A STUDY OF RHYMERS' CLUB POETRY

By

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D.R.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. SOME PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS: ORIGIN, MEMBERSHIP, PUBLICATIONS, AND CONTEMPORARY REPUTATION</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. THE INTELLECTUAL MATRIX OF THE RHYMERS' CLUB</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. The Triangle of Escapism: God, the Flesh, and the Devil</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The Major Influences: Pater and the French Poets</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The Pursuit of Unreality: The Rhymers and Their Poems</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Science, the Enemy: Conclusion</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. THE POETIC OF THE RHYMERS' CLUB</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Ubiquitous Music</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Key Sources of the Musical Analogue</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Music and the Rhymers' Poetry</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. THE RHYMERS IN PERSPECTIVE</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Isolation and the Image</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Symbolism and Decadence</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The Legacy of the Rhymers</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

Efforts to regard the Rhymers' Club as a coherent movement have been generally unsuccessful; the critical consensus is that the thirteen-odd writers were individuals united by nothing more than their common love of poetry and that their achievements were separate and slight. Scholarly interest in the Rhymers has tended to focus on such diverse matters as Arthur Symons' introducing William Butler Yeats to French symbolism, the narrow range of Ernest Dowson's poetry, the importance of Yeats and Lionel Johnson to the Irish literary renascence, and, above all, the tortured lives of the poets of Yeats's "tragic generation." Yet, although the Rhymers were never programmatic and articulated no poetic, they played a significant transitional role in the development from the didactic limitations of Tennyson and Browning to the integrated art of Pound, Eliot, and the later Yeats. It is perhaps attributable to the fact that the Rhymers were poets of retreat--artists who rejected the contemporary scene in a futile quest for sanctuary--that their achievement, modest that it was, has seldom been marked.

The problem of the Rhymers' Club is analogous to that of the second generation of English romantic poets, whose tempestuous lives and early deaths tended to distract attention from their work. But the poetry of Byron, Shelley, and Keats is so compelling that critical attention inevitably shifts to its rightful object: their poetry. With the Rhymers this has not always been the case. That the poetry of the Rhymers' Club has been subordinated to biography is perhaps an adverse
reflection on the Rhymers' art, but that art is of sufficient importance to merit a full-length study.¹

The members of the Rhymers' Club read their poetry aloud to each other. Although only a few of the poems published in the Club's anthologies were first presented before the assembled group, every poem a Rhymer composed was written by someone especially sensitive to the aural effect of poetry. To the Rhymers poetry was a public art, the beauty of which was its euphony. We are reminded by Herbert Read of how lost this art is in our century: "Poetry as an art has become a secret and shame-faced activity: people are even shy of being seen reading poetry in a train, whereas the public declamation of poetry, as it was practised even in the nineteenth century, and as it is still practised in Russia, is quite unknown."² As declaimers of poetry the Rhymers were intent on its

¹ An unpublished dissertation, "The Rhymers' Club (Founded 1891): a Study of Its Activities and Their Significance," by Norman William Alford of the University of Texas, was completed late in 1966. However, its emphasis is more on the literary achievements of the members and how the Club influenced their careers than is the case in my study, in which the poetry itself is the focus. Furthermore, I have chosen to stress the intellectual and aesthetic assumptions common among the group and to show how these assumptions influenced their poetry, whereas Mr. Alford adopts the traditional critical position that the Rhymers' Club "comprised men of differing outlook and purpose who met simply from a shared concern for the craft of poetry at a time when it was out of fashion." This attitude toward the Rhymers is in keeping with the 1931 statement of Albert J. Farmer: "C'est dans un commun amour de la poésie que ses membres trouvent le principe d'unité nécessaire à l'existence de leur groupe." (Le Mouvement esthétique et "décadent" en Angleterre [Bibliothèque de la Revue de littérature comparée, t. 75, Paris: H. Champion, 1931], p. 263.)

² Inasmuch as my research was essentially completed before Mr. Alford's dissertation became available, I have made no further explicit reference to it in this study.

"music," and it is the "music of poetry" that is the focal point of this essay.

The Rhymers were not well known to their contemporaries, nor have they been a posthumous literary success. What little reputation they have had has been more notoriety than fame, an environment in which facts seldom thrive. With this sullied background in mind, I have begun this study with a review of the history of the Club and of some pertinent biographical and bibliographical facts about its members. I have then described the publication of the Club's two anthologies and reviewed their critical reception. Those are the preliminary considerations.

The first question generally asked about a writer is an inquiry as to what he said. Even though ideas have traditionally been of less importance in belletristic than in expository prose, and of still less consequence in poetry, it is only natural to look to the discursive and therefore the intellectual content of any verbal structure. But close scrutiny of the Rhymers' poetry for new ideas leaves the reader in the position of the little boy asked to compliment the emperor on his new clothes: he can find nothing at all! It seems perplexing that poets whose intellectual endowment is unimpeachable should have written such vacuous poetry. The explanation is to be found in their attempt to "purify" poetry of ideas, a notion which they derived chiefly from the aesthetic of Walter Pater and the theory and practice of the French symbolists. Therefore, in an attempt to understand this intellectual negativism and its corollary, escapism, we shall consider these influences on the Rhymers and then compare the ideas of Pater and the Symbolists with those found in the Rhymers' own work.
The traditional alternative to content is form. The Rhymers equated form with music, which in their poetic ramified into subject and metaphor. The replacement of painting by music as the poetic analogue for the nineteenth century was a part of the larger shift from mimetic to expressive aesthetics. "Music" became the ubiquitous term for the Rhymers, the key term of an implied poetic that they never articulated, but which influenced their great successors of the twentieth century. Just as Pater and the French were the seminal factors in the formulation of the ideas found in the Rhymers' poetry, they were also the forerunners and perhaps the architects of an aesthetic never before so fully expressed in English literature: poetry as music, and, especially, as euphony. The work of the Rhymers' Club will be presented here as the embodiment of the "music" inhering in these poems as form, subject, and metaphor.

Finally, we must view the Rhymers in perspective. We must reconcile the biographical fact of their alienation from society with the literary fact of their non-rhetorical poetry. Although these facts are apparently in different universes of discourse, they are related through the tension of the "Image, ... a radiant truth out of space and time," a locution and concept for which I am indebted to Mr. Frank Kermode. The relationship of the Rhymers' poetry to the Symbolist movement and its corollary, decadence, will next be considered. Then, having treated the Rhymers' poetry in the contexts of the past and the present, we shall see how the men of the "tragic generation" helped to create the condition that made the poetic achievement of the twentieth century possible. We will then have done justice to Yeats's "Companions of the Cheshire Cheese."
CHAPTER I

SOME PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS: ORIGIN, MEMBERSHIP, PUBLICATIONS, AND CONTEMPORARY REPUTATION

Two slender sixteenmo anthologies published in the 1890's, The Book of the Rhymers' Club and The Second Book of the Rhymers' Club, remain as monuments to an ephemeral organization. It was a fugitive club of mainly young and little known London poets. Yet one of its members, William Butler Yeats, became perhaps the greatest modern poet in the English language. Three others, Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson, and Arthur Symons, earned minor, but secure, reputations. As is true of all artists, what has endured of the Rhymers and what merits our attention is their art, but first, some preliminary considerations present themselves. Who the Rhymers were, how they coalesced, what their club was like, how they regarded each other, and what they had written before the formation of the group are among topics surveyed in this chapter, which concludes with a résumé of the publishing history and critical reception of the two anthologies.

Our knowledge of the Rhymers' Club stems largely from the reminiscences of its members. Those Rhymers whose memories have provided the primary data for this chapter are William Butler Yeats through his autobiography and letters, Victor Plarr in his pioneering study of Ernest Dowson, and Ernest Rhys in his literary reminiscences, Everyman Remembers.  

*Notes will be found at the end of each chapter.
To a lesser extent Arthur Symons' prefatory memoir to his early edition of Dowson's poems and Richard Le Gallienne's *The Romantic '90s* have furnished insights to the Rhymers' Club.

These recollections being remote and no formal records of the Club (on the doubtful assumption that there ever were any) having survived, our conception of it is, not surprisingly, a reconstruction in the main. Even the precise membership and dates of the group are conjectural, accounts sometimes being at odds. The following list of official members, in the handwriting of George Arthur Greene ("who acted as hon. secretary to a club without rules or officers"), is given by H. Guy Harrison, Earnest Dowson's earliest bibliographer: John Davidson, Ernest Dowson, Edwin J. Ellis, George Arthur Greene, Arthur Cecil Hillier, Lionel Johnson, Richard Le Gallienne, Victor Plarr, Ernest Radford, Ernest Rhys, Thomas William Rolleston, Arthur Symons, John Todhunter, and William Butler Yeats.

Much valuable information about the Club derives from Yeats, who, if occasionally fallible on details, compensates for his imprecision with his critical acumen. His list, prepared nearly thirty years after the Club met, omits Greene and Hillier, while adding William Watson (who never attended meetings), Selwyn Image, and Herbert Percy Horne. Greene having published in both of the Club's anthologies and Hillier in the second, Yeats's omissions seem erroneous. On the other hand, not all members contributed; Davidson's name appears on both Greene's and Yeats's lists, yet his poetry is included in neither publication.

Others with first-hand knowledge of the Rhymers' Club have not attempted to detail the membership. Plarr has relied on Greene's list,
while Symons, Rhys, and Le Gallienne have mentioned poets associated with
the Club without questioning their precise membership status.\textsuperscript{5} John
Gray, Morley Roberts, Edgar Jepson, William Theodore Peters, and Edward
Garnett are frequently mentioned as having attended meetings, although
not as members.

Who organized the Rhymers' Club is just as conjectural. Yeats
claims that his statement to Rhys was the genesis of the group. He re-
calls his having told him: "I am growing jealous of other poets and we
will all grow jealous of each other unless we know each other and so feel
a share in each other's triumph."\textsuperscript{6} Rhys's version, however, does not
give Yeats credit for the initiative:

\textit{It was in my fourth winter [1890 by Rhys's reckoning] that
the Rhymers' Club was set going at the old Cheshire Cheese
in Fleet Street. The first three members were T. W. Rolleston, W. B. Yeats (Willie Yeats, which did not in any sense describe him) and myself. Each of us asked other Rhymers to come to the club suppers, and we soon reached the allotted number of ten.\textsuperscript{7}}

While contradicting neither Yeats nor Rhys, Plarr recalls the
Rhymers' Club as having emerged in two stages: "The Rhymers held one
memorable meeting in Mr. Herbert Horne's rooms in the Fitzroy settlement.
They were then, so to speak, rediscovered and reconstituted, having pre-
viously been but a small group of Dublin poets."\textsuperscript{8} Plarr does not specify
the original members, but Yeats, Todhunter, Rolleston, Greene, and
Hillier were all Dubliners. However, inasmuch as Hillier did not con-
tribute to the Rhymers' first book, it is unlikely that he was a founding Rhymer.

The Rhymers' Club endured from 1890 or 1891 through much of 1894.
Rhys's "fourth winter" or 1890 date for the founding of the Club deviates from the traditional date of 1891, but is not necessarily incorrect. In a letter conjecturally (but probably accurately) dated June 27, 1891, Yeats writes: "'The Rhymers' Club' will publish a book of verse almost at once." Although this statement could be interpreted to mean only that the Rhymers would publish in the immediate future, a more likely reading is that the Rhymers' Club intended publishing a book almost at the organization's inception. Furthermore, almost all secondary source writers, historians who were not party to the Club, give 1891 as the correct date: Albert J. Farmer, who believes his study is "la premiere qui ait été consacrée au Rhymers' Club"; [John] Mark Longaker, who devotes a chapter of his Dowson biography to the Rhymers; Joseph Hone, Yeats's biographer; Roger Lhombreaud, writing Symons' life; and Richard Ellmann in his Yeats: The Man and the Masks—to name only a few. 

Yet there is credible evidence for an earlier date. Yeats's statement to Rhys that was the alleged impetus to the Club was made "soon after the publication of The Wanderings of Oisin" to the man "who had set [him] to compile tales of the Irish fairies." These events being dated 1889, 1891 seems late for the inception of the Club. Also, Le Gallienne recollects a Rhymers' Club evening at Greene's house, at which, for the few minutes before the meeting began, Lionel Johnson captivated the early arrivals with his conversation. Le Gallienne writes that Johnson was then twenty-three. His birth date was March 15, 1867. This chronology would imply an 1890 date for the meeting. What is more, the epilogue to The Book of the Rhymers' Club is subtitled "First Anniversary of the Rhymers' Club." Considering that the book was in proof in December,
1891, we have strong internal evidence for the earlier year. Conceivably, some of these considerations may have convinced Ian Fletcher, who, in his careful biographical introduction to The Complete Poems of Lionel Johnson, without amplification gives a late 1890 date for the founding of the Club.

The Rhymers persisted through 1894. No one took the group sufficiently seriously to record the date of dissolution, but that year is universally accepted as the Rhymers' last. The movements of individual members and the absence of allusion to meetings after 1894 confirm that year as the one in which the Rhymers ceased meeting. Perhaps the event was unrecorded because, as Yeats suggested, it was unnoticed: "The Rhymers had begun to break up in tragedy, though we did not know that till the play had finished."

The artistic fellowship which Yeats proposed to Rhys may not have been the only motive for the establishment of the Rhymers' Club; it may not even have been the primary one. One hypothesis is that the Club was organized with a view toward collective publication. Perhaps motives were even ulterior. Many of the Rhymers were reviewers in a position to notice favorably their fellows' new offerings. That none of these purposes, however, was of more than temporary validity is borne out by the early fragmentation of the Club.

The testimony of Le Gallienne and Symons supports Yeats's view that friendship and a common interest in verse brought the Rhymers together. Le Gallienne sees the Club in terms of its publications, although he never alleges that publication was its raison d'etre:
"The Book of the Rhymers' Club," published by Lane in 1892, may be regarded as the first concerted attack of the "Bodley Head Poets" on the British public, though it was not conceived as such and had no prevailing tone. It had no purpose beyond bringing together in friendly association, after the manner of such old miscellanies as "England's Helicon" or Davidson's "Poetical Rhapsody," examples of the work of twelve poets, most of them young and recently arrived in London, who had constituted themselves a very informal club which met casually, at odd times, at the houses of one or other of them, or at Doctor Johnson's old tavern, the Cheshire Cheese in Fleet Street, for discreet conviviality, conversation on literary matters, and the reading of their own newborn lyrics.16

Symons, too, stresses camaraderie, but while Le Gallienne remembers the Club as comprising young poets in search of a sympathetic audience, mutual support, and a literary environment, Symons, more subject to French influence, recalls how young poets, then very young, recited their own verses to one another with a desperate and ineffectual attempt to get into key with the Latin Quarter. Though few of us were, as a matter of fact, Anglo-Saxon, we could not help feeling that we were in London, and the atmosphere of London is not the atmosphere of movements or societies. In Paris it is the most natural thing in the world to meet and discuss literature, ideas, one's own and one another's work; and it can be done without pretentiousness or constraint, because to the Latin mind, art, ideas, one's work and the work of one's friends, are definite and important things, which it would never occur to anyone to take anything but seriously. In England art has to be protected not only against the world, but against one's self and one's fellow artist, by a kind of affected modesty which is the Englishman's natural pose, half pride and half self-distrust. So this brave venture of the Rhymers' Club, though it lasted for two or three years, and produced two little books of verse which will some day be literary curiosities, was not quite a satisfactory kind of cenacle.17

For Symons the very diffidence of the poet in England foredoomed the Rhymers' Club. If poetry in England had to be an almost surreptitious vocation, a club dedicated to the community of poetic creation could only founder.
A less idealistic attitude toward the Club emerges from some of the letters of the period. Lhombreaud alludes to the difficulty of an individual poet's securing an audience as a spur to the formation of the Rhymers' Club:

These young people, this small minority almost entirely unknown to an indifferent, even hostile, public, had scarcely any chance of being heard. The poetry market at the beginning of the decade was hardly prosperous, and many aspirants ran the risk of never finding a publisher. 18

As evidence for this Lhombreaud quotes from a letter written by Edmond Gosse to Ernest Rhys, a Rhymer with this very problem:

It seems to me that it would be rather a good plan if four or five of the very best of the young poets would club together to produce a volume, a new Parnassus, and so give the reading public a chance of making your acquaintance... 19

While Lhombreaud cites this letter as pointing to the inception of the Rhymers' Club, it should be noted that it was written on October 10, 1891, an indefensibly late date for the beginning of the organization.

An even less disinterested rationale for the Club appears in one of Yeats's letters. Among the Rhymers Davidson, Le Gallienne, Johnson, Rolleston, Symons, and Yeats did considerable reviewing, whereas Rhys, as the editor of the Camelot Classics, had some influence in publishing circles. Yeats, writing to Katharine Tynan in July 1891 mentions his new rapport with reviewers, a rapport acquired through the Club:

Owing to the Rhymers' Club I have a certain amount of influence with reviewers. I can probably besides before-mentioned papers [Irish Monthly, Boston Pilot, Anti-Jacobin, Star, and Pall Mall Gazette] get you a note in the Speaker at least and certainly can help you with the Queen. The Speaker reviews are unfortunately very few and far between. The notes however are very much in the friendly hand of John Davidson. 20

Yeats himself wrote for the Boston Pilot, while Johnson contributed
regularly to the *Anti-Jacobin*; both men were on the best of terms with Father Matthew Russell, S. J., the editor of the *Irish Monthly*. Le Gallienne had a weekly book column (aptly named the "Log Roller") in the *Star*. Ernest Radford was reviewing for the *Pall Mall Gazette* at this time, and Oscar Wilde and Walter Pater, both of whom were generally friendly to the Rhymers, often contributed reviews; in such men Yeats's confidence was undoubtedly well placed. All of this connotes an element of calculation in the Rhymers' coming together. Perhaps some of their number clubbed for more than fellowship.

"Always decorous and often dull": so Yeats has described the meetings of the Rhymers' Club. Nevertheless, as is the case with every aspect of the group's history, the character of the meetings is largely a surmise. Graham Hough, by comparing the Rhymers to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, a movement with which the nineties group had a degree of intellectual consanguinity, clarifies the difficulty:

They had no conscientious historian like William Michael Rossetti, and since their principal theory was that all theories were vulgar, we can only attempt to describe an atmosphere, a vague community of sentiment, to be perceived only in hints and snatches.

That "community of sentiment" seemed to Yeats to include an innate respect for the poem as an aural experience. This credo being the basis of the Rhymers' aesthetic, we shall linger over it in the third chapter, but only glance at it here:

Some one would read out a poem and we would comment, too politely for the criticism to have great value; and yet that we read out our poems, and thought that they could be so tested, was a definition of our aims.

Most of the Tuesday evening meetings were at the Cheshire Cheese
in Wine Office Court, Fleet Street, although neither the evening, place, nor frequency of meeting was fixed. Rhys's account of a typical meeting is full of prosaic detail; still his picture does not show the Club in the ineffectual light of Yeats's description:

Our custom was to sup downstairs in the old coffee-house boxes, something like high double-seated pews with a table between. After supper at which we drank old ale and other time-honored liquors, we adjourned to a smoking-room at the top of the house, which we came to look upon as our sanctum. There long clays or churchwarden pipes were smoked, and the Rhymers were expected to bring rhymes in their pockets, to be read aloud to the club for criticism.25

Le Gallienne's memories of the Rhymers are of a less formal group than the one Rhys depicts. As stated earlier, the meetings were casual and irregular as to both time and place; the program included "discreet conviviality, conversation on literary matters, and the reading of their own newborn lyrics." Evidence for the group's mobility can be found in Le Gallienne's account of Johnson's display of erudition at Greene's house (cited above) and in a report by Plarr of a meeting at Horne's rooms.26

In default of that "conscientious historian," we cannot profitably explore further the Rhymers' Club's activities, excepting, of course, their principal activity, the publication of two anthologies. That the Rhymers left no manifesto or statement of principles is true. But there are theories implicit in their poems, although never articulated as Club pronouncements— theories which will be stated and developed in the next two chapters. To contemporary London, however, they were only individuals banded together to publish their poetry. Few reviewers of the Books of the Rhymers' Club acknowledged its corporate existence. Most readers of
the nineties would have agreed with Le Gallienne's appraisal that "the significance of the club was in its individuals rather than in any collective character." At this juncture, therefore, let us consider the members as individuals.

Who the Rhymers were we left unsettled. If formal membership in the Club were the differentia, this would be a cardinal question. But since whatever community that existed among the Rhymers is to be found in their poetry, it suffices, for our purposes, to classify as Rhymers the thirteen poets who published in the Club's anthologies: Dowson, Ellis, Greene, Hillier, Johnson, Le Gallienne, Plarr, Radford, Rhys, Rolleston, Symons, Todhunter, and Yeats. If such a criterion excludes people like John Davidson, it is in a way their own doing. Davidson--variously described as "rocky," "stubborn," "pig-headed," and "independent"--"did not care to be ranked as one of a coterie." Inclusion in a group anthology, to his mind, would have compromised his poetic integrity. Obviously participation in the anthologies as a group venture must not be taken as tantamount to endorsement by individual contributors of any special Rhymers' poetic, but conversely, one who did not choose to be a Rhymer would not have submitted his work.

Four men are pre-eminent in this group: Yeats, Dowson, Johnson, and Symons--the first dwarfing the others in poetical stature. William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) has deservedly been the subject of full biographical and bibliographical treatment, Joseph Hone having written the official life, W. B. Yeats 1865-1939, and Allan Wade having compiled a model bibliography (with a revised edition completed posthumously under the direction of Rupert Hart-Davis). Abundant first-rate bibliographical and biographical
material is available to Yeatsians, but his Rhymers' Club years, the years of his apprenticeship, have never been so well described as in his Autobiography. "Apprenticeship" is a relative term here, applicable only by comparison to his mature genius, because Yeats in his mid-twenties was already an established author. But, as was true of the other major Rhymers, his literary income was incommensurate with the recognition he was accorded. The Wanderings of Oisin and Other Poems had gone into a second edition; John Sherman and Dhoya, a small volume of fiction, had been published; and two editions of collected fairy tales had come out under Yeats's editorship. Such famous early poems as "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" and "The Old Pensioner" had already appeared in Henley's magazines.

Evidence for Yeats's early stature can be found in an article that appeared in the prestigious Nineteenth Century just prior to the appearance of The Book of the Rhymers' Club. H. D. Traill, writing of "Our Minor Poets," lists sixty-five British poets; of these some two or three . . . would have ranked as poets of the first order in any age of literature. . . . Then comes a round dozen of others . . . who . . . would have been recognized at any period in which English taste was in a sound condition as poets, if not of supreme power, at any rate of very high eminence. This leaves us with fifty singers, who, if poets at all, may without undue temerity be described as minor poets.

Being named in this far from exhaustive list was a remarkable feat for a twenty-six-year old. It is only by the vagaries of the alphabet that Yeats's name appears last. Traill was not so audacious as to rank his poets further, but it is noteworthy that his list includes such poets as A. C. Swinburne, William Morris, George Meredith, and Robert Bridges. John Todhunter was the only other Rhymer to qualify.
Like Yeats, Ernest Dowson (1867-1900) has been the subject of a full-scale biography, but here further work is clearly indicated. The problem is what John Gawsworth has called "The Dowson Legend." Writing in 1937 Gawsworth published Dowson's letters to his good friend Sam Smith in an effort to establish that the poet's love for the adolescent Adelaide Foltinowicz was not the pathological relationship so often depicted. Still the task of refutation lay heavily upon Mark Longaker when he published his biography of Dowson in 1944. Dowson's brief, irregular life, the somewhat unusual circumstances of his death, the suicides of his parents, his association with Oscar Wilde after his fall, and the deliberate or unwitting misrepresentations of Dowson's early historians have combined to make an objective view of his life difficult to achieve. The legend of "the one who deliberately cultivated nostalgie de la boue and chose the path which led to evil and destruction," to use Longaker's phrase for this misconception, has been so persistent that a critic could usefully write only three years ago:

Before 1944 critics relied heavily upon the false testimony of Arthur Symons and William Butler Yeats. The Dowson legend became too firmly established to be destroyed by the facts of Longaker's biography, and with very rare exceptions the so-called decadence of Dowson's life has described and continues to describe the character of the poet's work. . . . When we think of Ernest Dowson today we most probably think of the Dowson legend. The legend has changed little in the past sixty years; it still does duty in the name of literary criticism.

Although Ernest Dowson had published only five poems when the Rhymers were formed, they looked upon him, with a perspective as yet undistorted by any "Dowson legend," as one of their best. Ernest Rhys's opinion is unequivocal: "At that time the one Rhymer we secretly
believed to be the most potential of the group was Ernest Dowson. Yeats, recalling a pair of Dowson’s then unpublished poems, avows: "It was because of the desire to hold them in my hand that I suggested the first Book of the Rhymers’ Club." Symons vindicates Rhys’s belief and Yeats’s taste by writing: "[Dowson’s] contributions to the first book of the club were at once the most delicate and the most distinguished poems which it contained." The Rhymers’ discernment of Dowson’s excellence is commendable, but it is not surprising that so unpublished a poet had but small renown. Those five poems, however, include his most famous work, "Non sum qualis eram bonae sub regno Cynarae," printed in the Century Guild Hobby Horse; three others in the same magazine under the collective title "In Praise of Solitude": "The Carmelite Nuns of the Perpetual Adoration," "Fleur de la Lune," and "Amor Umbratilis"; and the early sonnet "My Lady April" in the Temple Bar. Even this handful of pre-Rhymers’ poems sufficed to demonstrate his genius.

The common description of Dowson, which seems to be essentially correct, is "vague" and "dreamy"; he stood apart from concrete entities, whether scientific or historical, despite his penchant for Latin titles. Plarr gives a clear picture of Dowson’s intellectual limitations:

Of modern science, like most of his literary generation, he knew nothing at all, nor of history, and he commented wonderingly upon another’s habit of always reading it. He envied a poet whose objective vignettes of periods and people struck him as a tapestry. "It is always that power of weaving tapestries that I envy and admire."

Superficially, Lionel Johnson (1867-1902) had much in common with Ernest Dowson. Born in the same year, educated at Oxford, converted to Roman Catholicism, unmarried, neither having a book to his credit when the Rhymers organized, and early and tragically dead, they were, although
friends, very different men.

Johnson was no scientist, nor was he a "weaver of tapestries," but he was thoroughly grounded in intellectual history, especially in the patristic writings. His scholarship was impressive to the point of being pedantic. He was the resident intellect among the Rhymers; as Yeats said: "His thought dominated the scene and gave the Club its character." It was his critical rather than his creative faculty which impressed his colleagues. Rhys subtly exemplifies this judgment by calling Johnson "a true poet and one of the ablest critics of his time."

Despite his not issuing a book of verse until after the breakup of the Rhymers, Johnson had published about two dozen English poems and one in Latin before his twenty-fifth birthday. None of his best known--"By the Statue of King Charles at Charing Cross," "The Dark Angel," "To Morfydd," "The Precept of Silence," or "The Destroyer of a Soul," to name a few--is to be found among those early poems. When Johnson finally did publish a book, in 1894, it was The Art of Thomas Hardy, not a collection of his poetry, which was only issued a year later.

To date no biography of Johnson has appeared; the best published study of his life is Ian Fletcher's extended introduction to the Complete Poems, which also contains a judiciously selected bibliography. Studies of his life and work exist in manuscript, but, generally, Johnson has not yet received the critical attention he deserves.

The fourth principal Rhymer, Arthur Symons (1865-1945), was an early and prolific author; by 1892 he had published two books of poetry and An Introduction to the Study of Robert Browning. Yet he was not noted among the Rhymers either for critical acumen (The Symbolist Movement
in Literature was not published until 1899) or for his verse. Instead, he was envied and appreciated as a bon vivant and a man with an unusual capacity for friendship. His importance to the poetry of the Club was not as a paradigmatic poet, but as a source of ideas and influences.

Symons' predilection to London theaters and music-halls occasioned much critical comment. But Roger Lhombreaud's reminder is pertinent: "[Symons] had been taken on the staff of the Star as critic of Music-hall and ballet which were coming into vogue at the beginning of the Nineties." Obviously, evenings at the music halls were a vocational necessity, although the converse proposition can be maintained: Symons' immersion in this milieu qualified him for his position as a critic. Derek Stanford says that Symons was called a "Herrick of the Music Halls"; Yeats recalls that "Symons . . . studied the music halls, as he might have studied the age of Chaucer"; Rhys completes the impression of a man with a "zest for life" by describing him as "a most entertaining London companion, with a keen sense of adventure in roaming the streets day or night."

For Yeats there was another and more important side to Symons: his ability to empathize. Yeats shows this by contrasting him with Johnson:

When with Johnson I had tuned myself to his mood, but Arthur Symons, more than any other man I have ever known, could slip as it were into the mind of another, and my thoughts gained in richness and in clearness from his sympathy, nor shall I ever know how much my practice and my theory owe to the passages that he read me from Catullus and from Verlaine and from Mallarme.

Two corollaries are useful in placing Yeats's comment in perspective. First, it refers to the period 1895-1900; therefore it is neither sufficiently coincident nor general to be taken as the Club's attitude, but Rhys, the painter Sir William Rothenstein, and other figures of the early
nineties have written of his qualities as a companion. Second, the mention of Verlaine and Mallarmé indicates Symons' importance to the Rhymers, collectively, as the cultural ambassador from France. French influence was manifest among the group. Symons' mediate role between the poets of the two cultures will emerge in the discussions of the Rhymers' intellectual matrix and aesthetic in the next two chapters.

In the preface to *Arthur Symons: a Critical Biography* Roger Lhombreaud cites Edith Sitwell's 1957 judgment that Symons was "a great critic of the 1890's and the 1900's, now most unwisely neglected." Through this biography and a bibliography in preparation, Lhombreaud is compensating for the neglect of two generations.

Two other Rhymers, Richard Le Gallienne (1866-1947) and T. W. Rolleston (1857-1920), have been the subjects of book-length studies. As a journalist, critic, and personality, Le Gallienne is of interest, but hardly of importance. He was a facile writer with four books of verse to his credit by 1892, the last entitled *English Poems*. The title is significant inasmuch as Le Gallienne was the only professed Rhymer who attacked that supposed corrupter of English poetry, the French Decadence.

Rolleston, while an important influence in the fledgling Irish literary renaissance, was not a key Rhymer, but merely another contributor to the Celtic tone of the Club. Trained at Trinity College, Dublin, he was adept in both classical and modern languages and, like Yeats, was a man with organizational talents. Unlike Le Gallienne he was not a prolific poet, publishing no book of verse until 1909.

One other of the company is well known, Ernest Rhys (1859-1946), but his reputation rests on his editorship of the *Everyman* reprint series,
rather than on his poetry. During the Rhymer years his major interest was his editing. Rhys's first publication was a bit of social fiction, his earliest volume of poetry not appearing until the Club was breaking up. 56

The other Rhymers are so obscure that a few facts of their lives are, on the one hand, helpful; on the other, sufficient. John Todhunter (1839-1916) was the oldest and, excepting Yeats, who was then feeling his way in this genre, the only dramatist among the group. He was born in Dublin of Quaker stock and attended Trinity College, where he studied both medicine and literature; he then briefly practiced in Dublin and married. Upon the death of his wife and child, he abandoned medicine, devoting his energies to literature. At the inception of the Club, he had a half dozen books, most of which were verse, to his credit. 57

Perhaps Victor Gustave Plarr (1863-1929) is the most neglected poet of the Rhymers. Though his compass is limited, he is a master of forms. His style often shows a droll humor under impeccable control, reflecting the innate discretion of the man. Stanford, in choosing him for an anthology of the nineties, emphasizes those qualities:

Plarr is, indeed, delightful, though largely on account of a couple of lyrics—the witty Epitaphium Citharistriae and the formally skilful Ad Cinerarium, a piece of succinct perfection such as Gautier might have envied. These are two of the choicest poems written during the 'nineties. 58

These poems were published in the first and second Club books, respectively.

In addition to composing nearly faultless lyrics for it, Plarr served the Rhymers' Club well in another capacity. Inspired by his friendship for Ernest Dowson, he wrote the book frequently mentioned
here that was the first to recite any meaningful details about the group.

Plarr was a librarian by profession, and there is about him the same decorum of the reading room that we associate with Johnson. In 1897, after receiving the M. A. from Oxford, Plarr assumed the position of Librarian to the Royal College of Surgeons, a position which, characteristically, he held to his death.59

Painter, illustrator, mystic, student of Blake, and incidentally a versifier—such is one explanation of the failure of Edwin John Ellis (1848-1918) as a poet. Ellis' reputation is founded on the edition of William Blake's works that he prepared in cooperation with Yeats. Ellis led a varied life. The son of Dr. Alexander Sharp (Ellis), a brilliant Scottish linguist and natural scientist, he was an old friend of Yeats's father, J. B. Yeats, with whom he had once shared a studio. Ellis lived many years in Italy, returning to England in the eighties. In 1888 he exhibited at the Royal Academy. Prior to 1892, when he published Fate in Arcadia, and Other Poems, he was known chiefly as a writer and illustrator of children's books.60

It is unlikely that the remaining three members would be remembered today in conjunction with the poetry of the nineties, had they not contributed to the Rhymers' Club's anthologies. Ernest William Radford (1857-1919) was a Cambridge man who had been called to the bar, but who pursued literature as a profession. Married to another poet, Dolly Radford, he wrote for the Pall Mall Gazette during its great period when Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw were also contributors. Rhys remembered Radford as "a casual disciple of William Morris, . . . a Fabian, a very effective speaker, a poet and a wit."61 He was a comparatively well-
published author, with two books of poetry in print, when he joined the Rhymers.

George Arthur Greene (1853-1921)—"il Greno" to Plarr, because of Greene's love for all things Italian—was an academic man. Educated in Florence and at Trinity College, Dublin, where the degree of Doctor of Literature had been conferred upon him, he was a professor of English literature at Alexandra College for three years. His reputation was that of an indefatigable worker. Accordingly, it was only natural that he should act as the Rhymers' secretary—in fact, as their only "executive." Although Greene eventually published his poetry, he was regarded by the generation of the nineties primarily as a scholar.62

Arthur Cecil Hillier (1857-1920?) was the only Rhymer not contributing to the first anthology. With Yeats, Rolleston, Todhunter, Greene, and Rhys, he formed the Celtic faction of the Club; Johnson, too, must be acknowledged as a kind of honorary Celt. Hillier was well educated (Trinity College and Oxford) and was, like Rolleston, a good German scholar. He collaborated with Greene and Dowson on the translation from German of a history of modern painting, but he published little poetry.63

The Rhymers' motive in bringing out their first anthology is intricably tied up with the rationale behind the Club. Just as efforts to illuminate the founding of the organization have yielded no definitive explanation, the purposes behind these joint ventures are not entirely clear. At this distance the difficulty of securing individual publication to which Gosse alludes seems a more likely reason than Yeats's lofty desire to hold Dowson's poems in his hand. But even if we do not know why the Rhymers decided on this course, we have a reasonable conception of
the procedures they followed. Working from Dowson's letters and Plarr's study, Longaker describes how *The Book of the Rhymers' Club* was published:

The publication of the book was made possible by the adoption of a cooperative plan between the contributors and the publishers. Expenses and profits were to be divided in accordance with the space taken by each contributor. The book was scarcely intended to make money for the Rhymers or the publishers; the authors were to be given one copy for each poem contributed. The maximum number of poems accepted from one contributor was not to exceed six, nor could any member be represented by only one poem: three were the minimum, although in one instance an exception was granted: Rolleston contributed only two. It was finally decided that the selections of the poems to be included were to be made by a committee of four, but the Committee's selections were to be submitted to the Club for its approval.64

Johnson, who intended remaining in London for the summer of 1891, was designated receiver of verse. Each contributor was to mail him twice the number of poems proposed for inclusion, numbered in "preferential order" with date and place of prior publication, if any. However, while contributors' preferences were considered, the final decisions were the Committee's and the Club's.

Typically, publication was delayed. Proposed for autumn, 1891, the small edition of *The Book of the Rhymers' Club* appeared in February, 1892.65 Although it is not quite the masterpiece of the bookmaker's art as John Gray's classic *Silverpoints*, *The Book of the Rhymers' Club* stands well in format and typography, less so in binding. This little volume, about five by six and a half inches, containing ninety-four pages of poetry, represents the work of twelve authors. Yeats, Dowson, Johnson, Rhys, and Greene contributed six poems each; Plarr and Radford, five; Symons, Le Gallienne, and Ellis, four apiece; Todhunter, three; and Rolleston, as Longaker explained, two.
The reviews were generally favorable, although no superlatives were used. The tenor of the notices reveals a prevalent ignorance of the Rhymers' corporate existence. The Rhymers' Club is taken as one of those amiable fictions which make for catchy titles, the book as a joint initiative of individual poets. Each reviewer selected his favorite from among the authors; there was little consensus.

In a review initialed "A. R." The Illustrated London News followed the lead of H. D. Traill, in the article mentioned above, in calling Yeats and Todhunter outstanding in a somewhat homogeneous group:

There is a certain uniformity of fairly good versification about the work of all the dozen. One and all might attain, like David's mighty men, to be chief among the six hundred and sixty-six, howbeit they attain not to the first sixty-six [compare Traill]. Perhaps Mr. W. B. Yeats has the root of the matter most unmistakably in him; his verses have the quaintness and fanciful tenderness and pathos of Celtic poetry--provincial but genuine. Next to his work perhaps we might rank Dr. Todhunter's fragment from his unlucky "Poison-Flower," though the spice-song therein has a reminiscence of "Paracelsus."

The ambivalence of this reviewer is evident in his treatment of Radford, Symons, Johnson, and Plarr, although he says the last-named "promises well." But he has no mercy for Ellis and Le Gallienne: "Mr. Edwin J. Ellis is the most irritating; Mr. Richard Le Gallienne the most affected of the dozen." Greene, Rolleston, Rhys, and, surprisingly, Dowson are omitted.

Perhaps the most sympathetic notice was that of Mrs. Graham R. Tomson, herself a hopeful poet who could scarcely afford to offend the Rhymers, some of whom, as journalists, would be sitting in judgment on her book that year. Writing in The Academy she elevates Johnson for his "By the Statue of King Charles at Charing Cross," quoting the poem at
length and praising its author's style:

Indeed, Mr. Johnson has a most rare gift of restraint, of composure, untainted by affectation, unspotted by strenuousness. And yet, for all that, he is something of an impressionist, in the best sense of the word, even as Matthew Arnold was now and again.67

She is nearly as enthusiastic about Yeats and has a good word for most of the Rhymers. Although all contributors are mentioned, Dowson, Ellis, Radford, and Rolleston are spoken of only as being represented.

The first critic apparently to recognize the quality of Dowson's work was the anonymous author of "The Poetry of Today--and Tomorrow" in the Church Quarterly Review. He cites (after quoting) the "Carmelite Nuns of the Perpetual Adoration" for its "seriousness . . . neither forced nor exaggerated." Yet Dowson's poem is disadvantageously compared with Johnson's "The Last Music," which inspires a now familiar comparison:

There is much here that reminds us of Matthew Arnold; and though Matthew Arnold was not quite in the first rank of poets, we should be glad indeed to think that Mr. Johnson might in time become another such as he.68

Here the emphasis is on the future. Poets are discussed in terms of their potential. Inferentially, Dowson and Johnson show maturity and promise.

Other notices are more perfunctory. The Athenaeum takes cognizance of many of the poems being reprints and implies that there will be time enough to discuss these works when they appear in the books of the individual members. However, an inclusive compliment is tendered in the comment that "the volume presents verse of excellent quality."69 A final instance of diverse reactions can be seen in The Bookman's listing of "The New Books of the Month. Book of the Rhymer's Club [sic] is described
as containing "verses by Mr. Radford, Mr. Le Gallienne and others."70

We can recall that the Rhymers thought, or in retrospect believed they thought, Ernest Dowson to be their best poet, yet no such general feeling emerges from the reviews. In fact, it is difficult to ascertain any consensus at all. Those critics most influenced by reputation mention Yeats, Le Gallienne, Todhunter, and Radford. On the other hand, those who scrutinized the poems carefully were more impressed by the younger men: Yeats again, Johnson, and, in one instance, Dowson.

Diversity also marked the critical response to The Second Book of the Rhymers' Club, published in June, 1894--another sixteenmo anthology, slightly thicker than its predecessor, 136 pages rather than 94. This time the poets were more willing to share the risk; after all, the first volume had sold out rapidly. Of the original dozen, only Symons, Rolleston, and Rhys did not take advantage of the opportunity to include the maximum six: Symons and Rolleston each contributed four poems; Rhys, three. In addition, A. C. Hillier joined the company with six of his poems. But again, no one figure emerged as the poet of the anthology.

It is to the poets' credit that The Times thought their second effort worth reviewing. The critical verdict is short and quotable:

THE SECOND BOOK OF THE RHYMERS' CLUB (Mathews and Lane) is a little volume of short poems by a group of the Parnassians of today, most of whose names are already pretty familiar to the readers of poetry. The list includes Messrs. John Todhunter, W. B. Yeats, Richard Le Gallienne, Arthur Symons, Ernest Radford, and a number of other writers who in various volumes have proved their literary skill, and that turn for versification which seems so universal nowadays. The writer who appears to us to have the most genuine poetic fibre in his composition is Mr. Victor Plarr, whose name we do not remember to have met before. His verses are unaffected, decent, and distinguished. He seems to wish to confine himself to
rhymed quatrains—the metre of "Gray's Elegy," except that the fourth line has only six syllables; a metre which, of course, only lends itself to rather grave poems. The "Lines to a Breton Beggar" and the quaint verses called "Deer in Greenwich Park" are the work of a man with real poetical insight; we wish we could find space to quote them. Of lighter verse, Mr. A. C. Hillier's "In Opera Land" is perhaps the best example in the volume.71

Clearly, The Times reviewer was uninterested in attacking or defending literary reputations. He seems to find a pedestrian quality in much of a book redeemed by a single fresh talent. The Rhymers are seen as poets—not as Celts, decadents, or the new generation.

As The Academy did with The Book of the Rhymers' Club, The Athenaeum did with its sequel, selecting Yeats and Johnson for special commendation.72 Yeats's "The Rose in My Heart" and Johnson's "To Morfydd" are cited and printed in full, the latter being termed "in some respects, perhaps, the best thing in the whole book." Rhys's handling of Welsh themes is complimented, and something pleasant is said about almost every poet in turn, although some of the praise is qualified. But Ellis and Greene add only "laborious lispings," whereas Tochunter displays "pagan sentiments"; Richard Le Gallienne is advised to cultivate the labor of the file. Dowson's "Cynara," perhaps the greatest poem in either anthology, comes in for this cursory condemnation:

Mr. Arthur Symons and Mr. Ernest Dowson evince their customary disposition of dwelling upon the less wholesome aspects of life in such verses as those which they call respectively "A Variation upon Love" and "Non sum qualis eram bonae sub regno Cynarae."

The anonymous reviewer regrets the poets' decision to appear as a coterie, and he refers to the collection as "the poetical manifesto of the Rhymers." Yet he praises and censures individuals and discovers no evidence of any coherence in this coterie.
The larger print order for *The Second Book of the Rhymers' Club* was given with a double purpose: to increase slightly the availability of the book in England, and to permit one hundred and seventy copies to be exported to the United States. As a result one American journal, *The Nation*, reviewed the book, echoing *The Athenaeum*: Yeats was pronounced superb and Symons, deplorable.\(^7\) The criterion, it emerges, is the poet's relative distance from what the critic takes to be French decadence:

> And the manly purity of these [Yeats's] poems—the utter freedom from the Gallic smirch—is refreshing when compared with the sickly and jaunty sensualism of Mr. Arthur Symons, who represents the low-water mark of the "Rhymers' Club."

We are not permitted to forget that their contemporaries often judged the Rhymers largely on theme and moral tendency.

At this juncture our impression of the Rhymers' Club and its anthologies should be taking form. We have seen how a dozen-odd poets, mostly young, gathered in London during the early 1890's. Whether they were chiefly motivated by fellowship or by expediency we cannot say. We know that they collaborated on two anthologies before their club disintegrated. Most important, we know that a major poet and three significant minor figures emerged from this coterie. Yet, they left no manifestoes, nor any explicit statements. Furthermore, their contemporaries seemed unaware of the Club's corporate character. What, then, is the importance of the Rhymers' Club to literature and literary history?

The answer, as stated in the introduction to this study, is twofold: first, some of the essential escapism of the period is especially, if not uniquely, embodied in their poetry; and second, a special aesthetic, the poem as euphony, informed their work. It is to the first of these conceptions that we turn in the next chapter.
NOTES: CHAPTER I


3. H. Guy Harrison has appended a "Bibliography of the Works of Ernest Dowson" to Plarr's Ernest Dowson 1888-1897. See p. 133.


7. Rhys, p. 220


12. Le Gallienne, p. 188.

13. In a letter to Katharine Tynan, Yeats refers, among other topics, to (1) a review which he had sent to the Evening Herald which was printed in the January 2nd, 1892 edition of that paper and (2) The Book of the Rhymers' Club being in proof. From the first event Roger McHugh, who edited this correspondence, dates the letter "late December, 1891." See Letters of W. B. Yeats to Katharine Tynan (New York: McMullen Books, Inc., 1953).


19. Lhombreaud, p. 84.

20. Wade, Letters . . . Yeats, pp. 172-173. Despite the friendship which subsisted between Yeats and Davidson during the early nineties, Davidson eventually soured on Yeats. Rhys, (p. 233) speaking from his later knowledge of Davidson, says: "Of these [certain members of the Rhymers' Club] I fancy that Yeats was his pet aversion."

21. See Rhys, p. 54.


26. Plarr, pp. 63-64.


30. Wade and Hart-Davis, Bibliography, passim.

31. The National Observer, December 13, 1890 and The Scots Observer, November 15, 1890, respectively (cited in Wade and Hart-Davis, Bibliography).
XXXI, 179 (January, 1892), 61-72. This article was regarded as sufficiently significant to be reprinted in the United States in Littell's Living Age, LXXVIII (March, 1892), 740-747.

While Longaker's bibliography of Dowson (Ernest Dowson, pp. 281-285) contains many more entries than Harrison's (in Plarr, Ernest Dowson 1888-1897), it is not as detailed and is best used in conjunction with the earlier bibliography.

Longaker's Ernest Dowson should be revised or supplemented. Like Hone's work on Yeats, it is undocumented, a palpable handicap to the serious student of Dowson; unlike Hone's it has not been supplemented by such valuable "bio-critical" studies as Ellmann's Yeats: the Man and the Masks and A. Norman Jeffares' W. B. Yeats: Man and Poet (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949). Worse yet, particularly for anyone interested in the Rhymers' Club, it is often inaccurate in its dealings with the Club. Although most of the following errors are of little substantive importance to Longaker's argument, their presence is not conducive to establishing the readers' confidence:

(1) Longaker, in his chapter on the Rhymers' Club, deals with the period 1890-1894 in Dowson's Life. He refers to "Todhunter in his fifties, and Rolleston and Greene in their mid-forties [as] representing the more mature element in the Club [p. 89]." Rolleston was born in 1857, Greene in 1853. The second oldest member was E. J. Ellis, born in 1848. Todhunter, indeed, was in his fifties.

(2) On pp. 91-92 Longaker describes "how Herbert Horne had nearly brought the Club to its end by introducing four Scotchmen, all on the same evening, in order to bring new life into the group." Yeats's The Trembling of the Veil (included in his Autobiography) is the acknowledged source of this anecdote. Longaker's error is his assumption that Yeats was a meticulous grammarian.

The anecdote (pp. 211-212) is a Yeatsian illustration of the character of John Davidson, not Herbert Horne. Yeats illustrates Davidson's masculinity and "rocky independence" by giving his reaction to Yeats's complimenting Herbert Horne: "Once when I had praised Herbert Horne for his knowledge and his taste, he [italics mine] burst out, 'If a man must be a connoisseur, let him be a connoisseur in women.'" The personalities of Davidson and Horne were such that the italicized "he" must refer to Davidson, not Horne. The next sentence reads: "He, indeed, was accustomed, in the most characteristic phrase of his type, to describe the Rhymers as lacking in 'blood and guts' and very nearly brought us to an end by attempting to supply the deficiency by the addition of four Scotsmen." For this apocryphal incident to be at all credible, a Scotsman (Davidson) would have been required to introduce his four countrymen, not an effete Italianate Englishman.

(3) Yeats is said (p. 93), with reference to Symons' statement about the Rhymers' Club meetings showing "a desperate and ineffectual attempt to get into key with the Latin Quarter," to have "recalled these meetings after a passage of forty years, but he [Yeats] made no mention of a desperate attempt to catch the spirit of the Latin Quarter." Longaker then quotes Yeats' statement from The Trembling of the Veil:
"The meetings were always decorous and often dull; . . ." This statement appeared in 1922, not forty years after the events.

(4) On page 96, with reference to The Book of the Rhymers' Club, Longaker writes: "Only three hundred and fifty copies of the book were issued by Elkin Mathews and John Lane in the autumn of 1892." This statement is erroneous in every respect. First, unlike The Second Book of the Rhymers' Club it was issued by Elkin Mathews alone. It was around the publication date of the Book of the Rhymers' Club, but after publication arrangements were completed, that Lane became an active partner of Mathews. Second, 350 copies of the regular edition were issued for sale, but simultaneously another fifty copies were offered in a large paper edition: a total of 400 (see note 65). On page 105, referring to the Second Book of the Rhymers' Club, Longaker says that "five hundred copies instead of 350 were issued." Five hundred was the print order; only 400 were offered for sale in England. If the large paper English edition were included, the total would only be 450. The correct figures are thus, for the two anthologies, 400 and 450, respectively. If copies for America are to be included, the totals for sale are 400 and 620. Third, The Book of the Rhymers' Club was published in February, not autumn, 1892. Longaker corrects his error by inconsistently writing (p. 101): "Sometime in February 1892, soon after The Book of the Rhymers' Club had appeared . . ."

(5) The "Song of the Songsmiths," by George Arthur Greene, is referred to (p. 98) as "the first poem in the collection." It is actually the last poem in The Book of the Rhymers' Club.

(6) "The closing piece of the collection, by Ernest Rhys, is a better sample of the quality of verse which the volume contains [p. 99]." Longaker then quotes Rhys's "At the Rhymers' Club," subtitled "The Toast"; this is, in fact, the opening selection of the first Book.


A few examples will suffice to show what Gawsworth was contending. Yeats tells a humorous, but apocryphal, tale about Dowson and Wilde in Dieppe; when neither had sufficient funds for a visit to the local bordel, at Dowson's behest and for Wilde's benefit they combined purses at the cafe and "set out accompanied by a cheering crowd." Afterwards, an unregenerate Wilde pronounced it a fiasco (Yeats, Autobiography, p. 217). As to Dowson's feeling for Adelaide, Yeats stated: "Sober, he would look at no other woman, it was said, but drunk, desired whatever woman chance brought, clean or dirty." (Autobiography, p. 207.) Symons, too, contributed to the "legend": "Under the influence of drink, he became almost literally insane, certainly quite irresponsible." And this next comment on the meaning of Adelaide to Dowson might well have inspired the one of Yeats's, above: "When that face faded from him, he saw all the other faces, and he saw no more difference than between sheep and sheep." (Symons, The Poems of Ernest Dowson, p.xv.)
A recent short biographical and critical study illustrates how the "legend" is perpetuated. Thomas Burnett Swann, in his Ernest Dowson (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1964), includes in a chapter entitled "For Love of Adelaide" the following items, among others: (1) a quotation by the notoriously unreliable Frank Harris as to Dowson's feelings about Adelaide (p. 33); (2) a sub-chapter on "child love" in which Ruskin's relationship with Rose La Touche is described (p. 36); and (3) a statement affirming Dowson's sexual potency, coupled with a remark "that Adelaide did not arouse him physically [p. 36]." Although the chapter contains no obvious misstatements, its author's inclusion of irrelevant material and his unwillingness to discriminate among sources are certainly conducive to the readers' drawing unwarranted inferences about the relationship which obtained between Adelaide and Dowson.

35. Longaker, Ernest Dowson, p. viii.
37. Rhys, p. 221.
41. Plarr, p. 21.
43. P. 227.
44. These bibliographical data are based on textual notes to Ian Fletcher's edition of Johnson's poems (see note 14).
45. London: Elkin Mathews and John Lane. Yeats, writing to Olivia Shakespear, a cousin of Johnson, about his Hardy, found the critic more interesting than the object criticized: "I think Lionel's book very wonderful and agree with you about caring more for his theories about literature than those about Hardy in particular... I feel however that there is something wrong about praising Hardy in a style so much better than his own. I wish he had written instead of Dante or Milton." (Wade, Letters... Yeats, p. 235.)
47. Guidelines for a thorough biography of Johnson have been set down in an unpublished thesis (Duke, 1942) by Justine H. Lorman, "Lionel Johnson: a Biographical Inquiry."
48. London: Cassell & Co., 1886. This little book was published when Symons was only twenty-one; it was reviewed by Pater, who praised it, and it occasioned an appreciative letter from Browning himself.

49. Lhombreaud, p. 89.


52. Rhys, p. 224.


55. In an extreme formulation Le Gallienne reduces decadence to "insane thinking" in one of his Retrospective Reviews ("Churton Collins: Illustrations of Tennyson" [London: John Lane, 1896], I, 24). However, as Albert J. Farmer so tellingly points out, Le Gallienne is quite ambivalent on the subject, roundly condemning decadence through his prose while using those very themes and qualities in his poetry (pp. 288-292).

56. Rhys's first book, The Great Cockney Tragedy, seems to have been a latter-day "penny-dreadful." It was noted in The Bookman, "The New Books of the Month," October, 1891, p. 39: "A story of a Jewish worker in a tailor's sweating den, one of the 'submerged tenth,' of his misery and suicide. It is dedicated to General Booth."

Rhys published A London Rose and Other Rhymes in 1894; he gratefully remembers Le Gallienne for his having accepted the book for publication by Mathews and Lane (Rhys, p. 229).

Bibliographical information on Rolleston, Rhys, Todhunter, Plarr, Ellis, Radford, Greene, and Hillier is derived chiefly from The English Catalogue of Books, III, IV, and V, covering books published January 1872 through December 1897 (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Company [Limited], 1882-1898). A predecessor (Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington) is in actuality named publisher on the title page of III; clearly, publication remained in the same hands.

57. See Yeats's biographical note on Todhunter in W. B. Yeats: Letters to Katharine Tynan, pp. 152-154, a reprint of a notice that had appeared in the Magazine of Poetry, Buffalo, April 1889. Also see Yeats, Autobiography, pp. 77-78, 80, and 186-187.

58. P. 89.

59. See Who Was Who, 1929-1940, III (London: Adam & Charles
Black, 1941), 1084.


61. Rhys, p. 54; there are other reminiscences of Radford scattered through Everyman Remembers. He is also listed in John Foster Kirk, A Supplement to Allibone's Critical Dictionary of English Literature and British and American Authors, II (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1891), 1259.

62. Greene's Italian interests and scholarship are both evident in his Italian Lyrists of Today (London: Elkin Mathews and John Lane, 1893), an anthology of translations of contemporary Italian poetry. Another of his critical interests was art history.

63. "It was Hillier, along with G. A. Greene, the secretary of the Rhymers' Club, who collaborated with Dowson in the translation of Richard Muther's Geschichte der Malerai im neunzehnten Jahrhundert, which was issued in three volumes totaling 2,304 pages in 1895-1896. Dowson, whose German was slight, did little of the actual translating; his work was largely restyling the relatively literal translations of Hillier and Greene." [John] Mark Longaker, The Poems of Ernest Dowson (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1962), pp. 214-215.

64. Longaker, Ernest Dowson, p. 96.

65. Accurate bibliographical descriptions of both anthologies of the Rhymers' Club follow, quoted from Wade's bibliography of Yeats, pp. 263-264 and 267-268. Having personally examined editions of both books in the regular editions and the Second in the large paper edition as well, I can vouch for the accuracy of Wade's descriptions (faded colors excepted):

THE BOOK / OF THE / RHYMERS' CLUB / [publisher's device]/
LONDON / ELKIN MATHEWS / AT THE SIGN OF THE BODLEY HEAD in red/
IN VIGO STREET / 1892 / ALL RIGHTS RESERVED
6 2/5 x 5; pp. xvi, 94.
Issued in dark yellow cloth with white label, printed in black, on spine; white end-papers; all edges untrimmed.
Published in February 1892.
On p. iv, facing half-title: "Four hundred and fifty copies of this edition printed, of which three hundred and fifty are for sale."
Large paper edition:
THE BOOK / OF THE / RHYMERS' CLUB [in red] / [publisher's device]/
LONDON/ ELKIN MATHEWS / AT THE SIGN OF THE BODLEY HEAD [in red]/
IN VIGO STREET / 1892 / ALL RIGHTS RESERVED
7 3/10 x 5 1/2; pp. xvi, 96.
Issued in blue paper boards with parchment spine; white end-papers; all edges untrimmed; a yellow silk marker is attached to headband.
On verso of p. iv facing half-title: "Only fifty copies of this Large Paper Edition Printed, of which this is No. . . ."

THE SECOND BOOK / OF / THE RHYMERS' CLUB /
LONDON: ELKIN MATTHEWS & JOHN LANE / NEW YORK: DODD, MEAD & COMPANY / 1894/ ALL RIGHTS RESERVED
6 3/10 x 5; pp. xvi, 136. At end is a list of Books in Belles Lettres, dated 1894, pp. 16.
Issued in brown buckram, lettered in gold on spine; white end-papers, all edges untrimmed. Published in June, 1894. On p. iv, facing half-title: "of this Edition Five Hundred Copies have been printed for England (of which Four Hundred only are for Sale). One Hundred and Fifty Copies also have been printed for America."

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THE SECOND BOOK / OF / THE RHYMERS' CLUB [in red] /
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7 3/10 x 5 1/2; pp. xvi, 136.
Issued in blue paper boards with parchment spine, label, printed in black, on spine; white end-papers; all edges trimmed; an orange silk marker is attached to headband. On p. [iv], facing half-title: "Of this Edition Fifty Copies have been printed for England, and Twenty Copies for America."

68. XXXV, October 1892, 214.
70. March 1892, p. 221.
CHAPTER II

THE INTELLECTUAL MATRIX OF THE RHYMERS' CLUB

1. The Triangle of Escapism: God, the Flesh, and the Devil

In a letter written to Victor Plarr approximately when The Book of the Rhymers Club was published, Ernest Dowson distorts a traditional baptismal injunction:

To take the world so seriously! Enfin c'est trop bête. God or the Flesh or the Devil—an artist may be in bondage to any one or other or all of these Powers and retain his self-respect—but the world mustn't, positively must not exist for him—or so much the worse for his art.1

With qualification—severe qualification—this could serve as the poetical manifesto that the Rhymers' Club never issued.

For all its sinister connotation Dowson's remark is typically "aesthetic" in the disdain it shows for all mundane concerns. If taken advisedly, as a statement of allegiance rather than exclusion, it begins to ring true for at least the major Rhymers: Yeats, Dowson, Symons, and Johnson.2 We cannot reconcile the contradiction latent in "taking the world so seriously," yet taking it, and the world's "positively not existing" for the artist; we should regard the more extreme position, which denies the world's mattering for the artist, as the hyperbole of a controversialist's convincing himself.

This unlikely triumvirate—God, the Flesh, and the Devil—as permissible poetical allegiances is a recasting of the familiar lines from the Book of Common Prayer: "... Renounce the devil and all his works, the vain pomp and glory of the world, with all covetous desires of the same, and the carnal desires of the Flesh..."3
This formula does pose problems for the modern reader. Each item for renunciation is one that is not quite at home in Western civilization today; even in fin de siècle London the World, the Flesh, and the Devil could not be conceived as imminent nemeses. The World was where urban, Protestant London lived. As R. H. Tawney and Max Weber have so conclusively proved, the Protestant ethic is conducive to worldly success. For all the faults of the World, it is the field where much work must be done. Renunciation of its "pomp and glory" seems medieval and monastic in outlook.

Similarly, the Flesh is not the deadly snare that it may have seemed to be at the time of the adoption of the Book of Common Prayer. The attenuation of the fear of the Flesh is not necessarily indicative of any moral weakening; rather, it reflects a contemporary movement in ethics from individual to social problems. Concupiscence, however deplorable it might be, somehow no longer seems as significant as it must have when the Book of Common Prayer was written.

If the World and the Flesh do not appear as formidable as they did in the time of Edward VI, the Devil must seem even more impotent; his fate is that of an anachronism. Yet the term "Devil" is a helpful metaphor for the central force presiding over the hermetic system—-that cosmology of fairies, magic, and "correspondences," which has long been put forward either as an alternative to or as a supplement to the Christian formulation. Like the World and Flesh, however, the Devil lacks immediacy. In other words, these erstwhile threats to salvation have now become theological curiosities. Perhaps the concepts symbolized by "World," "Flesh," and "Devil" are enduring human concerns, but the symbols no longer elicit
the reactions of an earlier day.

It is one thing to say that the World, the Flesh, and the Devil were not the enemies at hand for Dowson's generation, nor are for ours; it is quite another to say that any one of them might be a permissible master for the artist—the World in the Protestant sense of the arena where the elect prosper being a possible exception.

But of these the "aesthete" rejects only the World, not because it is evil, but because he finds it ugly. God as ultimate beauty seems an excellent master, and the Devil and the Flesh are at least eligible competitors, not that systematic diabolism or sensualism is the aesthete's objective. Perhaps this attitude is best explained by the reaction of a future Rhymer, seventeen-year-old Lionel Johnson, who did not look to his conscience when confronted with a moral issue, but to his "aesthetic" sense, asking himself: "By doing what would your artistic instinct be satisfied? What does the moment tell you is required for itself?"

It would be fatuous to argue that Johnson would have subscribed to that statement eight years later, when The Book of the Rhymers' Club was published. This credo is clearly that of a youth influenced by Oscar Wilde and by the Walter Pater who had not yet published Marius the Epicurean. Still, the mature Lionel Johnson as a practicing Catholic was no Newman or Hopkins who blended faith with works; rather, he was a man committed to the beauty of God.

For Johnson it was God; for other Rhymers, other commitments or "bondages," each of which pertains to Dowson's statement quoted at the beginning of this chapter. Therein can be found a formula which places the major Rhymers in an intellectual context, a context sufficiently
broad to embrace the two anthologies of the Club. It is a truism to state the artist's central concern as reality, i.e. the World, especially in nineteenth century England. But, in terms of the English tradition, each principal Rhymer was eccentric in his contribution to the books of the Club.

Imagine an equilateral triangle whose vertices are God, the Flesh, and the Devil. Let a point at the center of that triangle be the World. The Rhymers' Club poetry of Yeats, Dowson, Johnson, and Symons tends to be off-center, although each poet is not limited to a single eccentricity. In what is admittedly a metaphorical statement it may be said that Yeats's work bears toward the Devil and Symons' to the Flesh; Dowson's inclines toward both the Flesh and God, whereas Johnson's is oriented toward God alone. None was in bondage to the World; that would have been fatal to his art. There is no reason to suspect Dowson of having his brother Rhymers in mind when he wrote to Plarr, but in his poetic license he inadvertently struck the dominant intellectual note of the Club: escape from allegiance to a Phillistine world, each artist taking the master of his choice. The principal concerns of late Victorian England--imperialism, social reform, female emancipation, Darwinism, the "Higher Criticism," civil and political rights, industrialization, and the impact of contemporary science--affected the Rhymers little, unless negatively.

Yeats, Johnson, Dowson, and Symons were, in George Meredith's phrase, "hot for certainties," but they found few formulations which they could implicitly trust. None accepted his father's religious convictions, none trusted contemporary science, and none was a devotee of the present. Each was prone to suspend judgment, to avoid intellectual commitment. Their attitudes toward prevalent contemporary thought were negative--
either in the sense of ignoring the mundane scene or of rejecting it. The art of the principal Rhymers was not in bondage to the World; their art found other masters.

So exotic a mental set, outside of the central tradition, must have its specific sources. Of these the chief are the works of Walter Pater, the French Symbolist Movement, and the Celtic Renaissance, but the last, seminal as it was to some individuals in the Rhymers' Club, did not provide the Club as a whole with its principal intellectual assumptions. While the rebirth of Irish literature was cardinal to the Celts and those aspiring to be Celts, it yielded no common Weltanschauung; of the major Rhymers only Yeats was totally Celtic in outlook. Despite his English extraction, Johnson became increasingly subject to Irish literary influences during his years with the Rhymers' Club, but the effect of these influences is noticeable chiefly in his post-Rhymers' Club work. Symons, although Welsh by birth, felt his ancestry mainly as a factor contributing to his sense of alienation in London. Furthermore, aside from its impetus toward subject matter of ethnic interest, it is doubtful that the Celtic Renaissance was freighted with many specific, agreed, and identifiable intellectual positions. Therefore, while in no way denying the relevance of the new movement in Ireland to our subject, it is to Pater and contemporary Parisian developments that we turn in seeking the intellectual influences which were germinal to the poetry of the Club. And, if the Rhymers' unremarkable inventory of ideas scarcely seems to justify a consideration of the influence of Pater, on the one hand, and Baudelaire, Verlaine, and Mallarmé, on the other, it should be borne in mind that
these men were instrumental in the formulation of the Rhymers' aesthetic, that aspect of their poetry worthiest of attention. Next we will consider the mental set of the Rhymers in the context of their most important influences, confining ourselves to the major figures. Then we will look at some poetry by lesser Rhymers as manifesting the same escapist tendencies, and, finally, we will take stock of the anti-scientific spirit so prevalent among this coterie.

2. The Major Influences: Pater and the French Poets

The members of the Rhymers' Club were unsparing in their prose acknowledgments of intellectual indebtedness to Walter Pater. Yeats recalls the adulation his generation felt for this quiet don: "But one writer, almost unknown to the general public--I remember somebody saying at his death 'no newspaper had given him an obituary notice'--had its uncritical admiration, Walter Pater." Nevertheless, Yeats detects an almost sinister quality, however unintended, in Pater's influence.

Here and elsewhere the negativism of the Rhymers toward their contemporary scene has been noted. Yeats thought that Pater was largely responsible for these conservative values and traditional emphases:

Perhaps it was because of Pater's influence that we with an affectation of learning, claimed the whole past of literature for our authority, instead of finding it like the young men in the age of comedy that followed us, in some new, and so still unfututed authority; that we preferred what seemed still uncrumbled rock, to the still unspotted foam; that we were traditional alike in our dress, in our manner, in our opinions, and in our style.

Yeats is speaking here of the time when the seemingly flourishing Rhymers were already beginning to break up, the period when Dowson was publishing
poems of fin de siècle uncertainty, but classically entitled "O mors!
Quam amara est memoria tua homini pacem habent in substantum sui," "Ad
Domnulam Suam," "Amor Umbratilis," and "Non sum qualis eram bonae sub
regno Cynarae," all included in the books of the Rhymers' Club. Some
other indices of this quest for "uncrumbled rock" may be observed in
Yeats's backward look to the east in his theosophical researches, John-
son's study of patristic writings, and Symons' translations of the mysti-
cal poems of St. John of the Cross.

However, Pater gave the Rhymers more than a love for traditional
practices and a mannered approach to life. Speaking of the Rhymers and
the tragic ends some met, Yeats felt that Pater's "philosophy" had fatal
consequences:

We looked consciously to Pater for our philosophy. Three or
four years ago [1918 or 1919] I re-read Marius the Epicurean,
expecting to find that I cared for it no longer, but it still
seemed to me, as I think it seemed to us all, the only great
prose in modern English, and yet I began to wonder if it, or
the attitude of mind of which it was the noblest expression,
had not caused the disaster of my friends. It taught us to
walk upon a rope, tightly stretched through serene air, and
we were left to keep our feet upon a swaying rope in a storm.

There is an apparent contradiction between these two last statements about
Pater, but it is easily resolved. Could some one so imbedded in tradi-
tion as to "claim the whole past of literature for authority" be so un-
stable as "to walk upon a rope . . . through . . . air"? Yes, because
the Rhymers were lured more by the ritualism, mysticism, and intellectual
luminosity of the past than by uncritical acceptance of established creed.
Homage to the past was more a convention than a matter either of intellec-
tual or dogmatic commitment to the Rhymers, whereas to Thomas Carlyle in
Past and Present, to cite a Victorian example, the past furnished a
paradigm of the social order. Johnson gloried in patristic scholarship, but not in a pious acceptance of Catholicism. Dowson looked to the security of the bosom of Mother Church: he cherished the feeling of communion and vicariously participated in the asceticism so alien to his own disordered life, but he was never one of the devout. Symons was interested in St. John of the Cross and John's spiritual mentor, Santa Teresa, but it was their belles-lettres rather than their creed which attracted him. Yeats sought ancient wisdom both in his studies of Irish folklore and in his Rosicrucian and Theosophic experiments, but his objective was the creation or discovery of a system superior to Christianity and "science" alike, not the affirmation or augmentation of established belief. The Rhymers discovered beauty, wisdom, and solace in the past, but it yielded them no unshakable creed. Skepticism and tradition were not antitheses. One could love the older values and still suspend judgment on the present. Although the Rhymers were as avid for certainty as Marius himself, they were too disdainful of issues to commit themselves intellectually (Johnson's knowledge of church history being a possible exception) and too prone to Paterian ambivalence to be unquestioningly dogmatic.

When Symons first came to London Pater was generous to him. He remembered the late critic as "the most lovable of men; to those who rightly apprehended him, the most fascinating; the most generous and helpful of private friends, and in literature a living counsel of perfection, whose removal seems to leave modern English prose without a contemporary standard of value." Symons found him a noble man and an unparalleled critic, yet, like Yeats, Symons sensed the air of corruption in Pater. A discussion of decadence in the Rhymers' poetry follows in
the fourth chapter, but it is worth noting here that artificiality, a stock decadent trait, is observed in Pater. Symons alludes to Pater's declaration that *Imaginary Portraits* is his most natural book:

I think he was even then beginning to forget that it was not natural for him to be natural. There are many kinds of beauty in this world, and of these what is called natural beauty is but one. Pater's temperament was at once shy and complex, languid and ascetic, sensuous and spiritual. He did not permit life to come to him without a certain ceremony; he was on his guard against the abrupt indiscretion of events; and if his whole life was a service of art, he arranged his life so that, as far as possible, it might be served by that very dedication.11

Symons is apparently suggesting a random quality in natural events, not conducive to the "service of art." Events must be ordered for the true critic. All this implies system and hierarchy, but this "service of art" that sufficed as an ordering principle for Pater could well have been what Yeats calls a "swaying rope in the storm" for the young Rhymers, who were as volatile as their master was phlegmatic.

Johnson was another who responded to the Paterian dedication to art. Like Symons and Yeats, he recognized the importance of Pater to the younger literary generation. Writing shortly after Pater's death in 1894, Johnson dwelled on those characteristics of the man:

Emphatically the scholar and man of letters, there was in his life and work a perfect expression of that single-hearted devotion to fine literature, yet without a shadow of pedantry, which is ceasing to flourish in the ancient academic places. There is yet deeper sorrow upon which I cannot touch, save to say that to younger men, concerned with any of the arts, he was the most generous and gracious of helpful friends. In due time, they will be able to think, with nothing but a reverent affection, of the admired writer last laid to rest under the towers and trees of his own Oxford.12

Johnson's reticence effectively obscures that "deeper sorrow," but his cognizance of the importance of Pater to younger men is verified by
Le Gallienne, reviewing the revised edition of *Marius*. Le Gallienne was writing during Pater's lifetime; the loss of one's "spiritual pastor" might have been a permissible occasion for the poignancy to which Johnson alludes:

> When first we read Marius with glowing heart, . . . it was full indeed of burning matters. It seemed that no "spiritual pastor" had so harmonized the claims of body and soul, so wonderfully captured for us those fine elusive moods of which we were hardly aware till we recognize them in another; and that no one had written more movingly of friendship, of goodness, of beauty, or of death--great matters as we thought.13

There is a touch of effusiveness in Le Gallienne's recollections. For him *Marius* is the "golden book," as Apuleius' was for Marius.

Rhys and other Rhymers also felt the intellectual and aesthetic force of Pater. Tributes to his genius could be multiplied, but Yeats's, Johnson's, Symons', and Le Gallienne's are ample to demonstrate the influence Pater exerted among the members of the Rhymers' Club. He seemed the high priest of "The Palace of Art," a traditionalist by preference, and a critic of unwavering integrity. He was fastidious yet tolerant, brilliant yet receptive. But the aesthetic dedication and worldly rejection that proved "uncrumbled rock" for him provided too slippery a footing for his disciples.

The thorough grounding in Pater common to the Rhymers is reflected in their poetry. Dowson, who wrote no prose testimonial to Pater, revealed his indebtedness through his verse. We have already noticed Dowson's penchant for Latin titles; Pater's Latinisms, especially the head-links in *Marius*, were a likely inspiration. More important is the recurrence of key Paterian images in the poems "Amor Umbratilis" and "Extreme
Unction," published in the first and second anthologies, respectively. But, perhaps surprisingly, Dowson mined Marius for metaphors, not ethics; the young poet's impressionism was derived from The Renaissance rather than from Pater's novel.

The very title "Amor Umbratilis" is an echo of Pater, who gives a loving and discursive definition of umbratilis in the "White Nights" chapter of Marius, suggesting that it is the nearest approach in Latin to "unworldly":

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Had the Romans a word for unworldly? The beautiful word umbratilis perhaps comes nearest to it; and, with that precise sense, might describe the spirit in which he prepared himself for the sacerdotal function hereditary in his family—the sort of mystic enjoyment he had in the abstinence, the strenuous self-control and ascesis, which such preparation involved.14
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Pater's observation is a conventional one; there is an unworldly beauty in a mystical experience. Umbratilis is thus an adjective of abnegation, an adjective connoting a kind of self-effacement through religious communion. There is nothing morbid in communion, but it is not a worldly experience; instead, it is a transcendental relationship that exceeds without denying the world.

On the other hand, when Dowson thinks of umbratilis as a quality, he creates an instrument for love:

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A gift of silence. Sweet!
Who may not ever hear:
To lay down at your unobservant feet,
Is all the gift I bear.

I have no songs to sing,
That you should heed or know:
I have no lilies, in full hands, to fling
Across the path you go.

I cast my flowers away,
Blossoms unmeet for you:
```
The garland, I have gathered, in my day;  
My rose-mary and rue.

I watch you pass and pass,  
Serene and cold: I lay  
My lips upon your trodden, daisied grass,  
And turn my life away.

Yea, for I cast you, Sweet!  
This one gift, you shall take:  
Like ointment, on your unobservant feet,  
My silence, for your sake.15

The narrator in this poem is playing as sacerdotal a role as was the young Marius when preparing himself for his priestly duties at the feast of Dea Dia. It is a strange elegy; the narrator (whom I shall, in a convenient fiction, here and elsewhere take to be the author) is not merely remembering his late beloved, but is apostrophizing her. Addressing her, he tenders a gift: silence. But also important to the lyric is what Dowson does not give his beloved; he offers her neither a song nor flowers. The lady is undoubtedly dead. "Who may not ever hear" of line two is the first indication of this fact, which is reinforced by a series of details and metaphors. Her inability to "hear or know" his songs is a second indication of the lady's state. "Serene and cold" leaves little doubt as to her mortality, and her "trodden, daisied grass" completes the picture of the grave.

One of the devices used to evoke the aura of death in "Amor Umbritilis" is the failure of sensory response: "Who may not ever hear," "no songs ... that you should heed or know." There is a third such locution: "Your unobservant feet." This is a palpable absurdity, or so it would appear. Literally, feet never see, and, even in a looser construction, they are scarcely sensory instruments. Yet this phrase
is repeated and given prominence at the opening and close of a short lyric. Dowson appears to be too careful a workman to err and then repeat the error in another context. If, however, "observant" means "celebrating" (in a religious context) rather than "perceiving," the phrase is integral to the poem. The dying are usually said to "receive" whatever spiritual provision is made for them, such as extreme unction, but both the one departing and the one ministering may be considered as celebrants of the sacrament. In this sense an observant foot is one that has been anointed; "unobservant feet" are those that have not. Thus Dowson conceives himself as the priest ministering to the dead, rejecting the role of the lover serenading and garlanding his lady.

When Pater defines *umbratilis* as "unworldly," he refers to renunciation. Dowson's unworldly love has no such asceticism. Moreover, by juxtaposing sensuality with death, Dowson has written a lyric with sinister, almost necrophiliac connotations. However, a less imaginative surmise also seems reasonable. Perhaps Dowson is differentiating two kinds of love: worldly and unworldly. The first includes "songs to sing" and "lilies, in full hands, to fling," reminiscent of the flowers and music of "Cynara." The other love, "Amor Umbratilis," specifically excludes music, flowers, and whatever is commonly associated with the world. In these divergent uses of *umbratilis*, a difference between the "worlds" of the two authors emerges: the world of *Marius* is social, economic, and philosophical— that of "Amor Umbratilis," sensual.

"Extreme Unction" is another of Dowson's poems showing the influence of *Marius*. Like "Amor Umbratilis" it is a brief lyric dealing with death, but, in contrast with that enigmatic little song, it treats the
final sacrament explicitly:

Upon the lips, the eyes, the feet,
   On all the passages of sense,
The atoning oil is spread with sweet
   Renewal of lost innocence.

The feet that lately ran so fast
   To meet desire, are smoothly sealed:
The eyes, that were so often cast
   On vanity, are touched and healed.

From troublous sights and sounds set free,
   In such a twilight hour of breath,
Shall one retrace his life, or see
   Through shadows the true face of Death?

Vials of mercy! sacring oils!
   I know not where, nor when I come,
Nor through what wanderings and toils
   To crave of you Viaticum.

Yet when the walls of flesh grow weak,
   In such an hour, it well may be,
Through mist and darkness light shall break,
   And each anointed sense shall see!¹⁶

As Katherine Wheatley has pointed out, the imagery is closely derived from the scene in which the last sacrament is administered to Emma in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary.*¹⁷ But the death scene of Marius is also a contributing factor to this poem; parallel phrasing has been cited by Longaker and others: "Gentle fingers had applied to hands and feet, to all those old passage-ways of the senses, through which the world had come and gone for him, now so dim and obstructed, a medicinable oil."¹⁸

In "Extreme Unction" oil is applied to all the "passages of sense," in *Marius* to all the "passage-ways of the senses." Nevertheless, behind parallel images are divergent concepts. Pater writes of a "medicinable oil," a physical and spiritual anodyne. There is no thought of restoration of sensory function: "The world had come and gone for him." Not
for Dowson: "Through mist and darkness light shall break,/ And each
anointed sense shall see!" Implicit in these lines is either a reluc-
tance to forego sensory pleasure or a Christian vision of a divine ema-
nation. If "light" is to be taken literally, then a sensory renascence
is intended; if, however, "light" is only a metaphor for the heavenly
city, then the vision is essentially religious. Each alternative repre-
sents a pole of the Dowson dichotomy: God and the Flesh.

A reader is less likely to find echoes of Pater in Johnson's po-
etry than in Dowson's, not because Johnson read the Fellow of Brasenose
College less diligently, but for the contrary reason, that he knew his
writings better. Metaphor aside, what Dowson found in Pater was the im-
petus to experience expressed in the celebrated "Conclusion" to The
Renaissance, but Johnson, realizing that the author of Marius had intel-
lectually "grown" since reducing the formation of habits to a kind of
failure (in the "Conclusion"), found in him a more austere influence:
"Things hieratic, ascetic, appealed always to him."19 These variant re-
actions of Pater's disciples are thoughtfully explored by John Pick, who
says of Johnson: "He attributed a large share in his own conversion to
Roman Catholicism to the Marius of Pater."20 Still, in Johnson's poetry,
too removed from mundane concerns to mirror anyone's ethical system, it
is the imagery rather than the philosophy of Marius that is most observ-
able.

Johnson published "Glories" in the second anthology. It is a con-
ventional lyric, the poet's tribute to his dead beloved, in this instance
an ethereal Rossettian creation:
Roses from Paestan rosaries!
More goodly red and white was she:
Her red and white were harmonies,
Not matched upon a Paestan tree. (2 BRC, p. 33)

Although Paestum is cited by several Latin poets for the "twice blooming roses," allusions to the once flourishing Greek city are rare in late Victorian literature, so it is noteworthy that Pater had earlier recalled Paestum and its roses. It seems more than coincidental that Marius attempts to soothe the dying Flavian with "rich-scented flowers--rare Paestum roses, and the like--procured by Marius for his solace." The common attraction of Pater and Johnson to this image seems plausible, for when these men were writing, Paestum (or Posidonia to the Greeks) had been deserted for several centuries; the juxtaposition of roses and ruins could be made to symbolize the death of a sensualist. Still, their idiom of vision is not the same. Johnson, ascetic at least as to women, shifts the emphasis from the olfactory to color harmonies.

Pater's metaphors, evidently, even made an impression on Yeats, a less "aesthetic" poet than either Johnson or Dowson. Yeats's Rhymers' Club poetry stems mainly from Irish peasant life and Celtic folklore, but such poems of the same period as "When You Are Old," a free translation from Ronsard, and "The White Birds," reminiscent of Pater, suggest additional influences. The latter poem is very much in Yeats's early manner; it is in three anapestic hexameter quatrains, heavily alliterated, a form that the mature Yeats would have found objectionably contrived. Each quatrain is built around the poet's wish that he and his beloved could escape the temporal world by being changed into sea-dwelling white birds. The last quatrain suffices to show this urge to be transported:
I am haunted by numberless islands, and many a Danaan shore,
Where Time would surely forget us, and sorrow come near us no more;
Soon far from the rose and the lily and fret of the flames would we be,
Were we only white birds, my beloved, buoyed out on the foam of the sea! 22

Yeats prefaced the poem with this explanatory note: "The birds of fairyland are said to be white as snow. The Danaan Islands are the islands of the fairies." The note is consistent with the poem, suggesting such analogues as The Hesperian Islands, The Fortunate Islands, and the Enchanted Islands. The theme of the poem is one recurrent in Western literature: the plea for release from sensuality and temporality. "Far from the rose and the lily" symbolizes escape from the bondage of temporal love, whether carnal or chaste. The "fret of the flames" may refer to the doom of the Last Judgment. Inasmuch as nothing corporeal could be "buoyed out on the foam of the sea," the "white birds" are not to be taken literally. The sought-after transmigration is a species of disembodiment, the reduction of the body to soul.

To the young Marius a white bird is the very symbol of the soul. In a reflective mood he recalls his mother's words:

A white bird, she told him once, looking at him gravely, a bird which he must carry in his bosom across a crowded public place—his own soul was like that. Would it reach the hands of his good genius on the opposite side, unruffled and unsoiled? 23

This white bird, like Yeats's, is destined to live outside the temporal world. That Yeats derived this striking image from Pater is only inferential, but the metaphor in Marius would have greatly reinforced any source in folklore where Yeats might have discovered the White Bird image.
That aspect of Pater notable in "Amor Umbratilis," "Extreme Unction," "Glories," and "The White Birds" is the traditional, a reverence for older civilizations and a deference to what is ordered; however, in Symons' early poetry there is no evidence of such an influence. In retrospect Symons could say of Pater (in the passage cited earlier): "He did not permit life to come to him without a certain ceremony." But when Symons was writing his Rhymers' Club poetry, he was so saturated with Parisian decadence that it even colored his view of Pater. In an 1893 essay entitled "The Decadent Movement in Literature," Symons unearths decadent characteristics in Pater. In fact, he singles him out as the most prominent writer of decadent English prose:

Mr. Pater's prose is the most beautiful English prose which is now being written; and, unlike the prose of Goncourt, it has done no violence to language, it has sought after no vivid effects, it has found a large part of mastery in reticence, in knowing what to omit. But how far away from the classic ideals of style is this style in which words have their color, their music, their perfume, in which there is "some strangeness in the proportion" of every beauty! The Studies in the Renaissance have made of criticism a new art--have raised criticism almost to the act of creation. And Marius the Epicurean, in its study of "sensations and ideas" (the conjunction was Goncourt's before it was Mr. Pater's), and the Imaginary Portraits, in their evocations of the Middle Ages, the age of Watteau--have they not that morbid subtlety of analysis, that morbid curiosity of form, that we have found in the works of the French Decadents? 24

Symons, committed to the sensual aspects of life, finds a Baudelairean quality in Pater; "Words have their color, their music, their perfume" is a conjunction that recalls these synesthetic lines from Baudelaire's "Correspondances":

Il est des parfums frais comme des chairs d'enfants,  
Doux comme les hautbois, verts comme les prairies,--  
Et d'autres, corruppus, riches et triomphants. 25
This Baudelairean note that Symons hears in Pater's prose suggests the second major influence of which the Rhymers were aware--developments in French poetry during the latter half of the nineteenth century, primarily that complex movement or those movements known variously as Decadence and Symbolism.

Recognition of contemporary French influence was general among the Rhymers. Lionel Johnson, writing in 1891, indicated this, while cautiously avoiding overstatement: "The younger poets of France are 'making verses,' to use that sensible phrase of the last century, in a way not uninteresting, I think, to some of us English Islanders." That date precedes Yeats's intensive acquaintance with French writers, which began in 1894, with his progressive intimacy with Arthur Symons. From then through the century, under Symons' tutelage, Yeats spent increasingly more time in Paris. He saw and was deeply moved by Axel, read Verlaine and Mallarmé, and in his 1898 essay "The Autumn of the Body" showed his familiarity with French Symbolist theory, at least as Symons interpreted it. Dowson was adept in French. Throughout the nineties he frequented Paris, but from mid-decade on he was largely a resident of Brittany who often visited London and Paris, earning a meager living by translating contemporary French writers, poets and novelists alike. His Rhymers' Club selections, accordingly, include a translation from Verlaine beginning "you would have understood me had you waited." As to Symons it was his The Symbolist Movement in Literature (1899) which broadcast the new trend in French literature to the general English reader. Like Dowson, he extensively translated French poetry.

Paul Verlaine and Stephane Mallarmé, most importantly, bequeathed
a poetic and an aesthetic to the Rhymers, concepts which we will defer treating until the next chapter. Baudelaire was only slightly less influential, while Rimbaud, Laforgue, and a host of lesser poets, some contemporary, some earlier, were also factors influencing the poetry of the Rhymers' Club. However, few ideas about the world are to be derived from fin de siècle French poetry, a not too surprising disclaimer when one recalls that "prends l'éloquence et tords-lui son cou!" is a famous line of Verlaine's. Consider what the effect of such a dictum must have been when translated, as it was by Yeats, "Take rhetoric and wring its neck." (italics mine.) What in France was more an argument against pretentiousness in poetry became a mandate against intellectual involvement in poetry. Yeats recalls this attitude in the nineties:

Poets said to one another over their black coffee—a recently imported fashion—"We must purify poetry of all that is not poetry," and by poetry they meant poetry as it had been written by Catullus, a great name at that time, by the Jacobean writers, by Verlaine, by Baudelaire. The effect of contemporary French developments on London was thus primarily an anti-intellectual one. A poem could have a theme, but not a message, unless the message were an edict to escape—to flee the realities of the World.

The escapist motifs so evident among the Rhymers' Club's efforts prevailed among Mallarmé, Verlaine, and the Parisians as a whole. This was the legacy of Baudelaire, no escapist himself, but a poet who discarded conventional limitations of subject. His followers, particularly in England, explored the Baudelairean periphery, while neglecting his world. This tendency did not necessarily result in a poetry of abstrac-
tions, but it did give birth to a new decorum, which allowed the juxtaposition of conventionally poetic and unpoetic materials. This rejection of the boundaries of conventional diction was a corollary to the rejection of the limitations of the conventional world. Clouds, cities, dream-worlds, Negroes, exotics, impotence, excess, harlotry, and royalty—no item was too fanciful or outrageous—were appropriate to poetry for the Decadents and the Symbolists. Baudelaire could escape materialistic France by writing of a powerless young king of a tropical land:

Je suis comme le roi d'un pays pluvieux,
Riche, mais impuissant, jeune et pourtant très-vieux,
Qui, de ses précepteurs méprisant les courbettes,
S'ennuie avec ses chiens comme avec d'autres bêtes.\(^{30}\)

The World and conventional imagery are thus simultaneously rejected by Baudelaire. Or escapism can be more explicit as in these lines of Mallarmé:

La chair est triste, hélas! at j'ai lu tous les livres.
Fuir! la-bas fuir! Je sens que des oiseaux sont ivres
D'être parmi l'écume inconnue et les cieux!

Je partirai! Steamer balançant ta maturé,
Lève l'ancre pour une exotique nature!\(^{31}\)

Fantasy and distance are but two modes of escape; time, the heavenly world, and sensualism are three others. Verlaine yearns for the eighteenth century, an age before skepticism had vitiated simple religious convictions:

Sagesse d'un Louis Racine, je t'envie!
Ô n'avoir pas suivi les leçons de Rollin,
N'être pas né dans le grand siècle à son déclin,
Quand le soleil couchant, si beau, dorait la vie. . . \(^{32}\)

Then Verlaine immediately rebuts himself. He must recede further into time, even to the middle ages:

Non. Il fut gallican, ce siècle, et janséniste!
C'est vers le moyen âge, énorme et délicat,
Qu'il faudrait que mon coeur en panne naviguât,
Lois de nos jours d'esprit charnel et de chair triste.33

Baudelairean poetry could be purely sensual:

Ô toison moutonnant jusque, sur l'encolure!
Ô boucles! Ô parfum chargé de nonchaloir!
Extase! . . .34

Verlaine, however, was more ambivalent in his concept of love. Sometimes it was ethereal, occasionally carnal, perhaps both:

Son regard est pareil au regard des statues,
Et, pour sa voix, lointaine, et calme, et grave, elle a
L'inflexion des voix chères qui se sont tues.35

The convergence of religion and sensuality became one of the hallmarks of the nineties:

Parsifal a vaincu les Filles, leur gentil
Babil et la luxure amusante--et sa pente
Vers la Chair de garçon vierge que cela tente
D'aimer les seins légers et ce gentil babil.36

Occasionally, Verlaine banished sensuality and wrote vividly Christian poetry:

Mon Dieu m'a dit: "Mon fils il faut m'aimer. Tu vois
Mon flanc percé, mon coeur qui rayonne et qui saigne,
Et mes pieds offensés que Madeleine baigne
De larmes, et mes bras douloureux sous le poids
De tes péchés, et mes mains! . . .37

Earlier it was proposed that we treat the escapism of the Rhymers' Club's poetry in terms of its affinity toward God, the Flesh, or the Devil. Antecedents for two poles, God and the Flesh, are evident in these citations from Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Verlaine. The Devil, in the metaphorical sense stated above, also figured for nineteenth century French poets. Geoffrey Brereton suggests that the Devil co-existed for Baudelaire with God and the World: "Baudelaire was profoundly religious, believing with perhaps equal conviction in God and the Devil, yet cling-
ing heroically to his own human nature." There is a still more blatantly Satanic quality in the work of J. K. Huysmans, who was preeminently the Symbolist novelist.  

Gérard de Nerval preceded Baudelaire in his concern with the occult, the "black magic" of an earlier age. Nerval, as Symons perceived, "realized that central secret of the mystics, . . . 'As things are below, so they are above.'" In the world of the Rhymers' French contemporaries are persistent adumbrations of an alternative to the Christian cosmology, like that eventually formulated by Yeats in *A Vision*.

Mallarmé and Verlaine were still active poets during the years of the Rhymers' Club, but it would be a mistake to conclude, therefore, that there were merely parallels between French and English poetry. The current of ideas flowed from Paris to London; the influence of English literature on French was small indeed. Within a five-month interval Verlaine and Mallarmé lectured in England, Verlaine at Oxford, London, and Manchester in November, 1893, and Mallarmé at Oxford and Cambridge in March, 1894. Symons and the painter Will Rothenstein, with the cooperation of Frederick York Powell, arranged Verlaine's tour, whereas Mallarmé's visit resulted from a joint invitation by Powell and Charles Bonnier, both teaching at Oxford. These lectures were not epochal in the lives of the Rhymers, although we know that Dowson as well as Symons saw Verlaine in London and that both Symons and Yeats visited these French poets in Paris on more than one subsequent occasion. Instead, these invitations implied recognition of poetic stature.

Of the major Rhymers only Lionel Johnson seems uninfluenced by continental developments, although (their impressionism excepted) he was
not unsympathetic to the objectives of the French poets. Perhaps he and other Rhymers, as well as Symons and Dowson, whose presence is documented, heard Verlaine in London:

The French symbolistes, especially Paul Verlaine, had brought an unmistakable influence to bear upon the younger men of the group such as Arthur Symons, Richard Le Gallienne, and Ernest Dowson. To Dowson, Verlaine's *Art Poétique* had become an eloquent expression of the true aim of poetry. In fact, toward the middle 'nineties, Verlaine's influence on Dowson was transcendent. When Verlaine came to London to lecture in November, 1893 at Barnard's Inn in High Holborn, the Rhymers went in a body.42

From Pater the Rhymers learned a respect for the traditional and ritualistic (although not for their underlying values), a feeling for sensuous detail, a studied manner that was conducive to suspension of judgment, and the primacy of the aesthetic over the intellectual. From the French the Rhymers derived an aspect of their poetic—the poem as evocation rather than statement—and a series of escapist attitudes which they incorporated into their work. Given such an anti-intellectual matrix, the Rhymers were poets whose range of ideas was understandably restricted. We have seen how these two major forces propelled the Rhymers in several directions, but always centrifugally, if reality, or the real world, is the assumed center. The result in some instances is a poetry of pure negation, whereas in other poems a movement can be traced toward one of the three vertices of our hypothetical triangle: God, the Flesh, and the Devil. To verify the positions of the major Rhymers—Yeats, Dowson, Johnson, and Symons—on this triangle, let us consider specimens of their work from *The Book of the Rhymers' Club* and *The Second Book of the Rhymers' Club*. 
3. The Pursuit of Unreality: The Rhymers and Their Poems

Turning first to Yeats, whose themes are of a complexity unmatched by those of any other Rhymer, we find a poet who had been deeply immersed in the occult. For five or six years before joining the Rhymers' Club Yeats had been active in the Theosophical movement, which, its proponents claimed, offered a synthesis of science, religion, and philosophy, but nevertheless, Richard Ellmann states, "opposed the contemporary developments of all three."43 Theosophy purported to transmit intact an oral tradition of supreme wisdom, at that time sustained only in a remote area of Tibet. This movement was anti-Christian and anti-materialistic, proposing a cosmology equally distant from Biblical and empirical formulations. The degree of Yeats's commitment on Theosophy is uncertain, but the movement clearly influenced him, because it enabled him to weld his research into peasant and fairy lore and some of his still vague aspirations into a coherent whole:

He had been brought into contact with a system based on opposition to materialism and on support of secret and ancient wisdom, and was encouraged to believe that he would be able to bring together all the fairy tales and folklore he had heard in childhood, the poetry he had read in adolescence, the dreams he had been dreaming all his life. The Theosophists gave him support because they accepted and incorporated into their system ghosts and fairies, and regarded dreams and symbols as supernatural manifestations. A definition of the fairies such as Yeats made October 15, 1892 soon after leaving the Society, "The fairies are the lesser spiritual moods of the universal mind, wherein every mood is a soul and every thought a body," was entirely in accord with Theosophical doctrine.44

Taken this way, fairies are more than mere figments of a childlike imagination; they are entities fraught with cosmic significance.

It is the fairies and other occult entities who predominate in the
twelve poems of Yeats included in the Club's anthologies. These dozen
lyrics, one excepted, seem to fall naturally into three related categories.
"A Man Who Dreamed of Fairyland," "Dedication of 'Irish Tales'," "A Fairy
Song," and "The Folk of the Air" treat the "little people" or their world,
although in the first poem "fairyland" is almost a metaphor for nirvana,
a permanent respite from worldly care, rather than the home of the fairies.
A second category, the peasant tale, comprises "Father Gilligan," "The
Fiddler of Dooney," and "The Song of the Old Mother." The third, which
may be called arcana, includes "An Epitaph," "The Rose in My Heart," "A
Mystical Prayer to the Masters of the Elements, Finvarra, Feacra, and
Caolte," and "The Cap and Bells." Only the celebrated "The Lake Isle of
Innisfree" stands apart; the isle is a pastoral refuge.

As the Parisian poets discovered several avenues from the World, so
did Yeats. However, Yeats felt an essential unity in his subject matter.
Each of his areas of interest utilized material transmitted through the
oral tradition, as was also true of Theosophy, and each fitted a larger
system, a cosmology which could eventually be known, such as Theosophy
promised to its elect. For Yeats the apparent abandonment of the World
was, as Theosophy suggested, not a rejection of it, but a mode of recon-
ciliation to it. The fairies, peasant tales, and the mysterious powers
were all somehow related to Yeats, the 1890's, and Ireland.

An instance of this relationship occurs in the "Dedication of
'Irish Tales'." In the first two quatrains Yeats tells of a "green branch"
of ancient Ireland, which brought "calm of faery" to merchants, farmers,
warriors, everyone. And now, thinking of Irish poverty, oppression, dis-
content, and emigration, the poet offers a metaphorical "green branch" of solace, the *Irish Tales*:

> Ah, Exiles wandering over many seas,
> Spinning at all times Eri's good to-morrow,
> Ah, world-wide Nation, always growing Sorrow,
> I also bear a bell branch full of ease. *(BRC, p. 54)*

While the cruelty of the world is rejected, the World, ultimately, is not. Yeats evokes fairy magic not as a substitute for the World, but as a corrective to it. The bard is the physician with something medicinal for anguished Ireland. Through these fantasies one escapes from contemporary Ireland to the time when the fairies populated the country, but only to return. The peace of the past is recaptured for the present through a new "green branch."

Each of the other fairy poems involves the intervention of these mythical creatures in human affairs, yet the realms of fairy and humanity are discrete. The mountain fairies of "A Fairy Song" regard the "outlaw Michael Dwyer and his bride" as "children new from the world." In the "Dedication to 'Irish Tales,'" the poet serves as an intermediary between the magical and real worlds in bringing "calm of faery," but in "A Fairy Song" the newlyweds elope to a paradise that is a refuge from the real world. No rapprochement between the fairy and real worlds is put forth:

> Give to the children new from the world
> Rest far from men.
> Is anything better, anything better
> Tell it us then. *(BRC, p. 71)*

The same juxtaposition of folk lore and fairy tale occurs in "The Folk of the Air." O'Driscoll loses his Bridget to the malevolent "folk of the air" after a pagan quasi-communion in a poem with Gothic overtones:
The dancers crowded about him  
    And many a sweet thing said,  
And a young man brought him red wine  
    And a young girl white bread.

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

The bread and the wine had a doom,  
    For these were the folk of the air;
He sat and played in a dream  
    Of her long hair. (2 BRC, p. 38)

Yeats is overtly working in diabolism in this poem. Here are Ellmann's "supernatural manifestations" occurring for Yeats amidst the perversion of a Christian sacrament.

The poems purely in the peasant tradition are less remarkably indicative of Yeats's idiom of vision. "Father Gilligan" restates the truism, more Catholic than Protestant, that God asks only a willing heart; still, the poem relates what must be taken as a supernatural occurrence. "The Fiddler of Dooney" and "The Song of the Old Mother" are innocently rural; the first asserts that happiness and spontaneity constitute a form of piety, whereas the second is the lamentation of the older generation for the follies of its successor. But as evidence of Yeats's reverence for the oral tradition, his feeling that there is a wisdom accessible through formulations other than revealed and recorded truth, these poems are valuable.

The other poems Yeats contributed to the anthologies have meanings more or less arcane. "An Epitaph" is a nebulous stanza whose motivation is elusive. Traditional elegaic symbols, the cypress and the yew, are associated with the death of a beautiful, but unknown, maiden. There is a comparable obscurity in "The Cap and Bells," although this poem, despite its but slightly later date of composition, shows a far greater mastery of the lyric than "An Epitaph" does. This diminutive narrative of a
jester's unrequited love for a queen is an engaging tale, told concretely in a powerful symbolism. The work deals with events well removed from reality:

A queen was beloved by a jester,
    And once when the owls grew still
He made his soul go upward
    And stand on her window sill.

In a long and straight blue garment,
    It talked before morn was white,
And it had grown wise by thinking
    Of a footfall hushed and light.

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

He bade his heart go to her,
    When the bats cried out no more,
In a red and quivering garment
    It sang to her through the door,

The tongue of it sweet with dreaming
    Of a flutter of flower-like hair
But she took off her fan from the table
    And waved it off on the air. (2 BRC, pp. 108-109)

Yeats claimed this poem to be almost a transcription of a dream, "more a vision than a dream, for it was beautiful and coherent and gave . . . the sense of illumination and exaltation that one gets from visions." Like most dreams, however, its relationship to reality proved kaleidoscopic, but always significant. "The poem has always meant a good deal to me, though, as is the way with symbolic poems, it has not meant quite the same thing."45 Finally, "A Mystical Prayer . . ." and "The Rose in My Heart" deal explicitly with Yeats's major symbol of his Rhymers' Club period, the rose. The symbol proved persistent, Yeats publishing a group of short stories in 1897 entitled The Secret Rose. Two years later, when he issued The Wind Among the Reeds, the symbol of the rose was still of cardinal importance. It is in this 1899 volume of poetry that "A
Mystical Prayer . . ." (greatly reworked and retitled in the Christian tradition "A Mystical Prayer to the Masters of the Elements, Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael") and "The Rose in My Heart" (with slightly altered title) are first collected. Yeats appended an extended note, here excerpted, to "A Mystical Prayer . . ." in The Wind Among the Reeds on the symbolism of the rose:

The Rose has been for many centuries a symbol of spiritual love and supreme beauty. . . . Because the Rose, the flower sacred to the Virgin Mary, and the flower that Apuleius' adventurer ate, when he was changed out of the ass's shape and received into the fellowship of Isis is the western Flower of Life, I have imagined it growing upon the Tree of Life. . . . I do not know any evidence to prove whether this symbol came to Ireland with medieval Christianity, or whether it has come down from Celtic times.46

Ellmann sees the significance of Yeats's rose primarily in terms of the poet's interest in the Theosophical movement: "Each member was encouraged to meditate upon the central symbol of the rose, the exact meaning of which was hard to determine, though it signified mainly the flower of love that blossoms from the cross of sacrifice. . . . [Yeats] made it a symbol of beauty, of transcendental love, of mystic rapture, of the inner reality, of divinity."47

At this juncture we can find a coherence even in this complex of Yeatsian themes. Folklore, fairy tales, supernatural events, Theosophy, and inexplicable symbols are not merely negations of London and Dublin in the nineties, but are ingredients in a new formulation, one comprehensive enough to replace Yeats's father's skepticism and his father's father's faith; yet in its occult, non-Christian, and even occasionally anti-Christian bias, at least metaphorically, a diabolical system.

Dowson, too, was no spokesman for his time and place, but he lacked
Yeats's vitality, and might best be thought of as \textit{l'homme epuise}. There is a note of exhaustion that prevails in Dowson's poetry, a note heard also in Johnson's. Dowson writes poems of regret for unrealized potentialities, for that which could never be. Failure being inevitable, only withdrawal from reality can bring consolation. The Carmelite nuns who are the subject of a Dowson lyric are "calm, sad, secure." They are safe, while "outside, the world is wild and passionate." This contrast between a tempestuous outer world and the tranquility of the cloister culminates in the final stanza:

\begin{quote}
Calm, sad, serene; with faces worn and mild:
Surely their choice of vigil is best?
Yea! for our roses fade, the world is wild;
But there, beside the altar, there, is rest. (BRC, p. 11)
\end{quote}

The convent, at least, is a solution, whereas an alternative escape from a wild world, commercialized love, is less successful. Although the nunnery can obliterate the roses, the roses cannot repress the lilies with all their conventional connotations. In "Non sum qualis eram bonae sub regno Cynarae" is heard the frenetic melody that is the \textit{motif} of the \textit{poète maudit} of the 'nineties--a song of hedonism and world-weariness which labels the escape route a \textit{cul de sac}:

\begin{quote}
I have forgot much, Cynara! gone with the wind;
Flung roses, roses riotously with the throng;
Dancing to put thy pale lost lilies out of mind;
But I was desolate and sick of an old passion,
Yea! all the time because the dance was long!
I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion. (2BRC, p. 60)
\end{quote}

The two preceding poems show the tension in Dowson's writing between God and the Flesh as two modes of egress from an intolerable world. "Extreme Unction," of course, shows the way of God. Perhaps "To One in Bedlam"
does, also, with its traditional assumption that a demented man is God's special child:

Know they what dreams divine
Lift his long laughing reveries like enchanted wine,
And make his melancholy germaine to the stars!? (2BRC, p. 35)

Insanity is as much a mode of enlisting under divine protection as joining a convent, while any retreat into the world of God is for Dowson a successful flight from the materialism of the World.

But it is the unsuccessful escape that dominates Dowson's poetry--a flight, or at least attempted flight, by means of love. Innocent love, symbolized by the lily, never survives in Dowson's poetry. Death, maturity, destiny, misunderstanding, carnality--something always intervenes. Womanhood is the obstacle in "Growth" and "Ad Dominum Suam," death in "Vanitas," "Amor Umbratilis," and "0 Mors! Quam amara est memoria tua homini in substantiis suis!" and death and misunderstanding in the poem whose first line is "You would have understood me had you waited." Carnal love hovers over its innocent counterpart, destroying or waiting to destroy it, unless death instead is the disrupter. Silence and madness, God and the Flesh, are the lodestones of Dowson's poetry, none of it celebrating the topical world at the close of the nineteenth century.

The dozen poems Johnson contributed to the books of the Rhymers' Club are, like Dowson's, the product of a man who is fatigued, but while Dowson impresses the reader as the reluctant victim of society, Johnson often sounds like a man deliberately renouncing the world. Although Johnson wrote some topical poetry, generally inferior to his work in the Club's anthologies, his best verse is distanced by time, space, or abstraction. The speaker in Johnson's lyrics is frequently a man who
yearns for death as an escape from an exhausting world. Death is equated with peace; it is a sanctuary from a disordered and enervating existence.

For Johnson death is both anodyne and reward. In "The Last Music" the poet writes of "kindly death." "Peace is upon" his lady, "his dead queen," since "the balm of gracious death now laps her round." His parting injunction to her is "Rest! worthy found, to die." (italics his.) This death wish emerges more subtly in a poem entitled "In Falmouth Harbour," which contains a sequence of metaphor of the harbor, the bar, and the open sea, made famous by Tennyson's later "Crossing the Bar" (a coincidence noted as early as 1902): 49

Well was it worth to have each hour
Of high and perilous blowing wind:
For here, for now, deep peace hath power
To conquer the worn mind.

I have passed over the rough sea,
As over the white harbour bar:
And this Death's dreamland is to me,
Led hither by a star. (BRC, p. 64)

Elsewhere, death is a consummation furnishing the ultimate that is unattainable in life:

No Alban whiteness does she wear,
But death's perfection of that hue. (2 BRC, p. 33)

So death is more than a physical abnegation or a shedding of the corporeal husk; rather, it is the way to the Kingdom of Heaven, where all is tranquil, ordered, and just.

Johnson's preferred correlative for heavenly peace, order, and justice is the conventional one of the stars. Whatever is awry on earth will be rectified in heaven. On this we can rely, for the patterning of the stars is sufficient security that the divine will prevails in heaven.
To Johnson an instance of the apparent earthly frustration of divine justice was the execution of Charles I. In fact, both Dowson and Johnson were members of The White Rose League, an organization dedicated to sustaining the Stuart tradition. In "By the Statue of King Charles at Charing Cross" Johnson laments the fate of his hero-king, but he consoles himself by concluding that "The stars and heavenly deeps/ Work out their perfect will" (BRC, p. 6). Again, the stars symbolize the resolution of the divine will in "A Burden of Easter Vigil"; in addition, the rising of the stars is a warrant for the second coming of Christ:

But if He rise not? Over the far main,  
The sun of glory falls indeed: the stars are plain. (BRC, p. 33)

The stars are an omen of benevolence, evidence for Browning's famous description of Providence: "God's in his heaven--/ All's right with the world!" Or, at least, the thought is suggested toward the end of "In Falmouth Harbour" that such is the case while the stars are out and the cares of a workaday world do not obtain:

Content thee! Not the annulling light  
Of any pitiless dawn is here;  
Thou art alone with ancient night:  
And all the stars are clear. (BRC, p. 64)

The clarity of the stars is apparently symptomatic of divine mercy. In every way the stars are the material evidence for an ideal world. Thus, it is in the starry heights that Platonic idealism may be found in "Plato in London":

That starry music, starry fire,  
High above all our noise and glare:  
The image of our long desire,  
The beauty, and the strength are there.  
And Plato's thought lives, true and clear,  
In as august a sphere:  
Perchance, far higher. (BRC, p. 91)
In Johnson's poetry death is the entree to the ideal world, and the stars the manifestation of that world. Rather than bearing witness to a mechanistic order, the stars are conducive to belief. Therefore, the stars have a human as well as a cosmic significance: "There is the beauty of night and stars, as our poor eyes can see them, and our poor poetical imaginations dream of them: but Astronomy is tragic..."51

Although the heavenly kingdom or ideal world informed most of Johnson's lyrics, he often showed misgivings about his attaining it. This sense of doubt as to his election characterizes "Mystic and Cavalier" and "The Dark Angel." But, on occasion, Johnson could abandon the theme of destiny and concentrate on this planet. Besides topical poetry mentioned earlier he wrote on Celtic subjects. "Morfydd" and "Celtic Speech" show his lyric power in dealing with Welsh strains, romantic and remote in time. However, Johnson's typical orientation in his Rhymers' Club poetry is toward the Kingdom of God. He, too, was not in bondage to the World.

The eight poems that Arthur Symons contributed to the Club's books provide an ample basis for the charge of eroticism commonly lodged against him during the early nineties. Nevertheless, there is little reason to regard Symons as a pornographic author; first, there is nothing titillating or provocative in his work, and second, whatever license may be found in his poems is more a reaction to his milieu than an assertion of his views on love. As Lhombreaud has suggested in Symons' behalf: "The eroticism of his poems must not be quoted out of the context of the epoch. The long Victorian restraint gave place suddenly to a reaction which found its expression in licentious images of the works of new writers."52 The purpose, Lhombreaud adds, was "to bewilder the public, but Symons did not
write long in that vein." That Symons recognized and over came this tendency *epater le bourgeois* is clear from an observation he made in the 1899 Introduction to *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*: "Nothing, not even conventional virtue, is so provincial as conventional vice; and the desire to 'bewilder the middle classes' is itself middle-class." The Rhymers' Club poetry of Symons is erotic, but this characteristic is a more telling comment on Symons' London than on the poet himself.

Eroticism--the apotheosizing of the flesh--was but the mode of escape which marked this period of Symons' life. Bernard Muddiman, for one, has recognized escapism to be an ubiquitous aspect of the poet's writing: "Mr. Symons' favourite word is 'escape'; his favourite phrase 'escape from life.' Now the one and now the other reappears continually in all kinds of connections." And it is as an essay in escapism rather than as erogenous activity that Symons' poetry of the 'nineties should be taken.

Symons believed the consciousness of total reality to be unbearable: "To live through a single day with the overpowering consciousness of our real position, which, in the moments in which alone it mercifully comes, is like blinding light or the thrust of a flaming sword, would drive any man out of his senses." He was convinced that man must be diverted if he is to endure, and that man could achieve happiness only by dulling his consciousness of his contingency:

Allowing ourselves, for the most part to be but vaguely conscious of that great suspense in which we live, we find our escape from its sterile annihilating reality in many dreams, in religion, passion, art; each a forgetfulness, each a symbol of creation; religion being the creation of a new heaven, passion the creation of a new earth, and art, in its mingling
of heaven and earth, the creation of heaven out of earth. Each is a kind of sublime selfishness, the saint, the lover, and the artist having each an incommunicable ecstasy which he esteems as his ultimate attainment . . . But it is, before all things, an escape; and the prophets who have redeemed the world, and the artists who have made the world beautiful, and the lovers who have quickened the pulse of the world, have really, whether they knew it or not, been fleeing from the certainty of one thought: that we have, all of us, only our one day; and from the dread of that other thought: that the day, however used, must after all be wasted.56

But the escape is futile; it does no good. Symons, like Pater before him, recognizes that the brief interval called life can be ameliorated by experience; only to Pater it is a matter of crowding "as many pulsations as possible into the given time," that consciousness might be "quickened, multiplied," whereas for Symons "complete happiness lies in the measure of our success in shutting the eyes of the mind, and deadening its sense of hearing, and dulling the keenness of its apprehension of the unknown." The point is that Pater turned to art to enrich life, Symons to avoid life.

Symons considers each role—saint, artist, and lover—in his poetry, but it is chiefly the last which figures in the works under survey. In "The Broken Tryst" the anticipation of the lovers' meeting colors the poet's life, but when the rendezvous fails, disappointment leaves him woodenly accepting the continuity of the world. Other lyrics, such as "Song" and "A Variation upon Love," have a Cavalier insouciance and directness about them. Rather than the poet's being a "Herrick of the music halls," he is Herrick himself, or, at least, his echo, with an interrogative syntax reminiscent of Blake:

What are lips, but to be kissed?
What are eyes, but to be praised?
What the fineness of a wrist?
What the slimness of a waist?
What the softness of her hair,
If not that Love be tangled there? (2 BRC, p. 77)

Sometimes, when the narcotic of love fails, that of art works. This is the case in "Love and Art":

I enter and forget them, for to-night
I have my verse to write,
That love-song, I have yet to pare and trim.
So, should it be? or--God! the light
In that revealing casement-square grows dim:
He kisses her, and I but write of him! (2 BRC, p. 46)

These lines are by the same poet who translated St. John of the Cross and Santa Teresa in the very decade of the Rhymers' Club:

Let mine eyes see thee,
Sweet Jesus of Nazareth
Let mine eyes see thee,
And then see death. ("From Santa Teresa")

But love and love objects are what dominate Symons' contributions to the Club's anthologies. Six of the eight poems celebrate sensuous pleasure; it is chiefly through passion that Symons proposes to "escape from . . . sterile . . . annihilating reality."

Among the major figures, Yeats, Dowson, Johnson, and Symons, poetry was a way of dismissing the World. For Yeats and less so for Johnson, a new and ideal world was occasionally discovered at a pole from materialistic London society. Yeats, concerned with the supernatural and the oral tradition, tended toward a non-Christian cosmology--the metaphorical Devil. Symons, in search of an anodyne to the pain of the World with its certainty of death, was bondman to the Flesh. Mistrusting life, Johnson sought God in the stars and death. Torn between carnal and religious impulses, Dowson vacillated between the Flesh and God. So much
for the key figures, but even the lesser Rhymers were imbued with the current escapism.

Echoes of the larger talents were heard in the rhymes of Rhys, Rolleston, Le Gallienne, Plarr, and Todhunter. Rhys shares Yeats's propensity for choosing themes disengaged from the contemporary scene; while Yeats retold ancient Gaelic tales, Rhys narrated old Welsh legends in "The Wedding of Pale Bronwen" and "Howel the Tall." The preoccupation with death so explicit in Johnson's poetry is recalled by Le Gallienne's subtitling his "What of the Darkness" with the apostrophe "(To the Happy Dead People)," and Rolleston's extolling the liberation from desire in "Night (After All):

For others, Lord, Thy purging fires,
The loves reknit, the crown, the palm.
For me, the death of all desires
In deep, eternal calm. (2 BRC, p. 97)

To place Rolleston's plea for abnegation in context one must know that he is discussing the time when he must die. Rather than praying for death, he is only opting for a total release from earthly aspirations when death is inevitable. But the true death wish is apparent in some Keatsian stanzas of Todhunter's, that he goes so far as to subtitle "(Fin de siecle)---":

Yes, this rich death were best:
Lay poison on thy lips, kiss me to sleep,
Or on the siren billow of thy breast
Bring some voluptuous Lethe for life's pain,
Some languorous nepenthe that will creep
Drowsily from vein to vein;
That slowly, drowsily, will steep
Sense after sense, till down long gulfs of rest
Whirled like a leaf, I sink to the lone deep. (2 BRC, p. 62)

The soliloquy closes with a plea that "death . . . ease with poppies of oblivion,/ This heart, the scorpion Life no more may sting." Todhunter
assumes the role of a sufferer far more than "half in love with easeful death"; perhaps this cultivation of death visible in Johnson's, Dowson's, and Todhunter's poetry, cardinal to Axel as the Symbolist drama, and even a factor in the lives of the men of the nineties—Yeats's "tragic generation"—shows how far down the road of romantic melancholy the century had traveled.

The note of ennui is a recurrent one in the books of the Rhymers' Club. Todhunter sounds it again in "Beatrice's Song," in the course of which he catalogues Rappaccini's garden. Plarr plays it in "At Citoyenne Tussaud's," reserving his especial approbation for these Carriers and Heberts,

They only look so proud and serene:
They only look so infinitely tired! (BRC, p. 45)

Still, the reader should not assume that ennui or any other escapist characteristic pervades all the poetry of the Club.

Some of the poetry, in fact, is topical; still other verses in the Club's anthologies are occasional. Radford wrote a "Song of the Labour Movement" and in another poem condemned "London's damned money mart." Le Gallienne composed a "Ballad of London" and Plarr a description of "Deer in Greenwich Park." The death of Tennyson, a proposal to build a highway over Keats's grave, and the 1891 publication in England of the Persian poet Hafiz all occasioned poems. Nevertheless, the exotic, the remote, the sensuous, and the internal were more popular subjects with these lyricists than was contemporary external reality.

4. Science, the Enemy: Conclusion

One last attitude common to the Rhymers seems worth introducing at this juncture. The artist, given an anschauung where the World does "not
exist for him," must necessarily fear and detest science. To the poets of the Rhymers' Club the physical and biological sciences rivaled religion in attempting to order external reality. After all, higher criticism, Darwinism, and contemporary geology jeopardized the most liberal interpretations of revealed truth, not to mention the literal reading of the Bible. Science was dessicated and heartless; it threatened to strip the veil of mystery the lyricist elaborated around a painful world. Science was the nucleus of the Victorian concept of progress, the acceptance of the ever-improving world. Conversely, the negativism of the Rhymers entailed an anti-scientific bias.

This antipathy to science was so central that it was seldom made explicit in the members' poetry; therefore, its prominent display in the first poem of their first anthology seems deliberately provocative. In Rhys's "The Toast," in which he salutes "Queen Rhyme," the challenge to scientific domination is bluntly, in fact, belligerently, offered:

As they, we drink defiance
To-night to all but Rhyme,
And most of all to Science,
And all such skins of lions
That hide the ass of time. (BRC, p. 1)

The "they" of Rhys's stanza refers to Jonson and Herrick, some predecessors of the Rhymers on Fleet Street, but these nineteenth century "sons" held life to be grimmer than did their lyrical forefathers.

This detestation of science, admittedly not based on close knowledge, characterized the intellectual matrix of the major Rhymers. Lionel Johnson, for one, has been described by his friend Louise Imogen Guiney as "non-scientific, anti-mathematical . . . a recruit . . . for transcendentalism and the White Rose."58 Johnson makes his own attitude clear,
an attitude which opposes religion to science, in his projection of his personal view as typifying the English character: "It is this recognition of a mystery in the world, however vaguely and variably felt, which forbids one to believe that Englishmen will ever accept purely 'scientific and secular' principles of individual or of social life."\(^59\) As to Dowson, we have already encountered Plarr's statement that the younger poet knew nothing of modern science.\(^60\) In another context Plarr relates Dowson's having "scented modern science" in a Yeatsian theory of the origin and development of poetry and, consequently, "having voted down poetry debates in the future."\(^61\) Nevertheless, one should not assume from this incident that Yeats was a disciple of science; quite the contrary was true. After an adolescent phase in which Yeats aped his father and quoted Huxley and Darwin, the poet came under the influence of occultism and developed a life-long anti-scientific prejudice. Yeats the Theosophist was equally skeptical of science and religion:

... It is great question whether the soul be immortal or not. Has not theology solved that—-no! ... Has not science solved it. Science will tell you the soul of man is a volatile gas capable of solution in glycerine. Take this for your answer if you will.\(^62\)

In Richard Ellmann's words, "He is thoroughly convinced that science has failed and is hopeful that another way of discovering truth exists."\(^63\) For the older Yeats (1929) science is no more fruitful: "Science is the criticism of myths, there would be no Darwin had there been no book of Genesis, no electrons but for the Greek atomic myth. ..."\(^64\) For this poet, young or old, science had no answers.

Opposition to science is manifest in Johnson, Dowson, and Yeats, but Symons seems curiously ambivalent. A hasty reading of the following
could suffice to distort Symons into an apostle of science, whose only regret is that we misconstrue the nature of scientific inquiry:

True science is a kind of poetry, it is a divination, an imaginative reading of the universe. What we call science is an engine of material progress, it teaches us how to get most quickly to the other end of the world, and how to kill the people there in the most precise and economic manner. The function of this kind of science is to extinguish wonder, whereas the true science deepens our sense of wonder as it enlightens every new tract of the enveloping darkness.

Although one might sympathize with Symons' objectives, it is difficult to accept his strictures. Symons defines "science" prescriptively; his ideal study is one which is consecrated a priori to a theory of the marvelous, and which requires ethereal rather than pedestrian solutions. Attitudinally, he differs little from the Yeats who accuses science of reducing man's soul to "a volatile gas capable of solution in glycerine."

On this negative note we leave the Rhymers' intellectual milieu. To God, the Flesh, or the Devil—assent; to the World, hardly. If the Rhymers would neither accept nor reform the World, but preferred to eschew what they called rhetoric entirely, what did they hope to achieve through their poetry? The answer is the basis of their aesthetic—to create a "purer music." It is this music and its reverberations that form the subject of the next chapter.
NOTES: CHAPTER II

1. Plarr, p. 55.

2. That these are the principal figures in the Club is borne out by their names being prominent in any discussion of the organization. A few citations should demonstrate the pre-eminence of Yeats, Dowson, Johnson, and Symons among the Rhymers:

(1) "Yeats, Johnson, Dowson, Symons and the obscurer writers who formed the Rhymers' Club were trying to found a new school, with an austerer devotion to their own discipline than any Wilde could understand." (Hough, p. 204.)

(2) "Unlike its French prototypes, though, its members--who included Yeats, Dowson, Arthur Symons, Plarr, Rhys, and Le Gallienne--followed no acknowledged leader and were only vaguely agreed as to aims." (Johnson, p. xxv.) Note that the source is a critical introduction to the poetry of Johnson; his name is so central that it need not be explicitly mentioned.


(4) "Pure poetry and the cult of Pater were also the ideals of the Rhymers' Club, founded in 1891 by William Butler Yeats, Ernest Rhys, and T. W. Rolleston. Of the ten or twelve members Arthur Symons, Ernest Dowson, and Lionel Johnson, besides the founders, were the chief. ... They considered Dowson the best poet, Johnson, the second, and Yeats, the third." [William York Tindall, Forces in Modern British Literature: 1885-1956 (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), p. 9].


(7) "The Rhymers' Club, which was founded in 1891 and met for several years at the Cheshire Cheese in London, included among its members W. B. Yeats, Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson, John Davidson, Ernest Rhys, Richard Le Gallienne, and Arthur Symons." (Jerome Hamilton Buckley, The Victorian Temper: a Study in Literary Criticism [New York: Random House], 1964, p. 270.)

(8) Evidence for the comparative value of the members' poems
is afforded by the tastes of later anthologists. When Yeats himself was asked to edit and choose for *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), he included poems of seven Clubmen. The poets selected and the number of their works chosen are as follows: Yeats (14), Dowson (9), Johnson (6), and Symons (3); Rhys (2), Ellis (1), and Rolleston (1).


8. Yeats's occultism and Johnson's theological scholarship are well known, but Symons' interest in Christian mysticism should be borne in mind as well as that young poet's rejection of his father's Methodism.

9. *Autobiography*, p. 201. Yeats begins this statement with a dependent clause: "If Rossetti was a subconscious influence, and perhaps the most powerful of all, . . ." There is nothing hypothetical in this "if"; however, Rossetti's influence was always more felt than traceable. Rossetti was the apostle of beauty, but he fulfilled his ministry through his life and the spirit and manner of his works more than through critical pronouncements.


15. The Book of the Rhymers' Club, p. 41; hereinafter BRC.

16. The Second Book of the Rhymers' Club, pp. 6-7; hereinafter 2 BRC. Documentation in BRC and 2 BRC will hereafter be given parenthetically in the main body of the text, because of the frequency, brevity, and importance of these references. When a comment is necessary, documentation will be given through a note.


18. See Longaker, Ernest Dowson, pp. 71-72. The reference in Marius is to the penultimate sentence of the novel, p. 267.


21. Pater, Marius, p. 64.

22. The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W. B. Yeats, ed. Peter Allt and Russell K. Alspach (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1957), p. 122. Since this is definitely the most exhaustive and perhaps the most accessible edition of Yeats's poetry, all citation to poems outside of BRC and 2 BRC will be to this edition.


26. Quoted in Lhombreaud, p. 87.

27. Yeats, Essays and Introductions, pp. 189-194. He observes that the poets of his generation "speak out of some personal or spiritual
passion in words or types or metaphors that draw one's imagination as far as possible from the complexities of modern life or thought." (p. 191.) Yeats believes this new mode of speaking to be largely attributable to French influence, citing Villiers de l'Isle Adam, Maeterlinck, and Mallarmé as exponents of the new mode of symbolic presentation.


30. Baudelaire, p. 88. "I am like the king of a rainy country, rich but impotent, young and yet aged, who, scorning his tutor's obeisances, passes his time in boredom with his dogs as with other beasts." (Hartley, p. 161.)

31. Stephane Mallarmé, OEuvres complètes, ed. Henri Mondor et G. Jean-Aubry (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1945), p. 38. "The flesh is sad, alas! I feel that birds are drunk to be among unknown foam and the skies! ... I shall depart! Steamer with swaying masts, raise anchor for exotic landscapes!" (Hartley, p. 188.)

32. Verlaine, p. 249. "Wisdom of a Louis Racine, I envy you! O not to have followed Rollin's lectures, not to have been born in the decline of the great century, when the setting sun gilded life so beautifully. . . ." (Hartley, p. 222). There is apparently some confusion in this sonnet. Subsequent lines refer to Maintenon's orphanage at St. Cyr, for whose children Jean Racine, not Louis, wrote Esther and Athalie; These are seventeenth century events. But Louis Racine and Rollin were men of the eighteenth century, who were not flourishing when "le soleil couchant," i.e. during the waning years of the reign of Louis XIV.

33. Verlaine, p. 249. "No. That century was Gallican and Jansenist! It is toward the vast, delicate Middle Ages that my becalmed heart must steer, far from our days of carnal spirit and melancholy flesh." (Hartley, p. 223.) The reference to the Gallican and Jansenist controversies confirms the confusion of centuries mentioned in the preceding note.

34. Baudelaire, p. 46. "O fleece curling right down on the neck! O ringlets! O perfume laden with indifference! Ecstasy!" (Hartley, p. 153.)

35. Verlaine, p. 63. "Her gaze is like the gaze of statues, and her voice, distant and calm, and grave, has the inflection of the dear voices that have become silent." The translation is by Elaine Marks, French Poetry from Baudelaire to the Present (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1962), p. 115.

36. Verlaine, p. 427. "Parsifal has conquered the Girls, their pleasant chatter and amusing lust—and his virgin boy's inclination toward the flesh which tempts one to love light breasts and pleasant chat-
37. Verlaine, p. 268. "My God said to me: 'My son, you must love me. You see my pierced side, my heart that shines and bleeds, and my injured feet which Magdalene bathes with tears, and my arms suffering under the weight of your sins, and my hands!'" (Marks, pp. 120-121.)


42. Longaker, Ernest Dowson, p. 83.


44. Ellmann, p. 67.


47. P. 94.

48. A representative example of Johnson's topical work is "The Troopship," dated "New Year's Day: 1890." The first two quatrains are sufficient to illustrate the variety of difficulties Johnson encountered in topical poetry:

"At early morning, clear and cold,  
Still in her English harbour lay  
The long, white ship: while winter gold  
Shone pale upon her outward way."

"Slowly she moved, slowly she stirred,  
Stately and slow, she went away:  
Sounds of farewell, the harbour heard;  
Music on board began to play."

(Fletcher, The Complete Poems of Lionel Johnson, p. 38)

Abstract language, lack of metaphor, pathetic fallacy, confusion of active and passive moods, contrived sound manipulation, and trite diction
contribute to the mediocrity of this poem. For Johnson the subject, the departure of a troopship for India, was far less "real" than an inquiry into the state of his soul. Like Plato he found reality in ideals; the mundane world, in which no empyrean music was heard, evoked little poetry.

49. Writing shortly after Johnson's death, Louise Imogen Guiney reprints the last four quatrains of the original "In Falmouth Harbour," referring to "its lovely opening anticipation of Tennyson." ("Of Lionel Johnson: 1867-1902," The Atlantic Monthly, XC [December 1902], 861-862.) She is quite correct in noticing the correspondence of images in the two poems, but she does not point out how this metaphor exemplifies the divergent attitudes toward death held by Tennyson and Johnson. Tennyson crosses the bar to confront his "Pilot face to face," while Johnson moves in the opposite direction, from sea to harbor. For Tennyson death is only another Victorian challenge, in which the good man vindicates himself; for Johnson death is the blessed security from all challenges.

50. Johnson names Hardy, Newton, Berkeley, Pascal, and Lucretius as students of the heavens who have recognized the impetus toward belief in the pursuit of astronomy: "And Berkeley is no whit behind Mr. Hardy in grasping the doctrine of the heavens: 'Astronomy is peculiarly adapted to remedy a little and narrow spirit.'" (The Art of Thomas Hardy, p. 253.)


52. Lhombreaud, p. 96.

53. P. 4.


55. The Symbolist Movement, p. 94.

56. The Symbolist Movement, pp. 94-95.


60. Plarr, p. 21.

61. Plarr, p. 63.
62. Quoted in Ellmann, p. 42, who cites an unpublished manuscript as his source.

63. P. 42.

64. Hone, p. 405.

CHAPTER III

THE POETIC OF THE RHYMERS' CLUB

1. Ubiquitous Music

"Poetry is euphony": the Rhymers' poetic could be epitomized in this simplest of statements. The epitome of euphony being music, it is that art that figured for the Rhymers as ideal, form, subject, and setting—as the abstraction that shaped and guided their poetry. To call a poem "perfect music" was to grace it with the highest accolade. But "music" was more than the metaphor preferred by the Rhymers to describe their poetry, a poetry which dealt with music and which was formally influenced by its values. The Rhymers aspired to write in a purer lyricism, free from rhetorical contamination. Consequently, music, the art whose content is unobtrusive, was their constant model. Because "music" reverberates in so many ways, the word itself was the one ubiquitous term in their criticism and served with its many and even occasionally contradictory meanings as the leitmotif of their poetry.

Sometimes the objective of a Rhymer was to write "music" with words, to subordinate all intellectual considerations to euphony in an attempt to unify form with content. Dowson wrote many such poems. "O Mors! Quam amara est memoria tua homini pacem habenti in substantiis suis!" is one whose title is even more memorable for alliteration, assonance, and sibilance than it is for applicability to his beautiful, but vacuous, verses:
Exceeding sorrow
    Consumeth my sad heart!
Because tomorrow,
    We must depart,
Now is exceeding sorrow
    All my part!

Give over playing:
    Cast thy viol away:
Merely laying
    Thy head my way:
Prithee! give over playing,
    Grave or gay.

Be no word spoken:
    Weep nothing; let a pale
Silence, unbroken
    Silence prevail:
Prithee! be no word spoken,
    Lest I fail.

Forget to-morrow,
    Weep nothing: merely lay,
For silent sorrow,
    Thine head my way;
Let us forget to-morrow,
    This last day.  (BRC, pp. 30-31)

This lyric is neither instructive nor pictorial; it urges nothing on the reader and images little for him. No rhetoric obtrudes on the purity of the lyric. Instead, non-discursive values are pre-eminent, as this poem promises only to be beautiful.

Closely akin to this impulse toward pure form is the desire to soften speech by setting it to "music," not in the literal sense of providing melodies for lyrics, but by entitling lyrics "songs" and by using forms and meters associated with the Celtic or French bardic tradition. Such titles as "Villanelle of Sunset," "Beatrice's Song," "A Burden of Easter Vigil," "A Fairy Song," and "Ballade of the Cheshire Cheese," to name a few from the two Rhymers' Club anthologies, are instances of this impulse to emphasize the lyrical quality of poetry by associating it with
music.

Music was a favorite metaphor among the Rhymers, both in their criticism and their poetry. In its most literal sense "music" connotes harmony, euphony, and aural appeal, but if the poet is thought of as a bard, then this term implies "craftsmanship." By extension music becomes a symbol of the ideal and a metaphor for any perfected or consummate relationship. An instance of the unextended metaphor, in which "music" is no more than poetic euphony, is Johnson's reference to "the Lucretian periods, each a line of tremendous music, and the complete period their concerted harmony." Purely figurative, hearkening back to the "music of the spheres," is this line of the last stanza from the same poet's "Plato in London," quoted in the previous chapter: "That starry music, starry fire." Stars being only visible and music only audible, a synaesthetic effort is necessary to comprehend the locution. Here Johnson uses "music" as a key term in an extended simile for the world of Platonic idealism.

Furthermore, music was a congenial subject for the Rhymers. Symons was understandably partial to music-hall dancers. Yeats, always interested in folk tradition, wrote "The Fiddler of Dooney," and Hillier, an opera lover, included "Orpheus in Covent Garden" in the second anthology; these are but two instances of their practice. Because music is formal and removed from the substantive world, the Rhymers found it to be a valuable escape and, accordingly, a subject with which they were at ease.

To appreciate the Rhymers' utilization of music as subject, ideal, critical standard, and more, we must recognize that much of their practice
in this respect was derivative. With this in mind we shall examine their principal sources (the now familiar Pater, Verlaine, and Mallarmé, among others) before turning, in the last section of this chapter, to their poetic and its application.

2. **Key Sources of the Musical Analogue**

The establishment of music as the poetic analogue for the Rhymers' Club is attributable to the conjunction of several influences, some immediate, some less so: the romantic and expressive tradition that was already a century old, the apotheosis of music by contemporary German philosophers, Pater's aesthetic, and the pronouncements in prose and poetry of the Symbolists and Decadents, especially Verlaine and Mallarmé.

Under the aegis of nineteenth century romanticism the poet came to be seen as a man apart, expressing himself, rather than as a copyist furnishing a picture of nature, or as a teacher rendering morality palatable. The poet himself became an object of interest, his poetry reflecting the man more than it did the external world. Wordsworth's famous definition of the poet as "a man speaking to men" might be taken as a reduction of that artist to a democratic nonentity, had the great romantic theorist not qualified what might otherwise have been a commonplace by admitting the poet to be a man

endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind; a man pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him; delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on of the Universe, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them.²
Wordsworth thereby elevated the poet above the common man, stressing the poet's sensitivity and creativity. What such a man utters is important. His poetry is valuable more as a product of a finer sensibility than as a verbal reproduction of a plastic world. With the development of these attitudes the popular analogy of poetry to art, founded perhaps on the misapprehension of Horace's "Poesis ut pictura" (Poetry is like a picture) was discarded, as quality of expression supplanted fidelity to created objects as a critical standard. Poetry came to be regarded as resembling another art, which told little about the perceptible world, but was chiefly noteworthy for its innate sense of form: music.

The substitution of music for painting as the analogue for poetry was thus a part of that larger shift from mimetic to expressive critical theory, which became evident near the end of the eighteenth century or the beginning of the nineteenth, a critical tendency which has been brilliantly expounded by M. H. Abrams in The Mirror and the Lamp. Abrams' hypothesis and supporting evidence as to how music became the "type" of poetry seem completely tenable:

In place of painting, music becomes the art frequently pointed to as having a profound affinity with poetry. For if a picture seems the nearest thing to a mirror-image of the external world, music, of all the arts, is the most remote: except in the trivial echoism of programmatic passages, it does not duplicate aspects of sensible nature, nor can it be said, in any obvious sense, to refer to any state of affairs outside itself. As a result music was the first of the arts to be generally regarded as non-mimetic in nature; and in the theory of German writers of the 1790's, music came to be the art most immediately expressive of spirit and emotion, constituting the very pulse and quiddity of passion made public. Music, wrote Wackenroder, "shows us all the movements of our spirit, disembodied." Hence the utility of music to define and illustrate the nature of poetry, particularly of the lyric, but also of poetry in general when this came to be conceived as a mode of expression.
In an age growing conscious of scientific encroachment on the arts, it was reasonable not to look to poetry for "a mirror-image of the external world"; better to appreciate poetry for its rendition of the non-discursive, as "expressive of spirit and emotion." As an expressive instead of a mimetic art poetry was less obligated to substance, yet the early nineteenth century mind did not regard poetry as an exclusively formal art any more than it so considered music. The value of each depended upon its incorporation and transmission of "spirit and emotion," the increments the creative artist bestowed on his work through imagination.

While the romantic aesthetic posited music as the natural poetic analogue, it did not establish a hierarchy with music at the apex and poetry in the position of a hopeful aspirant to that high station. There is little humility evident in Coleridge's and Shelley's conceptions of poetry (if we take two representatively romantic views) that show it as subservient to any sister art. Coleridge, after making the definition of poetry a function of his definition of the poet, wrote: "The poet, described in ideal perfection, brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other, according to their relative worth and dignity." Shelley could allege that "a poem is the image of life expressed in its eternal truth" and that "poetry is indeed something divine." Although romantic conceptions of poetry such as those of Coleridge and Shelley diverge from poesis ut pictura and instead imply poetry's consanguinity with music, it is not the intent of such formulations to suggest music as an ideal to which poetry and, in fact, every other art should aspire. Pater, however, is famous for just such a dictum in "The School of Giorgione": "All art constantly aspires toward the
condition of music."\(^6\)

But just as the concept of romanticism was to a great extent of German provenience, so was Pater's apotheosis of music.\(^7\) Hegel and Schopenhauer, in different ways, are represented in the Rhymers' poetic. Each contributed to its formulation, the first through his direct influence on Pater, the second through Wagner to Mallarmé, and both, but perhaps Hegel more than Schopenhauer, by their general influence on the intellectual community of England. A brief examination of their positions will be beneficial to placing in its intellectual context that proposition of Pater's cited in the previous paragraph, a proposition cardinal to the Rhymers' poetic.

Lionel Johnson has testified to Pater's interest in German theories of art: "He gave much time to the aesthetic theorists of Germany--Winchelmann (sic), Lessing, Goethe, Hegel--such speculations as theirs agreed well with that cogitating and searching spirit strong in him."\(^8\)

Later students of Pater have also recognized the importance of German artistic theories to Pater. Ruth C. Child, who has written the only book-length study in English of Pater's aesthetic, summarizes the aesthetic aspect of Hegel's philosophy and shows where Pater's diverged from it:

When Pater argues . . . that music is the highest of the arts since it has in greatest degree the perfect fusion of form and content, he is choosing and rejecting from Hegel in accordance with his own emphasis on form. Hegel had held that music is the central of the modern arts, having the closest fusion between form and content; but he had considered poetry the highest, because most spiritual, and therefore most nearly adequate to express the infinitely complex and substantive spiritualities of the modern world; in it the content of consciousness becomes separated from the sensuous element and transcends it.\(^9\)
Pater accepted the uniqueness of music in its obliteration of the form-content distinction, but he was unimpressed by Hegel's criterion of "spirituality," as Miss Child points out. Before turning to Pater's adaptation of Hegel's material, however, we will consider a related, if less direct German influence: that of Schopenhauer.

During the years of the Rhymers' Club, Schopenhauer did not enjoy Hegel's celebrity in England. His major work, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (The World as Will and Idea), was not translated into English until 1883; yet Mark Longaker states that Schopenhauer's philosophy was a provocative topic even while Dowson and Johnson were attending Oxford, in the mid-eighties. The precocious Johnson had even read him while still at Winchester, but the young Wykehamist was then passing through a determinedly anti-rationalistic phase and was therefore resolved to deprecate all systems, including Schopenhauer's: "Eschew altogether the miserable affectations of Schopenhauer, Hartmann, Comte; hate all systems of that nature: but love the great idealists, Kant, Schelling, Fichte, Emerson. They are not philosophers: they are inconsistent, just as Christ was." Schopenhauer's priority among young Johnson's antipathies bears witness to the force the misanthropic German was felt to exert.

Johnson was right in apprehending Schopenhauer as a builder of systems. This philosopher's conception of music was subordinated to the construction of a cosmological edifice built from "will" and "idea." The result is a coherent cosmology, though not always a fully intelligible aesthetic. Music is unique: "It stands alone, quite cut off from all the other arts." All arts (but music) are copies or representations of Idea; this familiar Platonic concept is fundamental to mimetic aesthetics.
In music, however, "we do not recognize the copy or repetition of any Idea of existence in the world." Yet, in its very uniqueness, music is the supreme art for Schopenhauer:

Music is thus by no means like the other arts, the copy of the Ideas, but the copy of the will itself, whose objectivity the Ideas are. This is why the effect of music is so much more powerful and penetrating than that of the other arts, for they speak only of shadows, but it speaks of the thing itself.

Thus music "expresses in a perfectly universal language . . . with the greatest determinateness and truth the inner nature, the in-itself of the world."

Some of the corollaries of Schopenhauer's theory of music are inescapable. Music is a representation of the ideal, and in its fullest harmony objectifies the entire Will, just as creation does. Second, the virtue of music is the virtue of form, not content. Third, music as the objectification of the Will is finally ineffable, since it is immaterial and partakes of the Divine. Comparable ideas, though seldom clearly or consistently formulated, inform much Rhymers' Club poetry; how the group used these and other musical concepts will be discussed later.

Oxford aside, Schopenhauer's works probably exerted little direct influence on the Rhymers. His writings were, however, a seminal force on Wagner, who, in turn, after his death was accorded a kind of poetic canonization by Mallarmé, Verlaine, and other Symbolists. Despite having little more than a superficial understanding of this philosopher, Wagner was a Schopenhauer enthusiast, if not always a clear-headed disciple. A recent scholar has summarized Wagner's susceptibility to Schopenhauer's aesthetic:
As is well known, his ideas took a considerable hold upon Wagner: among the latter's own, not always very coherent writings there are explicit references to Schopenhauer's views concerning the emotional and philosophical significance of music, while the influence of Schopenhauer's metaphysics is clearly discernible in such an opera as Tristan.\(^{15}\) Not that Wagner was by any means a consistent devotee; in biographer Ernest Newman's words: "Feurbach, Schopenhauer, Hafiz, and heaven knows who besides were in turn the one great philosopher the world has known."\(^ {16}\) But to the extent that Schopenhauer's musikanschauung was reflected in Wagner's voluminous writings, the philosopher's influence was bequeathed to poets whom some Rhymers regarded as their masters, the Symbolists.

In the mid-eighties, adulation for Wagner assumed cultist proportions among certain Symbolists. Eight of them, including Mallarmé and Verlaine, contributed sonnets to an issue of La Revue Wagnerienne in 1886.\(^ {17}\) The previous year Mallarmé had written Richard Wagner, rêverie d'un poète français, an essay containing such Schopenhauerean terminology as "only the Dance can translate the fleeting and the sudden into the Idea."\(^ {18}\) The extent of Mallarmé's obsession with Wagner is described by Wallace Fowlie, who recognizes the transcendent aspect of that poet's devotion to Wagner:

The cult for Wagner during the last ten years of Mallarmé's life constituted for the poet the possible beginning of a new religion. The orchestra leader he saw occupying the celebrant's place at mass. Wagnerian opera was a new rite, as combination of drama and music, and yet it perpetuated elements of ancient rites by conferring upon its listeners a sacrament of sound.\(^ {19}\)

For Mallarmé, as we shall see, music had a quasi-religious function. Therefore, it was not the autotelic art that it was for Pater, nor the independent art it was for Verlaine; but it was a vehicle of mystery, and if not a representation of the Ideal, at least an avenue to it.
In any history of aesthetics the names of Hegel and Schopenhauer are far more important than those of Pater, Mallarmé, and Verlaine, yet it is this trio which most immediately influenced the Rhymers in their conceiving poetry as euphony, and so it is to them that we must turn, if we are to understand the Rhymers' preoccupation with music as subject, form, setting, and critical standard.

It is the poetic more than the aesthetic of Walter Pater, as it is with every source of Rhymers' attitudes on craft, that interests us. Because "all art constantly aspires to the condition of music" and Pater's amplification are both from an essay on painting, one might reasonably infer that any applicability that it has to poetry must derive from the three arts--music, painting, and poetry--all being parts of a comprehensive aesthetic evolved by Pater, with music at its apex. While this is generally the case in Pater's earlier critical theory, it is not necessarily so in his later essay "Style," where he establishes a dichotomy between music and literature. The earlier theory, found in The Renaissance and reflecting Pater's thought in the sixties and seventies prefigures Verlaine's "De la musique avant toute chose" in conjunction with "Et tout le reste est littérature." Pater, too, placed music first and dismissed the rest as mere literature in "The School of Giorgione":

Art, then, is always striving to be independent of the mere intelligence, to become a matter of pure perception, to get rid of its responsibilities to its subject or material; the ideal examples of poetry and painting being those in which the constituent elements of the composition are so welded together, that the material or subject no longer strikes the intellect only; nor the form, the eye or the ear only; but form and matter, in their union or identity, present one single effect to the "imaginative reason," that complex faculty for which every thought and feeling is twin-born with its sensible analogue or symbol.
It is the art of music which most completely realizes this artistic ideal, this perfect identification of matter and form. In its consummate moments, the end is not distinct from the means, the form from the matter, the subject from the expression; they inhere in and completely saturate each other; and to it, therefore, to the condition of its perfect moments, all the arts may be supposed constantly to tend and aspire. Music, then, and not poetry, as is so often supposed, is the true type or measure of perfected art. While music is praised for its "perfect identification of matter and form," the phraseology of this section is such that it can be read as a plea to excise intellective content from art. We are told that art is striving "to become a matter of pure perception"; this, at minimum, is a warrant for removing conception as a part of the artistic receptor's experience, and perhaps a doctrine which reduces artistic creation to perception. Art also aspires "to get rid of its responsibility to subject or material"; even if this be not a declaration of indifference to subject matter, such a statement certainly relegates content to a secondary role. The de-emphasis on content was conducive to the Impressionism of Symons, Dowson, and of the nineties as a decade. Pater's poetic even extended to emancipating the poet from an obligation to specific moral or intellectual positions, a freedom Wilde claimed in his preface to The Picture of Dorian Gray and Symons in prefaces to his own poetry, although Pater was not specifically cited in either case. However, that Wilde, Symons, and innumerable other "aesthetes" considered Pater to be their spiritual mentor has been amply demonstrated.

If "music, ... not poetry, ... is the true type or measure of perfected art," then the excellence of poetry is a function of its proximity to the condition of music, that identity which presents "one single effect to the 'imaginative reason.'" Pater recognized that poetry
"works with words addressed in the first instance to the pure intelligence" and that the form-content distinction can never be obliterated in poetry. Didactic verse may serve a useful purpose, but at an aesthetic price. Implicitly, narrative and dramatic poetry are vitiated by the same imperfect unity of form and matter:

But the ideal types of poetry are those in which the distinction is reduced to its minimum; so that lyrical poetry, precisely because in it we are least able to detach the matter from the form, without a deduction of something from that matter itself, is, at least artistically, the highest and most complete form of poetry.23

This is a theoretical basis for the practice of the Rhymers. Despite being Victorians who wrote under the shadow of Tennyson and Browning, they composed neither epics, like Morte d'Arthur, nor dramatic monologues, in the Browning manner. As poets, they were writers, almost exclusively, of lyrics. Todhunter, far the oldest of the group, we recall as a not too successful playwright, while Yeats's career as a dramatist was largely ahead of him. Symons' plays are amateurish, post-Rhymers' Club compositions, and Dowson had no pretensions about his diminutive verse drama, The Pierrot of the Minute. The lyric was held to be intrinsically superior to other forms of poetry.

Pater apparently recognized the anti-intellectualism latent in his less mature formulation of the relationship of music to poetry. In "Style" he minimizes the distinction between poetry and prose, as he proposes "to point out certain qualities of all literature as a fine art, which, if they apply to the literature of fact, apply still more to the literature of the imaginative sense of fact, while they apply indifferently to verse and prose..."24 In his recognition of the peculiar capability of
music to provide unity of perception, Pater is consistent with his earlier theory, but in his introduction of the value of correspondence of symbol to concept, he is moving back to a mimetic position and placing discursive arts on a parity with music:

Music and prose literature are, in one sense, the opposite terms of art; the art of literature presenting to the imagination, through the intelligence, a range of interests, as free and various as those which music presents to it through sense. And certainly the tendency of what has been here said is to bring literature too under those conditions, by conformity to which music takes rank as the typically perfect art. If music be the ideal of all art whatever, precisely because in music it is impossible to distinguish the form from the substance or matter, the subject from the expression, then literature, by finding its specific excellence in the absolute correspondence of the term to its import, will be but fulfilling the condition of all artistic quality in things everywhere, of all good art.25

Pater continues by distinguishing great art from merely good art, the criterion being matter, not form. In fact, Pater's references to "greater dignity of its interests," "quality of the matter it informs or controls," and "its alliance to great ends" as criteria of excellence for great art are reminiscent of Arnold's "high seriousness," but Pater merely touched on these standards while Arnold applied them.

Somehow, for the Rhymers Pater was more the "aesthetic" young author of The Renaissance than the middle-aged writer of "Style," who conceded aesthetic equality to prose and poetry. Nevertheless, the Rhymers were not authors of much belletristic prose, the bulk of their extra-poetic efforts being critical. This is attributable to, among other influences, the thought of Arnold and Pater, especially the latter. He had remarked of Roman culture what would be equally true of the Victorians: "But in a world, confessedly so opulent in what was old, the work,
even of genius, must necessarily consist very much in criticism." Criticism is precisely what the Rhymers wrote during the years of the Club—criticism in the form of journalism and reviews. With one exception, their other efforts in prose were undistinguished: Dowson's stories, Yeats's retelling of folk tales, and innumerable translations. That exception was The Art of Thomas Hardy by Johnson. He alone seemed to understand prose as a creative art, literature as an intellectual as well as an aesthetic exercise. The others were too concerned with the "music" of belle-lettres. In sum, the Rhymers often wrote as if only lyric poetry aspired to the condition of music, while the rest was mere literature. The young Pater was their mentor, while the older man figured but little in the formation of the Rhymers' poetic. John Pick aptly grasps the situation:

But two things, perhaps, have been insufficiently stressed: first, that Pater changed and developed from his early writings in the 1860's to his final work in the 1890's, that, in other words, he was consistently growing in his own thinking; and secondly, that most of the writers of the last decade of the century fastened on the early and not on the contemporaneous Pater as a font of inspiration and influence.

Having missed Pater's later emphasis on intellective content, the Rhymers continued striving to write purer lyrics.

Music as a metaphor for cosmic harmony is as old as Pythagoras, but Pater's use of it in Marius the Epicurean may have impressed the Rhymers, as they frequently relied on "music" for both shaping and incidental metaphor. While whatever poetic the Rhymers derived from Pater came from his early work, these same poets were careful readers of Marius, a fact already treated sufficiently. They were sensitive to Pater's employing "music" to describe the ordering of the otherwise
random qualities of the universe. Any perfection or consummation, whether audible or not, could be regarded by both Pater and the Rhymers as "music" or "a music." Thus for Pater "music" was appropriate to such diverse concepts as a comprehensive culture, an ethical system, and an ideal life.

Music as the totality of the arts appeals powerfully to the young Marius in his Cyrenaic stage, after the death of his friend Flavian: "The study of music, in that wide Platonic sense, according to which music comprehends all those matters over which the Muses of Greek mythology preside, would conduct one to an exquisite appreciation of all the finer traits of nature and of man." At the same stage in his spiritual development Marius visualizes his life in Cyrenaic completeness: "... one's existence from day to day, [will come] to be like a well-executed piece of music; that 'perpetual motion' in things (so Marius figured the matter to himself, under the old Greek imageries) according itself to a kind of cadence or harmony." Later, under the influence of the Stoic emperor, Marcus Aurelius, Marius has moved away from his earlier Cyrenaic position and is contemplating the Attic religion and ethical system: "The old Greek morality, again, with all its imperfections, was certainly a comely thing. --Yes! a harmony, a music, in men's ways, one might well hesitate to jar!" Again, detecting an ordonnance of an intangible kind, Pater calls it music. As the novel ends, Marius, dying with the plague, ambivalently approaches Christianity and reviews the meaning of life: "For still, in a shadowy world, his deeper wisdom had ever been with a jealous estimate of gain and loss, to use life, not as the means to some
problematic end, but, as far as might be, from dying hour to dying hour, an end in itself—a kind of music, all-sufficing to the duly trained ear, even as it died out on the air."31 The common denominator in these experiences is harmony or concord; music, here, is not the horizontal structure of melody, as it is in "The School of Giorgione," but a vertical or static relationship, in which elements are taken simultaneously.

Turning to the Rhymers' contemporary French influences, we find the same ambivalence in the relationship of music to poetry that characterizes Pater's writings. For Verlaine music was quintessential poetry, poetry freed from discourse, while for Mallarmé music and discourse were to be reconciled through an antinomy. The preceding is a gross statement in which subtleties have been repressed so that the opposition might appear more clearly. Yet the Rhymers in their avid embrace of music as a poetic ideal seem not to have found these positions pragmatically inconsistent, each being integral to their generalized poetic.

That diverse ideas (e.g. Pater's earlier and later pronouncements on the relationship of poetry to music) coexist is never very surprising. In terms of Symbolist-Decadent developments and their impact upon the Rhymers, it is even less so. Mallarmé, for all of his considerable influence as a chef d'oeuvre (a title, incidentally, which he resented), wrote little on the importance of music to literature that was both clear and accessible to the Rhymers. First, he prided himself on writing evocatively rather than descriptively, and second, his major formulations of ideals that had evolved and exerted influence over a lifetime were not published until the mid-nineties. As a result the possibility exists that the Rhymers more admired than actually knew what they believed to
be Mallarmé's poetic. Still, the importance of Mallarmé as an aesthetic influence must not be underestimated. As mentioned earlier, Mallarmé the conversationalist, Mallarmé le maître, was personally known to Symons and Yeats. Symons, the man who later wrote The Symbolist Movement in Literature, was an apostle of Mallarmé to the Rhymers from the earliest days of the Club. Furthermore, Mallarmé had no compunctions about drawing on his earlier writings, "Solemnity" and "Crisis in Poetry" exemplifying such re-use, a practice which surely would have made precise apprehension of his aesthetic theories more difficult. Yet some of these earlier statements could have been familiar to the Rhymers. As an example, "Crisis in Poetry," published in 1895, contains fifteen paragraphs from an essay published three years earlier in Henley's The National Observer, a periodical to which several Rhymers contributed. While it is true that the Rhymers were active poets before Mallarmé published his most famous dicta, they had some immediate knowledge of and a considerable second-hand acquaintance with his poetic when they wrote or selected their poetry for the Club's anthologies.

In considering the effect of Schopenhauer and Wagner on Mallarmé, I suggested that for the Symbolist master, music was a vehicle of mystery and, at least, an avenue to the Ideal. And for Mallarmé poetry, as well as music, aspired to represent something resembling the Schopenhauerean Idea: "Poetry, when human language has been reduced to its essential rhythm, is the expression of the mysterious meaning of the various aspects of our existence." This poetry does not aspire to the condition of music, certainly not to be music. It is, nevertheless, dependent on music:
In order to give life or meaning to literature, we must reach that "great symphony." Perhaps no one ever will. Nevertheless, the ideal has obsessed even the most unconscious writers, and its main lines—however gross or fine—are to be found in every written work. The perfect poem we dream of can be suggested by Music itself: and if our own written melody seem imperfect when it has ceased, we must lay siege to the other and plagiarize.35

Only music can convert verse into poetry, and since this musical quality is indispensable to poetry, Mallarmé suggested the poet's "plagiarizing." However, there is a discursive quality to which poetry aspires. Implicitly, this is a quality of verse. Unlike Pater, who opposed music to prose literature in a form-content distinction, Mallarmé opposed music to verse, but their conjunction produces poetry, which surpasses either:

. . . Since Wagner appeared, Music and Verse have combined to form Poetry.

Either one of these two elements, of course, may profitably stand apart in triumph and integrity, in a quiet concert of its own if it chooses not to speak distinctly. Or else the poem can tell of their reassociation and restrengthening: the instrumentation is brightened to the point of perfect clarity beneath the orchestral veil, while verse flies down the evening darkness of the sounds. That modern meteor—the symphony—approaches thought with the consent or ignorance of the musician. And thought itself is no longer expressed merely in common language.36

In considering verse without music, we are inevitably reminded of "et tout le reste est littérature," Verlaine's dismissal of the prosaic.

The Mallarméan rapprochement of literature and music is as complete as Pater's is unsatisfactory. Mallarmé's poetic combines them to produce a surpassing art, whereas Pater can only establish them as polar arts. We may recall Pater's referring to music and prose literature as "the opposite terms of art" in an essay in which he qualifies his comments on prose by insisting on their equal applicability to poetry. He finds the "specific excellence" of literature to be the "absolute correspondence
of the term to its import." In other words excellence in literature is a function of denotation. But for Mallarmé it was connotation which distinguishes poetry:

"It is not description which can unveil the efficacy and beauty of monuments, seas, or the human face in all their maturity and native state, but rather evocation, allusion, suggestion... For what is the magic charm of art, if not this: that... it delivers up that volatile scattering which we call the Spirit, Who cares for nothing save universal musicality."

Music can do nothing to make the term denote the object, but such denotation is what "the absolute correspondence of the term to its import" demands. However, when the objective is "evocation, allusion, suggestion," i.e. to "describe not the object, but the effect it produces," then the music integral to the poetry is essential to the accomplishment of the poet's objective.

Before leaving Mallarmé's complex poetic, we should note that "music" was not always audible for him. Rather, it was a series of patterned nuances, a pattern which is the sine qua non of poetry. This inaudible music that seems both to inform the poem and eventuate from it is what he had in mind when he described the mind's encounter with literature: "Thus the invisible air, or song, beneath the words leads our divining eye from word to music; and thus, like a motif, invisibly it inscribes its fleuron and pendant there." Perhaps some comparable early statement of the "master" inspired Johnson and Dowson to write what Symons has called the "music of silence": "Maidens! make a low music: merely make / Silence a melody, no more" and "A gift of Silence, sweet! / ... Is all the gift I bear." ("Collaterally inspired" might be more appropriate; Keats's lines, "Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard / Are sweeter...","

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were surely known to every English lover of poetry in the nineties.)
The very concepts of beauty and pattern in silence were natural to Mal-
larmé, who found beauty in the blank, white page.41

The Mallarméan poetic is a difficult one; nevertheless, he was always as faithful to it as possible. Verlaine's, on the other hand, is relatively simple, but a childlike figure like Verlaine could hardly have been expected consistently to apply any rule to his own work. In "Art poétique" he has left us a manifesto whose plea for evocative and symbolic poetry, uncontaminated by polemics, can scarcely be misconstrued. That his own religious poems have a polemical taint is irrelevant to the validity of his beautiful plea for pure poetry.

"Art poétique" begins with two stanzas in which music and imprec-
sion are discussed in somewhat Mallarméan terms, but with an important difference. For Verlaine music took precedence over other poetic ele-
ments, almost as if it were the quintessential element of poetry. We know that for Mallarmé music was necessary to convert verse to poetry, but for Verlaine music's primacy was such that it almost sufficed as poetry:

De la musique avant toute chose,
Et pour cela préfère l'Impair
Plus vague et plus soluble dans l'air
Sans rien en lui qui pese ou qui pose.

Il faut aussi que tu n'ailles point
Choisir tes mots sans quelque méprise:
Rien de plus cher que la chanson grise
Où l'Indécis au Précis se joint.

The next three stanzas salute the nebulous, praise light and shade, and warn against epigram, wit, and laughter. Next comes what became the rally-
ing cry against the didacticism of the century: "Prends l'éloquence et
tords-lui son cou!" Then, after a tirade against rhyme, come two stanzas like the opening ones, reaffirming the musical and the allusive:

De la musique encore et toujours!
Que ton vers soit la chose enlevée
Qu'on sent qui fuit d'une âme en allée
Vers d'autres cieux à d'autres amours.

Que ton vers soit la bonne aventure
Éparse au vent crispé du matin
Qui va fleurant la menthe et le thym ...
Et tout le reste est littérature.42

Elegance, humor, and wit are to be banished in favor of the sensuous and unsubstantial, but music is to be the one indispensable component of poetry. Although Verlaine's purport is clear, since his shadowy poem illustrates his manifesto, it is difficult to state the precise content of "Art poétique." Perhaps it suggests that music converts literature (not merely verse) to poetry, but it seems more plausibly read as holding up music to be the poetic ideal.

Verlaine leads directly to the Rhymers. Yeats never tired of citing Verlaine's comment about Tennyson as a justification for the Rhymers' preference for lyricism over discursiveness: "Had not Verlaine said of In Memoriam, 'When he should have been broken-hearted he had many reminiscences.'"43 Dowson adulated Verlaine, Symons dedicated London Nights to him, and both Rhymers translated his poetry. With this mention of Verlaine we by no means exhaust the list of poets and critics who influenced the Rhymers in the making of their poetic; Rossetti and Swinburne, especially, who so emphasized musicality, must not be overlooked. But the English romantics, the nineteenth century German aestheticians, Pater, Mallarmé, and Verlaine were the major factors in the shaping of a poetic
whose center was music. Next we shall turn to the Rhymers' criticism and poetry that we may see how they used this aesthetic legacy.

3. Music and the Rhymers' Poetry

Form, subject, and metaphor—under these three rubrics the Rhymers' use of music in their poetry naturally falls. The predilection for musical form was, in part, anti-intellectual; music stood as the antithesis to rhetoric, so the attempt to abolish intellection in poetry was conducted under the banner of music. A second consequence of the new concern for musical form was an impetus to euphony, "verbal music." Musical form also led to lyrical formalism—a fondness for fixed forms, for poems as songs.

Not only formally, but substantively, did music figure importantly for the Rhymers. Symons and Hillier were devotees of the musical stage: the music-hall and opera, respectively. Yeats chronicled the peasant singer and fiddler, while both Yeats and Rhys drew heavily on the peasant musical tradition.

Third, music was a dominant metaphor. Music as an ideal or harmonious state was implicit in much nineteenth century poetry; certainly the Rhymers, too, heard the "music of the spheres." Often, however, "music" was merely an extended metaphor, informing an entire poem; then the term entailed no special philosophical presumptions. Still more frequently musical terms and concepts were used less rigorously, as part of a pattern of aural imagery rather than in a single extended metaphor.

That aesthetic ideas focusing on poetry in terms of music were current among the Rhymers is clear, yet their taking root among these young
poets raises a question: why were they so especially sensitive to such thinking? Biographical data suggest a partial answer.

Symons, for one, was an enthusiastic pianist. Music was his favorite escape during an unhappy youth, when he was struggling to extricate himself from a puritanical, Methodist upbringing: "I have a passion for Schumann and get to hear every scrap of his I come across, and every book he wrote or anyone wrote about him. I have just bought the Carnival and am playing it whenever I can spare a moment's time." 44

A similar youthful penchant for music is evident in many of Johnson's Winchester letters: "I can give you a ticket for concert here: as a member of 'Glee Club' I have some at my disposal. I won't let you off--So don't try!" 45 Referring to the same concert, he writes a few days later: "You will hear fairly good music--nothing 'sacred' though nothing unworthy of the name of music." 46

Yeats, though tone-deaf, according to Hone, was haunted by music: never was he to decide the relationship of poetry to music to his satisfaction. 47 From his early experiments with Florence Farr's reading his poetry to the psaltery to his broadcasting poetry set to music in the thirties, he never arrived at a total reconciliation of these arts. Yeats, unlike Pater, would not permit music to legislate to poetry: "A poem should be a law to itself as plants and beasts are." 48 Nonetheless, because of their common aural quality, he felt that some special nexus had to exist between music and lyric poetry. As he said in his later years: "... I used to insist that all poems should be spoken (hence my plays) or sung..." 49
If music puzzled Yeats, it reduced Dowson to ambivalence. According to Plarr, Dowson "used to quote with approval Gautier's dictum that music is the most disagreeable of all sounds." Yet one of the stories of his 1895 collection, Dilemmas: Stories and Studies in Sentiment, is entitled "An Orchestral Violin" and centers around a priceless old instrument. Passing musical allusions abound in his work. It is doubtful that a confirmed music hater could have written so lovingly of the art and its instruments. Be that as it may, the gospel of music was received by these poets who made of it structure, content, and image, not always regarding these differing uses as discretely as they are treated in the following pages.

Music meant form. "Prends l'éloquence et torde-lui son cou!" was an ubiquitous line for the Rhymers. It is music, said Pater, in which the ideal of all art is most nearly achieved: "to get rid of its responsibility to its subject or material." In reaction not only to the poetry of Tennyson and Browning, but to the intellectual prose of Carlyle, Newman, and Arnold ("Victorian sages," to use John Holloway's apt phrase), writing a "pure poetry," free from rhetorical contamination, seemed a worthy objective. Yeats's retrospective summary grasps the spirit of the nineties:

The revolt against Victorianism meant to the young poet a revolt against irrelevant descriptions of nature, the scientific and moral discursiveness of In Memoriam... the political eloquence of Swinburne, the psychological curiosity of Browning, and the poetical diction of everybody. Poets said to one another over their black coffee—a recently imported fashion—"We must purify poetry of all that is not poetry," and by poetry they meant poetry as it had been written by Catullus, a great name at that time, by the Jacobean writers, by Verlaine, by Baudelaire.

The war against rhetoric, a conflict whose history was recollected by a
mellowed Yeats, had an immediacy for the schoolboy Johnson. Criticizing
the poetry of a young schoolfellow, he writes (in 1884) "that he, like
poor Clough, mars his work with the sense of a lesson, a moral, a truth:
whereas poetry has no relation to morality nor theology nor theosophy, but
is for itself: one verse of the 'Blessed Damozel' is . . . worth the
whole of 'Dipsychus. . . .'"52 Behind Johnson's impetuosity is the con-
viction articulated by Verlaine and Yeats and shared by the Rhymers as a
whole--that lyricism and rhetoric are incompatible.

Pretentiousness and pronouncement were the villains. Contrast
the close of Plarr's "Ad Cinerarium" with the standard eulogy elicited
by the sight of a funeral urn:

    Ah 'twas well! It scarcely matters
    What is sleeping in the keeping
    Of this house of mortal tatters,—

    Steel of steel, or rose of roses,
    Man or woman, Celt or Roman,
    If but soundly he reposes! (2 BRC, p. 4)

Rhetoric would have required a version of "Ars longa, vita brevis," but
Plarr avoided what Ian Fletcher calls the "Abyss Didactic." Instead,
Plarr wrote an insouciant poem in which sound takes precedence over sub-
stance.

The many quatrains and other short poems in the two Books of the
Rhymers' Club are also typically unheroic, or mock-heroic. It is the
moment that dominates these short poems, which are, in many cases, exer-
cises in carpe diem. Plarr, Rhys, Radford, and Todhunter were especi-
ally prone to these abbreviated lyrical outbursts, expressive of the anti-
rhetorical attitude common among the Rhymers. Rhys's "Epitaph on Hafiz,
a Young Linnet," could have been another occasional poem in which the im-
mortality of poetry was praised, but Rhys had the courage to resist the
The impulse against rhetoric is even the subject of a Todhunter quatrain:

Women were poets once, and dumbly wrought
Sweet love-songs from the perilous stuff of Thought,
Now they have learnt to speak in dreadful prose,
Thundering in our dazed ears their must and ought.
("The New Sinai," BRC, p. 85)

Behind this conventionally anti-feminist facade is a strong rejection of any attempt to inject rhetoric into lyricism.

The preference for the ephemeral also informs Radford's short poem, "A Choice of Likenesses." As a lyricist Radford chooses the "glance of sudden charm" over "the looks that stay":

"Mey," said the husband, "give him this,"
In manifest alarm,
"This is her very likeness;--that
Has but a sudden charm."

"The look that flashes into light
And quickly dies away
May blind some passer: as for me,
I love the looks that stay."

And I but said: (what could I say--
Not dreaming any harm?)
"They're yours, old friend, her looks that stay.
Spare then to me--she surely may--
This glance of sudden charm." (BRC, p. 66)

Whatever interest this poem has is an inherent one. It lays no claim to affirming a truth beyond itself.

Another instance of eschewing the rhetorical opportunity may be found in Yeats's "An Epitaph." This poem is replete with symbolism, some obvious, like that of the cypress and that of the yew, some arcane, such
as the message upon the cross. Like "The Blessed Damozel" it deals with that traditional favorite of lyric poets, death and the maiden.

I dreamed that one had died in a strange place
Near no accustomed hand,
And they had nailed the boards above her face,
The peasants of that land,
And wandering, planted by her solitude
A cypress and a yew.
I came and wrote upon a cross of wood
--Man had no more to do--
"She was more beautiful than thy first love
This lady by the trees,"
And gazed upon the mournful stars above
And heard the mournful breeze. (BRC, p. 88)

Yeats was generally faithful to his standards of that period. "An Epitaph" does not offend the reader with "irrelevant descriptions of nature," "scientific and moral discursiveness," "political eloquence," or "psychological curiosity," although more than a trace of that "poetical diction" against which Yeats inveighed is present in this poem.

A logical concomitant of a distaste for rhetoric in poetry is an appreciation of euphony. When discursive values in poetry are de-emphasized, substance can only yield precedence to sound. Euphony is thus a major canon, in fact the principal one, of the Rhymers' poetic. That neither contemporary nor recent criticism widely testifies to this statement does not prove it unfounded. Since the Rhymers were not technically innovative in the manner of Hopkins, nor as repetitiously insistent on devices for stressing aural elements as was Swinburne, their poetry has seldom compelled critics to fasten on technique. On the contrary, what have more often been emphasized are the substantive aspects of the Rhymers' poetry: Symons' Impressionism; Yeats's, Johnson's, and Rhys's dissimilar antiquarianisms; and Dowson's and Todhunter's purported
decadence. The slightness of some of these topics and the exaggerated aesthetic distance of others are themselves indices of the extent to which these poets subordinated subject matter to aural values.

Although the Rhymers' euphony is no literary commonplace, the poetic ear of key Rhymers has attracted attention. Yeats, the greatest Rhymor, has long been recognized as a master of euphony. Louis Untermeier, choosing "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," "The Cap and Bells," and other Yeatsian poems for his Modern British Poetry: A Critical Anthology, notes this quality in the Irish poet: "None of his books are without his particular beauty, a transformation of old themes into a personal music. This age has produced few lyrics more haunting than his, few indeed as musical as those here reprinted." Or, as a recent editor of Yeats, M. L. Rosenthal, has said: "Early and late he has the simple, indispensable gift of enchanting the ear."

However gifted Yeats was in writing verbal music, it was Dowson who, among the Rhymers, could describe his own poetry as "verses making for mere sound, and music, with just a suggestion of sense, or hardly that." Dowson is deprecating his work in finding "just a suggestion of sense" in it, but he is astutely extracting the kernel of his poetry: "sound and music." Likewise, the writer of his obituary in the Athenaeum, whose columns were generally favorable to Dowson, stressed the same properties in the poet's work: "He had neither sustained thought nor sustained passion, but he could set an exquisite moment to music. The music was faint, and did not seize upon the ear by any experimental boldness in the cadence." Euphony is also suggested by Plarr and Symons in their tributes to Dowson. Plarr, while admitting that Dowson "used to quote
with approval Gautier's dictum that music is the most disagreeable of all sounds," nevertheless felt that "Dowson's poetry has a kind of kinship to a certain sort of music.... His lovely poems... can truly be compared to some melody by some great composer." Symons was less metaphorical, more direct, in praising his fellow Rhymer's sense of euphony: "There never was a poet to whom verse came more naturally for the song's sake." That Plarr and Symons lit on these qualities in Dowson suggests that musicality was a significant consideration in their own poetry, even if neither was as much the master of the aural effect as was Dowson or Yeats.

Symons and Johnson, too, have been cited for their aural sensibility, as shown through their poetry. In his early critical study T. Earle Welby recognized this quality in Symons' verse:

Poetry has been defined for him... by two sentences of Joubert's: "In the style of poetry every word reverberates like the sound of a well-tuned lyre and leaves after it numberless undulations." "Nothing is poetry which does not transport; the lyre is in a certain sense a winged instrument...." Prose exists to be read, poetry to be heard, if only with the ghostly voice in the mind of its solitary reader. If Welby's surmise is correct, that for Symons poetry was primarily an aural affair, then he was a poet who must have found a special satisfaction in the meetings of the Rhymers' Club. But Symons was not as obviously fond of public declamation as was Johnson, who is cited by both Yeats and Plarr for the quality of his reading. Yeats recalls Johnson's "musical monotone, whose meaning and cadence found the most precise execution," and Plarr remembers Johnson as a Rhymer "who read marvelously, as a man peritus." But his sense of euphony was not limited to his reading.
So much of his work being formal and academic, critics have sometimes failed to realize how "musical" Johnson could be, particularly in a poem like "To Morfydd." Not Katharine Tynan: she knew him also to be a craftsman in sound. She writes: "But his poetry had a curious wild lovely strain in keeping with his love for the wind and open spaces, as in this unearthly lovesong:" she then reprints much of "To Morfydd," a poem to which we will return. In part Miss Tynan is differentiating Johnson the nature-lover from Johnson the pedant, but she is also campaigning for Johnson as a poet, a man with an ear, as opposed to a disembodied intellect who wrote verse. He, too, was a Rhymer and, like the others, a man who realized that euphony is indispensable to good poetry.

Surely the most cogent argument for the importance of euphony to the Rhymers is their poetry itself. While the Rhymers were not innovators in this respect, they demonstrated unusual dexterity in the manipulation of sound. Recurrent sounds contribute to the architectonic of Dowson's work, as of "Cynara" and "O Mors!" Johnson uses patterning this way in "To Morfydd," but in "By the Statue of King Charles the First at Charing Cross," he reveals another important aspect of the Rhymers' euphony: the reinforcement of discursive content (meager that it may be) through a non-discursive order of sounds. Consonant clusters, diphthongs and vowels requiring more time for pronunciation, and metrical inversions are correlated with passages describing statis or the slow movement of time. An alternation of consonants and short vowels is employed when poetic time is fleeting. In these four and other Rhymers' poems we can discover sound either informing structure or augmenting substance.
"Non sum qualis eram bonae sub regno Cynarae"—"Cynara," as it is usually named—was called by Symons "certainly one of the great lyrical poems of our time." Yet its appeal is elusive. Graham Hough has referred to it as "the standing symbol of the split between an ideal love and that of the market-place." Vivian de Sola Pinto has found the poem "notable as an expression of the unhappiness of the poet and his sense of the emptiness of the world in which he lived," but also an "attempt to romanticize the squalid and second-rate." The extreme verdict is that of William York Tindall, who judges Dowson mostly as the poet of "Cynara" and thereby dismisses him: "Flinging roses, crying for madder music, stronger wine, Dowson follows the course of Dorian Gray and all the students of sensation." These three judgments typify the range of "Cynara" criticism. Hough, a generally astute student of the nineties, admires the poem, although he goes on to say that its artistic validity is largely pre-Freudian. Pinto finds a certain fidelity in "Cynara," but condemns that to which the poem is faithful as unworthy of great poetry, Tindall, from his moral pinnacle, is severe. Whatever their differences may be, these critics agree in judging what is a standard anthology piece in terms of its reproduction of reality, i.e. by mimetic criteria, only disagreeing as to how germane that reality is to the poem and whether or not such reality is admissible into the Contemporary Palace of Art. These are representative comments, indicative of the critical tendency to direct attention toward the Rhymers' "rhetoric," an ephemeral quality at best, rather than toward their "euphony," the group's major strength. When Pinto recognizes "Cynara's" "original and attractive metrical movement" and its poet's "gift of word music," he approaches the aesthetic value of
the poem; unfortunately, he does not enlarge on these remarks to the extent that he does on the content of Dowson's poetry.

"Cynara," written in Alexandrines, has four six-line stanzas. The fifth line of each stanza is an intentional variation, being iambic pentameter. The first clue to the poet's prosodic intent is to be found in the name Cynara. Why would a poet using an iambic scheme select a name that must be pronounced as a dactyl? Could not his beloved have been Marie, Dianne, Elaine, or any of innumerable feminine names that are iambic? Yes, but then this recurrent word would not have only short vowels, an initial sibilant consonant, and a trailing accent. Dowson thought it preferable to build in this metrical discrepancy than to use a key name that could not satisfy his standards of euphony.

The strophic character of "Cynara" also suggests a musical conception. No stanza itself is symmetrical, but all four are parallel. In each stanza the first three lines are iambic hexameter with masculine endings, the fourth and sixth hexameters with feminine endings, while the fifth is a pentameter. The final line of each stanza is an unvarying refrain: "I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion."

No matter how well executed, such stanzaic patterning is no more than a poetic commonplace. The specific excellence of "Cynara" emerges in Dowson's control of repetitive elements of sound through alliteration, assonance, and repetend, as in the opening stanza:

Last night, ah yesternight, betwixt her lips and mine
There fell thy shadow, Cynara! thy breath was shed
Upon my soul, between the kisses and the wine;
And I was desolate and sick of an old passion,
   Yea, I grew desolate and bowed my head;
I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion.  (2 ERC, p. 60)
Perhaps the most obvious devices are the repetends: "Night," "desolate," and the reiterated personal pronouns. Almost as insistent are such alliterations as "last" and "lips," "there" and "thy," "shadow" and "shed," "soul" and "sick," "betwixt" and "between," and "faithful" and "fashion." Yet, although the pattern defies being overlooked, it is a subtle one. The alliterated consonants are fricatives and continuants, those of "betwixt" and "between" excepted. Such sounds are less obtrusive than stops, like those found in "betwixt" and "between," but the force of the alliteration is modulated in this instance by the intervention of the second line. Important as this rhythm of initial consonants may be, it is the tone coloring created through careful assonance that gives "Cynara" its characteristic euphony.

The subtlety of sound patterning of Dowson's alliteration also informs his vowel arrangements, creating an order of which the reader is always aware, but which never seems obtrusive. To appreciate this fully, we must digress into phonetics to consider briefly the vowel trapezoid. Vowels are usually classified in terms of where they are formed in the oral resonance chamber. The juxtaposition of jaw height, tongue position, and lip configuration is summarized by referring to a vowel as "high," "low," or "central," and as "front," "back," or "central." The least obtrusive vowels are the central ones: those heard in such words as "but" "above" (both syllables), "burden" (both syllables), and "integrate" (second syllable). These vowels require the least pronunciation time and demand the minimum stress; they are neither conspicuously high nor low in pitch and are often slurred. Contrast these with the "harder" vowels formed at the front or rear of the oral resonance chambers: the
front vowels of "beet," "bait," and "bat," and the rear ones of "boot," "boat," and "bought." These six vowels call for more time and greater stress, and are pronounced in a higher or lower frequency (pitch) than the central vowels. Midway between these extremes are the front vowels in "bit" and "bet," the low central vowel of "cot," and the back vowel of "foot." Finally, diphthongs must be borne in mind—those monosyllabic vowel combinations heard in "kite," "cow," "coin," and "cue." Some diphthongs rise, i.e. have a more heavily stressed second element, as in "cue"; others fall, i.e. have a lighter stress on the second element, as in "kite." These various distinctions into high or low and front or back among vowels, and into rising or falling among diphthongs, significantly matter toward an understanding of the "music" of Dowson's poetry, "Cynara" in particular.

Several patterns of sound are clearly discernible in the opening stanza. First, mid-vowels were overwhelmingly preferred by Dowson to either front or back vowels. Only in "soul," "between," "desolate," "old," "passion," "Yea," "grew," "faithful," "to," "fashion," and "shadow" are extreme front or back vowels found, and only six of these are arses, despite the usual placement of the ictus on the "long" vowel. Inasmuch as there are seventy vowels or diphthongs in each stanza, the incidence of "long" or "hard" vowels is especially low. Second, the few diphthongs used, as those in "night" and "bowed," are falling diphthongs, which harmonize with the falling accent of "yesternight," "shadow," "Cynara," "desolate," "faithful," "passion," and "fashion": feminine words that are contrapuntal to an iambic scheme. Third, of these seventy vowel or diphthong sounds, each has one or more alliterative partners, with a single exception: "bowed" in the pentameter line is an anomaly, a
contrasting sound in a line of contrasting meter. Fourth, the Alexandrine lines do not founder like the notorious Twickenham serpent, "That, like a wounded snake, drag its slow length along," because Dowson alternated vowel and consonant in adjacent syllables, rather than massing consonants in clusters. Pope deliberately slowed the tempo of his line by juxtaposing stops, as in "snake, drags" and "length," in addition to using central vowels as little as possible. It was Dowson's feeling for a rhythm of vowels and consonants that constrained him to write "my breast" and "mine arms" in adjacent lines of the second stanza of "Cynara"; "my arms" would have needlessly forced two vowels into adjacent positions. The same sense of euphony called for "betwixt" rather than the more usual "between" in the first line of the opening stanza. The next word, "her," begins with a glide, or semi-vowel. Because it has been treated as a vocalic, time was provided for the consonant cluster in "betwixt," whose vowel is assonant with the following "lips." Now, "between" is used in the third line, creating a pleasant if familiar tension: "betwixt" and "between." A parallelism is thereby evoked "betwixt her lips and mine," on the one hand, and "between the kisses and the wine," on the other. The delicacy of Dowson's handling of sound with its avoidance of obtrusive elements affords few obstacles to a rapidly moving line. As a result, the traditional objections to the English Alexandrine do not hold.

But when Dowson wished to write emphatic verse he had no difficulty, even when confined to Alexandrines. The solution lay in strengthening the alliterative pattern, using fewer central vowels, and clustering consonants. The first three lines of the third stanza of "Cynara" exemplify this forceful iambic hexameter:
I have forgot much, Cynara! gone with the wind;
Flung roses, roses riotously with the throng;
Dancing to put thy pale, lost lilies out of mind;

The consecutive resonance of "roses, roses riotously" is echoed by "pale, lost lilies." "Forget" and "gone," "with" and "wind," and "put" and "pale" are also alliterative. The consonance of "flung" and "throng" delays the stanza, as does the piling of consonant on consonant: "have forgot much, Cynara!"; "Flung roses, roses riotously"; and "throng;/ Dancing." In Dowson's hands the Alexandrine proves a versatile instrument; rapid and compliant when assonant, central vowels are used with alternating consonants; massive and stately, when heavy alliteration is placed among consonant clusters.

In short lines, too, Dowson was the master of euphony:

Give over playing:
   Cast thy viol away:
Merely laying
   Thine head my way:
Prithee, give over playing,
   Grave or gay. (BRC, p. 30)

It was "O Mors" which, with "Villanelle of Sunset," allegedly inspired Yeats to propose The Book of the Rhymers' Club. Perhaps Symons had "O Mors" in mind when he wrote of Dowson: "... His theories were all aesthetic, almost technical ones, such as a theory... that the letter 'v' was the most beautiful of the letters, and could never be brought into verse too often." This dictum, which Symons says was derived from Poe, is liberally applied in the quoted stanza, with its six 'v' sounds in as many short lines.

Johnson, more the intellectual and less the aesthetic artist than Dowson, showed a greater aptitude in his poetry for correlating sound
with substance, although few of his lines are as "musical" as Dowson's best lines. This correspondence of discursive and aural qualities may be seen in two quatrains from "By the Statue of King Charles the First at Charing Cross":

Sombre and rich, the skies;
Great glooms, and starry plains.
Gently the night wind sighs;
Else a vast silence reigns.

Alone he rides, alone,
The fair and fatal king:
Dark night is all his own,
That strange and solemn thing. (BRC, p. 4)

The first quatrain suggests a stasis, interrupted only by a diffident breeze. The stars, Johnson's prevalent metaphor for the divine and unchanging, are much in evidence. As the scene is stationary, so is the verse. Metrical inversions and consonant clusters contribute to an adagio line.

The six syllables of each lines permit little metrical variation, but Johnson accents the first syllable of each line in the opening quatrain. A scansion of it might look like this:

\texttt{\textbackslash ' u \ u \ '}\texttt{\textbackslash ' u \ u \ u \ }
Sombre / and rich / the skies;
\texttt{\textbackslash ' u \ u \ '}\texttt{\textbackslash ' u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u \ u
Alone / he rides, / alone,
The fair / and fa / tal king:
Dark night / is all / his own,
That strange / and sol/ emn thing.

The only departure from the regular meter is in the spondee of the third line, "Dark night," reminiscent of (although inconsistent with) the gloomy, starry night of the first quatrain.

In this second quatrain there is less of a tendency to heap consonants in adjacent syllables. In "Alone he rides, alone," two theses are single vowels, the other, "he," comprising a semi-vowel and a vowel. The consonants of "alone" and "ride," the 'd' excepted, are aurally of short duration. This sound pattern, like that of the strictly observed meter, helps to move the line much as King Charles rides.

For poetry to be reducible to euphony it would have to be totally non-discursive. The impossibility of this conceded, we can see how Johnson approached non-discursiveness in "To Morfydd":

A voice on the winds,
A voice by the waters,
Wanders and cries:

Oh! what are the winds?
And what are the waters?
Mine are your eyes.

Western the winds are,
And western the waters
Where the light lies:

Oh! what are the winds?
And what are the waters?
Mine are your eyes!

Cold, cold, grow the winds,
And dark grow the waters,
Where the sun dies:
Oh! what are the winds?
And what are the waters?
Mine are your eyes!

And down the night winds,
And down the night waters,
The music flies:

Oh! what are the winds?
And what are the waters?
Cold be the winds,
And wild be the waters,
So mine be your eyes. (2 BRC, pp. 55-56)

It is hard to reconcile "To Morfydd" with Johnson's strictures on Impressionism, but it is easy to accept the poem on its own merits. As a love song it has been likened to "a bleak utterance of ghost to ghost." But as a pattern of euphony it is a concrete realization.

"To Morfydd" is a series of repetitive structures. The most evident of these is the italicized refrain, which marks the poem as a "song." Second is the repetition of "winds" and "waters" in each of the four stanzas. Third, a key locution is repeated in consecutive lines of each stanza: "a voice," "western," "grow," and "down the night," respectively. The parallelism culminates with the dialectal "be" in the third and fourth lines of the last refrain. Fourth, a single rhyme is reiterated: "cries," "eyes," "lies," "dies," and "flies." All other lines (excepting one) end in "winds" or "waters." Fifth, the alliteration of "winds," "waters," "Wanders," "what," "western," "where," and "wild" is forceful to the point of being overdone. Finally, powerful assonance can be heard in "light lies," "cold, grow," and "waters/ Wanders." Dowson, a greater master of sound timbres than Johnson, would have eschewed contiguous words that are both assonant and alliterative. The cumulative effect of these repetitions is to make the reader or auditor more conscious of
structure than substance. Form, not content, predominates; "To Morfydd" is poetry that "constantly aspires toward the condition of music."

For Yeats the music of poetry was always the antithesis of rhetoric. He vacillated between them, choosing rhetoric at certain stages of his career, euphony at others. Once, a decade after the Rhymers' Club dissolved, he wrote that he favored "the man who, with an average audience before him, uses all means of persuasion--stories, laughter, tears, and but so much music as he can discover on the wings of words." But there was an earlier time when rhetoric was anathema--the period when the Rhymers' Club was formed.

It was then, December, 1890, when Yeats published one of his best known early poems, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," his first major document of the poem as euphony: "Innisfree [was] my first lyric with anything in its rhythm of my own music. I had begun to loosen rhythm as an escape from rhetoric and from the emotion of the crowd that rhetoric brings, but I only understood vaguely and occasionally that I must for my special purpose use nothing but the common syntax." Yeats's own music, according to Hone, was a success with both general and scholarly readers: "'The Lake Isle' was not only generally popular but it set the professors agog by the arrangement of the vowel sounds." What impresses a later professor, Richard Ellmann, is that "the accented vowels vary greatly in the amount of time that they force the tongue to linger over them." This durational pattern lends density to the poem, which seems longer than three quatrains:

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made;
Nine bean rows will I have there, a hive for the honey bee,  
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,  
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings;  
There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,  
And evening full of the linnet's wings.

I will arise and go now, for always night and day  
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds on the shore;  
While I stand on the roadway or on the pavements gray,  
I hear it in the deep heart's core. (BRC, p. 84)

Although the meter of "Innisfree" might not be anomalous, it is both unusual and irregular—a kind of sprung rhythm of six or seven beats per line, with shorter fourth lines. Spondees—"nine bean rows," "bee-loud glade," and "deep heart's core"—occur frequently. Obtrusive words slow the tempo of the poem; this is especially apparent when "Innisfree" is compared to "Cynara." Each poem is an aural tour de force, but the euphony of "Cynara" is that of an Alexandrine pattern, while the melody of "Innisfree" is its own.

As much as the Rhymers aimed for euphony in their poetry, they did not always manipulate sound to their advantage. A final example of the poem as "music," chosen from Symons' work, illustrates this failure:

The little amber-coloured dancers move,  
Like little painted figures on a screen,  
Or phantom dancers haply seen  
Among the shadows of a magic grove.  
("Javanese Dancers: a Silhouette," BRC, p. 57)

In this enclosed quatrain, itself a limiting form, Symons packs repetitions of sound. Anaphora is used in the first two lines: "little amber-coloured dancers" and "little painted figures." Alliteration is heard in "Like little," "figures" and "phantom," and "Among" and "magic." There
is a plethora of nasal consonants: 'm' and 'n' in "amber," "dancers," "move," "painted," "screen," "phantom," "dancers," "seen," "Among," and "magic." Most noticeable, when read aloud, is the assonance of the [æ] sound: "amber," "dancers," "phantom," "dancers," "haply," "shadow," and "magic." This is too impressively assonant an array for four short lines to have been written inadvertently. There is neither the intrinsic aural beauty of "O Mors" or "Innisfree," nor is there a specific rhythmic effect of tone color, as in "Cynara"; nor does Symons achieve the correlation of sound to sense that Johnson does. It would seem that Symons, aiming here at euphony, fell short into the slough of ostentatious technique.

The same conception—poetry as music—induced some Rhymers to rely on fixed forms, principally the ballad and the sonnet, although some esoteric forms, such as the villanelle and the ballade are also present in the anthologies. The superficiality of this approach to the problem of music in poetry sharply contrasts with the impetus to euphony, true "word-music." It was chiefly the refuge of the lesser authors of the Club. Nine of Greene's twelve contributions are sonnets. Two of Ellis' are in this form; "New Words and Old" is a sequence of four sonnets. Symons and Plarr each contributed one to the anthologies, while Dowson wrote "To One in Bedlam" as a sonnet in Alexandrines. Yeats and Rhys were the balladeers among the Rhymers, Yeats publishing six and Rhys two in the books of the Club. Their preference for the ballad was a logical outgrowth of their belief in the bardic tradition, but what are probably Yeats's best poems as a Rhymer, "A Man Who Dreamed of Fairyland" and "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," are not in this simplistic form. Both Yeats and Rhys, however, were more interested in showing allegiance to the
ballad than in slavishly following its pattern. Variations abound: rhyming first and third lines, dimeters in lieu of trimeters, sprung rhythms instead of those of the accentual-stress system, and others.

If the fixed form is questionable as an attempt to impose music upon the poem from without, then musicality by title is an even more dubious practice. Eleven of the poems in the anthologies have "song" in their titles: "Morning: Cycling Song" and "Evening (Evensong)" by Rolleston, "Song of the Labour Movement" and "Song" by Radford, "The Song of the Old Mother" and "A Fairy Song" by Yeats, "Beatrice's Song" and "The Song of Tristram" by Todhunter, "Song of the Songsmiths" by Greene, "Song of the Wulfshaw Larches" by Rhys, and "Song" by Symons. Johnson's "A Burden of Easter Vigil" and Todhunter's "Chorus (from Iphigenia in Aulis)" are also in this category.

To this point we have considered the influence of music as form upon the Rhymers, but music was also their poetic subject, although of minor importance in comparison to form. Symons often alluded to the music halls in his poetry of the nineties, and in "Javanese Dancers: a Silhouette" he goes beyond incidental mention to write a poem picturing a music hall performance. The onomatopoeia of the first quatrains is memorable:

Twitched strings, the clang of metal, beaten drums,
Dull, shrill, continuous, disquieting;
And now the stealthy dancer comes
Undulantly with cat-like steps that cling. (BRC, p. 57)

Symons' escapism was discussed in the preceding chapter, yet his treatment of musical entertainment is not as visionary as that in two of Hillier's poems: "Orpheus in Covent Garden" and "In Opera-land."
Hillier wrote as if he were transported by music:

For us once more the antique lyre is strung
That gave the lost Eurydice release,
Since one whose birthright is the perfect tongue
Of Italy brings back the art of Greece.
("Orpheus in Covent Garden," 2 BRC, p. 71)

Still positing the opera as escape, Hillier could strike a lighter note:

Bold gipsy girls whose love is light,
And hermits of the desert sand,
Long be it ere your charms are trite
And ways are changed in Opera-land.
("In Opera-land," 2 BRC, p. 82)

For each of these poets his choice of subject, music hall or opera, is as much a salute to spectacle as it is an appreciation of music, but the choice reflects on the importance of music to his poetry.

While the city's music lured Symons and Hillier, Yeats listened to folk tunes. The country fiddler was an integral part of the Celtic tradition that he was trying to reestablish:

When I play on my fiddle in Dooney,
Folk dance like a wave of the sea.
My brother is priest in Kilvarnet,
My cousin in Rossnaree.
("The Fiddler of Dooney," 2 BRC, p. 68)

This poem has its theological implications: of the three it is the fiddler of Dooney who will enter heaven first. However, the folk aspects of the poem were more important to Yeats than the moral ones. He also drew on the peasant tradition in "The Folk of the Air," but while the fiddler of Dooney plays an innocent tune, here the music is sinister:

But he heard high up in the air
A piper piping away;
And never was piping so sad,
And never was piping so gay. (2 BRC, p. 39)

Music that is simultaneously sad and gay is the ultimate denial of discourse. When the logical principle of contradiction is repealed, no
statement is intended and no rhetoric is possible.

Yet that very non-discursive quality of music made it a favorite metaphor among the Rhymers, a metaphor employed in a variety of ways. Calling the poet a bard is such common usage that the metaphorical character of the term can easily be overlooked; it is only figuratively that poets sing, but they often did for the Rhymers. Second, as music connoted an ideal harmony for Pater, so it did for certain Rhymers. Third, music seemed a generally honorific term, useful whenever a compliment was intended. Sometimes the Rhymers used music as a central metaphor, whereas in other instances it furnished only incidental figures of speech.

The most explicit presentation by a Rhymer of the poet as singer is in this brief apostrophe by Rhys:

Olwen, all the harps are still,
That would once have chimed for you
From the haunted fields of Wales.
Buried deep in Merlin's Hill,
Lost the lyric note they knew,
Now no more their bardic thrill
Stirs our pulses through and through:
And our later music fails.

("To O.E.," 2 BRC, p. 99)

That the bard was literally once a musician is beside the point. The essence of ancient, legendary Wales can best be evoked by idealizing it as music. Today's poetry being comparatively prosaic, "our later music fails."

Greene's "The Sonnet" is a logically intricate treatment of poetry as music. It is a sonnet about the sonnet in which that form is compared to melody and harmony in a rigorously followed conceit; this music is then treated as an analogue to life. Other poems in which poetry is
treated as music or, analogously, the poet as musician, are Greene's "Song of the Songsmiths" and Todhunter's "The New Sinai." In "Love and Art" Symons has a line about a poet's writing "the love song" he has "yet to pare and trim" (2 RRC, p. 46), and Todhunter could recall Tennyson as "a lordly forest tree,/ His branches filled with music" (2 RRC, p. 2).

Many of these allusions to the poet as musician are merely conventional, but their frequency suggests that for the Rhymers music was the "type" of all the arts.

Earthly music symbolized for these artists an audible, but other-worldly, phenomenon: the music of the spheres or the chorus of the angels. These distinct yet related ideas are found in the poetry of Johnson and Yeats. The "music of the spheres" was a favorite metaphor of Johnson. When pondering his vocation, while still a Winchester schoolboy, he wrote: "I have one monotone to which I will intone my life: 'I will be a priest': not, you may think, the music of the spheres, but at least not out of tune." Or he could describe Chopin's "Marche Funebre" as "the divinest music of this and all other spheres." In "The Last Music" he tells how he "loved this lady of the spheres" and requests an appropriate requiem: "Maidens! make a low music: merely make / Silence a melody, no more" (BRC, p. 49). But in "Mystic and Cavalier" unearthly music is heard that suggests a chorus, perhaps of angels, perhaps of darker powers:

O rich and sounding voices of the air!  
Interpreters and prophets of despair:  
Priests of a fearful sacrament! I come  
To make with you mine home. (2 RRC, p. 10)

Yeats also heard music from the powers beyond. In "A Mystical Prayer to
the Masters of the Elements, Finvarra, Feacra, and Caolte" he beseeches them to use their divine music to solace his beloved:

Great elemental Powers of wind, and wave, and fire,
With your harmonious quire,
Encircle her I love and sing her into peace,
That my old care may cease,
And she forget the wandering and the crimson gloom
Of the Rose in its doom. (2 BRC, p. 91)

In each of these poems music, sensually perceived, is used to evoke the image of the ineffable.

So serviceable is musical metaphor that it appears in about a third of the one hundred thirty-five selections in the two books of the Rhymers' Club. The diversity of items imaged by music is almost beyond enumeration. As concluding examples in this chapter on the importance of music to the poetry of the Rhymers, three poems have been arbitrarily selected: Dowson's "The Garden of Shadow," Johnson's "Celtic Speech," and Symons' "Music and Memory."

In "The Garden of Shadow" a dead love is described in funereal terms. Bondman that he was to the flesh, Dowson juxtaposed sensuous imagery with metaphors of death. Against this background love, personified as a defeated minstrel, appears:

O bright, bright hair! O mouth like a ripe fruit!
Can famine be so nigh to harvesting?
Love that was songful, with a broken lute
In grass of graveyard goeth murmuring. (2 BRC, p. 105)

Implicitly, love is music and musician. Dowson's choosing a musical metaphor is an argument for his conception of love as an ideal state: the love of Cynara, as distinct from carnality.

When music is metaphorical for another system of sound, fewer demands are made upon the reader's imagination than are called for in "The
Garden of Shadow," where music substitutes for love, an abstraction. In "Celtic Speech" music is the image for a series of Celtic languages: the speech of Cornwall, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. The transition from literal to figurative meaning is so gradual that in this stanza on Cornish dialect is passes almost unobserved:

Like music by the desolate Land's End,  
Mournful forgetfulness hath broken:  
No more words kindred to the winds are spoken,  
Where upon iron cliffs whole seas expend  
That strength, whereof the unalterable token  
Remains wild music, even to the world's end.  

(2 BRC, p. 123)

By comparing speech to music, Dowson subordinates its discursive qualities to its euphony. Cornish speech assumes the beauty, power, and indestructibility of the breakers' crashing against Land's End.

More complex in its metaphorical structure is "Music and Memory." Symons' lyric to Katherine Willard, a good friend of the early nineties, visualizes her in terms of music against a literally musical background:

Across the tides of music, in the night,  
Her magical face,  
A light upon it as the happy light  
Of dreams in some delicious place  
Under the moonlight in the night.  

Music, soft throbbing music in the night,  
Her memory swims  
Into the brain, a carol of delight;  
The cup of music overbrims  
With wine of memory, in the night.  

Her face across the music, in the night,  
Her face a refrain,  
A light that sings along the waves of light,  
A memory that returns again,  
Music in music, in the night.  

(BRC, p. 35)

"Music" is precisely that in the first stanza. The first figurative use of the concept is "a carol of delight" in the second stanza. Now memory
is also "music"; memory combines with the actual strains and "the cup of
music overflows." A further involvement occurs in the last stanza when
the auditory metaphor is joined with a visual one. The light upon the
"magical face" of the opening stanza "sings along the waves of light," as
the face is both seen and heard as light and music, all of this "percep-
tion" occurring only as recollection. It is this recollection that is
the first of the two "musics" in the final line of the poem. What Symons
has done is to evoke through the metaphor of music an image that defies
prose paraphrase. As something honorific, ethereal, and finally ine-
ffable, music was one of the richest metaphorical vehicles accessible to
the Rhymers.

It was Symons who said of the Symbolist achievement: "It is all
an attempt to spiritualize literature, to evade the old bondage of rhetoric,
the old bondage of exteriority."78 Perhaps this remark also epitomizes
the Rhymers' objectives in turning to music as a correlative to their art.
NOTES: CHAPTER III


10. See Longaker, Ernest Dowson, p. 21, where he quotes Plarr to this effect.


13. The Philosophy of Schopenhauer, p. 201.


18. Cook, p. 73.


20. The Renaissance, pp. 138-139.

21. Wilde's preface is a series of aphorisms asserting art's intrinsic value and total independence from any extrinsic commitment. Morality in art is categorically dismissed: "There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all." Nor is there room in art for an ethical posture: "No artist has ethical sympathies. An ethical sympathy in an artist is an unpardonable mannerism of style." In sum: "All art is quite useless." (The Works of Oscar Wilde, ed. G. F. Maine [London and Glasgow: Collins, 1963], p. 17.) Symons' position is less one of divorcing art from substantive considerations and more a claim for the artist's right to be unimpeded in his choice of content: "For in art there can be no prejudices, only results." (Studies in Prose and Verse, p. 281.) "I have been attacked, then, on the ground of morality, and by people who, in condemning my book, not because it is bad art, but because they think it bad morality, forget that they are confusing moral and artistic judgments, and limit art without aiding morality. . . . Art may be served by morality; it can never be its servant." (Studies in Prose and Verse, pp. 283-284.)


25. Appreciations, p. 35.


27. P. 114.
32. For the publishing history of these two essays, see Cook, pp. 143 and 125, respectively.

33. "Music and Literature" and "Mystery in Literature," which with "Crisis in Poetry" contain many of Mallarmé's pronouncements most germane to the relationship of music to poetry, were published in France (in French) in October 1894 and September 1896, respectively. As to Mallarmé's influence being disseminated in England, it should be borne in mind that not only Symons and Yeats visited him in Paris, but that Whistler, Wilde, George Moore, William Rothenstein, and Charles Conder also called on Mallarmé, all of whom were known, immediately or less so, by the Rhymers.


40. Symons' metaphor is from his introduction to Dowson's poems, p. xxvi. The Johnson and Dowson citations are from "The Last Music" (BRC, p. 49) and "Amor Umbratilis" (BRC, p. 41), respectively.

41. "An intellectual inhibited by the white sheet of paper which he was too fastidious to violate (a typewriter would have been fatal to his art), Mallarmé might easily have contented himself with tracing elaborate verbal flowers in the margin." (Brereton, p. 297.)

42. Verlaine, pp. 327-328. "Music before everything, and for that prefer the Uneven hazier and more soluble in the air with nothing in it weighty or fixed. Also you must not go to choose your words without any obscurity: there is nothing more precious than the grey song where the Undecided is joined to the precise. . . . Once again and always music! Let your line be the soaring thing which we feel fleeing from a soul going toward other skies and other loves. Let your line be the lucky chance scattered on the impatient morning wind that goes breathing mint and thyme. . . . And all the rest is literature." (Hartley, pp. 224-226.)

44. Quoted in Lhombreaud, p. 22.


47. Hone, p. 383, note. Michael Yeats, speaking in Gainesville, Florida on March 21, 1967, emphasized how the relationship of poetry to music had been a constant concern to his father throughout his creative life.


50. Plarr, p. 65.


52. Russell, p. 164.


56. Quoted in Flower, p. xxii.

57. Plarr, p. 65.

58. Ernest Dowson, p. xxv.


60. Yeats, Autobiography, p. 211 and Plarr, p. 66, respectively.


62. The full text of "0 Mors" appears near the beginning of this chapter. For "Cynara" see 2 BRC, p. 60.
63. Ernest Dowson, p. xxviii.

64. P. 214.

65. P. 23.

66. P. 10.

67. What follows is largely based on Albert H. Marckwardt, Introduction to the English Language (New York: Oxford University Press, 1940). His concept of the vowel trapezoid (p. 52) seems more useful than the standard diagram of the vowel triangle.

68. See Chapter 1, above and Yeats, Autobiography, p. 200.

69. Ernest Dowson, p. xxv.

70. Despite its limitations a two-stress system should suffice for this sort of gross analysis. The ['] indicates a stressed syllable, or arsis; the [u] indicates an unstressed syllable, or thesis.


73. Autobiography, p. 103.

74. Hone, p. 77.


76. Russell, p. 103.

77. Russell, p. 124.

78. The Symbolist Movement, p. 5.
CHAPTER IV
THE RHYMERS IN PERSPECTIVE

1. Isolation and the Image

In 1913 Yeats nostalgically recalled his fellow Rhymers: "Poets with whom I learned my trade, / Companions of the Cheshire Cheese." In his prize-winning "The Grey Rock," the first poem in a volume significantly entitled Responsibilities, Yeats praised the Rhymers for their courage and for their purity of art:

Since, tavern comrades, you have died,
Maybe your images have stood.
Mere bone and muscle thrown aside,
Before that roomful or as good,
You had to face your ends when young—
'Twas wine or women, or some curse—
But never made a poorer song
That you might have a heavier purse.
Nor gave loud service to a cause
That you might have a troop of friends.
You kept the Muses' sterner laws,
And unrepenting faced your ends,
And therefore earned the right— and yet
Dowson and Johnson most I praise—
To troop with those the world's forgot,
And copy their proud steady gaze.

Were this a tribute to friendship, Symons, who "more than any other man" of Yeats's acquaintance "could slip as it were into the mind of another," would have been singled out. Instead, Dowson and Johnson are named to illustrate artistic integrity, as artists who would pander neither to publishers nor the crowd. They are accorded a tentative immortality--"Maybe your images have stood"--because, young and inexperienced that they were, the Rhymers, notably Dowson and Johnson, never compromised their poetry to the world. In their splendid isolation the Rhymers were heroic.
A few years later Ezra Pound—Yeats's friend, critic, and erstwhile secretary—wrote Hugh Selwyn Mauberley, in which the Rhymers are treated as totally unheroic. The opinions are Mauberley's, and Mauberly is a persona, not Pound. To this extent we must differentiate his statements from those in the Rhymers' poetry; in reading them we felt that no harm would come from regarding the voice of any poem as that of the author. Nevertheless, although we need not hold Pound responsible for Mauberley's opinions, for the purpose at hand let us attribute this report of a conversation with Monsieur Verog (Victor Plarr) to Pound:

For two hours he talked of Gallifet;
Of Dowson; of the Rhymers' Club;
Told me how Johnson (Lionel) died
By falling from a high stool in a pub . . .

But showed no trace of alcohol
At the autopsy, privately performed--
Tissue preserved--the pure mind
Arose toward Newman as the whiskey warmed.

Dowson found harlots cheaper than hotels; . . .

Dowson, Johnson, and, implicitly, the Rhymers are abject wastrels in this account. True—Mauberley is only recounting Verog's narrative; furthermore, much of this is satirical. Yet the fact remains that at a glance Yeats and Pound have drawn two apparently irreconcilable pictures of the Rhymers. But with closer scrutiny the discrepancy fades. Yeats is describing poets; Pound, men. In fact, as noted later, Pound is sympathetic to some of the poetic canons to which the Rhymers subscribed.

There is an important parallel between Yeats's and Pound's characterizations of the Rhymers; each regarded these poets of the nineties as separated from the world. Yeats remembers his "Companions of the Cheshire Cheese" as writers of uncontaminated poetry—art that was pure.
because they "kept the Muses' sterner laws." They "unrepenting faced [their] ends," whether that end was "wine or women, or some curse." Pound regards the Rhymers as equally alienated, society preferring temperance and chastity to the Rhymers' pursuits. The difference is clear: Yeats postulated incorruptible artists who unfortunately died young, their curse (wine, women, or what you will) being contributory; Pound made this very curse the evidence for their separation from society. As artists or as men, they were nonetheless cut off from the world. The Rhymers were, in Verlaine's memorable phrase, *poètes maudits*, accursed because they were apart:

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Le monde, que troublait leur parole profonde,
Les exilés. A leur tour ils exilent le monde.
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In each poem, Yeats's or Pound's, the Rhymers are men whose values are irreconcilable to those of the world; that the distaste would be reciprocal was inevitable.

When the artist and his society disdain each other's values, another development occurs so interrelated with this mutual disregard that this second phenomenon is as much cause as effect. I am referring to that turning inward by the artist, that rejection of mimesis discussed earlier, an introversion which gives the creative experience and the object created a greater immediacy than society, nature, or external reality as a whole can have for him. It was in this sort of milieu, apart from external reality, that the Rhymers created their poetry. We have seen how, in the main, each with his special orientation "renounced" the world for some unworldly master: God, the Flesh, or the Devil. We have noted their emphasis on the non-discursive aspects of poetry, discourse
being excluded as entailing rhetoric. "Rhetoric" was the designation of the nineties for poetic impurities: "scientific and moral discursiveness," "political eloquence," and "psychological curiosity," among others. The pure poem was a design; it was a self-contained structure, not a referential or, worse yet, polemical or, what is still more corrupt, a mnemonic device.

For the Rhymers, as for all artists who so react, denying exteriority meant the embracing of the interior truth and a recognition of its compulsion. That such a truth may both defy description and have no objective validity does not vitiate it for those who give it credence. That is why Dowson, writing in 1892, could describe his inward experience to Plarr: "... Though I have done, nor said, nor suffered anything tangible since I last saw or wrote to you, I write as an illuminato: I seem to have seen mysteries; and if I fail to be explicit, it is because my eyes are dazzled." The sense of interior illumination felt by Dowson has a long history, beginning with the earliest mystical experience. As an aesthetic experience and one which is integral with the artist's consciousness of his separation from society, it is a development which has become part of the standard critical awareness only with the flowering of romanticism.

Of the many studies of this cleavage between the artist and society and the artist's consequent (or causal) search for the symbol or aesthetic monad, one of the most germane to an understanding of the Rhymers is "The Artist in Isolation," the first chapter of Frank Kermode's The Romantic Image. After a cursory reference to the Joycean "epiphany" as an instance of the "Image," Kermode alludes to the inter-related
assumptions of the integrity of the Image and the price, alienation from one's society, that one pays for perceiving it:

These two beliefs--in the Image as a radiant truth out of space and time, and in the necessary isolation or estrangement of men who can perceive it--are inextricably associated, and because of their interdependence I find that I must begin this essay on the Image with . . . this ubiquitous assumption that the artist is cut off from other men. . . .

Kermode discovers the source of this tradition in the Renaissance, and he follows it through the centuries to the contemporary scene, highlighting the roles of Keats, Arnold, and Pater in maintaining the tradition intact. Then comes a statement which bears on the importance of the Rhymers as a nexus between the English romantics and such great twentieth century poets as the mature Yeats, and Pound and Eliot:

Now it is well known that Pater's account of the tension between the wisdom of the Image and a more utilitarian knowledge, between the artist's and received morality, were gospel to the "tragic generation"; and for all their perversity, for all their inferiority to these great predecessors, that generation transmitted the doctrine to the twentieth century and fed the imagination of its major poet [Yeats].

Although Yeats is Kermode's choice as the major poet of this century, he admits that "it would have been possible to put Mr. Eliot at the centre instead," and that Pound and Eliot were animated by similar concepts of the Image.

Deferring consideration of the importance of the Rhymers to their successors, we should bear in mind that Kermode's "tragic generation," Yeats's locution for that group of artists in which the Rhymers were predominant, believed in the inviolability of the Image and the estrangement of the artist, the latter condition being the sacrifice necessary for access to the former.
The Rhymers' estrangement is most visible when they are compared with some of the poets of the nineties who were less out of sympathy with the current scene. Henley, a genuine poet in his *In Hospital*, was capable of composing such time-serving pieces as the following, written the year *The Book of the Rhymers' Club* was published:

What have I done for you,  
England, my England?  
What is there I would not do,  
England my own?  
With your glorious eyes austere,  
As the Lord were walking near,  
Whispering terrible things and dear  
As the song on your bugles blown,  
England--  
Round the world on your bugles blown!  
(From "England, my England")

Or, in a notorious example, Kipling (not yet as strident as in the 1899 "Take up the White Man's Burden") could be sure of an approving nod from the Victorian Sages with this 1892 stanza:

And only the Master shall praise us, and only the Master shall blame;  
And no one shall work for money, and no one shall work for fame;  
But each for the joy of the working, and each, in his separate star,  
Shall draw the Thing as he sees It for the God of Things as they are.  
(From "Envoy")

Kipling's allusion to "the Thing as [each] sees It for the God of Things as they are" superficially implies its resemblance to the Image, but on a nearer inspection it is apparent that the only community the two have is being in the same universe of discourse. For the conformist mentality, the kind that appears to be at work in Kipling's poem, the emphasis is on the object and its mimesis; the drawing of it is contingent upon human perception and divine approval. This is indeed remote from "the
Image as a radiant truth out of space and time." The Image, in Kermode's context, is what Yeats conceived in his fifties when he still hoped to write one "Poem maybe as cold / And passionate as the dawn." Because the Image is autonomous and self-sustaining, its existence, once it comes into existence, is in no way a function of creation, perception, or judgment. It is, simply stated, a symbolic truth. While no example from the two anthologies of the club seems precisely to evoke one ("evoke," not "make," inasmuch as an Image could never be created through discourse), Dowson's "Epigram" does capture the artist's longing not only to perceive the "Epiphany," but to objectify it:

Because I am idolatrous and have besought,
With grievous supplication and consuming prayer,
The admirable image that my dreams have wrought
Out of her swan's neck and her dark, abundant hair:
The jealous gods, who brook no worship save their own,
Turned my live idol marble and her heart to stone.

The Image in Dowson's poem is apprehended—-even possessed—-but the price is the fatal denial of human warmth as the love-object is petrified. Pygmalion is inverted to illustrate the separation the Epiphany entails.

Kermode defines the Image as being "out of space and time." These being Kantian terms for the forms of intuition, the Image cannot be apprehended discursively. The alternative is its non-discursive or symbolic apprehension. If the Rhymers were primarily concerned with the evocation of an "Image . . . out of space and time," were they symbolists? This is the first of two questions that have been hovering over this essay from its first reference to French influence. The second, as inevitably called up by the names of Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Mallarmé, and Verlaine, is a related one: "Is the poetry of the Rhymers' Club decadent?" Answers to
these questions will not be further postponed. Could the Rhymers' poetry fit into either or both of these categories, symbolic or decadent, then a meaningful step would have been taken toward placing it in the Western literary tradition. We would have located the Rhymers in the mise en scène. However, as will be shown, to each question the answer is a qualified "no"; the permanence of the Rhymers is neither as English symbolists nor decadents, but as transmitters of the lyric tradition, non-intellectual and dedicated to euphony, to some major twentieth century poets.

2. Symbolism and Decadence

"Symbolism" is a convenient term for an aggregate of ideas originated by French poets of the latter half of the nineteenth century: chiefly Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Verlaine, and Mallarme. Comparison of these poets and theoreticians, however dispersed in time, and the Rhymers' Club, an active and contemporaneous group which eschewed conscious literary theorizing, has nevertheless been popular. The inquiry is simple: do similarities in the poetry or theory, whether explicit or implicit, justify the comparison?

An important historical reason for identifying the Rhymers with Symbolism is Symons' authorship of The Symbolist Movement in Literature. In discussing Gérard de Nerval, a precursor of the movement who committed suicide during one of his flights from reality, Symons told of Nerval's discovery of the first ingredient of Symbolism: "that poetry should be a miracle; not a hymn to beauty, nor the description of beauty, nor beauty's mirror; but beauty itself. . . ."\(^{11}\) This rejection of imitative
aesthetics necessarily makes poetry obscure. If poetry does not tell of beauty, but is beauty, then it cannot hope to imitate a sensible, multi-dimensional world in its own terms. Therefore, for the Symbolist, poetry did not imitate at all, but in being beauty was capable of emanation and of impinging upon the reader. Beauty thus conceived is a relationship between the poet and a concrete object, the tension being embodied in a poem.

Mallarmé, who was to become the most influential theoretician among the Symbolists, arrived at the same conclusion: "Describe not the object itself, but the effect it produces." Wallace Fowlie has explained how Mallarmé achieved this description of the effect through the symbol, which bestows on "chance accidents . . . a permanent aspect," or, in Kermode's now familiar phrase, makes of each one "a radiant truth out of space and time." Fowlie then defines the symbol by differentiating it from metaphor: "A metaphor is a way of describing an experience or an object, but a symbol is a way of recreating or recasting or even deepening a significant experience." The symbol, in its destruction of time, is fatal to discursive reality: "In his real existence, time, for the poet, is incorporated into complexity and change, but the symbol, in his achievement of artist, is the passage out of duration into the consciousness of creation." Fowlie then suggests a reason for the symbolist's estrangement—why his creativity separates him from the common lot: "The artist—and this is what distinguishes him from other men—knows that there is something superior to sentiment, something that will separate him from the anguish and dominion of sentiment." This is the symbolic recasting of experience which, at best, eventuates in a "poem
maybe as cold and passionate as the dawn." But the recasting is not an exact formulation, whose content and structure can be precisely anticipated. Fowlie says further that for the Symbolist, especially Mallarmé: "A poem is a surprise and a mystery, even for the poet who composes it."\(^{13}\)

Symons and Fowlie, in analyzing the Symbolist mystique, have recourse to comparable language. Nerval is described as a man who recognized the miracle of poetry, whereas Mallarmé is presented as one who saw the poem as a mystery. Both commentators emphasize that Symbolism does not describe the experience, but expresses its aesthetic content. For both Symons and Fowlie this neo-Platonic beauty, this beauty that emanates, can be captured in a poem. The words, the diction, the symbols are preeminent because the words are the beauty, not metaphors for beauty.

From this first trait of Symbolist poetry, the poem as beauty rather than as the representation of beauty, the second, what shall be called "veiled diction," emerges. Symbolist poetry is nebulous; it is hazy, unlike the world of reality. The poet is, in Rimbaud's term, the voyant, the seer, the man who can see beyond appearances into what Baudelaire described as "... une ténébreuse et profonde unité, / Vaste comme la nuit et comme la clarté, / Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent."\(^{14}\) What is patent about this synesthetic response is that it contradicts mundane perception; the reality principle of the average man precludes the sensory confusion Baudelaire demands. Perhaps the two most common forms Symbolist obscurity of diction takes are synesthesia and description by negation.\(^ {15}\) Mallarmé has summarized the principle of veiled diction in a statement which echoes "Art poétique": "Le sens trop précis rature / Ta vague littérature."\(^ {16}\)
These, then are the two primary characteristics of Symbolism, as it evolved in nineteenth century France. First, poetry is beauty, not the recitation of beauty; it is a mystery that exists through symbol, which evokes, but does not recount. Second, if the poet is to symbolize precisely, his diction must be clouded, as poetry reflects synesthesia and other ways of "knowing" that are available only to the seer.

These Symbolist traits in mind, we now have the prerequisite context for a consideration of the Rhymers' poetry. Again, the major Rhy- mers may stand as surrogates for the entire Club. Johnson emerges as a man almost uninfluenced by Symbolism, Dowson as much more subject to this development, and Symons and Yeats as devotees of symbolism, although in Symons' case not as a poet and in Yeats's from native rather than French sources. Insufficient evidence exists to call any of the four conscious Symbolists in the manner of the French poets discussed.

Johnson shares the Symbolists' enthusiasm for the sound of words, but his reasons are not theirs. The Symbolists treasured words as isolated beauties, the sound of the word evoking a specific aesthetic value, whereas Johnson, accustomed to reading his poetry aloud, sought euphony for its musical effect. True, as Verlaine said, "De la musique avant toute chose," and music is a recurrent subject for Johnson. But for Johnson it was a structured litany, whereas for Verlaine music was the abstraction that underlies all experience.

Furthermore, the differences between Johnson and the Symbolists are sharp. Johnson used metaphors that have specific objective correlatives, whereas the absence of correlative or at least a single correlative is a distinguishing Symbolist trait. Johnson often wrote abstractly,
but when his matter was concrete, he seldom violated a conventional sense of reality. But the Symbolist reality is a juxtaposition of stimuli and responses that preclude nothing—that commingles universes of discourse to ultimate synesthesia. No greater contrast could be made than between the passionate interplay of life in Symbolist poetry and the classical serenity of Johnson's work. Accordingly, Johnson's diction is archaic and correct; Symbolist diction is hypermodern and tortuous.

Dowson approached the evocative ideal of Symbolism to a greater extent than did Johnson, who relied on images of stars, heaven, light, and gold to suggest cosmological significance. (This is the essential weakness of Johnson's poetry--the confusion of the abstract with the universal.) Dowson understood the art of evocation by indirection, although his fullest utilization of this technique occurred in his more mature works, written after the Rhymers disbanded:

In music I have no consolation,  
   No roses are pale enough for me;  
The sound of the waters of separation  
   Surpasseth roses and melody.17

Much of the impact of this stanza derives from the symbols of the infinitely pale rose and "the sound of the waters of separation," each of which defies description. In another example, the most famous of Dowson's short lyrics, the self-evident power of negation is inescapable:

They are not long, the weeping and the laughter,  
   Love and desire and hate;  
I think they have no portion in us after  
   We pass the gate.

They are not long, the days of wine and roses:  
   Out of a misty dream  
Our path emerges for a while, then closes  
   Within a dream.18
It would be an exaggeration to call Dowson a Symbolist merely because some of his imagery is negative. Negative imagery is traditional and universal; however, in each of these poems the negativism exceeds mere distinction to become the poetic nucleus. His talent for indirection implies a knowledge of Symbolist theory with its belief that the mystery can be presented, but that the object cannot be described.

Of the principal Rhymers Symons is the easiest to place in relation to the Symbolist movement. His poetry shows none of the Symbolist innovations in technique, yet he was the first English critic to appreciate the full force of the movement, and his pioneering work ranks even today as a brilliant dissection of a complex phenomenon. When Symons wrote, Paris was still divided among Symbolists, Decadents, Hirsutes, Black Cats, and other literary groups with equally picturesque names, each claiming in some way to be descended, yet advancing, from the only recently departed Rimbaud, Mallarmé, and Verlaine, as well as their long dead patron saint, Baudelaire. By placing them, Baudelaire excepted, under a single rubric, Symons gave coherence to Symbolism and made the movement intelligible to the English reader.

In dedicating his book to Yeats, Symons cited him as "the chief representative of that movement in our country." But that designation is deceptive; Yeats's "symbolism" is not of French provenance. It was Yeats's participation in the Irish literary renascence, which Symons regarded as an expression of the larger Symbolist movement, that impelled him to award Yeats this title. Symons was right in calling Yeats a symbolist; from his early The Wanderings of Oisin through the late works based on A Vision symbolism abounds, either through Yeats's use of a
system or through the utilization of recurrent individual symbols, e.g. birds, blind men, fools, roses, and midnight. This symbolism, however, is not derived from the French, despite the influence of Symons. As he generously admitted in his dedication, he was indebted to Yeats for the Irish poet's role in making him cognizant of the importance of the symbol. There was a reciprocal benefit from Symons' stimulating Yeats's interest in French literature. Because Yeats was a bad reader of French, his symbolism necessarily derived from other sources: "William Butler Yeats ... was a symbolist poet long before he had heard of the French. He based his symbolism upon the poetry of Blake, Shelley, and Rossetti and, above all these, upon the occult."21

Clearly, the Rhymers were in no sense the English counterparts of the French Symbolists. However seminal Mallarmé, Verlaine, Baudelaire, and Rimbaud were to the Rhymers in the development of their escapism and non-discursive poetic, Symbolism did not find a seed-bed in the Club. Symons' critical acumen responded to it, and Dowson's poetry reflects its evocative technique, but the Rhymers were too individualistic, too inaccessible to explicit theory, to be the English Symbolists.

The other major critical abstraction of the nineties, decadence, was even less of a movement than Symbolism was. Whereas Symbolism has proved to be too elusive for easy definition, decadence has presented the opposite problem. Critics have shown such facility in defining the term that, as with romanticism, one could discriminate among "decadences." No attempt will be made in this essay to exhaust the "decadences": instead, a brief inquiry will be made to ascertain whether or not a useful
definition has been formulated that has some applicability to the poetry of the Rhymers' Club.

"Decadence," over the past century, has tended to shift universes of discourse. In the nineteenth century it generally referred to the morality of an author or his works' implied moral center, whereas in the twentieth century it has become primarily a technical term and, to a lesser extent (especially recently), a mode of characterizing a writer's rhetoric. Hence, this triple view of decadence—as a moral, technical, and rhetorical concept—will be taken in considering the Rhymers.

As a moral term "decadent" first attained popularity as a description of certain minor French writers of the seventies and eighties, although the term had been applied earlier to Baudelaire and Gautier. Like many another opprobrious label it was soon worn as a badge of honor by those designated. As the century wore on and imperial visions receded in both England and France, contracting vistas suggested decay, and political and social realities redounded on the world of letters; decadence assumed importance as a literary phenomenon. Mario Praz, who popularized the conception of decadence as the final stage of romanticism, stresses the importance of decadence in these last decades of the century in what appears to be an overstatement:22 "From about 1880 till the beginning of the present century the idea of Decadence was the turning-point round which the literary world revolved."23 As to what this decadence was, Praz quotes an 1886 issue of Le Décadent: "La société se désagrège sous l'action corrosive d'une civilisation délicuescente. L'homme moderne est un blasé."24 Then follows from the same paper a long list of the symptoms of decadence, a series of overdvelopments, including appetites, sensa-
tions, neuroses, hysteria, morphine addiction, and an obsession for Schopenhauer, among others.

A less bizarre approach is found in the work of A. E. Carter, who writes that by "decadence" the nineteenth century meant "deterioration which is somehow both corrupt and alluring," and in terms of today's critical standards Carter's definition seems reasonable. However, for the Rhymers' Club period the world of Huysmans' *A Rebours* probably typified decadence, Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* being only a pale shadow of Huysmans' novel of sensuality.

It was this aggregate of French themes—sensualism, corruption, ennui, neurasthenia, and even perversion—which came to be regarded as decadence when the Rhymers wrote. In Symons' 1893 essay on decadence he lit on the pathological elements of this phenomenon: "Healthy we cannot call it and healthy it does not wish to be considered." His definition of "The Decadent Movement" is sufficiently extensive that Impressionism and Symbolism constitute its "two main branches." Perhaps Symons' anxiety to free Symbolism from the stigma of decadence accounts for his elevating the Symbolist movement to the status of an autonomous literary entity in his 1899 book. His 1893 article regards decadence as a mixture of stylistic and moral qualities: "an intense self-consciousness, a restless curiosity in research, an oversubtilizing refinement upon refinement, a spiritual and moral perversity."25

None of the Rhymers is mentioned in his essay on decadence; this can be attributed to their being relatively unknown. But what is more surprising is that instead of such likely Englishmen as Wilde and Swinburne figuring as decadents, Pater and Henley are Symons' nominees!
Pater's selection was discussed earlier; Henley's is justified by Symons' inclusion of Impressionism under the rubric of "Decadence," Henley's *In Hospital* being cited as extremely Impressionistic.

While Symons, who published the only thorough British formulation of decadence, did not place the Rhymers in that context, some reviewers of their anthologies did. It will be recalled that the reviewer of *The Second Book of the Rhymers' Club* for *The Athenaeum* found "Mr. Arthur Symons, who represents the low-water mark of the 'Rhymers' Club,'" to suffer from "sickly and jaunty sensualism" and to be soiled by the "Gallic smirch." More sarcastic, though intimating much the same about Symons, was a review of *The Book of the Rhymers' Club* in *The Illustrated London News*: "Mr. Arthur Symons is not Baudelaire, though he reminds us of the 'Fleurs du Mal' at times."27 Softer jibes were taken at Dowson and Todhunter for lesser, but comparable, offenses.

Accusations to the contrary, there is little reason to term the Rhymers' poetry "decadent" in the sense of its offending the then prevalent morality. That there were sensuous passages in the poetry of Symons, Dowson, and Todhunter is undeniable. But they seldom sounded the true notes of moral decadence: corruption and allurement, in Carter's words. Occasional lines, such as "Yes, this rich death were best: / Lay poison on thy lips, kiss me to sleep," show the requisite psychopathology, but this passage of Todhunter's, cited earlier, is exceptional. The sadism, masochism, and sundry perversions, such as W. T. Stead exposed in his famous *The Pall Mall Gazette* series (1885), are not even hinted at in the Rhymers' poems. However, these same deviations were the substance of sub
rosa fiction of the period on both sides of the English Channel. Comparatively speaking, even Todhunter's "Euthanasia" lacked the depravity to qualify as decadence, unless artifice, enervation, and sensuality are all that is meant by the term.

The Rhymers went beyond generally disregarding decadent themes, for in two poems unpublished in the books of the Club, they caricatured them. We have noted Le Gallienne's ostentatiously high-minded attack on decadence, but on another occasion he subjected it to parody: "He dreamed of a new sin: / An incent 'twixt the body and the soul. . . ." The same impulse was exploited more proficiently by Johnson, in a poem of the late nineties:

Some times, in very joy of shame,
Our flesh becomes one living flame:
And she and I
Are no more separate, but the same.

These are far removed from the approach of the true decadent, e.g. Huysmans' hero, Des Esseintes, to love. One has the suspicion that the aura of moral decadence which some modern critics have detected drifting over the Rhymers is more the product of biographical spice—Johnson's undergraduate homosexuality and later dipsomania; Dowson's wenching and drunkenness; rumored hashish parties involving Yeats, Symons, and others—than anything these poets actually wrote. Furthermore, to discuss the "moral center" of Rhymers' Club poetry is almost to risk oxymoron; this is the inevitable result of the escapism we have observed among the Rhymers. Hence, it seems unlikely that "decadence" is a useful moral abstraction to apply to the poetry of the group.

Formulations of decadence based on technical or rhetorical factors do not seem much more germane to the Rhymers than those entailing moral
or thematic considerations. In an investigation entitled "The Origin and Characteristics of 'Decadence' in British Literature in the 1890's," an unpublished doctoral dissertation, Karl Caton Kopp proposes that decadence be regarded as a decline from established standards, in this case those of the "art for art's sake" movement. One of those standards is the technical one of harmony of form and content, but this standard is not maintained in decadence: "In decadent art content is emphasized at the expense of form, at the expense of harmony." As we have seen, the converse being the case with the Rhymers' work, it could not be called "decadent" in this sense. Kopp also acquits of decadence the only Rhymer included in his study: Dowson.

A second, and more specific technical decadence would be in language. The applicability of this criterion to the Rhymers is put forth by A. E. Rodway, who contrasts the poetry of "the aesthetic members of the Rhymers' Club" with that of Kipling and Henley, citing specimens resembling those we have glanced at:

They were middlebrows writing for their like, the solid bourgeois; and the content of their work, by period standards, was healthy, while that of the Aesthetes was decadent. By the standards of modern psychology this is not the case; so it would seem better--if the word must be used--to say that if the Aesthetes are characterized by decadence, it is a decadence of language. In any case, decadence cannot be a definitive characteristic, since the Patriots are no less characterized by a decadence of intelligence.

This decadence of language, for Rodway, is characterized by a preoccupation with aural qualities and an indifference to exactitude of definition. Essentially, Rodway is discussing a failure to find adequate, concrete, and precise diction. But this need not be called "decadence"; it is more often the mark of lesser craftsmanship. Rodway recognizes the
expendability of "decadence" for describing this failing. That is why he says of "decadent": "if the word must be used."

If, however, we entertain the concept of decadence of language, we must avoid some unwarranted conclusions that the Rhymers' preference for euphonious and archaic diction might lead us into making: that their language was uniformly decadent, and that decadence of language was characteristically theirs. Quite the contrary is true. Derek Stanford has compared Symons' poetry with certain passages from _The Waste Land_ to show how indebted Eliot was to Symons for his freedom of diction. Although no Rhymer advanced poetic language as Hopkins did, William Watson (no one's idea of a decadent—in fact, one of the men responsible for Beardsley's removal from _The Yellow Book_) could apostrophize the sun in this 1897 poem in diction as cliche-riddled, inexact, and inconsistent as that of the worst poem in the Rhymers' anthologies:

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Thou art but a word of his speech,
Thou art but a wave of his hand;
Thou art brief as a glitter of sand
'Twixt tide and tide on his beach. . . .
("Ode in May")
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Whether the flaw be content unintegrated with form, failure of diction, or any other technical ineptitude, the problem is one of skill in craftsmanship, i.e. individual genius, rather than collective falling-away from an artistic standard. Therefore, labeling the Rhymers technically decadent is of little critical benefit.

The aspect of decadence which appears most promising to a study of the poetry of the Rhymers is that of the artist's relation to his public. The rhetorical stance assumed in his poetry is one of the identifying marks of the decadent. This interaction of artist and society is
considered by Barbara Charlesworth in *Dark Passages: the Decadent Consciousness in Victorian Literature*, in which she constructs a useful classification:

> It is possible, then—even if somewhat arbitrary—to divide Victorian society into three groups: the Philistines whose ideal was the attainment of wealth, power, and physical luxuries and whose selves were formed by the attainment of those things through social institutions; the Reformers whose ideal was the attainment of the good, the humane life and whose selves were formed in the attempt to apply that ideal within society; the Decadents whose ideal was the attainment of as many moments as possible of heightened sensory experience, enjoyed within the mind outside the society.35

The "selves" in this paragraph are social psychological concepts which Miss Charlesworth borrows from G. H. Mead, the pragmatic philosopher, whom she quotes: "The human self arises through its ability to take the attitude of the group to which he belongs. . . ."36 The Philistines, in these terms, are those whose values are subservient to society's: in our context, such poets as Watson and Kipling. The Reformers are those who wish to reconstruct society by imposing their values on it: among poets William Morris or the older Wordsworth might serve as examples. The Decadents are those who do not conceive of themselves in terms of their society: the Rhymers, taken as a group, will do. In fact, Johnson and Symons are included among the six belletristic writers in Miss Charlesworth's study. There are touches of what she calls "sceptical solipsism" (after George Santayana) in each important Rhymer, a condition which a sampling of their poems will show.

Returning to Yeats's "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," we can recall his determination to "live alone in the bee-loud glade" where he "shall
have some peace . . . , for peace comes dropping slow." This is familiar—the ancient urge to commune with nature. But here the search is for solitude; nature is not sought as a mere restorative, in Wordsworth's sense, which then permits the poet to return to society. The implication is that peace is obtainable only in solitude. Nowhere in the poem does Yeats suggest the possibility of communication; sensory impressions of the secluded island exist for him alone.

What Johnson, too, experienced is forever hidden within him:

Go from me: I am one of those, who fall.
What! hath no cold wind swept your heart at all,
In my sad company? Before the end,
    Go from me, dear my friend!
("Mystic and Cavalier," 2 BRC, p. 9)

Johnson is sceptical of his friend's piercing the wall of personality sufficiently to understand the poet's fate. He makes an even more poignant admission of impenetrable solitude in what purports to be the triumphant close of "The Dark Angel":

Do what thou wilt, thou shalt not so,
Dark Angel! triumph over me:
Lonely, unto the Lone I go;
Divine, to the Divinity.

Johnson's eschatology of solitude is too austere for the general human condition.

Symons took refuge in his art when love, the fabric of society, failed him. He watches the object of his desire being kissed by another, and he writes:

God! the light
In that revealing casement square grows dim:
He kisses her, and I but write of him. (2 BRC, p. 46)

As has been suggested before in our consideration of his intellectual matrix, Symons the poet assumed the role of saint, artist, and lover, but
never that of the social animal.

If, as Miss Charlesworth suggests, the Decadent "ideal was the attainment of as many moments as possible of heightened sensory experience," then much of the Dowson canon could be offered as evidence for his poetic decadence. "Cynara" would be the most obvious example, but even as devotional a poem as "Extreme Unction" stresses a sensory experience. Only Johnson, among the Rhymers, could be more solipsistic than Dowson, if this absolute term may be treated comparatively. Dowson's feeling for the unattainability of contact is strikingly illustrated in his elegy, "Vanitas":

Yet, crossed that weary river,
   In some ulterior land,
Or anywhere, or ever,
Will she stretch out a hand?
   And will she understand? (BRC, p. 70)

This is a poem intended neither to influence anyone, nor to reflect the unarticulated feelings of society; it is aloof from the social order. Like "The Dark Angel" and the other poems of these few pages, it serves no rhetorical purpose. These poems were written neither by poets who would remake society, nor by those who would pander to it. If that kind of poetry is decadence, then "decadent," in this sense, is a useful generic adjective to apply to the Rhymers' Club.

What has become a classic of criticism is Archibald MacLeish's "A poem should not mean / But be." Such is the essence of these poems. What they meant to the culture in which they were written is distantly secondary to what they are. Had Dowson, Johnson, or Symons been the "self" that Yeats was later to become, their poetry would have been the greater for it, but the Rhymers were too intent on that "Image as a
radiant truth out of space and time" to compromise their poetry to either
time-serving or polemic.

3. The Legacy of the Rhymers

In closing this essay I will suggest that the Rhymers have been
instrumental in the preservation of the lyric as a vital twentieth century
genre. Toward substantiating this statement four factors in the art of
some major twentieth century poets—Yeats, Pound, and Eliot—will be
pointed out, with a view toward establishing the salutary effect of the
Rhymers on their work. These factors are first, the importance of the
tradition as the matrix from which poetry develops and as the context in
which it may be judged; second, the reaffirmation that poetics are not
insular, but cosmopolitan; third, the tension between the autotelic poem
and the public for which that poem is intended; and fourth, the music that
inheres in all good poetry. This is not to say that the Rhymers origin-
ated these concepts, or that they are endemic in their work. Rather it
is to state retrospectively that the Rhymers played a role in making
these concepts significant to some important poets of our century.

Yeats, Pound, and Eliot: why these three? Yeats has been chosen
because of his pre-eminence among those who have written English poetry
since 1900. Subjectivity might dictate another choice for the century's
best, but Yeats's selection would be the consensus. Inasmuch as he was
a Rhymer one might be tempted to mouth "The Child is the father of the
Man" and say that this hardly establishes influence. True, but some
poets repeat themselves as they grow older, only with diminishing vital-
ity: Wordsworth could be cited as an example; while others, Rimbaud as
an extreme case, either renounce or repudiate their youthful productions. Yeats, however, was a poet whose growth from his early creative period is clear and traceable. As Eliot said of Yeats" "Returning to his earlier poems after making a close acquaintance with the later, one sees, to begin with, that in technique there was a slow and continuous development of what is always the same medium and idiom." In addition we must not overlook Yeats's own testimony that it was with his "companions of the Cheshire Cheese" that he learned his trade.

The notion of the Image calls up the name of the great popularizer of Imagism: Ezra Pound. He is married to the former Dorothy Shakespear, Lionel Johnson's first cousin, once removed. This might have been a factor in his being asked to edit and preface a selection of Johnson's poems, which appeared in 1915, although Pound felt that literary, rather than personal, considerations dictated the choice. An American expatriate, he did not come to London until 1908, but his close association with Yeats as friend, supporter, critic, and secretary have made him heir to much that was Yeats and that Yeats had experienced. Pound's trenchant criticism and correspondence reveal a greater consciousness of the nineties than has usually been the case among modern English men of letters.

Like Yeats and Pound, Eliot never lost sight of the Image. Being an intimate friend and co-worker of Pound for so many years, he shared with him many of the same critical opinions, but Eliot has been included in this group for other reasons. His response to traditionalism, French influences, and the music of poetry parallels the generalized Rhymers' response. That the Rhymers were the source in each case would be too large a claim, but that their influence was felt is manifestly true.
For a generation of sophomore literature students Eliot might have invented the tradition; such has been the impact of his 1919 essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent." Certainly, Eliot did much in this one essay to convert "tradition" from a frequently pejorative to a generally favorable term. For his purpose a careful definition of "tradition" was a prerequisite:

It involves, in the first place, the historical sense, . . . and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order.39

He then adds that it is this historical sense which makes a writer both traditional and aware of his own contemporaneity.

The conservative values and traditional emphases of the Rhymers have often been noted. Yeats's statement on the subject may be recalled here—his hypothesis that it was attributable to Pater's influence "that we [the Rhymers] were tradiditional alike in our dress, in our manner, in our opinions, and in our style."

Yeats never lost this sense of the cultural past. In his 1907 essay, "Poetry and Tradition," he made tradition indispensable to the creation of all beauty:

Three types of men have made all beautiful things. Aristocracies have made beautiful manners, . . . the countryside have made beautiful stories and beliefs . . . and the artists have made all the rest, because Providence has filled them with recklessness. All these look backward to a long tradition, for, being without fear, they have held to whatever pleased them.40

The artist, Yeats felt, must be a traditionalist. But the tradition in-
volves more than a sense of history; it is a simultaneous as well as a successive order, and this is central to Eliot's position. Yeats almost anticipated Eliot's view in the Irish poet's recognition of Johnson as a man who not only realized the depth of tradition, but its breadth, as well. Yeats's comment refers to the Johnson of the few years that remained to him after the Rhymers' Club disintegrated:

He was in all a traditionalist, gathering out of the past phrases, words, attitudes, and disliking ideas less for their uncertainty than because they made the mind itself changing and restless. He measured the Irish tradition by another greater than itself, and was quick to feel any falling asunder of the two, yet at any moment they seemed but one in his imagination.  

Pound resembles Yeats in holding Johnson to be the consummate traditionalist, but clarity and neatness, rather than anything as indefinite as a mood, are in Pound's opinion the outstanding quality of Johnson's work. His preface to his edition of Johnson opens with a succinct statement of this view: "A Traditionalist of traditionalists, his poems are criticisms for the most part." The clarity, hardness, and literary allusiveness that Pound finds characteristic of Johnson's poetry are responsible for his describing it as literary criticism. Pound, realizing that "traditionalist" is a dubious compliment, qualifies his description of Johnson: "But if he was traditionalist, he was so in the finest sense of that term. He really knew the tradition, the narrow tradition, that is, of English, Latin, and Greek. This intelligent acquaintance with the past differentiates him from the traditionalists of his time, and of ours."

Traditionalism prevailed among the Rhymers. Dowson savored Latin titles, Yeats and Rhys looked to the ancient and Celtic sources, Greene
studied the Renaissance, and almost unexceptionably, they revered the past. Yet, of all the Rhymers, it was Johnson who epitomized the tradition so reverenced by his great successors.

The integration of eastern and western or continental and British forms or materials into a single poem is a technique for which Yeats, Eliot, and Pound all have been noteworthy. Last Poems (Yeats), Seventy Cantos, and The Waste Land all exemplify this practice. Yet a century ago English poetry was written as if its authors were oblivious to contemporary foreign literary developments. Historically, there have been instances of English poets responding to and acknowledging contemporaneous European models, e.g. the Elizabethans to the Italian sonneteers, but they have been exceptional rather than recurrent events. The last major continental influence to impinge on English poetry prior to the Aesthetic period was German romanticism; philosophy and criticism, more than poetry, were its source. We are familiar with the Rhymers' sensitivity to French models of the late nineteenth century. This, chiefly through Symons, they transmitted to their successors. Yeats we may recall acknowledging his debt to Symons: "... nor shall I ever know how much my practice and my theory owe to the passages that he read me from Catullus and from Verlaine and Mallarmé." Pound also reveals his obligation to Symons and the nineties for his familiarity with French developments; this is done in an elliptical letter to a French correspondent in which he traces his formulation of the concept of the Image. These are the pertinent excerpts: "Symbolistes français >les '90's' à Londres"; "Rapports fr.> eng. via Arthur Symons etc. 1890. Baudelaire, Verlaine, etc."; and "l'idée de
l'image doit 'quelque chose' aux symbolistes français via T. E. Hulme, via Yeats < Symons < Mallarmé." Eliot, too, recognized Symons as the writer who introduced him to La Forgue and other French poets of the fin-de-siècle: "But if we can recall the time when we were ignorant of the French symbolists, and met with The Symbolist Movement in Literature, we remember the book as an introduction to wholly new feelings, as a revelation." The Symbolist Movement stimulated Eliot to read Verlaine, La Forgue, and Rimbaud; their influences are especially observable in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and other early poems. One incidental influence should be noted here: Dowson's following Swinburne in utilizing French forms was also not lost upon the moderns, Pound in particular.

The Rhymers were transmitters of the Image. The price for this poetic prerogative was their alienation from society—the writing of poetry that, in a rhetorical sense, we could call decadent. In their resistance to the Kiplings, Watsons, and Henleys of their decade, they glorified autotelic poetry, poetry that in its self-sufficiency spurned the public. Yeats, as a Rhymer, was subject to the same curse; Eliot describes his overcoming it:

Born into a world in which the doctrine of "Art for Art's sake" was generally accepted, and living on into one in which art has been asked to be instrumental to social purposes, he held firmly to the right view which is between these, though not in any way a compromise between them, and showed that an artist, by serving his art with entire integrity, is at the same time rendering the greatest service he can to his nation and to the whole world.

By calling Yeats's view "right," Eliot assents to it. In other words, not only did Yeats interpret the problem of the relationship of the artist to society as one of finding a via media that was not a compromise, but Eliot
understood it in the same manner.

Unlike Yeats and Eliot, Pound has never established that perfect tension between poem and public of which Yeats grew capable and which Eliot understood. Setting out to reform taste, much in the manner of Pugin and Ruskin, Pound has ended as they ended, wanting to reform society, an obsession to which many of the unassimilated portions of his cantos testify. Yet when he was twenty, he could almost echo Ernest Dowson:

As for the "eyes of too ruthless public": damn their eyes. No art ever yet grew by looking into the eyes of the public, ruthless or otherwise. You can obliterate yourself and mirror God, Nature, or Humanity but if you try to mirror yourself in the eyes of the public, woe be unto your art.48

Neither in his youth nor old age has Pound been guilty of Philistinism, but, as his career shows, the reforming instinct in an artist is at least equally perilous.

Then, if the path for the twentieth century poet has led between "social purposes" and "Art for Art's sake," and the Rhymers erred in adhering to "Art for Art's sake," why is their work meaningful to later poets? Their significance lies in the choice they made. Confronted with the Philistine and Decadent roads, they chose the latter, the hard road, which brought neither wealth nor approbation, both of which were the Philistine's reward. By offering an alternative to the time-servers, they made the twentieth century poetic achievement a possibility.49 The Rhymers, intent on "pure poetry," bequeathed the Image to poets with greater technical facility, and who were better able to establish that precise tension between artwork and society necessary to all great poetry.

The last of these factors, the music that inheres in all successful
poetry, will only be discussed in cursory fashion, the subject going far beyond the scope of this essay. Pound, the friend of Arnold Dolmetsch and George Antheil, is a composer in his own right who has written extensive music criticism. Naturally, music would assume considerable importance for him. It also did for Eliot and the older Yeats, though in a very different way than it did for the Rhymers. The Rhymers, in their multifarious use of "music," placed the greatest weight on euphony—the sound of words of "pure poetry"; their emphasis can be synesthetically described as color harmony. Yeats, Eliot, and Pound have all heard the music of poetry more in discursive terms—as involving words in some indefinable conversion which makes poetry of them, much as Mallarmé understood the process.

Yeats never seemed sure of whether music was the salvation or damnation of poetry. He realized that music could enhance poetry, but as a practitioner of one art, he distrusted the other. When he was in his seventies, he sponsored two British Broadcasting Corporation broadcasts of modern poetry in which musical instruments, generally one at a time, were to be used. But his restrictions were stringent: "There must never be an accompaniment, and no words must be spoken through music, though a pause may sometimes be marked by a few low musical notes. They must never be loud enough to shift the attention of the ear." A poem had its own durational pattern, which music could easily dominate. In fact, in his old age he defined poetry in terms which indicate its aural autonomy: "A poem is an elaboration of the rhythms of common speech and their association with profound feeling." In this Wordsworthian definition, with its emphasis on the rhythms of common speech, is found the nucleus of the
modern conception of the music of poetry.

Eliot and Pound, like Yeats, assume that poetry is closely related to common speech. Eliot adds the third term: "The music of poetry, then, must be a music latent in the common speech of its time." While this "music" is patently metaphorical, there is another, closely related "music" which is literally discussed and which Eliot feels belongs among the poet's technical equipment: "I think that a poet may gain much from the study of music: how much technical knowledge of musical form is desirable I do not know, for I have not that technical knowledge myself. But I believe that the properties in which music concerns the poet most nearly are the sense of rhythm and the sense of structure."

Pound is even more insistent on the advantages of poets' knowing music: "Poets who are not interested in music are, or become, bad poets. I would almost say that poets should never be too long out of touch with musicians. Poets who will not study music are defective." Pound's very definition of poetry necessitates this study: "Poetry is a composition of words set to music." Furthermore, "Poetry must be read as music and not as oratory." Certainly, Pound's superb adaptations of the verse patterns of the troubadours are a cogent argument for poets' having a musical education.

Speech pattern and rhythm (rather than euphony) dominating this new music of poetry, it cannot be directly attributed to the influence of the Rhymers. But it was the Rhymers, whose work was so often read aloud, who were instrumental in keeping this poetic value before London's literary circles. That Yeats, Pound, and Eliot, conscious of the Rhymers as predecessors, were also committed to the necessity of music in poetry, seems a significant fact of literary history.
In some respects the sonnet below epitomizes the Rhymers' Club, but Ernest Dowson wrote it as early as 1886, although he did not publish it until nine years later:

Let us go hence: the night is now at hand;  
The day is overworn, the birds all flown;  
And we have reaped the crops the gods have sown;  
Despair and death; deep darkness o'er the land,  
Broods like an owl; we cannot understand  
Laughter or tears, for we have only known  
Surpassing vanity: vain things alone  
Have driven our perverse and aimless band.  
Let us go hence, somewhither strange and cold,  
To Hollow Lands where just men and unjust  
Find end of labour, where's rest for the old,  
Freedom to all from love and fear and lust.  
Twine our torn hands! O pray the earth enfold  
Our life-sick hearts and turn them into dust.

The italics are mine. I wish to underscore these lines as if the poem had been intended as a retrospective judgment on the Rhymers' Club. Taken in perspective, the Rhymers' corporate accomplishment was not "surpassing vanity"; it was admittedly small, but conceivably worth more than the incidental mention it is commonly accorded in literary history. If the poetry of the Club is to be judged only in terms of fully achieved objectives, it deserves no more than the most cursory glance and dismissal. But if we consider contributions as well, we must prepare a place for the Rhymers in the tradition. These poets helped restore the aural aspect of poetry. They emphasized euphony when it was in jeopardy from the excesses of Swinburne, on the one hand, and from didactic verse, on the other. They were instrumental in bringing the French symbolist movement to England, although their own verse hardly reflected it. They showed a receptivity to a broader and deeper culture than did other poets of their period. And above all, the Rhymers nurtured a major poet and made the poetic
flowering of the twentieth century easier. May that strange prayer of Ernest Dowson which seems uniquely appropriate to this tragic generation, be granted, and may there be "freedom to all from love and fear and lust."
NOTES: CHAPTER IV

1. Allt and Alspach, Variorum... Yeats, p. 270.


4. "Prologue," Poèmes Saturniens, included in Œuvres Poétiques Complètes, p. 60. "The world, which their deep word disquiets, banishes them. In their turn, the banish the world."

5. Plarr, p. 55. Dowson's observation is from the same letter that is cited at the beginning of Chapter II.


10. Longaker, The Poems of Ernest Dowson, p. 93.

11. The Symbolist Movement, p. 20. Whenever my intent is to refer to that "aggregate of ideas originated by French poets of the latter half of the nineteenth century: and the word is not preceded by "French," "Symbolism" will be capitalized.

12. Cook, p. 83. The maxim is from an October 1864 letter to Henry Cazalis: "Peindre non la chose mais l'effet quelle produit."


14. "Correspondances," p. 33. "... a deep and shadowy unity, vast as darkness; and light, scents, colours, and sounds answer one another. (Hartley, p. 155.)"

15. The following instances of synesthesia typify Symbolist practice:

   (1) "Il est des parfums comme des chairs d'enfants / Doux comme les hautbois, vert comme les prairies..." ("Correspondances.") "There are some scents cool as the flesh of children, sweet as oboes and
green as meadows. . . ." (Hartley.)

(2) "Ainsi, quand les raisins j'ai sucé la clarté . . ."
(Mallarmé, "L'Apres-Midi d'un Faune.") "So, when I have sucked the
brightness of the grapes . . ."

(3) ". . . le piano scintille, le violon donne aux fibres
déchirées la lumière . . ." (Mallarmé, "Plainte d'automne").
". . . the piano sparkles, the violin gives the torn fibers light . . ."
(Hartley.)

(4) ". . . et ces parfums pourpres du soleil des poles . . ."
(Rimbaud, Metropolitan.) ". . . and these purple perfumes of the polar
sun . . ."

The Symbolists' use of negative imagery does not fall
into the single category that their use of synesthesia does, but the two
examples below are representative. In the first, an image is negated
through a contradictory one; discourse is replaced by oxymoron. In the
second the desired vagueness is achieved through the destruction of the
object imaged:

(1) "Son regard est pareil au regard des statues."
(Verlaine, "Mon Reve familier.") "Her gaze is like the gaze of statues." (Marks.)

(2) ". . . nul ptyx / Aboli bibelot d'inanité sonore.
. . ." (Mallarmé, [Ses purs ongles.]) ". . . no shell, / Abolished ob-
ject of sonorous inaneness. . . ." (Fowlie.)
Where no translator is parenthetically named, the re-
sponsibility for the English is my own.

16. [Toute l'âme résumée], OEuvres Complètes, p. 73. "Too pre-
cise a meaning erases your mysterious literature." (Hartley, p. 203.)


18. "Vitae summa brevis spem nos vetat incohere longam," Long-
aker, The Poems of Ernest Dowson, p. 38.


20. See Tindall, pp. 265-274, for a perceptive discussion of
Butler Yeats (New York: The Noonday Press, 1959), pp. 18-45, gives a
more comprehensive treatment to this matter. Ellmann, Yeats: The Man
and the Masks offers some valuable insights in passim.

a Collection of Critical Essays, ed. John Unterecker (Englewood Cliffs,
New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), p. 45. This essay is a revision
of the section on Yeats's symbolism in Forces in Modern British Litera-
ture: 1885-1956.

22. This is not to say that Praz originated the idea that decadence
grew out of romanticism. Holbrook Jackson was explicit on this point in his 1913 study, *The Eighteen Nineties* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1966), p. 57: "The decadent movement in English art was the final outcome of the romantic movement which began near the dawn of the nineteenth century."


24. "Society disintegrates under the corrosive action of the drying up of a civilization. Modern man is surfeited."


30. An instance of this biographical fallacy (in the New Critics' phrase) is to be found in a standard literary dictionary, William Flint Thrall and Addison Hibbard, *A Handbook to Literature*, revised and enlarged by C. Hugh Holman (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1960), p. 131. Oscar Wilde, Ernest Dowson, Aubrey Beardsley, and Frank Harris constitute the English contingent among the decadents: "A group of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century writers, principally in France but also in England and America, who held that art was superior to nature, that the finest beauty was that of dying or decaying things, and who both in their lives and their art attacked the accepted moral, ethical, and social standards of their time." (Italics mine.)

Implicitly, the Rhymers' decadence was personal as well as literary in the view of Pinto, who excludes Yeats from the Rhymers' shortcomings: "John Davidson was right when he said that the Rhymers lacked 'blood and guts.' They were too timid, too cloistered, too pedantic, and too self-consciously bohemian to make that thorough exploration of the inner life which was the necessary prelude to any rebuilding of English poetry." Pinto then implies that Yeats was unusual among the Rhymers in "that he was capable of exploring the empty but haunted regions of the late Victorian Palace of Art without becoming a sexual pervert, or drinking himself to death, and of proceeding with an enriched experience and unimpaired creative power to a more universal and enduring kind of art." (Italics mine: Pinto, p. 27.)

31. Recently, much critical energy has been expended on late nineteenth century British decadence. Clyde de L. Ryals, "Toward a Definition of Decadent as Applied to British Literature of the Nineteenth
Century," JAAC, XVII, 1 (September 1958), 85-92, draws on Pater's famous definition of "romantic": "It is the addition of strangeness to beauty that constitutes the romantic character in art." ("Postscript," Appreciations, p. 258.) Ryals (p. 86) defines "decadence" as "simply a condition inherent in romanticism that proceeds from romanticism when the romantic impulse is not held in check. Once the romantic blending of strangeness and the desire for beauty cease to be a perfect blending, that is, when the strange turns into the grotesque, then decadence must necessarily be the result." Robert L. Peters questions Ryals' methods, but not his conclusions, in a rebuttal, "Toward an 'Un-Definition' of Decadent as Applied to British Literature of the Nineteenth Century," JAAC, XVIII, 2 (December 1959), 258-264. Russell M. Goldfarb takes issue with both Ryals and Peters in their dissatisfaction with the imprecision of "decadence." Goldfarb, JAAC, XX, 3 (Summer 1962), 369-373, suggests (p. 373) that the term has a reasonably uniform and clear meaning: "We understand that late Victorian decadence refers to poetry and prose which does not emphasize philosophical, historical, or intellectual concerns, but which does emphasize the value to be gained both from experience of all sorts and from indulgence in a life of sensations." Goldfarb's thematic approach is useful, but of course leaves unanswered the questions of what decadent styles and rhetoric are.


34. See Stanford, p. 33.

35. P. xv. Miss Charlesworth is obviously indebted to Pater for the first part of her definition of "Decadents."

36. P. xiv.

37. 2 BRC, p. 89. Both Louise Imogen Guiney and Ian Fletcher have pointed out the anticipation of the last two lines by Plotinus: "This, therefore, is the life of the Gods, ... a flight of the alone to the alone."


40. Essays and Introductions, p. 251.

41. Essays and Introductions, p. 258.
42. "Lionel Johnson," *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T. S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1954), p. 361. This essay was originally published as Pound's "Preface" to *The Poetical Works of Lionel Johnson*, an edition which was withdrawn (and later reissued without a preface) because of objections to references in the preface to living authors.


46. Pound, the master of the sestina and the ballade, was none- theless no friend of the poetic stanza during his imagist phase, when he published his edition of Johnson. In discussing Johnson's employment of stanzaic forms, he alludes to Dowson's use of the villanelle: "The villanelle, even, can at its best achieve the closest intensity; I mean when, as with Dowson, the refrains are an emotional fact, which the intellect, in the various gyrations of the poem, tries in vain and in vain to escape." (*Literary Essays*, p. 369, note.)


48. Paige, *Letters...Pound*, p. 4. Since this letter was written six years before Plarr published the Dowson letter cited at the beginning of Chapter II, its resemblance to it in phraseology seems remarkable.


51. Quoted in Hone, p. 454.


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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Daniel Rutenberg was born September 1, 1929 at Chicago, Illinois. In January 1946 he was graduated from Austin High School in Chicago. In June 1947 he received the degree of Bachelor of Arts from the University of Chicago, which he continued to attend through 1950. From 1951 until 1953 he served in the United States Army, chiefly as a public information specialist in Garmisch, Germany. In 1953 he returned to the University of Chicago to major in English literature, remaining there until 1956. At that time he moved to Clearwater, Florida, where he was engaged in building construction and related activities until 1962. He then resumed his studies at the University of Chicago, which awarded him the degree of Master of Arts in August 1962.

After teaching English for one year at Odessa College in Odessa, Texas, he returned to Florida in 1963 to become an instructor of logic at St. Petersburg Junior College. He simultaneously enrolled in the Graduate School of the University of Florida, where he pursued his work toward the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, alternating full-time with part-time study. In 1964 he joined the staff of the University of South Florida, where he is presently an assistant professor of humanities.

Daniel Rutenberg is married to the former Joan Stone and is the father of three children. He is a member of The Modern Language Association of America and the American Association of University Professors.
This dissertation was prepared under the direction of the chairman of the candidate's supervisory committee and has been approved by all members of that committee. It was submitted to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and was approved as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

December 19, 1967

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