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The Aesthetic and Spiritual Functions of Robert Southwell's Writing

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THE AESTHETIC AND SPIRITUAL FUNCTIONS
OF ROBERT SOUTHWELL'S WRITING

by
Robert John McAuley, S.J.

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
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LIFE

Robert John McAuley, S.J. was born on March 18, 1923 in Cleveland, Ohio where he attended St. Thomas Aquinas grammar school and St. Ignatius High School from which he was graduated in 1942.

In September of the same year he entered the novitiate of the Society of Jesus at Milford, Ohio. Nearly all his work was done there for the B.A. degree. In August 1946 he transferred to West Baden College, an affiliate of Loyola University of Chicago, and was granted the B.A. degree from that university in February 1947. In the same year he entered the Loyola Graduate School.

During the scholastic years of 1949 to 1952 he taught Latin and English at Loyola Academy, Chicago.
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BIBLIOGRAPHY
INTRODUCTION

Historians have repeated many times the story of that glorious era during the reign of Queen Elizabeth when the Catholics of England rivalled, if they did not surpass, the wit and courage of their spiritual forefathers of the catacombs. Whenever that story is told we hear of Robert Southwell, Jesuit priest, poet, and martyr whose turbulent apostolate ended heroically on the gibbet at Tyburn.

Robert Southwell was born of noble parents at Horsham St. Faith's in 1561 or 1562. At a very tender age, it is reported, he was snatched away by a gypsy, but quickly recovered by his nurse, to whom he felt deeply indebted ever after. It is an interesting fact that this nurse was among Southwell's first converts when he returned to England as a priest. Evidently the gypsy incident made a lasting impression on the young Southwell, for we find him referring to it years later in the following words:

What if I had remained with the vagrant? how abject! how destitute of knowledge and reverence of God! in what debasement of vice, in what great peril of crimes, in what indubitable risk of a miserable death and eter-
nal punishment I should have been. 1

Aside from this kidnapping incident, very little is known about Southwell's early boyhood.

When he was about fifteen years of age, Robert's parents sent him to school at Douai and later at Paris where he studied under the Jesuits. In October 1578 Southwell entered the Society of Jesus. During the following two years he drank deeply of the spirit of that gallant Basque warrior, St. Ignatius Loyola, who wished his spiritual sons to be "men crucified to the world, men who would give and not count the cost, fight and not heed the wounds, toil and not seek for rest, labor and not ask for reward save that of knowing that they were doing God's will." 2 It was such a self-sacrificing spirit which would carry Southwell through his storm apostolate during the Elizabethan persecution.

In 1584 Southwell was ordained a priest. Only two years later he received the answer to the challenge which he had implicitly made by receiving Holy Orders. He was assigned by his superiors to the dangerous English mission. The young priest, fresh from his studies, and burning with zeal, was


2 St. Ignatius Loyola's "Prayer for Generosity."
about to take up the torch of Christ, which had been carried so boldly through England by such gallant missionaries as Edmund Campion, William Persons, William Weston, and an entire litany of courageous Catholic Englishmen who had shed their blood attempting to bring their motherland back to the true fold. The task which confronted Southwell was not an easy one.

Official England was hostile to priests, especially to Jesuit priests. This hostility is a grudging tribute to the zeal of the handful of Jesuits then laboring in Elizabeth's realm. The royal attitude with which Southwell and his companions were confronted upon their arrival in England was briefly this: any priest ordained since the feast of John the Baptist in the first year of Elizabeth's reign was to depart from the realm and all her dominions within forty days; it was not lawful for any Jesuit born in the realm to return thereto and anyone who did so would be considered guilty of high treason, as would anyone who received, relieved, comforted, or maintained any such Jesuit; finally, anyone who knew of the presence of such a Jesuit in the realm and did not report the fact to magistrates would be subject to fine and imprisonment. 3

3 Act 27 Elizabeth, c. 2.
Southwell, of course, came under these enactments. He had been born in England, and, therefore, was not permitted to "come into, be, or remain" in any part of the realm. However, if it is high treason to bring the consolations of the true faith to God-hungry English Catholics, Southwell and his fellow-priests were willing to pay the price for their crimes. It was beyond doubt that the good Queen Bess was serious about enforcing her laws. The ever-growing list of Catholic martyrs attested to that fact. Southwell's future was, to say the least, perilous, but even with a full realization of the seriousness of the situation, he embraced it willingly.

On the seventh of July 1586, Southwell, in the company of Father Henry Garnet, future superior of the English Jesuits and also a martyr, arrived in England. The arrival of the two Jesuits was soon known by the government, but their disguises and the aid of English Catholic nobles postponed their apprehension by Elizabeth's pursuivants. For the next six years Southwell played a perpetual game of hide-and-seek with authorities. He celebrated Mass, preached, administered the sacraments, did all in his power to renew or strengthen the faith of Catholics. Frequently his ministry was imperiled by the sudden arrival of the priest-hunters, but the cleverness of his faithful friends was always suffi-
cient to preserve his freedom for yet another encounter with the queen's agents. Finally, in 1592, the inevitable, abrupt end came. Father Southwell was betrayed into the hands of the pursuivants by an unworthy daughter of the Bellamy family which had harbored Father Southwell and other priests. He was apprehended in the Bellamy home by the infamous Topcliffe who promptly took him to London for questioning under the most severe torture. After a long, wretched imprisonment, trial, and automatic condemnation Father Southwell was executed on February 22, 1595. As his torture-racked body fell from the gibbet at Tyburn a Lord Mountjoy was heard to utter sentiments which were shared by many other protestants who were present at the ghastly scene: "I cannot judge of his religion, but pray God whenever I die, that my soul may be in no worse case than his." 4

Immediately after his execution Father Southwell's superior, in a letter written to the Jesuit Father General in Rome, referred to the martyr in glowing terms as "a lovely flower...the sweetest fruit from the tree...an invincible soldier, a most faithful disciple and courageous martyr of Jesus Christ." 5 Father Southwell had done his work well.

5 Ibid., 338.
Historians have adequately recorded Southwell the martyr. Our purpose is to study Southwell the poet, for it is his poetry, chiefly, that has won for him an undying name in the hearts of both friends and enemies. It was his poetry which caused his captor, Topcliffe, to boast to Queen Elizabeth, "Never have I taken so weighty a man." It was his poetry which caused the great Ben Johnson to exclaim, "Had I written that piece of his (The Burning Babe) I would be content to destroy many of mine." It was his poetry which has caused all subsequent generations to see in Southwell a gallant apostle, courageous martyr, and noble warrior of Jesus Christ.

To those who are accustomed to associate "Jesuit" with marching armies, clashing swords, and fiery crosses, Southwell's writing poetry while thousands of English Catholics were being hanged, drawn, and quartered may seem somewhat akin to Nero's alleged fiddling while Rome burned. The comparison is, however, unjust, for in his writings Fr. Southwell was wielding a powerful weapon in the Catholic cause. His pen was one of the mightiest guns defending the crumbling

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6 Ibid., 338.

7 Cambridge History of English Literature, New York, 1907, IV, 150.
ramparts of Catholicism in Elizabethan England. The following pages are an attempt to clarify and analyze Southwell's motives for writing.
CHAPTER I

THE AESTHETIC FUNCTION OF
SOUTHWELL'S POETRY

The poetry of Father Robert Southwell of the Society of Jesus may be said to have had a twofold function—esthetic and spiritual. It had an aesthetic function because, like all genuine poetry, it was a work of art. It had a spiritual function which manifested itself in three distinct ways: it helped destroy the purely pagan atmosphere of Elizabethan poetry; it comforted and strengthened Catholics who in Southwell's time were undergoing vigorous persecution; and, finally, it provided an outlet of expression for Southwell's own deep-rooted spirituality.

In the following pages we shall try to show that these functions were actually intended by Father Southwell, and we shall trace these functions in his own work and in the work of his contemporaries.

By way of preparation for a fuller appreciation of Southwell's attitude towards Elizabethan poetry we must observe the following facts. Robert Southwell was an unusually pious
youngster who had been educated first at Douai under the direc-
tion of the well-known Jesuit instructor, Leonard Lessius, and later
at Paris where he continued his studies for two years un-
der another very capable Jesuit, Thomas Derbyshire.

Southwell's instructors must have been inspiring men as well as excellent teachers, for during his years of study, the future martyr developed an eager enthusiasm for the Society of Jesus and sincerely desired to enter the ranks of Ignatius Loyola. After refusing Southwell's initial plea for admission because they thought him too immature, Jesuit superiors finally received him into the order on October 17, 1578.¹

As a student at Douai and Paris Southwell had proved himself a capable writer. He had read and imitated the classical poets, and had produced some original poems which, considering his youth, were not without merit. After his entrance into the Society of Jesus Southwell continued the literary career which was destined to reach full bloom in the last few years of his brief life.

It would be extremely satisfying to know exactly what Southwell had been taught concerning poetry in his classes at Douai and Paris, as well as in his years of study as a Jesuit in

Rome. Unfortunately, we have no record of this. However, we can surmise from treatises on poetry which, while not printed until a later date, were being formulated during Southwell's school days the spirit in which he had been trained.

Pierre Janelle, who has written the most detailed and best annotated biography of Robert Southwell, outlines the sixteenth century Jesuit concept of poetry by saying:

Poetry...like painting or music, like artistic beauty in general, is not an end in itself. Its position is subordinate. Indeed, it may give pleasure; but that pleasure is not to be cultivated or enjoyed for its own sake; it is only legitimate in so far as it is made to serve the cause of virtue or religion, to concur in the greater glory of God.

Janelle then quotes Pontanus, a Jesuit professor and critic who defines poetry as "an art which represents the actions of men and sets them forth in verse for the better ordering of man's life," and another Jesuit, Possevinus, who states in his *ars poetica* that "the first purpose of the poet must be to make his reader better; his second only, to delight him."

It is obvious that these definitions are more practical and utilitarian than the strictly Aristotelian theory of art.

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3 Ibid., 119

4 Ibid.
which would be accepted almost universally by the Jesuits of a later generation. The definitions of Pontanus and Possevinus definitely make poetry secondary to religion. One would hardly expect otherwise, considering the literary abuses of the times in which these theories were being formulated and the fact that the battle-cry of the then still young Society of Jesus was "all for the greater glory of God."

Janelle maintains that such theories banished "passion" from literature and tried to substitute methodical reflection for inspiration, thus taking the very heart out of poetry. 5 This conclusion of Janelle's seems to be carrying the theory of the Jesuits to extremes which are absurd. Certainly Possevinus, Pontanus, and other Jesuits who held similar theories would allow place for passion and inspiration as long as the passion and inspiration contributed to the betterment of men. At most, it seems, the theories in question ruled out the unbridled, wild flights of passion and inspiration so common in that period, and which were spiritually harmful, and who could say that that was doing anything detrimental to poetry?

It is not within the scope of this paper to discuss the validity of the definitions given above or try to justify

5 Ibid., 116
the poetic theories of many sixteenth century Jesuits. We merely wish to indicate that such was the concept of poetry which Southwell had when he returned to England as a missionary. Poetry, he thought, was to be the hand-maid of religion, but such obviously was not the case in Elizabethan England.

Writing of this period in English literature, Blanch Mary Kelly says:

The keynote of the Elizabethan age is the spirit of pride, which spirit it was entirely to Elizabeth's advantage to flatter and promote, as it became to the advantage of her subjects, especially her courtiers and writers, to flatter and cozen her in language which would be an affront to any but an already bemused intelligence. Consequently, it is a self-conscious age, exulting in itself, its wealth, its achievements, given over to the lust of the eye and the pride of life.

Such poets as Spenser, Lyly, and Sydney laid their pearls of flattery at the foot of the throne, but received very little in a material way for their reward. In fact, Spenser, who made an heroic attempt to gain preferment at court by paying homage to his sovereign in "The Fairie Queen" learned in his Irish exile how cheaply she bought her flattery. He had been sent to Ireland, it is said, because of a tactless bit of verse he had written about one of the queen's suitors. His "Fairie Queen" was

a futile attempt to regain his former position at court.

Southwell believed that poetry should be the hand-maid of religion, but found that it had become in England the hand-maid of a vain woman. One could hardly blame the young priest for finding fault with poets who were wasting their talents on such frivolous material.

Miss Kelly describes Elizabethan lyrics in the following manner:

Love was no longer a serious and holy thing, but a kind of game at which men and women played. Men sang of women's virtues, even while they doubted the existence of those virtues, but in a general way they refrained from all reference to spiritual qualities and strove to make catalogues of physical charms...Obviously romance had descended from its high estate to become at best something less real than the trifling which amused the Provencal courts of love, and at its worst an unbridled licentiousness.

We can well imagine the sadness in Father Southwell's heart as he contemplated an "age both of moral and artistic license, an age, moreover, which loved to contrast 'Sacred and Profane love'." We are not surprised to see him turning disgustedly from the secular verses of the day and endeavoring to compose poems to illustrate the "love of God instead of the lusts of men."

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7 Ibid., 88.
9 Ibid., 76.
Southwell himself left no doubts in his readers' minds concerning his reasons for writing. In his preface to St. Peter's Complaint he bluntly states:

Most poets now busy themselves in expressing such passions as only serve for testimonies to how unworthy affections they have wedded their wills. And because the best course to let them see the error of their works is to weave a new web in their own loom, I have here laid a few coarse threads together. 10

There remains but one question to consider before beginning our study of Southwell's poetry, and that is why, in the midst of a raging persecution he should attach so much importance to a seemingly insignificant thing like poetry.

In twentieth century America with its multitude of daily newspapers, radio, television, movies, and other effective media of propaganda and communication it is difficult to appreciate the important role which poetry played in establishing policies and attitudes in sixteenth century England. We must remember that even printing was still in the embryonic stage, and our modern channels of communication were undreamed of. Consequently, poetry was perhaps the best means of disseminating ideas. With this in mind we can look more tolerantly at what must have seemed at first glance a very indirect way of doing things—Southwell's approach to the conversion of England by

10 Robert Southwell, Preface to St. Peter's Complaint
reforming poetry. Southwell knew that, faith and morals could not long remain strong under the insidious attack of Elizabethan literature. Therefore, he determined to influence in some way the literary production of England.

From early youth Southwell had shown great promise as a writer. His boyish lament at being refused admission to the Society of Jesus, his numerous letters to a wide circle of friends, his imitation of classical authors—all these proved that he was making excellent use of the vivid imagination, sensitiveness, and power of contemplation with which God had endowed him. During his student days Southwell's writing was motivated chiefly by his desire for success, hope of some token reward which the then budding Ratio Studiorum recommended for work well done, or perhaps his work was inspired merely by the joy and satisfaction which he derived from creative work. Be that as it may, once Southwell sailed for England as a missioner he was a man with a single purpose, a single ideal. His work, his literary skill would henceforth be channelled in one direction—to bring England back to the true fold. As a result of his determination and unity of purpose Southwell's poetry took on an added significance and improved tremendously.

Southwell's first target was the immortal William Shakespeare, who had singularly avoided the pitfall of seeking preferment at court, but who was not above choosing pagan love as a poetic theme. His "Venus and Adonis" was typical of the times. It was probably the most widely read poem of the day, and was imitated by many poets far less gifted than Shakespeare. The result was that the literary market of England was filled with erotic poetry of questionable merit. Southwell determined to attack the evil at its root. No scholar has failed to notice the similarity of metre and diction, and the contrast of ideas in Southwell's "St. Peter's Complaint" and Shakespeare's "Venus and Adonis." Harold H. Child writes:

There can be no doubt that Southwell had read Shakespeare's Venus and Adonis, which was published in 1593 and at once became the most popular poem of the day. He seems, indeed, to have regarded it as the capital instance of the poetry he wished to supplant. His St. Peter's Complaint, published in 1595, soon after his death, is written in the metre of Shakespeare's poem, and the preliminary address from the author to the reader contains a line, "Stil finest wits are stilling Venus' rose," which may be a direct reference to it, and certainly would be considered so by Southwell's readers.

It is small wonder that "Venus and Adonis" became extremely popular in sixteenth century England. From beginning to end the poem is fraught with the sensuality and pride which were so typical of the times. Obviously the attempted seduction of

Adonis by the goddess of love, which is portrayed in this poem, would not be considered a fit theme for poetry according to the doctrine Southwell had been taught. The young Jesuit could appreciate the cadence and sheer magic of the words used by the great bard, but he necessarily deplored the subject matter and whole tone of the work.

"St. Peter's Complaint," Southwell's antidote to Shakespeare's poem, must have been read in shocked surprise by the Elizabethans. For who among that sophisticated, proud generation would expect the hero of a poem to be not a haughty, powerful character, but an anguished soul pleading for mercy and forgiveness? Who but a poet with Southwell's spiritual motives and purpose would so far depart from the accepted literary style to describe a man of St. Peter's great dignity in the following words:

At Sorrow's door I knocked: they craved my name. 
I answered, one unworthy to be known: 
What one? say they. One worthiest of blame. 
But who? A wretch, not God's, nor yet his own. 
A man? O not a beast; much worse: what creature? 
A rock: how called? The rock of scandal, Peter. 13

Certainly such a theme and such a manner of presentation were foreign to Elizabethan literature before Southwell's time. Yet the poem was well received, no doubt with devotion

13 Preface to "St. Peter's Complaint."
by some, with curiosity by others.

A comparative study of "St. Peter's Complaint" and "Venus and Adonis" reveals that it would be extremely rash to say that Southwell was Shakespeare's equal as a poet. Obviously he lacked the coherence and lovely grace which Shakespeare maintains even in his longer poems. In "St. Peter's Complaint" as well as in "A Fourefold Meditation," his two long poems, Fr. Southwell does not display the spontaneous charm that is found in his shorter poems, and the fantastic imagery and style employed by him often displease the modern reader. But at least a start had been made in this business of reforming pagan poetry.

It can be said without fear of contradiction that it is in his shorter poems that we find Southwell at his poetic best. Edward Hutton does not hesitate to state unqualifiedly that Southwell and Crashaw are the greatest religious lyrical poets in the English language. 14 And the great Ben Johnson is quoted as having said that "so he had written that piece of his (Southwell's) the Burning Babe, he would have been content to destroy many of his." 15

14 Edward Hutton, Catholicism and English Literature, London, 1948, 91.

In that delicate gem of poetry is contained the beauty, simplicity, and sincerity of feeling which only a poet of Southwell's spiritual insight could compose. In "The Burning Babe" are found the delicate imagination and fervor which are so typical of Southwell.

As I in hoary winter's night
Stood shivering in the snow
Surprised I was with sudden heat
Which made my heart to glow;
And lifting up a fearful eye
To view what fire was near,
A pretty Babe all burning bright
Did in the air appear...

* * * *

"My faultless breast the furnace is;
The fuel wounding thorns;
Love is the fire, and sighs the smoke;
The ashes shame and scorns.
The fuel Justice layeth on,
And mercy blows the coals,
The metal in this furnace wrought
Are men's defiled souls;

For which as now on fire I am
To work them to their good,
So will I melt into a bath,
To wash them in my blood."
With this he vanished out of sight
And swiftly shrank away
And straight I called unto mind
That it was Christmas day.

It is interesting to note that this poem was written many years before devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus was widespread, and yet the contemplative Southwell seems to have given us substantially in this little poem the core of the won-
derful Catholic devotion later revealed to and made known by St. Margaret Mary.

In a complex age, Southwell seems to have taken great delight in the simplicity of the Infant Christ. Besides "The Burning Babe," he also paid homage to the Infant in "A Childe My Choyse;"

Let folly praise that fancy loves, I praise and love that Childe
Whose heart no thought, whose tongue no word, whose hand no dede defiled...

Love's sweetest mark, laude's highest theme, man's most desired light,
To love Him life, to leave Him death, to live in Him de-lighte...

Southwell calls upon the angels of heaven to rally around the crib of Christ in a touching poem which he calls "New Heaven, New Warre."

His chilling could soth heate require,
Come Seraphims, in lieu of fire;
This little ark no cover hath,
Let Cherubs's winges His boody swath;
Come, Raphiell, this babe must eate,
Provide our little Tobie meate.

Let Gabriell be now His groome,
That first tooke upp His earthly roome;
Let Michell stand in His defense,
Whom love hath lincked to feeble sence;
Let graces rooke, when He doth crye,
And angells singe His lullybye.

"New Prince, New Pompe" is another tribute of Southwell to his Infant King. In touching words he contrasts the stable, the crib, His parents' poor attire with the pomp of roy-
alty and closes his poem with

With joy approach, O Christian wight:
Do homage to the King;
And highly praise His humble pompe
Which He from heaven doth bringe.

The pompous court of the good Queen Bess must have experienced great difficulty in appreciating the beautiful simplicity of this poem. In it, as in all his other poems, Southwell was trying to prove that a piece did not have to be pagan to be poetry.

In later chapters we shall consider more of Southwell's poetry. For the present suffice it to mention that his poems were very well received both by the Catholics and by their persecutors. Tanner says:

It is indeed the highest testimony, and a most unusual one, to the excellency of Fr. Southwell's writings, that they were not only read after his death by his enemies, including Queen Elizabeth herself, but were reprinted by them in editions brought out at their own expense. 16

Perhaps Southwell's success amid a people who were hostile to him and everything he stood for is explained in a tribute paid him by Elbridge Colby:

Into such a literary world (of euphuism, etc.) introduce a fine young man as fully versed in the Latin authors classical and more recent, as his years and his leisure would allow...Acquaint him with the best authors of his own language. Give him a consuming passion and devote his life to it alone. The result is an intensity of feeling in his chosen field which raises the wordiness of his

16 Foley, Records of the English Province of the Society of Jesus, 312, cites Tanner.
letters to the exaltation of undying verse. The result is Robert Southwell, poet and martyr, who eschewed the practice of other poets who were "abusing their talents and making the follies and faynigs of love the customarie subject of their base endeavors" and wrote poems of deep religious feeling which show "how well verse and virtue suit together." Here is no trickery pf phrase. The passion of the man burns brightly, more brightly than the scintillations of his art. His repetitions have all the power of solemnly chanted litanies. His work is consequently read, as Thurston says, "not merely for the sake of his poetry, but for the spiritual food the poems contained." It conforms to the true nature of art to capture and perpetuate an excellent and elemental mood. It is to secure such that men have ever, and ever will, turned their minds and eyes from the contemporary scene to the exaltations of high literature. 17

Elizabethans no doubt found Southwell's religious themes and treatment delightfully refreshing after the comparatively steady diet of love lyrics and patently flattering tributes to the sovereign to which they had been exposed.

17 Elbridge Colby, English Catholic Poets, Milwaukee, 1936, 141.
CHAPTER II

AN ATTEMPT TO REFORM

ELIZABETHAN POETS

Undoubtedly Robert Southwell was a very competent poet, but he was also, and primarily, a priest. In sixteenth century England that meant that he was a hunted man. Henry Foley's Records of the English Province of the Society of Jesus gives detailed accounts of the harrowing circumstances under which the Catholic missionaries labored during the Elizabethan persecution. In spite of the danger involved, Southwell, like all priests of his time, toiled untiringly for the cause of Christ. He celebrated Mass, heard confessions, received repentant apostates back into the Church, converted, baptized—all this in deepest secrecy. The very tongue on which he placed the Holy Eucharist in the morning might betray him before night, but that was the chance Southwell would take. He was a priest "ordained for sacrifice" and few priests have been called on to make sacrifices greater than those which priests in England made during Elizabeth's reign. Such a manner of life, though it makes interesting reading, does not lend itself to creative
writing. Southwell realized that with all his other duties he could not possibly hope to stem the tide of pagan Elizabethan poetry by himself. Consequently, in his dedication of "The Funeral Tears" he writes:

This love and these passions are the subject of this discourse, which though it reach not the dignity of Mary's deserts, yet shall I think my efforts well appaid if it may but woo some skillfuller pens from unworthy labors either to supply in this matter my want of ability, or in other of like piety, (whereof scripture is full) to exercise their happier talents.

Southwell's poetry was at first but a dim, flickering candle in the bright light and glittering false jewels that were Elizabethan literature. However, the young priest's candle was destined to enkindle sparks that would soon blaze forth not long after his death in the sacred music of Thomas Nash, Nicholas Breton, and, not to mention others, even the great Shakespeare himself.

It is interesting to note that during the last decade of the sixteenth century there was a very definite change in the literary trend of England. The cycle of amatory poems seems to have run its course, and in its place is what might well be called the "tear" or "repentence" cycle, a startling contrast to the proud, haughty tenor of the preceding decade.

1 Preface of "The Funeral Tears of Mary Magdalen."
"Christ's Tears over Jerusalem" by Thomas Nash, "Mary Magdalen's Love" by Nicholas Breton, and "The Tears of the Mother of God," by Thomas Lodge all made their appearance during the fifteen-nineties. There were three other poems whose ostensible theme was rape, but whose most forceful passages are concerned not with the rape, but with repentence. These three works are "The Complaint of Rosamund" by Samuel Daniel, "Lucrece" by Shakespeare, and "Matilda the Fair" by Michael Drayton.

In the following pages we shall attempt to show first of all that there was an abrupt change from the profane to the spiritual in English poetry around 1592; that there is some external evidence to show that this change was due to Southwell's influence; and, finally, that in several poems of this period there are some internal resemblances to one or other of Southwell's works.

The first poet we shall consider is Thomas Nash who was capable of writing poetry so coarse that no respectable man would read it. In 1593, however, he wrote "Christ's Tears over Jerusalem" and in the preface to the work said, "To God and man do I promise an unfained conversion." This remark brought from Nash's enemy, Harvey Gabriel the charge: "Now he (Thomas Nash) hath a little mused upon 'The Funeral Tears of Mary Magdalen' and is egged on to try the suppleness of his pathetical vein." 2

Gabriel continues, "I know not who weeped the 'Funeral Tears of Mary Magdalen': I would he that sheddeth the pathetical 'Tears of Christ' and trickleth the liquid tears of repentence were no worse affected in pure devotion." 3

Whatever Nash's motives may have been in his complete reversal of subject matter in his poetry, no one can deny that he may well have been impressed by the censure contained in the preface of Southwell's "Tears."

I know that none can express a passion that he feeleth not, neither doth the pen deliver but what it copieth out of the mind. And therefore, sith the finest wits are now given to write passionate discourses, I would wish them to make choice of such passions as it would neither be a shame to utter, nor sin to feel. 4

Christopher Devlin states that given the subject, there is bound to be a similarity between Southwell's and Nash's poems because both are elaborations of the same New Testament text. 5 Devlin then points out what he considers a much closer relationship between the works of the two men, namely, between Southwell's "Epistle of Comfort" and the latter and much longer part of Nash's sermon. Devlin observes that

3 Ibid., 13.

4 Preface to "Mary Magdalen's Tears."

the second part of Nash's book and the fifth chapter of Southwell's "Epistle" are both vivid descriptions of the siege of Jerusalem, another resemblance which seems almost inevitable. However, in the third part of Nash's work is found an unmistakable echo of Southwell's sentiments:

In this, the longest part, Nash holds up the mirror of Jerusalem to London. The pharishees are the hypocritical puritans, the Saduoees are the machievelian courtiers. To the Romans, God's scourge, will correspond the eagles of Spain; for Genevian pride has fled from Antwerp now to London. God's messengers whom the Jews maltreated and killed, one after the other, are---? Nash does not say. But his scathing censures on the New Religion and his nostalgic praises of the Old leave little doubt that he was thinking of those missionary priests whose mutilated limbs, strewn about the city, were generally believed to be a part-cause of the Plague then raging. 6

The sentiments expressed in the passage referred to above were certainly those of Southwell and other Catholics, but they prove nothing conclusively as far as Southwell's influence on Nash is concerned. A more obvious parallel is to be found in the following two passages taken from the works under discussion:

When he (the devil) findeth a strong rampier or bulwark, he strayte planteth his battery, and useth all possible engines to overthrow it. But his force is but feeble, his engines weak, to batter down the adamantine rock of vertue. 7

6 Ibid., 173.
7 Southwell, "Epistle of Comfort."
Good deeds, derived from faith, are rampiers or bulwarks raised up against the devil: he that hath no such bulwark of good deeds to resist the devil's batterie, cannot choose but have his soules-city soon razed. 8

There are many other similarities between Nash's and Southwell's work. For example, Nash follows closely the doctrine of intrinsic goodness and faith without good works expounded by Southwell in the sixth chapter of his "Epistle of Comfort," and Nash outlines his ideal pastor and preacher as one who has made philosophy, poetry, and music the fair hand-maids of divinity. The model Nash mentions is St. Augustine, who was named more than twenty times in "The Epistle of Comfort."

It is a very great tribute to Fr. Southwell that a man of Nash's propensities and reputation should have reformed to the point of using his skill as Southwell suggested, "to show how well verse and virtue suit together."

Alice Walker, a biographer of Thomas Lodge, states that he, too, was influenced by Robert Southwell to a very large extent. She points out that Lodge's conversion occurred about 1591, that after his conversion he married a lady-in-waiting to the Countess of Arundel, in whose home

Southwell had been chaplain and spiritual director, and that in his "Prosopopeia, The Tears...of the Mother of God," Lodge makes admiring references to Southwell's "Mary Magdalen's Funeral Tears" and "St. Peter's Complaint."

Nicholas Breton, although read very little today, was in the late sixteenth century a very popular and fashionable poet. It is noteworthy that sometime between 1590 and 1595 he changes his theme from "The Bower of Delights" to a devotional and mystical type of verse. Some time before 1592 Southwell had turned one of Breton's worldly poems into an invitation to prayer, so evidently there was some connection between the two poets. Finally, Breton's poems on St. Mary Magdalen recall Southwell, and in general his religious verse shows the rich imagery which was so typical of the Jesuit. 9

At last we come to Southwell's influence on the greatest of all English poets, William Shakespeare, to whom many consider the dedicatory verse of "St. Peter's Complaint" was addressed personally. As was mentioned earlier, in these verses Southwell bemoans the fact that the finest wits are wasting their talents on love themes, and exhorts them to turn their efforts to more worthy subjects. Whether or not

9 Devlin, "Southwell," The Month, September, 1950, 175.
the great bard of Avon considered the invitation as addressed to himself or not, the fact is that after the publication of "Venus and Adonis" which had occasioned Southwell's remarks, Shakespeare did take up a more spiritual vein.

Professor Hales states that:

"St. Peter's Complaint" reminds one curiously of the almost exactly contemporary poem, Shakespeare's "Lucrece." There is a like inexhaustibleness of illustrative resource..."St. Peter's Complaint" reminds one of "Lucrece" also in the minuteness of its narration, and in the unfailing abundance of thought and fancy with which every detail is treated. 10

It hardly seems possible that two poems of such apparently different themes could have much in common, but Devlin goes to great lengths to indicate similar antitheses, common images, and similar doctrines which are quite natural to Southwell's poem, but rather foreign to the theme of Shakespeare.

Following are some of the similarities which are detected in the works of Shakespeare and Southwell. The first quotation in each pairing is Southwell's.

**Similar antithesis:**

How can I live that thus my life denied?  
What can I hope that lost my hope in fear?

and

0 that is gone for which I sought to live,  
And therefore now I need not fear to die.

Common images:

Like sollest swan that swims in silent deep
And never sings but obsequies of death...

and

And now this pale swan in her watery nest
Begins the sad dirge of her certain ending.

On temptation:

Thus graceless holds he disputacion
'Tween frozen conscience and hot-burning will.

and

Where fear my thoughts candied with icy cold,
Heat did my tongue to perjury unfold.

On sin:

Served with toil, yet paying naught but pain
Man's deepest loss, though false-esteemed gain.

and

Having no other pleasures of his gain,
But torment that it cannot cure his pain.

On effects of sin:

O unseen shame! invisible disgrace!
O unfelt sore! crest-wounding private scar!

and

Shot without noise, wound without present smart,
First seeming light, providing in fine a load.

Throughout Shakespeare's poem which deals ostensibly with the rape of Lucrece by Tarquin, the poet is obviously more

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interested in Tarquin's soul than in Lucrece, and angle which is not present in "Venus and Adonis." In "Lucrece" there is a rape within a rape; Tarquin has violated the divine spark within him. Shakespeare thus describes Tarquin after he has committed his sinful deed.

For now against himself he sounds this doom,
That through the length of time he stand disgraced:
Besides, his soul's fair temple is defaced,
To whose weak ruins muster troops of cares,
To ask the spotted princess how she fares.

She says her subjects with foul insurrection
Have battered down her consecrated wall,
And by their mortal fault brought in subjection
Her immortality and made her thrall
To living death and pain perpetual:
Which in her prescience she controlled still,
But her foresight could not forstall their will.

The idea of a soul in the state of grace being depicted as a virgin consecrated to God is one that is found frequently in Southwell's poetry. It seems certain that the similarities between Shakespeare and Southwell are too numerous and too exact to be attributed to mere chance. The conclusion, then, is valid that Shakespeare, although abundantly more gifted than Southwell as a poet, was influenced by the priest in works following "Venus and Adonis."

It is not difficult to trace Southwell's influence on other poets of the time, men less gifted than Shakespeare, it is true, but nonetheless, men who had considerable impact on the literary circles of London. Michael Drayton's "Matilda" has
already been mentioned in connection with the repentence series. Samuel Daniel, author of "The Complaint of Rosamund," had for his patron the Earl of Cumberland in whose household Anthony Copley, a first cousin of Robert Southwell, and a poet in his own right, lived. Surely it is possible that Daniel imbibed some of the spirit of Southwell from his cousin and fellow-poet.

The last poet we shall consider at any length is Christopher Marlowe, not because we are able to establish any proof of personal contact between the two men, or trace any close similarities in their writings, as we could in the case of other poets, but because Marlowe's play Faustus is the climax of the repentence series which Southwell initiated.

In the play, Faustus discovers how empty are the things of the world. The beauty of Helen of Troy, knowledge, wisdom are all passing vanities. The prayer of the agonized Faustus may well have been the prayer of its author as he died without friends, an enemy of the crown, a victim of murderers:

Christ, health of fever'd soule, heaven of the mind, Force of the feeble, nurse of Infant loves, Guide to the wandering foote, light of the blind, Whom weeping winnes, repentant sorrow moves. Father in care, Mother in tender heart; Revive and save me slaine with sinneful dart.

The spirit of Southwell had been taught by Marlowe, and his play was perhaps the most significant contribution to
the cycle of repentence. This, in addition to the work of so
many other fine poets, might have made a less humble man
vain, and even Fr. Southwell who had come upon the literary
scene when it was at its pagan worst must have smiled with
great satisfaction in heaven as George Herbert wrote to his
mother just fifteen years after Southwell's death:

I need not their (the Muses) help, to reprove the
vanity of those many Love-poems that are daily writ
and consecrated to Venus: nor to bewail that so
few are writ, that look towards God and Heaven. For my own part, my meaning (dear mother) is in
these sonnets, to declare my resolution to be,
that my poor abilities in Poetry shall be all,
and ever consecrated to God's glory... 12

Evidently other men were coming along to champion
the cause for which Southwell strove so valiantly. We have
seen that it was his expressed intention "to rescue the art
of poetry from the worldly uses to which it had been almost
solely dedicated." He did this in his own works, "by arous-
ing," As Sister Rose Anita Morton says, "an interest in reli-
gious poetry, exemplifying in his works that a genuine poet
might ignore the strife of the hour and take refuge in the
thoughts of God and the things of the soul." 13

How well Southwell succeeded in achieving this end
may be summarized by the rather lengthy, but useful, quotation

12 F.E. Hutchinson, Works of George Herbert, Oxford,
1945, ix, cites Herbert.
13 Sister Rose Anita Morton, An Appreciation of
Robert Southwell, Philadelphia, 1929, 93.
from Father Thurston:

It is pleasant to think that Fr. Southwell really did achieve a notable success in this apostolate of good literature, to which he consecrated the many hours of enforced seclusion in his hunted existence as a priest. Apart from the direct work of the ministry pursued with untiring zeal, the talent so generously surrendered with all its brilliant promise left a mark upon the age. It was something to have induced Nash even for a time, to turn aside from his ribaldry and to have enlisted such pens as those of Lodge, Bleton, Rowland, Markham in the cause of morality and religion. It may be that literature was not greatly the gainer thereby, but the new interest thus created can hardly have failed to lend its aid in stemming the die of licentiousness and atheism which threatened to sweep everything before it, amid the convulsions of the change of religion. Neither do we know what the indirect effects of this new taste for devotional poetry may have been, or how much we are indebted to it for the work of Milton or Crashaw, of George Herbert, and the seventeenth century divines. This much at least the evidence seems to me clearly to establish, that there was such a fashion, which manifested itself in the last ten years of Elizabeth's reign, that the initiative may be traced without hesitation to the writings of Father Southwell, and that the influence which the new fashion exerted cannot have been otherwise than good. 14

From the evidence brought forth, it seems rather obvious that Southwell in his first objective, in "weaving a new web in their own loom," was successful. He had given England her first taste of sincere religious poetry. He had rescued the art of poetry from the worldly uses to which it had been almost solely dedicated.

CHAPTER III

THE COMFORT AND ENCOURAGEMENT
OF CATHOLICS

We have considered the aesthetic function of Southwell's poetry and the spiritual function as far as motivating his contemporaries is concerned. We now take up the second phase of the spiritual function, namely, how Southwell's writing was intended to, and actually did, comfort and encourage English Catholics during the Elizabethan persecution.

Let us begin by considering the state of things as Southwell found them on his arrival in England in July, 1586. To be a Catholic in England at this time demanded heroic faith and a courageous heart. Jails were packed with those who had sheltered priests and received the sacraments. The Queen's coffers bulged with the fines of those Catholics who would rather sacrifice their last farthing than attend a service of the state religion. The clatter of the cart hauling another victim to Tyburn became a familiar sound. Property losses, heavy fines, torture, life itself--these were the price one paid for his faith in those days. It was indeed a magnificently
heroic generation. Evelyn Waugh refers to them as:

...not the fine flower only, but the root and stem of English Catholicism, (who) surrendered themselves to their destiny without calculation or reserve: for whom the honorable pleasures and occupations of an earlier age were forbidden, whose choice lay between the ordered and respectable lives of their ancestors and the faith which had sanctified it: who followed holiness though it led them through bitter ways to poverty, to disgrace, exile, imprisonment and death—who followed it gaily. 1

However, the sheep can not long survive without a shepherd. Perhaps no one realized this better than did Robert Southwell. That is why he volunteered for the English mission; that is why he constantly urged superiors to send more and more priests to "feed the children of England the Bread of Life lest they grow hungry and faint." Southwell appreciated the calibre of the English people. He knew that their courage was limitless provided someone would inspire and direct them. That is the task he took upon himself.

Exiled English priests in France, Spain, and Italy had been doing their best to support and encourage their countrymen. Their pamphlets filtered into the channel ports and were passed eagerly from hand to hand among the Catholics. But somehow this form of remote moral support seemed empty and

inadequate. Perhaps the opinion expressed by Harold H. Child is applicable here:

When poets sing of the shortness and deceptive character of life, one is often tempted to wonder whether the sentiments are not the purely conventional utterances of men sitting at ease in comfortable homes, or merely signs of reaction from an excess of pleasure. 2

After all, what did a pamphleteer on the continent know of the filth and squalor of the English dungeons? They had never experienced the cold fear that grips the heart as one's home is ransacked by police in quest of a priest. They had never experienced the agony one feels at seeing a loved one hanged at Tyburn.

Southwell, however, was different. His words would be vital. He was a man who could write a story in the first person, a man who had known the anxiety of being hunted by the queen's relentless pursuivants, a man who had known, or would soon know, the filth of a prison and the exquisite torture of the rack, a man who would one day know the gallows of Tyburn. Southwell's words would ring with sincerity because he was one of the people. English Catholics would listen to him because to them Father Southwell was English Catholicism.

He represented all that they were fighting and dying for, and what was more important, he was at their side fighting and dying with them. Is it any wonder, then, that Southwell took up his pen to comfort and encourage his fellow Catholics?

Southwell's writings, considered in the light of their spiritual function of strengthening fellow Catholics, may be considered under two headings, his prose correspondence, and his poems on suffering, death, and heaven, which were intended for general circulation. We shall consider first his correspondence.

When Southwell and his companions arrived in England, he discovered with great sorrow that his own father had wavered in the faith and was sacrificing his religion to seek preferment at court. To his father, therefore, Southwell penned one of the most forceful, yet touching letters ever preserved. It is a plea from one who has sacrificed everything—home, honor, fame—to serve God, written to a man who had turned his back on God to court honor and fame at the feet of an earthly monarch. This letter, far too lengthy to quote in its entirety, is filled with filial tenderness supported by cold logic, blunt reasoning, and appeal to the fear of God.

After explaining that he had not contacted his father
or relatives since returning to England because he was afraid of incriminating them, but also because he knew that some among them would not welcome him, he writes with touching pathos:

Yet, because I might easily perceive by apparent conjectures that many (of his relatives) were more willing to hear of me than from me, and readier to praise than to use my endeavors, I have hitherto bridled my desire to see them with the care and jealousy of their safety; and banishing myself from the scene of my cradle, in my own country I have lived like a foreigner; finding among strangers that which in my nearest blood I presumed not to seek. 

Southwell then elaborates upon the relationship between his father and himself, explaining that although there is a difference of years, they are both equal as far as their souls' relationship is concerned in God's sight, and, therefore, his father should receive favorably the advice of his priest-son who, although young in years, was well trained in spiritual matters. He then bluntly states:

Now therefore, to join issue and to come to the principal drift of my discourse: most humbly and earnestly I am to beseech you, that...you would seriously consider the terms you stand in and weigh yourself in a Christian balance, taking for your counterpoise the judgments of God. Take heed in time that the word of Th cel, written of old against Baltasar and interpreted by Daniel, he not verified

3 Southwell, Epistle to His Father, John H. Trotman, Roehampton, 1914, 37.
in you; whose exposition was "you have been poised in the scale and found of too light weight." 4

Separated from its context, the passage quoted above may seem tactlessly bold. However, in the proper setting it could not be so construed by the elder Southwell. It cannot be denied, however, that the young priest is relentless in pursuing his theme, and sometimes runs the risk of hurting feelings to heal souls. In this letter he resembles Christ driving the money-changers from the temple with whips rather than in any of His less violent episodes. There is a quaint humor in the way Southwell sometimes sweetens the bitter medicine by reminding his father that no one has more right to his spiritual ministrations than his own father has, and then he administers the healing potion by recalling that his father is no getting any younger in such picturesque words as:

...the date of your pilgrimage is well-near expired; ...your force languisheth, your senses impair, and your body droopeth; and on every side the ruinous cottage of your faint and feeble flesh threateneth fall...

Remember I pray you that your spring is spent and your summer overpast; you are now arrived to the fall of leaf; yea, and winter colours have already stained your hoary head. 5

4 Ibid., 43
5 Ibid., 43-45
Towards the end of his beautiful exhortation, whose true beauty unfortunately is lost by quoting mere snatches, Southwell appeals to his father in the name of God, "who saith of such as I am—though most unworthy—'He that heareth you heareth Me, and he that despiseth you despiseth Me.'"

I exhort you therefore as the viceroygent of God and I humbly request you as a dutiful child, that you would surrender your assent and yield your soul a happy captive to God's merciful inspirations.

The priest-son then closes his epistle with a beautiful metaphor which portrays not only his tender solicitude towards his father, but also the power of his own poetic expression:

Howsoever therefore the soft gales of your morning pleasures lulled you in the slumbery fits; howsoever the violent heats of noon might awake affections; yet now, in the cool and calm of the evening, retire to a Christian rest and close up the day of life with a clear sunset: that leaving all darkness behind you and carrying in your conscience the light of grace, you may escape the sorrow of eternal night, and pass from a mortal day to an everlasting morrow.

This long letter of a loving son to his father bore fruit, and the elder Southwell was reconciled to the Church before his death.

6 Ibid., 61-62.
7 Ibid., 63-64.
The "Epistle to His Father" is of great interest not only because of its autobiographical nature, but because being one of the earliest works of Southwell after his return to England, it gives indications of profound tenderness and facility of expression which are to come to light later in his poetic works. It may be said that the lack of form is the only thing which prevents the "Epistle" from being sheer poetry.

Another letter, which we shall pass over without comment because of its similarity to the one considered above, was written to his brother. It treated of the matter which was so dear to him, the salvation of his brother's soul. This, too, met with success and the brother gave up his aspirations for preferement at court and returned to the true faith.

Probably the closest friend Southwell had outside of his Jesuit companions, was Philip, Earl of Arundel, who had played a prominent part in Elizabeth's court life until the time of his conversion to Catholicism in 1584. The Earl's conversion was attributable to the piety of his Catholic wife, and the disputation of Father Edmund Campion, priest of the Society of Jesus, with protestant theologians, at which Philip was present.
By the time of Southwell's arrival in England, the fickle Elizabeth had already had Philip imprisoned and sentenced to death because she could not afford to have such a well-known nobleman flaunting his Catholicity in the public eye, but Southwell was able to act as the spiritual director of Philip as well as of the Countess and entire Arundel household. He carried on a correspondence with the imprisoned noble, much of which is reprinted in the Catholic Record Society volumes. Through this correspondence, the bond of friendship and mutual respect between Southwell and Philip grew strong.

As spiritual director, Southwell induced the Earl of Arundel to make atonement for the evil deeds of his past life, especially for the mistreatment of his wife, of which he had been guilty while courting favor with Elizabeth. 8

How strong the Earl's faith became under Southwell's direction may be seen by the following incident. 9 Philip being very weak, and feeling that death was quite near, requested that the queen permit his wife and children to visit him. Elizabeth answered that if he would go just once to the

8 Janelle, Robert Southwell, 43.

Church of England, not only would his request be granted, but he would be restored to his honor and estates with as much favor as she (Elizabeth) could bestow.

The Earl, however, remained firm, remembering perhaps, the long letter he had received from Southwell concerning constancy and the glories of martyrdom.

Such a death will confirm the wavering, and make the strong even stronger... You whom hitherto neither a long imprisonment, nor the sentence of death, struck with terror, let neither the hope of pardon, nor false-painted promises, soften into compliance. The cause is that of God; the struggle is brief, the reward eternal. 10

"Triumphs Over Death" is a lengthy treatise which Southwell wrote to Philip at the time of Philip's sister Margaret's death. In this work the priest exhorts the Earl to be moderate in his grief in spite of his tremendous loss and unfortunate plight, because "all will band an attentive eye upon you observing how you ward this blow of temptation; and whether your patience be a shield of proof or easily entered with these violent strokes." 11

Southwell, who knew human nature so well, realized the importance of good example, especially in one as well-known as the Earl of Arundel. If sadness weakened him to

11 Southwell, Triumphs Over Death, 17.
the breaking point, others, too, would probably falter.

Southwell's frequent letters to the Earl were an attempt to prevent such a catastrophe. After extolling Margaret's virtues and comforting the Earl with appropriate spiritual considerations, Southwell ends his "Triumphs" with a four stanza eulogy, beginning "Of Howard's stem a glorious branch is dead," and ending with the lines:

Heaven of this heavenly pearl is now possessest,
Whose lustre was the blaze of honour's light;
Whose substance pure of every good the best,
Whose price the crown of virtues highest right;
Whose praise to be herself, whose greatest bliss—
To live, to love, to be, where now she is. 12

An unusually close bond of affection had existed between Philip and his lovely sister, Lady Margaret. She had been conspicuous for her virtue and piety, and when she died at the early age of twenty-nine, her imprisoned brother's grief was so keen that it could scarcely have been assuaged by anyone less understanding, less tenderly sympathetic, and yet utterly realistic, than Fr. Southwell.

The treatise written on this sad occasion, though directed primarily and personally to the Earl of Arundel, was also meant for all those who had suffered similar losses. At this period in history, the emotion of sorrow was too universal and Southwell's zeal for souls too limitless to permit the "Triumphs" to be a consolation for only one man. Consequent-

12 Ibid., 35
ly, in a preface to this work, Southwell explains:

I intend this comfort to him whom a lamenting fortune hath left most comfortless; by him to his friends that have equal portions in his sorrow... and into whenssoever of their hands it shall fortune, much honor and happiness may it carry with it, and leave in their hearts as much joy as it found sorrow.

Father More claims that the "Triumphs" was "most useful in soothing the sufferings of all Catholics." 14

Thus far we have been showing how Father Southwell attempted to comfort and strengthen his fellow Catholics in the person of Philip, Earl of Arundel. How much the Earl was impressed by the Jesuit's efforts, and what confidence he had in his spiritual direction is indicated in a message included in a letter to his wife in which he says, "Assure him (Southwell) from me that I will not for any worldly respect whatever, God willing, go one inch farther than he doth direct." 15 In a farewell note which Philip wrote shortly before his death, he says:

This being the last time that I think I shall ever send unto you, I should be very ungrateful if, wanting all other means of expressing my thankfulness, I should not now at least acknowledge it in words... I could not be more bound to any man nor to any but one of your calling so much; and all this in

13 Ibid., Author to the reader.
15 Janelle, Robert Southwell, cites letter, 44.
a time when such comforts are most welcome and even to the benefit of that which all men believe most precious; so in my heart our Lord who sees all secrets sees my goodwill and thankfulness, and I doubt not will reward you amongst all your worthy merits for those bestowed on me his most unworthy servant; and in as much thankfulness and goodwill as my heart can conceive, I remain yours till the last moment. 16

This note, coming as it does from an imprisoned man who had never seen Father Southwell personally, indicates rather well the influence which Southwell's pen must have wielded among Catholics. Through his writing people learned to know, love, and trust Father Southwell, and, if Philip's letter is a fair indication of the sentiments of the rest of the English Catholics, they were grateful to him for exhorting them to go forward courageously to receive the palm of martyrdom.

We have gone to considerable length in this matter of correspondence between Southwell and Philip because it is typical of the zeal with which the English Jesuit exercised his apostolate of the pen. To consider other pieces of personal correspondence would be tedious and would add little substantially to the impression already derived. Therefore, we shall pass on to the next important work calculated to comfort and strengthen his fellow Catholics, called by Southwell "An Epistle of Comfort: to the reverend priests, and to the honorable worshipfull, and other of the lay sort, re-

16 Southwell, Triumphs, 107-8.
strayned in durance for the Catholike Faith."

Obviously, this epistle was intended to strengthen the constancy of those who have been imprisoned, suffered property losses, or been tortured for the sake of their religion. Throughout this work Southwell is speaking as a priest, the shepherd of the flock, "as one having authority." He calmly tells both Catholics and their enemies the consequences, good or evil, of the course of action they adopt.

Early in the epistle Southwell explains to Catholics why they should accept their tribulation willingly. He points out that, after all, it is little enough that they suffer for their sins, and that the more they are suffering the more certain they may be that they are on the right path, for the devil sends his "strongest dints" against the most tenderly loved of God's children.

Next, Father Southwell proves the justice of the Catholic cause and admonishes Elizabeth's henchmen that they persecute men, and then are foolish enough to send them as ambassadors to heaven "there to be continuell solicitors with God for revenge against their murderers." 17

Throughout this epistle, Southwell, far from pampering the suffering Catholics, teaches them that it is now the

17 Janelle, Robert Southwell, 199.
suffering, crucified Christ that they must follow. He does not try to gloss over their predicament, or lull them with pious phrases. He admits that theirs is a hard lot, but one which they as Catholics should accept willingly, even joyfully in imitation of their Lord and Master.

In spite of the seriousness of subject, and the grimness of tone, even in this work are found traces of Southwell's poetic spirit which seem to flash out spontaneously in everything he ever wrote. In his closing chapter Southwell lashes out against the Elizabethan persecutors in the following words:

You have labored to suppress us this thirty years: and yet our ashes spring others, and our dead bones (as Ezechial prophesied) are come to be exercitus grandis, a huge army. With your thundering both the cloud of error is dissolved, the enclosed light of truth displayed, and the earth watered with profitable showers to the ripening of God's corn. New slips are ever engrafted, when the old bough is cut off; and the virtue of the root that the bough lesseth, the slip enjoyeth. You cut open the fruit and shed the kernel on the earth, where for one that you spoil, many willspring up of it. We are the wheat of Christ (as S. Ignatius said) and are ready (if you will) to be ground with the teeth of wild beasts, or if you will not suffer that, with the mill stones of your heavy persecution, that we may become pure and clean bread in the sight of Christ.

18 Ibid., 201.
There can be no doubt that Southwell's suffering flock was strengthened by such stirring passages. In fact, Southwell seems to have instilled in the people a certain amount of justifiable pride over the fact that they were boldly resisting their persecutors and clinging doggedly to their faith—even to the gallows. Their constancy was ample proof that Southwell had succeeded in his literary apostolate of encouragement.

Southwell's private correspondence, inspiring though it was, necessarily reached only a limited audience. To strengthen the general mass of Catholics he would write soul-stirring poetry—poetry which was quickly copied and slipped from hand to hand among the faithful. Secret presses hidden in some of the noblest homes of old England reproduced Southwell's works as rapidly as he wrote them. Most of his poems were widely circulated under manuscript form for several years before they were put out under legal publication.

To a weary, discouraged England Southwell would sing of the shortness of life, the love of God, and the glories of heaven. His people read Father Southwell's poems and took heart.

We can get some idea of the popularity which Southwell's poems enjoyed from the fact that fifteen or sixteen
editions were issued in the forty years following Southwell's death. 19

Being a priest who always seemed to have his finger on the pulse-beat of his flock, Southwell knew that he must ceaselessly teach his suffering children that the joys of this life are not fair to be compared with the eternal joys of heaven. "Life," Father Southwell told his people:

is a wandering course to doubtful rest;  
As oft a cursed rise to a damning leap,  
As happy race to win a heavenly crest;  
None being sure what final fruits to reap;  
And who can like in such a life to dwell,  
Whose ways are strict to heaven, but wide to hell? 20

Much bitter experience lay behind those lines. In his own family his brother's and father's lives had almost been "a cursed rise to a damming leap." Both of them had forsaken their religion in an attempt to "get ahead." Fortunately, Father Southwell's influence dragged them back from the brink. His dear friend, Philip Earl of Arundel, had once been as eager as any courtier of the queen. In fact, he had sent his wife to live alone in the country because he knew of Elizabeth's displeasure with married men. Is it

19 Hood, Book of Robert Southwell, 71.
20 from "Life is But Loss."
any wonder that the Jesuit referred to lives such as this as a cursed rise?

Perhaps at only a few periods in the history of the world have Catholics found the "way to heaven" more strict, or the ways to hell more wide. To be a good Catholic meant giving up all one's possessions, leaving loved ones, suffering some of the most exquisite tortures ever devised, and finally, giving up life itself. It must not have been easy for Catholics to remain firm when they saw their weaker, fallen brethren mounting to worldly success and apparent happiness merely by leading the gay, uninhibited life which their peers advocated.

In a touching poem called "Times Go by Turns" Southwell instructs Catholics that things will not always be as bad as they now seem. Everything which God made is undergoing change, and so it will be with their suffering:

Not always fall of leaf nor ever spring,
No endless night, yet not eternall day;
The saddest birds a season find to sing,
The roughest storms a calm may soon allay;
Thus with succeeding turns God tempereth all
That men may hope to rise, yet fear to fall.

These lines speak for themselves and the last one epitomizes the purpose of Father Southwell's unceasing words of encouragement—"that men may hope to rise, yet fear
to fall."

While reading "Losse in Delaye," one cannot help but recall Southwell's epistle to his father in which he admonishes him not to postpone his conversion or rashly rely on a death-bed repentence. Perhaps Southwell was thinking of his own father; certainly he was thinking of people like him when he wrote such lines as:

Take thy time while time doth serve thee;  
Good is best when soonest wrought.  
Hoyse upp sale while gale doth last  
After-witnes are dearly bought,  
Let thy forewytt guide thy thought." 21

Titles like "Man's Civil War," "Seek Flowers in Heaven," "At Home in Heaven," "Look Home," and "Upon the Image of Death" suggest to us the tenor of the other poems which Southwell composed for the encouragement of his fellow Catholics, and which we shall pass over without further comment.

There is one poem, however, which merits special consideration because it depicts so strikingly the differences between the two factions struggling under Elizabeth. "Content and Ritche" must have delighted the Catholics and brought pangs of remorse to the hearts of Elizabeth's follow-
ers who were trying sodesperately to verify the term "Merrie England amid the artificial gaiety of the English court.

In this poem, Southwell, speaking in the name of all good Catholics, says:

I dwell in Grace's courte,
Enriched with Vertue's righteas;
Faith guideth my witt; Love leadeth my will,
Hope all my mind delighteth.

The pronoun I is used as opposed to the courtiers, Grace's Court as opposed to Elizabeth's. The Catholics were enriched with rights from God, while the persecutors enjoyed only what privileges the fickle monarch chose to grant them, and these they enjoyed only as long as they struck the fancy of the queen. The wit of the Catholics was guided and tempered by their glorious faith, while the wit of their persecutors was guided by the ribald sense of humor prevalent in the court. Infinite Love led the wills of Catholics, while Elizabeth led, or misled, the wills of her puppets. The Catholics' minds found delight in the hope of the eternal glories of heaven. The Elizabethan minds took delight in the fleeting, false merriment of a depraved coterie whose only concern was to please the queen.

The comparison was certainly a sorry one. It was inspired, no doubt, by Saint Ignatius' meditation on the Two
Standards which Southwell had pondered so often and so deeply. In this meditation St. Ignatius draws the contrast between Lucifer and Christ. 22

Saint Ignatius tells his retreatant to consider first Lucifer, the head of all the enemy, sitting in a great plain of Babylon. Babylon, of course, was the symbol of all the wickedness in the world. Ignatius then says to consider how Lucifer instructs his demons to go into every part of the world and to tempt every man, first of all with the desire of riches in order to lead them more easily to a desire of honor and finally bring them to great pride; and from these three steps they can easily be led to all other vices.

It is not at all difficult to trace the procedure in the lives of the Elizabethans. First of all, their fear of fines and property losses prevented them from clinging to the true religion. Once they had severed their connection with the Church the next step was to seek honor, if only in the form of an approving nod from the queen. Those who succeeded were filled with the pride which was so typical of the times. A casual glance at the history of the sordid

22 St. Ignatius Loyola, The Spiritual Exercises, the second week.
side of court life will show what St. Ignatius meant by people being drawn from pride to all other vices. In striking contrast, St. Ignatius then pictures Christ, our leader, in a field in the region of Jerusalem, the city of peace and love.

Christ is warning that those who wish to follow Him must arrive at the highest degree of spiritual poverty, if it so pleases God, and even to actual poverty; secondly, they must have a desire for opprobrium and contempt because from these follow humility. The program of Christ is in direct opposition to that of Lucifer: poverty versus desire of wealth, opprobrium and contempt versus worldly honor, and humility versus pride. The Catholics had lost their worldly possessions; they had suffered insults and slander from their persecutors, and certainly nothing but the most sincere humility and trust in the Infinite God could make them endure the terrible existence which was theirs under Elizabeth.

The parallel between St. Ignatius' Two Standards and the Elizabethan and Catholic factions in England seems so striking that it should have brought fear to the former and great peace to the latter, for certainly in them was verified the conditions which Christ had set forth for His
followers.

No doubt there were many Elizabethans who wished that they could make the boast:

My conscience is my crowne,
Contented thoughts my rest;
My hart is happy in itself,
My bliss is in my breast.

Near the end of Southwell's poem, "Content and Ritche," he sounds an ominous note for those who preferred the court of Queen Elizabeth to the court of their real master, Christ:

No change of Fortune's calmes
Can cast my comfortes downe;
When fortune smiles, I smile to thinke
How quickly she will frowne.

This is one of the very few works in which Southwell very clearly illustrates the inward peace of the Catholics as contrasted to the feverish insecurity of their oppressors. Although the poet never refers to the foe explicitly, every line seems to bristle with the implication, "But you do not share in this happiness and contentment at all; in fact, you are at the opposite extreme."

In this chapter we have been attempting to show the second phase of the spiritual function of Southwell's writing, the comfort and strengthening of his fellow Catholics. We have seen from the contents of the works mentioned in this chapter that there could not possibly be any other motive
for them. The success with which this particular form of his apostolate met is indicated first of all by the fact that both his father and brother rejected the wealth and honor connected with court life and died as devout Catholics.

We have already indicated the influence the priest had on the Earl of Arundel and the gratefulness with which he received Southwell's ministrations. Although we have no testimony to support our statement, after reading some of the lines of poetry written for Catholics it hardly seems possible that Southwell's poems could have failed in their purpose; they must have comforted and strengthened Catholics.
CHAPTER IV

EXPRESSION OF SOUTHWELL'S OWN THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS

We have now reached the third phase of the spiritual function of Robert Southwell's poetry, namely, the expression of his own thoughts and feelings to which life in prison gave no other outlet. Naturally, most of the evidence brought forth in this matter will necessarily be internal. We shall attempt to prove our point by showing that from early youth it was Southwell's nature to be an extremely expressive individual, and therefore, we should not be surprised to find him using his poetry as a channel of self-expression. Secondly, we shall show that there are several works of his for which there could be no other motive possible.

A poet is a man endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness than the ordinary individual has, and consequently, he is more expressive. Someone has said that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings. A poet, like a cup, can contain only so much and then his feelings must overflow into words. Such a man
was Robert Southwell.

Another factor which motivated Southwell's writing to a large extent was his love of Christ. He had mastered well the teachings of St. Ignatius, and through constant prayer and self-denial had filled his heart with love for his Master. Just as an earthly lover whispers words of endearment to his loved one, so Southwell would express his love in his poems.

We must not think that poetic expressiveness is found in Southwell's writing only after long years of experience. We find him as a mere boy of seventeen, still seeking admission to the Society of Jesus letting his feelings overflow in the following passionate address to Christ:

Through thy loving sweetness thou hast grasped to thyself my heart, and I must needs offer myself up a slave to thee. For thou hast vanquished me, O Lord Jesus, thou hast vanquished me in a twofold fight. For when first I was assailed by thy holy inspirations, I resisted, as if choosing me for one of thy society brought more pleasure to thee than gain to myself. Thou sawest, 0 Lord, my infirmities, and with new engines shattering the ramparts of my heart, as I could flee nowhere, being needs compelled, after a long struggle, gave myself up, and submitted myself to thy powerful hand. ¹

¹ Foley, Records, 306.
The emotion expressed is one which has been experienced no doubt by many seventeen year olds, but there are probably very few of that age who could express themselves as capably as Southwell did.

We mentioned in a previous chapter that Southwell had been refused admission to the Society of Jesus temporarily because of his immaturity. In the deep sorrow of that occasion he penned a lament which would have done credit to a man many years his senior.

It reads in part:

How could I refrain from succumbing to my grief and sorrow, when I see myself divorced from that Company, separated from that Society, torn asunder from that body in which are placed my whole life, my love, and my delight? 2

The young would-be Jesuit feels that his refusal of admission is a punishment from God for wavering in a state of indecision for some time before finally deciding to enter the Society of Jesus. "While I live I languish," says Southwell, expressing his sentiments at that time, "and life itself is wearisome." 3

3 Ibid., 174.
The seventeen year old boy shows a rather penetrating insight of the spiritual life when he observes that God sometimes purposely withdraws Himself for a time from those who are sincerely pursuing a religious life, and yet they are comforted during these desolate periods by the sweet remembrance of past delights. But Southwell adds,

Alack for me who am constrained to winter yet in the world, who am daily tossed about amid the billows of carnal desires, who am dashed on the reefs of sinful occasions. What fear, think you, may not possess my soul? What doubts not solicit my heart? What dangers not batter my unhappy ship? O wretched me, who would forbid my tears? 4

To the modern reader Southwell’s writing may seem somewhat affected, but he was writing, we must remember, in the popular style of the sixteenth century. Furthermore, our interest at this point is not so much with his writing, but with the expressive nature which is shown through his writing.

We shall content ourselves with commenting on only one of Southwell’s letters as an expression of his own feelings. It is of special interest because it was written from Calais, the last stopping point before England, on the eve of departure for the land of his martyrdom. He

4 Ibid., 174
writes on that occasion to the Jesuit Father General, Claudius Aquaviva:

Being now exposed to great danger, I address you, my Father, from the threshold of death, imploring the aid of your prayers that, as once you reawakened in me the breath of life when I was ready to die, so now by your prayers I may either escape the death of the body for further use, or endure it with courage. I am sent indeed into the midst of wolves, would that it was as a sheep to be led to the slaughter, in the name of and for Him who sends. Truly, I well know that many with open mouths stand gaping at me both on sea and land, not as wolves only, but as lions going about seeking whom they may devour, whose fangs I fear less than desire them; nor do I much dread tortures, as look forward to the crown.5

This excerpt, besides portraying Southwell's expressive nature, also gives us an intimate glimpse of the courageous character of the man who was about to sail to an inevitable martyrdom.

In considering another aspect of Southwell's writings, his "Spiritual Exercises and Devotions," we cannot help but feel that we are prying into territory too sacred and personal, for this work is more or less a diary of Southwell's spiritual attitudes from the time he began his novitiate until he sailed for England. It was intended for the eyes of the author alone, but shortly after the

5 Foley, Records of the English Province, 319.
beatification of the English martyrs by Pope Pius XI on December 15, 1929, it was published in order to enable the faithful to know more about this recent candidate for canonization. The editor of this work, Rev. J.M. De Buck, S.J., states that:

With the possible exception of Blessed Thomas More's writings, there is perhaps no more important document left, giving first-hand information on the formation of a martyr's soul, than this MS., lost and hitherto unknown except for a dozen sentences quoted and handed down by historians. 6

It is obvious that since this work was not intended originally for publication or wide circulation, the author could not possibly have had any motive for it but giving expression to his own thoughts and feelings. The quotations which we shall select from this work are of special interest in the light of what we know of Southwell's later years. Most of these notes were composed during his novitiate.

One of the first notes contains the words, "My aim in entering religion was that, by constant mortification of self and by submitting myself to all men for Christ's sake, I might become as like to my crucified Savior as I could."

6 Southwell, Spiritual Exercises and Devotions, J.M. De Buck, S.J., New York, 1931, VI.

7 Ibid., 33-34.
It would be interesting to know whether the Jesuit martyr thought of this note written so many years previously as he lay in torture on the rack or dropped from the gibbet at Tyburn. In retrospect we can see that he fulfilled his aim admirably.

A little later Southwell writes:

...through the whole course of my life I can but expect that to happen to me which I have sought in the religious life, viz., the suffering of continuous tribulation so that during the whole course of my life I may not enjoy so much as one hour of repose. Indeed I am to think it an especial mark of God's favor to me if I am burdened with perpetual afflictions and wearied with constant difficulties, especially as in this manner alone may I become like unto Christ who passed no single moment of His whole life without some sorrow. 8

A foreboding of his own future career is discovered in a note which is headed "The Perfection of a Jesuit."

He says in it:

Consider what great perfection is required in a religious of the Society, who must be ready at any time to go to any quarter of the globe and to any race of mankind...(consider) what would be required in one cast into prison by heretics, wasted by hunger and thirst, tempted by harlots and in numberless other ways, torn by the rack, and other tortures and so on. 9

Southwell's anxiety as to whether or not he pos-

8 Ibid., 35-36
9 Ibid., 82-83
sessed such perfection would certainly have been allayed had he been able to read what Robert Cecil, president of the queen's council, and no friend to Catholics, would write about him not many years later:

Let antiquity boast of its Roman heroes, and the patience of the captives in torments: our own age is not inferior to it, nor do the minds of the English cede to the Romans. There is at present confined one Southwell, a Jesuit, who thirteen times most cruelly tortured cannot be induced to confess anything...

During his years of Jesuit life, Southwell had evidently acquired the perfection necessary to remain firm under the very tortures which he had named in his jottings as a novice.

Now we come to the point of great decision in Southwell's life. Addressing himself he says, "Thou wert indeed moved to enter the Society...merely because thy country, thy relatives and friends seemed to need thy help, and thou couldst give it to them in the Society alone and not in the other orders." 11

We find that the very next section of his notes is

10 Colby, English Catholic Poets, 143, cites Cecil's letter.

11 Southwell, Spiritual Exercises, 93.
headed, "Is it better to offer myself or to remain silent?" It must be presumed that he is speaking about volunteering for the English mission. In this passage the young Jesuit is debating whether or not it would be more pleasing to God to manifest to superiors the desire he has of returning to England and its persecution, or leave the matter entirely in the hands of God. He concludes finally that either course is proper and that he should adopt the one he feels more inclined to either by his own feelings or still more by the advice of his confessor. 12

The last of Southwell's spiritual notes which we shall consider is one which is lengthy, but very pertinent. It is headed "To die soon would be a safe thing and to live long in pain for Christ a holy thing." After observing that those souls are very happy who are now safe from sin and whose love of God is unfailing, he writes:

It is noble indeed, praiseworthy and glorious to suffer for the love of God toil, pain, torture and agony; it is great and meritorious to win souls, to live the religious life in the Society with the continuous mortification and self-conquest. But if I cannot have these things without offending God, I would rather be deprived of them all and die with-

12 Ibid., 96.
out delay...It is not that I shirk toil, not that I fear torment and agony, not that I wish to escape a life that is severe, restricted and full of difficulty (for if my God would wish me to endure the pains and torments of hell, I would do so willingly provided that I did not lose Him) but that true love can never suffer the loved one to be grieved either in small things or in great...But yet if God who knows man's misery still wishes to lengthen my life (although He knows that it cannot be without at least venial sin), and to exercise me still further in this valley of tears, then let toil come, let come chains, imprisonment, torture, the cross of Peter and Andrew, the gridiron of Lawrence, the flayer of Bartholomew, the lions of Ignatius, all things in a word which could possibly come. Indeed, my dearest Jesus, I pray from my heart, that they may come...For thy sake allow me to be tortured, mutilated, scourged, slain and butchered. I refuse nothing, I will embrace all...For I can do all things in Thee who strengthenest me...13

One cannot read the above passage without realizing keenly that Southwell's entire life was a preparation for his martyrdom. When he started across the channel from Calais to England, Father Southwell was not a naive, bright-eyed enthusiast; he was a mature Jesuit priest, trained in the spirituality of the hardy Basque warrior, St. Ignatius Loyola; he was one who had conditioned himself for martyrdom over a period of years by drawing close to the crucified

13 Ibid., 103-104
Christ in prayer. He saw his inevitable future clearly, he embraced it willingly out of love of Him for Whom he had left his native England in the first place.

We have seen examples of the prose works which were expressions of Southwell's innermost feelings. Now we turn to some of his poems which were obviously intended for no other reason than as channels of expression for his poetic nature.

What we shall call Southwell's "prison poems" are really an autobiography in verse. They do not give dates, or narrate important events in his life, but they portray something far more intimate—the thoughts, desires, and aspirations of a priest-poet-martyr. Southwell had once written, "I know that none can expresseth a passion that he feeleth not, neither doth the pen deliver but what it copieth out of the mind." 14

The love, suffering, and death of which Southwell wrote were not merely themes of his poetry; they were part of his life. Who could utter thoughts so tender as those

14 Southwell, preface to "Mary Magdalen's Tears."
expressed in "The Burning Babe" or in "A Childe My Choyse" except one who had studied Him and loved Him as Southwell did? Who but one who had suffered greatly could sympathize with the suffering Christ as Southwell did? Who but a sincere and generous lover could bewail his own shortcomings and protest his devotion as Southwell did?

There had been a time when Southwell could express his great love of Christ in his ministry. Each time he stood at the altar he was offering the supreme sacrifice of love. Each time he raised his hand in absolution, placed the sacred Host on someone’s tongue, rubbed the holy oils on some dying Catholic’s brow, he was expressing his love. Each peril encountered, each pain endured, each will escape from the pursuivants was an act of love. But in mid-summer, 1592, the inevitable betrayal took place. Father Southwell was taken prisoner by the infamous Topcliffe. His ministry was ended. His immense love of God welled up in his breast but could find no outlet now. Like the chalice which he had lifted so often, he could contain just so much and then must overflow. He had to express the love that was in his heart. Almost as a young boy might carve his words of love into the bark of a forest tree, Southwell would carve his words
of love for God in his poetry.

Before considering some of this poetry, we must mention that it would hardly be fair to speak of Southwell's "prison poems" without adverting to the fact that in recent years considerable doubt has been cast upon the hitherto unanimous opinion that certain of his poems were actually written while he was in prison. Pierre Janelle, who, it must be admitted, has composed one of the most authenticated biographies of Robert Southwell, affirms that none of his poems were written in prison. Janelle seems to base his statement solely on a passage of a letter written by Southwell's superior, Father Garnet, to Father Aquaviva, the General of the Society of Jesus. Father Garnet says: "I have turned over each leaf of this breviary (the breviary had been returned to Garnet by Southwell just before his death) curiously and have not found one single sign made with ink, from which it follows that he was never granted the commodity of writing to his friends outside." 15 Apparently Janelle stakes his entire proof on this one sentence.

However, in the very same letter, Father Garnet

speaks of two of Southwell's guards who treated the captive with the utmost respect and honor. The very fact that the breviary had been carried in to Southwell and returned again to Garnet proves that there was certainly some connivance on the part of the prison guards. Father Garnet stated that Southwell was never permitted to write to his friends. That is quite possible. No communications from him would ever leave the prison. That is probably why he wrote no message in the breviary. But be that as it may, it still seems quite possible that in view of the many other considerations shown Southwell during his imprisonment, he may also have been given "the commodity of pen and ink" to make private notes or write his poems, even though nothing he wrote would ever pass beyond the prison doors until after his death.

Since there are so many scholars such as Herbert Thurston, S.J., Harold Child, Christobel Hood, Henry Foley, S.J., who disagree with Janelle on this point, it seems safe to believe that some of Southwell's poems were written in prison, at least until much stronger proof than that which Janelle mentions is brought to light on the case.

Southwell was held prisoner for almost three years before he was brought to trial and condemned. Naturally, such
a long period would grow tedious to one of Southwell's temperament. Finally, Father Garnet informs us, the poet wrote to Robert Cecil, the same man whose praise of Southwell was quoted earlier in this chapter, begging him that since he had been kept a prisoner for so long and under such close guard, he might be brought forth to answer whatever accusations there might be against him, or at least that his friends might have access to him. 16 Cecil responded with typical Elizabethan wit that if Southwell longed for hanging so much, he should soon have it.

It is certainly not inconceivable that Southwell whiled away the weary hours of prison life by writing poetry. Although it would seem impossible to state exactly which of his poems were composed in prison, Christobel Hood does not hesitate to gather practically all of his shorter works together under the heading of "Prison Poems," and evidently she is on rather safe ground in doing so, for Harold H. Child says, "It was in prison that his poems were mainly written, 17 Sister Rose Anita Morton says, "Undoubtedly, most of his


poetry was written in prison." 18 And Hood assures us that Mr. Grossart, one of Southwell's early editors believes that most of his verses were written in prison. 19

We know from Father Garnet's letter already quoted in this chapter, that he was able to get a breviary in to Father Southwell's hands while he was imprisoned. We can well imagine the joy which the pious Jesuit derived from being able to read the divine office daily. But more than that, the prayers of the breviary evidently suggested numerous poetic themes to Southwell. The mysteries dealing with the Nativity and childhood of Christ seemed to have a particular attraction for him. No less than seven of his "prison poems" treat of that phase of Christ's life. We have already discussed "The Burning Babe," "New Prince New Pompe," and "A Childe My Choyse." Since these are unquestionably the best of these poems we will not enter into an analysis of the others.

Besides reflections on the mysteries of Christ's life, the hymns contained in the breviary stirred Southwell's

Muse. For example, in the Latin hymns we find the verse:

Sumens illud Ave,
Gabrielis ore,
Funda nos in pace,
Mutans Hevae nomen,

which Southwell paraphrases on "Our Lady's Salutation" as follows:

Spell Eva backe and Ave yowe finde,
The first beganne, the last reversed our harmes,
An Angell's witching wordes did Eva blynde,
An Angell's Ave disenchauntes the charmes.

St. Thomas Aquinas's "Lauda Sion Salvatorem" was another verse which inspired Southwell. It prompted two of his poems on the Blessed Sacrament. The first tells the story of the Last Supper when the Sacrament of the Eucharist was first established, and the second, like the "Lauda Sion" states the theological doctrine of the Eucharist. Southwell's lines,

They sawe, they harde, they felte Him sitting nere,
Unseene, unfelt, unhard, they Him received;
No diverse things, though diverse it appears;
Though senses faile, yet faith is not deceived...

certainly recall Aquinas's

Visus, tactus, gustus in te fallitur,
Sed auditu solo tuto creditur. 20

20 from Adoro Te Devote of St. Thomas Aquinas.
And Southwell's stanza.

That God and man that is the angell's blisse,
In form of bredd and wyne our nurture is.
Whole may His body be in smallest bredd,
Whole in the whole, yea whole in every crumme;
With which be one or be tenn thousand fedd,
All to ech one as much as all receive,

must certainly have been inspired by meditation on St. Thom-
as's words:

Caro cibus, sanguis potus: manet tamen
Christus totus, sub utraque specie.

A sumente non concisus, non contractus
Non divisus: integer accipitur.

Sumit unus, sumunt mille: quantum isti a
Tantum ille: nec sumptus consumitur. 21

What we have termed "devotional poems" must have
been written for no other purpose than to express the deep
love of God which was in Southwell's heart. They were cer-
tainly not written as part of his campaign against pagan
literature because they were written at the end of his active
career. They certainly were not written to comfort and
strengthen his fellow Catholics because no mention of their
plight nor words of advice are found in these poems, and such
things are found in the works quoted in chapter three. There-
fore, it seems safe to conclude that these at least are merely

21 from Lauda Sion of St. Thomas Aquinas.
channels of self-expression for the poet-martyr's pent up zeal.

Now let us turn to what have been called the autobiographical category of Southwell's prison poems. They are so named, of course, because they seem to give us a clear perception of what Southwell's thoughts were during his long imprisonment. From a close study of these poems one concludes that during his imprisonment Southwell had but one chief desire, and that was to die. His active life was ended, he had practically no contact with the outside world, he had no idea when he would be brought to trial, but could be certain of the outcome of the trial. Prison life was a hell-on-earth to him. We shall here consider two of the autobiographical poems, "Life is but Losse" and "I Dye Alive." It helps to remember that these are the musings of a man who had undergone some of the cruelest tortures ever devised, and these he suffered over a period of at least two and a half years.

The poet begins the first work with the lines:

By force I live, in will I wish to dye;  
In playnte I passe the length of lingering dayes.

Perhaps he was thinking of the "thirteen times most cruelly tortured" as he wrote:
Who would not die to kill all murdringe greives?
Or who would live in never dyinge feares?

Death parteth but two ever-fightinge foes,
Whose civil strife doth worke our endless woes.

Pathetic as the sentiments expressed may be, even
this poem ends on a hopeful note, something typical of South­
well's poetry.

Addressing cruel death, he says:

Avaunt, O viper! I thy spite defye:
There is a God that overrules thy force,
Who can thy weapons to His will applie,
And shorten or prolonge our brittle course.
I on His mercy, not thy mighte relye;
To Him I live, for Him I hope to die.

The theme of "I Dye Alive" is very similar. This
little poem is filled with a wealth of paradoxical expressions
which were so common among the poets of that era. Southwell
begins this poem with the lines:

O Life! what letts thee from a quick decease?
O Death! what draws thee from a present praye?
My feast is done, my soule would be at ease,
My grace is saide; O death! Come take awaye.

As Christobel Hood says so well, "It is tragic to
find the sienger of songs of joy and innocence changed by
torture and imprisonment into the writer of such sad verses
as "Life is but Losse," and "I Dye Alive." 22

22 Hood, Book of Robert Southwell, 75.
From the nature of the works quoted in this chapter, the conclusion that they were written to give expression to Southwell's own thoughts and feelings seems justified. Furthermore, this conclusion is altogether in harmony with what we have glimpsed of the exuberantly expressive, poetic nature of the man as revealed in all his writing from early boyhood until the time of his death.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This thesis began with the assertion that Southwell's writing had a twofold function—aesthetic and spiritual. To verify this fact required a study of both the content and style of his work.

First of all, an attempt was made to show the aesthetic function. This was done by analyzing some of the Jesuit's poetry, and showing that his work merited the place he has been given as one of the finest poets in lyrics in the English language. The treatment given this phase of the thesis was brief because it would seem from all we know of the poet and his theory of art that he himself would consider the aesthetic function of his poetry the least significant. Poetry, we must remember, was considered by him to be merely the hand-maid of religion and anything smacking of "art for art's sake" would seem unworthy to him.

Next, we divided the spiritual function of Southwell's poetry into three parts. We considered first how the Jesuit had inspired more gifted writers than himself to con-
centrate on religious themes, instead of wasting their time on love lyrics. The result of his campaign was the "repentance cycle" which was prominent in English literature during the last decade of the sixteenth century. Southwell's influence on such poets as Lodge, Nash, Drayton, Marlowe, and even Shakespeare was carefully traced through both external and internal evidence. Our findings seemed to justify the conclusion that behind the increase of devotional poetry was the work of Robert Southwell.

Secondly, we showed that much of Southwell's writing was intended to, and actually did, comfort and encourage his fellow-Catholics. The letters to his father, brother, and his correspondence with Philip Howard, Earl of Arundel, and his "Epistle of Comfort" showed by their contents that they had but one purpose. The dedication of "Triumphs Over Death," written to comfort the Earl of Arundel on the death of his sister, Lady Margaret, states explicitly the purpose of that work. An analysis of such poems as "Losse in Delaye" and "Tymes Goe by Turnes" in which the priest is obviously "preaching" to his flock adds to the impression that the comfort and strengthening of Catholics was certainly one of Southwell's primary motives for writing.

Finally, we showed that there were several of Southwell's works which could not possibly have had any
other motive but self-expression. Among those the most prominent was "The Spiritual Exercises and Devotions," a work which was composed as a private spiritual diary, but which was published shortly after the martyr's beatification in 1929.

The letters written by the poet when he was first refused admission to the Society of Jesus, and again on the eve of his departure for England gave further evidence of "self-expression."

The last types which we considered were the "autobiographical" and "devotional" poems. The former revealed the thoughts of the poet as he awaited martyrdom; the latter, especially the poems on the Blessed Sacrament, seemed to be the fruit of his meditation in prison on the prayers of the breviary which Father Garnet had sent to him.

Because of the nature of the fourth chapter, all the evidence was internal. However, the contents seemed to justify the conclusion that the works mentioned therein were composed for the sole purpose of giving expression to the martyr's thoughts and feelings to which life in prison gave no other channel.

In conclusion, therefore, judging from the evidence
discovered in this study, it seems quite legitimate to re-
affirm the assertion with which this thesis began, that the
poetry of Robert Southwell had a twofold function--aesthetic
and spiritual--and that these functions can be traced unhesi-
tatingly in his works.
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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Robert J. McAuley, S.J., has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

August 28, 1953

[Signature of Adviser]