing. For this reason, a "my" in the fourth line of the first verse would be premature. In testing the kingfisher, the speaker tests himself, and, in so doing, earns the right to his "quiet place".

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