

9. A GLIMPSE OF THE BEATIFIC VISION

9.1. The theme of death

Newman, the pilgrim was acutely aware of the transitory nature of this visible world which he considered the outward shell of an eternal kingdom. In his view, this life received a dignity and value from the prospect of the next life for which it is meant to be a preparation. Intent on the world to come, he was given glimpses of the realities of eternity, time and again in the long span of his earthly pilgrimage. Endowed with mystical intuition and transcendent vision, the poet was able to go beyond death and discover the unknown realms which lie behind the visible phenomenon. The mystery of death which alone would enable the soul to attain that ultimate union with the Divine was uppermost in his mind. Even the early poems such as "My Birthday,"¹ "Birthday Offering"² and the "The Trance of Time"³ point to man's mortality and to the higher life which awaits him upon resurrection from the dead. Poems like "Consolations in Bereavement,"⁴ "A Picture"⁵ "A voice from Afar,"⁶ written at his sister Mary's death and "Separation of Friends"⁷ deal with not only death but also point towards the Beatific Vision. In "Separation of Friends," the poet writes:

Not that earth's blessings are not all outshone
By Eden's Angel flame,
But that earth knows not yet, the Dead has won
That crown, which was his aim. (5-8)

Death was a vivid concept in Victorian times due to the high mortality rate of the time. Hence the works of many writers portray this social concern. A number of poems and novels of the time have death as a theme. Thus Tennyson's In Memoriam, some of Browning's dramatic monologues and such works as The Ring and the Book and Hopkin's The Wreck of the Deutschland

reflect a concern with death. Translations of Dante's work were popular during this time. Southey's poetry with the themes of death and judgement exercised a considerable influence on Newman. Scripture and the traditions of the Church pertaining to death and judgement form recurrent themes in Newman's poems. Unlike the medieval culture that gave prominence to death as a memento mori and the nineteenth century sentimentalization of death such as shown in In Memoriam, for Newman God alone mattered:

It is face to face, 'solus cum solo,' in all matters between man and his god. He alone creates; He alone has redeemed; before His awful eyes we go in death; in the vision of Him is our eternal beatitude.⁸

According to Christian beliefs, death is the consequence of sin and as a blessing in disguise it reunites the holy soul to all holy God. The poem "Waiting for the Morning,"⁹ depicts that mid-state of a higher level of existence than the earthly one. Here the soul waits in quiet appealing trust till it is cleansed of every stain and is made worthy to partake of that Celestial Life.

"Waiting for the Morning," portrays a state of paradisaal repose, a comfort for someone mourning the loss of a dear one. The poet draws aside the veil that separates the present life from the life to come, providing men with glimpses of their personal hopes and fears, of memories of their loved ones, assuring them of eventual reunion.

The poem begins with a welcome imagery of rest which provides a relief to the mourners that their loved ones are at peaceful repose after a care-worn life. Hence there is no reason for 'loud-voiced grief' (3). The poet uses open-ended imagery which would provide considerable freedom for the reader to draw fitting and consoling pictures about the state of existence of their deceased relatives and friends. They

rest at 'the mountain grotts of Eden' (5), the choice of the words are remarkable. Eden is supposed to be the first delightful abode of man, the word 'grot' stands for grotto or ornamental cave and it conveys also a feeling of 'limbo' or 'Hades' where the deceased souls wait for entrance into a still higher state of life.

The reference to the river that waters the garden of Eden ¹⁰ implies the idea of fostering life, for these souls are taken care of till they are raised to a holy state of life. There is no indication of any suffering or any disturbance such as that which mortals face in their earthly existence: "They at eddyng pool or current deep / Shall never more grow pale" (9-10). Such souls are no more at the mercy of time that brings along with it change and decay, and the torments of life on earth have no power over them. An ethereal atmosphere prevails about them and:

Posted along the haunted garden's bounds
 Angelic forms abide,
 Echoing, as words of watch, o'er lawn and grove,
 The verses of that hymn which Seraphs chant above.
 (15-18)

The words woven together and their sounds have a magical power to soothe--'sounds blend,' 'waters glide,' 'Angelic forms abide,' 'Seraphs chant'--in the mid-state between life and eternity. Together with the beautifully achieved 'tone colour,' the intense emotion in the heart of the poet too adds to the main force of the poem. The repeated use of [iz] sounds adds to the soothing sense. The alternate use of short and long lines in the poem gives a kind of rocking sensation which is also meant to give a pleasant feeling.

This poem is more imaginative and less concise than many of Newman's poems. The poet crafts together feelings, imagination and expressions, bringing out something haunting

and harmonious which flows like a smooth-running stream. The result is a balming effect on hearts that are tormented by the loss of dear ones. Tennyson's poem "Lotos-Eaters" mirrors something of the same blissful state as described by Newman. It may be presumed that Tennyson was familiar with Newman's poem as it was a favourite with the Victorians. Newman experiences the emotion of regret which brings tears and the emotion of resignation which transcends it, having in mind his own deceased sister Mary.

Newman's first title to the poem was " Rest," which highlights the idea of restful repose. His final choice of title "Waiting for the Morning" highlights the idea of pilgrims who have almost reached the goal. This poem foreshadows the grand requiem, The Dream of Gerontius .

9.2. Themes of the invisible realities

The poem entitled " Angelic Guidance" ¹¹ illustrates the pilgrim's belief in a ministering spirit. The poem "Guardian Angel" ¹² depicts his belief that it will be with him from birth, through life, through death, and will deliver his soul to purgatory. When he achieves Beatific Vision it is the Guardian Angel who will lead him to his Heavenly Home at the end of his pilgrimage. When the pilgrim deals with the world of invisible realities in his masterpiece The Dream of Gerontius, the true poetry of his soul comes out. Heaven seems to lie about him like a known kingdom and its bright denizens walk with him through many a thorny path. There are several poems of the 1850s and 1860s anticipatory of the Beatific Vision towards which the pilgrim poet was advancing. Poems such as "The Golden Prison," ¹³ and "For the Dead" ¹⁴ speak of the last things death, judgement, purgatory and heaven. The novel Callista written in 1856 was Newman's major attempt before

The Dream of Gerontius to create in literary form, the presentation of a heroic Christian death with some resemblances to Southey's romances which he admired.

Death and afterlife were subjects which were ever uppermost in the pilgrim's mind. In one of his sermons of 1832 "The Lapse of Time,"¹⁵ the poet has given a summary of the poem. Here he speaks of the awful moment of death, the judgement on the soul when its fate is decided before it begins a new life. Many of his sermons foreshadow the same theme. In one sermon he writes:

. . . , and it [the soul] submits itself to things of time so far as to be brought to perfection by them, that, when the veil is withdrawn and it sees itself to be, where it ever has been, in God's kingdom, it may be found worthy to enjoy it.¹⁶

The visible world the pilgrim considered a beautiful veil¹⁷ and spoke of it as a screen between him and the true world.¹⁸ He cautions us in a sermon preached in 1837, "The Invisible World,"¹⁹ lest the visible world prevents us from seeing the true, Invisible World. In the climax of the sermon he uses a simile drawn from the visible world to describe the Invisible:

In the spring season . . . there is a sudden rush and burst outwardly of that hidden life which God has lodged in the material world This earth, which now buds forth in leaves and blossoms, will one day burst forth into a new world of light and glory, in which, we shall see Saints and Angels dwelling.²⁰

As time went by and as the pilgrim was nearing the end of his journey, he committed himself more completely to the Invisible World. Though fleeting yet the mystical experience of the Invisible World which the pilgrim poet had, made it clear to him the shadowy and the pale nature of worldly grandeur as

the poem "The Two Worlds," ²¹ illustrates. The pilgrim poet reminds his fellows that their only true and lasting joy lies in the Invisible World. Hence in The Dream of Gerontius, the poet's passionate concern is that we apprehend the existence of the Invisible World, timeless and immaterial which lies unseen about us now and will be revealed after death. He wants us to empathize with the experience of a dying person. The need to prepare ourselves to encounter the Infinite Goodness and Great Judge is also brought out in this poem.

9.3. The Dream of Gerontius : the masterpiece

9.3.1. The techniques used

Newman made skilful use of various literary traditions such as the literature of meditation, the medieval hymn and the medieval and Scriptural dream-vision in the composition of The Dream of Gerontius. The discipline of meditation developed by spiritual directors has as its suitable subjects, the hour of death, the day of judgement and the glory and eternal bliss of Heaven. The practice of meditation played an integral part in the creation of the works of a number of seventeenth century poets, notably Donne, Herbert, Southwell and Crashaw. But it is his own personal experience of the traditional practice which fed Newman's poetic conception and made him write in terms of the internal drama of the soul. The poem bears all the marks of a meditative poem concerned with death. He portrays in symbols and in dramatic scenes the world beyond the temporal senses.

The dream vision used by the writers of the Middle Ages expressed spiritual truths for the reader. Dante gave this tradition its supreme form in The Divine Comedy. The Bible has familiarized men with the literary form of the dream vision

and Newman, being well acquainted with the Bible, could have learnt the use of visions and dream from the Scriptures alone. But it was the medieval writers who greatly developed this technique. Although, Newman's *Gerontius* does not return like their characters, the poet aims at the same effect as that of a dream vision. It is also possible that Newman viewed death in the Shelleyan sense of awakening from the dream of life. In one of his sermons, Newman comments:

We should consider ourselves to be in this world in no fuller sense than players in any game are in the game; and life to be a sort of dream, as detached and as different from real external existence, as a dream differs from waking; a serious dream, indeed, as affording a means of judging us, yet in itself a kind of shadow without substance, a scene set before us, in which we seem to be, and in which it is our duty to act just as if all we saw had a truth and reality, because all that meets us influences us and our destiny. ²²

Newman was familiar with the great medieval Latin Hymn De Die Mortis ²³ by Saint Peter Damian. This is an example of the medieval dream vision. This could have influenced the first section of The Dream of Gerontius. The first two stanzas of De Die Mortis seem very close to the beginning of Newman's poem. But the shallow Victorian religious sensibility is only a faint substitute for the emotional quality in Damian, born out of the intense realism of the medieval imagination.

9.3.2. A unique poem

Newman depicts in dramatic form the passage of the soul from life to death and the initial experiences of the afterlife. *Gerontius* the protagonist of the poem is the

representation of all those who attempt to live life according to God's will, inadequate though their efforts may be. The experience of Gerontius is a projection of the pilgrim's own experience to come and thus has considerable significance for many of its readers. A topic such as immortality and the state of the soul after death was Newman's domain. No poem in the language is so daringly explicit as The Dream of Gerontius ²⁴ in the use of revelation, of metaphysics and in its psychological analysis.

In the poem, Newman portrays the great mystery of how the spirit feels when its fleshly tie to earth is severed. He makes the last moments of a Christian visible, palpable and luminous --the rending of the soul from the body, the first experiences after death, the Judgement and the catharsis that follows. Thus in the poem we follow the soul through its last agony and through its ethereal flight and take leave of it as does its Guardian Angel, at its place of purification. The poet depicts each stage of the amazing progress of the Soul with a realism which makes this drama a psychological and spiritual marvel. Revealing the ineffable, the poem rises to the unforgettable incantation characteristic of great poetry. The poet's discovery of the unknown realm of Hades clearly and emphatically accounts for the singular power he possesses both as a poet and as a mystic. He makes this unique Christian meditation on death an epic oratorio. Newman's piercing insight, mystical intuition, transcendent vision, the broad sweep of imagination along with the poetical inspiration of religion, produced this unique poem in just twenty two days.

The poem falls into three scenes. The first scene focuses on the death experience of Gerontius which consists of his physical sensations and dreadful fears. In the second scene, Gerontius finds himself undergoing new sensations after death which is made comprehensible by his awareness of the Angelic

presence. The five hymns of praise by the Angels before the Beatific Vision, form the greatest truths of Christian revelation. The moment of Judgement reveals to Gerontius that he is saved even though he has to undergo purgatorial suffering. The last scene of the poetic-drama portrays the nature of Purgatory and the purgatorial suffering that would cleanse the soul until it is made worthy of Heavenly Fellowship.

The nine hundred lines of the poem are wrought out in a single unity, in the midst of great variety. Each of the varied characters--living, the Spirits, the Guardian Angel, the Angel of the Agony, the five Choirs of Angelicals, the demons, the souls in Purgatory--and Gerontius himself speaks in its own personal way. All have their authentic voices and for each a verse form is used that is admirably suited to it.

As in the Prometheus Bound of Aeschylus, so in The Dream of Gerontius the principal character is everything and the attendant figures occupy only a minor sphere. Gerontius himself takes up our interest so totally that we hardly notice the accessories to the drama. He is brought face to face with what medieval preaching styles the Four Last Things: death, judgement, purgatory, hell or heaven. Gerontius is not just Man in general but he is, in particular, the representative of that noble group of men whose outstanding characteristics are holy resignation to the Divine Will and an ardent love of God.

The setting of the poem is in a Christian atmosphere of hope. Although a believer, Gerontius is a man of the world and, therefore the dread of dying, the fear of annihilation, judgement and punishment are uppermost in his mind in the opening section of the poem. These fears wield unnerving power in the mind and soul of the man at the moment of his death. The poet deals with these fears with psychological, spiritual and

poetic penetration and masters them with simplicity. Through the example of Gerontius, the pilgrim poet tells the world that at death we are neither finished nor diminished but are most truly ourselves. Those who die with faith in the Lord are refined by His love which transforms and unites us into His perfect love and light.

9.3.3. The deathbed scene

The poem begins with Gerontius on his deathbed as he recognizes the summons of God to cross over the boundaries that keep him away from his final Home: "Jesu, Maria—I am near to death" (1). Yet the fear of perpetual extinction overtakes the dying man. So the opening lines convey the acuteness of Gerontius' assertion of self which renders dying and judgement more real. Self must be asserted before it begins a process of disintegration and Gerontius must move out of the prison-house of his living self. The opening lines portray a firm sense of the personal relationship between Gerontius and his God.

The dominant subject of this section is the personality of Gerontius. He has to accept the fact that death is imminent to him: "And thou art calling me; I know it now" (2). This line focuses on an experience which is beginning to become real to the old man. He tries to define the intuition that dawns on him by using negatives, which is a skilful technique used by the poet: "Not by the token of this faltering breath" (3). The phrase 'faltering breath' denotes an unknown experience and the poet makes it clear that Gerontius finds the process of dying hard. The poet conveys the struggle of the dying man in the verse form with its alternately rhymed lines of iambic pentameter and particularly in the trochaic substitution at the beginning of lines 1, 3, 5, 7, 10, 13, and 21. Fear

overwhelms the faith of Gerontius and his prayer put in parenthesis only highlights the fact that it is subservient to the dominant fears. Gerontius is brought to this awareness of his separation from this life by "this new feeling never felt before" (6).

Even though dying is an unknown experience, Gerontius tries to define it and it becomes clear that he must confront his immediate disintegration. As it becomes more and more clear to Gerontius that his end is approaching fast, there is this stark statement of the paradoxical horror: "That I am going, that I am no more" (8). The prayer preceding this line hardly gives any hope and 'no more' is placed against the assertive 'I am.' The unperceivable quality of the experience of dying is heightened by the phrase, 'strange innermost abandonment' (9). The person is at the point of leaving this mortal frame. Hence both from the depths of distress and from the realization of a need for God's help, springs the prayer: "(Lover of souls! Great God ! I look to thee)" (10). As the experience of dying deepens there is the image of 'emptying out' signifying total 'voiding:' "This emptying out of each constituent / And natural force, by which I come to be" (11-12).

As Gerontius realizes his spiritual disintegration, he also perceives his spiritual needs. The 'visitant' 'knocking his dire summons' intensifies the feeling of impending collapse. The lines that follow capture this ultimate sense of self-loss: "As though my very being had given away, / As though I was no more a substance now, / And could fall back on nought to be my stay" (18-20), and Gerontius appeals to his God: "(Help, loving Lord ! Thou my soul refuge, Thou)" (21). The loss of personal contact is brought out. He discerns the passing away of all transitory things and experiences, the vanishing of every external support. He must: " drop from out

the universal frame" (23) and the dying man experiences panic once again even more deeply. This is best conveyed in negative terms. He has to return to that 'shapeless, scopeless, blank abyss' (24), conveying the lack of observable and measurable quality of this experience. It is an experience and it cannot be seen. Here Gerontius reaches the terrifying climax of self-awareness which in turn forces him to break out of his 'self' and to turn to others for help. This is the path that would lead him to his Creator at his moment of death. Resistance ends here and Gerontius lets his self become part of a cosmic process. Thus the final line here, is prayer in a single line of hexameter: "So pray for me, my friends, who have not strength to pray" (28).

The sufferer's bewilderment is suspended here by the prayers of the priest and his assistants who call on saints, angels, martyrs and virgins for help. These form a kind of refrain to the words of Gerontius and show that he is close to death. The rhythms of the litany and the prayers complement the cycles of existence as the Prayer Book, the Church Calendar and the Sacraments parallel the course of the year and of a man's life. Gerontius has no regrets at leaving his friends or his earthly home. The reason for this is that Newman's religious attitude differed greatly from the contemporary Victorian attitude towards death and human ties. What we find for example in Tennyson's In Memoriam is a longing for communion with his departed friend Hallam who symbolizes the very essence of the life after death but we find Gerontius' attention is focused on God.

The lines that follow show that Gerontius is not a coward but an armed Christian who displays his vigorous courage. As admonished in the Scripture: "Let your loins be girded,"²⁵ so Gerontius addresses his soul: "Rouse thee, my fainting soul, and play the man; / And through such waning span . . . / Prepare

to meet thy God" (42, 43, 45). The poet wishes the soul to receive the grace of the incarnation, passion, death and resurrection of Christ and also of the Holy Spirit's strengthening grace to endure this trying yet passing hour. The poet sustains the emotional tone of the whole poem through effective use of recurring passages of Scripture, prayers and litanies. The skilful use of liturgical prayers and litanies by those assisting at the deathbed scene, such as: "Be merciful, be gracious; spare him Lord" (50), heighten the growing tension as the soul confronts death. The alternative use of Latin and English lines is especially effective in its suggestion of traditional faith fused with personal feeling.

By his selection and portioning out of traditional elements of liturgy, Newman emphasizes the differing perspective between Gerontius and those who pray for him. The first two speeches of the assistants contain adapted portions of the litany of the saints. The third with references to Old Testament figures still conforms to the general structure of the litany while Gerontius continues the dialogue with his own soul.

Since Gerontius can no longer join in traditional prayer the assistants alter the ora pro nobis in the original text to 'pray for him' in lines 30-41. Newman's adaptation of the Creed does not adhere to the rigid form required by the liturgy but preserves the liturgical cadences. Here through rhetorical structures Newman once again contrasts the dying man with those mortals still bound to time.

In lines 72-107 Gerontius accepts the doctrines of his faith, even though the sense of disintegration he experiences overwhelms him and threatens his faith in God. He strives to believe the dogmas of his Christian faith, for if his faith fails he would perish everlastingly. Lines 76-79 reflect the lack of ease Gerontius feels. The syntax of the line 76 has

'Firmly' placed before the pronoun 'I' with the adverbial emphasis indicating the great effort that is being made. This is strengthened immediately in the second adverb 'truly.' It looks as though Gerontius is trying to convince himself that he believes in the unity and Trinity of God and in the 'Manhood' of the Second Person of the Trinity. The intellectual declaration of faith in this section brings about a balance between subjectivity and objectivity, producing tensions since Gerontius is still very much at the mercy of his self. It is still his self that dominates the declarations of Faith and Hope.

In lines 80-83 Newman puts the dying man in control of his faith. The pronoun 'I' is placed before 'trust' and 'hope' that are declared 'most fully.' Hope like faith is at the theological and intellectual level but by the end of the prayer Gerontius discovers hope which involves the whole person. At the most testing moment of his life, Gerontius journeys gradually and painfully from accepting the dogmas of his Christian faith intellectually and theologically to a totally different apprehension of what this faith means.²⁶ He accepts wholeheartedly the fundamental beliefs of Catholicism, that is, the Triune God, Man's salvation through the Sacrifice of the Incarnate God, the Church as the institution of God and the expression of His will, the efficacy of the Mass and the communion of the saints. His emotion, his reason and his deepest moral sense are involved in this passionate but gradual acceptance of his faith, and its expressions speak to his imagination through their images and symbols, thus arousing the creative energy which is expressed in the poem.

The metrical pattern used here supports the external reality to which Gerontius commits himself. The alternate use of Latin and English stanzas provides a repeated pattern of

indirect warnings. This is supported by the trochaic metre with its incantatory effect. The English echoes medieval Latin Metre, as in the hymn: Dies irae, dies illa.²⁷ Line 105 echoes the Requiem Psalm 129 De profundis. The sadness of the Good Friday liturgy keeps recurring: Sanctus fortis, Sanctus Deus (104).

Lines 92-95 show a continued struggle to bring together a wholehearted emotional commitment to match his intellectual commitment to faith. The initial attempt to personalize the relationship with God: "I" "Thou" is finally distanced into a third person relationship: 'Him alone,' 'His Creation' and 'His own.' Yet the tension between the dying self and an intellectually created self is growing. Lines 96-97 sharpen this awareness. The word 'joy' is a significant intrusion. The trochaic thud of the line is at odds with the lightness of real joy and the words 'besets,' 'pain' and 'fear' provide the dominant impressions. The directly personal role of Gerontius is changed in line 97 to the passive object of 'besets.' Yet the tension between subjectivity and objectivity still persists even through lines 98-99.

In lines 100-107 Gerontius seems to have subdued his self and he offers adoration to the Holy Trinity. At this point Gerontius seems ready to die, but the struggle is renewed. The lines that follow show his emotional disintegration and they also show the purifying process which Gerontius undergoes to discover a wholehearted acceptance of Faith. The verse form reflects this disintegration, that sense of horror returns again now. The trochaic metre now shifts to iambic pentameter, initially rhymed. As Gerontius' faith starts to suffer, the rhyming structure becomes intermittent, and his distress is similarly reflected in the metrical collapse between lines 112 and 129. Though pentameter is reasserted at intervals, the verse form evades metrical control in the most trying moments

of Gerontius' suffering, as in lines 114 and 124. What Newman tries to convey through this metrical versatility is the dominant sense of self once again rather than of God.

The senses of Gerontius are shaken by pain and by his human terror of death once again. In line 108 'I can' is immediately negated, showing that Gerontius has lost God here again with the result that he is only aware of his own self: "That sense of ruin, which is worse than pain" (109) horrifies him. He is here the passive object of: "That masterful negation and collapse" (110). His personality still struggles for identity. Line 111 is so worded that Gerontius is able to observe his own fall: "as though I bent / Over the dizzy brink" (111-112). The sketch of the dying descent is skilfully worded. The dying man's constant emotional involvement contrasts with the attempt to become detached in lines 72-106. Newman using 'infinite' in line 113 portrays the never ending nature of the fall over an 'infinite descent,' and a frightening picture with its unlimited associations and the placing of the word 'Or worse' in line 114. Infinity is presented as a continuous process with the use of the continuous verb form: "Down, down for ever I was falling through" (115). Moment by moment the process of dying becomes a more acute reality. The cognizable structured outline established with 'solid frame work' (116) is immediately destroyed in the shapelessness and in the vagueness of 'vast abyss' (118). The punctuation details are crucial. The continuous line movement arrives at its worst point by ending mid-line at the full stop in line 118, so that the reader feels that suffering is at an end. But it is not so, what follows is a more active adjective 'crueller' that emphasizes the experience of the passive participant in this process.

The last lines of the dying Gerontius express terror and isolation from which is born a real consent to Faith. Newman

meticulously achieves a sense of dread in line 119: "A fierce and restless fright begins to fill" (119). The poet meaningfully describes the soul of Gerontius as a 'mansion' (120) which is spacious enough to accommodate the fears and anxieties that keep growing. Once again, the full stop at mid-line in line 120 persuades the reader to think that the worst is over. But the process recommences with 'And, worse and worse.' Now there are new physical manifestations of the 'bodily form of ill' (121) and its attack on the senses. Yet in the midst of the dreadful horror, there is a movement towards control that is reflected in the metre. Iambic pentameter reasserts itself in line 120, 122 and 123 with a trochaic substitution beginning with line 123 to capture the disgust of 'tainting.' The hostile powers try to take away his hope in the Lord in these last moments of his existence. Seized by the terrifying sense of dissolution and by an awareness of the loathsome beings hovering near him, threatening his salvation, Gerontius prays again with rising urgency. He begs Christ to send him 'Some Angel' (127) help. The weak triple rhymes of lines 127-129 make his speech cohesive.

The poet uses prose rhythm in the last line to refocus Gerontius in the direction of God, as he yields to Faith totally. Both urgency and conviction are expressed here. It is then that Gerontius turns to the incarnate suffering Christ, who was strengthened by an Angel in His agony, in the Garden of Gethsemane. Gerontius on his deathbed is also in need of supernatural help. In the poem "Guardian Angel" ²⁸ written in 1853, the pilgrim poet had expressed his mystical conviction that the Angel will be by his side at the moment of his death:

And thou wilt hang about my bed,
When life is ebbing low;
Of doubt, impatience, and of gloom,
The jealous sleepless foe. (33-36)

Such supernatural help is given to the protagonist. Gerontius at this moment passes from the theological, intellectual Faith to the one involving both the mind and the heart. His Faith in the opening section of the Creed is weakened by his sense of self. Later he confronts his self and his fears and works through the ensuing collapse to discover what genuine Faith means. Thus Faith prevails over the power of his enemies. When his relationship with Christ becomes personal and when he shares His 'agony' (128) Gerontius is ready to die.

Newman handles metre most skilfully in the poem. It is as varied as the context demands. It is quickened in time as Gerontius struggles to arouse his fainting energies. The firm rhythms that Gerontius uses at the affirmation of the Creed disintegrate as he confronts the loss of personal identity which stands as security for our earthly individuality. The consequent sense of panic, dissolution and scepticism has to be purged away in order to make it possible for Gerontius to be enlisted into the long line of those who lived by Faith 'in things not seen.' It moves more swiftly still when the anxious friends pour out their prayers of supplications. The metre changes again when Gerontius is aflame with hope and Faith and when his energies begin to ebb, the metre falls to a subdued measure.

In contrast to the terrifying experience of Gerontius when 'physicality' begins to appear alien, there are the voices of assistants who call on strong heroes of the Scripture as their points of reference. His friends at his deathbed catalogue the many physical and spiritual dangers from which God had delivered his people in the past.

The unvarying repetitions of the litany parallel the cyclic motion of human existence: 'Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.'²⁹ This cycle is meant to make irrelevant any notion of lasting individual achievement on earth. It is true that

a man's Faith can redeem him but the combined efforts of mankind do not lessen the demand on any other soul who seeks salvation after them. Hence it is that the assistants relate God's help to men of Faith in the past in a non-chronological order. Thus we see Newman placing Job before Isaac, Isaac before Lot, and Daniel before David. Though history gives the illusion of progress, for the individual all earthly accomplishments other than what prepare him for Heaven are ultimately futile. A devout soul must accept this inevitable cycle and live the holy life for its own sake.

Using contrasts skilfully Newman achieves amazing results. The chant of the assistants, low and solemn, is full of tender hopefulness. It falls softly on Gerontius' feeling of collapse which is fearful. It has a consoling effect on his desperate effort to cling to consciousness. In his agonized prayers for help at a time he is wild with horror and dismay, the chants of the assistants strengthen and encourage Gerontius and comfort his dying. The description of death in the poem is not like the stark images of an atheistic existentialist. Hence the 'emptying out' (11) is not into the void but into the hands of the Lord (147-148).

In lines 146-148 Gerontius seems to surrender at his dying moment all the pain and the fears of his life and most of all his own self, into the hands of his God. After the agony of fear, the metre falls back into an inert cadence which conveys the weariness of Gerontius: "Novissima hora est; and I fain would sleep. / The pain has wearied me Into Thy hands, / O Lord, into Thy hands" (146-148).

Newman is in close touch with both the worlds. He perceives that the keenest of the challenges even for the noblest of men comes at the last hour when his senses fail him. With this realization comes Gerontius' final surrender. The classic words of the Christian ritual are heard in sonorous

cadences, at this surrender in lines 149-169, which begins: "Proficiscere, anima Christiana, de hoc mundo ! / Go forth upon thy journey, Christian soul! / Go from this world! . . ." (149-151), and it is meant to strengthen and to accompany the soul at its journey to the Seat of Judgement. Thus the first scene of the poem closes with the death of Gerontius and his soul is escorted out of this life with the power of the Church. The poet puts into the lips of the priest at the deathbed, words which are both startling in their power and are greatly persuasive as a deathbed exhortation. These words release the dying soul to enter upon his journey to the next world.

In the poem death brings home to us the thinness of the crust which separates the personal consciousness from utter collapse. The reality of death will convince even the most faithful man of his utter impotence, and his absolute need for the constant care of Mightier Beings. For the first time Gerontius realizes his utter incapacity even to cling to the breath which sustains his being.

The finest part of the poem is the early soliloquy of Gerontius when he finds himself face to face with Infinity. The whole of this soliloquy is so real and so plausible that we accept it as the natural continuation of his earthly life. The feelings of desperation and agony in the deathbed scene, intertwined with the prayers of the priest and the assistants are expressed through supple and powerful blank verse. Though the poem portrays the death of a devout Christian, it is more than death; it is the experience of dying, which is a supreme psychological phenomenon that would remain as a factor of deep interest apart from its spiritual value.

Newman's imaginative insight supports throughout the poem--the dying man's feeling of surprise at the dire 'visitant' (13) knocking at the door, the sense of fear that follows him in varied forms, the gradual slipping away of the

senses, the void of nothingness which yawns below, that awful sense of losing consciousness, the struggle to retain that hold at any cost, the vague threat felt by evil presences, and then the final collapse. Very few literary works in English equal the depth of psychological penetration portrayed in the first part of this poem. The compelling depiction of the states of feeling during the supreme crisis of body and spirit, when the spirit abandons the body to reach its ultimate destiny is a unique poetical experience.

In his 1829 Essay Newman defined poetry as an 'unfettered effusion of genius'³⁰ which is an intensely personal poetry and *Gerontius* is perhaps the most personal of all. If Newman believed poetry should express personal emotions he believed as strongly that it should serve a moral and religious purpose. *Gerontius* is not merely a dying man but a devout Christian believer. His psychological perceptions which unify the poem are inextricable from his Faith. His passage from this world to the next follows the pattern set out in Orthodox Christian doctrine but the expression of this doctrine, the way it governs versification and the image patterns reveal Newman's own creative skill.

9.3.4. The ethereal journey

The journey of the soul after its departure from the body is depicted in the second scene. The creative genius in Newman is given its finest and most subtle expression here by his unique power of divining the unknown by the known. The poet's mystic soul searches out the depths of the unknown which is beyond experience. Feeling, as a means of comprehending the poem begins to fade with the death of *Gerontius*. From now on, the sense of hearing is made to carry the action. As a result the tension becomes less painful.

The concept of the temporal and sensory perception provides the keynote. Time and senses symbolized in the poem are two of the three great temptations facing mortal man. They are the world and the flesh. Time and sensation assume a drastically altered nature after the death of Gerontius. This alteration explains the transition from mortality to immortality. There probably is no where in English literature a more effective effort to realize the thoughts that overwhelm a soul separated from the body than the one shown in The Dream of Gerontius. The suggestion of the annihilation of space and time in this new life is conveyed as are all the sensations of the disembodied spirit.

The scene begins with the awareness in the soul of Gerontius of 'a strange refreshment' (171). After the sonorous cadences of the prayers for the dying, there is the rise and fall of the pentameter lines in blank verse that are skilfully employed and harmoniously fit the subdued calm of the deathbed chamber from whence the soul has just departed. The words of Gerontius: "I went to sleep, and now I am refresh'd" (170), and the harmoniously flowing lines that follow remind us of the lyrical quality of Tennyson. Lines 170-210 depict Gerontius as freed from the compulsive desire to reassure himself of spatial and temporal sensations. As a result he becomes more truly himself. His transition from earthly identity to celestial essence is shown by the dropping of the part of that identity which is his name. From now on in the poem his part becomes that of the Soul.

In this section of the poem as the heavenly perspective is introduced Newman uses metaphysics and theology in the description of the disembodied Soul. The poet's use of these means is sure and impressive. When the soul of Gerontius passes out of the body it feels light and free as if it were itself for the first time. In the deep stillness it hears 'no more

the busy beat of time' (175). It remembers as in a dream the voice 'He's gone' (179) and a sigh going about the room, the voice of the priest raised in prayer : Subvenite (181) and the other voices joined in prayer. The Soul continues to have a lingering affinity with the earth still. The voices that resound in his ears are: "but thin and low, / And fainter and more faint" (182-183).

Along with this fading affinity with the earth, the Soul also suffers a certain delusion that it still remains in the body. Yet all the fears of the body are laid to rest and the Soul experiences a newness, a certain self-possession and new understanding: "for I possess / A sort of confidence which clings to me" (196-197). This new realization comes to the Soul that it is now unable to speak or move and perceives that the vast universe where it has dwelt is quitting the Soul. The Soul feels that either it or the universe is rushing away 'on the wings / Of light' (214-215) and hence experiences the distance between it and the universe 'million miles apart' (216). The Soul realizes that all spatial boundaries are melting though it is not given a certitude as to how the change is being brought about: "is this peremptory severance ?" (217):

Or am I traversing infinity
By endless subdivision, hurrying back
From finite towards infinitesimal,

Thus dying out of the expansive world ? (220-223)

When the Guardian Angel takes the soul of Gerontius in hand and speaks to it, the Soul is sure that it is no longer in the body. Now the Soul has no fear either of falling into sin or of being 'clasp'd by such a saintliness' (313). As the Angel explains it, the Soul cannot now "Cherish a wish which ought not to be wish'd" (328). Now the Soul fears neither to meet God nor to be judged. Fear of death and judgement is an earthly trial which has helped to guard Gerontius from serious sin.

This holy fear has 'forestall'd the agony' (376). Gerontius faces his judgement with trust and confidence in the mercy of God.

With Gerontius, finding himself in the palms of the Guardian Angel, Newman drifts past the height of his imaginative flight. The soul of Gerontius being carried over among the Choirs of Angels to prostrate before the Seat of Judgement is a noble conception. Now, Newman having portrayed all that his study of human emotions, his insight and poetic fancy have revealed to him, relies on the teachings of the Church to transform the psychological drama into a spiritual one. Newman makes use of the doctrines and the rituals of the Church throughout the poem—the various litanies, the act of Faith, the ascent to the Judgement Seat, the Guardian Angel, Angelicals, demons, Purgatory, etc.

The Guardian Angel holds the office of interpreter as Virgil to Dante. The Guardian Angel tells the Soul that the solid frame of things do not exist for it any more. Instead it now lives in 'a world of signs and types' (526). The poet presents the Soul in such a condition of being in which it transcends human experience and the spirit becomes the medium of sensation. So once the Soul pierces the veil and reaches the world beyond, it is in a world unlike Milton's where the supernatural worlds are founded upon heathen rather than upon Christian tradition, nor is it in a world that Dante describes where history and landscape mingle in his Purgatorio, but in a world which resembles Calderon's autos sacramentales, which is at once an allegory and an act of faith. Here Newman avoids any visual representation of the unseen World. This heightens the atmosphere of awe and mystery which surrounds the poem.

Patterning is used in the lay out of the Angel's words in lines 236-257, and the lines of the Guardian Angel brim over with joy as it announces: "My work is done" (236), "the crown

is won, / Alleluia" (240-241).

On the other shore of life, time has existence only in the mind. Gerontius now is a resident of eternity. Following this transition there occurs a change in the verse form of his speeches. After his death Gerontius speaks in blank verse as though he were adopting the greater freedom of the world beyond. Blank verse is a more progressive metre than recurring rhyme, and it better fits a Soul newly liberated from its earthly cycle. At this moment however, the transformation of Gerontius from mortal to immortal has not reached its conclusion.

Further, the utterances of the Angelical Choirs which also rhyme, reveal that true immortals do not make any progress like the mortals. An Angel has a life that knows no change "through those cycles all but infinite, / Has had a strong and pure celestial life" (261-262). It is not an Angel's portion to take part in that: "shifting parti-colour'd scene / Of hope and fear, of triumph and dismay, / Of recklessness and penitence" (285-287). These lines describe most beautifully and poignantly man's life on earth which is but 'a shifting parti-colour'd scene' that has no stability and permanency. Human life on earth is a flux composed of 'hope,' 'fear,' 'triumph,' 'dismay,' 'recklessness,' penitence,' and it is but 'dreary' 'history' and a 'life-long fray!' (288). These lines convey Newman's insight into and his knowledge of human lives in their day-to-day strivings and his ability to portray it vividly and touchingly. The Angel's description of man's empty history recalls the fifth chapter of Newman's Apologia which speaks about the endless series of failures of man's earthly efforts and hopes. Even the crisis of faith which Christ seemed to have suffered in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the cross, as well as the summary of his teachings to men are highlighted by the fifth Choir of Angels, 'to suffer and to die' (813), is

the common lot of all humanity.

When it meets the Eternal face to face, the Soul reaches a sense of that knowledge and understanding of which St. Paul speaks.³¹ That sense of wholeness and the knowledge of self which comes over the Soul puts everything in perspective as is conveyed through lines 307-312. Thus the Soul becomes a new creation--'whole of heart,' 'self-possess'd,' 'full content,' 'apprehensive,'³² 'discriminant,' with 'no temptation' to 'intoxicate,' nor even 'terror.' Such is the transformation that comes upon the Soul which has shed its mortal frame. Therefore the Soul loses the capacity for freedom of choice and sin: "You cannot now / Cherish a wish which ought not to be wish'd" (328-329).

The poet depicts the journey of the Soul from this transitory life to Life Everlasting as a gradual liberation from time and senses which elevates the Soul to a new state of being. The time-bound man is freed from this state through the sacrifice of Christ but he can only achieve this freedom through death. Newman makes use of rhetorical differences to let us comprehend the contrast between mortal and immortal time. The poet conveys the actions that take place after death--the journey of the Soul to the Judgement Seat, the explanations of the Guardian Angel on this journey, the glimpse of the Beatific Vision, the entrance into the Purgatorial state--as taking place in an infinitesimal fraction of time in lines 337-343. Not even before the passing away of a moment in man's time divided 'into its million-million-millionth part' (339) since Gerontius died, the ethereal journey and the celestial experiences of the disembodied Soul take place. The way in which spirits measure 'the flow of time' (345), is different from that of men: "For spirits and men by different standards mete / The less and greater in the flow of time" (344-345). Time is no longer measured by the sun, the moon and the stars nor

by recurring seasons nor by clocks but it is measured "by the intensity of the living thought alone" (354) and time grows or wanes by the intensity of individual thought. For spirits 'time is not a common property' (356) and each mind 'is standard of his own chronology' (360). "And memory lacks its natural resting-points / Of years, and centuries, and periods" (361-362). The Guardian Angel explains to the Soul the particular nature of heavenly time in lines 344-364.

Newman describes the afterlife as one which is supersensuous. It is a world of signs and types which embody holy truths. Though the Guardian Angel carries the Soul along, it does not see the Angel but only hears its voice which is 'a heart-subduing melody!' (235). The Soul cannot differentiate the senses: hearing, touch, sight, taste or smell. Through the faculties of his imagination, the poet describes with exactness what words can convey--the feelings of the Soul on its strange journey. The Angel clarifies the Soul's puzzling mode of perception in lines 525-530, as it clarified previously the Soul's puzzling relationship to time. The Soul has no real physical attributes such as a living mortal has: touch, taste and hearing. The Soul is given perception which seems to come through bodily sense organs only in order that the 'stern solitude' (531) may not prove too much to bear.

The Soul is now wrapped and swathed in dreams 'that are true, yet enigmatical' (537). It resembles the comprehension of a man who has lost a hand or foot and yet seems to suffer in the missing member. Although the Soul has lost the entire body it still perceives in terms of space and time, of pain and pleasure, and of sensation of odour, taste, touch, and hearing. It is "As ice which blisters may be said to burn" (545). The Soul has not regained what it has lost 'new-made and glorified' (556) and hence the Angel explains to the Soul: "the belongings of thy present state, / Save through such symbols, come not home

to thee" (538-539). The poet creates through the power of imagination a living, pulsating experience of the life to come. This adds to the power of the poem and speaks for the originality of it.

At this intermediary sensory state, Gerontius is blind and lacks that 'princely sense' (523) of sight "which binds ideas in one, and makes them live" (524). For Newman, sight that binds ideas into one stands for rationally proven ideas. Here the Guardian Angel reveals that the Soul would remain blind until the Beatific Vision and even its Purgatory "which comes like fire / Is fire without its light" (562-563).

It is already explained that the essence of Heaven consists in bearing 'to gaze on the unveil'd face of God.' So it follows that except for a single piercing glimpse of the Lord at its Judgement, the Soul must remain blind until it is purified by the purgatorial fires. In "The Pillar of the Cloud,"³³ the poet had confessed his love of the 'garish day' (11), and his choice of seeing his own path which obscured the "Kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom" (1). Here in this poem, the Guardian Angel symbolizes the 'Kindly Light' and serves as the Soul's eyes in its darkness. This poem depends not so much upon the eye as upon the ear and this is because the poem is projected through the consciousness of a sightless man.

The disembodied Soul has its own real, personal existence with the capacity of thought, memory and love even though it will not be a complete man till the resurrection. When such a full restoration takes place, the Soul would experience that sense of refinement which belongs to ethereal beings: "An Angel's deathless fire, an Angel's reach of thought" (753).

The liberation of Gerontius from his senses is also traced by Newman in even greater detail than his departure from time. If time limits and defeats a man's aspirations, the senses

betray him even at the cost of his soul. As early as 1818 he had written in his poem "Solitude"³⁴ how man's mortal perceptions harken to "the earthly din / Of toil or mirth" (19-20), letting him miss the angelic voices which beckon from above. It is the senses alone that give Satan his power over the mortal man as lines 480-484 convey. So the lines dealing with the sensory transformation of Gerontius are less subtle than those dealing with the temporal. We may notice the use of the phrase 'a traitor nestling close at home' (481). Though 'a traitor,' Satan has comfortably settled down and has 'kept the keys' (483) of the senses. Man in his ignorance and in his search for sensual pleasures, unlocks his heart 'to the deadliest foe' (484).

As the Soul speeds towards its Judge, it encounters good and evil spirits. The demons wild in hell with their 'fierce hubbub' (390) and 'sullen howl' (393), are shown convincingly in lines 436-439. The interlocutory blasphemies of the demons are not the mechanical reproduction of a symphony but bear the coarse distinction of a living performance.

The potential for dramatic conflict is transferred in the second scene to the demons. In lines 450-457 the staccato rhythms of the demons threaten the measured exposition of the Angel and reassert all that the Soul has discarded, the fear of physical disintegration and: "The mind bold / And independent, / The purpose free" (440-442).

In his mystical insight Gerontius realizes that it is only in the case of sinful men:

Those fallen ones show so majestic.
But, when some child of grace, Angel or Saint,
Pure and upright in his integrity
Of nature, meets the demons in their raid,
They scud away as cowards from the fight.
Nay, oft hath holy hermit in his cell,

Not yet disburden'd of mortality,
 Mock'd at their threats and warlike overtures;
 Or, dying, when they swarm'd like flies around,
 Defied them, and departed to his judge. (486-495)

Newman understood the potential for evil and the darker side of human heart. His demons are unlike those of Milton's in Paradise Lost full of grandeur and power. Newman reduces his demons to devils whose power over the souls of the upright is limited.

It is true that Newman's demons are not Milton's great lords who in majestic splendour debate in golden pandemonium. Newman's demons resemble elemental and inchoate beings whose thoughts sink down in blind opposition and whose glory has vanished with no traces. For their role, in the case of the soul of Gerontius demands only such a portrayal. The overpowering potential for evil as exemplified in the evil presences in Paradise Lost is not what Newman's poem demands. Richard H. Hutton has remarked rightly: "I know no more powerful conception anywhere of impotent restiveness and restlessness."³⁵ Those critics who turn away from Newman's demons prefer the grand Miltonic fiends and sympathize with the melancholic grandeur with which Byron reproduces the Miltonic idea of a fallen spirit in his Heaven and Earth.

The comic parts of Doctor Faustus by Marlowe and The Screwtape Letters by C. S. Lewis, demonstrate the concept that the demonic is a burlesque activity mimicking and playing upon human weakness. Even in Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral, the demons are ridiculous and disgusting while they present the most deadly temptation. To demand more dignity and a better tune for the devil than the one assigned by Newman seems to be a Romantic illusion. The critics who seem dissatisfied with Newman's demons forget that the choruses of the demons are deliberately made 'sour' and 'uncouth dissonance' (400) in

contrast to the dialogues of Gerontius and the Guardian Angel. Newman uses this device to throw relief on both sides. The choruses of the demons are filled with such discord as are fitting to their spirit of malevolence. The demonic choruses are irregular, in harsh rhythms and are in short clacking lines. In contrast to this the cadenced harmony of the angelic verses is most graceful and appealing.

Newman uses images of sense perceptions in some beautiful lines which are successful as they rely on imagery having to do with sound. In the case of the Angels, Newman uses melodious lines based on the sense of hearing. After having passed through the House of Judgement, the Soul is struck by the first sounds it hears : "The sound is like the rushing of the wind-- / The summer wind among the lofty pines; / Swelling and dying, echoing round about" (664-666). Musician that Newman was, he had a keen aural sense and handled harmonies and dissonance well. The Angel chants a hymn of triumph; a 'fierce hubbub' (390) warns that the demon throng hovers around the Judgement Seat. Their 'restless panting' (436) breaks out in stanzas uncouth, turbulent, preterhuman and grim as in medieval mysteries. The contrast between the graceful harmonies of the Angelic Choirs and the cacophonous dissonances of the demons is masterful. Newman also calls upon the sense of smell, depicting the foul odour of the demons as "Some bodily form of ill" (121) that taints "the hallow'd air." He uses a subtle image of decay and foulness when he describes the demons as 'beasts of prey' (437).

The Soul hears the Angels sing the story of God in relation to Man and the Angels. They describe the nature of sinful Man and pure Angels and show the greatness of God and His ways. While the Spirits decide timelessly their choice of God, Man sways backwards and forwards among the things of sense and time. Man compromises with the material world and thus loses

his power to control it. He finds himself in the midst of corruption that torments his own heart. The result is that: "He dreed his penance age by age" (648). What ultimately brings about his redemption from sin is 'the Almighty's breath' (652) that is poured out on him. In contrast to man, in spirits good or evil, there exists: "No growth and no decay / 'Twas hopeless, all-ingulphing night, / Or beatific day" (679-681).

Newman presents three modes of temporality--cyclical, progressive, eternal. On earth, there exists a progression in history. A man must die but Man remains and evolves. For immortals there is no progress because of infinite completeness. The varied metres and rhyme schemes in the poem reinforce these distinctions. Through their repetitions and litanies, the life cycle that runs its course and returns again and again to its beginning is suggested. On the other hand, the Angelic discourse makes use of the ordering patterns of rhyme to define an unchanging existence which is harmonious rather than static. Both these patterns differ from the less-fixed blank verse of Gerontius who has left his mortal dwelling but has yet to achieve his final rest in heaven. As a result, the Guardian Angel converses with Gerontius in blank verse but returns to rhyme in various hymns which are not directly addressed to Gerontius.

While Gerontius journeys to the Throne of Judgement the five Angelical Choirs give a detailed account of man's fall, redemption by Christ and return to grace. Their hymns explain man's biological and spiritual fall. So man: "Who once had Angels for his friends, / Had but the brutes for kin" (638-639). It takes time for him to be restored back to his former wholesome self which involves a progression from creation to Judgement. Placing this account side by side with the journey of the Soul, Newman tries to show that the passage from life through death and particular Judgement represents this

sequence in miniature, and portrays in lines 698-701 the cost man has to pay. Before attaining, the final bliss he must suffer in body and soul, endure the pangs of death and the chill felt at the fading out of the senses which give him his identity as a living being. The soul must face God alone at the last and be consumed by His love. After the mystic cleansing of purgatory the soul would be aflame with selfless and pure love for the Divine alone as its only choice. The result is perfect holiness. Therefore, like the soul of Gerontius, all good Christian souls could join in changeless eternity when all journeys are ended on that final Day of Judgement when time stops forever.

As he approaches the Judgement Seat, with the help of the Guardian Angel, the soul of Gerontius learns the nature of the Divine and his own unworthiness to be in the company of the holy souls in Heaven. The Soul longs for at least a glimpse of the Divine Presence even though its own imperfections loom large before it. When the Angel explained to the Soul that it is blind and that even its purgatory would be 'fire without its light' in lines 561-563, the Soul asserts: 'His will be done!' (564). At the same time the Soul makes known the hope that it had nourished in life that it would be able to have at least a sight of God to strengthen it before it would be "plunged amid the avenging flame" (569). The Angel does assure the Soul that it would have "that sight of the Most Fair" (582) for a moment and the effect of it 'will gladden' the Soul 'but it will pierce' the Soul as well (583). Only then would the Soul realize the depth of the Divine Love against which it has failed and its consequent unworthiness to be in the Divine Presence. But the Soul does not even have any fear of Judgement now and looks forward to it 'With a serenest joy' (373). The Angel explains the reason for this as a foreboding granted to the Soul: "Straight from the Judge, expressive of its lot" (386). Thus

there is no more the fear of punishment due to the self-knowledge the Soul gains after its departure from the body.

The Guardian Angel informs the Soul that the brief vision of the Lord would 'gladden' (583) because even 'a lightning-flash' (578) would imprint on the Soul the immeasurable love of the Lord. This would 'pierce' (583) the Soul keenly and it would be made aware of its imperfections. God's love like refining fire would inflame the Soul as it did to Saint Francis of Assisi who was given a vision of the Crucified with the result: "that the Master's very wounds were stamp'd / Upon his flesh; and, from the agony / Which thrill'd through body and soul in that embrace" (589-591), the Angel tells the Soul to: "Learn that the flame of the Everlasting Love / Doth burn ere it transform" (592-593). Fire is the symbol of love and so we speak of hearts aflame with love. So the Angel warns the Soul that to come into the presence of God's love is to be refined by fire.

Newman does not express himself to any extent through imagery in his attempt to build the imaginative structure of the poem. In describing the journey of the Soul, Newman avoids sharp, vivid, highly specific imagery as used by Dante, Donne and Herbert in their religious poetry. For Newman the environment of the spirit could not be brought alive by sensory images. The relative absence of sensory imagery underscores the immaterial nature of the mysterious regions beyond earth. In his romantic love of place, Newman paints in the words of the Angel a picture of the Everlasting Home which awaits the Soul in lines 616-627. Heaven is no earthly temple or palace. We are made aware of an immaterial Heaven where the House of Judgement is made up of living, immortal beings who sing hymns continually in their Maker's praise.

Amidst 'a grand, mysterious harmony' (740), the Soul approaches for a single vision of 'the face of the Incarnate

God' (708) which the Angel informs the Soul: "Shall smite thee with that keen and subtle pain; / And yet the memory which it leaves will be / A sovereign febrifuge to heal the wound" (709-711). And the Soul longs for this vision but the result of it would be that the Soul "wilt be sick with love, and yearn for Him" (721). The Angel further informs it: "There is a pleading in His pensive eyes" (726) that will pierce the Soul 'to the quick, and trouble' it and that the Soul 'wilt hate and loathe itself (727-728). Consequently the Soul's 'verierst, sharpest purgatory' (737) would be its longing for God along with its realization of its unworthiness before the all Holy.

The Angelical Choirs surround Gerontius and his Guardian Angel as they pass beyond the blasphemous laughter and wailing of the demons. They approach the stairs which lead to the Presence-Chamber, where the Angels of the Sacred Stair hymn their song. We are made aware of the harmonies of Heaven through the words of the Soul: "But hark! a grand mysterious harmony: / It floods me like the deep and solemn sound / Of many waters" (740-742). As the Soul approaches the 'veiled' presence of God and as the Judgement is close at hand, it hears the voices raised in prayer around its corpse on earth. As Gerontius encountered death, he had begged Christ to send such an Angel to strengthen him as it had done previously in Christ's own agony. Now in the first 'million-million-millionth part' (339) of a moment after the death of Gerontius, the Angel of the Agony does pray for him. Here the style combines mysticism with imagery to link the threshold of the Eternal with the agony of death.

At the court of the Eternal Presence where peace and joy prevail, the intervention of the Angel of the Agony conjures up the anguish of Gethsemane, and once again supports the mounting tension, pleading for a tormented and suffering Soul and instilling even in the readers a deep sense of sadness.

Here the poem regains the old spell of the opening scene, the intensity. The Angel of the Agony who was present with Christ when He was: "Lone in that garden shade, bedew'd with blood" (882), intercedes with Christ to have mercy on the soul of Gerontius, "by that shuddering dread which fell on" (825) Christ. The Angel continues the prayer in a sort of litany of the holy name of Jesus pointing out the agony Christ suffered to redeem this Soul.

As this prayer ends, the Soul cries out: "I go before my Judge. Ah!" (837). This brief moment of Judgement expresses a sharp realization both of shock and of joy. The potential dramatic climax of the poem occurs in this single line. The expression 'Ah! ' speaks eloquently of the unutterable moment of Judgement and clearly adds an element of joy to this daunting experience. It also conveys the intuitive realization of the awesome majesty of the Lord of Love and, consequently, the profound ingratitude of sinful man and the willing acceptance of the need for expiation by the Soul.

The Angel's words mirror joy and praise: "Praise to His Name!" (838) and it is very close to the last broken, earthly utterance of Gerontius, rhetorically: "O Lord, into Thy hands. . . ." (148) and is also close to the prayer of the priest: "Proficiscere, anima Christiana, de hoc mundo!" (149) Amid the intercessions that ascend to the throne of God and the pleadings of the Angel of the Agony, Gerontius obtains a quick vision of the Lord whom his soul loves. That one moment of the Beatific Vision does soothe by its sweet remembrance the coming period of anguish when the Soul would be purified for its complete union with God.

The poet is meticulous about using the most appropriate adjective and uses 'eager' to capture the urgent wish of the Soul to reach Christ: "The eager spirit has darted from my hold"

(839). The fears and doubts that pervade the self and the Faith of Gerontius are no more there, instead the urgent desire for Christ is paramount in the Soul now. So in line 840, the poet uses the adjective 'intemperate' to explain the love of the Soul, for its love now is a love without boundaries which goes beyond self to embrace the Beloved.

To depict the moment of confrontation of a human soul with its Creator is a great challenge for any poet or writer. Newman captures most effectively the moment of contact between the Soul and Christ in this poem. He portrays this moment not by a direct confrontation but by using the Cross and the 'sanctity' (842) of Christ as his media. The Soul experiences a revelation of glory as well as a pang of pain. The Cross is represented in its directly active role and not as a passive image of crucifixion. The link between the Cross and Gerontius is built up in the Angel's Miltonic blank verse: "And circles round the Crucified, has seized, / And scorch'd, and shrivell'd it;" (844-845). Verbs of total control and destruction are used: the sanctity 'seized,' 'scorch'd' and 'shrivell'd' the Soul. The suffering here is part of a process in which the Soul willingly becomes 'passive,' "and now it lies / Passive and still before the awful Throne" (845-846), having shed self and moving on to the 'happy, suffering' (847) state. The purgatorial paradox is completed as Gerontius surrenders to the destructive yet vitalizing process, in line 848: "Consumed, yet quicken'd, by the glance of God." Thus the Soul is spiritually invigorated.

Gerontius does not speak in the poem of specific sinful acts but, instead, he is keenly aware of the impure personality that he has come to be. He longs to purify himself and willingly accepts the change that must take place within his own

personality, for he comes to this realization that his self must be subordinated to Christ's love. So he accepts with joy the passivity of the purgatorial state and pleads passionately in his poignant lyric to be taken to the place of purgation.

Gerontius is heard in the poem for the last time in lines 849-864. The fluid lyrical structure of the metre mirrors his final contentment. Several of the lines have at their beginning trochaic substitutions that capture the note of total acceptance--'Take,' 'There,' 'Told,' 'Love,' and there is a simplicity in the frequent monosyllables of the two-foot lines. The metrical range of this section is seen in the introduction of one single line of hexameter which marks the end of Gerontius' lyric and leaves the final stresses on 'Him,' 'truth' and 'day' (864). As the Soul accepts fully the need for a passive role, a state of being rather than action, so it is: 'let me be' (850), as he lets himself be the object: "Take me away" (849). The Soul reconciles itself willingly to pain now: "And there in hope the lone night-watches keep" (851). It is 'hope' that would carry the Soul through suffering which is best described as 'lone.' Gerontius, and for that matter each individual, must suffer alone. The paradox of the situation is brought out: "There, motionless and happy in my pain" (853) the Soul affirms.

In his last lines Gerontius communicates the nature of his pain. It is the suffering of love, waiting to be fulfilled:

There will I sing my sad perpetual strain,
Until the morn.

There will I sing, and soothe my stricken breast,
Which ne'er can cease

To throb, and pine, and languish, till possess
Of its Sole Peace.

There will I sing my absent Lord and Love:-- (855-861)

It is a love-lament. The verbs 'throb,' 'pine,' 'languish' are

words of longing and love. The total abandonment of self takes place at this point when the Soul realizes the truth that an end to suffering can come only by a total possession by the Beloved, "possest / Of its Sole Peace." So in pain born out of extreme longing for its 'absent Lord and Love,' the Soul would wait to be made fit for that Heavenly Fellowship with God. Newman succeeds in capturing the emotions of human love and anguish in this last lyric by Gerontius. Now the Soul is sure of its eternal reward, for it will "see Him in the truth of everlasting day" (864). Thus the lyric ends with a heart-healing hope, though the lines are strained out of a sad and yearning melody.

9.3.5. The Purgatorial scene

Newman's sketch of purgatory differs from that of Dante's with its flames and physical suffering. The emphasis of the purgatory described by Newman in the poem is on love and regeneration, not on punishment; on a willing acceptance of suffering which heals. The most excruciating pain of purgatory is the separation of the soul from God. The dual action of suffering and joy which fills the Soul because of the inflowing love of God, cleanses it and prepares it for ultimate salvation. Newman's visualization of purgatory is analogous to that of Catherine Of Genoa.³⁶ Even the imagery is much the same. Both Catherine and Newman use the symbolism of 'fire' and 'water.' The characteristics that are found in Gerontius at his entry into purgatory are the same, namely, insight, acceptance, suffering and joy. Newman skilfully portrays the paradox of this purgatorial state, that at the same moment of suffering Gerontius also passes through a process of love which as it destroys, revivifies, enlightens, brings understanding and 'the truth of everlasting day' (864).

Newman tries to eliminate the popular misunderstanding about the doctrine of purgatory. Hence here in the poem he places his focus on the spontaneous human realization of unworthiness before the presence of all Holy God and on the pain of the separation of the Soul from God, but with a hope for future Fellowship in the Heavenly City. In Newman's poem, fire exists only as the burning presence of the love of God which the unpurified soul cannot yet endure.

As the Angel carries the Soul to the penal waters of purgatory, once again we hear in the poem ethereal harmonies for a soul which has resolved all its discords: "the golden prison ope its gates / Making sweet music" (865-866). The souls in purgatory receive the soul of Gerontius with a hymn composed of Psalm 90. This Psalm refers again to cyclic time. Purgatory is a place where Man must wait to free himself from sin in preparation for eternal joy. The holy souls in purgatory throb, pine and languish at their distance from God. The paraphrase of this Psalm chanted by the souls in purgatory with its mention of the Lord being the 'refuge' of His people 'in every generation' (872), sets the atmosphere of love and resignation to which Gerontius surrenders his soul. It is tinged with hope mingled in sadness. Newman gives an altered version of the Psalm here to fit the poetical setting.

The poem begins like a personal commentary on the Office for the Dead and it ends in a similar manner by returning to Biblical and liturgical sources. The last speech of the Angel which is brief is preceded by this paraphrase of Psalm 90. Newman successfully attains that serenity of lines which mingles its rhythms harmoniously with Biblical texts.

Newman portrays the transformation of a Christian soul as a gradual casting off of its earthly chains rather than as a horrifying and abrupt change. At this most difficult time, the soul is not alone but is in the soothing presence of its

Guardian Angel. Both the terror of death and the trial of purgatory seem very realistic within the context of a devout Christian's earthly existence. The Angel soothes the fear in its final lyric beginning with the lines: "Softly and gently, dearly-ransom'd soul, / In my most loving arms I now enfold thee" (885-886). The lyric quatrain provides 'Softly and gently' a consolation to the suffering Soul in purgatory since pains will be brief. Gerontius 'without a sob or a resistance' (890) enters the penal waters to live out his night ~~of~~^{trial} and to await the morning. The Soul would be ministered to by Angels and supported by the prayers of the faithful. The farewell of the Guardian Angel with which the poetic drama closes is a strain of solemn and tender pensiveness. The lines are beautifully rhymed. The last lines of the Valedictory 897-900 by the Guardian Angel have two levels of meaning. The 'bed of sorrow' (898) is both the deathbed and the purgatorial fire. The very same Angel who met Gerontius after the 'night of trial' (899) which was death, promises that it will also welcome his fully-redeemed soul on the 'morrow' (900) of Resurrection. Thus the poem ends on a quiet assuring note and the perfect chord of Hope, after passing beyond the bounds of space and time.

The poet conveys through the poem his clear perception and belief that holiness is worth any sacrifice and any suffering. To be united with the Lord in eternity is a joy beyond comparison and even millenia of anguish is a cheap price paid for such a supernatural experience.

Some critics think that, had Newman conveyed the glory of Resurrection and Ascension to complete the theology, the close would have been more majestic. But Newman, not writing a Salvation History, confines the poem to the experience of death and transition to purgatory. Hence the poet strikes the right chord of perfect hope and leaves the Soul and the reader to

await that future time when the Eternal condescends to 'come and wake' him 'on the morrow' (900).

9.3.6. The marvel of reconciliation of twin vocations

Newman's greatest success in the poem is in developing the main character in whom we see our future selves as we encounter the Ultimate. Though there is literature dealing with the occasion of death and with the afterlife, there is hardly anything written about the experience of the encounter of a soul with the Infinite after the moment of death, and of the unexplored regions of Eternity. The poem bears a Dantesque idealism and keen vision. Its figurative and emotional features are very real. The moods expressed, the element of struggle and fear, the theme of elegy and the circumstances of its inception blend into a harmony. Towards the climax of the poem, the poet relies increasingly on the insights of the Church to complete the drama--the litanies, the rituals and the doctrines take over--but it is Newman's own personal insight which creates the unity. Yet the intensity of the poetry is felt much more keenly when the poet makes use of the appeal to psychology than to the matters of Faith.

The successful communication of the message of the poem is brought out by effective artistry. The poet makes use of suitable metre, fitting liturgy and introduces the poetry of dogma to bring about the desired artistic effect. At times the use of blank verse has a Miltonic grandeur. The poem abounds in skilfully managed contrasts. The frequent contrasts between the metre and the tone of the different sections are very effective in avoiding monotony and in contributing effectively to each particular section. The contrasts alone are ample evidence of Newman's amazing grasp of his subject.

The prosody bends and flexes to the meaning with supple

and subtle ease; the rhythm is stately at times, pleasing at other times, despairing as the situation demands, hopeful when Faith enters, awesome and solemn at the Heavenly Presence, anguished at the separation from the Divine and calm and resigned for the final valediction that brings the poem to a close. Its ministerial office being over for the time being, the Angel ends the hymn in a tone that all is well.

The colloquy between Gerontius and the Guardian Angel forms the dramatic element. The monotony of the dialogues is relieved from time to time by the choral hymns of the Seraphs whom they pass by on the journey to the Throne of Judgement. The dialogues are also interrupted by the malevolent utterances howled at the Soul by demons who would fain hinder its journey. The lack of sensuous details in the poem is well suited for the desired effect of the poem, since the local habitation and the solid frame of things have fallen away at the point of death. The action then takes place in a world of signs and types which embody heavenly Truths. Through human language the poet expresses the inexpressible in flashes of supersensuous vision. Newman's mastery over the language reflects itself from beginning to end, displaying a solemn harmony of its own, especially in the speeches in blank verse. The whole poem is grave and subdued in tone and is somewhat bare of ornament but is weighty with thought.

The focus of the poem on the movement of the soul of Gerontius in a growing, developing experience carries the reader to a climax of understanding and identification. Thus the poet exercises an unusual boldness of imagination in the poem. The individuality of the soul of Gerontius is the factor that gives the poem the stature of experience and that which avoids its becoming an expression of abstract statement. The pilgrimage of Gerontius from beginning to end is one of individual feeling, emotions and ideas. At first there is his

agony accompanied by the sense of disintegration: "That masterful negation and collapse / Of all that makes me man; . . ." (110-111), followed by that total resignation: "Into Thy hands / O Lord, into Thy hands. . . ." (147-148). Then the new sense of wholeness is born and there comes a new kind of existence which he does not fully understand. This is followed by the supportive, loving companionship of the Angel, the mounting foreboding as the moment of Judgement approaches, and finally the ultimate comprehended joy and suffering as the Angels sing and the deathbed litanies reproduced constitute one, single intentional movement which is both spiritually and artistically meaningful. The artistic confirmation of the poem lies in this mounting effect which finds its culmination in complete self-abandonment.

The most original contribution of Newman in The Dream of Gerontius is the psychological penetration into the mind of a dying man. The stanzaic variety and the occasional grandeur of the blank verse are also to be noted. Here Newman gives in poetry of a high order as exact an expression as may be hoped for, of deeply mysterious doctrines. The doctrines of judgement, reward and punishment after death are difficult to treat even in the abstract language of theology. The difficulties become greater still when they are transferred to the concrete realm of poetry. Yet from the first grave and solemn scene about the bed of the dying man, through the passage of the Soul to the Judgement Seat, and on to the close in purgatory, there is no faltering in the sureness with which the poet writes. There is no loss in the light that he throws upon his subject. Throughout the poem, the appeal is never to the eye but partly to the ear and partly to the emotions. Where as Dante touches and sees the things of the other world, for Newman, it is enough to feel them.

As Newman deals here with his most cherished aspirations

and beliefs, he brings to the best creative fusion the riches of his poetic self, his imaginative faculties and the mysticism of his religious Faith, not neglecting the insights and virtues of his mature years both as a poet and as a pilgrim. The personality of the poet pervades the poem as he expresses his beliefs about the earthly pilgrimage, leading to death, the judgement and purgatory.

Newman's theory of the multi-levels of personality involving all the layers of the psyche which must be reached in the process of purgation is also well developed in the poem. Thus The Dream of Gerontius summarizes in an effective way the ultimate conviction of the poet based on a lifetime of dedicated search. Though Newman takes over the deathbed convention as he finds in medieval poetry and in the literature of meditation, he goes on to a climax of celebration of the love of God and of pain, as prayer and joy as he had learned from Francis de Sales and from his own insights.

The poem is described as a metrical meditation on death and afterlife. Personal meditation of the soul is strongly supported by the liturgical framework. It is in fact the realization by means of a loving heart and poetic imagination, of the state of a just soul at and after death. Gerontius typifies not a particular soul but each one of those souls which may be fortunate enough to face a merciful and loving God. It is a unique meditation on death and also a musical evocation of a lofty yet sensitive soul. It is written out of intense personal feeling which communicates power to the poem. The poet himself forms his technique to communicate the experience. Newman lets his imagination go beyond the boundaries of human consciousness and conveys spirit as the medium of physical sensation which transcends all human experience. Those qualities of Newman that could vitalize dead pages and lift the mediocre into excellence, that

exquisiteness of touch that is human and majestic, quelling and imperial are found in the rhetoric and ecstasy which are colloquial and sublime in The Dream of Gerontius.

The metre in the poem is always appropriate to the thoughts expressed. The poem is an example of exquisite musical variety on a firm basis of unity. The music of the verse changes delicately with the themes, emotions and thoughts. It is a lofty work from a technical point of view, and a modern work for voices and orchestra. The delicacy of Newman's ears to sounds is shown by the changes of the verse-music which is made up of accent, pause and rhythm to fit the varying feelings of the work:

^υ - ^υ - ^υ - ^υ - ^υ - ^υ -
 Jesu Maria--I am near to death,
^υ - ^υ - ^υ - ^υ -
 And Thou art calling me. (1-2)

These two lines have the two-beat rhythm. The measure of the metre begins with the first accent.

The system of verse notation helps the metrical study of the poem. In the speeches of Gerontius we find the greatest metrical versatility. At times the speeches are in the form of dramatic monologues but the interaction of Gerontius with the Angel is in dialogue. Though the basic form of his speeches is blank verse, in the moments of deepest intensity the verse form adapts. The second form of primary rhythm based on three beats in the measure is effectively used. This is found in the song of the demons:

^υ - ^υ - ^υ -
 Low-born clouds
^υ - ^υ - ^υ -
 Of brute earth,
^υ - ^υ - ^υ -
 They aspire (401-403)

The contrasting chants of the demons are meant to produce the effect of taunts, with two-foot lines based on three beat rhythms, intended to produce drama both on paper and for the ear. The interior, non-visual drama of the poem is compensated by a firm reliance on the words and the differing sound effects

and rhythms of the verse forms.

The poem is a series of lyrics, and each lyric voices its own feelings and is sensitively tuned to that feeling. Thus the poem reveals Newman not only as a poet but as a musician, examples of whose love of music abound in the poem. The songs of the Angelicals though severe in their classic restraint, are realistically fervent and could be compared to any of the choral odes in Sophocles. The iambics and the grave lyrics of the poem, especially the one by Gerontius after his Beatific Vision, and the last lyric by the Guardian Angel have the peculiar and serious harmony of sounds which can be found in Newman's best speeches and lyrics. In his own words:

The sound is like the rushing of the wind--
The summer wind--among the lofty pines;
Swelling and dying, echoing round about,
Now here, now distant, wild and beautiful;
While, scatter'd from the branches it has stirr'd
Descend ecstatic odours. (664-669)

Newman handles the various techniques with skill and consistency and with an appeal to the emotions and to the ear. Its power is akin to that of music and it reaches completion when set to music, as Elgar did through his oratorio of the poem. As the poem depends on hearing, Newman himself proposed to Sir Edward Elgar that it could easily be set to music. Inspired by this poem Elgar put it into music and described his oratorio as a work into which he had put his whole soul. His oratorio won great acclaim and still provides satisfaction and aesthetic enjoyment to the audience by its amalgamation of aesthetic and religious emotions. It is also performed as a dramatic poem set to music by Fernand Laloux in 1951.

His autobiography Apologia ends with only a scanty reference to his inevitable death, but nine months later he wrote this poem which vividly describes a death and afterlife

that could easily be thought to be his own, even though he lives another twenty five years. Newman continues the significant home imagery of the Apologia in the poem. He wrote in the Apologia of his leaving his position at Oxford and the Church of England for a new home, the Catholic Church. In the poem Gerontius leaves his earthly home to reach his final Home. After the soul's departure from the body, the Angel speaks: "I come, / Taking it home" (238-239), and the last words of the Angel of the Agony are: "and bid them come home to Thee, / To that glorious Home" (835-836). The poem is more than the dream of a dying Christian. It is Newman the pilgrim's triumphant vindication of his entire spiritual life. His firm belief that the Catholic way of life will lead the obedient soul through the temptations and trials of this earthly pilgrimage to a glorious resurrection in Heaven is given beautiful expression in The Dream of Gerontius. This poem alone would ensure his place among the rank of great poets.

In depth of spiritual insight and emotion Newman's poem equals that of Dante. Among these poems which depict life after death, The Dream of Gerontius can be placed on an equal rank with the Dies Irae, and Michaelangelo's Last Judgement in ecstasy of imagination, and akin to Goethe's Faust in spirit and substance. According to Maurice Francis Egan a comparative study of The Dream of Gerontius with the Purgatorio of Dante, Book III, Milton's Paradise Lost, D.G. Rossetti's The Blessed Damozel, and Tennyson's In Memoriam, would show that Newman's poem excels in solemn purity, terseness, beauty of expression and musical cadences. 37

In Milton's poem of heaven and hell, man is not beyond this world. In Dante's poem, he is everywhere throughout Inferno, Purgatorio, Paradiso, in relation to his life and works. In Newman's poem nothing of this world is seen other than the saving of soul. The Soul is seen before the Creator and Judge.

In no other poem beyond the veil, is man so prominent. The Dream of Gerontius takes place where the Soul is, where human beings love and suffer but without the solid frame of things, and alone the Soul utters its beliefs. The outward world is removed like a veil hiding us from God. That vision of the Unseen is the life of a Christian and a pilgrim. Such a Beatific Vision is the end of the quest and the crowning glory of the pilgrimage.

Even the great fathers of poetry who have written of death have avoided the supernatural mystery of death. Thus the ghost of Agamemnon in the Odyssey and the spirit of Hamlet's father tell us each the occasion and consequence of his death, but are silent about what dying itself felt like. The departed soul of Faust also remains silent as good Angels and evil spirits contend for its possession.

Newman puts the poem into dramatic form and it bears resemblance to a Greek tragedy in form, for example to Prometheus Bound of Aeschylus. In both of these poems the protagonists are of great importance and stand in a definite relation to the Eternal. In the case of Newman, the character exudes peace and acceptance, while Aeschylus has a figure of revolt. In both these dramas the characters are limited, there are constant changes in the metre to suit the changes of mood and lack of action. To Aeschylus the lofty tragedian and to Newman the Catholic pilgrim, what they write are not mere fictions but the Ultimate Truth which transcends nature ever mingling with it. What they write belongs more to liturgy than to literature. Newman strips away the physical and takes man's soul as his stage. The characters of his drama live within it and throb to the vibrations of the Eternal as did the pilgrim poet himself during his life long quest for the Beatific Vision.

The Dream of Gerontius was applauded as a great poetic achievement. Here the pilgrim and the poet are in the most

creative unison. The warmth of Newman's death notices reflected the evident popularity of the poem which came out in twenty nine separate editions by 1894. It could be compared in popularity with In Memoriam. Aubre de Vere described the poem as: "one of the noblest in the language."³⁸ Even Newman's well known antagonist Charles Kingsley could not but be impressed: "I read the Dream with awe and admiration."³⁹ Gladstone derived comfort from the poem on his deathbed, having written of it in 1868 that it is "the most remarkable production. . . since the unapproachable Paradise of Dante."⁴⁰

The popularity of the poem was well established in the Victorian era. Periodicals referred to it as 'a noble drama' remarkable for its unique sincerity. Swinburne admired it for its force, its fervour and its terse energy. An article in The New England Magazine after Newman's death in 1890, spoke of it as the greatest poem in the language.⁴¹ The Harvard Monthly spoke of The Dream of Gerontius as Newman's supreme effort in poetry and considered it one of the noteworthy poems of the century and a work of the highest poetic imagination; its scope is tremendous: "a drama with immortality for its subject, saints and angels for its persons, and infinity for its scene. . . ."⁴² Sir Francis Doyle found that Newman wrote like a prophet, and felt that the poem gives us a sense of "that painful wrestling with the powers of the universe" and of "intercommunication with something higher and deeper than man."⁴³ C. F. Harrold stated that it was the culmination and summary of Newman's poetic achievement, the fruit and experience of almost a lifetime. He considered this the poem which finally gave Newman major stature in the Victorian mind.⁴⁴ R. H. Hutton referred to it as one of the most unique and original poems of the nineteenth century.⁴⁵ The poem was widely praised even by those not in sympathy with Newman and

even by those who were far removed from Newman in his aesthetics.

Between 1885 and 1905, 75,000 copies of the poem were sold and it was also included in Newman's anthology Verses on Various Occasions, which extended to seven editions by 1890. In Newman's lifetime itself it was translated into French in 1869 and into German in 1885. In England its fame grew with Elgar's oratorio in 1900 and continued to earn popularity during the first decade of this century. That most popular Victorian work, Tennyson's In Memoriam reached only nineteen separate editions in twenty seven years while Newman's poem was already in its twenty third edition in 1888, twenty two years after its first appearance in book form. Although taste in poetry has undergone considerable change, the fact remains that The Dream of Gerontius is an unusual poem and its message conveyed artistically, is an example of Newman's poetry at its best.

By the late twentieth century The Dream of Gerontius comes to mean Elgar not Newman and scant attention is paid to the range and power of its poetry. In the zenith of his poetic writing Newman's success rested on the fusion of the devotional and the doctrinal into an extensive artistic unity. It is ironic then that it is in the hymns of "Praise to the Holiest"⁴⁶ and "Firmly I believe and truly"⁴⁷ that his work is most widely remembered. The literary achievement of the poem was felt largely in the nineteenth century. Some of the reasons for the loss of interest in the poem may be found in the rejection of Victorian verse forms, changing religious attitudes and preference for a remote approach to one's own death. Today there is a tendency to consider a poem to be distorted by a message. Just as the Victorians perceived only half of the poem which is its message, so the modern reader and critic seem to perceive only the other half of it which has the intense

lyrical expression. But it was Newman's belief that both halves are needed to make a perfect artistic whole. Unfortunately, it is rarely read now-a-days and is frequently undervalued.

Notes

- 1 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 6-7.
- 2 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 22-24.
- 3 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 30-31.
- 4 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 33-34.
- 5 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 34-37.
- 6 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 42-43.
- 7 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 179-180.
- 8 Qtd. in Edward E. Kelly, Sermon Preached at the Catholic Chaplaincy of the University of Birmingham in honour of Cardinal Newman (15 June 1975) 1-6.
- 9 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 182-183.
- 10 Bible, Genesis 2:10.
- 11 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 70-71.
- 12 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 198-199.
- 13 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 199-200.
- 14 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 206-207.
- 15 John Henry Newman, "The Lapse of Time," Parochial and Plain Sermons. Vol.7. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987) 1409-1415.
- 16 John Henry Newman, "The Greatness and Littleness of Human Life," Parochial and Plain Sermons. Vol. 4. 861-868.
- 17 Anne Mozley, ed. Letters And Correspondence Vol. 1. 161.
- 18 Anne Mozley, ed. Letters And Correspondence. Vol. 1. 213.
- 19 John Henry Newman, "The Invisible World," Parochial and Plain Sermons. Vol.4. 852-860.
- 20 John Henry Newman, Parochial and Plain Sermons. Vol.4. 857-858.
- 21 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 209.
- 22 John Henry Newman, "The Greatness and Littleness of Human Life," Parochial and Plain Sermons. Vol. 4. 861-868.

- 23 John Mason Neale, trans. Medieval Hymns and Sequences : a translation of Latin Hymns (1854).
- 24 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 211-241.
- 25 Bible, Luke 12:35.
- 26 John Henry Newman, An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent, Nicholas Lash, intro. (London, 1979) 15-93.
- 27 Dom Gasper Lefebure, "Liturgy of the Dead," The Saint Andrew Daily Missal (Belgium: Abbey of St. Andrew, 1959) 1582-1584.
- 28 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 198-199.
- 29 Prayers for Ash Wednesday.
- 30 John Henry Newman, Essay Critical and Historical Vol.1. 7.
- 31 Bible, 1 Corinthians 13:12.
- 32 Newman uses this word 'apprehensive' in a non-traditional sense, related to 'understanding' rather than to 'worry.'
- 33 Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 152.
- 34 John Henry Cardinal Newman, Verses 3-4.
- 35 Richard H. Hutton, Cardinal Newman (London: Richard Clay and Sons Ltd, 1890) 248.
- 36 Saint Catherine of Genoa, Treatise on Purgatory, trans. Charlotte Balfour and Helen Douglas Irwine (London, 1946).
- 37 Maurice Francis Egan, intro. and notes Dream of Gerontius (London: Longmans, 1906) 1-8.
- 38 Aubrey de Vere to JHN, ALS (Autographs, Letters and Sources) Birmingham Oratory, VC 75, 6 March 1868. 23.
- 39 Charles Kingsley to William Cope, ALS Birmingham Oratory, VC 75, 2 January 1868. 14.
- 40 Ian Ker and Thomas Gornall, ed. Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman (Oxford: 1978) 24. 7.
- 41 John F. Genung, "John Henry Newman as a writer,"

New England Magazine Vol. 3. Oct. 1890. 202.

⁴² Robert Morse Lovett, "Cardinal Newman's Poetry,"
Harvard Monthly 9 Feb. 1891. 197-200.

⁴³ Sir Francis Doyle, "Lecture 3," Lecture Delivered
Before the University of Oxford 1868 (London: Macmillan,
1869) 91-124.

⁴⁴ Charles F. Harrold, Newman (New York: Longmans, 1945) 272.

⁴⁵ R. H. Hutton, Cardinal Newman, 2nd ed. (London:
Methuen, 1891) 244.

⁴⁶ Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 234-236.

⁴⁷ Elisabeth Ann Noel. Diss. 213.