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A Study of Dame Edith Sitwell's "Later Poems: 1940-1945"

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A STUDY OF DAME EDITH SITWELL'S
"LATER POEMS: 1940-1945"

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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VITA

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CHAPTER ONE

THE POET'S BACKGROUND, INFLUENCES, AND EARLY POETRY

Like the Brontes and the Rosettis of the nineteenth century, the Sitwells of the twentieth century hold an important place in the literary history of England. Dame Edith Sitwell came from a remarkable family "in which every member has in the same sudden-flowering generation displayed uncommon gifts in one branch or another of literary creation; unlike them, [she] has come to her unique stature as a poet in the English-speaking world today by a long process of development."¹ In the course of this development, her poetry has undergone change, only to disclose an individual but unmistakably brilliant art. Her work manifests a basic unity of inspiration, a tremendous inner vision, and a genuine human love, a love which proved "the secret of Dame Edith's very personal art."²

Dame Edith (Edith Louisa Sitwell), poet and critic,³ was

³Stanley Kunitz (ed.), Twentieth Century Authors (New York, 1942), p. 1296. In various sources Dame Edith is hailed as poet, prose writer, critic, biographer, literary historian, and anthologist. Although her achievements are numerous, her fame lies principally in her role as poet.
born in Scarborough, the daughter and eldest of the three children of Sir George Reresby Sitwell, the fourth baronet, and Lady Ida Emily Augusta Denison, daughter of the Earl of Londesborough, in 1887. With her two brothers, Sir Osbert Sitwell, C.H., the fifth baronet, who was born in 1892, and Sacheverell Sitwell, who was born in 1897, she completes the "Triad of Genius," of which each is an eminent writer in his own right; thus they give England claim to boast of another literary family.

The Sitwell ancestry can clearly be traced to 1301. For more than six hundred years the ancient family has held land near the Sitwell pinnacled grey-stone house of Renishaw in Derbyshire. Dame Edith's noble and aristocratic ancestry is a mingling of the medieval Norman and English, comprised of both the royal and common extraction.

The family biographical volume, *Left Hand, Right Hand!* (1944), written by Sir Osbert Sitwell, reveals the early relationship of his sister with her parents as strikingly unhappy. Too preoccupied with his business transactions and garden layouts, her father had little or no time for his literary and aes-

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thetic-minded daughter. And, it was no hidden secret that her mother failed to manifest any active devotion towards this extremely sensitive child. Frequently, Lady Ida, in social circles especially, displayed an acute embarrassment towards her daughter. The child was forced to rely on the friendship of her governesses and household servants and the moral support of her younger brothers.

Yet the very opposition and criticism encountered in the home seemed only "to have increased her determination to live her own life and to withdraw into her own inner world." At the early age of five, much to the embarrassment of her mother, she was already prophetically conscious of her vocation in life. From early childhood Dame Edith manifested a unique love for both music and poetry.

Dame Edith's education was derived in great part from the

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6 The father, Sir George Sitwell, merits credit for his contributions to art, beauty, and culture (e.g., On the Making of Gardens, [London, 1909]) which influenced his children directly and indirectly.

7 Much of the mother's embarrassment stemmed from the fact that the child, according to conventional standards, was not beautiful; that she was consciously persistent in a vocation contrary to the mother's expectations; and that, in short, it was a disgrace to be a female first-born. (Cf. Edith Sitwell's autobiography, Taken Care Of, [London, 1965], Chapters Two and Three.)

8 Lehmann, pp. 8-9.

private tutorship of governesses, the most talented of whom was Helen Rootham, a brilliant artist of music and literature who became not only Edith's teacher but also her close friend and companion until her death in 1938. In the description of Helen Rootham in his biographical volume The Scarlet Tree, Sir Osbert says succinctly but importantly that in her, his sister "found a champion and we all gained a friend." In addition to being an artist, Helen translated much French poetry with special concentration on the poems by Baudelaire and the Illuminations of Rimbaud. In several ways, therefore, Helen was instrumental in nurturing and fostering Dame Edith's inherent love of poetry and her natural tendency towards the arts. There is no doubt that Dame Edith's childhood years under the guidance of Helen Rootham were of extreme importance to the future development of the poet and her art.

It was early in her life, therefore, that Dame Edith was influenced by the great English poets and by nineteenth-century French literature, particularly the poetry of Baudelaire. She made a study of the French symbolists and their technique. In

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addition to this literary influence, her family sojournings in Italy, where the family seat is founded at the castle of Montegufoni, along with her brothers' love of Italy and of its art and culture, and her occasional visits to Spain, had a great influence on her. Her brother Osbert makes a particular point of emphasizing the effect of these journeys: "We came to be able to tell good things from bad, to use our own judgment and not believe anything about the arts that we were merely told."\textsuperscript{12} His statement illustrates the Sitwells' independence of thought which was to be the first strong characteristic of Dame Edith's work.

Whatever love and understanding the poet received came from her brothers Osbert and Sacheverell, and the household retainers. Despite the fact that her parents inadvertently denied her the basic human needs, she grew, in her own right, to maturity and to love.

As Dame Edith grew consciously more convinced of her vocation as a poet and literary artist, she realized that it was impossible for her to study or to create actively in the environment that surrounded her. Sir George, her father, with his unaccountable behavior was difficult: he was constantly engaged in bizarre financial activities.

All he wanted was to study the habits of the dwellers in Nottingham in the fourteenth century, and spend a great deal

\textsuperscript{12}Lehmann, p. 10.
more money on building houses on unliveable spots, which would cause him, in the future, as he told Osbert, to be known as 'the great Sir George.'

Her mother was cold, indifferent, and disinterested.

To her, all greatness was reduced to the smallness, the uselessness, of a grain of sand. . . . Her rages were the only reality in her life.

Both "their lives were completely atrophied." Both contributed to an inhuman, hostile, and unhealthy atmosphere. In 1914, therefore, at the age of twenty-seven, Dame Edith, accompanied by Miss Rootham, left home and moved into a small flat on Moscow Road, Bayswater, where she lived for nearly ten years. This particular period coincided with World War I (1914-1918), a time of "physical horrors" and "universal madness." During this time, nevertheless, she began to develop her poetic talent and to entertain young poets.

Her supposed association, however, with the Bloomsbury group was practically non-existent. Her distaste for this society is evidenced in her description of it as:

. . . the home of an echoing silence. This section of society was described to me by Gertrude Stein as 'the Young Men's Christian Association—with Christ left out, of course.'

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13 E. Sitwell, Taken Care Of, pp. 81-82.
14 Ibid., p. 9.
15 Ibid., p. 81.
17 E. Sitwell, Taken Care Of, pp. 87-88.
Although she admits that the group were "kind-hearted," she perceived that her occasional invitations were "on sufferance." She concluded that this distant relationship was just as well:

I do not think I should have 'fitted into' the closely serried company of Bloomsbury. I was not an unfriendly young woman, but I was shy, and yet, at unexpected moments, was not silent—and silence was much prized, sometimes to the embarrassment of persons outside the inner circle of Bloomsbury.

It was during this time that she edited her six anthologies, Wheels. Because Dame Edith Sitwell felt convinced that "a change in the direction, imagery, and rhythms in poetry had become necessary," she initiated experimentations with rhythm and texture. In her personal notes she gives us a clear understanding of the poetic elements which were basically to govern her technical achievements. Discussing rhythm she states:

Rhythm is one of the principal translators between dream and reality. Rhythm might be described as, to the world of sound, what light is to the world of sight. It shapes and gives new meaning. Rhythm was described by Schopenhauer as melody deprived of its pitch.

18E. Sitwell, Taken Care Of, p. 94.

19This anthology of verse, to which she and her brothers contributed considerably, was published annually (1916-1921). Consisting of gay, experimental, and almost nonsensical poems, it was a direct and deliberate challenge to Georgian Poetry.


21Ibid.
In her concern for texture and its nuances she explains:

The texture of a poem has been regarded as merely a matter of fatness or leanness—has been acknowledged only as producing richness, or sweetness, or harshness in the poem; but the fact that texture is largely responsible for rhythm, and for variations in the speed of the poem, has not been acknowledged. The particular part played by the varying uses of consonants, vowels, labials, and sibilants, has been insufficiently considered.  

In a further discussion on texture she explains that "vowels play the part of light or of darkness, consonants that of matter," and "sibilants slow the line." As examples of these effects we have in her analysis of "Fox Trot":

The 'ea' sounds, on which much of the poem is based, vary in lightness; at moments the effect is of light pleasant stretches of cornfields, as in:

'Among the pheasant-feathered corn the unicorn has torn, forlorn the'

over which the flying shadows of the darker-vowelled 'corn,' 'unicorn,' 'torn,' 'forlorn,' dip and are gone.

Her analysis of "Dark Song" includes the following:

The poem is built on a scheme of harsh 'r's, alternating with dulled 'r's, and the latter, with the thickness of the 'br' and the 'mb' in:

'The brown bear rambles in his chain'

are meant to give the thickness of the bear's dull fur.
Her early poems, particularly her experiments in *Facade*, "consist of inquiries into the effect on rhythm and on speed of the use of rhymes, assonances, and dissonances, placed at the beginning and in the middle of lines, as well as at the end, and in most elaborate patterns."\(^{26}\) She experimented also with the "effect upon speed of the use of equivalent syllables—a system that produces great variation."\(^{27}\) Her probe into texture, "in the subtle variations of thickness and thinness brought about in assonances by the changing of one consonant or labial, from word to word,"\(^{28}\) produced fascinating discoveries and poems. For Dame Edith Sitwell it was rhythmic life and shape recreated in each poem. Invariably, she was aware of the importance of music and texture in the making of verse. It was the rhythmical element that produced such melody in her poems and that led Neville Braybrooke, in his review of Dame Edith's autobiography, *Taken Care Of*, to say: "It should not be forgotten that in her youth she was a pioneer of jazz poetry."\(^{29}\)

In addition to her regard for rhythm and texture, she was obviously theme-conscious. Even at this time she manifested a concern about materialism in a world crumbling into dust; about ghosts

\(^{26}\) Poems, "Some Notes on My Own Poetry," p. xvi.

\(^{27}\) Ibid.

\(^{28}\) Ibid., p. xvii.

and shadows moving in a highly mechanized universe; about exquisite beauty surrounding man, and his failure to acknowledge the divine art in nature. Already polar images of light and dark, warm and cold, joy and sorrow, and rich and poor served to establish basic motifs in her poems. A brilliant mind, a keen perception, and a compassionate love, besides her countless experiences from infancy through life, provided her with an increasing source for ideas. A delight in verbal creation and a penetrating reverence for such work are emphatically indicated in her own notes:

"... the experience of the poet during the first process of the inception and creation of a poem (I say this in all humility) is akin to the experience of the saint." \(^{30}\)

A phenomenal use of imagery, which developed as the poet grew, dominated her work. With many tactile and audile images she created shapely designs. These designs revealed her skillful use of synesthesia, one of her major poetic devices. While she was making one sense do the work of another by seeing sounds and hearing colors, both her music and imagery grew and developed. The translation of color into sound blended together with experience, resulted in the poet's distinct "pyro-technics."

In her early years, therefore, she produced poetry alternately "experimental, light, imagistic, macabre, wistful—making

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\(^{30}\)E. Sitwell, A Poet's Notebook, p. 154. The same analysis is also contained in her autobiography, Taken Care Of, p. 43.
for a spectrum of highly colored qualities.\(^{31}\) Looking closely at some of the significant poetic works of her early years and at some of those immediately preceding her major poetry, one observes: 1) that her style undergoes change and development and 2) that there is a definite, persistent thematic concern.\(^{32}\)

In 1915 Dame Edith produced her first volume of poetry, *The Mother and Other Poems*, a rather slim sheaf of five poems. It was here that many of her themes, symbols, and images made their first appearance, rather unassumingly and unobtrusively:

... that of jewellery, gold, stars, fire, spring, symbolic duality and metamorphosis, the Shadow of Cain, Judas and the Betrayal, christian ethics, appearance and reality, the past and the present, the ideal and the real, time, the cold, the bone, the worm, death, a Baudelarian spleen, a sense of guilt and an unresolved emotional complex.\(^{33}\)

*Cloons' Houses*, her first successful volume, appeared in 1918. In it the influence of Rimbaud is easily detected, particularly in the first poem of the volume. And, as seen frequently throughout her poetry, the preoccupation with the disturbing picture of contemporary life through the imagery of clowns, masks, time, and death is obvious. Both *Cloons' Houses* and the subse-


\(^{32}\) This observation, of course, would necessitate a study of its own. Such a study has been done to some degree by Margaret Bond Odegard in "The Development of the Poetry of Edith Sitwell," Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1956.

quent volume of poetry, *The Wooden Pegasus* (1920), contain studies about different aspects of poetry itself, some of which are allied to the field of commedia dell'arte.\textsuperscript{34} Many of these earlier pieces deliberately identify the artist with the child; this identification establishes a "difficult symbolism and imagery in the poet's early work."\textsuperscript{35} However, Dame Edith "has denied she was ever 'a poet of childhood.'"\textsuperscript{36}

Yet, in 1920 she wrote a charming book titled *Children's Tales* (from the Russian Ballet). Inspired by Diaghilev, Dame Edith wrote a ballet story that deals with the "innocent world of childhood." Its introduction is important for the insights it gives us into her own development. In many ways the concept of good and evil in the story projects and foreshadows the basic concept of her later poetry.

In 1922, in the same year that James Joyce published his *Ulysses* and T. S. Eliot *The Waste Land*, Dame Edith caused a somewhat lesser sensation with the publication of her *Facade*. Scintillating, experimental, and rich in imagery, this musical entertain-


\textsuperscript{35}Ibid., p. 15.

\textsuperscript{36}Ibid., p. 17.
ment in which Dame Edith collaborated with Sir William Walton was a distinct achievement with words, syllables, letters, sounds, pitch resonance, and correspondence to different notes of the musical scale. Here the influence of the symbolist technique was evident; she exploited music, associations of words, and juxtaposed images. As McKenna theorizes, this was the culmination of her experimental pieces which were "attempts to correct the 'verbal deadness' and 'rhythmical flaccidity' the poet felt were paralyzing modern verse." As a skillful artist Dame Edith manifested the "freshness" that she attempted to bring into the language; as a successful artist she demonstrated that she was "both a traditionalist and an experimentalist." A growth of consciousness was apparent.

On June 12, 1923, Dame Edith, speaking behind a curtain

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37 In his biographical volume Laughter in the Next Room, in the chapter titled "Facade," pp. 187-223, Sir Osbert tells about his sister's meeting with the talented and accomplished musician; when and how the idea for Facade originated; and how it progressed.

38 Unlike most critics who maintain that Dame Edith's early poetry, phase one in her poetic development, ends with her writing of Gold Coast Customs, McKenna thinks that it ends with Facade. He maintains that what precedes it was a deliberate preparation for the "Entertainment" achievement.


"painted with a female figure, eyes closed and mouth open," gave Facade its public world premiere at the Aeolian Hall in London. She wanted to prove her theory that "poetry should emphasize musical cadence and dissociate itself from the personality of the poet." This first public reception was a scandal; the audience laughed and booed and the critics ridiculed it. Yet some twenty-five years later, in 1949, when the American premiere of the same took place at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, it was received with an enthusiastic and overwhelming applause. Although she is reportedly better known in America, particularly for her extraordinary dress and eccentric appearance, the reviewers made it known that the audience admired and recognized her poetic accomplishments. Beneath the gaiety of the mocking, modern, syncopated dance and jazz tunes of her jocose and witty verse, there were the grave implications of the theme that the poet wished to convey.

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41 Kunitz, p. 1296.
42 Ibid.
43 O. Sitwell, in his Laughter in the Next Room, pp. 215-219, gives a rather extensive account of the critical reception of the first public performance of Facade. A similar but briefer analysis is given by the poet in her Taken Care Of, pp. 139-140.
45 In her autobiography, the poet confirms that these poems "are, none the less, serious from an aesthetic point of view." p. 124.
Her Bucolic Comedies in 1923, however, contain a rustic atmosphere in which she penetrates the pastoral environment and in which her poetic rhythms draw nearer to that of speech.

After this came her longest and perhaps one of the most important of her early poems, The Sleeping Beauty (1924). Its surface fantasy of a fairy story reveals Dame Edith's delight, as elsewhere, in "the imaginary, the remote, the exotic, the mythical and the supernatural."46 Although not primarily about her own youth, this poem is "a partly-autobiographical piece about the joys and terrors of childhood, its acute perceptiveness and vulnerable innocence."47 Here Dame Edith transformed, with keen imagination, the beauties of the country with all its natural beauty into the ethereal atmosphere of a fairy world, a world that was deeply rooted in her as a child. In this fairy world three basic images emerge, gold, darkness, and silver.48 But as she continues to write, darkness gives way to cold and dream transforms into nightmare. Her poetry moves from the fanciful to the realistic.

The Elegy on Dead Fashion (1926) is one of the group of poems that foreshadows the realism of the caught-up contemporary life of Gold Coast Customs (1929), which is yet to follow. While she grieves

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46 Singleton, p. 57;
47 McKenna, Footnote 1, p. 17.
48 Singleton, p. 57.
for the vanishing golden age in the first half of the Elegy, she prepares us with foreboding imagery in the second half for the cold night of the human heart.

Still another poem, Metamorphosis (1929), heralded the Gold Coast Customs. In it Dame Edith is preoccupied with time and death. Once again she mirrors "a past peopled by an ideal race of men and women who lived in the natural freedom and luxuriance of the earth." But time has removed such an "approach to life," and the "coldness and isolation of death" literally and symbolically blind and blind the lost inhabitants in an "eternal anguish of the skeleton." Time initiated the decay which is at the very heart of the visible metamorphosis. As in her earlier poems, there is still no tangible solution to the problem of emptiness, of automation, of annihilation; hope for renewal comes only after her "dark night of the soul," after faith and hope provide her

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51 Ibid., p. 24.

52 The metamorphosis initiated by Time suggests the double-edged meaning of the title itself, namely, a change in the world as well as the change at the present stage of the poet's development. In regard to the double-edged meaning, Singleton remarks: "It illustrates the transmutation that has taken place at the present stage of the poet's development; a later version contained in The Canticle of the Rose has also undergone a metamorphosis to fit in with the new pattern of the poetry whose herald it originally was." p. 65.
with the means.

While her style was mainly technical, Dame Edith Sitwell's early poetry eventually led to the long poem Gold Coast Customs (1929), which marked, in a sense, the end of her long period of experiment and development. The poem heralded the depth and vision of her thematic concern and the marked change and maturity of her stylistic development; it was a forerunner of her major poetry.

To substantiate its importance the poet later explained: "It is a poem about the state that led up to the second World War. It is a definite prophecy of what would arise from such a state—what has arisen." To the world, more than merely crumbling, had crumbled. It was a suffering in the raw where everything was reduced to the primal mud. Briefly summarized the poem consists of "three main points of focus" which alternate in the poem:

- the Ashantee tribal ceremonies, Lady Bamburgher's parties (their 'civilized,' 'modernized' reflection) and all that goes with them, and a dock scene populated with sailors and prostitutes—but the movement between these points is so swift and like the camera-work of the movies that they appear to the reader to be witnessed almost simultaneously or to be imposed on one another.

The poet described the last-century slums of Ashantee, a native kingdom on the Gold Coast, Africa, with an overwhelming compassion for the underprivileged—a growing pathos
in her later poetry. The death of any rich person in Ashantee was marked by several days of national celebration during which the poor were often killed so that the bones of the deceased might be sprinkled with human blood. Through symbols suggesting the barbaric and primitive, these hideous orgies of the Ashantee funeral rites were associated with our modern civilization. Dame Edith equated these murder rites with "the miseries of London slums and the lives of the fashionable rich." She became a mouthpiece crying for all men.

The images—"Rich man Judas, brother Cain," "Lady Bamburgher," sightless faces, shrunken heads, ragged bodies—all condemned the malaise of a 1929 world and reflected the poet's own shame, despair, rage, and pity. Her main purpose throughout the poem was to produce "not so much the record of a world as the wounded and suffering soul of that world . . . seen through the eyes of a protagonist whose personal tragedy is echoed in that vaster tragedy." The suffering soul, the poor man, whether black or white, was for her the "Starved Man upon the Cross"; and throughout the rest of her poems the poor man continued to represent the Crucified Christ. Little wonder then that her major poems culminated in her union with Christ and embodied her own crucifixion.


56*Poems*, p. xlv.
Among the significant images that emerged from this sea of terror and corruption are sin as the worm which deforms and kills, and the human heart which is betrayed by lust and unable to be restored. In her later poems, however, as she realized the infinite value of the sinner, the human heart became liable to healing. Meanwhile, a spark of hope appeared in the age of darkness through the prophetic last lines of Gold Coast Customs. The possibility of healing even after the extremes of evil opened a way out of hell.\(^5^7\) The "gold and wheat," the "blood and fire," and the "fires of God," which terminated this remarkable poem, were to reappear in her later poems.\(^5^8\)

This work had an enormous impact on its readers. Not only did the poem bridge the two epochs of the poet's life, but it also helped to revitalize the poetic life of England. Critics and writers alike paid tribute to the woman who dared to attempt to restore hope to the hopeless; they lauded the woman who defied an extremely cold world in an age of darkness and endeavored to "bring back sight to the blind." William Butler Yeats wrote: "When I read her Gold Coast Customs, I felt something absent from all literature was back again, and in a form rare in literature of all generations, passion ennobled by intensity, by endurance, by wis-


\(^5^8\)Poems, p. xlv.
In his evaluation, C. M. Bowra examined the intense feeling for the ugliness of reality which has grown out of one of Dame Edith's "most notable poems" and concluded with a glowing tribute to both the poet and her "consummate craft": "It is as great and original a triumph of sound as Hopkins' Wreck of the Deutschland."  

After Gold Coast Customs, the poet disclosed, "I wrote no poetry for several years, with the exception of a long poem called 'Romance,' and one poem in which I was finding my way."  

It was during this silent period that her final prophetic lines of Gold Coast Customs were building momentum for her later major poems.

Yet the time will come  
To the heart's dark slum  
When the rich man's gold and the rich man's wheat  
Will grow in the street, that the starved may eat—  
And the sea of the rich will give up its dead—  
And the last blood and fire from my side will be shed.  
For the fires of God go marching on.

And come, they did.

These major poems coincided with the Second World War, before which her childhood governess, Helen Rootham, died in 1938. While caring for Helen, Dame Edith Sitwell underwent a soul-searching period. Thus it was that the poet's maturity concurred with the

61 Poems, p. xlv.
advent of war. It was a time of intense emotional struggle linked with the bloody Second World War; for Dame Edith it was also the time of reevaluation which led her poetical technique to approach perfection and her inner life to reach new depths and heights.

After a year of war, she began to write again "of the state of the world, of the terrible rain falling alike upon the guilty and guiltless, upon Dives and Lazarus; . . . of the sufferings of Christ, the Starved Man hung upon the Cross, the God of the Poor Man, who bears in His Heart all wounds."62 Her themes included the devastation of the world. Despite the vast devastation, the poet could still say with Christopher Smart: "I blessed Jesus Christ with the Rose and his people, which is a nation of living sweetness."63

Her writing changed significantly with the assertion of her belief in the promise of redemption in Street Songs (1942). This collection along with the rest of the poems that appeared between 1940 and 1945 reveal the poet at the peak of her poetical achievement.

Because Dame Edith experienced a downward journey "into the hell lying at the core of our society and its mores,"64 (climaxed, at this point, in Gold Coast Customs) and because, as Mills explains,

62 Poems, p. xlv.
63 Ibid.
64 Mills, p. 30.
the author figuratively undergoes the death of the spirit, which is the experience of our modern hell, and progresses beyond it to recover herself, in a new way, and at last to leave the underworld,65 the poet could reasonably evaluate and judge this world. But far more than for only the role of judge, she was prepared for "the combined role of poet and prophet, the wise old woman who reveals the hidden processes of creation, relates the myth of its cycles, and praises the Divine Spirit latent in it."66

The poet was ready to face despair without the mirthful cover-up of her early poems; she was prepared to transcend the "vicissitudes of living in our, or any other, time";67 she was ready to undertake the role of sage whose vision now spanned the whole of existence. The poet herself affirmed that she was ready; she insisted that the early poems were the product of her years of apprenticeship: "I wasn't such a fool as to use any fire that I had until I had the vehicle for the fire."68 Indeed after the


66 Ibid., p. 30. Mills believes that Edith Sitwell, "having experienced the journey, faced the diabolical frenzy of those who feast on the lives of others, [and could] reasonably judge this world. Her role of judge is won only at the cost of the journey. In classical literature, mythology, and in Dante, the traveler to the underworld earns the reward of vision and wisdom for undertaking; and Dame Edith as the protagonist of her own poem approaches a similar goal. Perhaps we can see in this journey and its achievement a justification and support for the role Dame Edith introduces here and develops more elaborately in later volumes."

67 Ibid., p. 31.

68 "Genius in a Wimple," p. 29.
period of experiment and development—that long and devoted ap­
prenticeship—she burst forth with a heart aflame, a mastery of
thought and word, and a new kind of beauty in her art and in her
life.
CHAPTER TWO

LATER POEMS: 1940-1945, PART I

Invocation

The very title, "Invocation," demands a two-fold interpretation: 1) it serves as the introduction to the entire section of Dame Edith Sitwell's "Later Poems: 1940-1945," and 2) the poem itself is, in the classical tradition, invoking the Muse for assistance and inspiration, as Milton had done in Paradise Lost. Here the Divine Muse, the Holy Ghost as "Love," "Primal Law," "Light," "Spirit," and "Peace," is being invoked, prayed to, both for poetic inspiration, "Light," that she as a poet-prophet might receive sight for herself and the other blind of her war generation, her readers or listeners; and for a rebirth, a re-creation of the world through the Spirit moving over the present chaos and waters as He did "in the beginning." The poet's invocation implies that only such a new coming of the Spirit can solve the problems of the war-

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1 Cf. John Milton's opening lines of Paradise Lost, ll. 6-13.

2 Gordon W. Bennett, "The Form and Sensibility of Edith Sitwell's Devotional Poems: A Study of Baroque Tradition," Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (University of Kansas, 1969), p. 327. Bennett's summation of the poem as "a prayer for another Pentecostal revelation" is erroneous since there is no suggestion here of a Pentecostal revelation but the plea for a new birth or creation out of chaos, as revealed here and especially later in the poem.
world of 1940 as Dame Edith Sitwell saw them.

As an introduction this poem introduces the various themes that will be treated in this collection. As an opening poem it also implies several levels of meaning, namely, the personal, historical, natural, and spiritual. These themes and levels of meaning are revealed in the present poem and developed in the remaining ones as this study will disclose.

The introductory stanza of the poem states the situation: the speaker, "I," the "golden woman," like the fire of light and the fire of love, like the earth, has now grown old. She was once "a golden woman" with a brightness like one of the planets, but like the earth has grown old and cold and lost her vitality, fire, and love along with the source of renewal and rebirth. Watching the dark fields in winter and the dying fire, the speaker hopes for spring and a spiritual renewal, a spiritual miracle like the natural miracle of spring. The speaker watches in hope, a spiritual hope based on the natural one of rebirth in the spring.

In stanza two the day is compared to Ixion bound on the torture wheel of time; like the torture wheel, time seems to be going nowhere. The internal rhythm of the heart's time (of love) also seems to be dead, and the only sound seems to be a despairing one at the seeming imminent end of the world with a darkness without hope of dawn or rebirth. This solitary sound is that of "ultimate Darkness" and of Blind Samson—man—shaking the pillars that uphold
the world and destroying himself and the world. (The description of a world at war as a "Fair" is sardonic irony.) This falling Darkness would be the end of the world, ultimate and final extinction; the sound is mingled with man's cry without faith, "emptily calling" without any hope of rebirth or light.

A marked contrast is evident between the first two stanzas: there is hope in the first, but a despair, or near-despair in the second stanza. These two stanzas foreshadow the entire collection in which the poet's opposites of hope and despair recur again and again. Man like Samson in his strength and blindness is destroying this world. In the midst of this destruction both Samson and modern man call out for help, but in contrast to the Old Testament hero, modern man is "emptily calling" because he has no faith. There is also an emptiness in both because of their common lack of love. Two rhythms are also established, namely, the natural one incorporating the seasons, planets, time, with the sun and its revolutions, and the human rhythm, "the beat of the heart," in human

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3 Bennett maintains that "a potent ambiguity enters in 'the sound of ultimate Darkness falling'" and implies that "both extinction and redemption occur," but I find this interpretation doubtful since with ultimate Darkness there would be no possibility of redemption. Ibid., p. 329.

4 In conjunction with the first two stanzas Bennett comments that "the allusions to Ixion and Samson . . . universalize the human condition to all times." But rather evidently, I think, the image of Ixion applies to Day, that is: natural time and rhythm, and there is a contrast between time's seemingly hopeless Ixion-condition and man's wilfully blinding Samson-like destruction—but without the latter's belief. Ibid., p. 338.
love.

The gardeners of stanza three cry for rain. They are literally close to the earth and have a personal love for it, and are also symbolically the poet and other lovers of the earth. On the other hand, "the high priests" want a darker rain, "the thunderous darkness" of the last line of the stanza; like those of the Old Testament, these modern day religious leaders, in their despair, want a destructive rain like that of the bomb raids in "Still Falls the Rain" in contrast to the healing rain of rebirth which nature itself craves and which is the symbol of the poet's spiritual hope. These are the two contrasting solutions for the world's disease, i.e., the greed of Dives--modern materialism, the world's "delirium of gold"--which causes the physical and spiritual hunger in the world. It is ironic that the high priests howl in their anger for a darker rain, with its connotations of destruction, since such a rain cannot cool or, above all, "raise Wheat," the physical and spiritual Bread of Life which they should desire; it can only destroy life.

In the fourth stanza the personification of the Fly predomines; the fly is a disease-carrier, a bearer of pestilence and

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5The high priests could also be images of the immature Apostles who asked Christ to call Lightning (punishment and destruction) upon the cities that rejected them; but Christ replied that He came to save and not to destroy. (Luke 9:54) Christ therefore would be like the gardeners. In "Harvest," 1. 4 (Poems, p. 257), these same priests are howling for rain and "universal darkness."
evil, and mirrors plague and sin. The Fly is, therefore, an image of evil itself and more specifically of the war with its death-carrying bombers. The stanza pictures this war which brings destruction to the bright heroes and leaves behind the followers of the Fly, the small, the mean, and the unheroic. These are described as "gadflies and gnats," the small gilded followers of the Fly, like the greedy munition makers carrying the plague of war and of spiritual death. Here, as throughout the poem, two levels are evident in the image of the world's fall into the coldness and darkness of winter: physical death by war and spiritual death of the soul.

Like the "golden woman" of the first line of the poem, the poet is still on the natural level in stanza five as she resembles the corn-goddess watching for the rebirth in the "dark fields" as spring begins, with the hope that with this natural rebirth in the fields the fires in the heavens and the fires of love will be rekindled. Flowers and the young people come out from the darkness, but the poet does not know where they are going since she can only speak with her natural knowledge as earth-mother and corn-goddess. The hierarchies—the higher beings, the stars in union with the angels—out of their love for the young give them their beauty and whiteness as does the constellation of the Swan, and beauty and fertility as does the constellation of Berenice—with her beautiful flowing hair which the constellation resembles. The voices of the
young speak as they are coming out from the darkness and now they will be able to speak of their new love, which they do in the following stanza.

The first line of stanza six introduces one of the themes that dominates the entire section, namely, the rebirth of brotherly love; it pervades all the poems and is finally resolved in the last poem. There is irony in line two since creeds should unite and not separate, and the basic creed of all religions should be this unifying bond, i.e., the Brotherhood of Man. The innocence, the non-taintedness, the natural beauty of "a country Fate" is contrasted with the city Fate where man is divorced from the earth and from his brother. The "wheel" of this "country Fate" is Day, (Clotho, the first of the three Fates, the spinner who weaves the thread of life,) not night, and therefore weaves and produces from the everyday tasks of human living the gold of light—not darkness—and therefore a life of value. The child in the country learns from the light the wisdom of the past and the humility of its "humble dust" in a human life from which holiness can come; he also learns the hope of rebirth in nature, such as in the "unripe wheat-ear" which hides within itself the gold of harvest. Finally, the image of the common fire in the fireplace is an image for the common love that spreads from the heart which plants its seeds of love in others as the sun does. This fire comes from the "long-leaved planets" with their rays of light, especially the Sun, reaching the
earth and the ears of corn and their leaves, as both a source of life and of fire. The country reveals this source of love through its people who are close to the sun, harvest, light, and the planets. Stanzas five and six, therefore, form a unity: natural love through a return to nature with the common gold-heat-love image.

Stanza seven begins the Invocation proper. The poet looks forward to a time when the present darkness and coldness of this winter, when "Man's fresh Fall," his most recent one now in World War II in which death is so "democratic," shall be forgotten. The next line specifies this coldness in the lack of love for one's brother which is described as worse than death itself. She prays that when this war and its effects are over and forgotten, that love will return to "the dying world." "O Love," the Holy Spirit, the only source of love or hope is implored to return to such a world. The poet implies that in the present condition of this dying world and its darkness, there is no light (as a source of poetic inspiration) or love. The last line of the stanza, "And households of high heaven within the heart," is repeated several times in these poems. It echoes the words of Christ: "If anyone loves me he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we shall come to him and make our home with him." (John 14:23)

Stanza eight continues the invocation prayer: Fill our visible world and the invisible one of our hearts with your love that we may love all that we see and cannot see. Fill our everyday life
with the joy of your love, and pour the heat of your love deep into the very depths of all life, vegetative, animal, and human. The Law of the Spirit can rule the "panic splendor of the animal" and bring order so that we are not destroyed by our common blood. Man like the animal is terrible as well as beautiful. Here the poet is invoking another attribute of the Holy Spirit, "primal Law," as the necessary foundation of order. The Spirit, this law within our veins, as within animals, rules our blood, tames it, and gives it law and order. This Law is like the "fire of the hearth," the source of the love in the home, and, like the old household god is the Deity close to us, the Spirit within us, within our homes and hearts, invisible but working within us. But even though it is fire, it does not destroy; it does not burn, but like the fire of the Sun, only nourishes and gives growth to the love within us. The "endless wandering" of the Spirit (in a later poem Christ is described as "my Wanderer") is puzzling. But in Scripture, (John 3:5–8), the Holy Spirit is compared to the "wind that blows where it wills." So the Spirit wanders over the face of the earth, visiting and nourishing with its love according to its own will. Likewise do the planets wander in the high heavens, but their movement and revolution reveal a plan and providence just as the action of the Holy Spirit does even if it is unknown to us.

In stanza nine the prayer continues to the Holy Spirit again as this primal Law, guiding and controlling the spiritual forces
within man and nature. The speaker, the woman, the Mother Earth, the Corn-goddess, who has been watching the dark fields, prays that the Holy Spirit will rule the spirit working in the dark earth. The spirit of life, the spirit of the seeds, must be guided to life and harvest as the husbandman and as the farmers are guided by the Sun and planets, by day and light, by the planetary rhythms. "Blood and bone" refer to the tree and animal of the previous stanza; their pride and beauty and their color recall their first appearance and splendor at the time of creation. Pride and splendor in vegetable and animal life have perdured in contrast to man's loss of humanity, splendor, and pride. The poet is also anticipating a new creation from which man will be reborn through the Spirit from the present darkness in which he is buried. From the first Darkness of chaos came the splendor of creation. She now hopes for such a new creation once more as the work of the Spirit.

Stanza ten echoes the sixth stanza and the lifeless stones of the city where men are lost and loveless, divided from one another without any Brotherhood, and physically and spiritually hungry. So she asks the Spirit to feed them: the "wheat" is primarily the spiritual food of love, the bread of Life who is Christ. And the poet recalls Christ's parable, (Matthew 7:9-10): "Is there a man among you who would hand his son a stone when he asked for bread?" But here, without such love, there are only stones, not bread, for man. The secondary reference is to Christ's temptation (Matthew 4:3-4)
when He refused to turn stones into bread—but only for Himself, never for others. The city and its life are hard like stone in contrast to the country and its life close to the earth. The "stones of the city weep" because of their helplessness and inability to feed man. "You," the lost days, the lost hopes, also the "Lost Men," have lost their opportunities in the past when the light of hope, like gold, might have been given to the poor; but this light has now become darkness shrunk like the poor and the miserly rich whose heart refused the poor.

In the opening line of stanza eleven the present night of the world carries on the "shrunken darkness" of the previous line. Previously we have had the coldness of the winter fallen on the world; now it is the darkness, as in the beginning when there was Chaos, and the poet continues her prayer to the Spirit who in creation moved over the waters and brought forth order and life, and He is appealed to for this same order of peace in the midst of the present war. In the next line on the "animal heat" and passions of the blood, the curious word again, as in stanza eight, is "splendor"—it indicates not only the "splendor" of the blood that has been shed, but also the potential "splendor" of the passions of the blood if these passions were directed by the Spirit to peace and love. In spite of the darkness, this blood, "the hot gold of the sun," and its passions continue to flame and know no setting like the Sun, but like the planets, continue to revolve. In spite
of the darkness the blood and passions continue to flame.

In the darkness of stanza twelve, night has fallen on the world. The thunder and lightning and storms of early spring which bring rain and rebirth are stilled. They could also be "acclamations" to this rebirth of spring but now in the darkness the leaves only whisper, barely moved by the motion of the Holy Spirit who speaks through them, not speaking as he did at Pentecost or in the past, namely, through thunder and fire. What the Holy Ghost is whispering does not seem to be revealed in the poem but merely that he is at work in spite of the darkness. A whisper connotes peace, but because of the thunders of war, He cannot be heard. In the next two lines the Holy Ghost is described as a wheat-ear and as water: a wheat-ear that would nourish and shine with its gold in the darkness, and water, bringing life to the waste land of the "dying gardens" of the heart.

Stanza thirteen opens with a prayer, a plea: "Bring peace" with its nourishment and love to our hungry bodies and souls. As there can be no peace in a world where there is hunger, poverty, and war, so there can be no peace in a heart which is so empty of love. As the heart, so, too, the lips are empty of love and also truth. Like the prophets of old, she, a modern poet, dreams of bringing "back sight to the blind." But this is impossible without the Holy Spirit whose intervention is being prayed for in this Invocation. "The Last Man’s loneliness" points not only to such a pos-
sibility in the present destruction but also, in spite of such a predicament, to a hope for mankind through the Spirit.

In the final stanza the Spirit fills this Night, a night like the Dark Night of the Soul, and a night like the Chaos before Creation which was filled by the Spirit before the Dawn and Light of Creation. The next two lines refer to man's search for peace and for love which has resulted in "Nothing" because man is blind in a "Blind Man's Street," a street that is a dead-end. In this night, "the hammer of Chaos" is stilled in the "human breast"; it is the chaos of human war that man brought about internally and externally like a destructive hammer, but this is stilled because there was no longer anything to destroy. But in this darkness she prays that man may be at rest and that the Spirit may be the restoring sleep that will re-create man to an innocent childhood as even Judas, also a betrayer like man, once had as a child with his mother. She finally prays that the Spirit moving over these waters of darkness and chaos may use them to purify the hands of man, darkened by the blood of the murder of his brothers.

An Old Woman

I. I, an old woman in the light of the sun

The poet, the speaker in this second poem, is still "an old woman" as in "Invocation." This poem is divided into two parts: "I. I, an old woman in the light of the sun," and "II. Harvest." "Harvest" implies that the first part is that which precedes the
harvest, that is, "mankind's dark seed-time."

In the first half of this poem the old woman is "in the light of the sun" and is thus contrasted to the old woman in "Invocation" where she was sitting by the fire, to which she returns in the second half of poem "I." This seems to point to the theme that the fire in man's heart has grown cold and that man seeks to return to the source of that fire and love, the Sun, his first lover. And the poem will end with the quest for the final perfect love, the heart of God who is Christ the Wanderer.

In line two, instead of watching the fields as previously, she waits for her Wanderer who seems to be Christ, although this early in the poem it is difficult to be so specific. "My upturned face" is like a flower turned to the sun for life, for light; from that light, the Day, the old woman's face reflects the glory of all the past days of history remembering them as the Day itself does. But she and her face have their own intrinsic and holy beauty as does the clay from which man is made and in which he knew the suffering in the Flood and in the periods of famine and drought when the Sun, the lover of the earth, seemed to be "uncaring," and overwhelmed the earth and man with its power.

Stanza two begins a hymn to the Sun, the source of all light and life, of all creation, as the first lover of the world. The sun is blessing all humble creatures especially the living ones, giving them the power to transmit this life which it has received from the
sun; it blesses, too, the end of life and the works done, rather evidently referring to her as an old woman, one close to death, in the persona the poet is using. The sun also blesses "the clean and the unclean" on both the natural and moral levels, e.g., the ores like the gold in the earth, and above all, man and his splendor, the "splendors / Within the heart of man, that second sun." Man, created in the image of the sun, becomes a second sun and also a lover with the power of giving light and life to others in love.

Stanza three continues this hymn to the sun at creation and at dawn: its rays of light and warmth, compared to the flow of water, pour down on the blind in the light on their faces upturned to the sun as that of the old woman's in the first lines. So the sun comes to bless man's mortal dress, his body, his clay—a recognition that man is both eternal (immortal) and mortal. The sun blesses all, both young lovers and old lechers, giving the gold of its light and warmth to both the poor and the rich, to the beggar without hope and the miser in his darkness.

Like John the Baptist the sun straightens the crooked, on both the physical and spiritual levels. On a deeper level, that of the redemption, the sun prepares the way for Christ as St. John

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6 Cf. Matthew 3:3 and Mark 1:3. "A voice cries in the wilderness: Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight." See also Luke 3:4-5, with the following addition: "Every valley will be filled in, every mountain and hill be laid low, winding ways will be straightened and rough roads made smooth. And all mankind shall see the salvation of God."
the Baptist did. So the "shallow places" like the shallow spirit of man regain their strength from the sun as they are filled with warmth, light, and growth. Finally the coldness of the Waste Land of the world is forgotten in this blessing of the sun. There is no redemption yet; there is merely the preparation, the hope, until Christ returns. During this period of waiting there is only the natural level—in nature and in the nature of man—with the implication that in the meantime all she and others can do is use nature both literally and symbolically. The last three lines of this stanza impart the final blessing that the sun can give by filling in and healing the divisions between men separated by creeds and tongues. The implication is that at least men can return to their original nature through the sun by what it gives and what it symbolizes. The sun with its "guiltless light" is contrasted with man; but the sun can re-create all into the original holiness that "men and things" had at the first creation. 7

Stanza four continues the hymn to the sun by recounting other blessings such as the golden fleece 8 of the fox (recalling all the

7Bennett states that the "origins of this holy light" is "the innocent heart as well as God"; but, the heart in this poem is certainly not always innocent nor is there any specific mention of God yet as the poet remains on the natural level preparing first, as already mentioned, the symbol on its literal level. Ibid., p. 343.

8In the well-known myth, (of the "Golden Fleece"), the ram with the golden fleece saved the royal children. Here perhaps the beauty of the animal world could be an instrument of our salvation by reminding us of the beauty of our creation.
other beauties in the animal world) and, above all, the blessing of the ears of plenty that covered the earth, i.e., the wheat which is compared with the planets as in "Invocation." As bread, this wheat is the source of man's life and therefore holy as man's clay is, i.e., his body is holy as her body is holy. So the sun blesses her even though she is a simple woman. The sun makes no distinction; he blesses all without exception. For the sun sees her arms with their veins bulging from work, and the wrinkles on her nursing hands as holy as the branches of the trees and the furrows of fields to which the former are compared. For she, too, under the influence of the sun's heat, has labored and produced children like the rest of nature. Here the oneness of the "heat of the earth / And the beat of the heart" is established. This life in the earth and in man's heart has a common source in the love which is the energy of the world revolving the planets and giving life to the beasts and to all creation which otherwise would freeze into immobility. The next line seems to contradict the last line of stanza three. But the sun which is now this natural love blesses and makes holy all of man because his clay is holy, even if he does not "live in holiness." Finally, man becomes the source of his own blessing with the new sun, his heart. The answer to the seeming contradiction is two-fold: 1) man's body as part of the earth is holy if it lives in contact with the sun and its energy of love; and 2) the rest of man through this love, the sun, the symbol of natural love, can also
be made holy.

The image of dust, "the shining racer," in the first line of stanza five is that of time racing with man and overtaking him in death. The picture is that of a racing automobile, shining and speeding. (The "shining" could point to the Resurrection and the risen future of dust.) In this same stanza, which is actually section two of poem "I," the poet repeats her description of herself as "golden," an epithet justified by her union with the sun. She now approaches death but with the consolation of the tasks of her past life and with the fact that she is loved by the sun as part of the earth as in section one. Sitting by this dying fire of her life, like Clotho, the Spinner of the three Fates, she sees herself as the woman in the home welcoming the workers in the evening and, above all, the Wanderer who is Christ, for whom she has been waiting but who perhaps has been waiting for the fire in her heart to be reenkindled by the sun. She also remembers her present lack of fertility because of the children to whom she will no longer give birth. So she sits by the fire whose sparks can no longer enkindle, but she has the consolation of the singing kettle symbolic of all her household tasks and of her life. That the Wanderer is Christ seems to be confirmed by the description of Him in the following line as "covered with earth," i.e., Christ risen from the tomb, the dead. His work was not in the holy fields of wheat but in the field of death to produce a greater bread, the bread of Life.
Returning to the dead child, the poet sees herself as receiving the child like the earth.

In stanza six she breaks into a hymn of praise to the earth as wise and consoling because she hopes to become like the earth and one with it as she is through her body of clay, in the way she hinted at the end of stanza five. The earth consoles not only the suffering and the humble but even the proud heroes whom it also embraces in death. They, too, are part of the earth's history. In spite of death and other changes, man's love, the new sun, withstands the horrors of war. So even though the world burns and freezes, yet the planets and young lovers shine on under the sun, the source of their life and love, predicting the harvest to come because all is cradled in God's heart. And the old woman, close to death after all her pain and joy—and after those of the earth's, too—even in her earthly clay, can bless and forgive like the sun who has blessed her. Now she can anticipate a harvest from this "dark seed-time."

II. Harvest

Having in the first part achieved this goal of making her heart like the sun, she, too, is able to see all the sorrows of the world and "yet is not weary of shining, fulfilment, and harvest."

But in contrast to the sun and herself, she has heard, as in "Invocation," the priests, those of pagan rites and those of the Old Testament and the present day, seeking destruction instead of salva-
tion even to the extent of human sacrifice. But line six implies that their prayers were not answered; instead of another flood there came another "cloud," "small as the hand of Man." This could be Christ but at least it is only a rain that will be fruitful and not destructive.

Now in spring, "the time of the swallow," she perceives the same contrast. The "lost one," whom the young women wait for, could be their potential off-spring, or Christ Himself, like the seed-corn in the earth, all of whom at present seem to be lost. The "great rain-clouds" in the next line seem to bring destruction and darkness to the beauty of the "golden eyelids" of the young women. The spring that now begins to bud, therefore, is under the influence of a dark "Fate" as well as the bright "swallow"; the love that is part of spring is described as a Lion with hungry "claws" in hiding, ready to devour the offspring of nature, human and natural.

The paradox and puzzle of spring is posited: it can be "nihilistic," i.e., through the rain clouds with their destruction, like a Lion, as well as fulfilling. How this is so is not yet clear,

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9 The "golden princes sacrificed" recall again the myth of the Golden Fleece.

10 Bennett's interpretation regarding 11. 11-12, --And love with the Lion's claws and the Lion's hunger Hides in the brakes in the nihilistic Spring, that "love is a hungry lion with claws hiding 'in the brakes in the nihilistic Spring'" as "a new symbolic label for the Holy Ghost," is either absurd or unintentionally blasphemous, depending on one's point of view. Ibid., p. 351.
but the next two lines give a human example: the "old men" full of the fire of "anger" instead of love, destruction therefore instead of harvest. The surprise appearance now of Christ with His universal forgiveness is called for by the universal sin of men who destroy instead of create. The primary object of Christ's forgiveness, therefore, are those guilty of the "blood of the slain" in the present war, especially the "thunder-browed Caesar," the leaders who have caused this war. Is the promised forgiveness one of changing their thirst from that of blood to water and, unlike Tantalus, finally being satisfied or filled with the water of eternal life? Even the innocent, the slain, seem to be accused of clinging to "the foolish companion of summer, the weeping rose."

After this reference to Christ we might have expected, for a sign that "we have not been forsaken," the one that Christ gave or even Christ Himself. But instead, the answer is "the Abraham-bearded Sun, the father of all things." The following lines give a vivid personal description of the Sun and its power as the source of the ripeness of life and its harvest. This is primarily on the natural level but there are evident indications that the image has overtones of the human and the spiritual, above all, in the comparison of the sun to Abraham and the near visibility of the "great gold planets" like a glimpse of heaven.

After the pause the poet addresses the readers, "the firmament's beloved," assuring us of the care of the "Golden Ones of
heaven," i.e., the angelic-like planets who rule us in their wisdom and guide us to the ripeness of our harvest. However, our needs are not only physical and temporal but also immortal with the same "primal Cause," the Spirit of "Invocation," that moves beasts as well as men and also life in the trees. The mediate source of all this is again the Sun, its heat not its fire, that is, not its destructive element but its life-giving, "divine" power. The greater power of the Lion, the Bull, and the Bear, like the motions of the constellations, point the way to man's productive life on earth: "Gestation, generation, and duration."

This fulfilment, however, in the fields and in human life, finally leads through the laws of time to death but a death in the midst of "the holy fields" and with "our love." (The image of the "wrinkled darkness" is an example of the well-known use of synesthesia in Dame Edith's poetry.)

Line fifty-four seems to initiate a new life for the old woman in spite of the "grave-clothes" of her dying flesh. Faced with the proximity of death, she sees herself transformed into a new life in death as Fire: "I am Fire." This is the Fire derived from the Sun through which she is also "fecundity, harvest." She celebrates, therefore, the reapers of the earthly harvest that are now compared to the "harvesters of heaven," i.e., the gods and constellations, Jupiter, Saturn, to whom is added the corn-goddess, Demeter. These gods, materialistic and incomplete, are about to
find their fulfilment in Christ and His Spirit. As Spring breaks on the earth in the early dawn, its fire is seen to come not only from the Sun on "the first ripe-bearded fire / Of wheat," but also from within the flames of men's spirits which "break from their thick earth" and have their source in the "Pentecostal Rushing of Flames." The Spirit, and Christ now "returned from the Dead," bring life to the dead wheat and forgiveness to the guilty like Caesar. But Christ returns also for "the right, the wise and the foolish" who have known earth's forgiveness; like its symbol, the sick rose, human love now must be cured of its immortal sickness.

To these who sought the Paradise of Love in this world but now must face death is given the Bread of Life, \(^{11}\) Christ, and therefore immortality.

The poem ends with the Seraphim symbols of immortality which are compared to the ripe wheat of the harvest. They thunder forth the climax of the poem and the final solution: "Our Christ is arisen." He is the sign asked for earlier in the poem that "we have not been forsaken." The first sign was on a natural, temporal level; now, it is on the immortal, eternal level, "a sign from the Dead," Christ Himself.

\(^{11}\)Cf. Dame Edith Sitwell's "Some Notes on My Own Poetry": 'He gives us men for our refreshment the bread of angels. . . . On the breaking of the Bread thou art not broken, nor art Thou divided, Thou art eaten, but like the Burning Bush, Thou are not consumed.' --St. Thomas Aquinas, "Sermon of the Body of Our Lord." Poems, pp. 421-422.
The final harvest, that of the dead, has begun with a new Sun, Christ.

Eurydice

In this poem the poet is no longer an old woman, but a Eurydice who has died; but unlike Eurydice, who in the myth was almost saved, the poet will be saved from death by Orpheus, Christ. The poem, therefore, is a continuation or rather fulfilment of the previous poem on harvest.

In the first stanza, the fire of Love is the means of bringing all to harvest on earth and in the heavens and, above all, in man. Death is conquered by love and, along with the earth, paradoxically becomes the instrument of love in producing the gold of love as gold itself is by the sun within the earth. And as the "rough husks" of the dead harvest are burnt away by the sun, so the husks of our bodies are burnt away by love; what remains will be fire and life.

The second stanza continues this song of victory over death with the revelation that death, too, shares in Love's great compassion for "fallen Nature." Like the rays of the sun ripening within the earth, so does the heart receive wisdom from death, i.e., the wisdom to know that our need for forgiveness is great and that we have received it. Like the rays of the sun, therefore, which are ripened within the earth to gold, so within the darkness of death,
within the earth, the sun of the heart is ripened to love. ¹²

The next stanza introduces Orpheus coming through darkness, singing to the underworld of death, to rescue Eurydice. There is no clear sign yet that he is also Christ except for the capitalization of "Sunlike." In his blindness man has cut himself off from the Sun and the planets and thus prevented himself from setting right his life. But Orpheus' song like the "laughing" sun has the power to penetrate the earth and the darkness of death. Orpheus' love and power, however, in contrast to Christ's, are limited, and as in the myth, Eurydice here remains unrescued at the "mouth of the Tomb."

In the fourth stanza the poet, the old woman, in contrast to Eurydice, now after the fields of death, walks in the dark fields of earth "where the sowers scatter grain." But instead of hope there are only the tears of the mourners: "They mourn for a young wife who had walked these fields." They are weeping for Eurydice who, as the old woman, remains unrecognized in their midst. "The lateness of the season," the late spring, is filling them with near-despair.

¹²Bennett interprets the imperative, "See then!" which introduces this stanza, as addressed to the fire of love which is being asked "to observe her triumphant posture." But the fire of Love is what she transformed into or has now become. Bennett is also confused in making death both "another identity for the heart and heavenly fire" and also "a locus for ripening wisdom and our forgiveness"; only the latter is evidently the meaning of the lines. *Ibid.*, p. 359.
Introducing a new myth, the poet describes Mother Earth, Demeter, weeping for her daughter Proserpina. This maiden of spring was led astray by the "drifts of the narcissus" and carried off to the underworld by Pluto. In the myth Demeter is able to rescue her daughter for only eight months of the year during which the Mother Earth and her daughter Spring restore life to the fields. But at this point in the poem Proserpina, Spring, still lies in the "silent Tomb." "Not yet had Proserpina tied up her golden hair / In a knot like the branched corn." In other words, at this point in the poem Spring, i.e., rebirth, also needs to be rescued from death.

This hopelessness and loneliness continue in the next stanza. The only note of hope is the voice and the message from one of the dead. The identity of this speaker is vague but is connected with Osiris and described as one "lying in darkness with the wheat." He is, therefore, apparently one of the vegetation gods buried with the hope of his resurrection in the spring. The message from this dead god is contained in the following lines, a quotation from Meister Eckhart as Dame Edith Sitwell notes (Poems, p. 422), in which it is stated in the original that to see the true light of God shining in darkness "one has to be blind and strip God naked of things." Dame Edith adds to Eckhart's quotation the image in the last line in which the "barren heart" described by Eckhart is transformed into a "gold flame." Apparently this can only occur in
death. The same wisdom from death (cf. Stanza 2) reveals again the mystery of rebirth in the dead seed.

The next stanza (6) reverts to the death of Eurydice and the old woman as at the beginning of the poem. The poet describes this death as a coming down from the "Metropolis of the Corn." The description of the corn fields as a Metropolis is in contrast to the Metropolis of stone which has no harvest. In the rest of the stanza dust is personified as a beast rearing about her. The self-description of the power of dust, and consequently death that follows, seems to negate all hope; he claims to have conquered and devoured all, even Venus. Even the fire within the wheat has been turned to dust. And he concludes that the fire of Love is dead and, instead of enkindling the barren heart like the dead seed, Love has ground man's heart between "the stones of the years."

Time, therefore, has conquered love in this view. The conclusion remains puzzling; but the dust of death is too blind to see that the wheat can be made into bread and life. Dust also seems, erroneously of course, to equate Venus with love; yet perhaps even the physical love of Venus can be transformed into true love, as the dust itself will be or can be transformed into immortality.

Stanza seven continues the earlier chronological reversion as

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13 Bennett's statement that "another dead vegetation deity declares that the dead were 'stripped God naked of things!'" does not make much sense. Ibid., p. 361.
it returns to the end of stanza three where Eurydice met Orpheus at the mouth of the Tomb; but here, of course, in contrast to Eurydice, there is a return to earthly life, presumably by the old woman as in stanza four. Returning to earth, to Life, she hears from the dwellings of men a noise like that of the "dark wild bees." This connects with "honey-making" in line three and in connection with the rest of the stanza refers to the physical love symbolized by Venus in the previous stanza. Like the other things of man which are not completely human and formed by Love, this Venus-like love, too, will be devoured by the Darkness of death. So, too, will be man's "wars" and his building of "gold roofs" as a protection against the Darkness.

In contrast to this materialism and lack of faith, the old woman has learned in death that all that is "gold" in nature, i.e., truly natural, is transformed into "wheat or gold," i.e., Life and Love, in the darkness of a Death that can therefore be called "sweet." She questions, therefore, the weeping she hears for those in the silent "Tomb," but admits that these tears, since they come from Love, can be like grain and come to harvest as Spring comes to Life. The "honey-comb" heart devoured by the bear of death in the next lines must be that of Venus in her physical love as symbolized by the honey. This is in contrast to the heart of Eurydice—the Old Woman with its true love which was transformed into fire and comes to harvest from death. The gold of the honey-comb, since it is not
true gold but only surface and sensuality, disappears. Like the honey-comb this merely physical, Venus-like heart is six-sided, geometrically, i.e., physically perfect unlike the true shape of the heart with its two sides. And such a love, moreover, is merely that of the senses containing the false gold of sensual love which, the poet says, is devoured by death. In contrast to such a heart, like that of Venus, Eurydice—the Old Woman has no fear of the chilling breath of death because, as she stated in stanza one and has discovered by experience, love conquers death and ends in the harvest of fire.

In the following stanza (8) the poet includes the reader as the subject changes to "We": all of us are "heavy with Death" like the earth at evening, heavy with heat of the sun or like a woman "heavy with child." Both images, however, point to the potentiality of life from death. So, too, the ripeness of the seed within the corn-husk that must be cast aside. The gold comb of the wheat also contains all the weight of the richness of the summer sun. The "lump of gold" is the love in the heart that has changed to corn, i.e., to life, to harvest. So, too, did "my Life rise from my Death." The epithet "grandeur" for Death is no longer surprising at this point in the poem. Because of death's compassion and the wisdom it has imparted (as in stanza two) and because from death has come life and love, death has achieved a "terrible grandeur." The following lines picture her return from death to the earthly
acts of love where Love is bread and where it transforms even the small things, and shapes our bodies and our souls, i.e., makes them human and beautiful. With this love all life from youth to old age is transformed into "an element beyond time," i.e., the eternal, "or a new climate."

In the last stanza she includes not only herself but also the other young "who were born from darkness," i.e., the darkness of suffering such as that of the war or the Dark Night of the Soul. The darkness they now return to is the darkness of death "at the mouth of the Tomb." With them as with Eurydice is Orpheus to whom the image of Adonis is added. The description of Orpheus as "glittering like the wind" seems to be reminiscent of the Holy Spirit and in contrast with dust as "a shining racer" in "An Old Woman." Identification of Orpheus' mouth with the Sun unites the myth with the natural powers of rebirth and perhaps with Christ. The clearest indication of Christ is in the repeated phrase "the mouth of the Tomb" and the vine-branch broken by "the wind of Love" as Christ was broken on the cross by Love in His descent into the realm of death. In this concluding stanza the image of mouth repeated three times points to the alternate views of death as either

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14 The myth of Adonis contributes the new element of death and resurrection to that of Orpheus. The myrrh-tree, of course, refers to Myrrha, his Mother, and the incestuous act that produced Adonis. The beauty and life from such a union points to the good that can come from evil as life can come from death.
devouring or giving forth the life of the Word and the kiss of Love.

A Song for Two Voices

The two voices and characters of this poem are Dionysus and the corn-goddess who has run through the whole of Part I. Dionysus has not appeared except implicitly through the image of the wind with which he is intimately connected in this poem. This mythological, symbolic level points towards three deeper levels in this poem as in Part I and in the rest of the book. These levels are the natural, the human, and the anagogic, i.e., the supernatural and divine. The interdependence of all three is one of the principal themes introduced in Part I as is their final purpose and finality, i.e., the "ripeness" and harvest—of humanity in union with the divine.  

In line one the principal characteristic of Dionysus, as also later of the corn-goddess Demeter, is ripeness. And the poem points to the union of the two in this common purpose. Dionysus, god of the vine (wine), is also the god of agriculture and the god of the corn. The two divinities, Dionysus and Demeter the corn-goddess, are also united in the symbolism of "beard" and "hair," the symbols

15 This latter image, that of "ripeness," recalls, of course, Shakespeare's "ripeness is all" in King Lear, Act V.

16 Sir James G. Frazer, The New Golden Bough, edited by Dr. Theodor H. Gaster (New York: The New American Library, 1959), pp. 417-418. It is also significant that Dionysus was the only god whose parents were not both divine; he was the son of Zeus and the Theban princess Semele.
of fertility. Frazer also points out that the image of Dionysus is said to have been placed in a plane-tree as the poet in line three sings in the words of Demeter.

The principal differences between the two gods, the speakers in the poem, are the symbols of the wind for Dionysus and the branches for the corn-goddess. Dionysus, therefore, is not merely a support like a vine for the tree and its branches but, above all, a wind bringing life and rain: fertility and harvest. In response to the plea of Demeter, the corn-goddess, Dionysus expresses his need of her earth which he repeats in the last line and describes as "darkness." This is the darkness we have seen throughout the three preceding poems, but a darkness from which can come "ripeness" and harvest.

On the natural level, therefore, the poem describes the union between the wind, and consequently the heavens and the rains, and the earth. So the beginning of life in Spring with its promise of harvest comes from the darkness of winter. On the next level, the human one, the poem points to the union of male and female, of human love with its own gestation and birth. Finally, on the deepest level the poem points to the union of the human and the divine; of earth and heaven; of the mortal and the immortal. On this level Dionysus could be Christ in the symbols of the tree and the vine, as also the Holy Spirit in the symbol of the wind.

The poem is, therefore, a song of hope, of joy, of triumph,
pointing toward the possibility of a union of all the disparate elements in the human condition which is the basic problem introduced in Part I and which is to be examined and further explicitated in the rest of the book.

In this closing poem of Part I is contained an answer to the plea for harvest and love uttered in the "Invocation," the opening poem of Part I; in answer, the poet succinctly presents a transformation—"ripeness" following death, the "darkness of earth." The "wind" and the implied rain of fertility descend also from the Christ of the Cross, the "Dionysus of the tree," to man represented by the "corn-goddess," "the earth of my [Dionysus'] heart," and also the earth of Christ's heart. This culmination of union on all levels, the union of opposites (e.g., "0 darkness . . . 0 ripeness"), points towards a solution to be developed in the rest of the book.
CHAPTER THREE

LATER POEMS: 1940-1945, PART II

Still Falls the Rain

Part II opens with the war poem, "Still Falls the Rain," which combines the realistic and the mystical in a union that characterizes this entire collection of poems. This deeply mystical poem is one of Dame Edith Sitwell's best known and most profound works. Moreover, it contains what is perhaps her most suggestive symbol—the Rain. It was inspired by the continuous bomb raids of 1940; its sub-title, "The Raids, 1940. Night and Dawn," not only confirms the poem's source of inspiration but also implies its additional symbolism and hope.

The accent and emphasis on the initial word "Still" suggests a continuum which is corroborated throughout the poem by the frequent and deliberate use of the same word (within a refrain), and by its use in exactly the same position. The "Rain" in the title summarizes the contrasting and ambiguous use of this image: a rain of goodness, of love and life-giving, of healing and of saving, of fertility, of redemption as opposed to a rain of wickedness, of punishment and of drowning, of destruction and of death. As the rain image develops and takes on its respective dimension throughout the poem, so does the "Blood" which accompanies it. Similarly, "Night and Dawn" grow in proportion, with perhaps the following
difference: Whereas the rain and blood images dominate the entire poem, the Night image dominates stanzas one to four; the Dawn image permeates stanzas five to seven and breaks out with its full impact of hope in the final line of the poem—the certainty of Christ and His Love.

In the opening stanza the "Rain" is "dark," "black," and "blind" like man himself, the source and victim of the night of the bomb raids. Black connotes the loss of light and sight: in the poem this loss of light points to a night in which men are unable to see one another as brothers. In destroying his brothers man not only destroys them as human beings but also destroys himself. This is the inhumanity of history. A type of crucifixion, therefore, is established in these opening lines. Moreover, even on the literal level, the destructive rain of bombs is "dark," "black," and "blind" in its senseless and indiscriminate killing. This bloody and destructive rain is the same that has been murdering our brothers since the rain of hatred began with the creation of man. And after 1940 years since Christ was nailed to the Cross man is still killing his brothers, as he did his brother Christ, year by year and nail by nail in other Christs. Man is still killing his brothers and Christ, but now with bombs instead of with nails.

Both literally and symbolically the "rain" of bombs also pictures a hatred that is "dark," "black," and "blind" which has turned the world of man into a world of darkness, a darkness in
which he is unable to see his fellow-man and their common humanity. And this hatred has blackened man spiritually and intellectually by depriving him of the light by which he would be able to see that other men are his brothers.

This blindness, therefore, is like the blindness of the nails and the bombs which destroy without any sense of justice or love. Symbolically, also, man's blindness is likened to that of the executioners on Calvary who so ruthlessly, in their spiritual blindness, nailed their innocent brother Christ to the cross. The rain, moreover, is shaped like the nails, sharp and elongated; but both the rain and the nails have been perverted from their original nature and symbolism: from the purification and fertility of the rain and from the means of construction and creation of the nails. Instead, both mirror destruction and death. This first stanza also implies a comparison between the earth on which this destructive rain of bombs is falling and the cross into which the nails were driven. Humanity, therefore, is still being crucified.

In stanza two the rain is still falling. As its sound intensifies, the "pulse of the heart"—of life and love—is being changed to death and to the sound of "the hammer-beat" on the coffins of the dead, of Judas primarily but also of all those who have betrayed Christ in the intervening centuries. This introduction here of Judas implies that this heart-beat is also that of Christ's since it was after His death that the hanging death and burial of
Judas in the "Potter's Field" occurred. But this Potter's Field also connotes the burial of the poor and nameless who, above all, are the daily and nightly victims of the war in these bomb raids. With the sound of the bombs likened to that of the hammer-blows, the imagery here changes from the visual to the auditory. This is, of course, in contrast to the natural sound of rain which would be similar to and of the same symbolic meaning as the heart-beat. And the earth here is being compared to "the Potter's Field" as it was to the Cross in stanza one since the war has made of the earth one vast graveyard with the holes and craters caused by the bombs.

Because of the previous mention of the Cross (in stanza one) and the impending mention of the Tomb (in stanza three), the impious feet here must refer to the executioners of Christ and the guards stationed at His Tomb—"impious" because of both their murderous act and their unbelief. But as in the preceding lines this description of the sound of the rain of the bombs, impious because of its murderous destruction of humanity, must point also to the living who are walking over the graves of the dead recently killed in the bomb raids.

In stanza three the rain continues to pour down "on the Tomb" of Christ now, as previously on His Cross. The "Field of Blood," that of the blood of the victims of the bomb raids, is again a reference to the betrayal of Judas. (The Potter's Field purchased with the silver which Judas returned was called "the Field of Blood."
Matt. 27:8). As in the case of Judas there is no possibility of
growth in such a field of the "small hopes," namely, the petty,
inhuman, and insignificant hopes of modern man. Only death is pos-
sible. All this is in contrast to the great hope of man, namely
salvation, which Judas lost and which modern man also seems to
have lost. And the greed that is nurtured also points to Judas
and to the greed that was such a cause of the war and that ironi-
cally seems to foster further greed. The description of this greed
as a "worm with the brow of Cain" includes the latter's hatred and
murder of his brother Abel as a sequel to his greed, as in the
present war. We are reminded of the final line of "Invocation":
"From the darkened hands of universal Cain." Like a worm, greed
gnaws and devours not only the living but also the bodies rotting
in death.

This torrential rain of destruction shifts now to a rain of
suffering as punishment. Stanza four recalls stanza one in its
picture of the nails driven into Christ not merely year by year
but even day by day and night by night. As before Christ continues
to be crucified in his brothers as He is in the present bomb raids.
But Christ now is more closely identified with the poor and the
wretched, like the starving Lazarus with his sores. Yet the poet
prays for Christ's mercy also on Dives with his gold. Both Dives
and Lazarus, the rich and the poor, the unjust and the just, the
guilty and the guiltless, are the victims of the destructive rain
of bombs. But in preparation for the second part of the poem, stanzas 5-7, there is proffered in this stanza a hint and a possibility of mercy and salvation from Christ and therefore of a different kind of rain. This foreshadowing is seen in the description of Christ as "the Starved Man" with the connotation that Christ is starved of the love He died for, the love that is so evidently lacking in this world at war. In spite of the incessant dark rain of suffering, therefore, which falls impartially on all alike, the dawn of mercy and hope begins to appear.

Stanza five begins the second part of the poem in which the rain is the Blood of Christ flowing from His wounds. This rain, also, like that of the bombs and the rain of hatred and death throughout the centuries, is still falling, with its hope of salvation. But here the word "Still" takes on another meaning, i.e., soundlessly, quietly, in contrast to the bombs. And the wounds caused by the war and by all of man's other acts of hatred and inhumanity are part of Christ's sufferings: "the nails." But the wound of Christ, above all, is that in His side and within His Heart. Christ "bears in His Heart" all the wounds of man not only physically but also redemptively, i.e., they can be the means of healing man's self-inflicted wounds and those which he inflicts on others.

The first of these wounds is described by an image that is rather abstract and vague: "of the light that dies." It could refer to the death of love or the loss of faith. As the death of
love it would be the "self-murdered heart" with its consequent selfishness as the cause of this death. But the "last faint spark" seems to give some hope that the fire of love could be reenkindled by the fire in the Heart of Christ.

The images of the "baited bear" and the "hunted hare" are ambiguous if not confusing. The few critics, like Geoffrey Singleton, who discuss these lines take these images in their literal sense. They do this because of Dame Edith's use of Thomas Dekker's description of bear-baiting and its cruelty in her *Fanfare for Elizabeth*. This is, of course, a possible reading but there are persuasive reasons pointing toward a symbolic meaning as primary. In the first place bear-baiting is not a contemporary sport. Furthermore, the description of the bear as "weeping" and the "tears" of the hare would be rather curious for a literal image. The symbolic meaning, therefore, would point to man himself as the "baited bear" or the "hunted hare," especially in conjunction with the preceding line, "the wounds of the sad uncomprehending dark," i.e., the bomb raids.

After the refrain of "Still falls the Rain" at the beginning of stanza six, with the new note of hope and redemption in this second half of the poem, the poet borrows from Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*. The lines express modern man's desire also for redemption through

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the rain of Christ's blood. The analogy between modern man and Faustus with his diabolic powers is clear enough. But there is also the frightening possibility that modern man like Faustus will not be able to raise himself to repentance. Yet in the words of Marlowe is contained the possibility of the poet's and man's renewal of faith. In spite of sin and evil, and the suffering and injustice surrounding him, man sees the dawn, i.e., the hope of: "Christ's blood streames in the firmament." And Christ's "thirsting heart" as in the earlier epithet of "Starved" emphasizes Christ's hunger and thirst for man's redemption and love. His Heart is the source of all love: it "holds the fires of the world."
The concluding description of this stanza recalls Christ's bleeding brow and His crown of thorns in contrast to Caesar's crown and the contrasting tyranny of those leaders who have caused this war. The laurel is a touch of irony because Christ's bloody crown alone can achieve true victory over the hatred of war and death.

The voice of Christ is heard in the conclusion of the poem. This description of Him as a child stresses His humanity and mercy; it also connotes the purpose of Christ's Incarnation and birth, namely, our redemption through His Blood. The added reference to Bethlehem and the beasts could recall the bear and hare of stanza five and the contrast between His relation to the animal world and that of humanity, both at the time of His birth and now in a world at war. The addition of Christ's "innocent light" to that of His
Blood in the last line returns us to the first stanza and the contrasting dark rain of the world of man and his war. And Christ's Blood itself is in contrast to the "dark," "black," and "blind" rain of the first part of the poem. His Blood, still being shed, is the proof of His Love and can be purifying and life-giving in contrast to the rain of bombs.

"Still falls the Rain—
Still falls the Blood . . . ."

Lullaby

The title of this poem is an ironic mockery since a real lullaby is out of the question at a time when the world is pictured as destroyed by war and caught up in a state of near-primeval chaos. The so-called "lullaby," moreover, is being sung by a Baboon.

In stanza one the opening line pictures the world in its chaotic state of nothingness; the picture is one of a world that has slipped off its base or off its axle into a crazy disorder. In the midst of this disorder and chaos, all the poet can do is sound her "discordant cry" of anguish in this poem. Deeply affected by a world collapsing around her she is incapable of writing any true poetry and is only able to write lines that can be put into the mouth of the Baboon, and therefore, something presumably irrational and unintelligible. Her cry is made in the midst of the roar of the motors of the steel birds, the bombing planes, and has the same discordancy as theirs. In the midst of all this the poet shouts
that there is "still one thing" left, namely, "the Bone!" The Bone signifies the skeleton that will remain, the only part of humanity that will survive the destruction of this war. The Bone could also symbolize the mind as in her poem "Heart and Mind" in which she uses the symbol "the moon-cold bone" with the implication that only mind and reason or science has survived as in the case of the technology of the bombing plane. The heart has been destroyed.

"Then out danced the Babioun." The Babioun is described as dancing, for at least two reasons. First, he is now able to come out of hiding into the land over which man was master up until now. But since the world is back in its primordial state of chaos the Babioun now reigns in freedom. Secondly, the Babioun could also have danced out of joy at the sight of the child. This is in ironic contrast to the actions of a mankind who has, in the poem, destroyed all life on the face of the earth and left this child alone and motherless.

In the next stanza the Babioun is pictured as holding the child in its arms and singing a lullaby to him. The setting is "the hollow of the sea" for even the sea has been destroyed; this points not only to the universality of the destruction and consequent chaos but also to the fact that the sea as a symbol of the source of life has also disappeared. The horror of the scene is emphasized by the comparison of "the hollow of the sea" to an empty eye "socket" which conjures up the picture of something bleeding,
torn, frightening, and sickening. But in the midst of all this, the ape "sang to the child a lullaby." Man's inhumanity, in ironic contrast to the ape's apparent humanity, is further emphasized by the reference to the "steel birds' nest." This nest was not made for eggs or for life but for the destruction in the craters formed by the bombs.

The so-called lullaby here begins with the seemingly meaningless sounds of the Babioun, now a foster-mother or nurse to the child: "Do, do, do, do." As the first note on the scale, "do" could possibly be a hint of a new beginning, a possibility of another evolution. The Babioun, now more the poet than a dumb animal, goes on to sing of the child's mother who has joined those who are dead, and who, by far, outnumber those who are living. The Pterodactyl, the monster bomber, has made its nest with its bombs and has killed the child's mother. The Pterodactyl, the prehistoric reptile, is now the steel bird, the bomber, with its steel eggs and so the prehistoric is united with the modern. This destruc—

2 Both the beginning of the lullaby and its refrain of "Do, do" which the Babioun sings to her foster-child recall such delightful lullabies as that of Dame Edith Sitwell's The Sleeping Beauty:

Do, do,
Princess, do,
Like a tree that drips with gold you flow
With beauty ripening very slow.

In this ironical contrast it is apparent that the form—that of a lullaby—which was so well adapted to an ethereal or enchanted dream atmosphere is transferred with a forceful and poignant effect to a bloody and revolting nightmare.
tion has taken place under "the Judas-colored sun." The color signified here by Judas could be red symbolizing the betrayal of Christ and the shedding of His blood in His consequent death. Here in the war, man has betrayed his brother as Judas betrayed Christ. The child's mother is also dead and to emphasize this the Babioun sings: "She'll work no more, nor dance, nor moan." The Babioun has come to take her place. This ape, this foster-mother, could ironically be the only hope for the human race. For if there is any hope at all in the poem it would only be through this sole surviving child and the protection and care of the Babioun. Man has evolved from the ape, but has now devolved into his present prehuman or unhuman state. And, as a result, the process of evolution is necessary again, if possible.

There is no bed left for the child but the earth itself, the "low bed" on which the dead are lying. And this earth, this nest, has been fouled by the Pterodactyl, the bomber, and man, the monster; it has been fouled with the dying and dead carcasses caused

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3 Apropos of the preceding statement and the Judas-color symbolism, it is both interesting and curious to note that Singleton recalls Dame Edith's references to the cold yellow of both gold and sun. Although the remarks are directed to other specific poems, indirectly they are applicable to Judas and the color he signifies in this poem. The poet says: "... I might remember that the hair of Judas, according to legend, was yellow and that he has often been painted in a yellow dress." Singleton then observes that "the yellow hair of Judas is implicitly associated with the Betrayal money and his own coldness of heart," and proceeds to make further associations, with e.g., the yellow hair of Chaucer's Pardoner. Ibid., p. 90.
by the bombs. And to fan the child to sleep there are nothing but the "steel wings" of these bombers and monsters. In contrast to these monsters with their steel wings, truth lies wingless and helpless like the larvae of insects in the earth. And hope itself has been destroyed; it is now "eyeless." And even fear has lost its hands and the means of protecting itself. Only such insects and monsters are left as toys with which the child can play. The last line of this stanza could be imitating a voice cracking, "Do—do," as if even the ape were finding it impossible to continue this lullaby.

Stanza five recalls the previous bloodshed in Poland and in Spain before the present war in mother England and in the bloody death of the child's mother. But there is a wisdom that England and the dead mother have learned from this spilled blood which has fouled the land. The mother, therefore, if she were able to do it all over again by rising from the dead, would reduce the child to an animal level so that it would not be able to fall again from its human level as mankind has now done. Since there is nothing to use the hands for, either to hold or to create, she would teach the child to crawl like an animal rather than teach him to use his hands.

4 Singleton's observation and interpretation of "the double irony of the steel wings of the foster-nurse hovering over the child, rocking it to sleep" is obviously wrong since a Baboon usually does not have steel wings. Ibid., p. 78.
Stanza six continues this "wisdom" of the uselessness of hands for mankind. Hands are no longer necessary even in the most basic use of making bread and sifting wheat and flour because there is only dust left to sift. There is no possibility of food and life but only of dust and death.

As the lullaby approaches its conclusion the Babioun gives its final advice to the child and advises him to listen carefully. The lullaby is described as "ragged," intellectually and emotionally, and also rhythmically like rag-time with its primitive beat. The advice, "Fear not living, fear not chance," is paradoxical; there can be, in actuality, no life and therefore nothing to fear since there is no possibility left even of chance, the lowest form of existence and of life. And there is no true life because "all is equal." There is nothing to see; darkness and light are the same. All is obliterated. There is no depth nor height physically or spiritually. Only a devastated void remains. The lullaby refrain of "Do, do" adds a note of horror at this point.

In the concluding lines the "Judas-colored sun is gone." It was treacherous perhaps in so far as it betrayed civilization by giving light to the bombers; treacherous, too, because it allowed us to see the horrors left on earth. "And with the Ape thou art alone— / Do, / Do." But this is not necessarily complete hopelessness. Since the ape has shown some human signs, there is a possibility of a new evolution. At the end of the poem the sun
is going down or is gone; night and darkness envelop the only survivors, the Babioun and the child. But the end of the lullaby denotes a trust in the Babioun by the child as it falls asleep; this is suggested by the final falling "Do, / Do." At the same time, however, the final grunts of the Babioun serve as a ghastly reminder of all that has happened.

Serenade: Any Man to Any Woman

This poem is certainly not a serenade as the title would seem to indicate. Unlike "Lullaby" it is a war poem, and the title is again ironic. And with the words "any man to any woman," Dame Edith Sitwell universalizes this war relationship in the poem between a dying soldier and his love.

In the first stanza the speaker, the dying soldier, addresses his love as "dark angel": black but "clear and straight" as a cannon. The imagery of these opening lines shows that the speaker in his dying moments is looking at her through the eyes of death and its blackness and the war in which he is dying. The most unusual part of his description of her is that of her hair as "thunderous," "thunderous as the armored wind," i.e., as the bomb raids that "rained on Europe." The effect, therefore, of her hair on him is overwhelming, but there is also a contrast implied between the fertility of that hair and the destructiveness of the bomb raids. He goes on to promise her that he will love her until he dies but he knows that this love must be brief and unfaithful because he is "the
cannon's mate" and his death is imminent. "Forgive my love of such brief span." Since his flesh is "fickle" and weak and since he is the victim of war, "death's cold" is about to overtake him and extinguish the passion of his love.

In stanza three the "serenade" of the title appears, but this serenade with which he will woo her is a horrible one of "the wolfish howls the starving made." The only song he has is that of the howls he has heard, those of the poor, the dying, and the starved turned into wolves. Any other song, he implies in the following two lines, would be "lies" and such a futile attempt to shield her from the "freezing sky" of reality would be an unreal "canopy." There is the implication, moreover, in these lines that the lies of propaganda are also impossible shields from this reality of war and poverty.

In the following fourth stanza he clasps her in his arms or remembers the times that he did so. In his arms she is his "sleep" but only the sleep of death, "the zero hour," the death which now begins to clothe his heart instead of his flesh, the flesh that is beginning to weaken and die as his death approaches. In the face of death she seems a "mirage," a flower but broken. And looking forward to the heaven after death, he realizes that alive she can have no part in that heaven. The only way she will be able to "see what dead men know," (Stanza 5), what he is now about to know, and therefore share in his heaven, will be to die with him and be his
love. In this line, Dame Edith horribly reverses the well-known line of Marlowe: "Then live with me and be my love." In order to be with him she must exchange the "shady grove" for the "grave." And the flowing rivers (Stanza 6) must become those that ripen the "new Paradise" in heaven. These rivers flow from a more "universal Flood / Than Noah knew," i.e., a much fuller and much more fertile flood than in the past.

From this dream and desire that the two might be together after death, the dying soldier quickly reverses to reality as he adds: but yours, your Flood is blood. He and she are living in the Flood of the blood of war that is covering their world. The chill of death is growing in his heart; but at the same time love for her is also growing. Yet in spite of this he realizes that she will still "imperfect be" (Stanza 7) unless she does die with him and enter into the perfection of Paradise. As it is, while alive she is only "a rainbow shining in the night," born of his tears but still something that will quickly disappear. And her lips and her beauty are like the "summer-old folly of the rose," like the summer and the rose that will quickly disappear. The last line concludes, therefore, that it is folly to cling to this life that is as brief as the summer and its rose. And it also answers the question as to whether she will die with him and be his love. Because she is like the rose, she, too, must eventually die.
Street Song

The speaker or the singer in "Street Song," which is more a lament or dying gasp, as well as a desire for hope, is a person presumably dying in the street as a result of the air raids. In his suffering he expresses the natural hope for a death that will be a night, but a night enlightened and made holy by the light of hope like that of the moon. The hope is minimal in so far as it is uttered only by the Bone, i.e., by the mind which the Bone symbolizes in Dame Edith's poetry—as is seen more clearly in "Heart and Mind" of Part III: "the moon-cold bone." The flesh and heart, and therefore love, will be consumed by death. Whether there is hope for rebirth of this love after death is left open at the end of the poem.

The speaker begins the "song" with a plea to the night of death, for the latter to love his heart, the fleshly part of him, for an hour, but the bone for a day. The skeleton, the bone, smiles with a touch of the macabre for it has a while longer to remain, even if in the grave. But his heart and the hearts of the young are now literally and symbolically victims of the war and the cruelty of the world; they are, therefore, part of the "dark treasure of Death," physically and spiritually. The last line of the stanza states the loneliness of the summer now that the young with their life and their love are gone.

Stanza two continues the plea, seemingly to the moon and the
night, to comfort this lonely light of the summer and the sun
lonely in its present sorrow for the world's condition. But the
sun also is terrible, and therefore night is something to be desired.
"For terrible is the sun / As truth": it reveals the reality of
man's cruelty and destruction as in this street of death. The
"dying light" of the setting sun reveals not the whole truth per-
haps but man's hunger for peace, at least, in death. There is
little hope for the flesh which is like the dying and lonely rose
of the brief summer season.

The vague moon-like hope is again appealed to in the follow-
ing stanza. The images, as the hope itself, are vague: "As once
through the branches / Of youth you came, through the shade like
the flowering door / That leads into Paradise." Like the moon
shining through the branches, so once hope came in youth. And the
moon lit up the flowering bushes which seemed to be a door leading
into Paradise. This as yet unborn city, which was seen only in hope,
was all that the homeless and poor could dream of.

In contrast to that dream in the past, death, night, lit up
by the moon, is now seen walking "in the city ways" where man's
threatening shadow looms over all. This shadow of man, his inhu-
man side, is described as "red-edged by the sun like Cain" full of
hatred and murder, red-edged by the blood of his brother and man's
inhumanity to man. This shadow, like man himself, has a "changing
shape": "elegant like the Skeleton" that he is about to become,
elegant with the touch of the macabre; "crouched like the Tiger" about to pounce upon his prey; and finally, like the Ape with its "age-old wisdom and aptness." Ironically, in his evolution from the Ape, man has lost this aptness, except his aptness for killing, and even his age-old wisdom has advanced no more than that of the Ape's.

Reminiscent of "Still Falls the Rain" are the next two lines of stanza five. Man's pulse beat of humanity, of warmth, of life, and of love has been changed into the hammer beat of destruction, of death, of hatred, and of greed. This new sound is again literally that of the hammer blows on the coffins in "the Potter's Field" where the dead poor are being buried and where they are building a new world, a new world not like the one dreamed of long ago in stanza three but one built from our bone, man's intellect divorced from his heart, from love. And in this present world of war, therefore, a new world is built from "the carrion-bird days' foul droppings and clamor," i.e., by the bomb raids of the efficient bombers built by man's intellect.

The only hope, therefore, in stanza six is in the night of death, one that might be a peaceful death like the nights of the past which were nights of rest, holy nights of conception and consolation when in the darkness all men were equal and there were no longer separate nations, but all were brothers in the night. And the hope is that in this night of death, this same equality and
brotherhood might be achieved in a new conception and in a re-
birth. Stanza six concludes the street song itself, apparently
with the death of the singer.

The poet who has heard this song in the street now declares
that "the Bone is silent!" And her mind, too, listening to this
song of death and contemplating the effects of war, is overwhelmed
and unable to speak. She is no longer sure if the sound, the song,
was really that "of the dead light calling," i.e., whether the call
was that of a dead person appealing for help and for hope. Maybe,
she concludes, it was "Caesar," the symbol of power, "rolling on-
ward his heart" which has turned into a stone, like a Tantalus with-
out any rest; rolling it on in the destruction of war. Or perhaps
the sound was "the burden of Atlas falling," the world itself fall-
ing into the abyss of nothingness. The poet concludes that like
the mind of man she is helpless in the face of death.

O Yet Forgive

The situation in this poem is that of an older speaker, some-
one still alive, addressing a young dead person, very possibly a
young soldier killed in war. In the opening line the speaker cries
out for his heart's forgiveness by the dead person in his "long
night" of death. The emphasis on heart in the first line and in
the succeeding lines implies that it is the lack of love for which
the speaker is seeking forgiveness and that this lack of love per-
haps contributed to the death of this young person. Her heart,
as she says later, has become a heart of stone. The poet goes on to express her desire to lie upon the heart of this dead person in grief and as an expression of her love. But the only way she would be able to do this would be through death itself. But even though she might want to be death itself and thus close to his heart, yet she is too poor to be even that which is the poorest and most humble of all states, namely, death. The only thing she really has, the poet continues, is "my mortality," her necessity of dying, and she certainly would not want to give that to him since he has it already and, above all, since her mortality is sad and heavy. If therefore she were to die to be with him, she would be merely a stain because of her guilt upon his lips and eyes. Her death with him would only destroy this beauty and youth which he brought to death and which she does not have because of her old age. In summation, therefore, these lines say that if it were any help, the speaker would sacrifice her life because of her guilt to obtain forgiveness; but it would do no good, in fact, it would do just the opposite.

Then after an hiatus the speaker continues: "You will not come again." These words are an echo of King Lear's to the dead Cordelia, "Thou'lt come no more," and carry with them therefore the overtones of that great tragedy. These words state the obvious tragic fact that the person is dead and cannot return to life. But they also repeat the preceding lines in the speaker's realiza-
tion that there is nothing she can do, even by death itself, to bring him back to life. The third meaning of these words looks forward to the remainder of the poem. The disillusionment in and the attempt to forget the world on the part of the dead person are the reasons why he would not want to come back to life again. "The weight of Atlas' woe" in the next line is the weight of this rejected world, the world of sorrow that has changed to stone. Sorrow is no longer human; it has changed people, made them inhuman just as it has made the speaker's heart into stone. But in spite of this, strangely, the speaker has laid her heart of stone upon the eyes of the dead person. Why? So that even in death the eyes of the dead person might be "blind as love" and would no more be able to see the work of "the old wise," i.e., of the older so-called "wise" generation. The work of this generation presumably has been death including the death of this young person and the destruction of war.

In the concluding stanza, however, the speaker realizes that in his "long night" of death the dead person is not deceived about the truth of what has happened and is happening, i.e., the evil and the crimes of this world, and therefore is not as "blind as love." In fact, the dead person has lost any love for the world that he might have had during life. For the next two lines state that "not heeding the world" he lets the world "roll / Into the long abyss," roll as it has from the shoulders of Atlas because of
its weight of stone, its inhumanity and its lack of love, roll into the long abyss of nothingness. This conclusion of the dead person's lack of concern for the world is emphasized in so far as he does not even know or care that this sound is that of the world disappearing. But he does realize that he is alone: "I am alone." In his death he is divorced from the world. As for the sound of the falling world he wonders whether that sound is that of "my great sunrise," of a dawn in his long night of death, i.e., of a resurrection. Actually, however, the poem does not really end on this note of hope, or need not end so, since the sound that he did actually hear was that of the world falling; and whether he and the world itself will eventually arise, with a sunrise, is left as a vague possibility.

Poor Young Simpleton

The title has a touch of the sardonic but also a note of pity: the speaker in the poem is described as simple, ignorant, and to be pitied that he believed that love is possible in such a world as today's, all because of his youth and inexperience. He is poor because he is loveless, having lost his love and consequently is living in a world in which love is now impossible.

The poem is divided into two parts: the first, Part I comprised of two stanzas, is the introduction and is entitled "An Old Song Resung," the old song of love but also of love lost. In the first two lines he recalls the love that he once had or seemed to have. It is imaged in "the Burning Bush" and "the Pentecost Rushing
of Flames," two images that point to the permanence that his love seemed to have, a love that seemed almost divine. In the next three lines he describes the present situation of that love now fallen and converted into horror. Love as "the Speech" is communication and revelation in conjunction with Pentecost in the preceding line. But this love, this Speech, has fallen into a meaningless chatter and is now located in alleys, places of horror, where man has fallen from his humanity and love, and the animal, the ape, is rising to take his place. The chatter is swallowed up in the howling of the Darkness of the world, and life has become a horrible game without meaning.

In the next stanza he tries to give the reason why this love has fallen and disappeared. She, the object of his love, has "leaned" from the light of love because she was unreal, subhuman, like the "Queen of Fairies," insubstantial and ephemeral. Instead of in the Burning Bush, she dwelt in the "yellow broom," a bush of common weeds that is superficial, beautiful but transitory. It has nothing of the permanent and divine of the "Burning Bush."

In the concluding lines we have her words in which she declared the death of that love, and worse. With her fairy magic turned diabolical, she prophesied the present situation to be developed in Part II. She not only promised to remove his heart of love and replace it with a stone, but she would finally leave his heart "an empty room," one "fouled" with the dirt of the Spider's world which
is the principal symbol for the present world in Part II.

Part II, the central part of the poem, describes the situation in which he and his former love are now both living and dead—the living dead—and also that of their loveless world. This section contains some of Dame Edith's greatest poetry, powerful and vivid. The two of them, he and his "dead living love," have been walking through the city of the dead, the world of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. The city is "the Potter's Field" where the poor, all men really, are buried—the universal cemetery. It is a city built by man himself, now animal-like, constructing ironically a new world, the only one he can construct because his creative ability has been lost from "unuse": he is "thumbless." The plan for this new world is "a skeleton plan," made by skeletons, the living dead, out of skeletons, their dead selves.

In this world even lightning and thunder, the signs of power and of rain and the symbols of "God's warning," have disappeared. Even God has withdrawn from it. The lightning was once the "Flag of Blood," a "Flag of immeasurable Doom"; it is now only "a spider's universe" like a web, a "banner of hunger," symbolizing only man's emptiness, formed from the dust of the dead. The thunder, too, has changed; it has been dulled to the sound of a drum, an "idiot" one without meaning in a universe that is now a circus, full of the clowns and grotesques to be described later in the poem. In the final, climaxing image the circus changes to a horrible dance of
the "paralyzed," blind and dancing in the slum of the world.

The introduction of the sun in the next stanza (4) seems at first to give some relief to this world of horror; but its beauty "as a mountain of diamonds" is more of a mirage, and even this illusionary beauty could never be appreciated by the starving. But it does recall the past and is a transition to the recollections of his lost Eden in the next two stanzas (5–6). Then life and love were as real as the sun, or seemed to be. In these two stanzas his former love is pictured in the highest possible terms, with the repetition of the image of the "Burning Bush" from the first stanza of the poem. She was earth itself, with its coolness in the evening, rest, and home, all in contrast to the coffins being constructed in the Potter's Field from which they then seemed to be secure. In the climax to these two stanzas he remembers that her kiss, like "the Fiery Chariot," had the power to transport him out of this world.

The next three stanzas (7–9) return to the reality of the present, a world of the dead and the lost, with a catalogue of its inhabitants. They are a nameless crowd sweeping onward to nowhere from nowhere. They are nomads, beachcombers, somnambulists, fugitives; each has a Shadow, but ironically this is his only proof of life. More frightening, there are the "molochs" and "man-eaters," lonely, and even worse, as centers of the infections that are destroying humanity: "hatred and greed—plague and fear."
The tenth stanza concludes this section with a description of the modern world with its "red pyromaniacs" putting the world to fire with war and the fevers of hatred. Even the sun itself, instead of being a "kiss," is also the source of conflagration.

The next five stanzas (11-15) picture the present situation of horror and death of the relationship of the two principal characters. He is the "skeleton" and she is about to die or already dead, laughing in the midst of this horror and at him. Mockingly she describes his heart as an eagle or a sun which she rejects, and requests instead all that she thinks he can give her or that she desires: a "crow" for dinner or a penny, a dirty one like all else, for her eyes in death. In the face of such a world, and her mockery, and lack of love, he is despairingly confirmed in the impossibility of recovering his lost Eden and his former heart of love whose beat is now identical with the hammering blows on the coffins of the dead in this dead town. As before, it is described as a skeleton city, and the sun, not as diamonds or glittering, but destroying and burning all even without any relief of the cool of the evening.

The striking image of the Spider is developed in the next stanza, as a symbol for a world that has changed her love to prudence and worse. Such a prudential "wisdom" has constructed this city like the spider's web, dirty and insubstantial, skeleton-like with all that physical and spiritual "Hunger" can produce.
In such a situation there is really nothing that he can do for her or give her; all is disease, delirium, and noise. And his hands again like the hands of all the inhabitants of this dead city are "thumbless from unuse" and unable to construct anything; and from their tiger-like pads, the claws of destruction are growing. In such a world of faithlessness, symbolized by the impermanence of the rose and flesh, the only eternity is the city made of the dead, of skeletons, and the only hope, that of the worm's among the dead flesh. He concludes therefore that all he can give her, all he has left or that she deserves, is pity; it is a strange and terrible pity since it comes from Man, now the Tiger, and extended to the "fallen Ape."

The conclusion reviews the fact that his Eden is withered like the rose and has been corrupted into the fouled alley where she lies dead. The "Rainbow" was not one of hope but of damnation, appearing in a night from which not even a "false dawn" is possible. Even her request, the poorest possible, that of a penny to close her eyes in the peace of death, is impossible. She, like all the loveless, must lie in death covered with the sins of the world, the effects of the denial of love: hatred, greed, and fear.

Song: Once my heart was a summer rose

This poem, a song of lost love, is close to a Ballad. Basically, it has the same theme as the previous poem, "Poor Young Simpleton," but without the horror of the previous poem and without
its cosmic consequences. The poem is divided into two parts: the first five stanzas describe the past, the "once" of careless love; and the final two stanzas describe the "now" with her love lost.

The first line introduces the central symbol of the poem, a summer rose: "my heart was a summer rose." The last line of this first stanza introduces the accompanying symbol, "the bright summer long." Both the rose and the summer seemed to be so long, but, like the love symbolized by that rose and that summer, they were really short-lived. The second line deals with the speaker's lack of care, her lack of concern for anything else except the summer and the rose of her love, when she cared not "for right or wrong." But in this line we have a foreshadowing, as in most of the stanzas of this first part, of the future when the wrong will be revealed and when the summer and the rose will be no more.

In the second stanza she walks "in the long and the light summer land" with no concern for the shade even if it really exists; but there is a shade, "the cloud," on the horizon to which she is oblivious as to all else. In that same past she said that the only cloud or shade that she knew of was her "ombrelle of rustling gray," her umbrella here in French with a touch of insousiance; but it is described as "gray / Sharp," and "silk," again foreshadowing the future. Even greater indication of the future that she was neglecting in her oblivion is the description of the umbrella with its
spokes of "gray steel rain." She concludes her second stanza with the description of the umbrella hiding not merely the cloud that might be in the sky but also the rose, the rose that is the sun, a sun that will take on an entirely new aspect in the latter part of the poem.

The third stanza opens with a striking example of Dame Edith’s well-known use of synesthesia: "my laughter shone like a flight of birds," which she specifies as the "tumbling pigeons" and "chattering starlings." In this world even when it did rain, even a rain of tears, it was something superficial and passing, like "the sheen on a wood-dove’s breast." And if any thought of sorrow crossed her mind, it seemed merely to be a song of a bird, and seemed to be "rest," not true sorrow.

The fifth and last stanza of this first part sums up her earlier life as one passed in "Feather Town," Feather Town describing the world of the birds in the previous stanza but also symbolic of the unreal, insubstantial, Feather-like world that she was living in without any concern for the future or any possible tragedy. But the concluding lines of this stanza point toward the conclusion of the poem. The "idle wind puffed that town up," that Feather Town, and blew herself and her life up, and then, seemingly without any reason at all, "blew it down."

In the conclusion, beginning with stanza six, she is now no longer in Feather Town but in "Lead Town," a gray heavy sorrowful
life in which she has lost her love. The second line of this stanza is in parenthesis, repeating ironically the refrain of the first part: "(All in the summer gay . . .)." As in "Poor Young Simpleton," this Lead Town seems to be a town of the dead where the people are described as "steady," "like the Dead," steady and lifeless, "and will not look my way"—without any concern for her and her sorrow.

The conclusion in the final stanza gives the reason for this sorrow and tragedy which has destroyed her former summer-like life, and changed her life into one without love. Her heart is withered like "the summer rose" and all the dew and freshness and beauty have been drunk up from that rose by "another heart like a sun," another heart presumably that of another person coming between her and her former love to whom she has been addressing this song. The other heart was only apparently like a sun: it did not have the brightness and the joy and the light of a true sun; instead, it was destructive and destroyed her love. As a result her long bright summer has ended and the birds that symbolized the joy of her summer love have forgotten their song and sing no more, just as her love has disappeared in her present world of Lead and lovelessness.

Green Flows the River of Lethe—0

The title in its image sums up a present hopeful, peaceful condition of the world or perhaps such a hoped-for condition after
the years of war and destruction and bloodshed have run their course. The "O" at the end of the title rhythmically prolongs the flowing of this river and also perhaps adds a note of relief and one of praise. The green gives the symbolic note of hope and it is also a reflection in the river of the green grass in the fields made fertile by this river. The Lethe is, of course, mythologically the river of forgetfulness between death and the next life, and in the poem, this river is covering the past and helping man to forget the war and its bloodshed and destruction.

The first stanza sums up the poem. This long, green flowing river of Lethe with the green grass growing on its banks has covered over "the fire" and "the fever" that "was in the veins." The fire of passion, hatred, and greed had spread from the veins to the fields, the cities, and the streets. The "I" in the poem, therefore, is man himself with this fire in his veins which has caused the destructive fire of war.

The next stanza is a description of "the Cities of the Plains" before they were turned red with blood and white with the ashes of the fires of war. It is summer, carefree and oblivious to all else like the butterflies and the winds, but ultimately meaningless. The stanza ends on an ominous note with a foreboding of the future: the young girls in the fields of summer are "like winds and butterflies on the Road from Nothing to Nowhere!"

As the poem continues, in stanza three this summer ends in
drought. Having destroyed the summer with its carefree love and joy, man, with his destroying fire of passion, flees to other fields to conquer, for he is still "unquenched" and "incarnadine," and he is "Destruction" itself "incarnate" in the flesh of man.

In the following stanza (4) this description of man is carried on as he describes himself as "Annihilation" and as "white as the Dead Sea" and as "the Cities of the Plains": white like the death he is about to cause, and as white as the ashes remaining from the fires that he is about to spread. Man the speaker who has threatened and caused the "thunder" of destruction, destruction to the beauty and love of the world, confesses that he has listened to his veins, to his passions, to his instinct. He, therefore, "went the way he would." And the "Street of the Blood" that he caused to flow has been "long" and "terrible." The "summer redness" with the fire of the sun that turned all to drought has now turned into "fire, annihilation," and "burning" and seemed to stretch forever as if there would be no turning and no surcease.

But finally the fire in the "Blood" ran its course and ceased. The implication seems to be that there was no more to annihilate, no more to destroy, or, at least, that there was no more fire in the veins and the passions of man. Now the only red is not that of fire and blood but only that of the "red clover" lying, significantly, symbolically, "over the breath of the lion," the symbol of destruction, and over "the mouth of the lover," of the dead lover.
destroyed by war.

The concluding stanza repeats the refrain: "And green flows Lethe river—0 / Long Lethe river." And the final line adds a new symbol from the historical example of Gomorrah that has also been covered by the river of forgetfulness and by the greeness of hope; the fires of passion and of war have now finally been extinguished.

A Mother to Her Dead Child

After a brief introduction on spring, the poem is divided into three parts. The first two parts comprise the central section: the first on the dead child, the mother's lament, and desire for its return, and the second on the world itself and its sorrows. The third part is centered on resignation and hope. But the poem concludes with the tears of the dead child. There are, I think, a few too many tears in the poem to save it completely, as M. Odegard thinks, from the sentimentality implicit in the title. This weakness in the poem, however, is more than overweighed by the powerful realistic section on the world of today in the center of the poem.

In the introduction, winter is over and the warmth of the affirming sun of spring brings life to all living things, even to the planets and the waters. This spring recalls the first spring that began not merely in nature but also within the heart of man.

But this was before "the Fall," and the final words look forward to the result of this Fall in death and in man's loss of love and humanity in the rest of the poem. The poem will conclude with the possibility of the return of such a spring in the heart of man.

The first part of the central section now introduces the dead child and the mother's longing desire for its return. "Return to the waiting earth / Of your mother's breast," she cries, "Return from your new mother / The earth." She feels that this new mother, the earth, in which her child is lying, is too old to care for the child and so old it can only think of darkness and sleep. She concludes this first part with the realization that in contrast to the fruitful pangs of giving birth, the pangs of winter and the pain of spring's birth will not be able to lay bare and bring forth the child's heart or her "small earthly dress," i.e., her body, as the mother did.

Just as the poem is about to overwhelm us with this sentimental approach, it quickly changes to a realistic picture of the world today, the world of the so-called living. The mother waits for the child "upon the summer roads" and there meets all of life, above all, the "lost men, the rejected of life." In two striking images she sums up their life. First, they "tend the wounds / That life has made as if they were a new sunrise." There is no true sunrise in their lives, no hope, no life, only these wounds which are the only signs by which they know they are alive. And in the
second image their voices from lack of use, from lack of communication with one another, are described as "the rusted voice of the tiger," the "hoarse tiger-voice." From these human beings turned tiger, she hears the words: "I am hungry! I am cold!" But these, "the lost men, the rejected of life," turn not their heads toward her lest she hear her own child crying these very words. And they turn not their heads lest she see her child's smile upon their lips, lips that were made for love, but lips never warm with love, and lips that were made for food, but a food deserts them. The crux of the poem lies in these lines and images which are difficult to interpret. Odegard\(^6\) sees the emphasis here on the mother's loss as part of the suffering of all men. The importance, however, I think, of these lines is the mother's realization of what would have happened to her child had it remained alive, as is brought out in the concluding part of the poem. The smile on the lips of these living dead which she sees, in spite of their reluctance and pity for her, is described in a frightening image: "a gap into darkness," into the darkness and nothingness of the soul behind that smile, the abyss that occurs in the soul of modern man in "the breaking apart / Of the long-impending earthquake that waits in the heart." It is a smile that is "self-devouring." And Dame Edith, the poet, enters directly into the poem here describing the smile as "tearing

\(^6\)\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 246-47.
the seer," tearing her with pity and grief.

The last part of the poem, however, shifts quickly to a note of hope in the "one" who "will return to the lost men, / Whose heart is the Sun of Reason." Presumably this is Christ but He is not named, perhaps because He is not yet known by these lost and rejected of life, or even by the mother, in the midst of such a world. When He comes He will perform four crucial acts. First, He will dispel the shadow, the shadow of despair; secondly, He will bring peace. Here man is described as the "Ape" lacking peace because of his lust and prurience. Thirdly, He will teach the dust that is man "that it is holy." This teaching significantly is said to spring from "the human heart's sublimity / And tenderness," the human heart of Christ, the God-man. And finally, to the "hungry," the "naked and the cold," both the rich and the poor as they will be in that last night, the night of the end of the world and judgment, Christ will bring love. This love is compared to "the daily bread," with the hint perhaps of the living Bread of the Eucharist, and also to "the light of morning," the light of the resurrection.

Knowing this, Christ's final return to redeem and restore humanity, the mother concludes: "I would give you again, my day's darling." The mother's hope, therefore, in Christ's return and in the resurrection gives her the strength for resignation to her child's death even to the extent that if she had to do it over
again, she would allow her child to die. But this resignation also includes, as was remarked in the previous stanza, the realistic picture of what would have happened perhaps to her child if it had remained alive and become an adult with the possibility of losing its humanity like so many of the present lost and rejected in the world. The following lines resume the earlier touch of sentimentality in the poem as the mother sees the child lying in the earth, and feels its tears, and feels its hands touching her cheek. But again, the poem is saved from such sentimentality by the concluding lines in which these presumed tears of the child are compared with the "empty years / And the worlds that are falling" around us.

**Tattered Serenade: Beggar to Shadow**

There is a touch of bitter humor as well as irony in the title; the serenade is rhythmically tattered as the beggar himself is. And the beggar has no one else to whom he could sing a serenade except to his Shadow, the only "person" or thing whom he knows, or to whom he speaks.

The poem is divided into two parts; they are much alike with many parallel images and even identical lines. The stanzas in the first part are of varying length, but those of the second part are all rhyming couplets. There is an ironic emphasis on spring in the first part although it ends in winter, while the second part concentrates on the summer and is perhaps a bit more optimistic.
Part I opens with two stanzas describing the Beggars and their world, a separate world of their own; they are "the nations of the Dead," spiritually and almost physically. Clothed in "Rags" and "eternally cold," they live "with Hunger." "Shut in by polar worlds of ice," cut off by the coldness and indifference of those around them, they are nameless, known to no one, brotherless, and the only means of identification they have as men is "their skin." With their skeletons almost naked to the open air, they have lost their flesh and "the rose" of the flesh, their heart, i.e., love and even "the light of the sun." The Beggars, like Lear, are left "with truth alone," the truth of who man is and themselves nakedly facing the truth of the world. The next two lines introduce the Beggar's "Serenade" which he sings "with muttering voices" to his only friend, "the Shade," his Shadow.

The Beggar begins his so-called "Serenade" to his Shadow with an apostrophe that is both frightening and realistic: "Gigantic and adaptable Ape." His Shadow also has "the elegance of the skeleton," his own skeleton, and it is dressed in the same "black tattered cape" that he has on. He then begins a list of the similarities and dissimilarities between himself and his Shadow: "How like, and yet how unlike, you are to our last state!" This is the last final state of humanity in which the Beggar now is, but also the last state of death itself.

Curiously, the Beggar has "giant hands" like the Shadow,
but perhaps the Beggar's hands have stretched from grasping and begging. But the Shadow has "no thumbs," and here it begins to assume a personality of its own because realistically no thumbs are needed "in a world where nothing is to make or hold." And even more realistically the Shadow has no heart so it cannot have "that appalling gulf" that the Beggar has for a heart; and the Shadow cannot feel hunger so it does not have "that red gulf," the empty "gullet." But the Shadow is like the Beggar, faceless with only "a hollow wolf-gray cowl," although the Beggar's face is more like a skeleton's, hollow and withdrawn. Neither has a "voice to howl" because the Beggar's voice has become silent through misuse and through having no one with whom to talk.

The word "howl" reminds the Beggar of the "winter wolves" of hunger beneath his heart. He continues with the comparison between himself and his only friend, the Shadow. Neither has any "identity"; neither has any "face to weep"; nor does either have a "bed" to lie on. This is in direct contrast to the rich. Here one of the most striking images in the poem occurs. The rich, for a bed, can creep "into the pocks made by that vast disease / That is our civilization." The pocks of diseases are from the syphilis that the rich with their luxuries and sin have brought upon themselves and civilization so that ironically this is their bed where they can there "lie at ease."

The comparison continues: neither has any "memory," nor age;
neither has anything "to feel or think," nor any "friend from whom to part with youthful tears." But again there is a difference: the rags and tatters of the Beggar "stink" as those of the Shadow do not.

They do, however, share an "overcoat" in common and for both, this overcoat "is an Ideal." It is certainly an Ideal, i.e., something unreal, on the Shadow and also on the Beggar in so far as the overcoat is more rags than it is a real overcoat. And the pockets of the coat for both are useless—"a gulf": there is nothing there to steal; there is nothing there but "empty hands" and again, hands that are useless because they have "lost their use."

The Beggar's serenade now suddenly shifts from winter to spring, and the new "world" and the "dreams" that come to his imagination then—to one who ironically never even has a bed.

But the Beggar then at least in his youth has a dream of a day "when all may be possible" as he pictures one Beggar saying this to another, one "small Rag-Castle to Rag-Castle tall," both in rags but both with their Castle of dreams. The Beggars in their youth have such dreams, but reality reveals that they have but "tatters" covering their "worthless skin," which alone proves that they yet are men. The "warm rain" of spring seems to fall like the "lilies of the vale" but actually the rain is falling on the pavements of the streets, and the raindrops only look like flower buds or like gold coins for those poor who are "homeless" and have no
clothing "against the winter's cold" that now comes after this dream of spring. All that the poor Beggars have is their "skeleton, that burgh of idleness," where they dwell in their weakness and helplessness and where "only the worm works," the worm of death that is approaching. They "are alone / Except for hunger, thirst, and lust" that still remains in the place of the love they no longer have. "The summer rose" of love and beauty and life has disappeared.

Part II begins in "summer" in complete contrast to the cold winter in the conclusion to Part I. Here no one is cold, yet the "hot gold" of the "country roads" gives a hint of the poverty of the poor Beggars. But "the air seems a draught of white wine," the white wine, of course, that the Beggars never taste. In the midst of this euphoria the Beggar is suddenly reminded of his hunger, by the sun which appears as "a world of red meat." And as he walks, he remembers that he has nowhere to go and he envies "the roads / That have somewhere to go." And he envies them that they "bear loads / Of happiness, business" and even "sorrow," a sorrow that he in his lifelessness can no longer feel. He also envies "the rose that cares not for tomorrow" as he in his hunger must.

The next two couplets repeat the images of Part I on his hands so useless with nothing to hold, and also his overcoat as "but an Ideal" with an empty pocket. Returning to the road on which he is walking, he again envies the fact that they have at least their various directions for their life and existence while he does
not have even food for his mouth, nor does he have any directions or love for his heart which is only an "empty red gulf." The only friend he has is his Shadow, the Shadow that will accompany him until his death when he will no longer have even this companion.

Again, the next two couplets repeat the images of Part I in the comparison of the Beggar's face to that of his Shadow like "a wolfish gray cowl" with the difference again, however, that he can shed tears whereas the Shadow cannot. And the Shadow cannot feel the cold as he can, nor will it ever "grow old" as he is, nor again do the black rags of the Shadow stink as his do. Above all, he can "feel, fear," and "think" as the Shadow again cannot do. And so with his feeling and thinking, "a universe" of dreams grows in his head in contrast to the realism of his life in which he does not even have a bed.

In the false glow of the optimism of summer, therefore, he concludes with a thought of "a world," "when all may be possible," when the "roads of hot gold" will become the gold that he needs to relieve his poverty, and when "no one is cold" as he will be again in the coming winter.

The Song of the Cold

This song is a lament, a cry of pity, a prayer for the cold, the frozen living with frozen hearts and dead souls who have spiritually died of lovelessness. These are both the poor and the rich, Lazarus and Dives. The poem is divided into three central sections
with an Introduction and a Conclusion. The first part deals with the poor; the second, with the rich; the third is on the poor and the rich, both Lazarus and Dives who were once brothers; and, the poem concludes with a prayer for all of these loveless souls in their eternal cold.

The poem opens with a colorful description of "the polar sun" borrowed from Rimbaud: the frozen winter with a sun without warmth under which the "homeless cold" wander. Such a winter should be a time "for comfort" and "for friendship" inside a home, next to a fire, where men seek to forget "their polar chaos" and coldness without "that separates us each from each." "It is no time to roam" the cold pavements of "Hell's huge polar street," that is our modern world, along which the poor and the homeless suffering from the "famine" of love roam like the wind.

In this universal cold and the blackness of the city, "the two opposing brotherhoods" of the poor and the rich are swept along in forgetfulness of one another. First are the poor, the cold, the homeless, those who are nameless and friendless, who are the living dead. The poet cries out to the rich, to Dives, "to him of the Paleocrystic heart,"—the heart frozen for centuries into the hardness of a crystal,—to behold "these who were once your brothers." From suffering and hunger and lack of communication "their voices" are hoarsened "to the rusty voice of the tiger." They are dead souls who have died of the cold of lovelessness and no longer do
they cry for the death of their souls but only lament their physical destitution. Among these poor and cold, the frozen living, are the young and the old. The young keep some youthful graces but the rags around them seem like "winding-sheets" prepared for their graves. The old have been humbled and are leaning toward the earth as if they would eat the very grass; they have become Cains and are turning Apes and Tigers. Their love has been turned into a murderous hate and into greed. Man's last desire, his "wish to multiply" his image, has become a "fear" for them as they stand on the brink of Oblivion.

Part II, beginning with stanza four, now introduces the rich, and Lazarus the representative of the poor is asked to weep for these who spiritually have been dying of small, "lesser deaths." These, "the High Priests of the god" of gold, Mammon, deserve pity because they, too, "ache with the cold / From the polar wastes" of their hearts which they have given over to their god. They have dried up and eaten their own hearts in their selfishness and have ended in a "famine" without the food of love. All the "Arithmetic" and the counting of their money has ended in "Zero," the eternal cold of nothingness. They have really been counting the small deaths of the loss of love and "so they live / And die of inanition."

The sixth stanza gives us an historical example of one of these miserly rich by the name of Foscue, a French farmer general as Dame Edith tells us in a note. He had fallen through a trap door
and unable to escape had died burned with his hidden gold. Like the gold, his flesh became "Yellow, cold, / And crumbling." He ended his life like "A Mummy with a Lion's mane," with hair grown wild and yellow like his gold. And his nails grew even in death like "the talons of the Lion" with which he tore himself to pieces in his pain as he died.

Therefore, the poet concludes this horrible story and this second part on the rich: "these hopeless acolytes," these servants at the altar of the god Mammon, deserve our pity. In their "vain Prudence" they have imitated "the wisdom of the Spider / Who spins but for herself" as the rich spin their lives only for themselves. And like the web of the Spider, they end in constructing only a world of hunger for themselves, a world of spiritual hunger without love. When the end of their lives comes "they have only gold / For flesh" and "for warmth," and they have "grown fleshless" just as the poor "who starve and freeze."

The third part, beginning with stanza eight, brings together the rich and the poor, Dives and Lazarus, as the "Night" of death begins to fall. "Those who were brothers" now finally, but too late, discover their common Brotherhood only in death. Unknowingly during life they had shared so much together, especially "the daily lesser deaths," the deaths of love. Now they speak to one another. Dives seeing Lazarus "so worn to the bone" thinks that the latter is "Death," his brother. With an unconscious irony Dives is dreaming
of a Death which will warm his heart, but which in reality will only be an "eternal cold." In reply Lazarus is amazed that Dives, too, has known "the cold." He asks, impossibly, for Dives' hand to warm his and for his friendship in his loneliness. His final words lament the death of the sun, the sun of love that once "shone / On all alike," but that has been murdered by "the cold in the heart of Man."

The following brief stanza pictures the only love that will come to Dives and Lazarus, the "Night" of death when the two will be embraced like children to their new "mother's breast," the earth, as they lie in death "naked and bare."

In contrast to these two who were never loved, the next stanza briefly introduces the famous lovers Anthony and Cleopatra. The "serpent's kiss" of death will make the loveless described above only immortal in dust in contrast to lovers like Anthony and Cleopatra. But the next line seems to point to a common fate for both the loveless and the loved, for all finally shall know the equality of the coldness of Death. In association, perhaps, with Cleopatra's beauty, the rest of this stanza, and continuing through the next two, introduces a new subject and theme, that of the deterioration of beauty in Death. This is a weakness in this great poem since it does distract from the central theme of the common loveless fate of the rich and the poor in the present world. But in spite of this, these lines are striking in their imagery. "Young Beauty" is bright as "the tips
of budding vine" but it is only an Appearance rising "from Nothing," shining "for a moment," and then disappearing.

In stanza eleven "the temples" are the temples to beauty, the bodies of the beautiful which were "bright as heat," but now are dust in Death. And the perfumes on their bodies are in vain for Death is "noseless" and the stench of "his breath" cannot be perfumed.

The next stanza attempts to connect these great beauties with the poor and the beggars in the poem. The "once great Venus" is now an "old rag-picker." She who once gave "the Lion's kiss," one of power but also of destruction, is now "shrunken" and "small" and her mouth has become "all Time's gap." Now that Venus is "small" and "weak as a babe" in Death, will the latter sing her a "lullaby"? Presumably not, since there is no love in Death. The only kiss for this Venus without love, "blackened, shrunken old / As the small worm," will be that from a sun "grown cold" like her.

The final stanza, the conclusion, opens with a prayer for these characters in the poem who live lives of lovelessness and are now in their "eternal cold." It is a prayer from the living who at least feel warm in "the inner leaf" of their hearts from the warmth of earth "in the nights of spring" which is the first sign of hope in the poem. But the only warmth that the eternally cold in death feel is that of "the sins of the world" that they carried with them, the sins of the coldness of selfishness and lovelessness. There was some light and violence in their lives as in "the buds / And the
roots of spring," but this, too, "like the spring, grew old."
Their hearts once had the beauty of diamonds and beautiful flowers
but are now merely "tombs" on the ironically "heroic shore" of life
on which they have been washed up and now are being carved into
aimless patterns "by Time's wave." And as the tombs of the so-
called heroic are being washed away "by Time's wave," so are the
very pedestals of their statues crumbling.

The concluding lines with their difficult imagery and the
introduction of "I" create a problem for the reader. If the "I" is
the poet, or modern man, she confesses that the same "great sins
and fires" described in the poem "break out" of her, too. She is
therefore "a walking fire"; but she is also hopefully "all leaves"
with the hope of Spring and growth and life and love. United to
the Spring, therefore, she asks for "the birds' and the serpents' speech." The serpents have no voice but are in their silence a
part of nature and symbolically part of man. With this speech she
will be able to "weep for those who die of the cold," the poor and
the rich portrayed in the poem who died of "the ultimate cold within
the heart of Man," namely, of the lack of love.

**Tears**

The poem is divided into two parts: the first part opens
with the description of the tears of the title, a bit overdone it
must be admitted, and then, the reason for these tears. The second
part is a reversal as the tears become fewer and as man's condition
changes. But the poem ends, in spite of this, on a note of hope.

The description of the poet's tears in the first line is a little overdone. They are compared first of all in splendor with the "sextuple suns" of Orion, the six visible planets of the Pleiades, and then in number with the million stars like "flowers in the fields of heaven." But a realistic touch is added, foreshadowing the second half of the poem, with the realization that even among the stars the "solar systems are setting." In the next two lines these stars in the heavens are described as "the rocks of great diamonds in the midst of the clear wave," the clear wave of the morning dews in a May morn as the flowers gradually appear and increase.

The next four lines enumerate the three reasons for her tears. First, "I wept for the glories of air, for the millions of dawns." These were the glories of the clouds, the sunsets and the sunrises, gone with the past forever. Secondly, she wept for "the splendors within Man's heart with the darkness warring," i.e., for man's courage and strength against the forces of darkness; but it is a struggle in which he will be overcome as pointed out in the final line. Finally, she wept "for the beautiful queens of the world," as beautiful as the flowers, but who now are dead and have become, so early, part of Eternity.

The second part of the poem with its realism is a complete shift from the romantic view of the first part with its too copious tears. Now in the midst of war, apparently, her "tears have shrunk,"
have become fewer and are falling away into nothingness. The reasons for the fewer tears, or none at all, are now given. The body of Venus, one of the "beautiful queens" of the first part, has now become "a metaphysical city," something abstract and inhuman, and the heart-beat of love is now "the sound of the revolutions." These revolutions appear to be not merely the physical ones of violence but the greater revolutions in which, first of all, love has changed "to the hospital mercy," the love and pity for the wounded and the dying during war. And the hope for new humanity that love had engendered has now changed to the "scientists' hope for the future," to a hope founded only on science and technology, to the despair of humanity and love. This future is only that of "the darkened Man," Man who has lost his battle with the darkness. But the final description of Man in his "complex multiplicity" gives, perhaps, some hope for him in the future and some hope for a counter revolution, for he is not merely matter, "air and water," not merely sprung from the "plant and animal," but he is also "hard diamond, infinite sun." This last line, a possible borrowing from Hopkins, points to Man's value and durability and the possibility that he will be able to survive these revolutions and this war especially, because he does share in the infinite love of the "infinite sun."

7Concluding lines of No. 72, "That Nature Is a Heraclitean Fire . . . ": "I am all at once what Christ is, since he was what I am, and / This Jack, joke, poor potsherd, patch, matchwood, immortal diamond, / Is immortal diamond."
CHAPTER FOUR
LATER POEMS: 1940-1945, PART III

Heart and Mind

The title of this poem and its theme as stated in the last two lines are relatively clear. Its theme is that not until "Time is done / Will the fire of the heart and the fire of the mind be one." This integration of heart and mind, so necessary for a complete and perfect love, cannot be achieved in Time and, therefore, presumably will only be attained in Eternity. (This rather hopeless approach to such an important problem will however be mitigated in the rest of this Third Part. Here the problem is being stated.)

The poem is divided into three stanzas; the first is the speech of the "Lion to the Lioness." This part evidently is on the animal level. The second part is the speech of the "Skeleton"—on the human level. And the third part is symbolic, but it is also on the planetary level in the speech of the "Sun to the Moon."

It is tempting in this first part to speculate on what the Lion and the Lioness symbolize, as Odegard¹ does without any real conclusions. But to neglect the literal level of this stanza would

be to lose much of the meaning of this poem. The Lion is animality to a very high degree, but still an animal, even though his physical and even sensual beauty is stressed in this stanza. The relationship between the two, the Lion and the Lioness, is therefore principally one of lust as symbolized by the "raging fire" and "heat of the Sun." With such lust, perhaps the highest possible relationship between two animals, there is "no liking," since, of course, there is no possibility of any love between them. The principal reason, of course, for this would be simply that the Lion and Lioness have no mind. Their only hope, if we may term it so, would be in a world in which human love was possible and existent—a world in which the heart and mind were one. The "moon-cold bone" in this last line points to the symbol of the moon, as the mind in the last stanza, but it also points to the bone—the Skeleton—divorced from the heart of man in the second stanza.

Stanza two is the speech of the "Skeleton," the remains of a human being, in a monologue. The description of the Sun in line two of this stanza as "the mourning heat" points to the final stanza and the grief of the Sun over its future demise, and at its grief of this divorce of the heart from the mind. But this heat "is greater than all gold," i.e., greater than the heat of the greed of man that can also destroy him, and also "more powerful / Than

2Ibid., p. 249. Odegard sees the Skeleton as talking to his Heart. But the references to his Heart in the speech are in the third person and therefore do not indicate any such dialogue.
the tawny body of a Lion" which is also destroyed by this fire, this fire of lust. But the heart with its fire is also "more powerful than all dust," i.e., than anything physical which this fire consumes. The next image describes man in the fullness of his physical strength as a "Hercules / Or Samson" but still one who was turned to dust and is now but a Skeleton. "The flames of the heart," the flame of lust consumed even these great physical heroes as it consumes all men when the heart is divorced from the mind. Finally, for these two giants as for so many men, "the mind / Is but a foolish wind," something that is neglected, something therefore that cannot balance and use the heat of the Heart to obtain love.

The third and final stanza, in its speech of "the Sun to the Moon," is on a planetary level pointing to the universality of this problem of the heart and mind. The preceding stanzas have clearly described the Sun as a raging and consuming fire when it is divorced from the Mind and, therefore, as lust; and the Moon is the Mind which, when it is divorced from the Heart, becomes cold and lonely. The Sun in his speech, therefore, predicts the Time when the Moon will be "but a lonely white crone" and he himself, with his fires dead, will be buried "in a dark wood" with his "golden armor" which symbolizes perhaps the lack of communication between him and the moon. And so he concludes with a statement of the theme of this poem: Love in Time is hopeless because
"the fire of the heart and the fire of the mind" are not one.
And they were not one because the fire of love was selfish and
consuming—even self-consuming—and not shared; and the light of
the mind with its cold did not receive the fire it needed from
the sun, i.e., from the heart of love.

Green Song

This is a song of hope with the greenness and newness of
spring giving the hope of rebirth. This rebirth from the death
and darkness of winter is seen as possible because of love, espe-
cially the love of the young. Their love, in a return to the hu-
man Spring before the time of the Fall, points to a solution of
the problem posed in the preceding poem. How this is possible is
suggested by the closing lines of the poem with the introduction
of the Creative Spirit.

The poem is divided into three parts. The first part intro-
duces Spring but with the possibility that this could only be "the
world's fever" and the breaking up of the world; but it also points
to the other possibility of rebirth through the love of the youth
of the world. The second part, however, introduces a "ghost" from
the underworld of winter who denies any possibility of love and
predicts the victory of Time in death and the negation of human
love and hope. But this second part ends with a repetition of
youth's hope and the plight of this poor ghost. The third part
looks forward to the victory of this love over Time and Death and
to rebirth through the Creative Spirit.

In part one, with the reappearance of the sun, "the sudden spring began." But the ominous possibility of "Doom" and "Fate" in a spring that would merely be "the world's fever" is indicated. The sound of spring, therefore, could be "the sound of the worlds that are breaking." But this pessimism is quickly counteracted by the lovers, "the youth of the world." For them Spring is a rebirth, a new life, as it is in nature. And from "the beast-philosopher," possibly the owl, the symbol of wisdom, they will learn the secret of the original Spring "in the young world before the Fall of Man." Before this "Fall," Love was "the young spring earth" of creation. The "dark and lowering heaven" of the last line was Man who could again be reunited with the earth and produce a new world.

The "envious ghost" of part two (stanzas 2-11), beginning with the next stanza, is described as "bare" and "alone," without a heart, and predicting that the heart of these young lovers also will one day be gone. This pessimistic ghost from the dead is described as a "Knight" but more significantly like "the dark bird proud as the Prince of the Air," as Satan himself. He claims to be "the world's last love," with the implication that the cause of the death of that love was his pride as it was that of Satan and of Man himself. Approaching the young girl as a second Eve with her possibility of a new world, he tempts her to despair in the possibility of
love. He predicts the death of her young soldier lover; furthermore, his death will not be by her side but in a "foreign earth."

Even if he should return from the war, the ghost threatens to appear to him in her guise like "Poverty" and destroy him with hunger as the aftermath of war.

Finally, if this fails, there is Time and Death that will eventually overtake and destroy their youthful love. This ghost will "come like Time" with its frost to cover over and despoil everything on earth, above all, love, and even the sun itself. After this victory by the frost of Time, then, he claims, will come Death itself, the "dust, the shining racer," that overtakes all men and women. These last lines of the "envious ghost," especially "the golden ladies and the ragpickers," are evidently in imitation of Shakespeare's famous song in Cymbeline: "Golden lads and girls all must / As chimney sweepers come to dust."

The conclusion of part two, however, ends in a defeat of the ghost, with his pessimism and foreboding, by the youth of the world. They claim a victorious union with one another, a union of earth and heaven in "the growth of spring in the heart's deep core." Hearing this "the poor ghost fled like the winter rain" or like dust, and with his disappearance, "spring grew warm again." This victory of youthful hope through love over despair is expanded in part three, the final stanza of the poem.

The new light of spring, loving life and blessing man, is contrasted to "the accusing light" of winter that revealed man's
"motives" and "lack of desire." This new light blesses even the
death in "their great winter," i.e., those in their final winter
before rebirth as well as those still living for whom the winter
"breaks in flower / And summer." And with this light there is
love that, like the spring, turns man's heart from winter into the
green of life. All that was lost has returned and men's hearts
are once again "those households of high heaven," the dwelling
places of even God Himself who is Love. The voices of Spring are
the voices of men with their new hopes now planning for tomorrow
as if yesterday and winter "had never been." Time, instead of a
curse, now seemed but the rhythm of love; Death, only the pain of
rebirth "after the winter rain."

The concluding lines point to a distinction between the
"we" and "they": the "we" are those like the poet of the older
generation who are close to death, and "they," the young lovers
beginning their new lives. But "the great mornings" of hope born
from the lives of the old and the dying will continue to be seen
along with the surviving memories of their lives in the beauties
of nature. There is a touch of Pantheism in the phrase "of the
same substance" but the emphasis here is on hope, not only for men
but for planets and earth, i.e., for all creation who in spite of
"returning to darkness" and to death, do so only for "the short
winter sleep." It is a sleep, therefore, from which there will be
rebirth and new life. The source of all this life is given in the
final line, as in "Invocation," in "the spirit / Moving upon the waters" as in Genesis, symbolized here by the light of the dove, the Holy Spirit. 3

Anne Boleyn's Song

Anne Boleyn is too well known in English history to need any introduction. And her story, her marriage to Henry and her consequent death, are at the center of this poem. There are really two songs in this poem, as there are two angels and two Annunciations. The first is that of the bird, the bird of Spring, and the second song is that of Anne. And there are two Kings in the poem: the first is Henry, of course, but the second is Death. There is, therefore, a complete contrast in the two Annunciations: the first announcing love, the love of Anne and Henry, but the second, announcing her death. This use of the image of the Annunciation from the Christian story of Mary and the Angel announcing the birth of Christ makes this poem unique, and contributes to its greatness. The two announcements in the poem are reflections of the first Annunciation of the Angel to Mary, but the second "Annunciation," that of Anne's death, only dimly recalls the Christian Annunciation and echoes it only in the promise of some Spring after her death.

The poem begins with the "bird-call," the message of the bird, the angel of the first Annunciation in the poem. It is an-

3 Cf. Hopkins' "God's Grandeur": "Because the Holy Ghost over the bent / World broods with warm breast and with Ah! bright wings."
nouncing Spring in its newness after the coldness of winter and "after the terrible rain." The second line describes this beginning of Spring with "the bird-blood in the veins" changing to "emeralds," the emeralds of the buds on the trees and flowers. In the last line of this first stanza, Anne is introduced with "I" as she hopes for Spring with its forgetfulness of the coldness of her "last lover," formerly Henry, and now "the great gray King," death.

The second stanza, therefore, introduces Anne in her Death; instead of Henry, this new King is now lying upon her breast. Death now rules this "bird-blood" of life and Spring that once rose in her veins—in her youth and in her love for Henry. But she remembers that her shrieks of laughter as a girl also had a note of fear and foreboding of her final end. In recalling her youth as a "living lass" with a "step light and high," she recalls how she "spurned my sun down from the sky." The unusual imagery of this line must indicate Henry as the sun and how her spurning of him initially brought him close to her and, eventually, to love and marriage. The next line certainly plays on the word "headless," not only with its primary contextual interpretation of the unconcern of her youthful life and dance, but also with the premonition of her final loss, the ultimate loss of her head in execution.

After this introduction in the first two stanzas on Anne's life and fate, the third stanza pauses for a general statement
before the expansion of the rest of the poem. "The bird, the Angel of the Annunciation" of life and Spring "broods over" and brings forth life in all its species. In each egg with its future of life, "Fate is lying," the Fate that can bring forth either good or evil as in the case of Anne.\(^4\)

The next stanza (4) introduces Henry with his love for Anne, and their consequent marriage. The description of Henry as "my terrible sun" recalls the second stanza with its "my sun down from the sky" and also prepares for the eventual fate of Anne in the remainder of the poem. But the stanza is principally concerned with Henry's romantic description of Anne's beauty. The images, however, are vivid and certainly in keeping with the central imagery of Spring in this poem. Through their union "a new world grows" in her side as she becomes pregnant with his child, with Elizabeth.

Immediately following, stanza five describes Anne as another Eve bringing the apple and sin to Henry since, of course, their marriage ended so disastrously. With the accusations against Anne and her fidelity, the stanza concludes that like Eve, Anne was also the cause of Henry's Fall.

However, the next stanza (6) gives Anne's own brief account of what happened between her and Henry, and their final break-up.

\(^4\)There is a strong possibility of a pun in "lying." Fate is lying, i.e., deceptive as in Anne's case where her fate in early life seemed so benevolent.
The crucial line here as it is in the poem is "When to keep his love I turned from him." This paradox is explained somewhat by the following words: "as the world / Turns from the sun." The sun, therefore, is Henry, the "terrible sun" of stanza four. Lest therefore this sun consume her and consume itself, she turned from him and at least temporarily spurned his love. Thus the world turns from sun lest in a perpetual summer, in a tropic climate, it be consumed with fire. The implication is that the fire of Henry's love was as much lust as love. And so Henry thought her "winter-cold" and rejected her; her execution followed and then "the world grew old" as she died.

In the next stanza (7), Anne, "I," is the terrible angel of this new Annunciation, that of her Death. In contrast to the former Annunciation of the bird-song "in the heart of Spring," she now feels the cold of the night of Spring with Death her new King, her "gray glittering King" (stanza 8). The epithet "glittering" for King is curious and difficult, as is "amorous." Negatively there is Anne's attraction for death because of her situation during life with Henry. But there is, moreover, this new relationship between herself and Death, in the final stanza, that is quite remarkable.

There is first of all her coldness in Death to which this new King of hers becomes acclimatized; then, in spite of her union with Death, there is the reawakening of Spring within her veins that finally brings "warmth to his grayness," i.e., to his age and
decay. The poem ends therefore on a note of hope with the hint of the possible resurrection of Death through Anne's love.

A Young Girl

This brief poem is such a contrast to the greatness of the preceding one that one wonders at its selection by the poet for inclusion in her final Collected Poems. This very contrast, however, might excuse its selection. Yet the poem is so weak that it must ultimately be judged a failure, in spite of its redeeming last two lines. The most one can say about it is that it is the romantic dream by a young girl.

The dominance of angels in the first lines is one of the weaknesses of the poem, because these preternatural creatures offer little by way of symbolic value in this poem. The question about the source of light in the first line is quickly answered with the response that "the light is the whiteness of all the wings of the angels." The comparison of its purity with that of "the lily born with the white sun" is, of course, far from original. The extension of this image of the angel to the hairs on the head of the young girl, and then the comparison of her neck to a sunbeam are, to say the least, quite bizarre and reminiscent of the baroque.

Even more unusual but a bit more realistic is the image of "my red Adam." This "Adam," with its original Hebrew meaning of "earth," is the "red loam," the clay of the earth with its grandeur now in ruin because of the war. The young girl's hope therefore
is that her hair, like the angels, will bring peace to this earth and that her face will bring light to the lonely.

This hope is further expressed by the striking image, in line twelve, of "the people in islands of loneliness" with the wish that they might "cry to the other islands." The repeated hope that this Adam and "the new Fall" might be forgotten includes the puzzling angels again in the last line. This could mean the original war of the angels in heaven or the present war of men against these symbols of light and purity. At any rate, to repeat the previous estimate, the poem, especially in its imagery, has little to recommend it.

How Many Heavens . . .

The poem implies that there are as many heavens as there are presences of God. And since He is in everything and is everything, there are as many heavens as there are creatures from the grass and stone to the angels. The thesis that "God is everything" and also some of the imagery in the poem are borrowed from one of Donne's Sermons as Dame Edith tells us in her note. This Pantheism, however, is not Donne's but that of the Stancarest whose belief he is

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5 Collected Poems, p. 423. "... The Stancarest will needs have God not only to be in everything, but to be everything, that God is an angel in an angel, and a stone in a stone, and a straw in a straw." --John Donne, Sermon VII.

6 Francesco Stancari (1501-74). For biography, see Nouvelle Biographie Universelle or Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie. Stancarism: An anti-Trinitarian movement in Poland began with the
reporting in this part of his sermon. In her poem Dame Edith modifies this Pantheism, a Pantheism, of course, that ultimately would be the defeat of all poetry, especially a poetry of the concrete like Sitwell's. But what Dame Edith does with Donne's three examples and images is much more revealing about her as poet than as a theologian. To the three images that she borrows, of angel, stone, and straw, she adds six more of her own and also changes and develops the original images, unifying all of them into a whole. Her new imagery is connected with her expansion of the Pantheism of the original quotation to an expansion of God as the Beginning and the End, as well as the Middle of all things.

The poem opens with the emerald green of the "singing" grasses of Spring but with the cold of winter still "ringing" from the trees. The speaker's blood, too, is changing as it feels the effect of the coming of Spring in the growing grass.

The image of the angel and the thesis that "God is everything" from Donne's reference is introduced in the second stanza. The angel, however, becomes the blade of grass and the grass itself a flame; all three become God Himself who is "the grass within the grass, the angel in the angel, flame / Within the flame." In contrast to the flame, "the green shade" is introduced in connection with the grass and God also is "the green shade," or a trifle less

appointment of Stancaro to chair of Hebrew in Cracow in 1549. Apparently he and his followers shared the ideas of Anabaptists on lordship, ownership, work, etc.
Pantheistically, "the heart of shade."

In the next stanza (3), in association with the shade and the angel, God is "the heart of silence" in the "stone," the stone of a statue of an angel. This statue, possibly in the shade and on the grass, is weathered gray and cries out in its wisdom that its silence and its stone is God. Or, at least, He is "the heart of silence."

But, not only is God "shade" and "silence" in His mystery, He is also "light," as in the next stanza.

Here Dame Edith changes and develops the original image of straw from Donne's Sermon into the "yellow straws of light" in the sun. In her new image the sun is pictured as a bird building its nest from these "yellow straws of light." But the common yellow straw of the field also shares in this light; in fact, the stanza concludes, "All things are Light," and God Himself is Light. The Pantheism or at least God as the form and essence of all things is expanded with additional imagery in the final stanza.

But the repetition of the "flame of grass" and the final line are of most importance here. The grass is the "root of the world" and of Spring, with the implication that God is the Beginning of all things, as He is also the heart of all things in the previous stanzas. But, above all, here He is "the core of the heart of love." Finally, He will be, after the "laboring seas" of life, the "ultimate shore" for all creation and for man himself
as his final goal. This is evidently Dame Edith Sitwell's most theological and most hopeful poem.

The Flowering Forest

The title refers literally not only to the "bright April land" but also to the stars and the planets in the heavens. The poem is, I think, a minor one expressing briefly and superficially the hope of the two young lovers in the poem.

They are walking in the green, flowering forest and the "wild snows" are not those of winter but of the blossoms and flowers around them. It is night, and looking up at the heavens he names various stars, such as Sirius, some of the very brightest in the sky, but thinks that her hand is even brighter and whiter. Light from the stars, he continues, is falling to greet her. With a bit more depth, but still rather romantically, he pictures the planets and the snowy blossoms on the trees laughing at the folly of an old world that dreams "that the heart will grow cold." Like the young lovers, this young spring world of "drops of dew" and "white flowers" is united in the greenness and star-brightness of April and in a belief that the spring and the young lovers will always be young.

Holiday

This poem includes much more and is much more significant than is suggested by the title. It does have the holiday escape
from the city into the country. But under the divine influence of "the Intelligible Light" and because of Christ's crucifixion it reaches a very deep humanism.

The poem opens with an apostrophe to life and to the "Cause" and "Power" in nature behind all the energy of life. This Cause and Power, with its capitals, are personalized by the "you" in the first line. This "you" is not only a remote cause influencing life from afar like the sun and the planets in their influence on the farmer, but is also a Power in the very heart of all living things, the "sap, the life-blood" and also the "flower" produced by life. In the final line of the stanza, the greatness of this Power is indicated in "holds the Golden Rainers in the heaven," i.e., the stars which rain down their golden rays on the earth.

In the second stanza this Power in nature is pictured in its prodigality as it spreads its life like the seeds of nature in seemingly infinite profusion even though but "one flower" is finally produced. The "calyxes" in line three is an example of Dame Edith's well-known use of synedochе, the calyx being only the protective covering of the seed. Line four contains an abrupt shift to Man and Time, the principal objects of nature's Power. Time and its hours are seen as seeds planted and given growth by this same Power. The last two lines of the stanza refer briefly to the paradox and mystery of Time. It is "an abstraction," almost too abstract to be conceived, yet because of its reality, it brings on death and can
be as cold and hard as the winter that encloses us in death.

The third stanza concludes the introduction to the poem with a transition to the central section after a break in line four. The stanza opens with an invitation to leave this "gray life" of Time in which we are blind to reality. In such a life, our lives are determined by "Toil" which merely counts the hours of work and turns our very heart and blood into machines. The shift from such a life governed by Time and Toil to that of the country and nature is introduced by "the flowering boughs of heaven," i.e., by the clouds in the beauty of their shape and color. The "gold" of "the country roads" in the next line is not only that of the dust transformed by the brilliant sunshine but also that of the revelation of "the Intelligible Light" of God revealing the reality behind all things, a reality that points beyond this world. But this revelation and renewal, not only in nature but also in human beings, is not so much supernatural as humanistic since it points the way to "the heart" of love where the world and all people should eventually find their final end on this earth.

"This great holiday," therefore, is not merely an escape but, as developed in the following stanza, is a day of discovery of self and of others. In such a light "Dives and Lazarus are brothers again" as they once were before the death of humanity caused by the rule of Time and Toil. Such a life is symbolized by the city from which this holiday is at least a temporary retreat,
a city of the living dead in which the inhabitants are clothed in their "grave-clothes," the inhumanity of their lives. The "gold" with which "Dives and Lazarus" now seem to be clothed is that of love and Brotherhood. Even the "ragged dust" of their bodies, perhaps because of old age, is transformed into the light of the Sun. This "dying world" of inhumanity and materialism is also symbolized in "Atlas" resigning his burden and by the lowly clerk abandoning his "dusty office." A new world of love is being born as lovers meet their opposites and are no longer in opposition, as before, like the night and the noon, but are borne together by the instinct of love in their blood streams.

This new world of love causes men to forget their differences and the separation and wars of the previous life in which men were more like atoms than like human beings. And now the "holiness" of life is seen not only in the gold and goodness of human nature but even in its lowest form, i.e., man's physical body. All this occurs in spite of the laws and decrees of a Fate that is opposed to such a human existence of love. Man now rises above the earth and above the "worm," once "his brother," which then seemed to be his only destiny. And even though he might have had "the shape of that eyeless one," i.e., of the worm, in his embryonic form, yet within the womb man changes to the world. In other words, with his growth in the womb, he is no longer merely a part of the earth but comes to the world of beauty and power
under the influence of love, that of his mother. Because of this new heart and humanity, therefore, Man continues his fight against the "Chaos" of hatred and war. Two of the signs of Chaos are mentioned in the next two lines: Man's loss of ability to create as symbolized by his "thumbless" hands, and the poverty that has changed his hands into "claws." But there is hope because one Man was crucified and in His hands are "the wounds" of love and forgiveness.

Because of this crucified God-man, there is an "unborn God in the human heart" that can therefore now know, if only for a moment, "all sublimities," i.e., all the beauties and possibilities of humanity. The picture in the next three lines of this concluding stanza returns the poem from this Utopian holiday to the reality of "the slum." But even here, even in old age, and even in a "broken window," the "Burning Bush," the presence of the Divine can be seen reflected. And the poverty symbolized by the "starving bird" can be alleviated by the example of Christ's forgiveness and love. In the conclusion Christ's "bright Hair" is strikingly contrasted with His "broken Body" and the Blood spilt on the cross. He is like the "Sun" and the prodigal "Gardener" of stanza two, and because of Him and His Blood, our fields, i.e., our world, can come to "harvest," a harvest of love and holiness even here on this earth.

The poem is, therefore, deeply humanistic and likewise Christocentric.
This brief lyric is difficult and even obscure but is certainly rich in imagery. Since the "we" in the poem reject the "sun and its false light" and have "Death" for their sun, they must be the dead, but the dead as still felt and almost seen among us. In contrast to "the heat of the day" which they no longer suffer, they are "the darkness" in that heat, i.e., they are scarcely visible. No longer with any roots in the earth, they are "flowers in the air" enjoying its "coolness." The last three lines of this first stanza point to the brevity of their lives, but lives that did contain beauty. The two images of the "water" on the leaves and the "heart of the rose" reveal this brief beauty, clearly and vividly.

These dead are, moreover, the second stanza continues, full of hope and joy. The thought of them and their influence, therefore, is like a cooling "breath of evening" after a hot day. But their "smile" that can be felt is still that of those who are dead and will not return. Now in death they see that the light of the sun of this earth is false and thus they scorn it. They have apparently found the true light in death. But in spite of their death, their influence is still felt, beneficently, among the living.

The Youth with the Red-Gold Hair

This is an unusual poem, minor and brief, but also subtle and suggestive. It is really a war elegy for the youth in the title
and poem, a warrior and knight, now long dead. The red-gold of his hair could identify his nationality, say that of the Celts, but its connection with the sun and the rain, in the center of the poem, is much more important.

This youthful "ghost," as he is introduced in the first line, is also "gold-armored" and described as coming "from the Roman road." He lived, therefore, during the Roman occupation of England and since he was not a Roman, he was one of the Celtic defenders, and conquered of the Island. His sighing speech is addressed first to the "wheat" and secondly, to the "blonde girl," presumably his lover during life. He tells the wheat not to fear his "gold armor" not its "clamor." There is irony here since, of course, the fields of the wheat need have no fear of a ghost. But the wheat, the symbol of life, could have been destroyed during those past wars as it is at present. As the parenthesis suggests, the only noise or clamor now is not that of the silent ghost but that of "the wind and the wheat," both symbolic of the life that has perdured.

The second part of his speech is to his "blonde girl" whom he describes as "my tall tower of the corn." She is warned to "fear only the red-gold sun with the fleece of a fox." This colorful and even tactile description of the sun could be a symbol of war because of both the blood in the red and the greed in the gold. The fox indicates the craftiness and trickery of those in war. The red-gold hair of this youthful warrior ghost is connected with this red-
gold sun of war since he apparently was killed in war. War, he warns his "blonde girl," can steal "the fluttering bird," namely, her heart that she hides in her breast, since she can lose and apparently has lost his love in death. She is also warned to fear "the red-gold rain." This could be the bloody and greedy rain of war, and it will, he continues, dim her "brightness." In her sorrow and suffering she will lose the beauty of her youth.

In the concluding lines it is the "wind" who speaks with a sigh, a sigh describing the sound of the wind and also its lament for the dead youth. Since the youthful ghost is apparently restless, the wind tells him to "rest." His appearance and his warning are really useless because war and death have continued on to the present. The wind, curiously, is also described in "knight's armor" not of gold, but of gray, i.e., of "gray night." The grayness contrasts with the gold, with the golden age in which the youth lived when there was such hope for the future. But now, the wind sighs in the final line, "He," and that age, "is gone." And we, as well as he, are "forlorn" like Keats in the "Ode to the Nightingale," as was his blonde girl—all victims of war and death.

Girl and Butterfly

These two symbols of beauty and happiness in the title are contrasted in the poem, however, by the two spectators, the "old man" and the "old woman." Their world of the grayness of dust and loneliness is victorious in the poem over the brevity of the beauty
and the happiness that even now has dust on its wings. All that is symbolized by the girl and the butterfly has been swallowed up in the past by dust and death and the same two creatures in the present world of the poem have no other goal because they, too, are on the road "from Nothing to Nowhere."

The two opening stanzas introduce the opposing characters, as spectators, in the grayness and loneliness of their loveless, suffering, dying lives. The suffering of the old man is imaged through the myth of Ixion, but the wheel of torture is the world itself from which he cannot escape except through death; it is, moreover, a wheel and a world that is broken. Ironically the Ixion myth also suggests that his suffering is due to his attempt to find love in such a broken world, a love that eventually turned into stone. (This image also recalls Lear and his tragedy in the image of the wheel to which he was bound.)

The old man stares at the dust as if this is all that is left in the world and scans what has been made of this dust. A world has been made of this dust in the past, but because that world came from dust and nothing, it has returned back to dust. The grayness of his "companion / Shadow" is also like the dust and just as insubstantial. The "wolfish pelt" on the Shadow has overtones of the ominous and will merge with the dust into the image of a devouring death later in the poem. But the Shadow's protective covering, in contrast to the old man's, "against the invincible
cold" of death, will be useless; it, too, will be overcome and will disappear. The two, the old man and his companion Shadow, stare at the dust and "scan the old / And young" who have been made from the dust and they also "stare at the old woman," the old man's wife. The coldness and distance between the aged couple as between all lovers at the end of the poem is emphasized not only by his separation from the old woman but also by the description of the "stone in her breast" that has replaced her heart of flesh and love. But like her heart, the stone, too, is still restless because of what it once was, namely, "a world." It was a world, such as the one to be described in stanza four, a world of light and love, but in a dawn that was forebodingly gray, as gray as the world they now inhabit.

In a significant sequence, the old man and his Shadow now stare at the vision, as brief as the stanza itself, of the "young girl" and the "yellow butterfly" which she is chasing. They stare in disbelief and without any hope because of their realization that the young girl, like all creatures, is on the road that leads "from Nothing to Nowhere," from dust to dust.

This golden vision recalls other "golden racers" in the past whose lives were swift and fleeting, although beautiful as the "young winds," and now "have gone." Dust and mortality overtook and crushed them in spite of all their beauty and goldness. But this fourth stanza with its imagery of gold does contain the single positive note
in the poem in the achievements that love attained in the past. The "golden hand" of beauty and love did open up "undiscovered" lands and, like the creative "words," their words of love "drew from the shade" even "a planetary system," a new world of love. But these new worlds with their discovery of a new humanity of love are gone and now are only dust.

This dust with the implied image of death is personified in "the Gray Man," of the next stanza, who "waits on the Road from Nothing to Nowhere" for the young girl. He has no care for her and even less for the "breezes and butterflies" that accompany her. He has already met and overcome "the old woman" who is now dead. The latter, like the girl in her beauty and love, was "once a world" and the "earth" to the old man, but now lies on his heart like a burden, the burden of time that he carries. She is now but a part of the pile of gray dust that is overwhelming him and the world.

In spite of all this, the poem concludes with the young girl continuing to chase "the yellow butterfly" of "Happiness" heedless of "the dust that lies" even "on its wings" foreshadowing its eventual crumbling and decay. This pursuit of the Happiness of love is an impossible one and it is symbolized by the wings and fleeting swiftness of the butterfly itself. The eventual dust which the girl will also become is foreshadowed by the present distance between all lovers due to the impossibility of any meeting of their minds. The lovers are "like the bright continents" of Asia, Africa,
and, poetically, Cathay (China), the geographical discoveries of the past, and like them are destined never to meet. Furthermore, they are like "golden flowers," beautiful but lasting only for the summer, and therefore are "quickly dying" and turning into the dust to which all gold returns.

Song: The Queen Bee sighed . . .

This simple little lyric is quite minor and scarcely needs any elucidation. But it does have one subtle point that could easily be overlooked. In turn, the "Queen Bee," the "old King," and the sun, "the gold heart of the day," each sighs and laments its respective burden. For the Queen Bee the "sweet gold," of course, which is so "heavy," is its honey. For the old King, it is "the weight" of his "crown" which is also "cold." And for the sun, it is its "heat" that is so "heavy."

A hint for the reason for this common heaviness is given in the second line where the Queen Bee sighed "to the wind in the honey-hive." She is alone and there is no one but the wind with whom to communicate. This is also implied in the case of the old King whose life seems to be as weighty and lonely as his crown. Finally, the sun, too, is alone. But in contrast to the burdens of these three, the singer of the song concludes that his heart with "its infinite gold" and "weight of love" has a burden that is much sweeter than honey and of far greater value than gold; its far greater weight is therefore easily carried.
You, the Young Rainbow

The title describes the young lover who is being addressed by the speaker in the poem; the lover, however, the poem concludes, is now cold and distant. In her grief the speaker appeals to him in the opening lines as "the young Rainbow of my tears," the sign of hope in her grief. He is also appealed to as "the gentle Halcyon," the fabled bird like the kingfisher who had the power to calm "the troubled waters" of her heart. Finally, by implication he is pictured as a shepherd who could lead his "flock," her "grief," to the "far pastures of lost heaven," namely, to peace and to joy. Since his flock is her grief, it could be that her sorrow has been caused by him. The "hollow / Hills" over which she hopes to be led symbolize the hollowness and emptiness of her life in its grief.

The second half of the poem, however, reveals the reality in which she realizes that, because of his lack of love for her, there is no hope of any help from him. The "meadows" of the "lost heaven" she dreams of and the "horizon" she seeks are now withered. The "sun," therefore, is no longer gentle or Halcyon-like, with any power to calm and soothe, but is more like the blood of the mythical Hyacinthus. The "boughs" are "cold" and the "constellations" that are falling could be both the planetary ones and the buds and flowers on "the spring branches." These symbolize the distance and the coldness in the heart of her lover who no longer is willing to help her in her grief; he is, moreover, the cause of that grief.
because of the loss of his love which has brought about the "darkness" in her heart.

The Poet Laments the Coming of Old Age

This lament is based on the experience and reality which old age brings, namely, that "Goodness" and "Wisdom" are not possible in this life, as the poet once dreamed in her youth. She must, therefore, abandon her youthful "Folly" during which she believed that Time would bring Goodness and that Wisdom could be "caught."

The beginning of the poem with "the children running out of school" and the contrast with the present experience of old age must remind one of Yeats's "Among School Children." But the themes of the two poems are quite different, and Dame Edith stresses goodness and death more than Yeats does. Seeing the school children, therefore, she is reminded of what she once was taught as they are now. "They are taught that Goodness means a blinding hood" which blinds them to the reality of the world and its evil. Or they are taught that "Time" can bring this "Goodness" and that "Evil can be cast," i.e., cast aside like the "old rag" that it is. And finally, they are taught that "Wisdom," even though it is an elusive hare, can be caught and "held in the golden sack / Of the heart." She concludes by lamenting that, because of her age and experience and because she is a poet, she "must bring back sight to the blind," i.e., reveal the reality of life with its evil to those who have been blinded by such teaching.
She continues by recalling that once long ago, when she was young, she had in her mind "a gold seed of Folly" like a "planet dancing" like the laughing Sun in the following stanza. But the joy and the beauty of this youthful "Folly" that could have been of much value in her life have disappeared with the spring, with "the hare-wild wind." The image of the hare recalls the Wisdom of the first stanza which, like her Folly, has fled from her. What this Folly was is explained in the third and following stanzas.

In her Folly, like a "fool," she "was once like the philosopher / Sun who laughs at evil and at good." Now, as she points out later in the poem, she can no longer laugh at evil but can only realize its horror. And perhaps then in her Folly she saw no distinction between evil and good just as she was able to see "great things mirrored in littleness," i.e., was able to appreciate even the small things of life. Now, however, with age and experience and with the eyes of reality she sees the changes that have come about, as for instance, that the "great Venus" has now deteriorated and "wears Time's filthy dress" and is "a toothless crone." But she can also see now that the lovely Venus once had a "Lion's mouth," i.e., was so destructive and devouring.

The following stanzas concentrate on Alexander the Great as an historical example who, like the mythological Venus, arose "from Nothing" and whose appearance in life was "Gold" but who now no longer exists. Such Alexanders are now more like dreams than real-
ity. Alexander is described as a "Lion" and as a "Sun" in his power and in the conquests by which he leaped across the world when he saw what he wanted whether in possessions or in love. In the past in her Folly, like "the philosopher Sun," the poet was able to laugh at an Alexander, whereas, perhaps now in her old age, she no longer can after seeing other such tyrants and conquerors. And above all, the two, the Sun and she, laughed because Alexander with all his power is "now no more." He is "now no more / Than the armored knight who buzzed" like a fly "on the windowpane," and like "the first drops of rain" that have disappeared.

Yet, even among the school children, other Alexanders are coming forth at least with similar desires of conquests in love, i.e., "the honey-hive," or "honeycomb," or of becoming like the "knight" in the previous stanza but, ironically, also like him vainly buzzing "on the windowpane."

The seventh stanza returns again briefly to Alexander who is now dead in spite of his likeness to the Sun and in spite of his gold sinews of beauty and power. So also, her youthful dreams of Folly, like those of the school children, are dead. In that Folly, as she said before, she once hoped that "Goodness" would grow with age "like a hump" on her back, but it has not. Instead, her "heart must bear / The weight of all Time's filth," i.e., of its evil, and Wisdom cannot be caught.

She concludes, therefore, that even though she "brings back
sight to the blind," i.e., reveals the reality of good and evil, she has lost, however, this seed of Folly. This latter could teach her "to bear" that a figure like Alexander with his beauty and his vitality "has changed to an old rag of the outworn world." Not only has his "gold-sinewed body" in death become an "old rag" but the world since his time also has worn out and is itself an "old rag," the rag of evil. Finally, she laments the loss of such a youthful Folly which could now teach her to bear that "the great heart" of man which "the first Morning made," i.e., the Morning of Creation, that man since then in spite of all his promise now wears "all Time's destruction for a dress" instead of the heart of love that he could have had.

'O Bitter Love, O Death . . .'

The love in the poem, in the stories of Helen and Alexander, is a bitter one because of death which has meant the end of their loves. But the other meaning of the title is also present in the poem, especially in the case of Plato. The possessive love of death is a bitter one because it is so devouring. Both meanings of the title, as exemplified in the lives of the three speakers, are assumed by the poet herself at the end of the poem.

Helen is the first speaker and her voice is heard as a sigh when the poet draws a "stalk of dry grass" through her lips. Literally this might be a little overdone as an auditory image. The poet is trying to connect the excellent visual image of Helen in
her present condition to a sound of her voice. The once "golden Helen," the symbol of beauty, is now "a thin / Dry stalk of quaking grass," quaking in the cold wind. Every wind, as Paris himself, was her lover during life, but in her present state who would try to win her love? No longer a beauty, she is "drier than a crone."

In spite of this there is enough "sap," i.e., blood, in her "dry veins" to enable her to sing "like a bird," and so she continues: "I was the sea that knew the siren song." She was no mere siren, as we might have expected, but she was the "sea" itself with its power and beauty. But the implication is that in spite of this she was lured to destruction by the siren of love. The singing planet that her "veins heard" was common enough in Greek philosophy, and the singing would be an ancient Greek song that is "in the Dorian mode." Her veins, therefore, her blood and her heart, responded to and resounded the music of the spheres. She was, therefore, no common woman with an ordinary love and the contrast in her present condition is all the more startling. Death came to her as something tragic and made her love for Paris something bitter.

The speaker in the next two stanzas is Plato, the prototype of the greatness of Greek philosophy. But now he is an old man, like Tantalus, constantly. "rolling wisdom like a stone / Up endless hills." This stone is like the philosopher's stone presumably capable of turning the basest metal into gold and of redeeming man
from his ignorance. But after all these centuries, Plato is weary
of his ceaseless attempts to lay this stone "on the innocent eyes,"
i.e., the eyes of mankind in their innocence and ignorance of real-
ity. In his speech the old man who once was Plato implies that he
no longer has the wisdom that he once had. Then he was wise "in
the ripe and unripe weathers of the mind." This unusual image im-
plies perhaps that his wisdom flourished not merely in ripe weather,
i.e., in times of prosperity and maturity, but also in times of im-
maturity and when people were not ready for his philosophy. "The
maps of worlds beyond the countries of the blind" that he says he
was able to draw were the worlds of eternity, the worlds of Ideas
and Universals, the intelligible world in contrast to the country
of the blind, those who use only their senses. The "blind sense"
is that of the eye which, when man uses it exclusively, allows him
only to see the shadows as in Plato's myth and blinds him to the
absolute reality that Plato attempted to reveal. This law, there-
fore, that he discovered was the real world of Ideas and Universals
that united the "atoms of our Chaos," the physical and intellectual
Chaos before the time of Plato. This unifying law of his is com-
pared to "the love / Of boy and girl" since the highest of the
Platonic ideas would be that of universal Love.

The other old man who now speaks in the following stanzas
is Alexander the Great. The description of him as "gold-sinewed"
and with "a lion's mane / Like a raging Sun" is almost identical
with that in the preceding poem, "The Poet Laments the Coming of Old Age." But now, not only has he lost this physical beauty and his power, he is also alone since his love, "that white lady," is dead and is but "a thin white bone." The emphasis, therefore, in Alexander's story is not on his conquering power but on the love he had during his life and that he now no longer has. Once he conquered "the countries of the heart," but now he lives in his "perpendicular gray house," i.e., his aged body, and also in his "horizontal house," the "foolish bed" of his grave. "All is the same" and equal in death. Like the other "heroes" of the past, he, too, has ended up "upon the shore" of death, washed up like the waves. "Their great horizons" and dreams have ended in death as have their loves and the very "atoms" of the world.

The concluding two lines are those of the poet herself. She concludes by making her reaction to Death the same as that of the three speakers in the poem. All that she owns, like the love and wisdom of Helen, Plato, and Alexander, has been stolen by Death and now is no more. Death is a "bitter love" and love itself that must end in death is bitter.

A Sylph's Song

This is a light delicate lyric, a minor poem without much depth. But even in a minor poem, as always, Dame Edith's diction and imagery are worthy of a close reading.

The story in the poem is taken from Roman mythology and is
that of Pomona, the Nymph who deserted the wild woodland for the
gardens and orchards. There she cut herself off from all men and
only Vertumnus, after many a trial and in disguise, was finally
able to approach her. There is no reference to Vertumnus in the
poem but perhaps he is pictured as in the disguise of the Sylph.
At any rate, he or the Sylph is addressing Pomona in this song.

He is "fading" and languishing, he begins, not for any horn
of plenty but for the "fair Pomona, gardener's daughter." The
description of her "laughing like bird-feathered water" is a charm-
ing description of her face, more a visual image than an auditory
one. But in contrast to her, he continues, there is this hot,
gloomy garden in which she dwells and in which "a word falls"
hollow.

The image in the following two couplets is a bit confused
or perhaps we should not take it too seriously. Literally the
"baskets of ripe fruit in air" to which the "bird-songs" are some-
how compared are suspended in the air like fruit hanging from a
tree. The "goldfinches" which "peck slyly at them," presumably
the baskets of ripe fruit, in their "quick flights" are also imag-
inatively described as "the ripe warm lights." The lover, the
Sylph or Vertumnus, now offers her his gifts of green branches and
fruits, but he includes a dig in describing her hair as "waspish-
gilded." Her disposition in her loneliness, he implies, has become
somewhat irascible. But he hopes that his gifts and her hair will
become a "cornucopia" filled and covered with dew that will stain her warm lips and make the "bird-blood leap within" her veins. Presumably, judging from the following line, he thinks that her warm lips are becoming cold and dry and that her blood also is lacking any life. He warns Pomona, therefore, as Vertumnus does in the myth, that the "fruits" of her garden where she spends all her time will fade "like ripples of the water," and also, perhaps, she herself.

He appeals to her, therefore, to "leave her fruits," cleverly admitting that they are "smooth" and beautiful but implying that her "cheek" is much more so. The "lovelier, smoother shade" to which he invites her to listen to his serenade is perhaps the one in which he dwells and the one to which she finally retires with Vertumnus in the myth.

Most Lovely Shade

This minor lyric to the beauty of the "shade," the "Dark," and the "cloud" is a curious poem. On the literal level it is a rich poem, rich in imagery—almost too much so. But there are possible overtones of the symbolic. Does the shade symbolize death, or melancholy? It is difficult, almost impossible, to say since the poem itself gives no hint of such symbolization. Light and shade, however, play a large part in Dame Edith's imagery; in the over-all view of her poetry, this poem would have a place, if only a minor one, as we shall see later.
On the literal level the poem in the first stanza describes the "Dark" and the "shade" as lovely, of "richest splendor," and of "pomp." The metaphor in the first line connects this "Dark" with "Ethiopia" and darkest Africa. The "leafy plumes" of the dark air of this shade are silent, i.e., "no more a lulling music" make, and the poet asks not to be left outside.

The imagery in the second stanza becomes tactile as the Dark is described as "fleece" and the leaves in the shade as "weeping" from the dew. This imagery, however, as in much of the poem, is rather overdone when the "rich leaves" are described as perspiring from the dew. Finally, the dark air is connected tactically with feathers.

The third stanza employs the use of "Syrinx and Dryope" to increase the beauty of this lovely shade. These two Nymphs in Greek mythology became, in the case of Syrinx, a tuft of reeds and eventually a shepherd's pipe by the power of Pan, and Dryope was changed into a tree for her crime of plucking a lotus blossom. Their beauty now makes more bright the "treasuries" of the shade. Their blood still grows in "the dark secret of the rose," and their beauty becomes part of the "stem of many a weeping tree."

In the final stanza the beauty of the shade is not that of the grove of the trees but that caused by a lovely "precious cloud." Again the poet appeals to this cloud to lean to her heart, and she concludes that the "splendor" of the shade of her "precious cloud"
is more beautiful than that of the trees.

'Lo, This Is She That Was the World's Desire'

"She," of course, is Venus, but she is now no longer "the world's desire" because the poem pictures her in old age, close to death. Venus, the goddess of beauty and love, is a frequent symbol in Dame Edith's poetry, especially in contrast between youth and old age brought about by Time. This theme of the deterioration effected by Time is also the center of an earlier poem, significantly entitled "Metamorphosis," from which some of the imagery in the present poem is borrowed. Another version of "Metamorphosis" was published in 1945 after the present poem, but with a significant difference. The second version, in contrast to the first and to this poem, introduces Christ as the hope for a final, eternal metamorphosis.

The present poem includes no such ground for any hope except perhaps in the "green" of the introduction and in Venus's final prayer for a restoration of her beauty in the spring. The green, however, of the introductory stanza is that of a "green winter night," dark green with the cypress and the pine and the other winter branches. The sun, the heart of the world, has set and left the world in shadow. All beauty has been darkened as the second stanza states, and then Venus is introduced.

She is an old crone like "gray dust bent over the fire in the winter night." This fire is the only light or gold for her who
once was like the bright planet Venus loved by the stars and kissed 
by the constellation Orion. And in mythology it was she who was 
loved by the god Adonis. The description of her present condition 
in old age, however, is one of horror. And the poet piles up a 
series of epithets to an extreme and beyond. Her heart is "dust, 
black as the Ape's," and she herself has "grown blackened, nose-
less," and unable to "stand upright." "Noseless" is a touch of 
horror that recalls previous poems in which "noseless death" ap-
pears; and here perhaps we have a foreshadowing of Venus's death. 
And although her bent back foreshadows the "Ape's bent skeleton," 
it could indicate that she is leaning forward in thirst—but the 
poet adds "for what spring?" Her metamorphosis, therefore, has oc-
curred, caused by the "lion-claws of age" whose talons tear her 
"cheek and heart." But her own "rage / For life" like "a tigerish 
fire" is also devouring her. And her heart, full of empty "cra-
ters," is weeping along with the "mire" that is her flesh, full of 
the "wounds" of Time and eternally cold. This first part of the 
poem concludes with a repetition of the title in the last line of 
stanza nine. She that was "the world's desire" because of her 
beauty has been shown in the preceding stanzas to be now the hor-
ror of the world.

The five couplets of the next part concentrate on Death, 
the approaching Death of Venus. Blind and in anguish without any 
hope for love, she devours her blood, i.e., her life, like one of
the members of the family of Atreus in Greek mythology. She is "deserted by all" except Death. Death in the Cleopatra image of the "small immortal serpent cries, / 'To my embrace the foolish and the wise / Will come.'" There is, however, no sign of immortality in this poem as in Cleopatra's death and no indication as to whether Venus in her lifetime was foolish or wise. But the constant, falling wrinkles have left the Venus of old now an "ancient wrinkled shadow-shape." This part ends by again comparing her horribly to the Ape "our great precursor." Joined to the previous use of this image when Venus foreshadowed the Ape (stanza six), the conclusion is that the Ape is man's beginning and his end.

The next stanza fifteen, beginning the conclusion, introduces the unusual theme of "pity for the dust" and for "Time." The earth, now dust, and Time have seen human beauty grow from the earth and through Time. Time now has only the "unchanging memory" of the skeleton, "the bone" to which human beauty is reduced. And from the "porphyry" of the earth, i.e., from its metals, "grew the summer rose," the beauty of the flower and the beauty of a Venus.

The concluding two stanzas look forward to spring when dew will bring life back to the earth, but also when the "gray dust" that is now Venus but that was "the world's desire" will sigh the concluding speech of the poem. She recalls the blindness and the violence of the desires of her loves in the past. This description and the comparison of her desires to the snow indicate perhaps
the reasons why her life of love has turned to the grayness of this present old age. She cries out that she might once again in spring feel this "violence" and this "wild-beast fire." She longs to know again "the kiss" of love "that holds all the spring redness" of life and beauty but that also brings tears and suffering in the blood.

The Swans

This minor lyric like the earlier one, "Most Lovely Shade," to which it is in strong contrast, concludes Part III of this collection. Evidently, with "Most Lovely Shade" it envelops the intervening poem on Venus with its contrasting imagery of black and white. It is also significant that in contrast to "Most Lovely Shade" and as a conclusion to Part III, this poem finishes with a note on Time like winter with its snows covering all in its cold. Like "Most Lovely Shade" this poem, "The Swans," is also rich in its imagery but in imagery that is more colorful, original, and varied. The two stanzas of the poem are in contrast to one another, and only the second deals directly with the swans.

The water of the swans is introduced in the first line but its light is green and the spray and foam on the water are compared to flowers. The following lines go on to enumerate a half a dozen flowers varied in color and smell and texture. Green predominates but there are also white, pink, velvet, and orange. In the second half of this first stanza, "the white rose-trees" are described as
an introduction to the whiteness of the swans in the second stanza. The showers of the varied-colored flowers already enumerated pelt these "white women," the rose-trees, these "solar statues" snow-like under "the green trees." Several species of white rose-trees are mentioned and they are compared to the snow, stars, flowers, and waves of the sea. Finally, they seem to be "born of a dream" as the poem goes into the second stanza on the swans proper.

The sound of the swans is described as a laughter "like doves" and then their appearance itself as that of "angels" or "ghosts." They are reflected in the "air-pale water" which in turn reflects the stars and also the "young thin moons from great wings falling," i.e., the feathers from the swans. The swans, therefore, see "their ghosts," their whiteness and their own "white angels" in the water over which they are flying. And their "great wings spreading" are described as having bones of "amber, smooth and thin." These bones are connected in their common origin of "amber dust" with the rose and the nymph. But on all this beauty as on the flowers of the first stanza, "Time's winter falls" and the swans disappear or are covered with snow. A human element is added in the final line, for this same snow covers not only the swan but the girl with her beauty, and the rose, so that neither can be distinguished from the other.
One Day in Spring

In spite of the title this long poem that introduces Part IV is concerned even more with death and dead love than it is with spring and its life and love. The contrast in the poem is between young lovers filled with the life of spring and the "living dead man" who recalls his departed beloved. In spite of the deafness of the two lovers to his long speech in the poem, they do show some pity and concern for the dead. But their principal interest is in each other and their love; the poem ends ironically in their belief that the beauty and love of their spring will never grow old.

This contrast between death and life is introduced in the first lines of the poem in the images of winter and spring. But for the young, in contrast to the bereaved lover, "winter's cold" has gone and spring with its warmth is filling their hearts. In the last three lines of this introductory stanza, the young people express their love for one another. It is a love which they believe will not grow old.

The second stanza introduces the character of the "living dead man" who will tell his story of a love that died and is no more. In the midst of their spring, however, the young with their
hearts full of love are not listening to him. In fact, they refuse to: "'O heed him not.'" It is ironic that in saying so, the young lover's description of his beloved is: she is "my dew with golden feet," with flowers, but a dew that flees from him and that "is born of the spring heat," i.e., a dew that is symbolic of time and transiency.

But in spite of his lack of an audience, the "living dead man" begins his story in the next stanza and continues it for the following nine stanzas. He begins with the death of his beloved and her speech on that last day. She has hope for their future reunion after her death at "the world's end," even though until that time she fears that she will be cold without his kiss. But Death, she believes, will one day himself grow old and will no longer feel "the pain / Of jealous love," jealousy for her earthly lover, and will give her back again to him. She describes that day, that beginning of their eternity, as a "great holiday" when there will be no more work, no more fear of poverty, but only peace. Then presumably in their resurrection "only Death will feel the sorrow of old age." The speaker, the living dead man, adds that then she died. With the Sun of his life gone, he is now "sunless" but he does not feel the cold and his heart and the earth for him are dead. And he himself is dead even though they clothed him in his suit and he walks the earth all day "waving at Nothingness." The world around him is now Nothingness because of the loss of her
whom he loved. Finally, he describes himself as "a scarecrow," "changing with every wind," empty and helpless.

But sometimes, he goes on, he has enough strength and desire to utter a few words from his dead lips: "Come home!" He can say this in spite of his fear of Death: what he had seen it do to her while dying and what it might have done since her death. This foreshadows his reaction to her appearance later in the poem. The striking lines here are four-six. He had feared, he says, "to see / That eternal truth the Bone / Laid bare by Death." The Bone, the skeleton that is laid bare by Death, is the eternal truth of man's mortality, and is itself all that remains of man after death. But, in spite of his fears, he expresses his desire for her and also his belief that whatever change she has undergone in death he would still recognize her heart and her love.

In the next stanza (8) he passionately expresses "the cold" he fears that she is lying in while dead and also his own cold in his loneliness without her. His heart has no beat without her, nor his clay any soul, for she is the beat of his heart and the soul of his clay. He concludes this speech to her with the hope that his heart and his love will cover and give "warmth and light" to her in the coldness of her "grave's long night."

He continues his speech to the unlistening world around him as he describes her heart as the foundation of "cathedrals and their creeds," because of the greatness of her love. But the em-
phasis here is on her heart, i.e., her love, as a symbol of the foundation of the divine love expressed in the great cathedrals and in the various beliefs of the religions of the world. In contrast to such beliefs are the "Babels of the world," with their madness and their bells tolling "'Dead'—over her love" instead of love, like the cathedrals.

Finally, all the earth could not hold her down, nor could the "seas and seasons" drown her heart; and therefore she appeared twelve months after her death. She had come home, as he had desired, with eyes hollow from her tears, but with her lips warm with love for him in her attempt to prove her love and out of fear that he might love her no more. But out of fear of Death and the dead, he had rejected her when she appeared to him. Even more significant was his fear of "that eternity of love," love that lasted beyond the grave but a love that was unknown and therefore something fearful. The description of himself again as a dead man almost implies that he was more dead than she was. And so, fearing "Death's cold," he "dared not kiss / Her" and thus laid "Death's earth upon her heart." Rejecting her love from the grave, he gives "Death her love," and thus he refuses her "the only light / And fire she had to warm her eternal night." The old man's tragic story ends here and he departs from the scene.

Two striking metaphors in the following two couplets present the greatness of his grief and hers. Their coldness is as eternal
and immobile as that of a "rock crystal" with its "six rays" in contrast to the passing cold of a mere "snowflake's star," i.e., a snowflake with its star-like shape. And the minor griefs of every day life are only "waterfalls" in contrast to such an eternally frozen grief like theirs that never melts.

Now, in contrast to the preceding stanzas, in stanza thirteen Spring reappears along with the youth of the world in two lovers walking together. Their pity for the "poor Dead" is surprising but very human. It will, however, become all the more ironic in the conclusion of the poem. In contrast to themselves, Spring for the Dead, they realize, is cold and the heart of the Dead is gone with their love and their youthful lips are worn away even though "a youthful smile" remains on their skeleton but as "a thing of sorrow." Love for the dead is hopeless and so they have wasted away to "a shade," to "an echo." Love is hopeless because the one they wait for "comes not" and the season of Spring on earth cannot return to them.

In contrast to the cathedrals also, that the old man saw as built above his beloved's heart, here the young lovers see the "Parthenon," the Greek temple, as being built by the "dead kiss," i.e., by the love of the departed. The fear of the Dead and the destruction of love by this fear is voiced here again in the line, "But what should love seek now you are changed to this / Thin piteous wreck!" In contrast to the rock that Moses struck and
from which waters gushed forth there are no tears here from this "stone" that the heart has become. In "Death's immobility," in such a stone-like condition, the eyes see only one sight. They see a kiss in the past, a clasp of hands in farewell in a summer now dead, in a morning of sorrows during life. Even in life, therefore, love meant farewell and love was something that was lost.

Now in Death, in the deep groves of "the young green-blooming strawberry," they long for the bliss of a kiss that has now "grown dead and rotten." They have forgotten that the love of youth grows old and now in Death "they must sleep alone."

In the conclusion of the final three stanzas, the young lovers, forgetting Death and their pity for the Dead, turn to the warmth of Spring. They feel and see now nothing but the rebirth of spring, a rebirth of faith and love. Lightly putting aside the reality that lovers of the world might grow old and die, they have no such fears for themselves. After all, the world was made only for their love, and such youthful beauty as hers, they think, can never grow old.

A Song at Morning

This poem is a song of hope, but a hope that is obtained after overcoming the night of doubt and despair by means of the dawn and the morning. The central symbol in the poem is the rose, the symbol of love, but the poem has many other symbols.
The "weeping rose," in the darkness of doubt and fear in the opening stanza, sighs over the darkness in its "heart" and also over the darkness of its "secret love." The secret love is that of the sun for the rose but is also a symbol for any love that has been lost and is now seemingly hopeless. In spite of this, there still is the fire of love within the heart as there is within the rose. But the rose and love fear to reveal this fire of love "in the night." The revelation of such a fire would only be "a rainbow in the night," a rainbow not of hope but one that would foreshadow the "overthrow" of love. Darkness and night, therefore, dominate this first stanza, symbolically representing doubt and despair about the possibility of love.

But in the second stanza night is over and the morning dawns; and with it come "the great dews." These dews symbolize the cleansing of the heart as explained in the third stanza. The doubts and despairs, therefore, of the "heart's darkness" die with morning in the midst of this cleansing dew. Morning brings hope not only for a despairing love but also, seemingly, for the poet in the rest of this second stanza. The poet, the "I," rises from her sleep and "darkness" which were like an earlier stage in her poetic development, as in the case of the butterfly which is the symbol here. The new wings of the butterfly symbolize the inspiration that the poet now has which enables her to cast aside her former oblivion and powerlessness.
Now, like the rose, she too in stanza three is "careless in the morning dews." The burden of guilt is cast aside with the dews that symbolize the forgiveness of the dead which she now feels. But "the stain on our hands" includes not only the poet but mankind itself for all its crimes but especially at this time for the crimes of war. And cleansed like the rose she now can shout "of the red joys and redder sorrows" of the young who had fallen during the war. The rose, with its redness as love, itself symbolizes both joy and sorrow, for the blood in the veins of the young soldiers. From this blood had come both "incendiarism," i.e., the incendiary bombs during the war, but also the "redness of summer" with its love and beauty, i.e., the hope of the world as symbolized in the rose. The wintery coldness and unreality of Prudence also will pass away in this emergence of summer and love. The poem concludes that the tears of sorrow will return, but now they will seem part of the "rose's light" and its beauty and love; the sorrow itself is seen as only the temporary night that is soon overcome by the morning with its hope and love.

The Two Loves

This magnificent conclusion to the collection of poems, that has been the subject of this study, sums up much of what Dame Edith has been poeticizing in the previous thirty-nine poems. The two loves are first of all the universal, that of the Universal Fire that includes human love. In this love, as Dame Edith wrote
in an earlier poem, "An Old Woman," the sun is the first lover but it is a fire and love that has grown old and cold, as in the heart of man, and it seems on the verge of extinction. The second love is that of Christ: it is the Divine Love that has become human and universal and through which alone the human love can be redeemed and reenkindled.

The first brief part of the poem is an introduction to this deepest of human problems. The woman of the first line who speaks in this first part is like the old woman of Part One. But here she is dead—one of the living dead—and "black" and even in a "shroud." But she is still "upright" and still burning with the desire for life and love. The ambiguity of Spring and the fundamental dilemma of human life that can be either a blessing or a damnation is also pictured in these first lines. Spring has its flowers and its buds but also its thunder and lightnings as well as the remaining "snows" of late winter that symbolize man's "sins and sorrows." Spring, therefore, can bring forth life or death. As a result of this dilemma, the woman in black cries out to the passing lovers of Spring to beware since she has a "light" with which to see them: to see a future of love and fire for them or a future of death. But she herself does not know what the future is, nor what she is, whether the light she has is that of the "Burning Bush" of the Divine Presence or that of the "Damnation's Fire" of hell; or maybe, she concludes, it is her "old aching heart with its desire" for love.
This terrible fire burning within her, therefore, can be for either
good or evil. And the possibility of good is indicated by her at-
tempt "to bless," but the possibility of damnation by the fact
that, like all men, she is dressed in "Time's filthy dress," that
of mortal human flesh.

It is not, however, the old woman in her doubt and despair
who speaks in the second part of the poem, but the poet herself
who will become, at the end of the poem, "the voice of Fire."
Here, at the beginning of this second part, she is seeking for this
"Universal Fire," this universal love that has grown cold in the
world's heart. It is only "the seeds" of this Universal Fire that
can burn out "the roots of Death" in man's heart, the death of the
lovelessness that is destroying him. Her heart, therefore, like
that of all men, is broken and sunken low along with the fires of
love. She had hopes that this Universal Fire like the sun itself
would be let loose to enkindle the hearts of men as the sun does
with its light "deep in the heart of the rose." Like the heart of
man, Spring itself has fallen, but her hopes were that this light
and love would return especially to the poor, those who are "famine-
white" and who have lost their courage "from hunger." The poor, of
course, would be those above all who feel this coldness and lack of
love in the world. This first section of the second part concludes
with an answer as to the time when this Universal Fire will once
again kindle the cold heart of man. The answer in the images of the
last two lines is similar to that of her poem "Heart and Mind" at the beginning of Part Three. Only when "the fire of the heart and the fire of the mind" are one will man's love be reenkindled. But here it seems that the fire of the heart can only come from "the sapphire tears the heavens weep": only the pity and mercy of heaven can solve man's problem as it does in the appearance of Christ.

The second section of this second part of the poem takes us back to man's earlier history and to a solution to this problem that is, however, no longer valid. The Universal Fire as symbolized by "summer" and its "heat" should be, but is not, sufficient to enkindle "the sun of the heart." It should do this in the same way that it ripens and beautifies the peach and the apricot and their hearts, i.e., their kernels. The "wonder" is, she goes on, that with "so many fires" in the universe, as in "the earth, the sun, and the heart," "the whole world is not consumed" with fire and with love. But it is not. In an earlier age, however, it was; this was in the time of Adam and man's early history when he was close to the earth and to its heat. Adam was "red" with the clay from which he came and which he farmed and in which he was buried. The description of him as "the Colossus of rubies" indicates not only his size and strength but also his value. And the rubies were of the very clay from which he was made. Close to the earth, Adam and his descendants had their religion and mythology
of the vegetation god, "the corn effigy." It was yearly buried and resurrected "to a new birth" in the spring. This "ancient wisdom" and belief in rebirth and the cycles of the seasons gave man hope in spite of Death. His life, therefore, was one of "heat," the heat of the earth he was close to and the heat of love, and, consequently, one of "laughter."

Such a "heat," however, the poet continues in the next section, is gone and is no longer possible in the present age. Man is no longer close to the earth; a new belief and a new mythology are now necessary. "This is the hour of brotherhood." Certainly in the midst of the divisions of the present age and of war such a brotherhood and such a warmth are necessary, especially for "the rejected by Life." These lifeless, inhuman "shadows," blind and with eyes, really include all human beings as seen in the symbols and classifications that follow. First there is "Icarus," the youth of the world, with his broken wings and his futile attempt to fly and to escape the labyrinth of life. The "ageing Atlas" represents the old of the world living in the slums, the slums of the world, and devoured day by day by Time until his death. He was an Atlas in his futile attempt to hold up the world by himself. The "Croesus" is the rich of the world, now, however, poor in the "breadline" with only the "gold from the sun." This imagery of the sun is frequent throughout this section and is the note of hope on which is based the possibility of rebirth and brotherhood. Finally among the
"rejected by Life" are the lovers whose love was destroyed by a perverse view of women. They saw women either as a devouring "Life-force" of procreation or like "Gravity's force" dragging men down to the earth and death.

Summing up this lack of brotherhood in these rejected souls, the poet concludes by describing them as "fag-ends of Ambition," because of the false ambitions they had, and as the "wrecks of the heart," from their loss of love, and finally as "lumps" and "bones left by the Lion." Taking a hint from the first poem, "Invocation," this Lion can be seen as part of the nihilistic spring, a spring that does not bring life and love but only destruction. These negations of life, therefore, "wait for a rebirth" amid the "roses" and "under the democratic sun" that can enrich all on earth. But in spite of the sun there seems little hope, for the mouths of youth and of flowers seem only "open wounds of a hunger" that is unsatisfied and dry as dust. Instead of sounding with the beats of love the heart of man has only "the noise of revolutions" between "Chaos" and "rebuilding." First there is the destructive "hammer of Chaos" such as war. And because of man's small "hopes and fears" the rebuilding seems of little consequence, except again for the light of the sun. In such a feverish situation in Nature and especially in man with his wars, poverty, and famine who would have expected a "light" and a new revelation? But this has happened, as the poem will conclude, through Christ, the "light" of the world and the
"new Word" of love who has come to take His place among and in
"the hearts of Men." How much this new heart and light was needed
is indicated in the concluding lines to this section as Dame Edith
borrows from a passage by William James. To "tell the blind" the
color of a flower, or "the philosopher" the essence of what dis-
tance is, is, of course, impossible. But even were that possible,
it is much more impossible to tell "the distance between the hearts
of Men"; and therefore new hearts and a new love are needed.

Christ is introduced in the first line of the conclusion to
the poem through the image of the Rose borrowed from Christopher
Smart who is quoted later in the stanza. But the rose,¹ a symbol
of love, beauty, and humanity, had been a frequent image in Dame
Edith's poetry.

The "Rose" as the visual and tactile image of "Christ's
wounds" which are in turn the symbol of love, of God's love for
men, dominates this final concluding stanza and is the climax to
this book of Dame Edith. The "I" in the next line is the "old
woman" of the earlier poems, i.e., mother earth, but she is also
the poet. The "Seeds of Fire," of the Universal Fire in the earth
and in man, have not been completely extinguished by hate and by
war but are ready for this enkindling by the fire of Christ's
wounds. But the seeds are both "red" and "dark"; they are ready

¹See also Patrick Pearse's poem: "I See His Blood Upon the
Rose."
for the eternal dilemma of either life or death. The imagery in
the third line pictures this problem in the "pomegranate grandeur,"
the image of beauty and fruitfulness, and "the dark seeds of Death."
The earth and man can become either, life or death.

But the poet, in the following lines, goes on with hope to
say that she feels them change, feels these seeds of fire change
"to the light and fire in the heart of the rose," i.e., in Christ
and in man. Instead of the dark seeds of Death, they are becoming
the light and the fire of love. This is due to the "umbilical
cords that bind us to strange suns." (This image is from a sentence
by an unknown French author as Dame Edith tells us in a note.) The
"strange suns / And causes" are many as she will enumerate them in
the following lines. They include above all Christ; but also the
plants like the Rose and the preceding generations with their poets
like Smart and scientists like Harvey and Linnaeus. Christopher
Smart's poetry, as Dame Edith Sitwell's own poems, was not only
devotional but Christocentric, as seen in the quotation that she
gives in the following line from "Rejoice with the Lamb." Ironi-
cally, Smart was "the madman," as the poet always is, especially
in our modern age. But Smart, the madman poet, like Dame Edith
"was born / To bless Christ with the Rose and his people," with the
rose of humanity and human love that would produce "a nation / Of
living sweetness."

Not only the poet, however, but also the scientist, like
Harvey and Linnaeus, blessed Christ and praised Him by seeing Him in the "veins" of blood\(^2\) and in "the winged seed." This omnipresence of Christ, in His divinity and humanity, is at the center of this conclusion to Dame Edith Sitwell's "Later Poems: 1940-1945." These men, she concludes, were "born for the Sun's need." The Sun's light and influence can only be interpreted by such poets and scientists. But their work is also a hymn "to God who walks in darkness" and who is revealed not only through His work of creation but also through the revelation of the creative work of poets and scientists.

After examining the work of such men, Dame Edith turns to the earth itself and to what it has produced: first its minerals, then the plants. Although "far / From heaven," still "deep in the earth" the light of heaven has produced diamonds and precious stones like "the zircon and sapphire." These, she adds, are "bright as the

\(^2\)See Dame Edith's note to "Invocation" (Poems, pp. 420-421): "'The blood, when present in the veins as part of a body, a generative part, too, and endowed with soul, being the soul's immediate instrument, and primary seat ... the blood, seeming also to have a share of another divine body and being suffused with divine animal heat, suddenly acquires remarkable and most excellent powers, and is analogous to the essence of the stars. In so far as it is spirit, it is the hearth, the Vesta, the household divinity, the innate heat, the sun of the microcosm, the fire of Plato; not because like common fire it lightens, burns, and destroys, but because, by a vague and incessant motion, it preserves, nourishes, and aggrandizes itself. It further deserves the name of spirit, inasmuch as it is radical moisture, at once the ultimate and the proximate and the primary ailment.'--William Harvey (The Works of William Harvey, M.D., translated from the Latin by R. Willis, Sydenham Society, 1847)."
tears of heaven," the tears of heaven that, as she said before, are being shed from the Divine Mercy and that must be added to the earth for man's regeneration. Next there is "the child of the four elements, / The plant" produced by the earth, air, fire, and water. The plants, both "the water-plant" and "the earth-plant," are rooted in and centered in not only the earth but also in the light, and then rise through the leaf and flower to the air and the sun. In the plant, therefore, are united the minerals in the earth in addition to all of the elements.

Finally, there is Man himself and his heart, "the flower of the world," the culmination of the evolution of the earth. And into this small flower the "One," the Divinity, "has contracted His immensity" into "the scope of a small flower." Like the root of the flower that "is clasped in darkness," the darkness of the earth and the minerals within, Christ has embraced a humanity that has its roots in the darkness of its origin of sin. Like Tennyson's "flower in the crannied wall," all creation through Christ's humanity is now embraced by God from its root in the earth to its flower, the "light-seeking corolla." Now Man and the poet enkindled by this

3 The following lines (Stanza 7, lines 16-19), as Dame Edith tells us in a note (Poems, p. 425), "came into my head after reading a passage in Lorenz Oken's Elements of Physiophilosophy; the lines are in part a transcript." Odegard (Ibid., pp. 263-264) has investigated and cited this book about the unity of the mineral and plant life from the earth. She has, however, neglected Dame Edith's poetical use of this scientific data.
fire, by the seeds of the Universal Fire enflamed by Christ's fire, can cry out: "Will He disdain that flower of the world, the heart of Man?" The answer, rather evidently, is No. Since the heart of Man is the flower of the world, and therefore of such value, and since Christ, the God-man, has made Himself this flower with His heart of love, He will never disdain the heart of humanity but will enkindle it with His Fire.
CHAPTER SIX
THEMES, INTERCONNEXION, AND UNITY

Although not all the poems in "Later Poems: 1940-1945" are concerned with the war, nevertheless, we know from Dame Edith Sitwell herself that her long silence was broken by the horror of World War II:

After a year of war, I began to write again—of the state of the world, of the terrible rain
"Dark as the world of man, black as our loss—
Blind as the nineteen hundred and forty nails
Upon the Cross—"

In spite of this, her poems are not entirely pessimistic. But the principal question that the book poses is whether the pessimism is too overwhelming to be conquered. Or, is it resolved? There is gold and wheat in these poems, but also blood and fire; yet, "the fires of God" are also present: e.g., "the Burning Bush" in "Invocation," "Poor Young Simpleton," and "The Two Loves."

The optimism in the book is certainly based on her belief in the Divine Spirit and in the Incarnation in Christ. But this does not imply any deus ex machina solutions to the problems, the critical human problems posed in the book. What are these human problems that tempt one to pessimism but that possibly have a solu-

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tion, if any, in this faith of hers? The human problem evidently is death; but even during life there are the perennial problems of suffering, both spiritual and physical, such as poverty and hunger arising from the greed of the rich. These problems are focused by the historical problem of the war personally experienced by the poet during the years of World War II when these poems were written. On the optimistic side there is the love which has persisted in spite of man's selfishness and hatred. But can this love have any harvest or value in the face of death? And can it continue in a world devastated by war?

This study suggests the theme of the book might be found in Shakespeare's "Ripeness is all," in *King Lear*. Dame Edith Sitwell's book also raises the question as to whether the harvest and ripeness of love is possible in this temporal world and especially in the modern world being destroyed by greed and hatred. Is such a temporal ripeness and harvest possible without eternity? And what is the relationship between the temporal and eternal harvest? Dame Edith raises this problem and seeks the solution on the mythological, historical, symbolical—natural, imaginative, and poetical,—the theological, scientific, and personal (especially her own experience of the sufferings of war) levels. Realistically, therefore, she does not evade or neglect modern man and his problems, and she searches for a solution from every possible source, human and divine. Ultimately the solution must combine time and
eternity, the human and the divine, in a Teilhardian sense; but it is a solution that can only be expressed symbolically by a poet, by a poet of the sensitivity, intelligence, and background of a Dame Edith Sitwell.

The Book is divided into four parts:

Part I - Introduction
Part II - Development (Negative - Pessimistic)
Part III - Development (Positive - Optimistic)
Part IV - Conclusion

Part I

As the Introduction, Part I introduces the problems to be faced and, hopefully, solved, above all, the human problem of the hope and possibility of the value of human existence in the face of evil, war, and death. The possible solutions to these problems are also introduced, on the natural and supernatural levels. But the ultimate solution in the interrelationship of these two levels, namely, the human and the divine, is reserved for the conclusion of the book and the final poem, "The Two Loves."

The opening poem, "Invocation," i.e., an appeal to the Divine Spirit for help, strikes an introductory note on the possible source of hope.

Now falls the night of the world:—O Spirit moving upon the waters,
Your peace instil
In the animal heat and splendor of the blood—

......
Bring peace to the famine of the heart and lips,
And to the Last Man's loneliness
Of those who dream they can bring back sight to the blind!
You are the Night. 2

But the poem in its principal images of fire and darkness sets up man's perennial problem and the central conflict of the book. The struggle is between the fire of love and the darkness of evil and war. Is the victory and harvest of love possible in such a world? The faith, however, in the Spirit of life and love that still dwells in this darkness strikes a dominant note of hope in this opening poem.

So when the winter of the world and Man's fresh Fall
When democratic Death feared no more the heart's coldness
Shall be forgotten,
O Love, return to the dying world, as the light Of morning, shining in all regions, latitudes, And households of high heaven within the heart. 3

But this hope is natural as well as supernatural, a hope imaged by the golden woman, mother earth, and man's oldest faith revealed in his mythology of the rebirth of the spring of the earth.

But I, a golden woman like the corn goddess, Watch the dark fields, and know when spring begins To the sound of the heart and the planetary rhythm, Fires in the heavens and in the hearts of men, Young people and young flowers come out in the darkness. 4

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3 Ibid., p. 252.
4 Ibid., p. 252.
This mythological faith is developed in the second poem, "An Old Woman."

And I, the primeval clay
That has known earth's grief and harvest's happiness,
Seeing mankind's dark seed-time, come to bless,
Forgive and bless all men like the holy light.5

In this mythology not only the earth but man himself and
his body are holy in their union with the Sun, the symbol of love,
of universal love.

For the sun is the first lover of the world,
Blessing all humble creatures, all life-giving,
Blessing the end of life and the work done,
The clean and the unclean, ores in earth, and
splendors
Within the heart of man, that second sun.6

But this natural hope founded on mythology is confirmed and devel-
oped by the reference to Christ and His love, human and divine.

A "harvest"—and "ripeness"—as in the title of the second
part of this poem, is shown to be possible by this union of the
mythological and Christological. The symbol of wheat summarizes
and climaxes this union, the wheat of earthly bread and the wheat
of the Bread of Life.

The universal language of the Bread—
(0 Thou who are not broken, or divided—
Thou who art eaten, but like the Burning Bush
Are not consumed—Thou Bread of Men and Angels)—
The Seraphim rank on rank of the ripe wheat—

5 Edith Sitwell, "An Old Woman" (I), Poems, p. 257.
6 Ibid., p. 255.
Gold-bearded thunders and hierarchies of heaven
Roar from the earth: "Our Christ is arisen, He
comes to give a sign from the Dead."

The additional symbol of fire unites the Sun and the Spirit as
the ultimate source of the harvest of man in time and in eternity.
Death, therefore, as that of Christ's, can be conquered and can
bring forth a harvest.

The two concluding poems of this introductory Part I are
on the mythological level. In the first, "Eurydice," the problem
of death, the universal and human problem of death and the more
personal and immediate one in the war, is reiterated. The myth of
Eurydice, while offering no solution, at least points toward a
possible wisdom to be gained from the universal problem of death.

For as the Sun buries his hot days and rays
To ripen in earth, so the great rays of the heart
Are ripened to wisdom by Death, and great is our
forgiveness.

Love is not changed by Death,
And nothing is lost and all in the end is harvest.

The introduction of the additional myth of Adonis at the end of
the poem points to a life rising from death.

We are heavy with Death, as a woman is heavy with
child,
As the corn-husk holds its ripeness, the gold comb
Its weight of summer. . . . But as if a lump of
gold had changed to corn,

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So did my Life rise from my Death. I cast the
grandeur of Death away
And homeward came to the small things of Love.\(^9\)

(This same myth in the person of Dionysius is continued in the
book's final poem, "The Two Loves.") But the other voice here is
that of the golden woman, the earth mother and corn-goddess, the
symbol of harvest.

The concluding poem, therefore, in Part I points to the
necessity and possible union of the mythological and supernatural,
i.e., of Christ and His Spirit, the new Dionysius. The two voices
become one in the poetical voice of the author deeply rooted in the
earth and her personal experiences, but with her added faith. The
concluding line therefore is pregnant: "Ripeness" is possible
along with the "darkness" of earth.

**Part II**

Part II is principally negative and pessimistic in contrast
to Part III which will balance this part with a positive and op-
timistic view of man's condition.

The principal subject of this Part is introduced in the first
poem, "Still Falls the Rain": war with its consequent suffering and
death and its destruction of nearly all human values, especially
love and civilization. The suffering of the poor in the poverty
caused by the destruction of war and its greed is also here. Man's

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\(^9\)Ibid., p. 263.
grief and near-despair, including, of course, that of the poet's personal grief, also dominate most of this Part II of the book. As a poet Dame Edith expresses and communicates this grief, above all, in the symbols of the Waste Land effected in man by the war: the cold suffered by the poor and also the lack of love within man's heart; and the water of fertility now the rain of blood and the tears that she sheds over suffering man.

Of the twelve poems in this part only one can be termed completely hopeful. But this is a hope that can only be realized after the cessation of war. Such a hope, based on man's durability but above all on a Christ who also suffering with man, is introduced in the opening poem, "Still Falls the Rain," and reiterated later in "A Mother to Her Dead Child."

In spite of the rain of Christ's blood in the first poem,

Still falls the Rain—
Still falls the Blood from the Starved Man's wounded Side

"Still do I love, still shed my innocent light, my Blood, for thee."

the poems in this part plumb the depths of near-despair, if not despair itself. Beginning with the second poem, "Lullaby," and gradually sinking, with only some brief relief as in "Green Flows the River Lethe-O," the direction and feeling continues to the absolute zero of "The Song of the Cold" in the next to the last poem.

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Here we are at the center of the whole book, at the bottom of the hell man has created, with Dante in the Inferno.

These first two poems, therefore, and the following two, "Serenade: Any Man to Any Woman" and "Street Song," deal with the war and its destruction, above all, the destruction of man himself and human love. The symbol of fire introduced in Part I images both the war, with man's passions of selfishness and hatred (the destructive force of fire), and also the fire of love now grown cold but a love that still exists in Christ, the hope of its rekindling (the salvific force of fire).

The physical and spiritual suffering of war, especially in the poverty resulting from the war's destruction, and the increased greed of the rich, also dominate these first four poems and the later ones.

There is a pause, but no true relief, from this pessimistic theme in the fifth poem, "O Yet Forgive." The poet, and hopefully the reader, is forced back on himself and his guilt for the war and, above all, for his lack of love for the dead victims of this carnage.

0 yet forgive my heart in your long night!
I am too poor to be Death's self so I might lie
Upon your heart.11

The following poem; "Poor Young Simpleton," continues the

despairing theme of the loss of love because of the war but universalizes it as a human tragedy that occurs through all of human history.

"Once my love seemed the Burning Bush,
The Pentecost Rushing of Flames:
Now the Speech has fallen to the chatter of alleys
Where fallen man and the rising ape
And the howling Dark play games." 12

The following poem, "Song: Once my heart was a summer rose," does not so much universalize this same theme as personalize it in the poet's reflection of her own loss of love.

Once my heart was a summer rose
That cares not for right or wrong,
And the sun was another rose, that year,
They shone, the sun and the rose, my dear—
Over the long and the light summer land
All the bright summer long. 13

The poem contains, ironically, some relief, however, in the picture of a naive past when all seemed but a summer rose in a Feather Town that has now become the Lead Town of the loveless dead.

I passed a while in Feather Town—
(All the bright summer long)—
The idle wind puffed that town up
In air, then blew it down.

I walk alone now in Lead Town
(All in the summer gay . . .)
Where the steady people walk like the Dead—
And will not look my way. 14

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13 Edith Sitwell, "Song: Once my heart was a summer rose," Poems, p. 276.
14 Ibid., pp. 276-277.
"Green Flows the River Lethe-O" is the first true relief from the black picture of despair in the preceding poems and reverts to the note of hope in the opening poem, but without the latter's reference to Christ:

Green flows the river of Lethe-O
Long Lethe river
Where the fire was in the veins—and grass is growing
Over the fever—
The green grass growing. 15

The note of hope here in this poem, however, is based on a hope for the exhaustion of man's passions and blood-shedding.

I thought the way of the Blood would never tire.
But now only the red clover
Lies over the breath of the lion and the mouth of the lover. 16

It is a natural hope founded in the green grass of nature and spring recalling the mythology of Part I. It is significant that this mythology with its optimistic hopes plays only a small part here in these poems; but it will again reappear strongly in Part III. Perhaps man's myths, with so much of his civilization and culture, have also been crushed by war.

The following two poems, however, "A Mother to Her Dead Child" and "Tattered Serenade: Beggar to Shadow," continue the downward trend that is the general movement of Part II. Although there is

16 Ibid.
a brief note of hope in both of these poems, the principal themes, as seen in the titles, emphasize the suffering of war with its death and grief; such suffering is all the more poignant in the dead child and, in the second poem, the suffering of the beggar's poverty. The hope in the former poem is founded in Christ but not as explicitly and strongly as in "Still Falls the Rain." It is as if the series of meditations on the horror of the war has almost obliterated man's faith in Him. Here He is "the Sun of Reason" and not the suffering Christ of faith.

Yet one will return to the lost men,
Whose heart is the Sun of Reason, dispelling the shadow
That was born with no eyes to shed tears—bringing peace to the lust
And prurience of the Ape; from the human heart's sublimity
And tenderness teaching the dust that it is holy,
And to those who are hungry, are naked and cold as the Worm, who are bare as the spirit
In the last night when the rich and the poor are alone,
Bringing love like the daily bread, like the light at morning.

It is also, significantly, a hope that transcends this world and leaves man's present despair untouched. The hope of the beggar has no connection with Christ and seems more like a day-dream, man's perennial hope against hope.

While a universe grows in my head—
I have dreams, though I have not a bed—

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The thought of a world and a day
When all may be possible, still come my way,
As I walk the long roads of hot gold.
In the summer, when no one is cold.

There is no hope, however, in the central theme of "The Song of the Cold." This theme is "the ultimate cold within the heart of Man," which embraces both the rich and the poor, Dives and Lazarus. This symbol of the cold for man's physical and spiritual poverty has pervaded all the poems in Part II but now reaches the ultimate cold of zero.

Their huge Arithmetic is but the endless Repetition of Zero—the unlimited, Eternal.—Even the beat of the heart and the pulse is changed to this:
The counting of small deaths, the repetition Of nothing, endless positing and suppression of Nothing. So they live And die of inanition.

The poet, therefore, in these poems of Part II has sunk to the depth of despair in facing a world without love. "The Song of the Cold," however, does not conclude in this "eternal cold." The poet utters a prayer of hope springing from the fire of love that she has maintained within her:

I am a walking fire, I am all leaves—
I will cry to the Spring to give me the birds' and the serpents' speech

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That I may weep for those who die of the cold—
The ultimate cold within the heart of Man.

The source of this fire is the eternal Spring to which she turns again as in the "Invocation." There is no hint, however, of any hope in Christ as she returns to man's mythological beginnings and his hope in nature.

The final poem of Part II, after all the suffering of the preceding poems, is significantly entitled "Tears." Her tears are shed as she recalls man's former glories in the midst of the glories of nature. But all this has now changed for "darkened Man."

In spite of this the poet's optimism again reappears in the concluding lines with a hope of a future for man because of the indestructible fire of love in this "hard diamond."

And for darkened Man, that complex multiplicity Of air and water, plant and animal, Hard diamond, infinite sun.

Part III

In Part III, in contrast to Part II, not war and despair but hope and love predominate. Yet, there is still despair in several of the poems and this Part does not conclude with a solution and complete hope: such optimism is reserved for Part IV. Part III also contains several light, minor lyrics whose presence is curious

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20 Ibid., p. 289.

and unusual, and which pose a small problem to the study of this third section of the book.

This Part, however, does not begin with hope but with one of the fundamental problems posed by the poet and the problematic possibility of hope in this life. "Heart and Mind" places the problem within man himself and not in the war which was so dominant in Part II. The fundamental split in man between his heart and mind, between love and his knowledge of the truth, is seen as the destruction of both man's love and truth. Instead, because of this dichotomy, human love is hopeless and man's mind a "foolish wind." The poet's favorite "Lion" symbol reappears in this poem and points to the destructive side of man which leads to his own self-destruction. Dame Edith Sitwell offers no hope for man's needed self-unity until Time is finished:

> Remember only this of our hopeless love:
> That never till Time is done
> Will the fire of the heart and the fire of the mind be one.  

But this extra-temporal solution is not her final word as is seen in the remainder of these poems and, above all, in Part IV.

Beginning with "Green Song" the following songs rise with hope through the next six poems up to the height of "Holiday." The remaining poems, however, have a falling movement away from this hope—but not into the complete despair of Part II, with the

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one possible exception of "'O Bitter Love, O Death . . . '. " The concluding poem is ambiguous: there is hope but also the coldness of winter.

"Green Song" as the title indicates and as has been seen above in this study, is full of hope but one that faces despair and overcomes it.

But the youth of the world, the lovers, said,
'It is Spring!
And we who were black with the winter's shade, and old,
See the emeralds are awake upon the branches
And grasses; bird-blood leaps within our veins
And is changed to emeralds like the sap in the grasses. 23

Its hope in the rebirth of human love after winter is both natural and supernatural, founded on the mythology of Spring and the Creative Spirit of "Invocation":

And Love is the vernal equinox in the veins
When the sun crosses the marrow and pith of the heart
Among the viridian smells, the green rejoicing.
All names, sounds, faiths, delights, and duties lost
Return to the hearts of men, those households of high heaven. 24

The poem's conclusion, however, faces the problem of death without any solution except, again, a supernatural one after death.

Are we not all of the same substance,
Men, planets, and earth, born from the heart of darkness,


24 Ibid., p. 294.
Returning to darkness, the consoling mother,
For the short winter sleep—0 my calyx of the flower
of the world, you the spirit
Moving upon the waters, the light on the breast of
the dove. 25

This problem of death, in addition to the previous one of
man's dichotomous nature, is what man and the poet face and attempt
to solve in this Part III, but a hopeful solution is to be found
only in Part IV.

Death and love are the subjects of the following poem on
Anne Boleyn. Her victory over death through her abiding love in
the conclusion of the poem is hopeful:

When my gray glittering King—
Old amorous Death—grew acclimatized to my coldness:
His age sleeps on my breast,
My veins, like branches where the first peach-blossom
Trembles, bring the Spring's warmth to his grayness. 26

But just how this is to be achieved remains to be answered. The
partial answer in the strength of her love which conquers death is
moving and significant but finally incomplete.

The love in "A Young Girl" does not have a strength like
Anne's in spite of its note of hope.

Come back from the underworld, bringing light to
the lonely:
Till the people in islands of loneliness cry to the
other islands,

25 Ibid., pp. 294-295.
Forgetting the wars of men and of angels, the new Fall of Man.

In fact the relative weakness of this minor poem as also that of "The Flowering Forest," "Song: We are the darkness in the heat of the day," "You, the Young Rainbow," and "A Sylph's Song" all pose a problem in themselves and their position in the book itself. Although they all have love as their subject, the poems are too light and minor to contribute much to the development of the book's love theme: the love in them is usually romantic and even sentimental. (This is not to deny, as we saw in our study of the poems, that these poems do contain some striking imagery and some good lines.) The only possible reason, apart from the personal ones that Dame Edith might have had, could be to serve as moments of relief and relaxation in the midst of the serious poems that make up the bulk of this third Part.

In the next two major poems, "How Many Heavens . . ." and "Holiday," Part III reaches a climax, poetically and thematically. The first is deeply theological in its theme of the omnipresence of God as the Heart of Love.

'God is everything!

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

He is the sea of ripeness and the sweet apple's emerald lore.

So you, my flame of grass, my root of the world from which all Spring shall grow,

0 you, my hawthorn bough of the stars, now leaning low

Through the day, for your flowers to kiss my lips,
shall know
He is the core of the heart of love, and He,
beyond laboring seas, our ultimate shore. 28

Without such a presence and such a love, no hope would be possible.
With it, the foundation of the possibility of hope is laid.

The natural and human foundation of hope is the center of
the deeply humanistic "Holiday." But it is a humanism in and
through Christ. In His human and divine love the possibility of
the union of the opposing elements within man in his heart and
mind as well as among men, as between Dives and Lazarus, is envi-
ioned:

For now the unborn God in the human heart
Knows for a moment all sublimities. . . .
Old people at evening sitting in the doorways
See in a broken window of the slum
The Burning Bush reflected, and the crumb
For the starving bird is part of the broken Body
Of Christ Who forgives us—He with the bright Hair—
The Sun Whose Body was spilt on our fields to bring
us harvest.

These themes of this climactic poem will be developed and height-
ened in the final poem of the book, "The Two Loves."

The remaining poems in Part III, as we have said, fall away
from this summit of hope and are pessimistic, for the most part.
It is as if the poet could not as yet completely overcome the
temptations to despair, especially in the face of death. As a re-

sult, the final hope that is achieved in the book as a whole is not a facile or superficial one and, therefore, all the more realistic.

The central problem of death, therefore, dominates the next three poems—without any proffered solution. How can all the goodness and beauty in man's life on earth, which, presumably, is destroyed by death, be preserved? This perennial and seemingly insoluble problem will, perhaps, not be completely answered by Dame Edith Sitwell, even in Part IV, but she will, as is to be seen, cast some light into the darkness of this mystery.

The hopeful but only partial and incomplete answer in "Song: We are the darkness in the heat of the day" is not original. The dead in the poem sing of their trust that their joy and hope during life perdures among the living. All is not lost—they hope. True, we might reply, but for how long does such an influence remain after death? And what of these dead themselves?

There is not even this minimal hope in the following two poems, "The Youth with the Red-Gold Hair" and "Girl and Butterfly." The former with its elegy for a dead soldier and his love is reminiscent of the war poems of Part II and also of the despair which we saw there. Although there is beauty in the second poem, "Girl and Butterfly," some of it belongs only to the past, and that of the present is as fleeting as the butterfly; and all is turning to dust like the old man and old woman.
These are gone—
And the Gray Man that waits on the Road from
Nothing to Nowhere
Does not care how the breezes and butterflies
move their four wings—
And now the old woman who once was a world and
my earth,
Lies like time upon my heart, or a drift of the
gray dust.

But the young girl chases the yellow butterfly
Happiness . . . what is the dust that lies on
its wings? 30

Such momentary beauty keeps reappearing in life but more like a
vision than reality.

The poet herself now seems to speak out more personally on
the loss of love in "You, the Young Rainbow" and, above all, in
"The Poet Laments the Coming of Old Age." She is once more the
Old Woman of Part I. But here, there is not the hope of such
poems as "Invocation" and "Harvest." Here, in old age, Time has
conquered her childhood faith in the possibility of Goodness and
Love: her early belief in love now seems only the folly of a
youth destroyed by age and experience.

Though I bring
back sight to the blind,
My seed of Folly has gone, that could teach me to
bear
That the gold-sinewed body that had the blood of
all the earth in its veins
Has changed to an old rag of the outworn world
And the great heart that the first Morning made
Should wear, all Time's destruction for a dress. 31

31 Edith Sitwell, "The Poet Laments the Coming of Old Age,"
Poems, p. 310.
Within the thematic structure of the book, the poem points to her need, as a human being and as a poet, for some external basis for hope, such as Christ in the earlier poems of Part I.

This absence of any hope for man in his loneliness sinks to despair in the following poem, "'0 Bitter Love, O Death ...'." Death is the end of all, especially love:

O bitter love, O Death that came
To steal all that I own.

It is echoed in "'Lo, This Is She That Was the World's Desire'" in Venus' deterioration in old age.

So changed is she by Time's appalling night
That even her bone can no more stand upright
But leans as if it thirsted—for what spring?

But the image of Spring at the end hints at man's unconquerable hope even in the face of death.

O, might I feel again
The violence, the uproar of bursting buds, the wild-beast fire
Of spring in my veins—and know again the kiss
That holds all the spring redness and the rose that weeps in the blood—
O, might I know but this!

Enveloping this latter poem are the contrasting ones of

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32 Edith Sitwell, "'0 Bitter Love, O Death . . .'," Poems, p. 312.

33 Edith Sitwell, "'Lo, This Is She That Was the World's Desire'," Poems, p. 315.

34 Ibid., pp. 316-317.
"Most Lovely Shade" and the concluding "The Swans." Neither is a major poem but only light lyrics; their contribution to the thematic rhythm and their position at the end of Part III, however, are significant. The symbolism of the shade is vague, perhaps deliberately so, and the mere hint of death is sublimated in the beauty of the Dark and the cloud. It is a suggestive poem rich in imagery and is more optimistic than pessimistic.

The beauty of the final poem, "The Swans," is one of brightness and color in contrast to the "Most Lovely Shade." If the imagery is overdone, as this study suggested above, the poem still prevents the conclusion to Part III from being one of despair— even in the face of time and death. But the last lines still echo this strain of realism that has threaded the preceding poems.

But Time's winter falls
With snows as soft, as soundless . . . . Then who knows
Rose-footed swan from snow, or girl from rose?35

"Time's winter," i.e., death with its snows, at least temporarily, obscures human love as well as the swans.

Part IV

The Conclusion, Part IV, opens optimistically with "One Day in Spring" and its first line, "Gone is the winter's cold." This winter's cold of death is not, however, superficially transcended.

in the poem, but, as in Part III, is realistically confronted. But the love in the poem, at least that of the two young lovers, is strong enough to overcome the fear in this life of death's reality and its aftermath:

On that great holiday
There'll be no work, no fear for tomorrow's bread,
Nor will the nations rage—
And only Death will feel the sorrow of old age."

The seeming defeat of love by death is faced by the lovers with a hope that has no seeming foundation but love itself.

Though all the lovers of the world
Grow old, and fade, and die—
Yet how should you and I?
For the world was only made that we should love—
0 hair, 0 eyes, 0 lips that will never grow old.

The problem, therefore, remains: the problem of death.

The following poem, "A Song at Morning," is symbolic, mostly of hope. The doubts and fears of the whole book are here in the "darkness" but are defeated by love, symbolized by the rose. The blood of the war and the tears of life are, again, not neglected but are now seen as part of the rose and the love of life.

But morning came, and the great dews; then her philosophies
Of the heart's darkness died. And from the chrysalis
Of my thin sleep
That lay like light or dew upon my form
I rose and wrapped my wings about me, went
From that porphyrian darkness. Like the rose

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37 Ibid., p. 322.
I, too, was careless in the morning dews,
Seeing the dead and the dead hour return
To forgive the stain on our hands. 38

But, as before, how this is to be effected in reality is left un-
answered. The final solution and answer, at least as far as this
is possible in this life, even with faith, is reserved for the
climax and concluding poem: "The Two Loves."

The two loves of this final poem are the universal love,
which includes the human, and the divine love in Christ which has
become universal and human. It is the union of these two loves
in Him that offers and promises an answer, in faith, to the major
problems posed in the book, especially that of death.

The poem echoes the opening "Invocation" with its symbols
of Spring and Fire, as it poses realistically again the human prob-
lems of love in the face of death.

The dead woman black as thunder, upright in the
Spring's great shroud
Of flowers and lightnings, snows and sins and sor-
rows, cried like the loud
Noise of Spring that breaks in heart and bud
'Oh, should you pass--
Come not to this ground with your living lass:
For I have a light to see you by!
Is it the Burning Bush?
Is it Damnation Fire?
Or the old aching heart with its desire?
I only know I tried to bless
But felt that terrible fire burn to the bone--
Beneath Time's filthy dress." 39

The added chaos of a world as pictured in Part II in the midst of a world war also reappears, as does the suffering of the poor and the greed of the rich. The poem summarizes and culminates all these themes and problems along with the imagery of the preceding poems. The hope of rebirth, even in this life, like another Spring, that was prayed for and envisioned in spite of the surrounding despair, now becomes a reality in Christ.

I see Christ's wounds weep in the Rose on the wall. Then I who nursed in my earth the dark red seed of Fire—
The pomegranate grandeur, the dark seeds of Death, Felt them change to the light and fire in the heart of the rose.

It is the Christ of "Still Falls the Rain" with His wounds, sharing the sufferings of all mankind.

Not only human life and love but all creation is seen as subsumed and elevated in Christ to the perfection of His Eternal Life:
"the stem and root, . . . the flower, the plant of fire."

And of One who contracted His Immensity
And shut Himself in the scope of a small flower
Whose root is clasped in darkness . . . God in the span
Of the root and light-seeking corolla.

The ripeness of all in Him, even of sin and suffering, is seen, through faith, to be not only a possibility, as in the opening poems of the book, but as a reality now and in eternity after death.

40 Ibid., p. 326.
41 Ibid., p. 327.
The poet is filled with the inspiration of this new Fire, of human and divine love, that ensures both her hope and the hope of all men: Man is the "flower of the world" that will bloom in eternity, and his Heart will be enflamed by the perfect love in the Heart of Christ.
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The dissertation submitted by Ellen Misko, V.S.C., has been read and approved by members of the Department of English.

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

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

16 May 1972
Date

Signature of Advisor