

A STUDY OF MYSTICISM IN THE POETRY OF
EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of English
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Vassar Miller

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The purpose of this thesis is to determine the presence of mysticism in the poetry of Edwin Arlington Robinson, to examine the nature of this mysticism, to discover what influences led him to it, and to show how his work treats and reveals it.

This thesis defines mysticism as the effort of a soul to enjoy immediate communion with the object of religious faith, however this object be conceived. Theological and philosophical distinctions existing in mysticism do not change its essential nature as an experience. The same basic identity remains despite differences of method in realizing immediate communion, distinctions of terminology describing this communion, and varieties of temperaments among mystics.

The factors leading Robinson to mysticism are historical, intellectual, and temperamental. They are historical because of the deposit of mysticism in New England thought and life, culminating in Transcendentalism; intellectual, because of the similarity of mystical influences on both Emerson and Robinson; and temperamental, because of the mystical, rather than metaphysical, foundation of Robinson's idealism.

The most fruitful source for a study of Robinson's mysticism is his poetry. Recognizing his mysticism, his critics and biographers still lack a clear notion of the

subject. Even a letter to the present writer from Hermann Hagedorn, who knew Robinson well and who in his biography frequently mentions the poet's mysticism, shows a confusion of mysticism with religion in general.

Robinson's early poetry is strongly influenced by Oriental mysticism in that it deals with abstractions and implies a conception of impersonal Deity. "The Fan Against the Sky" defies materialism in the name of mystical affirmation. Captain Craig leaves the realm of abstractions to investigate the ways in which "the light," Robinson's favorite mystical symbol, transfigures a pauper's life. The Arthurian trilogy, particularly Merlin and Lancelot, studies men's various responses to the light, and Tristram emphasizes the victory over time. Roman Partholow and Matthias at the Door present applications of mysticism to modern society. Matthias also, together with "Lazarus" and "Nicodemus," shows the influence of the Fourth Gospel upon Robinson's mysticism. His mysticism culminates in The Fan Who Died Twice, wherein Fernando Nash by finding God in failure enacts Robinson's individual application of mysticism.

Robinson, unattached to any creed, yet confronted pessimism with mystical faith. As mysticism is the key to his conviction, so his poetry is the key to his mysticism.

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INTRODUCTION

EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON AND THE NATURE OF MISTICISM

Edwin Arlington Robinson considered his mission in the literary world that of a poet, and of a poet only. Unlike Shelley and Tennyson, he was not a self-styled prophet. He constantly decried efforts of readers and critics to find his philosophy in his poetry. Yet perhaps because of this very subordination of his ideas to his art, he may have unconsciously fused poetry and philosophy into a substance that will outlast the work of many would-be oracles. A man is not always his own best judge. Robinson's letter to a student requesting information for her thesis shows his modesty and implies his distaste for poetry with a message:

There is no "philosophy" in my poetry beyond an ordered universe and a sort of deterministic negation of the general futility that appears to be the basis of "rational" thought. So I suppose you will have to put me down as a mystic, if that means a man who cannot prove all his convictions to be true.¹

His letter also offers a key to his whole philosophy in the use of the word mystic. No doubt Robinson adopted the word casually for want of a better one, and certainly he did not define it accurately. Nevertheless, mysticism underlies his idealism, his faith in a divine purpose despite the materialism and naturalism of his contemporaries, and his conviction that tragedy contains the seed of triumph. A mystic light shafts the gloom of his darkest poems, and a

mystic faith exalts the lives of his most pathetic derelicts.

Various critics have sensed the mysticism in his poetry. Hagedorn, Robinson's biographer, calls him "the one conspicuous mystic in contemporary American poetry."² According to Cestre, the poet was "a mystic like Emerson."³ Dauner refers to Robinson's "mystical idealism"⁴ and Morris to his "mystic philosophy."⁵ But none of these writers have specialized in the study of mysticism, and some of them may not be aware of precisely what mysticism is. Hagedorn typifies the persons who think that if a man is not a materialist, he is a mystic.⁶ They would make mysticism synonymous with religion. As Pfliederer defines it:

Mysticism is the immediate feeling of the unity of the self with God; it is nothing, therefore, but the fundamental feeling of religion, the religious life at its very heart and centre. But what makes the mystical a special tendency inside religion is the endeavour to fix the immediateness of life in God as such, as abstracted from all intervening helps and channels whatever.⁷

Mysticism is an experience before it ever becomes a creed. It is the living water that the spirit drinks, although later the spirit may pour it into any one of the thousand cups of interpretation. Robinson was never able to find a cup to suit him, but he did believe that the water of life exists, and he at times even tasted it.

However, an understanding of the relationship of Robinson and his poetry to mysticism requires an understanding of mysticism both as an experience and as various inter-

pretations of this experience. The mystic is one who seeks to come into immediate contact with the object of his religious faith. To succeed in this effort is his first and essential interest. His conviction is "that men can experience, and live, and feel, and do much more than they can formulate, define, explain, or fully express."⁸ His is the religious hunger in its keenest pangs. The mystic does not want to know about God; he wants to know God. He is not a doubting Thomas; he is only an impatient one. The experiences of other souls do not satisfy him; he wants his own.

The mystic's effort to know reality for himself comes from his extraordinarily acute hunger, and his acute hunger results from his realization that reality in its essence can never be described, that it can only be confronted. If no one can describe color to a man born blind, the mystic reasons, no one can describe the infinite to the finite. "Wouldst thou be perfect, do not yelp about God,"⁹ instructs the blunt old German mystic, Meister Eckhart. The Chinese mystic, Laotse, is suaver but no less decisive; "He who knows does not speak; He who speaks does not know."¹⁰ As the only way to teach color to the blind is to cure his blindness, so the only way to teach the infinite to the finite is to free the finite of limitations. This liberation is the task of mysticism.

Precisely because the mystics have undertaken this task, they become involved in the contradiction of trying to describe the indescribable and to share the unsharable. Moreover, mystics have been of many different religions, times, and temperaments. These factors preclude mysticism from remaining exclusively an irrefutable experience, but cause it to be also the dependent of various religions and philosophies.

All mystics seek immediate communion with the object of religion, but from religion to religion and even from mystic to mystic within the same faith this object varies in conception. The Christian mystic usually speaks of God¹¹ or of Christ. Of the three most familiar philosophical systems of Hinduism, the Vedantist refers to the Brahman, the Supreme Atman, or the Self; the Bhagavata thinks of the personal god, Vishnu; and the Yogin seeks to realize the Atman, his own soul viewed, not as the empirical ego, but as the absolute self. The primitive Buddhist speaks neither of the gods, whose existence to him is irrelevant, nor of the Atman, which as personal ego he denies and as the universal Self he considers idle speculation--but only of Nirvana. The Taoist meditates upon the Tao, sometimes translated as the Law or the Way and frequently compared to the Word in the Fourth Gospel. The One of Neo-Platonism, the Absolute, Reality, and the Everlasting Now are other terms that various mystics use for the object of their longings.

The mystic, according to Otto, has not a conception of God different from that of the ordinary religious person, but a different God, a God without modes, a God without any attributes whatsoever. This doctrine of modeless deity belongs to "God-mysticism" as distinguished from "soul-mysticism,"¹² the mysticism that emphasizes the inconceivable might and majesty of the soul.

Although the supreme reality conceived as "the One . . . 'Before whom words recoil,'"¹³ is associated with Oriental mysticism, some Christian mystics have held the same view of the Divine. Dionysius the Areopagite rivals any of his Eastern brothers in describing the Godhead as indescribable:

It is neither soul, nor mind, nor has imagination, or opinion, or reason, or conception; neither is expressed, nor conceived; neither is number, nor order, nor greatness, nor littleness, nor equality, nor inequality; nor similarity, nor dissimilarity; neither is standing, nor moving; nor at rest; neither has power, nor is power, nor light; neither lives, nor is life; neither is essence nor eternity, nor time; neither is its touch intelligible, neither is it science, nor truth; nor kingdom, nor wisdom; neither one, nor oneness; neither Deity, nor Goodness; nor is it Spirit according to our understanding; . . . neither is there any definition at all of it, nor any abstraction.¹⁴

Nevertheless, this doctrine of the divine ineffability, which simply means that the supreme reality transcends all categories of thought however subtle and profound, that the truth is adulterated the moment it touches the tongue or enters the mind, is not the essence of mysticism. The

earmark of mysticism is the soul's insistence upon immediate contact with whatever it holds to be supreme in the universe. Thomas a' Kempis,¹⁵ who would have probably been shocked by Dionysius' mystical theology, was yet a mystic because he hungered to know God immediately, because, despite his meek submission to Scriptural and ecclesiastical authority, he implored, "Let therefore Moses not speak to me, nor none of the prophets; but speak thou rather, Lord God, inspirer and illuminer of the prophets; for thou alone without them mayest teach me perfectly."¹⁶ The entire Imitation breathes the yearning for union with Christ.

For Eastern mystics the religious object is characteristically super-rational and "wholly-other."¹⁷ Even so, two aspects of the Brahman, Nirguna Brahman and Saguna Brahman, appear in the Upanishads. Nirguna Brahman is the Brahman without attributes, the principle of all that exists, and of which the only description is "Not this, not this."¹⁸ Nirguna Brahman cannot be said to have any activity, creative or otherwise; yet as the life of all being and activity, "though sitting still, he walks far; though lying down, he goes everywhere."¹⁹ Saguna Brahman is the Brahman with attributes, the Brahman personified as Brahma the Creator, who to a certain degree can be described and who is the recipient of devotion: "He who worships the Self alone as dear, the object of his love will never perish."²⁰ Various attempts to harmonize these two aspects of the Brahman have given

rise to various schools of Hinduism.²¹ Developing the personal element, the Thavagad-Gita identifies Krishna²² with both phases of the Brahman; he is "the imperishable SELF, and also the lord of all beings."²³ The pantheism of the Upanishads mingles with the tenderness of the Imitation as Krishna assures his devotee, "He who sees Me in all and all in Me, from him I vanish not nor does he vanish from Me."²⁴

Nevertheless, the icy, if exhilarating, winds that blow through the Upanishads, the Yogin's effort to realize the mysterious power within himself, and the void of Nirvana in which the Buddhist would lose self-identity typify Oriental as opposed to Occidental mysticism. The soul longing for union with a personal God freezes amid the Himalayas of such abstractions.

As God, the Brahman, Nirvana, and countless other terms apply to that which the mystic desires, so the means of gaining this desire differ in name and conception. Sometimes the mystic seeks to perceive the unity of existence and finally to intuit that, all things being one, only the One exists. This vision of unity is typically Oriental. Christian mystics, however, such as Eckhart, have shared it: "In the eternal goodness of the divine nature . . . the essence of all creatures is seen as one."²⁵ Christian mystics more often describe the attainment of their goal as union with God, a gift of divine grace. Many Oriental mystics like-

wise speak of union, but as an eternal reality, which the soul need only realize. The extent of this union also varies. The Christian may lose all consciousness of his creaturely identity, but for all his audacious metaphors describing the closeness of his union with God, he never means that he actually becomes God. The Hindu does not feel guilty of blasphemy in claiming to become the Brahman; according to his pantheism he has never been anything else.

Since the Atman, the soul, is by nature part of the Divine, the Hindu mystic naturally turns inward to seek the Divine. Christian mystics with their doctrine of God's omnipresence arrive at the same introspection. "Since, then, I too exist, why do I seek that Thou shouldst enter into me, who wert not, wert Thou not in me?"²⁶ questions Augustine wrestling with the supreme paradox of mysticism. Regardless of metaphysics, mystics agree that what they seek is within themselves. For the mystic is an individualist and wishes no outside assistance. "As the Godhead is nameless, . . . the soul is also nameless,"²⁷ declares Eckhart issuing the mystic's declaration of independence. Thus, God-mysticism is also soul-mysticism, mysticism with the intuition of the ineffability of the soul.

Despite their divergence theologically and philosophically, psychologically the mystics agree in that they have varying names for their desire, but only one desire. And

the means by which they embrace the object of their desire are the same. The absorption into Nirvana surpasses all modes of consciousness.²⁸ Yet no less ineffable is the union with Christ to him who enjoys it: "It is truly the Beloved who visits thee. But He comes invisible, hidden, incomprehensible."²⁹ Dionysius strains language beyond endurance in saying what the Divine is not. Buddha proves himself the most logical of all mystics by refusing to say anything whatsoever concerning the ultimate.³⁰

Mysticism remains essentially the immediate experience of God. If men interpret this experience according to their lights, they also respond to it according to their temperaments. Mystics who stress the transcendent aspect of God tend to become ascetics. Because God transcends everyday life, they, too, would transcend it in order to find Him. Mystics who emphasize a divine incarnation³¹ moderate the contempt of the flesh. Or if they do not, their asceticism is, in the case of Christian mystics, an effort to imitate Christ's sufferings. Mysticism may be ascetic, but it need not be. According to the anonymous author of the Theologia Germanica, the two eyes of the soul, namely, "the power of seeing into eternity" and the power "of seeing into time and the creatures, . . . cannot perform their work at once."³² Boehme, the Protestant mystic, declares that it is possible "to have both the eye of time and eternity at once open together."³³ More often a mystic takes both attitudes.

"Pass over every creature,"³⁴ a'Kempis exhorts, but says elsewhere, "If thine heart were right, then every creature should be to thee a mirror of life and a book of holy doctrine."³⁵

Numerous other shades of temperament may color mysticism. Sankara, the Hindu mystic, is cool and speculative. The Persian Sufis bathe their mysticism in an erotic glow. Some Christian mystics use the passionate imagery of The Song of Songs to express their yearnings for the Divine Lover, but are more restrained than the Sufis. Augustine is impetuous and fiery. George Fox, for all his visions and tribulations, is practical and cheerful. Plotinus attains mystical ecstasy only four times. Brother Lawrence maintains a calm but intense awareness of God's presence even amid the clatter of the monastery kitchen. Many Oriental and some Christian mystics appear unethical in their extreme withdrawal from the active life. Perhaps such souls confuse mysticism with the whole of religion, which among other elements includes service to mankind. However, Tagore, the modern Indian poet and mystic, fears to lose the many in the One as keenly as he fears to lose the One in the many. Eckhart, who dangerously skirts quietism, a form of mysticism that emphasizes extinction of the will, says that rather than remain in the loftiest rapture while a sick man awaits help "it would be far better to come out of the rapture and show love by serv-

ing the ready one."³⁶ For mystics like the Quaker John Woolman not only charitable deeds, but reforms as well, should be the direct result of personal communications from God.

Mystics are not always rigid adherents of orthodoxy. Buddha broke from Hinduism. Pious Mohammedans severely persecuted their mystics, the Sufis. Catholic writers rarely mention Eckhart except to condemn him. The heresies that sprang up on the eve of the Reformation had strong elements of mysticism. A Lutheran minister, whose orthodoxy Boehme had outraged, drove the gentle shoemaker from Goerlitz. For a long time the Quakers suffered at the hands of official Protestantism because they equated the authority of the "Inner Light" with that of the Bible. And Blake, the English poet, was a mystic who claimed membership in no church.

Therefore, personality traits and environments are merely accidents that modify the surface of mysticism, but do not change its core. Nor does any background of temperament, except an absolute literalism, prevent a person from being a mystic, although some types of personalities find mysticism more congenial than do others. Poets are particularly susceptible to mysticism, and many mystics have been poets. Bremond's thesis is that the poet shares the mystic's experience. But whereas the nature of the poetic experience is to be communicable, the mystical experience is incommunicable. The

poet steps to the brink of mystical experience, but draws back while he can still reveal his glimpses of the truth; the mystic steps over the brink and loses himself in that of which no man can speak. Thus, although the poetic process is mystical, regardless of the content of the poetry, the poet remains only a mystique manque, a frustrated mystic.³⁷

However, there is a less debatable sense in which poetry is akin to mysticism. Most mystics feel impelled to disclose to other persons some snatches of what they themselves have enjoyed. From this impulse come such paradoxical expressions as "to know by unknowing," "to find oneself by losing oneself," "luminous darkness," and "being beyond being." Poetry at once tempers and heightens the effect of such paradoxes. "Elected Silence, sing to me,"³⁸ Hopkins prays in the role of conscious poet. Eckhart is notable among the mystics for the spontaneous poetry of his expressions: "Up then, noble soul, put on thy jumping shoes."³⁹ As mystics are often unconscious poets, so poets, even when they are not mystics, are more often unconscious mystics, or at least they are drawn to mystical moods. Byron, the last poet to be suspected of devout contemplation, writes:

Then stirs the feeling infinite, so felt
In solitude where we are least alone;
A truth, which through our being then doth melt
And purifies [sic] from self.⁴⁰

Mystical elements in varying degrees are found in the poetry

of Herbert, Traherne, Crawshaw, Wordsworth, Shelley, Tennyson, and Browning. These poets are only the most famous and obvious examples. The reader can select almost at random books of contemporary poetry and find mystical passages, such as "Infinite Passion--"⁴¹ by Benet and "The Great Wind"⁴² by Mary Webb. If Blake is unique in being famous both as poet and as mystic, the reason is that mysticism and poetry each demand whole-souled service. Some individuals can serve both callings at once, but usually one of the two will be master.

Although Edwin Arlington Robinson was first a poet, the mysticism in him claimed an important share of his personality. For him mysticism was neither an occasional predilection nor a fancy summoned to befriend a romantic mood. It was an integral part of his being and his poetry. Moreover, as mysticism is that art of knowing what cannot be known, so Robinson, stating more than a half truth, once defined poetry as "a language that tells us . . . something that cannot be said."⁴³

CHAPTER I

THE INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND OF EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON

Mysticism, whatever else it may be, is never an inheritance. "Mysticism has no genealogy."¹ Nevertheless, certain periods of history, such as the time of the late Roman Empire and of fourteenth-century Europe, witness revivals of mysticism. And when lonely mystics, such as Blake, are born into an age whence the fruits of the spirit have departed and left only shells behind, these hungry souls search the past to find comradeship.

Edwin Arlington Robinson lived in such a season of dryness, in a time when materialism, mechanism, and naturalism sought to discredit the vision of the spirit. Therefore, without retreating from the doubts and dilemmas of his age, Robinson listened to voices older than those of his contemporaries. He abandoned what he regarded as the popular version of Christianity, but the materialism that he adopted during adolescence failed to satisfy him. His temperament demanded something more. Three sources pointed to the fulfillment of this demand: New England mysticism, Greek mysticism, and Oriental mysticism.

Robinson was the son of Puritan New England, an environment at once hostile and friendly to mystics. It was hostile because too often Puritanism is synonymous with Cal-

vinism--a system autocratic, authoritarian, and suspicious of human nature. When the Quakers came preaching the Inner Light and Anne Hutchinson came declaring the inner law, the Massachusetts fathers drove them out in the name of Scripture and Theocracy. The letter of the Bible was the sole authority, they decreed, and man was too corrupt to obey even that authority. To teach any form of intuition was to teach blasphemy.

Yet Calvinism is not the whole of Puritanism. Puritanism is also the spirit of independence in the face of religious despotism. It produces not only tyrants like John Winthrop and Cotton Mather; it produces rebels like Anne Hutchinson and Roger Williams.

Of Roger Williams, Parrington writes, "As a transcendental mystic he was a forerunner of Emerson and the Concord School, discovering an indwelling God of love in a world of material things."² Some of his writings express yearning for union with Christ in the imagery of the Song of Songs. "But when he went out into the broad ways of Carolinian England, seeking the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valley, he discovered only abominations."³ Men were not ready for this Seeker-mystic, who wanted to give them the untrammelled liberty of discovering God's will for themselves.

If Williams was a disappointed mystic, Jonathan Ed-

wards was a self-thwarted one. Riley calls Edwards a mystic "because of his wonderful sense of the divine presence and agency,"⁴ and the "Personal Narrative" records a mystic's contemplations, illuminations, and yearnings for Christ. Before the conversion that the "Personal Narrative" describes, the youthful Edwards, developing some of the implications of Locke's Essay on the Human Understanding, had arrived independently of Berkeley at a Berkeleian idealism.⁵ The Reality behind phenomena is none other than God. Throughout the life of the New England divine this idealism lurked in his mind, even when smothered by the cruder portions of Calvinism, but Riley views the theologian's metaphysics as only the afterthought of his mysticism.⁶

Yet his theology crushed his mysticism. Faced by rebellion against Calvinism, "the mystic and idealist was aroused to protest against a theology that conceived of religion as benevolence towards men rather than in union with God."⁷ Thus he defeated his deepest spiritual urges by defending them against the onslaught of what he considered mere worldliness. Upholding the God of wrath, he neglected, against his will, the God of love for whom he longed. He, like Williams, desired to sing the Song of Songs, but he yielded to Calvinism and preached Hell-fire. The final fruit of his miscarried and crippled mysticism, once the inspiration of a profound philosophy, ripened into a defense of the morbid

emotionalism of the "Great Awakening."

Calvinism made its last stand in Edwards' day, and Unitarianism became the next faith of New England intellectuals. In some respects Unitarianism was no more congenial to the mystic temper than Calvinism. Calvinism had used Scripture as a bed of Procrustes for the mystical vision, and now Unitarianism was using rationalism for the same purpose. The emphasis upon ethics and the understanding was a normal and healthy reaction to the morbid fervors of the "Great Awakening," but too often Unitarianism froze into the religion of respectability. But in the beginning it was not so. William Ellery Channing was a man of mystical temperament, and as he lay dying confessed, "I have received many messages from the Spirit."⁸ He exalted calmness and the understanding, but his religion was not mere rationalism. He taught that man could find God in everyday duties, but he did not teach a dull morality. "The soul was made for God,"⁹ he wrote:

It has a capacity of more than human love, a principle or power of adoration, which cannot bound itself to finite natures, which carries up the thoughts above the visible universe, and which, in approaching God, rises into a solemn transport, a mingled awe and joy, prophetic of a higher life; and a brighter signature of our end and happiness cannot be conceived.¹⁰

Man's nature is godlike and so can intuit divine truth. But Channing recognized the direction Unitarianism was taking and lamented that "Unitarianism has suffered from union with a

heart-withering philosophy."¹¹ To his desire for a heart-quickening philosophy Transcendentalism was the answer.

With the Transcendentalists mysticism came into its own in New England. Roger Williams' mysticism had been condemned. Edwards' had been stunted. Channing's had been cautious. But Transcendentalism was in its essence mysticism full-blown. Moreover, only Emerson and the Transcendentalists make Robinson's place in the line of New England apparent. For the Transcendentalists shook off the same orthodoxies that Robinson refused. He would have found the mysticism of Williams and Edwards too like the popular version of Christianity that repelled him. The Unitarian viewpoint to which he leaned had absorbed the glow of Channing's personality into its own colorless orthodoxy. But Emerson's idealism deepening into mysticism revealed to Robinson the way from the materialistic slough.

Robinson's relationship to the Transcendentalists Morris traces in some detail. The poet, he states, shared their belief that "all human beings are part of one infinite life, and that the ends of the Absolute are best served through the cultivation by each individual of his special aptitudes."¹² Dauner calls Robinson "the last of the Transcendentalists, in his mystical insistence upon 'revelation' (the Light), and its correlative demand for a moral individualism."¹³ Robinson himself, always label-shy, admitted, "I

am more of a Transcendentalist than many of my friends are willing to believe."¹⁴

But the convincing testimony lies in the comparison of the writings of the Transcendentalists, especially of Emerson, who led and surpassed the group, and Robinson's views. Some of the major influences upon Transcendentalism, such as Plato, Oriental wisdom, and Carlyle, Robinson knew either directly or indirectly. Other influences, such as Neo-Platonism, Kant's doctrine of intuition, and Jacobi's insistence upon feeling and conviction as valid means of knowing the noumenal world, were philosophies that Robinson would have found congenial.

Transcendentalism teaches that the soul is one with God, who is sometimes represented as personal, sometimes as impersonal, and that it receives truth immediately from God. God and the soul are the supreme realities, and in comparison all other things are unreal. "Within man is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal ONE,"¹⁵ declared Emerson in "The Over-Soul," echoing Plotinus and the Pharavad-Gita. And "the Transcendentalist . . . believes in inspiration and in ecstasy,"¹⁶ he wrote in "The Transcendentalist." He admired Plato, who could adore with Asia "the Ineffable" and "the Illimitable," and still affirm "'Yet things are knowable!' They are knowable, because being one,

things correspond."¹⁷

"The Over-Soul," the most mystical of Emerson's Essays, greatly impressed Robinson. In 1897 he urged Harry de Forest Smith:

I have just read Emerson on "The Over-Soul." If you do not know it, for heaven's sake, get hold of it. In this I seem to find all that he was trying to bring out in the eminently unsatisfactory essay on "Compensation"--which is no more a measure of Emerson's genius than a cloudy dawn is of daylight.¹⁸

The theme of "Compensation" is that rewards and punishments, instead of being deferred to some far-off judgment day, exist here and now by reason of the "soul" present in all things. "The Over-Soul" elaborates upon the nature of this presence. As a quotation from this essay has revealed, Emerson maintained the pantheistic mysticism of Hinduism. Like all mystics he believed that "we lie open on one side to the deeps of spiritual nature, to the attributes of God."¹⁹ And "before the revelations of the soul, Time, Space, and Nature shrink away."²⁰

"Ineffable is the union of God and man in every act of the soul. The simplest soul who in his integrity worships God becomes God,"²¹ he declares with the audacity of an Eckhart. The revelations to the soul are likewise ineffable: "They do not answer the questions which the understanding asks."²² But for all his other-worldly mysticism, Emerson was no ascetic mystic. He had read the Bhagavad-Gita, which because of its insistence on both action and contemplation appealed to his

Puritan practicality. "In these communications the power to see is not abstracted from the will to do, but the insight proceeds from obedience, and the obedience proceeds from a joyful perception."²³

Many echoes of "The Over-soul" appear in Robinson's poetry. They are the most distinct in the Octaves and in Captain Craig's ecstatic utterances, but the mysticism that is the heart of Transcendentalism remains strong throughout Robinson's work. Robinson could never share the unwearied joy of the Concord Sage because the bitterness of life subdued him. He shared the vision of Emerson, but he also shared the vision of Hardy. The two visions fused into one and gave Robinson to the world. As Launer says, "Ultimately in his mysticism, Robinson parts company with Hardy; but in their mutual confronting of 'life with the sad, scarred face,' the two are eminently compatible."²⁴ Fetsky states the same truth from a different angle,

Robinson . . . is supported by a transcendental faith in the movement of ideal life. Even though the moments of quiet, unalloyed, deep joy which derive from the ideal are infrequent, fitful, glimmering, as they usually are in Robinson's verse, they are worth all the rest.²⁵

Because these brief moments were "worth all the rest" to Robinson, he found Emerson a kindred spirit instead of a deluded dreamer, and found, upon becoming directly familiar with some of Emerson's sources, the same inspiration that Emerson had discovered. Even as Plato's mysticism and ideal-

ism had appealed to Emerson, so they appealed to Robinson. The same elements in Oriental philosophy inspired both men. The same idealism that Emerson shared with his contemporary, Carlyle, impressed Robinson. All these inspirations the poet mentions in the letter from which his comments have been quoted:

J. [Jones] and I are reading up on Oriental religions . . . I have been interested to find out that Christianity is in reality nothing more than Buddhism humanized; and that Nirvana and Heaven are from the idealist's point of view--which to me is the only point of view--pretty much the same thing. . . . If you ever take the trouble to look into these matters (and you must before you ever make anything out of Plato) I am sure that you will come around,--not to my way of thinking, but to my way--or if you prefer it, T. Carlyle's--way of looking at things.²⁶

To Robinson the appeal of idealism lay, not in its metaphysics--for he espoused no technical philosophy any more than he embraced a religious orthodoxy--but in its affinities to mysticism. Every idealist is not a mystic, but every mystic is, avowedly or not, an idealist. For to the mystic God is the supreme reality, compared to which all other things have either subordinate reality or no reality at all. The doctrine of Plato is that objects have reality only as they approximate their patterns, the Ideas. Although he arrived at his idealism by dialectics, his doctrine also stemmed from the mystical impulse. According to his Phaedo, "All experience shows that if we would have pure knowledge of anything we must be quit of the body, and the soul in herself must behold all things in themselves."²⁷ "And what is that which is termed

death, but this very release and separation of the soul from the body?"²⁸ Russell says of the passage containing these excerpts, "All this language is mystical."²⁹ Whether Plato means "death" in the mystical sense of ecstasy, his Symposium does teach that the soul in this life may learn to contemplate "the true beauty--the divine beauty"³⁰ by a gradual and ascending process of abstraction:

The true order of going or being led by another to the things of love, is to use the beauties of earth as steps along which he mounts upwards for the sake of that other beauty, going from one to two, and from two to all fair forms, and from fair forms to fair actions, and from fair actions to fair notions, until from fair notions he arrives at the notion of absolute beauty and at last knows what the essence of beauty is.³¹

To behold this beauty of beauties is "to become the friend of God and immortal, if mortal man may."³²

Finally, according to Inge, the modern Platonist, "It is Plato the religious mystic, not the creator of political utopias, who has inspired us, and exercised an influence second only to that of the Founder of Christianity."³³ It was Plato, the mystic-idealist, who inspired Robinson. This same idealism and mysticism drew the poet to "T. Carlyle's way--of looking at things." Sartor Resartus defines man as "A Soul, a Spirit, and divine Apparition."³⁴ Are not "souls rendered visible in Bodies, that took shape and will lose it, melting into air? Their solid pavement is a picture of the Sense; they walk on the bosom of Nothing."³⁵ Carlyle calls attention to "the high Platonic Mysticism of our Author,"³⁶

that is, of Himself, as revealed by passages like the following:

Man . . . feels; power has been given to him to know, to believe; nay, does not the spirit of Love, free in its celestial primeval brightness even here, though but for moments, look through? Well said Saint Chrysostom, with his lips of gold, "the true STURKINAH is Man!" where else is GOD'S-PRESENCE manifested . . . as in our fellow-man?³⁷

Idealism is likewise the philosophy of the third source Robinson mentions, Buddhism and Oriental religions in general. According to Hindu scriptures, notably the Upanishads and the Bhagavad-Gita, nothing really exists but the impersonal divine essence, variously called the Brahman, the Atman, or the Self. All things are lost within It as the rivers are lost within the sea, and It pervades all things as the taste of salt pervades water. This doctrine is idealism become pantheism and pantheism deepened into mysticism: "The Self smaller than small, greater than great, is hidden in the heart of the creature. A man who has left all grief behind, sees the majesty, the Lord, the passionless, by the grace of the creator."³⁸

Buddhism, to which Robinson specifically refers, developed an idealistic philosophy suggestive of Berkeley's. Like Hinduism, Buddhism teaches that all phenomena in themselves are Maya--illusion. In reality they "all intrinsically belong to the pure, perfect Essential Mind of the wonderful, enlightening Supreme Bodhi,"³⁹ Bodhi meaning wisdom. Moreover two stages on Buddha's Eightfold Path or Way to Nirvana,

"right view" and "right contemplation"⁴⁰ consist in distinguishing between the passing and the permanent and between the unreal and the real.⁴¹

The books that Robinson read with Jones are unknown, but much of his poetry breathes the spirit of the Oriental scriptures. Yet books were not the only cause of his interest in Oriental wisdom. George Burnham, whom Robinson met at Harvard, had, like the poet, broken away from traditional Christianity, but had regained his bearings in Oriental philosophy. He freed Robinson from the last vestiges of orthodoxy. "The tap-root of the subconscious goes down to God," Burnham would say, "There is only one self. That we call God, or the Absolute. Everything is the manifestation of that Absolute."⁴² Even after the Harvard days, when Robinson first went to New York, "Night after night" the two old friends "discussed the Absolute over glasses of beer."⁴³ Without accepting his phraseology, Robinson absorbed Burnham's thought in his own independent way.

The influence of Jones, a Christian Scientist about whom nothing is known except his surname, was ultimately more important in Robinson's life than that of Burnham.

Jones gave him a copy of Mary Baker Eddy's Science and Health, of which the poet said, "a remarkable book, . . . but I cannot accept it in detail."⁴⁴ This book with its denial of matter confirmed him in idealism, which "line of thought took

hold of me in Harvard, but my meeting with Jones was the first thing that set it going."⁴⁵ He did not believe in Christian Science as "anything apart from the spiritual wisdom that is latent in us all: but I do believe in idealism as the one logical and satisfactory interpretation of life."⁴⁶ The idealism that Robinson found in Christian Science he discovered to be the common basis of Buddhism and Christianity. Idealism was the bridge over which he crossed from his former disgust with Christianity to a new understanding of his fathers' faith.

Jones helped him to view the New Testament in a different light. Various letters from Robinson to Smith comment merely upon the literary value of this book and his enjoyment of it, but a letter of 1897 records, "I have not read much of anything lately except the gospel according to Saint John, which I found an entirely different thing from what I used to find it. The popular misinterpretation of Christianity makes me sick."⁴⁷ What his new conception grew to be is evident in his three poems inspired by this Gospel -- "Lazarus," "Nicodemus," and Matthias at the Door. The most immediate response to St. John rediscovered was "Calvary," the sonnet ending "Tell me, O Lord--tell me, O Lord, how long/Are we to keep Christ writhing on the cross!"⁴⁸ He was convinced that the petty squabbings and the crassness that he had witnessed in the churches had done Christ an injustice. Thereafter his

position changed from a defense of poetry and the spiritual life to an attack upon their enemy, materialism.

Christianity came to mean for Robinson "a logical notion of human life."⁴⁹ His acceptance of Christianity was gradual and lifelong and never crystalized into a creed. A letter of 1933 emphasizes this fact and even seemingly contradicts this statement:

The Christian theology has so thoroughly crumpled that I do not know of any non-Roman acquaintance to whom it means anything. . . . The Christian ethics might have done some good, if they had ever been tried, or understood, but I'm afraid it's too late now. There's a non-theological religion on the way, probably to be revealed by science.⁵⁰

Yet the preceding year "Nicodemus" had appeared. His last two poems, Amaranth and Ring Jasper, while comparatively unimportant to the present study, still reflect a Christian attitude. Certainly the poet's faith in science does not mean a renunciation of mysticism, as a letter to the same friend explains, "As for the religion of the future, I didn't say that it wouldn't be mystical. Of course it must be that to be religion."⁵¹

Perhaps the poet predicting a religion "revealed by science" had in mind something similar to Lin Yutang's comment: "Any branch of knowledge, whether it be the study of rocks and minerals, or the study of cosmic rays, strikes mysticism as soon as it reaches any depth. Witness Dr. Alexis Carrel and A. S. Eddington."⁵² Or perhaps Robinson's

faith in science was merely the mystic's confidence that the vision of the spirit will yet be justified before men. For although Amaranth concerns men who mistake their vocation and King Jasper is a political allegory, neither poem lacks the mystical ideas prevalent in Robinson's other work.

Robinson's conviction that science would introduce a new religion and his faith in idealism as the one true picture of life have roots deeper than his reading or his reasoning. No man is explained primarily by outward influences; he is explained by inward qualities and tendencies that react to these influences. Therefore, the next step in the examination of Robinson's mysticism is a study of the man himself.

CHAPTER II

EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON AS A MYSTIC

To study the character and personality of Edwin Arlington Robinson in relation to mysticism is no easy task. Nor is it one which he would have encouraged or welcomed. Nevertheless, the attempt of such a study is essential. Mysticism grows from experience rather than from philosophy; it is a way of life and not a theory about life. Therefore, the external influences upon a man give but a half knowledge, which only an understanding of the man himself can complete.

The facts concerning Robinson's life are not extraordinary. His parents were "deeply of New England."¹ Their Puritan ancestors had been devoted to hard work and theology, generous and charitable towards the needy, but stern and formidable with the erring, suspicious of emotion and enthusiasm, yet wryly humorous with a humor "like their own chipmunks, elusive and abrupt."² A touch of poetry had also enlivened their high seriousness, for Robinson's mother was descended from a sister of Anne Bradstreet. This touch of poetry was to become genius in Robinson, and all that was noble, aspiring, and daring in this sturdy people was to find fruition in him:

Out of them--their blood, their daring, their industry, their thinking, their disciplined passion--came the vital essence of a life, fed by them, and enriched

by unrecordable legacies, In painful hours, their philosophy had assured them that no sparrow fell, except by the will of God. Destiny . . . and, through the clouds, the Light. A thousand births and deaths to shape at last a birth that might escape the common end. The eternal legend of mankind, remaining incredible even in the moment of fulfillment.³

Robinson, born in Head Tide, Maine, in 1869, had not been joyfully anticipated. Nor did he redeem the misfortune of his arrival by not being a girl, and by almost costing his mother's life. Six months passed before the baby received a name. The following year his family moved to Gardiner, Maine, "Tilbury Town," which was to give Robinson so much inspiration and heartache. Gardiner was "New England incarnate, eight generations of her, kindly, proud, shrewd, moralistic, censorious, uneasy under the divine eye."⁴

Robinson's childhood was by outward appearances not unhappy. Although he was none too good at games, he could walk a fence as well as any of his playmates who, accordingly, accepted him as an equal. The ripe age of five found him delighting in reading and reciting poetry much to his family's amusement. His mother and practically every one else in Maine engaged in the then current fashion of quoting, writing and copying verses. However, if his dreaminess did not annoy his parents, it did annoy his teachers, one of whom struck the eleven-year old boy under the ear as punishment for the trait and caused permanent damage.

Young Robinson felt vaguely like an outsider. Even

as a small child he would rock himself in a chair, whose size swallowed him, and wonder why he had ever been born. His young mind also interpreted the Biblical words, "Suffer little children," as an injunction to endure. His brother, Dean, a medical student, became his idol, whom he felt he could never equal in brilliance, and whose medical books terrified him with their description of diseases. Herman, Edwin's other brother, gave blustering promise of being what parents and Gardiner called a "success," such as Edwin could never be.

His parents loved him, and had his mother not delegated the rearing of the boys to her husband, she could have understood Edwin. She, like her youngest son, was gentle, quiet, and exquisitely sensitive. A Congregationalist, she was deeply and unostentatiously religious, whereas his father was content to be kind and just towards his fellow men. Hence, young Robinson's religious life was never a matter of serious concern. He was likelier to be influenced by the atmosphere at the Swantons', whose

happy household had its effect on his spiritual development. Mrs. Swanton was a Swedenborgian, a vigorous Mary-Martha who was bringing up her turbulent sons on a pittance, . . . but giving them and their friends a sense of a vital Presence.⁵

High school was a happy interval. Here Robinson found that he could translate and write poetry, and here he was chosen class poet. During this time he also discovered

an appreciative literary critic and audience in Dr. Alanson Tucker Schumann, a homeopath, whose delight was sonnets and intricate French forms. His three school friends, Ed Moore, Harry de Forest Smith, and Arthur R. Gledhill, met his need for sympathetic companionship.

But his friends left for college and jobs, and Robinson, not knowing what else to do, took a postgraduate course in high school. His studies and his letters to and from his friends were his solace amid his troubles at home. The brother who had won his boyish admiration had become a narcotic-addict, a mental and physical wreck. The father, who now could hardly walk, was slowly dying. The old man had conceived an interest in spiritualism, and Robinson assisted him in experiments with levitation. Robinson, in whom spiritualism awoke a dispassionate interest, passed a cemetery during this period, and, noting a strange excitement in his horse, wondered whether animals could see things invisible to human eyes.

Such incidents could not but affect the maturing youth. His essential soundness and sense of humor protected him from morbidity; yet the emotions common to adolescence combined with his agonized sensitivity to the tragedy around him shook Robinson. He was stirred by "troubled speculations on life and death; a restless mysticism, assured even in its questionings; and a psychic sensitivity that, he suspected, might

develop any instant into psychic experience."⁶

The following year, 1891, his father, disillusioned about higher education by Dean's pathetic failure, gave Robinson grudging consent to attend Harvard. Although enrolling as a special student made the young poet feel set apart, and although the Boston physicians caused him more dread than relief for his serious mastoid trouble, college opened for Robinson a new life. He met Howry Saben, whose education as a child prodigy had almost killed him and whose defiant plunge into paganism had apparently saved him. Another friend that Robinson made was the crippled George Burnham, who influenced him towards mysticism.⁷ Robinson, Saben, Burnham, and several other congenial men formed the Corn Cob Club, in which they discussed literature and philosophy. Paganism, Roman Catholicism, Swedenborgianism, and Ingersoll's iconoclasm, all found representation in the debates. Robinson was, for the most part, a silent listener; religious arguments confused him. He had no creed to defend, but was convinced that a man must be religious or be an animal, "and that it were better for a man to swallow all the camels of orthodoxy than to have no religion at all."⁸ Having no systematic philosophy, he yet "admitted a mystic element in his thinking, though he would not defend or even formulate it. 'I can't argue,' he would say, but Saben was conscious of an underlying conviction as firm as Plymouth

Rock."⁹

His father's last illness and death interrupted Robinson's college career. The old man's interest in spiritualism had increased and so apparently had the success of his experiments. The weird events that occurred, or seemed to occur, unnerved Robinson, "cutting my universe," as he said later of a levitating table, "clean in half."¹⁰

Robinson had yet another year of college and once again left wistful for the pleasant times that he should have no more and disappointed because of his failure to win literary recognition at Harvard--to care for the shattered Dean and their failing mother. His other brother, approaching financial ruin, had turned to drink. Both Dean and Herman were fated to die early as complete failures. Robinson not only felt himself a failure in the eyes of his townsmen, to whom success meant a job and a wife, but he was suffering intensely with his ear. He feared lest at any time his disease might bring death or insanity. "You see," he wrote wistfully, uttering one of his rare complaints, "my life hasn't been such a pleasant affair as some men's seems to be."¹¹

This was the time when he met Jones, whose Christian Science was an added stimulus to Robinson's idealism.¹² The poet worked hard at his craft and sent poems to every reputable periodical in the country. For his forebodings of early death and his sense of failure could neither melt him into self-

pity nor rob him of faith in himself: "I shall never be a Prominent Citizen and I thank God for it, but I shall be something just as good perhaps and possibly a little more permanent."¹³ Discussions of books and ideas with a gathering of boyhood friends provided his recreation. Finding that one of the group was a materialist, Robinson, armed with Thomas Carlyle, whom he had discovered in college, sought earnestly and successfully to convert him to idealism. "'Idealize yourself!' he would exclaim. 'Take your mind off the material and focus it on the real existence.'"¹⁴

Robinson needed his own counsel to brighten those dark days; for in 1896 his mother's death plunged him into utter misery. The fact that his first book of poems, the privately printed Torrent and the Night Before, appeared less than a week after her death added to his sorrow. She who had always worried about the future of her youngest son and for whom he had intended the volume as a surprise would never share his pleasure, now became bitterness. Two weeks after her death he wrote Smith, "She has gone on ahead and I am glad for her. You see I look on death as an advancement . . . , and I am very glad to stand up and say that I am an idealist."¹⁵

Three months later in 1897 Robinson wrote Smith another letter whose contents show that the poet's idealism was inspired by something more than Carlyle's Sartor Resartus.

"How long do you think a man can live in hell,"¹⁶ demands the letter singularly unreticent for Robinson; "I think he can live there a good many years--a hundred, perhaps, if his bowels keep in decent order--" Robinson continues, maintaining his dry humor; "But he isn't going to have a very good time--of the right sort, at any rate--until he understands things." And how can a man understand things "in an age like this when the whole trend of thought is in the wrong direction--not only that, but proud of the way it is taking?" The age, material progress, even hell are all right, admits the poet. "But they are damned uninteresting to one who can get a glimpse of the real light through the clouds of time." Except for this glimpse, he continues, suicide would be his only solution, had he courage to follow this way out. However, he prays for another kind of courage, the courage to accept his present life as the best one for him and to believe that every man can conquer every obstacle, even death. He still cannot understand the reason for his mother's sufferings; the one thing for which he is grateful is that she is out of them. Otherwise, "she would have gone crazy." "I am not going crazy, for I can see some things she did not see--some things she could not see," Robinson declares. He realizes that he will be deprived of "all those pleasures which are said to make up the pleasures of this life, and I'm

glad of it." For "there is a pleasure--a joy--greater than all these little selfish notions, and I have found the way to it through idealism."

He could and did do without the conventional joys of life. He never married. A shy love affair during the winter of 1897, the winter subsequent to the foregoing letter, proved no more than a dream. He still lacked a job when soon afterwards he went to New York to stay with Burnham. He was never to hold the kind of position that Gardiner respected. He became inspector on a New York subway for the daily wages of two dollars, and later, through Theodore Roosevelt's influence, he obtained a post in the New York Customs House. Recognition of the poet came slowly, although his *Tristram* vaulted him into popular fame such as few modern poets enjoy.

Robinson was always lonely, awkward, and shy. Save with a few intimate friends, he never knew what to say and usually regretted his remarks after he had managed to make them. In New York he frequently drank to loosen his reluctant tongue and to forget his troubles. Robinson's

' friends urged Burnham to save him from self-destruction, but Burnham, with Oriental faith in the moral order of the universe, refused to act; "I know Robinson. When the time comes he will see the necessity and do the right thing." ¹⁷

And although Robinson often lost faith, he never renounced it. The light glimpsed "through the clouds of time"

with his own eyes, and not with another's, never vanished. His faith expressed in the letter to Smith was based neither on dialectics nor on sentimentality. "You will have to put me down as a mystic, if that means a man who cannot prove all his convictions to be true,"¹³ he wrote thirty-three years later in 1930. Yet many a man has held convictions that he could not prove to be true, not because he was a mystic, but because he was an idler or a coward. Robinson was not a philosopher, but neither was he mentally lazy or timid. "Once I thought I was in a way to be a Christian Scientist," he told Smith in the same letter, "but that will be impossible. The system is too dependent on unsubstantial inferences."¹⁴ Robinson refused to accept a belief merely because it suited his wishes. Nevertheless, he clung to optimism in the teeth of his personal tragedies and of the pessimistic philosophies that invited him to despair. His poetry is steeped in darkness and defeat, but all of it affirms that light and triumph have the last words. The appellation of pessimist that stubborn critics constantly gave him wearied and annoyed Robinson. A reader failing to "get from my books an impression that life is very much worth while, even though it may not seem always to be profitable or desirable, . . . doesn't see what I'm driving at."²⁰ Again he said with a note of desperation:

How they find me a pessimist . . . just because I can't subscribe to their ready-made little notions of things, particularly of the future, is beyond me. As a

matter of fact, I am more of an optimist than any of them--if they must have it in their own words--for when I look at this life without the rosy spectacles and try to see it as a thing in itself, as the final word, it is too absurd to be thought of. You've got to add something, just to make sense.²¹

A letter of Robinson's to Will Durant tells the philosopher that, although the poet cannot disprove the picture of a soulless, ruthless universe, such a universe eludes his comprehension:

As I do not know that such a tragic absurdity is not a fact, I can only know my native inability to believe that it is one. . . . If life is only what it appears to be, no amount of improvement or enlightenment will ever compensate or atone for what it has inflicted and endured in ages past, or for what it is inflicting and enduring today. Only the most self-centered and short-visioned of egotists, it seems to me, will attempt to deny the truth of a statement so obvious, though I am aware that its obviousness is no warrant for our wasting much time over it.²²

This letter reveals a strain resembling agnosticism, but it is only a resemblance. The agnostic says, "I cannot prove reality because reality is unknowable." The mystic says, "I cannot prove reality because reality is beyond proof." Robinson clearly established himself upon the side of the mystic, when in 1931 he wrote, "As I see it, my poetry is not pessimistic, nothing of an infinite nature can be proven or disproven in finite terms--meaning words."²³ Time and again his poetry asserts that words can never be the Word itself.

Herbert Spencer, whom Macintosh calls "the typical religious agnostic,"²⁴ held that "God, divine reality, is

that of which we can never have experience and concerning which we can never think without self-contradiction."²⁵ That God cannot be experienced is the antithesis of the mystic's faith. Nor would Robinson have denied God can be the object of experience. For although "he revolted almost physically from certain aspects of emotional religion, . . . he was conscious of a close personal relationship with Deity."²⁶

Robinson was not an agnostic. He was a mystic. He could prove neither that life has meaning nor that God exists. But he was sure of meaning and certain of God. He knew too well the objections to this faith and therefore could not, would not, be dogmatic about it. His natural reticence, moreover, forbade his asserting his convictions loudly. Just as he shrank from sensuality almost to the point of asceticism, so he detested spiritual exhibitionism. His most communicative letters stop short of revealing his profoundest emotions and experiences.

The exact nature of Robinson's illuminative moments no one will ever know. He kept no journals such as Emerson kept, and if he had, he should probably not have recorded, as Emerson did record "the ineffable peace, yea, and the influx of God,"²⁷ into his soul. The letter to Smith in which Robinson makes his confession of idealism and of the joy found therein is his most direct personal expression of his assurance. Mystical experience is not necessarily, although

it often is, soul-shaking and ecstatic; it may be a calm and silent undercurrent, rising in certain moments and gently rippling the surface of a life. Such mystical experience must have been Robinson's.

The man cannot be resurrected to give any more information about himself. But his work lives on, and since the man and the poet cannot be separated, Robinson's poetry is the best key to his personality. "Don't look for me in my poetry," he warned, "you won't find me there."²⁸ He modified this statement when he wrote, "While nearly everything that I have written has a certain amount of personal coloring, I do not recall anything of mine that is a direct transcription of experience."²⁹ The external experiences, the biographical facts, do not appear, but the inner experiences, the adventures of the spirit, suffuse his poetry and make it undeniable proof of Robinson's personal mysticism.

CHAPTER III

THE SHORT POEMS

The variety and universality of his mysticism reveals itself through the poetry of Edwin Arlington Robinson. It would be folly to insist that mysticism is in all of his poetry or that it is the subject of all of his poems. Robinson was more interested in persons than in principles. Betsky points out that the didacticism and abstractions of his early poems become in his later work the application of these youthful assertions and generalizations.¹ The poet grows in the understanding of the ways of truth and goodness and of their apparent failure in some battered lives, but he never abandons faith in truth and goodness. This process of development is natural. Either a man forsakes his early convictions or he proves them by experience. Mysticism, which underlies all Robinson's poetry, was the means whereby he proved to his own satisfaction the conviction that life has meaning and dignity.

The short poems afford glimpses of the mystical ideas upon which the long poems elaborate through detail and concrete situations. The title poem of The Children of the Night, Robinson's second volume, published in 1897, proclaims his faith in idealism and immortality and in the spirit of the Upanishads counsels, "Let us in ourselves revere/The Self .

that is the Universe."² The Children of the Night--stumbling, doubting, falling--are yet one with That "within the heart, smaller than a corn of rice, smaller than a mustard seed," and "greater than the earth, greater than the heaven, greater than all these worlds."³ Feeling this assurance, the poet urges,

Let us, the Children of the Night,
Put off the cloak that hides the scar!
Let us be Children of the Light,
And tell the ages what we are!

Waggoner maintains that Robinson omitted this poem from subsequent volumes because the poet felt it to be too positive, immature, and unconsidered.⁴ A likelier reason is that Robinson realized the comparatively inferior quality of the verse. The style, and not the statement, is immature. The argument that suicide would be the only logical reaction to the cruel, meaningless existence that the naturalists, materialists, and mechanists posit reappears in "The Man Against the Sky," which is certainly a mature poem.

The verse form in which Robinson excelled was the sonnet, and every type of mysticism reflected in the long poems is reflected in this genre. "The Altar" from The Children of the Night expresses Robinson's intuited conviction that the divine order lies behind the apparent chaos of life. The "altar builded in a dream"⁵ symbolizes heroic self-sacrifice:

Love's murmur, blent
With sorrow's warning, gave but a supreme
Unending impulse to that human stream
Whose flood was all for the flame's fury bent.

The poet, outraged by this seeming waste of devotion,
cries, "The world is in the wrong."

But the same quenchless fury of unrest
That thrilled the foremost of that martyred throng
Thrilled me, and I awoke . . . and was the same
Bewildered insect plunging for the flame
That burns, and must burn somehow for the best.

From the same volume, "Credo," which Morris calls "one of the finest statements of his . . . mystic philosophy which Mr. Robinson has given,"⁶ repeats the theme of "The Altar" with more emphasis and clearer imagery. The poet in this second sonnet is not a visionary as he is in the first. "I cannot find my way; there is no star/In all the shrouded heavens anywhere."⁷ But he is still a mystic because through, yes, above and beyond "the black and awful chaos of the night . . . I know the far-sent glory of the years/I feel the coming glory of the light." The "light" remains throughout Robinson's poems a symbol of the vision of the Divine.

Sometimes this light must be pursued through terror and despair, hardship and self-denial. But often, according to "Sonnet" from still the same collection, careful eyes can see it shining near at hand. God is transcendent, but He is also immanent:

And when we do so frantically strive
To win strange faith, why do we shun to know
That in love's elemental over-glow
God's wholeness glows with light superlative?

"Look at a branch, a bird, a child, a rose/Or anything God ever made that grows," the poet pleads.

Nor let the smallest vision of it slip
That you may read, as on Belshazzar's wall,
The glory of eternal partnership.

"Belshazzar's wall is a curious place on which to read the glory of eternal partnership,"⁹ writes Winters. Perhaps Robinson did select the wrong Biblical allusion, or perhaps by this illustration he intended to emphasize the necessity of man's recognition of "eternal partnership." Interpreted thus, these last two verses breathe the same urgency of "the final message of the Upanishads"¹⁰: "Only when men shall roll up the sky like a hide, will there be an end of misery, unless God at first be known."¹¹

But the tension between transcendental mysticism, the mysticism that conceives of God as wholly other than the world, and immanent mysticism, the mysticism that conceives of God as within the world, -- the paradox that exists for most mystics -- existed for Robinson. In "Two Sonnets" the transcendental type, which always fascinated Robinson, especially during his younger years, claims his attention. The first sonnet denies personal immortality; the second affirms the typical Oriental doctrine of impersonal immortality, but could as well describe the mystical experience, Oriental or Occidental. "Never until our souls are strong enough/To plunge into the crater of the Scheme,"¹² is it possible to

reach the essence of reality, "where atoms and the ages are one stuff." The soul, as Plato said, must rid itself of the "reptile skins of us whereon we set/The stigma of scared years" before it knows things in themselves. Never shall men know "the cursed waste/Of life" amid "the beneficence divine/Of starlight and of sunlight and soul-shine" till they "have drunk, and trembled at the taste,/The mead of Thought's prophetic endlessness."

"The Sage" beautifully describes a man who has discovered the treasures of Oriental mysticism, one who has "drunk the mead of Thought's prophetic endlessness." "Fore-guarded and unfevered and serene,/Back to the perilous gates of truth"¹³ goes the Sage, perhaps Emerson or one of the Eastern wise men about whom Robinson and Jones had read, "To the Dawn that is, and shall be, and has been."

He stood where Asia, crowned with ravishment,
The curtain of Love's inner shrine had rent,
And after had gone scarred by the Unseen.

He finds "a treasure chest" bearing this inscription:

"I keep the mintage of Eternity.
Who comes to take one coin may take the rest,
And all may come--but not without the key."

Nevertheless, "the mintage of Eternity" may be found in time, and "Maya" from Dionysius in Doubt, published in 1925, in Robinson's maturity, strikes a balance between the transcendental and the immanental views. The theme of this sonnet is that the Maya, illusion, that is, the world distinguished

from the Brahman, or God as literally All in all, is in its place good and even necessary:

Through an ascending emptiness of night,
Leaving the flesh and the complacent mind
Together in their sufficiency behind,
The soul of man went up to a far height;
And where those others would have had no sight
Or sense of else than terror for the blind,
Soul met the Will, and was again consigned
To the supreme illusion which is right.

"And what goes on up there," the Mind inquired,
"That I know not already to be true?--
"More than enough, but not enough for you,"
Said the descending soul: "Here in the dark,
Where you are least revealed when most admired,
You still may be the bellows and the spark."¹⁴

The poet is here extremely subtle. The soul, the apex mentis,¹⁵ finds "more than enough" for itself, but "not enough" for the mind, the tool of logic. Yet even the mind contains depths that could appreciate the soul's discovery, were it not "in the dark" of an uncompromising rationalism where it is "least revealed when most admired."

One more sonnet from The Children of the Night, "Supremacy," reveals the mysticism underlying Robinson's much misunderstood philosophy of failure. This mysticism, peculiarly Robinson's, is not so much a distinct type as an application of mysticism explaining how men may in failure, even through failure, find God. "There is a drear and lonely tract of hell/From all the common gloom removed afar"¹⁶ where all the outcasts of life wander. Such men the poet "had slandered on life's little star/For churls and sluggards"

Till with a shaft of God's eternal day,
 The dream of all my glory was undone,--
 And with a fool's importunate dismay,
 I heard the dead men singing in the sun.

This idea threads many of Robinson's poems until its culmination, also the culmination of his mysticism in general, in The Man Who Died Twice. The spiritual epic of Fernando Nash reveals the profound connection between Robinson's philosophy of failure and mysticism.

The Octaves, from the same volume, forms another group of short poems strongly influenced by mysticism. These poems marked with the youthful interest in abstractions are, fittingly enough for this reason, largely Oriental in tone. However, the theme of "Octave I" is akin to that of the sonnet "Supremacy":

We thrill too strangely at the master's touch
 We shrink too sadly from the larger self
 Which for its own completeness agitates
 And undermines us; we do not feel--
 We dare not feel it yet--the splendid shame
 Of uncreated failure; we forget
 The while we groan, that God's accomplishment
 Is always and unfailingly at hand.¹⁷

Robinson here adds to the thought of "the splendid shame of uncreated failure" the idea of the sacrifice which individual selves make to "the larger self." All is One, declares the mystic.

Yet individuals are not thrown to the scrap heap.

"Octave XIV" declares that

Grief and loss,
Disease and desolation, are the dreams
Of wasted excellence; and every dream
Has in it something of an ageless fact
That flouts deformity and laughs at years.

The immanental mystical experience also appears.

"There is no loneliness," affirms "Octave VIII," "no matter
. . . what good friends/Porsake us in the seeming," because
"we are all at one with a complete companionship." Since One
is in all, all are in One,

And though forlornly joyless be the ways
We travel, the compensate spirit-gleams
Of wisdom shaft the darkness here and there
Like scattered lamps in unfrequented streets.

The ascetic tone, nevertheless, predominates; for only "here
and there" the "spirit-gleams of wisdom shaft the darkness."

"Octave XII" repeats the same note:

With conscious eyes not yet sincere enough
To pierce the glimmered cloud that fluctuates
Between me and the glorifying light
That screens itself with knowledge, I discern
The searching rays of wisdom that reach through
The mist of shame's infirm credulity.

Although the gleams of wisdom shine, they shine through "a
glimmered cloud," the cloud that the world calls knowledge.
But, the mystic insists, God "is known by unknowing." 18

Therefore, the viewpoint of the Octaves is prevailingly
that of the ascetic mystic, who warns that

we search
To get where life begins, and still we groan
Because we do not find the living spark
Where no spark ever was.

Only when "the cradle-songs/Of ages" give way to "the time-
less hymns of Love" shall men know "the rapture of that large
release which all/Right science comprehends" and shall read

With unoppressed and unoffended eyes,
The record of All-Soul whereon God writes
In everlasting runes the truth of Him.

"Octave VII" is another escape to eternity. "The guerdon
of new childhood is repose," states the poet, and

Once he has read the primer of right thought,
A man may claim between two smithy strokes
Beatitude enough to realize
God's parallel completeness in the vague
And incommensurable excellence
That equitably uncreates itself
And makes a whirlwind of the Universe.

This octave also repeats the Upanishadic teaching that the
universe is alternately emanated from and reabsorbed into
the Godhead: "At the approach of (Brahma's) day, all mani-
festations proceed from the Unmanifested, and at the approach
of the night, they merge into . . . the Unmanifested."¹⁹

Plotinus, the Greek mystic, maintained a similar doctrine.

But all mystics, ascetic and non-ascetic, would agree
that

The soul itself must insulate the Real,
Or ever you do cherish in this life--
In this life or in any life--repose.

For all mystics echo Ruysbroeck: "The soul finds God in
its own depths."²⁰

All twenty-three octaves are lit by the mystical light,
all sound the other-worldly note, and all echo passages in

Emerson, Carlyle, and the Oriental scriptures. The number of mystical terms and symbols in the Octaves is striking. "Right science" and "right thought" reflect Buddha's Eight-fold Path to Nirvana: right doctrine, right discourse, right purity, right thought, right solitude, and right rapture. "All-Soul" is the Upanishadic Self, and the Octaves refer to the divine enlightenment as "wisdom," as do the Oriental scriptures. "The glimmered cloud that fluctuates/Between me and the glorifying light" suggests the title of the fourteenth-century mystical classic, The Cloud of Unknowing. However, the unknown author of this work used this symbol to represent the ignorance of worldly things, in which state the soul comes to know God, and the vague similarity between the poet's phrase and the mystic's is an interesting coincidence.

Light is a universal mystical symbol, which Robinson employs not only in the Octaves but throughout his poetry to symbolize the Divine. Burnham had told him that the word divine in Sanskrit means light,²¹ and to this information the poet may have owed his partiality for this symbol. His fondness for music gave him another metaphor to describe the same divine message that "light" designates, "the timeless hymns of Love" and "that infinite plain-song/which is itself all music."

Both Eastern and Western mystics use the terms wisdom and love. Yet, as a rule, Hindus and Buddhists speak of

According to "Octave XXIII,"

This final octave presents in its last verse, "the crumpled wharves of Time," the ancient enemy of mystics, among whom Robinson is no exception. According to a rough estimate, three hundred references to the concept of time appear in the 1939 edition of his Collected Poems. He calls time "a guest not given to long waiting," an "old wilderness," an "old monster," and uses a multitude of metaphors--"the dust of time," "the whips of time," "the intolerable drums of time." "Time-born words" cannot record the answer of Eternity. Tristram and Isolt, whose human passion is a well-nigh mystical one, must needs have "torn life from time" to possess life at all. To achieve even mortal joy means to be as those medieval lovers, "lost in a gulf of time where time was not." As for spiritual joy, Robinson was one with Eckhart,

who declares, "Time . . . is what keeps the light from reaching us."²²

Aside from the Octaves and the sonnets, only the long poems reflect to any large extent the influence of mysticism. Moreover, the long poems demonstrate mysticism working in and upon the souls of specific individuals. It becomes practical, far less Oriental, and in the broad sense more Christian. For example, the second of "Two Quatrains," which except for its verse form might belong to the Octaves, states the idea of the mystic's death to self and rebirth to spiritual life:

We shriek to live, but no man ever lives
Till he has rid the ghost of human breath;
We dream to die, but no man ever dies
Till he has quit the road that leads to death.²³

The idea of rebirth came to Robinson more from the Gospel of John than from any other mystical source. Matthias at the Door, a poem of Robinson's maturity, makes this same theme concrete in the life of an individual character.

The short poems are in general either abstract philosophy or miniature portraits. In the portraits Robinson paints men as they are at a given moment, but does not attempt to explain their characters or behavior. He portrays Kiniver Cheevy in his futile romanticism and retreat from life, but tells nothing of how he has become what he is. Richard Cory, paragon of all the things that men envy, who

"glittered when he walked," "one calm summer night, / Went home and put a bullet through his head,"²⁴ and his secret tragedy remains a mystery. Does poor old John Evereldown chase women in order to forget that he himself is followed by the Divine Pursuer? Robinson is not interested. Cliff Flingenhagen is happy because he gives the wine to others and drinks the wormwood himself, but to suggest what experience has taught him the joy of unselfishness and the benefits of self-discipline is only to surmise.

However, mysticism predominates in the long poems, wherein Robinson had time and space to search the inner depths of his characters, rather than in the small portraits. These portraits are unexcelled snapshots, but the lengthy narratives are studies of the human soul.

CHAPTER IV

"THE MAN AGAINST THE SKY"

Although "The Man Against the Sky" is chronologically not the first of Edwin Arlington Robinson's long poems, it is the logical one to study first, because it stands between the abstractions of his early speculative poems and the long character studies. The Man reflects in symbol many a character that Robinson portrays in lifelike delineations.

The importance of this poem also lies in the fact that, instead of writing the letter to the philosopher Durant, the poet might have sent him this poem. For both poem and letter express Robinson's basic, mystical convictions about life and the universe. The poet might have sent the philosopher this poem, that is, had not the philosopher been likely to give it his own naturalistic interpretation, the precise opposite of its meaning. "That wonder and pity should come first," Neff comments, "and the poem close in irony has disconcerted conventional readers. But more flexible minds recognize in it the temper of the twentieth century."¹ The temper of Robinson might likewise be recognized. For he shunned the obvious and despised moralizing to such an extent that in regard to this poem he had to explain to Amy Lowell:

I must hasten to correct, or try to correct, what seems to be a false impression on your part. . . . Nothing could have been farther from my mind when I wrote "The

"Man" than any emissary of gloom or of despair. In the closing pages I meant merely, through what I supposed to be an obviously ironic medium, to carry materialism to its logical end and to indicate its futility as an explanation or a justification of existence. Perhaps you will read the poem again sometime and observe my "lesson" in the last line. I thought of printing it in italics, but changed my mind since I don't like 'em.²

This frequently misinterpreted poem is an ode, free and eloquent of style, studded with vivid pictures, suggestive Biblical allusions, and massive figures of speech. Its eloquence, however, never becomes grandiloquence, and the style is never turgid, but sweeps on with the solemnity of sincere earnestness. The poem opens with an apocalyptic vision of "the glory of a world on fire"³ with sunset, where

Now burned a sudden hill,
Bleak, round, and high, by flame-lit height made higher,
With nothing on it for the flame to kill
Save one who moved and was alone up there
To loom before the chaos and the glare
As if he were the last god going home
Unto his last desire.

Suddenly the man vanishes "down the fiery distance" "like one of those eternal, remote things/That range across a man's imaginings." The lonely figure, "dark, marvelous, and inscrutable," suggests the loneliness and awe of human life. The "sudden hill" is the peak of experience whereon every man sooner or later finds himself, and it is lit by "the fires of time." Time is aflame, burning itself out into eternity.

The Man Against the Sky is Everyman, who represents

the various types of men who meet a climactic experience and interpret it according to their natures. The poet first imagines the Man as one whose experience has been anguish:

Even he who climbed and vanished may have taken
Down to the perils of a depth not known,
From death defended though by men forsaken,
The bread that every man must eat alone.

The experience has proven a mystical one. For to such souls "the bread that every man must eat alone," the bread of sorrow, is the bread of life. The man of whom Robinson is here thinking is not defeated by defeat:

He may have walked while others hardly dared
Look on to see him stand where many fell;
And upward out of that, as out of hell,
He may have sung and striven
To mount where more of him shall yet be given,
Bereft of all retreat,
To a sevenfold heat,--
As on a day when three in Dura shared
The furnace and were spared
For glory.

This heroic sufferer knows glory greater than the kind known by earthly Babylon "who made himself so great that God, who heard/Covered him with long feathers like a bird."

But the "sudden hill," the experience, is not mystical for every man. Or if it is, not every man can so interpret it. "The Lord was in this place," and he like Jacob "knew it not." Only, unlike Jacob, he never discovers his ignorance. He is "possessed already of the promised land." He cares nothing for those who have made possible his easy outlook, who have left

Their names as far behind them as their bones,
 And yet by dint of slaughter toil and theft,
 And shrewdly sharpened stones,
 Carved hard the way of his ascendancy
 Through deserts of lost years.

A man who looks at life with such Pollyanna eyes can have no mystical experience. He can only brush against it and never feel it. "Why trouble him now who sees and hears/No more than what his innocence requires?"

Again, the Man Against the Sky may entertain what Robinson sums up as "a sick negation born of weak denials." Such a man may be an egocentric grumbler, who

met with atrabilious eyes
 The fires of time on equal terms and passed
 Indifferently down.

Or he may be too lazy to question about truth and "may have had for evil or for good/No argument." Possibly he is an absolute egotist, indifferent towards "what without himself went anywhere./To failure or to glory." Or "he may have been the prophet of an art/Immovable to old idolatries," a disappointed member of the avant-garde. Perhaps his is the unhappy case of a cynic,

who now for all
 Of any thing divine that his effete
 Negation may have tasted,
 Saw truth in his own image, rather small,
 Forebore to fever the ephemeral,
 Found any barren height a good retreat
 From any swarming street.

He seeks solitude, not to make "the flight of the alone to the Alone,"⁴ but to shun the despised mob.

If the enigmatic Man is any of these negative personalities, he has derived no spiritual benefit from his vigil on the hill. He is too full of self to receive God. He has merely

proved a world a sorry thing
In his imagining,
And life a lighted highway to the tomb.

However, he may be entirely different. He may be akin to the man whom the poet has at first imagined, akin in genuine and bitter suffering. But this sufferer has not taken with him "the bread that every man must eat alone," the bread of sorrow which is also the bread of life. So, "mounting with infirm unsearching tread/His hopes to chaos led," and his cross cannot redeem them. Robinson believed that tragedy may be a mystical experience. But he did not believe that it is an automatic one any more than Christianity teaches that suffering is an automatic sanctifying experience. Although Robinson warned readers that they would not find him in his poetry, the temptation to find some of his history in this stanza is irresistible. He, too, had had "sick memories of a dead faith foiled and flawed" before he had discovered a new and deeper one. He, too, had seen "anguish fallen on those he loved around him" and had known "no young way to forg t." Nevertheless, his mystical temper, which had led him to idealism, had saved him from the possibilities left the tormented Man Against the Sky, who

may go forward like a stoic Roman
 Where pangs and terrors in his pathway lie,--
 Or, seizing the swift logic of a woman,
 Curse God and die.

This second alternative is the only sensible one that
 the poet can see for the mysterious Man should he prove

like many another one
 Who might have stood aloft and looked ahead,
 Black drawn against wild red,

and "unawed by fiery gules" builds "a living reason out of
 molecules/Why molecules occurred." But such a man "a
 materialist, or a mechanist or whatever he likes to call him-
 self,"⁵--so Robinson mockingly referred to him in his letter
 to Durant--is "one for smiling when he might have sighed," and

Discovered an odd reason too for pride
 In being what he must have been by laws
 Infrangible and for no kind of cause.
 Deterred by no confusion or surprise
 He may have been with his mechanic eyes
 A world without a meaning, and had room,
 Alone amid magnificence and doom,
 To build himself an airy monument,

commemorating his philosophy of despair. The ironical
 verses might break into the poet's familiar dry humor, were
 not their subject too depressing for laughter. The pity that
 he felt for philosophers who so lightly destroy man's dreams
 is in this stanza almost lost in his contempt, but not en-
 tirely, for "Mahum's great grasshoppers were such as these,/
 Sun-scattered and soon lost."

Robinson's scorn for these dream-destroyers comes from
 the fact that they propose substitutes for this dream. But

if the world is only "a planetary trap where souls are wrought/
 For nothing but the sake of being caught," no political, economic, or scientific utopia can make this cul-de-sac of existence other than a cul-de-sac. "If after all that we have lived and thought,/All comes to Nought," man has no reason to continue living

'Twere sure but weaklings' vain distress
 To suffer dungeons where so many doors
 Will open on the cold eternal shores
 That look sheer down
 To the dark tideless floods of Nothingness
 Where all who know may drown.

"The Man Against the Sky" closes with a challenge to the materialists to bring their philosophy to its logical conclusion; But so certain was Robinson of the impracticability of its logical conclusion, suicide, that he was amazed to find readers who misunderstood the intent of this poem. The human race does not commit suicide. Why, he asks, when "all who know may drown?" His answer is that not even the materialists of the human race "know" that "all comes to Nought." Or rather, they know it only intellectually and theoretically, not intuitively and practically.

The verb to know, in the mystical sense, is used earlier in the poem:

But this we know, if we know anything:
 That we may laugh and fight and sing
 And of our transience here make offering
 To an orient Word that will not be erased,
 Or save in incommunicable gleams
 Too permanent for dreams,
 Be found or known.

If Robinson was the agnostic that some of his interpreters think him, and not the mystic that he was, he would never have written that the "orient Word" comes "in incommunicable gleams/Too permanent for dreams." The Word cannot "be found or known" by the faculties that add a column of figures or reduce reality to a scientific formula, but it can be found and known in a different way. Robinson is simply stating in his own manner what the fourteenth-century contemplative stated in his, "Of God Himself can no man think. . . . By love he may be gotten and holden; but by thought never."⁶

"The Man Against the Sky" does not reflect "an attitude of . . . patient, questioning agnosticism."⁷ Neff has discovered that mysticism gives the poem its positive meaning. Comparing "The Man Against the Sky" with In Memoriam, he writes:

Here Tennyson is plaintive and on the defensive where Robinson is militantly aggressive, and the American poet's mysticism has no specific Christian coloring, the "orient Word" coming from the East in general.⁸

Neff has apparently forgotten that Robinson read in the Fourth Gospel of "the Word made flesh," but he has discovered the secret of the poem. Robinson here means more than he did when he confessed his inability to see "this life as a thing in itself, as the final word. . . . You've got to add something just to make sense."⁹

"The Man Against the Sky" voices the desperate need of making sense of life, but were this need the sole theme of

the poem, the poet would be guilty of shallowness and sentimentality. However, the response to the need is the conviction that behind the shifting and essentially unreal scene of tragedy and terror there exists a Reality of wisdom and goodness. The mere fact that tragedy and terror sometimes appear the more obvious does not disprove the Reality, and still less that the Reality overflows and overwhelms traditional concepts of it:

Shall we, because Eternity records
 Too vast an answer for the time-born words
 We spell, whereof so many are dead that once
 In our capricious lexicons
 Were so alive and final, hear no more
 The Word itself, the living word
 That none alive has ever heard
 Or ever spelt,
 And few have ever felt
 Without the fears and old surrenderings
 And terrors that began
 When Death let fall a feather from his wings
 And humbled the first man?

"The living word," the Johannine symbol given an Oriental interpretation, "none alive have ever heard/Or ever spelt." But a few choice souls have "felt" it, have known it intuitively, have seen God face to face. Yet this rapture brings with it "the fears and old surrenderings" akin to the dread and helplessness in the face of death; for the soul in order to find God must surrender its will and die to self. This agonizing discovery Robinson's Lancelot must make, and the protagonist of Matthias at the Door.

The various ideas in "The Man Against the Sky" are

thus tested in the lives of many of Robinson's characters. The Man himself is an abstraction whose many possible roles the inhabitants of Robinson's mind-world actualize in their experience. And one of the spirits whose glory it is to obey "a vision answering a faith unshaken" is the subject of the next chapter, Captain Craig.

CHAPTER V

CAPTAIN CRAIG

No place has ever appeared a less likely dwelling for a mystic than Tilbury Town. No man has ever been superficially seen, less likely to be a mystic than Captain Craig, the village tramp. Edwin Arlington Robinson had met this character's prototype, Alfred H. Louis, in New York and known him well. Louis was a picturesque little Jew in his late sixties, a man whose vast and thorough learning included the European and Hebraic literatures, law, government, and diplomacy. He claimed familiarity with the nineteenth-century great of letters, science, and government. An expert pianist, a poet, and a philosopher, the old man must have been something of a mystic as Blackwood's description suggests: "He was a Presence . . . His voice . . . increased the air of greatness, almost I had said of majesty . . . I watched him melt into the shadows . . . with a feeling that I watched some legendary figure, some ancient prophet, some mysterious priest."¹

Turning Louis into a Yankee and omitting the fact that he had "a goatish smell as though he had slept in a stable,"² Robinson made him the central character in the long poem published in 1902. As Louis' disreputable appearance masked his brilliance and profundity, so does the Captain's reduced circumstances hide his. None of his fellow townsmen knows

Captain Craig for anything besides a sponge. "My name is Captain Craig," he murmurs to more prosperous citizens, "and I must eat."³ Since he does not fit the pattern of God-fearing New England thrift, his neighbors only grudgingly keep the skin upon his bones while they continue "to trust in God, and let the Captain starve."

However, a group of young men befriend him, and Captain Craig is the story of this friendship. The "I" of the poem, who represents Robinson's viewpoint, gradually recognizes the mystic in the ancient waif. Gratefully and humorously the Captain regales his astonished friends with his philosophy: "'You are the resurrection and the life,'/He said, 'and I the hymn the Brahman sings.'" Some moments later he speaks more seriously. He is not ashamed of being a tramp, a failure: instead he feels

"a joy to find it in his life
To be an outcast usher of the soul
For such as had good courage of the Sun
To pattern Love."

As gracefully and as quickly as possible every one but the narrator leaves. He, perhaps fascinated, perhaps amused, stays to hear more of "this nineteenth-century Nirvana talk." Captain Craig tactfully suggests to his benefactor that two kinds of gratitude exist:

"the sudden kind
We feel for what we take, the larger kind
We feel for what we give."

This lesson once mastered, he declares, reveals the age-old truth that is God's music.

"But we have had no ears to listen yet
For more than fragments of it: we have heard
A murmur now and then, an echo here
And there, and we have made great music of it;
And we have made innumerable books
To please the Unknown God. Time throws away
Dead thousands of them, but the God that knows
No death denies not one; the books all count,
The songs all count; and yet God's music has
No modes, his language has no adjectives."

The old man's bird-like mind has darted from an aphorism about gratitude to the mystical doctrine of the ineffability of God. "To know God is to know him as unknowable,"⁴ say all the mystics, and so says the oddest of their fellowship, Captain Craig. His remarks sometimes lack logical sequence; the bridge between the aphorism and the lesson that it reveals is slender, unless "God's music" be God's self-giving. But during another monologue Captain Craig asserts, "God sells himself eternally, / But never gives a crust." The Captain might resolve his contradictory statements by explaining that the "sale" involves mutual self-giving between God and man.

The Captain glows with something of the joy of St. Francis. He thinks of the Divine in terms of music, light, and laughter. He deplores the frequent tendency to make religion a sad-faced thing. "God's humor is the music of the spheres."

"We pervert
The courage of an infinite ideal
To finite resignation. You have made

The cement of your churches out of tears
And ashes, and the fabric will not stand,"

warns Captain Craig, But faith will not die:

"Not the faintest or the farthest whirled
First atom of the least that ever flew
Shall be by man defrauded of the touch
God thrilled it with to make a dream for man
When Science was unborn,"

he adds lest his listener think that he is proposing a humanistic substitute. No, he prophesies with mystic certainty a time "when we have earned our spiritual ears." "Then shall at last come ringing through the sun,/Through time, through flesh, a music that is true," he declares. "For wisdom is that music, and all joy/That wisdom." His mysticism is essentially immanent. The modelless music will come "through time, through flesh," and men need not retreat from life to hear it. Yet the music will also cleave "Through time, through flesh" in testimony that time and flesh are not the ultimate realities. The Captain's invitation is to share the "wiser kind of joy that you shall have/Never, until you learn to laugh with God," the kind that the Upanishads proclaim: "From joy does spring all this creation, by joy is it maintained, towards joy does it progress, and into joy does it enter."⁵

For all his counsels to rejoice, Captain Craig is not the mystic who indulges in ecstasy and disregards the anguished world. Although he begins the first of his letters to the narrator by exulting in May and praising the child-

spirit, his favorite theme of "the child" introduces a somber note. "We were brutes without him" and are brutes enough with him in our midst. For although the old man "cannot think of anything" this spring day "that I would rather do than be myself," he recalls cursing

"The sunlight and the breezes and the leaves
To think of men on stretchers or on beds,
Or on foul floors, things without shapes or names,
Made human with paralysis and rags;
Or some poor devil on a battle-field,
Left undiscovered and without the strength
To drag a maggot from his clotted mouth;
Or women working where a man would fall--
Flat-breasted miracles of cheerfulness
Made neuter by the work that no man counts
Until it waits undone; children thrown out
To feed their brains and souls on offal."

Such words as these would leave any realist, any naturalist, satisfied. However, with Emersonian bouyancy and candor the Captain asks, what has all this woe to do with spring? Misery cannot help misery. It will only pull these fortunates down into the dark where the miserable lie. "What does the child say?"

But it is well not to labor the point of "the child untaught." Both darkness and light contain truth. Captain Craig tells of two people, a sentimental woman and a cynical one, whom he has known in better days. Each comes to Captain Craig and asks him to talk sense into the other person. The cynic growls:

"There goes a woman cursed with happiness:
Beauty and wealth, health, horses,--everything
That she could ask, or we could ask, is hers,

Except an inward eye for the dim fact
Of what this dark world is."

The woman so characterized gives fleeting echoes of one of Robinson's own early sonnets.⁶

Give him a rose,
And he will tell you it is very sweet,
But only for a day. Most wonderful!
Show him a child, or anything that laughs,
And he begins at once to crunch his wormwood.'

Robinson perhaps mocks his own one-time unthinking idealism and mysticism. The Captain is guilty of no such thoughtlessness. Which was right and which was wrong, the cynic or the idealist? Both, answers the old man. A demon dwells in the sunlight as well as in the shadows, but because the demon in the shadows is obvious, it is well to look out for the demon in the sunlight. An easy faith too often blinds men to human suffering. Only "the child," whom mystics frequently use as a symbol of receptivity or wisdom, "the child that is the savior of all ages,/The prophet and the poet," can "with Love's unhonored fortitude" teach

"The candor and the generosity,
By leave of which we smile if we bring back
The first revealing flash that wakened us
When wisdom like a shaft of dungeon-light
Came searching down to find us."

Among the titles which Captain Craig gives "the child" is that of poet. To the Captain, poetic insight and mystical intuition, "the light," are identical. "With a few good glimpses I have had/Of heaven through the little holes in hell," he writes in his second letter,

"I can half understand what price it is
 The poet pays, at one time and another,
 For those indemnifying interludes
 That are to be the kernel in what lives
 To shrine him when the new-born men come singing."

These words identifying the poet with "the new born men," those who share the child-spirit, suggest Bremond's thesis that the poet shares within great limitations the mystic's revelation.⁷ The Tilbury seer, however, would think that Bremond was splitting hairs: for Captain Craig, the poetic and the mystic experience are one.

He is sure that he has partaken of this experience. To what degree he cannot say, but he is no less certain:

"Though I have lived through barren years enough
 To make me seem--as I transmute myself
 In downward retrospect from what I am--
 As unproductive and as unconvinced
 Of living bread and the soul's eternal draught
 As a frog on a Passover-cake in a streamless desert,
 Still do I trust the light that I have earned,
 And having earned, received."

Captain Craig's phraseology--"barren years," "unproductive," "the light that I have earned"--suggests, not only the attainment of the mystic's goal, but also the periods of dryness that many mystics experience before they achieve union with God.

The third letter describes in language like beautiful and solemn music a dream that the Captain has had. It is a dream of Christ, the Carpenter of Nazareth, who appears to the old man sitting beneath the sycamores and cedars. The Captain is weary to the point of desperation, but afraid to

sleep lest he wake no more. His dull tools lie beside him.

"But soon, and in the distance,
Concealed, importunate, there was a sound
Of coming steps,--and I was not afraid;
No, I was not afraid then, I was glad;
For I could feel, with every thought, the Man,
The Mystery, the Child, a footfall nearer.
Then when he stood before me, there was no
Surprise, there was no questioning: I knew him,
As I had always known him."

Christ asks Captain Craig what he is doing there. "I was a carpenter," replies the Captain, "But there was nothing in this world to do." Christ picks up the tools and, smiling, asks him whether he is sure that there was nothing, whether he is sure that he has learned his trade. "No, you are not," says Christ and laughs. The tools are dull, the Master admits, and would not be very sharp if they were ground. Nevertheless, he bids the Captain clean and grind his tools, put new handles on them, "and then go learn your trade in Nazareth./Only be sure that you find Nazareth." "But if I starve?" the old man questions anxiously. In answer, Christ smiles.

Captain Craig writes that in his dream, when the Nazarine laughed he himself did not, although he might well have. The reason for the laughter and the smile Captain Craig gives some lines later. He tells of a man

"Who dreamed that he was Aeschylus, reborn
To clutch, combine, compensate, and adjust
The plunging and unfathomable chorus
Wherein we catch, like a bacchanale through thunder,
The chanting of the new Eumenides,
Implacable, renascent, farcical,
Triumphant, and American."

The young man died before he fulfilled the promise in him,
and Captain Craig rejoices that he died young, for

"That measure would have chased him all his days,
Defeated him, deposed him, wasted him,
And shrewdly ruined him--though in that ruin
There would have lived, as always it has lived,
In ruin as in failure, the supreme
Fulfillment unexpressed, the rhythm of God
That beats unheard through songs of shattered men
Who dream but cannot sound it."

These words reflect Robinson's own mystical view of failure
that runs throughout his poetry, that finds climax and ex-
planation in the story of Fernando Nash.

Captain Craig's friend returns to find the old man
dying. But the Captain as gayly and as grandiosely as ever
promises to read the next day "some clauses of a jocund
instrument," his will. His friends return, and from under-
neath his pillow he produces the document that begins:

"I, Captain Craig, abhorred iconoclast,
Sage-errant, favored of the Mysteries,
And self-reputed humorist at large,
Do now, confessed of my world-worshipping,
Time-questioning, sun-fearing, and heart-yielding,
Approve and unreservedly devise
To you and your assigns for evermore,
God's universe and yours."

"A jocund instrument," truly! But everyone of his tongue-in-
check phrases Captain Craig has discussed with utmost serious-
ness. He is an iconoclast, a wandering sage, a mystic, a
humorist, simultaneously of the world, "world-worshipping,"
and not of it, "time-questioning." He fears an optimism
born of mere speculative trust in the light, "sun-fearing";

yet to that light he is "heart-yielding."

His will mainly reiterates what he has said before. He is glad that he has made men laugh; for human laughter is a fragment, if an infinitesimal one, of God's, and he humbly believes that he has "somewhat recognized/The formal measure of it." He calls himself both fortunate and failure. "What men lose/Man gains," and as long as the losses do not affect himself, no one worries over them. "This is right," asserts the Captain, save when "the devil in the sun/Misguides us." In that case

"we go darkly where the shine
Misleads us, and we know not what we see:
We know not if we fly or if we fall;
And if we fly, we know not where we fly."

Nevertheless he inserts "an urging clause/For climbers and up-fliers of all sorts," even for those who will crash unheard. The Captain emphasizes that although "the crash may count/Undoubtedly, and earth be fairer for it," crashing in itself has no virtue. Failure does not automatically make men winners or benefit mankind. Only the flesh "ails us, the spirit knows no qualm/No failure, no down-falling." Climb high, he bids his friends, and never mind the jeers or the warnings.

"Only know,
As well as you know dawn from lantern-light
That far above you, for you, and within you,
There burns and shines and lives, unwavering
And always yours, the truth."

These words synthesize the various views of various mystics.

The truth, the light, transcends man, but, as it is for man, it is also within him. It burns as an unapproachable fire, it shines as a steady light to draw men, and it lives within men that they may live. Captain Craig shares the vision of St. John. The light to which men blind themselves is still "the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."

Although it may be the flesh that ails us, Captain Craig is not advocating asceticism. Neither the austerities of a hermit nor the orgies of the Greek mystery cults, though both phenomena are shot through with mysticism, guarantee the Light:

"The truth we seek and equally the truth
We do not seek, but yet may not escape,
Was never found alone through flesh contempt
Or through flesh reverence. Look east and west
And we may read the story: where the light
Shown first the shade now darkens; where the shade
Clung first, the light fights westward--though the shade
Still feeds, and there is still the Orient."

Earlier when he urged his friends to follow the light, he was the Transcendentalist, heir of New England evangelism. In the passage just quoted, he is no less of a Transcendentalist, for Transcendentalism drew upon the Orient. But Captain Craig also reflects Robinson's own interest in Eastern religions. His words render specific passages from other poems already noted. Robinson's sage goes "back to fierce wisdom and the Orient,/To the dawn that is, that shall be, and has been."⁸ The Octaves are full of Oriental mysticism. "The Man Against the

Sky" speaks of "an Orient Word."⁹ Captain Craig's remarks are none too clear in detail. Presumably, since Eastern culture is older than Western culture, "where the light/Shone first" means the Orient. "Where the shade/Clung first" means the West, although the next phrase "the light fights westward" seems to make it come from the region where the shade first clung. Perhaps the Captain means that the radiance of Christianity and the Oriental religion fuse into one light, and the shadows, the differences between the religions do not count. The light is the light that all mystics behold.

After various other "clauses" the will reaffirms that he has seen the light, not as an aloof seer, but as a sufferer among the suffering. Once he thought that men's deeds should be rewarded in some way besides "the spacious way of words." But suddenly he discovered that rewards are nothing. that the light is all:

"The wisdom of a warm thought woke within me
And I could read the sun. Then did I turn
My long-defeated face full towards the world,
And through the clouded warfare of it all
Discern the light. Through dusk that hindered it,
I found the truth, and for the first whole time
Knew then that we were climbing. Not as one
Who mounts along with his experience
Bound on him like an Old Man of the Sea--
Not as a moral pedant who drags chains
Of his unearned ideals after him
And always to the lead-like thud they make
Attunes a cold inhospitable chant
Of All things easy to the Non-Attached--
But as a man, a scarred man among men,
I knew it, and I felt the strings of thought
Between us to pull tight the while I strove;
And if a curse came ringing now and then

To my defended ears, how could I know
 The light that burned above me and within me,
 And at the same time put on cap-and-bells
 For such as yet were groping?"

When a man hears

"But once on all his journey, singing down
 To find him, the gold-throated forward call,
 What way but one, what but the forward way
 Shall after that call guide him?"

When he has made melody of confusion, can he be torn again
 by discord? Or, having "Read the book of wisdom in the sun,"
 shall he turn back

"to scan some huge
 Blood-lettered protest of bewildered men
 That hunger while he feeds where they would starve
 And all absurdly perish?"

The following day the old fellow tells the friends of
 another dream he has had this morning. He and Hamlet meet on
 the wharf of Lethe where Hamlet is tugging at a large weed
 and says that he is predestined to uproot it. Captain Craig
 tells him that as long as he talks that way he can never pull
 it up. Hamlet at first glares, then laughs, "And we had
 eisel on the strength of it."

Along comes a crocodile. Captain Craig and Hamlet
 step upon its back. Hamlet starts to try to uproot another
 weed and still insists that he must pull it up. Hamlet is
 seized by a fierce hunger, and the two men kill and eat the
 crocodile. Hamlet goes back to his task, the weed snaps,
 and Hamlet falls into the water and is drowned.

Perhaps Captain Craig's mind is wandering as his friends

believe. Perhaps he is also trying to tell them that Hamlet is one of those persons who attempt to help misery by being miserable instead of by obeying the light. Captain Craig chides his friends for their amazed looks:

"Why do you look like that?
You don't believe me? Crocodiles--Why not?
Who knows what he has eaten in his life?
Who knows but I have eaten Atropos?"

Atropos is the Fate that cuts the thread of life. Captain Craig feels sure of immortality. After the dying man begs his friends piteously to stay awhile, he tells them as much, and asks them why, if they think never to see him again, they have listened to him so long and so eagerly. The Captain falls to thinking that he is Socrates: "The truth is yours, God's universe is yours. . ./Goodbye . . . good citizens . . . give me the cup." The last words upon the lips of Captain Craig is "Trombones," reminding his friends to have a brass band at his funeral.

Most critics have appreciated the idealism and the Transcendentalism in Captain Craig, even if they have not realized the extent of the Captain's mysticism. The poem is not all mysticism; the Captain does not sit in the cloudless realms of contemplation. He is a social critic, a reader of books, and a lover of good company. The poem is not all philosophy; it is a character sketch and it is poetry of frequent high order. It is by no means perfect poetry and is often as needlessly wordy as the Captain is loquacious.

But the Captain is a mystic. He, in Stovall's words, "learned that failure is of the flesh, not of the spirit, and that humanity gains more by the failure of individual men than it gains by their worldly success."¹⁰ Yet Stovall fails to see the mystical implication of this lesson. Kay Sinclair calls Captain Craig "a drama of the Unapparent."¹¹ But it reveals more than "the divine soul hidden in the starved body of that 'sequestered parasite,' a soul that had the courage to be itself, abiding in its dream, facing the world as a superb failure."¹² The poem reveals the reason for this courage.

Surely Winters errs by saying that although Captain Craig and Count Pretzel von Wurburger the Obscene

"talk as if they were paraphrasing Emerson, . . . Captain Craig is a character sketch, not a philosophic poem, and although these two characters are treated with affection, they are also treated with irony, and it seems unlikely that Robinson admired them without reservations."¹³

Captain Craig is primarily a character sketch. Robinson does view the Captain with irony--his bombast, his sometimes heavy humor, his whole predicament. But this fact does not preclude philosophy. Nor is Count Pretzel, described as "a vagabond, a drunkard, and a sponge," equated with the Captain. That Robinson considered the Captain's words "perfectly in character"¹⁴ with someone like the Count is doubtful. The

narrator of the poem speaks for Robinson and echoes the
Captain's words with reverence:

The ways have scattered for us, and all things
Have changed; and we have wisdom, I doubt not,
More fit for the world's work than we had then;
But neither parted ways nor cent per cent
May starve quite out the child that lives in us--
The Child that is the Man, the Mystery,
The Phoenix of the World.

CHAPTER VI

THE ARTHURIAN POEMS

A long road seems to glimmer from Captain Craig and Tilbury Town to King Arthur and his court. To a casual observer the Middle Ages provides richer soil for the flowering of mysticism than do the Captain's dingy rooms. For Edwin Arlington Robinson, however, the change in setting was unimportant. Whatever reason the poet had for selecting a medieval background, it was not to escape the quandaries of modern life. Only the physical settings differ; the spiritual milieu remains one. Merlin and Lancelot have problems no less complex than Roman Bartholow and Matthias, and, in some respects, Merlin, Lancelot, and Tristram are more contemporary than Captain Craig. As historical writing, the Arthurian trilogy is a failure; for the poet has to remind his readers by sparsely scattered archaisms and occasional references to confessors and hermits that he is telling of medieval times and folk. Morris correctly describes the characters of these poems as "a singular modern expression . . . of the perpetually recurrent moods of the human spirit"¹ seeking immortality, beauty, knowledge, freedom, and the meaning of life. But history, time, is not an ultimate to the mystical-minded Robinson; therefore, it should not be such in the evaluation of his Arthurian poems.

These poems were not written in immediate succession. Merlin appeared in 1917, Lancelot in 1920, and Tristram in 1927. But to discuss them together is logical and necessary. The first two poems are closely interrelated. Tristram is not as intimately related in plot or theme to Merlin and Lancelot, but a mystical element pervades it.

I. MERLIN

The mystical element in Merlin and Lancelot is the symbol of "the Light." Captain Craig, too, speaks of "the light," but in these two later poems the word is capitalized. Perhaps the capitalization has no significant purpose, or perhaps it shows that "the Light" has assumed even greater importance to the poet. This Light he defines as

simply the Light of the Grail, interpreted universally as a spiritual realization of Things, and their significance. I don't see how this could be made any more concrete, for it is not the same thing to any two individuals.²

It is the mystical light, the revelation that visits, in what form it will, each soul prepared for it.

Merlin opens with a conversation between the King's fool, Dagonet, and the light-hearted, lightly-loving Gawaine. The fool recalling the musing knight from his dream introduces the Grail-motif as surely as Wagner does in Parsifal:

"Think ye that if ye look far enough
And hard enough into the feathery west

Ye'll have a glimmer of the Grail itself?
 And if ye look for neither Grail nor lady,
 What look ye for to see, Gawaine, Gawaine?" 3

The "lady" is Vivian, for whom the wizard Merlin has deserted King and Camelot and under whose spell he has become young again. In discussing this spectacular love affair Dagonet introduces another theme that runs through the Arthurian poems, the time-theme:

"Time swings

A mighty scythe, and some day all your peace
 Goes down before its edge like so much clover."

p. 238-9

The fool is but echoing the mystical doctrine that time is man's foe.

Arthur, fearing disaster for his realm, has summoned Merlin home. A group of Arthur's knights are discussing the dark situation. "We're late now for much praying, Lamorak," says Sir Bedivere voicing the general feeling of impending doom,

"When you and I can feel upon our faces
 A wind that has been blowing over ruins
 That we had said were castles and high towers."

Modred seeking the King's overthrow, the Queen's unfaithfulness with Arthur's favorite knight, Lancelot,--all things spell total destruction for the old order:

"For me I see the shadow of the end,
 Wherein to serve King Arthur to the end,
 And, if God have it so, to see the Grail
 Before I die."

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But Lamorak, "the man of oak," the tough-minded realist, growls that nothing can be done for such a state of affairs

except to "let 'em go, and see what comes of 'em." "As for the Grail," he is not concerned; "I've never worried it, and so the Grail/⁽²⁴⁸⁾Has never worried me."

Then comes the flashback of a conversation between the tormented Arthur and the love-possessed Merlin. The wise man who has made Arthur king tells him that Camelot is doomed. But Arthur is not to despair, for "the time is imminent when he shall come/For whom I founded the Siege Perilous." Like many such sensitive souls

"He shall be too much a living part
Of what he brings, and what he burns away in,
To be for long a vexed inhabitant
Of this mad realm of stains and lower trials."

"And here the ways of God again are mixed," says Merlin, conscious of the paradoxes of life.

"For this new Knight who is to find the Grail
For you, and for the least who pray for you
In such lost coombs and hollows of the world
As you have never entered, is to be
The son of him you trusted--Lancelot,
Of all who ever jeopardized a throne
Sure the most evil-fated."

Arthur gloomily resigns himself. He will await his "new knight" who is to find the Grail, "Though I shall see no Grail. For I have built/On sand and mud, and I shall see no Grail."

Merlin makes his own confession:

"Nor I," said Merlin. "Once I dreamed of it,
But I was buried. I shall see no Grail,
Nor would I have it otherwise. I saw
Too much, and that was never good for man.
The man who goes alone too far goes mad--
In one way or another."

254

Arthur has been too shallow and too materialistic to behold the Vision. Yet Merlin's condition is worse; he is capable of seeing the Light, but he fears that the price of seeing it is too high. Merlin implies that the Light has given him his superior wisdom. By the Light he can read the future. But the blinding Light itself he has never seen. His predicament is that described by Eckhart:

Know that when you seek your own you never find
God there till you seek God alone. You seek something
with God and do with him just as though you made him
a candle with which to look for something; and having
found it you throw the candle away. ⁴

Merlin has used the Light, but he dares not let it use him.

He dares not because there are other things that he loves better than it. There are other things that he loves more than his king, and Arthur knows it. In accordance with his preferences, Merlin leaves Camelot for Broceliande and Vivian.

The wizard now cares only for the wizardry of love. "I have not lived in Time until today," he tells Vivian. But Vivian in her woman's wisdom knows better. "We are out of Time/And out of tune with Time," she tells him later; for time, unless man transcends it--and this fact Vivian does not know--defeats human happiness. Their paradise always rests uneasy. Merlin fears that "there may be specks" in their cup of pleasure. Vivian lives in constant terror lest her lover go away.

Go away he does when Arthur sends for him. But Merlin returns to Vivian and declares,

No kings are coming on their hands and knees
Nor yet on horses or in chariots
To carry me away from you again."

283

But he cannot keep his promise. He has seen Arthur's kingdom doomed because Arthur has "built on sand and mud" and "will see no Grail." Merlin has shut himself to the same Light and knows that he has done so. He muses in self-awareness:

"The man who sees
May go on seeing till the immortal flame
That lights and lures him folds him to its heart,
And leaves of what there was of him to die
An item of inhospitable dust
That love and hate alike must hide away."

294

But Merlin has been unable to thus sacrifice himself. The Light, nevertheless, has lured him:

"Or there may still be charted for his feet
A dimmer faring, where the touch of time
Were like the passing of a twilight moth
From flower to flower into oblivion,
If there were not somewhere a barren end
Of moths and flowers, and glimmering far away
Beyond a desert where the flowerless days
Are told in slow defeats and agonies,
The guiding of a nameless light that once
Had made him see too much and has by now
Revealed in death, to the undying child
Of Lancelot, the Grail."

295

Merlin must take the "dimmer faring." The "nameless light" is not the Grail, the Light. It merely points to it. Merlin is caught in the No-Man's Land between blindness and vision, and cannot escape in either direction. He is a mystique manque, not as Fremont says the poet is, from necessity, but from timorousness.

"For this pure light
Has many rays to throw, for many men
To follow; and the wise are not all pure,
Nor are the pure all wise who follow it."

"I see the light," sighs the wise man of this lesser light pointing to the Grail, or perhaps the Light itself seen from a deadly distance, "But I shall fall before I come to it." Yet, though he sees nothing for himself save failure and death, he must return to do what he can.

The wizard finds Camelot approaching the state that he has foreseen. Lancelot has abducted the Queen and made Gawaine a mortal enemy by unwittingly killing his two brothers. Modred has attacked Arthur and war rages.

"It means the end," Merlin tells Dagonet, "and you may pray for me or not,/Sir Friend, Sir Dagonet." "Sir fool, you mean," cries the jester bitterly; "when Merlin comes to Dagonet for prayer,/It is indeed the end."

But Merlin, who sees farther than Dagonet, replies,

"And in the end
Are more beginnings, Dagonet, than men
Shall name or know today. It was the end
Of Arthur's insubstantial majesty
When to him and to his knights the Grail foreshowed
The quest of life that was to be the death
Of many, and the slow discouraging
Of many more. Or do I err in this?"

p. 305

No, answers Dagonet, a Light did shine, "a Light wherein men saw themselves/In one another as they might become." Gawaine swearing to find the Grail or die was the first and most clamorous to follow. But "he came back as living and as fit/

For new and old iniquity as ever." Lancelot "came back from seeing what he saw," and "though his passion holds him like hot claws,/He's neither in this world or out of it."

"They told of Percival
Who saw too much to make of this worn life
A long necessity, and of Calahad,
Who died and is alive, They all saw Something. P.304
God knows the meaning or the end of it,
But they saw Something."

Merlin's only way of rendering these tragic and tremendous times intelligible is to believe that every man is "a groping thought/Of an eternal will" and that somet'imes a thought becomes swollen beyond its own importance. Selfishness and refusal to obey the Light have destroyed Arthur's kingdom. The only hope is "the torch of woman" and Calahad's light that are "yet to rule the world."

According to Robinson, "'the torch of woman' is to be taken literally." ⁵ Merlin, like Captain Craig, is preaching mysticism, but not asceticism. Men are to follow the spirit, but not to the destruction of the flesh. Dagonet cannot understand this doctrine. He doubts its practicability, and says with medieval world-weariness, "The world is done/For me." Merlin's meaning, however, is surely broader

than Dagonet supposes. Love for God and love for man are the two essential pillars on which a righteous society must rest. Men must see the Light and in its radiance view their "brothers. Merlin has been able to do neither. He has seen from afar the Promised Land, but has not dared enter. He

and the fool leave behind a dead world and together set out
into the night, while

Colder blew the wind
Across the world, and on it heavier lay
The shadow and the burden of the night;
And there was darkness over Camelot.

23/11

II. LANCELOT

Merlin's story ends in tragedy. Lancelot's story is laid against the same gloomy background as the seer's, but the knight achieves a personal triumph. Merlin is a prophet, but he sees only into time. Lancelot looks beyond time into eternity. His vision is no easy one to behold, but, unlike Merlin, he does not draw back in terror.

Like Merlin, Lancelot stands between two worlds, but Lancelot is not paralyzed. His indecision is that of one who knows what he has already decided. Gawaine finds him in this mood of brooding and silence and oblivion to all about him. Finally he comes to himself and tells Gawaine, "I go tomorrow."⁶

"No man has known you for the man you were/Before you saw whatever 'twas you saw," says Gawaine referring to the search for the Grail. Lancelot ignores the implied question. For Gawaine has admitted that he saw nothing, and so could not understand Lancelot's vision. Lancelot merely explains that he is leaving Camelot, not because he dreads the two

swords "parching for the blood of Lancelot," nor solely because "the fires of God are my one fear." "For there is one fear more," which Gawaine knows is Guinevere. Arthur's once loyal knight realizes that she may keep him from his quest. This hindrance must not be; for, says Lancelot, his way

"Leads off to battles that are not yet fought,
And to the Light that once had blinded me.
When I came back from seeing what I saw,
I saw no place for me in Camelot."

He still sees no place for him in Camelot or anywhere else "save where the Light/May lead." Gawaine correctly analyzes Lancelot: "You are a thing too vaporous to be sharing/The carnal feast of life."

Guinevere appears, smiting Lancelot once more with her white and gold beauty, and Gawaine leaves the lovers alone. Gawaine is laughing at their guilty secret, the Queen insists. Lancelot assures her that he does not fear Gawaine, for the fickle knight is as much his friend as he is any man's. No sooner than Guinevere ceases to worry about Gawaine than a worse dread visits her. Although Lancelot reminds her, "I saw your face, and there were no more kings," he gently implies that such a time is over. "It is yourself/That I see now:" he says sadly, "And if I saw you only/I might forego again all other service." Guinevere knows what else Lancelot sees besides her: "There is a Light that you fear

more today/Than all the darkness that has ever been." Then she says, more to convince herself than Lancelot, "Yet I doubt not that your light will burn on/For some time yet without your ministration." She is even glad that the danger from Modred makes Lancelot think of her safety.

But Lancelot, faltering, tries to tell her that not even her safety can keep him from his purpose. She understands. She has seen him change even before the advent of the Grail. For "it was God, not something new that called you." Despite her comprehension, she cannot but remind him of "those two Elaines," one of whom "is dead, poor child, for you." "How do you feel," Guinevere asks plaintively, "you men, when women die for you? They do,/Sometimes, you know. Not often, but sometimes."

Lancelot attempts to smile away her words as "an unrelated rambling." Nevertheless, he knows that they are no such thing; he realizes her heart-broken passion for him. Before Guinevere leaves him, she asks Lancelot to come to her tonight while Arthur is away on a hunt.

She leaves without his answer, but he will come. Lancelot cannot refuse her this last meeting. It may imperil his resolution and her life, but he realizes painfully that she has not his mystic vision to sustain her. "Time, tide, and twilight--and the dark;/And then, for me, the Light. But what for her?"

His own spiritual certainty has not cursed Lancelot with self-righteousness. "Who is this Lancelot that has betrayed/His King, and served him with a cankered honor?" he asks in a passion of self-recrimination. "Who is this Lancelot that sees the Light/And waits now in the shadow for the dark?" And this King, this Arthur, secure in willful ignorance, who is he? Who and why are these "kings, queens, Camelots?" "What is this dim world" that he would, and cannot, leave tonight "because a Queen is in it and a King/Has gone away to some place where there's hunting?" What are kings, asks Lancelot once more, and

"When are they
To know that men must have an end of them
When men have seen the Light and left the world
That I am leaving now?"

A haze of unreality has shrouded all things since he has seen the Light. He rebels against the right of anything to exist except his vision. With more justification he foresees, like Merlin, that sacrifices must be made to the Light. Yet he thinks sardonically of tonight when he will "prove/How merry a man may be who sees the Light" and nearly despairs: "God, what a rain of ashes fall on him/who sees the new and cannot leave the old!"

Even as Lancelot contemplates the possibility of leaving Camelot and Guinevere this very hour

the silver lights of memory
Shone faintly on a far-off eastern shore

There he had seen on earth for the last time
The triumph and the sadness in the face
Of Calahad, for whom the Light was waiting.

In vision he sees the face again, and "his flickering will
abjured him/To follow it and be free." But the vision
fades as he pursues it, and Guinevere's face appears to his
imagination. Once more his desires have stalemated.

However, not for long. This night Arthur surprises
the lovers in their sin. His mad grief makes the King con-
demn Guinevere to the flames, from which Lancelot rescues
her, but not without unknowingly killing Gawaine's unarmed
brothers. When Gawaine insists that Arthur avenge him, the
King wages double war against Modred and against Lancelot,
who has taken the Queen to Joyous Gard. X

The name of his castle has a bitter sound to Lancelot.
For having wrought havoc in one night he desires only Calahad's vision. Joyous Gard has an even bitterer ring to
Guinevere, who realizes that Lancelot has forfeited peace and
honor for her, whom he no longer holds dear. She begs him to
surrender. But he cannot do so without killing Gawaine, whom
he wishes to harm no further, or yielding Guinevere to
Arthur's anger.

Nevertheless, the Light shines steadily on against the
holocaust and, for the reader, discloses something more of
its nature. Sir Bors, expostulating with Lancelot about the
fruitless carnage, says:

"I saw once with you, in a far land,
 The glimmering of a Light that you saw nearer--
 Too near for your salvation or advantage,
 If you be what you seem. What I saw then
 Made life a wilder mystery than ever,
 And earth a new illusion. You, maybe,
 Saw pity and grief. What I saw was a Gleam,
 To fight for or to die for."

Lancelot is no simple-hearted knight to think that the Grail
 can be won by combat. As Bors perceives, Lancelot's Light
 is not for Camelot,

"Nor more for Rome; but for another state
 That shall be neither Rome nor Camelot,
 Nor one that we may name."

Guinevere tells Lancelot more explicitly, "The Light you
 saw was not the Light of Rome." The Light does not shine
 through creeds and ceremonies, but falls directly on the
 naked soul. Even the most orthodox mystic ultimately obeys
 Suso's maxim, "Rest on nothing which is not God."⁷ And
 Lancelot's Light is nothing less than God known intensely
 and immediately.

God known directly is also God known dangerously
 because nothing may obstruct His way. Merlin has dared not
 pay the price of full vision, but Lancelot dares and Guinevere
 knows that he does. Her desperate love, however, still re-
 fuses to admit the fact. "Am I not anything now?" she asks,
 and lacerates him with the reminder that she wore for him
 "the fiery crown itself/of human torture." Why did he save
 her? Not, she thinks, because of any "far-off Light." For
 the Light has nothing to do with her or with this warfare:

"Knowing the world, you know
How surely and how indifferently that Light
Shall burn through many a war that is to be
To which this war were no more than a smear
On circumstance."

Guinevere believes that Lancelot has seen the Light, but that it has no practical value. It is not "the Light of Rome," she argues; no authority supports it. It is not even the Light of Time, and so does not make sense.

Therefore, when Arthur has agreed to peace and Guinevere may return safely to Camelot, she pleads to know why her lover

"must hurry away to grasp and hoard
The small effect of time I might have stolen
From you and from a Light that where it lives
Must live forever."

"Yet one morsel more of life together," she begs, "cannot hurt your Vision." But all her pleadings and wild suggestions are vain. There would be no place for the lovers to hide, even if Lancelot wished to hide. "There is no other way than one for you,/Nor is there more than one for me," he insists, telling her with grim and tragic courtliness, "We have lived,/And we shall die. I thank you for my life."

Events race to a swift close. The war with Gawaine ends, and Lancelot exchanges forgiveness with the light-hearted knight now dying. Modred destroys Arthur and Camelot. The world has ended for those left behind. "There is more than men at work in this," affirms Bors, "And I have not your eyes to find the Light,/Here in the dark--though someday I

may see it."

"We shall all see it, Bors," replies Lancelot solemnly. Men's darkness will not last forever, even as his own will not:

"Once I had gone
where the Light guided me, but the Queen came
And then there was no Light, We shall all see--"

He must see the Queen once more before he gives himself to the Light; for he "would leave/The world and not the shadow of it." He is riding to Almesbury, where she is in a convent.

A different Guinevere awaits him, no longer "the Queen of white and gold," but a hooded nun. He has been dreading his lack of words to comfort her. Now beholding her melancholy appearance, he exclaims, "Is this the end/Of Arthur's kingdom and of Camelot," and she replies,

"We are told of other States
Where there are palaces, if we should need them,
That are not made with hands. I thought you knew."

These quiet words, so strange on Guinevere's lips, strike Lancelot "dumb, like a man twice banished." He should not have come, she says. Nevertheless,

"There is nothing now
That I can see between you and the Light
That I have dimmed so long."

"Yes, there is that between me and the light," he says, but means her black hood between him and her golden hair.

Guinevere knows that he is feeling only the last embers of passion. "No, Lancelot," she smiles. "We are

going by two roads to the same place." "Is there no other place in the world left?" he asks. "There is not even the world left, Lancelot,/For you and me," she answers. "There is France," he blurts, echoing her own plea made at Joyous Gard. She, too, can echo and repeats his words spoken once before, "'We cannot make one world of two, nor may we/Count one life more than one.'"

She asks him to remember her, not as she is now, but "all white and gold, as I was once./I shall not harm you then," she promises with a touch of her old pathos; "I shall not come/Between you and the Gleam that you must follow." She has not ceased to love him; she has accepted the inevitable.

"I, who have not prayed much,
May as well pray now. I have not what you have
To make me see, though I shall have, sometime,
A new light of my own. I saw in the Tower,
When all was darkest and I may have dreamed,
A light that gave to men the eyes of Time
To read themselves in silence."

Guinevere is no mystic. Like Merlin, she sees only into Time; unlike Merlin, she lacks capacity to see farther. But Lancelot is a mystic; the Light summons him above and beyond Time, beyond the duties and necessities that other men feel. "He crushed her cold white hands and saw them falling/Away from him like flowers into a grave."

Lancelot rides away, but not in triumph. The indescribable loneliness that must be Guinevere's torments him. "No man was ever alone like that," he thinks, but he does

not know "what last havoc pity and love" are "still to
wreak on wisdom."

Gradually,

In one long wave it whelmed him, and then broke--
Leaving him like a lone man on a reef,
Staring for what had been with him, but now
Was gone and was a white face under the sea,
Alive there, and alone--always alone.

Again he seems to see Guinevere's face, but it is a white
face no longer framed in gold. Twilight has settled over
the land, the reapers have gone home, and peace is every-
where--save in Lancelot's heart. Yet "Why should I look for
peace/When I have made the world a ruin of war?" he asks.
"Where the Light falls, death falls; a world has died/For
you, that a world may live. There is no peace," the inner
Voice replies. "Be glad no man or woman bears forever/The
burden of first days. There is no peace." As he rides "out
of a world/That was not his, or the King's" he feels "a
burden lifted."

Through his tears he beholds Guinevere's face "fading,
always fading." That which is fading is his world. Once he
turns his horse, "and would have brought his army back with
him/To make her free. They should be free together." Once
more he hears "the Voice within him:"

"You are not free.
You have come to the world's end, and it is best
You are not free. Where the Light falls, death falls;
And in the darkness comes the Light."

"The darkness" is what St. John of the Cross calls "the dark

night of the sense" and "the dark night of the soul." The Spanish mystic describes "the dark night" thus:

This night--it is contemplation--produces in spiritual men two sorts of darkness or purgations conformable to the two divisions of man's nature into sensual and spiritual. Thus the first night or sensual purgation, wherein the soul is purified or detached, will be of the senses, subjecting them to the spirit. The other is that night or spiritual purgation wherein the soul is purified and detached in the spirit, and which subdues it and disposes it for union with God in love.⁸

Lancelot has undergone the first darkness; it has been the state remarked by the shallowest of his friends. "You are a thing too vaporous to be sharing/The carnal feast of life," Gawaine has said, not understanding what he describes.

Lancelot is about to undergo the second darkness, "the dark night of the soul." No present evidence exists that Robinson had ever read St. John of the Cross. But the poet need never have read a treatise on the experience that no man can describe and that is both universal and unique. Insofar as a poet may intimate the dark night and the divine visitation, Robinson has done so in the conclusion of Lancelot:

He rode on, under the stars,
Out of the world, into he knew not what,
Until a vision chilled him and he saw,
Now as in Camelot, long ago in the garden,
The face of Galahad who had seen and died,
And was alive, now in a mist of gold.
He rode on into the dark, under the stars,
And there were no more faces. There was nothing.
But always in the darkness he rode on,
Alone; and in the darkness came the Light.

Lancelot needs no more faces, neither the gold and white face of his love, nor even the face of Galahad. For

Lancelot himself beholds what Galahad has beheld, the ineffable vision of God--the Light.

III. TRISTRAM

The change from the world of Lancelot to that of Tristram is drastic, much more drastic than the change from the world of Merlin to that of Lancelot. No world is on fire in Tristram, but only two passions; no love is a sacrifice to the Light, but everything is a sacrifice to love. The Grail, the Light, is never mentioned. The Grail is no part of the Tristram legend; but as Robinson treated the details of all three Arthurian stories freely, so he could have introduced the symbol in Tristram had he so wished.

Nevertheless, Mark Van Doren errs in saying of this poem, "We have tragedy once more, but the elements which compose it have nothing of metaphysics in them."⁹ Carpenter, disagreeing with Van Doren, asks, "Would it not be more accurate . . . to say rather that Tristram implied, . . . incarnated, the intellectual ideas which Robinson had formerly described explicitly?"¹⁰ and says that this poem "did give certain explicit formulation to the most fundamental of these ideas,"¹¹ that of time. Carpenter asks further, "Did not Tristram rather suggest how 'love' and 'the light'--which in Lancelot had been divided--might achieve a certain tragic harmony?"¹² The truth lies somewhere between the opinion of

Van Doren and that of Carpenter.

Tristram is not merely a love poem any more than Merlin and Lancelot are exclusively mystical poems. But as the two earlier poems are essentially mystical so Tristram is fundamentally a love story. This fact was the source of its wide popular appeal that caused Tristram to be selected by the Literary Guild as book-of-the-month and within three weeks to be reprinted four times. The poem also won the Pulitzer Prize.

The intensity of the passion and the poetry that expresses it rather than the passion itself gives Tristram its appeal. The mystical quality lies in the lovers' struggles with and victory over Time. Time haunts the characters in the other two Arthurian poems, but never so much as in Tristram. On nearly every page Time, which word is frequently capitalized in this poem, crouches ready to strike down the lovers in their ecstasy. Time begins as the victor; for on the night after the dark Isolt has married the gross Mark and goes for a last meeting with Tristram, whom she has loved too late,

Time was aware of them
And would soon beat upon his empty bell
Release from such a fettered ecstasy
As fate would not endure.¹³

Yet Isolt realizes that the ultimate triumph is not Time's, but love's. "We cannot make it die,/We are not mighty enough to sentence love," she tells Tristram, even though

love slays the lovers. For the passion between Tristram and Isolt is not physical alone, and it is a sacrifice as well as a rapture. "I do not think there is much love like ours/Here in this life," whispers Isolt,

"or that too much of it
Would make poor men and women who go alone
Into their graves without it more content,
Or more by common sorrow to be envied."

Isolt proves right in both judgments; for she and Tristram "were not made for time,/And time therefore would not be long for them." Even Mark, whose stupidity is his only crime, admits that "these two . . . have torn life from time,/Like a death-laden flower out of the earth."

Time, which Lancelot overcomes with the Light, Tristram and Isolt conquer by love. "Whatever it was that filled life high and full,/It was not time," It would be too much to say that Robinson identifies love with the Light. It would have been contrary to Robinson's nature to use erotic symbolism for things religious as some mystics have done. Nevertheless, love in Tristram ultimately transcends itself as well as time. It is love neither physical nor Platonic, but both and something more than both. Perhaps, too, this love fulfills the prophecy concerning "the torch of woman" that is to rule the world along with the Light. Perhaps Isolt is the fulfillment of Merlin's words:

"In time to be,
The like of her shall have another name

Than Vivian, and her laugh shall be a fire,
 Not shining only to consume itself
 With what it burns."

IV. THE ARTHURIAN POEMS AS A WHOLE

Self-frustrated mystic though he is, Merlin is the best balanced character in the Arthurian poems. Lancelot is so possessed by the Light that he has no room for human love. Tristram and Isolt are so possessed by love for each other that they attain at most to a secular mystical experience. Merlin, possessed fully by neither Light nor love, can foresee the synthesis of both. Yet it is easy for him to be dispassionate when he refuses to yield to either. Moreover, he only foresees a union of the human with the Divine; he does not experience it. Few, if any, of Robinson's characters achieve this synthesis; for Robinson, mystic though he is, never forgets the world of tormented men in which perfection is impossible.

The Arthurian trilogy has its setting in the world of men. The characters, particularly in Merlin and Lancelot, are men against the sky, men who respond to the Light in various ways. Merlin sees the Light and fears it. Lancelot sees it and forsakes all for it. Gawaine seeks it in the spirit of high adventure and finds nothing. Lamorak cares nothing for it. And Bedivere would fight for it like a true medieval knight.

But only Lancelot finds the Light; only he is the genuine mystic. Therefore, one objection to the Arthurian poems is that they present as an ideal the retreat from life.¹⁴ Such criticisms completely miss the point. When Merlin and Lancelot speak of leaving the world, or of a world in shambles, they do not mean every kind of world. They mean Arthur's world, a world that he confesses is "built on sand and mud." Truly, "where the Light falls, death falls," but death to blindness, greed, and selfishness. The Arthurian poems abound in social vision, and Lancelot foretells a future when all men, not the chosen few, will see the Light. Robinson does not glorify an ascetic mysticism.

Obviously, however, the Vision of Lancelot is not purely social. The social and the personal blend into each other and have between them no fixed boundary, even as the love in Tristram is partly personal and partly symbolic of "the torch of woman." Robinson agreed that Lancelot "if one insists, . . . may be taken as a rather distant symbol of Germany, though the reader will do well not to make too much of this or to carry it too far."¹⁵ Perhaps Robinson's conception of Lancelot as both symbol of Germany in the first World War and as an individual in his own right is the reason for the poet's unreserved treatment of the mystical experience; for, he perhaps mistakenly thought, the reader would be unable to tell where Germany ends and mysticism begins.

The Arthurian poems reveal the souls of men who seek to transcend self and time. Some of them fail, some succeed only partially, and others attain their end through heart-break and anguish. Yet the poet admits never a doubt that the suffering is a waste, or that the world will not someday share the vision of its Light-tormented mystics.

CHAPTER VII

ROMAN BARTHOLOW

Having resurrected and made real the dim world of Camelot, Edwin Arlington Robinson turned to modern persons and places. Roman Bartholow, published in 1923, is the first long character study that he undertook after he had begun the Arthurian trilogy.

Mysticism flowers in strange places. It is an eccentric blossom in Captain Craig's lodgings. It blooms lushly in the Middle Ages. But what a bedraggled shrub it must be in a bourgeois mansion, scene of a nervous breakdown and of an affair between a loveless woman and her husband's best friend! Yet the Light that Lancelot sought shines everywhere, and the poet intends to show what curious circumstances reflect and deflect its rays.

Roman Bartholow, when his story opens, feels no intimations except of hope and joy. His friend, Penn-Raven, has cured his mind-sickness, which was more than mind-sickness, and hence Bartholow glows with happiness part pagan and part religious for

the Power

That filled him as light fills a buried room,
When earth is lifted and the sun comes in.
He would have raised an altar now to spring,
And one to God; and one now to the friend
Who, coming strangely out of the unknown
To find him here in his ancestral prison,
Had brought with him release.¹

His optimism, however, goes unshared. Gabrielle, his wife, with whom he hopes "to let new vision build/with new love a new house" rebuffs his affectionate demonstration. Penn-Raven also dampens his enthusiasm. "Because your soul/Has found itself and is at last alive," he warns Bartholow, "never believe that you have not a body."

"Lose that, and off your soul will go again
 Into the dungeon where it was I found you,
 And you will go there with it."

Penn-Raven would do better to apply this warning to himself.

For Penn-Raven has fallen in love with Gabrielle, wife of the man whom he has rescued from insanity. Robinson draws Penn-Raven in the physical likeness of thick-lipped men who repelled the poet: ²

The square face
 And heavy forehead were for more men's envy
 Than a soft mouth where lips that were too full
 Here for the cautious like a false addition
 To be deplored.

Penn-Raven has a sensualist's body and a mystic's soul. He is of Merlin's line, a man who has seen the Light, who can prompt others to seek it, but who cannot himself follow it.

He may have practiced something of psychiatry upon Bartholow, but his cure was more spiritual than that of the psychiatrist. "If science tells you it was not the soul/That ailed him when I came, why not believe it?" says he to the skeptic Gabrielle. But if science says any such thing, Penn-Raven does not believe its pronouncement. No, he tells

Gabrielle, he has worked no miracles for Bartholow. "There is a field for them, or their appearance/Though I have never gleaned or wandered in it," he says. But he knows something more wonderful than miracles, and in the following words to the uncomprehending Gabrielle he reveals his mysticism and his realization of his tragic flaw: —

"There's also an unfailing fountainhead
Of power and peace: and if once we prove
The benefit of its immortal taste,
Our living thirst will have a living drink--
Dilute it or offend it as we may
With trashy draughts of easy consequence,
Kinkled with reason."

These words also afford the keynote of the whole poem. A fountainhead has been opened in the experience of Bartholow, and all the characters are affected by it and all "dilute it or offend it." The poem is a study of human reactions to this fountainhead even as Merlin and Lancelot are studies of men's responses to the Light. Both symbols represent the one divine experience.

Penn-Raven dilutes the fountainhead because he cannot resist his lust. Gabrielle offends it because she cannot love. She, the poem explains, is one of those women "who seize on comfort without love." When Bartholow's long mental depression troubled her comfort, she accepted Penn-Raven as a temporary release from boredom. Like Penn-Raven, however, she has the gift to see herself, not as others see her, but as she is. She knows that she is shallow, bereft

of inner resources. She tells her lover:

"When I was little,
I'm told that I would howl astonishingly
When there was nothing but myself and silence
To entertain."

Nor has she changed. A psychologist would call her infantile. She was not woman enough to help her husband in his need. When "he would sit for hours/Trying to make believe that he was reading," she says, "in a language where the words were gone/Like stars under a cloud," she considered merely her own drab loneliness.

Penn-Raven scornfully tells Gabrielle that she has thrown Bartholow's love away, that she has refused to be a real wife, that she mocks the man, now well, who bored her when he was sick. "You were dead/Before he came," declares Penn-Raven. Disgust for the way Gabrielle treats her husband is fast overcoming Penn-Raven's guilty love:

"You knew that in his love
You had, whether or not you cared for knowing,
More than a few in any thousand men
May lay upon the altar of one woman;
And, haunting an old ruin as you were then,
You reasoned that another ruin or two
Would not much matter, and in any event
Would be a change. And that was your grand passion."

Gabrielle sneers at this righteous indignation, "You make an awful noise over the dead." She is angry as she realizes the hopelessness of trying to revive the dead. "If there be only what you say there is," says the shocked Penn-Raven, "You are too beautiful to be alive."

Gabrielle, nevertheless, is not so callous as he supposes. She is merely unimaginative, and has been no match for another's need. She has no faith in her husband's permanent cure nor the ability to share his vision:

He had seen much in his illumination--
 Failing a better name for the unknown--
 That she, having a soul that had no eyes,
 If she had any, had not been born to see.

Self-knowledge is no mean gift, but for Gabrielle it leads to self-destruction. On this fatal night she admits to her husband what by now he already knows, "There will be no houses, . . ./Or none I mean that we shall build together." "You are not worth--" Bartholow begins angrily and then in vain retracts his words. "I was a plant prepared for other soil/Than yours on which I fell," she admits, humbled by his scorn, "and so I've shrunk./I'd best have withered." She even confesses that his vision may not be "moonshine" and says what no decent man would have his wife say:

"I am the bridge, then, over which you pass,
 Here in the dark, to find a lighted way
 To a new region where I cannot follow."

With a fleeting kiss she leaves him and goes out into the night.

But what of Roman Bartholow, whose name gives the poem its title? Less is revealed directly of him, the central character, than of the other characters in the poem. What Penn-Raven, Gabrielle, and Unfraville the fisherman, say of and to him, rather than his own words or thoughts, permits

an insight into his soul.

The nature of his cure, of his experience, remains undisclosed; for it has been a mystical experience and, as such, ineffable. He is "Bartholow, knowing only the unknown,/ And sharing only the unsharable." His experience is variously described in the poem as release, resurrection, rebirth, seeing the light, and finding his soul.

But none of Robinson's mystics attain perfection, and certainly not Bartholow. Hagedorn includes Roman Bartholow among the poems presenting "the struggle of the lonely woman against the self-centered . . . male." ³ Hagedorn in a sense is correct. An intimation runs through the narrative that Bartholow's self-centeredness has caused his illness. Although he confesses to Gabrielle, "I was wrong/To shut you up in such a place as this," he never entirely loses his self-righteous and possessive attitude towards her.

He, as well as Penn-Raven, dilutes the fountainhead. Like a man dazed by a sudden light, he does not know exactly what has happened. Penn-Raven explains to Bartholow the significance of Bartholow's experience even after the latter has learned of his friend's guilt. Who but Robinson would have conceived the irony of an offending friend talking mysticism to an offended husband?

Sitting on the floor to which the enraged Bartholow has struck him, Penn-Raven calmly analyzes his friend:

"Bartholow,
 There was a man once who believed himself
 Nearer to God, and by the way of reason--
 Where few may see, or seeing may dare to go--
 Than all the martyrs by the way of faith."

The man of whom Penn-Raven speaks is obviously Bartholow himself. Penn-Raven here intimates the nature of the conversations between the two men during Bartholow's illness. The pronouncement that the distressed man has been led "nearer to God, and by the way of reason/ . . . Than all the martyrs by the way of faith" appears very unmythical. Yet Penn-Raven does not mean the experience itself, but only the way to it. Strictly speaking, of course, no one attains to the mystic vision by reason, but vision and reason are not antitheses. "It is a mistake to suppose," writes Underhill, "that these qualities," humility and love, "cannot exist side by side with an active and disciplined intelligence."⁴ Moreover, by "reason" Penn-Raven certainly does not mean the narrow eighteenth-century variety. No rationalist of that period would have added, "And if I believe it/For all my needs I know it." Penn-Raven tells his friend that he is still near God, but warns him that

"There is no going back from such a place--
 Or not by the same road; yet there are pits
 Along the way, and there are darknesses,
 As on all other ways--only far deeper,
 And, after an excess of blinding light,
 Unconsciously darker."

Bartholow has no reply save angry sarcasm. By way of apology Penn-Raven describes his own experience:

"There was a man
 On whom a light fell once, as once a light
 Fell sharp on Saul--though it was not like that;
 Or possibly it was. There are these things,
 And they are so--until we give them names
 And harness them with words that have one meaning
 For no two men."

His mystical experience has been richer than Bartholow's.
 Penn-Raven confesses that he has been too confident of his
 power to resist his own love for Gabrielle: "Sure that his
 house that was not made with hands/as built forever, he was
 too sure to see."

"There may be somewhere in forgotten song/A love like
 mine," he says sadly, "though hardly quite another/In life
 I fancy." Both he and Bartholow have loved Gabrielle; both
 have lost her.

"Meanwhile our occupation is to live,
 And somehow to be wiser for a woman
 Who, as we thought, was here; and was not here."

Bartholow has something more to do than grieve for a loveless
 wife. He has been illuminated, and he is not to quench the
 inner light in the salt waters of bitterness. The light
 brings with it social responsibility, though in itself it is
 incommunicable:

"Your doom is to be free, The seed of truth
 Is in you, and the fruit is yours
 To eat alone. You cannot share it,
 Though you may give it, and a few thereby
 May taste of it, and so not wholly starve."

Yet Bartholow naturally enough is "deaf to the mystic
 fervor/That once had healed and liberated him." No betrayed

husband likes to be classed with the betrayer, nor enjoys being told, "Your doom is to be free," by the man who he feels has so doomed him. Nevertheless, Penn-Raven repeats his assurance of his friend's destiny:

"You know as well as I
That you are the inheritor to-night____
Of more than all the pottage or the gold
Of time would ever buy. You cannot lose it
By gift or sale or prodigality
For any more by scorn."

Penn-Raven is well-nigh antinomian in his mysticism. Once the light has been fully beheld, nothing can take it away. His own fall might have made him more cautious.

Bartholow's response to his one-time spiritual physician is, "Get out!"

And neither saw the other's face again
Until there was a crunch of rushing feet
Outside along the gravel, and anon
The sound of a slow knocking at the door.

Two nights later "Umfraville, the learned fisherman," opens his door to find Bartholow "pallid and changed and calm." The self-styled student with the "miscreated face" has previously assured Bartholow of his friendship, and now in his sorrow and confusion over Gabrielle's suicide Bartholow seeks him out.

"You have done well to tell me how she died," says Umfraville, "But ill to tell me that you know not why." Umfraville has a cool and collected view of the situation, and gives the stricken man a saner and juster outlook on the

tragedy. "Your soul/May shrink if you are too familiar with it," he warns; for he suspects that Bartholow, like Penn-Raven, may grow too self-sure. Umfraville has never trusted Bartholow's "savior." "And on the other hand," he muses, "strange bottles hold strange wines, or we are told so/And I believe old sayings, for I'm a student."

"Your soul may shrink if you are too familiar with it," says Umfraville, and echoes Penn-Raven's warning that "yours would be the blackest of all worlds/without your new-found light." Yet he, like Penn-Raven, believes that "there is a voice that says it will not fade." Umfraville is not the cynic that he has appeared earlier in the poem, saying "Once I believed that I had found my soul,/But therein I was wrong and only bilious." He is merely cautious and clear-eyed. He can see the wrong done to Gabrielle by her husband as well as the wrong done to Bartholow by Gabrielle.

Nevertheless, Bartholow supposes that Umfraville is putting upon him the responsibility of her death: "You mean then that I killed her?" The thought that the accusation is just crushes Bartholow. At the same time he feels that he was too harsh with the man who, traitor though he has been, is yet his savior. "There is much you do not know," he maintains, "of doors that are within us and are closed/Until one comes who has the key to them." How the traitor-savior opened his doors, Bartholow does not know. He is only certain

that

"There were no mummeries, no miracles;
There was no degradation of the wits,
Or of the will; there was no name for it;
Yet something in me opened and the light
Came in. I could have given him all but life
For recompense. Also I could have killed him,
Indifferently, while he was on the floor
And I was at his throat.

Remembering how Penn-Raven wept when Bartholow ordered him away, Bartholow himself loses control and weeps.

Three months later Bartholow has sold his ancestral home and prepares to leave it forever. The faithful Umfraville comes to bid him farewell and finds him calm with no forced calm, and assured once more of his "new-found light," the light that Umfraville's common sense does not give eyes to see. Bartholow recalls his own words about the doors and asks:

"How is a man who has a door in him
Still closed, like yours, to say what else he was
Besides a blackguard,"

Bartholow is as far as Umfraville is from understanding the contradiction in Penn-Raven's nature. But he is sure of that which Penn-Raven has given him.

Poman Bartholow ends on a subdued note that is almost anti-climactic. The conclusion presents no lone soul going out to face the dark splendor of the Light. There is only a lonely man walking away from a lonely mansion,

Knowing that he had seen for the last time
The changeless outlines of those eastern hills,

And all those changing trees that flamed along
A river that should flow for him no more.

Yet the Light is still there, and Foman Bartholow is going out to meet it as surely as Lancelot met it. The difference is that, even if Lancelot's Light is not "the light of Rome," he rode forth in the age of faith in which the Grail descended to mortal eyes and men were folded to the heart of its radiance. Robinson was freer to break his customary reticence in the Arthurian poems than in a modern narrative wherein even the most mystical of the characters dares not speak of his vision without equivocation. The style of the poem matches its mood. The verse is dry and tense, slow-moving and strained. The lush descriptions of the Arthurian poems are gone. Gabrielle is merely "beautiful," but her beauty does not come to life before the reader's eyes as does Vivian's and Guinevere's and Isolt's. Nor, when Robinson uses the word light, does he capitalize it.

The Light, however, remains the same symbol for the same Reality. If modern throats choke with the dust of doubt until modern tongues speak with difficulty the convictions of modern mystics, the convictions are no less true. "Now I am not so sure," says Penn-Raven, "Though I believe it; and if I believe it,/For all my needs I know it." This voice is the voice of Robinson. This intuition is the fountainhead of his mysticism.

CHAPTER VIII

MATTHIAS AT THE DOOR

Matthias at the Door, published in 1932, is another study in grays and blacks. Even darker than those in Roman Partholow, the shadows do not cast a gloom all unrelieved. Whatever darkness appears in the poetry of Edwin Arlington Robinson results essentially from his conviction that "where the Light falls, death falls."¹ Moreover, in an interview he said, "If you want to find out about my 'Transcendentalism' . . . read The War Against the Sky and Matthias at the Door. It's in those poems."² The poet would have meant the same thing had he used the word mysticism.

Matthias as he first appears has little mysticism in his soul. Prosperous, middle-aged but still passionately in love with Natalie, his wife, sure of himself and of his God, he sits surveying his estate and is "in harmony this afternoon/Even with chaos."³ He hears an unseen brook making

a cold song of an eternity
That would be always cold, and always dark,
And far from his desire.

He is orthodox in his religion, but a soul who lives only in time. To Matthias God is a rewarder of the good, preferably in terms of stocks and bonds, and the scourger of the wicked, or more precisely, of the fools as exemplified in

Garth, a bitter ne'er-do-well, who startles Matthias' repose;

"I'm not the devil,
Matthias, I am only a lost dog.
I was too tired to bark. Forgive my trespass.
You are not God, but you are more like God
In a few ways than any one else I know.
Have you not thought so?"

"Your compliments are not engaging, Garth," replies Matthias,
irritated and shocked.

Garth, however, is more sarcastic than sincere in his
compliments. He knows that Matthias is smug, that he regards
other people with haughty toleration, that his pride would
suffer if he felt the need of a friend, and that

"'A mystery might be worse if it were knowledge.'
Matthias might have said; 'and though unlikely,
There may still be surprise.'"

Matthias hardly knows how to answer this frank esti-
mate of himself. Garth puzzles him even more by calling
his attention to a large rock with a hole in it like a door,
"dark and large and heavy enough/To be the tomb of God."
Matthias follows Garth to examine this "waste of evil arch-
itecture" and shudders at the strange place. Garth speaks
mysteriously:

"One of these days I shall go there to knock,
And that will be the last of doors for me.
I have knocked on too many, and for nothing."

And menacingly:

"You are strong in body and soul, yet I'm not sure
That you are sound in your serenity.
Your God, if you may still believe in him,
Created you so wrapped in rectitude
That even your eyes are filmed a little with it.

Like a benignant sort of cataract,
 It spares your vision many distances
 That you have not explored. I hope, Matthias,
 That you may not pursue them ruinously,
 For they may come to this--which you consider
 Merely a scenery."

If this "dark Egyptian door" opens for Matthias, it may lead him to another door, although Garth thinks this possibility unlikely and is "no longer curious." "It's only a dark hole in a dark rock," says Garth, "If you see only that. You will see more, Matthias. You have not yet seen anything."

Matthias is to see what Garth predicts and more also. For as the brook symbolizes the spirit and the eternity which Matthias, in love with time and the things of time, does not care to know, so the door symbolizes the way into the Dark Night of the Soul.

However, as yet Matthias sees nothing but that the hole in the rock is only a hole and that Garth is merely envious and blasphemous. He goes home, hoping to forget Garth and his "dark Egyptian door."

Matthias, however, is not permitted to forget the elusive Garth. Garth is found that night in the hole of the rock, where he has crawled to poison himself. The dead man disturbs Matthias' Sunday peace the next afternoon. "It's all Garth," he declares of the tense mood fallen upon him and his wife. Therefore, they agree to forget the unfortunate.

"I should not forget him; or not wholly--/Or not at

once," advises Timberlake, friend of Matthias' and Natalie's, who has just come for a stay with the couple. But Matthias has only pitying scorn for the dead man. Garth's was a wasted life, and God has done solid folk like Matthias a favor in removing it: "I'll assume it was God's way,/Not his, that he was taking when he left us."

"Poor soul! Poor soul!
When I see folly that has pawned its wings
Hating itself because it cannot fly,
I'd rather turn my eyes and look the other way."

Nothing shakes the complacent Puritan until he sees his wife and Timberlake in each other's arms near the Egyptian door. His pride suffers even more when he learns that Timberlake, in gratitude to Matthias for saving him from burning to death, had let Natalie marry Matthias. Natalie had agreed to this sacrifice and confesses to her husband,

"I married you, Matthias,
Because I liked you, and because your love
Was too real to be tortured, and because
There was no better thing for me to do."

Now Timberlake has gone away because "the mark of fire" is upon his friendship for Matthias and his love for Natalie.

Stunned by this revelation of his hitherto unknown debt to two persons, Matthias goes away. He returns, and man and wife agree that since "patches are better than holes," they will save appearances and sail "with a flag flying."

The couple settle down to a dreary despair. Natalie

feels the shadow of

A black and giant rock that made her think
Of Egypt and lost shadows in the night
Of ages, where defeats were all forgotten,
Dreams all a part of nothing, and words all said.

Matthias apparently ceases to brood over the rock and the events surrounding it. Nevertheless, "time was a traitor to Matthias, /who had believed and trusted in it," and time will not befriend him again. He begins to drink and to be grossly possessive towards his wife. One day she can endure his behavior no more. He finds a note, "Matthias I am sorry. Fatalie," and, terrified, goes to search

down among trees and rocks and shadows,
And silence broken only by a brook
Running unseen down there where he must go,
And go alone, knowing what he must find.

The "cold song" of eternity has drowned out the sound of time.

Matthias abandons himself to bitterness and bleakness. His estate, which once swelled his pride and self-confidence, is now "a tomb of life and love, and of his God." His faith that has been rooted in shallow soil has withered. But pride has yet to die:

His pride of unbelief had strength in it
Of a new tonic that must give him strength
Because it was so bitter. There was pride
In bitterness for him who must be proud
And for Matthias pride was more than life.

He exults that he can

meet with patience and high scorn
A life without a scheme and to no purpose--
An accident of nameless energies,

Of which he was a part, and no small part.
His blindness to his insignificance
Was like another faith, and would not die.

However, this state of mind begins to pass when he sees Timberlake, worn and wrinkled, disheveled and dying, standing at his door. For Matthias, more than anything else, is lonely; Timberlake is also lonely with the loneliness of the dying. What may have happened before is no barrier between the two friends.

When Matthias confesses, "I believe nothing;/And I am done with mysteries and with gods," Timberlake smiles:

"Hold fast, Matthias,
There's not a man who breathes and believes nothing.
So you are done with mysteries. If you are,
You are the one elected and fulfilled
Emeritus and initiate of us all.
You are a man worth a long journeying
Over cold roads to see. I'm not amazed
That you see only folly and false vision
In such a fraudulent and ephemeral
Disguise of life as this."

Timberlake's is not the easy, sentimental assertion that "there is no such thing as an atheist." His conviction is rooted deeper than a catch phrase. "You are a man worth a long journeying/Over cold roads to see," has much more pathos than rhetoric. Timberlake has made such a journey, weary, sick, heartbroken. "Now she is dead, I love her desperately," he admits freely of Natalie. His faith is not cheaply earned. That of Matthias' has been. Timberlake says as much when he implies that Matthias has always mistaken "a fraudulent and ephemeral/Disguise of life" for life

itself.

These words make Matthias uncomfortable; therefore, Timberlake "for three days was quiet, save when he coughed." Finally, he realizes that Matthias is neglecting his business for watching over him. Timberlake reassures his friend:

"You will remember Garth was honorable.
But I'll not follow Garth. I shall not go
Until my name is called. Now, good Matthias,
Go catch a golden fish."

Matthias yields and returns to his affairs. But a new joy is in him as he comes home, expecting to find a friend awaiting him. Timberlake, strangely enough, is gone. No one has seen him leave, but no one can find him. The afternoon is drenched with a storm, and with a familiar dread upon him Matthias leads a party out to find Timberlake at the rock.

He is not dead, but has "only his eyes at first/To say that he" is living. The next day he explains that he went to the rock, not to attempt suicide, but, drawn by an impelling urge, to see where Natalie died. He stayed there until it rained and during the rain, because he could not move for his coldness. "Too much of me was dead for me to care/Whether I came up out of there or not."

But he was not thinking of his discomfort, but of the three lives seemingly wasted, Matthias', Natalie's, and his own. "I am sorry it was no better/You saved me from the fire," he says humbly. "And you saved more,/Conceivably, than you

see." Even so, "there should have been/Far more for you to save." Why there was not, Timberlake does not know. The question of why many lives promise more than they fulfill allows of no pat answer.

"Why do we pay so heavily for so little,
Or for so much? Or for whatever it is?
We do not know. We only pay and die."

Nevertheless, Timberlake's position is far from despair:

"To a short-sighted and earth-hindered vision
It would seem rather a waste, but not to mine.
I have found gold, Matthias, where you found gravel,
But I can't give it to you. I feel and see it,
But you must find it somehow for yourself.
It's not negotiable. You have to find it--
Or say it must find you. Even you, Matthias."

Timberlake exemplifies the paradox of humility and audacity that is the mystic. He feels himself almost too poor an article for Matthias to save, yet he deliberately contrasts "a short-sighted and earth-hindered vision" to his own. He is without spiritual pride, however, for he believes that all men may share his vision who will yield themselves. Even Matthias.

"If I've done one thing well, I have not meddled
Until today, with men's inheritances
And acquisitions,"

Timberlake apologizes; "but," he continues as if he must say even against his will:

men like you, Matthias,
Believe that if you stumble the world trembles.
Try to believe now, as a friendly favor
To me, that it does nothing of the sort."

In almost the same breath Timberlake introduces him to the

paradox:

"If you had eyes inside you, and you may,
To read a little farther into your book--
Well, you would be surprised at what is there
For you to find."

Had it not been there, says Timberlake, he might have hated Matthias for saving his life and for thus obligating him in such a stern fashion. All three lives have paid a heavy toll for Matthias' generous deed. But Timberlake is not bitter: "We are like stairs/For one another's climbing."
"You are down now/As far as you will go," affirms Timberlake,

if you remember
That you are like a book with pages in it
You have not read and cannot read in the dark."

Some people are happier in the dark as Matthias has been but can be no longer. "More darkness would have a balm for me/
But not a cure. There is no cure for self." Timberlake exclaims in a moment of anguish;

"There's only an occasional revelation,
Arriving not infrequently too late.
For me it was too early--which is granted,
Sometimes to the elected and the damned."

His exclamation suggests St. Paul's "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Both cries are the cries of mystics who yearn to be free from the traps of sin, folly and selfishness.

But Timberlake is not pitying himself; he is striving to help his friends:

"There's a nativity
That waits for some of us who are not born.

Before you build a tower that will remain
Where it is built and will not crumble down
To another poor ruin of self, you must be born."

And until he is so born Matthias can "see nothing in fate that takes away/Your playthings but a curse, and a world blasted." Suddenly embarrassed by this preaching to a friend who has helped him, Timberlake begs Matthias not to listen to him "for I'm tired;/And I don't half believe what I am saying."

"Yes, Timberlake, you believe it," replies Matthias.

After Timberlake dies, Matthias is again alone. Dreams of Natalie torment him, and this time no friend comes to untangle his confusion. He begins

Half-heartedly to search the darkness in him
Hoping to find surprise where Timberlake
Ead said it lived in unsuspected ambush,
Patient and there to wait.

Since "to turn thy thoughts into thy own soul where He is hid"⁴ requires more than a half-hearted effort, it is small wonder that Matthias finds no "surprise" "except a small/And useless one of his not finding any."

He then searches for this "surprise" in books; but since "Mystical knowledge proceeds not from Wit, but from Experience; it is not invented, but proved; not read, but received,"⁵ "the best of them were moonshine without light."

Matthias surrenders. He is alone with pride and money, but these are worthless, and pride is "tired." "A man who must have light/Or darkness that was rest and certainty,"

he has neither. Prayer is a stranger to him. Above all, he agonizes with loneliness. "Timberlake was a ruin,/But he was not alone." Yet Timberlake was Timberlake and not Matthias. Death is now Matthias' sole hope, and one that he can embrace without compromising his pride.

He finds himself confronting "a dark Egyptian door." His hand is upon it, he feels it moving slowly open, when he hears a voice from within, "Not yet, Matthias," It is Garth's voice fraught with "decision and authority/Not native" to it. Strangely enough, Matthias feels no surprise. Rather indignantly he asks, why should he wait, by what power does Garth forbid him, what if he shows Garth that the power to enter is his own.

"No matter what you do,/You are not coming," the voice declares.

"You cannot die, Matthias, till you are born.
You are down here too soon, and must go back.
Don't be annoyed, or be disquieted,
Or more than necessarily surprised
At any change. You will still be yourself
When you are born. There is no cure for self;
There's only an occasional--"

To all Matthias' arguments the reply is the same: death is denied him; birth is required of him.

Amazed that the voice of Garth, the suicide, should speak in this manner, Matthias exclaims, "There's more of Timberlake/In you than of yourself. Is it you Garth?" The voice answers:

"No matter whose voice it is,
Matthias, It may be yours. It may be Caesar's.
All voices are one voice, with many tongues
To make it inexpressible and obscure
To us until we hear the voice itself."

Garth, or whoever here is present, speaks of the same thing
as in the "incommunicable gleams" of "an orient Word"⁶ or as
God's modeless music of which Captain Craig tells.

The voice once more denies that Matthias can escape
through death. He must be born. "It seems a mystery that
so many should live/Who are not born, but that's the in-
finite way." Matthias has yet to recognize many mysteries,
and he himself is among the greatest:

"There's more of you for you to find, Matthias,
Than science has found yet, or may find soon.
Science that blinds its eyes incessantly
With a new light that fades and leaves them aching,
Whatever it sees, will be a long time showing."

Meanwhile, Matthias must follow another Light. He cannot
find what he seeks in the dark, "Though you may find it
there if a door opens/Not this door, but another one in
yourself."

But to what end would he find this door, asks
Matthias. Never mind "the end," comes the answer. Trust
and act upon whatever guidance "revelation or conviction"
affords.

"The end will wait
For all your most magnificent and protracted
Progressions and expansions, and be still
Sufficiently far away."

Then tell me, demands Matthias, where these "progressions

and expansions" begin. Are they only in men, or do "worms, armadillos, and hyenas" share them also.

"Where may the soul begin?
And why not grass? There's mystery living in grass
As dark as any in me."

Why not indeed? agrees the voice. However, Garth soon returns to Matthias' own soul as a practical starting point. "Most of us are half-born, with only self/To cheer us with a promise of importance," Matthias is told, "until it is all over--in appearance--/And one by one we're down here at this door." Matthias is "down here" in anticipation." However, "forget that, and anticipate your tower."

Soon alone again,

Matthias, in a light that was a darkness
More than a light, saw the door shut itself
Inexorably; and there was only silence
Saying he must go back.

The door has vanished, the door that the voice has forbidden him to open, the door of death that symbolizes the door of birth. For if Matthias has been at the first door "in anticipation," he is now at the second in reality. The death of the self is always its birth in the eyes of the mystics. Timberlake and the voice do not preach the utter absorption of the soul into the Absolute: "There is no cure for self." The mysticism in this poem is rather the Christian mysticism: the old tower of self must crumble, but a new one must be built.

As Matthias tries to grope his way back to his house

he hears

A tinkling in the night like a small music
That had been always and would always be,
And was a brook.

The brook, symbolizing eternity throughout the poem, informs him that he is at the actual rock, that the door which he has seen has been a vision. Yet the vision is more real than reality. It has shown Matthias that only one way exists: to be born, to live to serve. This revelation does not come as the happy ending of a novel. Death is hard, birth is bitter, and the Dark Night of the Soul is starless. But Matthias will endure until the morning:

The night was cold,
And in the darkness was a feel of death,
But in Matthias was a warmth of life,
Or birth, defending and sustaining him
With patience, and with an expectancy
That he had said would never in life again
Be his to know. There were long hours to wait,
And dark hours; and he met their length and darkness
With a vast gratitude that humbled him
And warmed him while he waited for the dawn.

But John of the Gospel, rather than John of the Cross, inspired Matthias at the Door. The poem bears witness to what this Gospel came to mean to Robinson ever since Jones had introduced it to him many years before. The poet's interpretation of St. John is that of one mystic who understands these words of another, "Ye must be born again."

CHAPTER IX

THREE BIBLICAL CHARACTERS

Since the time that Edwin Arlington Robinson's interest awakened in the Bible, he wrote several studies of Biblical characters. A trio of New Testament poems, "The Three Taverns," "Lazarus," and "Nicodemus," show the influence of mysticism. Largely upon the strength of the last named poem, Hagedorn calls Robinson "the one conspicuous mystic in contemporary American poetry."¹

Nevertheless, only in the light of his non-Biblical poems is the complete understanding of these three studies possible. None of the characters is so developed as those in some of Robinson's other portrayals, none is nearly so well drawn, and none seems entirely at home with the words that he speaks. Robinson fails to make Paul, Lazarus, and Nicodemus live. He neither recaptures the spirit of their ancient times, nor surrounds them with an authentic atmosphere of his own creation as he does for the Arthurian poems. But the three Biblical poems are interesting as types of molds into which Robinson pours his mysticism.

I. "THE THREE TAVERNS"

The title poem of a volume published in 1920, "The Three Taverns" is developed around the text of Acts 28: 15, "When the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far

as Appii Forum and The Three Taverns." Paul the apostle, just arrived at Rome to appear before Caesar, is explaining himself to an emissary of cautious disciples. In so doing he reveals himself as Paul the mystic.

However, important differences appear between the mystic of this poem and the mystic in the New Testament. For although Robinson's Paul calls himself "a prisoner . . . of the Lord"² he shows none of the ardent adoration of Christ that the historical Paul felt. Moreover, the Paul of the poem is truly Robinson in reticence. "I am of a race that feels," he confesses, but no reader can imagine his exclaiming "I live, yet not I but Christ liveth in me."³ His mysticism centers not in a Person, but in an experience, the experience of a man

"who fell
Prone to the earth when he was nigh Damascus,
Where the great light came down."

This mysticism and that of Robinson's mature poems in general is Christian, not because it is orthodox, but because it emphasizes practical transformation in character.

Yet the stressing of the Damascus experience is historical. Moreover, as the Paul of the Epistles declares, "Ye are not under the law,"⁴ so the Paul of the poem teaches that "Something" is "beyond the Law,/And in ourselves." Even so, for Robinson's Paul the opposition is not between Law and Grace, but between Law and spirit, between time and eternity,

between words and the Word. This opposition he calls

"the Cross between two worlds--
To guide us, or to blind us for a time
Till we have eyes indeed."

These words with their awareness of agonizing tension might have come from Lancelot.

Recalling his own tension, Paul says, "I fed my suffering soul/Upon the Law till I went famishing." The martyr Stephen once aroused his indignation: "Why should a man be given/To live beyond the Law?" Now the same question is asked of the apostle by men hungry for his life. "How then do I/Persist in living?" Paul reads his listeners' questioning minds and replies,

"Let my appearance be for you
No living answer; for time writes of death
On men before they die, and what you see
Is not the man. That man that you see not--
The man within the man--is most alive."

He encourages the disciples against the coming "crown of thorns and fire" that both he and they will wear. He counsels patience if the world at first refuses their message and if men interpret it variously. "A word here,/Or there, or not there, or not anywhere," says he with the modesty implicit in the Pauline Epistles, "is not the Word that lives and is the life." Paul knows well that many men

Finding at last that words are not the Word,
And finding only that, will flourish aloft,
Like heads of captured Pharisees on pikes,
Our contradictions and discrepancies;

And there are many more will hang themselves
 Upon the letter, seeing not in the Word
 The friend of all who fail, and in their faith
 A sword of excellence to cut them down.

Paul feels with all the mystics that words are the faintest shadows of Reality, which cannot be expressed, but only embraced. Many "that are incredulous of the Mystery," he affirms,

Shall yet be driven to feel, and then to read
 Where language has an end and is a veil,
 Not woven of our words.

Thinking no doubt of the many words that he has written, he warns that the man

Who writes in the Lord's name for his name's sake
 And has not in his blood the fire of time
 To warm eternity,

should, "if once the light is in him and endures--/Content himself to be the general man," "to sift the decencies and" "to learn, except he be one set aside/For sorrow, more of pleasure than of pain." Perhaps Paul in the phrase "one set aside for sorrow" thinks of his own "thorn in the flesh."⁵ Perhaps Robinson through Paul intimates the mystical revelation through pain. "My grace is sufficient for thee; my strength is made perfect in weakness"⁶--such an affirmation differs not greatly from Robinson's own.

His humility never weakens Paul's faith in his mission. "I move a driven agent among my kind,/Establishing by the faith of Abraham," he declares, "and by the grace of their necessities,/The clamoring word that is the word of life." And if he has sometimes "loosed/A shaft of language"

that has flown above their hearts and heads, he knows that "it will yet be heard,/Like a new song that waits for distant ears." Paul believes as Lancelot does that all will see the Light; for none of Robinson's mystics is ultimately world-despising or world-despairing.

II. "LAZARUS"

"Lazarus," a poem in the same volume with "The Three Taverns," presents a character whose mystical experience has at first made him fear the world as he sees it through his strange and breath-taking vision. His experience is mystical in two senses of the word: in the loose, inaccurate sense of supernatural, and in the sense in which this thesis has consistently used it. The second meaning is the more important, because Robinson was interested in the symbolic significance of Christianity rather than in its literal truth.

Mary and Martha cannot understand the behavior of their brother since "the Master gave him back."⁷ Nor can they understand the Master himself. "Why did he wait/So long before he came? Why did he weep?" questions the frightened Martha.

He who had been
Their brother, and was dead, now seemed alive
Only in death again--or worse than death.

"Better the tomb," Mary thinks, "for Lazarus than life, if this be life," then says to Mary, "Nothing is ever as it

was before/Where Time has been. Here there is more than Time." "Until the spirit that is in him speaks" nothing remains to be done but to watch over their brother and to trust that the Master knew what he was doing when he called Lazarus from the dead.

"Let me, the selfish and the careless one,/Be housewife and a mother for tonight," pleads Mary tenderly. "For I am not so fearful as you are,/And I was not so eager."

"No, Mary," replies Martha bitterly;

"you are not so eager
To see our brother as we see him now;
Neither is he who gave him back to us.
I was to be the simple one as always,
And this was all for me."

Finally, staring "over among the trees where Lazarus,/Who seemed to be a man who was not there" has been brooding, Martha loses self-restraint. "Go now--make him look at you--/And I shall hear him if he stirs or whispers," she commands hysterically. "Go!--or I'll scream and bring all Bethany/To come and make him speak." Mary, to calm her sister, obeys, although she doubts whether she can "make him say once that he is glad, and God may say the rest." Seizing his cold, trembling hands, Mary begs Lazarus to speak the welcome words. For reply he answers, "I heard them saying, Mary, that he wept before I woke." "Who made him come,/That he should weep for me? . . . Was it you, Mary?" he asks bit-

terly, incredulously. And finally, "I should have wept," he said,/"If I had been the Master. . . ."

Mary is at an utter loss to understand Lazarus, and he to understand himself. When he first awoke from his strange sleep, he looked into the Master's eyes. "Nothing else anywhere was to be seen--/Only his eyes," he tells her; "And they looked into mine--/Long into mine, Mary, as if he knew."

Fearing her own question, Mary whispers, "He cannot know that there is worse than death."

"Yes, there is worse than death," replies her brother; "and that was what he knew."

"And there is nothing that is good
For you in dying while you are still here.
Mary, never go back to that again.
You would not hear me if I told you more,
For I should say it only in a language
That you are not to learn by going back.
To be a child again is to go forward--"

Mary proves that she is not ready "to be a child again."
For she misinterprets his words to mean that after death comes Nothing.

If there were indeed Nothing, replies Lazarus, he could not tell her, "not even if I were God." But were there Nothing, "why should the Master weep--/For me, or for the world?" Why should he "save himself/Longer for nothing" when he could have been secure, "had he but held his peace and given his nod/To an old Law that would be new as any?" "I cannot say the answer to all that," Lazarus admits, "Though

I may say that he is not afraid." Lazarus feels sure also that it is not for any joy "In serving an eternal Ignorance/ Of our futility that he is here." If that is what Mary and Martha mean by "Nothing," and if "Nothing" is what they are fearing, then, "There are more weeds than lentils in your garden."

For some time now during the course of his conversation with Mary, Lazarus has been shaking the darkness from himself. The shadows "will not always be so dark as this," he assures her; "Though now I see there's yet an evil in me/That made me let you be afraid of me." He realizes that he "was not afraid-- not even of life./I thought I was . . . I must have time for this." What did the Master see in Lazarus' eyes? What has he learned from his unearthly adventure? Why is he back upon "the old road," and where does it lead? Lazarus does not know. The one thing that he does know is the memory of the Master's eyes looking long into his own, "long, long, as if he knew."

The exact nature of Lazarus' experience is purposely left vague; for who can describe a mystical experience? But its nature is also, somewhat less defensibly from an artistic standpoint, ambiguous. Is the experience good or bad? Christ in the poem is reluctant to raise his friend from the dead. Lazarus tells Mary, "There is nothing good/For you in dying while you are still here." On the other hand, Mary

points out that "we are too young, perhaps,/To say that we know better what is best" than the Master, who after all, did raise Lazarus and bade the sisters not to fear. Lazarus himself, after denying any good in "dying while you are still here," declares that he can describe it only in language which "you are not to learn by going back./To be a child again is to go forward." Thus, he seems to identify his "death" with the birth that Matthias must undergo, with the birth that Nicodemus longs for but will not dare. Hence, seen from the psychological standpoint, the ambiguity belongs in the poem. He who experiences the new birth, the Dark Night of the Soul, the death of self, feels that "there is nothing good in it" until he accustoms himself to his new life. Moreover, he who submits to such an experience undergoes mortal danger unless he can maintain his equilibrium. Many would-be mystics "came to be hypocrites and heretics-- or fell into madness and wild ecstasies and other misfortunes,"³ warns The Cloud of Unknowing. Perhaps Jesus wept because He feared that Lazarus would not be strong enough for the vision that the new birth brings. And perhaps the strength to fulfill the vision was what the Master saw in the eyes of Lazarus.

According to the outer events of the story, Lazarus dies and is resurrected. According to the inner events which interest Robinson more, Lazarus dies to his old life, and is

awakened to the new. The parallel between the two types of events is sometimes imperfect, but that the parallel does exist is the most plausible explanation of the poem.

III. "NICODEMUS"

"Nicodemus" appearing in 1932, the year after Robinson published Matthias at the Door, tells the story of the character who inspired the latter poem. However, Nicodemus is far less the spiritual ancestor of Matthias than Lazarus is. Lazarus is reborn; but, although the story of Nicodemus came "out of the unconscious, with the controls relaxed by fatigue,"⁹ Nicodemus sings only the "song of the intellectual mystic, who wanted to give himself wholly yet could not quite manage it."¹⁰ Hagedorn finds irony in the fact that

the most savage assault on the fame of the one conspicuous mystic in contemporary American poetry, the creator of the reborn Matthias, the interpreter of the Christ-hungry Nicodemus, should have been published in the Christian Century."¹¹

Probably the reviewer in the Christian Century had not read Matthias. For although the "assault" is scarcely "the most savage," its author apparently had not the least intimation that mysticism was in Robinson's atmosphere.¹² Except for an acquaintance with Matthias and other of Robinson's poems, any reader is likely to make the same mistake.

"Nicodemus" records a conversation between the man

who visited Jesus by night and Caiaphas, the cynical high priest. Caiaphas is the typical priest, in the bad sense of the phrase, living off the sweat of human brows, smugly content, and nearsightedly realistic. It is obvious

That his eyes rested well on what he saw,
And that his ears required no crash or murmur
Of innovation for their daily music.¹³

Nicodemus, the dreamer who is too timid to act upon his dreams, comes in looking "more like a fugitive" "in a long cloak that covered him/With dark humility" "than like a lord/At home in his own city."

"Why do you wear/Your shroud while you are living, Nicodemus?" asks Caiaphas; "Are you afraid of robbers?" But the questions are rhetorical. His next question is sarcastic. "Was he pleased," and his lip curls at the word carpenter, "With the accomodation of your graces/To the plain level of his lowliness?"

Nicodemus is not ashamed that his prophet is a carpenter. "There are men who were dead yesterday," he replies, "And are alive today, who do not care/Profoundly about that." Nor "though he has wrought/With common tools" does he require "that we be carpenters." Caiaphas need not fear that Jesus is plotting a revolution.

Caiaphas sneeringly expresses relief, "For you might cut your finger, Nicodemus." But "what's all this that you are telling me/Of men dead yesterday and still alive?" asks

the mocker. "I do not know such men and would far rather/
Not meet them in the dark."

Nicodemus again implies a rebuke to crassness: "It is not there/That you are like to know them, Caiaphas," he says, suggesting the words of the Voice to Matthias: "They have come out of darkness--where we are,/I fear, and where I fear we may remain." Nicodemus forgets his timidity, at least his timidity in speech, and becomes eloquent:

"Men who are braver may forgo their shining,
Leaving it all above them, and go down
To lowliness and peace, and there find life.
Caiaphas, you and I are not alive.
We are two painted shells of eminence
Carried by two dead men."

"Yes, Caiaphas, good men like you and me," exclaims Nicodemus, "Have driven this man, if he be man, to vanish/Beyond the laws that hate him."

"Why not say/The laws he hates, and done with it?" inquires Caiaphas impatiently.

"What's wrong with them? Would his be any better?
Our laws and Caesar's are enough, God knows,
To keep the safest of us occupied."

speaks the voice of despairing practicality. The carpenter is either madman or charlatan. In any case he is a danger to himself, to Nicodemus, and to society, and Nicodemus had better advise him to leave Jerusalem. Besides, if he is all that Nicodemus claims, "Why should he hide from powerless things of earth?" "No," declares the priest, "the whole story shakes."

To destroy his body is not to destroy his spirit, replies Nicodemus. The carpenter is not afraid; yet his body must not die before he has accomplished his mission. It is men like Nicodemus and Caiaphas who are dead and blind and afraid, not he. "You are a priest of death, not knowing it," Nicodemus tells the increasingly resentful Caiaphas. He and the priest fear "the laws of death; and, Caiaphas, / They are the dead who are afraid of dying." He begs the cynic to come see this man who "is the light," to hear his words:

"You have not heard and tasted them to know,
Or not to know, the food that lives in them
And quickens them till they are words no longer,
But are the Word."

Terrified, Caiaphas can only call Nicodemus mad. "I have been / A burden to your patience, Caiaphas," says he hopelessly. "I shall not come again." The priest smiles, "You may take yourself / Alone to him at night and feast with him," he replies, "On dreams till you are drunk with his evangel," but in the morning,

"You will rejoice, like a man dug from ruin,
To find the sun and stars; and the old laws,
Unfailing and unchanged, as firm as ever."

"I know you, Nicodemus."

Nicodemus knows himself. His words are those of the mystic, but not the certainty. The bread that he invites Caiaphas to taste he himself has tasted only in fancy, not in faith; only in imagination, not by intuition. Otherwise, he would cast off the cloak of privilege no less than the cloak

of fear and follow the one whom he now sees through tears, the "one that he had left alone/Alone in a bare room, and not afraid." The "song of the intellectual mystic" has droned into silence.

IV. THE THREE POEMS AS A WHOLE

Like "Nicodemus," all three of these Biblical studies, even the two stories that end in triumph, "The Three Taverns" and "Lazarus," close with a dying fall. All three poems are sincere, for Robinson could write no other way except sincerely. Nevertheless, Robinson's non-orthodox mysticism absorbed the Bible, so long the instrument of orthodoxy, only incompletely into his art.

CHAPTER X

THE MAN WHO DIED TWICE: CULMINATION OF ROBINSON'S MYSTICISM

The traditional frames of theme and thought do not show the mysticism of Edwin Arlington Robinson to its best advantage. Not Nicodemus, not Lazarus, nor even Paul stand among his great mystics; it is Captain Craig, Lancelot, and Matthias who trouble the waters of doubt with their tormented but undaunted conviction of things unseen. The most haunting and haunted of Robinson's wayward mystics is Fernando Nash, the Man Who Died Twice.

His story is the climax of Robinson's mysticism. The Man Who Died Twice, appearing in 1924, when the poet had still eleven years of life and poetry left him, is not a chronological culmination. The poem is a culmination, because it presents Robinson's most direct dealing with mysticism and because it is the fruition of that type of mysticism most peculiarly Robinson's. He had intimated it in the sonnet "Supremacy," in the first of the Octaves, in "The Man Against the Sky," in Captain Craig, and possibly in "The Three Taverns." But never before the spiritual epic of Fernando Nash, had he made it the theme of a long poem.

This type, or perhaps more accurately, application of mysticism is the key to Robinson's so-called philosophy of failure might itself be termed the mysticism of failure. It

explains why, although before reading Robinson "one would not have believed there were so many ways to fail,"¹ Robinson was not a pessimist. The Man Who Died Twice reveals the secret of "the dead men singing in the sun."²

Walking home, the narrator of the story passes a Salvation Army band playing on a street corner. To his astonishment he sees Fernando Nash, once a haughty and feared "potential world-shaker,"³

beating a bass drum
And shouting Hallelujah with a fervor
At which, as I remember, no man smiled.

The musical genius is a husk of his former splendor, but to the observant the husk still proclaims what it once has housed.

This human wreck who declares that the genius he had--once, scarcely matters now because "glory to God! Mine are the drums of life--" is also

This foiled initiate who had seen and felt
Meanwhile the living fires that mortal doors
For most of us hold hidden.

The narrator believes the fantastic story that he is to hear from Nash no less than he has always believed in his potential genius. No one, however, has believed in Fernando Nash so much as the old Fernando Nash has believed in himself. Ten years before his career with "the drums of life," his musical rivals feared and envied him. Nash recognized their thinly disguised feelings and returned only scorn.

From boyhood Nash felt that he had only to wait and his gift of music would break into fire. But he grew careless in his waiting, plunged into dissipation, and suddenly awoke to find his gift gone. His confession to his friend relates the occurrences after this awakening.

In the experience that Nash describes lies the mysticism of the poem. But the experience has several levels. This fact has misled many critics; they have understood the events only upon one level. The Man Who Died Twice is, as Mark Van Doren labels it, "a tale of the unpardonable sin,"⁴ the sin of degrading a gift until it is destroyed. Another interpretation, which, however, Robinson himself implies is only a possibility, is that the poem is the study of a man who loses his mind as the result of losing his gift. The trance and the visions on one level are caused by delirium tremens. On another level they are a mystical experience. On one level the gift that Nash receives in this experience is his lost genius momentarily restored. On a higher level the gift is the Divine. Robinson's ability to weave these threads of meaning into one seamless garment proves his artistry.

The remarkable fact is that Nash's experience on its mystical level corresponds so closely to the classical descriptions of "the Mystic Way," when no evidence appears to show that Robinson ever read them. To a mystic this fact

would help to confirm the validity of intuition. Robinson may have dealt so directly with a mystical experience in this poem because the multiplicity of interpretations concealed this directness even from himself.

Classical descriptions usually divide "the Mystic Way," the way a soul takes to union with the Divine, into three, five, or seven steps. The division into three steps is the most convenient for studying Robinson's treatment of "the Mystic Way." The first step is Illumination, whereby the soul awakens to its sin and is filled with loathing for it. The word Purgation suggests the nature of the second step, in which the soul strives to purge itself of sin, by repentance, penances, prayer, and meditation. The purge is bitter; for sometimes evil visions torment the soul, sometimes the soul feels "dry," and all desire for prayer and meditation leave it, sometimes it feels God-forsaken. These distressing periods are the Dark Night of the Senses and the Dark Night of the Soul. These periods alternate with divine visions and states of joy. Finally joy triumphs and the soul has taken the step of Union. Catholic mystics, who generally use this term, regard Union as a spiritual marriage between the soul and God. Protestant mystics such as Boehme speak of "Regeneration." Buddhists use the terms "Freedom in Union with the Law" and "Enlightenment." Many other names have designated this step and the other steps.

Robinson's description of it in terms of music applies as well as any other designation, which of necessity is highly metaphorical. And as the poem reveals, the Mystic Way never follows a rigid or mechanical pattern.⁵

His Enlightenment visits Nash in a "barren room . . . not much larger than the iron bed/On which he sat." As he gazes at the picture of Bach,

Calm in achievement, looking down at him
Like an incurious Titan at a worm,
That once in adolescent insolence
Would have believed himself another Titan,

and then at his own bleared countenance in the mirror, he bursts into a fury of self-recrimination. In name-calling only Kent, who verbally batters Oswald, excels Nash, who spits epithets at his own reflection: "You bloated greasy cinder," "You kicked out, half-hatched bird of paradise," "You crapulous and overgrown sick lump/Of failure and premeditated ruin," "You paramount whale of lust and drunkenness." "What do you think you are--one of God's jokes?" he demands; "You slunk away from him, still adequate/For his immortal service, and you failed him."

His abhorrence for his sin rouses a ferocious desire to punish himself. He rejects all the conventional means of suicide in favor of starvation.

"For if you starve to death,
Maybe the God you've so industriously
Offended in most ways accessible
Will tell you something; and if you live again
You may attain to fewer discrepancies

In less within that you may destroy.
That's a good way for you to meet your doubt,
And show at the same time a reverence
That's in you somewhere still."

"Though he may well then have believed in nothing/More real
than a defective destiny," the narrator of Nash's story
believes, that reverence "was in him somewhere as he said."

So, tearing to bits his two symphonies, Fernando
Nash prepares for "this unaccompanied expiation." But half-
way down the stairs he hears again those fatal "drums of
death" driving him into a last debauch, a prelude

for a fugue
Of ravening miseries and recriminations
Assembling in remorseful exposition
That was to be remorseless and infernal
And richer in dissonance and involution
Than all his dreams together had heretofore
Aspired or dared to be.

After a three-week orgy of drunkenness that would kill "a
village blacksmith or a stevedore" he awakes in bed. He
looks up to see the familiar face of Nash behaving in a very
unfamiliar manner. The august portrait has come alive and
bows to Nash, who fittingly returns the salutation. The air
hangs ominous with expectant silence for what is to come.
What comes is an orchestra of rats, conductors and players all
dressed in proper style. A humorous sight to the fancy, but
not to Fernando, who hears "with unforeseen solemnity/The
first chords of the first rat symphony" ever heard. The fear-
ful music rises "to a dark and surging climax" until it breaks

horribly into a coarse and unclean laughter
That rose above a groaning of the damned;
And through it all there were those drums of death,
Which always had been haunting him from childhood.

As if they will never stop, the rats dance "madly to this
long cacophony," and grimace at Nash while they dance, until
one by one they bow mockingly to him and vanish as they have
come, through the keyhole. Nash lies in a cold sweat while
Bach frowns, shakes his head, and turns back into a picture.

Day after day, night after night he lies tormented,
no more by the rat symphony, but by "those miseries and
recriminations/Devouring one another but never dead." One
afternoon after being tortured beyond torture Nash feels a
new clarity which has begun

To pierce forbidden chambers long obscured
Within him, and abandoned, being so dark
And empty that he would not enter them.

An exquisite peace that poor Fernando Nash has never
known overtakes him,

Enveloping and persuading body and brain
Together, a cool relief as if warm wings
Were in the air above him.

The crazed remorse is gone. Only "a grateful shame" is left
"for all his insults to the Holy Ghost/That were forgiven."

And a vast joy
Which broke and swept and covered him like a sea
Of innocence, leaving him eager as a child
That has outlived experience and remembers
Only the golden moment as it flows,
Told him in silence that was more than speech
That after passion, arrogance and ambition
Doubt, fear, defeat, sorrow and desperation,

He had wrought out of martyrdom the peace
That passeth understanding.

Never has a poet sung more beautifully of the joy that
out-scars song.

The drums of death sound faintly, but now they can
do no harm. Nash feels that he has the right to live "to
serve/And so to be content where God should call him." Yet
he would not be too familiar with his new-met exaltation.
And his old pride is still not dead; it is merely a trans-
formed pride common to those souls in the first stages of
purification:

So arrogant in his new humility
Was he becoming, and so chary was he
Of exultation, that to break his fast
With no excess of zeal he planned a fare
That would have saddened Simon on a pillar.

Now ensues what the medieval mystic would have
described as a struggle between Heaven and Hell for the soul
of Fernando Nash. The drums of death come nearer,

Still muffled within the same unyielding cloud
Of sound and fire, which had somewhere within it
A singing flame.

This "singing flame" is a cruel ecstasy of music, the beauty
that he himself might have captured once. The hideous drums
still beat

Till choral gold came down
Out of a star to quench and vanquish them
With molten glory.

Death was his one fear in hearing the "singing flame;"

now death is the sole expectation of him who now receives this "choral gold." Yet he does not die.

And those far sent celestial messengers
That he had for so long a time denied
Had found him now. He had offended them,
He had insulted and forsaken them,
And he was not forsaken.

A moment passes, and Nash beholds "a quivering miracle of architecture" "uprising lightly out of chaos," a temple wherein the Queen of Life and her followers honor music in joyous festivals. Their homage is interrupted by "slow infernal drums" and by "a singing horde of demons, men and women." This obscene frenzy, which Nash witnesses as one past caring, as a soul in the inertia of dryness, drives out the glad celebrants, and the demons sing and laugh until

They must have wearied God--who, pitying them
Smote with avenging trumpets into silence
All but those drums of death, which played by Death
Himself, were beating sullenly alone.

Finally the drums cease, and he hears

That golden choral overflow
Of sound and fire, which he had always heard--
And had not heard before.

The gift, half-realized and thrown away, is his again. No delay must prevent his writing down this music that has come to him and has not left. "With blinding tears of praise and of exhaustion" he stumbles out into the dark hall, "crying aloud to God or man or devil/For paper--not for food." The devil perhaps hears him first and makes of him, "for sport, the large and sprawling obstacle/They found there at the bottom of the stairs."

So ends the purgation of a soul. The musical genius has forever died, but the spirit has been reborn. "Burn me to ashes; and when that is done,/Take me somewhere to sea and let me sink," Nash requests, knowing that his second death approaches. "And fear not for my soul. I have found that,/Though I have lost all else." He maintains that in finding and losing his music for the last time, he has found God. "Mine are the drums of life--and they are mine./You may not like them," he tells his skeptical friend with a conviction and yet with a tolerance for doubt that argues eloquently for Nash's sanity. All he asks of his friend "is to believe me when I say to you/That what I had I had."

The friend does believe Nash to be the crippled giant who has worn, if only for one moment, the mantle of the masters.

And whether his allegiance to the Lord
With a bass drum was earnest of thanksgiving,
Confusion, penance, or the picturesque,
Is not the story.

The friend expresses doubt, not so much of Nash's conviction that he has found his soul and is to praise the Lord, as of his manner of expressing "his allegiance to the Lord."

"There was in the man,/With all his frailties and extravagances," the narrator speculates, "The caste of an inviolable distinction/That was to break and vanish only in fire." He realizes also that Nash has attained

A giant's privacy of lone communion
 With older giants who had made a music
 Whereof the world was not impossibly
 Not the last note.

"And more than these" incomprehensible gifts, "There was the nameless and authentic seal/Of power and ordained accomplishment." But Nash's friend who tells the story is interested primarily in the lost gift "of lone communion" with master composers of the past, not in the new gift "of lone communion" with God. He is interested in the genius who died before the body died. Nash cares only that the self died and was reborn. However, Robinson, the poet, who deplored the loss of the artistic endowment, was no less the mystic whose Fernando Nash symbolizes, incarnates, that which lives

In ruin as in failure, the supreme
 Fulfillment unexpressed, the rhythm of God
 That beats unheard through songs of shattered men.⁶

The Man Who Died Twice explains why Robinson's emphasis upon failure did not make him a prophet of doom. Nash found God. Whether his own interpretation is true or whether the divine music he heard at last was the Divine, makes no difference. The picture of a potential Bach drumming and shouting in a Salvation Army band is not the poet's mocking comment or his epitome of the tragic view. It may be an ironic comment mingled with pity. It is also the mystic's admission that in this life man's union with God is imperfect. That Robinson should be the most mystical when he is the most ironical characterizes him, man and poet.

Not only Fernando Nash, but Captain Craig, Lancelot, Roman Bartholow, and Matthias discover God in the heart of failure. Robinson's message is that death is in birth and birth is in death, that darkness is in light and light is in darkness, that failure is in triumph and triumph is in failure. His mysticism is one that flees the world and does not flee it. This last paradox Nash does not embody. He, unfortunate initiate, after receiving the divine gift, can only praise the Lord on a street corner. Robinson approves fully only of the man who turns from the world to the Light and then turns back to the world that he may lead men nearer the Vision.

Nevertheless, The Man Who Died Twice is the culmination of Robinson's mysticism and any study of it. For Edwin Arlington Robinson lived close to failure, to men foiled and dying. His letters often disclose that he sometimes felt himself to rank among the defeated. Yet he was not cast down. This study has attempted to show that the reason for his refusal of despair lay in his mysticism reflected in his poems. Many mystics would have been appalled by his lack of theology; Robinson would have rejected their theology and their very phraseology. But all mystics, orthodox and heterodox, share that intuition which underlies all creeds and reveals all differences of words and all words themselves to be but dreams shadowing the groping souls of men.

NOTES FOR INTRODUCTION

¹ Ridgely Torrence, et al., editors, Selected Letters of Edwin Arlington Robinson, to Miss Helen Grace Adams, January 1, 1930, p. 160.

² Hermann Hagedorn, Edwin Arlington Robinson: A Biography, p. 371.

³ Quoted from Charles Cestre in Revue Anglo-Américaine by Estelle Kaplan, Philosophy in the Poetry of Edwin Arlington Robinson, p. 22.

⁴ Louise Dauner, "Studies in Edwin Arlington Robinson," p. 22.

⁵ Lloyd Morris, The Poetry of Edwin Arlington Robinson, p. 69.

⁶ Letter of Hermann Hagedorn to Miss Vassar Miller, November 29, 1948: "E. A. was a mystic, in my judgment, inasmuch as he was conscious of forces in the universe transcending matter; something beyond the reach of man that was at the same time infinite intelligence and infinite mercy."

Of the general misconceptions and haziness about mysticism Helen C. White says: "Probably never before has there been so much or such interest in mysticism as there is at the present time; never, certainly, since the latter days of the Roman Empire has there been so much curiosity as now when rationalism and materialism and pseudo-paganism are bringing about the inevitable reaction. And yet--and here one is reminded of the latter days of the Roman Empire again--it is hard to imagine a state of greater confusion or looseness of usage than that which exists today. Verily, mysticism has come to mean so many things that it has ceased to mean much of anything. Nine-tenths of the people who use the word today mean little more than a vague emotional reaction in which awe and a sense of strangeness play almost equal parts." The Mysticism of William Blake, p. 44.

⁷ Quoted from Pfliederer by W. R. Inge, Mysticism in Religion, p. 25.

⁸ Quoted from Henry Churchill King's Theology and Social Consciousness by Rufus M. Jones, Studies in Mystical Religion, p. xvii.

⁹ Quoted from Eckhart by Rudolph Otto, Mysticism

East and West: A Comparative Analysis of the Nature of Mysticism, p. 7.

10 Lin Yutang, editor, The Wisdom of China and India, Lao-tse, the Book of Tao, p. 612.

11 Except in this Introduction the term generally used throughout this thesis is, because of convenience, God.

12 Otto, op. cit., p. 143.

13 Quoted from Sankara by Otto, op. cit., p. 11.

14 Thomas S. Kepler, editor, The Fellowship of the Saints: An Anthology of Christian Devotional Literature, Monseigneur the Areopagite, on Mystical Theology, pp. 64-65.

15 The authorship of The Imitation of Christ has been questioned. See Rufus M. Jones, The Flowering of Mysticism: The Friends of God in the Fourteenth Century, pp. 234-44. For convenience, the traditional authorship of Thomas a' Kempis has been assumed in this thesis.

16 Thomas a' Kempis, The Imitation of Christ, edited by Ernest Rhys, p. 95.

17 Otto, op. cit., p. 141.

18 Swami Nikhilanada, editor, The Upanishads: Katha, Isa, Kena, and Mundaka, p. 29.

19 Lin Yutang, op. cit., The Upanishads, p. 46.

20 Ibid., p. 36.

21 For a discussion of the Brahman and various opinions regarding His nature, see Nikhilanada, op. cit., pp. 25-106.

22 Krishna is the ninth incarnation of Vishnu, who in turn is the second member of the Hindu Triad composed of Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva. See George Foot Moore, History of Religions, I, p. 344.

23 Robert O. Ballou, Frederick Spielgelberg, and Horace L. Friess, editors, The Bible of the World, The Bhagavad-Gita, or, The Lord's Song, trans. Annie Besant, p. 91.

24 Lin Yutang, op. cit., The Blessed Lord's Song. Srīmad, Bhagavad-Gita. Swami Paramanada, translator, p. 73.

25 Quoted from Eckhart by Otto, op. cit., p. 44.

26 Thomas S. Kepler, editor, The Fellowship of the Saints: An Anthology of Christian Devotional Literature, Augustine, "Reflections on the Majesty and Mercy of God" from The Confessions, p. 75.

27 Quoted from Eckhart by Otto, op. cit., p. 12.

28 "The Tathagara's Nirvana is where it is recognized that there is nothing but what is seen of the mind itself; is where, recognizing the nature of the self-mind, one no longer cherishes the dualisms of discrimination; is where there is no more thirst nor grasping; is where there is no more attachment to external things. Nirvana is where the thinking-mind with all its discriminations, attachments, aversions, and egotism is forever put away; is where logical measures, as they are seen to be inert, are no longer seized upon; is where even the notion of truth is treated with indifference because of its causing bewilderment; is where, getting rid of the four propositions, there is insight into the abode of Reality." Lin Yutang, op. cit., Lankavatara Sutra, pp. 555-56.

29 Kepler, op. cit., Hugh of St. Victor, "The Embrace," p. 118.

30 Some scholars consider Buddha completely secular in his teachings. This viewpoint excludes the possibility of his being mystic. This thesis, however, ignores such controversies whenever possible.

31 Some Christian mystics, such as a Kempis, center their devotions upon Christ, and so naturally emphasize the Incarnation. Others, for example, the anonymous author of The Cloud of Unknowing, acknowledge the Incarnation, but do not concentrate upon God as incarnate in the Second Person of the Trinity.

32 Kepler, op. cit., ["On Living a Perfect Life"], from Theologia Germanica, pp. 197-98.

33 Ibid., Jakob Boehme, ["The Way to God's Love"], from Of the Supersensual Life, p. 303.

34 a Kempis, op. cit., p. 163.

35 Ibid., p. 67.

36 Quoted from Eckhart by Jones, The Flowering of Mysticism: The Friends of God in the Fourteenth Century, p. 63.

37 "Et voici enfin où éclate l'infirmité du poète: l'amour qui lui est demandé et rendu facile, en tant que poète, il ne peut pas l'accorder, tandis que, dans le bloc de l'expérience mystique normale, Anima s'unit de toutes ses forces volontaires à la présence qui se fait aux profondeurs d' Anima. D'où vient cette différence nécessaire? Encore un coup du caractère spécial qui définit l'activité poétique, le poète ayant pour unique objet, non pas, comme le mystique, de s'approprier le don divin, mais de trouver les formules incantatoires par où le courant poétique puisse passer jusqu'à l'Anima du lecteur. Cette union amoureuse qui suit toute expérience mystique normale, l'expérience poétique ne la permet pas. Le poète, en tant que poète, ne s'unit au réel que pour s'en désunir aussitôt. Ce n'est pas là, je vous prie, un paradoxe: ou plutôt, c'en un, mais pas de mon cru; c'est le paradoxe du poète. Un mystique manque. . . ." Henri Eremond, Prière et Poésie, "Le Poète et le Mystique," XVIII, pp. 212-13.

38 Gerard Manly Hopkins, Poems, "The Habit of Perfection," p. 46.

39 Quoted from Eckhart by Jones, The Flowering of Mysticism, p. 82.

40 George Gordon Byron, The Complete Poetical Works, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, p. 49.

41 William Rose Benet, The Stairway of Surprise, "'Infinite Passion--'", p. 29.

42 Mary Webb, Fifty-two Poems, "The Great Wind," p. 16.

43 Quoted from Edwin Arlington Robinson's interview with Joyce Kilmer by Mark Van Doren, Edwin Arlington Robinson, p. 13.

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¹ Quoted from R. A. Vaughan's Hours with the Mystics by Henry David Gray, Emerson: A Statement of New England Transcendentalism as Expressed in the Philosophy of its Chief Exponent, p. 47.

² Vernon Louis Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought: An Interpretation of American Literature from the Beginnings to 1920, p. 62.

³ Ibid., p. 65.

⁴ Woodbridge Riley, American Thought: From Puritanism to Pragmatism, p. 29.

⁵ Walter G. Huelder and Laurence Sears, editors, The Development of American Philosophy: A Book of Readings, p. 2.

⁶ Riley, op. cit., p. 34.

⁷ Parrington, op. cit., p. 155.

⁸ Charles H. Lyttle, editor, The Liberal Gospel as Set Forth in the Writings of William Ellery Channing, p. xxiv.

⁹ Ibid., "On Fenelon," p. 15.

¹⁰ Loc. cit.

¹¹ Quoted from a letter of William Ellery Channing's of 1820 by Norman Foerster, editor, American Prose and Poetry: Part I to the Civil War, "William Ellery Channing (1780-1842)," p. 492.

¹² Lloyd Morris, The Poetry of Edwin Arlington Robinson, p. 38.

¹³ Louise Dauner, "Studies in Edwin Arlington Robinson," p. 5.

¹⁴ Quoted from Edwin Arlington Robinson's interview with Lucius Beebe as recorded in "Dignified Faun: A Portrait of E. A. R.," in Outlook and Independent, by Seymour Eetsky, "Some Aspects of the Philosophy of Edwin Arlington Robinson: Self-knowledge, Self-acceptance," p. 70.

¹⁵ Brooks Atkinson, editor, The Complete Essays and Other Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Over-Soul," p. 262.

- 16 Ibid., "The Transcendentalist," p. 90.
- 17 Ibid., "Plato: or, the Philosopher," p. 483.
- 18 Denham Sutcliffe, editor, Untriangulated Stars: Letters of Edwin Arlington Robinson to Harry de Forest Smith, February 3, 1897, p. 274.
- 19 Atkinson, op. cit., "The Over-Soul," p. 264.
- 20 Ibid., "The Over-Soul," p. 265.
- 21 Ibid., "The Over-Soul," p. 275.
- 22 Ibid., "The Over-Soul," p. 270.
- 23 Ibid., "The Over-Soul," p. 260.
- 24 Dauner, op. cit., p. 7.
- 25 Betsky, op. cit., p. 13.
- 26 Sutcliffe, loc. cit.
- 27 B. Jowett, translator, The Works of Plato, vol. 3, Phaedo, p. 198.
- 28 Ibid., Phaedo, p. 199.
- 29 Bertrand Russell, A History of Western Philosophy and Its Connection with Political and Social Circumstances from the Earliest Times to the Present Day, p. 138.
- 30 Jowett, op. cit., The Symposium, pp. 342-43.
- 31 Ibid., The Symposium, p. 342.
- 32 Loc. cit.
- 33 W. R. Inge, Mysticism in Religion, p. 97.
- 34 Archibald MacMechan, editor, Carlyle: Sartor Resartus, p. 17.
- 35 Loc. cit.
- 36 MacMechan, op. cit., p. 58.
- 37 Loc. cit.

- 38 Lin Yutang, editor, The Wisdom of China and India, The Upanishads, p. 48.
- 39 Ibid., The Surangama Sutra, p. 552.
- 40 Ibid., "Three Sermons by Buddha," p. 362.
- 41 Adams L. Beck, The Story of Oriental Philosophy, pp. 185, 187.
- 42 Hermann Hagedorn, Edwin Arlington Robinson: A Biography, p. 131.
- 43 Loc. cit.
- 44 Quoted from a letter to Arthur R. Gledhill in Ibid., p. 95.
- 45 Sutcliffe, op. cit., November 6, 1896, p. 263.
- 46 Loc. cit.
- 47 Sutcliffe, op. cit., January 17, 1897, p. 270.
- 48 Edwin Arlington Robinson, Collected Poems, "Calvary," p. 83.
- 49 Sutcliffe, op. cit., October 15, 1896, p. 260.
- 50 Ridgely Torrence, et. al., Selected Letters of Edwin Arlington Robinson, to Mrs. Laura E. Richards, January 20, 1933, p. 169.
- 51 Ibid., to Mrs. Laura E. Richards, February 13, 1933, p. 170.
- 52 Lin Yutang, op. cit., p. 567.

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¹ Hermann Hagedorn, Edwin Arlington Robinson: A Biography, p. 4.

² Ibid., p. 7.

³ Ibid., pp. 7-8.

⁴ Ibid., p. 14.

⁵ Ibid., p. 29.

⁶ Ibid., p. 59.

⁷ Supra, p. 25.

⁸ Hagedorn, op. cit., p. 72.

⁹ Loc. cit.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 77.

¹¹ Ridgely Torrence, et. al., editors, Selected Letters of Edwin Arlington Robinson, to Arthur R. Gledhill, October 23, 1893, p. 10.

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¹³ Torrence, op. cit., to Arthur R. Gledhill, August 20, 1895, pp. 11-12.

¹⁴ Hagedorn, op. cit., p. 94.

¹⁵ Denham Sutcliffe, editor, Untriangulated Stars: Letters of Edwin Arlington Robinson to Harry de Forest Smith, December 7, 1896, p. 264.

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¹⁸ Supra, p. 20.

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- ²⁰Hagedorn, op. cit., p. 286.
- ²¹Holle Walter Brown, Next Door to a Poet, pp. 56-57.
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- ²³Ibid., to Miss Bess Dworsky, December 7, 1931, p. 165.
- ²⁴Douglas Clyde Macintosh, The Problem of Religious Knowledge, p. 236.
- ²⁵Loc. cit.
- ²⁶Hagedorn, Loc. cit.
- ²⁷Bliss Perry, editor, The Heart of Emerson's Journals, December 27, 1834, p. 90.
- ²⁸Louise Dauner, "Studies in Edwin Arlington Robinson," quoting Edwin Arlington Robinson's remark to Winfield Townley Scott, p. 139.
- ²⁹Torrence, op. cit., to L. H. Chase, July 11, 1917, p. 103.

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¹ Seymore Betsky, "Some Aspects of the Philosophy of Edwin Arlington Robinson: Self-knowledge, Self-acceptance," p. 30.

² Quoted from The Children of the Night, by Edwin Arlington Robinson by Hyatt Howe Waggoner, "E. A. Robinson and the Cosmic Chill," The New England Quarterly, XIII, p. 75.

³ Lin Yutang, The Wisdom of China and India, The Upanishads, p. 40.

⁴ Waggoner, op. cit., p. 74.

⁵ Edwin Arlington Robinson, Collected Poems, "The Altar," p. 92.

⁶ Lloyd Morris, The Poetry of Edwin Arlington Robinson, pp. 69-70.

⁷ Robinson, op. cit., "Credo," p. 94.

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¹⁰ Lin Yutang, op. cit., The Upanishads, footnote, p. 53.

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¹² Robinson, op. cit., "Two Sonnets," p. 89.

¹³ Ibid., "The Sage," pp. 192-93.

¹⁴ Ibid., "Maya," pp. 871-72.

¹⁵ Thomas S. Kepler, editor, The Fellowship of the Saints: An Anthology of Christian Devotional Literature, "The speculation of the Poor Man in the Wilderness," from The Progress of the Soul, p. 136.

¹⁶ Robinson, op. cit., "Supremacy," p. 97.

¹⁷ Ibid., Octaves, pp. 100-07..

- 18 _____, The Cloud of Unknowing, p. 133.
- 19 Lin Yutang, op. cit., The Bhagavad-Gita, p. 84.
- 20 Quoted from Ruysbroeck by Douglas Clyde Macintosh, The Problem of Religious Knowledge, p. 16.
- 21 Hermann Hagedorn, Edwin Arlington Robinson: A Biography, p. 94.
- 22 Quoted from Eckhart by Rudolph Otto, Mysticism East and West: A Comparative Analysis of the Nature of Mysticism, p. 66.
- 23 Robinson, op. cit., "Two Quatrains," p. 103.
- 24 Ibid., "Richard Cory," p. 82.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER IV

- ¹ Emery Heff, Edwin Arlington Robinson, p. 136.
- ² Ridgely Torrence, et al., editors, Selected Letters of Edwin Arlington Robinson, to Amy Lowell, March 18, 1916, p. 75.
- ³ Edwin Arlington Robinson, Collected Poems, "The Man Against the Sky," pp. 60-9.
- ⁴ Quoted from Plotinus by Edward Caird, The Evolution of Theology in the Greek Philosophers, p. 221.
- ⁵ Supra, p. 39.
- ⁶ Quoted from the anonymous Cloud of Unknowing by Douglas Clyde Macintosh, The Problems of Religious Knowledge, p. 19.
- ⁷ John Gould Fletcher, Life is My Song, p. 232.
- ⁸ Heff, op. cit., p. 184.
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¹ Quoted from Algernon Blackwood's "Episodes before Thirty," by Hermann Hagedorn, Edwin Arlington Robinson: A Biography, p. 133.

² Ibid., p. 132.

³ Edwin Arlington Robinson, Collected Poems, Captain Craig, pp. 113-69.

⁴ Quoted by Douglas Clyde Macintosh, The Problem of Religious Knowledge, p. 19.

⁵ Quoted from the "Upanishads" by Rabindranath Tagore, Sadhana: The Realization of Life, p. 79.

⁶ Supra, "When we can all so excellently give," p. 44.

⁷ Supra, p. 12.

⁸ Supra, p. 24.

⁹ Supra, p. 45.

¹⁰ Floyd Stovall, American Idealism, p. 172.

¹¹ May Sinclair, "Three American Poets of Today," Atlantic Monthly, XCVIII, p. 332.

¹² Loc. cit.

¹³ Ivor Winters, "Religious and Social Ideas in the Didactic Work of E. A. Robinson," Arizona Quarterly, I, p. 78.

¹⁴ Loc. cit.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER VI

¹ Lloyd Morris, The Poetry of Edwin Arlington Robinson, p. 47.

² Ridgely Torrence, et al., editors, Selected Letters of Edwin Arlington Robinson, to Hermann Hagedorn, September 8, 1913, p. 113.

³ Edwin Arlington Robinson, Collected Poems, Merlin, pp. 235-316.

⁴ Quoted from Eckhart by Charles Morris Addison, The Theory and Practice of Mysticism, p. 210.

⁵ Torrence, loc. cit.

⁶ Robinson, op. cit., Lancelot, pp. 365-449.

⁷ Thomas S. Kepler, editor, The Fellowship of the Saints: An Anthology of Christian Devotional Literature, Heinrich Suso, (Selected Maxims), p. 187.

⁸ Ibid., John of the Cross, [Conditions of the Spiritual Nature], from The Dark Night of the Soul, p. 284.

⁹ Mark Van Doren, Edwin Arlington Robinson, p. 77.

¹⁰ Frederic Ives Carpenter, "Tristram the Transcendent," The New England Quarterly, p. 504.

¹¹ Loc. cit.

¹² Carpenter, op. cit., p. 505.

¹³ Robinson, op. cit., Tristram, pp. 595-729.

¹⁴ An example is the following quotations from T. K. Whipple, Spokesman: Modern Writers and American Life, p. 52 and p. 53:

"In both poems, [Merlin and Lancelot] since following the Light is the business of man, whatever holds him from that purpose must be abolished; and since the world and the life of the world hide the Light from men, it is better that the world should break up so that men may be set free from its insistence to seek the Vision."

"All who have held similar views . . . have tried

to hitch wagons to their stars, to find in their intuitions some sort of practical guidance, to establish a vital connection between their illuminations and their every-day lives."

¹⁵Torrence, op. cit., To Hermann Hagedorn, September 8, 1918. p. 112.

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¹ Edwin Arlington Robinson, Collected Poems, Roman
Bartholow, pp. 733-856.

² Hermann Hagedorn, Edwin Arlington Robinson: A
Biography, p. 74.

³ Ibid., p. 360.

⁴ Thomas S. Kepler, editor, The Fellowship of the
Saints: An Anthology of Christian Devotional Literature,
Evelyn Underhill, "The Place of Will, Intellect, and Feeling
in Prayer," from The Essentials of Mysticism, p. 627.

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¹ Quoted from The Bookman, November, 1932, by Estelle Kaplan, Philosophy in the Poetry of Edwin Arlington Robinson, p. 27.

² Edwin Arlington Robinson, Collected Poems, Lancelot, p. 448.

³ Robinson, op. cit., Matthias at the Door, pp. 1077-1155.

⁴ Quoting Walter Hilton by Charles Morris Addison, The Theory and Practice of Mysticism, pp. 82-3.

⁵ Ibid., p. 92.

⁶ Robinson, op. cit., "The Man Against the Sky," p. 66.

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- ¹ Supra, p. 2.
- ² Edwin Arlington Robinson, Collected Poems, "The Three Taverns," pp. 461-71.
- ³ Gal. 2: 20. Biblical quotations have not been footnoted in this thesis, except in the chapter to avoid confusion with quotations from "The Three Taverns."
- ⁴ Ibid., 5: 18.
- ⁵ II. Cor. 12: 17.
- ⁶ Ibid., 12: 9.
- ⁷ Robinson, op. cit., "Lazarus," pp. 530-33.
- ⁸ _____, The Cloud of Unknowing, p. 71.
- ⁹ Hermann Egedorn, Edwin Arlington Robinson: A Biography, p. 363.
- ¹⁰ Loc. cit.
- ¹¹ Egedorn, op. cit., p. 371.
- ¹² _____, "Nicodemus: Poetry That is Not Song," Christian Century, XLIX, p. 1348.
- ¹³ Robinson, op. cit., "Nicodemus," p. 1159-69.

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¹ T. K. Whipple, Spokesmen: Modern Writers and American Life, p. 46.

² Supra, p. 25.

³ Edwin Arlington Robinson, Collected Poems, The Man Who Died Twice, pp. 921-57.

⁴ Mark Van Doren, "A Symphony of Sin: The Man Who Died Twice," Nation, CXVIII, p. 445.

⁵ Information about the stages and discipline of "the Mystic Way" as well as the terms used are from Charles Morris Addison, The Theory and Practice of Mysticism, pp. 43-4, and Helen C. White, The Mysticism of William Blake, pp. 75-89.

⁶ Supra, p. 45.

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