

To those who made this thesis possible--

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and, of course, my thesis advisor, Dr.Peter C.Noel-Bentley,  
who introduced me to James Thomson and who expended  
the great deal of time, energy, and above all, patience  
which insured the completion of this study.



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BIBLICAL LANDSCAPE IN JAMES THOMSON'S CITIES

by

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the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate the extent to which Thomson utilizes a "biblical landscape," in particular the landscape of the Old Testament and the Apocalypse, in the two poems and the prose phantasy which form his main examination of city life: "The Doom of a City" (1857), the prose "A Lady of Sorrow" (1862, 1864), and the poem "The City of Dreadful Night" (1873). Although it does manifest itself in the images of desert, exile and failure to reach the promised land, the nature of this biblical landscape is not merely imagistic. It extends also into the 'attitudes' (tone, diction) of the works in question and their personae, and is manifest in the presentation of the narrators as visionaries who are reminiscent of Old Testament prophets.

The introductory chapter will establish the biographical and theological background necessary for the examination of the biblical landscape in these works by Thomson and will trace this strain in some of his earlier poetry. The following chapters (II, III, IV) will deal with Thomson's use of biblical landscape in each of his 'cities' in chronological order. The conclusion will summarize the artistic effect of Thomson's appeal to the reader's religious sensibility, and consider this factor in relation to other writers of the Victorian era.

In particular the introductory chapter will examine the theological influences at work in Thomson's life, notably those of Calvinism and Irvingism. Many critics have touched upon the topic of Thomson's atheism, and, indeed, the evidence in his imagery of his Calvinist background has been noted in critical studies of his work. There has been,

however, no critical effort made towards a systematic study of the biblical overtones in Thomson--an aspect seldom absent in image, theme and perspective in his work.

## CHAPTER I

James Thomson (B.V.), when mentioned at all in commentaries on Victorian poetry, is generally cited only in association with his "The City of Dreadful Night," as an example of the extreme point of Victorian pessimism, of the consciousness which ultimately could admit not even a hope of daylight. However, as one contemporary reviewer of his major poem maintained, the force of his poetry lies not in any doctrine of philosophical pessimism, but in the fierce emotional integrity of his vision:

The originality of the writer's thought consists not in his creed, which man thought out and rejected before Job, but in his own horror of his creed; in the ghastliness with which he invests it, the fervour with which he hates it, the energy with which he depicts all the degradation it involves, and yet goes on believing it. Necessity alone exists, and Necessity is a fiend.<sup>1</sup>

The negative creed of "The City of Dreadful Night" was an end-product of years of consideration by Thomson of alternative beliefs. Thus, as William David Schaefer, author of James Thomson (B.V.): Beyond "The City" suggests, a broader study of the poet's works may be illuminating, for they "provide a fascinating portrait of one man's struggle to come to terms with the new ideas and shifting attitudes of a dynamic century."<sup>2</sup> Thomson's writings cover a broad spectrum of emotional and intellectual perspectives. Such poems as "Sunday up the River" and "Sunday at Hampstead" could conceivably be put forward as examples of Victorian optimism;<sup>3</sup> his "satires and profanities"<sup>4</sup> lead one to envisage a somewhat violently blasphemous secularist; and, finally, such essays as "On the Worth of Metaphysical Systems" and "Bumble, Bumbledom, Bumbleism" present, respectively, a thoughtful, though oddly defensive, agnostic

and a perceptive social critic.

In 1875, one year after the completion of "The City of Dreadful Night," Thomson in "On the Worth of Metaphysical Systems" mocks those who depend upon, or who themselves construct, "systems" which impose significance on the universe:

The subtlest of them recognize quite clearly the practical trustworthiness of what the natural or relative sciences have established within their limits; but they cannot endure the utter blank immeasurable beyond their strait limits, the formless void unfathomable beneath their surface. They see plainly what many of the triumphant and triumphing natural philosophers do not see at all, that even the most obvious and common-place so-called facts are undermined by deepest metaphysical doubts. Admitting the relative truth, they must seek the absolute basis; acknowledging the limited fact, they hunger for universal law.<sup>5</sup>

Of their "systems," which he defines as essentially escapist, he comments:

They will build out of pure thought a faithful counterpart of the world, a microcosm the perfect image of the macrocosm; believing that the laws and processes of the human mind correspond with those of the universe.<sup>6</sup>

Yet, in this commentary on the self-deceptions of philosophers and theologians, Thomson defines, to a large extent, the psychological torture implicit in his own rejection of "system" (whether it be Christianity or his later infatuation with Shelleyan pantheism), and also the principal structural technique of his own poetry and prose phantasies.

Thomson's writing is dominated by the psychological need for an "absolute" vision, for an awareness of some "universal law" which would mitigate his increasing conviction that there was indeed a "formless void" beneath material reality. The poems and prose works which comprise "B.V.'s" search for "truth," whether "absolute" or "relative"<sup>7</sup> are written primarily in the genre of fantasy. In each he constructs a symbolic uni-



verse in which the narrator is confronted with the concrete manifestations of the poet's own thought, his current version of the "macrocosm."<sup>8</sup>

The dichotomy exemplified above between the poet's objective judgment of others (and, we may possibly assume, himself) and his own poetic practice--the simultaneous dependence upon and rejection of the validity of personal evaluation--is perhaps characteristic of a mind schooled in Calvinist-based Protestantism.<sup>9</sup> In no other interpretation of the Christian faith is there such a stress upon personal perception as the medium of spiritual revelation, and, at the same time, such an overwhelming mistrust of that perception as having been distorted by original sin.

James Thomson, raised from the age of eight years in the Royal Caledonian Asylum for children of poor Scottish soldiers and sailors, was well-versed in the major tenets and scriptural bases of Calvinism: the principles of election, reprobation, covenant and law. Thomson's religious background was further complicated by the fact that his mother, whom he remembered as an especially devout woman, was an Irvingite, a member of an increasingly millenarianist offshoot of the Scottish Kirk.<sup>10</sup> Although he was only eight years old at the time of his mother's death, Thomson recalls in a letter to his sister-in-law (23 January 1882):

I remember well Irving's portrait under yellow gauze, and some books of his own on the interpretation of prophecy, which I used to read for the imagery.<sup>11</sup>

However, many years later, entries in the poet's journals of the service-times of the Catholic and Apostolic Church (as well as the Swedenborgian and others)<sup>12</sup> would seem to indicate that his interest in "the imagery" of the Irvingite church was not limited to his pre-school reading of theology.

Although there were ever-widening differences between the Kirk and the Irvingite sect, the latter, particularly in its early form (the form with which Thomson would have been familiar through his mother) still maintained strong ties with the parent church. As P.E. Shaw in his study of the Catholic-Apostolic Church comments:

Edward Irving felt himself throughout a loyal son of the Church of Scotland, and in his day the services were simple save for the interruptions by the 'prophetic' power, and without the elaborateness of later days.<sup>13</sup>

Both sects were (and are) characterized by their adherence to the doctrines of predestination, election and reprobation, and by an emphasis on the literal interpretation of biblical text. Calvin, for instance, in the Institutes of 1536, features these as the primary conditions of faith:

Faith consists not only in belief in the existence of God and Christ, but also in belief in God and Christ. That means not only holding all that is written or said on the subject of God and of Christ to be true, but putting all our hope and trust in one God and Christ alone, and being so confirmed in that faith that we have no doubt of God's good will towards us, that we have the certitude that everything necessary to our soul and our body will be given by him, that we confidently expect the fulfillment of all the promises of Scripture concerning him, that we unflinchingly believe that for us Jesus is the Christ--....<sup>14</sup>

This total acceptance of biblical truth defines also the spiritual state of the elect. Conversely, the inability to accept a fundamental stance indicates that one is in a state of sin or reprobation:<sup>15</sup>

Now, that the covenant of life is not preached equally to everyone, and even where it is preached is not equally received by all--in this diversity there appears a wonderful secret of the judgement of God.<sup>16</sup>

On the basis of these same doctrines, of predestined sanctification or depravity, the Catholic-Apostolic Church maintained a decidedly anti-evangelical stance. As one contemporary commentator remarked:

Their efforts are directed to convert the heathen, and only secondarily to convert the unconverted; but principally to gather in the elect out of mystical Egypt and Babylon; (by which terms they designate the religious world;) for they hold a definite number has been given by the Father to the Son, and this number can neither be increased or diminished by the efforts of all the Evangelists or Infidels in the world. They therefore address themselves principally to the Children of God....<sup>17</sup>

The two alternatives of election and reprobation in the Calvinist concept of predestination necessitate the existence of a rigid moral code, a code which finds its basis in Old Testament covenant Law. As Calvin maintains in his "Sermon on Ephesians 2.19-22":

Let us apply our study to the law and the Prophets, well knowing that they lead us to our Lord Jesus Christ, for he is the end proposed to us...as it is said that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the law.<sup>18</sup>

However, if Calvinism can be said to approach Christianity through the promise of the covenant-law, Irvingism concentrates on the promise embodied in the new covenant to be fulfilled with the Second Advent. Thus, the Catholic-Apostolic Church laid great stress on the prophetic and apocalyptic writings of the Old and New Testaments--a stress already present in Calvinism owing to the predominately ethical concern of that faith. As the Irvingites believed themselves to be witnesses of the final stages of the Apocalypse and participants in the re-establishment of the Apostolate, they attempted to perform a prophetic mission to the world (although as we commented earlier this was somewhat limited). Thus, ultimately, despite the growing mysticism of the sect, the traditions on which its doctrines were based--the apostolic and apocalyptic--find their imagistic and thematic basis in the same prophetic literature which dominates Calvinist concern.

Partly as a consequence of this highly legalistic religious background, the startling scientific advances of the Nineteenth Century

(particularly Darwinism) profoundly affected the poet. Hoxie Neale Fairchild hypothesizes that the extreme ethical divisions of Calvinist Protestantism were carried over into Thomson's evaluation of the new science, that only one system of universal law could be valid:

He lacked a philosophical centre from which to judge his secondhand notions of "scientific law," and he identified theology with the crudest fundamentalism. The negative side of Bradlaugh's program appealed to him strongly: whatever else might or might not be true, Christianity was false and must be destroyed.<sup>19</sup>

Incapable of intellectual compromise, and hampered severely by emotional ties to the religious system in which he had been educated, Thomson in his early poetry struggles to rationalize, to accept, the ethical paradox of a Calvinist God of Wrath ("The Doom of a City"), to cope with the seeming disappearance of the merciful aspect of God ("Suggested by Matthew Arnold's 'Stanzas from the Grand Chartreuse'"), or to visualize a deity which would nullify the extremes of beatitude and violent judgement offered by fundamentalist Christianity ("To Our Ladies of Death"). The poetry written between 1855 and the early 1860's shows a constant oscillation between acceptance and rejection of Christianity. Whatever the state of Thomson's beliefs, however, these poems are characterized by an unaltering pattern of imagery, the imagery of the Christian faith.

"The Approach to St. Pauls" (1855) which Thomson wrote at the age of twenty-one simultaneously reflects, in the imagery which is to dominate his poetic expression, the young poet's current religious commitment and the irreligious nature of his environment:

Eastwards through the busy streets I lingered on;  
Jostled by anxious crowds, who, heart and brain,  
Were so absorbed in dreams of Mammon-gain,  
That they could spare no time to look upon

The sunset's gold and crimson fires, which shone  
 Blessing keen eyes and wrinkled brows in vain.  
 Right in my path stood out that solemn Fane  
 Whose soaring cupola of stern grey stone  
 Lifteth for awful beacon to the sky  
 The burning Cross: silent and sole amid  
 That ceaseless uproar, as a pyramid  
 Isled in its desert. The great throngs pressed by  
 Heedless and Urgent: Thus Religion towers  
 Above this sordid, restless Life of ours.

Already evident in this poem is the poet's sense of isolation, brought on by his religious belief, as well as his disdain of others for their idolatry and blindness in the face of what he feels to be metaphysical truth (as yet symbolized in the "burning Cross" of Christianity). The street is, as in his later work, a desert; the setting is by allusion equated with the wilderness of the Egyptian captivity.

Thomson's early reaction (1855) in "Suggested by Matthew Arnold's 'Stanzas from the Grand Chartreuse'" to the possible invalidity of Christianity could well be an example of the stance which twenty years later, in "On the Worth of Metaphysical System," he criticizes as the inability to "endure the utter blank immeasurable" that forms the "truth".<sup>20</sup> The poem is a "dirge" (1.7) for the creed which, for the poet, is symbolized in the prostrate form of the dead Christ; yet, despite his conviction that the Christian God is indeed dead, there is a deliberate reluctance to desert the faith:

Nay, ask us not to rise and leave  
 Him from whom power and life seem gone;  
 Say not that it is weak to grieve;  
 Duty does not, now, urge us on.  
 In vain ye urge, too well we know  
 We cannot by our own strength go. (III. 1-6)

The ambiguity of Thomson's religious stance in the poem is further exemplified in the internal division between the initially stated theme and its presentation. The poem sets out to bemoan the death of a

God, but the imagery is that of the Old Testament (Mosaic) covenant of God with his people, and of the consequences of that people's faithlessness to that covenant. Matthew Arnold's "Stanzas from the Grand Chartreuse" is echoed in Thomson's appeal "Oh, teach us how to worship Thee!"<sup>21</sup> but the thrust of the poem is ultimately different from Arnold's as Thomson's stress is progressively shifted from the death of the Creed to the reprobation of its adherents:

My brothers, let us own the truth,  
 Bitter and mournful though it be,  
 That we, who spent our dreary youth  
 In foul and sensual slavery,  
 Are all too slavish, too unmanned,  
 For Conquerors of the Promised Land.

In unprogressive wanderings  
 We plod the desert to and fro;  
 And fiery serpents' mortal stings,  
 And pestilence deal fearful death, *Earthquake and sword and weary woe*  
 Amongst us for our lack of faith. (III. 25-36)

The Calvinist doctrine of election surfaces in the declaration:

He gives us all we can receive;  
 He teaches us all we can believe.

The pure can see Him perfect-pure;  
 The strong feel Him, Omnipotent;  
 The wise, All-wise; He is obscure  
 But to the gross and earth-bound sense:  
 Alas for us with blinded sight  
 Who dare to cry, There is no light! (II, 71-80)

Of this doctrine P. Lobstein in his discussion of Calvinism comments:

For those whom God chooses, he renews and justifies by communicating to them the strength to live a godly life. The decree of everlasting election does not refer, then, to an abstract transcendence or to a rigid objective outside and above the elect; it is realized in their life and becomes immanent in it. Where there is no sanctification, the election which is a prior condition for it must necessarily be absent.<sup>22</sup>

Thomson's use of biblical imagery in this poem is increasingly filtered through "the Calvinist ethic," as Lobstein calls it. The sense of repro-

bation, of the absence of "sanctification," is communicated through the images of the Exodus: the plagues visited on Israel for their unbelief, of which the principle is the exclusion of the Exodus generation from the Promised Land.

Thomson's poetry in the late 1850's and early 1860's is increasingly complicated by a concern with the farther-reaching doctrinal implications of the character assigned to the Deity: the nature and validity of divine judgement, human immortality, life itself. "The Doom of a City" (1857) asserts the existence of an ethical God, but a God of violent judgement; "Mater Tenebrarum" (1859) demands proof of immortality, of a God of Beatitude, and affirms it more through emotional desperation than intellectual conviction; in the three "Ladies of Death" ("To Our Ladies of Death," 1860)--Beatitude, Annihilation and Oblivion--Thomson examines, from an alternately objective and subjective point of view, the implications of each form of "divinely inspired" death which they, as personifications of concept, represent.

In this last poem, the Calvinist orientation of the poet becomes apparent with the sharp division outlined between those worthy of Beatitude and the reprobate subject of Our Lady of Annihilation. The first aspect of Death, Our Lady of Beatitudes, is surrounded with symbols of Christian justice: the "seraphic mien" (l.38) of God's marshalls; the "tablet" (l.39) of trust and "regnant word" (l.42); the god-like characteristic of dispensing just deserts implied by her name. Just as Beatitude is identified with apocalyptic judgement and reward, Annihilation is linked with the demonic in an exactly paralleled series of images. She is:

Of mighty stature, of demoniac mien;  
Upon whose swarthy face and livid brow

Are graven deeply anguish, malice, scorn,  
 Strength ravaged by unrest, resolve forlorn  
 Of any hope, dazed pride that will not bow.  
 (II. 87-91)

Simultaneously she embodies the symbols of Milton's Satan, and (with her cup which parodies religious sacrament,) the temptations of the apocalyptic Whore of Babylon. Her victims are the "great," the "strong"-- "the great heart" and "mind" (II. 115-117) given up to sin. However, although the narrator feels himself to be unworthy of beatitude, "forlorn" in its literal meaning of lost--in Calvinist terms, because of lack of purity--he does not consider himself sufficiently reprobate to warrant annihilation.

Thomson's third aspect of Death, Oblivion, seems to find its source in an attempt to avoid the extremes of punishment or reward implicit in the affirmation of the existence of a Calvinist God. In this figure Thomson seeks the spiritual resurrection (the consciousness of 'grace') of "Beatitude," as well as physical and intellectual escape from the terrors of "Annihilation":

That when I have drunk my inmost fill  
 Of perfect peace, I may arise renewed;  
 In soul and body, intellect and will,  
 Equal to cope with Life whate'er its mood;  
 To sway its storm and energize its calm;  
 Through rhythmic years evolving like a psalm  
 Of infinite love and faith and sanctitude.  
 (183-189)

The concept of Oblivion, which as an escape from the consciousness of an inane universe is to become an important element in Thomson's later work, is as yet in its formative stages: its attraction seems to lie in its potential of eliminating the consciousness of sin, of assuring a state with "no sin, no fear, no failure, no excess" (217); its reality cannot be confirmed, only "yearned for" (223).



In his early poetry, as we have seen, Thomson seems to be searching for some principle which will validate the traditional symbolism of Christianity; in his later work, there is a constant tension between the essentially religious orientation of his symbolic vocabulary and the atheistic pronouncements which serve as his theme. However, despite his ultimate denial of the existence of a Christian God, Thomson's central concerns--personal immortality, determinism, the laws of nature--are too ontological to admit a definition of atheism for as Tillich notes:

Where there is ultimate concern, God can be denied only in the name of God. One God can deny another one. Ultimate concern cannot deny its own character as ultimate. Therefore, it affirms what is meant by the word "God". Atheism, consequently, can only mean the attempt to remove any ultimate concern--to remain unconcerned about the meaning of one's existence. Indifference toward the ultimate question is the only imaginable form of atheism.<sup>23</sup>

R.A. Forsyth quite legitimately observes of Thomson:

he never, even when most devoted to the religion of humanity, fully liberated himself from the traditional Christian ethos. That tradition proved to be a vital emotional landmark; the irony of his position was that having no other by which to take his bearings, he felt obliged to continue orienting from it even after it had crumbled. It was the desire for a guiding creed and dogma, the lack of 'negative capability', which circumscribed his visionary awareness of the totality and variety of human experience,...<sup>24</sup>

In fact, the "emotional landmarks" of Christianity provide not only the thematic concerns of Thomson's poetry and prose as indicated by Forsyth, but also the symbolic language of his expression. However seemingly incompatible with the theological implications of his personal beliefs, Thomson's imagery throughout is that of fundamentalist Christianity.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps the classic example of the resulting effect is found in "The City of Dreadful Night," in which the diction of the Nativity is twisted into the form of an announcement of the non-existence of God:

Good tidings of great joy for you, for all;  
 There is no God; no Fiend with names divine  
 Made us and tortures us; if we must pine,  
 It is to satiate no Being's gall.

(XIV. 39-42)

As a result of this technique, there is in much of Thomson's work a jarring gap between the emotive value of the images evoked and the new thematic context in which the positive potential of biblical and theological allusion is nullified. Despite this gap, the "landmarks" provided by traditional religious imagery and allusion become in their predominance the constituent parts of a landscape. This landscape is increasingly characterized by an almost demonic syncretization of the old and new faiths of the poet as the invasion of Christianity by Darwinism and Higher Criticism produces in Thomson's mind a new deity--Fate. The concept of Fate, especially in the later works ("A Lady of Sorrow," "The City of Dreadful Night") validates the symbolic language of the Christian tradition by ambiguously manifesting itself in the poet's emotional evaluation as simultaneously an Old Testament God of Wrath and the mechanistic force of the New Science.

The same mastery of ironic biblical allusion, which makes Thomson's free-thought satires so completely blasphemous, becomes in the landscape of his poetry and prose phantasies the medium of a consciously powerful appeal to the reader's religious sensibility. For example, in "Suggested by Matthew Arnold's 'Stanzas from the Grand Chartreuse'" the poet's use of biblical imagery is strictly within tradition: wandering through the desert in search of the Promised Land (Exodus); God as Light (The Gospel according to St. John); and the Apostles' accounts of the resurrection. The mood, however, is static, halted just prior to its logical conclusion in belief: the chosen people remain in the desert; the Light is no longer

visible; the God has not risen. The wilderness Law still exists, but the fulfillment of the covenant which it implies is denied.

Thomson also manipulates the emotive impact of his imagery by superimposing on the familiar Nineteenth-Century landscape of the city the mythic qualities of biblical settings--the wilderness and Babylon. Of these settings Northrop Frye comments:

In biblical typology the relation between Eden and the wilderness of Adam's exile is closely parallel to the relation between the Promised Land and the wilderness of the Law.<sup>26</sup>

This correlation is especially true in a fundamentalist interpretation of biblical type, in the tradition of interpretation in which Thomson was educated. Thus, as Adam is consigned to the desert for his sin, it (the desert) becomes the natural element of man; Ishmael, on the birth of the legitimate son of Israel, is excluded from the covenant-relationship of the chosen people with God, and is driven into the desert; Moses secures for the Israelites the promise inherent in the Law, but because of their unbelief he himself never reaches the Promised Land; the Old Testament prophets cry out in the wilderness, as does John the Baptist, and they never see the advent of the New Covenant. These figures provide Thomson with the narrative perspective of much of his poetry; their environment symbolically defines the moral state of the social reality which underlies his "surreal"<sup>27</sup> cities. His Cities are deserts; the circular, Dantesque, quests of the narrators of "The Doom of a City" and "The City of Dreadful Night" are simultaneously representative of the wilderness-wanderings of the chosen people.

In Thomson's poetry, we witness multiple alterations in the belief of the poet, but, as we have seen, the same images run throughout most of his work regardless of his current religious or philosophical stance.

These major images, chiefly biblical or theological in origin, while not altered in themselves, are inextricably linked with the attitude dominant in each individual poem, and change in significance with the fluctuating psychological and religious orientation of the poet. In the next three chapters of this thesis, with the examination of three longer works of fantasy--"The Doom of a City," "A Lady of Sorrow" and "The City of Dreadful Night"--the transition of the poet from faith to despair, will be seen and the effect of this transition on the biblical landscape which forms the basis of his imagistic presentation, will be more closely defined.

## CHAPTER II

In "The Doom of a City," perhaps more than in any other work by James Thomson, there is evidence of a violent surfacing of his Calvinist background. In the key concepts of Calvinism with their distinctly Old Testament orientation we find the primary source of the poet's pessimism; in the Old Testament itself we find the primary source of the language with which he gives that pessimism resonant expression. "The Doom" (1857) marks an affirmation of the existence of a God whose purposeful operation through doom and predestination does not differ greatly from that of arbitrary Fate in "The City of Dreadful Night."

Thomson himself observed of the poem:

I call it a Fantasia, because (lacking the knowledge and power to deal with the theme in its epical integrity) I have made it but an episode in a human life, instead of a chapter in the History of Fate. Thus it is throughout alloyed with the feelings and thoughts, the fantasies, of the supposed narrator; and the verse has all the variable-ness and abrupt transitions of a man's moods, instead of the solemn uniformity of the laws of Fate.<sup>1</sup>

The poem, then, is the chronicle of a mind; all that appears has been filtered through the perceptive faculties, and the imagination, of Thomson's narrator. The poet, manipulating the imagistic potential of "fantasy", creates in the poem a visionary geography, a world in which concept has physical actualization, in which metaphor and symbol become reality. In this essentially mythic construct, the narrator encounters the implications of the Calvinist doctrines of sin, predestination and retributive judgement on the level of physical experience. The poem progresses, however, not only by means of the narrator's physical movement within a symbolic landscape, but also by means of the interaction of two metaphysical perspectives: the one exemplified in the changing perceptions

and beliefs of the narrator; and the other, less evident initially but omnipresent throughout, manifesting itself in the uniform operation of "the laws of Fate." Ultimately, the first gives way to a consciousness of the latter, and in the final prophetic statement of the work becomes its "instrument" (IV.iii. 89).

On the narrative level, "The Doom of a City" traces the voyage of its narrator from his native city which, in his eyes, is spiritually dead, to a second city in which the inhabitants have, in fact, been transformed into senseless stone. There he witnesses the reawakening of the statues and the imposition upon them of divine judgement, and once again returns to his own city to warn his countrymen of the impending doom. The poem is divided into four sections which correspond to this physical movement: "The Voyage" (Part I), "The City" (Part II), "The Judgements" (Part III) and "The Return" (Part IV). However, each section also witnesses a distinct shift in the narrator's perception of metaphysical reality as he moves from a pantheistic to an almost prophetic interpretation of the relationship of man to the universe.

In "The Voyage," Thomson's narrator, in a state of spiritual lethargy, sets out on a directionless journey in an attempt to escape the lifeless atmosphere of his native city. The descriptions of the city, the landscape and the perils of the sea-voyage are thus initially filtered through the narrator's spiritual uncertainty, or, as Thomson phrases it in his commentary, are "alloyed with the farrings and thoughts, the fantasies, of the supposed narrator."<sup>2</sup> As the voyage progresses, the narrator's perceptions are gradually purged of their self-indulgent negativism by the violence of the storm, and by an equally violent psychological conflict within the narrator himself. In the city of Part II, nature seems vibrantly alive.

However, despite the atmosphere of life, its human inhabitants are physically and spiritually dead. In "The Judgements," as the poem is formally transmuted into a concrete statement of the precepts of ethical Christianity, this deadness is revealed as a preparation for divine judgement. In this section, the narrator is no longer able to impose his own perceptions on the action, but becomes merely an observer of the operation of the "laws of Fate,"<sup>3</sup> relaying to the reader the decrees of a higher power. Finally, after having been initiated into the Calvinist vision of an ethical universe, the narrator returns to his own city and conveys to its inhabitants the conditions of man's covenant with God as they have been demonstrated in "The Judgements."

As the poem progresses, the narrator's judgements are based less and less on his own perceptions, until in the final segment he becomes merely the "passive instrument" (IV.iii. 89) of the Deity. This change is exemplified in the poem's (and the narrator's) shifting portrayal of the two cities around which Thomson has structured the physical and thematic progress of the poem. Each of these cities is described in two stages: first, in terms of the narrator's personal evaluation, and secondly, in terms of the omniscient judgement of an ethical God--in terms of Law. The work thus divides into two main sections: Parts I and II exemplifying the unaided perceptions of the narrator, and Parts III and IV witnessing an intrusion into the natural world of transcendent ethical judgement. Separating these variously perceived cities are transitional sections in which the narrator undergoes the psychological changes, the emotional, intellectual and spiritual revelations, which result in the transmutation of his subsequent evaluations of physical and metaphysical reality.

The narrator's native city, the starting point for his quest, is

characterized in his description by its physical deadness. It is evident from the beginning, however, that the description is largely conditioned by the narrator's own uncertain psychological state:

The mighty City in vast silence slept,  
 Dreaming away its tumult, toil and strife:  
 But sleep and sleep's rich dreams were not for me,  
 For me, accurst, whom terror and the pain  
 Of baffled longings, and starved misery,  
 And such remorse as sears the brain  
 Till wildest action blind and vain  
 Would be more welcome than supine unrest,  
     Drove forth as one possest  
 To leave my kind and dare the desert sea;...

(I.i. 3-13)

The narrator's impression (for it cannot accurately be called a physical description) of his city concentrates markedly on its finite and mortal nature in contrast with the surrounding sea's intriguing suggestions of voices "from worlds beyond our life and death, The unknown awful realm where broods Eternity" (I.i. 24-25). The night-scene of the "desert streets" (I.ii. 26) through which the narrator walks in his resolve to leave the city takes on, in juxtaposition with the sea's suggestions of the eternal, a dream-like unreality. Even nature seems dead within the bounds of the city; the river's pulse is still in the "unnatural hush of brooding night" (I.ii.45).

The narrator's commentary on his city is structured around a simile which, in describing the lamps in the empty street, plays upon the traditional symbolic association of light with life. This simile is expanded into the only description given by the narrator of his native city, a description wholly based in his current negative psychological orientation. Consequently, the portrayal of the city is solely in terms of the negation of life: sleep is equated with death, the City with a cemetery, the night with the "sunless ages" of mortality, and finally, the "rich dreams" of



sleep (I.i.5) previously so desired by the narrator are perceived as false illusions accepted by the "peopling corpses" as the reality of "complicated life" (I.ii.32).

While the description of the narrator's native city is almost completely figurative, the city at which he arrives at the end of his voyage is given an extremely thorough physical description. Indeed, Part II of the poem is devoted to the narrator's exploration of, and reaction to, the physical reality of this second city, a city which presents an inverse image of the city of the opening cantos of "The Voyage." There nature seemed dead; here nature is represented by "the stream whose pulse flowed lifeful through the City's heart" (II.v.123-4). There lamps burnt "sepulchral" in the "buried City" and the sky was moonless; here "the full moon gazeth down on the smokeless lampless town" (II.ix.253). The first city was equated in simile with a cemetery; in the second city, the first scene encountered by the narrator is an actual cemetery.

However, while in the Part I description Thomson's concentration was on the inevitable mortality of the "peopling corpses," here it is the monuments which insure the immortality of the dead which are stressed:

And far around stood up in dense array  
These monumental marbles ever reared  
By men still battling with the Powers of Life  
To those released before them from its sway:...

(II.iii.72-75)

The description of a funeral train within this literal "City of the dead" becomes increasingly ironic. The mourners seem frozen by grief, one figure in particular stands "a dumb statue of Despair" (II.iv.97), and, as the narrator approaches, he perceives the truth of his metaphor. The scene is at this point, however, interpreted as being one of "monumental marble," cemetery art:

What people dwell within this Silent Land,  
 Who thus have placed, through day and night to stand,  
 This scene complete in all its images  
 Of Life in solemn conference with Death  
 Amidst the wide and populous solitude  
 Of Death's own realm?--a people of strange mood.

(II.iv.109-114)

On a larger scale this tableau becomes an emblem of the City's physical reality, and of the irony underlying its appearance of life, for, as the narrator continues his explorations, he finds that its inhabitants have become stone memorials of their own lives. Where the narrator described the first city with its sleeping population in terms of the abodes of the dead, this "Mausolean" city (II.vi.143) is described primarily in terms of the absence of life in those places most identified with social interchange: the market-place, the theatre, the jail, the temple, the palace. While in the first city the living slept, leaving the streets deserted, here the dead stand in the places of the living; if in Part I the narrator and the "peopling corpses" seemed to have no affinity with the lifeful sea, here:

The whole vast sea of life about me lay,  
 The passionate, heaving, restless, sounding life  
 With all its tides and billows, foam and spray,  
 Arrested in the full tumult of its strife  
 Frozen into a nightmare's ghastly death,  
 Struck silent from its laughter and its moan;  
 The vigorous heart and brain and blood and breath  
 Stark, strangled, confined in eternal stone.

(II.viii.209-216)

The narrator makes metaphoric appeals throughout "The City" for a catharsis--whether natural (II.x.280f) or dramatic (II.ix.225-232)--appeals which are at this point left unanswered. The fate of the city's inhabitants is continually restated in terms of different metaphors in what would seem to be an attempt by the narrator to rationalize the absence of human life in a setting which otherwise reflects his metaphysic

of an organic universe:

Can souls be blighted where mere trees grow?  
 Can lives be frozen where the dead streams flow?  
 Can Man be prostrate where the fleeting mountains  
 Stand up and fling abroad their joyous fountains?  
 (II.vii.175-8)

Finally, Thomson presents the portrait of the Sage. This figure stands in the context of the city as an emblem of the failings of the pantheistic vision attained:

By constant intercourse with general Life,  
 And with the Universal Spirit rife  
 In Man and Nature,--One in all their forms,  
 Alike contented with its worlds and worms,  
 Through all its countless masks alike resplendent,  
 The Breath of Life, eternal and transcendent.  
 (II.xv.360-5)

The City which the tower of the Sage overlooks now stands as a contradiction of the existence of that "Universal Spirit," and the Sage himself has become merely one of his own memorials of past philosophers.

Thomson, by confronting his narrator with the metaphysical conclusions outlined in the Sage's thesis, "the roll which telleth on what mysteries/ He shed his lustre till they shone out clear" (II.xvi.371-2), provides his readers with a defining statement of the vision which, in its positive or negative form, has dominated the narrator's perceptions to this point. This "Thesis" (II.xvii.398) serves as a link to the subsequently ethical orientation of "The Doom of a City" through its doctrinal, point-by-point, definition of the defunct pantheism which the narrator will finally discard in favour of its antithesis: a non-organic, supernatural deity. The rhetoric of the thesis itself, while expressing a pantheistic philosophy, is stylistically reminiscent of biblical diction, perhaps marking an attempt by Thomson to emphasize the heretical nature of its stance; thematically, it recalls by contradiction several of the key assumptions of the Calvinist

theology. The Sage's courtly dedication of his Thesis to "Chrysandros Tyrant of Cosmopolis," an earthly king of an earthly kingdom,<sup>4</sup> echoes the description of the "Ancient of Days" on his fiery throne in Daniel 7:9. The king is "creator," "sustainer," administrator of "life" and "light," and commands both "love" and "awe." Perhaps of still more significance, "He" is the one "by Whom our heritage is grown the flower o' the world" (II.xv.388-9). He is, in other words, described as the director of the history of a chosen people, as is the Old Testament God of Israel. The Thesis itself denies the necessity of apocalypse in its statement of the perfectibility of Nature, of the gradual ascendance of creation to a state of universal sentience, in effect transferring to the natural universe the eternal properties traditionally accorded to the Deity alone.

The voyage between these two cities is, in accordance with the mode of perception of the narrator in Parts I and II of the poem, distinctly reminiscent of such poetic voyages as Shelley's Alastor. Thomson observed of this long transitional passage:

The Voyage is certainly tiresome, and probably foolish,  
but a penny steamboat will not carry one to a city where  
the people are all petrified, - not simply in soul and  
mind, but also in flesh and blood and bone.<sup>5</sup>

However "tiresome," the tradition of the Romantic voyage provides the poet with a means of initiating a quest without a closely defined goal or purpose. Its concentration on psychological change (or movement) towards a widened consciousness not only serves as a contrast to the narrator's later assertion of the subservience of man to an external power, but also introduces to the subject's mode of perception the lucidity necessary to his examination of the "City of the Dead." The experience

of "The City," in turn, by means of the nullification of pathetic fallacy, prepares the narrator for the direct intervention of the Deity in "The Judgements."

While our concern with biblical landscape as it manifests itself in "The Doom of a City" necessitates a concentration of interest on the final segments of the poem, and although the voyage of the narrator in Part I is essentially equatable with the psychologically oriented quests of the Romantics, the ethical orientation of the metaphysic of Parts III and IV of "The Doom" is subtly prepared for by biblical allusions and images incorporated into the narrator's description of his experiences at sea.

The narrator's description of his voyage is, from the start, grounded primarily in personal impressions, "the feelings and thoughts, the fantasies,"<sup>6</sup> rather than in empirical observation. Perhaps an extreme example of the implications of this mode of perception is found in his portrayal, at the beginning of his journey, of the gradual merging of the river which flows through the city with the sea:

Like some weak life whose sluggish moments creep  
Diffused on worthless objects, yet whose tide  
With dull reluctance hard to understand  
Refrains its death-in-life from death's full sleep,  
The river's shallow waters oozed out wide,  
Inclosing dreary flats of barren sand;  
So merged at last into the lethal waste  
That bounds of sea and stream could not be traced.  
(I.iv.56-65)

The scene is described in terms of the psychological, the "weak life," implying in the comparison that the latter has more basis in reality than the concrete "sea and stream." This method of communicating personal significance simultaneously with effective portrayal of physical reality is the basic technique employed by Thomson in "The Voyage." It is also

the means by which he incorporates into his description of the ever-changing sea-scape the apocalyptic allusions which link Parts I and II of his fantasia with the actions of an ethical deity in "The Judgements" and "The Return."

A storm at sea takes on in Thomson's manipulation of the simile-form implications of malignity, becoming "as" a wrathful God,

- As a King who had slept  
The sleep of worn out frenzy, while his slaves  
Cowered still in stupor till he woke again  
Refreshed for carnage - (I.v.70-73)

As the storm grows in intensity, so does the apocalyptic inference of the narrator's figurative equations. The narrator has just left a city which he has defined as being "peopled" with "corpses," and is progressing towards a second city in which the people are indeed dead; now, as lightning strikes, he depicts the momentary calm in a particularly relevant allusion to the traditional events of the "Last Day":

Such shuddering silence as may once appal  
The universe of tombs,  
Ere the last trumpet's clangour rend them all:... (I.v.81-3)

Thomson's inference is definitely to the second and final flood: the deluge is one of fire rather than water; the sky is full of "wild rainbow fragments," traditional symbols of covenant but here broken. In the narrator's personal reaction to his safe conduct through the storm is evidence of a sense of reprobation, wonder at his deliverance from the wrath of nature. Further, the narrator, in defining his own relationship to the natural turbulence, infers through descriptive metaphor the existence of ethical concepts which have no viable basis in his apparently pantheistic orientation--universal law, and divine direction of human action:

How shall I tell that tempest's thunder-story?-  
 The Soldier plunged into the Battle-stress,  
 Struggling and gasping in the mighty flood,

...

What knows he of the Battle's spheric glory?  
 Of heavenly laws that all its evil bless-  
 Of sacred rights of justice which invoke  
 Its sternest pleading - of the tranquil eye  
 Triumphant o'er its chaos - of the Mind  
 Commanding all, serene and unsubdued,  
 Which having first with wisest care designed  
 Works to that end with vigilant fortitude;...

(I.vi.87-101)

The natural storm remains the reality, the apocalyptic suggestion being confined to metaphor. However, metaphor and simile inevitably imply the validity of their equations. The narrator's religious interpretation of, and reaction to, the elemental storm prepare the way for later validation of the metaphysic they imply. Even within the context of "The Voyage" nature seems to be awaiting some further development of the negative potential of this first storm as clouds, "grey phantoms," remain

Still unrecovered from the storm whose ire  
 Had drowned them in wild floods of pitiless fire,  
 Or prescient of some deadlier tempest lowering.

(I.x.200-202)

Within "The Voyage" itself a version of this "deadlier tempest" is provided. With the post-storm dawn, peace emerges out of chaos, only to be submerged again as the first tempest is re-enacted on a level in which the distinctions between the physical and psychological, reality and metaphor, are completely blurred. The fresh disturbance begins in the natural realm of wind and night (I.xiii.240-249), and becomes in the narrator's imagination something supernatural, a serpentine, Leviathan-like monster:

It bore on steadfastly those loathsome eyes,  
 Set in the midst of intertangled hair

Like sea-weed in whose jungle have their lair  
 All foul and half-lived things:  
 With such a gleam as haunts the rotting graves.  
 They fixed upon me their malignant stare;  
 Shallow and slimy, fiendish, eyes of death.

The creature arises "coil on coil" (I.xii.256) in the narrator's mind, a manifestation imagistically and thematically complementing the apocalyptic atmosphere of "The Voyage," for:

In that day the LORD with his sore and great and strong  
 sword shall punish leviathan the piercing serpent, even  
 leviathan that crooked serpent; and he shall slay the  
 dragon that is in the sea.

(Isaiah 27:1)

Thomson here synthesizes the biblical symbolism implicit in the expulsion of the serpentine monster with the high Romantic identification of the sea with the traveller's own soul; the creature's destruction completes the emotional catharsis necessary for the more specifically spiritual revelation of the following segments of the poem.

The metaphor of deliverance equates relief from the spectre of the Medusa-like creature with the fall of Satan as decreed by God. However, despite the tendency on the part of the narrator to define the threat in terms of externals, the "fateful Horror" which dominates cantos xiii-xv is ultimately internal in origin:

Formless and dim, but mighty to disease;  
 Devouring, poisoning, stifling his pure life.  
 (I.xv.293-4)

His release, in metaphor attributed to "the holy skies," is also clearly psychological, but carries with it suggestions of evangelical repentance. The dangers of emotional turbulence and the constriction of despair which have plagued the "man forlorn" are outlined in terms usually reserved for descriptions of spiritual depravity:

And thus in his first health is clearly shown  
 What still was hidden from his lunacy,



The full obscene and deadly ghastliness  
 Of that which held and ruled him to this day:  
 Abhorrence almost chills him into stone,  
 And that great blow which struck the prisoner free  
 Hath nearly slain him by its mighty stress.  
 Such was my agony of joy that hour,  
 When saved for ever from the monster's power.  
 (I.xv.302-310)

The culmination of these resonances of the biblical in the narrator's commentary on his voyage comes in Part II, canto ii, in the aftermath of this purgation. Here, the narrator's evaluation of the journey takes on an even more biblical theological tone, though still on a metaphoric level, as he tentatively defines his journey as an Exodus in search of the Law:

Some revelation from the awful Throne  
 Awaits me surely: if my life, torn free  
 From dire Egyptian bondage has been led  
 In safety through the all-devouring sea;  
 If, lost in some foodless deserts it was fed  
 Though murmuring ever; hath it truly trod  
 Such paths for nothing? Shall it not be brought  
 To stand awe-stricken. 'neath some Mount of God  
 Wrapt in thick clouds of thunder, fire and gloom,  
 To good or evil must henceforth be wrought?  
 (II.ii.45-55)

Closely related to the Voyage between the two cities is another transitional passage, one forming a thematic bridge between the initial, physical description of the second city in Part II and the levying of ethical judgement upon it in Part III. The Sage and his thesis provide an outline of the metaphysical premises of both his and the narrator's evaluations of that city; the narrator's reaction to this doctrinal outline in the context of the city's fate marks another step in his movement towards a new understanding of the limitations of his own preoccupations and perception.

In a passage significantly reminiscent of that in "The Voyage" in which he describes his escape from the serpentine "coils" of the "Horror," the narrator defines the source of his negative perceptions as the willing

espousal of Misery (II.xviii.439f). The gradual constriction of his "pure life," attributed in the earlier passage to the monster, is now recognizably psychological, no longer externalized:

I shut myself up from the lives around me,  
Eating my own foul heart - envenomed food;  
And while dark shadows more and more enwound me,  
Nourished a dreary pride of solitude;  
The cords of sympathy which should have bound me  
In sweet-communion with earth's brotherhood,  
I drew in tight and tighter still around me,  
Strangling my best existence for a mood.

(II.xix.459-466)

As we have previously noted, his understanding of his own city provides the gauge by which to judge the shifting orientation of the narrator's evaluations. His early observations, based in pathetic fallacy and put forward in simile and metaphor, are here redefined in increasingly less subjective terms. In the initial description, the narrator's city became, within the structure of simile, a cemetery, a grave; in the metaphor of Part II, canto ii, as the narrator perceives himself to be moving towards some kind of revelation, it becomes, necessarily in his analogy, the site of "dire Egyptian bondage" (II.ii.47); finally, considered separately from his self-evaluation, and in the light of the true deadness of the second city, the city is reinterpreted, as is his own previous orientation:

Dire Vanity! to think to break the union  
That interweaveth strictly soul with soul  
In constant, sane, life-nourishing communion:  
The rivers ever to the ocean roll,  
The ocean-waters feed the clouds on high  
Whose rains descending feed the flowing rivers:  
All the world's children must how quickly die  
Were they not all receivers and givers!

(II.xix.483-450)

In a parallel to the purgative process of "The Voyage," in which the Medusa-like characteristic of inducing solidification attributed to the monster apparently depends upon the subject's awakened consciousness of his own reprobation, the recognition by the narrator of his mistaken

metaphysic results in a movement towards the abdication of consciousness. As the Sage sits triumphant and frozen, expounder of his heretical Romantic creed and proof of its invalidity, the narrator who had earlier stated, through the metaphor of the revelation of the Mosaic covenant, an expectation of a visionary experience, consciously longs for the non-existence which will obscure the truth which has been "unveiled" to him.

In "The Judgements" the metaphoric suggestions within Parts I and II of "The Doom of a City" of the existence of a universal ethical force are confirmed by the direct intervention of the Deity into the physical world. In Thomson's portrayal of a universe under the active direction of moral law, the doctrines of Calvinist Christianity, though often slightly altered, necessarily form an intrinsic part: the doctrines of pre-destination, election and reprobation and, on a more structural level, the Calvinist mistrust of individual perception. The organic view of the universe previously subscribed to by the narrator, as it by implication necessitates an 'immanence' of divinity, is, from a Calvinist point of view, sinful:

For as soon as a survey of the world has shown us a deity,  
neglecting the true God, we set up in his stead the dreams  
and fantasms of our own brains and confer on them the  
praise of righteousness, wisdom, goodness and power, due  
to him.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, the revelation of a transcendent force demands a revaluation on the part of the narrator of the landscape of the poem, a revaluation imposed upon him by the "Voice" which in Part III explicates the nature of the sins of the statue-city.

The Sage and his thesis in the last few cantos of Part II ("The City") provide a base for the transition from one metaphysical system to another by establishing that the precepts of a pantheistic perception are essentially incompatible with those of a universe based in moral law. Chief

among these is the assertion that:

'This glorious Universe shall live for ever;  
By all decay and death diminished never,  
Nor added to by constant birth and growth;  
But in the balanced interchange of both,  
Ascending slowly by successive stages  
Of nobler Good and Beauty through the Ages;  
Until its infinite AEther and the Whole  
Of stars and spheres that through it flashing roll  
Shall be informed with conscious Life and Soul:  
The All, one perfect sphere, breathing one breath  
Of cosmic Life too pure for birth or death....'  
(II.xvii.399-409)

In direct opposition to this notion of perfectibility is the repeated stress by Thomson on the concept of "aeon" in "The Judgements." In his commentary on the poem, the poet refers the reader to De Quincey's definition of this term:<sup>8</sup>

Having anchorage in God, innumerable entities may possibly be admitted to a participation in divine 'aeon'. But what interest in the favour of God can belong to falsehood, to malignity, to impurity? To invest them with aeonian privileges is, in effect, and by its results, to distrust and to insult the Deity. Evil would not be evil, if it had that power of self-subsistence which is imputed to it in supposing its aeonian life to be co-eternal with that which crowns and glorifies the good.<sup>9</sup>

Part III of "The Doom" reaffirms, by the action of destructive judgement, the exclusive nature of aeonian privilege.

The city of statues itself, although its source is acknowledged by Thomson as "The Tale of Zobeide, The Three Ladies from Bagdad," is expanded by the pantheistic construct of "The Voyage" and by "The Judgements" and "The Return" segments far beyond the original tale. In the original, the strange fate of the city's inhabitants is explicated by the sole survivor of the transformation who is redeemed by his loyalty to Allah in a city dedicated to the worship of fire. This possibility of redemption is explored, but not manifested, in "The City":

Perchance the stately sepulchre may hide  
Some single life amidst the desolation,

Preserved alone in mystical salvation,  
 Entranced apart in holy contemplation?  
 (II.xii.302-5)

Thomson's version of the transformation, with its distinctly prophetic orientation, would seem to find a partial origin in a motif which runs throughout the prophetic texts of the Old Testament, that of the "hardening of the heart."<sup>10</sup> Perhaps the most extreme statement of this is to be found in the vision in which Isaiah of Jerusalem was called to be a prophet:

Make the heart of this people fat, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert and be healed.

Then I said, LORD, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate.<sup>11</sup>

This is seemingly the act of a vindictive God denying to his people the sensitivity necessary for their redemption. Abraham Heschel, however, notes that the biblical passage does in essence merely affirm an already present state of sin:

Spiritual deprivation will be but an intensification or an extension to what they themselves had done to their own souls. For hardening of the heart is either due to man himself (Jer. 5:3; Isa. 44:18; Zech. 7:11-13; Josh. 11:20; I Sam. 6:6; Ps. 95:8) or comes about as punishment from above.<sup>12</sup>

After divine retribution on the unheeding, and thus sinning, nation, the "tenth" (Isa. 6:13) yet remains, and the "holy seed" is its "substance"; in Calvinist terms, the destruction implicit in God's judgement marks the separation of the elect from the reprobate. The calcification of Thomson's city, which simultaneously incorporates guilt and punishment, suspends the religious and ethical stance of its inhabitants in preparation for judgement. Implicit in this perspective is the prophetic

concern with covenant and the consequences of covenant transgressed, for, as Calvin in the Institutes dictates the imperatives of this legalistic orientation of faith:

These three things it is certainly of the highest importance for us to know--mercy, in which alone consists all our salvation; judgement, which is executed on the wicked every day, and awaits them in still heavier degree to eternal destruction; righteousness, by which the faithful are preserved, and most generously supported.<sup>13</sup>

"The Judgements" incorporates features of both prophetic and apocalyptic judgement, features prefigured in the metaphoric description of the elemental storm of Part I. The voices, lightnings and trumpets of Thomson's description are the traditional preliminaries to apocalyptic statement; the "whirlwind blast" of III.i.10 recalls the affirmation of God's purpose to an uncomprehending Job "out of a whirlwind" (Job 38-42:6). The narrator's questioning description--

Drear palpitations, long-drawn moan and sigh:  
And then--an overwhelming whirlwind blast?  
Or else, indeed, the irrepressible cry  
Of all its statues waking up aghast!  
Doth God in final Judgement come thus heralded?  
(III.i.9-13)--

is significantly reminiscent of the description of "the Day of the Lord" in Daniel 12:2 :

And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and contempt.

The "Titanic forms" of canto ii of "The Judgements" echo back ironically to "The City," the Theatre of II.ix and x and the dramatic figures of "Titans, Furies, Eyeless Fate," there part of a metaphor which implies that the stone audience is frozen in anticipation of a dramatic catharsis, here linked conclusively with images of the judgement of the Hebraic Deity. In form, the chant recalls a chorus in classical

drama; in content, it provides an examination of prophetic covenant-curse, and the concepts of sin, predestination and fate.

The imagery of the "strange fragments" (III.ii.18) which comprise the chant of the Titanic forms, while puzzling in context, is, in fact, highly appropriate to a statement of impending doom. The first fragment manifests one of the recurring emblems of the prophetic portrayal of coming disorder--the ascendance in the realm of Man of the beasts of the desert (the desert being traditionally associated with chaos): the "owl," "serpent," "bear," and "vulture" (III.ii.19-26).<sup>14</sup> The second fragment recalls the prophetic image of the book, an emblem of God-given knowledge of coming judgement, and expands it into the "archives of Fate" and the "records of Doom" (III.ii.27-30).<sup>15</sup> However, in each of these two fragments there is an element of ambiguity. The Voices transmute the distinctly apocalyptic imagery to a questioning rather than an affirmation of the ethics of judgement: would the desert beasts not be happier in their native element? Does the operation of Fate, here seemingly connoting History, recognize ethical principle ("Punishment or Reward" (III.iii.30))?

The final two fragments continue the somewhat problematic statement, in the context of a poem which delineates apocalyptic judgement, of an essential gap between ethical principle and actual existence--a problem inherent in the Calvinist doctrine of predestination:<sup>16</sup>

'Peace may be happy and sweet; bitter and heart-rending strife;  
Sin is corruption and death, Virtue is health and life:  
But every being is placed in that sphere, in that crisis, that spot,  
Which alone its nature demands and asserts for its lot:...' (III.ii.31-4)

The picture is of a methodical ordering, an interweaving of creation:

All the World--this infinite azure robe sphere-spangled sublime,  
In which God walks forth revealed and veiled to the Creatures  
of Space and Time,  
Is interwoven in one....

(III.ii.39-41)

By contrast, line 45 and following depict the perspective of mankind caught in the incomprehensible web of existence in a series of seemingly contradictory statements. "Bliss" in "golden air" is countered by "storms of doubt, dread, anguish, despair" (III.ii.45-46); worlds are "swept on their path"--"going nowhere" in an "infinite journey" with no purpose (III.ii.47-54). The conclusion supplies a negative inference of the validity of faith, or perhaps, of the validity of man's perceptions:

'But we swear by the Life Eternal, we swear by Eternal Death,  
We swear by the Fate supreme which rules in every pulse and breath;  
That strong or weak, simple or wise, polluted or most holy,  
Each each day is fed with the food befitting him fully and solely.'  
(III.ii.55-58)

These seeming contradictions are also implicit in Calvinist theology. The positive perspective is that of the elect, those to whom God and his purpose are "revealed" (III.ii.40); the inability to perceive God's ends is necessarily evidence of reprobation, the state in which God is "veiled" (III.ii.40). This passage thus provides a possible definition of the directionless voyage of Part I, which is ultimately given direction by an external and unknowable force.

After the initial tumult, as in "The Voyage," there is a silence which may well "appal the universe of tombs" (I.v.81-2). The orientation of the narrator within the city is re-established; then the Voice's "unimpassioned monotone" rings out the first Judgement in an indirect response to the ambiguous vision of the "strange fragments," The Judge-ments themselves each echo various biblical oracles and apocalyptic judgements, but with significant variations.

The "poisoned wine" of the first pronouncement, which necessitates the destruction of the "vessel," carries with it resonance of John of Patmos' account of the coming doom of Babylon whose "cup of fornication"



has infected the nations (Rev. 14), and of Isaiah's portrayal of the consequences of mistrust of the Deity:

And he shall break it as the breaking of the potters' vessel that is broken in pieces; he shall not spare: so that there shall not be found in the bursting of it a sherd to take fire from the hearth, or to take water withall out of the pit.

(Isaiah 30:14)

The answering cry that "our sins and souls are thine!" appeals again to the question of the moral validity of judgement as the complaint simultaneously confirms the statues' guilt and suggests that some measure of responsibility should fall on the Creator who predestined it. However, to St. Paul, in a passage central to Calvin's justification of the doctrine of election, this is a matter of the inscrutable will of God:

Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?  
(Rom. 9:21)

The decree, therefore, is final.

In the next judgement, the "sapless tree," to be "hewn away" so as to leave space for the living, appeals to a central image in Isaiah in which the tree, representing Israel, is to be cut to the stump, from which will grow a new and regenerate nation. It may also find points of reference in the tree vision of Daniel (Daniel 4) in which the tree symbolizes Nebuchadnezzar, or in the parable of the barren fig-tree of Matthew 21:18-22, each of which again involves a regenerative potential. Thomson's version of the judgement manifests no such potential. The dwellers in "limbo" protest that they "lived," but the decree is final. Linked with the "tree" oracle is that of the destruction of souls who have "lived," but perversely, "Whose virtue cannot pay their Life's expense." This judgement is perhaps most significant in its relation to

the stance of the Sage in "The City" (II.xvii.400f), to the aspiration implicit in his concept of the organic growth of the universe towards perfection:

'They are no more: themselves with God have willed,--  
Their aeon is fulfilled.'

(III.iv.135-6)

In the subsequent decrees, the theological orientation of Thomson's imagery becomes increasingly unorthodox. The judgement against selfish "rulers" in canto v, for instance, follows a well-defined tradition in prophetic literature in which the "righteousness" of the Law of God is contrasted with its earthly administration. By causing them to be reincarnated as beasts, Thomson seems to have incorporated into this tradition the rather unique judgement upon Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel (Daniel 4:16):

Let his heart be changed from man's, and let a beast's heart  
be given unto him; and let seven times pass over him.

By this means the poet actualizes the frequently occurring image of judgement discussed earlier--the habitation of the city by beasts--while introducing the picture of a Circe-like enchantment with implications of a purgative cycle of incarnations. The transgression judged in canto vi is the lack of dedication to the pilgrimage of Life. This is portrayed in terms of the rocky path and wide highway of gospel (Matt. 7:13-14) which is so popular in Puritan allegory. The consequence of this sin is the annihilation of the offenders, as well as the destruction of the symbol of the "community," the need for human companionship, which retarded their progress--the City itself.

St. Paul repeatedly uses the metaphor of life as a battle:

I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I  
have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a  
crown of righteousness which the LORD, the righteous judge,

shall give me at that day:...

(II Timothy 4:7-8)<sup>17</sup>

Thomson uses the same image in his revelation of the reward of those who have lived uncorrupted, without aspiration, who were "PERSIST-ANT FOR THE RIGHT" (III.viii.250). They are accorded a respite, a time to gather their strength to continue "FOR EVER" in a cycle of ever more noble existences, until the Last Judgement grant them "BLISS". However, the vision which is granted to them at this time of "Thy perfect light" (III.ix.291) is, significantly, in a Calvinist mistrust of flesh, not so much ecstatic as painful:<sup>18</sup>

They stood-the Spirits who had conquered Life;  
Erect-yet pleading, hands uplifted, there;  
Glorious - yet wan with that divine despair:  
Was this the crowning issue of that strife?  
(III.x.301-4)

The answer to this question is the past-judgement descent of "a lofty band" of angels, and the subsequent ascension of the redeemed (III.x-xiii). In the angelic statement of divine purpose, Thomson attempts a response to the apparent ambiguities of the "strange fragments" (III.ii) and of the Judgements themselves, bringing to a transcendental realization the metaphors of growth, quest and seasonal cycle evoked in those passages. In the all-encompassing angelic perspective, the seemingly directionless wandering that is life (cantos ii;vi) has an ultimate goal; the tree that is life (canto iv) need not die; the wine which fills the human "vessel" (canto iii), too often "poisoned," has a potential form in the angelic "wine of Joy and Youth"; the "vessels" themselves, in the first judgement destroyed, may be, like those of the "redeemed,"

transfigured with the holy light  
As crystal cups with sacramental wine.  
(III.xiii.388-9)

This potential, obscured in the "midnight sphere" (III.ix.293) of human existence, is symbolized in the strengthening, albeit temporary, transcendence of the "Spirits who had conquered Life" to an informed state. Despite this more promising note, the ascendance of the elect leaves the earth "soulless" (III.xiii.398-409) as nature, in the aftermath of its manipulation for the purposes of God's wrath, is once again insensible to the doom of man. In the pantheistic vision of Part II this insensibility led to the nullification of that metaphysic; in this alternate vision of a universe under the direction of a transcendent power, the presence of natural cycle in conjunction with human tragedy becomes representative to the narrator of the possibility of immortality. He searches for a language with which to express hope and settles upon the language of the New Testament conception of God, and of regenerative incarnation:

What a dawn ascendeth fair through the pure and silent air,  
 Fain to greet with holy rapture what a glorious virgin Earth!  
 From her sins and fears and woes, from her memories, by the throes  
 Of a fierce regeneration born anew in perfect birth!  
(III.xb.464-7)

In this new perspective, the statues are not viewed as carnage of God's wrath, but as "marble fountains" to be filled with the "waters of the Life that never dies" (III.xv.483) in a distinct echo of the concept of Pentecost (Acts 2:4ff), and of its fulfilment in Revelation (Rev. 21:6). Also significant in terms of the expected reanimation is the imagery of Ezekiel:

A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put  
 within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your  
 flesh and I will give you an heart of flesh.  
(Ezekiel 36:26)

This is a regeneration, however, in which the narrator cannot share:

As he within that holy fane,  
 Was I upon that solemn shore;  
 One murky cloud, one spoiling stain,  
 One jarring note,--all these and more:....  
 (III.xvi.529-532)

Merely a witness to, and not a participant in, the regenerative process, he represents the pre-purgation state of City, the perversions of "Lusts," "Will," "Thought," and "Moods" which have been gradually illuminated for the narrator and the reader in the Judgements upon the inhabitants of the City. Although the "sinful Moods" with which the narrator identifies himself are imagistically related here to the simultaneous sin and redemption of the Christian Passion (III.xvi.545-8), the Christian inference is by parallel structure linked with the uncertainty of "that doleful drama, Life" (552), and the narrator seems to be trapped within the "sin-restless" state of pre-resurrection reprobation.

"The Return" marks the completion of the narrator's journey. He has moved from the metaphorically perceived city in Part I, to one physically demonstrating the inadequacy of that mode of perception in Part II, to a mythic city of divine judgement in Part III, and finally to a real city in which the concepts presented in archetypal form in Part III are given application in the realm of the particular. The portents of doom assigned to the natural elements in Part I, and actualized in Parts II and III, are now accorded to the city itself:

The shapeless houses and monstrous ships  
 Were brooding thunderclouds which could eclipse  
 The burning sun of day;  
 Surcharged with storms of such electric life,  
 Keen as the lightning to its chosen prey,  
 Curbless and dreadful when aroused to strife....  
 (IV.ii.57-62)

In Part IV, canto iii, for the first time in the poem, the narrator is clearly defined as having a purpose in his wanderings, a prophetic

mission. The desire for the peace of death which followed the emotional revelation of "The Voyage" and the intellectual one of the encounter with the Sage in "The City" is reiterated here. This time, however, the fear is of yet a different sort--comparable to Isaiah's reaction to his call in Isaiah 6: "Lord, how long." The "Spirit" speaks through him "its own stern language" with a force rare even in the prophetic literature of the Old Testament.<sup>19</sup>

The prophetic indictment of the "Empress sole of the earth-surrounding sea" is grounded in its ethical, social and religious evils. Thus, William David Schaefer maintains:

it was, in fact, as a Carlylean poet-prophet that Thomson concluded this poem, for the narrator, who had overheard God delivering his judgements on the inhabitants of a doomed city returns to England with a fierce warning.<sup>20</sup>

The concerns of the oracle Schaefer sees as "Carlyle's indictments." However, although the evils denounced may correspond to the topics of Carlylean criticism, and thus firmly based in Victorian England, they are also typical admonitions of Old Testament prophecy to an unfaithful Zion: they are the sins for which the Babylon of the Apocalypse is to be eternally damned; and they are, finally, in a more specific form, the sins for which judgement was rained down on the City in Part III. The imagery of idolatry, blasphemy, harlotry, and the appeals to the symbolic value of famous centres of sin, whether biblical or post-biblical (Sodom, Venice, Carthage, Tyre) (IV.iv.116;152), and finally, the definition of the city's evils in phrases resonant of prophetic expression, join to produce a studied imitation of the prophetic doom oracle.

The segment of the prophecy dedicated to the perversion of religion offers perhaps the most significant deviation from biblical tradition.

This discussion of the "Fossil of a Faith," with its sense of the death of God, is perhaps the most Victorian in its concern of any of the indictments. The reign of a Christian God is contrasted with the current materialist perversion of social, ethical and religious ideals. Yet, the most significant loss for Thomson and his narrator would seem to be on a more cosmic plane, the loss of a "moral" universe:

While He lived there yawned a Hell with a Devil for His foes,  
And a God-ruled Heaven of triumph before His followers rose;  
While He lived the noblest of men were wholly dedicated to Him,  
The saints, the bards, the heroes, in soul and mind and limb,--  
And now without a Leader, mournful in silence wait,  
Girding each one himself to his lonely fight with Fate.

(IV.iv.167-172)

This is the same problem of perception which, in the structure of the poem as a whole, necessitated the solitary directionless progress of the narrator in Parts I and II of "The Doom," which in the strange fragments that preceded the Judgements in Part III conjured up a picture of the aimless wandering of the "world-realms," and which, in the final stanzas of the poem, culminates in the essentially Calvinist paradox of a judgement by a Christian God with none of the merciful attributes of a Christ:

The final Doom evolveth, burdened with woe on woe,  
Sure as the justice of a God while yet by His patience slow:  
For the earth is pervaded wholly, through densest stone and clod,  
With the burning fire of the law of the Truth of the Living God;  
Consuming the falsehood, the evil, the pride, the lust, the shame,  
With ever-burning, unrelenting, irresistible flame;  
Until all save the purest spirit, eternal, of truth and love,  
Be altogether consumed away, beneath as well as above.

(IV.iv.201-8)

The question "Where are the signs of His life?" (IV.iv.161) is perhaps definitive of much of "The Doom of a City." Within the context of the poem, the sole answer seems to be that judgement or the action of Fate, does operate on a principle of "Punishment and Reward," that human

suffering is justified on the grounds of the existence of a just God. Yet Calvinism decrees that the elect have knowledge of their own sanctification. It would seem, therefore, that the modern world is defined as reprobate in its inability to perceive a "God-ruled Heaven" (IV.iv.168). "The Doom of a City," though essentially an affirmation of God's existence, is nevertheless not an optimistic statement, for implicit in its statement is the poet's conviction that evidence of an active deity, outside the scope of the poem, is lacking, and that men, without a "Leader," are "girding each one himself to his lonely fight with Fate." (IV.iv.172)



## CHAPTER III

Our examination of Thomson's work as a whole is centred on his use of the traditional symbolism and arguments of Christianity--his biblical landscape, and on the movement in his presentation, from an attempt to validate the underlying theology of this symbolic vocabulary, to a recognition of its incompatibility with his own ultimate conclusions concerning metaphysical reality. In "A Lady of Sorrow," Thomson concentrates the transitions in belief and symbolic significance in a single work. His narrator moves from an orthodox religious position to a new theology which, though based in a materialist concept of the universe, is markedly influenced by Calvinism, and is given expression in the language of the faith it has superceded.

In "The Doom of a City," by allowing his narrator to confront theological concepts physically, Thomson made those concepts representative, within the context of the work, of the only possible metaphysical reality. In "A Lady of Sorrow" his narrator wanders through realms of alternative visions. While "The Doom" had at its centre the creation of a quasi-allegorical universe in which a well-defined symbolic geography and the concrete evidence of the machinations of the Deity determined the narrator's physical and emotional responses, Thomson in "A Lady of Sorrow" purposefully grounds his creation in the psychological, rather than the material experience of the narrator. The physical setting of the phantasy is, as usual in Thomson, the city, and indeed, for the only time in his work, it is specifically designated as London. However, physical setting is of little significance:

She (Sorrow) annihilated so utterly from me the mighty metropolis, whose citizens are counted by millions, that the whole did not even form a dark background for the spiritual scenes and personages her spells continuously evoked.<sup>1</sup>

This universe is dominated by the "Lady of Sorrow" the defining symbolic geography changes with the narrator's changing emotional state.

"A Lady of Sorrow" is a phantasy in the true sense of the word: structured around the dream-visions of its writer-narrator, Vane; neither needing, nor pretending to, any basis in material reality. The work is divided into four sections: "Introductory Note," "The Angel" (Part I), "The Siren" (Part II), and "The Shadow" (Part III). In the "Introductory Note," Thomson, by means of the pretense of making editorial comment on certain manuscripts which comprise the phantasy, disavows any personal identification with his narrator and places himself firmly on the side of the objective perspective which is to have no place in the perceptions of "my friend Vane." This critical commentary on the extremely subjective phantasy serves both to offer a partial definition, and simultaneously, a defense, of its format and admits the possibility of an alternative vision. The subsequent sections of the phantasy mark Vane's examination of different levels of consciousness as he emerges from the stupor of grief caused by the death of his beloved. This grief, in the form of the "Lady of Sorrow," is throughout the phantasy the narrator's constant and sole companion, a companion who, with Vane's changing perceptions, is "perpetually suffering transformation":

Usually, vague and slight changes affect her every moment, decided and obvious changes--in form, and feature, and expression--almost every hour....; so I, from her multitudinous and still evolving variations, catch at three which are so conspicuously distinct and representative, and try to give them expression.

(pp. 306-7)

It is around these three "conspicuously distinct" aspects of Sorrow--the Angel, the Siren, the Shadow--that Thomson (or rather, Vane) has structured his phantasy.

In Part I, "The Angel," Sorrow undergoes a distinctly religious "Transfiguration" (p. 307)<sup>2</sup> as Vane is presented with, and for a period accepts, an orthodox religious consolation for the death of the loved one. In Part II, "The Siren," unable to retain the faith necessary to the beatific vision of "The Angel," Vane is tempted to participate in an existence of destructive self-indulgence, to emulate Siren's attempt "to renounce, to defy, to ignore her own essential sorrowfulness" (p. 311). In Part III, "The Shadow," Sorrow dominates Vane's existence in a less obtrusive manner than previously. The influence of Shadow promises to be much more permanent than that of either Angel or Siren, for Shadow is the aspect which accompanies Vane on his return to consciousness from the grief-induced visions and delirium of Parts I and II respectively. Unable to sustain the catholic vision of "The Angel" or the defiant sensuality of "The Siren," Vane has lapsed into the shadow of existential despair. This third section is composed of two main parts: in the first, the Shadow and her universe are described in accordance with the pattern established in sections I and II; the second part includes a defining vision, a structural outline of the Shadow's "religion of death," and a doctrinal defense of its theology.

As Thomson himself informs us in his editorial introduction, "A Lady of Sorrow" is structurally, and to some extent, thematically, derived from Thomas De Quincey's Suspiria de Profundis, specifically the section entitled "Lèvana and Our Ladies of Sorrow." Although De Quincey's influence is strongly evident, however, particularly in the representation

of three aspects of Sorrow, it becomes clear in a comparative examination of Thomson's phantasy and its De Quincey model that the primary characteristic of Thomson's use of his source is his selectivity. From the portraits of the Ladies of Sorrow--Mater Lachrymarum (Our Lady of Tears), Mater Suspiriorum (Our Lady of Sighs) and Mater Tenebrarum (Our Lady of Darkness)--he has chosen key points (primarily biblical and theological), often very minor, and carried to the fullest extent their latent theological connotations.

De Quincey's representation of Sorrow is three-fold and distinct in its aspects. Thomson's Sorrow is triune; three manifestations are chosen from the many aspects of the One in a parody of the triune representation of the Christian God. De Quincey's Ladies minister to the bereaved; Thomson's Sorrow, in her ministry, stands as a parody of the Christian Messiah:

For Death is a great rival, magnanimous in the instant of his cruelest triumph; sending ever to companion those whom he has bereaved of their darlings no menial, but this his own beloved daughter.

(pp. 305-6)

The aspects of Sorrow become in Thomson's version emblematic of theological concept--beatitude, sin, existentialism--and are defined in terms of religious symbolism. If De Quincey's Mater Lachrymarum is vaguely linked with the beatific purpose of God in "recalling to himself"<sup>3</sup> those worthy of blessing, Thomson's Angel is "the image in beatitude of her who died so young" (p. 307). While Mater Tenebrarum is characterized by De Quincey as the "wicked sister that tempest and hatest,"<sup>4</sup> the Siren is symbolically equated with the archetype of the Whore of Babylon. Mater Suspiriorum may be associated with forgetfulness and the abodes of the dead, but the Shadow advocates a religion of death

of which the chief attribute is the supreme "beatitude" of Oblivion. In each case, the portrait provides a platform for the construction of a landscape symbolically congruent with that aspect of Sorrow which currently regulates Vane's perceptions, a landscape which, though transitory, offers a concrete representation of the implications of the theological stance symbolized by the aspect of Sorrow which inspires it.

From the general thematic construction of De Quincey's phantasy, Thomson has separated and developed the concept of the educational value of suffering. De Quincey credits his Sorrows with a well-defined mission under the auspices of the goddess Levana:<sup>5</sup> "to plague his (man's) heart until we had unfolded the capacities of his spirit."<sup>6</sup> Thomson transforms this theme to accommodate theological speculation on the question of immortality, the "unfolded capacities" of the spirit being the ultimate source of metaphysical understanding.

The narrator-subject Vane has been confronted with death, with the most basic and concrete theological problem known to man: "the question of the immortality of the human soul" (p. 304). Thomson utilizes the tripartite structure of "A Lady of Sorrow" as a medium for the examination of this question, symbolically embodying in the Angel, the Siren, and the Shadow and their self-inspired settings three extremes of metaphysical possibility.

The epigraphs to section I, from Arnold's "Longing" and Thomson's own "Mater Tenebrarum," establish the question of personal immortality and the emotional need on the part of the narrator for some affirmation of its validity. In response, "The Angel" would seem to fulfill the conditions necessary to a belief in the beatific purpose of the Deity.

The Angel is the "image in beatitude" of the dead girl, like Christ an image of spiritual love. Her death does not seem to destroy, but rather to purify their love.

In this particular transformation of Sorrow, the universe reflects the beatitude of a gracious God, as the symbolic potential of the sacraments of baptism and eucharist, and of the doctrinal concepts of grace and election, are realized on a spiritual level:

Our lips scarcely moved, our hands never gestured save in startled rapture, our eyes rarely expressed aught save reverence and gratitude and love of Him and to Him through whose realms we were thus enfranchised to wander as in our own heritage; yet spirit into spirit, and specially (as I felt) her spirit into mine poured itself fully without any material or symbolic medium: then first was I taught beyond all after forgetting that there is a perfect interfusion of soul with soul, when the pure fire of love has utterly consumed matter and space and time.

(p. 308)

Nevertheless, in Thomson's conception of God, there are conditions set on beatitude; this heaven is not without its version of purgatory:

For she revealed to me...that she was resting in a sphere divine and tranquil; she and many, many others who, like her, could not continue their infinite ascension until rejoined by the twin-souls left behind them on earth, and who also like her were permitted to visit their twin-souls on earth with heavenly consolations until death's consummate beatitude should remove all need and possibility of consolation.

(p. 309)

The vision originally partakes heavily of Roman-Catholicism, the dead girl combining traditional features of the Virgin and of Christ. At this point, however, Thomson's Calvinist ethic intrudes, as the ideal of the "Supreme Sacrament," of complete actualization of the spiritual potential of love, is obscured by Vane's feelings of reprobation. The vision of grace given him is sufficient only to convince him of his present depravity; and his faith is inevitably succeeded by

## cynicism:

When fresh from the consecration of bereavement, I was found worthy to be comforted with angelic communion; but as in the course of time the virtue of that consecration from without was exhausted, while yet I had not by its blessing attained inward self-consecration, my ignoble heart found ignobler companionship. When the mouthful of Eucharistic wine inspires us no more, we may gulp down the wine of the tavern; when the temple-incense is mystical no more we may drug ourselves with opium and hasheesh.

(pp. 310-311)

The visionary universe where "the pure fire of love has utterly consumed matter and space and time," where faith, hope and love are manifest, gives way in a "famine of love-sustenance" to the deliriums of spiritual deprivation. God is no longer the beneficent Father but a graven image, "as if the God and his ordinances had been petrified into immutability in the instant of cosmic creation" (p. 310).

Significantly, this development finds a correlation in traditional Calvinism, for as John Calvin observes of the operation of grace:

There is also a special call, with which he (God), for the most part, favours only believers, when, by the inward illumination of his Spirit, he causes the word preached to sink into their hearts. Yet sometimes he also communicates it to those whom he only enlightens for a season, and afterwards forsakes on account of their ingratitude, and strikes with greater blindness.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, in the context created by "The Angel" segment, Vane's reactionary espousal of the Siren's sensuality becomes an act of spiritual infidelity, a reprobate act which makes the "Supreme Sacrament" unattainable. Consequently, his universe is now directed by Fate rather than by Providence, by absurdity rather than by spiritual values.

The Siren and her universe are thus a distorted mirror image of the Angel and her universe, a demonic parody of the paradisaal world of beatitude. Sorrow is now the uncreating force which "laughed the world

back into chaos" (p. 312) as she reveals the "whitened sepulchre," the reality of man's spiritual and physical constructs. Her element is not the calm ethereal sky, but the violently sensual sea: beautiful but a spiritual desert, full of abysses and wrecked ships. The episode builds in sensual appeal to the point at which Vane yields totally to the Siren's intoxicating spell in a parody of the spiritual interfusion of souls of the angelic vision.

The subsequent realization of what lies behind the Siren's enchantment, of what she has made of the world, recalls the apocalyptic revelation to John of Patmos of the Whore of Babylon whose cup was "full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication," who grew drunken on the blood of martyrs and saints (Revs. 17:4-6):

--the feast was vanished; the coral and emerald and jasper were no more, the wine was black blood, and its jewelled golden beakers were human skulls; the gleaming sand was a loathsome slime whereon and wherein crawled shapes of clammy hideousness. Then amphorous monsters of the unfathomed sea came heaving in by thousands, by myriads; and the flat was a Golgatha of human bones, the bones of men and women and children devoured by the insatiate sea;...

(p. 313)

Vane's horror of the Siren lies primarily in the fact that she seems to possess him, to imprison him in this state of reprobation:

so, that the conviction was seared into me, that I, though still breathing, was drowned as utterly as the skeletons, separated for ever to this death-in-life by the whole impassible ocean firmament, from God in heaven and from man on earth.

(p. 313)

His flight from the persistent whore, his personal hell, is a flight from consciousness which must inevitably be unsuccessful,<sup>8</sup> although temporary escape is achieved by an awakening to yet another level of perception-- "the natural world."



The realm of the Shadow is this "natural world," the desert reality of the City. The initial picture of the Shadow's universe is characterized by the despair, the hopelessness of its inhabitants, for Vane's perceptions now admit the existence of his "fellow-men." With this more encompassing consciousness, humanity, not merely the individual, seem to be imprisoned in a state of reprobation; the City has become their hell:

a vast Necropolis, desolate as a Pariah; burdened in all places and at all times with the vision of wrath and hatred that might dye the green earth blood-red, lust that might pollute all the seas, ignorance and guilt and despair that might shroud the noonday sun with eclipse.

(p. 314)

The City is simultaneously Dante's Limbo, the desert of the wandering tribes of Israel and the Egypt of their captivity, and the valley of the Shadow of Death. Street lamps, negating the spiritual light of "The Angel," "funereally measure the long vistas of still streets, or portentously surround the black gulphs of squares and graveyards silent" (p. 315). Churches, earlier defined by the Siren as symbols of hypocrisy ("whitened sepulchres"), are now "sepulchral":

the pyramids of this mournful desert, each conserving the Mummy of a Great King in its heart.

(p. 315)

The spiritual values of love, faith and hope which formed the basis of the angelic vision, and which became distorted in "The Siren" to sensuality, self-indulgence and delirium, are finally negated in a reality of "ignorance and guilt and despair."

Significantly, the vocabulary of "The Angel" and "The Siren," despite their overall suggestion of the dominant Calvinist spiritual states of grace and depravity, is not as characteristic of Thomson's use of biblical landscape as the existential statement of the portrait of the Shadow.

The first two portraits, while clearly manifesting theological concepts, find their imagistic bases in sources essentially extraneous to a fundamentalist religious vocabulary; they are not, for the most part, biblical in origin. In "The Angel," the heavenly geography, and the portrait itself, seem to have been derived from Roman-Catholic mysticism rather than from the more austere Protestant model; "The Siren" concentrates heavily on the non-biblical interpretation of the sea-image as the potentially dangerous sensuality inherent in man, and, possibly, as emblematic of the chaotic workings of fortune. "The Shadow" finally reverts in its imagery to a Calvinist orientation, as the full realization of universal law, although here material rather than ethical, imposes itself on the narrator's consciousness.

In the Calvinist conception of the movement towards knowledge of God and His purposes, this recognition of the existence of Law is of crucial importance. T.F. Torrance summarizes as follows Calvin's conclusions on man's ability to know his place in the universal hierarchy:

Man's true knowledge of himself is reflexive of his knowledge of God. He is made to know God, and to live in dependence on God's grace. Therefore, only when a man so responds to the Word of grace that he becomes what he was made to be, can he begin to know his true nature. Christian self-knowledge differs from secular self-knowledge. The latter ministers to man's pride; the former ministers to his humility by revealing his creaturehood and wretchedness, but does not allow him to despair, or to disguise his humanity, for he is a creature of God. This Biblical knowledge of man is gained: (a) Through the law, which enables man to see himself as he really is in comparison with his original truth which is the law of his being. This may easily lead to a despairing and unhealthy knowledge of depravity, though it may be used didactically with much profit; (b) Through the Gospel, which not only reveals to man what he actually is, but brings him regeneration so that he may become what he is meant to be. Here we have a revelation of the original truth of man which does not bring despair, but kindles hope and gratitude. The doctrine of depravity must be considered only within this context of grace.<sup>9</sup>

This patterning of the movement towards spiritual self-knowledge, and, simultaneously, towards knowledge of a larger metaphysical truth, through pride and "didactic" depravity to regeneration has provided many artists with the thematic structure for philosophic speculation. In Thomson's hands the mythic frame is given a new orientation. The narrator, through his experiences with Sorrow, moves from the revelation traditionally slated for the positive conclusion of the spiritual quest, through depravity, to a spiritual state equatable with that imposed by the consciousness of reprobation. Finally in the second half of "The Shadow," in which the Gospel of the religion of death is outlined, he moves not to the traditional spiritual revelation and subsequent regeneration of Christianity, but to an affirmation of the supremacy of Death, an existential affirmation which drives home more surely than Christianity could the "creaturehood"<sup>10</sup> of mankind.

However, as Thomson in the "Introductory Note" comments of Vane's philosophical conclusion:

There is a truth of winter and black night, there is a truth of summer and dazzling noonday. On the one side of the great medal are stamped the glory and triumph of life, on the other side are stamped the glory and triumph of death; but which is the obverse and which the reverse none of us really knows.

(p. 304)

The final, and darkest, manifestation of Sorrow, from the midst of her revelation of the religion of Death, holds out to Vane a potential state of grace, a state which like that of Calvinist Christianity hinges upon man's acceptance of his rightful place in creation. The inability of man to accept his creaturehood in a materialistic universe prevents him from participating fully in it, and reveals his essential "depravity"; a depravity perhaps even greater on a universal scale than the sensual

indulgence of Vane under the influence of the Siren-manifestation, as he would rather suffer the stroke of purposeful doom than an oblivion imposed by impersonal Fate.

In his purposefully objective examination of Vane's phantasy in "Introductory Note," Thomson defines in two comments the mode in which the "night-side" metaphysic of "A Lady of Sorrow" is presented, and to a large extent, validated:

Some men see truth and express truth best in imagery and symbol, others in syllogism and formula.

(p. 305)

and

Mystery is but misery dissolved in thought, the intolerable concrete rendered abstract and vague.

(p. 304)

Vane's concern is with the "intolerable concrete"; therefore his medium is "mystery," a term applicable not only in its connotation of the "abstract and vague," but also in its theological meaning of a previously hidden spiritual truth. "Imagery and symbol" provide the necessary means of expression in the communication of mystery, because the reader cannot attain complete understanding of an image without first having been initiated into the underlying assumptions which determine its significance. Thus, Thomson is ultimately operating in "A Lady" in accordance with the New Testament rationale for parabolic revelation:

And the disciples came and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables?

He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given....

Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.

And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive:...

But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.

(Matthew 13:10;11;13;14;16)<sub>11</sub>

Around this same passage, which is also a principal text in the Calvinist justification of the concept of predestined election, Thomson in Part III constructs his own version of the revelation accorded the elect:

Then she, the Shadow, interweaves herself more wonderfully about me and within me; so that seeing I may see not and hearing I may hear not, so that not seeing I may see and not hearing I may hear. As my eyes fix and dilate into vision more entranced of the supreme and awful mystery, the browbrain upon my eyes expands and protends into a vast shadowy theatre for processions more multitudinous and solemn.

(p. 316)

The essential difference between the Christian vision and that of the Shade lies in the source of revelation: the Christian coming from without, the existential from the ability of the individual to visualize in and through the self "all the members of the aeon of humanity" (p. 316).

When at last "it was given me to see and to hear," the goal to which humanity is moving is presented both visually and aurally:

Right opposite to where I stood, a league beyond the farther bank of the silent everflowing river of peoples, towered a vast black shape dwarfing the Cyclopedean rock-wall behind it; an image like to that which the king of Babylon set up in the plain of Dura, that all men might bow down and worship it; a colossal image of black marble, the Image and the concentration of the whole blackness of Night, as of a Woman seated, veiled from head to foot; and the ranks as they pass it bow down all with one impulse, like ranks of corn before a steady blowing wind.

(p. 317)

This unnamed deity is a direct inversion of the Judaeo-Christian God. It is of darkness rather than of light; its portrayal as "image" is in direct contradiction to the second Commandment; and the appeal to Daniel 3 and

Nebuchadnezzar's "image" infers a history of political opposition to the Hebraic God. The chant which accompanies the movement of mankind is a parody of the liturgy of the "Living God" in which death is seen as part of the transition into Life:

All must move to live, and their moving  
 Moves on and on to Death;  
 Wherever they pause in their moving,  
 There awaiteth them Death;  
 Let them move as they will, their moving  
 Soon brings them unto Death;  
 Let them move where they will, their moving  
 So surely leads to Death:  
 All Life's continual moving  
 Moveth only for Death.

(p. 318)

However, as the vision and, indeed, the voice of the Shadow herself are human in their source and orientation, the theological questionings which inevitably accompany the symbolic revelation are ultimately unanswerable:

Know this only, that you can never know; of this only  
 be assured, that you must doubt to the end--if end  
 there be....

(p. 320)

Although the Shadow's revelation is the version of mystery finally accepted by Vane, each of the first two manifestations of Sorrow present its own version of spiritual truth. Sorrow, whatever her aspect, is "'Grief wound up to a mysteriousness'" (p. 306); the "hearing" and "seeing" motifs, with stress being placed on the mode of perception, descriptions of Sorrow's manifestations:

As I passed daily through the streets, my eyes must have pictured the buildings and the people, my ears must have vibrated to the roar of the vehicles; but my inward vision was fixed the while on her, my inward ear was attentive to her voice alone.

(p. 306)

The narrator's progression through Parts I and II, and even though the initial landscape of Part III, is ultimately a process of initiation into Sorrow's final vision and, finally, into her religion of death. The portraits and the accompanying metaphysical systems serve finally to establish in the minds of Vane and the reader the vocabulary of theological imagery and concept necessary to an understanding of the Shadow's theology.

"The Angel" parabolically presents the traditional Christian mystery of redemption, the "catholic vision" (p. 308) of a beatific universe. However, it is limited in that it admits none of the imperfections of reality:

Our approach never divested the worlds of their pure spheric beauty, never discovered them rugged with mountains, blotted with storms, varicoloured with day and night, and land and sea; they remained always to us bright throbbing stars, that grew in size and glory as we neared them.

(p. 308)

The ecstasy of love, faith and hope obscures by its infinitude the lesser realities of "language," "world," and "mortality" (p. 308). The dead of the heavenly purgatory have been commissioned to communicate "the holy mysteries of love" to their "twin-souls" (p. 309), but both love and its mysteries are, in retrospect, significantly impermanent.

In the Siren episode, the senses are intensified to a hypercritical, feverish pitch. Where Vane's perspective under the Angel's influence was all-encompassing; all contradictions being swallowed up in the "ambient brightness," his perceptions now involve a hallucinatory concentration on negative detail:

The churches dwindled before her into whitened sepulchres, the palaces were seen as dungeons populous with vermin; she showed the fire raging under the earth's thin vesture of green grass brodered with flowers, and the skeleton padded with raw flesh beneath the skin of the beautiful; her fingerpoint seared the hidden folly of the wise and the

secret terror of the brave; her glance transfixed the  
foul lust in the lover and the core of sublimated selfish-  
ness in the holy ones: all the noble and mighty and  
reverend of the kingdoms she transformed into gibbering  
apes.

(pp. 311-312)

The mystery of life is denied in the concentration on mortality.

Sacrament, traditionally the visible sign of religious mystery, which  
in "The Angel" needed no "material or symbolic medium," is in "The Siren"  
mocked in the drinking of "the wine of the tavern" (p. 311), the false  
ecstasy of "triumphant delirium" (p. 312), and the negative revelation  
of "death-in-life" (p. 313).

The transitional passages which introduce the three episodes, in  
each of which Thomson constructs an emblem of the metaphysical structure  
of the universe in which these aspects of Sorrow operate, perhaps best  
exemplify the criteria for the acceptance or rejection of their theologies.  
It is, in view of Thomson's personal stance, interesting that Vane accepts  
the religious consolation of the Angel in a state of virtual unconscious-  
ness. In the transition to the Siren-vision, reality begins finally to  
demand consideration:

The earth's time passed over me, unperceived, unregarded;  
but the true time, which is change, wrought within me.  
The natural world refused to be wholly shut out; and its  
countless objects, besieging persistently the gateways of  
the senses, began gradually to penetrate my soul. But still  
I perceived them as phantasmagoria, fleeting bubbles and  
cloud shadows on the hurrying river of time.

(p. 310)

Reality would be unbearable as yet, so the world is perceived as a parody  
of reality: "a carnival masquerade and drama, with irony for the secret of  
its plot." (p. 310). In the train of Vane's sense of reprobation, there  
is no beatific God; the ethical deity implied in the concept of "just  
desserts" of Part I is frozen into Law:



an enormous stone idol, dumb, blind, dead, pitiless, passionless, eternal; and beside it the laws of doom and destiny graven on tablets of stone; as it the God and His ordinances had been petrified into immutability in the instant of cosmic creation.

(p. 310)

The masquerade suddenly becomes too real, however, and once again inducing a transition to a new level of consciousness as "the true time, which is change, wrought within me" (p. 314). Mass replaces the phantasy; the "fantastic mime" becomes "a vast tragedy ruthlessly real" (p. 314); distancing metaphor gives way to oppressive reality as the fatalist intuition of "The Siren" is confirmed in a vision of

Fate the Sphynx in the desert of Life, whose enigma is destruction to all who cannot interpret, and a doom more horrible before destruction to him who does interpret; Fate which weaves lives only too real in the loom of destiny so mysterious, uncompassionate of their agonies in the process; Fate, God petrified; the dumb, blind, soulless deification of Matter.

(p. 314)

Although the Shadow's materialist universe is established, Vane must take yet another step in his progress towards a valid spiritual vision. It is in the symbolic revelation of the "image colossal, like to that which the King of Babylon set up in the plain of Dura" that the progression towards a definitive emblem of metaphysical reality, evident in the transitional passages of Parts II and III, is finally complete. The petrified God and the Sphynx are half-perceived, incomplete versions of this final Statue; the vision finally is made universal by the inclusion of the time-stream of humanity and the symbolic representation of life and death.

In the Shadow's discourse on the sacramental and theological "mysteries" of her religion of Death, the complicated system of structural and thematic elements by which Thomson has, in the context of the work, validated the revelation of his new metaphysic, are drawn together in what may be one of

his closest doctrinal scrutinies of Calvinist Christianity. Because the key spiritual values of Christianity--love, faith and hope--are dead, death becomes representative of the only certainty in an absurd universe, and is thus the only possible god. The religion of Death put forth by the Shadow marks a strange perversion of the structure and ideals of Christianity. Like the Christian Church, it has its Trinity, here composed of Death the Father, Sorrow "his eldest and dearest and mightiest daughter" (p. 321), and Love, whose death provides the "spirit" of the faith. Death, like God, is all things because he encompasses all things: he is "the sole substance itself always one and the same, itself by itself, solely, one everlasting and single," (p. 322).

In the established tradition of Christianity there are two books by which one may come to know God: Nature (Creation) and the Word (the Bible). So it is here. However, the writings of the religion of Death are not limited to the historical records of a chosen people, but include literature of the "Universal History" of Man. Accordingly, the twenty-seven "anthem-words and hymns, the lessons and litanies and ejaculations" (p. 329) of worship cited by the Shadow, are drawn from a variety of sources: three passages from the Bible, several from Shakespeare and other Renaissance writers, classical philosophers, and contemporary (19th Century) poets and prose writers. Significantly, the criteria for their selection is defined as involving a total disregard for any positive implications in their original contexts.

The ritual of the faith established, the Shadow goes on to explicate its theology, a theology which takes direct aim in several of its precepts at key doctrines of Calvinist Christianity: predestination, reprobation and election, judgement, and the image of God as it exists in man. The presentation takes the form of a dialogue between the Shadow and Vane,

the former deftly constructing an ad hominem rebuttal of Vane's Christian orientation by simultaneously affirming the doctrinal judgements of Calvinism and inverting their theological conclusions. Oblivion becomes, in each case, the answer to the discomforts of an ethical religion, the religion of Death's response to "everlasting life," to the concept of beatific just desserts:

am I not kinder than all the gaudy Patronesses of Life?  
 They bring agitation, I give rest; they bring the hopes  
 which ever deceive, I give consummate fruition; they  
 bring memory, the sad grievous, the remorseful, I give  
 Lethaeian absolution from the Past; they bring Time, I give  
 timeless Eternity. All their woes, wants, sins, despairs,  
 I translate into the beatitude of unconsciousness.

(p. 329)

Evil is, as in the Calvinist tradition, predetermined, "everlastingly existent (as it was indeed everlastingly pre-existent)" (p. 330). Death, like the Christian God of Wrath, promises the destruction of the "vessel of wrath" (Roms. 9:22): "the poison glass is shattered with the glass that held the wine" (p. 330). However, the good are to meet the same fate. As in Revelations, the sinful and the elect are to be recorded in a Book of Life and Death, "the great Account Book, the infallible Ledger of the Universe":

but in vain would the debtor be cited, for he is not; his  
 very name will in a few years be illegible.

(p. 330)

This universe, though directed by law, has no ethical orientation, is moving towards an organic rather than an ethical fulfillment. Yet the Shadow would seem to argue that the Christian conception of heaven precludes to a greater extent a truly moral basis:

I say unto you that your God Himself, the God whom your seers have beheld in vision, throned omnipotent and eternal in the Heaven of Heavens, veiled with burning glory, amidst countless legions of quiring seraphim and adoring saints, He could not be what you call happy while one cry of suffering ascended from His earth or one spark of evil glowed in His hell.

(p. 331)

Here, as in Christianity, the creative power of the Word is ultimately the factor which determines the capacity for transcendence. However, the Shadow's interpretation of this concept is vastly reductive, devoid of any implication of human immortality. Word becomes symbol rather than the more universally creative 'fiat.' The human species itself is, from the Shadow's informed point of view, doomed to extinction, as it is not so much representative of God's image as of "the less noble thoughts and imaginations" of the youth of Time (p. 335). Indeed, Thomson seizes upon the Calvinist doctrine of man's distortion through depravity of the divine image<sup>13</sup> in which he was created, and twists it into a statement of the inappropriateness of personal immortality:

If ever anything of divine began incarnation in those forms it must have long ago shrunk away from the pollutions. So far are they now from any trace of the divine, that the very manhood and womanhood have long ago been crushed out of them.

(p. 333)

Finally, Sorrow in her self-representation takes on the attributes of the Christian God. She is "just," "gracious," "generous." She offers man internal harmony, a place in the universal hierarchy and in "the wine of life," a version of the sacramental mystery of Christianity. Ultimately, the universe of the Shadow is also accorded a spiritual reality beyond the material, an aspect of grace in which the Shade would be the Splendour. Man, however, in his depravity, refuses to assume, or even to acknowledge, his predestined role. Therefore, "in the midst of life you are in death":

not merely liable to death, as so shallowly you are wont to interpret the great truth into a truism; but in death; you and your transitory phantasmal Universe of matter floating in the midst of the eternal Divine Life which alone is Reality.  
(p. 338)

The potential of Christianity to transform the cosmos, to offer mankind transcendence and fulfillment, has been emotionally, intellectually and spiritually nullified; the new faith, though usurping Christian imagery, vocabulary and precept, grounds itself in the inevitable reality of death. Vane, the personified extension of the Preacher's declaration that "all is Vanity" (Ecclesiastes 1:2), perceives the truth of the Shadow's theology, but perceives also that a world without spiritual values is, indeed, vanity:

And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.

(I Cor. 13:2)

As the concluding paragraphs of the phantasy suggest, this inability to accept the Shadow's doctrine causes Vane to be imprisoned in the material nightmare which is, in Thomson's poetry, to manifest itself in "The City of Dreadful Night":

And the thin weird voice of the Shadow dies away remote in the dense blackness subterranean, as a star-speck dwindles in the formless night; and the gloom, so deep and crushing in the revelation of her voice, grows deeper still and yet more awful in the following utter silence.

(p. 341)

## CHAPTER IV

Although "The Doom of a City" ends with an affirmation of the existence of an ethical God, Thomson's narrator observes in a comment immediately preceding that affirmation that God's presence is no longer self-evident in the modern world:

Where are the signs of His life?--While living He never ceased  
To thrill with the breath of His being thy realm from the West  
to the East;...

(IV.iv.161-2)

"A Lady of Sorrow" concludes, in the aftermath of the Shadow's unsuccessful attempt to glorify Oblivion, with a complete negation of the idea of a moral universe:

the gloom, so deep and crushing, in the revelation of her voice,  
grows deeper still and yet more awful in the following utter  
silence.

(p. 341)

Finally, from this spiritual void, comes Thomson's most famous, and most negative, metaphysical statement--"The City of Dreadful Night."

However, if "The City of Dreadful Night" is the culminating statement of the religious pessimism towards which Thomson had been moving throughout his career, it also, on a technical level, culminates the progression evident in his work towards a complete separation of the poet's metaphysical vision from the symbolic language with which he expresses that vision. In "The City of Dreadful Night," Thomson conducts a methodical refutation of certain of the principal images, mythic structures and doctrinal concepts which comprise the vocabulary of the Christian faith. At the same time, it is typical of the poet's technique that he accomplishes this refutation by means of an invocation of these same images and mythic patterns, retaining their characteristic biblical landscape while denying their metaphysical validity. The result is, as Jerome McGann in his comparison of the "visions"

of Shelley and Thomson maintains, the construction of an "anti-myth":

the myth as a vehicle for unifying all experience is destroyed and in its place is established an anti-myth, a vehicle for promoting and unifying non- or negative experience.<sup>1</sup>

Like "The Doom of a City," "The City of Dreadful Night" describes a physical quest through an essentially mythic landscape, and, as in "A Lady of Sorrow," the orientation of that landscape is obviously psychological. Thomson's concern, however, is ultimately with metaphysical, rather than concrete or personal, reality. The differentiation, in his phantasies, between the individual perceptions of his narrators and the physical context of their adventures serves merely as a convenient indicator of the validity of their current metaphysical stance; the character's final understanding, to be legitimate in the context of each particular phantasy, must necessarily correspond to the poet's portrayal of the physical universe. Accordingly, "The Doom of a City" concentrates its presentation on the narrator's changing perception of the concrete; and, indeed, the existence of God is proven by divine action on a physical level. In "A Lady of Sorrow," material reality is admitted to the narrator's perceptions only as a medium for the clarification of his spiritual vision, a clarification which results in the negation of his earlier conception of an ethical universe.

Thomson continues this progression in "The City of Dreadful Night" by creating a milieu in which the distinctions established in the earlier phantasies between concrete and psychologically perceived reality, 'true' and 'false' perceptions, are not only blurred, but, for all intents and purposes, irrelevant.<sup>2</sup> This is not to say that Thomson's vision in the poem is so encompassing as to include all perspectives, but rather that his definition of the City's physical reality is so reductive as to exclude those meta-

physical perspectives which he feels to be invalid or illusory. Thus the narrator of "The City of Dreadful Night" is extremely careful to define both his audience and the physical limitations of the City itself. In effect he redefines 'reality' as it must be perceived in an existential universe--totally subjectively:

For life is but a dream whose shapes return,  
     Some frequently, some seldom, some by night  
 And some by day, some by night and day: we learn,  
     That while all change and many vanish quite,  
 In their recurrence with recurrent changes  
 A certain seeming order; where this ranges  
     We count things real; such is memory's might.  
(I.15-21)

Consequently, "The City" is not directed to the "hopeful young," the self-satisfied, the "pious spirits with a God above them" or the "sages" with their visions of utopian existence (Proem, 15-21) because their 'reality' is defined in their positive personal perspectives.

In "The City of Dreadful Night," Thomson traces his narrator's entrance into, and exploration of, the nightmare world which is defined simultaneously as cause and consequence of the spiritual despair of its inhabitants. The exploration becomes, in the course of the poem, a quest for the reasons for the City's existence, for some definition of the implications of life in such a spiritual wasteland, and for some means of transcending these negative implications for a more satisfying version of reality. Our study of the poem will be concentrated on these three major stages in the progress of the narrator's quest towards a definition of the City. In the first stage (cantos I-X), the narrator's encounters with the inhabitants of the City illustrate the spiritual disillusionment which necessitates their presence there. These episodes culminate in the second stage (cantos XI-XVI) in a statement of the communal vision of these figures, for,



however divergent their paths, they have reached a common ground in the shared nightmare that is the City. Here, their negative vision is finally given authoritative form in a gospel of the non-existence of God (canto XIV). In the final stage (cantos XVII-XXI) Thomson exemplifies the necessary outcome of the pronouncement made in Stage II: outlining man's freedoms in such a universe (cantos XVII-XIX); symbolically representing man's inevitable subservience to "Necessity Supreme" (canto XX), and, finally, offering an exemplum of the ideal of dignity and endurance in defiance of the impersonality of Fate (canto XXI).

A contemporary reviewer of "The City of Dreadful Night" concluded that Thomson had "succeeded in producing the worst constructed allegory of his time."<sup>3</sup> However, although the poem does pay little attention to standard unifying devices, lacking the concentration on plot of "The Doom of a City" and the internal continuity of imagistic development of "A Lady of Sorrow," it must finally be considered as a carefully constructed unit. In the main body of the poem, Thomson sets up a dual perspective by means of an alternation of cantos exhibiting two different techniques and areas of thematic concern. The odd-numbered cantos consistently follow a seven-line stanza-form and are chiefly devoted to a description of the City and to relatively objective commentary on the psychological effect which the City's atmosphere exerts on its inhabitants. These can be read as a unit, as they are consistent throughout in technique, perspective and theme. The even-numbered cantos, on the other hand, form a series of self-contained units--varying to a greater extent in internal structure, subject, and even perspective. Depicting the experiences of the narrator in the City, his encounters with its citizens, they are essentially emblematic, complementing the seemingly objective, impersonal approach of the odd-numbered

sections with their parabolic and imagistic definitions of the City's subjective and personal realities. The general effect is, finally, of a present-tense exposition periodically interrupted by appropriate anecdotes from the past experience of the speaker. These two perspectives gradually merge, meeting in the last canto of the poem (canto XXI) in which the emblematic description of Melencolia, the "City's sombre Patroness and Queen" (XXI.72), is presented in the context of an expository section.

This format, the alternation of emblematic and transitional passages, is evident to a certain extent in the construction of each of Thomson's previous phantasies. In these it formed a structural basis for the thematic progression of the work within the larger context of a physical or psychological plot; in "The City of Dreadful Night," since the odd-numbered cantos operate in terms of a thematic rather than a narrative progression, the poem necessarily, despite its more uniform technical construction, can seem to a careless reader much more diffuse and disconnected in its presentation.

Ultimately, the unity of the poem lies not in the directed action of its narrator, or even in a reliance on a single narrative stance, for it has neither, but in the poet's consistent use of two distinctive "landscapes" throughout the poem. The most obvious of these is evident in the geographic definition of the City itself, for, as has been stressed repeatedly in this thesis, Thomson's manipulation of the physical context of his narrators' experiences to provide imagistic and structural reference-points is perhaps one of the most effective techniques employed by the poet in his phantasies. The second unifying principle (and the subject of this thesis) is also characteristic of Thomson's work--the construction of a biblical landscape, the use of biblical and religious texts and images as thematic reference-points.

The substructure created by the continuous appeals to the biblical, in as much as the fatalistic vision of "The City of Dreadful Night" is largely defined through a negation of the more positive stance of Christianity, is most important to the poet's exploration of the creed of fatalism.

Each of these "landscapes" spans the apparent structural and thematic divisions between the expository and emblematic segments of the poem. Canto I, in mapping out for the reader the geographic and psychological context of the City thus provides a basis for both the odd and even-numbered cantos: the former generally developing particular elements of the initial description; the latter tending to expand the physical landmarks of the City--the river, the desert, the sea, and the mountain--to a realization of their mythic potentialities, and thereby incorporating the physical frame of reference into the poem's biblical landscape. This merging of the physical and biblical landscapes of the poem is most evident in the description of the City itself, which with its empty streets, gloomy artificial lights and unlit, tomblike buildings, is by now a familiar picture in Thomson's work, carrying with it almost automatically the suggestions of "necropolis," "desert," and the unsanctified existence of the spiritually reprobate-- suggestions which the poet is careful to re-establish.

In the area of biblical landscape, Thomson largely neglects the doctrinal pronouncements of "The Doom of a City" and the careful refutation of Calvinist doctrine which characterized the final segment of "A Lady of Sorrow." The evocation of religious significance instead follows a trend initiated in Parts I and II of "A Lady of Sorrow" away from biblical imagery per se in favour of the more readily recognizable symbolism of Roman Catholicism (in particular of that faith's tendency toward Mariolatry) and, in at least one instance (canto VI), of Dante. In addition, further

developing a technique with which he experimented in the prose phantasy, Thomson manipulates biblical text to provide a thematic structure for the poem's development. The poet creates, in the odd-numbered cantos, by means of biblical allusion, the thematic context for the re-construction of the same themes on an imagistic level in the even-numbered cantos.

For instance, as in "A Lady of Sorrow," Thomson uses as a key to his emblematic presentation in the poem the passage from the Gospel according to Saint Matthew in which the validity of the parable format in religious teaching is explained by Christ:

Why speakest thou in parables?

He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but unto them it is not given....

Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing hear not, neither do they understand....

But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.

(Matthew 13:10b,11,13,16)

Here, as in the earlier phantasy, Thomson's concern is with a species of men who are subject to a type of negative election. In a parallel to Christ's observations concerning His elect, Thomson's characters are accorded, on their initiation into the City, a special capacity for the perception of metaphysical reality. Instead of a capacity for the discernment of spiritual light, however, the capacity is for the perception of physical and spiritual darkness:

And soon the eye a strange new vision learns:  
The night remains for it as dark and dense,  
Yet clearly in this darkness it discerns  
As in the daylight with its natural sense;  
Perceives a shade in shadow not obscurely,  
Pursues a stir of black in darkness surely,  
Sees spectres also in the gloom intense.

The ear, too, with the silence vast and deep  
 Becomes familiar though unreconciled;  
 Hears breathings as of hidden life asleep,  
 And muffled throbs as pent passions wild,  
 Far murmurs, speech of pity or derision;  
 But all more dubious than the things of vision,  
 So that it knows not when it is beguiled.

(III.8-21)

As the narrator comments in the Proem, the "mysteries" of this kingdom are thus also reserved for those to whom "it is given" to "see" and to "hear":

O sad Fraternity, do I unfold  
 Your dolorous mysteries shrouded from of yore?  
 Nay, be assured; no secret can be told  
 To any who divined it not before:  
 None uninitiate by many a presage  
 Will comprehend the language of the message,  
 Although proclaimed aloud for ever more.

(Proem 36-42)

Within the basic thematic structure created in accordance with the guidelines suggested in Matthew 13, Thomson appeals to other biblical texts, basing individual emblems on plots, images, themes suggested by them. Indeed, while others of the emblematic cantos find their sources in Dante (canto VI), Browning (canto IV),<sup>4</sup> and Poe (canto X),<sup>5</sup> these too, almost invariably, evidence biblical resonance in imagery, tone, or thematic suggestion. Finally, the "mystery," the metaphysical reality, of the City is expressed in a series of cantos which Thomson has centred on the themes of Ecclesiastes (or "The Preacher"), themes essentially compressed into the single phrase which dominates that book: "All is vanity."

The culminating statement of universal vanity comprises the second stage of the narrator's progress towards a definition of the spiritual realities of the City. The third and final stage of the poem completes the progression with its advocacy in the portrait of Melencolia of a stoic acceptance of "vanity and nothingness" (XXI.70). This statement

(Stage II) and confirmation (Stage III) are, however, prepared for throughout the initial, exploratory stage of the narrator's quest as Thomson, in the emblematic cantos II, IV, VI, VIII and X, operating within the geographic and psychological milieu set up in canto I, presents a random sampling of the experiences by which the City's inhabitants have been initiated into spiritual despair. Invariably this initiation involves the negation of traditional spiritual values, and simultaneously demonstrates an inability on the part of the characters to relinquish fully their defunct beliefs.

In the first emblem of the series, Thomson offers a definition of the process by which the City's 'elect' are prepared for the revelation of "mysteries" in Stage II of the poem's development. Although the narrator is, by his very presence in the City, preordained to an achievement of the negative vision peculiar to the place, he does not know his way; he is as yet ignorant of the City's physical and spiritual realities. Encountering another inhabitant of the City, he follows him "because he seemed to walk with an intent" (II.1), and is subsequently given a guided tour of sites significant both to the physical City, and to an understanding of the psychological state of which Thomson takes it to be representative: the church grave-yard where Faith died "poisoned in this charnal air" (II.11), the villa where Love was "stabbed by its own worshipped pair" (II.17), and the slum where Hope was "starved out in its utmost lair" (II.24). The City is thus defined from the beginning as being devoid of the central Christian spiritual values, and, as St. Paul maintains in I Corinthians 13, life without Love, Faith and Hope is totally without significance.<sup>6</sup>

Thomson's narrator, not yet fully educated in the City's laws, poses the question which necessarily follows such a revelation:

When he had spoken thus, before he stirred,  
 I spoke, perplexed by something in the signs  
 Of desolation I had seen and heard  
 In this drear pilgrimage to ruined shrines:  
 When Faith and Love and Hope are dead indeed,  
 Can Life still live? By what doth it proceed?

(II.25-30)

The more experienced wanderer's response is definitive of existence in "The City of Dreadful Night":

Take a watch, erase  
 The signs and figures of the circling hours,  
 Detach the hands, remove the dial face;  
 The works proceed until run down; although  
 Bereft of purpose, void of use, still go.

(II.32-36)

At this, the narrator "ceases to follow" (II.43), for as the "knot of doubt/was severed sharply" he is initiated into the "Fraternity," and begins his own quest, finding his own landmarks of disillusionment and encountering those of others. The subsequent emblematic cantos of the quest section present the loss of Love, Faith and Hope and move to a climax in the second stage of the poem's thematic exposition (cantos XII, XIV and XVI) with the natural conclusion that the source of these spiritual values must also be non-existent.

Canto IV is perhaps the most recognizably biblical passage in "The City of Dreadful Night." In the figure of the orator which the narrator encounters in his wanderings, Thomson has constructed a parody of the biblical figure of the prophet--"the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord" (Isaiah 40:3; Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3, Luke 3:4-6; John 1:23)--which becomes in the New Testament the stance of John the Baptist:<sup>7</sup>

He stood alone within the spacious square  
 Declaiming from the central grassy mound,  
 With head uncovered and with streaming hair,  
 As if large multitudes were gathered around:

A stalwart shape, the gestures full of might,  
 The glances burning with unnatural light:--  
 (IV.1-6)

Like the biblical prototype of which he is an inversion, Thomson's prophet outlines man's preparation for revelation. This preparation, like that of John the Baptist, is to be a species of baptismal rite, but it is a wholly negative one. John prepared the way for the coming of Christ; this prophet, marching through a landscape reminiscent of that projected by John of Patmos for the Second Coming, prepares the way for the inverted gospel of canto XIV: "There is no God" (XIV.40).

The "unnatural light" of the prophet's eyes would seem to indicate his membership in the City's elect with their "strange new vision" (III.8); his subsequent narration of his experiences in the wilderness validates the assertion of canto III that for the possessors of this heightened sensibility "wonder ceases soon" (III.22). Surrounded by the hellish events of the Apocalypse--Apollyon-like monsters,<sup>8</sup> unnatural fires, meteor showers, and "waves of fire that surged/And weltered around me sole there unsubmerged" (IV.39-40)--his response is throughout the same:

I strode on austere;  
 No hope could have no fear.

The culmination of the apocalyptic events comes in a particularly significant image from the Last Day descriptions of both the Prophets and Revelations<sup>9</sup>; the first act of Creation (the separation of light and darkness) is inverted as the sun and the moon appear simultaneously in the sky. Thomson has slightly altered the image: Revelations (Rev. 6:12) paints a picture traditionally symbolic of anarchy, "the sun...black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon...as blood"; in Thomson's version the description of the sun is incorporated into the motif running throughout the poem of the consequences of preternatural "sight":



As I came through the desert thus it was,  
 As I came through the desert: On the left  
 The sun arose and crowned a broad crag-cleft;  
 There stopped and burnt out black, except a rim,  
 A bleeding eyeless socket, red and dim;  
 Whereon the moon fell suddenly south-west,  
 And stood above the right-hand cliffs at rest:  
     Still I strode on austere;  
     No hope could have no fear.

(IV.52-60)

In the timeless sequence which follows, timeless because it is neither day or night, the wanderer has a vision which shatters his "austere" composure:

A shape came slowly with a ruddy light;  
 A woman with a red lamp in her hand,  
 Bareheaded and barefooted on that strand;  
 O desolation moving with such grace!  
 O anguish with such beauty in thy face!  
     I fell as on my bier,  
     Hope travailed with such fear.

(IV.63-69)

Into the figure of the woman, Thomson incorporates aspects of both Mary and of Christ; she is the supreme redemptive figure defined in a collage of imagery of light, baptism, and sacrificial death. As John Calvin explained the sacrament of baptism:

Baptism promises us no other purification than by the sprinkling of the blood of Christ; which is emblematically represented by water....<sup>10</sup>

Baptism involves the acceptance of the hope instilled by the spiritual light of Christ; and, following the death to sin which the rite symbolizes, confirms a new unity of being and a sense of sanctification.<sup>11</sup> The woman with the lamp instills hope, but, as she draws nearer, the lamp is revealed to be her "own burning heart" (IV.84). Thus, the narrator's reaction of hope coupled with terror results in a division between the rational mind and the emotional need to give oneself up to belief; the wanderer feels himself splitting in two:

Two selves distinct that cannot join again;  
 One stood apart and knew but could not stir,  
 And watched the other in start swoon and her;...  
 (IV.72-4)

As she bends over "that senseless me," the parallels between the scene and the sacrament of baptism become increasingly apparent:

Those lamp-drops fell upon my white brow there,  
 She tried to cleanse them with her tears and hair;  
 She murmured words of pity, love and woe,  
 She heeded not the level rushing flow:...  
 (IV.91-4)

The sprinkling of "heart's blood," the attempt to cleanse, and the intent of "pity, love, and woe" are closely linked with the Christian ceremony of purification. This version of the rite is, however, a diminishing rather than a unifying experience. The part of the man which is able to reach out for consolation is baptised into a death devoid of the accompanying promise of resurrection, and the surviving part is left consciously reprobate:

When the tide  
 Swept up to her there kneeling by my side,  
 She clasped that corpse-like me, and they were borne  
 Away, and this vile me was left forlorn;  
 I know the whole sea cannot quench that heart,  
 Or cleanse that brow, or wash thoses two apart:  
     They love; their doom is drear,  
     Yet they nor hope nor fear;  
     But I, what do I here?

(IV.98-106)

Canto V, a descriptive passage, restates the basic theme of the preceding parable: the ability of a citizen to experience momentary escape. As in the parable of the divided self, only one part of the previously initiated man may participate in a universe of spiritual values; his doubt invariably overcomes any positive emotion. In the context of the City, here re-established, this inability to sustain total freedom prevents a continuing existence outside the "dolent City":

Though he possess sweet babes and loving wife,  
 A home of peace by loyal friendships cheered,  
 And love them more than death or happy life,  
 They shall avail not, he must dree his weird;  
 Renounce all blessings for that imprecation,  
 Steal forth and haunt that builded desolation,  
 Of woe and terrors and thick darkness reared.  
 (V.22-8)

The indication is that the desert and the City are essentially equatable: the one a natural wilderness with mythic resonance, the other a man-made wilderness, a "builded desolation."

Cantos VI and VIII, returning in the narrative frame to the theme of "seeing" and "hearing," offer a redefinition of the City and of the universe respectively. The narrator in canto VI, sitting by the river, hears voices. His description of these reiterates a previous passage (canto III) in which knowledge gained by hearing is dubbed "all the more dubious than the things of vision" (III.15-21), for from

These bodiless voices in my waking dream  
 Flowed dark words blending with the solemn stream.  
 (IV.11-2)

In the mystical wanderings of the prophet in the previous emblem, hope was revived and then stifled; here the voices recount the death of their last "spark of hope" (VI.15).

The allegory of canto VI is derived from Dante's description of the portals of Hell, concentrating on the implications of the condition set for entrance into Hell's "positive eternity of pain" (VI.23): "Leave hope behind, all ye who enter here" (VI.20). Although the picture of metaphysical reality finally confirmed in "The City of Dreadful Night" precludes the validity of this emblem, for there can be no Hell in an existential universe, the Dantesque frame provides Thomson with an alternate terminology for a definition of the psychological atmosphere of his City: a Limbo, a

place "shut out alike from Heaven and Earth and Hell" (VI.57). Yet the need for an absolute vision, for an end to inanity, drives Thomson's characters on in their search for "some minute lost hope" (VI.60) which will pay their way into Hell.

In canto VIII the narrator sitting by the river once again overhears a discussion between two of the citizens. Although the scene is the same in this parable as in VI, the speakers are both seen and heard, and thus the report of their discourse is by definition of a more reliable nature than that of the previous emblem. Thomson uses the discussion of the two characters as a medium for the presentation of the two metaphysical perspectives to which one may adhere in the City. The first speaker assumes the existence of a God, and blames Him for his own and the world's misery; his description of the Deity completely reverses the usual reverence for the 'Creator.' Apparently appealing to a Calvinist vision of a pre-ordained universe, the speaker concludes that guilt for misery in the world must necessarily belong to the Being by whom it was determined. God has thus, by the very act of Creation, put Himself in need of redemption, of a 'Christ' who would "assume" his "ignominious guilt":

'The vilest thing must be less vile than Thou  
From whom it has its being, God and Lord!  
Creator of all woe and sin! abhorred,  
Malignant and implacable! I vow

'That not for all Thy power furled and unfurled,  
For all the temples to thy glory built,  
Would I assume the ignominious guilt  
Of having made men in such a world.'

(VIII.25-32)

The second speaker, throughout the first's tirade, conducts a commentary on the egotism of the concept of a malignant God:

'This all-too humble soul would arrogate  
Unto itself some signalising hate  
From the supreme indifference of Fate!'

(VIII.18-20)

In response to his companion's conclusions concerning a malevolent Creator, he denies the existence of any sentient force in the universe, and thus also denies the validity of the application of ethical standards to life:

As if a Being, God or Fiend could reign,  
At once so wicked, foolish, and insane,  
As to produce men when he might refrain!

'The world rolls round for ever like a mill;  
It grinds out death and life and good and ill;  
It has no purpose, heart or mind or will.

'While air of Space and Time's full river flow  
The mill must blindly whirl unresting so:  
It may be wearing out, but who can know?

'Man might know one thing were his sight less dim;  
That it whirls not to suit his petty whim,  
That it is quite indifferent to him.

'Nay, does it treat him harshly as he saith?  
It grinds him some slow years of better breath,  
Then grinds him back into eternal death.'

(VIII.33-47)

In canto X, after the qualifying dialogues of the two previous emblematic sections (cantos VI and VIII), Thomson returns to the distorted sacramental vision of canto IV. In this episode, the narrator comes across a lighted mansion which, with its appearance of life, is "Portentous in that City of the Night" (X.6). The poet implies in his description of the house that it will be the site of some religious ceremony peculiarly suited to the environment of the City:

Solemnities of silence in this doom,  
Mysterious rites of dolour and despair  
Permitting not a breath of chant or prayer?  
(X.9-12)

As the narrator enters and explores the mansion, these suggestions are intensified. Rooms are draped in black, each containing a shrine,

around which tapers burned,  
 With picture or statue or with bust,  
 All copied from the same fair form of dust:...  
 (X.22-4)

The model for these is called, in a distinct echo of Roman Catholic mariolatry, "The Lady of the images," and, in the description of the house there are repeated allusions to Catholic ritual:

At length I heard a murmur as of lips,  
 And reached an open oratory hung  
 With heaviest blackness of the whole eclipse;  
 Beneath the dome a fuming censer swung;  
 And one lay there upon a low white bed,  
 With tapers burning at the foot and head:

The Lady of the images: supine,  
 Death-still, life-sweet, with folded palms she lay:  
 And kneeling there as at a sacred shrine  
 A young man wan and worn who seemed to pray:  
 A crucifix of dim and ghostly white  
 Surmounted the large altar left in night:--  
 (X.31-42)

The final statement of the canto is, however, a distortion of mariolatry and of the Christian mythos of resurrection. The young man, waiting for the redemptive figure to rise from the dead, is gradually being frozen into an untenable religious position by his psychological need for belief in her continuing existence:

While thou dost not awake I cannot move;  
 And something tells me thou wilt never wake,  
 And I alive feel turning into stone.  
 (X.55-7)

As in the parables of cantos IV, VI and VIII, the young man is directed by the impulse to believe rather than by the also present knowledge of the futility of belief. In clinging to a defunct symbol of redemption he commits himself to death-in-life:

But I renounce all choice of life or death,  
 For either shall be ever at thy side,  
 And thus in bliss or woe be ever well.--  
 (X.61-3)

In canto XI, in preparation for the considerations of Stage II of the

poem, Thomson summarizes the discussion to this point, commenting on the dual perspective of each of the exploratory emblems and on the sense of Fate which permeates the attitudes of the characters encountered by the narrator in his wanderings:

They are most rational and yet insane:  
 An outward madness not to be controlled;  
 A perfect reason in the central brain,  
 Which has no power, but sitteth wan and cold,  
 And sees the madness, and foresees as plainly  
 The ruin in its path, and trieth vainly  
 To cheat itself by refusing to behold.  
 (XI.15-21)

The emblems of the first stage of the poem have outlined in terms of a variety of parabolic structures, each having its own terminology, the means by which the City's inhabitants have come to recognize, if not fully accept, the City's spiritual realities. In canto II, by way of introducing the quest motif of the poem, Thomson defined the source of this desolation in terms of the death of the three primary Christian values: Faith, Hope and Love. In canto XI, which serves to introduce the second stage of the narrator's examination of the City, the situation is restated in these same terms. The City is seen partly as cause, partly as consequence of the unique mode of vision of its citizens, for by means of it they

pierce life's pleasant veil of various error  
 To reach that void of darkness and old terror  
 Wherein expire the lamps of hope and faith.  
 (XI.5-7)

Here as in canto II, Thomson invokes a passage from I Corinthians 13:

For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face:  
 now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am  
 known.

And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the great-  
 est of these is charity.

(I Cor. 13:12-13)

In contrast to the theme of St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians, the

projected revelation of positive spiritual values beyond the "veil" is nullified. The men "who haunt these fatal glooms" have "seen" the "mysteries", but instead of spiritual light they find "darkness" and "terror". Their experiences prove instead the validity of another passage from I Corinthians 13:

And though I have the gift of prophecy, and though  
I understand all mysteries, and all knowledge;  
...and have not charity, I am nothing.  
(I Cor. 13:2)

In the second stage of the quest, in the process of negating positive biblical allusion, Thomson introduces and develops as a structural and thematic base, yet another text--one which shares in its original context elements of the poet's own pessimism: "All is vanity" (Ecclesiastes 1:2). In accordance with the tone of that statement, the poem moves in its presentation of the sterility of the City's universe from the documentation of the experiences of various of the City's inmates in Stage I to an authoritative pronouncement of doctrine in Stage II. Thomson had introduced the themes of Ecclesiastes in "A Lady of Sorrow," quoting some passages from the book in his catalogue of the "homilies" of the "religion of death," and, indeed, largely basing that religion's doctrinal tenets in the conclusions of Ecclesiastes:

All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean,...

This is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event to all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead.

(Ecclesiastes 9:2-3)

The men of "The City of Dreadful Night" are joined in a community not of spiritual love, hope or faith, but of the knowledge of the supremacy of death, for also predominant among Thomson's metaphysical conclusions is



the Ecclesiastic evaluation of the pursuit of knowledge:

For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth  
knowledge increaseth sorrow.

(Eccles.1:18)

Central to Thomson's use of the themes of Ecclesiastes is the traditional interpretation of its narrator's (the Preacher's) portrayal of the relationship between man and God, a relationship which is essentially one of estrangement. As C.I. Schofield in his commentary on the book observes:

"Vanity" in Ecclesiastes, and usually in the Scriptures, means, not foolish pride, but the emptiness in the final result of all life apart from God. It is to be born, to toil, to suffer, to experience some transitory joy, which is as nothing in view of eternity, to leave it all, and to die.<sup>13</sup>

In this estrangement, and in the inevitability of death, the inhabitants of Thomson's City have a common bond. In cantos XI through XVI, the poet brings his poem to a climax with an affirmation of this essential brotherhood, and, as he had promised in the Proem, provides a formal revelation of the "mysteries" of this "sad Fraternity" (Proem, 36).

In a modified version of the scene at hell-gate in canto VI, a "shrouded" warder at the door of the meeting-place of the brotherhood demands as a pass-word proof of the abandonment of illusions, proof of the citizen's "awakening" into "this real night" from the "day-dream" perspective of the outside world. In the answers provided, a broad spectrum of "day-dreams" is defined for us: on a political level encompassing the dreams of monarchs, social reformers and rebels; on a social level, dramatic art and debauchery; on a religious level, the induced ecstasies of monasticism, the fundamentalist stance of the evangelist, and the self-justification of the Miltonic artist. The principle irony of the meeting, however, lies in Thomson's choice of a cathedral as its setting. He has, in

situating the definitive metaphysical statement of the poem in a place traditionally symbolic of the inter-communion of man and God, traditionally symbolic of the propagation of the spiritual values negated throughout the poem, denuded the cathedral of its pretensions of a significance beyond its concrete existence; even the physical setting has been deprived of its "day-dreams."

Preceding the carefully prepared-for climax of the poem is an expository passage (canto XIII) which at first glance seems to break the momentum of the poem. This section concerns itself with two possible perceptions of Time: the one exemplifying the faulty evaluations of "marvellous fancy," of the "day-dream" vision; the other, the night-vision of the inhabitants of the City:

O length of the intolerable hours,  
 O nights that are as aeons of slow pain,  
 O Time, too ample for our vital powers,  
 O Life whose woeful vanities remain  
 Immutable for all of all our legions  
 Through all the centuries and in all the regions,  
 Not of your speed and variance we complain.  
 (XIII.28-35)

This complaint echoes the section in Ecclesiastes (chapter 3) on the nature of time. It is, though, Thomson's use of a single word which, in the context of the Ecclesiastical group of cantos, carries the most significance for the poem as a whole---the word "we." At this point it becomes clear that the detached perspective maintained in the odd-numbered sections of the poem is being absorbed into the movement of the poem in the even-numbered cantos towards a realization of "Fraternity"; the narrator has officially joined the ranks of the citizens of the City. The transitional passage thus becomes a pronouncement of the spiritual state of the congregation gathered in the emblematic sections which surround it:

We do not ask a longer term of strife,  
 Weakness and weariness and nameless woes;  
 We do not claim renewed or endless life  
 When this which is our torment here shall close,  
 An everlasting conscious inanition!  
 We yearn for speedy death in full fruition,  
 Dateless oblivion and divine repose.

(XIII.36-42)

In canto XIV, the Preacher, addressing the brotherhood, is to confirm the existence of the "dateless oblivion" for which they "yearn." The interior of the cathedral, to which our attention returns in preparation for this confirmation, simultaneously intuitively and negates religious ceremony; in accordance with the precedent set in the rejection of "day-dreams" in canto XII, any definition is achieved solely by negation:

And all was hush: no swelling organ-strain,  
 No chant, no voice or murmuring of prayer;  
 No priests came forth, no tinkling censers fumed,  
 And the high altar was unilluminated.

(XIV.3-6)

In Stage I of the poem's development, particularly in canto X, these symbols of Catholic ceremony were present, but the redemptive figure which was the object of worship refused to be resurrected; here the rites and symbols are lacking, but the congregation awaits some "event" (XIV.13) which will define their metaphysical status.

Finally, in a marked appeal to the format of Ecclesiastes, which is also called "The Preacher," the City produces yet another orator who bears the marks of prophetic vocation:<sup>14</sup>

Two steadfast and intolerable eyes  
 Burning beneath a broad and rugged brow;  
 The head behind it of enormous size.  
 And as black fir-groves in a large wind bow,  
 Our rooted congregation, gloom-arrayed,  
 By that great sad voice deep and full were swayed:--

(XIV.19-24)

The "eyes which burned as never eyes burned yet" recall the truth-glazed

eyes of the orator in canto IV and the image in that same canto of the sun, traditional symbol of truth, as a "bleeding eyeless socket, red and dim" (IV.56).

This prophetic figure takes upon himself the imagery of the self-sacrifice of the Messiah: "My soul hath bled for you these sunless years" (XIV.28). Having "seen" and "heard" the mysteries of the universe, he offers the "Brothers" of the City "authentic word" at last. His stance is notably Christ-like, participating in, yet detached from, the pain of the Fraternity, but it has none of Christ's positive attributes. The Scriptural decree is that:

Almost all things are by law purged with blood; and without  
the shedding of blood there is no remission.

(Hebrews 9:22)

But here, as in canto IV, the redemptive figure sheds blood (XIV.28) which has no validity in terms of a potential remission of doom. The inhabitants of the City are caught in the "black floods" (XIV.26) of judgment without an "ark" (XIV.26);<sup>15</sup> they are left "wanderers" (XIV.27) in an "unholy Night" (XIV.27) which holds no promise of a Nativity. The authoritative message rings out in the language of the heavenly announcement of the birth of the Messiah (Luke 2:10)--"Good tidings of great joy for you, for all" (XIV.39)--but proceeds to deny what in the existential universe of the City must be the supreme "day-dream" of mankind:

There is no God; no Fiend with names divine  
Made us and tortures us; if we must pine,  
It is to satiate no Being's gall.

It was the dark delusion of a dream,  
That living Person conscious and supreme,  
Whom we must curse for cursing us with life;  
Whom we must curse because the life He gave  
Could not be buried in the quiet grave,  
Could not be killed by poison or by knife.  
(XIV.40-8)

Ecclesiastes may have provided Thomson with the structural and thematic basis for this powerful statement, but in denying the possibility of divine direction or redemption in human activities he outdoes Ecclesiastes; God Himself has become "vanity," and all that remains is Law:

I find no hint throughout the Universe  
Of good or ill, of blessing or of curse;  
I find alone Necessity Supreme;  
With infinite Mystery, abysmal, dark,  
Unlighted ever by the faintest spark  
For us the flitting shadows of a dream.  
(XIV.73-8)

Man's freedom thus lies in one area alone, for, as life is no longer sacred, the Christian dictum against suicide has been lifted; each is free to "end it when you will" (XIV.83). The odd-numbered section which separates the doctrinal statement from the reaction of the brotherhood to this sermon is used to emphasize the resulting secularization of the universe. "Wherever men are gathered" (XV.1) implies, but does not substantiate, its companion-phrase, "in His name."<sup>16</sup> The omnipresence of Deity in a sacramental universe is parodied in the narrator's insistence that the air "is with our life fraught and over-fraught" (XV.6). Faith, Hope and Love have given way to "unutterable sadness," "incalculable madness," and "incurable despair" (XV.19-21).

The uncertainty which in the first stage of "The City of Dreadful Night" caused men to continue to follow defunct values and symbols, has been replaced in the Preacher's pronouncement by an absolute negation of those values. Canto XVI outlines the response of the citizens to this confirmation of universal inanity, a response which is essentially one of resentment, for the declaration that "There is no God" (XVI.9) officially nullifies their "one chance" for personal happiness:

And this sole chance was frustrate from my birth,  
 A mockery, a delusion; and my breath  
 Of noble human life upon this earth  
 So racks me that I sigh for senseless death.

My wine of life is poison mixed with gall,  
 My noonday passes in a nightmare dream,  
 I worse than lose the years which are my all:  
 What can console me for the loss supreme?

Speak not of comfort where no comfort is,  
 Speak not at all: can words make foul things fair?  
 Our life's a cheat, our death a black abyss:  
 Hush and be mute invisaging despair.--

(XVI.31-42)

Thus the metaphysic of the City has been established in the pronouncements of the Preacher in the Ecclesiastic group of cantos (Stage II). Stage III of the poem will proceed to these metaphysical conclusions on a more universal level. Where in Stage II the Preacher's gospel was definitive of existence within the self-contained universe of the City, Stage III begins with an extension to the doctrine of non-sentience to the cosmos (canto XVII):

The spheres eternal are a grand illusion,  
 The empyrean is a void abyss.

(XVII.27-8)

As the existence of a universe dominated by Fate has been established, the concern of this final segment (cantos XVII-XXI) is with the ascertainment of the nature of the laws governing man in such an environment. The third stage thus re-establishes the conclusions of the previous sections and examines them further, essentially following the format of the poem as a whole in its re-evaluation of the City's "mysteries": canto XVIII provides a parabolic definition of man's limitations in the exercise of his sole "freedom"; canto XX presents a series of still pictures which trace the disintegration of metaphysical, spiritual and humanistic illusion; canto XXI essentially reiterates the Preacher's

counsel of endurance in the face of the "vanity" of life.

The emblem which follows the cathedral sequence not so much continues as exemplifies man's response to a vain universe. The Preacher, in the doctrinal stage of the poem, criticized in canto XVI for revealing the disastrous truth unnecessarily, answers:

My Brother, my poor Brothers, it is thus;  
This life itself holds nothing good for us,  
But it ends soon and nevermore can be;  
And we knew nothing of it ere our birth,  
And shall know nothing when consigned to earth:  
I ponder these things and they comfort me.  
(XVI.49-54)

The principle figure in canto XVIII, however, attempts a different response; he tries to erase his life completely by retracing it to its origin. In a description based on Blake's engraving of Nebuchadnezzar, and having a good deal of resonance of the biblical account of the transformation of Nebuchadnezzar, Thomson portrays a man become a beast in his complete and obstinate denial of metaphysical realities. In Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar was changed into a beast so that he would learn to recognize the supremacy of the Deity; here, the dehumanization would seem to be a result of spiritual sight rather than of spiritual blindness. Like the figures in the emblems of cantos IV and XIV, the man-beast bears the mark of prophetic vision, but of vision distorted into madness:

A haggard filthy face with bloodshot eyes,  
An infamy for manhood to behold.  
He gasped all trembling, What, you want my prize?  
You leave, to rob me, wine and lust and gold  
And all that men go mad upon, since you  
Have traced my sacred secret of the clue?  
(XVIII.25-30)

He has fabricated, and jealously guards, his own version of the "mysteries" of Christianity, his "sacred secret." This, he claims, will redeem him from the exile from spiritual innocence necessitated by his present reprobate state:

it leads me back  
 From this accursed night without a morn,  
 And through the deserts which else have no track,  
 And through the vast wastes of horror-haunted time,  
 To Eden innocence in Eden's clime:...

(XVIII.56-60)

The flaw in the scheme is that, in a universe grounded in the theology of Ecclesiastes, time cannot be redeemed: "There is...a time to be born and a time to die" (Eccles. 3:2). As the Preacher maintained in canto XIV:

If one is born a certain day on earth  
 All times and forces tended to that birth,  
 Not all the world could change or hinder it.

(XIV.70-72)

The conclusion of the canto thus re-establishes the sole freedom of men, to die when he wishes, but stresses the irreversible nature of Time and death, for man can be released from neither:

For this is law, if law there be in Fate:  
 What never has been, yet may have its when;  
 The thing which has been, never is again.

(XVIII.76-8)

This statement is appropriately followed by a short note on the City's version of the apocalyptic river of Revelations ("the river of the water of life," Revs. 22:1)--"the River of the Suicides" (XIX.4). The suicide's goal of "perfect peace eventual in the grave" (XIX.21) is held up as a parallel to the Christian promise of the "peace that passeth understanding," and, indeed, from the traditional Christian rationalization of death as an escape from the pains of life only one element is missing--life after death.

Canto XX provides an emblem of man's progress towards a recognition of the impersonality of metaphysical reality, and of the necessity of his obeisance to it, an emblem portraying the opposition central to the poem of the symbols of faith and the more enduring reality of Fate. Before the cathedral, which in cantos XII, XIV and XVI was the site of the



revelation of the "mysteries" of the City's universe,

Two figures faced each other, large, austere;  
A couchant sphinx in shadow to the breast,  
An angel standing in the moonlight clear;  
So mighty by magnificence of form,  
They were not dwarfed beneath that mass enorm.  
(XX.8-12)

The sphinx inevitably carries, in Thomson's work, connotations of Egyptian bondage and the wilderness of the Law; the angel is in Christian tradition the intermediary between God and man, the symbol of faith.

The encounter between the two figures is, as Thomson himself implies, of mythic significance:

Upon the cross-hilt of a naked sword  
The angel's hands, as prompt to smite, were held;  
His vigilant intense regard was poured  
Upon the creature placidly unquelled,  
Whose front was set at level gaze which took  
No heed of aught, a solemn trance-like look.  
(XX.12-7)

The sword of God's wrath, with its "cross-hilt" simultaneously representative of Christianity, is held "as prompt to strike" as the angel regards the potentially dangerous sphinx, easily equatable with the biblical type of the Beast. In the second stage of the progression, a crash awakes the dozing narrator to a change in the scene. The angel has lost his wings, becoming "a warrior leaning on his sword alone," who nevertheless continues to watch "the sphinx with that regard profound" (XX.27-8). This positioning of the statue may well be a visual rendering of the metaphor of the Christian soldier outlined by Paul in Ephesians:

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of darkness in this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

(Eph. 6:12-13)

The defence of the angel, the divinity symbolized in his wings, is proven to be ineffectual in the confrontation; the warrior has as his defense merely the sword, perhaps related to "the sword of the Word of God" in Ephesians (Eph. 6:17). The sword, however, crumbles, leaving the "unarmed man with raised hands impotent" (XX.34), who, after another pause, finally succumbs to the mysterious power of the sphinx:

The man had fallen forward, stone on stone,  
And lay there shattered, with his trunkless head  
Between the monster's large quiescent paws,  
Beneath its grand front changeless as life's laws.  
(XX.39-42)

In each of the confrontations created by the disintegration of the statue from angel to warrior to man, the antagonistic statue of the sphinx is viewed in a slightly different light; the emblem is as much an attempt to identify the sphinx as to trace the destruction of the angel. The initial encounter may be between angel and Beast; the second may be between the "Christian soldier," dependent on the "cross-hilt" sword and "the powers of darkness"; the final two segments echo back to the Oedipal myth of man's inability to guess the riddle of the Sphinx, and the consequences of his failure (or, for that matter, of his success). This last is finally perhaps definitive. As N.H. Fairchild has written of the meaning of the Sphinx:

She is "Necessity Supreme," but she is also "infinite Mystery"  
--Demogorgon, and the black void which surrounds Demogorgon.  
She means knowing too much, and she means knowing nothing at  
all.<sup>17</sup>

While canto XX parabolically depicts the potentially destructive power of the metaphysical realities of the universe of which the City is representative, canto XXI, in the final statement of the poem, offers a means of coping with these realities. The picture of Melencolia, "That City's sombre Patroness and Queen" (XXI.72), is taken from, and is

remarkably faithful to, Durer's woodcut of "MELENCOLIA, or the Mother of Invention." Our interest, however, lies in the biblical and meta-physical resonances which infiltrate Thomson's commentary on the drawing:

Thus the artist copied her, and thus  
 Surrounded to expound her form sublime,  
 Her fate heroic and calamitous;  
 Fronting the dreadful mysteries of Time,  
 Unvanquished in defeat and desolation,  
 Undaunted in that hopeless conflagration  
 Of the day setting on her baffled prime.  
 (XXI.43-49)

In placing her at the end of the poem, Thomson has made of Melencolia a type of the redemptive female figure at the conclusion of the spiritual quest: the "multifoliate rose" of Dante, the Virgin Mary. She offers an answer to the realities of the City which the female figures of cantos IV and X of the poem with their incomplete sacramental visions have failed to provide. However, as she is fully cogniscent of the "mysteries" of this universe, her answer necessarily absorbs the negative visionary structures which, in the initial stages of the poem, Thomson used to define his City; she perceives the vanity of a world devoid of faith, hope and love:

The sense that every struggle brings defeat  
 Because Fate holds no prize to crown success;  
 That all the oracles are dumb or cheat  
 Because they have no secret to express;  
 That none can pierce the vast black veil uncertain  
 Because there is no light beyond the curtain;  
 That all is vanity and nothingness.  
 (XXi.64-70)

Melencolia, like the statue of the angel in canto XX, faces the "dreadful mysteries" (XXI.46) of an impersonal universe. Unlike the angel, the warrior, or the man, however, she does not issue the challenge which would ultimately result in her destruction. Instead, she emulates the gaze of the sphinx "Whose vision seemed of infinite void space" (XX.48):

she gazes  
 With full set eyes, but wandering in thick mazes  
 Of sombre thought beholds no outward sight.  
 (XXI.13-4)

By admitting into her vision the City's "mysteries" and in continuing, nevertheless, to exist, she incorporates the qualities of each of the statues of the previous emblem. Like the man unarmed, she faces calamity with the courage of a warrior "undaunted in the hopeless conflagration," and, finally, she approximates as far as humanly possible the divinity of the angel with

Her folded wings as of a mighty eagle,  
 But all too impotent to lift the regal  
 Robustness of her earth-born strength and pride.  
 (XXI.26-8)

Yet as she sits in the final picture of the poem amidst the circling stars of a mechanical, unfeeling universe, she also has the incomprehensible endurance of the sphinx:

The moving moon and stars from east to west  
 Circle before her in the sea of air;  
 Shadows and gleams glide round her solemn rest.  
 Her subjects often gaze up to her there:  
 The strong to drink new strength of iron endurance,  
 The weak new terrors; all, renewed assurance  
 And confirmation of old despair.  
 (XXI.78-84)

Above all Melencolia is emblematic of the solitude imposed by the City on its inhabitants. The second stage of the poem, with its declaration of the essential brotherhood of man, early poses the question:

Our isolated units could be brought  
 To act together for some common end?  
 (XII.1-2)

The Fraternity finds, however, that no communal action could mitigate the psychological impact of the City. The "mazes of solemn thought" (XXI.13-14) in which Melencolia wanders merely reiterate on a different plane the circular wanderings of the figure encountered by the narrator

in canto II, to the shrines of dead values and beliefs. She manifests a compulsion to work, to fashion, despite her knowledge of the inanity of human action in an inane universe; like the clock of canto II, "The works proceed until run down; although/Bereft of purpose, void of use" (II.35-6):

Baffled and beaten back she works on still,  
 Weary and sick of soul she works the more,  
 Sustained by her indomitable will:  
 The hands shall fashion and the brain shall pore,  
 And all her sorrow shall be turned to labour,  
 Till Death the friend-foe piercing with his sabre  
 That mighty heart of hearts ends bitter war.  
 (XXI.50-56)

The narrator gives in the Proem to "The City of Dreadful Night" a comparable reason for the composition of the poem, for his evocation of "the spectres of black night" (Proem, 3):

Because it gives some sense of power and passion  
 In helpless impotence to try to fashion  
 Our woe in living words howe'er uncouth.  
 (Proem, 12-14)

Thus ultimately the poem itself is absorbed into the circular motion of the physical or intellectual mazes of the wanderings of the City's inhabitants; Melencolia's strengthening example parallels Thomson's rationale for the existence of his poem--to instill "endurance" and to "confirm" despair. The format of the poem, the alternation of expository and emblematic cantos, thus marks the narrator's own visitation of the shrines of his disillusionment: the emblems recounting his original experiences; the narrative sections the mental retracing of the journey through the City; the total defining his own membership in the City's "Fraternity":

Yes, here and there some weary wanderer  
 In that same city of tremendous night,  
 Will understand the speech, and feel a stir

Of fellowship in all-disastrous fight;  
'I suffer mute and lonely, yet another  
Uplifts his voice to let me know a brother  
Travels the same wild paths though out of sight.  
(Proem, 29-35)

The sense of spiritual desolation implicit in the circular movement of the poem is intensified by the biblical landscape in which it takes place, for the atmosphere of the "desert" city bears the weight of the unrealized redemptive suggestions of Thomson's imagery. Finally, in the universe of the City in which the concepts of God, of covenant between man and the Deity, and of personal and universal redemption are negated, man is doomed to participate in an Exodus which must forever remain incomplete because there is no Canaan, to a perpetual wandering in the wilderness of the Law.

## CONCLUSION

In the Nineteenth Century, the gap between the tenets of established religion (biblical and doctrinal) and the conclusions of science (Darwin, Geology, Higher Criticism) became increasingly apparent. Some succeeded in ignoring this gap, clinging more fiercely to the certainties of faith. Some examined the consequences of science's seeming negation of the historical validity of Christianity, and proceeded nonetheless to affirm its continuing symbolic truth in their newly established secular world. Among these was Arthur Hugh Clough<sup>1</sup> who, after having expressed his despair on discovering that "Christ is not risen" (Easter Day-Naples, 1849"), is able to find relief from a potentially black vision:

Whate'er befell,  
Earth is not hell;  
Now too, as when it first began,  
Life yet is Life and Man is Man.  
For all that breathe beneath the heaven's high cope,  
Joy with grief mixes, with despondence hope.  
Hope conquers cowardice, joy grief:  
Or at the least, faith unbelief.  
Though dead, not dead;  
Not gone, though fled;  
Not lost, not vanished.  
In the great Gospel and true Creed,  
He is yet risen indeed;  
Christ is risen.

("Easter Day II," II.28-41)

Some, on the other hand, found, in a vision of the universe which excluded the pressures imposed by an ethical God, a tremendous sense of release. As Harriet Martineau, one of Thomson's contemporaries, describes her rejection of faith:

When I experienced the still new joy of feeling myself to be a portion of the universe resting on the security of its everlasting laws, certain that its Cause was wholly out of the sphere of human attributes...how could it matter to me that the adherents of a decaying mythology,--(the Christian following the heathen, as the heathen followed the barbaric fetish) were fiercely clinging to their Man-God, their scheme of salvation, their reward and punishment, their arrogance, their selfishness, their essential pay-

system, as ordered by their mythology?...To the emancipated, it is a small matter that those who remain imprisoned are shocked at the daring which goes forth into the sunshine and under the stars, to study and enjoy, without leave asked or fear of penalty.<sup>2</sup>

Thomson, as we have seen, experimented with each of these approaches, and rejected them. In "Suggested by Matthew Arnold's 'Stanzas From the Grand Chartreuse'," he attempts to make do with symbolic truths of Christianity; rejecting that alternative, he returns in "The Doom of a City" to the sphere of Calvinist Christianity, validating through the experience of his narrator belief in the existence of God. In "A Lady of Sorrow," Thomson's narrator finds himself unable to justify faith in the presence of the supreme reality of death, but finds himself equally incapable of joyous acceptance of a godless universe. Thomson finally, in "The City of Dreadful Night," declares the existence of a spiritual void, and proceeds to define its implications to the individual consciousness.

Perhaps the most traumatic feature of God's withdrawal from Thomson's universe is the isolation it imposes on man. Positive human emotion is countered by the negation of personal immortality; positive human action is ultimately pointless in a universe devoid of an ethical base; community is impossible in an atmosphere of social and metaphysical despair. Invariably characteristic of Thomson's phantasy is the isolation of his narrator: in "The Doom of a City," he wanders alone through a world turned to stone; in "A Lady of Sorrow," his consciousness refuses to admit his fellow-men, or, once having allowed them entrance, has difficulty recognizing them as kindred beings; in the brotherhood of existential despair of "The City of Dreadful Night," no communal action can ultimately be of any use, and the City itself is finally symbolized in the solitary suffering of Melencolia (canto XX).

The Victorian city consistently, and quite understandably, becomes



representative in Thomson's work of the impersonal universe of his metaphysic. As Raymond Williams maintains, for Thomson as well as for other Victorian writers,

Struggle, indifference, loss of purpose, loss of meaning-- features of nineteenth-century social experience and of a common interpretation of the new scientific world-view-- have found in the City a habitation and a name. For the city is not only, in this vision, a form of modern life; it is the physical embodiment of a decisive modern consciousness.<sup>3</sup>

In the visionary geography of Thomson's phantasies, this evaluation is justified by the gradual reduction in size and scenic variety of the created universe, until it is wholly encompassed within the well-defined limits of the City of "Dreadful Night." This diminishing of the physical perspective is, to a large extent, defined by the reduction of metaphysical possibility which accompanies it. The arrival of Thomson's narrator in "The City of Dreadful Night" marks the end of the poet's exhaustive search on the levels of psychological, physical and metaphysical reality for an alternative vision:

The city is the whole world, its mankind and its nature painted darkly against the monochrome of desolation.<sup>4</sup>

His creation of "The City of Dreadful Night" is simultaneously a statement of personal disbelief in Victorian positivism, in schemes for social reform,<sup>5</sup> and in the metaphysical perspective which accords to such a reality a potential form in the apocalyptic New Jerusalem.

Any statement of a negative reality such as Thomson's, however, can be made only through the establishment and nullification of positive concept. "The City of Dreadful Night" is dreadful because of what it is not, rather than because of what it is. Mankind's state as a non-communal "Fraternity" emphasizes the isolation of the individual; God is conspicuous by his absence. Ultimately the power of Thomson's vision lies not in his

creed as such, but in his consciousness of the gap between his own beliefs and the vision of reality to which he would have preferred to ascribe, in the peculiar melding together in his work of the symbolic language of the system he could not accept--his biblical landscape--with the physical representation of his negative vision--the City.

## FOOTNOTES

## Chapter I:

- 1 Anon. The Spectator (June 20, 1874), p. 781.
- 2 William David Schaefer, "Introduction" to The Speedy Extinction of Evil and Misery: selected prose of James Thomson (B.V.), eds. William David Schaefer (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), p. 11.
- 3 William David Schaefer describes Thomson's stance in these poems as "pantheistic humanism" (W.D. Schaefer, James Thomson (B.V.): Beyond the 'City' (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965), p. 59); Jerome Hamilton Buckley cites "Sunday up the River" as an example of "the pagan worship of physical vitality" (J.H. Buckley, The Victorian Temper (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), p. 205).
- 4 This phrase is borrowed from the title of the edition of Thomson's satires published in 1884--Satires and Profanities.
- 5 James Thomson (B.V.), "On the Worth of Metaphysical Systems," as reprinted in The Speedy Extinction of Evil and Misery, p. 153-154.
- 6 Ibid., p. 154.
- 7 Ibid., p. 154.
- 8 Ibid., p. 154.
- 9 As Paul Tillich comments: "From the power of self-criticism and from the courage to face one's own relativity come the greatness and the danger of the Protestant faith. Here more than anywhere else the dynamics of faith become manifest and conscious: the infinite tension between the absoluteness of its claim and the relativity of its life." Dynamics of Faith (New York: Harper Torchbooks, Harper & Row, Publishers, 1958), p. 57.
- 10 The Catholic and Apostolic Church (sometimes called Irvingite) began under the auspices of Edward Irving, a Scots Presbyterian minister, in London. Its formation was centred around certain incidents of glossalalia ("speaking in tongues") which led its adherents to believe that the events foretold in the Apocalypse were already in progress.
- 11 Anne Ridler, editor, Poems and Some Letters of James Thomson (B.V.) (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1963), p. 255.

- 12 Ibid., p. xix.
- 13 Plato Ernest Shaw, The Catholic-Apostolic Church, Sometimes Called Irvingite (Morningside Hts., N.Y.: King's Crown Press, 1946), p. 241.
- 14 John Calvin, The Institutes of the Christian Religion (1536) as reported in Francois Wendel, Calvin, trans. Philip Moiret (1950-French) (London: William Collins Sons & Co., Ltd., 1963), p. 240.
- 15 As Wendel notes of the Calvinist doctrine of sin:  
Sin has, indeed, a double consequence: man becomes an object of horror to God and, conversely, man acquires a horror of God and hates him, for divine righteousness fills him with fear. Thus man enslaved to sin cannot take up any attitude towards God but that of escape from him be it only by denying him, which is also a manner of hiding from him. Calvin, p. 216.
- 16 Calvin, The Institutes, III, 21, 1, as reported in Wendel, p. 269.
- 17 Anon, The Christian Guardian, November 19, 1834 (a Canadian Methodist paper), as reported in Shaw, The Catholic-Apostolic Church, p. 114.
- 18 Calvin, "Sermon on Ephesians 2:19-22," 51, 427 as reported in Wendel, Calvin, p. 201.
- 19 Hoxie Neale Fairchild, Religious Trends in English Poetry, Vol. IV (1830-1880), (Morningside Hts., New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), p. 461.
- 20 Thomson, "On the Worth of Metaphysical Systems," p. 154.
- 21 Matthew Arnold, "Stanzas from the Grand Chartreuse" (11.93-4):  
Take me, cowled forms and fence me round,  
Till I possess my soul again;...
- 22 P. Lobstein, Die Ethik Calvins (Strasbourg, 1877), as reported in Wendel, Calvin, p. 228.
- 23 Tillich, Dynamics of Faith, p. 45.
- 24 R.A. Forsyth, "Evolutionism and the Pessimism of James Thomson (B.V.)," p. 164-5.
- 25 Again Tillich provides what may be the definitive statement on this characteristic of B.V.: "(demythologization) is an attempt which never can be successful, because symbol and myth are forms

of the human consciousness which are always present. One can replace one myth with another, but one cannot remove the myth from man's spiritual life. For the myth is the combination of symbols of our ultimate concern." Dynamics of Faith, p. 50.

- 26 Northrop Frye, "New Directions From the Old," Fables of Identity (New York: Harcourt Brace & World, Inc., 1963), p. 60.
- 27 G. Robert Stange, "The Victorian City and the Frightened Poets," VS, Summer 1968, p. 638.

## Chapter II:

- 1 Anne Ridler, Poems and Some Letters of James Thomson (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965), p. 260.
- 2 Ibid, p. 260.
- 3 Ibid, p. 260.
- 4 The word "Cosmopolis" is closely related to the New Testament "Kosmos" which in the tradition of biblical apocalyptic (e.g. Rev. 13:8) "refers to the 'order,' 'arrangement,' under which Satan has organized the world of unbelieving mankind upon his cosmic principles of force, greed, selfishness, ambition and pleasure (Mt. 4:8, 9; John 12:31; 14:30; 18:36; Eph. 2:2; 6:12; I John 2:15-17)." Rev. C.I. Schofield, The Schofield Reference Bible (New York: Oxford University Press, 1909), p. 1342.
- 5 Ridler, Poems and Some Letters, p. 260.
- 6 Ibid, p. 260.
- 7 John Calvin, The Institutes of the Christian Religion, I.v.14-15, as reprinted in A Compend of the Institutes of the Christian Religion, Hugh T. Kerr, ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1964), p. 12.
- 8 Ridler quotes Thomson's comment in reference to III.136:  
'This is, I conceive, the true meaning of Aeon, as developed in one of De Quincey's papers, "On the Scriptural expression Eternity".' Poems and Some Letters, p. 261.
- 9 Thomas De Quincey, "On the Supposed Scriptural Expression for Eternity," as reported in The Disappearance of God: Five 19th Century Writers, J. Hillis Miller (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), pp. 74-5.
- 10 This motif, while valid in The Arabian Nights episode as Islam finds a partial basis in the Hebraic religion, is not in that context accorded much thematic significance.
- 11 Isaiah 6:10-11. All biblical quotations are from The King James Version.
- 12 Abraham Heschel, The Prophets (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1962), p. 90.
- 13 Calvin, The Institutes of the Christian Religion, I.x.2 as reported in A Compend of the Institutes, p. 20.

- 14 Isaiah, for instance, proclaims of the coming destruction of Babylon:  
But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their  
houses shall be full of doleful creatures; and owls shall  
dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there. (Isaiah 13:21)
- 15 In Revelations 20:12, it is linked with final judgement in a scene  
distinctly parallel to Thomson's portrayal of the pronouncement  
of doom by the Voice:  
And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God;  
and the books were opened: and another book was opened,  
which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out  
of those things which were written in the books, accord-  
ing to their works. (Rev. 20:12)
- 16 This assignment of revelation according to natural, predestined  
capacity is a recurrent theme in Thomson's early poetry.  
For instance, "Suggested by Matthew Arnold's 'Stanzas from  
the Grand Chartreuse'":  
He gives us all we can receive;  
He teaches all we can believe. (II.71-2)
- 17 II Timothy 4:7; I Timothy 6:12.
- 18 "Our sins and weaknesses crush our spirits here!" (III.ix.296)
- 19 The prophet in whom the "operation of the Spirit" most closely  
approximates Thomson's portrayal is Ezekiel: "So the Spirit  
lifted me up, and took my away, and I went in bitterness,  
in the heat of my spirit; but the hand of God was strong  
upon me." (Ezek. 3:10f).
- 20 Schaefer, James Thomson (B.V.): Beyond "The City," p. 44.

## Chapter III:

- 1 James Thomson, "A Lady of Sorrow," as reprinted in The Speedy Extinction of Evil and Misery: Selected Prose of James Thomson (B.V.), edited by William David Schaefer (Berkely and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), p. 306. Hereafter cited in the body of the paper by page reference only.
- 2 Compare to the New Testament transfiguration of Christ in Matthew 17:2.
- 3 Thomas De Quincey, "Levana and Our Ladies of Sorrow" from the "Suspiria de Profundis," as reprinted in The Collected Writings of Thomas De Quincey (New and Enlarged edition), edited by David Masson (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1968), Volume XIII, p. 365.
- 4 Ibid, p. 368.
- 5 De Quincey's goddess Levana has as her vocation the unlifting of man's mind to a realization of his potential as "the king of all this world;" her "education of the nursery" progressing by sounding the subject's emotional depths in order to "unfold" his spiritual capacities.  
Ibid, p. 362.
- 6 Ibid, p. 372.
- 7 John Calvin, The Institutes of the Christian Religion, III.xxiv.8., as reported in A Compend of the Institutes of the Christian Religion by John Calvin, edited by Hugh T. Kerr (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1939), p. 48.
- 8 This flight from consciousness is markedly reminiscent of a passage in "The Doom of a City":  
 And thus in his first health is clearly shown  
 What still was hidden from his lunacy,  
 The full obscene and deadly ghastliness  
 Of that which held and ruled him to this day:  
 Abhorrence almost chills him into stone,  
 And that great blow which struck the prisoner free  
 Hath nearly slain him by its mighty stress. (I.xv.290-310)  
  
 More specifically prefiguring the Siren episode, however, is the "Lady of Annihilation" of "To Our Ladies of Death":  
 O mighty Spirit, fraudulent and malign,  
 Demon of madness and perversity!  
 The evil passions which make me thine  
 Are not yet irrepressible in me;  
 And I have pierced thy mask of riant youth,  
 And seen thy form in all its hideous truth:  
 I will not, Dreadful Mother, call on Thee. (II.120-6)



- 9 T.F. Torrance, Calvin's Doctrine of Man (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957) (New Edition), p. 13.
- 10 Ibid, p. 13.
- 11 All biblical quotations are taken from the King James Version of the Bible.
- 12 Significantly, these quotations are from the most disillusioned and depressing sections of the Bible: Job 3:13-15, 17-22; 10:21-22; 17:14., Ecclesiastes 2:17, 3:19-21; 4:2; 9:10; 12:8., and Jeremiah 20:14-18.
- 13 Calvin, The Institutes. II.i.5, maintains:  
As the spiritual life of Adam consisted in a union to his Maker, so an alienation from him was the death of his soul. Nor is it surprising that he ruined his posterity by his defection, which has perverted the whole order of nature in heaven and earth.... When the Divine Image in him was obliterated, and he was punished with the loss of wisdom, strength, sanctity, truth, and righteousness with which he had been adorned, but which were succeeded by the dreadful pests of ignorance, impotence, impurity, vanity, and iniquity, he suffered not alone, but involved all his posterity with him,...
- As reported in A Compend of the Institutes, p. 42-3.

## Chapter IV:

- 1 Jerome J. McGann, "James Thomson (B.V.): The Woven Hymns of Night and Day," Studies in English Literature, III (1963), p. 497.
- 2 Hoxie Neale Fairchild comments of this aspect of "The City":  
Perhaps the saddest feature of the poem is the absence of the conviction that anything is really true or really false!" Religious Trends in English Poetry, Vol IV. (1830-1880) (Morningside Hts., N.Y.: Columbia U. Press, 1957), p. 473.
- 3 Anon. Athenaeum, 1 May 1880.
- 4 The similarities between Browning's "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" and canto IV of Thomson's "The City of Dreadful Night" are striking. Thomson was a great admirer of Robert Browning's poetry and, in an early article (Robert Browning's Men and Women, 1862), he specifically mentions "Childe Roland."
- 5 Canto X of "The City of Dreadful Night" has several marked parallels with Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher (in the description of the mansion), and "Ligeia" (in the expectation that the dead woman would rise from the dead).
- 6 I Corinthians 13:2:  
And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.
- 7 John 1:23:  
He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make strait the way of the LORD, as said the prophet Esaias.
- 8 Revs. 9:9-11:  
And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle. And they had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails: and their power was to hurt men five months. And they had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon.
- 9 Joel 2:31; Luke **21:25**; Revs. 6:12.
- 10 John Calvin, The Institutes of the Christian Religion, (IV.xv.2) as reprinted in A Compend of the Institutes of the Christian Religion, Hugh T. Kerr (ed.) (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1939), p. 189.
- 11 Calvin outlines the symbolic value of the sacrament of baptism as follows:

We are admonished by baptism, that after the example of death we should die to sin, and that after the example of his resurrection we should rise to righteousness.

The Institutes, IV.xv.5, as reported in A Compend of the Institutes, p. 190.

- 12 Masao Miyoshi, The Divided Self: A Perspective on the Literature of the Victorians (New York: New York University Press; London: University of London Press, 1969), p. 263.
- 13 Rev. C.I. Schofield, The Schofield Reference Bible (New York: Oxford University Press, 1909), p. 696n.
- 14 Ecclesiastes 8:1: "a man's wisdom maketh his face to shine, and the boldness of his face shall be changed."
- 15 C.I. Schofield defines as follows the significance of the ark:  
 "Ark": type of Christ as the refuge of His people from judgment (Heb. 11.7). In strictness of application this speaks of the preservation through the "great tribulation" (Mt. 24.21, 22) of the remnant of Israel who will turn to the Lord after the Church...has been caught up to meet the Lord...." The Schofield Reference Bible, p. 13n.
- 16 Matthew 18:20:  
 For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.
- 17 Fairchild, Religious Trends in English Poetry, p. 471.

## Conclusion:

- 1 Arthur Hugh Clough. The Poems of Arthur Hugh Clough, A.L.P. Norrington, ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1968).
- 2 Harriet Martineau, Autobiography, with Memorials by Maria Weston Chapman (2 volumes, London 1877), vol. 2, period VI, section 6, pp. 355-6. As reported in Walter E. Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 53.
- 3 Raymond Williams, The Country and The City (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 239.
- 4 Masao Miyoshi, The Divided Self: A Perspective on the Literature of the Victorians (New York: New York University Press, 1969), p. 259.
- 5 Thomson wrote in The Secularist, 19.8.76:

It is so much easier to set about reforming the world than oneself, it is so pleasant to be comprehensive in our plans and vast in our aspirations...it is so cheerless to fight vice-after-vice in the silent and solitary arena of one's own heart, that ninety-nine out of a hundred will ever persist to understand in somewhat of a parliamentary sense the 'making our calling and election sure.'

As reported in Poems and Some Letters of James Thomson, Anne Ridler, editor, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1963), p. xxv.

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