

NARRATIVE FORM IN THE LONG POEMS OF
EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON

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by

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I hereby recommend that the thesis prepared under my supervision by Richard Samuel Moseley, III

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Edwin Arlington Robinson

be accepted as fulfilling this part of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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In the Macmillan edition of Edwin Arlington Robinson, Collected Poems(1961), which is the basic text for this study, line numbers are not printed for Robinson's narratives. In referring to this text, I have given only page numbers except in cases where the line reference may not be clear, in which case a count is given from the top of the specific page cited.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Edwin Arlington Robinson was born at Head Tide, Maine, in 1869; and with the centennial of his birth now approaching, it is likely that many critics and scholars of American literature will turn their attention toward this poet, by consensus one of the central figures of early twentieth century poetry. Three decades have now passed since Robinson's death and the publication of his last work, a sufficient time for us to have attained some measure of historical perspective; hence the prospect of this intensified study of Robinson's poems seems quite promising. There is certainly much yet to be discovered concerning the poetic production of Edwin Arlington Robinson, especially, it seems to me, in the area of his long narratives.

Our sense of Robinson's importance in the history of American literature may be considerably heightened if we recall briefly the poets and kinds of poems which were successful in the years of Robinson's poetic apprenticeship. C. T. Kindilien has done an interesting survey of American poetry in the eighteen nineties¹ which enables the reader to recreate the literary world into which Robinson thrust himself in 1896 by personally paying for the publication of The Torrent and the Night Before. Kindilien points out

the reliance of the American poets of the nineties on traditional poetic techniques and then focuses his study upon the kinds of subject matter which were in vogue. A list of the names of his key poets will be informative. According to Kindilien, there were the "genteel" poets, Edmund Stodmund, Thomas Aldrich, Edward R. Taylor, Silas Mitchell, Lloyd Mifflin; the "romantic-oriented," George Woodberry, Richard Burton, Joaquin Miller, Madison Cawein; the sentimental-humorists, James Whitcomb Riley, Paul Dunbar; the traditionalists, Mark Antony DeWolfe Howe, Charles Keeler, Josephine Peabody, Louise Guiney, John Tabb, Lizette Reese; the social critics, Hamlin Garland, Stephen Crane, Ambrose Bierce; and the vagabondians, Ernest Crosby, Richard Hovey, Maurice Thompson. Aside from scholarly experts in the area, there are few readers who will recognize more than a few of these names. The names most familiar, those of Garland, Crane, and Bierce, are known because of prose works rather than poetry.

The reader's unfamiliarity with the leading poets of the eighteen nineties will not imply a serious gap in his literary knowledge. Most of the poems produced by these poets are insipid, unoriginal, and repetitive. As is generally the case with almost any published poet, there are occasional passages of technical beauty and, though less often, occasional passages of original subject matter. In the main, the verse is quite undistinguished.

Why this should be so is discussed by Kindilien:

Both the poet and the audience share the responsibility for the representative volume of verse which appeared during the Nineties. The average poet wrote for selfish reasons and appealed to the stock emotional responses with which his readers were primed. The poet knew well that he would meet a friendly audience when he addressed their compassion, their prejudice, and their patriotism. The poet's function was to decipher the popular taste and to express its thoughts and emotions with the ready-made means he found at hand. An interplay of conditions and circumstances created the audience in this decade: the strength of the continuing traditions of American and English poetry, the sentimental and didactic frames of mind, the role of the poet as an entertainer and a moralizer, and finally an entrepreneur publisher who was able to bring² the average poet into contact with the average mind.

Kindilien here describes an environment which demands a reassuring, inferior verse and refuses to examine unsettling creative poetry. He closes this description by adding:

"There were poets who had given up the ambition of reaching an audience."³ No doubt this was the case for many young poets, but Edwin Arlington Robinson was one young man who insisted on defying the establishment, to the enrichment of our literary tradition.

This is not to say that Robinson's first volume was aimed at overthrowing or redirecting the poetic practices of the late nineties. He rather remained firmly in contact with the conventional forms of the day. The sonnet, in particular, was his favorite form in the early poems, though he demonstrated a fondness for the artificial

French forms as well. His diction was simple and straightforward, but this was not a wholly unknown practice among the young poets who had read the dictates of Wordsworth or Whitman.

The great distinguishing aspect of Robinson's first volume, and presumably the cause of his inability to find a publisher, was his insistence upon using contemporary themes and "human" subject matter. Robinson wrote to his friend Arthur Gledhill in 1896 concerning the subjects of his poems:

You won't find much in the way of natural description. There is very little tinkling water, and there is not a red-bellied robin in the whole collection. When it comes to "nightingales and roses" I am not "in it" nor have I the smallest desire to be. I sing, in my own particular manner, of heaven & hell and now and then of natural things (supposing they exist) of a more prosy connotation than those generally admitted into the domain of metre. In short I write whatever I think is appropriate to the subject and let tradition go to the deuce. This may not be a safe plan, but there is no end of personal satisfaction in it.⁴

In actuality, Robinson did not let tradition go totally "to the deuce." Kindilien lists Robinson as one of the "new traditionalists" of the eighteen nineties, but points out the uniqueness of his "study of ethical conflicts in individuals."⁵ Kindilien sees in Robinson's "reconciliation of conventional forms and contemporary themes"⁶ an important emerging guideline for future American poets, a point well made.

In the twenty years following The Torrent and The Night Before, many American poets joined Robinson in discovering their subject matter within the contemporary American environment. Going even further in repudiating the conventionality of the poets of the nineties, the new generation of American poets refused as well much of the prosodic tradition which the older age had utilized. Lowell, Pound, Eliot, Crane, Cummings, Stevens--these new voices re-examined and often repudiated the traditional forms. The "new poetry" rebelled against both the "old-fashioned" subject matter and the traditional techniques and forms--a rebellion clearly of central importance to the directions taken by American poets up to the present day.

E. A. Robinson, however, deplored the new prosodic vogue except as it dealt with what he thought was appropriate subject matter. In a famous letter to Amy Lowell, he repudiated the directions her movement had taken, suggesting that the best of the vers libre was "human" in its subject matter. Robinson added: "I don't care a pin-feather what form a poem is written in so long as it makes me sit up. " 'Imagiste' work, per se, taken as a theory apart from one special form, seems to me rather too self-conscious and exclusive to stand the test of time. I feel pretty confident that if you had to sacrifice one or the other you would retain that part of your poetry that has

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in it the good and bad solid old-fashioned human qualities."⁷ Robinson continued to write about "solid old-fashioned human qualities" set in contemporary environments. He also insisted on retaining the older poetic forms which had served his purpose in his first volume and which presumably had the power to make readers "sit up"; in this way he helped to hold the line for poetic tradition in the twentieth century.

Robinson's importance in our literary history thus arises primarily out of two somewhat opposed aspects of his work: his early and sustained use of contemporary subject matter and his continuing use of traditional prosodic forms. Compared to the evolving poetic practices of his day, the former was avant garde; the latter, somewhat reactionary. Interestingly, Robinson was a man who craved recognition, both from other poets and from the masses of readers, and who craved as well considerable monetary recompense.⁸ That he firmly refused to bend to popular demands in spite of his desire for recognition would seem to indicate clearly a strong sense of artistic purpose and moral vision underlying his conception of the poet's social role.⁹ One can only believe that he was a man totally committed to making the best possible poems.

So far as the critics are concerned, Robinson's "best possible poems" have apparently proved to be those he published between 1896 and 1916. Five volumes appeared during these years: The Torrent and the Night Before (1896),

The Children of the Night(1897), Captain Craig(1902),
The Town Down River(1910), and The Man Against the Sky(1916).

The poems in these volumes are, in the main, written in concise, traditional, rhymed forms. They employ plain diction and understatement, and use simple, realistic subject matter. The most often used form is the sonnet, the scope of which Robinson extended considerably by his choice of subject.

The short poems from these five volumes, plus a few short poems from The Three Taverns(1920) and Avon's Harvest (1921), make up a basic canon which most critics would agree represents accurately Robinson's significant work and to which the critics usually turn when seeking poems for critical analysis. It is interesting to note that the emphasis placed by critics on Robinson's short poems is also supported strongly by historical scholars discussing the poet's "place" in American literature. To these scholars, the fact that from 1916 on he wrote, almost exclusively, long narrative poems in blank verse seems not really relevant to placing him historically. As a result of this emphasis on the early, shorter poems, Robinson's long poems are seldom discussed and, in fact, seldom read.

The neglect by most readers and critics of Robinson's long poems is somewhat puzzling, however. On the one hand, it is easy to understand the admiration felt for the concision, precise rhetorical balance, and highly

inferential treatment of character and situation which make for the excellence of his early poems. On the other hand, the magnitude, structural interweaving, and content complexity of the Arthurian trilogy offer, it seems to me, a greater poetic achievement. The critical assumption here is that the poem is greatest which deals effectively with the greatest quantity and quality of human experience, provided the poet keeps his work under control, the parts balanced and the relationships made clear. This is not, of course, a statement about the physical length of a poem, but a statement about the number of elements which are put together to produce a meaningful form for the reader. The only plausible (if fallaciously reasoned) excuse for elevating "Richard Cory," "Luke Havergal," and "John Evereltdown" over Merlin, Lancelot, and Tristram¹⁰ is the argument that time is valuable and that it is concision which lies next to godliness. Robinson's short poems have been frequently analyzed by modern critics and have often been highly praised. This fact, along with the impossibility of including long poems in anthologies, probably influences many readers in their favor.

It seems to me unfortunate that Robinson's long poems have yet to receive a fair and systematic critical appraisal. A comparison of any of Robinson's early volumes with his last volume, King Jasper (1935), is sufficient to indicate that we have not completely described his canon

when we have described the qualities of his pre-1917 poems. King Jasper is a long poem, much longer than any in The Torrent and the Night Before. It is written in blank verse rather than in a rhymed form and advances its plot through lengthy combinations of dialogue and narrative comment. Its impact is heavy with allegorical implications. All in all, it seems to be clearly a different kind of poetry from the earlier work, utilizing significantly different means to achieve totally different effects.

Were any modern, informed reader given King Jasper to read without being given the author's name, he would probably agree that the poem is fairly difficult to read and that it has little in common with today's critically popular verse. However, he would probably also find the poem entertaining, exciting, and intellectually stimulating. Though he might well judge portions of the poem heavy, perhaps slow or repetitious, he would not find it feeble, boring, or worthless. Though most literary critics who have described and/or evaluated it have disliked the poem, it seems to me that King Jasper, given a sympathetic reading, offers large rewards to the reader; and this feeling gives rise to several doubts concerning our current judgments of Robinson's poetic production.

There are 1488 pages in the final arrangement of Robinson's Collected Poems.¹¹ If we examine the total canon, we find that approximately 900 of these pages

present long narrative poems more or less similar to King Jasper.¹² Though their subject matter may very considerably, their means and manner seem to be quite similar. It may also be noted that the long narratives were written toward the latter part of Robinson's career. In fact, after 1916 there are relatively few poems which are not long narratives.¹³ Since these narratives hold a chronological position of seeming importance and since their bulk looms so large among Robinson's total production, it would seem that any serious critical evaluation of Robinson's poetry would have something to say about them. A survey of the criticism reveals that, within certain limits, such is the case, but that the comments are seriously deficient in several respects.

For the moment, it is sufficient to generalize the typical critical treatment of Robinson's long narratives.¹⁴ To begin with, most critical treatments of Robinson's longer poems rely heavily on extensive plot paraphrase, perhaps supplemented by general comments upon theme, character, or psychological insight. Since the shorter poems are thought to be more important historically, a paraphrase of the narratives usually exhausts the critic's space, leaving him only to close with a generalization upon the thematic relevance of the poem in relation to the Robinson canon.

Even though the long poems are too briefly considered,

the critics are virtually unanimous in condemning the whole of Robinson's narrative production. These poems are described variously as indirect and obscure in plotting, weak and unbelievable in characterization, overly abstract in thought, inane and redundant in dialogue, too loose in meter, and generally swamped by irrelevant detail.¹⁵ They are seen as difficult, repetitious, prolix, and undistinguished--as too much for the average reader to handle and enjoy--as hard poems, demanding much and returning little. All in all, they are considered the downhill production of a man past his prime. These severe critical judgments of the long narratives are usually not based on sufficient evidence to be entirely convincing.

Indicative of the gap in the critical picture is Robinson's own feeling that the long narratives were significant parts of his poetry.¹⁶ A biographical justification of these poems as his greatest would, of course, be highly suspect; but Robinson's opinion deserves at least consideration, if only to be refuted. We must remember that Robinson wrote long narratives almost exclusively for the last twenty years of his life. These were the years when he was 1) assured of a hearing before the American public, 2) presumably collecting the fruits from years of contemplation and practice, and 3) by virtue of accrued experience and relatively stable financial status able at last to focus all of his conscious creative power

on whatever he felt to be the truest expression of his poetic vision. Even if one suspected the long narratives to be the worst of Robinson's work, their key position in his chronology would indicate that they deserve a full and independent hearing.

Furthermore, from the historical point of view, Robinson's chronological position in American literary history suggests that he is a key figure in the general history of narrative poetry. On the one hand, there is the situation of the narrative in American poetry of the eighteen nineties: "The long romantic narrative poem was a popular form in the Nineties. Really novels in verse (couplets, blank verse, and even Spenserian stanzas), the poems were replicas of the sentimental and sensational romantic narratives which had such a vogue in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Occasionally these narratives were staged against the background of American history, but a landscape replete with English squires and 'Arab hordes' was more usual."¹⁷ Against this background Robinson's narratives are strikingly original.

On the other hand, there is the situation of the narrative in American poetry in our own day, where it is quite unusual to note the publication of poetry even faintly resembling what we think of as traditional narrative verse. Nonetheless, an understanding of Robinson's treatment of the narrative clarifies many of the current problems in

narrative verse and is suggestive concerning its viability in the twentieth century. Robinson's treatment of the narrative form is interesting and important both in its relation to the nineteenth century and in what it indicates about the modern trends and potentialities of narrative poetry.

To summarize, then, the time does seem ripe for a full length study of E. A. Robinson's narratives. Though he is an important poet from the historical point of view, the narrative part of his canon has been largely ignored or unfairly treated by the critics. Chronologically and biographically, the narratives appear to be of central importance to Robinson's canon. His narratives also offer interesting implications concerning the study of narrative poetry in general. This study aims to give Robinson's twelve major narratives the full and systematic treatment they deserve.

As to the organization of the study, Chapter II, in addition to summarizing previous critical studies of Robinson's narratives, establishes the methodology to be employed. Chapter III describes, with reference to three representative narratives (Lancelot, Matthias at the Door, and Amaranth), the characteristic formal principles underlying Robinson's long poems. Chapter IV tests these formal principles against the rest of Robinson's narrative canon. The fifth and final chapter contains

a general evaluation of Robinson's strengths and weaknesses as a narrative poet, a discussion of Robinson's relation to the traditional narrative forms, and a consideration of the viability of narrative poetry at the present time.

The long narrative poems of Edwin Arlington Robinson have never received the full attention they deserve, neither from critic nor reader. Nor is this study intended as an inclusive fixing of their literary values. It aims rather to establish a basic guideline by which the interested reader may approach these demanding but rewarding poems without too limiting a preconception of what he will find there. We are today too often discouraged by nothing more than physical length from reading narrative poetry. The loss is all our own.

CHAPTER I: FOOTNOTES

¹Carlin T. Kindilien, American Poetry in the Eighteen Nineties (Providence, R.I., 1956).

²Ibid., p. 11.

³Ibid.

⁴Ridgely Torrence, ed., Selected Letters of Edwin Arlington Robinson (New York, 1940), pp. 12-13. Referred to hereafter as SL. The letter is dated Oct. 28, 1896.

⁵Kindilien, p. 101.

⁶Ibid., p. 102.

⁷SL, p. 93. Dated March 18, 1916, one year before Robinson's first real narrative poem, Merlin, was to be published.

⁸Both of his principle biographers, Hagedorn and Smith, agree on this point. Chard Powers Smith, in Where the Light Falls (New York, 1965), especially emphasizes Robinson's desire that his work allow him a comfortable old age, free from the monetary difficulties he had long struggled under.

⁹Some might contend that Robinson's attempts at playwriting and his change to long narrative verse were aimed at achieving mass popularity. This argument cannot, however, explain his continuing commitment to narrative verse in the face of considerable discouragement and meager rewards. His first popular success in narrative did not occur until 1927, twenty-five years after his first attempt, Captain Craig.

¹⁰It seems fairly clear that the short poems have been so "elevated." The quantity of criticism dealing with the three mentioned here exceeds that given over to the Arthurian group. Also the short poems are more highly and more often praised.

¹¹The edition used for this study is: Edwin Arlington Robinson, Collected Poems (New York, 1961). This is Macmillan's fourteenth printing of the Collected Poems since the final arrangement in 1937. It includes virtually all of Robinson's published work. The exceptions are:

1) twelve of the forty-six poems appearing in The Torrent and the Night Before (Cambridge, Mass., 1896)--"Ballade of a Ship," "For Some Poems by Matthew Arnold," "The Miracle," "The Ballade of Dead Friends," "For a Book by Thomas Hardy," "For Calderon," "The World," "The Children of the Night," "Walt Whitman," "Kosmos," "A Poem for Max Nordau," and "The Night Before"; 2) Modred; a Fragment (New York, 1929); 3) Fortunatus (Reno, 1928); and 4) the privately printed, posthumous Hannibal Brown (Buffalo, N. Y., 1936). Other omitted poems never published by Robinson in book form are: 1) "For a Copy of Poe's Poems," Lippincott's Magazine, LXXVIII (August, 1906), 243; 2) "In Harvard 5," Harvard Advocate, LII (Dec. 11, 1891), 85; 3) "Menoetes," Harvard Advocate, LIII (March 15, 1892), 32; 4) "The Pilgram's Chorus," Pilgram Spirit (Boston, 1921), pp. 77-8; and 5) "Quatrain," A Wreath for Edwin Markham (Chicago, 1922), p. 20.

¹² These poems are "Captain Craig," Merlin, Lancelot, "Avon's Harvest," Roman Bartholow, The Man Who Died Twice, Tristram, Cavender's House, The Glory of the Nightingales, Matthias at the Door, Talifer, Amaranth, King Jasper. These poems make up the essential canon for my study.

¹³ The exceptions: The Three Taverns (1920) contained twenty-two lyrics, three dramatic monologues, two dramatic dialogues, and two short (under ten pages) narratives, one in first and one in third person. Avon's Harvest (1921) contained, in addition to the title poem, twelve lyrics and a dramatic monologue. Dionysus in Doubt (1925) contained nineteen lyrics, two dramatic dialogues, and two short narratives. Nicodemus (1932) contained five lyrics, one dramatic monologue, and four short narratives. There were thus only fifty-eight published lyrics after 1916 and only five after 1925. Compare the 159 lyrics published in the volumes of Robinson's first twenty years of writing.

¹⁴ Important treatments of Robinson's narratives are discussed in the following chapter. It is interesting to note that there have been no published studies to date which deal exclusively with the narratives.

¹⁵ The following chapter summarizes the criticism upon which this generalization is based. Most of these charges are made, in one form or another, by one of Robinson's greatest admirers, Yvor Winters, in Edwin Arlington Robinson (Norfolk, Conn., 1946). Though Winters evaluates Robinson as an important American poet, he condemns most of his narratives.

¹⁶In his letters, Robinson refers to them with mixed emotions but always with respect. He seems to have felt a compulsion about some of them. Chard Powers Smith quotes him in Where the Light Falls, p. 29: "But in Lancelot I said what I have to say." In a letter to Mrs. Ledoux in 1932, quoted in SL, p. 168, he wrote: "If these modern long things of mine survive their first hundred years, which are said to be the hardest, they may go on longer. Anyhow, I had to do them...." Robinson spoke in a similar fashion to Rollo Walter Brown, who quoted him in Next Door to a Poet (New York, 1937), p. 48. Robinson complained that people were advising him to give up writing long narratives and added, "They happen to be the thing that's in my blood; so I've got to write them." Speaking of the long poems to Esther Bates, he indicated that the short poems "don't come anymore. At least, not good ones. And I'm not willing to publish poems I know are inferior to the early ones." This declaration, quoted by Miss Bates in Edwin Arlington Robinson and His Manuscripts (Waterville, Maine, 1944), p. 22, implies that Robinson must have seen his long poems as, in some sense, the equal of his early works; for he did publish them.

¹⁷Kindilien, pp. 193-94.

CHAPTER II: CRITICAL APPROACHES

The introductory chapter of this study included a brief outline of the typical critical treatment of E. A. Robinson's long narratives. It was suggested that most of the criticism was less than satisfactory in its treatment of the long narratives, and it seems necessary that the more important of the critical treatments of Robinson be examined at this stage in order to establish the kinds of critical methodologies which have been used with Robinson, the evaluations which have been pronounced upon his long poems, and the kinds of critical problems which have been raised by the various treatments.

There is not a large body of criticism dealing with Robinson's poetry. There have been no sudden surges of critical interest in his work, but there has been, from the mid-twenties to the present, a small but steady critical production. A review here of the important books and dissertations will indicate the extent and depth of the scholarly contributions to date. In each case my comment focuses mainly on the writer's conclusions relevant to Robinson's long narrative verse.

Prior to Robinson's death in 1935, critical comment on his work tended to be somewhat impressionistic. On

the one hand were the books which dealt with him as one poet among many, books with space for only generalized comment. On the other, there were books dealing with Robinson alone, books of "appreciation," usually written by the poet's acquaintances. Too often these books lacked persuasive critical commentary. Among the former kinds of studies, that of Louis Untermeyer,¹ in 1923 when only a few of the long narratives had yet been published, criticizes "Captain Craig" as being a mere peg for sometimes beautiful but finally tiresome talk and criticizes Merlin and Lancelot for their heavy air of allegory, for the similarities in the characters' speech, and for the general lack of variety and vitality.

Untermeyer is kinder than Bruce Weirick, who a year later makes the following estimate of Robinson's poetry: "As a critic of life we must feel his inadequacy, and as a poet his ineffectual sterility. Passion certainly is not his, but in its place resignation, reserve, smooth irony, and at best a dim romantic wonder at the idleness of fate. He has perhaps avoided danger, and has lived frugally on his income--but his is the fate of all those who prefer safety to adventure and a chance of ruin; he will not greatly endow his descendants at his decease."² Weirick's judgment represents an extreme, but disappointment in Robinson's turning toward the long narrative was widespread.

Harriet Monroe, who praises Robinson's individuality in style and content, feels that the long narratives were weakened by the lengthy speech of the characters.

Concerning Robinson's use of the characters' voices, she writes that "in the longer poems we have, as a rule, monologue and dialogue, the characters unfolding their perplexities, or recording their action upon each other, in long speeches which are not talk, as talk actually ever was or could be, but which are talk intensified into an extra-luminous self-revelation; as if an x-ray, turned into the suffering soul, made clear its hidden structural mysteries."³ The stance of the poet is in this view similar to that of the psychoanalyst in its encouraging of confessional monologue.

In 1929 Alfred Kreymborg agreed with Miss Monroe's criticism. Kreymborg points out that Robinson's technique involves taking characters completely apart and then putting them back together again; in his estimation the technique reduces the characters to little more than extensions of the poet. "They speak his language; analyze themselves at great length; play into his hands like puppets of his own theories of love and life....Many of their dialogues are extensions of monologues on the part of the hidden author."⁴ The result for Kreymborg is monotony, too much of the theoretical, perpetual indirection, involved digressions, a minimum of the sensual, and a

tendency to use exposition rather than action--this last a violation of the most basic of dramatic principles.

Kreymborg's judgment is representative of those who, during the twenties, wrote about Robinson in the comparatively restrictive context of literary history. As late as 1932 that judgment is upheld by Ludwig Lewisohn, who calls the long poems "cold intricacies and bloodless ingenuities [which lack] any fusing ardor" and "dreary novels in verse."⁵

Of the literary appreciations written during Robinson's lifetime, three are noteworthy--those of Lloyd Morris, Ben Ray Redman, and Mark Van Doren. Morris' short book was published in 1923; unlike Untermeyer, however, he gives general approval to those long narratives that had been published. Morris feels that Robinson's greatest strengths lay in his "psychological analysis" and his "dramatic power" and that the long narratives were a natural extension of those strengths as Robinson moved from the individual to the universal aspects of humanity. "Captain Craig" gives "a philosophy of which humour is the essence";⁶ "Avon's Harvest" is "a powerful and haunting analysis of the effects upon the mind and spirit of hate and fear";⁷ and the early Arthurian poems represent "the distillation and the synthesis of a rigorous observation of human character and experience in terms of what the poet has come to believe is their most abiding and

universal significance."⁸ Morris' praise is generally undiluted by any questioning analyses.

Three years later, Ben Ray Redman comments in a similar fashion, also praising Robinson's psychological insights. For him "Captain Craig" is "direct" and "noble," assuming "epic proportions." Interestingly, he notes the charges that "Craig" lacks form and answers them: "That the poem lacks 'artistic form' is not a pertinent criticism; it is undramatic in conception, and its form is in its very formlessness; it begins when the Captain begins talking, and it ends when he has said what he has had to say. His whim and purpose are the only arbiters of its length and structure."⁹ It is questionable whether poetry thus organized can be aptly described as direct, noble, or epic; but Redman's discussion does not lead him to explore further the implications of this statement.

Redman also notes that several critics have disliked the Arthurian poems and he answers them simply by insisting that Robinson had "vitalized" the legend by presenting the "grandeur and mystery of epic figures" plus the "psychological and emotional complexities of modern individuals."¹⁰ In some cases, however, Redman is distinctly critical of the long narratives. He dislikes The Man Who Died Twice, and he is specifically critical of Roman Bartholow, complaining that "the supposedly contemporary figures of Bartholow, Gabrielle, Penn-Raven, and

Umfraville seem to exist in his mind's eye only as factors in a human problem, and he handles them much as one might finger the pieces on a mysterious chess board that called for moves one did not wholly understand. The directing player seems bent upon discovery through experiment; the atmosphere of mystery remains, to the last, undisputed."¹¹ This charge that Robinson's characterizations in the narratives are dead through lack of authorial knowledge is a serious one, for earlier in his book Redman's discussion of the short poems had indicated that he felt Robinson's treatment of character to be the essence of his poetry.¹² Other than this criticism, Redman avoids specific discussion to support his generalized judgments.

In 1927, Mark Van Doren's appreciation was published to accompany Tristram in a Book-of-the-Month-Club offer. It is Van Doren's judgment that the six long poems so far published ("Captain Craig," Merlin, Lancelot, Roman Bartholow, The Man Who Died Twice, and Tristram) are "the basis of Mr. Robinson's claim to be called a major poet."¹³ Only in these poems has Robinson demonstrated his ability to deal with "complex and extended action" where, in a dramatic manner, he traces the fate of the "ideal" once it has been adopted by the human brain. In comparing the six long narratives, he writes: "They are all written in blank verse tempered like a magic blade; they all narrate the careers of men afflicted with abnormal

vision, either of truth or of untruth; they are all conceived and executed in passion; and they all carry a weight of thought which is constantly relieved, or perhaps intensified, by a trace of irony ever to be heard behind the austere--and frequently vernacular--lines."¹⁵ The main weakness in Van Doren's judgment, as in all of this early criticism, lies in its generalization. The lack of detailed discussion makes the commentary seem overly subjective, much too impressionistic. These early works offer many interesting suggestions for analysis, but they invariably fail to follow up the suggestions in any complete or systematic fashion.

During Robinson's lifetime, only one book was published which dealt in depth with the poetry. Charles Cestre's An Introduction to Edwin Arlington Robinson (1930) was favorably mentioned by Robinson in a letter to Mrs. Ledoux: "From what you have said, I rather think you will like what the friendly Frenchman has to say about the Arthurian things. In fact he says a great deal that I have been waiting for someone to say--not only praise, which in itself doesn't always amount to much, but simple statements of what I have been trying to do."¹⁶ Cestre's criticism is by no means systematic and it is colored considerably by his uninhibited admiration of Robinson's work, but it is nonetheless an honest attempt to discover and demonstrate the central aspects of Robinson's poetry. As such, it deserves close examination.

Cestre's book was published before many of Robinson's narratives were written and by modern critical standards it is impressionistic and disorganized; but his critical instincts are sound, and several key points emerge.¹⁷

Cestre opens early with the key observation that Robinson's short poems hardly ever present much of a story, that the poet aims rather at an emotion. The emotional effect is drawn out primarily by a combination of "character-painting" and the poet's use of an "inner view" which incorporates both sympathy and psychology. Robinson's poetic strength is to be found in the depth of his psychological insight and in his "dramatic force in presenting conflict."

When he turns to discuss the long narratives, Cestre constructs a formula which is meant to reveal the principles of construction supporting those poems. Character-drawing (as it was exemplified in the short poems) is "incorporated" into an action; the result is a "dramatic narrative." Or, using different terms: psychological analysis plus bare plot outline results in a narrative poetry which is less a sequence of events than a mental progression. In Cestre's opinion, this kind of narrative progression somehow lacks the emotional power of the shorter poems. Cestre's basic criticism of the long narratives is that in them an over-subtle analysis detracts from both narrative directness and from the rapidity of the dramatic development. He apparently would have preferred the internal analysis of character in

the long narratives to conform to the bare, static "emotion" given in the shorter poems and making for their excellence. It is interesting to note that Cestre begins his study with the short poems and gradually intersperses comment on the various long poems. His study, like most studies of Robinson since, is organized on a chronological basis, an organization which tends to set the short poems as Robinson's norm against which the long poems are then tested.

Cestre's criticism of the long narratives was supported by Allan Tate's 1933 essay based on the thesis that our age offers no myth which the poet (in this case, Robinson) might relate to his own experience and thus produce great "dramatic literature." Speaking of Robinson's long poems, Tate declares that "at a distance they lose outline; blur into one another. They constitute a single complete poem that the poet has not succeeded in writing, a poem around which these indistinct narratives have been written."¹⁸ This criticism seems to contend that the poet simply did not understand fully his materials or the use to which he was putting them. Tate follows this judgment by commenting that Robinson's narrative verse gives the reader "but a few moments of drama that are swiftly dispersed by the dry casuistry of the commentary."¹⁹ Tate's definition of drama is not clear in the essay, but his conception of the flawing element in the long narrative is explicit--

Robinson's "dry casuistry," the subtle and perhaps evasive processes of reasoning by which characters come to, and situations are led to, resolution. For Tate the drama (by which we must suppose he means the active, externalized conflicts) should be the central and ruling elements of the poems, but it is undercut by the lengthy and boring narrative commentary (by which Tate apparently means both the comments of the narrator and the discussions between characters).

Following Robinson's death in 1935, the interest in his work took a different turn, one somewhat less critical. At that time, Robinson's philosophical and ethical substance came to the foreground, as is indicated by Morton Zabel's judgment of 1937. Writing in Literary Opinion in America, Zabel defends the long poems for their moral depth: "...the naptha-flame charm of the currently applauded lyric writers seldom settles down to the constant flame that feeds on a profound spiritual nourishment."²⁰ Zabel's emphasis is quite distinct from the emphasis of Charles Cestre seven years earlier. Zabel points out Robinson's "syllogistic" method and "abstract formulation." In his view, Robinson's typical poem "drives toward the center of moral consciousness for its certainty, even when the process involves an exploration that leaves sensory logic and the external world behind for the sphere of pure notion."²¹ This interest in the moral bases of

Robinson's art was to be picked up and developed extensively in the forties.

Estelle Kaplan's Philosophy in the Poetry of Edwin Arlington Robinson,²² published in 1940, attempts to seek out the philosophical stances which Robinson took in his poetry and to discover what influences might underlie them. Miss Kaplan argues that Robinson's "idealism" was founded in a combination of Puritanism, Transcendentalism, and pessimism and was centered in his emphasis on "self-understanding." The development of his art indicates a personal development toward a hard-minded faith based in that "sharp 'light' of self-knowledge."

Yvor Winters, in 1946, wrote what was to that date the most important book on Robinson, and he continued, in a sense, the discussion of the philosophical and ethical aspects of Robinson's poetry.²³ Winters' central artistic criteria of rationality and morality have always been backed by a strong sense of formal aesthetic excellences. What Winters admires most in Robinson is, characteristically, his utilization of a "rational structure" and his ties to a moralistic tradition, though he deplores Robinson's occasional signs of Emersonian influence. In his individual analyses of poems, Winters describes the "structure" of the works in terms of the "logical development" of situation, character, or thought. His basic aim in discussing each poem is always to elicit a paraphrase of the philosophical content.

Like Cestre, Winters writes about the short poems first, but he does keep distinct in his exposition the sections on the long narratives. When Winters begins to deal with the long narratives, however, his tendency toward paraphrase is continued, though in a different manner. Feeling that the actual story as Robinson wrote it is too disconnected to be intelligible in a single reading, Winters finds it necessary to paraphrase the facts of the action before the philosophical content of the poem can even be considered. Robinson's obscurity, which for Winters undermines rational structure, is heartily condemned. The withholding of information Winters calls "a technique of systematic exasperation." Winters notes that Robinson often begins his narration near the chronological end of the story and precedes to build slowly the reader's knowledge of what had occurred. Because Robinson uses such a technique, in Winters' view, "the form of the poem has precluded the possibility of development of character or action and of the relation of motive to emotion."²⁴ Thus Winters sees the long narratives as lesser poems than the shorter works because the narrative technique of withheld information blurs the reader's sense of "rational structure" and lessens his knowledge concerning character motivation. The long narratives lack the straightforward presentation of knowledge--which Winters praises so highly in the best of the short poems--and are for that reason less satisfactory

works.

Another reason why the long poems might be unsatisfactory was suggested by Hyatt Howe Waggoner in 1950. Commenting that Robinson's best poetry was his early lyric verse, Waggoner surmises that later in his life, Robinson reached "an impasse which paralysed his sensibilities." Waggoner complains that Robinson's later works are too much based in abstract argument and speculation, that Robinson was "rather innocent of philosophy," and that his late works thus lack the power to convince. Of the narrative verse, he writes: "Robinson's poetry is that of a man whose mind and heart are at odds....If the philosophic passages of his long narrative poems are frequently thin and verbose, unconvincing and even tedious, it is because they are most often on the theme of ultimate meaning and on this theme Robinson could only think and feel by turns."²⁵ In this view, Robinson fails because he turned to philosophical questions which he was ill-equipped to handle. Waggoner sees the poet as simply incapable of fusing his intellect and his emotion when dealing with complexity or enigma.

In 1951, Louise Bogan added her explanation of Robinson's "failure" when she tried to explain why the development of action and character in the long narratives might seem obscure. As she sees it, Robinson "adumbrated rather than described" human actions in his "profoundly symbolic" long poems. The symbols became "repetitive

obsessions" disguised by "tenuosities of language" and as a result never were fully realized as figures of human life.²⁶ If Robinson indeed "adumbrated" actions so as to symbolize obscurely his obsessions, Miss Bogan does not elaborate or exemplify it convincingly in her chapter. Her comment is nonetheless quite interesting, especially in light of Yvor Winters' early criticism.

In 1952, Ellsworth Barnard published the best work to date on Robinson's poetry. Barnard incorporates an impressive formalistic methodology in his study, and although the space given to the long narratives is limited, several interesting suggestions are made. Barnard points out that most of Robinson's poems, long or short, tell stories (often sad) of particular men and women, stories which forego stating the explicit moral. Barnard, recognizing a basic distinction between the effect of separate parts ("style") and the effect of an artistic whole ("form"), seeks out in Robinson's poems the "organic form"--in his definition, that form which results from the combination of repetition, unified subject matter, and character development.

In Barnard's view, the form of Robinson's long poems is dictated by the development of the hero's character, and the primary interest is psychological. The principles of unity reside in the singleness of action, the consistency of the protagonist, and the general thought which is

illustrated. Barnard continues this idea in writing that "in the long poems, as a rule, the structure is dictated by the development of one or more of the characters themselves. The interest is not so much dramatic as psychological. The characters call not only for our sympathy--or, in some instances, antipathy--but also for our understanding, as far as that is ever possible, of why human beings change or fail to change."²⁷ In the Aristotelian terminology appropriate to his method, then, character is the organizing factor in the narrative poems.

Barnard writes that "it is character and not situation that really counts; the story is not told for its own sake but for the sake of the people in it."²⁸ Barnard feels that this fact is really Robinson's distinguishing characteristic, that his "centering of interest on individual human beings" clearly separates him from most other twentieth century poets (possibly excepting Frost and Masters). "Robinson's characters, in the main ... have no other motive than mere existence."²⁹ The primary interest is in "the inward world" of the character, "not with what happens to people but with what happens in them."³⁰

Barnard feels, however, that Robinson has somehow failed to realize for his readers the intended poetic effect of the long narratives. Robinson's failure is seen as a result of his complex vision of the elusiveness of ultimate fact, of the equivocal nature of things. This

philosophical view erects barriers between poet and reader, the poet being obscured by his vagueness (too concise in his short poems, too diffuse in the long), his indirection, his tendency toward allegory, and his refusal to take sides.

Barnard's judgment is reasonable and persuasive, based on a careful reading of Robinson's work. However, because it is an important book, it is necessary to comment briefly on what seem to me the shortcomings of its treatment of Robinson's long narratives. For one thing, Barnard's attempt to discover the "organic form" of Robinson's poems is undercut by his method of dealing with the long poems in mixed bits and pieces--not simply analyzing one at a time, but mixing together the whole canon, then reaching in for whatever evidence he needs for any particular development in his study. Such a method patently tends to obscure the wholeness or form of the individual poems. At the same time Barnard makes an error which can equally be ascribed to most of the Robinson critics; he tries to generalize into one formula the uniting principles of all the long narratives rather than to work out the form of each poem separately. As a result, in his book it often appears as if the theory of character as fusing principle is being forced upon individual poems.

The most important book since Barnard's is Edwin Fussell's influence study, published in 1954. Fussell feels Robinson's dominant temper is distinctly romantic.

The nature of Fussell's study does not allow for much interpretation, and he wisely refrains from judging Robinson's long narratives. He does, however, offer comments as to the literary influences upon Robinson's developing art, and suggests Maupassant and Ibsen as most important--the former for his "persistent attention to details" and his "superhuman power of concentration,"³¹ the latter for "the minute and scrupulous examination of social and ethical problems, the skillful complication and unraveling of plot(all under the guise of the strictest 'realism'), the almost total dependence upon dramatic dialogue to advance the action, the insistence upon unity, the use of a realistic and controlling symbolism."³²

Fussell also insists that Robinson's development as a poet followed a clear line of advance in favor of dramatic structure: "Robinson's career, in respect to dramatic content, is continuous: he moved from the brief narrative and dramatic vignettes of his first book, through a series of more extended narratives, dramatic monologues, and character portraits, to the long Arthurian and modern narratives in dramatic structure that in retrospect seem what he was moving toward from the beginning."³³ Fussell finds Robinson's long narratives to be the serious outcome of a developing theory of poetry and, by implication, good and mature poems. These attitudes are not supported, however, by critical analyses.

In the last ten years, there have been several dissertations dealing with Robinson, three of which contain material relevant to the long narratives. Robert Stevick, in his 1956 dissertation, concerns himself with poetic techniques and leaves the longer poems mostly alone except for judging them inferior. Stevick feels that Robinson's excellence is to be found in what he calls the "narrow scope" poems, where "complexity and control derive from the interplay of diction, verse forms, character-depiction, dual points of view, plot, and abstract statement."³⁴

He states that Robinson's method is by nature susceptible to flaws because of its dependence on "complex and subtle meshworks of meaning, which reached astonishing complication in poems simultaneously presenting character, abstract statement, plot, and more than one point of view...."³⁵

In Stevick's view, the difficulty for the narratives thus arose when Robinson continued to use the same materials but ceased to use the restricting versification, thereby allowing his materials to expand too far. Specifically, then, there is "no adequate organizing element" in the narratives. Stevick may have meant by this that none of the "materials"(character, abstract statement, plot, point of view) was given precedence by the poet, with a resulting confusion in how these parts were to be related and subordinated. From the context, however, it is rather more likely that Stevick simply sees the short poems as organized

by diction and the long poems (obviously not organized in the same way) as therefore lacking in unity. In view of Stevick's primary focus (on Robinson's poetic techniques) his emphasis on diction is understandable, but his carrying of that emphasis over into a condemnatory judgment of the narratives would seem to illustrate a basic ends-means confusion, one into which many of Robinson's critics have fallen.

Another Robinson dissertation was also completed in 1956; Paul Morrill sought out the psychological elements of Robinson's poetry. Morrill, aiming his discussion primarily at aspects of characterization, feels the long poems are better than the short because they deal with people who have deeper and more intricate problems. In his view, the considerable use of analysis, monologue, and dialogue gives information which illuminates the thoughts and actions of the characters. Robinson's method develops from "short to long, from concise to elaborate, from monologue to dialogue, from general to internal,"³⁶ and all of these developments are, of course, for the best in the eyes of a critic collecting psychological data. Again there seems a confusion of the short and long poems stemming from the assumption that both kinds of poems were trying to do the same things, here, to explore psychological states of mind.

In 1961, John Vail Foy focused his attention exclusively

on the long narratives, and in many of the details of his analysis he showed good insight into Robinson's narrative techniques. However the title of his dissertation, "Character and Structure in Edwin Arlington Robinson's Major Narratives," is somewhat misleading; for by structure Foy means basically any devices which contribute to character revelation. "Structure" is the "plotted background" against which character emerges, and Robinson's chief problem in the narrative is seen as finding an effective structure for handling complex character.³⁷

Foy is greatly concerned with qualities of diction, as is indicated by his extensive handling of the "devices which structure controls"--analogy, simile, paradox, symbol, abstraction, personification, repetition, and counter-point.³⁸ For Foy the developing and distinguishing of character is the central factor in Robinson's narratives; he therefore seeks signs of that development in the poet's diction. Foy finds fault in what he calls Robinson's "purposeful indirection," which he explains as the attempt of the poet to produce through his language the "illusion of character enigma." In Foy's theory, the measure of structural control is whether the "characters are clearly discernable as separate identities in their motives, ideas, attitudes, and purposes."³⁹ He concludes that Robinson's characters in the long poems tend by their diction rather to blend together, thereby putting increasing emphasis on

ideas and thus weakening the works.

William Ronald Robinson advances the thesis that Robinson's poetry developed as he matured philosophically until his late work became poetry as existential act.⁴⁰ Mr. Robinson develops an interesting case based upon the paradox of the poet's accepting the aesthetics of realism but treating as his subject the unrealistic inner life. For Mr. Robinson such an approach raises the problem of reconciling the artistic demands of realism with the presentation of an incompatible inner reality; this incompatibility in manner and subject results in obscurity. Both Robinson's plotting and diction are described as becoming progressively more vague as he tries to suggest a spiritual life which language cannot communicate. What the poet seems to have done, according to Mr. Robinson, is to have put his poetry into "the intangibles" of form, tone, style rather than into the words themselves. By his "equivalence of form and content" he has reflected in his structural obscurity the existential nature of modern man.

Mr. Robinson's reasoning is interesting; but he has, it seems to me, only stated elaborately what several of the other critics had previously noted (Redman, Tate, Barnard, Foy): that E. A. Robinson's long narrative poems are structurally more complex than his early works, that neither his philosophy nor his characterization nor his

plot arrangements offer themselves to quick and easy comprehension--especially not if one comes to them full of expectations based on the short poems.

Finally, the recent comments of Roy Harvey Pearce concerning Robinson's work are interesting if brief; and it seems to me they summarize well the general attitudes that critics since 1935 have taken toward Robinson. In his book, Pearce advances the view that Robinson's proper metier is the novel, in view of his tendency toward the anecdotal, his objectivity, and his celebration of life simply as something "lived through," a fact. Pearce agrees with Barnard in noting the "inevitable, walled-off privacy" of Robinson's protagonists, and he criticizes all of the late poems (1917 and on) for the deadness in their characters: "...there are no persons in any of them, just aspects of the disintegrated psyche of a disintegrated community, without even strong memories of what it had been."⁴¹ Pearce sees Robinson as striving eventually and in vain for a philosophy in his poetry: "He wanted in the end to be as much a philosophical as a dramatic poet. Philosophical poetry was to be his means of establishing the sense of communitas--of ego--transcending human relations --which dramatic poetry requires. At this he failed just about completely."⁴²

For Pearce, Robinson's failure is due to his simple lack of intellectual comprehension of the things he was

trying to say: "The poet too often strives to hint at what he has no way of imagining. The poem needs a situation and a movement more certain than those dictated by the poet's compulsion, however genuine, to see the light."⁴³

For Pearce, then, Robinson's long poems fail because he attempts to organize them upon a philosophy which he could not rationally support or even comprehend.

Most of the critics discussed above have made contributions to our understanding of E. A. Robinson's poetry, and certainly many of the points they make are suggestive and helpful in formulating a complete reading of Robinson's narratives. But none of these critics, it seems to me, have given the long narratives the full hearing they deserve. Most of them agree that the long poems are flawed, though they may differ on the precise nature of the flaw.

For Cestre, oversubtle analysis weakens character drawing; for Winters, the obscuring of the reader's knowledge of the action weakens his sense of character motivation and destroys rational structure; for Barnard, narrative indirection weakens the reader's sense of character development; and for Foy, inadequacies in the structure (plotted background) undercut complexity of characterization. The primary complaint in these, the best of the studies of Robinson's narratives, revolves about the common feeling that the information conveyed

within the various sections of the poems is either not complete, not clear, or not properly arranged with the result that the poem fails to reveal to the reader most precisely the traits or developments of character which should be central to the "meaning" of the poem. This wide-spread emphasis on the importance of character must be taken seriously.

There are, to be sure, critics who look less to character than to some other part as central to Robinson's narrative poems. Tate, for example, looks rather for some aspect of external action to control the poem; Stevick looks to diction to organize the material; and Pearce seems to feel the late poems fail because of Robinson's inability to produce a coherent philosophy. William Robinson, of course, is concerned not with the insufficiency of any particular organizing principle so much as with the progressive loss of any synthesizing material part. All of these men, however, agree on at least one point: that the long narratives are flawed poems and are lesser works than the early lyrics.

It seems to me that there is a problem in the attitude with which these men approached the longer works. In varying degrees the comments of every critic writing about the narratives originate in the question: "Why are these poems failures?" The actual discussions of the narratives proceed to show how the excellences of the short poems are

lost or lessened in the longer works. Depending upon the critical emphasis of the writer, we are shown 1) how vital characterization gradually deteriorated through dilution, 2) how philosophic content was expanded beyond artistic control, 3) how psychological insight was overstrained through verbosity, or 4) how early excellences in prosodic technique eventually weakened and lost the virtues of dictional concision and metrical precision. Even the most important books, to my mind those of Yvor Winters and Ellsworth Barnard, end in criticizing the narratives because they lose or weaken the emphases which are seen as most valuable to the short poems. For Barnard "character" is less effectively developed, and for Winters the "tight rational structure" is dissipated.

None of the published studies take Robinson's narratives in critical isolation; the form of the narrative is not sought independently but rather by analogy with the shorter poems. Too often as well, the critics approach the narratives by beginning with the generalization of what they all have in common, which has unfortunately led to a blurring of the awareness of the distinct formal qualities of the separate poems. As any critic must, each of these men has formulated his personal theory concerning the sources of excellence in poetry and the kinds of critical questions which will best enable him to test that excellence in any given work. For reasons usually clearly

set forth, each of them derives less pleasure from Robinson's long narratives than from his shorter works. The problem thus lies in what seems to me to be a critical bias in favor of lyric poetry. This bias is perhaps the main factor withholding from the narratives the critical consideration they deserve.

It seems to me, therefore, that the narrative poems should be held distinct from the shorter works. Discussion of the ends and means of the short poems must not be allowed to establish a basis for describing and evaluating the ends and means of the longer ones. The kinds of poetic excellence appropriate to the narratives does not correspond in source or quality to the kinds of excellence discovered in the short verse. To try to establish analogues between the two almost certainly insures the condemnation of the narrative.

The primary problem for the critic who approaches Robinson's long narratives would seem to be to establish independently the end at which the poet aims and the means which he chooses to produce it. That is, the method should allow for an inductive and distinguishing approach to the poems. The oldest and still most basic text offering such a methodology is the Poetics of Aristotle.⁴⁴

The Poetics offers not only a firm base upon which to build a general critical theory, but offers as well an explicit discussion of the mixed narrative mode(epic) and

its comparison with a dramatic mode(tragedy). The interpretations of Aristotle by R. S. Crane, particularly in The Languages of Criticism and the Structure of Poetry,⁴⁵ and by others of the "Chicago" school offer a full and promising methodology to the critic seeking an inductive and distinguishing means of approaching poetry, a methodology which will shortly be examined in more detail. For the moment, Crane's comment upon distinctions in modes serves to indicate his appropriateness for this study:

[As the poet's] materials and poetic aims vary, so also will vary the precise practical meaning of all such concepts as excess and defect, unity, order, magnitude, and beauty: the beauty of tragedy is one thing and that of comedy quite another, and the correct mean between parts and whole in a full-length drama or novel will not be the same as the corresponding mean in a short story or a lyric. Hence the question of better and worse in poetry can never be answered in absolute terms; the answer is always relative, not to ourselves(as when dramas are judged to be good because they are "effective" for particular audiences), but in Aristotle's phrase, to "the thing itself," that is, immediately to the part that is being constructed and ultimately to the form of the whole to which the part belongs and the peculiar "power" it is to have....⁴⁶

In theory, lyric and narrative forms may be clearly distinguished as to what the reader expects to find when he begins to read one or the other, and most critics would never expect the same things from the two--neither in prosody, in idea or emotion, in character, nor in situation or action. The canon of Edwin Arlington Robinson, however, contains poems of all lengths, utilizing

various points of view, and thus obscures to a degree the lines dividing lyric and narrative. This situation is potentially confusing for the critic seeking to describe and/or evaluate Robinson's entire canon. This is one of the reasons it seems proper to focus a study upon the narratives alone.

It will be helpful here to distinguish lyric and narrative modes.⁴⁷ Lyric forms deal in concentration, aiming to capture only an essential action and/or characterization. The lyric deals with the instant, with the single situation, the single character. There is no change in fortune. There is an immediate presentation of personal action. The lyric aims at singleness and at unity.

In contrast, the narrative deals in expansion, aiming to build gradually a long plot and a full characterization. The narrative deals with a span of time, a series of incidents, and multiple characters. Changes of fortune occur. A narrative voice presents action among groups of characters. Moreover, the narrative, in its length, is not ruined by digression or even by some unevenness. In short, about all the two share is their vehicle of communication, language, and their basic subject matter, human behavior.

Traditionally, point of view has been the primary way of distinguishing lyric, drama, and epic. Lyric

generally utilizes the poet's own persona; drama conceals the writer behind the cast of characters; and epic has the poet speaking partly as narrator and partly hiding behind the dialogue of his characters (mixed narrative).⁴⁸ In the latter category we would today place the novel and the various forms of verse narrative.

Narrative fiction requires the reader to recognize time and sequence in time, to be involved with a whole event as it develops and not merely with its outcome. Its criticism has customarily centered in discussion of plot, character, setting, and point of view. It is these terms of analysis that are suitable for "verse novels"⁴⁹ like Robinson's. In discussing the epic, Aristotle's basic concern was with "the nature and organization of the story."⁵⁰ It is this concern that will be applied to Robinson's narrative poetry in this study.

Aristotle's Poetics begins: "Let us consider poetry itself and its species, dealing with the capacity of each one and showing how its matter must be arranged if a poem is to be good...."⁵¹ A poem, according to Aristotle, is an "imitation." It is a form shaped in materials not natural to it by an efficient cause, the poet. The end to which the poet directs his effort is a product possessing beauty and valued for its formal excellence rather than for its practical utility.

The aim of the poet is thus simply to make a good poem.

The reader, or auditor, may discover the excellence particular to a given poem only if he comprehends it as a complete formal whole. As Crane describes it:

[Poems] exist and are fully knowable only as "concrete wholes"--as things, that is, of which we can give an adequate account only when we specify both the matter or elements of which they are composed and the form, or principle of structure, by reason of which this matter has the character of a definite existing thing, the two aspects of matter and form being inseparable in fact but separable analytically in our account; and in all such things the form, or synthesizing principle, is most completely expressed, for any specific whole, by its peculiar dynamis or "power."⁵²

The form of any work is the principle of structure, the synthesizing principle expressed in the dynamis--"that which animates its parts and makes of them one determinate whole, as the 'soul' is the most formal principle, in this sense, of the living being."⁵³

When Aristotle formulated his definition of tragedy in the Poetics, he described first the material components, of which there are three (an object, a means, and a manner), and he concluded with the dynamis, the form which unites the parts into an effective whole: "Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious and complete and has sufficient size, in language that is made sweet, and with each of the kinds of sweet language separately in the various parts of the tragedy, presented by those who act and not by narrative, exciting pity and fear, bringing about the catharsis of such emotions."⁵⁴ The object is to

be some serious action of a certain size. The means is to be poetic language. The manner is to be dramatic. But the distinctive thing which makes the work exactly what it is as a complete form is represented by the particular dynamis, the effecting of pity and fear.⁵⁵ The effect of a poem thus seems to be the first consideration in explaining the form which a work possesses.⁵⁶

In dealing with tragedy, Aristotle establishes a hierarchy of parts: plot comes first, followed by character, and thought, then by diction and music, finally by spectacle--each step in the hierarchy relating to the one below as form to material. Certainly most of these terms (plot, character, thought, diction) are equally appropriate to other kinds of imitations which utilize the same materials to produce "imitations of human actions." In the Poetics, the epic mode is compared to the tragic with reference to those terms.

R. S. Crane has commented extensively on the meaning of Aristotle's terms.⁵⁷ Lexis (diction) refers to the "arrangement of words." Dianoia (thought) designates "what the words most immediately signify." Ethos (character) is whatever reveals the "moral purpose of the agents, that is, the sort of thing they distinctively seek or avoid." Mythos (plot) is used in two closely related senses by Aristotle, as 1) a part of the whole (the most important part) and as 2) the form itself. In the first of these

senses, it is the part of the whole which represents the imitated object. In the second sense, it is the "first principle" or "soul" of the poem. Crane writes of plot that it is "nothing more or less than its whole object of imitation as this is imaginatively constructed, with its necessary specifications of moral character and states of mind, by the poet and embodied by him, in ways appropriate to his chosen manner of imitation, in the words of his poem; it is the total imitated action of the poem as qualified ethically in such a way as to produce the special 'tragic pleasure.'"⁵⁸ Plot is seen here not as something mechanical but as the final end which all the parts of a poem work to produce. The "form of the plot," then, is the central and organizing principle of the work, and understanding of it is essential for any critic who wishes to explain why the parts of the work are as they are.

In the reading of any long work, the reader is at various times in the reading affected by diction, thought, character, and plot separately. He is struck at times by the beauty of isolated phrases or words, at times by a sense of knowledge gained though not clearly connected to action, at times by an awareness of the moral nature of the character apart, and at times by changes or progressions in the action. The reader's final feeling about the whole poem, however, involves his sense of the whole action (plot in the larger sense) and is made up of a synthesis of all the

separate effects he felt in the process of actually reading.⁵⁹ Understanding how the parts have been combined to produce one final effect involves describing structural relationships.

Structure, as Crane points out, is a word which possesses two meanings for the literary critic, one quantitative, one qualitative. In the quantitative sense, structure refers simply to the "discrete sections" of the poem; by various conventions, depending upon the mode, shifts in the character of the action are indicated.⁶⁰ Only secondarily does this quantitative structural arrangement "determine the form and effect." The qualitative sense of structure, however, directly determines form and effect and the completeness of their realization in the work. Epic has four qualitative parts: plot, character, thought, and diction.

As Crane has it, structural analysis concerns itself primarily with the "human action" which is imitated, seeking its quality in two natural causes, "the moral habits of the agents," and their "mental processes and states," and exploring its medium, the "metrical language." Structural analysis aims to show "how the material nature of the work is related to its formal nature." The evidence to be examined is thus primarily internal, and Crane suggests that the critic seeks "not the actual process but the actual rationale of the poem's construction

in terms of the poetic problems the writer faced and the reasons which determined his solutions."⁶¹ Following Crane's reasoning, we may say, then, that the structural analysis of literature deals most essentially with describing and evaluating the qualitative structure of the given work by questioning the problems the writer faced in composing it.⁶²

Crane indicates four basic questions which must be asked of any work having a plot as its principle of construction. These will serve as a starting point for determining the structure of any plot-organized work: "What the change is, from what it starts and to what it moves; in what kind of man it takes place; by reason of what causes in the man's thoughts and actions or outside him; and with what succession of emotional effects in the representation."⁶³ With these questions in mind, the critic has a base for developing a full examination of the poem. Seeking the kind of protagonist, the nature and causes of his change, and the emotional effects aroused is only a beginning, but it gives rise to a series of questions which support and complete the analysis.

To this point the methodological discussion has centered almost exclusively in suggestions advanced by R. S. Crane. It might be argued that it is a critical danger to follow too closely the theory of one man, or of one school. David Daiches offers appropriate comment

here: "The tendency of professional critics is to establish a method, which can be taught to disciples, and to set more store by the right handling of the method than by the increased perception, understanding, and appreciation it yields....Whatever enables a reader to see further into the manifold life of a literary work is effective criticism."⁶⁴ Daiches' warning is well-taken, but it seems to me that the very virtue of Crane's metholology lies in the flexibility and wide-ranging applicability of his interpretation from Aristotle's basic methods and terms. These terms are, of course, applicable to such poems as those of Edwin Arlington Robinson.⁶⁵

The problem for the critic resolves in discovering what other critical questions are appropriate to analyzing Robinson's long narrative poems. It is possible for the critic to proceed, as most of them have done, by means of asking critical questions aimed at establishing analogues with Robinson's early verse: Has his language lost or gained in power? Is his thought more or less original and clear? Are his characters more or less interesting, motivated, distinct? Is his plot tighter or looser, more or less exciting and interesting? In each case with these kinds of critical questions, the comparison is, to a degree, specious; for any of the separate parts may be comparatively weaker to the end of furthering the total effect of the long work. Which is to say that the answers to these kinds of critical questions may seemingly condemn the narrative

poems, but that the condemnation is irrelevant unless it also considers the differences in lyric and narrative forms and shows the narrative as failing to realize its proper end.

The more viable critical method is to approach the long narratives with a set of distinguishing questions aimed at revealing the poem's specific aesthetic ends, how the poet has tried to realize those ends, and the extent of his success. We may first ask the four general questions suggested by Crane concerning the change that occurs, the kind of man to whom it occurs, the causes for its occurrence, and the accompanying kinds of emotional effects. A series of broadly-based questions may also be asked concerning form and effect: How is the reader affected by the arrangement of the various parts? Do all the parts contribute to one single effect? What considerations must have led the poet to arrange the parts in this particular way? Is the whole pattern of part to part unified? Is this the best form for this kind of story?⁶⁶

In seeking to explore these broad questions, the critic begins to ask more specific questions, for example: What is the point of view? How does the narrator relate to the action? Is there a change of situation, of character, of thought? Which of the parts are most fully expanded? What is the time span? How extensive is the action (how many incidents)? How many characters are presented?

How many situations? How elaborate is the diction in the various parts? How much dialogue is used? How much summary? The answers to and explanations of these kinds of questions contribute to discovering the larger answers of the first questions. All of the questions help the critic to evaluate the effect of the work. In practice, of course, all of the questions are explored simultaneously.

Once the poem is seen in its own terms as an aesthetic whole, complete, combining its parts toward evoking a single effect, the critic may effectively begin to answer a third set of critical questions, those raised by other critics using different methods of analysis. He may, for example, ask concerning E. A. Robinson's long narratives: Does the diction lack force? Is the syntax overly convoluted? Is there excessive use of dialogue? Is there extensive use of undefined abstraction? Are the ideas advanced naive? Is the number of characters severely limited? Is the action sequence obscure? Are important details withheld? And in each case, the critic must conclude with: If the charge is true, what might have been Robinson's purpose? How does it contribute to or distract from the intended effect of the whole poem? In this manner the long narrative may be more fairly and systematically tested.

This is the essence of the critical methodology employed in this study. The substance emerges in the chapters

following. Hopefully it does treat E. A. Robinson's long narratives in a manner more appropriate than critics have heretofore employed and thus uncovers new aspects of Robinson's art for the interested reader. The problem is to discover the narrative form of Robinson's long work and to test whether or not he has succeeded in producing a unified, complete formal whole--a good work of a particular kind.

The question of what makes for good criticism is, of course, one which each critic must himself determine before he can truly begin to practice his craft. What is to be the end at which he aims? To what audience is he directing his commentary? What kinds of questions is he to ask about the works he studies? What criteria of excellence is he to impose upon them? David Daiches has written a comment on the possibilities for the critic which is valuable:

All criticism is tentative, partial, oblique. This is not by any means to say that there are no standards of value, that we must fall back on personal taste, or vague impressionism, or mere gush. We do, however, mean that no critical statement about a work of literary art can be a complete statement of what it is and whether or not it is good. On the level of critical theory, it may be possible to construct a set of valid general principles; as far as practical criticism is concerned--criticism designed to demonstrate the nature and quality of a work and so to increase understanding and appreciation--it must always be fragmentary, indirect, approximate. It can never be a complete and wholly satisfactory description of what takes place in the work of art.

This study of Robinson is an exercise in practical criticism and is subject to all of the difficulties of completeness which Daiches describes. Practical criticism can, however, impart to its audience a sense of the completeness of the art work itself. It seems to me that the end of criticism involves its being expressive of the poem's wholeness, its particular power to affect the reader as an organic whole. Wayne Shumaker expresses this idea clearly in contending that a work's profundity and vitality lie in "powerfully expressed meanings":

"If readers could be helped, by a criticism which separated the various strands of the action and interpreted each individually and then all in formal combination, not only to see more deeply into the source of the play's power but also to acquire the ability in life to learn through perceptions as well as through the reason, the critical exposition would itself have the richest possible human significance."⁶⁸ The problem is to discover, in each particular case, how to achieve this admirable kind of criticism.

CHAPTER II: FOOTNOTES

¹Louis Untermeyer, American Poetry Since 1900(New York, 1923), pp. 42-66.

²Bruce Weirick, From Whitman to Sandburg in American Poetry(New York, 1924), p. 191.

³Harriet Monroe, Poets and Their Art(New York, 1926), p. 5.

⁴Alfred Kreymborg, Our Singing Strength(New York, 1929), p. 312.

⁵Ludwig Lewisohn, Expression in America(New York, 1932), p. 558.

⁶Lloyd Morris, The Poetry of Edwin Arlington Robinson: An Essay in Appreciation(New York, 1923), p. 31.

⁷Ibid., p. 292.

⁸Ibid., p. 46.

⁹Ben Ray Redman, Edwin Arlington Robinson(New York, 1926), p. 45.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 73.

¹¹Ibid., p. 82.

¹²Ibid., p. 14.

¹³Mark Van Doren, Edwin Arlington Robinson(New York, 1927), p. 22.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 54.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 47.

¹⁶SL, pp. 161-62.

¹⁷Charles Cestre, An Introduction to Edwin Arlington Robinson(New York, 1930).

¹⁸Alan Tate, On the Limits of Poetry(New York, 1948), p. 361.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 362.

²⁰Morton Dauwen Zabel, "Four Poets in America," in Literary Opinion in America(New York, 1937), p. 398.

²¹Ibid., pp. 401-2.

²²Estelle Kaplan, Philosophy in the Poetry of Edwin Arlington Robinson(New York, 1940).

²³Yvor Winters, Edwin Arlington Robinson(Norfolk, Conn., 1946).

²⁴Ibid., p. 114. Winters was speaking here of Roman Bartholow but the criticism suggests his attitude toward most of the other long narratives as well.

²⁵Hyatt Howe Waggoner, The Heel of Elohin(Norman, 1950), pp. 22-3.

²⁶Louise Bogan, Achievement in American Poetry: 1900-1950(Chicago, 1951), p. 22.

²⁷Ellsworth Barnard, Edwin Arlington Robinson: A Critical Study(New York, 1952), p. 108.

²⁸Ibid., p. 121.

²⁹Ibid., p. 122.

³⁰Ibid., p. 149.

³¹Edwin S. Fussell, Edwin Arlington Robinson: The Literary Background of a Traditional Poet(Berkeley, 1954), p. 127. The phrase is from an unpublished letter to George Lathan dated September 20, 1895.

³²Ibid., p. 132.

³³Ibid., p. 137.

³⁴Robert David Stevick, "E. A. Robinson's Principles and Practices of Poetry: The Effects of His Principles of Poetry on the Technique and Structure of the Poems," unpubl. diss.(Wisconsin, 1956), p. 276.

³⁵Ibid., p. 273.

³⁶Paul Hampton Morrill, "Psychological Aspects of the Poetry of Edwin Arlington Robinson," unpubl. diss. (Northwestern, 1956), p. 164.

³⁷John Vail Foy, "Character and Structure in Edwin Arlington Robinson's Major Narratives," unpubl. diss. (Cornell, 1961), p. 20.

³⁸Ibid., p. 83.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰William Ronald Robinson, Edwin Arlington Robinson: A Poetry of the Act (Cleveland, 1967). Mr. Robinson's book is derived from his 1962 dissertation, which is the basis for these comments.

⁴¹Roy Harvey Pearce, The Continuity of American Poetry (Princeton, N.J., 1961), p. 268.

⁴²Ibid., p. 265.

⁴³Ibid., p. 267.

⁴⁴In Critics and Criticism, R. S. Crane, ed. (Chicago, 1952), p. 9, Elder Olson writes that "if one wishes to know the nature of a given kind of poetry, as a certain synolon or composite, a whole and its parts specified with the maximum differentiation possible without the destruction of the undversals upon which science depends, an Aristotelian criticism is requisite."

⁴⁵R. S. Crane, The Languages of Criticism and the Structure of Poetry (Toronto, 1953). Also most helpful among modern criticism and theory in establishing the methodology of the study were: R. S. Crane, ed., Critics and Criticism (Chicago, 1952); David Daiches, Critical Approaches to Literature (New York, 1956); Paul Goodman, The Structure of Literature (Chicago, 1954); Elder Olson, Tragedy and the Theory of Drama (Detroit, 1961); Wayne Shumaker, Elements of Critical Theory (Berkeley, 1964); Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, Theory of Literature (New York, 1942); and Austin M. Wright, The American Short Story in the Twenties (Chicago, 1961).

⁴⁶Crane, Languages of Criticism, p. 61.

⁴⁷The following summary is based largely upon: Elder Olson, "Introduction," American Lyric Poems (New York, 1964).

⁴⁸Wellek and Warren, Theory of Literature, p. 217. Mr. Warren's discussion in chapters 16-18, pp. 201-41, was helpful in writing the discussion of narrative which follows here.

⁴⁹See Daiches, Critical Approaches, p. 40. According to Daiches' commentary on Aristotle's Poetics, the sections dealing with the epic are especially interesting to the twentieth century critic in that the epic was the form of that day nearest to our modern novel.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 41.

⁵¹Aristotle, "The Poetics," in Literary Criticism: Plato to Dryden, Allan H. Gilbert, ed. (Detroit, 1962), p. 69.

⁵²Crane, Languages of Criticism, p. 44.

⁵³Ibid., p. 52. Austin Wright's definition of form in The American Short Story, p. 159, is helpful: "the principle that unites and organizes a story, making necessary the inclusion of details in their own particular order and manner of treatment."

⁵⁴Aristotle, "Poetics," pp. 75-6.

⁵⁵Crane, Languages of Criticism, p. 54.

⁵⁶Wright's definition of effect is helpful; see The American Short Story, p. 164: "the precise emotional power that the author has put into the story for the 'ideal' reader."

⁵⁷Crane, Languages of Criticism, pp. 67-9.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 68. Paul Goodman's comment in The Structure of Literature, pp. 16-7, is helpful here. He writes: "Any system of parts that carries over, continuous and changing, from the beginning to the end let us call the 'plot.' ...it is the plot that adds up, is carried in the memory, and keeps providing conditions."

⁵⁹In Critics and Criticism, p. 64, Crane points out the importance of recognizing and discussing all of the formal parts (plot, character, thought, and diction) in critical analyses: "The nature of the four elements is such, in short, that, although a critic in his analysis of a given tragedy or epic may take any one of them as his primary object of attention, he can make no adequate judgment of the poet's success or failure with respect to it without bringing into his discussion all the others to which it is related, directly or indirectly, either as matter or form."

⁶⁰The best example, act-scene divisions in drama.

⁶¹Crane, Languages of Criticism, pp. 166-67.

⁶²These are basically questions, as Crane shows in Critics and Criticism, pp. 67 and 78, dealing with the development in the reader of a series of expectations and desires for the agents of the work. As the reader comes to know the ethical qualities of the agents of a work and to understand the nature of the situations in which they are involved, he begins to expect and desire certain developments in the action. The moral character of the protagonist may be bad or good; the situation in which he finds himself may promise painful or pleasurable consequences; the responsibility for the occurrences may or may not rest on his shoulders. As these variables are set off against one another in a plot, the sympathies and expectations of the reader are emotionally involved. The sequence of effects in a plot is thus derived from "the particular ethical qualities manifested in their agents' actions and thoughts vis-à-vis the human situations in which they are engaged." It is this sequence of effects which must be described in a structural analysis.

⁶³Crane, Languages of Criticism, p. 160. Crane points out elsewhere (in Critics and Criticism, pp. 66-7) that the structure of plots varies according to the kind of change which is used as "synthesizing principle." There are "plots of action, plots of character, and plots of thought. In the first, the synthesizing principle is a completed change, gradual or sudden, in the situation of the protagonist ... in the second, the principle is a completed change in the moral character of the protagonist ... in the third, the principle is a completed process of change in the thought of the protagonist." Plot is not seen, therefore, as having to do with action alone.

⁶⁴Daiches, Critical Approaches, p. 392.

⁶⁵Crane recognizes the limitations of his critical methodology. He discusses its value in Critics and Criticism, p. 91. "Its distinctive character derives, in the first place, from the fact that it views a work of art as a dynamic whole which affects our emotions in a certain way through the functioning together of its elements in subordination to a determinate poetic form. It is better suited, therefore, to exhibit the degree of efficiency with which the parts of a work or section thereof contribute to the maximum achievement of its effect than to do full justice to the qualities over and above this which characterize, in all fine works, the development of the parts

themselves"(my italics). It is exactly this kind of study which is needed to clarify E. A. Robinson's achievement in his long narratives.

⁶⁶Basic to this critical approach is the questioning of how the poet might have done it better, more effectively. Obviously this requires that the critic continually compare the work he is studying to other works of similar form.

⁶⁷Daiches, Critical Approaches, pp. 391-92.

⁶⁸Shumaker, Elements of Critical Theory, p. 70.

CHAPTER III: DISTINCTIONS IN STRUCTURE

Preceding formal inductive analyses of any group of poems, the critic must by some means establish a canon and an order of treatment. This process must of course be based in the ends which the critic hopes by his analyses to achieve. The end here being a fuller and fairer treatment of E. A. Robinson's long narrative poems, there is no need to exclude any of the narratives from consideration. However, "Captain Craig," because it is an early attempt and because it is uniquely formed among the Robinson canon, should be treated separately and may be treated more briefly.¹ In its effects it shares little with the twelve narratives written later in Robinson's career, and a full analysis of the poem adds little to understanding Robinson's narrative art.

The remaining problem, then, is to justify an order of treatment which will allow for the most clearly developed and integrated reading of the remaining twelve major narratives: Merlin(1917), Lancelot(1920), "Avon's Harvest" (1921), Roman Bartholow(1923), The Man Who Died Twice(1924), Tristram(1927), Cavender's House(1929), The Glory of the Nightingales(1930), Matthias at the Door(1931), Talifer (1933), Amaranth(1934), and King Jasper(1935). A simple chronological arrangement is not appropriate, for it would

separate poems which clearly are to some degree related and which may be better, more clearly analyzed in closer juxtaposition, as, for example, the three poems dealing with Arthurian materials. The poems do not readily submit to grouping by shared techniques, for the techniques of Robinson's narratives do not differ greatly from poem to poem. Neither is it advisable to group the poems by forms or effects, since the disclosure of Robinson's narrative forms is itself the aim of the analyses. The shared subject matter of the three Arthurian poems suggests that some kind of grouping by subject matter may be a convenient means of dealing with the poems, and such is indeed the case.

Merlin, Lancelot, and Tristram all deal, in general, with mythic characters who are members of a crumbling social structure. To these three, Robinson's last poem, King Jasper, may be added; for it resembles them in its treatment of the collapse of an allegorical kingdom. Roman Bartholow, The Glory of the Nightingales, Matthias at the Door, and Talifer all deal with love triangles in contemporary society. "Avon's Harvest," The Man Who Died Twice, Cavender's House, and Amaranth all deal with contemporary men whose disturbed internal states of mind set the scene for the action. This grouping by fours offers a convenient and balanced order of treatment.

Within this grouping by general subject matter, three of Robinson's long poems seem to me best to have realized

their distinct narrative forms: Lancelot, Matthias at the Door, and Amaranth. These poems, written respectively in 1920, 1931, and 1934, span Robinson's career as a writer of long narratives; and they exemplify the basic kinds of plots Robinson used. Lancelot deals with a slightly elevated protagonist, utilizes a historical setting, and elaborates upon a given action--based mainly upon the destruction of a society in Arthurian legend. Matthias at the Door deals with an ordinary protagonist, utilizes a realistic, contemporary setting, and advances an original action--based in the character conflicts aroused by a love triangle. Amaranth deals with a protagonist possessing some artistic inclination, utilizes a dream setting, and advances an original action--based primarily upon an internal conflict in the mind of the protagonist. These three poems thus offer the opportunity to examine in depth a selection of Robinson's best narratives and at the same time to establish formal critical guidelines by which the narrative forms of the remainder of his canon may be tested.

i.

Lancelot, published in 1920, four years after Merlin, was called by Robinson a "companion piece" to that earlier poem.² It is clear that the two are related in many ways--in subject matter, in techniques, in some aspects of theme--

but it is also clear that they are not so integrally interconnected as to demand a single combined reading. Forcing the two poems to become one would in fact destroy the unity they possess singly. Lancelot can and should be approached as a single, complete narrative poem.

Lancelot is a poem about the love affair of Lancelot and Guinevere and how it contributed to the destruction of Camelot. Reading it leads the reader into something other than a retelling of the old and commonly known legend, however. From the first, the reader's attention is directed primarily to the internal tensions that pull at Lancelot. The reader must perceive the conflict which torments Lancelot, how he tries to handle it, what the effects of his handling are for other characters, and how the conflict is finally resolved. The action of the poem is the course of Lancelot's moral vacillation and the resolution of his dilemma.

The plot has to do with the change occurring in the situation of the protagonist, Lancelot; and it is best to begin by examining the character and the change he undergoes. From a strictly objective standpoint, Lancelot is by all means an elevated character, one "better than us." His position in society is high and his problems are important to determining the future of an entire culture. That the future of the culture has been foretold and that Lancelot at least attempts to deny his personal responsi-

bility for Camelot's collapse does not lessen his position. Especially by dint of his glimpse of the Light(of the Grail) he is a man better in degree than the average. His conflicts are treated seriously, and the plot is clearly a serious plot.

Lancelot undergoes a change in the course of the action; certainly his situation changes, for he has lost his lover and his king and ends as a wanderer pursuing an indefinite goal. His reasoning processes have changed as well, for the tensions which freeze him from decisive action in the early stages have been removed or reconciled when the poem ends, and his view of the way he will go is clearcut and firmly accepted. The most important question concerning his change, however, rests in the problem of his moral character. Whether or not Lancelot's moral character undergoes change is in fact the basic critical question in determining the effect of the whole poem, and answering it involves a closer, more detailed look at the developing action.

The nature of the situation in which Lancelot is involved at the beginning of the poem is complex and is based in several conflicts. He is an important member of a crumbling social structure, and his potentially explosive conflict with Arthur threatens to hasten Camelot's downfall and the destruction of the chivalric tradition. He is involved in an illicit love affair(with an accompanying love-conflict) which, as he recognizes, inhibits

his moral growth, his search for the Light. He is, at the most personal level, involved in a tension between his own flesh and spirit which has stripped him of his powers of self-determination. The nature of each of these situations implies a moral choice which Lancelot must make between his immediate feelings of responsibility to Guinevere (based in strong, if now fading, sensual attraction and in his adherence to the chivalric code) and his pressing feelings of responsibility to his society on the one hand and his personal moral growth on the other. The obscuring factor which keeps the choice from appearing clear-cut to him is that of time; he falls into the trap of believing that he can, as Guinevere suggests, satisfy her needs now and still have time to seek the Light later. As a result, time actually determines his course and the course of Camelot, since his inner debate continues until the moment for decision has passed. Lancelot thus continues to live in conflict, both internal and external, but has the immediate stress relieved by the simple means of failing to make a choice. What could be a clear decision at the beginning becomes later more and more difficult and complicated.

In the early sections of the poem, the reader's understanding of the moral character of Lancelot is to a large degree influenced by his familiarity with the external action of the story--the love affair between Lancelot and Guinevere and the destruction of Camelot.

Lancelot naturally stands as the representative of the chivalric code from the first, and this position determines much of the reader's feelings about him. One expects a strength appropriate to the grand mythic figures. A key to the effect of the work is the gradual revelation that occurs as Lancelot, in action, puts the lie to the pre-fixed conception of his character. While one may sympathize with Lancelot's difficult moral dilemma, he must be seen as somewhat weak-willed, especially when it is made clear that he sees the appropriate choice as early as the third section of the poem but is unable to act as his knowledge indicates he should.

The first three sections of the poem aim to establish the moral, emotional, and intellectual qualities upon which Lancelot's character is based. He is at various points self-involved, withdrawn, cautious, sarcastic, bitter, distraught, anxious, sensual, angry, and, most important, unable to act. Most simply, it may be said that he is a sincere and serious man who regrets the effects his lapse to passion has occasioned in the court and who regrets even more his digression from the search for spiritual fulfillment which the Light promises. Seemingly Lancelot has, early in the action, firmly determined to leave Camelot and Guinevere behind.

Significantly, it is not until later events that Lancelot feels compelled by the chivalric code to rescue

her and commit his entire allegiance to preserving her life. In the beginning, he is kept back from his plan to depart immediately when Guinevere advances a coquettish invitation to visit her room that night, an invitation which only thinly masks her fear of rejection. His conversation with her leads Lancelot to hold up his departure and to begin an argument with himself as to whether his will should break him free now or later. It is time itself which settles the question. By extending his internal conflict, Lancelot sees the opportunity pass for an immediate departure. The necessity for carrying out what seems his final decision is thus postponed. It is this weakness of character, this indecisiveness or abdication of will, which the reader comes to recognize as the central moral trait determining Lancelot's fate.

Given the situation in which Lancelot finds himself and the particular moral qualities which form his character, the emotional effects of the developing action depend largely upon the reader's sense of the extent of Lancelot's personal responsibility for the action which follows. Obviously the action is complicated by Lancelot's continuing desire for passivity, resulting always in personal inertia. A brief review of his refusals to choose will illustrate this passivity.

Lancelot is lulled into remaining one more fatal night in Camelot; in so doing he allows the queen, in effect, to

determine his actions. His later off-stage rescue of Guinevere involves no decision making; that the choice is automatic is indicated by the refusal of the narrator to show Lancelot deciding on the rescue. Lancelot's social role as courtly lover under a chivalric code dictates this decision. The killing of Gawaine's brothers, far-reaching in consequences, is described as a blind, undirected striking out, involving no moral decision by Lancelot. Neither in the battles at Joyous Gard is Lancelot decisive. As Bors and Guinevere point out, Lancelot lets men die rather than end the battle by sacrificing either the king and Gawaine or Guinevere (and himself). He refuses to break the impasse himself, rather awaits an outside force to determine events. He quickly allows the bishop to decide the issue, grateful for a dictated peace from an outside power. Lancelot is apparently relieved to give Guinevere over to the king, having filled the letter of his chivalric obligation if not the spirit. In fact he has been unfaithful to king, fellow knight, and lover. Later, he refuses to kill Gawaine outright but in defending himself wounds Gawaine, causing him a slow, painful death. Only in the spirit of resignation does Lancelot respond to Gawaine's summons, and it is in the same spirit that he agrees to try to help Arthur. With similar resignation, Lancelot offers to sacrifice himself at the end to support Guinevere. Significantly, he is bemused when the offer is rejected.

To the end, he prefers to be forced by circumstance, and only at Guinevere's insistence does he at last resume his search for the Light.

Thus is Lancelot shown throughout the poem as a man trying to avoid responsibility for events by resisting active choice. In spite of his passivity, he is to be held largely accountable for the whole situation. He is the catalyst for the foretold crumbling of Camelot. By an act of will and insight, he could change history.

Lancelot can therefore be described as weak in spite of his obvious capacities as a warrior and lover. The situation in which he is involved is a serious one--for an entire society as well as for a few individual people--and he is largely responsible for the events which occur. The development of those events, as they are shown revolving about Lancelot, gives rise to a series of emotional concerns (effects) for the reader. One is at first concerned with Lancelot's impasse, and desires that he break the bands of indecision that freeze him from positive action. Because Guinevere appears somewhat flirtatious and flighty, the reader is led to distrust her motives or to see them as, at best, predominantly selfish. One is nonetheless relieved that Lancelot rescues her from the fire; for him not to do so would undercut the whole tradition of chivalrous conduct. Besides, as long as she lives, the chance for a positive action of moral choice on his part still exists.

It is at the Joyous Gard scenes that the reader is led to see that in fact Lancelot is incapable of choosing--with the effects of irritation at his passivity and disdain for his weakness. These feelings are eventually muted by sympathy for his torment during the final conversation with Gawaine and by admiration for his fortitude when he is finally pushed out into his quest by the still-dominant queen.

It is evident that the changes which Lancelot undergoes in situation and thought are caused by forces external to himself. Changes in the social setting and in his social role force him into action at some points in the narrative, and changes in the queen's demands force him into action at others. At the end of the poem, however, it is questionable whether he has changed at all in character. Having seen the answers to his conflicts from the early stages of the poem, he has not changed his moral, emotional, or intellectual attitudes toward them. His character does not change; rather it is gradually set in the view of the reader. Lancelot is no stronger at the end of the poem than at the beginning. He is a weak-willed but not unadmirable man who experiences pain, loss, and separation, is forced to accept them, and who demands of the reader a final sympathy for his all too human fall. The uniqueness of the plot is that the reader must first reconcile a preconceived heroic notion of the protagonist with the actuality

of a weak-willed human being.

The preceding passages have dealt with the protagonist of the poem. This is appropriate, for it is to the completed development of Lancelot's situation that all the parts of the poem are subordinated. An examination of the structure and techniques of the poem will demonstrate that this is so.

The mechanical structure of Lancelot is quite simple, involving a chronological development and five basic physical settings: the garden(I-III), a room in the castle(IV-V), Joyous Gard(VI-VII), Gawaine's deathroom(VIII), and the convent at Almsbury(IX). The first three sections of the poem are used to establish the basic conflicts in which Lancelot is involved. In turn, each section involves Lancelot's conversation in the garden, on the eve of Camelot's crisis, with Gawaine(I), Guinevere(II), and himself(III). Successively three levels of commitment and conflict are disclosed: political, sexual, religious. Each commitment involves some aspect of the chivalric code: loyalty to the king, to the mistress, to the Grail. In the third section, Lancelot is shown as having intellectually sorted out these commitments. Guinevere demands more loyalty than Arthur, but less than the Grail. Lancelot has not, however, come to an emotional choice; and in his indecision(stemming from his weak hope that he can have both Guinevere and the Light), he wastes away the chance to

leave Camelot as he had planned.

Sections IV and V are used to establish the motives underlying the social forces which antagonize Lancelot throughout the action. These sections occur while Lancelot rescues and flees with Guinevere. Rather than present the violent action, Robinson turns to show the effects of Lancelot's action on the persons of the king, Gawaine, Bedevere, and Lucan. The king, wounded personally and politically, is in collapse but recovers rapidly when political decisions are to be made. Gawaine, outraged by his brothers' death, forgets his remorse for failing Lancelot and begins to demand revenge. Bedevere, a sympathetic but detached observer, pities his king and friend and reaffirms allegiance. Lucan, a foolish court hanger-on, is excited by the events. The reactions of each character reinforce the sense that collapse and destruction are inevitable; by their attitudes they reveal the different aspects of court opinion.

Sections VI and VII serve to present Lancelot when the conflicting demands of the outer world and conflicting desires of his inner world are at full force. His relationship with Guinevere is also developed fully. In these sections Lancelot talks with Bors, Guinevere, the Bishop, and Guinevere again. In these dialogues his feeling about the situation is made clear. The emphasis is on his desire for a passive role, for an outside power

to resolve his internal impasse. Though he distrusts the Church as an institution, he allows it to settle things for him. That it cannot settle things finally is indicated by the fact that the fighting continues anyway. But Guinevere is taken, protesting, out of Lancelot's hands, though her fate remains on his head and heart.

Section VIII serves to resolve Lancelot's political conflict. At Gawaine's request, a dubious Lancelot comes to converse and to be reconciled. Their conflict is resolved and, at Gawaine's suggestion, Lancelot is able to fulfill his duty as Arthur's knight and to go to the king's aid.

Section IX concludes the poem and provides resolution for the other conflicts which press Lancelot. The trip to England and the visit to Guinevere resolve Lancelot's conflict as to what he owes his mistress. She refuses his offer and sends him away. In each conflict, the knot is broken for Lancelot, not by him. Arthur and Gawaine are dead; Guinevere is retired. At the poem's conclusion, he is left only to resolve the conflict within himself; but even here he is ironically ruled by an internal force (the Voice) which is even more powerful than his will.

The mechanical structure of the work functions to set Lancelot's difficulties and then to unfold the external pressures which solve his problems for him. Because the reader is to be concerned only with Lancelot's reactions

to events, the events themselves are not described except obliquely, by report or brief narrative summary. The work shows only a series of scenes and focuses in on extended dialogues, discussions by the characters of the motives which move them. The reader is never allowed to see Lancelot as a man of action and great personal power and courage; he is instead repeatedly shown Lancelot as a talker, as a man whose conscious powers of determining events are thwarted. Lancelot is in this manner made to seem essentially passive although even his refusals to act have the effect of determining lives and kindgoms. At the end he does at least realize to what degree he is responsible for the ugly events which have occurred; it is this recognition of responsibility which redeems him in the reader's eyes.

The action of the plot is the working out of Lancelot's conflicts, and the developing action involves a somewhat complicated scheme of probabilities. Lancelot's original conflicting duties are presented so as to arouse the expectation that he will eventually break away and begin the search for the Light, but the simple moral clarity with which he is able to analyze the opening conflicts is considerably complicated as the action proceeds. The discovery of the adultery complicates his desires and results in a fuller commitment to Guinevere, now more on moral than on sensual grounds, and thus less easily broken

off. In rescuing her from the fire, Lancelot's killing of Gareth and Gaheris incurs a further responsibility--to Gawaine. This responsibility also serves to complicate his path to the Light.

At Joyous Gard, then, Lancelot's conflicts are painfully more difficult to see through. He has wronged the king and Gawaine, and he is responsible for their anger. He is nonetheless totally committed to Guinevere, for whose unhappy exile he also is responsible. Because he still is aware of and eager to follow the Light, the expectation is that he will break through the difficulties somehow. His indecisiveness when conflicts were simpler, however, has prepared the reader for his inability to act now; and it is easy to accept his acquiescence to the Church's command. This acceptance would seem to clear the way again for a clean break, but the reader has already seen the depth of Gawaine's outrage, and it is to be expected that the war will continue. The earlier presentation of Gawaine's basically kind, if flippant, nature raises also the expectation that his grudge, once carried to conclusion, can be forgotten. Such is the case, and his reconciliation with Lancelot in section VIII removes one problem; but Arthur's defeat and death quickly raises another, and Lancelot's commitment to Guinevere is re-established.

It is the final reversal of the queen's earlier attitudes which completes and resolves Lancelot's gropings

for release. That she should change is not unexpected. She is seen throughout as a dominant character, one who by sensuality, cunning, hard-headed argument, or passionate hysteria always strives to have things her own way. Because she at last recognizes the force of Lancelot's Light, she knows that to have her way she must reverse her stand; and so, to Lancelot's confusion, she does.

Released from all commitment except to his Light, Lancelot is burdened still by a weight of guilt for all that has occurred: "Why should I look for peace/ When I have made the world a ruin of war?"(p. 448). He can leave this responsibility only when he discovers, within himself, an answering Voice which removes his burden by concurring with his instinctive judgment of what power a man has to control his destiny: "You are not free." The resolution of the poem rests then in Lancelot's ability to accept what he cannot change and take up again the search for moral fulfillment, the Light.

Lancelot's plot is a plot of action(to use Crane's distinction) in that it is organized so as to unfold a completed change in the situation of the protagonist. The plot is the unfolding of how Lancelot gains his freedom, a change "determined and effected" by character and by thought. The action which is presented is made up mainly of character interrelationships expressed through dialogues, and the form of the whole is based in a rhythm

of confrontations of characters. What the reader sees is not a motivating event, but the effects of the event being worked out by the characters among themselves. By the rhythms of confrontations, and the resulting tensions and complications, the characters move toward both better knowledge of others and, concurrently, of themselves. Especially in Lancelot is this the case. It is by attaining fuller knowledge of others (Gawaine and Guinevere) that Lancelot eventually comes to hear his own inner Voice and to accept the nature of his responsibility.

An examination of the important details of the work reveals clearly the heavy burden placed on the speeches of the characters. A brief analysis of some of the aspects of dialogue, point of view, setting, and characterization will fill in and support the above description of Lancelot's narrative form.

The importance of character confrontations expressed in dialogue suggests that a close look at the narration-dialogue balance along with an examination of the point of view would be helpful. Slightly less than three-fourths of the lines in the poem are given over to dialogue or monologue spoken aloud by the characters.³ Though Lancelot appears in seven sections of the poem and the queen in only five, the number of lines they speak is equal.⁴ In their dialogues, the queen holds her own in the early sections and gradually gains a large advantage in total of lines

delivered to Lancelot. The speeches of all the characters tend to be long, and thus to undercut the sense of dramatic presentation. These are by and large not dramatic speeches; they rather attempt, often tortuously, to define emotional or intellectual states of the characters. The difficulty for the reader is in discerning to what extent any given speech represents truthfully the man behind it.

The demands on the reader's powers of inference are extended by the hesitancy of the narrative voice to express an internal view of the characters' motives. Though occasionally the narrator takes an internal view of the characters' thoughts, the reader is expected to understand the motivation of the characters primarily by what they say. A close examination of the first section of Lancelot will illustrate Robinson's method.

Though most of the first section is composed of dialogue between Lancelot and Gawaine, the narrative voice early establishes Lancelot's mood. The poem begins abruptly:

Gawaine, aware again of Lancelot
In the King's garden, coughed and followed him;
Whereat he turned and stood with folded arms
And weary-waiting eyes, cold and half closed--
Hard eyes, where doubts at war with memories
Fanned a sad wrath.

Here are given two characters (Arthur's knights) and a setting ("the King's" property). The archaic "whereat" is not inappropriate. Suggesting as it does that the reader prepare

himself for a treatment of ancient myth, the word establishes a tone of dignity--an indication that the narrator will be true to the past he describes. Lancelot is immediately described by the narrator as guarded and at war with himself. His eyes, "weary-waiting," are emphasized, beginning motifs which will recur constantly in the poem: waiting and vision. The note of seriousness implied in Lancelot's stance is immediately set off by the flippancy of Gawaine's opening speech. Gawaine makes a distinct but unsuccessful attempt to break Lancelot's reserve, and the conflict between the two is quickly uncovered. The seeming bitterness of Lancelot and the levity of Gawaine are incongruous and abrasive attitudes, and it is soon evident that Gawaine has seriously underestimated the situation.

In the conversation between the two, Gawaine's chief characteristics are suggested primarily by the words he speaks. He is habitually flippant, and he refuses to be less than candid in his remarks. He is honestly concerned for Lancelot's unhappiness and wishes to cheer him if possible. His strong love for his brothers, Gaheris and Gareth(p. 368, ll. 5-7), is admirable; but here is foreshadowed the powerful impulse to revenge which will seize him when they are killed. He is to some degree responsible for the conflicts which will follow because he fails to make any real connection with Lancelot in this opening encounter. His inability to go beyond banter and nonsense

cuts him off from helpful, understanding communication and flaws his character.

Similarly, Lancelot cuts himself off from communication by presenting only an unfriendly, rough exterior. Nonetheless the reader is quickly made aware of several important facts about Lancelot's current state of mind. He was, at some time before the action now occurring, changed by his experiences in seeking the Grail; Gawaine declares that since their return to Camelot "No man has known you for the man you were/ Before you saw whatever't was you saw"(p. 367). Lancelot corroborates this judgment and indicates as well that he knows he must leave when he says:

When I came back from seeing what I saw,
I saw no place for me in Camelot.
There is no place for me in Camelot.
There is no place for me save where the Light
May lead me.... (p. 369)

Later, when Lancelot's slight smile turns sullen at Guinevere's appearance, it is clear that he is indeed serious about removing himself from Camelot. The contrast between the queen's flirtatiousness and Lancelot's coldness parallels the earlier contrast between the attitudes of the two knights and extends the reader's awareness of Lancelot's conflicts. In this tense atmosphere Gawaine's lines of farewell which close the first section ring highly ironic in their association

of the queen with the source of the earth's light, the sun: "...leaving you,/ I leave the sun to shine for him alone,/ Whiles I grope on to gloom"(p. 371). Lancelot, of course, wishes to seek another Light; and the twilight garden setting seems thus to presage the ending of his relationship with Guinevere. That it suggests also the passage of time, which is Lancelot's unceasing problem, adds another level to the irony.

It is important to note that the most distinctive quality of this section is that it conveys a considerable amount of information while relying predominately upon dialogue. The reader learns the state of Lancelot's mind and what has shaped it, the basic traits of Gawaine's character, and the queen's impulse to deny the rejection she knows is coming. Eighty percent of the lines(175 of 219 lines) are spoken by the characters, over half of those (100 lines) by Gawaine, a minor character. Of the lines given by the narrative voice, most are objective descriptions of external appearances or actions. The occasional passages of internal analysis by the narrator are thus given an added weight, as when he describes Lancelot's eyes "where doubts at war with memories/ Fanned a sad wrath," or goes into Gawaine's mind to indicate the queen's suspicion of Lancelot's intention:

With all her poise,
To Gawaine's undeceived urbanity

She was less queen than woman for the nonce,
 And in her eyes there was a flickering
 Of a still fear that would not be veiled wholly
 With any mask of mannered nonchalance. (pp. 370-71)

Thus it is that Robinson manages to convey information about the characters, including information about their interior states of mind, by using a minimum of direct narrative commentary. When the narrative voice does speak, it is important; but the bulk of the action is carried, in the entire poem as in the first section, by the speeches of characters. Interestingly, the narrator uses his comment ("and to himself he [Lancelot] said no more/ Than he said now aloud" [p. 368]) to suggest that, for Lancelot at least, the speeches may be read as valid evidence of conscious thought processes; that is, Lancelot's speeches will not contain deliberately deceptive statements.

In the conversation with Guinevere which begins the second section, Lancelot explicitly comments on the vast amount of talking they all do:

There's over much
 Of knowing in this realm of many tongues,
 Where deeds are less to those who tell of them
 Than are the words they sow; and you and I
 Are like to yield a granary of such words,
 For God knows what next harvesting. (p. 372)

This passage suggests one reason for the weight of dialogue in the poem. It is the time when words have somehow

become more important than actions. It is words(as court gossip) which have complicated things for Lancelot and Guinevere and it is words which keep Lancelot back from the active pursuit of the Light which he craves.

Lancelot's long discussion with himself in the garden in section three actually uses up the time he has to make his departure. But his words reveal how difficult he finds his situation to be:

Time, tide, and twilight--and the dark;
And then, for me, the Light. But what for her?

.....
What have I seen that I must leave behind
So much of heaven and earth to burn itself
Away in white and gold, until in time
There shall be no more white and no more gold?
(p. 383)

Lancelot is speaking a monologue, and the words represent his conscious reasoning process. He does wish to protect the queen from hurt, but he has determined that the best way to do that is to renounce passion and seek the Light, leaving her before their affair is uncovered. Still he is frozen:

When are the women who make toys of men
To know that they themselves are less than toys
When Time has laid upon their skins the touch
Of his all-shrivelling fingers? When are they
To know that men must have an end of them
When men have seen the Light, and left the world
That I am leaving now. Yet, here I am ...
(p. 384)

The conflict is real and Lancelot's anguish is painful

to see. He has decided rationally but not emotionally to leave; his concluding exclamation summarizes his dilemma: "God, what a rain of ashes falls on him/ Who sees the new and cannot leave the old!" (p. 385).

Just as it is through Lancelot's speech that the reader sees his torment, so is it in the speeches of Gawaine and Arthur that their motivation is made clear. The narrative voice offers little comment on Arthur. He enters the poem in a long monologue which shows self-pity and finally breaks into semi-coherent grief. Once he learns Guinevere has been abducted, he regains control and is calm when he evaluates the situation of his kingdom:

Gawaine with his hate,
Or Modred with his anger for his birth,
And the black malady of his ambition--
Will make of my Round Table, where was drawn
The circle of a world, a thing of wreck
And yesterday--a furniture forgotten;
And I, who loved the world as Merlin did,
May lose it as he lost it, for a love
That was not peace, and therefore was not love.
(p. 401)

The king sees clearly the end of things, but he cannot prevent it.

As the king regains coherency, Gawaine loses it. The flippancy of his earlier speeches gives way to rash passion. This passion pushes the action on to its conclusion, for it is Gawaine who "goads" the king into

pursuit of Lancelot and Guinevere. After receiving his fatal wound, Gawaine's 156 line speech(pp. 429-34) in the eighth section signals an end to animosity. Like Lancelot and Arthur, he too has made moral decisions under the influence of passion and comes later to regret them.

The queen delivers more and more lines as the poem progresses, and comes to dominate much of the concluding sections in which she appears. Almost all of her motivating drives must be learned through the words she speaks(for example, her flirtatiousness and fear in II, her anger in VI, her despair in VII, her resignation in IX). Her ninety-one line appeal to Lancelot at Joyous Gard(pp. 404-06) is highly emotional and is rhetorically efficient; it summarizes the main points of Lancelot's conflict and, combined with Bors' comments on the same topic, sets up effectively the ethical situation which confronts Lancelot. Her eighty-three line emotional appeal(pp. 417-20) when Lancelot declares his intent to return her to Arthur shows her self-pity and her despair at losing her lover. It is her concluding passages in section IX that provide the basis for Lancelot's final understanding. Speaking to him of the passage of years, she indicates her acceptance of the inevitability of time and loss, an acceptance which softens her continuing vanity and self-pity:

"When they are gone,"
She said, with grateful sadness in her eyes,
"We do not bring them back, or buy them back,

Even with our souls. I see now it is best
 We do not buy them back, even with our souls."
 (p. 446)

The queen seems in this passage to have come to some basic recognition of the human condition which she had tried before to deny--that time eventually destroys life and that it is as well that days eventually cease. Her acceptance parallels the advice the inner Voice gives Lancelot at the poem's end.

In that speech on loss, it is interesting to note that the narrative voice supports Guinevere's sincerity by the descriptive phrase "with grateful sadness in her eyes." This oblique kind of comment, which does not involve any internal view by the narrator, is often used effectively by Robinson to indicate how the reader is to react. In spite of the heavy emphasis in dialogue, the narrative voice is also brought into play in a few longer passages, some of which summarize action (as in the passage on pp. 401-2, beginning of section V), some of which deal explicitly with character motivation. The passages explaining motivation are usually especially important. Typically they occur following passages in which new aspects of characterization have been introduced, and they serve to summarize inferences the reader should already have made.

For example, following Lancelot's monologue in section III the narrative voice expends forty-two lines

delving into his thought and commenting on his conflict. The advantage of such comment is that it can note explicitly the passage of time and its pressure ("Time that was tearing minutes out of life") and can indicate by Lancelot's silence and immobility the passivity of character which holds him. Similarly, the narrator interrupts Lancelot's conversation with Guinevere in section VII to show explicitly the depth of his confusion, something his speech cannot indicate because he is trying to spare Guinevere's feelings:

Once more he frowned away a threatening smile,
 But soon forgot the memory of all smiling
 While he gazed on the glimmering face and hair
 Of Guinevere--the glory of white and gold
 That had been his, and were, for taking of it,
 Still his, to cloud, with an insidious gleam
 Of earth, another that was not of earth,
 And so to make of him a thing of night--
 A moth between a window and a star,
 Not wholly lured by one or led by the other.
 The more he gazed upon her beauty there,
 The longer was he living in two kingdoms,
 Not owning in his heart the king of either,
 And ruling not himself. (p. 415)

This is clearly the narrator's view of the situation. Lancelot's hovering indecision and his desire for a "king," a transcendent purpose, make up the central situation of the poem. Robinson does not refuse to utilize the prerogative of an omniscient narrator; and when he uses the narrative voice, his technique assures that the voice will be especially noted.

In addition to speeches by the major characters and occasional passages of internal analysis by the narrator, Robinson utilizes the minor characters and the settings to fill out the reader's understanding of the action. Among the minor characters, Lucan, the Bishop, Bedivere, and Bors are most important. Lucan and the Bishop both function as representatives of classes; Lucan reveals the point of view of the mass of the court followers and the Bishop that of the Church. Lucan is impossibly pedantic in his speech; for example, his announcement of the fateful occurrences at Guinevere's burning begins:

Sir, will your patience with a clement ear,
Attend the confirmation of events,
I will, with all available precision,
Say what this morning has inaugurated.
No preface or prolonged exordium
Need aggravate the narrative, I venture. (p. 394)

Lucan's long-windedness supports Lancelot's earlier analysis of the chief problem of the day, too much talking; and his continued attempts to utilize all histrionic possibilities indicates the self-involvement and desire for excitement which one part of Arthur's followers dote on. In its effect, the speech is comic, and provides a relief from the emotionally overwrought speeches by Arthur which precedes it.

Similarly, the brief appearance and speech of the Bishop in section VI provide a moment of humor in the

midst of Lancelot's tense confrontations with Guinevere as well as indicate the matter-of-fact attitude of the Church toward war and killing, an attitude which also underlines the fact that the queen's later choice of the convent is a less admirable one than Lancelot's choice of the Light.

Bedivere and Bors are important for their ability, as morally admirable bystanders, to make ethical commentary upon the action; Bedivere evaluates Arthur and Gawaine's position and Bors evaluates Lancelot's. Bedivere, "like a man of stone with folded arms," stands as a practical voice of wisdom, as when he advises Gawaine in section IV:

Recriminations are not remedies,
 Gawaine; and though you cast them at yourself,
 And hurt yourself, you cannot end or swerve
 The flowing of these minutes that leave hours
 Behind us, as we leave our faded selves
 And yesterdays. The surest-visioned of us
 Are creatures of our dreams and inferences,
 And though it look to us a few go far
 For seeing far, the fewest and the farthest
 Of all we know go not beyond themselves.
 (pp. 388-9)

His clear sense of passing time and its inevitability establishes the lesson Lancelot, as well as Gawaine, will have to learn.

In section VI, it is Bors who serves to summarize all of Lancelot's feelings and to comment ethically upon them. His comment is on the particulars of the case, not on abstract qualities; and it adds ethically to Bedivere's

comment. For example, speaking of the Light he says:

And I saw once with you, in a far land,
The glimmering of a Light that you saw nearer--
Too near for your salvation or advantage,
If you be what you seem. What I saw then
Made life a wilder mystery than ever,
And earth a new illusion. You, maybe,
Saw pity and grief. What I saw was a Gleam,
To fight for or to die for--till we know
Too much to fight or die. (p. 402)

Having thus described (and qualified by his own interpretation) what the Light has done to Lancelot, Bors continues by questioning the hesitation of Lancelot to kill Arthur and Gawaine:

Why carve a compost of a multitude,
When only two, discriminately despatched,
Would sum the end of what you know is ending
And leave to you the scorch of no more blood
Upon your blistered soul? The Light you saw
Was not for this poor crumbling realm of Arthur,
Nor more for Rome; but for another state
That shall be neither Rome nor Camelot,
Nor one that we may name. Why longer, then,
Are you and Gawaine to anoint with war,
That even in hell would be superfluous,
A reign already dying, and ripe to die?
I leave you to your last interpretation
Of what may be the pleasure of your madness.
(p. 403)

This is the ultimate ethical point. The power and position of these men (Lancelot, Arthur, and Gawaine) insures that their personal problems will be imposed upon the whole society. They have a responsibility to others which they have failed.

Significantly Lancelot makes no response to this

speech by Bors but sinks into brooding until the queen comes to him. When her comments are similar to Bors', he finally tries to justify himself by insisting that he feels strong guilt and responsibility but nevertheless sees no way to end the conflict. Though his feeling for the queen has at this point clearly changed in the direction of disdain(p. 407, ll. 9-22), his trust in Bors is not altered. At the beginning of section IX, he hears with embarrassment Bors' final judgment of him:

Your way
Of late, I fear, has been too much your own;
But what has been, has been, and I say nothing.
For there is more than men at work in this;
And I have not your eyes to find the Light,
Here in the dark--though some day I may see it.
(p. 437)

Here in his last speech, Bors' philosophy corresponds with Bedivere's: recriminations are useless and mere men are, in their shortsightedness, the instruments of more powerful forces. The reader must take it as a reasonable statement by a reasonable man.

To support the illuminating speeches of minor characters, Robinson uses settings to good advantage. The twilight confrontations in the king's garden are symbolically appropriate for the situation at the poem's beginning. The fading light foreshadows the falling of Camelot as well as the pressures of time which torment Lancelot. The movement into darkness helps establish the

queen's misgivings about mortality and fading sexual attractiveness; the comparison is made explicit by Gawaine's comparison of the queen to the sun. The garden is the king's and as such it serves as a reminder of the laws of ownership which Lancelot and Guinevere are flouting. The garden setting also implies the kind of burden Guinevere is placing upon Lancelot in its suggestions of the temptation in the Garden of Eden. The "oak leaves flashing in the golden light" make Guinevere tantalizingly desirable to Lancelot, and she uses the attractiveness to distract him from his intention. But the course of the entire action is foreshadowed by the symbolic setting as their conversation proceeds and Lancelot gradually sees Guinevere "before him in the shadow, soon to change/ Into the darkness of a darker night"(p. 380). The fitting irony is that even as he recognizes the threat of nightfall, its coming delays his departure and gives a new setting, one of darkness, for the completion of his temptation and the discovery of his disloyalty by the king.

The persistent mist which clouds the atmosphere during the episodes at Joyous Gard sets the atmosphere of Lancelot's unhappy conflict. Mist makes clear vision impossible, and that there is no clarifying light of any kind is appropriate to Lancelot's situation. Cut off from both the Light of his quest and the light of the queen, his vision is insufficient; and the clear-cut decision of

the early sections of the poem is now lost to him. Ironically, Joyous Gard has, in happier days, been the hide-away for passionate lovers (Tristram and Isolt); but for Lancelot, passion has ceased to be the motivating force. Just as Mark had earlier retrieved his unwilling wife, Arthur now retrieves his. The "cleansing crash of rain" which clears away the mist sets the stage for the Bishop, who will offer Lancelot a way out. But the rain continues unabated through the day as Guinevere passionately pleads her case. Lancelot's final denial of her indicates a clearing of the air as one aspect of his conflict is settled; and "at some strange hour/ It ceased, and there was light" (p. 427).

The setting of the final passages of the poem is similarly symbolic, involving the convent at Almsbury, Guinevere's new home, and the harvest season, time of fruition and completion. Once he has talked to Guinevere for the last time, Lancelot's hearing of the "sound of reapers" re-emphasizes the reader's sense of Lancelot's painful and continuing awareness of the passage of time, an awareness which has motivated his action from the first. As Lancelot reduces his understanding of Guinevere to one phrase she has spoken, "I am not alone," the harvest is concluded: "The reapers had gone home. Over the land/ Around him in the twilight there was rest" (p. 448). The falling twilight of the opening sections, when Lancelot

first had determined to leave Camelot, is now completed. Lancelot rides at last "under the stars." His burden lifting, Lancelot nonetheless retains a vision before him of Guinevere's face; but when he reaches out to it he catches only "a black branch of leaves." This gesture, recalling as it does the "flash of oak leaves over Guinevere" in section II, signals the end of his dependence on her. Understanding at last that there is no freedom for men and that the Light he seeks is a part of darkness and death, Lancelot accepts the inevitability of time and has a chilling vision of "the face of Galahad who had seen and died, / And was alive, now in a mist of gold" (p. 449). The final image is one of simple, lonely endurance succeeding to fulfillment: "But always in the darkness he rode on, / Alone; and in the darkness came the Light" (p. 449).

The critical aim in this reading of Lancelot has been to analyze the action by presenting the kinds of changes Lancelot undergoes and the effects which the reader is meant to feel. The broad description of the structure and the discussion of dialogue, narration, characterization, and setting are intended to support and exemplify that analysis of action. But the focusing of critical attention upon details which help define Lancelot as a narrative, as the above reading has done, is not meant to imply that qualities of excellence in the diction are missing from the poem. Many of the passages in Lancelot are impressive in

their beauty.⁶ The extended metaphor of the chess game in section VI is one of several figures of speech which contribute greatly to the pleasure of the whole. The image motifs which run through the poem (the images of sight or vision are the most significant and completely developed) effectively support the reader's pleasure in and understanding of the action. It is when several of these motifs are pulled together by Robinson, usually in the speech or thought of a character, that the most lyric passages of the poem result. The important point here, the point which underlies this whole study, is that the diction of the poem is totally subordinate to the development of character and action. Where, in Lancelot, heightened diction would be inappropriate to the situation or would distract attention from important developments in thought, character, or action, Robinson keeps diction simple.

It is perhaps failure to recognize the subordination of diction to elements of plot, character, and thought that has given rise to many criticisms of the poem. A brief consideration of some of the criticisms of Lancelot will show that this is so. Charles Cestre feels that aside from a few scenes (the two lovers' partings, Arthur's breakdown) "the poem seems rather artificial, made up of incidents and dialogues of secondary interest."⁷ "Elaboration in the details" gives rise to "a certain dragging

lengthiness."⁸ Cestre sees the poem as a character-drawing with psychological analysis the chief aim and the separation scene at Joyous Gard as the crisis of the action, because there the psychology of the queen is stripped bare. Certainly Guinevere's long plea is impassioned and revealing, but it can hardly be called the climactic speech in the poem if the action is seen to be centered in Lancelot and his conflict. Cestre's praise for such emotionalized passages, where psychological analysis presumably can best be applied, explains why the poem seems often artificial and lengthy to him. Most of the poem's passages are much less emotionally and rhetorically heightened than Guinevere's plea or Arthur's breakdown, as befits the slowly developing, sometimes static nature of Lancelot's conflict. The passages of impassioned lyricism which Cestre praises should not be taken as the most important elements of Lancelot's form.

Yvor Winters feels that Robinson's primary failure in writing Lancelot lay in cutting and revising. Even though Winters recognizes in Lancelot "one of the few deeply impressive narrative poems written in English in more than two hundred years,"⁹ he nonetheless criticizes the opening with an overheard conversation, the prolixity of section II, the speech representing Arthur's breakdown (imitative form), the useless, "infuriating" characterization of Sir Lucan, the length and ineffectiveness of section

VII, the frequent use of abstractions ("evasion of exact statement"), the inappropriate use of colloquialisms, and the unrealistic, flippant, and lengthy final speech of Gawaine.¹⁰ Winters, then, seems to focus his criticism on two areas of failure by Robinson: inexact or inappropriate diction and unnecessary length or diffusiveness in some of the parts.

Winters, admiring the poem as he does, seems to me nonetheless to be demanding a tightness and preciseness of Robinson's narrative which would be more appropriate for lyric verse. The parts he finds unnecessary all fulfill a narrative function. Opening with an overheard conversation is a traditional narrative technique; here, with a given plot, the device seems especially appropriate. Arthur's breakdown is not carried to extremes and serves as an effective device of characterization which allows the narrator to refrain from explicit comment. Lucan's function as a comic character and class representative adds to the structural development of the poem.

The parts Winters finds lengthy also fulfill their purposes. Part IV establishes Gawaine's new attitude and sets Bedivere as a voice of ethical importance. Part VII in its lengthy speeches reveals the queen's strong-willed determination to control events, thus contributing to the reader's understanding of her at the poem's end. Gawaine's final speech, like Arthur's breakdown, completes a

characterization; and the flippancy, which Winters especially condemns, is used to reassert Gawaine's attitudes of section I. As for Robinson's diction, to criticize the use of colloquialisms (Winters cites "one of these days") in an otherwise "formal style" seems to deny Robinson his stylistic individuality. He wishes to suggest informality in his character's attitude, and the diction seems appropriate. Even more appropriate are the abstractions, *Light and Vision*, which Winters condemns as "evasion of exact statement." The difficult task of the poem is attempting to express the inexpressible. Here Robinson's use of images of sight to suggest the range of feeling and meaning throughout this poem are especially effective, thus appropriate. Robinson's Lancelot is not a perfect poem, but its careful structure seems to me to realize fully the effects of Lancelot's changing situation.

Ellsworth Barnard writes little concerning Lancelot. He does state that character organizes the poem: "the main theme--the thing that holds the story together and guides its course--is the development of the hero's character: the slow conquest of his old passion for Guinevere by his new devotion to the Grail, as the ruinous results of the former make themselves evident and as the call of the latter becomes stronger."¹¹ By insisting that a change in character organizes this (and all other) of Robinson's narratives, Barnard incorrectly focuses on the

"slow conquest of his old passion" as the center of interest. In fact, Lancelot's passion is shown largely conquered in the beginning of the poem. Barnard suggests that Lancelot's will overcomes adversity, an interpretation the above reading of the poem contradicts.

In short, it seems to me the poem does well what it sets out to do. It delivers a complete action, the movement of Lancelot (a man of high estate) through severe complications (caused by his own indecisiveness) to a final personal freedom which he is somewhat fearful of assuming. The general effect of the whole involves a sympathy for Lancelot culminating in relief at his final fortune. Lancelot and Guinevere are fully drawn in all their groping uncertainty, and the secondary characters function to illuminate and advance the action. Diction is throughout subordinated to considerations of character and action, as is proper to a narrative form seeking narrative ends.

ii.

Matthias at the Door, a poem published in 1931, takes as its subject matter complications in love and marriage which intrude into the life of a modern day materialist and educate him in the facts of human involvement and responsibility. The poem covers some four years in the

life of a fifty year old man, showing how his attitudes toward his property, his wife, and his friends are violently reversed by the pressure of human change and loss. The destruction of his marriage and the death of his wife and friends lead Matthias to come to terms with the fact of death and to accept the burden of human isolation. The poem presents the spiritual education of a man as he comes to understand the inevitable fact of death.

A brief synopsis of the action may be helpful. The first section of the poem introduces the self-satisfied Matthias, who, in looking over his isolated property, runs across and talks to an old and disreputable friend, Garth, to whom Matthias shows an irritated condescension. The two approach some ominously dark rock-caves which disturb Matthias and intrigue Garth. Matthias returns to his house and his wife, Natalie.

The action of the second section of the poem occurs the following day. Matthias and his wife discuss the suicide of Garth down among the rocks. They are joined by Timberlake, Natalie's childhood sweetheart and Matthias' long-time friend, whose life Matthias had once rescued. As the three discuss Garth's death, Natalie and Timberlake both show distaste for Matthias' pompous attitude toward the dead man and for his materialistic philosophy of success.

In the third section, shortly following in time, the three principals find themselves drawn to the rock-tomb

where Garth had died. Natalie and Timberlake, unknowingly observed by Matthias, speak candidly but not cruelly of Garth and Matthias and eventually embrace at Natalie's instigation. She confesses regret for her marriage of convenience to Matthias, and Timberlake admits he made himself appear worthless to repay Matthias for saving his life. In spite of Natalie's aggressive passion, they separate. Matthias later confronts Natalie, and she confesses she married without love but insists that she has been faithful to him. He is crushed by what he has learned.

The fourth section then covers a three year period, tracing the dissolution of the marriage. Timberlake having left the area, Matthias and Natalie continue in injured, noncommunicative coexistence. Natalie feels pity and Matthias feels love, but his sense of injury pushes him to drinking and eventually to a drunken pass at his wife. Horrified by his attitude, Natalie recoils and, while Matthias sleeps, commits suicide down by the ominous rock-tomb.

In the fifth section of the work, Matthias passes lonely seasons brooding on his isolation until Timberlake returns, sick and weakened. Matthias bears no grudge and is delighted to have someone near him to whom he can talk. Matthias fears Timberlake too will attempt suicide and asks his word that he will not. Timberlake agrees, but while Matthias is away on business, he wanders out into a rainstorm, responding to a vision of Natalie. As he dies of pneumonia,

he talks to Matthias at length of life's meaning and difficulty.

The sixth and concluding section finds Matthias dreaming ugly dreams of Natalie and sinking into despair. Desiring death, he dreams he too approaches the rock-tomb, but that he cannot enter. The voice of Garth explains to him at length that he must live until the proper time, that he must be born before he can die. Awakening down near the rocks where he has walked in his sleep, Matthias accepts the dream advice and, reconciled to the isolation of living, returns to his house.

Thus paraphrased, the action of the poem seems simple, although the potential for complexity, especially of character relationships, is evident. Even from the bare paraphrase, the probable effect of the work may be guessed. Dislike for the central character should either alter in the direction of sympathy (if he possesses naturally good qualities and learns from his experience) or progress to the point of fearful recoil (if his character proves evil or if he is incapable of learning). Robinson chooses the former effect, developing in the reader a sympathy for Matthias. The paraphrase also suggests that setting will be symbolic, that philosophic conversations between characters may be emphasized, and that overtones of mysticism should inevitably color the progress of the action.

Matthias, of course, is the protagonist of the poem.

As the poem begins, he is a man who seems to have attained, at the age of fifty, a full and satisfying financial success—~~one~~ which has enabled him to remove himself and his wife physically and emotionally from the harrassments of day to day living in human society. Matthias and Natalie live in an isolated home(or "castle," "tower") set in ~~an~~ isolated landscape of rock and tree and stream. The only visitors to this hideaway are friends from childhood days, men who, because of their material poverty, seem to pose no threat to the materialistically oriented ego of Matthias. Though he is a material success, Matthias is quickly revealed(in his conversation with Garth) to be a spiritual child; and the following action of the story concerns the progress of his spiritual education. The primary conflict is between material man(Matthias) and aspects of spiritual man(in Garth, Natalie, and Timberlake), and is resolved by the recognition and acceptance in the materialist of the value system of his physically weaker antagonists.

Matthias is presented, in the early stages of the work, as a man similar in degree to most men. He is wealthy, but he has not attained his wealth by evil or cruel tactics. He is condescending toward the people he thinks of as his "friends" and this lessens his stature in the reader's evaluation. This condescension, added to the strong sense of ownership he evinces toward the objects(even those of

nature) which surround him, leads the reader to view Matthias with some distaste. By any humanistic scale of values, he is not an admirable man; this feeling is confirmed with finality when he carries the sense of ownership over into his marriage, looking upon his wife, Natalie, as something he has purchased and hidden away. This is not to say that Matthias is made to seem an evil person; he is simply childlike in the spiritual sense and thus not a complete moral man at the beginning of the poem.

In the course of the action, Matthias undergoes changes in his life and attitudes which alter greatly the reader's feelings toward him. He loses his most valued possessions: his marriage, his friend, his self-assurance. His situation at the end has him bereft of human connections; the people who surrounded him have all sought out death and he has found himself unable to die and cancel out the loss. More important than this change in the situation of his life is the change which occurs in his moral understanding of human existence. Matthias comes to appreciate the value of human life and to accept the necessity for endurance in the face of loss. That this change in his character comes about only at the expense of ~~three~~ lives does not lessen the sympathy which he finally attains in the reader's evaluation. Matthias experiences genuine despair, learns from it, overcomes it, and thus gains in moral stature.

Matthias' drastic loss of fortune might seem an unfair

punishment for a man with relatively slight character flaws, but Robinson assures that the reader will accept the punishment as justified by developing considerable sympathy for Natalie in the first four sections of the poem. Her emotions are fully exposed and her character developed in detail; in spite of her flaws, she is a basically kind woman and hardly deserves such a harsh fate. That she weakly chooses death rather than attempt to resolve her problems precludes strong pity for her, but Matthias' responsibility for her death becomes a key element in the reader's feeling for him. His suffering is deserved and he must undergo it to gain the reader's eventual sympathy.

The focus of the narration is on the process of suffering-learning which Matthias must undergo. The unifying element in the poem is not the change in his material situation but the change in moral character which accompanies it. At the conclusion of the poem, Matthias is quite willing to die, to suffer the final misfortune; yet the reader's involvement is not with whether he lives or dies but with whether he will complete the process of moral awakening which he has struggled through from the early parts of the poem. That the progression of his learning process is central may be more clearly shown by a consideration of the structure of the work.

The first section of Matthias at the Door establishes firmly the character of Matthias. First described in brief

by the narrative voice, Matthias contributes to the reader's knowledge of his character by his speech and action in the meeting with Garth. The narrator early in the poem describes Matthias: "As a man deserving them,/ He glowed with honors earned. He was apart"(p. 1077). His gruffness toward and unconcealed distaste for Garth supports the reader's awareness of his unattractive egotism. Garth then adds a malicious comment describing how Matthias looks to others:

He had some enemies, and no fear of them;
 He had few friends, and had the need of fewer.
 There was nowhere a more agreeable bondage
 Than his was to himself; and where he was,
 He was not anywhere else. He was not one
 To move unenvied or to fade unseen,
 Or to be elbowed and anonymous
 In a known multitude. (p. 1081)

In this manner, the beginning of the poem focuses on the kind of man Matthias is: self-satisfied, assured in love and ownership, smug and condescending toward his friends, isolated by choice from the mass of humanity and from suffering and fear, superficially in love with life and sensual pleasure, philosophically innocent. At the same time that these moral traits are established, the process of disturbing and altering them begins. The final passage of the section has Matthias, clearly shaken by the conversation with Garth, acting strangely toward his wife, seeking reassurance of the solidity of his self-made world.

In addition to its central function of characterizing

Matthias, the section introduces the setting, the character of Garth, and the basic conflict from which the action is to develop. Though avoiding any heavily mystical tone, the narrator quickly establishes the symbolic qualities of the landscape. The "wind-shadowed and forsaken gorge" with its "mighty rocks" pleases Matthias by its contrast with the light and upward thrusting trees above. The narrator's description of the scene as "like a mis-shapen city that was dead/ ...monstrous and unreal"(p. 1077) and Garth's later discussion of the "dark Egyptian door" both serve to indicate the ominous nature of the setting. In contrast, Matthias' thoughts of his firmly based, isolated house high in the light above suggests a conflict of light-darkness, life-death, and begins as well image patterns that run throughout the poem: patterns of light and darkness and of houses and towers.

The conflict suggested by the setting is supported by the antagonism between Matthias and Garth. Garth, characterized only by his speeches and Matthias' biased comments about him, is a malicious, deliberately cryptic man whose dislike of Matthias, though perhaps justified, seems unnecessarily harsh. Garth's comments suggest, however, that Matthias may be able to learn more about life as the action continues. He describes Matthias as being unusual in his "serenity" and tells him that there are "many distances/ That you have not explored"(p. 1084).

Though the reader sees Matthias as pompous, Garth's nastiness mitigates the distaste for Matthias. The result is for the reader a sense of conflict (between characters and between value systems) and the accompanying expectation that development and resolution of the conflict should follow.

The second section of the poem develops this conflict in new areas, as the other two principal agents are introduced and characterized. Natalie is a fully drawn character, revealed by speech, action, and thought as a kind of sharp-tongued woman with a clear understanding of the kind of man she married. The narrator, by making explicit statements of her character and by presenting her thought processes, establishes a closeness between Natalie and the reader, though her unnecessarily sharp criticism of her husband (e.g., p. 1096, ll. 18-30) prevents full sympathy. Timberlake, characterized only by the tone of his speeches, appears to be a likable, soft-spoken man who shares with Natalie the ability to accept other human beings for what they are without setting coldly materialistic standards for success. Natalie and Timberlake speak with one mind on the subject of Garth's suicide and by their open criticism of Matthias' hard judgment extend the conflict begun in the first section between two kinds of value systems by which men may live.

Against the admirable sentiments of Natalie and Timberlake are set the egotistic thoughts of Matthias

as he relaxes in "acquisitive meditation":

He was no worse than others not unlike him,
 And he was worthier far than many of them
 Who pelted him with envy or maligned him
 With mirrored attributes of enmity
 That was not his, but theirs. He did not hate them;
 He measured and reduced them. (p. 1088)

Probably Matthias is correct in his judgment here, but he is not admirable. His coldness and egotism in these thoughts are distasteful, to be sure; but it is nonetheless clear that he may be able to change. Garth has earlier pointed out that Matthias' eyes are "filmed a little" with "rectitude." Matthias confirms that in speaking of Garth's death and why he turns away:

When I see folly that has pawned its wings
 Hating itself because it cannot fly,
 I'd rather turn my eyes the other way. (p. 1093)

Natalie replies to this, "You always do, Matthias," setting the tone of their conflict but suggesting as well that once Matthias is brought to see, to confront life directly, he may become a better man.

The first two sections are the beginning of the poem, establishing all of the characters (especially focusing on Matthias and Natalie), the setting in which they move, and the conflict of human ethics which is particularized by the conflict of characters. When, at the end of this second section, Matthias and Natalie edge up to a real and

violent argument in which her sharpness opposes his physical force, the plot has moved to a point of complication and the stage is set for a development of the conflict in action.

In the third section of the poem, the background of relationships between Garth, Timberlake, Natalie, and Matthias is completed by a long dialogue between Timberlake and Natalie. The complications of the action begin as they confess their love for one another. Matthias' hidden presence on the scene leads to his discovery of the true quality of his marriage, heretofore thought secure. The reader's sympathy remains divided between Matthias and his wife, but the emphasis continues to be placed upon the process of education which Matthias is undergoing. Early in his conversation with Natalie, Timberlake remarks of Matthias:

Garth, I've a notion, tore a few farewell holes
In the rich web of his complacency,
Letting some truth come in. Whether Matthias
Would see the truth, or would see only holes,
Is a new question. (p. 1106)

Timberlake and Natalie are both well aware of Matthias' shortcomings as a man; and in their shared knowledge, they are somewhat condescending (e.g., p. 1103, ll. 20-29). Nonetheless, both recognize the process of learning he has entered upon. They, like Matthias, have been moved by Garth's death out of old ruts of living, and their

confession of love now contributes largely to Matthias' moral development. His discovery of his wife's spiritual infidelity begins the destruction of the solid "house" he had built to keep out the world.

Because the narrator focuses attention on Natalie's mind in this third section, Matthias' discovery and the pain which must accompany it occur "off-stage," precluding immediate sympathy for Matthias. The reader is rather led to understand Natalie's motivation first, with the effect of maintaining the balance between the two sides of the rapidly developing conflict. The section ends with Natalie's practical, if cold-blooded, response to Matthias' injured disillusionment. Admitting that she does not love him, she nonetheless suggests that they continue the marriage: "Houses are built on more infirm foundations/ Than ours, and some of them are standing well"(p. 1111). Given Matthias' earlier confidence in the strength of his foundations, the statement shows clearly that his education has begun in earnest. His tearful, stumbling withdrawal prepares for the further development of his sight.

The fourth section develops Matthias' conflict with Natalie. The passages which open the section present contrasting glimpses into the thoughts of Natalie and Matthias. Natalie is full of anxiety for her marriage and of pity for her husband. Matthias is self-pitying, thinking of himself as totally alone. As the section proceeds,

alternations of scene and narrative commentary present the dissolution, over a three year period, of these attitudes. The increasing sense of alienation leads both characters to violent action, and the section ends with Natalie's suicide. Natalie, who compares the marriage to a sinking ship, proves unable to live with the appearance of marriage which she suggested. Matthias, who sees his life as a ruined tower, finds his demand for perfection eroded by the imperfect relationship in which he is trapped. Both characters are pathetic in their play-acting, and both are ugly in their culminating passion, Matthias in his drunken sexuality, Natalie in her antagonistic rejection.

Nonetheless, it becomes evident as the section concludes that Matthias has developed new powers of ethical analysis. He is cruel but not unjust when he tells Natalie:

You sold yourself
More to your satisfaction and advantage
Than to your disappointment or surprise,
And must have known what you were selling.
(pp. 1123-4)

A few lines later, he shows surprising insight by placing the tension between them into an objective, somewhat ironic light:

The trouble with you,
And me, and a few millions who are like us,
Is that we live so long to know so little,
And are not willing then to know ourselves.
Where are the mysteries in us that require
So much dramatic fuss? (p. 1124)

That Matthias can admit there is "trouble" with him, as well as with Natalie, is clear evidence that his education is continuing.

Natalie's suicide, which concludes the section, increases the pressure upon Matthias. Her anguish is not elaborated; the narrator chooses to remove the focus from her and declines to analyze further her motive. There is, as a result, no excessive pity for her built up in the reader. From this point, the light of internal analysis is turned fully and exclusively upon Matthias. More and more the reader comes to sympathize with him in the painful learning process he undergoes.

The fifth section now develops Matthias' conflict with Timberlake. The section begins with a long passage in which the narrator evaluates Matthias. He has learned but still holds himself in isolation: "he was on an eminence and would stay there/ ...His pride of unbelief had strength in it"(p. 1127). Matthias has moved to a new kind of pride, one based in a more complex vision of reality. The narrative voice is explicit:

Alone there with a winter-laden wind
Whirling dead leaves over a darkening floor,
Matthias heard their message and was proud
That he could meet with patience and high scorn
A life without a scheme and to no purpose--
An accident of nameless energies,
Of which he was a part, and no small part.
His blindness to his insignificance
Was like another faith, and would not die.
(p. 1127)

The final two lines here define Matthias' flaw and indicate the direction toward which his final illumination must turn.

The point which has been reached in Matthias' education having been thus established, the remainder of the section develops in long one-sided dialogues the philosophical attitudes of Timberlake, who returns to Matthias' house a broken, pitiful man. Matthias continues his deplorable possessiveness toward other human beings (e.g., p. 1131, ll. 28-30), which here underscores his inability to understand the ethical advice Timberlake dispenses. Still, his increased sensitivity is also clear, as when he thinks:

I do not know him,
And never shall. No man has known another
Since men were born. It is enough to know
That he is in my house, and is my friend.
(p. 1133)

Timberlake's eventual death completes the pattern of loss which Garth began; there is little pity involved because the death is expected and occurs, as with the others, outside the narrative.

Before he dies, however, Timberlake comments extensively on Matthias' life and on the path he must take. His philosophy establishes a basis for Matthias' final illumination. "All things worth having are perilous" (p. 1131), he declares, and may be admirable only if "passion ... knows itself." Timberlake confesses that men cannot lead one another, but that a man may nonetheless aid others by the

simple fact of existing:

I have found gold, Matthias, where you found gravel,
And I can't give it to you. I feel and see it,
But you must find it somehow for yourself.
It's not negotiable. You have to find it--

.....

We are like stairs
For one another's climbing, and are never
Quite told which way it is that we are going
While we are climbing higher, or think we are.

.....

There is no cure for self;
There's only an occasional revelation,
Arriving not infrequently too late. (pp. 1136-7)

He makes explicit for Matthias the need for birth: "You must be born." If the tower is not to crumble into a "poor ruin of self," he suggests, one must be born into true and deep insight. On this note he leaves Matthias to begin the climactic journey to self-knowledge alone.

The extensive passages of thought upon which the fifth section is built are integral parts of Matthias' development, just as important as the earlier passages of emotional antagonism with Natalie for giving Matthias the necessary building blocks for his eventual rebuilding of his "tower." Without them, the internal resolution of the sixth and final section could not occur.

Much of the sixth section is presented as if in dialogue between Matthias and Garth, but it is essential to note that the dialogue occurs within a dream. Even given the sense of supernatural forces developed through the setting and through the circumstances of Timberlake's

death("She [Natalie] was calling for me"), it is important to the effect of the poem that Matthias eventually develops within himself a rationale for living. The dream argument is presented through Garth, thus concluding the conflict begun in the first section and re-emphasizing the point that Matthias' education is the result of what others have, by speech and example, shown him. Matthias has learned from his suffering and from the suffering of others. In his final understanding, he no longer is pressed by events toward greater awareness of reality; rather he at last incorporates creatively the messages of his friends and becomes capable of finding independently the meanings he craves, i. e., capable of being "born" as a free and responsible human being.

The opening passages of the sixth section, presenting Matthias' ugly dream of Natalie's vindictiveness, establish considerable sympathy in the reader. More than at any earlier time, he now appears to be suffering painfully the losses he has undergone. His despair and doubt are made explicit by narrative commentary(beginning at p. 1141, l. 24), and the narrative voice enters again later to indicate the possibility of escape:

Matthias did not know that in his garden
 There were some perilous seeds of sympathy
 That he had found and planted, unaware
 Of what they were or what they might conceal ...
 (p. 1144)

The "perilous seeds of sympathy" bloom in the concluding passages of the poem within the tormented brain of Matthias. Seeking release from his soul darkness, Matthias attempts, psychologically, in a dream, to embrace the exit taken by Garth, Natalie, and Timberlake before him. Such a reversal of his original attitude is not the final character change to which the action has led him, however. In the voice of Garth, the argument for life is established.

The voice begins by echoing Timberlake's statement, "There is no cure for self," and continues by pointing out that there are "differences of desperation" which lead each man to his own destiny, that there is an inevitability about the life process which no man can deny:

All voices are one voice, with many tongues
To make it inexpressible and obscure
To us until we hear the voice itself.
We are prisoners now and pupils in a school
Where often our best rewards appear to us
To be our punishments. There's no escape.
(pp. 1149-50)

Continuing later the metaphor of voices, Garth's voice sets a complex vision of the combined blessing-curse of human communication:

Language, Matthias.
With a few finite and unfinished words
That are the chips of brief experience,
You restless and precipitate world-infants
Would build a skiff to circumnavigate
Infinity, and would find it, if you could,
No more sufficient or more commodious
Or comprehensive in its means and habit

Than a confused, confined phenomenon
 Prisoned within a skull, with knowledge in it.
 There's not much knowledge in it, and less wisdom.
 (p. 1151)

This description of the human condition, recognizing the necessary incompleteness of any communication and the inevitable isolation of the individual mind, defines the limits within which Matthias must function as a man. His acceptance of life thus grows out of a full awareness of the difficulties life enforces. The unadmirable qualities of pride, self-assurance, and possessiveness which Matthias was shown to possess at the beginning of the poem cannot exist in the face of such an uncompromising vision of reality; and the Matthias who emerges upward from the dark gorge in the sixth section is not the same moral character as he who emerged at the end of the first.

The poem ends, as it begins, with a narrative comment upon the mental state of the protagonist:

The night was cold,
 And in the darkness was a feel of death,
 But in Matthias was a warmth of life,
 Of birth, defending and sustaining him
 With patience, and with an expectancy
 That he had said would never in life again
 Be his to know. There were long hours to wait,
 And dark hours; and he met their length and darkness
 With a vast gratitude that humbled him
 And warmed him while he waited for the dawn.
 (p. 1155)

The contrast between the opening and closing passages of the poem suggests the change that has occurred. Matthias

thinks differently about life now. He has been educated by learning the strengths and weaknesses of other humans and by recognizing his own shortcomings and incapacabilities. At the conclusion, as throughout, the emphasis is thrown strongly upon the change in moral character which the protagonist, Matthias, has completed.

The kind of change which Matthias undergoes involves his developing an understanding of the inequities of life, the inevitability of loss, the impossibility of possession. In order to live with this knowledge, he must develop qualities of sympathy, self-denial, and self-examination. The causes of this change are largely external through most of the action. Certain of the security of his position, his self-esteem buoyed by the people around him, Matthias changes only when these supports are removed by events over which he has no control. He exercises little choice as the action progresses; rather he finds himself buffeted by actions and criticisms external to him. He is pushed by circumstances to each new stage of moral growth.

The development of Matthias' capacities begins as complications enter his once secure existence. As the complications multiply, the expectations of the reader become somewhat complex. At the beginning of the work, the single clearly established expectation is that Matthias will receive some punishment for his stance of detached superiority. Once Garth disturbs that stance slightly, it

becomes probable that the process of education will continue; and the antagonism between Garth and Matthias also sets the expectation that their conflict will be resolved, probably in Garth's favor. That conflict is complicated by the addition of other, allied forces in Natalie and Timberlake and by the debt of life Timberlake owes Matthias.

The basic ethical conflict is complicated by the revelation of the love triangle, which also demands a resolution. There is the expectation that the passion of Natalie must somehow be answered and that she must pay for her original choice to marry Matthias without loving him. Matthias' crushing discovery makes inevitable the intensifying of personal conflict. Set against the expectations relating to character conflicts is the continuing development of Matthias' learning process. An awareness that the emphasis falls more and more heavily on Matthias' character change prepares the reader for the sacrificial end to which Natalie and Timberlake move. Matthias is expected to learn responsibility; the deaths of the other characters are means to that end. Only drastic events can move him to change. His gradual, painful change is combined with his loss of fortune. He loses his security, as the reader desires from the first; and he gains in insight, as the reader also expects he should. Ironically it is only the removal of the other characters that can bring about both developments.

The succession of emotional effects which result lead the reader generally to increasing sympathy for the protagonist. Though Matthias is contemptible in the beginning, his change begins almost immediately. In the basic situation of the action, the love triangle, Matthias is surely the wronged party. Though his reaction is not especially admirable, it is a natural one. His sudden realization that his marriage is loveless is too much for him to cope with. Careful balance in point of view keeps the sympathy of the reader divided through the first four sections, but when Natalie commits suicide, knowledge of her basic weakness detaches the reader from her and strengthens sympathy for Matthias.

Matthias is, after all, not totally responsible for Natalie's death. She chooses the deceitful marriage of convenience and she chooses to conclude that marriage by suicide. He is, on the other hand, responsible for his egocentrism. His disdain for Garth, his insult to Natalie, and his anger at Timberlake contribute to the death of each. The effect of each death for the reader involves a tension between pity for Matthias' suffering and contempt for his pride. The determining factor in the final effect of the poem is the essential weakness of character which Garth, Timberlake, and Natalie each display. In spite of their good qualities, each is unable to face the difficulty of living on in pain. In the end, only Matthias proves

strong enough to bear the burden of life, learning as he does from their weaknesses. Thus it is that sympathy is developed out of early dislike. The reader is at last relieved that by fulfilling himself as a man, Matthias lends meaning to the lives lost by the others.

The plot may be described as a plot of character, in which the action is organized so as to emphasize the change in moral character of the protagonist. From the self-satisfied, non-introspective, smugly confident man of the opening passages, Matthias moves through loss, doubt, and eventual despair to become capable of awareness and acceptance of the human condition. All of the parts of the poem support this emphasis; this is especially clear when the emotionally explosive love triangle is resolved without the development either of any strong pity for Natalie nor contempt for Matthias. The change in situation is played down, and it is the effect upon Matthias' character that is developed.

The setting of the story also supports the development of Matthias' character. The gorge and dark rock-tomb pose a symbolic choice to which Matthias eventually must respond. The descent into darkness becomes a journey which Matthias must make before his education can be completed. Each of the supporting characters functions to push Matthias further on his way to knowledge; the structure of the poem is related to the comment of the dying Timberlake: "We are like stairs/ For one another's climbing"(p. 1137).

In such a manner each of the characters is used in the development of Matthias' change. The maliciousness of Garth, the aggressiveness of Natalie, and the obsequiousness of Timberlake function in turn to help Matthias along; and they are made distinct in their speeches only as these attitudes toward Matthias are reflected in their words.

Matthias develops through a series of confrontations, some emotional, some philosophical, with the three supporting characters. These confrontations culminate in an internal confrontation when Matthias discovers himself. The alterations in his attitudes are usually noted explicitly by the omniscient narrator or are shown by the narrative voice in internal analyses. As a result of this kind of presentation, the passages of dialogue and narrative commentary are evenly balanced (43% of the poem is narration, 1066 of 2498 lines). The narrative voice is used extensively in the fourth section, where Natalie and Matthias are hardly communicating and where three years pass rapidly by, and in the sixth section, where Matthias is totally alone and speaks only to himself.

In discussing Matthias at the Door, Yvor Winters finds the poem flawed by "mysterious and unsatisfactory" symbolism. The suicide setting lacks realism in his view; realistic and allegorical functions are unsuccessfully mixed. There is no "organic relation" between the idea of the door of death and the door to new life.¹²

Emery Neff declares the coincidence of three deaths all occurring in the same spot is an impossibility.¹³ Though Ellsworth Barnard finds these to be caviling objections, he objects to the length of Garth's ghostly speech in the concluding passages of the work.¹⁴ Barnard does think this to be among Robinson's best works. He writes:

"Matthias at the Door seems to me to have a better planned and more plausible story, more credible and interesting characters, and a more effective narrative technique than any other of the long poems dealing with love in a modern setting."¹⁵

The complaints of heavy-handed symbolism, over-lengthy speeches, or unrealistic action are unfair to the intention of the poem as Robinson wrote it. The symbolic value given the "dark Egyptian door" is not arbitrary; it grows out of Garth's subjective vision and takes root in the minds of the other characters. Robinson, by narrative tone, avoids making the setting supernatural; its mystic qualities are all in the minds of the characters. It is not coincidental, then, that the characters all feel drawn to the "Egyptian door." The emotional pressures released by Garth's death assure that they will be. As for the length of the speeches at the end, they are not aimed at quickly and neatly tying up the threads of a completed plot; rather they aim to reflect the slow process of conscious self-discovery, the

difficulty of which has been prepared for by the comments of all of the characters concerning the tortuous nature of communication. Barnard's general judgment about Matthias at the Door is, it seems to me, a good one. It is an effectively organized narrative poem.

iii.

Amaranth, published in 1934, is a poem about a man's re-examination, within a dream, of the principles upon which he has based his life. The protagonist, a man named Fargo, came to a point of choice at the age of thirty-five. Having attempted to become an artist for all of his younger years, Fargo arrived at a decision to abandon art for business (pump-making), a decision prompted by an inner voice which warned him away from his artistic inclination. Ten years later, now a success in his new profession, Fargo wonders whether his earlier decision was a good one. The poem narrates Fargo's dream which follows upon this momentary doubt. In it are presented a series of characters, all of whom have chosen the wrong careers for themselves. Fargo, with the aid of his inner voice, Amaranth (Truth), moves to a renewed understanding of why the path he has taken is best. The narrative structure of the work involves the development of a set of intellectual stances which are available to the human mind which seeks to justify a

poorly chosen mode of existence. The several philosophies presented enable Fargo to comprehend the value of his own heretofore emotionally based choice. Fargo's intellectual ignorance of his own motive is removed, and his feelings about life are clarified and somewhat altered.

The action of the poem occurs in four parts, a paraphrase of which will facilitate analysis. In the first section, Fargo is introduced as a man who feels misgivings about his vocation. Having ten years before destroyed all of his paintings but one, he now wonders just how good an artist he might have proved to be. He begins to dream, and the progression of events which follow are all part of the dream-fantasy within Fargo's mind. Fargo is beside wharves and thinks the dark temptation of the water represents his despairing attitude of ten years before--at the time his inner voice warned him to renounce art. That inner voice now appears in the flesh as a character with fiery eyes named Amaranth. The two converse, neither being sure just why it is Fargo has returned to his previous doubtful state of mind. Amaranth leads Fargo to a tavern where most of the satirically named characters of the poem are introduced: Evensong, the composer; Figg, the lawyer; Styx, the doctor; Flax, the minister; Pink, the poet; and Atlas, the painter. All but the latter two are introduced as men who chose their profession mistakenly and have lived to regret it. Pink, the aggressive poet, feels his vocation

is well-chosen, however, and insists on looking into Amaranth's eyes, which reflect the true value of any man's ability. The glance is devastating, and Pink leaves to commit suicide, his illusions shattered. The section concludes with Evensong's admittedly pedestrian dirge.

The second section of the poem begins with Fargo alone on a dark street. Grave-diggers accost and threaten him, but Amaranth comes to drive them away. Amaranth takes Fargo first to Pink's room, where the hanged poet comes back to life long enough to deliver a violent protest against the injustice of life, and then to the room of a new character, the woman novelist, Elaine Amelia Watchman. Following an extended discussion between Amaranth, Watchman, Evensong, and a cat named Ampersand concerning art and its staying power, the other characters appear to witness Watchman, the novelist, try to look into Amaranth's fateful eyes. Like Pink, she is destroyed, and the glimpse of truth causes her to turn immediately into dust. Evensong, her would-be lover, gathers the dust as memento as the section ends.

The third section finds Fargo alone among graves. He is approached by a man called Ipswich, the inventor, who attempts to persuade the bewildered protagonist to give up his puzzling efforts at understanding. Offering a care-free voyage on a battered ship and a powerful potion of forgetfulness, Ipswich almost seduces Fargo away; but

Amaranth again intervenes and he and Fargo watch while Ipswich casts anchor and immediately sinks into dark water with his entire crew. Amaranth leads Fargo now to the studio of Atlas, where the primitive, subjective artist is arguing against traditional art with all the remaining characters. Like the other artists before him, he dares the threat of Amaranth's eyes, loses his illusions, and dies, after destroying all of his paintings.

The final section of the poem picks up Fargo in his own studio, now painting furiously, compelled against his will. He converses at length with Evensong about the other artists who have died, hears Ampersand the cat discuss determinism, and responds to Amaranth's presence at last by requesting for himself an eye-to-eye confrontation. Before granting that request, Amaranth suggests a pilgrimage to the graveyard and the whole group of characters reassembles there for the conclusion of the dream. Each character sums up his resignation to his misguided life before Fargo is at last revealed by Amaranth to be that man who is capable of seeing truth unflinchingly and of choosing the vocation for which his specific talents best fit him. The dream ends as Evensong and Amaranth bid Fargo farewell and fade from view; and the poem ends as Fargo awakes with a sense of joy and release, facing refreshed the sounds and colors of his life.

The poem is a dream, and the dream is Fargo's. The

development of various characters and philosophies exists only as exemplification for Fargo's search, and whatever change may be said to occur is certainly a change in Fargo's state of mind. The parts of the work are arranged to illustrate that state of mind as it develops. As protagonist of a narrative work, however, Fargo's traits of character seem at first remarkably indistinct for the reader. Given his age, his decision of ten years before, his current misgivings about that decision, there follows little development of Fargo as character in the body of the work. He is basically a bemused, troubled, sometimes despondent observer. There are good reasons, considering the nature of the work, why this should be so.

The dream itself, as an experience based totally in the mind of Fargo, is inevitably a presentation of his moral, emotional, and intellectual capacities. Though as dreamer in his own fantasy, he seems often to be a neutral observer, the characters he creates for his fantasy establish the internal tensions and thought progressions that would combine to make up his character in the real, external world. It may be said then that the reader sees actually the basic elements of the character of Fargo, here unmodified by the conscious reconciliation which precedes assuming stances or roles for the external world. The poem is thus truly an inner view, an attempt to express the elements of the inner man.

The use of third person narration in such a narrative structure is effective. The narrative voice sets the frame about the dream, establishing at the beginning Fargo's external situation and indicating without elaboration the state of mind which precedes the dream experience, establishing at the end the state of mind with which Fargo awakens, thus setting from an external point of view the nature of the change which has occurred.

Within the dream itself, the third person narration assures a variety of effects for the reader. For example, the presence of Fargo as observer is often ignored, as when the characters argue among themselves in each of the first three parts. The result of this technique is to involve the reader with the immediacy of the thoughts presented. In these parts, the reader watches with Fargo, not through Fargo, and is detached from the immediate concern for Fargo's situation. At other points, the narrative description leads the reader to react to actions as if they were real. For example, there are incidents which find Fargo threatened by ugly or fearsome characters, with a resulting effect of fear for his physical (as well as psychic) well-being. Most important is the satiric, biting tone of the narrative as Robinson reverses the usual cliché of man's inner light pushing him toward art.

In this way, the point of view Robinson chooses assures that a wider sense of conflict will be established for the

reader. In reality the only conflict of the poem is Fargo's inner doubt about the wisdom of his vocational choice. The narration, however, develops intellectual conflicts between characters, and physical conflicts between Fargo and aspects of his dream world, all of these functioning to sustain narrative interest in the more abstract progress of Fargo's discovery. Suggestions of such traditional forms as the dream vision and morality play add to this interest.

The resolving of Fargo's doubt uncovers the change which occurs in the action. At the end of the poem, Fargo's situation in life has not altered. He awakens from sleep the same successful businessman, with the same goals, as when he began his dream. Neither have the traits which make up his character altered; though Fargo may better understand the traits which form him, they have not changed in any basic way. What has changed is the degree of understanding which Fargo possesses. He has questioned his original decision, has learned why it was a good one, and is therefore better able to face his existence without the crippling regret for what might have been that threatened him at the beginning of the poem. The pressures that bring about this change are all internal. His mind works out the problem, and the poem shows this process. Its parts are organized by the "thought," to use the Aristotelian term, which is to be presented. A closer examination of the

structure of the poem will support this statement.

The first section of the work aims to establish Fargo's internal conflict, the dream-background against which that conflict will be played out, and the pattern of self-confrontation which Fargo eventually must undergo. The first lines of the poem indicate that Fargo has sacrificed all of his paintings but one because of an internal warning ten years previous:

A voice like one of an undying friend
Whom he had always known and never seen
Had pierced and wounded him till he was warned
Of only one escape; and he was free. (p. 1311)

Awakening on a Sunday morning and glancing at the one picture he has spared, Fargo is able to admit its unexceptional nature. The narrative voice explains that Fargo has "surrendered" his art to escape death. He is described as "content," with neither "recrimination" nor "remorse" to plague his life. Nevertheless, Fargo dozes (unlike the creative artists, he has a leisurely day off) into a bewildering dream in which the contentment claimed for him is seen to be less than complete.

Fargo dreams he stands near "wharves and ships that he had seen/ Somewhere before" (p. 1312) and recognizes that he has come back to "a lost world," "the wrong world." He recognizes that the water extends the same invitation to suicide which he escaped ten years before. Inexplicably,

that invitation re-extends itself in his thoughts: "No clearer way was anywhere left for him/ Than a swift one to darkness down before him"(p. 1313). It is at this point that Amaranth appears, establishing a pattern of rescue that continues throughout the work. Identifying himself as the inner voice which saved Fargo before, Amaranth questions, "Why, friend, have you come back to the wrong world?"(p. 1314), establishing explicitly the central problem of the poem. Answering the question of why Fargo is motivated to return becomes the primary goal toward which the succeeding action aims.

The mystic qualities of Amaranth are evident as he approaches Fargo. That his eyes embody some powerful force is first established. Here, early in the poem, Fargo ventures a quick glance into them which foreshadows his final look at the poem's conclusion:

More fire was in them
Than he could meet, though he felt glimmerings,
And shadows that were less than memories,
Of having met them once and welcomed them
Incredibly, and their appointed purpose.
If that was true, they could not then have been
So flaming or so fierce. (p. 1315)

Amaranth suggests that the first grace offered man is to act without seeing, as Fargo originally heard a voice and accepted its warning, but that if one comes back again questioning, he must be made to see. With the expectation thus advanced that Fargo must eventually "see" into

Amaranth's eyes, the direction of the action becomes a probability; Fargo will move to new insight.

The potentially frightful consequences of that insight are indicated in the latter parts of this opening section. The setting quickly changes. The reader is reminded that the action is a dream sequence by the quick switch and by Fargo's feeling that he has "flown or floated" there. The new scene is a tavern "so old/ That all who entered it remembered it"(p. 1318), suggesting the mythic quality of Fargo's inward journey. Four of the six men there have encountered Amaranth's eye and survived the experience, but in each case the disillusionment is complete and unrelieved. The composer, the lawyer, the doctor, and the minister share equally a sense of personal failure, waste, and misdirected talent. Each has been "withered" by Amaranth's glance. The poet and the painter have yet to look into Amaranth's eyes, but their turn is approaching, as Evensong, the composer, points out. Evensong, who introduces the group to Fargo, indicates the helplessness of Fargo to control events in this strange dream world when he says:

You are a painter,
And must have eyes. Whatever you see with them,
Don't pity us, for you are one of us--
Unless he lets you go. (pp. 1321-2)

It is evident that a man must abrogate his will here, that

he is helpless before his inner light.

Even more threatening for Fargo is the fate of Pink, the poet, whose confrontation with Amaranth concludes the section. Amaranth baits the brash Pink (who detests the "roots" of tradition and writes obscure, personal poems) by telling him "there is more joy, if not more wisdom, / In seeing not too well" (p. 1324). Amaranth warns openly of the dangers of self-exploration:

I should not rush to see myself too well,
Or to behold myself too finally,
If I were you. Dreams have a kindly way,
Sometimes, if they are not explored or shaken,
Of lasting glamorously. (p. 1324)

Pink, claiming to "fear no shrinkage," stares into Amaranth's face and recognizes that he too is in the "wrong world." Claiming that the recognition involves surprise rather than terror, Pink nonetheless immediately repudiates his art and his life: "The bowl is broken, and I'm not afraid. / Excuse me, while I go and hang myself" (p. 1326). The section then ends on Evensong's dirge and an invitation to Fargo to join the group, an invitation he is helpless to decline.

The structure of the poem from this point involves repetition of the conflicts and confrontations established, each repetition leading Fargo nearer to his own moment of truth. The second and third sections begin with threats of physical or psychological death for the solitary Fargo.

He is in each case rescued by Amaranth and taken to a new setting where, in the presence of the other resigned misfits, he hears philosophical debates about art which culminate in an artist's self-destruction via Amaranth's powerful eyes. In the final section Fargo's own turn comes and he faces the truth of the inner light.

The pattern of the action being so clearly settled, the attention of the reader is more and more strongly directed to the intellectual or ethical statements which the characters make. In the first section Evensong alone is given a long passage of speech, and he devotes it to capsule characterizations of the other characters, thus establishing their points of difference, but only within the narrow limits of vocation. Though they work at different jobs, all of them are, to their eternal misfortune, wrongly employed. Also, Pink very briefly argues his poetic theory before his fateful look into Amaranth's eyes. There are no long set speeches developing intellectual positions in the opening section.

The sections which follow, however, are increasingly concerned with just such set speeches. In the second section, Pink's reprisal involves a long speech about his disillusionment. Evensong and Watchman carry on about the rewards of art and lasting fame. Figg, Styx, and Flax each expound on the advantages of avoiding insight. In the third section, Ipswich argues extensively the value of

forgetfulness. Atlas presents his theory of primitive art. Figg, Flax, and Styx each attempt to refute the theory of non-representational art as a valid creative form. Finally, in the fourth section, Evensong and Fargo argue the meaning of Amaranth's lesson; Ampersand discusses his philosophy of determinism; Figg, Styx, and Flax deliver even longer speeches explaining their personal philosophies of renunciation and acceptance; and Amaranth at last explains fully his relation to Fargo and the lesson Fargo has come to learn. The increasingly heavy emphasis upon what may be termed (using Crane's distinction) "non-dramatic thought" indicates clearly the central structural importance those elements play in the work. The development of action and character is subordinated to the development of thought in the narrative organization of the poem.

In setting and character, as in the action, patterns of expectation are early established so that the reader's attention may later be effectively focused on ideas. What is involved in the structure of Amaranth is an internal journey through the thought processes of the protagonist whose name, Fargo, suggests that great distances must be covered before the journey will be completed. The settings used in the poem support the journey motif (wharves, graves, streets). The setting of the opening and closing passages is Fargo's room, indicating the cyclical nature of the trip he takes. Within the dream, a cycle of settings is

also used. Fargo begins at the wharves, near a graveyard. He is taken to a tavern by Amaranth, returns to the dark streets, is taken to Pink's room. He returns to the street, is taken to Watchman's room. He moves back to the graves and wharves, then is taken to Atlas' room, to his own studio, and finally back to the graves again before awakening from his dream. The movement from graveyard and harbor into a series of artists' rooms and back again suggests the nature of the decision which Fargo made ten years before and now is re-examining. He could have labored compulsively at inferior art or he could have committed suicide. He chose neither of what seemed at the time exclusive alternatives; rather he was saved by the inner voice which suggested a third possibility.

The minor characters within the poem divide into two groups which also represent the alternatives Fargo once faced. Pink, Watchman, and Atlas(poetry, prose, painting) are all creative artists who refuse to compromise their artistic aims. Each of them believes that art offers the only hope for immortality; and, forced to recognize their own creative shortcomings, each of them commits suicide immediately. In contrast Figg, Styx, and Flax are professionals(law, medicine, theology) who choose to accept their inabilities and to continue to live even though they live uselessly in a dull limbo. Ipswich the inventor and Ampersand the cat suggest related alternatives

of hedonistic forgetfulness culminating in death and deterministic acceptance to the point of total detachment from human involvement.

The most important characters of Fargo's dream world are Evensong and Amaranth; it is these two who are with Fargo to the end and whose words most directly indicate the progression of thought through which Fargo passes. Evensong is the one artist(music) who has looked into Amaranth's eyes and elected resignation over death. He continues his music but admits it is worthless. As an artist who accepts his lack of talent but continues in art, he becomes a negative example for Fargo. Amaranth, "the flower that never fades," represents from the first to Fargo the inner voice which each man possesses, that core of integrity which contains the objective evaluation of the outer man's actions, decisions, and productions. It is ultimately through Amaranth that each man evaluates his existence--as Fargo does in his dream.

All of these elements of action, character, and setting are established in the first section as the pattern of development is begun. Fargo wishes to know why he has returned to "the wrong world" and he wishes to understand what meaning there is in his individual life. The cycle of settings, the ideological opposition of character types, and the pattern of self-confrontations by artists set the background against which Fargo moves toward his own

self-confrontation and understanding.

The increasingly lengthy philosophic speeches which are delivered by the various characters as the poem continues direct themselves primarily to questions of why any man should hold on to his life and to what ends the lives of individual men may profitably be directed. Among the defeated artists, Pink speaks first to this point in a sixty-two line speech(pp. 1334-36) in which he deprecates the useless lives of the others and requests for himself privacy and anonymity in death. He suggests that there is a greater creative source than any of them can see, and that it humbles them all "to a small heap of sudden dust"(p. 1335). Having placed his hope in his art's value, he generally questions the value of any life which does not possess deep, real creative talent.

The same conclusion is drawn by each of the other two artists who face Amaranth's eyes. Watchman, in fact, becomes dust after her dream of immortality through art is taken from her. She declares her theory of what is truly important in life when she says:

There's in me an insistent little spirit
That holds and shields me from life-eating trifles--
Love, doubt, regret, or fear. I'm never vague;
I never cloud myself with airy vapors.
When I am dust, my work will say all this,
And against all your doubts. (pp. 1345-46)

Having rejected these basic human emotions for the sake of

her art, she learns from Amaranth that her art is dry and vulnerable to time. She has counted too heavily on enduring through her books, and so dies immediately.

Atlas, the gusty stevadore turned painter, is the last artist to face Amaranth. He believes passionately that his refusal to study traditional art forms will be justified one day by a posterity which will comprehend his non-representational paintings. His vision of himself as a Christ-like bearer of the world's burdens (p. 1366, ll. 3-8) is based in his certainty that immortality may lie in art objects, the same belief which Pink and Watchman espoused. Seeing the truth in Amaranth's eyes, he has nothing left to live for. He says:

I don't mind death. I mind the falling down
Of a tall monument that I was building
Higher than lighting, and as everlasting
As man on earth. (p. 1370)

After destroying all of his paintings, Atlas too dies rather than continue in a world which will deny him immortality in art.

In contrast to those who give up life in disappointment are those who hang on to life in failure: Figg, Styx, and Flax. None of these three are distinct as characters; in their speeches they successively develop different aspects of a single idea. They function to goad Pink, Watchman, and Atlas into their confrontations with Amaranth

in the first three sections, in each case by suggesting that it is safer to avoid glimpses into the future, a suggestion no self-respecting artist would countenance. It is in the fourth section that they are given their longest speeches. There each man tries to explain why he lives by stating his understanding of the will to continue. Lawyer Figg speaks first in a forty-one line summation which concludes by saying of the artists who have died:

My only contribution at this hour
Is my suspicion that a mortal haste
Like theirs may not have hurried them on so far
As they foresaw. I do not see them here,
And cannot follow them to tell you more.
I am not mystical. But there's a jarring
Somewhere in this for me, and for the most
Of mankind, I believe; and I suspect
Without it there would not be trees enough
To make the paper that would hold the news
Of those who might no longer stay with us.
(pp. 1384-85)

For Figg, then, the foreboding of an afterlife keeps this life, if not valuable, nonetheless preferable to the unknown.

Dr. Styx agrees in essence. Even if God does not exist, one should not commit suicide. He notes the cat: "He looks away where there are distances/ That are unknown and unimaginable"(pp. 1385-86). Styx has no name for this mystical sense and expects that it is safer not to explore it; perhaps its very "dimness" is what makes it "profound." He declares at the end of his fifty line

summation:

No man that I have met
Has ever named it with a word that tells me
More than a clock says. As for seeking it,
Or flying from here in a malignant rage
Of disillusionment--well, I suspect
I'm too indifferent, or we'll say too lazy.
(p. 1386)

The doctor, like the lawyer, is satisfied simply to exist with his vague intuition of the unknown.

Similarly the minister, Flax, feels something which he cannot name, but which gives him reason to live. In his fifty-five line concluding speech(pp. 1387-88), he explains his unwillingness to condemn any man's choice and his own awareness of a God within himself who forces his own choice. Personal "well-being" and "peace" are best served by avoiding the demanding questioning of artists like Pink. Each of these three sees his personal life as a failure, but continues to exist because of intimations of more powerful forces which exist in the universe, forces which it is perhaps "safer" not to see too clearly.

Against both the resignation of the professionals and the uncompromising, destructive honesty of the artists, Ipswich offers in the third section of the poem a philosophy of escape. In the series of long speeches to Fargo, he advances his philosophy. He has done little evil in the world and he doesn't know exactly why he is alive. He fears to seek out the reasons:

It's as well
 Sometimes, that we leave reasons in the darkness
 Where they like best to live. We do not know
 So many forces that are moulding us
 That we must have a word we call a name
 For more, say, than a few of them. (p. 1354)

His drink, which induces forgetfulness, is his answer
 to the impossible and frightening questions of life.

The drink also builds confidence:

Since I made this drink,
 We are the souls of our misguided selves,
 And our lives are no longer our disasters.
 We are immortal now, and we are going
 Where life will cease to be the long mistake
 That we have made of it. (p. 1356)

To set sail, forgetting the fiasco of life, is the answer
 he suggests to Fargo.

For the cat, Ampersand, in the fourth section, there
 is no need to forget; rather the aim should be to accept.
 One should do what one likes best and rest content in
 "nature's law":

When I can seize the possibility
 Of doing what I like best, I always do it;
 And I have no devouring aspirations
 Consuming me with unacknowledged lies.
 The more I learn of men's and women's folly
 In trying to make their wishes their belief,
 The more I'm rather content to be a cat ...
 (p. 1378)

Ampersand insists that he has no choice. As animal, he
 inevitably eats the fly or kills the sparrow. He admits
 that a man has "an instinct that appears more flexible/

And less confined and less inexorable"(p. 1378) than his own, but if man is free then he should be able to explain all of his compulsions--exactly what none of the others is able to accomplish.

Through these characters in the various parts of the poem are presented the rationalizations by which men live. The ultimate failure of each philosophy is evident by the context in which it is presented. These are the philosophies of those captured and held in the "wrong world." These philosophies of despair, resignation, denial, and unquestioning acceptance must all be rejected by Fargo before his journey is completed.

The attitude most dangerous for Fargo is that presented by Evensong, for the old composer is closest to the protagonist in being an artist who is able to accept without self-destruction a recognition of his lack of talent. Should Fargo have continued to paint once he knew his limits as an artist, his condition would be that of Evensong. It is Evensong who first warns Fargo about Amaranth's eyes and the danger they contain(p. 1319, ll. 20-25). It is he who later tries to explain what is necessary to a man when he tells Fargo that one must search for where his heart lies if he is to find emotional fulfillment. Further, one must have the patience to do that heart's desire properly, to learn the way carefully and completely (p. 1374, ll. 15-18). The difference between Evensong and

Fargo comes clear late in the poem when Evensong confesses his reason for remaining:

... when [Amaranth] found that I was here securely,
 Without incentive and without invention,
 Too dream-worn and indifferent to escape,
 He gave me resignation or destruction
 As a cold choice. Slower than Pink and Atlas
 In my pursuit of the omnivorous Why,
 I am still here, and in a manner tuneful.
 (p. 1383)

Fading ambition and indifference have trapped Evensong. Fargo escapes because he is strong enough to avoid these failings, and thus to avoid the rationalizations which accompany them and which tie men down in their wrong worlds.

The most important voice of Fargo's journey inward is that of Amaranth. Interestingly, Amaranth does not know at first why it is that Fargo has returned. He does lead him and protect him, but he is not sure to what end Fargo's journey is intended. Having rescued Fargo from the grave-diggers, he questions Fargo's motive:

You have come back, my brother, to a city
 Where there is nothing firm and nothing right.
 Have you come back to it because you love it?
 Was it for nothing that I set you free?
 (p. 1332)

Recognizing that Fargo must seek out the answer to this very question, Amaranth guides him on. After rescuing him from Ipswich, Amaranth indicates the great difficulty

of finding any certainty in this life:

How do men learn
To know, and where the light is none too clear,
The language of so much that's unrevealed
And ultimate in the books they have not read?
I see that here I must have some instruction.
(p. 1360)

Shortly thereafter Amaranth indicates what must in part motivate Fargo when he tells Atlas that doubt must be present in any man who turns toward Amaranth's eyes. He declares that "many awake to learn that they are born/ Out of a dream"(p. 1369). Doubt has brought Fargo here; a new awakening is required.

Having heard all the self-justifications of the motley group of failures who live in Amaranth's dark world, Fargo is ready to confront Amaranth's eyes and seek out his own answers. Amaranth, at this point, explains that Fargo has nothing to fear from the eyes. Having once heeded the voice, Fargo gained for his own eyes the ability to see clearly and truthfully. In his dream, he has sought only reaffirmation of the decision of his youth, and he is free to leave his dream(as the others are not). Amaranth declares:

You heard my voice,
And heeded it, not knowing whose voice it was.
Many have heard it, and have only covered
Their fears and indecisions and misgivings
More resolutely with their vanities;
And under such an unsubstantial armor
Against the slow rust of discovery,

Must choose rather to strive and starve and fail,
 And be forgotten, than to feel their names
 In my pursuing murmur--which is mine
 Because a mightier voice than you have heard
 Is over mine the master. To a few
 I murmur not in vain: they fly from here
 As you did, and I see no more of them
 Where, far from this miasma of delusion
 They know the best there is for man to know;
 They know the peace of reason. (pp. 1391-2)

Fargo is thus revealed as one of the few who move to true reason. Presumably he has, in the course of the poem, gone through a dream journey which corresponds to the process of reasoning out a perplexing problem. He has seen different answers, tested them, and found them lacking. His instinctive acceptance of the inner voice ten years earlier is now corroborated by an intellectual examination of alternatives, and Fargo has at last arrived at understanding.

Fargo's awakening back into the right world is joyful, but it is not without some nostalgia that he turns for the last time away from the wrong one:

Fargo, partly awake, with eyes half open,
 Saw sunlight and deliverance, and all through him
 Felt a slow gratitude that he was hearing
 Outside, somewhere, at last, the sound of living--
 Mixed with a quaint regret that he was seeing
 The last of Amaranth and Evensong. (p. 1393)

That Evensong's name concludes the poem indicates that Fargo retains a fascination for the other life he could have lived. It is, of course, a path not taken, as Fargo now

clearly understands. His doubt resolved, he faces his life as pump-maker grateful and renewed.

The effect of this conclusion no doubt involves for the reader some sense of relief that the various threats posed to Fargo's mental well-being have been dissolved. The destructive consequences of looking into Amaranth's eyes pose a serious psychological threat, even within a dream. The sequence of effects building to the conclusion, however, suggests that Fargo is in no really painful situation. The humorous or ironic attitudes of Fargo's dream characters lighten the threats of the dream world posed by the grave-diggers, Ipswich's drink, or Amaranth's eyes. A great part of the pleasure in such a narrative form as this derives from perceiving the succession of arguments which the characters expound and noting their relevance to the protagonist's problem.

Fargo has undergone a completed change at the poem's conclusion. His understanding of his vocation has been developed; he has learned enough about the choice he once instinctively made to alter significantly his feelings about that choice. Looking within himself, he has made a discovery which removes the ignorance which caused him to doubt. The plot of discovery is here organized by the thought of the protagonist, as action and character are subordinated to the dream reflections of Fargo.

The three analyses of this chapter have presented

Lancelot, Matthias at the Door, and Amaranth as narrative poems organized to produce three distinct narrative forms. Lancelot has been called a plot of action; Matthias at the Door, a plot of character; and Amaranth, a plot of thought. This is to say that the form of each poem is the result of a significantly different intent on the part of the author, and that the parts of each poem have been arranged in significantly different patterns in order to fulfill that intent. The reader's involvement in Lancelot is with the progress of a completed change in the situation of the protagonist. In Matthias at the Door, the reader's concern is made to center in the spiritual education of the protagonist. The reader's fullest attention in Amaranth is forced by patterns of emphasis to fall upon extended passages of non-dramatic thought which help the protagonist to understand and renew a choice made years before.

Although the forms may be clearly distinguished among the poems; it is also clear that these three poems by E. A. Robinson share many characteristics. The most important similarity is one central to the final effects of the separate works. The conflicts in which the protagonists are involved are different, but in each case the conclusion finds the protagonist gaining in his sense of personal responsibility. In each case, some kind of learning process has been completed. Lancelot accepts the dictates of a powerful inner voice, and so does Matthias (Garth's

voice), and so does Fargo(Amaranth's voice). The conclusions of the three poems suggest that each protagonist has come to terms with himself, has gained somehow in insight. The sympathy that the reader is made to feel for each man is largely due to the man's potential for such insight(which the narrator indicates early in each poem) and the implied promise that it will be realized.

In this context, the recurring images of sight or vision which these three poems share are appropriate. The darkness which traps Lancelot in Camelot, the dark door which haunts Matthias, and the dark wharves which tempt Fargo are all suggestive of forces which impede the learning process for these men. When Lancelot rides out to find his Light, Matthias strides upward out of darkness into light, or Fargo awakens to his sun-lit room, the impeding forces have in each case been removed. It is also significant that each man must metaphorically rebuild from wreckage. Lancelot advances over a collapsing kingdom; Matthias plans to rebuild his crumbled tower; and Fargo starts a new life, having destroyed the work of the old one.

In each poem, symbolic settings are used to indicate the progress of the protagonist's change; and in each, minor characters are used structurally as aids to knowledge for the protagonists. The thematic content of each poem is to some extent involved with the problem of human

communication, man to man, man to himself. The difficulties and weaknesses of spoken language are mentioned again and again. The "word" is difficult and deceiving; learning to cope with language is a problem for each protagonist.

These similarities among the three poems suggest that Robinson was characteristically concerned with certain basic learning processes with which men must cope. They suggest as well that certain techniques in image, metaphor, setting, and characterization were found to be especially appropriate for presenting those processes. Such similarities should not, however, be taken as evidence of Robinson's "limited scope." If nothing else, the analyses of this chapter should have suggested the variety of narrative forms with which E. A. Robinson experimented. In the chapter which follows, the remaining nine narrative poems will be discussed with the aim of revealing further the variety of effects which Robinson utilized.

CHAPTER III: FOOTNOTES

¹See Appendix I, p. 265.

²See SL, p. 112.

³Of 2782 lines, 1995 are the speeches of characters, about 72%. Only in section III, when Lancelot is alone in the garden, and in section IX, when Lancelot rides alone to and from Almsbury, are the dialogue and narration balanced. The following breakdown indicates the lines given to dialogue, then the lines given to narrative commentary: I, 175--44; II, 259--95; III, 66--64; IV, 189--33; V, 196--78; VI, 280--75; VII, 399--125; VIII, 207--50; and IX, 224--223.

⁴Lancelot speaks 623 lines; Guinevere, 603. Gawaine has 372 lines. It is Lancelot, however, on whom the narrative commentary usually centers.

⁵Edwin Arlington Robinson, Collected Poems (New York, 1961), p. 365. All quotations from Robinson's poetry are taken from this edition. Succeeding page references will be placed within the text.

⁶For example, the passage in which Lancelot and Guinevere first are introduced in the garden (pp. 371-75), the passage in which Lancelot debates leaving Camelot immediately (pp. 382-86), and the passage in which Lancelot's final state of mind is suggested at Almsbury (pp. 446-49). In these passages, the diction of itself may be said to produce strong pleasurable effects for the reader.

⁷Cestre, Introduction to Edwin Arlington Robinson, p. 27.

⁸Ibid., p. 89.

⁹Winters, Edwin Arlington Robinson, p. 85.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 71-85.

¹¹Barnard, Edwin Arlington Robinson: A Critical Study, p. 109.

¹²Winters, pp. 114-19.

¹³Emery Neff, Edwin Arlington Robinson (New York, 1948), p. 235.

¹⁴Barnard, pp. 286-87.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 287.

CHAPTER IV: DISTINCTIONS IN EFFECT

In the preceding chapter, three of E. A. Robinson's long poems were discussed in some detail, Lancelot, Matthias at the Door, and Amaranth, with the aim of demonstrating the variety of narrative forms the poet utilized. In this chapter, the focus of the study settles on the other nine long poems. For these it will be possible to suggest more briefly the organizing principles operative, since each falls into one of the patterns discussed in Chapter III. The primary concern now will be to analyze for each work whatever parts are emphasized most heavily--with the aim of describing the final effect which is attained.

The grouping by subject matter offers a convenient and symmetrical means of dealing with the poems (as discussed in the beginning of the previous chapter). It will be a simple matter in this chapter, having dealt with a work singly, to relate it then to other works which deal with similar characters and conflicts so as to show some broader movements, especially thematic movements, within the canon. For example, since the three Arthurian poems and the last poem Robinson published, King Jasper, all deal with characters who are tested against a background of social unrest and collapse, differences in narrative treatment and

especially in final effects can be seen to comment upon Robinson's development of such broad thematic concerns as the conflict between love and duty or the pressure of time on men. This is not to say that the formalistic intent of the analysis is to switch to a thematic one; the primary aim is to demonstrate the kinds of effects which Robinson produced in his twelve narrative poems. The thematic progressions can, however, suggest why these effects were chosen and can aid the reader in coming finally to a fuller view of the entire canon.

i.

Merlin appeared in 1917, the first of the long narratives to be published as a separate volume. Lancelot appeared in 1920, and Tristram, Robinson's first commercial success, was published in 1927. King Jasper, the last poem Robinson published, appeared in 1935 after his death. In this grouping, then, it is possible to test the narrative forms constructed by Robinson early and late in his career.

To paraphrase as briefly as possible, the action of Merlin covers the ten years leading up to the beginning of Camelot's great conflict, the battle between Lancelot and Arthur. Merlin, having set Arthur on the throne, had predicted to no avail the danger of making Guinevere queen. He leaves Camelot and his position as advisor to Arthur

for the sensual pleasures of Vivian and her garden at Broceliande. Torn, however, between feelings of duty to Arthur and love for Vivian and pressed by a newly-realized sense of his own mortality, Merlin deserts Vivian, returns briefly to Camelot, and ultimately abandons Arthur as well--recognizing that the destruction of the society is inevitable and that he has no longer the powers for either intellectual or sensual expression.

In the mechanics of its structure, Merlin is complicated. The reader involved in a first reading of the poem may find difficulty in establishing the chronology of incidents, for the time sequence is shuffled to produce a slow, deepening understanding of Merlin's motives. Beginning in medias res, the first two sections of the poem present conversations among various knights of Arthur's court, occurring at a time when Merlin has returned to Camelot after a ten year's absence with Vivian at Broceliande and shortly before the love affair of Guinevere and Lancelot is discovered. The third section continues at that time with a conversation between Arthur and Merlin which confirms the serious threats to Camelot about which the knights could only speculate.

This chronological development is broken just after the beginning of the fourth section, where Merlin bids Arthur good-bye and starts to return to Vivian. The narration jumps in space to Broceliande, where Vivian

anxiously awaits Merlin, and then immediately jumps in time to ten years before, when Merlin first came away from Camelot. The fourth and fifth sections then describe Merlin's first arrival at Broceliande and the beginnings of his love affair, and progress chronologically across the ten years up to the moment Arthur summons him back to Camelot for the conversation already described. The sixth section then resumes the original chronology and presents Merlin's second arrival at Broceliande and his growing disillusionment with the choice he has made. The seventh and final section has Merlin returning to Camelot again, shortly following in time-sequence the attempt to burn Guinevere at the stake and Lancelot's dramatic and destructive rescue of her.

The actual temporal sequence thus begins with Merlin's first arrival (and ten year stay) in Broceliande (IV, V), proceeds to his first return to Camelot (I, II, III), his second arrival and sojourn at Broceliande (VI), and his second and final return to Camelot (VII). Understanding why Robinson breaks the temporal sequence in this way offers important clues as to his central intent in the narrative. This arrangement effectively forces the reader's attention to Merlin and the internal conflict which he must resolve as Camelot falters. It does this by showing first the conflicting expectations which external forces press upon him. Only after the expectations of the knights and

of Arthur are established is the conflicting pull of a ten year passion then opposed. The resolution requires a choice by Merlin, and the conclusion of the poem mainly ignores the effects of that choice on Camelot and on Vivian and explores the effects of the choice on Merlin himself. The reader who tries to find the unity of the poem in 1) the destruction of Camelot or 2) the collapse of a love affair has little success.¹ The unity of the poem resides in the unfolding of Merlin's misfortune, and only by examining the structure in terms of Merlin's conflict does Robinson's organization of the poem come clear.

The conflicting claims to which Merlin must respond are reflected by the settings in which the action occurs. The poem begins on a hilltop overlooking Camelot, beside "Merlin's Rock." There are scenes following which occur within Sir Lamorak's abode and the king's castle. The sensually appealing garden at Broceliande is the setting for the remaining sections except the last, which occurs back at "Merlin's Rock," high over Camelot. The contrast here between the over-looking hilltop and the garden at Broceliande is a striking one; it underscores the nature of the forces between which Merlin is pulled.

The opening upon the rock elevation suggests the detachment which was once Merlin's. The elevation and the awe of Dagonet and Gawaine for Merlin combine to suggest the power of his old ability. When the garden is later

described in a fine descriptive passage, it indicates clearly the nature of the force which now impedes and destroys:

Merlin's intellectual detachment:

Gay birds

Were singing high to greet him all along
 A broad and sanded woodland avenue
 That led him on forever, so he thought,
 Until at last there was an end of it;
 And at the end there was a gate of iron,
 Wrought heavily and invidiously barred.
 He pulled a cord that rang somewhere a bell
 Of many echoes, and sat down to rest,
 Outside the keeper's house, upon a bench
 Of carven stone that might for centuries
 Have waited there in silence to receive him.
 The birds were singing still; leaves flashed and swung
 Before him in the sunlight; a soft breeze
 Made intermittent whisperings around him
 Of love and fate and danger, and faint waves
 Of many sweetly-stinging fragile odors
 Broke lightly as they touched him; cherry-boughs
 Above him snowed white petals down upon him,
 And under their slow falling Merlin smiled
 Contentedly, as one who contemplates
 No longer fear, confusion, or regret,
 May smile at ruin or at revelation.
 (pp. 260-1)

The passage suggests beautifully the world into which Merlin has ventured. Merlin has told Arthur that he is going "to find a living grave"(p. 260); but the timelessness of this "gate of iron," "bell of many echoes," and "bench of carven stone" combines with the highly sensual description of breeze, odor, and falling petal to reveal that Merlin's grave is more than simply living; it is an ecstasy of the senses which seemingly lies beyond the grasp of time. Indeed, when Merlin meets Vivian, he boasts of

agelessness and declares: "I have not lived in Time until today"(p. 265). This boast turns two edges; he who was ageless has assumed the mantle of mortality. Merlin shaves his beard for Vivian, an indication of his new role in time. He has cut off his ability to use time(to see into the future) and has become time's slave.

When Merlin returns to "Merlin's Rock" at the end of the poem, it is clear that he has rejected the sensuous life of Broceliande. Having entered time, however, he cannot stay on his hill; and so it is that the final setting of the poem reveals him descending into a cold dark night with his wily friend, Dagonet:

They arose,
And, saying nothing, found a groping way
Down through the gloom together. Fiercer now
The wind was like a flying animal
That beat the two of them incessantly
With icy wings, and bit them as they went.
The rock above them was an empty place
Where neither seer nor fool should view again
The stricken city. Colder blew the wind
Across the world, and on it heavier lay
The shadow and the burden of the night;
And there was darkness over Camelot.
(p. 314)

The passage shows Merlin leaving both worlds which have held him. It is a barren landscape; and though Merlin departs in hope,² the accompanying disappointment and disillusionment cannot be overlooked.

The final effect of the poem depends largely upon

what the reader is led to feel toward the protagonist, Merlin. As Edith Pipkin has pointed out, Robinson's Merlin is a less omniscient and supernatural prophet than legend has described.³ The reader is only gradually made to realize this, however. Merlin's character is first introduced by the comments of the knights about him; they are awed by his presence, bemused by both his original choice to leave the Court and his current choice to return. The respect implied by their attitudes is supported by the faith which Arthur puts in Merlin. For all these characters, he is an elevated man, better and more powerful than any others. The reader is thus led to expect great insight and moral clarity from Merlin. His interview with Arthur tends to weaken this expectation, but the sections at Broceliande explain his motivation and uncover his conflict.

Merlin's character slowly emerges as succeeding sections move closer to an inner view. He is a good man, brilliant in his ability to understand cause and effect and thus to analyze the past and to predict the future. Having foreseen the destruction of Camelot, Merlin has rejected his powers of intellect and has chosen to live sensually, in the present, with Vivian. As he lives in the immediacy of his passion, he begins to feel and understand the pressure of his mortality; and as he understands it, he more and more fluctuates between his personal, sensuous love and his old public, intellectual responsibility.

Vivian's demand on Merlin is straightforward. As her servant, Blaise, says, "she abhors/ Mortality in all its hues and emblems"(p. 268). Much aware of time and its threat of aging and death, Vivian feels she has escaped it with Merlin. Through love, she thinks to overcome the processes of time. She instructs Merlin:

Time's way with you and me
Is our way, in that we are out of Time
And out of tune with Time. We have this place,
And you must hold us in it or we die.
(pp. 280-81)

Merlin must, of course, fail her. In understanding that, he eventually comes to realize how much of his power he has given up by trying to join Vivian "out of Time."

The nature of Merlin's situation is difficult. The situation with Vivian is immediately pleasurable but threatened by time, and the situation with Camelot promises to be painful. The Court looks to him for aid; Vivian looks to him for assurance. Everyone expects answers of him, and because Merlin is to a degree responsible for all of the occurrences, he is torn between two worlds. He has not created Camelot, but he has made a king and he has foreseen disaster. By his presence at Broceliande, he has allowed Vivian to feel secure from time's destructive threat; here too he is responsible. The conflicting demands upon him are intensified because Merlin, having opted for the present, has come to know the inevitability

of death and thus to see that no satisfactory answer can be made to either Arthur or to Vivian. The irony of this is not lost on Merlin:

He wondered, when she was away from him,
If his avenging injured intellect
Might shine with Arthur's kingdom a twin mirror,
Fate's plaything, for new ages without eyes
To see therein themselves and their declension.
(p. 285)

Merlin's recognition of his helplessness before the force of mortality comes after Vivian has angrily accused him of giving up on their love:

A melancholy wave of revelation
Broke over Merlin like a rising sea,
Long viewed unwillingly and long denied.
He saw what he had seen, but would not feel,
Till now the bitterness of what he felt
Was in his throat, and all the coldness of it
Was on him and around him like a flood ...

.....
But now he knew that his cold angel's name
Was Change, and that a mightier will than his
Or Vivian's had ordained that he be there.
(p. 291)

Seeing that he has been caught up in the flow of time and change, Merlin knows himself to be an aging man. The recognition is a harsh one, and it leads to his retreat from Broceliande and back to "Merlin's Rock":

I see the light,
But I shall fall before I come to it;
For I am old, I was young yesterday.
Time's hand that I have held away so long
Grips hard now on my shoulder. Time has won.
(p. 295)

So it is that Merlin undergoes a considerable change of fortune. He gives up his lover. He becomes vulnerable to time and mortality. Finally, at his Rock, he renounces all of the demands made upon him, having discovered that he cannot answer them satisfactorily. Having left Vivian, he arrives at Camelot in time to see its destruction begin. Breaking free of all responsibilities except what he owes to his own integrity as a moral human being, Merlin is left at the end with only his newly-discovered vulnerability. He has begun to grow a "silver beard," and his "faded eyes" hold "a mystic and intrinsic peace" (p. 304). He has gained in self-knowledge, but he is an old and a defeated man.

There are several complications in the action which impede Merlin's final response. The other characters in the work function to place barriers in Merlin's path. In Dagonet's masked wisdom, Gawaine's flippancy, Arthur's helplessness, or Vivian's grasping love, Merlin is faced with difficult situations which require his old timeless power, a power once put aside and now lost. Their expectations complicate his life; their demands reveal his new weaknesses to him. His final renunciation in effect sweeps all of these complications aside. Merlin recognizes that no answer can be given, that each man ultimately wanders alone. That discovery resolves all conflict in his mind and opens the way to personal freedom.

Merlin declares:

I shall not go back.
We pay for going back; and all we get
Is one more needless ounce of weary wisdom
To bring away with us. (p. 311)

On this note, he and Dagonet abandon the hill, and Camelot.

The final situation, involving as it does the simultaneous dissolution of love affair and kingdom, presents a painful defeat and loss for the protagonist. The plot, organized by action, presents the progress of Merlin's loss of fortune. The reader, sympathetic to this elevated figure of high moral integrity, appreciates the depth and validity of his final insight, but Merlin's new knowledge is of a somber nature, and the final effect of the poem is one of pathos. Merlin is at end a broken and pathetic figure, descending into darkness.

Tristram, the last of Robinson's Arthurian poems, was published ten years after Merlin, seven after Lancelot, and incorporates shock into its effect as well as pity. The myth requires the death of the protagonist, but by altering the circumstances and the agent of the killing Robinson alters considerably the effect of the story.⁴ The action of Tristram covers a span of several years. Tristram, having casually left behind in Brittany the white Isolt, who thinks to marry him, has a series of adventures which culminate in a great disappointment in love. On the day of King Mark's wedding to the dark

Isolt, he waits in anguish outside the palace while the ceremony and celebration continue inside. By narrative flashback, and by the comments of the characters sent out to ask him inside, the motive for his anguish is established. Out of an earlier contempt, Tristram and the dark Isolt of Ireland have grown too late into a passionate love. Fetched by Tristram to marry his uncle, Mark, the dark Isolt goes too far to back out, and the political marriage is consummated--to Tristram's horror.

On her marriage day, Tristram is seen by the king's spy, Andred, embracing the new queen. Tristram confronts Mark, threatens him, and is banned from Cornwall on threat of death. Tristram wanders in despair, is rescued by his friend, Gouvernail, and eventually is seduced by Arthur's sister, Morgan. Breaking out of that trap, he seeks a new life in Brittany, saves the country in battle, and comes to marry the patient white Isolt, more from feelings of pity than passion. Called away to Camelot, Tristram is manipulated into a summer's idyll at Joyous Gard with his only real passion, Isolt of Ireland. The joy is short-lived, for she is kidnapped by Mark and returned to Cornwall, where her health fails and death approaches. Mark undergoes a change of heart and allows Tristram to come to her; but Andred, coached by the jealous Morgan, violates the lovers' embrace by stabbing and killing Tristram. Both lovers die, and the action ends by describing the sorrow

of Isolt of Brittany.

As the paraphrase suggests, the action is loaded with potentially fast-paced incidents; but Robinson chooses to slow the pace by describing most of the more active events through brief summary, either by the narrator or in the dialogue of the characters. The emphasis in Tristram is not so much on the external events in which Tristram is engaged as on the ultimate effects of those events. In this longest of his narrative poems,⁵ Robinson arranges the parts to show the pressures of events on the protagonist and to uncover his weak, indecisive moral character. The dialogues between the lovers are long and complex, the descriptions of Tristram's breakdowns are detailed studies in self-centered anguish, and the descriptive passages of the white Isolt are carefully placed to make maximum contrast clear to the reader.

For the structure of the poem, the most significant consideration is probably the manner in which Robinson chose to begin and end it. In each case the focus is on the white Isolt. The poem begins:

Isolt of the white hands, in Brittany,
 Could see no longer northward anywhere
 A picture more alive or less familiar
 Than a blank ocean and the same white birds
 Flying, and always flying, and still flying,
 Yet never bringing any news of him
 That she remembered, who had sailed away
 The spring before--saying he would come back,
 Although not saying when. (p. 595)

From these images which set Isolt's patient wait for Tristram, the first part of the poem develops fully her character and her expectations. Only secondarily does the section begin to suggest what the reader is to expect of the protagonist, Tristram.

As the poem ends, Isolt of Brittany is again described:

Isolt of the white hands,
Isolt with her gray eyes and her white face,
Still gazed across the water to the north
But not now for a ship.

.....

He had been all,
And would be always all there was for her,
And he had not come back to her alive,
Not even to go again. It was like that
For women, sometimes, and might be so too often
For women like her. She hoped there were not many
Of them, or many of them to be, not knowing
More about that than about waves and foam,
And white birds everywhere, flying, and flying!
Alone, with her white face and her gray eyes,
She watched them there till even her thoughts were white,
And there was nothing alive but white birds flying,
Flying, and always flying, and still flying,
And the white sunlight flashing on the sea.
(pp. 728-29)

Isolt gazes still patiently to the north. Lines and phrases are repeated to give a sense of cyclic timelessness to the action which has occurred. This structural framing is an important factor in setting the reader's attitude toward Tristram.

In the arrangement of the parts, Robinson's aim seems to have been to build structurally a balanced contrast between the two Isolts and to develop the character

and conflict of Tristram against the background of the two women and the two kinds of love they embody. Thus sections I and X present the qualities of the white Isolt's lonely, loving devotion related to the seaside landscape of a peaceful Brittany. The two central sections, V and VI, deal with her marriage to Tristram and her grave fear, soon realized, that he will leave her. Framed by these parts, sections II, III, and IV and sections VII, VIII, and IX present the two halves of Tristram's passionate love for the dark Isolt, related primarily to the rough seaside terrain of Mark's castle in Cornwall. It is in these six turbulent sections that most of the complications, turnings, and climaxes of the action occur. The result for the reader is a strong sense of contrast, reinforced by setting, character, incident, and structure. This structure assures that though the final effect of the work is based primarily in the loss of fortune experienced by Tristram, that effect will be altered somewhat by the attitude of the white Isolt which actually concludes the action.

Tristram's desire, of course, is evident from the beginning of the second section: he desires the dark Isolt with a burning passion. Against the patient calm of the passages describing the white Isolt may be contrasted the narrator's description of Tristram and Isolt of Ireland meeting on her wedding day:

Isolt of Ireland,
 With all her dark young majesty unshaken
 By grief and shame and fear that made her shake
 Till to go further would have been to fall,
 Came nearer still to him and still said nothing,
 Till terror born of passion became passion
 Reborn of terror while his lips and hers
 Put speech out like a flame put out by fire.
 (p. 613)

The fiery desire evident here is the motivating factor in Tristram's life. All of his actions are conditioned by his desire for and jealousy of Isolt of Ireland.

The complicating forces which impede that desire and work to his destruction are numerous and fast multiplying. His own inability to speak out has allowed Isolt's marriage to Mark. His fear of casting off all political obligation and simply taking her away forces him to an emotional impasse. Physical jealousy prevents him from accepting Isolt's reasoned comment that Mark is old and time is on their side. His despair is deepened when Mark discovers his illicit love and banishes him. His physical breakdown and later angry acquiescence to Morgan's temptation add more complicating problems to his ever fulfilling his desire. By the end of the fourth section, his chances of seeing the dark Isolt again are at their worst. But his seduction by Morgan, which marks the point at which his moral estate is at its ebb, also contains in it the impetus to turn the course of the action. Morgan's enmity, added to her connections with

Arthur's powerful court, assure that eventually Tristram gets his chance to court disaster.

At this point in the action, the relatively calm two year period passes in Brittany. Tristram's desire is removed even more from the expectation of happy fulfillment when he marries the white Isolt out of pity for her patience and trust. Once Gawaine comes to Brittany to fetch Tristram to Camelot, and brings with him the news that Mark is out of circulation for the nonce, the complications begin to unravel for Tristram. It becomes probable that he will gain his desire, as his wife recognizes; and because the remaining complications are subtle ones veiled in Margan's duplicity, the probability also emerges that Tristram's seeming victory will carry with it sad consequences.

Tristram's first emotional triumph occurs when he is given a summer of love with the dark Isolt at Joyous Gard. That triumph is reversed when she is taken away by Mark; and Tristram, for the second time, collapses in despair. But Mark's presence as impeding force is suddenly removed by his recognition of the real power of their love. Tristram again triumphs as he is reunited with Isolt, and even her impending death does not detract from the joy they both express. It is indeed a grand and inevitable passion. Its sudden termination by Andred's knife, however, marks the necessary result of Tristram's foolish

weaknesses earlier in the poem.

In the incidents which make up this action, it is evident that Tristram is mostly moved by forces external to himself. What changes he undergoes (the loss of his life, the fulfillment of his desire) are, to be sure, a result of his blinding passion; but he does not act without the impetus of external pressure. He is unable to declare or to defend his love. When he is banished, his inclination is to die; but he is rescued by Gouvernail. He lacks the will to refuse Morgan's blandishments and gives in to her desire. In the same way, he bends beneath Isolt of Brittany's devotion and marries her though he loves another woman passionately. His idyll at Joyous Gard is arranged by Arthur, Lancelot, and Guinevere. He collapses in despair when Mark reappears; only Morgan's note spurs him to new hope. His final scene with Isolt of Ireland is contingent on Mark's change of heart; he is "allowed" to visit the king's wife. In all, his weak indecision concerning courses of action and his fainting despair whenever events work against him show him to be somewhat morally deficient. Elevated by his position as prince and powerful warrior, he is deflated by his emotional nature. Though he is not evil, his character is not a fully admirable one.

The most important factor in lessening the reader's sympathy for Tristram is the way in which he treats the white Isolt. Already established as an innocent, loving

figure, Isolt's power to revitalize Tristram is expected. He returns to Brittany for just that reason. Tristram remarks to Gouvernail:

My memory sees a land where there is peace,
And a good king whose world is in his kingdom
And in his quaint possession of a child
Whose innocence may teach me to be wise
Till I be strong again. (p. 643)

Once having been made "strong again," however, Tristram lingers by the white Isolt. The motive for his marriage is expressed by the narrator's voice:

Once by the shore
They lingered while a summer sun went down
Beyond the shining sea; and it was then
That sorrow's witchcraft, long at work in him,
Made pity out of sorrow, and of pity
Made the pale wine of love that is not love,
Yet steals from love a name. (p. 648)

Tristram's motivation is not unnatural or cruel, but the eventual effect upon Isolt assures a lessening of sympathy in the reader's feeling for Tristram. When he leaves her, Isolt of Brittany is somewhat bitter; her cry, poignant:

Sometimes I wish that heaven had let you have her,
And given me back all that was left of you,
To teach and heal. I might be sure of that ...
(p. 668)

Her unhappiness must complicate the reader's reaction when Tristram at last fulfills his great desire. At the

least, it has the effect of emphasizing his selfishness.

Tristram's love is illicit, and his disregard for the political consequences of his actions is foolish. He is responsible for his situation, and he makes most of the complications himself, including those which lead to his death. This view of Tristram suggests that the succession of emotional effects of the poem will not be centered in the reader's strong sympathy for him. The structure, in fact, works to an opposite emotional involvement by placing the delightful Isolt of Brittany first and last. The reader's natural sympathy for her patient faith in Tristram undercuts any strong sympathy for his cause. Although the intensity of his passion demands some emotional commitment by the reader, it is not possible for the reader to accept with unmixed relief his consummations of love.

Whatever sympathy the reader feels for Tristram must grow out of his attempt to transcend time through the power of love. The overhanging threat of time is introduced early in the poem, during Tristram and the dark Isolt's first meeting. The narrator comments:

Time was aware of them,
And would beat soon upon his empty bell
Release from such a fettered ecstasy
As fate would not endure. But until then
There was no room for time between their souls
And bodies, or between their silences ...

(pp. 613-14)

This "no room for time" is reinforced later by Isolt of Ireland's comment when the two are at last brought together at Joyous Gard:

But when two loves like ours
Wear down the wall of time dividing them,
Two oceans come together and flow over
Time and his evil work. (p. 625)

To avoid time becomes the aim of both lovers. They see in their passion a means of transcendence.

Tristram apparently has a keen sense of his mortality. Even as his great desire is fulfilled at Joyous Gard, he feels a chilling sense of how short a time he will be allowed with Isolt of Ireland:

Like a wild wine her love
Went singing through him and all over him;
And like a warning her warm loveliness
Told him how far away it would all be
When it was warm no longer. (p. 682)

In the face of this recognition of transience, Tristram seeks meaning in moments of intense living. In the long dialogue which he and the dark Isolt continue, he advances a philosophy in a speech which is the keynote of the poem:

Time is not life. For many, and many more,
Living is mostly for a time not dying--
But not for me. For me, a few more years
Of shows and slaughters, or the tinsel seat
Of a small throne, would not be life. Whatever
It is that fills life high and full, till fate
Itself may do no more, it is not time.
Years are not life. (p. 685)

Upon this philosophy must rest Tristram's claim to transcendence in his eventual death and his justification for abandoning his wife for a summer of passion. To fill life "high and full" with love is to escape Time. At the end, just before his death, Tristram claims:

Love, it was far from here
And far from England and this inchmeal world
That our wings lifted us to let us fly
Where time forgot us. He waited for us here,
But his wings were too old to follow us.
We shall not go so far away from here
Again, till we go farther. (p. 715-16)

Tristram thus claims victory in the intense living of his summer with the dark Isolt. His victory is not unblemished, for he has shirked responsibility for the white Isolt. Still he has, as he wished, escaped the "tinsel seat."

In spite of the moral weakness evident in many of Tristram's actions(or refusals to act), there is no doubt that he is repaid with misfortune more brutal and evil than he deserves. Given his philosophy("Years are not life.") and the antagonism he has aroused in Morgan, his death may be expected. The shocking suddenness of that death, however, is not expected. Tristram has involved himself in an action for which there can be no painless resolution, neither for himself nor for the other major characters. Softening the painful effects of the conclusion (horror for Tristram's sudden murder, pity for Isolt

of Brittany's bereavement) are the claims of transcendence by Tristram and the dark Isolt, and the seeming mature peace which has been attained by the white Isolt at the poem's conclusion. The timeless quality of that conclusion suggests interesting thematic lines which relate to each of Robinson's Arthurian poems.

A comparison of the final lines of Merlin, Lancelot,⁶ and Tristram suggests a thematic progression. The earliest poem, with Merlin and Dagonet realizing the end of an age and descending in gloom of sunset, ends in total darkness. Lancelot rides alone from Almsbury into darkness with the promise of light. And Tristram, with the protagonist dead and the focus on the stationary Isolt of Brittany, ends in blazing light. There is progression in imagery from total blackness, to black with impending light, to pure white sunlight; from movement downward in wind and shadow, to horizontal movement beneath stars, to flying upward over sea into blazing sun. This imagery suggests that perhaps an increasing optimism is intended in the three poems.

Thematically each poem is concerned with varying problems in love. Richard Crowder summarizes their themes respectively as 1) duty to state opposed to love, 2) obligation toward God opposed to earthly love, and 3) the duty of love.⁷ These themes are made more meaningful by the attitudes toward time which characters adopt within

each poem. Merlin tries to deny time and escape the fact of his mortality by burying himself in sensual love; and though he comes to realize his fault, he is old and tired and admits of defeat. Lancelot tries to delay time and hold on to Guinevere by postponement. He realizes his fault from the first but cannot overcome it; only the strength of Guinevere gives the promise of hope to his final suffering. Tristram tries to experience time in depth. His early anguish and realistic awareness of mortality lend increased vitality to his summer of love; his death is not a defeat but a spiritual victory.

It is interesting to note that the word "time" is used on some 350 occasions in the three poems, about once every forty lines. The word is used more frequently in each successive poem. Often it is used to indicate temporal intervals("the time remaining," "a-waste of time"). It is also used as a device of transition("for a long time," "many a time"). It is used in metaphor ("Time is a casket"), in personification("Time would have sung my reign," "Time has saved for him a flower"); and occasionally it is discussed directly as an abstract concept("Time is not life"). The emphasis is clear and heavy. The question is whether Robinson develops any coherent attitude toward the problem of time in these three Arthurian poems.

In Merlin, Robinson presents the dilemma of the

far-seeing prophet who attempts to renounce duty for love and finds himself spiritually defeated for his effort. Merlin had wished both to luxuriate in time and to escape time's inevitable erosion. He eventually recognizes that he has escaped nothing, that his duty to Arthur weighs upon him even though there is not and has never been any possibility of his saving the king. Too late Merlin recognizes that he himself is also subject to the laws of time and change.

For Lancelot, in the second poem, the problem is not the same. Lancelot is quick to admit the inevitability of time and change. For him the problem is slowing time down. Lancelot desires more time to consider courses of action, and his postponement of decisions leads him farther and farther from the Light he seeks. He desires not so much to deny time as to delay time, but he is not successful and his procrastination contributes to the fall of Arthur's kingdom. At the end of the poem, Lancelot has begun to emerge from the passivity to which his procrastination has led him. The pain of love's loss has led Guinevere to a full understanding of time's limits and time's irrevocability. After speaking to her, Lancelot too is certain that mortality is good, is necessary. Both of them accept their position in time's scheme; and in their turning toward the hope of spiritual fulfillment, they give promise of an impending

dawn for man.

Finally, Tristram's attitudes toward time present still another approach. Having felt himself the plaything of time, Tristram changes that attitude quickly when he is reunited with the dark Isolt at Joyous Gard. Of their love he thinks:

...by time no more
Divided until time for them should cease.
They were not made for time as others were,
And time therefore would not be long for them ...
(p. 675)

Like Lancelot, Tristram is much aware of time's speedy departure; but his regret is only for moments of love lost. Love does not deny time for him; neither does it delay time. Rather love raises man to ecstatic heights within time.⁸ In his positive approach to love, Tristram succeeds where Merlin and Lancelot failed, that is, in realizing the quality of love fully and completely.

Tristram freely accepts his love as the center of his existence, but he realizes its transience. The fact of threatening mortality is dreadful to him, but at the same time it makes the present more tender. Tristram is able to formulate his understanding of time, to express directly the creed on which his life is founded in the "Time is not life" speech. Even his claim of flight from time just before his death is immediately balanced by the admission of time's patient and ancient

presence. The feelings of the dark Isolt complement those of Tristram. Just before they die, she declares her feeling:

My cup was running over; and having had all
That one life holds of Joy, and in one summer,
Why should I be a miser crying to God
For more? (p. 712)

So it is that Tristram shortly dies in the arms of Isolt of Ireland, his life fulfilled and completed in love's embrace.

In the three poems, Robinson is exploring the possibility of transcending time as that possibility relates to sexual love. The idea emerges that one who seeks to escape time through love is doomed, not simply to inevitable failure, but to the loss of love as well. Only those who recognize time and utilize time to heighten the experience of love emerge victorious. It is appropriate that the final images of Tristram center on the bereft Isolt of Brittany, whose love has been betrayed and removed from time. In these calm verses, it is clear that the white Isolt has realized her own particular peace and that this peace is closely related to Tristram's triumph. No longer a child, Isolt has become a mature, wise woman--one who can remark:

I am not one
Who must have everything, yet I must have
My dreams if I must live, for they are mine.

Wisdom is not one word and then another
 Till words are like dry leaves under a tree;
 Wisdom is like a dawn that comes up slowly
 Out of an unknown ocean. (pp. 726-27)

Her patient acceptance is the result of her insight into Tristram's powerful love for the dark Isolt. She recognizes Tristram's love (which the dark Isolt called an ocean) as transcendent and is thus able to share in his triumph, even to the extent of accepting Isolt of Ireland:

It was not earth in him that burned
 Itself to death; and she that died for him
 Must have been more than earth. (p. 727)

In the passages which introduce the poem, the white Isolt is sitting waiting for Tristram by a sea which is blank and unsympathetic. By the end of the poem she is identified with the sea, traditional symbol of eternity--a sea which waits calmly beneath the flying birds.⁹ Tristram and Isolt of Ireland had identified themselves as birds who had flown momentarily beyond the reach of Time, and this final image of birds circling over sea recalls that identification. The poem has taken a circular motion, but much change has occurred. Isolt of Brittany is now outwardly as she was earlier, patiently waiting beside the sea. But she has changed. She has grown because of her love for Tristram. Like the lives of Arthur, Merlin, and Lancelot, Tristram's life is a mirror;

and its reflection has given Isolt insight into her own life and love, has enabled her to accept the inevitable and to endure.

The element of sexual love which occurs in each of the Arthurian poems is not present to any great extent in King Jasper, but that poem too studies the reactions of a man who is pressed by time. The poem utilizes in its structure neither the temporal complexity of Merlin nor the proliferation of complicating incidents built up in Tristram. King Jasper is direct in chronology and simple in structure. The action, briefly paraphrased, involves the paralleled destructions of a kingdom and a man.

Jasper, having built a great power structure upon the bones of a brilliant inventor and personal friend, Hebron, finds as he ages that his kingdom is threatened by mysterious, unspecified forces. Faced in his personal life with family conflicts when his rebellious son and heir brings home a fragile common-law wife, Jasper is further troubled by sudden feelings of guilt which his new daughter-in-law, Zoë, somehow imposes upon him. He feels powerfully attracted to the girl, and she to him, but his guilt culminates in an awesome dream which brings on a heart attack. Recuperating slowly, he is unable to reconcile his wife, Honoria, to Zoë, nor is he able to fend off the revenge plot hatched by Hebron's angry son. Eventually Jasper must witness his wife's suicide and

his kingdom's destruction before a second heart attack takes his own life. Nor does the destruction cease there. Young Hebron murders Jasper's son and is in turn killed by Zoë, who emerges from the collapsing castle the only character left alive at the poem's conclusion.

The six part structure develops this action with heavy reliance upon dialogue. The motivation which has led the characters to their crisis is drawn out gradually as they talk to one another and try vaguely to express fears which oppress them. Section I has Jasper and Honoria discussing their mutual apprehension--to set the basic situation and establish an atmosphere of tense fearfulness. Section II introduces the complicating factor of Zoë, and she speaks at length of her feelings about Jasper's kingdom. Section III is made up of Jasper's lengthy dream and allows for the introduction of the dead Hebron, who speaks out his accusations, clarifying the reasons for Jasper's guilt. This section ends with the minor climax of Jasper's heart attack, foreshadowing the eventual conclusion.

Section IV has the sick Jasper confront in turn Honoria, young Hebron, and Zoë as he hopelessly attempts to reverse the decay of his world at the same time that he is learning why that decay is inevitable. Section V begins the collapse, as Jasper's arguments force his wife to suicide. Section VI then presents in rapid sequence

the fiery destruction of the characters and the kingdom.

Zoë, of course, is the catalyst for the action. She disrupts the family, disturbs and enlightens King Jasper, and eventually destroys his murderer. For Jasper she poses the threat of self-knowledge, for she awakens in him a guilt he has long pushed out of his mind. His early feeling for her is expressed by the narrative voice:

His eyes were tethered and held invincibly
By those eyes of a woman--laughing eyes,
Of which he was afraid. The fears he felt
Were not the tinglings of inveiglement;
They were unsought inept awakenings
Of truth he long had fancied was asleep,
Knowing truth never sleeps. (pp. 1412-13)

Zoë soon brings Jasper to the recollection of his past injustice, as this passage suggests she will. She is a girl wise far beyond her years, and she does not hesitate to express what she sees to be true. So it is that as Jasper becomes aware of his guilt and fear, she articulates these emotions for him. Her comments about time are especially interesting in view of Robinson's use of that concept in previous poems. She tells Jasper:

You were afraid of time, and you still fear it.
Is it worth fearing, when so little is left?
I'm not afraid of it. I'm only incensed
With destiny somewhat, and sorry for man
Always; and for the curse of time on man
That shrieks to him unheard from history.
(p. 1455)

By pointing out the uselessness of fearing time and change, Zoë helps Jasper to accept the burden which gradually increases on his shoulders as the action progresses.

Eventually Zoë states explicitly the philosophy which must console Jasper. It is a philosophy often echoed in Robinson's poetry, most notably in "The Man Against the Sky." Here, Zoë expresses it:

No God,
 No Law, no Purpose, could have hatched for sport
 Out of warm water and slime, a war for life
 That was unnecessary, and far better
 Never had been--if man, as we behold him,
 Is all it means. Father, if I were you,
 I should not think too vigorously today
 Of what it means. Your doing it only shows
 That even a king, when he is vexed and worn,
 Is a bit fearful of his imperfections.
 You cannot have the past, and cannot want it;
 You must have what's to be, and cannot help it.
 If it is all, there's nothing to be feared;
 If it is nothing, it is not worth fearing.
 (p. 1471)

There is no final answer given here--only hopeful acceptance of the inevitable. Man's limits of knowledge are painful but clear. Jasper's life and power are ending; the wisdom of Zoë's philosophy proves to console him in his loss.

Actually, Jasper recognizes soon after Zoë's arrival that his prospects are not good. Following their first conversation and just preceeding the painful dream which leads to his heart attack, Jasper's attitude is described by the narrator:

Like one who for the first time in his life
 Knows that he is alone, the king sat watching,
 And seeing not what they were, nor why they were,
 The few last sparks of a forgotten fire.
 They died; and there was nothing but white ashes,
 And the king watching them. When he stood up,
 And stretched himself erect and absolute,
 A clock struck two. The lighted room was cold,
 Too large, and empty; and the king was cold.
 He shivered as he moved himself away
 To the dim-lighted hall, and at the door
 He stayed--as if that large and lighted room
 That was there now might not be there tomorrow.
The Old Man of the Sea, King Jasper said,
Unheard; and like a man who was afraid
 To be alone, he put out the last light.
 (pp. 1418-19)

The setting and stance nicely depict the king's situation and suggest the fear which possesses him. The dark hour, the fading fire, and the cold room indicate the depth of Jasper's spirit. The Old Man of the Sea has already been associated with Hebron, the inventor whom Jasper exploited. Jasper's power is ending and he is to be left alone with his guilt.

It is interesting to compare with the passage describing the fearful king, the passage which concludes the poem. As Zoë alone climbs out of the burning kingdom, she pauses to look back, as Jasper did in the earlier passage. The narrator describes:

More than a house
 Was burning; and far below her more than chimneys
 Were falling:.... Now she could rest, and she could see
 Two fires at once that were a kingdom burning.
 In one of them there was the king himself,
 The prince, and their destroyer. In the other,
 With chimneys falling on him while he burned,

There was a dragon dying.... Nothing alive
 Was left of Jasper's kingdom. There was only
 Zoë. There was only Zoë--alone. (p. 1488)

The dragon, said by young Jasper to inhabit his father's kingdom, is slain; and it is Zoë who emerges alone. Having struck the blaze by her presence, she continues on her way, much like Merlin, or Lancelot, or Isolt of Brittany.

Zoë has, however, done more than simply strike the blaze. She has helped Jasper to a new knowledge. The painfulness of his loss is mitigated by his understanding of the necessity of change. Near the climax of the action, Jasper's thought is expressed by the narrator:

King Jasper sighed
 For gratitude to Zoë that she had come
 So far to tell him the best way to learn
 That his indomitable reign was ending.
 Without her presence, and without the wound
 Of his awakening that her knife had made,
 Approaching hours would be enormities
 Of a slow and unendurable dissolution
 That would be fire to feel and death to know.

.....
 In his heart there was a wound of revelation...

.....
 In his fear there was a numbness of defiance,
 Like a spell to foil an onslaught of illusion;
 In his pride there was a calm and overwhelming
 Recognition of irrecocable changes. (p. 1458)

Like Merlin, Jasper has come to know and accept the principle of change in the universe. It is this discovery and acceptance by Jasper that redeems his moral character and mitigates the horror of his destruction.

From the first section of the poem, the reader is led to expect the collapse of Jasper's kingdom. The atmosphere is tense and the problems, as he fears they will, begin immediately to multiply. Honoria's adamant refusals to bend from her dislike of Zoë, young Jasper's flippant refusals to take his father seriously, and the unpleasant details of how Jasper gained his power all complicate the action and advance the prospect for an unhappy resolution. The expectation that Zoë and young Jasper may survive to build a wiser kingdom is quashed by Zoë's repeated comment that she must go her way alone in the end. The action thus takes Jasper undeviatingly downward, a movement relieved only by the partial understanding Zoë is able to give him concerning the necessity of his loss. Beginning with a situation of discontent in family and kingdom, the middle develops the reasons for the unrest, and the end shows how the conflicts end in disaster.

The poem is consciously allegorical,¹⁰ but it seems to me that the reader's primary interest centers not in the allegory so much as the working out of the conflicts and the gradual revelation of motivation. The openly symbolic value of the characters does cut into their reality as individuals somewhat and hinders complete development. The dialogue occasionally has them speaking as ideas rather than as emotionally involved human beings.¹¹

For this reason the pathos which is the final effect is somewhat muted, less powerful and complete than it might have been.

As protagonist, Jasper's change involves a drastic loss of fortune, culminating in his unpleasant death. This loss is triggered by his own previous actions, his mistaken greed for power which led him to act unjustly to his close friend and partner. That Jasper comes to understand his error and the retaliation it invites speaks favorably for his character, however. Shown to the reader only as an aging king, he appears to react with warmth and understanding to the fears of others. For this reason he gains the reader's tentative sympathy in the early parts of the poem. It is only as his earlier error is brought forward and accusations are advanced that Jasper's ugly side is seen. The moral weakness implied is mitigated, however, by Jasper's suffering and guilt. Because he resists panic, struggles with his conscience, and learns a bit about love and need, he ultimately earns the reader's sympathy.

The situations in which he is involved all bear painful consequences for him. The family dissension, the revenge plot, and the personal struggle with guilt all are the result of an error of his youth for which, as he finally recognizes, he must pay with all he has ever owned or loved. The final effect of this plot of

misfortune is one of pity. Jasper suffers more than he deserves to suffer; and even though the reader may be detached from full pity by displeasure at Jasper's earlier cruelty, he will be involved in some kind of sympathetic horror at the blood-bath which concludes the action. The allegorical stances of the characters, as suggested above, undercut somewhat the amount of sympathetic involvement possible, but the structure is in final analysis not a structure of ideas but of human conflicts and complications.

In Merlin, Tristram, and King Jasper, as in Lancelot, the protagonist loses something. All four lose political power; Merlin and Lancelot lose lovers as well; Tristram and Jasper lose their lives. Each poem, however, finally concludes with an affirmation of human continuity. Merlin descends the hill a wiser man. Lancelot turns toward the Light. Isolt of Brittany continues patiently by the sea, and the lonely Zoë hastens away from destruction. Each protagonist, in the process of loss, has gained an inner clarity. Merlin has gained self-knowledge; Lancelot, freedom to seek; Tristram, transcendence in love; and Jasper, understanding and acceptance of his own guilt.

It is interesting to note, however, that in the successive poems each protagonist is less admirable to the reader than those that precede him. Successively,

each protagonist is more brutal toward others, more selfish, and, at the same time, more moved by forces external to himself. Merlin aims always to do the good, to fulfill the expectations of others. Lancelot, whose impulse is to be cruel to Guinevere, is hard pressed to maintain his facade of kindness. Tristram makes little show of concern for others; he uses women and is manipulated by forces beyond his control. And Jasper has built his kingdom on the body of a friend. By the end of his poem, he is totally dependent on others, symbolically stated by his confinement to a wheelchair.

The progression is from a good man(Merlin) to a passive man(Lancelot) to a weak man(Tristram) to a partially reformed villain(Jasper). Each successive protagonist is less worthy of the reader's pity and so the effect of pity for misfortune is less in each story. At the same time the nature of the misfortune becomes consecutively more final and brutal. The tendency seems to have been to move from effects of pure pathos toward effects verging on horror. Whatever positive results are realized in the face of the misfortune are settled in the later poems on characters who are bystanders to the central conflict(the white Isolt and Zoë). For the protagonist, the resolutions are increasingly harsh.

ii.

In contrast to the poems discussed above, the set of poems dealing with love triangles in contemporary society move toward successively more hopeful, painless resolutions. Here, too, protagonists learn from their experiences; but in later poems the experiences are less and less painful, the resolutions thus more easily attained, the changes undergone less drastic. The poems in this subject matter grouping include Roman Bartholow(1923), The Glory of the Nightingales(1930), Matthias at the Door(1931), and Talifer (1933). Matthias at the Door was discussed in the third chapter as a poem organized to show the spiritual growing-up of a man as he stumblingly works out the problems of a love conflict. To a large degree, each of the other three deals with a similar situation, though all are not, like Matthias at the Door, organized by character. The poems are made distinct by their various structures and the effects to which the structures lead.

Roman Bartholow, exceeded in length only by Tristram in the Robinson canon, presents a situation much similar to that of Matthias at the Door. The relationships of four characters, three men and one woman, are presented in detail, the presentation being balanced between internal analyses by the narrator and long dialogues between the characters. A paraphrase reveals how much alike the two

poems are.

Penn-Raven arrives at the home of Bartholow just in time to revitalize Bartholow's unhappy life. Though Bartholow feels that his soul has been reborn by Penn-Raven's presence and advice, his wife, Gabrielle, resents the intrusion even as she admits its value. She feels left out, unable to comprehend what her husband has learned that so revives him. She and Penn-Raven begin a love affair, of which Gabrielle quickly tires. She finally admits her indiscretion to her husband, shocking his pride and destroying his friendship for Penn-Raven. He quarrels with Penn-Raven, and asks him to leave just as Gabrielle commits suicide. Shortly thereafter, Bartholow discusses his actions with a bookish friend named Umfraville and decides to leave his house and seek action in the world.

In the later poem, Matthias at the Door, Matthias undergoes a birth into more sensitive humanity as he sees his two friends and wife one by one commit suicide. In Roman Bartholow only the wife dies, but the one friend is alienated and the other left behind. And, like Matthias, Bartholow discovers much about himself as he undergoes loss and suffering. In spite of such similarities, Matthias at the Door is a much more fully realized poem. It is in the arrangement of parts and choices of emphases that the poems are distinct.

Roman Bartholow is divided into eight sections which

further divide into three parts. I, II, and III are short sections which present the occurrences of one spring morning, establish the countryside setting, and introduce the four characters and the situation in which they find themselves. Beginning in medias res, the narrative voice describes Bartholow's state of mind; his revitalized state is made clear. His friend Penn-Raven has saved him, he feels, and has restored his joy in living. Running across an old and physically repulsive friend, Umfraville, Bartholow engages in a short conversation which affirms how much he has changed. The two men agree that he has discovered his "soul." Even as Bartholow exults in his new happiness, he foreshadows impending complications by remarking:

One of these days I'll find myself across
The river, at your door--if you invite me--
And weigh the tonnage of my ignorance
Upon your classic scales. (p. 741)

That he may soon need further soul guidance seems unlikely at the moment, but such proves to be the case.

In section II, Bartholow is shown by the narrative to be somewhat egotistical as he postures before a mirror and trades remarks (some of them cutting) with his wife. The wife, Gabrielle, is self-deprecating and resentful. She does not understand her husband nor her husband's relationship with his friend, Penn-Raven. Her attitude

is justified by the breakfast scene which follows, during which Penn-Raven casually exchanges conversational barbs with her while he consumes all of the breakfast trout. The narrator's description shows Penn-Raven to be almost obscenely sensual in appearance and prepares the reader to believe in his later ambivalence toward friendship and sex. The section concludes with a short, antagonistic conversation between Bartholow and Gabrielle in which she says:

I am half afraid already;
Not of your friend, or of your grandfather,
But of this queer new house that you are building
Of timber out of trees that never grew.
For even a phantom house, if made unwisely,
May fall down on us and hurt horribly. (p. 757)

Using the symbol of the crumbling house, Gabrielle forecasts trouble for the marriage and raises expectations that Bartholow's happiness will not be long-lived.

In the third section, Penn-Raven sends Bartholow to chop down trees between the house and the river, and in doing so suggests the body-soul tension which underlies his own actions:

Because your soul,
Has found itself and is at last alive,
Never believe that you have not a body.
Lose that, and off your soul will go again
Into the dungeon where it was I found you,
And you will go there with it.
(p. 760)

Penn-Raven follows this with a short, intense conversation with Gabrielle which makes it clear that her marriage is crumbling and that she knows it. At this point in the action, the basic situation and conflict have been established, and it remains to see the tense situation worked out. It is clear that Bartholow's soul-renewal is not a final stage in his life but has in fact precipitated several serious consequences.

Those consequences are worked out in the middle sections of the poem(IV, V, VI), which are much longer than the opening sections. The time jumps into midsummer, and the conversations between characters become much more complex and lengthy. Each section centers in such a conversation: between Penn-Raven and Gabrielle in IV, Gabrielle and Bartholow in V, and Bartholow and Penn-Raven in VI.

In section IV, the narrator goes into Penn-Raven's mind to show the uncertainty he is feeling about his stay at Bartholow's home. In his long conversation with Gabrielle, it is clear that they have begun an affair which has left her nervous and guilty. Penn-Raven is malicious and points out to her the hopelessness of her situation:

You are still here,
And if your dream is to live on with him,
No house that you and he may build together
Will stand long on a lie; and if you choose

To tell him all, there will not be a house
For you to build. (p. 785)

These are her alternatives, to see her marriage crumble on a lie or to confess and lose everything at once.

Section V then focuses entirely on Gabrielle and the torture of her indecision. First by internal analysis, later by her remarks to Bartholow, her unhappiness is fully developed, and is shown to be based in her feeling that she is somehow being left behind spiritually. After confessing her affair with Penn-Raven, she tells her husband:

I am the bridge, then, over which you pass,
Here in the dark, to find a lighted way
To a new region where I cannot follow,
And where there is not either sand or moonshine,
And a new sun shines always. (p. 802)

After this pitiful protest, she is shown in a final passage of internal analysis to have reached the end of her emotional reserves. She leaves the house to commit suicide.

Section VI then begins with an internal analysis of Bartholow's mental state. His pride is outraged by what his wife has told him:

He was alone, as they had been alone
Before him, and as many a man unborn
Would some day be alone; and while he wondered
What sort of madness might awaken in him
If there were love as well as pride at work
To rouse it into being, his new-found soul
Trembled and ached with his offended clay,

Which rapidly was over-mastering
Its reigning spirit. (p. 807)

It is clear that he recognizes that pride rather than love motivates his hate, but body nonetheless overpowers soul and leads him to outrage.

When Penn-Raven enters and begins to talk facetiously, Bartholow holds back for a time but eventually attacks the man physically, only to be overpowered and forced to sit and listen while Penn-Raven explains the situation rationally to him. Penn-Raven callously dismisses Gabrielle as a consideration by pointing out that she is actually an obstacle to Bartholow's freedom as a man. The conclusion is a simple one:

Your doom now is to see, and see alone.
Whether she go to-morrow or to-night,
Or live on to fade out and be forgotten
Is now for you no matter--or for me.

.....
Your doom is to be free. The seed of truth
Is rooted in you, and the fruit is yours
For you to eat alone. You cannot share it,
Though you may give it, and a few thereby
May taste of it, and so not wholly starve.
(p. 825)

Bartholow cannot accept this and so simply refuses to hear it; he ends by paying Penn-Raven to leave the country just as the body of Gabrielle is brought back to the house.

At this point, the central action of the poem has been concluded. The love triangle has exploded, leaving Bartholow deflated by the loss of both wife and friend.

It remains for the man to settle his own personal responsibility for the occurrences, however, and either reaffirm or deny the rebirth he celebrated earlier. The last two sections(VII, VIII) present this conclusion, in each case by presenting Bartholow in a conversation with the old friend of section I, Umfraville.

The action of section VII occurs two days after the suicide. Bartholow seeks out Umfraville and tells his the story, hoping that the man of books can reflect light on the lessons contained therein. Umfraville consoles him, and in the process contrives to alter slightly the quality of Bartholow's rebirth. He says:

Your saviour may have saved you,
But never fancy now that in your freedom
Your fee is paid. Your freedom is itself
Another poison, or may turn to one
If you consume too much of it. Your soul
May shrink, if you are too familiar with it,
To such offended and obscure concealment
That you may never end it in this life
Again ... (p. 836)

Bartholow must learn properly to evaluate and protect his freedom. One way to that end involves accepting a burden of guilt for Gabrielle's death--which Bartholow does under Umfraville's sympathetic guidance.

In section VIII then, set in autumn, Bartholow leaves his house to seek out new relationships in the world. From his last conversation with Umfraville, it is clear he has learned at least that a man cannot deny human

contacts by cutting himself off from the world, that a man's effects on others are deceptive and painful, and that every man is really the product of his human relationships. These things having been stated with varying degrees of clarity, Bartholow makes his way off, into twilight.

It seems clear that Bartholow is intended to be seen as the protagonist of the work. It is he whom the reader sees early and late and he who undergoes the central change in the action. Much like Matthias, he is required to learn from suffering and loss; he is required to be purged of the pride which keeps him from establishing deep human relationships. He is a good, if somewhat selfish and prideful, man; and he is largely responsible for the painfulness of the situation. He has destroyed his wife by a succession of errors, from isolating her in the country to condemning her for her lack of spiritual depth. As with Matthias, Bartholow's friends function to help him attain progressive stages in spiritual growth.

This earlier poem, however, is not nearly as successful as Matthias at the Door; and the reason for its failure is largely structural. Matthias, of course, has much more to learn than Bartholow but both are characterized so as to reveal moral short-comings which they must overcome. In Matthias at the Door, a balance is established early in the narration which holds the reader's sympathies

divided between man and wife for the bulk of the poem. Then, just before Natalie's suicide, the narrative focus is removed from her and fixed finally on Matthias' pain, with the result that the reader becomes involved exclusively with the completion of his learning process as the poem concludes.

In Roman Bartholow the focus of narration remains much longer and more intensely upon the outraged grief of Gabrielle. The long passage of internal analysis which leads up to her suicide assures strong pity in the reader, so much so that one critic has seen Gabrielle as the central character of the poem, this in spite of the fact that she does not appear in the last three sections except as a corpse.¹² The pathos of her death and suffering detracts a great deal from the reader's willingness to approve Bartholow's new understanding later, an understanding which by its structural position seems meant to be the culmination of the plot and the central determinant of final effect.

Also working to lessen the emotional power of Bartholow's final understanding is the manipulation of the fourth character, Umfraville. Introduced in section I, he reappears in sections VII and VIII to console and advise Bartholow. His presence, however, adds little to Bartholow's self-knowledge; in fact he is presented as a bookish man in contrast to Bartholow's action-directed nature. On

several occasions, Bartholow shows open contempt for his passive, retiring attitude toward life. Mostly, Umfraville is a sounding-board for Bartholow's internal searching, and his physical presence is not nearly so convincing as the use of Garth's voice in the conclusion of Matthias at the Door.

It appears that Robinson intended in this early poem to present a plot of character in which the central change involved the purging of pride in a sympathetic protagonist. The tone and development of the last two sections suggest that Robinson intended a growing sympathy for Bartholow to culminate in relief for his new vision. The awkwardness of Umfraville and the overly strong residue of pity for Gabrielle work against that effect, however. It seems to me that Matthias at the Door is a better developed, more carefully arranged and subordinated structure which more exactly realizes an effect intended in the early work.

Interestingly, it is another of the poems dealing with contemporary love triangles, The Glory of the Nightingales, which has been accused of structural break-down.¹³

Robinson's aim in this poem was much similar to that of Roman Bartholow or Matthias at the Door, to present a plot organized to reveal a change of character in the protagonist with a final effect built largely upon the reader's relief that the change has been successfully completed. The

nature of the action in this poem is quite different, however.

Having been helped through school and having been made a close friend by the rich and powerful Nightingale, a bacteriologist named Malory steals his benefactor's fiancée, Agatha. Outraged, Nightingale contrives to ruin Malory financially and consequently causes the death of Agatha. Malory exiles himself for years while he alters his naturally benevolent character so that he can revenge himself by murdering Nightingale. When he returns to carry out his revenge, however, he finds his antagonist a dying cripple in a lonely sea-side house. Losing his long cultivated will to destroy, Malory finds himself without purpose; but he gradually establishes, with the help of Nightingale, a will to live and serve. Nightingale eventually signs his estate over to Malory, for use as a hospital and research center, and then graciously commits suicide.

Robinson chooses to begin the narration of this action as Malory walks back to Sharon, his old hometown, with the intention of murdering Nightingale. The poem is divided into six sections; the first three are presented almost entirely as narrative summary, an unusual practice for Robinson. In those three sections are combined internal analysis, indirect interior monologue,¹⁴ and intrusive narrative comment.¹⁵ As Malory walks for two days back

to Nightingale's isolated home, the narrator gradually brings out details of his hate for Nightingale and the situation which precipitated it. At the same time Malory's character is developed, and it is suggested that this kind of hate is not natural for him, that it is a carefully nourished emotion that is not a part of his basic character. Thus the central conflict is established and the reader is led to believe Malory incapable of actually killing his antagonist.

With the actual confrontation of the two men at the beginning of the fourth section, the reader's expectation is validated when Malory finds himself unable to kill the already dying Nightingale. Malory drops into a moral and emotional limbo upon this discovery, and the remainder of the poem presents a series of conversations between the two men during which Malory's will to live is gradually returned to him. Nightingale is characterized by his speeches to be less the villain than Malory's thoughts had suggested. He is a man possessing an aggressive drive for power, who had his aggressiveness turned away from useful goals and toward hate when his friend made off with his fiancée. His current pain and feelings of guilt have altered his hate, and he is able to function as an aid to help Malory back to positive living. It is Nightingale who declares:

You and the world are in a partnership
 Too large and too impersonal to include
 A presence of sick hate. You owe yourself
 To your unhappy millions in your city
 Of cries and silences and suffering hope.
 (p. 1068)

It is to assure that Malory will serve humanity that
 Nightingale ultimately wills him the hospital and commits
 suicide.

The resolution of the poem involves Malory's re-
 capture of his youthful zest for service. He is considerably
 enlightened about the difficulties of life, however, as
 his final vision shows:

There was no escape
 From the long sentence of his usefulness.
 He was a slave now in a city of pain,
 A pullulating place that was all places,
 And soon or late the last abode of man
 Till his departure. There was no fear of joy
 To be a stain on his inheritance,
 Except the lonely joy of being alive
 In a good servitude, and of not being
 Obscurely and unintelligibly wasted.
 (p. 1069)

Malory, like Bartholow and Matthias, ends by discovering
 a new purpose for his life. His basically good character
 has been restored and he has learned from painful experience
 the best direction his life can take.

In this poem, Robinson chooses to remove the female
 figure from any possibility of strong pity in the reader.
 Malory has survived the loss of his wife but he must also
 be purged of the accompanying hate. Malory undergoes a

change in his personal fortune, but that is not the center of concern for the reader, whose interest is led rather to be placed in Malory's change in character, in his intention to murder Nightingale, the motive for that intention, and the eventual correction of motive.

Malory is a basically good man who has been pained by betrayal and loss. He has cultivated a hate which he thinks will allow him to murder, but it gradually becomes evident to the reader that the hate is neither deep nor enduring. He unconvincingly thinks of himself as free, as god-like; and his self-reassurances become repetitive and somewhat ridiculous, as when the narrative voice describes his thought:

He felt the spur of a good going forward
To the right end--a prize of realizations
Withheld from all but the more fortunate
Whose dreams are preparations. (p. 1027)

To see revenge-murder as a prize awarded the fortunate is too clearly a foolish rationalization, given the sensitive character of the man. Similarly, his thoughts of the magnificent deed ring false:

Death was another country where new light
Or darkness would inevitably prevail.
If there was hazard in his tearing down
This treacherous and imperfect house of man,
There was a moment of magnificence ...
(p. 1028)

Against these blustering claims, the narrator's

analysis of his mind sets forward contrasting passages which reveal that his tenacity may be faltering. For example, this passage as Malory pauses beside an elm tree:

And a blank vision of oblivion
Chilled him with an irrelevance of regret
That he should never see that elm again--
As if a landmark had a language older
Than his, and a long eloquence that only
Ruin could understand. (p. 1030)

The "language" which Malory senses in this elm is later reinforced by the language of the sea, which eventually becomes the symbolic connection allowing Malory to break through into renewed life. In the sixth section of the poem, when Malory is caught at the peak of his emotional crisis and lacks the will to do anything at all now his motive to kill has been removed, he is sent by Nightingale down to the shore. There he struggles with himself, feeling his thoughts "as vain/ As a dumb wave"(p. 1062). His answer comes to him suddenly as he connects the waves to humanity:

Yet surely they [the waves] were flashing with a
language
That was important and inevitable;
There were too many of them to be dismissed
By one whose life was only a little more
Of time than one of theirs. (p. 1065)

This recognition that even in the face of endless time the very number of human lives requires, demands attention is the key to Malory's revival and his acceptance of a

life of medical service to mankind.

As Malory moves toward this point of self-discovery, the reader's expectations are led slowly from anticipation of a revenge killing, to the hope that Malory will recover his admirable character, to relief at his new life and good fortune. It is interesting that in this poem, more than any other, Robinson chooses to utilize internal analyses of the protagonist's state of mind and to intrude his authorial presence into the narration. The internal analyses continue even after the first three sections; in the latter parts of the poem they are played against the counterpoint of Nightingale's suggestions. The result is to develop a strong sense of the slow, torturous process of internal change in a man.

Talifer, the last of Robinson's poems treating modern love triangles, is an anomaly among Robinson's works because its final effect is unmixed comedy. Its action is a simple one. A somewhat pompous but not stupid man, Talifer, jilts his kind and personable fiancée, Althea, when he is intrigued by the feminine wiles of a lovely but cold intellectual, Karen. Dr. Quick, a rejected suitor to both women at one time, tries mildly to intervene and foresees drastic problems for the marriage. Quick's fears prove correct, and Talifer recognizes his error but hesitates (for social reasons) to seek divorce. Having confessed his misery to Althea and learned that she

still loves him, Talifer accidentally frightens Karen into leaving him. She runs away with the compliant Dr. Quick. Talifer and Althea marry and find a peaceful, happy life, which they share with Dr. Quick, once Karen has left him for more intellectual pursuits.

The development of this action is complicated by the use of Dr. Quick as the center of consciousness for the first three of the five sections. He acts as a counter to be played off against the other three while the conflict is being presented. In section I he visits Althea and learns she has been jilted. In section II he visits Karen, questions her motives, and then talks to Talifer and elicits his feeling about the broken engagement. In section III Quick interviews Althea ten months after the marriage and Karen and Talifer on their first anniversary; in each case, Quick works to bring Althea and Talifer back together. Only after Talifer admits he has made a mistaken choice in marrying Karen does the focus of narration, at the beginning of section IV, switch to him and his correcting of his error.

Section IV shows Talifer discovering that Althea still loves him and builds to a climactic action in which he bemoans his fate with such gusto that a single glimpse of his face sends a drowsy Karen scurrying for the protection of Dr. Quick and assures the end of the marriage. It remains only for section V to present the happy ending. Talifer,

Althea, and their son enjoy a reminiscence with the deserted but undaunted Dr. Quick. The structure thus works first to dramatize Talifer's error by contrasting the two women, then to indicate the qualities of Talifer which have caused the error, next to show the results of the error on his character, and finally to release him to a happier existence, the error having been corrected.

The tone of the narration is, from the first, one of playful irony. Robinson comes close to a parody of his earlier serious poems in the descriptions of the jilted Althea. For example, passages describing the white Isolt in Tristram may be compared with:

Althea, like a white bird left alone
In a still cage of leaves and memories,
Sat watching summer, seeing no more of it
Than scattered sunlight--which was better at least
For her to see than rain. (p. 1231)

But Althea is pretty clearly overdoing her emotion. The casual attitude of Dr. Quick toward the whole situation clues the reader that no painful resolutions need be feared. Quick's calm advice, "We do not mostly drown if we can swim/ Or drift, somehow, to shore"(p. 1240), establishes for the reader the painless probabilities of the plot. In the face of Quick's ironic calm, Althea's complaints soon show up as humorous.

Similarly, Talifer is deflated by the description which accompanies his first appearance in the poem. He

is described as "commanding and erect--an admiral,/ At least, if not a monarch, in appearance," and then the narrator adds:

A power to bend
Or break was in his face, and in his eyes
The conquering gleam--which is a gleam sometimes
Of more fire than is there; and in his voice
There was a ripe repose--which might, without
Its honest warmth, have been complacency. (p. 1347)

His stuffiness and pomposity are clearly noted but the narrative voice is careful to point out the mitigating "honest warmth" which will make Talifer's eventual good fortune a deserved one.

The turning of the action in Talifer's favor begins once he comes to recognize the error he has made in choosing Karen. A year of marriage changes him completely and produces a man capable of questioning. He says to Quick:

Once I believed
That I was not a fool--till I became one.
Today I find a yearning to go back
And find myself again, to recognize
Today in yesterday--which may be asking
A man's whole world too much. How shall I know
Whether I'm there or not, if none shall tell me?
It is important that I find myself;
For we that are no more than ordinary
Are more for that the creatures of our lapses.
They make us--or unmake us. (p. 1275)

Talifer's desire to go back is complicated only by his feeling of duty, a feeling engendered in him by his ancestral heritage. When that obstacle is removed by

Karen's humorous fright at the hate she thinks she sees in Talifer's eyes, the way is clear to a happy ending. At the conclusion of the poem the protagonist is a happy man:

Talifer, smiling
 With eyes that were no longer terrifying,
 Saw now around him only quiet and rest,
 And realization; and with grateful ears
 That were attuned again to pleasant music,
 Heard nothing but the mellow bells of peace. (p. 1307)

In this romance, the reader finds pleasure in seeing a just and happy ending for the protagonist. The plot centers in the change in situation which Talifer undergoes; the primary interest is in whether he will recoup his loss and win the hand of the right girl. The unpleasantness Talifer undergoes in being married to Karen for a year redeems his premarital pomposity and his final good fortune is deserved. He is both a wiser and a happier man.

Certainly this kind of conclusion is unusual for E. A. Robinson. Even limiting the consideration to the three poems which also deal with contemporary love triangles, it is evident that this comic effect is unique. Bartholow, Malory, and Matthias all suffer drastic losses in the process of discovering some kind of meaning by which they can order their lives. Talifer, by comparison, suffers nothing. The catch, however, is that Talifer ends up having less insight than the other three. He has learned less about himself and his nature as a man.

And, ultimately, it is just this learning process with which Robinson appears most concerned in these modern love stories. That a man's character is largely a result of his personal relationships seems the recurring message of Roman Bartholow, The Glory of the Nightingales, and Matthias at the Door. A passage in Roman Barthlow states this theme most clearly:

...if in considering what we are
 We ponder for a season on the many
 Behind us who have made us what we are,
 Our vanity will hardly have an eyelash
 To cling with to the ridge of our achievement ...
 (p. 848)

Acknowledging the centrality of this theme clarifies to a large extent one factor in the characters of Robinson's protagonists which recurs often and is felt by many reader's to be an irritant.¹⁶ That is the passivity with which so many of them face the conflicts in which they are involved. In discussing the changes which Robinson's protagonists undergo, it has repeatedly been shown that the men are largely moved by forces external to themselves (Lancelot, Tristram, Jasper, Bartholow, Malory, Matthias, and others in the poems discussed hereafter). This is one way of dramatizing the idea that men are formed by their contacts and interactions with others. This also goes a long way toward explaining why so many of Robinson's poems conclude with the protagonist

(or his torch-bearer) beginning alone to build a new and better life. Through the sacrifices of others, new knowledge is gained. It is interesting indeed to note that the only happy family grouping in the canon of the long narratives occurs in the comic Talifer, and involves a protagonist who seems constitutionally unable to delve deeply inward. The seekers end alone, wiser for their experience of other human beings.

Roman Bartholow, The Glory of the Nightingales, Matthias at the Door, and Talifer are not repetitive poems; Robinson assured that by utilizing different structural frameworks and by varying the emphasis placed upon different parts and techniques. But Bartholow, Malory, Matthias, and Talifer are all twentieth century men who err in their vision of what makes a good, just life. Each one must have his error corrected before he can live a full and useful life. Each one loses a wife in the process of revising his life. They differ greatly in the final outcome of their difficulties, however. For Bartholow, the conclusion is a better understanding of his own soul and its demands. For Malory, it is the resumption of an old but forgotten goal, to serve humanity. For Matthias, it is new insight which will enable him to build a firmer life. And for Talifer, it is happy, uncomplicated familial bliss. In each case the attainment of the goal is developed out of personal relationships.

In the final set of poems to be considered, it will be seen that another group of Robinson's protagonists derive their answers from an internal rather than an external search, with a resulting alteration in the kinds of effects achieved.'

iii.

It is a disturbed internal state of mind which demands resolution in "Avon's Harvest"(1921), The Man Who Died Twice(1924), and Cavender's House(1929). As a result, the resolutions of these poems depend largely upon how a conflict is settled internally rather than externally. The poems are like Amaranth in that focus rests on internal states. Amaranth was analyzed in Chapter III as a plot organized by thought since its dream characters all originated in Fargo's mind and were objectified expressions of aspects of his thought. Fargo had not erred in rejecting a career in art and so the resolution of the poem called for a reiteration(now with a more complete understanding) of an earlier choice. In the three poems to be discussed now, the protagonist has in each case chosen badly at some point in his life. The errors are different in nature, but each is serious and leads to painful consequences. The need to explain or understand his error leads each protagonist into a mental

purgation, and the effect of the work is in each case largely determined by the final degree of insight attained by the protagonist in his internal search.

This group of poems also offers interesting comment on Robinson's narrative technique because in two of them, "Avon's Harvest" and The Man Who Died Twice, Robinson chooses to use the first person point of view, the only times he did so in the long narratives. The poems are short ones (by Robinsonian narrative standards) and will be handled briefly, but their importance in evaluating Robinson's narrative technique should not be underestimated.

"Avon's Harvest" is a horror story, though the effect of horror is somewhat modified by the point of view Robinson utilized. It is the story of a man's twenty year deterioration under the pressure of internal hate and guilt. Avon, at sixteen, becomes accidentally friendly with a snake-like boy whom he grows to detest. His disgust is eventually expressed openly by a blow and harsh words, and the boys part in open antagonism, Avon's enemy threatening to know always where Avon is. For ten years an implicitly malicious birthday card is sent to Avon, and twice the two meet (in Rome and London); but the enemy is reported to have drowned when the Titanic sinks and Avon spends ten more years without being harrassed. Then, in an isolated river cabin, Avon is terrified by the appearance of his antagonist and collapses in fear.

A year later, having told his story to an old friend, he dies in a locked room of an apparent heart attack.

Several traditional devices of the horror story are present, most notably that of the curse and the unseen threat, the mysteriously pursuing avenger who continues hatred beyond the grave. The pure horror, however, is lessened by Robinson's choice to present the tale through two filters of consciousness. The old friend and auditor writes the story as it was told to him by Avon just before his death. The narrator's first person comment, as sympathetic friend, acts at first and last as a frame for Avon's story. He begins by describing Avon's change and ends by describing his death. As Avon tells the story, the narrator occasionally interrupts to affirm Avon's honesty, to testify to the atmosphere of terror in the room, or to register his own sympathetic reactions to the tale.

The bulk of the poem, however, is the first person testimony of Avon, who describes in the early parts of the work the beginnings of his boyhood conflict, in the central parts the progression of his persecution and growing hatred, in the concluding parts the absolute terror of the cabin confrontation of one year before. The result of using these two first person reports in the narrative is to make the entire action somewhat ambiguous. The objective truth of any of Avon's report may be called

into question by the reader. Perhaps there was no meeting in Rome. Perhaps the antagonist died at sea, perhaps not. Because of Avon's obvious fear and paranoia, and because of the hallucinatory nature of his riverside experience, these things cannot be determined true or false. This is, of course, exactly what Robinson intended. The emphasis is thus less on the developing horror of Avon's situation than on the mental state which is revealed.¹⁷

Of course, there is no reason to doubt the original conflict between the two boys. There must be some motivation for the internal conflict in which Avon is caught. The emotion of the boy is one expressed in the current agony of the man: "...a battle going on within me/ Of hate that fought remorse"(p. 554). Hate won this battle when the blow was struck by the sixteen year old Avon. He recalls of their parting: "There was just hatred, hauled up out of hell/ For me to writhe in; and I writhed in it" (p. 559). The expression of this writhing twenty years later is the content of the poem. Neither need the reception of the birthday cards be doubted, for their existence could be verified by the narrator. Their message is at any rate not a threat of physical harm: "I shall know where you are until you die"(p. 560).

For the meetings in Rome and London, however, there may be some doubt, especially since Avon admits that the external reality of his enemy is mixed inextricably with

his internal presence: "My shadow of him, wherever I found myself,/ Might horribly as well have been the man--"(p. 561). Similarly the ominous dark figure at the cabin may or may not have been real; most likely it was hallucinatory since it could have killed but did not. The point is that certainty is not possible; such ambiguity is present throughout. The narrator's belief in Avon's honesty does not change this, nor does his avouching for the atmosphere of terror. The atmosphere of terror is built by the strange actions and unconcealed fearfulness of Avon. It is his product and it reflects the state of his mind.

For the reader, the poem becomes primarily a study of the psychology of fear. A character is presented in an advanced state of paranoia. His earlier normalcy is not shown but is attested to by a seemingly reliable narrator. The story he relates sets forth his rationale for the mentally destructive progression of his last twenty years. The painful change which has occurred in his life was triggered by an external action, his rejection and hate of another boy. The tone and emphasis of his recollection reflect the quality of the internal change which has resulted.

For the reader the effect of horror emerges from the atmosphere Avon evokes in his narration. His description of the action, whether that action is real or

imaginary, builds a growing sense of threat. The horror of Avon's death is heightened by the fact that he, of all Robinson's narrative protagonists, understands himself no better at the end of the poem than at the beginning. He is the captive of his fear, feels himself threatened by external forces, and dies in a locked room, having literally scared himself to death. Whatever sympathy is established for him is a result of the narrator's attitude. A final recoil from Avon's passive, unenlightened fear concludes the reader's involvement.

The Man Who Died Twice also is presented by first person narration from a peripheral character who is not involved in the main action but is told about it by the protagonist. Fernando Nash, the protagonist, is a musical prodigy of great talent whose impetuous, spiteful character causes him to forsake his career because jealous critics condemn his youthful experimental works. After twenty years of increasing debauchery and self-contempt, Nash attempts suicide by starvation, is led to a mystic vision, and is thereby reconciled to the loss of his talent and to a servile life as drummer for a Salvation Army band. The action, thus paraphrased, seems potentially comic, but the careful manipulation of point of view and tone by Robinson work to produce a more serious kind of effect.

As in "Avon's Harvest," the poem begins and concludes

with the narrator's summing up of the protagonist. The beginning involves a contrast between Nash as he was in his youth and as he appears at present, having been a Salvation Army drummer for one year. The narrator is clearly skeptical about the external change Nash has undergone. He comments:

The rough resentful egoist I had known
Was now a shell. The giant had been reduced;
And the old scorn that once had been his faith
Was now a sacrificial desperation. (p. 923)

At the poem's conclusion, the narrator's skepticism about Nash's change has disappeared. Writing at some time after Nash's death, he concludes by saying he believes that Nash's story of mystic redemption was true. The poem's final passage states:

Crippled or cursed or crucified, the giant
Was always there, and always will be there.
For reasons less concealed and more sufficient
Than words will ever make them, I believe him
To-day as I believed him while he died,
And while I sank his ashes in the sea.
(p. 957)

That the narrator, a determinist in his world view, loses his skepticism concerning Nash's change is meant to lend credence to Nash's story, which is the real action of the poem. His early skepticism also serves to keep the reader detached from sympathy for Nash; the reader's attitude toward Nash(as toward Avon) is mostly determined by the first person narrator.

The story which Fernando Nash tells, a story which apparently emerges over the course of several discussions with the narrator, is not presented (as was Avon's story) by the use of first person monologue. Rather the narrator sums up and delivers Nash's story in narrative summary. Only rarely in the poem is dialogue used at all; Nash's self disgust is developed in one quoted passage early in the poem, and at the end he and the narrator converse briefly about the narrator's emotional reaction to the things he has heard. Between these two passages of spoken dialogue, Nash's story is paraphrased in third person by the narrator to whom he told it.

The action of this central section involves only the one month period of Nash's life when he brought himself to the point of his mystic experience. The actions of this month are described chronologically: Nash decides to starve to death, destroys the two symphonies of his youth, goes on a three week drunk, endures delirium tremens (including a brilliantly described symphony by an orchestra of rats), lies helpless for a week without food. At this point Nash achieves mental clarity and begins a mystic vision which takes him through joy to fear and back to joy--after which he bursts from his room and collapses. Later, in a hospital bed, he recreates his experience and evaluates its lesson: patience and acceptance are the attributes by which fallible men must live.

Nash changes in his moral evaluation of the human condition as a result of his experience, and this change in his basic character is the central and organizing one in the poem. On his inward search for redemption from his youthful error(his choice to desert his promising career out of spite for inferior men), he is brought to realize his essence as a man and so to reconnect himself with the suffering masses of humanity. Even before his vision, Nash recognizes the duality of his being. He calls the two opposed forces within himself his "daemon" and his "devil". He attributes his powers to create to his inner "daemon" and his self-destructive impulse to his inner "devil." Threatened throughout his life by the "drums of death," he at first finds in his starvation-induced hallucination a relief from that beating pressure--the symbol of his own sense of time's inevitable progression and his own fragile mortality:

... a vast joy
Which broke and swept and covered him like a sea
Of innocence, leaving him eager as a child
That has outlived experience and remembers
Only the golden moment as it flows,
Told him in silence that was more than speech
That after passion, arrogance and ambition,
Doubt, fear, defeat, sorrow and desperation,
He had wrought out of martyrdom the peace
That passeth understanding. (p. 943)

His peace and joy are here wrapped in his recovery of the childlike state of living in and for the moment.

The real change he is to experience, however, occurs only after this joy of his regression to childhood(his rebirth) is swept away by the return of the drums, the awareness of mortality:

Now it was fear
Not peace, that falling on him like a wave,
Covered and overwhelmed him; it was fear,
Not peace, that made him cold and left him trembling
After the cold had passed. (p. 946)

Nash must realize that the joy of that "sea of innocence" contains as a necessary and inevitable part the "wave" which covers and overwhelms. He must embrace his threatening drums as a valuable part of his being. As he does this, he attains the mature joy of mystic acceptance:

No lightning shaft
Of blinding and immediate dissolution
Was yet impending: there was only joy,
And a vast wonder that all this had been
So near him for so long. Smiling and still,
He listened gratefully. It had come at last;
And those far sent celestial messengers
That he had for so long a time denied
Had found him now. (p. 948)

Having attained this ability to accept his life unquestioningly, Nash is able to bear the self-knowledge of having once "had it"(i.e., great talent) and of having wasted it abysmally. His life as drummer for others, for the suffering masses of the city, leaves him content. He knows he "had it" once, and that is enough.

In spite of the narrator's sympathetic view of Nash,

it seems to me that the reader is meant to question to a degree the validity of Nash's awakening. The egoism which was pointed out to be his motivating trait as a youth is never really removed from his character, though the device of having his story paraphrased works to make it seem as if his ego has been submerged by his experience. Actually the final brief dialogue suggests that Nash's discovery may not be so much how to accept his life as how to rationalize his life. His claim implies a continuing egoism when he says:

Once, for an hour,
I lived; and for an hour my cup was full
With wine that not a hundred, if a score,
Have tasted that are told in history.
(p. 955)

That his last words are, "For I had it--once"(p. 956), supports this view as does the fact that he continues to hate his erstwhile critics and only speaks to the narrator because he was never one of them.

Here, as with "Avon's Harvest," then, considerable ambiguity grows out of the use of the first person point of view and its inability to delve into the mind and explain motivation. The reader is given a character who appears morally deficient from the first--weak, self-centered, spiteful, undirected. This character has undergone a painful loss of self-confidence and talent for which he is himself fully responsible. The character

claims dramatically to have confronted and understood his internal tension and to have attained a consoling vision of reality. Because the narrator is skeptical at the first, the reader tends also to question. But the narrator's ultimate acceptance of Nash's claim does not so much determine its validity as to heighten the ambiguity of the reader's reaction.

In "Avon's Harvest," the ambivalence or mystery surrounding the protagonist's story is appropriate to the horror which is the poem's effect. "Avon's Harvest" is, of course, a minor poem compared to The Man Who Died Twice, which is most ambitious in its examination of human failure and consolation. Nonetheless, it seems to me that Robinson errs in the latter poem to the extent of undermining the poem's effect.

On the one hand is the change in the material situation of Nash, from despairing, suicide-prone drunk to religious enthusiast, a change which apparently involves a recovery of fortune for the protagonist. On the other hand is the focus of the point of view, which emphasizes the change in character which Nash undergoes and involves an implicit claim that the man's ego has been deflated by his new understanding. While the reader could accept Nash's egotism and still applaud his emotional recovery in a plot centered in his change in situation, such approval becomes difficult in a plot centered in his change in character. The

ambiguity caused by the point of view here causes ambivalence in the final effect, and the careful reader is left without any solid foundation upon which to base his emotional reaction.

Cavender's House, the third of Robinson's poems to present an internal search for self-knowledge, develops undoubtedly the least attractive of Robinson's protagonists in the long narratives. The major complaint critics have advanced against this poem, that its motivating action is hidden until too near the end, is no doubt a result of Robinson's desire to withhold from the reader as long as possible the ugliness of Cavender's character.¹⁷ Cavender is a self-centered and possessive materialist who has little time for his wife, Laramie, but expects of her absolute fidelity in both thought and deed. When she acts mysteriously, according to her nature, he becomes jealous, questions her angrily, and eventually throws her off a cliff to her death. He wanders in a torment of doubt for twelve years, returning to his old home at last to wrestle the last time with his jealousy. He manages finally to objectify his understanding of his action and to confess his guilt, thus removing the source of his long torment.

The action of the poem picks up Cavender at the end of his twelve year flight just as he returns to the dark, threatening house where the murder occurred.

Robinson uses the third person omniscient point of view but refuses to allow the narrative voice to reveal the reason for Cavender's long absence and despairing frame of mind. The narrative voice simply suggests that Cavender's trouble lies within his mind:

...he waited as one waits
 Hooded for death, and with no fear to die.
 It was not time and dying that frightened him,
 Nor was it yet the night that was around him;
 It was a darker night, and one within him,
 That others not himself were not to know.
 (p. 961)

Cavender, the reader is told, has returned because he has heard a "call"; and after the dark setting of the interior of the unlighted house is established, the origin of the voice is presented. It is Laramie, apparently Cavender's wife, who appears and begins to talk with Cavender in the dialogue which makes up virtually the entire action of the poem.

The device here is to develop in the imaginary figure of the wife one side of the internal dialogue which has hounded Cavender for twelve years. The murder was unjust, regardless of Laramie's original guilt or lack of it, and one buried part of Cavender's mind knows that. At the conscious level, however, Cavender has made the central issue of his own guilt depend upon the now unanswerable question of Laramie's fidelity. The progress of the poem involves the gradual emergence

of the former view-point from deep within Cavender's mind. The ghost-like figure of Laramie admits as much early in their conversation when she says, "I have not come/ Like a wise spectre to lift any veils"(p. 986). And shortly thereafter she tells Cavender why she has come: "we must learn/ Of our defects and doubts, however they hurt"(p. 979). Cavender must learn, and it is Laramie who will lead him.

The arrangement of the poem is based in the gradual unfolding of what terrible deed Cavender committed against Laramie twelve years before. As the pieces of that puzzle are singly offered, the psychological conflict within Cavender's mind is slowly developed. By the time the reader has enough information to ascertain that Cavender is a murderer, Cavender has reached the point in the dialogue of admitting that his central question is whether or not Laramie was faithful to him, and Laramie has reached the point of stating the only alternatives he has remaining: "Cavender, you are locked in a dark house/ Where you must live, or wreck your house to die"(p. 1001).

By utilizing such a structure, Robinson assures that the reader's sympathy will not be completely withdrawn from Cavender. By the time his crime is stated, the extent of his suffering is also clear. His self-torture is his punishment. Also the reader's process

of working out the puzzle of Cavender's crime has paralleled Cavender's process of working out his guilt so that, in a sense, objective reality is established for both reader and protagonist at once. Psychologically, this structure rings true, for Cavender's mental state is such that he too is actually only now recognizing that in fact a murder was committed--or that the ghost-Laramie is actually only a projection of his own conscience.

Cavender must admit that the question of Laramie's faithfulness is not at issue. Near the conclusion, her voice asks him:

How many times,
Cavender, will it soothe or comfort you
To ask of me what I may never tell you?
There is in me no answer to your question;
There is in me only as much of me
As you have brought with you and made of me.
How shall I tell you what you do not know,
Knowing no more myself? (p. 1003)

There result no positive answers for Cavender as he confronts the truth of his guilt. He thinks that he will turn himself over to human laws, but that is not the emotional answer he requires. Laramie's voice explains:

Was ever an insect flying between two flowers
Told less than we are told of what we are?
Cavender, there may still be hidden for you
A meaning in your house why you are here.
(p. 1006)

Though he has found no meanings, Cavender at last sees his

error clearly and objectively. By resigning his inner struggle, he finds peace.

The reader of Cavender's House is led through overtones of terror in the opening passages to the threat of death for Cavender and on to a final cathartic admission of guilt. Although the reader cannot sympathize with Cavender's unhappy condition once his crime is known, he can approve the release from doubt which accompanies the final admission. The ugliness of Cavender's error exposed, the reader recoils from identification with him, but the horror implicit in his act is so greatly understated by its gradual uncovering and by Cavender's decision to give himself up that the final horror is softened. That the action is organized to present a change in Cavender's thought rather than to emphasize the murder itself further abstracts the horror of the concluding passages. In this poem, better than any other, the reason for Robinson's often noted "narrative indirection" can be explained.

Robinson's protagonists who look inward for their answers--Avon, Fernando Nash, Cavender, and Fargo--vary greatly among themselves in moral character and situation as well as in the kinds of answers they are able (in Avon's case, unable) to discover. In Nash's case, even the quality of the professed answer is obscured by the narrative technique. The use of point of view in "Avon's Harvest" and The Man Who Died Twice to convey the

internal ambiguity is an interesting aspect of Robinson's technique. In Cavender's House and Amaranth, the device of characters created by the mind of the protagonist to externalize the mental processes of that protagonist is creatively and effectively utilized.

In these four poems, the use of settings is important in revealing Robinson's view of the human mind. The settings in which these actions occur are closely related, not only to one another but to the settings of other of Robinson's narratives, particularly to the "house equals man" metaphor which the poet often advanced. Avon in his locked room or in the dark cabin near the riverside, Nash in his barren one-room apartment or descending the stairs, Cavender in his dark house or by the side of the cliff, Fargo in his small studio or near the wharves or the graveyard--each man finds himself isolated within the cell of his outer appearance, and each man faces the dark threat of death and the temptation of suicide. The impulse to leap over a cliff or into dark water seems to be the motivating emotion which sends these protagonists on their inward search in the first place. There is a self-destructive impulse which must be answered in Robinson's protagonists. This is true not just of these four but of the others as well: Tristram above the Cornwall cliffs, Malory at the ocean-side, Matthias near his dark Egyptian door, Jasper above his dream chasm; less overtly with Merlin's "living

grave" at Broceliande, Lancelot's passivity at Joyous Gard, Bartholow's axe wielding by the river.¹⁹

More than any other element of character, the impulse to death or passivity gives rise to the conflicts of E. A. Robinson's narrative plots; and because this impulse is considered a sign of moral weakness in a man, the trait is an integral one in building the relationship of reader to protagonist upon which the final effect largely depends. A few of Robinson's protagonists are clearly admirable men: Merlin, Fargo, Malory. Most of the rest possess strong enough moral, emotional, and intellectual traits to gain the reader's sympathy; Lancelot, Nash, Tristram, and Matthias certainly do. And Bartholow and Jasper may be marginally included. Only Avon and Cavender are so weak as to preclude identification, and there, techniques of narration manage to minimize the ugliness of their characters for at least a portion of the poems. All of these protagonists deserve some pity for the suffering they undergo, but it seems to me that in almost every case the reader will hold reservations about the character and will tend to refuse to identify with his plight. This is the result of recognizing the passivity which each man possesses. The further result is that the effects of Robinson's narrative poems, varied as they may be, are all based finally upon a sense of emotional detachment in the reader.

The fascination with death suggests that murder and suicide might occur often in Robinson's poems, and such is, of course, the case. None of the protagonists commit suicide although a few go so far as to attempt it (Nash, Matthias, and Jasper--the last two in dreams). Many secondary characters kill themselves, however: Gabrielle, Garth, Natalie, Nightingale, Pink, Watchman, Atlas, Ipswich, Honoria. A few others are murdered, including one protagonist: Tristram, Isolt of Ireland, Laramie, young Jasper, young Hebron. Others, including several protagonists, die by more normal means, although some are violent: Gawaine, Avon, Nash, Timberlake, Agatha, Hebron, Jasper. More minor characters also die, especially in the Arthurian poems, but with little accompanying detail. That this number of deaths is spaced over eleven poems indicates that violence is one of the important plot incidents in Robinson's works. The interesting point is that few of the deaths are described in the narration except by report--and even then often obliquely (Sir Lucan's report in Lancelot is the great exception). In the early poems, none are described. In later works, Tristram's is described. The imaginary deaths of Pink, Watchman, Atlas, and Ipswich are described. Finally, in Robinson's last poem, King Jasper, his son, and young Hebron expire "on stage."

Among the motivating incidents of Robinson's plots, occurrences of fear, hatred, or revenge are more often

involved than any others, along with the frequent use of the love triangle as a complicating device. In ten of Robinson's twelve long narratives, hatred is an important and controlling motive: for Gawaine, Avon, Bartholow, Nash, Tristram, Cavender, Matthias, Malory, Talifer, and Jasper. By contrast only four contain any kind of firmly based male-female love relationship: those of Merlin and Vivian(which is broken off), Tristram and Isolt of Ireland(which ends in death), Talifer and Althea, and young Jasper and Zoë(which also is ended by death). Other protagonists are motivated toward violence by disturbances in their sexual or marital lives: Lancelot, Bartholow, Cavender, Matthias, and Malory.

This description of the more frequently used motivating incidents in Robinson's long poems would seem to suggest a considerable amount of action and external conflict in the poems. That such is not the case is the result of Robinson's primary technique of narrative presentation, the complex interweaving of narrative analysis and characters' dialogue almost to the total exclusion of rapid, "on stage" action. Robinson's central method involves the development of the effects of an action upon the character relationships among those most concerned. It is not the deaths of Arthur and Modred that are important, but the effects of their deaths upon the relationship of Lancelot and Guinevere. This is the

central factor in understanding Robinson's narrative art. It is in the subtle adjustments of character relationships that he is interested.

The conflicts in which Robinson's characters find themselves engaged are usually the result of upsets in human relationships. Quite often the central problem stems from the inability of characters to communicate. Ultimately, it seems to me, the striving for a mode of communication is the central thematic strand carrying over throughout the Robinson canon. Again and again, Robinson's characters remark upon the failure of language as they engage in lengthy conversations attempting to understand one another.

Of all Robinson's images, the descriptions of eyes are most prevalent in these long poems. It is the eyes which reveal the inner being, the true emotion, whether it be hate or love. This is a key metaphor, for it is vision inward, insight, that the characters crave and struggle for. Men are isolated, cut off from one another by the facade of skin(their "houses") and by the inevitable abstraction of language. The quest for communication is unending and mostly unsuccessful, as the concluding scenes of these narratives suggest. Too many of the poems end with characters continuing alone: Lancelot, Bartholow, Isolt of Brittany, Cavender, Matthias, Malory, Fargo, Zoë. In the ~~two~~ first person narratives, the

character is dead: Avon and Fernando Nash. Only in the comedy, Talifer, and the first long narrative, Merlin, are the protagonists accompanied at the conclusion; and the descent of Merlin and Dagonet into darkness is not softened by any aura of mutual understanding between the two.

The chronological structures which Robinson constructed tend (seven of the twelve) to begin in the late stages of a character's development and unfold gradually, often obliquely, the earlier stages of the action. One of the obvious effects of this technique is to involve the reader in a searching out of the details, forcing his attention to sharpen in the search for explanatory clues even through long passages of abstract dialogue. Such a structure often gives characters an appearance of more complexity than in fact they possess--since they are discussing events of which the reader is unaware. The poems arranged in this manner are Merlin, "Avon's Harvest," The Man Who Died Twice, Cavender's House, The Glory of the Nightingales, Amaranth, and King Jasper.¹⁹

The other five poems of the canon (Lancelot, Roman Bartholow, Tristram, Matthias at the Door, and Talifer) are presented basically from beginning of action to end without chronological juggling. The result is to leave the reader's attention more fully in the developing relationships among characters. The risk is that the

lack of action or unfolding detail will cause the reader's attention to wander, no small danger when, for example, Penn-Raven lectures Bartholow or Tristram and Isolt of Ireland discourse abstractly about the quality of their love.

Whether his central and organizing change lies in situation, character, or thought, each of Robinson's lonely protagonists undergoes some loss of fortune before his story is done. Usually the loss is accompanied by a compensating gain in self-knowledge (Avon is the exception here). To a large degree, it is upon Robinson's choice of how strongly to emphasize loss or gain that the final effect of these poems depends. The qualitative structure of most of these poems involves some rhythm of confrontations (usually by twos or threes) among the principal characters. An important event occurs and is summarily described; then the effects of the event are worked out in detail as the characters react, discuss, evaluate among themselves. As tensions among characters are complicated or resolved, the protagonist moves on toward better knowledge of 1) the other characters and 2) himself. This is true of the inward seekers, Cavender and Fargo, as well, although their supporting characters are extensions of their imaginations. Only the protagonists of the first person narratives are exceptions. Avon's inward turning is a dead-end. Fernando Nash claims to have

experienced mystic vision but finds it necessary to explain in long conversations with his friend(that is, to continue to test human communication). In Robinson's narrative poems, it is by attaining fuller knowledge of others (even if only of their ambiguous depths) that the protagonist comes to know his own responsibility.

The preceding paragraphs are intended to construct a basic genus for the species of the Robinson canon; for having reviewed the twelve long narratives, it is clear that Robinson's poems share much in narrative technique and subject matter. This is really to say no more than that he was moderately consistent in his technique and that his mind turned frequently to some central problems of human life, for example, the problem of successful communication, the problem of discovering some valid philosophic reason for responsible living, the problem of coping with the mental pressure of recognizing mortality.

Given the similarities in technique and subject matter, each of these twelve poems attempts to involve the reader and to affect him in different ways. The nature of the final effect depends upon a set of factors:

- 1) the seriousness and painfulness of the loss, as qualified by the tone of the narration;
- 2) the moral character of the protagonist and his responsibility for the events that occur, determining the amount of sympathy the reader may have for him;
- and 3) the depth and conclusiveness of

his final knowledge. The final effect grows basically out of E. A. Robinson's authorial choices in these areas.

At the extremes of Robinson's range of effects lie "Avon's Harvest" and Talifer, in horror and romantic comedy. Avon undergoes a most painful loss of sanity and life, is presented as a weak character who is responsible for destroying his own sanity, and arrives at no final understanding at all. Talifer undergoes a momentary and humorously treated loss, is revealed as a pompous and simple minded character who is manipulated by others, and changes in his understanding only to recognize a simple distinction between "Peace" and "peace."

In contrast to these extremes of horror and comedy is the more typical pathos of Merlin. Merlin suffers a serious loss of love and power, emerges as a strong moral figure who is responsible for his plight by the choices he has made, and attains a deep final awareness of the human condition. Most of Robinson's effects fall somewhere near that of Merlin. Typically, the protagonist suffers a serious loss, shows himself to be a passive but not evil character, and reaches a new knowledge of sometimes questionable depth. It remains for the concluding chapter of this study to evaluate Robinson's relative success in constructing good, unified narrative poems.

CHAPTER IV: FOOTNOTES

¹Were the collapse of Camelot the central action, the fourth and fifth sections are distracting and add nothing to the development. If the love affair is the central action, the chronology is disruptive and the early sections fail to develop the situation at all economically. The important consideration is how each of these two situations affects Merlin.

²Ellsworth Barnard (Edwin Arlington Robinson: A Critical Study, p. 109) says of Merlin's final position: "It is with a humanized wisdom and a chastened hope that he takes his final departure."

³Edith Pipkin, "The Arthur of Edwin Arlington Robinson," English Journal, XIX(1930), 187.

⁴Tristram is not killed, as in legend, by Isolt of Brittany's jealous lie. Her character, as Robinson conceives her, would not allow this. Morgan, through Andred, becomes the agent of Tristram's death. Mark is made less evil too; the killing is done in spite of him after he sincerely bows before the lover's demonstrated passion. Frederick Carpenter, in "Tristram the Transcendent," New England Quarterly, XI(1938), 501-523, has an excellent discussion of these changes.

⁵Number of pages to each poem in the Collected Works (approximately 33 lines per page): Merlin, 80; Lancelot, 85; "Avon's Harvest", 31; Roman Bartholow, 124; The Man Who Died Twice, 37; Tristram, 135; Cavender's House, 46; The Glory of the Nightingales, 63; Matthias at the Door, 79; Talifer, 77; Amaranth, 83; King Jasper, 92.

⁶Lancelot is discussed above, pp. 65-102.

⁷Richard Crowder, "E. A. Robinson's Camelot," College English, IX(1947), 76.

⁸Frederick Carpenter's article, mentioned above in note 4, is the first to discuss Tristram's "transcendence." For Carpenter, the basic theme of the poem is "the triumph of true love over time."

⁹See Charles T. Davis, "Image Patterns in the Poetry

of Edwin Arlington Robinson," College English, XXII(1961), 384-85.

¹⁰See Estelle Kaplan, Philosophy in the Poetry of Edwin Arlington Robinson, pp. 128-44, for an examination of the allegorical aspects of the work. Jasper may be generally equated with ignorance, Honoria with complacency, Zoë with life, knowledge, or self-understanding; nonetheless, the characters, though not fully realized, are more complex in their interplay than these equations will allow.

¹¹The best examples occur in the fourth section where Jasper speaks successively with Honoria, young Hebron, and Zoë, each of them representing one of the forces against which he struggles.

¹²Cestre, An Introduction to Edwin Arlington Robinson, p. 209.

¹³Winters, Edwin Arlington Robinson, pp. 111-14.

¹⁴The term is Robert Humphrey's, from Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel (Berkeley, 1954), p. 29: "that type of interior monologue in which an omniscient author presents unspoken material as if it were directly from the consciousness of a character and, with commentary and description, guides the reader through it."

¹⁵For good examples of this authorial intrusion, see pp. 1012, ll. 27-33, and 1013, ll. 20-28; the use of the first person plural pronoun and the direct statement of ethical judgment by the narrator intrude his presence into the action. This is an unusual practice for Robinson in the narratives.

¹⁶Several critics have noted Robinson's "cult of failure." Among recent commentary, see Barnard, p. 122; Louis O. Coxe, "E. A. Robinson: The Lost Tradition," Sewanee Review, LXII(1954), 249; M. L. Rosenthal, The Modern Poets: A Critical Introduction (New York, 1960), p. 167; and Roy Harvey Pearce, The Continuity of American Poetry, p. 258.

¹⁷Robinson altered the original text, making, as he described it, "a radical change near the end of the poem in which I take out the material knife and leave the whole thing 'psychological.'" This statement is from Letters of Edwin Arlington Robinson to Howard George Schmitt, Carl J. Weber, ed. (Waterville, Maine, 1943), p. 27. That there was originally a knife literally at Avon's throat, one which he shows to the narrator, has confused critics of the poem.

See the lucid comments of David Brown, "A Note of Avon's Harvest," American Literature, IX(1938), 343-48; and Barnard, pp. 287-88. If Avon's whole story is suspect, he could have produced the knife himself. At any rate, Robinson's own statement supports the important consideration that the emphasis is on the psychological.

¹⁸The most strident condemnation of this slow unfolding of the original action is made by Yvor Winters, pp. 108-11. Winters concludes, "The poem is merely a shell."

¹⁹Talifer could be added to this list by dint of his ancestral home and latent impulse to self-destruction, but the tone and effect of his poem cut him off from these other protagonists. Because he is atypical, it seems best to omit him from these general statements.

²⁰Appendix II, p. 269, diagrams the chronological structure of Robinson's long narratives.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

In the two preceding chapters, twelve major narratives of E. A. Robinson have been described according to narrative ends and means. It has been shown that in various works Robinson chooses to structure his plots to emphasize changes in his protagonists' situation(e.g., Lancelot), moral character(e.g., Matthias at the Door), or thought (e.g., Amaranth). It has been shown that in various works Robinson attempts effects ranging from romantic comedy (in Talifer) to horror(in "Avon's Harvest). It has been suggested that within this diversity of narrative forms, Robinson is consistently concerned with certain basic social and psychological problems--the difficulty of communication between men, the fear of mortality, the isolation and alienation of the individual, the loss of absolute value systems, the vitiating effects of materialism, the inevitability of social failure for the sensitive human being. It has been pointed out also that in his technique Robinson basically depends upon the interplay of omniscient analysis with the dialogue of his characters to develop the conflicts, choices, and changes of his plots. The discussion has, it seems to me, shown that in several of Robinson's narratives effective, appropriate techniques are used to present serious and contemporary problems through

structures that are complex, carefully arranged for emphasis, and admirably unified.

At the beginning of Chapter II, the most important critics of Robinson's poetry were discussed, and there emerged then a set of objections which have been variously advanced against Robinson's narratives. It seems appropriate here to comment specifically upon those criticisms, which may be generally summarized within the four areas of diction, thought, character, and action: 1) that Robinson's qualities of rhetorical concision and metrical ingenuity are lost in the ponderous syntax and unvarying meter of the blank verse; 2) that his increasingly complex philosophical questions outrun his ability to understand and to provide convincing answers; 3) that his characterizations, relying heavily as they do on dialogue, fail to produce distinct characters; and 4) that indirection in unfolding the plot undercuts structural unity.¹

Robinson's choices in diction for the long narratives seem to me appropriate to his narrative ends. Overly elaborate rhetoric or overly complicated meter would detract from the narrative focus on conflict and change, which have been demonstrated to be the central concerns of these narrative poems. In many passages Robinson develops delicate and/or complex images worthy of his best lyrics, but rarely does he allow elaborations in diction to overshadow his central narrative concerns.

Robinson's thematic concerns are, to be sure, increasingly difficult. Seeking to express the situation of modern man cut off from communication, denied the traditional value system, dehumanized by materialism, and frightened by his transciency, Robinson drives directly into the sources of human despair. "The theme is loss" has become a truism for modern literature, and Robinson is among the first to have recognized this. That he fails to provide an answer for the contemporary dilemma is not a fair criticism of his work; in fact the basic thematic implication of his protagonists' search for "light" is that ultimately a man must find his meanings in the faintest of glimmers, in an intuitive belief in guiding universal forces. Answers are at best fragmentary, and communicating them(as in poetry) is an uncertain and, at best, partially successful task. His thematic preoccupations are never fully "solved" nor are they intended to be.

It is true that Robinson's characters often sound alike in their speeches, but to a degree this is an inevitability. Robinson is consistent as a stylist, and of course all of the characters speak his blank verse. Although the styles may be similar, the tone and content of speeches usually distinguish the characters. For example, it is clear that Lancelot, Guinevere, Gawaine, Arthur, and Sir Lucan deliver speeches distinct in subject and tone. To be sure, characters wrestling with similar problems often

speak in closely related ways about those problems; for example, Roman Bartholow and Matthias share much in their traits of character and in their experiences and conflicts--hence speak similar passages. For the most part Robinson gives his agents speeches which are true to their characters and situations; and by their attitudes and choices, each of the central characters at least sets himself apart.

As to Robinson's "indirection," that has been discussed somewhat above.² Apparently Robinson felt indirection was necessary to his poems. There are several traditional advantages to this technique: it can cultivate suspense, involve the reader's mind in the puzzling out of the plot and thus in the poem as a whole, offer a means to complicate the structure, and assure the continuation of reader interest. While indirection can do all of these, it is debatable whether or not Robinson always succeeded with the device. The central concern, however, is whether the unity of the entire structure is jeopardized; and this simply is not the case in most of Robinson's narratives. With the possible exception of The Glory of the Nightingales,³ in none of the narratives does lack of information about the action impede or obscure the reader's awareness of the central conflict or the kind of change which is occurring. In short, it seems to me that judged by traditional standards of narrative verse, E. A. Robinson produced a solid canon of well-organized, structurally unified long poems.

Robinson is of course not always successful in his narratives. His central artistic problem was no doubt a problem of determining proper magnitude. His method of writing and revising the narratives suggests that this is the case. According to Robinson, he first put together in his mind the outline of the action, then wrote a rapid first draft, and revised by cutting out whole passages which later seemed to him to add little to the poem.⁴ Especially in his two longest narratives, Roman Bartholow and Tristram, several passages are unnecessarily long and repetitious, to the discouragement and perhaps boredom of the reader. But magnitude is not the only aesthetic problem in Robinson's narratives. In the relatively short The Man Who Died Twice, for example, difficulties with handling the point of view flaw the unity of the whole.

No artist, of course, can expect to overcome always the problems of construction and to produce nothing but masterpieces. Most of Robinson's narratives, however, are unified works of art and structurally sound narrative poems; and some of them are distinguished pieces of literature. Lancelot is brilliant in the originality of its conception of the mythic characters of Lancelot and Guinevere; in its early-established and clearly focused conflict between duty, love, and Light; and in its presentation of a painful internal impasse. Matthias at the Door is striking in its interplay of character and setting,

in its slow, precise unfolding of a complex change in character, and in its careful manipulation of point of view. Amaranth is delightful in its mordant, satirical reversal of artistic cliches; its complex interweaving of social, philosophical, and aesthetic ideology; and its carefully arranged "dream" structure. In these three works at least, Robinson proves himself a good narrative poet.

The question of the relation of Robinson's narratives to those of other American poets is an interesting one. The desire to produce an "American epic"⁵ led many of the early poets of the country to write long poems, some imitative of the English models, even to the choice of foreign settings and characters, and some based in the new American environment. Among the most ambitious and interesting are Barlow's The Columbiad(1809), an epic in the heroic mold; Timothy Dwight's The Conquest of Canaan(1785), an epic based in biblical events; John Trumbull's McFingal(1782), an epic burlesque; and Longfellow's Evangeline(1847) and Song of Hiawatha(1855), metrical romances. Besides these, there were various other kinds of long narratives and dramatic monologues published in America before 1900. Wigglesworth's Day of Doom(1662) is a meditative narrative. Longfellow's The Courtship of Miles Standish(1876) is an historical narrative. Melville's Clarel(1876) is a philosophical/travel narrative. In Robinson's youth, the long romantic narrative was in vogue, a result no doubt of

Longfellow's popularity.⁶

Some twentieth century narratives are traditional enough in form not to upset the generic distinctions of earlier eras, although categorization is not always comfortable; for example, there are Stephen Vincent Benet's John Brown's Body(1928), MacLeish's Conquistador(1933), and Kenneth Koch's Ko, or a Season on Earth(1959).⁷ But in contrast to those narrative kinds of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the most significant long poems of the twentieth century are by no means easily classified. It is difficult to assign generic classifications to such diversely constructed works as Eliot's The Waste Land(1923), Hart Crane's The Bridge(1930), Pound's Cantos(1933 to present), and William Carlos Williams' Paterson(1946-1958).⁸ These four are ambitious poems, all of them technically innovative. However much they vary its traditional technique, they all utilize the narrative manner. Each of these works is, it seems to me, epic in spirit, although to call them "epic" requires a narrowing of genre definition.⁹

Whether or not The Bridge should be called an epic is irrelevant to this study, of course. The concern here is simply to describe the relation of E. A. Robinson's narrative poems to the typical narrative poems of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It will serve that purpose to contrast briefly two particular long poems which are representative of the two centuries, Evangeline and Paterson.

Longfellow's Evangeline presents a romantic subject, the separation and reconciliation of lovers; and the narrative is structured upon the long search Evangeline undergoes and its pathetic conclusion. Characterization is simple and external. Good and bad motivations are explicitly announced by the narrator. The thought advanced is openly sentimental and idealistic. Settings are elaborately described. Both diction and meter are artificial. The meter is dactylic hexameter, which often puts a strain on normal syntax; and Longfellow utilizes widely the extended simile and elaborate metaphor. Evangeline is a romantic tale of external conflict and seeking in which the symbolic and universal values of the particulars are heavily emphasized.

By contrast, William Carlos Williams' Paterson presents a realistic and psychological subject, a specific American community, a specific American man. The poem is structured to reflect the life of a man, a town, a river. Characterization is complex and illusive as point of view shifts rapidly. The thought is based in unreconciled paradox. Free verse is interspersed with prose to deliver the idioms of the times which are being explored. Williams' aim, "in the particular to discover the universal,"¹⁰ suggests his focus on the particular, the local. Perhaps because the local is always in flux, unfinished, complete structure in the traditional sense is not possible--hence the eventual open-ended approach of Williams as he added on books to his

original plan. At any rate, spontaneity is an important aspect of Williams' art. As Gordon Grigsby has noted, Williams "wanted the writing method to be natural, to approach the spontaneous, so that the poem would catch the actual world, the texture of man and the city, the flux and swirl of contemporary reality."¹¹ The subject, contemporary reality, is only apprehended in the inner view of the poet, Mr. Paterson; thus it is the description of internal conflict and seeking. It is an intensely personal, inward-looking poem, and that is the center of its contrast with such a narrative work as Evangeline. Paterson's form is the consciousness of the poet.¹²

It seems to me that Evangeline and Paterson fairly represent, if not the characteristic long poem of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, at least the characteristic means and ends to which the best narrative poets in the two centuries direct their efforts. If this is so, then E. A. Robinson's narratives represent a clear point of transition in the history of narrative poetry. In his narrative structure, he suggests the old; in his theme and subject matter, he uncovers the new.

Robinson keeps his narrative a tale of human relationships in the external world. His poems are indeed "realistic verse novels." He establishes a single point of view which the reader can trust. He analyses his characters' thoughts and has them reveal their traits through their dialogue

and actions. He uses symbolic settings and extended metaphors to comment upon the action. He often approaches the allegorical in his efforts to reveal the universal applications of his particular cases.

But at the same time, Robinson emphasizes repeatedly the psychological complexity which underlies human action and reaction. His awareness of the difficulty of communicating either idea or emotion is a constant thematic factor in his poetry. His verse is clearly narrative in the traditional sense, yet he is concerned mainly with internal change and character interplay. He suggests internal ambiguities and human enigmas without deserting the traditional externalized forms for the fully internalized view. He is suggesting depth rather than, as Williams does, plumbing depth.

This study of Robinson's narratives has emphasized how important to his art are the traditional emphases on such elements as character, conflict, choice, and change. Robinson's narrative effects grow out of the resolution of these elements according to carefully prepared expectations and probabilities. But by his attempts to suggest the cosmic complexity of twentieth century life and to reflect the necessarily enigmatic quality of any human relationship, Robinson stretches the traditional narrative form to its outer limits and forecasts the new direction narrative verse will take.

According to Robinson, real communication requires a breaking down of barriers. Interestingly, the naturalism which underlies all of his poetry has proved ultimately insufficient to communicate the quality of the contemporary poetic consciousness. It seems to me clear that the gradual narrative unfolding of a thought progression, a character growth, or an external action is passé in modern poetry. As the personal and particular are seen more and more as basic to poetic expression, even long poems have tended to blur that distinction which traditionally defines narrative as a mode, i.e., the set point of view. Narrative mode is traditionally defined as mixed summary and dialogue. The summary is delivered by a narrative voice, not the author himself, and hence a stance, a role, a mask. The demand for the personal undercuts this use of the mask, blurs point of view, and precludes the naturalistic storytelling mode in serious modern verse. Mr. Paterson is a character, but he is dominated by the poet's own persona. Paterson is expressive of the consciousness of William Carlos Williams. In varying degrees, this is true of the Cantos, The Waste Land, and The Bridge as well, each of which expresses the inner life of the man who wrote it.

In a sense, a book like Robert Lowell's Life Studies (1959) is also a long narrative poem in that it follows one central character, the first person protagonist, across a span of years. But here the tone is confessional, openly

personal, and fully subjectified. Lowell's work is critically acclaimed and so it should be; but his popularity, and that of "confessional" poetry in general, further suggests the direction which modern poetry is taking. It may be that the modern day reader of poetry is less interested in recognizing the "realism" of the poem as set against his own daily experience than in discovering new ways of seeing, experiencing, and expressing through contact with the personal images which order the poet's life. The realistic or naturalistic repeats what is common knowledge. The personal uncovers the new, reminding us that each consciousness is a differentiated, unique center of being. Whether writing confessional or not, most modern poets follow the Williams' dictate, "no ideas but in things,"¹³ and project the particular, thus the personal, image. If the mask is no longer permitted, narratives like Robinson's are certainly outdated.¹⁴

Of course, the novel is quite popular today, even those novels which adhere to traditional narrative techniques and naturalistic presentation. It is primarily in poetry that the movement is toward the particular and personal.¹⁵ Perhaps poetry is in the forefront, as it should be. Perhaps the novel does better with its prose what E. A. Robinson tried to do with his blank verse. Perhaps the people who want the naturalistic presentation are the people who are least likely to read poetry. At any rate, the traditional

narrative poem is a barely viable literary form in the 1960's.¹⁶

That this is the case is unfortunate, because a well-constructed verse narrative, one like Matthias at the Door, can suggest the modern quest for meaning as well as the prose novel and with more clarity than the "personal" poem. Even forty years after its publication, this poem, along with several other of Robinson's long narratives, speaks to current problems, and in the process produces a satisfying, fully realized aesthetic experience. It is a good poem of its kind, and deserves recognition as such.

CHAPTER V: FOOTNOTES

¹See in Chapter II of this study my discussion of each of the following for the central points of criticism: Robert Stevick against weakening diction, p. 35; Roy Harvey Pearce concerning Robinson's insufficient philosophy, p. 39; John Vail Foy criticizing characterization, p. 37; and Yvor Winters condemning Robinson's indirection, p. 29.

²See Chapter IV, p. 232, concerning the rationale for the extreme indirection in Cavender's House.

³See Yvor Winters, Edwin Arlington Robinson, pp. 111-114, for a cogent discussion of the structure of The Glory of the Nightingales.

⁴Esther Bates, in Edwin Arlington Robinson and His Manuscripts, p. 24, mentions this method: "Once he remarked that he had a system of his own when it came to the long poems. He had their sequence of events all planned before he came to the MacDowell Colony on June first, all worked out, 'as you do the scenario to a play,' he said." Miss Bates also describes (p. 26) his typical revision as cutting groups of from two to twenty lines. Herman Hagedorn, in Edwin Arlington Robinson: A Biography (New York, 1938), p. 320, mentions Robinson's revising of Lancelot where he took out "a large part of the bilious comedy."

⁵The term "epic" has been used in so many different ways that generalization is dangerous; but for this brief consideration, the traditional definition of epic as capsuled by John Ciardi (in "The Epic of Place," The Saturday Review of Literature, [XLI Oct., 1958], 37) will suffice: "the celebration in narrative verse of great deeds performed by a single hero or set of heroes." The kind of "verse novel" written by Robinson is similar to traditional epic in means and manner but is distinct in subject. The "hero or set of heroes" and "great deeds" are not Robinson's subject matter, not even in the Arthurian poems. Certainly the scope of his "verse novels" is considerably reduced from that of the traditional epic. Of course, this distinction in subject matter does not preclude the generic connection between traditional epic and modern verse narrative. Barlow and Dwight's poems are epic in intent; Longfellow's narrower scope and romantic subject are closer

to Robinson's later forms. All of these are in the narrative manner and so share much in technique.

⁶See above, Chapter I, p. 12, for Kindilien's summation of the popular narrative poetry of the 1890's.

⁷Respectively, a historical narrative, a dramatic monologue, and a mock epic.

⁸To these recognized American classics may be compared such recent narrative works as John Berryman's Homage to Mistress Bradstreet (1956) and Charles Olson's The Maximus Poems (1960).

⁹A narrowing of definition is suggested by Ciardi (p. 37). Epic in this century perhaps should be defined simply: "the sustained handling of a society-enclosing subject matter." In this view it is the scope of the poet's conception which largely classifies his poem.

¹⁰William Carlos Williams, Autobiography (New York, 1951) p. 391.

¹¹Gordon K. Grigsby, "The Genesis of Paterson," College English, XXIII (1962), 279.

¹²Ibid., p. 280. Grigsby suggests that such may be the case by pointing out that "the form of the poem imitates natural processes," the most important of these, "the life of consciousness, the process at work in the mind of the poet, Mr. Paterson."

¹³In William Carlos Williams, Paterson (New York, 1963), p. 14. This is one of many points at which Williams shows the influence of Ezra Pound.

¹⁴Interestingly, Robinson's Amaranth is to some extent his refutation of modern trends in aesthetics. Pink, writer of personal and obscure poetry, and Atlas, non-representational artist, both argue against the use of tradition. Both are killed off by Robinson after they are shown the triviality of their work. This is especially significant in that the poem itself is Robinson's attempt to show an inner view of a character by using traditional narrative techniques, including such a venerable device as the dream-vision.

¹⁵This is not to say that other art forms are not experimenting along analogous lines. For example, though the heavily plotted Hollywood film is quite popular, experimental films today tend more and more toward a

highly subjective kind of arrangement, where visual images meaningful to the film-maker's personal perception of his own daily environment are presented without consideration of any "plot-line" whatsoever. The films of Jonas Mekas and Stan Brakhage pursue this kind of organization. Compare also the "environmental element" utilized in the music of John Cage, the painting of Robert Rauschenberg.

¹⁶This is not to say that long narratives are not being attempted. Interest in variations of traditional narrative forms is high, as is indicated by the special issue of Poetry, CVI(1965), no. 1-2, 1-172, which presented excerpts of works in progress, long poems and sequences, by several contemporary poets.

APPENDIX I: "CAPTAIN CRAIG"

Robinson was little noticed by either the critics or the general public before 1916, and it may be that lack of recognition led him to attempt his first long poem, "Captain Craig"(1902), and to try his hand at playwriting with Van Zorn(1914) and The Porcupine(1915). In both cases he was trying something different for himself, experimenting with new forms.

"Captain Craig" is an unusual poem, much longer(57 pages in the Collected Works) than the lyrics which are typical of his early work or than the occasional dramatic monologues which he had written. It is a digressive kind of narrative, often explicitly and lengthily philosophical, which attempts to capture the spirit of an old, brilliant, eccentric man and to show how such a spirit affects those with whom it comes into contact. The action deals with the final days of Craig's life, shown through the conversations and letters of the man as reported by the first person narrator, a sensitive youth in a small New England town.

Craig's character and philosophy are developed through the three sections of the poem. In the first, the narrator describes how he and his art-conscious friends discovered the poverty stricken, abandoned Craig and arranged for his material necessities, in the process coming to a kind of

condescending friendship for the old man. In the second, the narrator quotes three letters he received from Craig while he was away from the town, letters in which Craig petulantly tries to communicate his philosophy of life. In the third, the narrator describes Craig's death and quotes his will, an extended testament of what his life had taught him, then indicates the importance of knowing Captain Craig for those who befriended him.

There are several kinds of developments in the poem. The Captain's external circumstances are improved; from a pit of despair and failure, he is allowed a comfortable environment and given a set of listeners to whom he can pour out his knowledge and be attended. The Captain's remarkable and erratic character is unfolded through the narrator's descriptions and speculations and through Craig's own four pieces of writing. The Captain's "philosophy" is also developed; in his speech and writing, an extended structure of ideas is presented. Finally, the language of the poem is elaborate both in the narrator's commentary and Craig's monologues, heavily burdened with obscure allusions and complex patterns of image and metaphor.

The major critical problem with the poem is that none of these four narrative parts seem central, and each at times detracts from the others. Craig's change in fortune is overwhelmed by the force of his character revelation. The characterization is often undercut by the explicitly

didactic development of Craig's philosophy, but the philosophy is often pushed aside by the elaborate diction. As early as 1923, Louis Untermeyer (in American Poetry Since 1900, p. 49) wrote of "Captain Craig" that its technique and dialectic were often interesting but that "Captain Craig himself seems less a character-study than a peg on which to hang a great quantity of brilliant, sometimes beautiful but finally tiresome talk." Untermeyer's description suggests that a confusion of narrative ends flaws the poem, and such seems to me to be the case. In this first long narrative, Robinson fails to discover an organizing principle by which to structure the work; and as a result the relationships of part to part are not clear and blur into a final difficult obscurity.

It is interesting to note, in concluding, that the core of Captain Craig's philosophy, which he expounds at such length, is that a man's vision of truth cannot really be expounded at all. Craig rejoices in being allowed to "communicate" his accrued wisdom before his death, but it is his belief that no "poet" can teach to others what he discovers in life and that finding the light either comes naturally or not at all. At the end, the narrator feels he has benefited greatly from his friendship with Craig, from his personal qualities (especially from his humor), but not so much from his philosophical commentary. In this first long narrative, Robinson thus states explicitly

the "communication" theme which is implicit in all of those narratives which followed.

APPENDIX II: CHRONOLOGICAL STRUCTURES

The diagrams here are meant to show in its simplest form the chronology of narration and the direction of change in each of Robinson's major narratives. The seven poems in which the narration begins near the conclusion of the action are diagrammed on the following page. The other five poems, diagrammed on page 271, are presented by Robinson in unbroken chronological order; that is, no extensive amount of additional information about the past is necessary in order to understand the central action of the story.

WORK	PROTAGONIST IN OPENING PASSAGES	CHRONOLOGICAL BEGINNING OF ACTION	MIDDLE	END
"Avon's Harvest"	Avon as fear- ful, confiding in friend	Avon as average school-boy, striking schoolmate	years of increasing torture	death
<u>The Man Who Died Twice</u>	Nash as exul- tant Salvation Army drummer	Nash as young composer dissipating talent for spite	years of debauchery and self- contempt	redeeming vision preceding death
<u>Cavender's House</u>	Cavender as haunted, guilt- stricken	Cavender as jealous husband, killing wife	years of wandering doubt--implied	acceptance of guilt
<u>Amaranth</u>	Fargo as doubter of his career in business	Fargo as inferior artist choosing to give up art	years of new and successful career--implied	reiterates old choice
<u>Merlin</u>	Merlin as caught between demands of Arthur and Vivian	Merlin as intellect choosing sensual life	years of sensual pleasure	renouncing responsibility
<u>King Jasper</u>	Jasper as an old, worried man	Jasper as ingrate, denying Hebron after gaining power	years of un- bothered power wielding	total loss of power
<u>The Glory of the Nightingales</u>	Malory as hate-filled revenger	Malory as young, innocent doctor des- troyed by jealous Nightingale	years of wandering and hate building	recovery of benevolence, altruism

WORK	PROTAGONIST AT BEGINNING	MIDDLE	END
<u>Lancelot</u>	Lancelot as torn between love, duty, and spirit	extended indecision	release to spiritual quest
Roman <u>Bertholow</u>	Bertholow as exultant in "spiritual rebirth"	collapse of simple world	second rebirth
<u>Tristram</u>	Tristram as frustrated in love	period of dissatisfied wandering	fulfilling of love preceding death
<u>Matthias at the Door</u>	Matthias as selfishly materialistic and possessive	series of personal losses	spiritual awakening
<u>Talifer</u>	Talifer as wrongheaded in choosing a wife	period of unhappiness	correction of error and attainment of happiness

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