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A DRAMATIC AND RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF "THE MAN AGAINST THE SKY" AND OTHER SELECTED POEMS OF E. A. ROBINSON.

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THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

A DRAMATIC AND RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF "THE MAN AGAINST THE SKY" AND OTHER SELECTED POEMS OF E. A. ROBINSON

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

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degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

ROBERT STEVENS FISH

Norman, Oklahoma

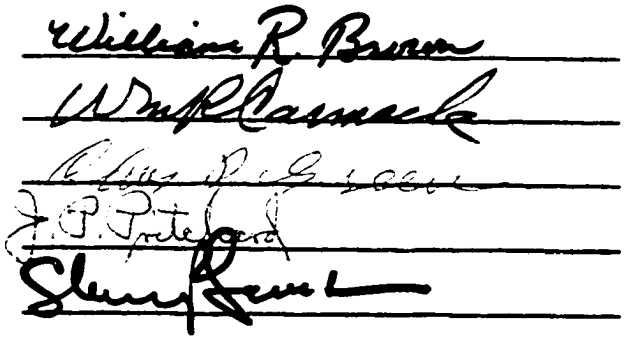
1970

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SELECTED POEMS OF E. A. ROBINSON

APPROVED BY



DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

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A DRAMATIC AND RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF "THE MAN AGAINST THE SKY" AND OTHER SELECTED POEMS OF E. A. ROBINSON

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"The Man Against the Sky," first published in 1916, is a key work in a study of Edwin Arlington Robinson's poetry. Most critical studies and biographies of Robinson discuss the poem to varying degrees. Since its publication, the poem has been widely praised and damned and sometimes misinterpreted. Initially, the poem was thought to be pessimistic in attitude and meaning by such critics as Amy Lowell, who termed the work "an emissary of gloom or of despair."[1] This and other similar interpretations troubled Robinson, and he wrote to a friend in March, 1916: "You are entirely right in assuming that the . . . poem is not a

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[1]Quoted in Wallace L. Anderson, Edwin Arlington Robinson: A Critical Introduction (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 22.

dirge. My purpose was to cheer people up."[2] In time, critics began to reevaluate the poem and by 1940 most critical assessments agreed with that of Estelle Kaplan who said only "superficial readers" view the poem as skeptical and pessimistic.[3]

An error in interpretation that has not been widely corrected yet is the belief that "The Man Against the Sky" is a philosophic poem rather than a dramatic poem. A number of critics evaluate the poem as a personal expression of Robinson's philosophy, unmediated by a dramatized persona.[4] An extreme example of a comment in this vein

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[2]Ridgely Torrence, et al., eds., Selected Letters of Edwin Arlington Robinson, with an Introduction by Ridgely Torrence (New York: Macmillan Company, 1940), p. 92.

[3]Philosophy in the Poetry of Edwin Arlington Robinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940), p. 63. Post-1940 critical evaluations which still see the poem as one of despair have been written by Hoxie Neale Fairchild, 1880-1920, Gods of a Changing Poetry, Vol. V of Religious Trends in English Poetry (6 vols.; New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), p. 240; Hyatt Howe Waggoner, The Heel of Elohim: Science and Values in Modern American Poetry (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950), p. 35; and Yvor Winters, Edwin Arlington Robinson (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1946), p. 48.

[4]"The Man Against the Sky" and Dionysius in Doubt "are philosophical and not narrative or dramatic," Ellsworth Barnard, Edwin Arlington Robinson: A Critical Study (New York: Macmillan Company, 1952), p. 98. "'The Man Against the Sky' /is/ a purely philosophic poem," Alfred Kreymborg, A History of American Poetry: Our Singing Strength (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1934), p. 310. "'The Man Against the Sky'. . . . is the crystallization of Robinson's philosophy," Herbert S. Gorman, The Procession of Masks (Boston: B. J. Brimmer Co., 1923), p. 25. Also see Anderson, p. 146; Morton Dauwen Zabel, ed., Selected Poems of Edwin Arlington Robinson, with an Introduction by

referring to Robinson's poetry in general is Louis O. Coxe's remark that "this poet wears no masks; he is simply at a distance from his poem, unfolding the 'plot,' letting us see and letting us make what applications we will."[5] This statement does not hold true for "The Man Against the Sky"; the poem is a complex of situation-attitude relationships wherein a dramatized persona, an "I," addresses himself as auditor. Placing himself in the scene of an imaginary "furnace" and acting as a prophet, the "I" subjects himself to a testing of his faith and a testing of the tenets of the philosophy of materialism, the greatest threat to his faith. By not recognizing "The Man Against the Sky" as a dramatic poem, critics have not seen it as a dramatized persona's struggle to strengthen his faith.

Moreover, the poem's rhetorical aspects have been neglected. No one, in any of the almost five hundred books and articles on Robinson which I examined, seems aware of the persuasive nature of the poem. This omission is not

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James Dickey (London: Collier-Macmillan Limited, 1966), p. xxvi; James G. Hepburn, "E. A. Robinson's System of Opposites," Publications of The Modern Language Association of America, LXXX (June, 1965), 273; Vernon Loggins, I Hear America . . . : Literature in the United States Since 1900 (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1937), p. 57; Harriet Monroe, Poets and Their Art (New York: Macmillan Company, 1926), p. 8; Lloyd Morris, The Poetry of Edwin Arlington Robinson; An Essay in Appreciation (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1923), p. 70; and Waggoner, p. 29.

[5]E. A. Robinson, University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers, No. 17 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962), 31.

surprising: Since most readers generally view the work as philosophical self-expression by the poet, the communicative aspects would not readily come to mind. But the speaker of the poem is not only addressing himself: He is addressing an implied auditor outside the poem. This implied auditor is not simply anyone who reads the poem; rather, he is a particular type of man. As he speaks through the mask of a prophet, the "I" delivers a speech to the implied auditor for a specific purpose. The "I" attempts to persuade the implied auditor to become a disciple of the prophecy which is the "message" of the oration-poem.[6]

Therefore, by viewing the poem dramatically as a complex of situation-attitude relationships, the reader will recognize that "The Man Against the Sky" is not a philosophical poem; rather, the philosophy within the poem is vivified and presented in the context of a dramatic situation through the speaker. The general purpose of this dissertation is to demonstrate the truth of the preceding statement. Specifically, the purpose of this study is to (1) explain and substantiate the ways in which "The Man Against the Sky" is dramatic in nature, and (2) explain and

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[6]Nicholas Ayo, "Robinson's Use of the Bible," Colby Library Quarterly, VIII (March, 1969), 250-65, discusses the characters in Robinson's biblical poems as prophets, but does not refer to prophetic speakers in Robinson's non-biblical poems.

substantiate the ways in which "The Man Against the Sky" is rhetorical in nature.[7]

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[7]I would like to point out those sources which have been most useful in this study. The definitive edition of Robinson's poetry, including "The Man Against the Sky," is Collected Poems of Edwin Arlington Robinson (New York: Macmillan Company, 1937). Some of his earlier poems not reprinted in the omnibus collection, notably "Kosmos" and "The Children of the Night," are in Charles T. Davis, ed., Edwin Arlington Robinson: Selected Early Poems and Letters (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960). Three collections of Robinson's letters are indispensable to a study of Robinson and his poetry: Ridgely Torrence, et al., eds., Selected Letters of Edwin Arlington Robinson, with an Introduction by Ridgely Torrence (New York: Macmillan Company, 1940); Denham Sutcliffe, ed., Untriangulated Stars: Letters of Edwin Arlington Robinson to Harry de Forest Smith, 1890-1905 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1947); and Richard Cary, ed., Edwin Arlington Robinson's Letters to Edith Brower (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968). The most useful biographical and critical studies are Wallace L. Anderson, Edwin Arlington Robinson: A Critical Introduction (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968); Ellsworth Barnard, Edwin Arlington Robinson: A Critical Study (New York: Macmillan Company, 1952); Louis O. Coxe, Edwin Arlington Robinson: The Life of Poetry (New York: Pegasus, 1969); Hoyt C. Franchere, Edwin Arlington Robinson (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1968); Hermann Hagedorn, Edwin Arlington Robinson: A Biography (New York: Macmillan Company, 1938); Emery Neff, Edwin Arlington Robinson (New York: William Sloane Associates, Inc., 1948); W. R. Robinson, Edwin Arlington Robinson: A Poetry of the Act (Cleveland: Western Reserve University Press, 1967); Chard Powers Smith, Where the Light Falls: A Portrait of Edwin Arlington Robinson (New York: Macmillan Company, 1965); Yvor Winters, Edwin Arlington Robinson (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1946). The helpful articles are too numerous to list here; two stand out, however: Richard Crowder, "'Man against the Sky,'" College English, XIV (February, 1953), 269-76; Robert D. Stevick, "Robinson and William James," The University of Kansas City Review, XXV (June, 1959), 293-301. Sources of theoretical discussions of dramatic criticism include Wayne C. Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961); Don Geiger, The Dramatic Impulse in Modern Poetics (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967); Don Geiger, The Sound, Sense, and Performance of Literature (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and

Before either purpose can be accomplished, we need to understand the bases of dramatic and rhetorical criticism. Therefore, the second chapter of this study describes the principles of both dramatic and rhetorical criticism so that their application to "The Man Against the Sky" will be readily comprehensible. Some of Robinson's poems which are similar in certain aspects to "The Man Against the Sky," particularly "Credo" and "The Children of the Night," are used to illustrate the principles.

With this background of dramatic and rhetorical criticism developed, I shall demonstrate first the dramatic nature of the "I" of "The Man Against the Sky" because of his central position in the poem. Although chapter three discusses the two beliefs common to the implied author and the speaker, it points out how the speaker differs from the implied author by acting as a prophet; thus, the speaker is a dramatized persona. One may ask what the speaker's purpose is in acting as a prophet. I believe it is that the speaker believes his faith is weak; his purpose in the poem is to erase his doubts by establishing a situation which tests his confidence in his beliefs. The fourth chapter of this study analyzes the dramatic nature of the speaker-prophet's struggle to triumph over his self-imposed "trial." I shall describe the dramatic elements of the poem which

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Company, 1963); George T. Wright, The Poet in the Poem (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960).

constitute the situation-attitude complex of the "I's" resolution of his conflict.

While the speaker is engaged in his conflict, he may be persuading someone else at the same time. That someone else is an implied auditor who is outside the poem witnessing the dramatic struggle. Our only method of knowing the nature of this auditor is to infer him from the construction of the contents of the poem. The implied auditor of "The Man Against the Sky" is a type of man characterized by particular needs which make him a potential disciple of the speaker's prophecy. Chapter five develops this concept. If the speaker does address the implied auditor of the poem, we have a rhetorical situation. Even though the speaker-prophet's main intent is self-persuasion, if his appeals function persuasively for the implied auditor he creates a rhetorical dimension of the poem. Given a speaker as prophet, an implied auditor as potential disciple, and a message as prophecy, we may identify and evaluate the major ways the appeals of the poem function rhetorically. This identification and evaluation make up the content of chapter six.

If the speaker of "The Man Against the Sky" is a dramatized persona acting as a prophet, I derive the hypothesis that the poem is both dramatic and rhetorical in nature. To test the hypothesis is to open the way for a different assessment of a significant body of Robinson's poetry.

The study begins with an explanation of the rubrics of dramatic and rhetorical criticism.

CHAPTER II

RUBRICS OF DRAMATIC AND RHETORICAL CRITICISM

Introduction

The word "dramatic" is used in this dissertation in the sense that a piece of literature is a complex of situation-attitude relationships. This complex is dramatic in that a speaker, an "I," exists as the narrator; that this speaker exists at a point in space and time; that this speaker's utterance has a discernible purpose; that this speaker is addressing someone, either himself, another character in the poem, or God; and that a speaker may also address someone outside the poem, an implied auditor who the speaker feels is reading the poem.

In the last two instances, a poem is not only dramatic but is also rhetorical. The "I" of a poem is acting rhetorically when he attempts to change the attitudes of either himself, another character, God, or the reader through the language of the poem.

In this chapter those ways in which a poem is dramatic and rhetorical will be discussed as they apply to analysis and criticism.

Dramatic Criticism

The focus of a situation-attitude relationship is the experience that occurs in time and space within a poem. Physical objects and action may or may not be present, but something happens or is observed in a poem and this "something" is the poem's focus. The attitude is the feelings that grow out of, or act upon, or interact with, the situation. These feelings may be held by someone in the situation, someone observing the situation, or both. There might even be an absence of feeling, although it can never be total and does not make for good poetry. These feelings or attitudes concerning a situation make up an experience, a situation-attitude relationship. A number of these experiences constitute a complex of situation-attitude relationships. According to Cleanth Brooks, "The unifying principle of the organization which is the poem is an attitude or complex of attitudes."[1] The "total attitude" or that which "is" the poem results from the relationships of all the situation-attitude combinations that are in the poem. The meaning of a poem, then, is found within this complex of situation-attitude relationships. According to Don Geiger, "'Meaning' is inseparable from represented experience in works of literature as it is inseparable

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[1]The Well Wrought Urn (New York: Harvest Books, 1947), p. 191.

from experience in life itself."[2] The meaning of a poem is its "total attitude" which will be substituted for "experence." This total attitude, encompassing the complex of situation-attitude relationships that make up the work, is dramatic because the complex deals with conflict on some level and the total attitude is often a resolution of conflict. According to Bacon and Breen, given a speaker, a situation, and a listener, "There is always a conflict expressed or implied, and a prevailing emotional state. Such are the conditions of drama, and such are the conditions which give all literature the semblance of life."[3] Therefore, all literature is dramatic; criticism based on this viewpoint is rightly termed dramatic criticism.

Exploring the situation-attitude complex is a method of studying the dramatic element in poetry. Speakers and listeners in poems are involved in, and may exert control over, this complex. If we can identify the speakers, the listeners, their situations and attitudes about those situations, then we can begin to understand the relationships in the situation-attitude complex. To identify these elements, writes Thomas Sloan, the critic "has a basic set of questions to ask: Who is speaking? To whom? What does

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[2]The Sound, Sense, and Performance of Literature (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1963), p. 66.

[3]Wallace A. Bacon and Robert S. Breen, Literature as Experience (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959), p. 7.

he say? Why? How? Where? When?"[4] Sloan goes on to emphasize that an additional question must be answered "so far as 'meaning' is concerned: How do the answers to these questions relate to one another?"[5] By discovering answers to all these questions, "we are discovering the situation-attitude relationships which comprise the piece's 'drama,'"[6] which is also the piece's meaning.

The Dramatist: Poet as Maker of Speakers

An important element of the situation-attitude complex is the presence of a speaker: "All literary works imply, more or less distinctly, but always to some degree, a speaker."[7] The speaker, or "I," is usually the initial concern since the other questions may be unanswerable without an identification of the persona. Are the speaker in the poem and the author one man or two? Are they identical or only similar or unrelated? Many critics have taken a position on this question. Of those critics who view the speaker and author as one, T. S. Eliot believes that the author is the speaker in both lyric poetry and dramatic

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[4]Thomas O. Sloan, ed., The Oral Study of Literature (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 8.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Geiger, p. 62.

[7]Monroe Beardsley, Robert Daniel, and Glen Leggett, Theme and Form: An Introduction to Literature (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1956), p. xxiv.

monologues.[8] Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren believe that the speaker may be "the poet writing in his own person."[9]

Representing the opposite view are Professors Beardsley, Daniel, and Leggett, who strongly believe that "the speaker of a literary work . . . is not to be confused with the actual living author--however similar they may be."[10] Which position is correct? The answer is found within the artist, the writer of the poem. A conventional statement is that "literature is an expression of the artist, an extension of his personal feelings and beliefs." But how reliable is it, how literally truthful? How honest is the writer in putting down his true feelings? What honesty is he capable of? Even when an author attempts to write in his own person, in a private journal for example, he finds it difficult, in Patrick Cruttwell's words, "to keep the person-in-the-journal and the person-who-makes-the-journal always identical."[11] Cruttwell goes on to explain the role of person as maker:

> This in the true amateur is simply the germ of what, in the real writer, is fully developed. For him the

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[8]The Three Voices of Poetry (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1954), pp. 6, 23-24, 27.

[9]Cleanth Brooks, Jr., and Robert Penn Warren, eds., Understanding Poetry (New York: Henry Holt, 1938), p. 23.

[10]P. xxiv.

[11]"Makers and Persons," Hudson Review, XII (Winter, 1959-60), 488.

> habit of making, the practice of standing aside a little and looking at the subject, has become incurable; . . . And in the real writer, who cannot write a line without a lurking suspicion (fear or hope or a blend of the two) that it may one day be read by others, the habit of public writing infects the private; he begins to "make" when he professes merely to record. The maker takes hold of the person and changes it.[12]

Wright's explanation of why the speaker is not the actual voice of the poet is, briefly, that the speaker in the poem has a separate existence.

> The persona may share much with his creator--a point of view, an attitude toward life, certain historical circumstances, certain intellectual qualities; but the persona is part of the poem, and the poet exists outside it. The author dies; the persona has a permanently potential existence, realized whenever the work in which he appears is read. However skillfully the poet may try to effect an identity between himself and his persona, the task is hopeless, for he and what he has created exist on different metaphysical levels. Mainly because the speaker is in the poem, not behind it--though he may be behind the events of the poem, not in them--he cannot quite be identified with the maker of the whole poem, speaker and all.[13]

When critics refer to "Robinson's beliefs" as expressed in his poetry, they mean or should mean the beliefs of the speaker in the poem who may approximate but never be synonymous with the actual author himself. The speaker or "I" of a poem is a created character, a dramatic persona from the author's imagination. Although different speakers may express one attitude in a large number of an author's works and although that attitude may be one which

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[12] Ibid.

[13] George T. Wright, The Poet in the Poem (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), p. 22.

the author has in letters or interviews admitted holding himself, the "I" of the poem is still not synonymous with the author. By the act of creation the author cannot avoid constructing an actor to play in the performance which is the literature.[14] The author cannot be that actor without assuming some type of mask. The creation of a mask, a dramatized persona, may be unconscious on the part of the author. The author's relationship to his persona is so complex and the use of the word "I" may be so ambiguous that "even the poet may become understandably confused as to who it is that actually speaks his poems."[15] Herbert S. Gorman summarized this concept of the persona when he wrote, "All of /the masks/ are twisted, either greatly or slightly, from the truth; there is not a naked face in all literature."[16]

Although it is erroneous to equate a poem's speaker with the author, it is equally erroneous to conclude that the poet is not to be found at all in the poem. Wayne C. Booth said, "The author's judgment is always present, always evident to anyone who knows how to look for it. . . . though the author can to some extent choose his disguises,

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[14]Beardsley, Daniel, and Leggett, p. xxiv.

[15]Wright, pp. 37-38.

[16]The Procession of Masks (Boston: B. J. Brimmer Co., 1923), p. 15.

he can never choose to disappear."[17] If the poet is not the speaker, how can we find him in a poem? After all, it is true that "the poem . . . may be seen as an act of the author himself."[18] We can draw certain conclusions about what we think an author might be like from his choice of topics.[19] One might make statements about Robinson's Arthurian legend poems, or the large number of poems centered in the mythical Tilbury Town. The content of poems, what the poet chooses to include and what he chooses to leave out, provides clues about an author. The form of poems, diction, meter, rhythm, style, all give us a picture, however incomplete, of the author. In fact, part of the poet can be found in the persona. According to Wright,

> It is doubtful if in practice the poet ever completely detaches himself from his persona. Although the "I" is fundamentally a singer, a mask through which the poet examines reality, the poet necessarily draws from his own experience in establishing the song of his singer.[20]

We do, then, find the poet in the poem. But how much of the author is real and how much is a mask? And how can we know the difference? If Wright is correct in saying that "in a sense, the song [poem], not the persona, is the poet's mask,"[21] the task may be impossible.

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[17] The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 20. All statements and ideas from this book refer to novels but are applicable to poetry.

[18] Geiger, pp. 62-63.

[19] Booth, p. 20.

[20] P. 37.

[21] Ibid., p. 59.

Too many variables exist for the critic to point to a specific word or line of a poem and say, "Aha! That is the author himself speaking there." The critic can speculate on matters, but to know beyond a doubt how a poem relates to the life of the author will be difficult. Meaningful statements can still be made, however, about the author in the poem. We need only to be sure that our conclusions about the author refer to the image of the author who is found within his literature and not to the man of flesh and blood who eats and sleeps and makes love, for this latter author is not entirely in his works; we must constantly keep in mind that the real author is a creator of masks, even for himself. The implied author is somewhat different, as Wright points out, from the real author:

> The poet not only contrives a speaker for his poems; he also contrives for himself a personality that the reader can abstract from the poem. Some aspects of the writer are omitted, others are added, so that the idea of the poet which comes to us from the poem is often a representation not of what the poet is but of what he thinks he is or would like to be or cannot help being. Yet, however this picture of the poet relates to the actual man, it is this intelligence that we take to define the perspective of the poem.[22]

It is with a knowledge of this second author, according to Booth, that we are able to make meaningful statements concerning the work:

> The "implied author" chooses, consciously or unconsciously, what we read; we infer him as an ideal, literary, created version of the real man; he is the

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[22] Ibid., p. 28.

> sum of his own choices.
>
> It is only by distinguishing between the author and his implied image that we can avoid pointless and unverifiable talk about such qualities as "sincerity" or "seriousness" in the author. . . . we have only the work as evidence for the only kind of sincerity that concerns us: Is the implied author in harmony with himself--that is, are his other choices in harmony with his explicit narrative character? If a narrator who by every trustworthy sign is presented to us as a reliable spokesman for the author professes to believe in values which are never realized in the structure as a whole, we can then talk of an insincere work. A great work establishes the "sincerity" of its implied author, regardless of how grossly the man who created that author may belie in his other forms of conduct the values embodied in his work. For all we know, the only sincere moments of his life may have been lived as he wrote.[23]

Thus, we may substantiate the nature of the implied author from the lines of the poem itself.

Having examined literature as being generally dramatic in the senses of creating a "total attitude" and of having a speaker who addresses a listener, we may examine with more specificity dramatic elements of some of Robinson's poems. Each of the dramatic questions (who, to whom, where, when, how, what, and why) will serve as a guideline.

The Speaker in the Poem

Two fictive voices are present in poetry, the implied author who controls the poem from the sidelines, and the narrator who speaks from within the poem. "In some works," according to Wright, "the distinction between poet and speaker is obvious; in others it seems an extravagance

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[23]Pp. 74-75.

to call attention to a distinction so thin that it can hardly be said to exist. Its existence is nevertheless a matter of fact."[24] The speaker of the poem, the narrator, may be generally classified into two types--the dramatized and the undramatized. In actuality, however, narrators exist in infinite variety on a scale between poles of dramatization and non-dramatization. The identification of a narrator as dramatized or undramatized is an oversimplification; narrators are dramatized to one degree or another.

Dramatic monologues and dramatic dialogues contain the most obviously dramatic speakers. In a dramatic monologue the speaker addresses another character within the poem. One of Robinson's best known poems in this genre is "How Annandale Went Out":

> "They called it Annandale--and I was there
> To flourish, to find words, and to attend:
> Liar, physician, hypocrite, and friend,
> I watched him; and the sight was not so fair
> As one or two that I have seen elsewhere:
> An apparatus not for me to mend--
> A wreck, with hell between him and the end,
> Remained of Annandale; and I was there.
>
> "I knew the ruin as I knew the man;
> So put the two together, if you can,
> Remembering the worst you know of me.
> Now view yourself as I was, on the spot--
> With a slight kind of engine. Do you see?
> Like this . . . You wouldn't hang me? I
> thought not."[25]

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[24] P. 22.

[25] Collected Poems of Edwin Arlington Robinson (New York: Macmillan Company, 1937), p. 346. (Hereinafter referred to as Collected Poems.)

The "I" of the poem is a doctor, a friend of a man named Annandale. The doctor defends his mercykilling of Annandale, possibly to a judge or jury or close friend. Within the fourteen lines of the poem, the "I" becomes an individual, a man of compassion. Single words such as the doctor's self-description as "liar" and "hypocrite" create new dimensions of meaning of the speaker.

The second form, the dramatic dialogue, is a poem with two or more characters speaking to each other without narrative comment. "John Evereldown" is a clear example of this form:

"Where are you going to-night, to-night,--
  Where are you going, John Evereldown?
There's never the sign of a star in sight,
  Nor a lamp that's nearer than Tilbury Town.
Why do you stare as a dead man might?
Where are you pointing away from the light?
And where are you going to-night, to-night,--
  Where are you going, John Evereldown?"

"Right through the forest, where none can see,
  There's where I'm going, to Tilbury Town.
The men are asleep,--or awake, may be,--
  But the women are calling John Evereldown.
Ever and ever they call for me,
And while they call can a man be free?
So right through the forest, where none can see,
  There's where I'm going, to Tilbury Town."

"But why are you going so late, so late,--
  Why are you going, John Evereldown?
Though the road be smooth and the way be straight,
  There are two long leagues to Tilbury Town.
Come in by the fire, old man, and wait!
Why do you chatter out there by the gate?
And why are you going so late, so late,--
  Why are you going, John Evereldown?"

"I follow the women wherever they call,--
  That's why I'm going to Tilbury Town.

God knows if I pray to be done with it all,
  But God is no friend to John Evereldown.
So the clouds may come and the rain may fall,
The shadows may creep and the dead men crawl,--
But I follow the women wherever they call,
  And that's why I'm going to Tilbury Town."[26]

The speakers are two citizens of Tilbury Town, but John Evereldown is more clearly developed as a character than the second man. The purpose of the verbal exchange between the two men is to illustrate John's personality; the second man is nameless and serves as a questioner to draw information out of John. In other of Robinson's dramatic dialogues, such as "London Bridge" and "On the Way," both characters are developed as individuals and the relationship between the two is a dominant theme.

A modification of the dramatic monologue and dialogue is the poem narrated by a single speaker in which the speaker discusses his relationship with a second character and may even recreate what the second character said to him. An important distinction in this form of dramatic poem is that everything we learn of the second character is through the interpretation of the first. The second character speaks in his own words only as the first allows him to. Often the second character becomes the center of interest, and the first, the speaker, becomes a vehicle and filter for him while still retaining his own personality. "Captain Craig" and "Ben Jonson Entertains a Man from Stratford,"

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[26] Ibid., pp. 73-74.

the best examples of this form, are too long to be quoted in their entirety here. The poem "Cassandra" fits this category with one exception--the speaker is not developed at all as an individual:

I heard one who said: "Verily,
  What word have I for children here?
Your Dollar is your only Word,
  The wrath of it your only fear.

"You build it altars tall enough
  To make you see, but you are blind;
You cannot leave it long enough
  To look before you or behind.

"When Reason beckons you to pause,
  You laugh and say that you know best;
But what it is you know, you keep
  As dark as ingots in a chest.

"You laugh and answer, 'We are young;
  O leave us now, and let us grow.'--
Not asking how much more of this
  Will Time endure or Fate bestow.

"Because a few complacent years
  Have made your peril of your pride,
Think you that you are to go on
  Forever pampered and untried?

"What lost eclipse of history,
  What bivouac of the marching stars,
Has given the sign for you to see
  Millenniums and last great wars?

"What unrecorded overthrow
  Of all the world has ever known,
Or ever been, has made itself
  So plain to you, and you alone?

"Your Dollar, Dove and Eagle make
  A Trinity that even you
Rate higher than you rate yourselves;
  It pays, it flatters, and it's new.

"And though your very flesh and blood
  Be what your Eagle eats and drinks,
You'll praise him for the best of birds,
  Not knowing what the Eagle thinks.

"The power is yours, but not the sight;
  You see not upon what you tread;
You have the ages for your guide,
  But not the wisdom to be led.

"Think you to tread forever down
  The merciless old verities?
And are you never to have eyes
  To see the world for what it is?

"Are you to pay for what you have
  With all you are?"--No other word
We caught, but with a laughing crowd
  Moved on. None heeded, and few heard.[27]

The narrator's lack of individuality is necessary if none who heard the speech heeded it; he is a faceless member of the crowd, as guilty as the rest. It would be erroneous to say that because the narrator of the poem is not a well-developed character we can make no judgments concerning him. Knowing the orator's message about the shortcomings of America and the smug materialism of Americans coupled with the narrator's reaction to the message, we are able to conclude a good deal about the narrator (who might represent the "average" American to the implied author). The "I" of the poem is distant from the implied author whose beliefs are much closer to those of the orator. The "I" is ignorant and is guilty of the orator's charges; the orator represents the man who sees reality and seeks after the truth, a viewpoint expressed by speakers and implied authors of a number of Robinson's poems.

Those speakers of poems who are most dramatized,

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[27] Ibid., pp. 11-12.

then, are those in dramatic monologues and dialogues. "Cassandra" is a bridge on the scale of dramatized-undramatized speakers; it is a type of poem which belongs toward the dramatized end of the scale but which must be placed closer to the midway point because the "I" is not developed as an individual character. That is, the "I" of "Cassandra" is not given any unique personality characteristics, as is the "I" of "How Annandale Went Out" or John of "John Evereldown." The "I" of "Cassandra" is still a dramatic persona distinct from the implied author, but he is less dramatized than the doctor or John.

We might make an artificial division from this example. Dramatic monologues and dialogues are under the heading of highly dramatized speakers. The new division might be termed moderately dramatized speakers. The poems in which one character speaks through another bridges the two divisions, depending on the dramatization of the "I." The distinguishing characteristic of poems in the second grouping is that the speaker usually uses personal pronouns. Wayne Booth wrote that "in a sense even the most reticent narrator has been dramatized as soon as he refers to himself as 'I.'"[28] It is certainly possible for the speaker of a poem to be a dramatized persona without referring to himself, but the use of "I" or "we" or "us" or even "you"

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[28] P. 152.

immediately draws the reader's attention to the existence of the speaker as a person.

Other than "Cassandra," a poem which exemplifies this second area on the scale of dramatized-undramatized personae is "Credo":

> I cannot find my way: there is no star
> In all the shrouded heavens anywhere;
> And there is not a whisper in the air
> Of any living voice but one so far
> That I can hear it only as a bar
> Of lost, imperial music, played when fair
> And angel fingers wove, and unaware,
> Dead leaves to garlands where no roses are.
>
> No, there is not a glimmer, nor a call,
> For one that welcomes, welcomes when he fears,
> The black and awful chaos of the night;
> For through it all--above, beyond it all--
> I know the far-sent message of the years,
> I feel the coming glory of the Light.[29]

We can say as much about the "I" of "Credo" as we could of the doctor of "How Annandale Went Out." The content of the former is more abstract than the content of the latter; therefore, less is known about such things as the speaker's occupation. But as with the "I" of "Cassandra," we can still identify the type of man who is speaking the poem and evaluate as much as we know of him. At the same time that the "I" is somewhat dramatized, he also reflects a highly focused aspect of the implied author's beliefs concerning man's place in the universe.

A third area of speaker would be that of the

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[29] Collected Poems, p. 94.

slightly dramatized, the "I" who does not refer to himself or the auditor and who sometimes speaks in an impersonal and objective style. When no "I" is present to make us "conscious of an experiencing mind whose views of the experience will come between us and the event," points out Wayne Booth, "the inexperienced reader may make the mistake of thinking that the story comes to him unmediated."[30] But as Wright explained, even in poems where the distance between the speaker and poet is too small to be worthy of discussion, that distance nevertheless exists.

The "I" of Robinson's second "Octave" is an example of a speaker who does not refer directly to either himself or an implied auditor:

> Tumultuously void of a clean scheme
> Whereon to build, whereof to formulate,
> The legion life that riots in mankind
> Goes ever plunging upward, up and down,
> Most like some crazy regiment at arms,
> Undisciplined of aught but Ignorance,
> And ever led resourcelessly along
> To brainless carnage by drunk trumpeters.[31]

The speaker's presentation of mankind's being led to "brainless carnage" is similar to Robinson's views expressed elsewhere[32] on the dangers of materialism ("drunk trumpeters") to man. To discover at exactly which points the speaker of the second "Octave" may be differentiated from

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[30] P. 152. [31] Collected Poems, p. 101.

[32] See "Cassandra," "Kosmos," "The Children of the Night," and "The Man Against the Sky."

the implied author would require a study similar to that in chapter three, where the differences and similarities of speaker and implied author of "The Man Against the Sky" are discussed.

To categorize completely all poems on our scale of dramatized-undramatized speakers, we would want a separate position on the scale for each poem since, although two different personae may be dramatized to an almost equal degree, differences will exist. Because these differences are sometimes too small to be measured, however, we would end by grouping poems in clusters along the continuum. This section on the speaker identified three of those broad clusters and tried to identify the differences between personae in each group. In "The Man Against the Sky," I shall show that the speaker belongs somewhere between the middle group and the highly dramatized speaker.

The Auditor of the Poem

The question of to whom the poem is addressed is not always an easy one to answer. Although some critics believe that poetry is addressed to no one in particular and everyone in general, others feel that while this view is essentially correct, it is oversimplified. George Wright explains that auditors exist on two levels: "that on which the characters speak to each other, to themselves, to an implied audience, or to God, and that on which the

writer speaks to us."[33] Although Wright admits that "the poem is always finally addressed to us,"[34] the other level of auditor often plays a central role in the meaning of the poem.

Wright's first level of auditors consists of two distinct groups: Other characters, the speaker himself, and God compose one group; an implied audience outside the poem makes up the second. An implied audience is usually more abstract and more difficult to identify than anyone in the first group. An implied audience shifts the focus of communication from one of rhetoric within the poem to one of rhetoric of the poem. Communication between the speaker and real reader is more direct when the "I" addresses an implied auditor because the real reader often identifies easily with the implied auditor. The rhetoric within "The Man Against the Sky" will be discussed in chapter four; the implied auditor and the rhetoric of the poem will be the subject of the fifth and sixth chapters.

In the area of rhetoric within the poem, we recognize three different implied auditors: the speaker himself, another character, and God. All three auditors may be spoken to in a single poem; therefore, examples used in this section were chosen for the primary auditor spoken to (ignoring for now the auditor outside the poem).

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[33] P. 19. [34] Ibid.

When the "I" of a poem addresses himself, he becomes his own auditor. The speaker may deliver a soliloquy for a number of reasons: possibly to persuade himself of something, to think out a problem aloud, to cheer himself up, or to express some emotion. In "Credo" the "I" thinks out a problem aloud and, as a result of solving the problem, expresses an emotion. The problem is described in the opening two lines: "I cannot find my way: there is no star / In all the shrouded heavens anywhere." The speaker is despondent and lost; "there is not a whisper in the air / Of any living voice" except one which the speaker hears as "a bar / Of lost, imperial music." Perhaps the voice within the music can lead the "I" out of the darkness. In the second stanza, the "I" admits to himself that he both fears and welcomes death and its chaos but realizes at the same time that he understands life's meaning and can "feel the coming glory of the Light." The "I's" initial despair has given way to serenity and confidence. By serving as his own auditor, the speaker is able to find expression for his emotions and to persuade himself of an approaching discovery. In chapter four we will see that the "I" of "The Man Against the Sky" also addresses himself as auditor for the purpose of self-persuasion.

The second kind of auditor, the other character or characters in the poem who remain silent, is found in the dramatic monologue. In "How Annandale Went Out," the

implied auditor may be either a judge or jury or a close friend in whom the doctor is confiding to relieve his guilt. One clue which supports both types of auditor is the line, "'Like this . . . You wouldn't hang me? I thought not.'" The doctor demonstrates how he administered the fatal hypodermic needle, "'Like this,'" then pauses to gauge the reaction of his auditor. If he faces a judge or jury, he may see the judge's head nod in sympathetic understanding or see a tear in a juror's eye, prompting his reply, "'You wouldn't hang me? I thought not.'" "After hearing my story," he is saying, "I was sure you would not find me guilty of murder."

On the other hand, the doctor could be addressing a close friend just as easily. After years of silence the physician is forced by guilt to reveal his secret; perhaps his confidant is also a physician. The doctor demonstrates and pauses to hear his friend answer, "I would have done the same had I been you." And the relieved doctor answers, "'You wouldn't hang me? I thought not,'" meaning, "You don't condemn me for my action? I was right to have faith that you, my friend, would understand what drove me to perform euthanasia." Whether one interprets the implied auditor as judge or friend or someone else, the identity of the auditor is central to a complete understanding of the speaker. Without an identification of the auditor as jury or friend, the last line might be completely misunderstood. The auditor therefore has a role in the developing

situation-attitude complex since he may be a part of the situation and may shape the speaker's attitude. Although the auditor is silent in this instance, the drama of the poem is incomplete without a knowledge of his presence and identity.

Wright's third category of auditor was the speaker addressing God. Robinson's "Calvary" may be interpreted as a poem of this type:

> Friendless and faint, with martyred steps and slow,
> Faint for the flesh, but for the spirit free,
> Stung by the mob that came to see the show,
> The Master toiled along to Calvary;
> We gibed him, as he went, with houndish glee,
> Till his dimmed eyes for us did overflow;
> We cursed his vengeless hands thrice wretchedly,--
> And this was nineteen hundred years ago.
>
> But after nineteen hundred years the shame
> Still clings, and we have not made good the loss
> That outraged faith has entered in his name.
> Ah, when shall come love's courage to be strong!
> Tell me, O Lord--tell me, O Lord, how long
> Are we to keep Christ writhing on the cross![35]

The use of the pronoun "we" three times during the poem suggests that the speaker is addressing mankind and berating them for rejecting Christ's teaching. The direct address to God in the last two lines, however, makes clear that the "I" is addressing God on behalf of mankind, lamenting man's errors and seeking the love and faith to "make good the loss." Through the identification of the auditor, we see the poem in its complex of situation and attitude not as a

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[35] Collected Poems, p. 83.

chastisement of man but as a plea for understanding.

In addition to the three divisions of auditor described, two minor modifications should be mentioned as being representative of the possible levels on which an auditor may be found. The first occurs in "Cassandra," the greatest part of which is the orator's addressing the "I." The speaker becomes an auditor for another character who speaks only through the "I." A second modification occurs in dramatic dialogues such as "John Evereldown" in which the speaker and auditor alternate roles. Two "I's" and two auditors exist in the poem. In this way, explains Wright, "the audience takes in the action first from one point of view, then from another, grasping the 'I-ness' of each persona at the same time as it regards each of them from outside as a 'he.'"[36] "Cassandra" and "John Evereldown" are examples of some of the more complex constructions of the "I" addressing the auditor. An understanding of the auditor within the poem is one of the keys to the understanding of the situation-attitude relationships which make up the experience of the poem.

Thus far, pointing out the dramatic elements along the way, I have discussed two of the questions of dramatic analysis: Who is speaking, and to whom. According to Geiger, answers to "who," "where," and "when" establish the

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[36]P. 18.

situation of the poem.[37] We should next consider, then, the time and place in which the poem exists.

Setting

The where is the setting or location of the poem. Where is the persona as he speaks? Does the persona partake of the scene? The importance of knowing the scene, states Paul Campbell, is this; to him, scene is

> not so much as an isolated element, but as a phase of the speaker himself. One is not the same person driving along an empty highway that one is arguing with an employer. . . . Where one is is a very real part of what one is.[38]

In addition, the more information we have about a persona, the more complete our conception of him as a human being will be. As was true of speakers, the exactness with which a scene is described may range the length of a scale from "everything known" to "no hints at all," with all gradations in between. One of Robinson's poems with a clear setting is "The Torrent":

> I found a torrent falling in a glen
> Where the sun's light shone silvered and leaf-split;
> The boom, the foam, and the mad flash of it
> All made a magic symphony; but when
> I thought upon the coming of hard men
> To cut those patriarchal trees away,
> And turn to gold the silver of that spray,
> I shuddered. Yet a gladness now and then
> Did wake me to myself till I was glad
> In earnest, and was welcoming the time

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[37] P. 63.

[38] The Speaking and The Speakers of Literature (Belmont, Cal.: Dickenson Publishing Co., 1967), pp. 49-50.

> For screaming saws to sound above the chime
> Of idle waters, and for me to know
> The jealous visionings that I had had
> Were steps to the great place where trees and
> torrents go.[39]

Standing in a secluded valley and watching a swift-running stream has affected the "I" of the poem. His belief that nature's beauties should be preserved has caused displeasure at the possible destruction of the forest. But while he stood and watched the torrent,

> a gladness now and then
> Did wake me to myself till I was glad
> In earnest.

The speaker realized that since the universe is a continual cycle of life and death, death does not necessarily mean the end of beauty or the end of life. The "great place where trees and torrents go" may be the Allness and Oneness of the universe. Just as the ocean loses molecules of water through condensation and gains those molecules back through rain, birth is merely a loss of a sense of oneness by being an individual and death is a return to the original form. The speaker's "jealous visionings" of the destruction of the forest were necessary steps to the final realization. The speaker would not have reached the conclusion had he not stood in the valley and contemplated nature's beauty. Thus "The Torrent" illustrates the validity of Campbell's statement that "<u>where</u> one is is a very real part of <u>what</u> one is."

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[39] <u>Collected Poems</u>, p. 108.

"Credo," on the other hand, does not have a clear setting in which the poem takes place. Both "The Torrent" and "Credo" treat man's relation to the universe; the conclusions about man's relation were gained through intuition rather than by substantive proof. But one poem is not better or worse than the other solely on the basis of the concreteness of the imagery of the speaker's location. Robinson simply desired to utilize different methods to discuss aspects of a single question. The point is that when the implied author does provide a setting for the speaker, the importance of that setting's impact on the speaker's attitudes should not be ignored. In "The Man Against the Sky," I shall show the influence of setting upon the speaker and action of the poem.

Time

The time in which a poem takes place exists on a number of different levels. Some of those levels are as follows: the reader's mental positioning of the speaker in either the present, immediate past, or distant past; or the time or season of the year and the time of day or night; or the Zeitgeist or spirit of the age in which the poem was written. As was true of the location, the time of the poem changes the speaker and the audience's image of the speaker and auditor in various ways.

For example, the speaker's language is a determinant in the reader's positioning the speaker in time. The

use of "thee" and "maketh" would indicate the "I" is not speaking in the twentieth century. Syntax and style also contribute to the speaker's being perceived as a contemporary or as a person from a different era. The "I" of "The Torrent" speaks in the present time; the words "screaming saws" refer to the noisy mechanical saws of the twentieth century. Nothing in the speaker's words necessarily makes him a speaker of a past time.

Another level of time mentioned was the season of the year. One of the most obvious examples in all of literature is Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol in which the season is a situational factor responsible for much of the action and attitudinal changes. The time of year in "The Torrent" is probably spring or summer because the sunlight is "leaf-split." This level of time may contribute to the "I's" conclusion that neither he nor the trees will cease to exist after death: Had he stood in the glen during winter the trees would be bare and would appear already dead, hindering the "I's" identification with them. The "I" is alive, and he must view the trees as being alive if he is to see the relationship between himself and them, that relationship being that both he and the trees are mortal only in the physical sense. Thus the time of the year helps to shape the total meaning of the poem.

A third level of time was the time of day or night in which the poem takes place. Since the "I" of "The

Torrent" speaks of sunlight, the poem is obviously occurring during the day. Had it been night the reader might have been suspicious of the motives of a lone man walking about a glen in the dark. Moreover, the "I" would not have had the visual stimulation of the trees to help him make the necessary association between the trees and himself. Had the sunlight not been mentioned by the speaker, a daytime setting would naturally be assumed by the reader unless he was given reason to think otherwise. Even the time of day, then, can be a determinant in the "I's" attitudes and actions.

The times in which a poem takes place are numerous; more times exist than those mentioned here for illustration. An identification of these times and their influences upon the speaker and his situation is a necessary part of a dramatic analysis of a work. Some poems establish the sense of time more clearly than others; when clues are provided, the critic should take advantage of them. Campbell wrote that "to know a speaker means that one must know when he spoke."[40]

The "where" and the "when" together constitute the scene or situation of the poem, the background against which the act or the "what" occurs. I mention this notion because it is central to a study of Robinson's poems, especially "The Man Against the Sky," as Conrad Aiken points out:

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[40]P. 56.

> /Robinson/ is at his most characteristic best when he has, for his poetic framework, a "situation" to present, a situation out of which, from moment to moment, the specifically poetic may flower. This flowering, we are inclined to think, is more conspicuous and more fragrant in The Man Against the Sky and Merlin than elsewhere.[41]

Yvor Winters and Louis O. Coxe agree, adding that Robinson's best poems also have specific characters.[42] In future chapters I shall demonstrate how the particular scene and dramatized persona of "The Man Against the Sky" are the two most important factors in the poem's complex of situation-attitude relationships.

Tone

Don Geiger interprets "how" as the emotional tone of the speaker,[43] his attitude toward the situation of the poem. The tone of "Credo" is not static. The "I's" attitude is one of despair and hopelessness at the poem's beginning. The speaker even welcomes death, but his attitude changes when he hears "a bar / Of lost, imperial music."

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[41] Collected Criticism of Conrad Aiken from 1916 to the Present: A Reviewer's ABC (New York: Meridian Books, 1958), p. 339.

[42] "Nearly all of Robinson's best poems appear to deal with particular persons and situations," Yvor Winters, Edwin Arlington Robinson (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1946), p. 57. "Robinson is happiest as a poet when he starts with a specific human situation or relationship, with a 'story,'" Louis O. Coxe, "E. A. Robinson: The Lost Tradition," Sewanee Review, LXII (April-June, 1954), 248.

[43] P. 63.

The basic situation has changed in that the "I" now knows "the far-sent message of the years," the meaning of life. This change in situation alters his attitude: His tone moves from despair to gladness and hope.

The speaker's tone is related to what occurs in the poem and to the speaker's purpose. The attitude of the "I" is further discussed in the next section on "what" and "why."

Message and Purpose

In his use of Housman's "Loveliest of Trees" to illustrate the dramatic questions, Geiger says that the "I" of the poem ". . . (What) looks at cherry trees . . . (Why) because he is aware of the short time he has in life to look at beautiful things."[44] It would be difficult and unnecessary to discuss the "what" of a poem like "Credo" without at the same time explaining the "why." We could say that the "what" of "Credo" is the speaker's hearing a bar of music and feeling the coming light, but that is not saying much. As soon as we go below the literal level to find what the speaker meant by the words "music" and "light," we are discovering material which answers "why" the speaker has heard and felt. Therefore, this section will explore the "what" and "why" together. "Credo" will best serve our purposes for illustration because we have already discussed it to some extent under each of the preceding headings (who, to

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[44] Ibid.

whom, where, when, and how) and because the answer to "why" is in part a demonstration of how all the parts of the dramatic analysis interact. By having done some analysis of "Credo" for each question, we have laid the groundwork for an answer to "why."

The speaker is a man who is experiencing hopelessness, who is familiar with fear and despair: "I cannot find my way: there is no star / In all the shrouded heavens anywhere." In fact, his grief is so great that he contemplates suicide, or at least anticipates his death, for

> there is not a glimmer, nor a call,
> For one that welcomes, welcomes when he fears,
> The black and awful chaos of the night.

What has happened to the "I" to warrant his contemplation of suicide? What tragedy has drained him of all hope?

The "I" does not tell us directly, but we can infer a certain amount from the fourteen lines. The man's grief is not at the loss of a loved one, or there would be some reference to that person. "I cannot find my way." Perhaps life has lost its meaning for the speaker because he realized he does not know his purpose for existing, if indeed one exists. He may be in his thirties or forties, having worked hard at accumulating material wealth, for instance, and one day stopping and asking himself what it all meant. Perhaps he didn't know. And that frightened him. Material possessions lost their value for him when compared to the brevity of life and the eternity of death where physical goods could

not be taken. And perhaps he feared that eternity was only an endless dreamless sleep, an oblivion, the antithesis of existence. If that be true, what is life worth? Why work, why laugh, why live?

Assuming that this is what happened to the speaker to make him contemplate suicide, and there is nothing in the poem which would contradict such an interpretation, what changes his mind? He hears "a bar / Of lost, imperial music" but played only

> when fair
> And angel fingers wove, and unaware,
> Dead leaves to garlands where no roses are.

That is, he hears a bar of music as the revelation that death does not mean oblivion, the end of all existence. Dead leaves, or the fact of death, are woven into garlands, wreaths of beauty and decoration--meaningful objects. Life has meaning because life does not end with death but continues in some form. Exactly what that form is the "I" does not know; that is why he can only feel the "coming glory of the Light" and not see it. The Light, then, represents the truth which is impossible to know completely but which is possible to sense.

If the speaker is unable to explain at all what form the afterlife takes, he could not have received the knowledge from another man; another man could not have convinced him that the idea was true, that the Light existed, on the basis of no real evidence and little description. Where, then,

could the "I" have learned of this truth in such a fashion as to be convinced? The most probable explanation is that he perceived the truth of an afterlife through intuition. On contemplation of life's apparent meaninglessness and of death's apparent total conquest over life, in search for an answer which he could believe in as true and which would give life meaning and stay his hand from suicide, the speaker recognized the truth in a flash of intuition characterized by "a bar / Of lost, imperial music." The "I's" inability to describe the Light he feels is understandable since the idea of an afterlife was revealed to him in a vision rather than in words which can be communicated to others.

The speaker, then, having first been lost and afraid in a meaningless world, prepared to escape life's buffetings through suicide, has undergone a vividly mystical experience. This experience of intuition, triggered by a situation about which we can only conjecture, has given him a reason for living--life is not purposeless but is a prelude or a step to something beyond death.

The answers to the dramatic questions "what" and "why" draw upon the knowledge gained from the answers to "who," "to whom," "where," "when," and "how." The complex of situation-attitude relationships of a poem is beginning to take shape. Only one question remains to be answered: How do the answers to the seven dramatic questions relate

to one another?

Relationships of the Seven Dramatic Components

"The Children of the Night," one of Robinson's early poems, will illustrate the relationships of the dramatic questions. The same poem is material for rhetorical criticism in the following section; in this way the relationship of the situation-attitude complex of dramatic criticism (as the "I" addresses himself) to the persuasive strategies of rhetorical criticism (as the "I" addresses an implied auditor) can be demonstrated. The text of the poem is as follows:

For those that never know the light,
  The darkness is a sullen thing;
And they, the Children of the Night,
  Seem lost in Fortune's winnowing.

But some are strong and some are weak,--
  And there's the story. House and home
Are shut from countless hearts that seek
  World-refuge that will never come.

And if there be no other life,
  And if there be no other chance
To weigh their sorrow and their strife
  Than in the scales of circumstance,

'Twere better, ere the sun go down
  Upon the first day we embark,
In life's imbittered sea to drown,
  Than sail forever in the dark.

But if there be a soul on earth
  So blinded with its own misuse
Of man's revealed, incessant worth,
  Or worn with anguish, that it views

No light but for a mortal eye,
  No rest but of a mortal sleep,
No God but in a prophet's lie,
  No faith for "honest doubt" to keep;

If there be nothing, good or bad,
  But chaos for a soul to trust,--
God counts it for a soul gone mad;
  And if God be God, He is just.

And if God be God, He is love;
  And though the Dawn be still so dim,
It shows us we have played enough
  With creeds that make a fiend of Him.

There is one creed, and only one,
  That glorifies God's excellence;
So cherish, that His will be done,
  The common creed of common sense.

It is the crimson, not the gray,
  That charms the twilight of all time;
It is the promise of the day
  That makes the starry sky sublime;

It is the faith within the fear
  That holds us to the life we curse;--
So let us in ourselves revere
  The Self which is the Universe!

Let us, the Children of the Night,
  Put off the cloak that hides the scar!
Let us be Children of the Light,
  And tell the ages what we are![45]

The speaker of this poem, dramatized moderately, considers himself a child of the night ("Let us, the Children of the Night"). Although the pronouns "we" and "us" are clues that he is addressing someone else, the speaker's main purpose seems to be an attempt to persuade himself to become a child of the light. In the first stanza the speaker admits not knowing the light; for him "the darkness is a sullen thing." He seems "lost in Fortune's winnowing." In the second

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[45]Charles T. Davis, ed., Edwin Arlington Robinson: Selected Early Poems and Letters (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), pp. 28-30. (Hereinafter referred to as Early Poems.)

stanza we learn the reason for the speaker's plight: "But some are strong and some are weak,-- / And there's the story." The "I" considers himself weak, weak in his ability to overcome adversity and weak in his faith in the light. This is the position of the speaker at the start of the poem.

He delivers his soliloquy from no particular point in time or space, although the mood, title, and tenth and twelfth stanzas suggest a nighttime setting. I infer, from this vagueness of setting, a speaker wandering aimlessly in the night, the disembodied voice of a soul in anguish. The speaker refers to "they," the children of the night, to comfort himself that he is not alone in his suffering. But any comfort he gains is hollow and meaningless; only he can aid himself. He must somehow find the strength within himself to become a child of the light. Thus, the conflict in the situation is the "I's" attempt to triumph over his doubts.

During the third through the eighth stanzas, the "I" seeks to find the needed inspiration by denouncing belief in the night (belief that "there be no other life"). He states that if it be true that no other life exists, man would be better off to commit suicide "than sail forever in the dark." But man does not commit suicide just because he is a child of the night--why? The speaker tells us in the eleventh stanza: "It is the faith within the fear / That holds us to the life we curse." Within each man is the faith in some form of immortality; children of the night need to

bring this faith to their consciousness and thus become children of the light. By this reasoning the speaker assures himself that he does have faith in the light, although not yet on the conscious level.

The speaker's next attempt to tap the source of his faith is to say that God thinks any man insane who views "no light but for a mortal eye, / No rest but of a mortal sleep." One implication is that, if God exists, the light or afterlife also exists. The speaker wants to believe in God (I say "wants to" because the speaker mentions twice "if God be God," suggesting that he is not sure of God's existence) but not in a God defined by certain religions, "creeds that make a fiend of Him." The "I" seems to want to believe in a religion of common sense, in a divine force which is the universe itself. He commands himself: "So cherish, that His will be done, / The common creed of common sense." And later he urges himself: "So let us in ourselves revere / The Self which is the Universe!" If the speaker is able to convince himself of the truth, he will become a child of the light. But the speaker's conflict with his doubts is not resolved in the poem; it closes on what the speaker hopes he will accomplish in the future:

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

The "I" is not yet a child of the light. His strategies designed to bring him to a revelation of the truth have not

succeeded by the poem's end. He may be stronger in his faith than he was at the poem's start, and he should be, but he is still a soul wandering in the night, seeking the light of truth. He hopes for the coming of the light, but the dawn is "still so dim" that he cannot be certain it is there. He cannot say, with the certainty of the "I" of "Credo," "I feel the coming glory of the Light!"

Rhetorical Criticism

The difference between dramatic and rhetorical criticism is one of degree and focus rather than of kind. The dramatic critic assumes that in any piece of literature there exists a speaker who addresses an implied auditor. That is, communication takes place between the speaker and auditor. If the dramatic critic believes, as does Ivan L. Preston, that some degree of persuasion, however slight, exists in all communication,[46] then he engages in rhetorical criticism when he seeks to identify the communicative act. And the rhetorical critic is also a dramatic critic, for he wants to know who is speaking, to whom, where, when, how, what, and why. Therefore, the two critics ask some common questions.

The difference in focus was mentioned in the section on the question "to whom": The dramatic critic is primarily interested in "the rhetoric in the poem, between the persona

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[46]Letter to "The Forum," Quarterly Journal of Speech, LV (October, 1969), 312-15.

and his imaginary audience"; the rhetorical critic is primarily interested in "the rhetoric of the poem, the ways whereby the poet through the poem uses verbal strategies on an audience."[47] Although both critics do venture into the other area, the focus of primary interest is the key to the distinction. The dramatic critic stays as much as he can within the work, discovering the meaning (the complex of situation-attitude relationships) of the poem through the masks within it; the rhetorical critic seeks to look behind the masks (but not to ignore them) to discover how the author attempted "to affect with intent"[48] his readers.

While the modern critic of public address can to some degree identify and study the audiences of many speeches and can even test the success of the speech both verbally and behaviorally, the literary critic cannot so easily identify the audience of a piece of literature. He has his own reactions and those of other critics who review or analyze the poem, but critics are not usually the audience aimed at by the writer. Even sales may not be helpful--how does a large sale of a collection of poems help measure the acceptance of one of the poems?

Rather than attempt an experimental study of a

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[47]Thomas O. Sloan, "The Oral Interpreter and Poetry as Speech," The Speech Teacher, XVIII (September, 1969), 188.

[48]David K. Berlo, The Process of Communication (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1960), p. 12.

largely unknown audience, the rhetorical critic of literature can determine if, given the type of auditor the author is writing to, the rhetorical strategies of the poem are potentially successful. But who is the author writing to? How can we find him? This auditor is the general, undefined, perhaps even idealized audience mentioned earlier and postponed until this time. Edwin Black calls the implied auditor the second persona.[49]

Instead of focusing on the relationships between the work and the real listener, Black's application "focuses instead on the discourse alone, and extracts from it the audience it implies."[50] Beardsley, Daniel, and Leggett agree with this approach: "The speaker may show by the words he chooses, and his manner of address, and in other ways, what sort of person, or what class of people he is aiming his words at."[51]

The speaker may arrange his appeals in such a way that the real reader, the audience sitting in a chair with book in hand, is persuaded to take on the mask of this second persona. That is, the real reader puts himself in the place of the implied auditor. Walker Gibson wrote that as readers "we assume, for the sake of the experience, that set of attitudes and qualities which the language asks us

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[49]"The Second Persona," Quarterly Journal of Speech, LVI (April, 1970), 111.

[50]Ibid., 112.

[51]P. xxiv.

to assume, and, if we cannot assume them, we throw the book away."[52] Gibson uses advertising as the most obvious type of example--the consumer who is aware of a disparity between the implied auditor appealed to in the advertisement and himself will not be persuaded to buy the product. Although Geiger believes that it is a fallacy to confuse literature "with a whiskey advertisement,"[53] not to realize that an implied auditor is present in both literature and the advertisement is also fallacious.

Black continues his discussion of the second persona in public speaking by saying:

> The critic can see in the auditor implied by a discourse a model of what the rhetor would have his real auditor become. What the critic can find projected by the discourse is the image of a man, and though that man may never find actual embodiment, it is still a man that the image is of.[54]

This idea holds true for literature as well as for oratory. Two of the duties of the rhetorical critic of literature are to isolate and identify the implied auditor and to evaluate the persuasive strategies that the "I" uses in the poem in relation to their theoretical effect upon a real reader who assumes, during the act of reading, the mask of that implied auditor. That is, knowing the image of the implied auditor from the kinds and arrangement and style of arguments used

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[52]"Authors, Speakers, Readers, and Mock Readers," College English, XI (February, 1950), 265.

[53]P. 77.

[54]P. 113.

by the "I," should those arguments have persuaded that implied auditor? Were the strongest arguments used? Were they presented in the language and syntax best suited to persuade that particular audience? Why were the arguments or strategies either effective or ineffective? These are the questions which the rhetorical critic of literature needs to answer.

One fruitful method of approaching certain of Robinson's poems, especially "The Man Against the Sky," from a rhetorical viewpoint is to examine them as prophecies. If the critic would view the speaker of the poem as a prophet, the implied auditor as a potential disciple, and the poem itself as a prophetic message, the speaker's purpose and success or failure as a prophet and persuader would be more readily evident. Naturally, not all of Robinson's poems were written in a prophetic tone; "The Man Against the Sky" and some others were, centered upon the general theme of man's relation to the universe.[55] Although we have seen that the primary goal of the speaker of "The Children of the Night" was self-persuasion in the form of a soliloquy, the poem may be examined rhetorically. While the speaker's intent has geared his language strategies toward himself as

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[55]Nicholas Ayo touches upon this aspect in Robinson's biblical poems ("The Three Taverns," "Lazarus," "Nicodemus," "The Prodigal Son," "Sisera," and "Young Gideon") in his article, "Robinson's Use of the Bible," Colby Library Quarterly, VIII (March, 1959), 250-65.

auditor, these same strategies function rhetorically for an implied auditor.

The Speaker as Reluctant Prophet

The role of the speaker as prophet is best expressed in one of Robinson's "Octaves":

> To get at the eternal strength of things,
> And fearlessly to make strong songs of it,
> Is, to my mind, the mission of that man
> The world would call a poet. He may sing
> But roughly, and withal ungraciously;
> But if he touch to life the one right chord
> Wherein God's music slumbers, and awake
> To truth one drowsed ambition, he sings well.[56]

The prophet as he is defined in this study is one who attempts to "awake / To truth one drowsed ambition" by revealing the evils of temptations with which his auditors are faced and by encouraging acceptance of "the one right chord / Wherein God's music slumbers." The orator in "Cassandra" and the speakers of both "The Children of the Night" and "The Man Against the Sky" are considered prophets.

The speaker of "The Children of the Night" acts as a reluctant prophet because he has serious doubts concerning the strength of his own faith. He is occupied with being a prophet for himself alone. But because an implied auditor hears the speaker's soliloquy and can picture the struggle within the situation, he may identify with the speaker and thus be susceptible to the persuasive strategies. The

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[56] Early Poems, pp. 55-56.

speaker of "The Children of the Night" does not present a strong image of himself as a prophet: He knows what the truth ought to be but he is yet to grow into a child of the light.

The orator of "Cassandra," on the other hand, is a prophet who, to use the words of J. Philip Hyatt, "had 'eyes to see and ears to hear' more than was seen and heard by the common man."[57] The orator accuses his young audience:

> "The power is yours, but not the sight;
> You see not upon what you tread;
> You have the ages for your guide,
> But not the wisdom to be led.
> . . . . . .
> And are you never to have eyes
> To see the world for what it is?"[58]

This orator is convinced of the truth of his beliefs; if he has any doubts at all concerning them, he has hidden them from his auditors. The speaker of "The Man Against the Sky" falls midway between the positions demonstrated in "Cassandra" and "The Children of the Night": To himself, he feels that his faith could be stronger; to the implied auditor, his faith is that of a prophet.

So the first persona speaks. What of the second, the implied auditor who may identify with the "I" of "The Children of the Night"?

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[57] Prophetic Religion (New York: Abingdon Press, 1947), p. 45.

[58] Collected Poems, p. 12.

The Implied Auditor as Potential Disciple

The implied auditor inferred from the poem is one who is a child of the night. Since the "I" has constructed the poem as self-persuasion, the implied auditor outside the poem will have the same characteristics as the speaker. In "The Man Against the Sky," speaker and implied auditor are similar, but not completely identical, as is true of "The Children of the Night." The explanation is that the "I" of "The Man Against the Sky" is a child of the light and speaks to an implied auditor who is a child of the night.

The Poem as Prophecy

The common thread that runs through Robinson's prophetic poems is that life continues in some form beyond death.[59] "The Children of the Night" expresses this idea and hints at the form of life in the lines, "So let us in ourselves revere / The Self which is the Universe!" That life may be a merging with the Universe on a spiritual plane.

This notion follows certain characteristics of prophecies: It deals with hopes instead of certainties.[60] Prophecies as a rule are also sweeping generalizations.[61] The speaker makes such allegations as: God considers "a

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[59]Ayo, 253.

[60]J. M. Powis Smith, The Prophet and His Problems (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923), p. 221.

[61]Abraham J. Heschel, The Prophets (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 13.

soul gone mad" any man who does not believe in an afterlife; only faith in an afterlife prevents mankind from mass suicide. Another characteristic is that a prophecy is not mere prediction, but is exhortation.[62] "The Children of the Night" is not a good example of this type of prophecy. The prophecy of "Cassandra" is much more admonitory:

> "Because a few complacent years
> Have made your peril of your pride,
> Think you that you are to go on
> Forever pampered and untried?"
> . . . . . .
> "Think you to tread forever down
> The merciless old verities?
> . . . . . .
> "Are you to pay for what you have
> With all you are?"[63]

With this brief description of "The Children of the Night" in terms of prophet, disciple, and prophecy, the rhetorical strategies can be identified and evaluated.

"The Children of the Night" as Rhetoric

The implied auditor should immediately identify with the speaker in the poem's opening lines:

> For those that never know the light,
> The darkness is a sullen thing;
> And they, the Children of the Night,
> Seem lost in Fortune's winnowing.

The implied auditor who realizes his weak faith and who desires to be a child of the light will be drawn into the situation. By classifying man into two groups ("Some are strong and some are weak"), the speaker suggests to the

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[62] Ibid., p. 12. [63] Collected Poems, pp. 11-12.

auditor that he, the speaker, may know the method of achieving strength. The implied auditor may sense an indirect promise of hope.

But before fulfilling the promise, the "I" attacks the erroneous belief that life ends with death. If the auditor is tempted by this belief, the "I" attempts to disabuse him with two passionate arguments: If life ends at death we should commit suicide now and escape life's sorrows (stanzas three and four); God is unhappy with those men who believe in life's ending at death (stanzas five through seven). The auditor should now feel that his past attitudes toward death were what made him a child of the night and that he wishes to know the correct attitude which will make him strong.

The "I" bridges the attack on erroneous belief and the promise of hope with stanzas eight and nine which describe God as a God of love wanting man to subscribe to the creed of common sense. This bridge between the passionate attack and the passionate plea is appropriate, for the auditor's emotions may change gradually.

The promise is expressed in stanzas ten through twelve: Believe in "the Self which is the Universe." That is, believe that a spiritual part of man does not die but becomes a part of the universe. With faith in this truth, mankind can become children of the light.

The persuasive aspects of the language may have

aided in moving the implied auditor toward an acceptance of discipleship to the prophecy. If the poem failed to bring the auditor to a discipleship, it failed because the speaker was not able to convince himself of the truth and therefore could not convince an implied auditor.

The prophecy that did not succeed in "The Children of the Night" does succeed in "The Man Against the Sky." The prophecy is similar, but it is the image of the prophet that makes the difference.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the major ways in which a poem may be analyzed from a dramatic viewpoint and from a rhetorical viewpoint: The meaning of a poem is found in its complex of situation-attitude relationships; a speaker other than the real author exists in a work and addresses someone; and the speaker may act rhetorically by attempting to change the values of the implied auditor.

Chapter three will be limited to the speaker of "The Man Against the Sky"--who he is, his similarity to the implied author, and his characteristics as a prophet. Chapter four will be a dramatic analysis of the poem.

CHAPTER III

THE SPEAKER OF "THE MAN AGAINST THE SKY"

Introduction

In 1931 Robinson wrote a letter to a young lady who had inquired about his philosophy:

> I am naturally gratified to learn that you are writing a thesis on my poetry, but I am rather sorry to learn that you are writing about my "philosophy"--which is mostly a statement of my inability to accept a mechanistic interpretation of the universe and of life. As I see it, my poetry is not pessimistic, nothing of an infinite nature can be proven or disproven in finite terms--meaning words--and the rest is probably a matter of one's individual ways of seeing and feeling things. . . . I still wish that you were writing about my poetry--of which my so-called philosophy is only a small part, and probably the least important.[1]

Robinson expresses his philosophy in two parts: that which he does not believe, and that which he does believe. What he does not believe in is "a mechanistic interpretation of the universe and of life." I infer from the next sentence that he does believe in something of an "infinite nature." If we interpret this something as immortality (which cannot be "proven or disproven in finite terms--meaning words")--

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[1]Ridgely Torrence, et al., eds., Selected Letters of Edwin Arlington Robinson, with an Introduction by Ridgely Torrence (New York: Macmillan Company, 1940), pp. 165-66. (Hereinafter referred to as Selected Letters.)

as I shall attempt to prove in the following section as a correct interpretation--then the two parts of Robinson's "philosophy" correspond to the two parts of the speaker's prophecy in "The Man Against the Sky." If one explores this two-part "philosophy" as Robinson expressed it in his poetry and letters and compares it to the philosophy expressed by the dramatized persona of "The Man Against the Sky," he could then draw some conclusions concerning the distance of the implied author from the speaker. Therefore, one purpose of this chapter is to show that in terms of philosophy, there is no discernible distance between implied author and speaker. But at the same time the speaker of "The Man Against the Sky" is a dramatized persona and not the unmasked voice of the implied author. To understand this concept, we must return to Robinson's letter.

Robinson's last statement is, "I still wish that you were writing about my poetry--of which my so-called philosophy is only a small part, and probably the least important." If he considers his philosophy the "least important part" of his poetry, what is important? I believe Louis O. Coxe, quoted earlier, answered this question: "Robinson is happiest as a poet when he starts with a specific human situation or relationship, with a 'story.'"[2] A "human situation," a persona acting in a scene, is what is

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[2]"E. A. Robinson: The Lost Tradition," Sewanee Review, LXII (April-June, 1954), 248.

important to Robinson. Whatever philosophy is present in most of his poetry is usually one aspect of a character's composition. What may appear to be the unmediated voice of the implied author in a poem which includes some aspect of Robinson's "so-called philosophy" may actually be a dramatized persona who is similar to the implied author in this one aspect but who has an individuality and other beliefs different from the implied author. Such is the case with "The Man Against the Sky": The speaker reflects the negative and positive poles of the implied author's philosophic belief but is distinguishable from the implied author because he acts in the role of a prophet. Therefore, a second purpose of this chapter is to show how the "I" of the poem wears the mask of a prophet and thus dramatizes the two-part philosophy of the implied author.

The first section will describe the philosophy of the implied author; the second section will describe the "I" of "The Man Against the Sky" and illustrate the points of similarity and difference between the persona and implied author. The general goal of this chapter is to provide the first step in demonstrating the ways in which "The Man Against the Sky" is a dramatic poem.

Robinson's Implied Author

This section is entitled "Robinson's Implied Author" instead of "Robinson's Philosophy" to make a distinction between the real and implied author. As I pointed out in

chapter two, the image of the author we derive from his writings should be designated as the implied author. To quote Wright again:

> The poet . . . contrives for himself a personality that the reader can abstract from the poem. . . . the idea of the poet which comes to us from the poem is often a representation not of what the poet is but of what he thinks he is or would like to be or cannot help being.[3]

I do not know how close Robinson the real author is to his implied author, nor do I think this knowledge particularly relevant to the present study. If my purpose were to discover how much of the real author can be found in "The Man Against the Sky," I would need to pursue this point; rather, I wish to show how the poem is dramatic and rhetorical in nature. I will continue to employ the term "implied author," however, because the image of the author presented in this section derives from his writings (poetry and letters[4]) and

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[3]George T. Wright, The Poet in the Poem (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), p. 28.

[4]Although personal letters are sometimes considered the unmasked voice of the poet, Patrick Cruttwell's comment on the role of the person as maker should be remembered: "In the real writer, who cannot write a line without a lurking suspicion . . . that it may one day be read by others, the habit of public writing infects the private; he begins to 'make' when he professes merely to record. The maker takes hold of the person and changes [the writing]," "Makers and Persons," Hudson Review, XII (Winter, 1959-60), 488. Robinson was aware of the possibility of his letters being published, according to Richard Cary in his Introduction to Edwin Arlington Robinson's Letters to Edith Brower (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 5. Therefore, Robinson, being a "real" writer, could be expected to create an implied author in his letters. He admitted to being a "maker" in his correspondence when he wrote to Edith Brower in 1900: "I never keep letters myself

critical comments on his writings, which may or may not be the image of the real author.

To move from the author in the work to that author's beliefs, we might make a general statement that the cornerstone of this implied author's poetry is a continual search for truth.[5] The poems reflect this search in various areas of human existence; one particular area is of interest to this study--the truth concerning immortality. We should explore this topic in the order suggested by the 1931 letter quoted at the beginning of this chapter: First, in his poetry the implied author attempted to disprove materialism, a philosophy which denies immortality. Second, the implied author did believe in some form of immortality. (As we shall see in the section on the speaker, the prophecy of "The Man Against the Sky" follows this same order.) This antimaterialist attitude and a belief in an afterlife are the two parts of the implied author's philosophy which form the core of the philosophy within the dramatic poem "The Man Against the Sky."

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and I prefer to know that mine are torn up as soon as they are read--or, say, answered. There is so much in them that is none of the real 'me,'" Ibid., p. 124.

[5]"The primary fact to be considered in the study of Robinson is his search for truth," Floyd Stovall, American Idealism (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1943), p. 170. "There can be no doubt that the aim and supreme value of life for Robinson was truth. . . . His poetry is also bound in service to this end," W. R. Robinson, Edwin Arlington Robinson: A Poetry of the Act (Cleveland: Western Reserve University Press, 1967), p. 13.

Reaction to Materialism

Materialism explains all phenomena by physical causation. It is

> the view that all facts (including facts about men's minds and wills and the course of human history) are causally dependent upon physical processes, or even reducible to them. . . . Materialism is . . . opposed to philosophical dualism or idealism and, in general, to belief in God. . . . Materialistic views insist upon settling questions by reference to public observation and not to private intuitions.[6]

Materialism rejects the notion that any spiritual force has control over man's destiny and the notion of a spiritual existence after death, because neither idea is scientifically demonstrable. The purpose of life is not to prepare oneself for an afterlife that does not exist; physical existence has its own values. As Emery Neff put it, "Christianity, which made life meaningful by Heaven and Hell, has been superseded, the twentieth century says, by science, which palliates Oblivion by promising to make earthly life its own reward."[7] But Robinson the implied author thought this earthly life too harsh to be its own reward. In a letter written in 1897, he said: "The world is a grind and the sooner we make up our minds to the fact the better it will be for us."[8] To

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[6]"Materialism," Encyclopedia Britannica, 1968, XIV, 1059.

[7]Edwin Arlington Robinson (New York: William Sloane Associates, Inc., 1948), p. 183.

[8]Denham Sutcliffe, ed., Untriangulated Stars: Letters of Edwin Arlington Robinson to Harry de Forest Smith, 1890-1905 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1947), p. 286.

Robinson, life was too much of a grind not to mean something else. He expressed this notion and his belief that materialism was an erroneous philosophy in a letter to Will Durant in 1931:

> It is true that we have acquired a great deal of material knowledge in recent years, but so far as knowledge of the truth itself is concerned, I cannot see that we are any nearer to it now than our less imaginative ancestors were when they cracked each others' skulls with stone hatchets, or that we know any more than they knew of what happened to the soul that escaped in the process. It is easy, and just now rather fashionable, to say that there is no soul, but we do not know whether there is a soul or not. If a man is a materialist, or a mechanist, or whatever he likes to call himself, I can see for him no escape from belief in a futility so prolonged and complicated and diabolical and preposterous as to be worse than absurd; and as I do not know that such a tragic absurdity is not a fact, I can only know my native inability to believe that it is one. There is nothing in the thought of annihilation that frightens me; for it would be, at the worst, nothing more terrible than going to sleep at the end of a long day, whether a pleasant or a painful one, or both. But if life is only what it appears to be, no amount of improvement or enlightenment will ever compensate or atone for what it has inflicted and endured in ages past, or for what it is inflicting and enduring today. . . . There is apparently not much that anyone can do about it except to follow his own light--which may or may not be the light of an ignis fatuus in a swamp. The cocksureness of the modern "mechanist" means nothing to me; and I doubt if it means any more to him when he pauses really to think. His position is not entirely unlike that of an intrepid explorer standing on a promontory in a fog, looking through the newest thing in the way of glasses for an ocean that he cannot see, and shouting to his mechanistic friends behind him that he has found the end of the world.[9]

Since so much of life is pain and endurance, something more must exist because life in itself is not worth the suffering.

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[9]Selected Letters, pp. 163-65.

As we will see shortly, the speaker of "The Man Against the Sky" follows exactly this line of reasoning. The lines, "as I do not know that such a tragic absurdity [materialism] is not a fact, I can only know my native inability to believe that it is one," are echoed in "The Man Against the Sky" when the speaker says: "Where was he going, this man against the sky? / You know not, nor do I."[10] The speaker does not know man's fate, but he has faith in immortality.

Robinson's poems as well as his letters reflect the implied author's negative reaction to materialism. "The Children of the Night," analyzed in chapter two, is a good example. "Cassandra," "Rembrandt to Rembrandt," Cavender's House, Matthias at the Door, "Ponce de Leon," "The March of the Cameron Men," and King Jasper contain references to the philosophical error of materialism.[11]

The "I" of "The Man Against the Sky" also expresses a similar point of view. After we examine the "I's" beliefs toward materialism, we will be able to conclude that in this important respect, no discernible distance exists between the "I" and the implied author.

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[10] Collected Poems of Edwin Arlington Robinson (New York: Macmillan Company, 1937), ix.1-2. (Hereinafter referred to as Collected Poems.) All citations from this poem will be from this source.

[11] Ellsworth Barnard, Edwin Arlington Robinson: A Critical Study (New York: Macmillan Company, 1952), pp. 191-92.

Belief in Immortality

Robinson the implied author wrote to Will Durant in a fashion to make agnosticism an expression of faith if compared with materialism.

> We do not know whether there is a soul or not. . . . Our teleological endowment spares most of us from worrying over such matters [the validity of materialism] to any great extent, or from disturbing ourselves unduly over the freedom of the will. There is apparently not much that anyone can do about it except to follow his own light--which may or may not be the light of an *ignis fatuus* in a swamp.[12]

The implied author does follow his own light--the light of immortality--throughout his poetry although the qualification that the light may be the light of an "*ignis fatuus*" is always present. "Credo," "Kosmos," "The Children of the Night," and some of the "Octaves" are representative poems of this type. The speaker of "The Man Against the Sky," as mentioned earlier, admits to not knowing that the light exists, but his faith in its existence seems stronger than that expressed by the speakers of "The Children of the Night," "Credo," and most other poems written before 1916. The same is true for poems written after 1916: Hoyt C. Franchere, speaking of the "unequivocal affirmation of life and [the] denial of eternal death" in "The Man Against the Sky," points out that "the doubts and fears raised and *overcome* in 'The Man' appear and reappear in later poems

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[12] *Selected Letters*, p. 164.

unresolved."[13] (Italics mine.) The reason for this difference, I think, is in the nature of the speaker of "The Man Against the Sky." The "I" wears firmly the mask of a prophet and thus demonstrates a strong faith to the implied auditor. The "I" is similar to the implied author in his reaction to materialism and in his belief in immortality, but because the "I" acts as a prophet, his faith in the light appears stronger than the faith presented in other poems.[14]

In this section I have briefly outlined the two major tenets of the implied author's "so-called philosophy." I have also suggested that the "I" of "The Man Against the Sky" is similar to the implied author in reflecting these tenets but differs from him by acting as a prophet. The purpose of the next section is to substantiate that suggestion.

The Speaker of "The Man Against the Sky" as Prophet

The Hebrew word for prophet is roughly translated as "speaker" or "proclaimer."[15] It probably also meant that

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[13] Edwin Arlington Robinson (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1968), p. 141.

[14] In the next chapter I explain how the "I" of "The Man Against the Sky" believes his own faith should be stronger and attempts to accomplish this through the poem.

[15] J. M. Powis Smith, The Prophet and His Problems (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923), pp. 87-88.

the prophet was a "deputed speaker,"[16] one who spoke in place of another. The "I" of "The Man Against the Sky" gives no indication that he is a spokesman for God or anyone else; on that basis he is not a prophet. But he is a "speaker" and he does "proclaim" a message of truth. However, the Hebrew prophets of the Bible had additional characteristics which set them apart from other speakers and proclaimers. The "I" of "The Man Against the Sky" reflects enough of these characteristics to warrant the title "prophet." This section will demonstrate in what ways the speaker acts a prophet by analyzing each of the sections of the poem: introduction, revelation of types of men, discussion of the prophecy, and conclusion.

Introduction (Strophes 1 and 2)

The description of the poem's scene in the opening strophe contributes to the "I's" image as a prophet:

> Between me and the sunset, like a dome
> Against the glory of a world on fire,
> Now burned a sudden hill,
> Bleak, round, and high, by flame-lit height
> made higher.
> With nothing on it for the flame to kill
> Save one who moved and was alone up there
> To loom before the chaos and the glare
> As if he were the last god going home
> Unto his last desire.[17]

We can picture the "I" walking through the countryside

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[16]Edward Chauncey Baldwin, The Prophets (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1927), p. 30.

[17]1.1-9.

alone in the late afternoon ("between me and the sunset"). The season of the year is not clear: It may be winter when the sun's rays could reflect from ice and snow and suggest "a world on fire"; it may be summer when the rays could be diffused through dust particles suspended in the air to produce a similar effect. This vagueness of season suggests a certain timelessness appropriate to a propnetic vision.

The speaker, while walking, sees a hill silhouetted against a sunset:

> Between me and the sunset, like a dome
> Against the glory of a world on fire,
> Now burned a sudden hill. (Italics mine.)[18]

The word "now" gives a sense of immediacy to the situation, blending, almost paradoxically, present and past. Although the scene has occurred in the past and is being recalled by the speaker, it has occurred within the near past. The time in which the poem takes place may be twilight of the same day, that indeterminate moment between day and night. Thus, the speaker recounts his experience while he is still moved by the insight he has received from it. The term "sudden hill," as though the hill had not previously existed and suddenly appeared before the speaker, is still another indication of the paradoxical and therefore mystical perception of the prophet. The "I" reconstructs the scene in

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[18] i.1-3.

a way designed to project an image of himself as a prophet by utilizing a time progression that indicates the typical prophetic quality of giving an account of a mystical experience.

The central idea of the second strophe is a simile comparing the man disappearing over the hill to

> one of those eternal, remote things
> That range across a man's imaginings
> When a sure music fills him and he knows
> What he may say thereafter to few men,--
> The touch of ages having wrought
> An echo and a glimpse of what he thought
> A phantom or a legend until then.[19]

The man against the sky is compared with an ultimate truth ("eternal"), one which man glimpses but rarely. The speaker would not have been able to make that comparison if he had not heard and seen "one of those eternal, remote things" himself. The speaker presents himself as a prophet possessing knowledge that others below the crest of the hill do not. The man against the sky also possesses knowledge but cannot communicate to others because he has crossed the hill's crest and disappeared. Neff described the symbolism of the man in this manner:

> A man alone up there in the sun's fierce rays would be Everyman, representative of collective humanity at the summit or end of earthly experience, exposed to the searching light of wisdom a brief moment before beginning the dark descent from which no traveler has returned.[20]

The "I," envisioning Everyman's intuition of final truth,

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[19] ii.3-9. [20] P. 175.

is also filled with a "sure music." R. B. Y. Scott's description of a prophet's extra knowledge is that prophets "see a word which other men do not see."[21] This statement takes on more relevance when we examine the "I's" own description of his prophecy later as "an orient Word" that cannot be "found or known" except "in incommunicable gleams."[22] (Italics mine.)

Therefore, in the two introductory strophes of the poem the "I" has presented himself as a prophet by his description of the scene and his mystical insight into it, and by his indication that he possesses knowledge which few men have.

Revelation of Five Types of Men (Strophes 3-7)

From the third through the seventh strophes the "I" describes five philosophies by which the man against the sky may have lived; these men may be labeled as the man of sure faith, the innocent optimist, the indifferent pessimist, the man of lost faith, and the materialist. What does the speaker's description of each type tell us about the speaker himself?

The five men themselves appear to be a revelation of human types. The speaker-prophet, curious about what the man against the sky envisions as his destiny on the far

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[21] The Relevance of the Prophets (New York: Macmillan Company, 1944), p. 95.

[22] ix.3-9.

side of the hill, imagines what sort of philosophy would lead one to a particular way of descending the hill (e.g., "easily,"[23] "indifferently,"[24] "with infirm unsearching tread"[25]). The types are revealed to the prophet as he muses upon the "dark, marvelous, and inscrutable"[26] man.

The man of sure faith (strophe 3). The description of the first man, the man of sure faith, indicates the prophet's attitude that this type is to be admired, praised, and even emulated. The man of sure faith meets tests of his faith and emerges triumphant:

> He may have walked while others hardly dared
> Look on to see him stand where many fell;
> And upward out of that, as out of hell,
> He may have sung and striven
> To mount where more of him shall yet be given,
> Bereft of all retreat.[27]

The speaker is probably continuing to describe himself indirectly as he did in strophe two: What gives this first man the strength to meet and overcome the dangers and pitfalls of life? The "I" tells us later in the poem that faith in the "orient Word" is the answer, faith which arises from having caught a glimpse of "one of those eternal, remote things." The speaker may feel that at this point in the poem the auditor probably will not see the relationship between the man of faith and himself, but he is establishing

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[23] iv.1. [24] v.4. [25] vi.1.
[26] ii.1. [27] iii.13-18.

himself as a prophet possessing a message to be revealed later in the poem.

The speaker's biblical reference at the end of the strophe,

> As on a day when three in Dura shared
> The furnace, and were spared
> For glory by that King of Babylon
> Who made himself so great that God, who heard,
> Covered him with long feathers, like a bird,[28]

is taken from the book of Daniel. This reference to an apocalyptic book suggests a prophetic speaker, one who provides, in Scott's words,

> the consolation of a great hope in the God who works behind the scenes of history. Most [apocalyptic writings] are dominated by the conviction that evil is increasing. . . . The seer is enabled in vision to look on at what is happening in that heavenly world, the counterpart of what happens in <u>this</u> world. . . . On the basis of the vision the apocalyptic writer proceeds to predict the future course of events.
>
> Apocalyptic, in one sense, is mythology--a pictorial and narrative representation of a reality lying beyond sense experience. It is a mythology, not of the origins of all things . . . , but of the End.[29]

As we proceed through the poem, the "I" will be found to believe that the evil of materialism is increasing, to believe that he has had a vision of materialism's downfall and of the great hope for mankind, and to put forth a prophecy that is a mythology "of a reality lying beyond sense experience," a reality concerning the end of man's life on earth.

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[28] iii.20-24.

[29] P. 5.

The innocent optimist (strophe 4). The description of the second type of man reveals the prophet as one who realizes that a number of people do not face the realities of life. The "I" believes a man's happiness is illusory if it is based on ignorance of life's difficulties. The "I" ironically asks, "Why trouble him now?"[30] and "Why question of his ease?"[31] to show his impatience with one

> who sees and hears
> No more than what his innocence requires,
> And therefore to no other height aspires
> Than one at which he neither quails or tires.[32]

The prophet does want to bring this man out of his complacency and help make his life truly meaningful.

Additionally, the prophet is obviously not a man who has any illusions about life's innate goodness himself; he is not lulled into a false sense of pride and happiness by those outward signs of success which make a mother's eyes "shine glad with hidden tears."[33]

The indifferent pessimist (strophe 5). The prophet becomes angry at the man who sees life as only "a lighted highway to the tomb."[34] The opening description of the pessimist as having "atrabilious eyes"[35] characterizes the speaker's negative attitude toward the pessimist's empty life. The speaker is acting as a prophet by being critical

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[30] iv.17. [31] iv.10. [32] iv.17-20.
[33] iv.9. [34] v.32. [35] v.2.

of the values men place on life. J. Philip Hyatt lists four major sins which the Hebrew prophets condemned most often: narrowness of vision, false leadership, abuse of economic power, and pride.[36] The innocent optimist suffered most from narrowness of vision and pride, the same sins of the indifferent pessimist. The pessimist sees life only as it applies to him; he would walk down the far side of the hill "indifferently,"

> until at last
> His only kind of grandeur would have been,
> Apparently, in being seen.[37]

His view of life is so narrow that

> he may have had no care
> For what without himself went anywhere
> To failure or to glory.[38]

By pointing out the sins of man, the speaker reinforces his image as a prophet.

The man of lost faith (strophe 6). The fourth man's fate is stated in words that clearly demonstrate the speaker's own faith (a faith, similar to that of the first type, we discover later). The fourth man's life is hopeless; he is sick at heart. The speaker feels great pity for this broken man, as reflected in his description:

> mounting with infirm unsearching tread,
> His hopes to chaos led,

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[36] Prophetic Religion (New York: Abingdon Press, 1947), p. 51.

[37] v.4-6. [38] v.8-10.

> He may have stumbled up there from the past,
> And with an aching strangeness viewed the last
> Abysmal conflagration of his dreams,--
> A flame where nothing seems
> To burn but flame itself, by nothing fed.[39]

The speaker then gives what he feels is the cause of such a joyless and pitiful man:

> And at his heart there may have gnawed
> Sick memories of a dead faith foiled and flawed
> And long dishonored by the living death
> Assigned alike by chance
> To brutes and hierophants.[40]

Although the prophet feels pity for the man of lost faith, he condemns the man's narrowness of vision; this man, like the innocent optimist, is "asleep" and views life through a glass distorted by pride and wrong decisions. The prophet fulfills his role by angrily denouncing this type.

The materialist (strophe 7). But the prophet reserves the full force of his anger and ironic invective for the fifth type. The materialist is guilty of false leadership: He builds "a living reason out of molecules / Why molecules occurred."[41] He builds an "airy monument" to "outlast an accidental universe."[42] The materialist's scientific explanation of the universe attracts followers as does a demagogue, by offering simplified and superficial answers to complex questions.

The materialist is guilty of narrowness of vision:

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[39] vi.1-7.

[40] vi.14-18.

[41] vii.7.

[42] vii.18-20.

He has not seen "far enough" in constructing his reason "why molecules occurred."[43] He sees "with his mechanic eyes / A world without a meaning."[44]

The materialist is also guilty of pride, which is strange considering that the laws he has constructed are false. The prophet is ironic when he says that if the materialist's vision were not so narrow, he would have

> Discovered an odd reason for pride
> In being what he must have been by laws
> Infrangible and for no kind of cause.[45]

To the prophet, the laws are not infrangible: They are lies. The monument built upon these laws is "airy" and in time will fall like "mighty trees"[46] (this prediction foreshadows the prophecy).

The materialist may be a powerful ruler, a scientist, or a military leader,[47] but worldly success is worthless as long as one's philosophy toward life is wrong. The materialist is

> Doomed here to swell by dangerous degrees,
> And then give up the ghost.
> Nahum's great grasshoppers were such as these,
> Sun-scattered and soon lost.[48]

This biblical reference is to the book of Nahum, a prophet who predicted the destruction of Nineveh. The speaker is

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[43] vii.7-9. [44] vii.15-16.

[45] vii.11-13. [46] vii.18-28.

[47] vii.29-38. [48] vii.39-42.

suggesting a parallel between Nineveh and materialism.[49] To the "I," the materialist holds the most damnable philosophy of all of the types; the pessimist has no faith at all, the fourth man had a faith and lost it, but the materialist builds a faith on his negation of faith. The materialist's life is not empty; it is worse than empty, for it is filled with fallacies and misconceptions; the materialist's life is a lie.

We might ask why the speaker-prophet is so strongly opposed to materialism. Probably it is that materialism is a false faith with a false god. The "I" sees materialism as a threat to his doctrine: If it be true that we live in "a world without a meaning"[50] as the materialist believes, the speaker's faith in a world of meaning must be false. The speaker is reacting to what he perceives as an attack on his own philosophy of life. But the speaker apparently does not feel personally threatened: If he has felt "one of those eternal, remote things"[51] and if he is akin to the man of faith described in the third strophe who "may have walked while others hardly dared / Look on to see him stand where many fell,"[52] then his own faith should be in no danger of being "dishonored" as the fourth man's was. Instead,

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[49]Wallace L. Anderson, Edwin Arlington Robinson: A Critical Introduction (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 148.

[50]vii.16. [51]ii.3. [52]iii.13-14.

the speaker-prophet is apparently concerned about the effects of materialism upon the masses of people who do not have a strong faith. The speaker believes materialism could turn some men's lives into the hopeless despair of the man of lost faith; thus his description of the materialist is meant as a warning. The "I" adds another dimension to his image as a prophet by his concern and warning: A major factor in the rise of the Hebrew prophets was their sensitivity to the evil they saw around them resulting from false beliefs and their desire to combat this degeneration of faith.[53] The "I" of the poem believes that materialism is a popular, influential, and dangerously false faith and has committed himself to combating it and to turning men back toward the true faith.

Even the order of the five types of men reinforces the speaker's belief that materialism is dangerous; the man of sure faith, the innocent optimist, the indifferent pessimist, the man of lost faith, and the materialist form a regression from true faith to false faith, each degree in turn more harmful to the individual and to those around him than the preceding one. To the speaker, materialism poses the greatest threat to man's faith and so must be dealt with and disproven. This goal is accomplished in the next section of the poem.

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[53]Abraham J. Heschel, The Prophets (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 3.; and Scott, pp. 187-96.

Discussion of the Prophecy (Strophes 8 and 9)

The prophet opens the eighth strophe by transcending the differences of men to achieve identification with Everyman:

> Whatever the dark road he may have taken,
> This man who stood on high
> And faced alone the sky,
> . . . . . .
> Whatever stayed him or derided him,
> His way was even as ours;
> And we, with all our wounds and all our powers,
> Must each await alone at his own height
> Another darkness or another light.[54]

The "I" refers to the central question of the poem: What does await man beyond his worldly life's end, "another darkness or another light"?

The speaker now fully reveals himself as a prophet by answering the question with his two-part prophecy. The first part is a denial of materialism's tenet that oblivion, or another darkness, follows death. This position was put forth by the "I" in the preceding strophe, but another aspect is presented here: If materialism is true, why does man continue to reproduce? And if it is true that chance and physical laws are the only controlling factors in our lives,

> then let us all be still
> About our share in it, and live and die
> More quietly thereby.[55]

By continuing to attack the philosophy, the speaker obviously

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[54] viii.1-3, 10-14. [55] viii.43-45.

feels that the position of the materialists is superficially sound and widely accepted in society. If materialism were not dressed in the appealing garb of science, the speaker would not deem it worthy of so detailed a denunciation. Unrealistic optimism and pessimism and total hopelessness, the second, third, and fourth types of men, did not warrant any lengthy condemnation because they do not pose real threats to the truth; but materialism does. Therefore, the "I" is committed to disproving it as a tenable philosophy:

> Is this the music of the toys we shake
> So loud,--as if there might be no mistake
> Somewhere in our indomitable will?
> Are we no greater than the noise we make
> Along one blind atomic pilgrimage
> Whereon by crass chance billeted we go
> Because our brains and bones and cartilage
> Will have it so?[56]

As a prophet, the speaker makes clear his confidence in materialism's falseness.

At last, in the ninth strophe, he presents the other half of his prophecy:

> Where was he going, this man against the sky?
> You know not, nor do I.
> But this we know, if we know anything:
> That we may laugh and fight and sing
> And of our transience here make offering
> To an orient Word that will not be erased,
> Or, save in incommunicable gleams,
> Too permanent for dreams,
> Be found or known.[57]

The key to the prophecy is in the phrase "orient Word." The speaker of "The Sage" defines "orient" in the first

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[56] viii.35-42. [57] ix.1-9.

stanza of that poem:

> Foreguarded and unfevered and serene,
> Back to the perilous gates of Truth he went--
> Back to fierce wisdom and the Orient,
> To the Dawn that is, that shall be, and has been.[58]

The orient is the East, the direction of the rising sun. "Orient" also means something brilliant, shining, and precious. Therefore, each man awaits "alone at his own height"[59] not another darkness as materialists claim, but a light resplendent and radiant, the light of truth.

If darkness is oblivion, the antithesis of existence, and if the belief that oblivion follows death is wrong, then light, some form of existence, must follow death. Some spiritual immortality must exist. And because it is true, man should have faith in its existence and live by this faith. This is the speaker's prophecy.

The overall explanation of the prophecy is vague, but the "I" again acts in accordance with the Hebrew prophets who, according to Smith, "frequently present warnings or promises relating to the future. These are, for the most part, general in scope and more or less hazy and indefinite as to details."[60] The part of the prophecy dealing with materialism's future demise is a warning; the "orient Word" is the promise. Both parts are general in scope because the "I" of "The Man Against the Sky," like the Hebrew prophets, could not substantiate his prophecies at the time of

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[58] Collected Poems, p. 192. [59] viii.13. [60] P. 97.

speaking. And he should not be expected to:

> The predictions of the prophets are rather their highest ideals carried over into the region of the future and visualised. They are describing the world for us as they would like it to be and as they believed in God's good time it would be. In such utterances they are giving us dreams--not time-tables, pictures--not reality.[61]

This explanation of the vagueness of the prophecy does not harm the auditor's image of the speaker as a prophet: He is a man of sure faith, a man who admits, like the implied author of the letter to Will Durant, not "knowing whether a spiritual aspect of life exists or not ("Where was he going, this man against the sky? / You know not, nor do I"[62]). But unlike Robinson the implied author, the "I" demonstrates to the implied auditor a faith as strong as that of the first type of man. The "I" has glimpsed the Word; he cannot prove its existence in words but he can and does transfer an attitude of sincere belief.[63] Nowhere does the prophet waver in his denunciation of materialism as the supreme evil. Nowhere does he express to the implied auditor any doubt that the Word does exist. The "I" is similar in firmness of belief to the Hebrew prophets described by Smith:

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[61]Ibid., pp. 106-7. [62]ix.1.

[63]Chapter five deals with the "I's" use of the poem as self-persuasion to strengthen his own faith. The "I" believes his faith could be firmer, but to the implied auditor of the poem the "I's" faith is secure.

> Prophecy dealt not with certainties but with hopes, not with the fixed past but with the changing present and the still more uncertain future. Yet amid changing circumstance and fluctuating opinion the prophet was upheld by a sense of certainty. While others lost heart and yielded to despair he lived in confidence. . . . Few things in history are as marvellous as the firmness of the prophet's grip upon the unseen. In spite of apparent failure and in the face of seemingly insuperable difficulty and inevitable defeat, the faith of the prophet remained serene and immovable. It rose supreme above every doubt and grew richer in content with each successive trial.[64]

Another similarity between prophets and the "I" is that of motivation. The prophets believed that they were chosen of God. God gave them information other men did not have; with this knowledge went responsibility. In Hyatt's words, "A burden was placed upon them which they had to bear, willingly or upon compulsion. . . . It was not their own will which they sought to do, but God's."[65] The "I" of "The Man Against the Sky" is in a somewhat similar situation. He realizes that his powers of intuition are stronger than those of most men; by intuition he has been able to pierce the curtain of knowledge and catch a shadowy glimpse of the truth. Perhaps the experience of seeing the lone man cross the "sudden hill" prompted his mystical insight into the truth. With his awareness of truth also comes responsibility, the responsibility to bring others to his level of awareness. Stovall described the speaker's power and responsibility in this manner:

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[64]Pp. 211-12. [65]P. 31.

> If [man] knew more, reason might confirm his wavering faith; if he knew less, he might be content to dwell in the world of his illusions. To evade knowledge is despicable; to seek it, dangerous and sometimes disastrous. The great majority of people find their moral strength unequal to the demands of truth, and sink back into their world of illusions, where they pursue dim phantoms instead of realities and never truly know themselves. Some who are bold but not strong face the truth and are destroyed by it. Only the strong and courageous few, the wise and the good, can face reality and conquer it. These are the leaders of men whose function it is to draw others into the world of truth-speaking things. . . . The few must save the many, . . . or the many will be lost. But these few must be stern demanders and not lavish promises, and the many must learn the wisdom to choose the hard way to truth instead of the easy way to folly. . . . Every man has in some degree an intuition of truth, but . . . in most men it is an insufficient guide because its power is little whereas the power of illusion and of desire is great. The few in whom the intuition of truth is stronger, and especially those in whom it is reinforced by rational intelligence, must devote themselves to the establishment of those truths which they are given to know and by their precept and example draw the many toward a recognition of their own intuitive revelations.[66]

We now know two things of central importance about the speaker of the poem: His goal is to persuade those not aware of the truth that it does exist and that they should seek it themselves. His motivation for this goal is the realization that his perception of truth is greater than that of most men and his acceptance of responsibility for the promulgation of that truth. The "I" has taken on the mantle of the prophet. The early lines,

> Like one of those eternal, remote things
> That range across a man's imaginings
> When a sure music fills him and he knows
> What he may say thereafter to few men,[67]

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[66] Pp. 170-71.

[67] ll.3-6.

now become clear: "What he may say" is that the truth exists and materialism is false; "what he may say" is that faith and intuition are the ways to the truth of immortality. That is the speaker's prophecy.

The rest of the ninth strophe is a return to an attack on materialism, including the argument that if materialism is true then men should leave the planet to the animals. The speaker's concern about the negative effects of materialism is obvious; he is not only worried about how it may harm those people exposed to it, but he also fears that many people will accept materialism as true and will live by its principle that the physical world alone is reality. The "I" admonishes and warns of its dangers. If materialism can be overcome, minor evils resulting from materialism would also be eliminated. Therefore, by spending most of his time attacking materialism, the "I" is warring against what he considers to be the single major cause of man's lack of faith in the orient Word.

Conclusion (Strophe 10)

The tenth and final strophe consists of seven rhetorical questions and a closing statement. Each of the rhetorical questions is a summary of or reference to an earlier part of the poem; the speaker continues his methodical presentation. All but the first and fifth questions admonish the implied auditor to accept life's pain and tediousness, to look at life free of illusions, but primarily to realize

the harm done by materialism. The first question asks if man shall "hear no more / The Word itself,"[68] and the fifth asks, "What have we seen beyond our sunset fires / That lights again the way by which we came?"[69] The speaker again affirms his faith in the Word or Light. One implication in the two lines is that the Light has guided us in our lives no matter what philosophy we professed. Man may deny the existence of the Light, but it is true nonetheless. The Light affects all men. By this idea the "I" again expresses the prophet's total commitment to his faith.

The idea of the final statement was disclosed earlier in the poem but not in a manner such as this (the seventh rhetorical question is added to present the thought in context):

> If after all that we have lived and thought,
> All comes to Nought,--
> If there be nothing after Now,
> And we be nothing anyhow,
> And we know that,--why live?
> 'Twere sure but weaklings' vain distress
> To suffer dungeons where so many doors
> That look sheer down
> To the dark tideless floods of Nothingness
> Where all who know may drown.[70]

The "I" is being ironic in suggesting suicide. His reason for using irony is to reduce materialism to a philosophical absurdity by extending the materialist principle of a meaningless existence to its logical conclusion. The speaker's

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[68] x.5-6. [69] x.28-29. [70] x.35-45.

ability to use irony well, as he has done throughout the poem, is a further indication that he acts as a prophet, for as Heschel says, the language of prophetic utterance is "explosive," "often slashing, even horrid--designed to shock rather than to edify."[71]

The speaker has given the impression of having a number of characteristics of the prophet. We have seen that he is a man of faith, that he is sensitive to evil and concerned with combating degeneration of faith, that through an intuitive experience he has perceived truths that other men have not, and that he is aware of his responsibility to persuade other men to seek the truth. The ancient prophets and the "I" share other characteristics:[72] Neither are systematic theologians. The "I," even more so than the prophets, does not present a carefully worked out system of life, afterlife, and God. The "I" cannot explain an answer too vast "for the time-born words / We spell."[73] The "I" also acts as a prophet by attempting to reveal the spiritual reality, in Scott's words, "behind appearances, what is, as against what seems."[74] Both the Hebrew prophets and the speaker asked their auditors to cast off their illusions and face the truth. Finally, the "I" offers, as did some of the prophets, a belief based on hope,[75] a faith in

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[71] P. 7. [72] Hyatt, p. 149. [73] x.2-3.
[74] P. 103. [75] Ibid., p. 197.

a better future.

The "I" differs from the ancient prophets on a number of points also. God was much more personal and tangible to the prophets[76] than to the "I." To the "I," God seems more of a force than an objective personality. The word "God" is not in the poem: The "orient Word" is the closest equivalent, and Chard Powers Smith feels this term is more suggestive of pantheism than of the Judeo-Christian concept of God.[77] The Hebrew prophets also preached a God who demanded a high amount of ethical and moral obedience;[78] this is missing in "The Man Against the Sky." The "I" preaches that faith in the Word is the only way to true happiness, not that God expects certain signs of obedience.

Although the "I" does not emulate the Hebrew prophets in every possible manner, he shares enough characteristics in common with them for us to conclude that the "I" acted in the role of a prophet.

Conclusion

The "I" of "The Man Against the Sky" is in two important respects close to the general image of Robinson's implied author: Both believe in the error of materialism

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[76]Smith, p. 210.

[77]Where the Light Falls: A Portrait of Edwin Arlington Robinson (New York: Macmillan Company, 1965), p. 284.

[78]Hyatt, p. 152.

and the existence of some form of immortality. But because the "I" wears the mask of a prophet, his faith in the Word is stronger than that expressed in Robinson's other poetry. Franchere was correct to say that "the doubts and fears raised and overcome in 'The Man' appear and reappear in later poems unresolved."[79] The "I" of "The Man Against the Sky" is a dramatized persona, and the "so-called philosophy" of the implied author is dramatized and brought to life through the persona.

Having identified the speaker as a dramatized persona and as a prophet, it is time to examine the poem as a dramatic complex.

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[79]P. 141.

CHAPTER IV

A DRAMATIC ANALYSIS OF "THE MAN AGAINST THE SKY"

Introduction

The speaker-prophet of "The Man Against the Sky," in addition to being a mask of the implied author, also wears a mask himself for both his implied auditor and himself. He wears the mask of the man of sure faith. The "I" constructs a test of his belief out of the situation which centers upon the "flame-lit" hill and the man in the midst of the fire. The poem becomes the development and resolution of his struggle. This chapter deals with the "I's" trial of faith: Within the situation of the hilltop as fiery trial, the speaker addresses himself in an attempt to strengthen his faith. What is the complex of situation-attitude relationships with which the speaker struggles and by which he resolves his conflict? The present chapter will answer this question by examining the trial-situation of the poem, the types of men the "I" would like both to become and to avoid, and his identification of and conflict with the enemy of his faith: materialism. First, I should explain why the speaker's mask of the prophet is, to him, only a mask.

The Speaker as His Own Auditor

Before beginning the dramatic analysis, I wish to discuss an apparent inconsistency between the implied auditor's image of the speaker as a prophet and the speaker's self-image. Is the speaker insincere? What evidence is there to support this discrepancy? The speaker is not insincere. I believe the speaker's primary intent is to persuade himself of the truth of his prophecy. He has had a glimpse of the Word, which gives him a stronger faith than most men have (since most men never see even a glimpse), but to the speaker himself, his faith is not so firm as it should be. He is tempted by the sin of materialism; he admits that he does not "know" if an afterlife exists,[1] but he accepts it on faith because he has had a glimpse of the truth of it. But the materialist proudly says "I know" and bases his unqualified statement on scientific knowledge. The materialist is not haunted by doubts; the materialist does not need faith because he believes he has proof. The position is appealing to the speaker in that it promises complacency in place of doubt, "facts" in place of faith, pride in place of nagging guilt, the known in place of the unknown. Perhaps the amount of time the speaker spends in directly condemning materialism, almost

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[1] Collected Poems of Edwin Arlington Robinson (New York: Macmillan Company, 1937), ix.1-2. All citations from this poem will be from this source.

two-thirds of the poem, is an indication of the place he assigns it in the hierarchy of temptations. Perhaps when the speaker says "we" he really means "I"; when a person speaks out loud to himself, it is not uncommon for him to use the plural, since he must play two roles--speaker and auditor. Therefore, since the "I" may have some doubts concerning his ability to withstand the temptation of materialism as suggested by his admission that he does not "know" and by his repeated denunciations of materialism, I believe the poem should be viewed dramatically primarily as soliloquy.

But if the speaker intends to address himself, why does he wear the mask of the prophet? He wears it partly for the implied auditor: The implied auditor inferred, and was meant to infer, that the "I" was the man of sure faith. To the implied auditor, the speaker wears no mask: He <u>is</u> a prophet. The speaker wears this mask as an aid in establishing his <u>ethos</u> with the implied auditor but at the same time as a persuasive strategy for himself. The speaker probably believes that by putting on the mask of faith, it will in time become real. By acting for others as though he has no doubts concerning his faith, he may aid himself in overcoming the doubts. The continual wearing of the mask of sure faith may transform the speaker's own features into those of the mask. At that time the mask is no longer that but has become the speaker's real countenance. The mask therefore

serves a persuasive purpose for the speaker as his own auditor. Thus, the speaker as the implied auditor sees him and the speaker as he sees himself are not inconsistent.

The Situation as Trial

The dramatic situation of the poem is the catalyst for the speaker's actions. As he walks in the country, perhaps lost in his own thoughts, and looks up to see a "sudden" hill, unexpected and arresting in the chaos and glare of the sunset behind it, the "I" stares at "one who moved and was alone up there."[2] This is the precipitating situation, the speaker watching a lone man walk over the crest of a "bleak, round, and high"[3] hill, which is silhouetted against a blazing sunset. This situation is inspiring for the speaker. He envisions the man on the hill as "the last god going home / Unto his last desire."[4] And he also envisions himself as the man on the hill. The actual man "moved along the molten west, / And over the round hill's crest"[5] and was gone, but for the speaker the moment when the man "stood where I had found him, / On high with fire all round him,"[6] is fixed in his mind. The speaker sees himself as the man having climbed the hill of life; and now before descending the hill's dark side to his life's end, he stands poised on the crest, engulfed in the questioning light of

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[2] i.6. [3] i.4. [4] i.8-9.

[5] iii.3-4. [6] iii.1-2.

truth. Is his faith strong enough to withstand a trial? How can he strengthen his faith? What will happen to him if he fails his trial of fire? The "I" forces himself to deal with these questions. The situation of the hilltop as place of trial therefore precipitates the "I's" creation of a test of his faith.

Types of Men as Model and Temptations

The speaker's first reaction is to think of the type of man he would become if he passed his trial--a man of sure faith. As explained in the last chapter, the "I" as prophet is closer to this type than to any of the other four. But to himself, he is not confident that he has "walked while others hardly dared / Look on to see him stand where many fell."[7] The man of sure faith is willing

> To mount where more of him shall yet be given,
> Bereft of all retreat,
> To sevenfold heat,--
> As on a day when three in Dura shared
> The furnace.[8]

The man of faith has been tested in fiery trials, just as the three in Dura, and has emerged with a firmer faith each time. This firmer faith is the goal of the speaker in expressing the poem--to pass through the "furnace" with his faith increased.

After describing the ideal man he would like to be, the speaker reminds himself of the man he perhaps used to

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[7] iii.13-14. [8] iii.17-21.

be--the innocent optimist. The "I" once saw and heard "no more than what his innocence requires."[9] This was before he viewed life realistically, as he does at present, realizing the pain and tediousness of existence.[10] In the possibility that the pressures of his trial of faith tempt him to desire to return to a past state of innocence, the speaker recalls the pitiable and meaningless happiness he once possessed. The optimist, in his naïvete, sets his life goals so low that meeting them is not a challenge: "Why trouble him now who . . . to no other height aspires / Than one at which he neither quails nor tires?"[11] The speaker-prophet could never be an innocent optimist again, for he could never regain the naïvete necessary for that belief. Yet, the life of the optimist is comfortable, as the speaker probably remembers: The strife, the struggles such as the "I" is experiencing now did not exist; perhaps it would be simpler to go backward than forward; perhaps he could regain his innocence. To see again a world always pleasant and fresh--is that not to be desired?

The optimist, the "I's" past, is a temptation to him, a temptation he must meet and conquer. Even if he must rationalize to the point of thinking his past outlook empty of all meaning, he shall do so if that can help him overcome the temptation. Therefore, through the description of the optimist, the "I" reminds himself that no matter what happens

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[9] iv.18. [10] x.14-17. [11] iv.17-20.

he is better to be what he is than what he was. He would rather "mount where more of him shall yet be given,"[12] that is, face continual tests of his faith no matter the consequences, than enjoy the "meaningless" complacency of finding

> As always, underneath him solid ground
> Whereon to be sufficient and to stand
> Possessed already of the promised land.[13]

This second type helps to strengthen the "I's" faith by pointing up the values of the present in comparison to the past.

Having pictured the man he desires to be and having successfully overcome his first temptation, the man he once was, the speaker looks to the future again to face other temptations.

He might become an artist, perhaps an actor or painter.[14] In that role he would be a creator; he would become godlike: How satisfying and powerful to be creative. But this desire is also the speaker's temptation; he must fight the self-centeredness within himself that craves satisfaction. The "I" fights back with the idea that were he to become an artist, his egotism possibly would gain control of him and he would become a pessimist, a cynic, a man indifferent to anything that did not have him as its center:

> He may have had for evil or for good
> No argument; he may have had no care

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[12] iii.17. [13] iv.3-5. [14] v.12-18.

> For what without himself went anywhere
> To failure or to glory.[15]

If he did become an artist, he would probably become "immovable to old idolatries."[16] If he did become an actor, he would probably be so egotistical as to be "annoyed that even the sun should have the skies / For such a flaming way to advertise."[17] And if he did become a painter, he might become "sick at heart / With Nature's toiling for a new surprise."[18] By the speaker's reasoning, the consequences decidedly outweigh the advantages.

The speaker also considers the possibility that he may become pessimistic and cynical as a result of failing his trial of faith for whatever reason. Were he unsuccessful in resolving his conflict in his favor, he might become so disillusioned and cynical that his self-centeredness could easily become dominant in his life and he would become a man who

> Saw truth in his own image, rather small,
> Forbore to fever the ephemeral,
> Found any barren height a good retreat
> From any swarming street,
> And in the sun saw power superbly wasted.[19]

By letting his ego dictate his attitudes, whether through his becoming an artist or otherwise, what would he accomplish with his life? Would he create immortal works of art? Would they be worth the price he would have to pay? The

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[15] v.7-10. [16] v.13. [17] v.15-16.
[18] v.17-18. [19] v.22-26.

truth is probably that

> when the primitive old-fashioned stars
> Came out again to shine on joys and wars
> More primitive, and all arrayed for doom,
> He may have proved a world a sorry thing
> In his imagining,
> And life a lighted highway to the tomb.[20]

The speaker tries to convince himself that by giving in to his ego's desire to become an egocentric artist, he would render his life empty and bitter. He also holds this consequence up to himself as a warning of what he might become should he fail his trial at any point.

But his earthly ambition is strong, and the warning of the pessimist may not be sufficient to overcome it. After all, if he were a pessimist, he would still have some faith, if only in himself, and he would still have his dreams. The speaker must now struggle against this aspect of his self-indulgence, and he does so by portraying the man of lost faith and of lost dreams. By seeking worldly success he may reach levels of great power[21] and influence which would again allow him to play the role of God, but his position would be ephemeral; he would climb the sun-drenched hill

> with infirm unsearching tread,
> His hopes to chaos led,
> He may have stumbled up there from the past,
> And with an aching strangeness viewed the last
> Abysmal conflagration of his dreams,--
> A flame where nothing seems

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[20] v.27-32. [21] vi.11.

> To burn but flame itself, by nothing fed;
> And while it all went out,
> Not even the faint anodyne of doubt
> May then have eased a painful going down
> From pictured heights of power and lost renown,
> Revealed at length to his outlived endeavor
> Remote and unapproachable forever.[22]

The faith of the "three in Dura"[23] was strong enough to prevent a fate such as this; the speaker must likewise find the strength. If his faith cannot withstand these tests in the heat of the "furnace," "sick memories of a dead faith" may gnaw at his heart.[24] Even if he were a "hierophant," "the living death / Assigned . . . by chance" could befall him.[25] The glory he would gain from worldly success would be quickly forgotten; his power could not save him from a moral and spiritual downfall. At that point the speaker would be faced with a different internal struggle: whether to "cry out and stay on horribly,"[26] to "go forward like a stoic Roman / Where pangs and terrors in his pathway lie,"[27] or to "curse God and die" by committing suicide.[28] Suicide would certainly be a resolution of the struggle with self-centeredness, but the speaker seeks a different resolution.

The man of lost faith is a fate to be avoided, and should be the worst that could befall him for the sin of wanting to be godlike. No, one other possibility remains--one more dangerous, more evil, more destructive to self and

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[22] vi.1-13. [23] iii.20. [24] vi.14-15. [25] vi.16-18.
[26] vi.29. [27] vi.31-32. [28] vi.33-34.

others than any other belief: materialism. The materialist has built "a living reason out of molecules / Why molecules occurred";[29] everything in the universe can be explained in terms of physical matter. Therefore any spiritual aspect to existence which cannot be proven by the scientific method does not exist. The materialist achieves the height of man's desire to "play God"; with science he controls the universe; when he discovers the secret of life he will be the supreme creator. Materialism is, therefore, the speaker's greatest temptation. It is the enemy. The insidious influence of materialism may be the cause of the speaker's fall. He does not admit this threat openly to himself, but his repeated and vigorous denunciations of the philosophy strongly suggest that he views materialism as a force potentially debilitating to all men, himself included, whose faith is not secure. Materialism is a cancer, a death disguised behind the acceptable and benign mask of science. As a prophet, the speaker fears its effects on others. As a man who has doubts concerning his own faith, he fears its effects on himself. Its allure is strong so the speaker attacks it vigorously in an attempt to overcome it.

Materialism is false, he tells himself, because its premises are false ("an airy monument"[30]); he would be wasting his life to believe in a philosophy that will "like

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[29] vii.6-7. [30] vii.18.

once-remembered mighty trees go down / To ruin."[31] Materialism would serve his self-interests, however; perhaps he may become "so great / That satraps would have shivered at his frown."[32] "He may have been a master of his fate, / And of his atoms,"[33] or "a captain of a host,"[34] all positions of influence, all ego-satisfying. But the speaker foresees only a dangerous pride and finally death as a result.[35] The "I" has struck at his weakness, earthly ambition, in this last statement, but not hard enough to slay such a formidable foe. He must try harder.

Now that the speaker has identified his real enemy, he ceases his revelation of types of men. In that revelation, the five types just discussed, the speaker has contemplated the innocence of his past and the failure or glory awaiting him in the future. As he overcame the temptation offered by the optimist, pessimist, and man of lost faith, he in effect affirmed his own belief as true and valid. One final temptation remains between him and triumphant glory. The test of the "furnace" is now upon the "I's" ability to overcome materialism's siren song as proof of the strength of his faith. The speaker attempts to resolve this struggle in the discussion section of the poem, strophes eight and nine.

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[31] vii.24-25. [32] vii.29-30. [33] vii.33-34.
[34] vii.37. [35] vii.39-42.

The Speaker's Struggle Against Materialism

The content of strophe eight is primarily a denunciation of materialism. The speaker opens the strophe by identifying himself with the man against the sky:

> Whatever the dark road he may have taken,
> This man who stood on high
> And faced alone the sky,
> . . . . . .
> His way was even as ours;
> And we, with all our wounds and all our powers,
> Must each await alone at his own height
> Another darkness or another light.[36]

The "I" realizes that he cannot depend on help from anyone else; this struggle is his to pass or fail alone. Knowing that his strength must come from within, the speaker accepts this responsibility and faces the enemy.

He asks himself a series of questions designed to resist the temptation by demonstrating materialism's faulty reasoning. If man refuses to believe either in a spiritual existence or in "oblivion" following death, would not his will be thwarted, enabling him to commit suicide?

> If inference and reason shun
> Hell, Heaven, and Oblivion,
> May thwarted will (perforce precarious,
> But for our conservation better thus)
> Have no misgiving left
> Of doing yet what here we leave undone?[37]

Therefore, man believes in either the darkness or the light. And if man believes that "oblivion," or "another darkness," awaits him, what is the logic of bringing children into a world "that would have still in sight / A

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[36] viii.1-3, 11-14. [37] viii.16-21.

manifest end of ashes and eternal night?"[38] Is a belief in a universe governed solely by principles of physics and chemistry the only result of our scientific knowledge? Must we act as though our theories are facts and not admit the possibility that a spiritual aspect exists?

> Is this the music of the toys we shake
> So loud,--as if there might be no mistake
> Somewhere in our indomitable will?[39]

Is man nothing more than "brains and bones and cartilage" tossed about by "crass chance"?[40]

> If this we say, then let us all be still
> About our share in it, and live and die
> More quietly thereby.[41]

The final statement is ironic: The speaker is anything but "still" as he goes on to challenge materialism for two more strophes, thus implying that he is more than a physical being. By utilizing this type of reasoning, the speaker intensifies his belief that man is spiritual in addition to being physical. He also weakens his desire to succumb to materialism's temptation.

The speaker next admits to himself that he has doubts by saying, "Where was he going, this man against the sky? / You know not, nor do I."[42] The Word of truth cannot be "found or known" "save in incommunicable gleams / Too permanent for dreams."[43] Although the "I" has seen a gleam

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[38] viii.33-34. [39] viii.35-37. [40] viii.38-42.
[41] viii.43-45. [42] ix.1-2. [43] ix.7-9.

of the Word, he cannot prove it exists; he can, however, have faith in its existence and permanence. If his faith is strong enough, it will take the place of proof. The speaker reasons with himself that his faith in the Word can be secure even though the Word is vague and known only in gleams:

> this we know, if we know anything:
> That we may laugh and fight and sing
> And of our transience here make offering
> To an orient Word that will not be erased.[44]

The speaker intends this strategy to help himself understand that his faith can be strong enough to withstand the fires of the furnace. This understanding without revelation may aid in making his faith stronger.

The rest of the strophe is the speaker's final concentrated effort to resolve the struggle. He tells himself that nothing that stimulates a desire for worldly success (meaning materialism) has had an effect upon the past or will have an effect on the future:

> No tonic and ambitious irritant
> Of increase or of want
> Has made an otherwise insensate waste
> Of ages overthrown
> A ruthless, veiled, implacable foretaste
> Of other ages that are still to be
> Depleted and rewarded variously
> Because a few, by fate's economy,
> Shall seem to move the world the way it goes.[45]

Earthly ambition is senseless because it is illusionary power and does not really "move the world." Whatever future

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[44] ix.3-6. [45] ix.10-18.

generations do either to harm or help themselves will occur in spite of materialism's boasts, not because of them.

The speaker then convinces himself that no philosophy based on social reform will endure or be of any value:

> No soft evangel of equality,
> Safe-cradled in a communal repose
> That huddles into death and may at last
> Be covered well with equatorial snows--
> And all for what, the devil only knows--
> Will aggregate an inkling to confirm
> The credit of a sage or of a worm,
> Or tell us why one man in five
> Should have a care to stay alive
> While in his heart he feels no violence
> Laid on his humor and intelligence
> When infant Science makes a pleasant face
> And waves again that hollow toy, the Race.[46]

These philosophies cannot explain why one man in five accepts science's notion that the improvement of the human race is man's goal. The speaker holds up science which after all cannot prove all it asserts in comparison to the Word which asks only faith. Only the Word can explain mankind's purpose. With faith in the Word, the speaker can know meaningful happiness and peace. And with faith, the speaker can be sure that oblivion is not his ultimate fate; <u>something</u> exists beyond this material life.

The speaker continues to demonstrate the fallacy of materialism with the ironic argument that if we are indeed in a

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[46] ix.19-31.

planetary trap where souls are wrought
For nothing but the sake of being caught
And sent again to nothing,[47]

man should "go away" and let the animals have domain over the earth. Through irony the "I" persuades himself of the untenable position of the materialists.

Strophes eight and nine are thus a discussion of the prophecy that materialism will be proven false and that some form of nonphysical existence exists beyond death. Their purpose is to strengthen, primarily through irony, the beliefs of the speaker as he stands in the midst of the fiery "furnace" on the hill's crest.

The Speaker's Victory Over Materialism

In the final strophe the speaker apparently overcomes the enemy, the obstacle to his becoming a man of sure faith. He asks seven questions of himself, each designed to move his faith closer toward total fulfillment and farther from the temptations of materialism. Irony is still the speaker's basic weapon: He asks if we are "to pity ourselves and laugh at faith / And while we curse life bear it?"[48] He asks: "And if we see the soul's dead end in death, / Are we to fear it?"[49] The point is, of course, that the "I" does not see the "soul's dead end in death"; he sees something else "beyond our sunset fires"--the glimmer of the distant light of truth "that lights again the

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[47] ix.32-34. [48] x.22-23. [49] x.24-25.

way by which we came."[50] The speaker resolves his struggle by turning toward the light. His faith has withstood, although not easily, the torments and temptations imposed on it by materialism. The turning point for the speaker occurred in strophe nine, resulting from the exposure of the promise within the Word and the lies of materialism. The speaker's overt recognition of his triumph is found in the questions and final statement of strophe ten.

The final statement of the poem is an ironic dismissal of the once-dreaded materialism. If it is true that

> there be nothing after Now,
> And we be nothing anyhow,
> And we know that,[51]

then only weaklings would not commit suicide and escape the "dungeon" of a meaningless, chance existence.[52] The speaker's attitude seems firm. He appears convinced that the Word exists and that materialism will be proven false as he knows it to be. The "I" has survived the test of the "furnace" and emerges as the man of sure faith, tempered by the fires of his inner struggle.

Conclusion

As a dramatic poem in which the speaker addresses himself for the purpose of self-persuasion, "The Man Against the Sky" reveals itself as a test both of materialism's tenet that the universe consists solely of matter and of

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[50] x.28-29. [51] x.37-39. [52] x.40-45.

the "I's" belief in something "after Now." The focal point of the poem is the image of the "flame-lit" hill with the lone man standing in the midst of the fire, as did the "three in Dura."

The speaker's trial was not a simple one. By recalling the man he used to be and conjecturing upon the man he would like to be and the men his self-centeredness might lead him to be, he accomplished two things: He reinforced his desire to emerge victorious from his "furnace" and he identified the main cause of his being unsure of his faith. The "I" employs irony primarily from that point on in the poem to prove to himself that materialism is a false belief and one unable to challenge effectively the existence of the Word. He has triumphed in his contention with evil and his own weakness. The "I" becomes a man of sure faith.

With himself as auditor, the speaker was successful in his attempt at persuasion. Who is the implied auditor outside the poem? Is he similar at all to the speaker? What makes him a potential disciple of the prophecy? The implied auditor is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER V

THE IMPLIED AUDITOR OF "THE MAN AGAINST THE SKY"

Introduction

The "I" of "The Man Against the Sky" speaks primarily to persuade himself, but he also speaks to an implied auditor outside the poem. The speaker's intent in addressing an implied auditor is to persuade him to become a disciple of the prophecy. As I mentioned in chapter two, when a speaker's words are directed primarily toward himself, an implied auditor, if present, may display characteristics and even ideologies similar to the speaker's; to adapt language to an implied auditor with an opposing viewpoint would restrict the speaker in his use of language to serve his own ends. The implied auditor of "The Man Against the Sky" is not identical with the speaker, however: The major distinction between the two is that the speaker has had a glimpse of the Word and the implied auditor has not.

This discussion of the implied auditor utilizes only the poem as a source of information. In the absence of any overt response from the implied auditor, we must infer his nature as the speaker pictures it in constructing

his arguments. Therefore, what is described in this chapter is the speaker's image of the implied auditor.

The Implied Auditor as Potential Disciple

The implied auditor has five distinguishable characteristics as a potential disciple to the speaker's prophecy: He is disturbed by societal changes; he has not settled on a particular belief; he is open to influence; he has a sense of irony; and he can accept the speaker's prophecy of the Word. Each of these characteristics will be discussed separately.

Disturbed by Societal Changes

The implied auditor is a twentieth-century man confused and bewildered by rapid changes in technology and by challenges to authority, religion, and the established verities. The beliefs and life-styles of his parents and grandparents no longer seem valid. He seeks stability and permanence in a world of continual change. He is a man with a felt but perhaps undefined need for assurance that his life is meaningful, and he seeks ways to satisfy this need. He is, in a way, searching for a teacher, a man of wisdom who can ameliorate his felt need. Established popular religions may seem outdated and incapable of meeting the challenge of materialism in modern society. The implied auditor is a potential disciple without a prophet or prophecy to guide him.

The opening image of the man against the sky might reflect the symbolic "trial" of a confused and isolated implied auditor:

> Between me and the sunset, like a dome
> Against the glory of a world on fire,
> Now burned a sudden hill,
> Bleak, round, and high, by flame-lit height
> made higher,
> With nothing on it for the flame to kill
> Save one who moved and was alone up there
> To loom before the chaos and the glare.[1]

The fire imagery adumbrates the passage of the "three in Dura" for the implied auditor just as it does for the speaker: The implied auditor must submit himself to a trial in an attempt to discover a satisfying faith. The man against the sky, alone and apparently vulnerable to the destructive "flames" surrounding him, would attract the attention of an implied auditor whose need was great enough that he was willing to submit to the test of a "furnace." The last two lines of the strophe continue to describe the man against the sky: "As if he were the last god going home / Unto his last desire."[2] If the implied auditor has in any way identified with the man, this simile may give him confidence that he potentially does have the ability to survive the fiery test.

The inference in strophe two that the speaker has

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[1] Collected Poems of Edwin Arlington Robinson (New York: Macmillan Company, 1937), i.1-7. All citations from this poem will be from this source.

[2] i.7-9.

knowledge of "one of those eternal, remote things,"[3] and the description of the man of sure faith in strophe three also hints of a disturbed implied auditor. His confusion is great enough that he needs immediate reinforcement. He needs to believe that the speaker has some message that can help him; he needs to believe that some men's lives have meaning and are not merely chaotic and frightening. If he can believe this, he may continue listening to the speaker. The auditor has a strong desire to be a disciple of someone with an answer which can satisfy his need. If the opening strophes make him identify with the man against the sky, arouse his curiosity about the speaker's message, and provoke envy of the man of sure faith, then the implied auditor is acting out of his unhappiness and bewilderment. Because of the auditor's confusion concerning his place in the world, he has not yet decided to live by a particular philosophy or belief.

No Settled Philosophy

We know that the implied auditor is not the man of sure faith; if he were, the speaker would have no need to persuade him to accept the Word. Moreover, it is unlikely that the implied auditor is any of the other four types of men discussed: If he were, the speaker would have little hope of convincing him to become a disciple of the prophecy

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[3] 11.3.

in the 314 lines of the poem. The speaker's description of each type illustrates this point.

The innocent optimist is a man who

> sees and hears
> No more than what his innocence requires,
> And therefore to no other height aspires
> Than one at which he neither quails nor tires.[4]

The prophecy would have no effect on this man because acceptance of it entails a willingness to face trials of faith, something which the optimist feels no need to do. Additionally, since we have established that the implied auditor views his life as chaotic and confusing, he could not think of it as

> the promised land,
> Far stretched and fair to see:
> A good sight, verily.[5]

The implied auditor is not an indifferent pessimist, either. The man who sees life as "a lighted highway to the tomb"[6] has already made up his mind about life's meaning, or the lack of it, and will not be interested in any vague explanation of an "orient Word." The pessimist is too bitter about life to be cheered by a prophet's vision. Therefore, the speaker was not thinking of the indifferent pessmist when he considered his implied auditor.

Nor was the speaker thinking of the man of lost faith and lost dreams. For this man, the prophecy would be too late; he has

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[4] iv.17-20. [5] iv.5-7. [6] v.32.

viewed the last
Abysmal conflagration of his dreams,--
A flame where nothing seems
To burn but flame itself, by nothing fed;
And while it all went out,
Not even the faint anodyne of doubt
May then have eased a painful going down.[7]

This man's faith is dead;[8] since he "knows no young way to forget"[9] he is incapable of finding a new faith and so will probably "struggle to the tomb unreconciled."[10] The implied auditor has at least a potential for belief for him to be capable of becoming a disciple; the man of lost faith and dreams does not even have a potential any more.

And last, the auditor is not a materialist since the materialist feels his life is already stable and secure. The materialist has the answers, through science, to the questions of man's purpose on earth--the advancement of the race.[11] He has no need, he believes, for any vague prophecy about "incommunicable gleams."[12] Physics and chemistry are his prophecies, "a world without a meaning"[13] his God. The materialist is not a potential disciple.

There is one other reason why the implied auditor is none of the four men described: If he were any one of the types, he would react negatively to the speaker's ironic and biting criticism of his belief. As a result he would reject both speaker and prophecy. Therefore, the implied

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[7] vi.4-10. [8] vi.15. [9] vi.23. [10] vi.24.
[11] ix.30-31. [12] ix.7. [13] vii.16.

auditor of "The Man Against the Sky" has not yet accepted or been driven to one of the philosophies conjectured upon by the speaker. But because his need for stability and meaning forces him to seek an answer, he is a potential disciple of some belief.

Open to Influence

Although the implied auditor has not yet accepted any of the last four types of belief, he may be tending toward

> An easy trust assumed of easy trials,
> A sick negation born of weak denials,
> A crazed abhorrence of an old condition,
> A blind attendance on a brief ambition.[14]

In all probability the greatest influence upon the implied auditor is materialism; materialism is the auditor's greatest temptation, as it was the speaker's. The implied auditor may wish to be open-minded about his decision but may find it difficult with an emotional desire to discover meaning spurring him on.

The auditor's open-mindedness is a double-edged sword. It makes him susceptible to materialism's seductive arguments, but it also makes him susceptible to the speaker's prophecy. Thus, the auditor may be succumbing to materialism's allure but he is not deaf to a prophet's message.

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[14] viii.6-9.

A Sense of Irony

As a part of his open-mindedness, the implied auditor has a sense of irony. If he did not, he would not understand the speaker's intended meaning in such lines as "why trouble him now?"[15] (speaking of the innocent optimist), and

> If there be nothing after Now,
> And we be nothing anyhow,
> And we know that,--why live?[16]

Since many of the arguments are based on irony, the auditor which is derived from the work appreciates the subtleties of meaning resulting from the use of irony. Additionally, because he is open-minded, the implied auditor can appreciate the ironic barbs aimed at materialism even though he may have been considering accepting it.

Can Accept the Word

In the second strophe the speaker described himself as a man who has had a glimpse of "one of those eternal, remote things" which fills him with "a sure music"; at that time "he knows / What he may say thereafter to few men."[17] The speaker realizes that only "few men" will understand and accept the prophecy and become disciples. What is it that makes the implied auditor one of a select group? The speaker informs us through his prophecy.

As a potential disciple, the implied auditor fulfills

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[15] iv.17. [16] x.37-39. [17] ii.3-6.

four prerequisites. The first is a belief in, or a belief in the possibility of, a nonphysical aspect of existence. The auditor is willing to accept the belief that something may exist beyond the material world. Since the Word, or Light, is beyond the material world, an auditor who trusts only his five senses could not be a disciple.

Second, the auditor has faith in his own powers of intuition. He believes that it is possible that he, like the speaker, can and will hear the Word. The auditor as a potential disciple believes that his inner self, his intuitive powers, can transcend rational thought and the material world to comprehend innately a spiritual truth. He realizes that only through intuition can he catch a glimpse of the Light or hear an echo of the Word.

Third, the implied auditor is willing to accept a prophecy of an afterlife which is vaguely stated.[18] He wants to believe in something beyond this life but does not want a rigid dogma that would require him to subscribe to all of it, parts of which he may be unwilling or unable to accept. Therefore, he has not turned to organized religions for his answer. Moreover, having been exposed to the scientific basis of materialism, he respects scientific knowledge and thus does not want an inflexible creed so precise that

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[18]Malcolm Cowley thought the prophecy "too vague to be intellectually respectable." See "Edwin Arlington Robinson: Defeat and Triumph," New Republic, December 6, 1948, p. 30.

it is in complete disagreement with such theories as evolution and the age of the earth. The speaker's abstract presentation of the Word therefore satisfies the implied auditor.

Fourth, the auditor is capable of believing that the prophecy is true even though he may never hear an echo of the Word himself. The speaker asks if we shall

> hear no more
> The Word itself, the living word
> That none alive has ever heard
> Or ever spelt,
> And few have ever felt
> Without the fears and old surrenderings
> And terrors that began
> When Death let fall a feather from his wings
> And humbled the first man?[19]

Some men have felt the truth of the Word, but few have believed it; most did not have the faith to accept it and reacted with the age-old fear of death. The implied auditor needs to <u>believe</u> in the Word so that he will recognize it when and if he does feel it. But he must also live by and act upon his faith in the Word's existence with the knowledge that he may not catch a glimpse of it. If he can live by his faith, he becomes a disciple.[20]

This discussion of the auditor's acceptance of the

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[19] x.5-13.

[20] Although the auditor probably will not hear an echo of the Word in his lifetime, if he does, then "a sure music fills him and he knows / What he may say thereafter to few men." (ii.5-6.) That is, he would then become a prophet himself, and would be able to pass on the prophecy to others.

Word on faith points out one difference of degree between him and the speaker: The implied auditor has not had even a glimpse of the Word, and the speaker has. Thus to the auditor, the speaker is a prophet--the speaker has more knowledge of that "eternal, remote thing"[21] than does the auditor. But since the speaker has only had a glimpse, he also must accept the existence of the Word on faith. Speaker and auditor exist on two different levels of faith in the Word: The auditor is a potential disciple; the speaker is already a disciple but demands more of himself than he does of the auditor in terms of faith, which explains his self-image as a man of weak faith discussed in the previous chapter.

Conclusion

The implied auditor, as inferred from the speaker's picture of him, is victimized by twentieth-century materialism and rapid scientific and technological advancement to the point of feeling a sense of hopelessness and confusion and a loss of identity. At the same time, having driven the auditor to seek for meaning in his life, materialism courts him to become a disciple of its credo as an answer to his problem. The auditor is unsettled and open to influence by both materialists and the speaker: He has the potential to accept either position. The strategies that

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[21] ii.3.

the speaker-prophet utilizes in the poem to attempt to persuade the implied auditor toward discipleship to his prophecy are discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER VI

A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF "THE MAN AGAINST THE SKY"

Introduction

The speaker's address to himself is part of a rhetorical situation which includes the implied auditor. Although the "I's" intent is self-persuasion, his appeals function rhetorically on two levels--for himself as auditor and for the implied auditor outside the poem.[1] The appeals do not always function identically for both speaker and auditor; what persuades the speaker on one level often persuades the implied auditor on a different level. At only one point in the poem do the appeals designed for the speaker possibly clash with their function for the auditor.

The primary rhetorical strategies which affect the auditor are the speaker's prophetic mask, his use of irony and personal pronouns, the harmony of the two parts of the

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[1]As mentioned in chapter two, the language appeals of poetry attempt to persuade the actual reader to take on, in Walker Gibson's words, "the mask and costume" of the implied auditor "in order to experience the language." "Authors, Speakers, Readers, and Mock Readers," College English, XI (February, 1950), 266. Therefore, as George T. Wright said, "The poem is always finally addressed to us." The Poet in the Poem (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), p. 19.

prophecy, the scene of the man against the sky, the description of five types of men, and the arrangement of the address into an adaptation of a classical oration. The address is divided into an exordium, a narration, a confirmation and refutation, and a peroration.[2] The discussion of the rhetoric of the poem will follow these divisions to illustrate the clarity of their purpose and use. The other strategies mentioned are pointed out as they occur in the address.

Exordium

The opening strophe serves an introductory function by catching the implied auditor's attention and arousing his curiosity through vivid imagery. The auditor may feel involved in the poem if, as mentioned in chapter five, he relates his own confusing life to "the chaos and the glare" of "a world on fire."[3] Thus, he may sense that the scene is a test of his own faith. He may also begin to identify with the speaker since the description of the scene comes to him through the speaker's eyes. Moreover, the speaker begins to establish with the auditor his image as a sensitive, astute observer. This image may further the auditor's identification with the "I."

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[2]The terms are from Donald Lemen Clark, Rhetoric in Greco-Roman Education (Morningside Heights, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1957), pp. 70, 117-18.

[3]Collected Poems of Edwin Arlington Robinson (New York: Macmillan Company, 1937), i.2-7. All citations from this poem will be from this source.

In the second strophe the speaker adds another dimension to his image by indirectly referring to himself as a man who has experienced

> one of those eternal, remote things
> That range across a man's imaginings
> When a sure music fills him and he knows
> What he may say thereafter to few men,--
> The touch of ages having wrought
> An echo and a glimpse of what he thought
> A phantom or a legend until then.[4]

This passage functions both to further the auditor's identification with a man who has such knowledge and to arouse his curiosity about the "eternal, remote thing" by foreshadowing the prophecy. Presented as he is with a guide through the poem who combined sensitive observation with a knowledge of some truth which may help him, the auditor may be unconsciously putting on the mask of the speaker as he listens.

But at the same time the auditor makes assumptions about the speaker's knowledge, the "I" warns that the truth he possesses sets him spiritually apart from most men:

> For whether lighted over ways that save,
> Or lured from all repose,
> If he go on too far to find a grave,
> Mostly alone he goes.[5]

The auditor's picture of the speaker's <u>ethos</u> is beginning to take shape; he does not see the speaker as a prophet yet, but the groundwork is laid.

The exordium has served to gain the auditor's

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[4] ii.3-9. [5] ii.10-13.

attention and good will; the auditor may feel involved in the scene and may begin to identify with the speaker. The auditor is beginning his own struggle for a resolution of his needs.

Narration

The third through the seventh strophes are a description of five types of men that in itself argues by suggestion. The section is a narration which speculates on who the man against the sky may have been.

The Man of Sure Faith

The first type of man is described as one who

> may have taken
> Down to the perils of a depth not known,
> From death defended though by men forsaken,
> The bread that every man must eat alone.[6]

The "bread" is the truth of the soul's destiny which some men deny ("by men forsaken") but which is "one of those eternal, remote things" referred to in strophe two;[7] thus, the truth is "from death defended." The possession of this "bread" allows this type of man to descend "to the perils of a depth not known" with a confidence similar to that of the "three in Dura."[8]

The four lines just examined present a hope to the implied auditor concerning his own fate. Some men have found and live by the "bread" of truth; it is this truth

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[6] iii.9-12. [7] ii.3. [8] iii.20.

that makes their lives meaningful. Perhaps the implied auditor could live by this truth himself. Thus the auditor starts to become aware of his own role in the poem and starts to seek identification with this first type, the man of faith. This identification strengthens the auditor's ultimate identification with the speaker because by the ninth strophe the similarity between the speaker and the man of faith is made clear. If the auditor identifies himself with both men and compares the faith of the first type to the four others, the desirability of accepting the attitudes of the speaker and the first type is reinforced on two different levels.

The strength of the first type and his willingness to face the dangers of life and the problem of death supplement the auditor's growing acceptance of that man's attitudes. Because he reached heights that others could not, heights that

> others hardly dared
> Look on to see him stand where many fell;
> And upward out of that, as out of hell,
> He may have sung and striven
> To mount where more of him shall yet be given,
> Bereft of all retreat,[9]

the man of sure faith becomes a model for the confused auditor. The auditor takes on the masks of both speaker and the man of faith; through the mask of the speaker the auditor judges the fates of other types of men and through the

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[9] iii.13-18.

mask of the man of faith he compares the other men to himself. This point of view is important because through it the auditor will see the negative aspects of materialism in later strophes. His attitude is thus slowly being shifted away from an open-minded position.

The biblical reference at the end of the third strophe suggests the implied auditor's goal; the man of faith mounts bravely

> To sevenfold heat,--
> As on a day when three in Dura shared
> The furnace, and were spared
> For glory by that king of Babylon.[10]

The auditor, like the "three in Dura," faces a "furnace," a test which will determine which answer he accepts to satisfy his feelings of alienation and confusion. The three in Dura chose the path of faith and "were spared / For glory"--their correct decision being an implication that the auditor should choose a similar path.

The Innocent Optimist

The optimist is also a man of faith, but his faith is built on illusion and results in a false happiness. The auditor may at first think this second man is similar in optimism and faith to the first man because of the speaker's initial description of him as inheritor of the promised land:

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[10] iii.19-22.

> Again, he may have gone down easily,
> By comfortable altitudes, and found,
> As always, underneath him solid ground
> Whereon to be sufficient and to stand
> Possessed already of the promised land,
> Far stretched and fair to see:
> A good sight, verily,
> And one to make the eyes of her who bore him
> Shine glad with hidden tears.[11]

The image of the man as a "son of Abraham" strengthens his apparent similarity to the first man. Additionally, the second man's life is so successful that he gives great pride to his mother. But a mother's pride may be based on superficial or outward success, which is the easiest kind to display.

The speaker then asks two rhetorical questions of the auditor, which, by their irony, show the second man's innocence and optimism to be based on an illusion of his own happiness. The first question shows that the man is ignorant of his past, of his ancestors who "carved hard the way for his ascendency / Through deserts of lost years."[12] Not only does this man ignore the past, but he also is blindly trustful of the future: "He may, by seeing all things for the best / Incite futurity to do the rest."[13]

The gloss, the superficial veneer, of this man begins to crack for the auditor; he begins to see the shortcomings of this type of man, exemplified in the speaker's second question:

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[11] iv.1-9. [12] iv.15-16. [13] iv.23-24.

> Why trouble him now who sees and hears
> No more than what his innocence requires,
> And therefore to no other height aspires
> Than one at which he neither quails nor tires?[14]

If the auditor has sensed the irony, he may feel that this type should be disturbed and awakened. However, an optimistic attitude is not without its positive aspects:

> He may do more by seeing what he sees
> Than others eager for iniquities;
> He may, by seeing all things for the best,
> Incite futurity to do the rest.[15]

This man is a temptation for the implied auditor as he was for the speaker, but the temptation may be overcome without much difficulty by accepting the speaker's attitude toward the optimist that is behind the words: The optimist not only lives solely in the present but never challenges himself to accomplish anything he cannot handle easily. He is an outward success but an inward failure because he sees only one part of life, an illusion of a present happiness. He is unwilling or unable to risk suffering and pain himself by facing and overcoming the dangers and challenges of life.

The presentation of this man is effective. The auditor's initial exposure to him is positive--the man is optimistic, a success, a man of faith just like the first man. Then the speaker takes the auditor behind the mask to see the flaws of the real man, just as the auditor would

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[14] iv.17-20. [15] iv.21-24.

be initially impressed, then suspicious, and finally disappointed in the man's capacity for illusion had he actually met and known the man. That is, the speaker's method of presenting the second type mirrors the world of the type--superficially impressive but inwardly naive, innocent, and immature.

From the first through the fourth strophe four additional changes may have occurred within the auditor: First, the auditor has become involved through the imagery of the man against the sky; second, the auditor has identified himself with the speaker as a sensitive person, wise beyond intellect, one who possesses an eternal truth and who may share this truth with the auditor; third, the auditor has also identified with the man of faith, the first hypothetical type that the man against the sky may be; fourth, the auditor has seen how another man may superficially resemble the man of faith, but whose life is based on illusion and complacency.

The Indifferent Pessimist

In the fifth strophe, the speaker posits a third possible philosophy the man against the sky may hold--that of the indifferent pessimist. If the attitude of the implied auditor toward the optimist was one of pity touched with scorn, the attitude toward the third type, the indifferent pessimist, is one of scorn touched with pity. This man has "atrabilious eyes" and has crossed the hill

"indifferently,"[16]

until at last
His only kind of grandeur would have been,
Apparently, in being seen.[17]

These lines illustrate the man's ego-involvement, his total concern with self. The speaker again presents first an aspect of a man's character one is apt to notice immediately; in this case it is the man's eyes. The auditor would move into a deeper identification with the speaker and the man of faith as a result of being repelled by the pessimist's negative attitude.

The "I" then goes on to subdivide this type of man, theorizing as to who he may be: an artist who denies the notions of heaven, hell, and god; an actor annoyed at the sun for his possession of the sky as an advertisement for itself; a painter disgusted with Nature's continually new portraits; a cynic who views truth as small and ephemeral and puts himself above the common crowd. In chapter four I discussed how these vocations were temptations to the speaker's own self-centeredness. But the implied auditor does not necessarily have the struggle with ego that the "I" does; thus this section is a point at which the "I's" rhetoric for himself may clash with his rhetoric for the auditor. In this instance, the section may serve to reinforce the auditor's negative attitude toward the pessimist,

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[16] v.2-4. [17] v.4-6.

but the temptation to be a creator is not necessarily strong for the auditor.

What the auditor may notice, however, is the broad outline of the narration: Following the man of sure faith, each of the successive two types had less and less faith. The optimist had faith that all would work out for the best; the pessimist seemed only to have faith in himself. The auditor may be able to predict that the next type would have even less faith. An auditor's ability to foresee an orator's progression before it is completed may help build his self-confidence. If the auditor does see this unfolding of types as moving farther from the man of sure faith, he is correct--the next type is the man of lost faith.

The Man of Lost Faith

Although this fourth type has no faith or dreams at all and thus is farther from the man of sure faith than the pessimist, the description of the type appeals more to the auditor's compassion than to his sense of scorn:

> Or, mounting with infirm unsearching tread,
> His hopes to chaos led,
> He may have stumbled up there from the past,
> And with an aching strangeness viewed the last
> Abysmal conflagration of his dreams.[18]

The words connote a hopelessness, a soul lost and wandering in pain and fear. The highly suggestive description of this fourth man plunges the auditor into a state of empathic

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[18] vi.1-5.

despair. The man's dreams are only "a flame where nothing seems / To burn but flame itself, by nothing fed."[19] The flame reminds us of the fire of the sunset at the poem's opening, the glare and "glory of a world on fire"; but in contrast, this man's flame is only a dying spark, a meager remnant of what once existed.[20] What completes the hellish nightmare for the man of lost faith is that his flicker of truth has gone out completely; he must go down the hill to death in darkness and doubt and fear:

> And while it all went out,
> Not even the faint anodyne of doubt
> May then have eased a painful going down
> From pictured heights of power and lost renown,
> Revealed at length to his outlived endeavor
> Remote and unapproachable forever.[21]

What draws upon the auditor's pity is the knowledge that this man was not born to his lot; he once had power and renown. He has fallen from greatness, the classic hero of tragedy without the hero's ability to salvage wisdom or even pride from the ashes of his life.

Why is it that this man, once powerful and well-known, should have fallen to such depths that he no longer

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[19] vi.6-8.

[20] This inconsiderable flame is echoed in the poem "George Crabbe" in which the speaker chides the auditor for reading "books that are altars where we kneel / To consecrate the flicker, not the flame." Collected Poems of Edwin Arlington Robinson, p. 94. The implication is that Crabbe's works are flames, not flickers, of truth.

[21] vi.8-13.

even has dreams or "the faint anodyne of doubt," a man for whom no hope at all exists? The speaker tells us in these lines:

> And at his heart there may have gnawed
> Sick memories of a dead faith foiled and flawed
> And long dishonored by the living death
> Assigned alike by chance
> To brutes and hierophants;
> And anguish fallen on those he loved around him
> May once have dealt the last blow to confound him
> And so have left him as death leaves a child,
> Who sees it all too near;
> And he who knows no young way to forget
> May struggle to the tomb unreconciled.[22]

This man has fallen because his faith was not strong enough to support him in crises (such as "anguish fallen on those he loved around him"). When he realized his faith was insufficient to aid him, he probably turned away from it; the continued pressures on his life dealt the death blow to his faith.[23]

The message of this strophe for the auditor must be inferred: If the auditor fails his "trial by fire" and as a result rejects whatever faith he possesses, his fate may be the same as this man's. The auditor's desire to find some faith that he can rely on is thus reinforced. The strophe also reinforces the speaker's image as a prophet: The speaker is predicting that the fourth type of man may be the penalty for weak faith in a time when temptations abound (it is not yet clear to the auditor that the speaker

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[22] vi.14-24. [23] vi.15-18.

means materialism as the greatest temptation). The "I" also acts as a prophet by being critical of those men who do not have a "true" faith. But the "I" fully reveals his anger and critical powers in his discussion of the materialist.

The Materialist

The opening description of the materialist is that of a strong, intelligent type:

> Or maybe there, like many another one
> Who might have stood aloft and looked ahead,
> Black-dawn against wild red,
> He may have built, unawed by fiery gules
> That in him no commotion stirred,
> A living reason out of molecules
> Why molecules occurred.[24]

Beneath the surface, however, is the speaker's sarcastic conception of the enemy of faith. A "black-dawn" is the opposite of the expected light; it is the oblivion the materialist believes awaits him beyond death. The imagery of black against red suggests a menacing, almost dangerous aspect to this man. "Unawed by fiery gules / That in him no commotion stirred" tells the auditor that the materialist is uninterested in the fiery coat of arms which represents the truth of man's destiny--the Word. The prophet is sarcastically referring to this man as cold and unemotional.

The description makes the materialist appear both intelligent and malevolent. This image functions well in

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[24] vii.1-7.

relation to the auditor's attitude toward the prophet: A victory over a cunning, intelligent opponent is more valuable than a victory over a bumbling fool. Had the speaker introduced the materialist as a fool and then attacked his arguments, the victory would have been hollow and the speaker would have gained little. But by presenting the materialist as cold and calculating, poised on the hill's crest among a chaos of black and red, unmoved by the prospect of death or "fiery gules," able to build a theory of life that satisfies him, the speaker has constructed a formidable opponent, one worthy of combat. If the speaker can best this dangerous foe, he will certainly prove his own courage and wisdom to the auditor and thus make his own view more acceptable.

Therefore, the auditor is given no chance to feel sympathy or compassion for this type of man; to allow the auditor to do so would weaken the prophet's righteous position--the auditor should see the materialist as a man devoid of feeling, a machine rather than a man. The prophet aids this view by describing the man as having "mechanic eyes."[25] Mechanic refers to mechanism, a branch of materialism. But the term also operates on another level, meaning mechanical or machine-like. No room is left the auditor for any positive feelings toward this fifth type,

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[25] vii.15.

not only because of the description given, but because the auditor has just passed through a stage of pity and sorrow for the fourth type, the man of lost faith. Whatever pity the auditor may desire to feel for the materialist is decreased by the description of the materialist as being machine-like, following the piteous description of the man of lost faith. In comparison, the materialist is too proud to warrant the auditor's positive feelings. The lines which include "mechanic eyes" are: "He may have seen with his mechanic eyes / A world without a meaning."[26] The speaker's sarcastic implication in this sentence is clear: The materialist's viewpoint clouds his vision so that he witnesses not reality but an illusion, "a world without a meaning." Although he may see a meaningless world, one does not necessarily exist.

The prophet employs dramatic irony in describing the materialist as "deterred by no confusion or surprise."[27] The materialist lives in a condition of only partial knowledge of his true condition; the speaker and auditor foresee the materialist's future downfall to which he is blind. This downfall is described as:

> Deterred by no confusion or surprise
> He may have seen with his mechanic eyes
> A world without a meaning, and had room,
> Alone amid magnificence and doom,
> To build himself an airy monument
> That should, or fail him in his vague intent,

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[26] vii.15-16.

[27] vii.14.

> Outlast an accidental universe--
> To call it nothing worse--
> Or, by the burrowing guile
> Of Time disintegrated and effaced,
> Like once-remembered mighty trees go down
> To ruin, of which by man may now be traced
> No part sufficient even to be rotten,
> And in the book of things that are forgotten,
> Is entered as a thing not quite worth while.[28]

The prophet is ironic in calling the materialist's hypothesis "airy" (insubstantial) and in saying that it should "outlast an accidental universe," which is the subject of the hypothesis. The image of the theories as "mighty trees" is also ironic since the prophet feels they are more like "foul weeds." The irony is continued by the idea that in "the book of things that are forgotten," materialism will be "entered as a thing not quite worth while." This occurrence is the downfall that the materialist does not foresee. The speaker is acting prophetically by predicting disaster for those who follow a false god.

The final lines of the strophe serve as a warning to the implied auditor; the materialist may become a ruler or be in complete control of his own destiny, but because his particular and dangerous view of the world is false his life is as meaningless as the universe he has built for himself.

> He may have been so great
> That satraps would have shivered at his frown.
> And all he prized alive may rule a state
> No larger than a grave that holds a clown.

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[28] vii.14-28.

He may have been a master of his fate,
And of his atoms,--ready as another
In his emergence to exonerate
His father and his mother.
He may have been a captain of a host,
Self-eloquent and ripe for prodigies,
Doomed here to swell by dangerous degrees,
And then give up the ghost.
Nahum's great grasshoppers were such as these,
Sun-scattered and soon lost.[29]

After the line that the materialist may be a "great" man, the reference is ironic that all he prized is no larger than a clown's grave. In addition, the image of the "grave that holds a clown" refers to the graveyard scene in Shakespeare's Hamlet. Standing over the grave of Yorick, the king's jester, Hamlet reflects on the deaths of Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar, their return to dust and loam, and their subsequent use as a plug in a beer barrel. The allusion is in keeping with the function of the four lines, the ironic condemndation of materialism's goals as transitory.

The speaker is also ironic in the next four lines. "He may have been a master of his fate, / And of his atoms" is dramatic irony: The materialist believes that through science he can control his own destiny; the prophet and the auditor know that he is only partly aware of his true condtion and has a false notion both of life and his role in it. The auditor is drawn to a closer identification with the prophet by virtue of their sharing knowledge which many other men do not have. (When the two men share the knowledge

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[29] vii.29-42.

of the prophecy of the Word later, this consubstantiality becomes even greater.)

The lines describing the materialist as exonerating his parents seem to present the materialist as placing great emphasis on heredity and little on environment in human development: Parents are not to be blamed for the results of their children's "emergence," for natural laws of atoms explain why men are as they are. In addition, the materialist exonerates his parents for dooming him to this "brief candle"; the speaker again employs dramatic irony in referring to the materialist's incomplete and erroneous knowledge.

The sarcastic irony of the final image is the simile of a "captain of a host" to grasshoppers, which points out to the auditor that what is important to the materialist appears inconsequential to the prophet. These powerful positions the materialist might hold served as temptations to the speaker's self-centeredness, and at the same time act as temptations to the auditor's desire for a stabilizing force in his life. The apparent confidence and stability of the materialist is offset by the ironic imagery of the materialist as a man who deludes himself that he has the correct answers when in reality his answers are "airy" and doomed to "go down / To ruin."[30]

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[30] vii.18, 24-25.

Summary

The narration has served to attempt to persuade the auditor that materialism is a false faith and should not be believed. The prophet's language appeals functioned in this manner partly through placing the materialist last in a line of types descending from the faithful to the demonic. If the auditor sees the order to the list, the conclusion about the materialist will be clear to him. In addition, the appeal to the implied auditor's emotions, theoretically shifting his attitude from gentle pity and scorn to angry scorn, also acted to induce the auditor to accept the speaker's attitude that materialism will be proven false. The speaker's use of irony was another important factor in the auditor's acceptance of the speaker's values: Through the sharing of esoteric knowledge, the auditor was drawn to a greater identification with the speaker. The prophecy of materialism's demise, the use of irony, the invective behind the irony, and the speaker's confident tone, all combined to enhance the speaker's image as a prophet. The section showed the auditor the false prophecy he must not accept and hinted at the only prophecy he should accept. Thus, the implied auditor feels a sense of need to hear the speaker's prophecy and also is predisposed against the materialist as a result of hearing the narration.

Confirmation and Refutation

The eighth and ninth strophes comprise the

confirmation and refutation, or proofs of the rhetor's main points. There are two main points which together form the speaker's prophecy: Materialism will "go down / To ruin,"[31] and the Word "will not be erased."[32] The first part of the prophecy could be called the refutation because it is an attack upon the materialist's position. The second part of the prophecy is the confirmation because it is the argument of the speaker's affirmative position. The refutation is in two parts, separated by the confirmation; therefore, the refutation will be designated first and second refutations.

First Refutation

This section, the eighth strophe, opens with a summary of the five types of men presented in the narration:

> Whatever the dark road he may have taken,
> This man who stood on high
> And faced alone the sky,
> Whatever drove or lured or guided him,--
> A vision answering a faith unshaken,
> An easy trust assumed of easy trials,
> A sick negation born of weak denials,
> A crazed abhorrence of an old condition,
> A blind attendance on a brief ambition. . . .[33]

If the implied auditor did not see the regression from sure faith through doubt to the demon-possessed materialist, this summary points it out to him. The auditor is also brought back to the poem's central question--where is the man against the sky going?

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[31] vii.24-25. [32] ix.6. [33] viii.1-9.

And then, for the first time, the prophet refers directly to the auditor:

> Whatever stayed him or derided him,
> His way was even as ours;
> And we, with all our wounds and all our powers,
> Must each wait alone at his own height
> Another darkness or another light.[34]

The auditor is brought into the situation in that he becomes the man against the sky. He can no longer be an objective bystander but is forced into the role of participant. The pronouns make the auditor fully aware of the speaker as a person, and as a person talking to him. The speaker is not addressing all the world, but, so it seems, the individual auditor on a one-to-one basis. The auditor thus feels more important and involved; he is not overhearing someone speaking; he is being spoken to.

In addition, the use of such pronouns as "ours" and "we" encourages identification of the auditor with the speaker. As mentioned earlier, this identification is necessary if the auditor is to become consubstantial with the speaker, to accept the speaker's prophecy during and perhaps after the time he is addressed.

Finally, the auditor is forced to see himself as the man against the sky; it was suggested earlier that the figure was Everyman, but at the poem's beginning the auditor was able to avoid placing himself on the hill, if he wished.

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[34] viii.10-14.

That is no longer true. The language now forces the auditor to stand in the light of truth on the crest of the hill and ask himself how he will go down the far side.

The implied auditor now faces his own "fiery furnace," as the "three in Dura" did. He must make a decision soon either to become a disciple of the Word or succumb to the vainglorious temptations of materialism. The way of the man against the sky "was even as ours."[35] Speaker and auditor are at the same time alone and yet together in their humanity--"We, with all our wounds and all our powers."[36] Auditor and speaker have both suffered the cruelties of life and they each possess strengths. And auditor and speaker "must each wait alone at his own height / Another darkness or another light."[37] The prophet seems to ask the auditor to search his heart: What does the prospect of death hold for you? Do you see light beyond death with whatever that implies, or another darkness, oblivion, nothingness, the cessation of all being? Will you descend the hill as the man of faith does? Or as a materialist?

The speaker's words do not allow the auditor a chance to retreat into anonymity. From the first time the auditor is addressed (viii.11) to the end of the strophe (viii.45), the pronouns "we" and "our" are used twenty

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[35] viii.11. [36] viii.12. [37] viii.13-14.

times, averaging more than once every other line. The pronouns result in a high degree of identification between the auditor and prophet. The next strophe opens with the confirmation of the Word; the more firmly the auditor is wearing the mask of the speaker at that point, the more readily he should accept the prophecy.

The thirty-four lines used as a vehicle for twenty pronouns form the core of the first refutation. The lines are an attack on the materialist tenet that only oblivion awaits man beyond death. The prophet contends that

> If inference and reason shun
> Hell, Heaven, and Oblivion,
> May thwarted will (perforce precarious,
> But for our conservation better thus)
> Have no misgiving left
> Of doing yet what here we leave undone?[38]

If we do not believe in either a heaven and hell or oblivion (the materialist view that death is utter and final), then we might frustrate our will to the point where it may force us to commit suicide. Or if we believe only in oblivion, as materialists do (and the prophet adds a brief cutting denunciation of this belief, calling it "an idle and ephemeral / Florescence of the diabolical"[39]), why do we continue to propagate the race?

> If, robbed of two fond old enormities,
> Our being had no onward auguries,
> What then were this great love of ours to say
> For launching other lives to voyage again

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[38] viii.16-21. [39] viii.24-25.

A little farther into time and pain,
A little faster in a futile chase
For a kingdom and a power and a Race
That would have still in sight
A manifest end of ashes and eternal night?[40]

The prophet reverts to irony again as his main form of refutation. Irony used within a rhetorical question increases the auditor's involvement in the situation, his identification with the prophet, and his rejection of materialism. There are three questions of this nature in the first refutation; the final two are reductio ad absurdum:

Is this the music of the toys we shake
So loud,--as if there might be no mistake
Somewhere in our indomitable will?
Are we no greater than the noise we make
Along one blind atomic pilgrimage
Whereon by crass chance billeted we go
Because our brains and bones and cartilage
Will have it so?[41]

The prophet concludes this section with a final ironic statement:

If this we say, then let us all be still
About our share in it, and live and die
More quietly thereby.[42]

This first refutation has brought the auditor into a closer identification with the prophet and has attempted to refute ironically materialism's theory that oblivion exists beyond death.

Confirmation

The ninth strophe opens with an explanation of the

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[40] viii.26-34. [41] viii.35-42. [42] viii.43-45.

second part of the prophecy:

> Where was he going, this man against the sky?
> You know not, nor do I.
> But this we know, if we know anything:
> That we may laugh and fight and sing
> And of our transience here make offering
> To an orient Word that will not be erased,
> Or, save in incommunicable gleams
> Too permanent for dreams,
> Be found or known.[43]

Again, the use of "we" strengthens the bond between prophet and auditor. The "orient Word that will not be erased" is the faith that there is a future beyond the grave. The auditor now has both parts of the prophecy; if he accepts either one as true, he must accept the other for the parts are two sides to the same coin. If oblivion does not await us on the far side of the hill, the Word does; if the Word will bring us another dawn, another night is not our fate. The prophet admits that he cannot prove that the Word exists ("Where was he going . . . ? You know not, nor do I"); the Word must be accepted on faith. But he can prove to his satisfaction that oblivion is not man's fate. Thus, since the two parts of the prophecy prove each other, the Word is proven true only as strongly as materialism is proven false. So the prophet's confirmation of the Word is limited to these nine lines. The implied auditor does not suffer; as I tried to show in chapter five, he does not want creeds specifically spelled out. The vagueness of the Word should be an

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[43] ix.1-9.

inducement to belief. The prophet next presents his second refutation.

Second Refutation

The auditor senses the prophet's sarcastic tone in his opening statement that

> No tonic and ambitious irritant
> Of increase or of want
> Has made an otherwise insensate waste
> Of ages overthrown
> A ruthless, veiled, implacable foretaste
> Of other ages that are still to be
> Depleted and rewarded variously
> Because a few, by fate's economy,
> Shall seem to move the world the way it goes.[44]

The last line employs dramatic irony by the inclusion of the word "seems": Materialists erroneously believe that a few men control man's fate. The auditor feels that he and the prophet share a secret unknown to materialists--the Word, not a few men, guides mankind.

The prophet's second argument contains a prophecy that any "soft evangel of equality," any system of social reform based on materialism will not last but will "be covered well with equatorial snows."[45] The auditor sees that materialism contaminates and ultimately destroys political systems which adopt it. The prophet's tone is denunciatory and harsh as he continues his statement that no system based on materialism

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[44] ix.10-18. [45] ix.19-22.

Will aggregate an inkling to confirm
The credit of a sage or of a worm,
Or tell us why one man in five
Should have a care to stay alive
While in his heart he feels no violence
Laid on his humor and intelligence
When infant Science makes a pleasant face
And waves again that hollow toy, the Race.[46]

The auditor may feel the anger, wrath, and biting irony of the prophet's third and final statement of the refutation. If materialism is correct, the prophet says, mankind should leave the planet to the animals who are true materialists.

No planetary trap where souls are wrought
For nothing but the sake of being caught
And sent again to nothing will attune
Itself to any key or any reason
Why man should hunger through another season
To find out why 'twere better late than soon
To go away and let the sun and moon
And all the silly stars illuminate
A place for creeping things,
And those that root and trumpet and have wings,
And herd and ruminate,
Or dive and flash and poise in rivers and seas,
Or by their loyal tails in lofty trees
Hang screeching lewd victorious derision
Of man's immortal vision.[47]

The auditor knows the speaker's intent clearly now and easily sees the irony--man does not give up the earth to animals; therefore life has meaning, and therefore materialism is false.

Peroration

In the final strophe the prophet summarizes his prophecy in seven rhetorical questions and a final statement.

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[46] ix.24-31. [47] ix.32-46.

The first question, concerning the Word, is this:

> Shall we, because Eternity records
> Too vast an answer for the time-worn words
> We spell, whereof so many are dead that once
> In our capricious lexicons
> Were so alive and final, hear no more
> The Word itself, the living word
> That none alive has ever heard
> Or ever spelt,
> And few have ever felt
> Without the fears and old surrenderings
> And terrors that began
> When Death let fall a feather from his wings
> And humbled the first man?[48]

The auditor, identifying with the speaker and his values, recognizes the irony and answers No, we shall again hear the Word. Even though language is inadequate to express the explanation of man's fate, we can still have faith in the existence of the Word and hope to hear echoes of it. The speaker's use of pronouns is central in producing empathy and involvement within the auditor. The "I" seems not to be addressing the Muse or Fate with the question; he is addressing the auditor. He is also including himself in the question; the answer then does not come from the auditor alone, but from the auditor and speaker together, two voices as one, giving strength to the auditor, reinforcing the speaker's values which stand behind the answers.

The essence of the second question is this: Do life's difficulties blind us to the shortsightedness of the materialists who persuade us to "laugh at faith"?[49] The

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[48] x.1-13. [49] x.14-23.

speaker has finished his long and intricate arguments against materialism; the questions serve as summary, to review the speaker's main ideas, as something of a catechism to test the auditor's acceptance of ideas, and as choral response, mentioned above, in which the auditor and speaker say the answers together.

"And if we see the soul's dead end in death, / Are we to fear it?"[50] is the third question, short and direct, again apparently pointing to one answer but meaning the opposite. The question is ironic since the speaker and auditor obviously do not "see the soul's dead end in death." This is a summary of the earlier argument that if materialism is true,

> then let us all be still
> About our share in it, and live and die
> More quietly thereby.[51]

The fourth question is, "What folly is here that has not yet a name / Unless we say outright that we are liars?"[52] Can we admit that our superficial commitment to materialism was a lie? Can we face our own illusions? The auditor is forced to a commitment which has only two alternatives: He will either become a disciple of the Word or he will accept materialism.

The fifth question is the final direct reference to the Word: "What have we seen beyond our sunset fires /

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[50] x.24-25. [51] viii.43-45. [52] x.26-27.

That lights again the way by which we came?"[53] The answer is that we have seen the gleam, the Light which is the faith for man's future. It is the faith in "another light" instead of "another darkness."[54] The question refers to the "eternal, remote thing" of strophe one, to the first type of man who "may have sung and striven / To mount where more of him shall yet be given,"[55] and to the "orient Word,"[56] and the "living word."[57] Each reference is a part of the total prophecy. The auditor stands on the crest of the hill in place of the original unknown man and is asked to look beyond the fire of the sunset and discover what force has kept him from committing suicide before this. What "lights again the way by which we came?" It is faith in the Word.

The sixth question ironically asks why, if our lives are void of meaning, we continue to live. The simile comparing our defeated hopes to our children being slaughtered is particularly horrifying in its suggestion:

> Why pay we such a price, and one we give
> So clamoringly, for each racked empty day
> That leads one more last human hope away,
> As quiet fiends would lead past our crazed eyes
> Our children to an unseen sacrifice?[58]

The seventh question is a rewording of the sixth:

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[53] x.28-29.

[54] viii.14.

[55] iii.16-17.

[56] ix.6.

[57] x.6.

[58] x.30-34.

> If after all that we have lived and thought,
> All comes to Nought,--
> If there be nothing after Now,
> And we be nothing anyhow,
> And we know that,--why live?[59]

These last two questions are ironic summaries of the part of the prophecy that oblivion will not be man's fate, for if materialism is correct we would all commit suicide. And of course the argument is stated in terms which make the "I" appear to accept the view that we should commit suicide.

The final statement of the poem is a shout of triumphant irony:

> 'Twere sure but weaklings' vain distress
> To suffer dungeons where so many doors
> Will open on the cold eternal shores
> That look sheer down
> To the dark tideless floods of Nothingness
> Where all who know may drown.[60]

The auditor's alternatives should be obvious to him now as he attempts to make a resolution of his struggle to impose order and meaning upon his chaotic life: He may become a disciple of the Word because the Word can give meaning to his existence. Or he may turn to materialism which asks him to accept the idea that no meaning exists beyond what his five senses tell him. And if he accepts that as true, why should he continue to live, unless he is a coward. The auditor must either have faith in the existence of the Word or commit suicide. Considering the composition of the implied auditor and the types of rhetorical appeals he was

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[59] x.35-39. [60] x.40-45.

exposed to in the prophet's oration, I would speculate that he has been persuaded to become a disciple of the Word.

Conclusion

Although the speaker's primary goal was that of self-persuasion, the language appeals he employed to strengthen his own faith functioned well in persuading the implied auditor to become a disciple of the Word. At only one point, the temptation to become an actor, painter, or artist,[61] did the speaker's rhetoric for himself perhaps clash with his rhetoric for the auditor. The persuasive appeals did not always function for the auditor in the same manner as they did for the speaker, but they did have application for the auditor's own struggle.

The speaker's mask of a prophet was instrumental in his authoritative appeal to the auditor. The speaker's use of an adapted classical arrangement of parts of his oration was another important strategy which helped influence the auditor's resolution of his struggle. Irony both promoted identification between speaker and auditor and helped shape the auditor's attitude toward materialism; the description of the five men also contributed to the auditor's attitude, while personal pronouns also promoted identification. The harmony of the two parts of the prophecy offered the auditor a unified belief. Finally, the scene of the man against the

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[61] v.14-18.

sky crossing a hilltop helped the auditor become involved in a dramatic situation with the prophet.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Dramatic Analysis as a Critical Method

Dramatic analysis offers the reader a way into the poem. A dramatic analysis may result in the realization of a poem as "its author's vision of reality through the agency of his dramatic speaker's utterance."[1] To view this utterance as communication rather than as self-expression of a poet's feelings is to open a new dimension of the poem, possibly a dimension closer to the author's intent than some other methods provide. But this is not to suggest that dramatic analysis as a critical theory is an ultimate answer to a poem's meaning. Don Geiger suggests that we

> think of a given theory of poetry as a funding for insight rather than as a cause to defend to the death--which is surely well, for the most certain thing about a theory championed on any given today is that it will be some tomorrow's lost cause. So I do not regard dramatic theory as a final truth. . . . Rather, I think we may . . . , with some certainty, say that in contrast with contextualism an approach to the poem by way of dramatic analysis affords a different focus in which

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[1]Don Geiger, The Dramatic Impulse in Modern Poetics (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), p. 43.

> we may usefully review some of contemporary criticism's larger concerns.[2]

Dramatic analysis offers a consistent explanation of what a poem is and what a poem means. There is a voice in every piece of literature; this voice is varied and complex, and affects and is affected by other elements within the poem. It is through the senses of the "I" that the reader experiences the poem. Therefore, to understand the "I" as he functions within the complex of situation-attitude relationships is to approach that which is the poem. One important way that the speaker functions is rhetorically, which leads to the time-worn question of the relationship of rhetoric and poetic.

Relationship of Rhetoric and Poetic

In the preface to his monograph on rhetoric and poetic, Gordon E. Bigelow recalls the advice given to recruits in the military service--"never volunteer":

> That same advice should be given to any student of literature who attempts to say anything about the relationship of rhetoric to poetry. The safest thing for him is to stay away from the whole war, the next safest thing is to so limit his terms that no one can take exception.[3]

With that advice in mind, I would like to offer some comments which bear upon the present study. One similarity between

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[2] Ibid., pp. 38-39.

[3] Rhetoric and American Poetry of the Early National Period, University of Florida Monographs, No. 4, Spring, 1960 (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1960), iii.

the two modes is that both rhetoric and poetic are communicative in nature. A speaker is necessary for both arts, and these speakers have a purpose in trying to communicate. Communication demands an audience; the presence of an audience is accepted in rhetoric but has been challenged at times in the area of poetics. The ancient question has been whether poetry's purpose is to teach or to delight. It does both, as does rhetoric. Bigelow points out that many speeches and poems give pleasure at the same time that they persuade.[4] His distinction is the emphasis of the speaker: "Rhetoric may propose both to please and to persuade, but the emphasis is on persuasion; poetry may also propose both to please and to persuade, but the emphasis is on pleasure."[5] "The Man Against the Sky" fits this distinction: The primary purpose is for the reader to receive an emotional uplifting from witnessing the trial and triumph of the speaker-prophet. But a rhetorical purpose is also present for the reader who can identify with the implied auditor.[6]

Another distinction between rhetoric and poetic is the method of presentation. To Wilbur Samuel Howell,

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[4] Ibid., 7. [5] Ibid.

[6] "A poem may be more than an aesthetic object, to be isolated and appreciated in itself; it may function rhetorically," Karl R. Wallace, Understanding Discourse: The Speech Act and Rhetorical Action (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970), p. 101.

rhetoric uses words which "refer directly to states of reality," while poetry uses words which "refer directly to things that stand by deputy for states of reality:"[7] that is, poetry relies heavily upon symbolism to achieve its pleasurable effect. The man against the sky is the speaker's most vivid symbol in the poem, but the symbol of the furnace has the most implications for the speaker and auditor since the scene of the poem hinges on the furnace as a test. The Word must also be mentioned as a symbol standing "by deputy" for a state of reality. Although direct reference to the Word in the poem is scant, its presence and influence is felt throughout.

One rhetorical principle reflected in "The Man Against the Sky" resulting from the influence of the Word is that rhetoric defines a role for the speaker. In "The Man Against the Sky," the "I," in constructing his strategies, established for himself the role of a prophet to help strengthen his faith in the Word. The role developed out of the dramatic and rhetorical situation of the poem. At the same time, the rhetorical situation also determined the implied auditor's perception of the speaker's role. The implied auditor viewed the speaker as a prophet; but because the speaker had more knowledge of the Word than the auditor, because the speaker established his authority with the

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[7]"Literature as Enterprise in Communication," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XXXIII (December, 1947), 418.

auditor through a number of methods in the address, and because he did not allow the auditor to see behind the prophetic mask, the auditor saw the speaker as having a firmer faith than the speaker saw himself. Therefore, roles established by the rhetorical situations function in poetry much the same way as they do in rhetoric.

Another principle reflected in "The Man Against the Sky" is that language can serve several functions simultaneously.[8] Language appeals in the poem operated on two levels--on one level as self-persuasion directed toward the speaker and on another level as persuasion directed toward an implied auditor. The language transcended one motive of the speaker to fulfill a second motive. By approaching the poem from various viewpoints, such as the dramatic and the rhetorical, the critic is better able to observe how language may operate on different levels for different purposes simultaneously.

Finally, we might ask what conclusions may be drawn from the rhetoric-poetic relationship examined in "The Man Against the Sky."

Summary

Edwin Arlington Robinson, in a letter to Hermann Hagedorn, wrote: "I've always told you /the world/ was a

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[8]Kenneth Burke demonstrated this idea with Milton's poem Samson Agonistes in his book A Rhetoric of Motives (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 3-17.

hell of a place. That's why I insist it must mean something. My July work was a poem on this theme and I call it 'The Man Against the Sky.'"[9] In what ways did Robinson the implied author perceive the world "a hell of a place"? On earth hell is

> the weight of our humility,
> Wherefrom we gain
> A little wisdom and much pain, [which]
> Falls here too sore and there too tedious.[10]

Hell is the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune." Hell is witnessing demon-possessed materialists influence men away from the truth, making the prophet cry

> Why pay we such a price, and one we give
> So clamoringly, for each racked empty day
> That leads one more last human hope away,
> As quiet fiends would lead past our crazed eyes
> Our children to an unseen sacrifice?[11]

And hell is a furnace heated seven times that tests a man's faith in a gleam of a Word that is beyond his own "brains and bones and cartilage."[12] But hell is endurable for those who know life's meaning, for those who can transcend knowledge and perceive, however dimly, the gleam that lights the universe. For those who know, this present darkness does not imply that the light is receding but rather that

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[9]Hermann Hagedorn, Edwin Arlington Robinson: A Biography (New York: Macmillan Company, 1938), p. 302.

[10]"The Man Against the Sky," Collected Poems of Edwin Arlington Robinson (New York: Macmillan Company, 1937), x.14-17. (Hereinafter referred to as Collected Poems.) All citations from this poem will be from this source.

[11]x.30-34. [12]viii.41.

it is approaching and shall burst forth as a blazing sunrise. This light of the Word is cosmic in its optimism and its grandeur; it sweeps the lies and despair of false faith from its path and illuminates the deserts of space beyond the farthest star. "The Man Against the Sky" is not a pessimistic poem, as some critics have written of it: It is an oration of exultation.

Nor is the poem primarily philosophical or didactic, as a number of writers have indicated: "The Man Against the Sky" is a dramatic poem. The speaker is a complex dramatized persona playing the role of a prophet--a mask behind a mask. The speaker presents us with his "world on fire"[13] and we witness his straining to break the shackles of temptation. The speaker is strong but his desire to be godlike is also strong; the struggle and resolution within the flames of a furnace are both dramatic and rhetorical.

The poem is both dramatic and rhetorical on another level, that of the prophet addressing the auditor. The two form their own scene, again a fiery furnace; but this time the implied auditor is tested, while the prophet stands outside exhorting him to rise from the flames protected by the mantle of discipleship. We sense the wavering, the indecision, the anguish of the auditor from the prophet's tones--commanding and angry, condemning and ironic. The auditor's

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[13] i.2.

trial and resolution are not as sharply defined as the speaker's since the auditor does not respond and all we know of him is through inference; but his interaction with the speaker as prophet does create another complex of situation-attitude relationships for dramatic and rhetorical analysis. Thus, "The Man Against the Sky" is, on two levels, quite clearly a dramatic rather than philosophic poem.

In this study, I have also shown how "Credo" and "The Children of the Night" were dramatic and rhetorical in nature. These poems are also included in a group of Robinson's poetry along with "Hillcrest," "L'Envoi," "Calvary," and the "Octaves," labeled "explicitly philosophical"[14] or "explicitly didactic and expository."[15] But are they? The drama of "Hillcrest" may be within the scene of the speaker standing on a hilltop in September overlooking the forest below him:

> No sound of any storm that shakes
> Old island walls with older seas
> Comes here where now September makes
> An island in a sea of trees.[16]

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[14]Richard P. Adams, "The Failure of Edwin Arlington Robinson," Tulane Studies in English, XI (1961), 110.

[15]Yvor Winters, "Religious and Social Ideas in the Didactic Work of E. A. Robinson," Arizona Quarterly, I (Spring, 1945), 74. See also Hyatt Howe Waggoner, The Heel of Elohim: Science and Values in Modern American Poetry (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950), pp. 22, 39; Charles Cestre, An Introduction to Edwin Arlington Robinson (New York: Macmillan Company, 1930), ch. 2; and Harriet Monroe, "Edwin Arlington Robinson," Poetry, XXV (January, 1925), 213.

[16]Collected Poems, p. 15.

The speaker may be addressing himself in a soliloquy and talking about himself in the third person:

> Between the sunlight and the shade
> A man may learn till he forgets
> The roaring of a world remade,
> And all his ruins and regrets;
>
> And if he still remembers here
> Poor fights he may have won or lost,--
> If he be ridden with the fear
> Of what some other fight may cost,--
>
> If, eager to confuse too soon,
> What he has known with what may be,
> He reads a planet out of tune
> For cause of his jarred harmony,--
>
> If here he venture to unroll
> His index of adagios,
> And he be given to console
> Humanity with what he knows,--
>
> He may by contemplation learn
> A little more than what he knew,
> And even see great oaks return
> To acorns out of which they grew.[17]

This speaker may be attempting to persuade himself to a faith in the existence of the Word:

> He may, if he but listen well,
> Through twilight and the silence here,
> Be told what there are none may tell
> To vanity's impatient ear;
>
> And he may never dare again
> Say what awaits him, or be sure
> What sunlit labyrinth of pain
> He may not enter and endure.
>
> Who knows to-day from yesterday
> May learn to count no thing too strange:
> Love builds of what Time takes away,
> Till Death itself is less than Change.[18]

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[17] Ibid., p. 16. [18] Ibid., pp. 16-17.

Perhaps we should be examining this poem in its dramatic and rhetorical aspects, rather than as self-expression.

Let us briefly examine another "philosophical" poem, "L'Envoi":

> Now in a thought, now in a shadowed word,
> Now in a voice that thrills eternity,
> Ever there comes an onward phrase to me
> Of some transcendent music I have heard;
> No piteous thing by soft hands dulcimered,
> No trumpet crash of blood-sick victory,
> But a glad strain of some vast harmony
> That no brief mortal touch has ever stirred.
>
> There is no music in the world like this,
> No character wherewith to set it down,
> No kind of instrument to make it sing.
> No kind of instrument? Ah, yes, there is;
> And after time and place are overthrown,
> God's touch will keep its one chord quivering.[19]

The speaker of this poem may be addressing an implied auditor outside the poem who has not heard "transcendent music" to persuade him to listen and believe that it exists. This sounds similar to the speaker-auditor situation of "The Man Against the Sky." And "Hillcrest" sounds similar to the soliloquy situation of "The Man Against the Sky." The "Octaves"[20] reflect speakers and situations and purposes found in "Credo," "The Children of the Night," and "The Man Against the Sky." And the speaker of "Demos" is a prophet.[21]

These poems indicate that Robinson's poetry variously labeled "philosophic" or "didactic" needs to be reexamined;

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[19] Ibid., pp. 108-9. [20] Ibid., pp. 100-7.

[21] Ibid., pp. 471-72.

Robinson's dramatic poems extend far beyond his dramatic monologues and dialogues. Poems considered "meditative" in nature (for example, "The Man Against the Sky"[22]) may actually be soliloquies wherein the speaker attempts to affect change within himself.

Thus, critics of Robinson who have termed his "nondramatic" poetry weak and uninteresting because the philosophy in them is presented too obviously and openly have not seen the entire poems; they have judged his poetry by something it is not. Robinson's so-called "philosophic" and "didactic" poetry is better than some critical assessments have indicated precisely because they <u>are</u> dramatic and thus fulfill one of the highest functions of poetry--an imitation of life.

Because many of Robinson's poems previously thought to be nondramatic actually have persuasive purposes related to the Word, "The Man Against the Sky" will remain a pivotal poem. Previously "The Man Against the Sky" was considered the most complete statement of Robinson's philosophy. It is also the most complete dramatic statement of the prophecy of the Word which can be traced through a number of "nondramatic" poems in differing dramatic and rhetorical forms.

In addition, "The Man Against the Sky" is a key

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[22]See Harriet Monroe, "Edwin Arlington Robinson," 213, and Conrad Aiken, <u>Collected Criticism of Conrad Aiken from 1916 to the Present: A Reviewer's ABC</u> (New York: Meridian Books, 1958), p. 341.

poem because it is the best dramatic statement of the prophecy: The cosmic vision of the Word also passes through the "fiery furnace" of the poem, as do the speaker and implied auditor; and it is tested and tempered in the flames, resulting in an artistic fusion of dramatic, philosophical, and rhetorical elements. The vision is noble in its execution, and the Word emerges triumphant from the furnace to illuminate in resplendent glory man's position in the universe.

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