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CLASSIFICATION OF THE  
MAJOR BLANK VERSE POEMS OF THE  
EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

by

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A THESIS

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To

Sister Mary Helen

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## INTRODUCTION

Twelve major blank verse poems of the eighteenth century have been selected for this study as representative of a school of poetry which has been difficult to name. What is remarkable and confounding is that such a school has been named often, differently, and never erroneously. When the philosophical, the moral, the religious, the reflective, the descriptive, and the didactic take principal parts in a poem, it is truly difficult to find an all-encompassing adjective which might serve to classify that poem; therefore, one critic might call a poem "philosophical" and another might call the same poem "reflective," both equally correct and equally unsatisfying names. Thus it has been with the poems under consideration, often classified and so in need of more accurate classification. In the words of R. D. Havens, "This has never been attempted..."

Description and didacticism are of major import in The Seasons, Cyder, The Chase, Night Thoughts, The Grave, The Art of Preserving Health, The Pleasures of Imagination, The Fleece, The English Garden, and The Task. The other two poems, The Enthusiast, or Lover of Nature and The Pleasures of Melancholy, are composed of slightly different components and have a slightly different story. The attempt in this thesis has been primarily to adjust the opinions of the principal critics who have "classified" these poems and to find the appropriate "name" for them.

I have chosen "twelve" poems because that is a plausible

number from which generalizations may be drawn; I have chosen the twelve aforementioned poems because they were the most popular, hence the most representative, blank verse poems of the century. That they are "blank verse" poems is interesting in its own right; the "why," it is hoped, will be answered in the first section of the thesis.

It will be observed that the problem of classification, the highlighted study of this thesis, has been reserved for the last section; the reason is that much information must be obtained in order that the decisive classification can be grounded in documented fact. This information, which amounts to the story of two literary genres, the didactic and the descriptive, has taken up three sections, important sections, in my opinion, of the complete study. I have tried to evaluate the major treatises on these two species of poetry with more thoroughness than the usual summary of the main contents; in fact, there has been an effort to make the evaluations somewhat comparative--in this respect, the treatises gain significance when it is realized that they were themselves attempts to classify the very poems, in most cases, to be dealt with here.

## I

A Critical Examination  
of the Use of Non-Dramatic Blank Verse in Certain  
Didactic and Descriptive Poems

The ushering of blank verse versification, "a style new to all and disgusting to many," into the poetry of the eighteenth century and the protection offered it by certain poets, subjects of intrinsic importance, will introduce the more prominent aspect of this thesis: the classification of the major blank verse poems of the century drawn from the remarks of the critics, often the poets themselves.

This century of neo-classic triumph, furbished by the works of Pope, Swift, and Johnson, and, paradoxically, containing within it the embryo of a Romanticism which produced a Blake, is rich with story. In the literary stuff of it are James Thomson and his followers, who lighted and warmed an age grown "classically cold." With them came "Nature! great parent!" usually treated descriptively and preceptively, and enveloped most often in "that stately and varied march of rhythm in which our language peculiarly finds itself at ease."

An age of beginnings is an age of debate. And blank verse had to fight to figure in the literature, opposed to the antagonist, rhyme. The controversy was one of major significance. There were two factions, "the one stressing freedom, breadth, and imaginative suggestiveness as the essentials of poetry, the other emphasizing finish, elegance, and intellectual keenness."<sup>1</sup>

This treatise deals with the poets who chose the freer

style of versification; therefore, the reader may justifiably ask "why" Thomson and "why" Young and "why" Cowper employed blank verse. But that aspect must be reserved for later consideration when these poets and their poetry are treated individually.

Judging from the number of editions published of the major blank verse poems, the conclusion may be drawn that these were the poems most widely and enthusiastically read in the century. Havens points out that The Seasons was probably the most popular poem; and The Grave (1743), which reached a sixteenth edition in 1786, was reprinted, alone or in collections at least twenty-nine times more by 1825. Somerville's Chase (1735) underwent twelve editions by 1800. The numbers of editions of Young's Night Thoughts, Akenside's Pleasures of Imagination, and the blank verse poems of the Wartons, Dyer, Armstrong, Philips, and Cowper support this claim.

In the age of the heroic couplet, Oliver Goldsmith (?) defined the unrhymed iambic pentameter form thus: "the sort of verse which has no rhyme is called blank verse."<sup>2</sup> Those who wrote poetry in couplets rallied those who wrote in blank verse, either because of their slovenly imitations of Paradise Lost or of their intimated inability to rhyme. Literary jealousy, the usual protection given to the traditional, and prejudice kept rhyme on its pedestal. With such backing in the heroic couplet afforded by Dryden and Pope, even Miltonic influence in versification was slow in finding acceptance and recognition. But the fact became obvious

that rhyme was suited to some types of poetry and blank verse to others. "In English Poetry," wrote Armstrong, "I question whether it is possible, with any Success, to write Odes, Epistles, Elegies, Pastorals or Satires, without Rhime."<sup>3</sup> In the preface to Judah Restored, W. H. Roberts, in accordance, wished to banish rhyme from epic, dramatic, and didactic poetry.

"By universal accord, blank verse soon came to be the recognized medium for religious works, and notwithstanding the vogue of Pope's Homer, for translations of the classics. It was also much used in meditative and philosophical poetry and, owing to the popularity of The Seasons, it became the usual vehicle for long descriptions of nature."<sup>4</sup>

Hugh Blair agreed with "those who think that Rhyme finds its popular place in the middle, but not in the higher regions of poetry."<sup>5</sup> Thus we note blank verse seeking refuge in the descriptive and didactic genres of poetry.

Charles Dunster, in his notes to Philips's Cyder, prefixed a short history of blank verse prosody which will serve well here:

"Modern blank verse had its origin in the School of Italian Poetry.--In the year 1528, Trissino published his Italia Liberata di Goti, without rhyme.--Not a long time after this, the celebrated Earl of Surrey gave the first specimen of English blank verse, in a translation of the second and fourth books of the Aeneid.--The Dramatic Poets soon began to lay aside rhyme: the first example of which, and indeed the first regular tragedy, was the Earl of Buckhurst's Gorbuduc; in which, as well as in Surrey's translation from Vergil, there are many lines which Milton would not have disdained to own. Blank verse, however, made but little progress, except among the Dramatic writers; and does not appear to have been adopted for any original composition of consequence. Milton is therefore justified in saying (in the account of the verse of his Paradise Lost,



prefixed to that Poem) that he had 'set the first example, in English, of antient Liberty restored to Heroic Poem from the troublesome and modern bondage of rhyme.'"6

A strain of dramatic blank verse followed Shakespeare through Dryden, who in the Prologue to Aureng-Zebe grew "weary of his long-loved mistress Rhyme," and was popularized further by Jonson, Lee, Otway, and others. Though dramatic blank verse cannot be discussed here at any length, it does serve to prove that the drama kept it alive when the other genres of poetry kept it suppressed.

That "blank verse" and "Miltonic verse" were nearly always synonymous in poetry other than dramatic poetry is one of the curious facts about the prosody of the eighteenth century. In the words of Mr. Havens:

"If a writer grew tired of the couplet or desired a freer measure, there was, accordingly, but one thing for him to do,--follow Paradise Lost. As a result, blank verse poems usually stood by themselves with their style, diction, and prosody little affected by those of either the drama or the couplet."

The fear of being prosaic, it seems, kept poets from exercising their genius in writing "everyday blank verse." But Robert Blair in his Grave seems to have rebelled against the imitation of Milton, just as Edward Young rebelled against studied imitation of any sort. However, both of these poets, and later Cowper, knew Milton's work and could not help being influenced somewhat by him.

It would be superfluous information to enumerate the tributes to Milton by the poets who succeeded him; the task would seem endless. But, let it suffice to say that Milton

was regarded, generally, as the first to bring blank verse back to English poetry. John Dennis, in the interval between Milton and Thomson, was the most prolific writer of blank verse, but to another poet of the century goes the credit for the popularization of Milton and Milton's versification. John Philips, "Pomona's bard," is that poet. He was the genius of Cyder, the imitator of Milton, and the poet whose emulation of Vergil succeeded in reminding the later poets that the georgic was a highly promising medium of poetic inspiration. The Splendid Shilling, a brilliant burlesque, but scholarly imitation of Milton, set the popular pattern for the more prominent imitations yet to come. In less than twenty years this short piece had been printed, either by itself or in miscellanies, as many as nine times.

Most important of Philips's imitations of Milton, however, is Cyder, a thorough-going georgic, written as early in the Augustan Age as 1706. Regarding the versification, Charles Dunster, whose notes embellish a 1791 edition, says:

"Whether Blank Verse is most happily adapted to a Didactic Poem on such a subject, may perhaps with justice be questioned; but, allowing the Poet in this point to please himself, the most material point to be considered will be, how far he has succeeded in this species of versification. And here, if we examine the general tenor of his verse through the whole of the poem, and especially those parts which he seems to have more particularly finished; such as the Destruction of Ariconium, the Praises of Herefordshire...we shall probably incline to think that he has not ill chosen his style of versification, and that he has eminently excelled in it."<sup>8</sup>

But there was Dr. Johnson who said of Philips, "He

imitated Milton's numbers injudiciously...whatever there is in Milton which the Reader wishes away--all that is obsolete, peculiar and licentious, Philips has accumulated with great care."<sup>9</sup> Dr. Johnson's criticisms are always interesting, but not always impartial, in spite of their wit.

Everything balanced, the importance of Philips's Cyder for the purposes of this thesis lies in the fact that it "set a model for the blank-verse descriptive-didactic poem."<sup>10</sup>

Between Paradise Lost and The Seasons only one hundred and fifty unrhymed poems found their way into English Literature according to the tabulation of Havens. The fortunes of blank verse were relatively unpromising. But the close of the first quarter of the century, in this connection, was not indicative of the opening of the second quarter, for a thin shilling folio of sixteen pages, called "Winter, A Poem, by James Thomson, A.M." appeared in the London bookshops in 1726. Its success, and the success of the succeeding editions, and additions, resulted in The Seasons, comprising "Spring," "Summer," "Autumn," and "Winter" in a poem of 5,541 lines which contained 405 lines at its birth.

But the formal matter about this "epoch-marking work" will be discussed elsewhere in this thesis; the important factor here is that Thomson wrote his poem in blank verse. Over a hundred unrhymed pieces appeared in the fifteen years that followed the completion of Thomson's poem and about seventy in the next five years. Thomson, however, is not responsible for all of the blank verse published

between 1731 and 1750, but he had some effect on most of it, and without his example many of the pieces that employed it, particularly the longer works, would never have been written.

Thomson has been studied in almost every light, one of the most interesting being his gleanings from the ethical philosopher, Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury. But there were parallels other than the philosophical, as pointed out by C. A. Moore in his article on "Shaftesbury and Ethical Poets in England." One of the most striking of these associations of Shaftesbury and Thomson lay in this matter of blank verse, and more specifically, of blank verse in the didactic genre. Of this, Moore remarks,

"Shaftesbury urges particularly the employment of blank verse and the conversion of all poetry into a medium for moral instruction. Thomson's conformity with these views and defense of his practice, set forth in the prose dedications and in the poetry itself, may be accidental...."<sup>11</sup>

Shaftesbury, in his "Advice to an Author," referring to "those reverend bards" (Shakespeare, Fletcher, Jonson, and Milton), said, "To their eternal honour they have withal been the first of Europeans, who, since the Gothic model of poetry, attempted to throw off the horrid discord of jingling rhyme."<sup>12</sup> And again, "we have...proofs of a right disposition in our people towards the moral and instructive way."<sup>13</sup> Speaking in praise of Shakespeare, he said, "that piece of his (Hamlet) which appears to have most affected English hearts...is almost one continued moral."<sup>14</sup>

I do not believe the question at hand necessitates the

weighing of the respective influences of Milton and Shaftesbury on Thomson as regards his choice of versification, but, nonetheless, it is a significant fact that Shaftesbury, whose influence was widespread, especially among the didactic and descriptive poets, propounded the use of blank verse. I find it doubly striking that Havens should have omitted Shaftesbury's opinion from his definitive work which considers the rhyme/blank-verse controversy in all its aspects.

In 1735 a poem which "Breathes all the huntsman's honesty of heart" was published under the title, The Chase. It was written by William Somervile, who found its subject well adapted to the most beautiful turns of poetry. In his preface to the poem, the author asserted:

"The gentlemen who are fond of a jingle at the close of every verse, and think no poem truly musical but what is in rhyme, will here find themselves disappointed. If they will be pleased to read over the short preface before Paradise Lost, Mr. Smith's poem in memory of his friend Mr. John Philips, and the Archbishop of Cambray's letter to Monsieur Fontenelle, they may, probably be of another opinion. For my own part, I shall not be ashamed to follow the example of Milton, Philips, and Thomson...."<sup>15</sup>

And before his own poem was written Somervile versed to Thomson these lines:

"The rhiming, jingling tribe, with bells and song,  
Who drive their jingling Pegasus along,  
Shall learn from thee in bolder flights to rise  
To scorn the beaten road, and range the skies."<sup>16</sup>

So another poet chose to link his theme with Vergil, who, in his third Georgic, treats the subject of hunting. In the train of Philips and Thomson, Somervile avowed his imitation of the Roman poet in the georgic genre. The

Monthly Review was not without a view on this marriage of the georgic and blank verse. The publication of Christopher Smart's Hop-Garden (1752) provoked this comment, "there is therefore a notorious error in the design of composing the Hop-Garden, or indeed of composing any Georgic at all, in our language, in blank verse."<sup>17</sup> By way of vindicating Thomson, it is necessary to point out that the critic wrote, "'Tis true, some few English pieces of this kind, and in this form, have succeeded; for what indeed is it that great genius and great application will not effect? but even these would have been better in rhyme."<sup>18</sup>

Technical treatises of this type continued to be written throughout the century, most of them rhymed, but probably the most popular, judging from the number of editions published, were those in blank verse meter, as previously noted. The extensive reading of The Chase is evident, three editions being published the first year and at least eight others before the close of the century, besides the six that had been issued by 1801 with Somerville's other poems.

Next in chronology for consideration here was the first "Night" of Edward Young's Night Thoughts published in 1742, expanded to nine nights, a blank verse poem which gained a popularity second only to The Seasons. Of the versification, Havens states, "even at this late time Young might not have relinquished his lifelong devotion to the couplet had it not been for the influence of the Scottish poet."<sup>19</sup> But there is no proof of Thomson's influence on Young in the use of the new measure.

There is, however, evidence that Young had done much thinking on the subject before he divorced the couplet for the unrhymed line. The results of this speculation have been recorded in his publication of 1759, Conjectures on Original Composition. In the preface to her edition of this work, Edith Morley, writes:

"His bold preference for blank verse, suggestive as it is, seems no more than what might have been expected, though it comes in the same year in which Goldsmith condemns that metre as a 'mark of Literary decay' (Enquiry, chapter XI), and long before Johnson ("Life of Milton") quotes with approval the dictum that 'blank verse seems to be verse only to the eye.'"<sup>20</sup>

Young's own remarks warrant the observation of his editor, for he said:

"Must rhyme then, say you, be banished? I wish the nature of our language could bear its entire expulsion; but our lesser poetry stands in need of a toleration for it; it raises that, but sinks the great; as spangles adorn children, but expose men."<sup>21</sup>

He also made reference to the "childish shackles and tinkling sounds"<sup>22</sup> in Pope's Homer. Blank verse, to Young, was "verse unfallen, uncursed; verse reclaimed, reenthroned in the true language of the gods: who never thundered, nor suffered their Homer to thunder, in rime."<sup>23</sup>

It is significant that Young in his quest for originality and in his antipathy for labored imitation, goes as far as any of the poets under inspection, except perhaps Blair and Cowper, from the poetic diction of Milton. There were those critics and poets who lamented this fact and used it as a basis for their adverse criticism. However, the everyday diction of Night Thoughts and that of another blank

verse poem, The Task, which came more than a generation later, gave popularity and permanence to the simpler style.

In their "Life of Young," the Rev. Sir Herbert Croft and Dr. Johnson agreed that "This is one poem in which blank verse could not be changed for rhyme but with disadvantage. The wild diffusion of the sentiments, and the digressive sallies of imagination would have been compressed and restrained by confinement to rhyme."<sup>24</sup>

In a "leisured and ruminative" blank verse style, Robert Blair in 1743 published The Grave, similar to Young's work only in theme. There is a uniqueness about Blair's blank verse which cannot escape the reader; it is less Miltonic than it is Shakespearean; it is adapted from the style of the drama rather than from the Thomsonian school. Robert Anderson said in his "Life of Blair" that Blair's versification resembles "sometimes the best manner of Shakespeare and Rowe, and sometimes that of Milton and Young; but without any marks of servile imitation."<sup>25</sup>

John Armstrong's Art of Preserving Health and Mark Akenside's Pleasures of Imagination, both published in 1744, are next in advancing this report on the unrhymed pieces. Armstrong's poem, said to have "passed through the strainer of the heroic couplet," was probably more than a little influenced by Thomson's poetry. His relationship with Thomson may be evidenced in the Castle of Indolence, Thomson's poem, which makes him the subject of one stanza and finds him the author of three.



In his Sketches, or Essays on Various Subjects, Armstrong records his preference for blank verse thus:

"Blank verse admits of a greater variety of pauses than rhyme, and is partly for that reason the fittest for works of any length. But in English poetry I question whether it is possible, with any success, to write odes, epistles, elegies, pastorals, or satires, without rhyme."<sup>26</sup>

The Art of Preserving Health, a popular "how-to-do-it" poem, was highly successful and went through eleven editions before 1800.

The Pleasures of Imagination, that poem of philosophical flight, is closely connected to The Seasons by various parallels: it includes the philosophy of Shaftesbury, a Latinized and grandiose diction, descriptions and moral precepts, and, of course, Thomson's form of versification. The Right Honorable Jeremiah Dyson, by whom the Advertisement to the First Edition of the poem was written, observes that "after all, the subject before us, tending almost constantly to admiration and enthusiasm, seemed rather to demand a more open, pathetic, and figured style (than the rhymed style)."<sup>27</sup>

As suggested by their enthusiasm for Milton, it might be expected of the Wartons that much of their poetry would be in blank verse prosody. But such was not the case. The father wrote only four short pieces of blank verse, and the sons produced but a few hundred lines of it. In 1744 appeared The Enthusiast, or Lover of Nature, "organized on a reflective outline,"<sup>28</sup> but prominent also as a descriptive poem, by Joseph Warton. The 210 lines of blank verse

show the evidence of Milton's diction. A poem closely associated in diction and also reflective and descriptive was The Pleasures of Melancholy by the brother, Thomas Warton, a 315-line poem published in 1747. In Mr. Chalmer's "Life of Warton," there is this curious remark,

"...he deserves to be classed among the revivers of genuine poetry, by preferring 'fiction and fancy, picturesque description and romantic imagery,' to 'wit and elegance, sentiment and satire, sparkling couplets, and pointed periods.'"<sup>29</sup>

John Dyer's The Fleece of 1757 provoked significant comment for and against blank verse employment in didactic poetry. Dr. Johnson, who "thought a poem had a claim to little mercy when clothed in this forbidding dress,"<sup>30</sup> offered in addition to his adverse criticism of the poem, "the disgust which blank verse, encumbering and encumbered, superadds to an unpleasing subject, soon repels the reader, however willing to be pleased."<sup>31</sup> But in his defense of The Fleece, Nathan Drake vindicated Dyer:

"The blank verse, however, of Dyer calls for decided approbation; its style of composition is rich and unbroken, and its tones, in general, sweet and varied. Much as I do enjoy the melody of Pope and Goldsmith, I am clearly convinced that in epic and didactic poetry, the more solemn, dignified and plastic strains of blank verse should ever be the poet's choice."<sup>32</sup>

Probably most convincing of all of the defenses of blank verse came with The English Garden (1772-82) in a Preface prefixed to the poem. It is by William Mason, who wrote the blank verse preceptive piece. With an air of finality, he claimed:

"...I did not hesitate as to my choice between blank verse and rhyme; because it clearly appeared, that numbers of the most varied kind were the most proper to illustrate a subject whose every charm springs from variety, and which, painting Nature as scorning control, should employ a versification for that end as unfettered as Nature itself. Art at the same time, in rural improvements, pervading the province of Nature, unseen, and unfelt, seemed to bear a striking analogy to that species of verse, the harmony of which results from measured quantity and varied cadence without the too studied arrangement of final syllables, or regular return of consonant sounds. I was, notwithstanding, well aware, that by choosing to write blank verse, I should not court popularity, because I perceived it was growing much out of vogue; but this reason, as may be supposed, did not weigh much with a writer, who meant to combat Fashion in the very theme he intended to write upon; and who was also convinced that a mode of English versification, in which so many good poems, with Paradise Lost at their head, have been worth any writer's while, who aimed at more than the reputation of the day, to endeavour to amuse the public."33

Nor did those blank verse poems which were "growing out of vogue...long continue unfashionable." For in 1785 The Task was presented to the public and was received very enthusiastically. Its author, William Cowper, found his descriptive subject matter comfortable in blank verse, and his distinctive diction, natural and conversational, indicated a farewell to the florid Thomsonian style. In a letter to Rev. John Newton, he wrote:

"Blank verse is susceptible of a much greater diversification of manner, than verse in rhyme; and why the modern writers of it have all thought proper to cast their numbers alike, I know not."34

His was the most significant break from the Miltonic diction of the earlier poets; this fact is more enlightening when it is remembered that no poet knew Milton or loved Milton so well.

Add to all of this the fact that a poem<sup>35</sup> in blank verse was written in praise of blank verse by W. H. Roberts, once Provost of Eton College, in 1773, and the picture becomes more colorful. In the poem the poet's progress of praise finds Milton first, followed by Thomson, Armstrong, Somerville, Akenside, and Mason. Such a piece reflects the serious attention still paid to the rhyme/blank-verse controversy at that late date.

The choice of blank verse for their non-dramatic didactic and descriptive poems had to be defended by these eighteenth-century poets. Only the remarks which appear at the surface of the wrangle have been documented above. The great support which Milton, and, in turn, Thomson, offered was their strongest argument for blank verse, but their defenses often contained more than the buttresses of Milton and Thomson, as has been shown. It is a fact, previously cited, that the poetic diction of Milton lost prominence first in Young, then in Blair, and, of course, in Cowper. But the use of blank verse increased in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries even if its eighteenth-century twin, sententious diction, was left unkindled. Wordsworth's Prelude stands as the conviction.

The Cambridge History of English Literature makes this recapitulation:

"The most formidable rival, however, of the heroic was blank verse. The practice of this inevitably arose from, and, in most instances continued to be the imitations of, Milton, which, sparce and scanty for the first generation after his death, grew more

abundant as the eighteenth century itself went on and, in the Seasons, almost ceased to be mere imitation. Fine, however, as Thomson's blank verse is, and sometimes almost original, it suffered not a little, while all the blank verse of the century before Cowper's latest suffered more...."36

The major poems which were pointed out and those which were like them in prosody, diction, and genre were generally long poems which treated Nature in its various aspects. For those who make cases for Romantic trends in literature, there is much food here. Many of the early nineteenth-century poets, in all of their abandon of classicism, disliked restriction from anything, let alone the confinement to the couplet. It may safely be deduced that the increasing popularity of blank verse, from 1706 throughout the century, was indicative of that freer movement of thought and expression which has been termed Romanticism.

## II

An Evaluation  
of the Principal Treatises  
on Didactic Poetry

Having shown that many of the blank verse poems of the eighteenth century treated didactic subject matter, it now becomes necessary for the purposes of this thesis to speak about the treatises which deal with didacticism in this literature.

Almost all of the eighteenth-century poets wrote with the Horatian principle, "to delight and instruct," foremost in mind. Probably no other age of poets has offered such a varied lot of preceptive literature; probably no other age of people enjoyed reading it so much.

The earliest appraisal of the didactic poetry as a genre came with Addison's anonymously-contributed "Essay on the Georgics" to John Dryden's translation of Vergil's Georgics, published in 1697. Considering the influence of this essay on the poets who wrote according to its teaching, it is certainly one of Addison's major additions to literature.

The georgic is defined as "some part of the science of husbandry put into a pleasing dress, and set off with all the beauties and embellishments of poetry."<sup>1</sup> Before the eighteenth century this type of poetry had seldom been treated in English. The publication of Cyder in 1706 began a new chapter in the history of didactic poetry which dealt with country occupations, a chapter relatively short in the history of literature, but full of new material.

In 1711 two lectures were delivered at Oxford on the subject, "De poemate didactico"<sup>2</sup> and "De poesi didactica,"<sup>3</sup> by Joseph Trapp and Thomas Tickell, respectively. Both of these published pieces professedly stemmed from Addison's Essay and are interesting in that they, too, are attempts to give prestige to the didactic form. Tickell's treatise, translated by J. L. Austin (1930), is curiously different from the other dissertations on didactic poetry in that it pronounces the origin of this genre in the worship of God and the training of Morals. Trapp's interest in the scientific analysis of the phenomena of nature was a major topic of his didactic treatise and, undoubtedly, had its influence on Thomson.

Joseph Warton published his Reflections on Didactic Poetry with his translation of Vergil's Eclogues and Georgics in 1753. Addison is again echoed, but Warton has done more than Addison with regard to the historical sketch of didactic poetry; he has traced it from Hesiod chronologically through to Akenside, whereas Addison, limited to the georgic, merely treated the works of Hesiod and Vergil.

A later critic, Hugh Blair, gave further critical prestige to the genre in his Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres, given in 1760 and published in 1783. His treatment of the subject is more generalized than Addison's or Warton's, though he includes all of their major observations. He speaks of satires and epistles as forms of didactic poetry and praises Pope highly for his Essay on Man.

Goldsmith (?), in the Newbery Art of Poetry on a New Plan of 1762, offers no more than Addison, Tickell, Trapp, or Warton in his observations on this poetry genre. He avows his debt to these writers, and is chiefly interested in illustrating their principles by pointing out certain passages in the appropriate poems.

In all of these treatises may be found some discussion of the subject, method, and style of the didactic poem. From them can be formed a system of rules first poetically compiled by Vergil in his Georgics, but never recorded until Addison discovered them and included them in his Essay.

### 1. THE SUBJECT

Addison, speaking of the georgic, merely admonished the poet to use his "skill in singling out such precepts...as are useful."<sup>4</sup> He pointed out that the rules of practice of husbandry must be always kept prominent, even in the digressions, since the fundamental function of the poem is to make those rules known to those who will know them.

Warton more completely determined what the subject must be:

"As material objects are the most susceptible of poetical ornaments, so perhaps, the various employments, businesses, and amusements of life, together with the elegant arts and sciences, are more proper subjects for didactic poetry, than such as are purely speculative and metaphysical. All parts of natural philosophy in particular as being conversant about sensible images, seem the best calculated to shine in this way of writing."<sup>5</sup>

This statement is more satisfying than that offered by Addison and, of course, concerns all didactic verse. It is



important, too, that Warton stressed universality as the major attribute of the subject matter to be chosen. After the subject of the poem has been decided upon, only rules pertaining to it should be put forward.

Blair brought out a distinction between a subject regularly or irregularly treated. He does restrict the poet to "an instructive subject," but allows him to leave the traditional Vergilian didactic form if he wishes only to inveigh against particular vices, or make moral observations on human life and characters. He saw the need of Pope, for example, for a medium of poetry whereby he might criticize; he regarded the satire and the epistle as legitimate devices of the didactic poet.

The author of the Art of Poetry on a New Plan added that any subject may be chosen, provided that the precepts laid down are the most useful to it.

From these opinions concerning the first consideration of the poet, the subject, we may observe the variety of themes chosen by our major blank verse didactic poets. Phillips chose cider as the subject of his work. The selection of a site for the orchard, orchard pests, kinds of fruit, the building of the mill, uses of pulp, proper mixtures, and the aging of cider in wood and in glass, treated in the Vergilian manner, are the substance of his lines.

Thomson chose the Seasons, a descriptive subject, but used the employments of the farmer incidentally as part of the pageant. The glorification of labor and the life of

the husbandmen through their associations with patriotism, morality, religion, and the beauties of nature are the essential motifs of The Seasons as transmitted by the Georgics. But the philosophy and popular tastes of the time are also in Thomson; physico-theology and science are the subjects of many parts. Thomson, the leader in this new scheme of Nature poetry, is "the English Vergil."

William Somervile wrote of the chase in his Vergilian georgic of that name. He begins with the origin of hunting, traces the development of the sport, gives the rules for the training, care, and selection of hounds, and describes the chase of the hare, fox, stag, and otter. Here, as in Cyder, we find the georgic limited to one specific subject or "country occupation."

In another didactic poem, The Art of Preserving Health, by Dr. Armstrong, we are confronted with a variation on the georgic theme. This is an example of the "how-to-do-it" Vergilian, or Thomsonian, poem. The poem is divided into four books, treating the manner in which health is promoted or impaired by Air, Diet, Exercise, and the Passions.

In The Fleece of John Dyer the purpose has been to connect the subject with the glory of Britain. The author exalts the fleece and trade in general; his outline is chronological. The reader is led from the choice of pastures for flocks, through the care of the sheep, their shearing, the uses of wool and the making of cloth, to the exporting of British fabrics and to an account of their conquests on the Mediter-

ranee, in Russia, the Indies, Africa, the Orient, and the Americas. The chief debt to Vergil is in the first two books, but the influence of Thomson, amplifying Vergil, is also prominent throughout the poem.

The English Garden by William Mason must be considered as another georgic type. Taking the hint from Vergil's third Georgic, Mason uses the "garden" as his subject and describes it in the new "picturesque" manner. The formal style of gardening is rejected and the new irregular landscaping is praised.

Of the poems selected for this study, those named above are indisputably regarded as georgics. They are all alike in the fact that they are Vergilian, and, except for Philips, Thomsonian, as pointed out by Dwight Durling. That they are all Miltonic, regarding style and diction, has been the observation of R. D. Havens, already pointed out.

## 2. THE METHOD

The treatises have also given a prescription of treatment for the poems of the didactic muse. The three most important tenets stressed are: the indirect transmission of instruction, digressions, and natural transitions. Addison studied Vergil's Georgics most carefully and in his Essay recorded the secrets of the Vergilian method; his results must have been remarkably accurate, for Warton, Blair, and the author of The Art of Poetry on a New Plan have little to add to them in the matter of method.

## (a) Indirect Instruction

Addison remarked:

"There are several ways of conveying the same truth to the mind of man; and to choose the pleasantest of these ways is that which chiefly distinguishes poetry from prose, and makes Vergil's rules of husbandry pleasanter to read than Varro's. Where the prose writer tells us plainly what ought to be done, the poet often conceals the precept in the description, and represents his countryman performing the action in which he would instruct his reader. Where the one sets out as fully and distinctly as he can, all the parts of the truth which he would communicate to us, the other singles out the most pleasing circumstance of this truth, and so conveys the whole in a more diverting manner to the understanding."<sup>6</sup>

Warton wrote:

"Professed teaching is highly disagreeable to the natural pride of man, as it implies a superiority of understanding over the person instructed. So that precepts may gain an easy admission into the heart, it is necessary to deliver them in a concealed indirect manner, divested of all pretensions to a larger share of reason, and of all dogmatical stiffness." Another device was to "describe things by their effects; and speak of them as already done, instead of regularly ordering the manner in which they should be done."<sup>7</sup>

Blair observed:

"The ultimate end of all poetry, indeed of every composition, should be to make some useful impression on the mind. This useful impression is most commonly made in poetry by indirect methods."<sup>8</sup>

Goldsmith (?) added:

"Knowledge that is conveyed thus indirectly, and without the appearance of a dictator, will be learned with more ease, sink deeper into the understanding, and so fix itself in the mind as not to be easily obliterated."<sup>9</sup>

And Pope's couplet must not be forgotten:

"Men must be taught as if you taught them not,  
And things unknown propos'd as things forgot."<sup>10</sup>

It would be as superfluous here to cite passages in the poems which thus "indirectly instruct" as it would be tiring. Hesiod's Works and Days, Addison complained, was method "too grave and simple...and makes the whole look but like a modern almanac in verse."<sup>11</sup> The appraisals of such poems as Dodsley's Agriculture (1753) suffered the same criticism. How then should the poet transmit "a precept, that enters, as it were, through a by-way?"<sup>12</sup> The answer lies in description as aforementioned in the quotation by Addison. But there have been treatises written on the eighteenth-century descriptive poetry which have been evaluated in the chapter following and which arose from the medium of description in didactic poetry, the digression.

#### (b) The Digression

Addison:

"But, since the inculcating precept upon precept will at length prove tiresome to the reader, if he meets with no entertainment,--the poet must take care not to encumber his poem with too much business, but sometimes to relieve the subject with a moral reflection, or let it rest a while for the sake of an interesting digression."<sup>13</sup>

In that flight, Addison said, "we should never quite lose sight of the country, though we are sometimes entertained with a distant prospect of it."<sup>14</sup>

Warton:

"The reader will soon be disgusted with a continued series of instruction, if his mind be not relieved at proper intervals by pleasing digressions of various kinds...."<sup>15</sup>

It is a curious fact that Warton should remark, "Of all the various kinds of digressions, those of a pathetic nature, if they can be introduced with propriety will have the best effect. A stroke of passion is worth a hundred of the most lively and glowing descriptions."<sup>16</sup> We immediately recall the sentimental episodes in The Seasons. Warton recognized the importance of introducing people in the digressions (an idea taken from the presence of persons in landscape paintings) to successfully put forth the affecting pathetic.

Blair:

"The poet must instruct; but he must study, at the same time, to enliven his instructions, by the introduction of such figures, and such circumstances, as may amuse the imagination, may conceal the dryness of the subject, and embellish it with poetical painting."<sup>17</sup>

Art of Poetry on a New Plan:

"The mind will require some recreation and refreshment by the way; which is to be procured by seasonable moral reflections, pertinent remarks, familiar similes and descriptions naturally introduced, by allusions to ancient histories and fables, and by short and pleasant digressions and excursions into more noble subjects, so aptly brought in that they may seem to have a remote relation and be a piece with the poem."<sup>18</sup>

And, "In these digressions and episodes it is also of the utmost consequence to introduce the pathetic, and agitate the affections."<sup>19</sup>

Blair pointed out that the digressions are always the parts of the work which are best known and which contribute most to support the reputation of the poet. Judging by the usual eighteenth-century anthology selections from the didactic poems under consideration, the fact is enforced. The story

of the artful digressions or episodes follows in tradition through the Vergilian didactic imitations. Of course, Thomson leads the list in his moral, religious, panegyric, exotic, and narrative episodes. How these excursions from the preceptive plan of the poem are naturally introduced and naturally return to the main subject has also been expounded in the essays.

### (c) Transitions

Addison cautioned poets:

"Nor is it sufficient to run out into beautiful and diverting digressions, unless they are brought in aptly, and are something of a piece with the main design...for they ought to have a remote alliance at least to the subject, that so the whole poem may be more uniform and agreeable in all its parts."<sup>20</sup>

Vergil is praised for his treatment of transitions, except where in the First Book he launches out into a discourse of the battle of Pharsalia. When we consider how far from their subjects Thomson and his followers have taken us, we wonder how artfully they introduced their episodes without severely upsetting the pattern of poetry.

In his Reflections, Joseph Warton expounded Addison's principle that the various kinds of digressions "naturally arise from the main subject, and be closely connected with it."<sup>21</sup> Blair agreed, and the Art of Poetry on a New Plan also promoted the rule that these departures from the subject "should follow each other in a natural and easy method, and be delivered in the most agreeable engaging manner."<sup>22</sup>

This "manner" will be considered under the head of

### 3. STYLE

From centuries of literature, the heritage of the eighteenth-century writers had been a choice of the simple or the sententious style. Traced to Greek antiquity, the debate had once been between the Attic and the Asiatic school; from the Roman past the controversy was renewed by the Anti-Ciceronian and the Ciceronian schools. On the side of the Attics and Anti-Ciceronians were the proponents of the new scientific, journalistic, lucid style. Opposed were those writers who thought the language of literature must cling to the Ciceronian dictum of dignity and rhetorical beauty. The differences of stylistic procedure reflected in poetry as well as in prose, and having Milton's florid works in their immediate past, it is no wonder that Philips and Thomson should have sided with the highly rhetorical style. But there were other directions for diction other than those by Milton. Along with the advice of Addison on the subject and method of the didactic poems came his recommendations with respect to style. With Vergil, who "breaks the clods, and tosses the dung about with an air of gracefulness,"<sup>23</sup> dictating, Addison instructed the poet that "he ought, in particular, to be careful of not letting his subject debase his style, and betray him into a meanness of expression, but everywhere to keep up his verse in all the pomp of numbers and dignity of words."<sup>24</sup>

Warton further pointed out that the poem with a simple didactic theme,

"...ought certainly to abound in the most bold and forcible metaphors, the most glowing and picturesque



epithets; it ought to be elevated and enlivened by pomp of numbers, and majesty of words, and by every figure that can lift a language above the vulgar and current expressions."<sup>25</sup>

It should be mentioned that Warton emphasized this matter more than did the other writers; he drew the distinction between the style of the type of poetry under consideration and dramatic writing. He cited Aristotle who said that diction ought most be laboured in the unactive, that is, the descriptive parts of the poem, in which opinions, manners, and passions of men are not represented. Aristotle was, of course, speaking of the diction of the drama which must necessarily closely approximate the actual everyday speech of people.

Blair, in concurrence, added that the poet might embellish his theme and digressions with "poetical painting." Goldsmith (?), too, realized that the peculiar gracefulness of the poet would render his preceptive poetry sprightly and entertaining, which might otherwise be dull and disagreeable.

Neither Tickell's nor Trapp's treatises advance any pointed rules for subject, method, or style de poesi didactica, since they were more interested in classifying didactic poetry.

Having thus appraised the contributions of Addison, Tickell, Trapp, Warton, Blair, and Goldsmith (?), in their similarities, it now remains to indicate the adjunct information of their essays.

The Essay on the Georgics includes a comparison of Works and Days and The Georgics, in which Addison is somewhat harsh with Hesiod. Warton reprehends him for this,

pointing out that Hesiod is, after all, the "venerable father of didactic poetry."<sup>26</sup> But Hesiod suffered under Addison only because of Addison's admiration for Vergil. He said of Vergil that he,

"...has so raised the natural rudeness and simplicity of his subject with such a significancy of expression, such a pomp of verse, such variety of transitions, and such a solemn air in his reflections, that if we look on both poets together, we see in one the plainness of a downright countryman, and, in the other, something of a rustic majesty, like that of a Roman dictator at the plough tail."<sup>27</sup>

A consideration of The Georgics separately ended Addison's essay which was, in a manner, continued by a historical sketch of the didactic poets in Warton's Reflections. He estimated critically Hesiod, Aratus, Oppian, Lucretius, Vergil, Manilius, Ovid, Polignac, Fracastoro, Rapin, Vaniere, Philips, Somervile, Akenside, Armstrong, and the Italian georgic poets Alamanni and Ruccellai. He distinguished the more formal didactic poem from those, like Horace's Ars Poetica, of an epistolary cast, marked by a "graceful negligence" of style. Among the followers of Horace, he praised Vida, Boileau, Pope, Buckingham, and Roscommon. It may be observed that in speaking of these poets he probably followed Pope's Essay on Criticism, for he used the same chronology and the same criticism.

Hugh Blair picked Akenside, Armstrong, and Young from among the host of didactic writers through which he could illustrate his principles.

Young's Night Thoughts, a series of nine versified sermons, which holds as its purpose "the defense of Christian orthodoxy

against freethinkers and libertines,"<sup>28</sup> is a didactic poem and claims a place here. Blair found in the poem "much energy of expression...several pathetic passages, and happy images and allusions, as well as pious reflections."<sup>29</sup> Durling, who deals with a great number of the didactic and descriptive works of the eighteenth century, omits Night Thoughts from his study. Havens has little praise and much censure for Young; but, notwithstanding the later unpopularity of Night Thoughts, the poem enjoyed a tremendous approval in its own century.

The Pleasures of Imagination was classed by Blair among the best of the didactic writing of the period. Durling includes this poem in his survey because Akenside avowedly wrote in the tradition of Vergil's Georgics. He shows that this is true only in that the poem employs digressions from the didactic manner, episodes of descriptive, moral, scientific, and exotic kinds, and in that it employs a consciously elevated manner.

Armstrong's Art of Preserving Health must have considerably impressed both Blair and the originator of the Art of Poetry on a New Plan, because both commend the poem, the latter devoting much attention to it, adducing almost every passage of the poem as evidence of its superior treatment as a didactic piece.

In closing the evaluation of these treatises, it must be noted that each of the writers of them has attempted the classification of didactic poetry; the interesting results

have been reserved for a succeeding section of this thesis.

There were many volumes of didactic literature written and printed in the eighteenth century, probably the middle of the century finding this literature in its fullest flourish. There was a need for dissertations on that species of writing at that time, and it is left to our judgments as to whether the writers under consideration were successful in their scheme of standardizing principles for a type of poetry which had its roots in Greek antiquity, but which required the attention of a new genre because of its various forms and applications in the literature of the time.

## III

Two Treatises on Descriptive Poetry:  
Some Blank Verse Poems in this Genre

The critics of the English Aufklärung generally used "nature" in the limited sense of human nature. Human life and all its circumstances, its social and ethical problems, were the things in which the age took an interest; they were considered the only fit subjects for literary treatment.

Pope had written:

"The proper study of mankind is man."<sup>1</sup>

And Dr. Johnson added:

"The great object of remark is human life."<sup>2</sup>

It is the plan of this chapter to indicate the reaction to this limited conception of nature through evaluating the treatises which dealt with descriptive poetry, and by giving a general glance to the blank verse poems which gave this genre popularity.

Addison, Tickell, and Trapp wrote their treatises on didactic poetry years before Thomson composed his Seasons. With Vergil's Georgics, and with the aid of those treatises, it may be assumed, Thomson found principles with which to progress wherein preceptual verses are concerned. However, the treatises on descriptive poetry did not come until long after Thomson's Seasons. As Addison studied Vergil's Georgics, from which he derived rules for the didactic genre, so did the writers of these treatises study Thomson's poem to derive principles for the descriptive genre.

The Art of Poetry on a New Plan (1762) held as its objective the display of the beauties in The Seasons in its section on descriptive poetry. Whereas the purpose of didactic poetry is to instruct, Goldsmith (?) in this treatise said of descriptive poems that they "are intended more to delight than instruct." L'Allegro and Il Penseroso, the Miltonic additions to this genre, are praised for their descriptive values, as are Denham's Cooper's Hill and Pope's Windsor Forest. But a more thorough study is made of The Seasons as the proponent of this new school of poetry in the century, the poetry which held external nature for its perusal.

Hugh Blair's principles are laid down with more regularity and his Belles Lettres thesis (1783) is the more definitive of the two. He defined the genre thus:

"By descriptive poetry I do not mean any one particular species or form of composition. There are few compositions of any length, that can be called purely descriptive, or wherein the poet proposes to himself no other object, but merely to describe, without employing narrative, action, or moral sentiment, as the groundwork of his piece."<sup>3</sup>

He remarked that of all professed descriptive compositions, the largest and fullest with which he is acquainted in any language is Thomson's Seasons, "a work which possesses uncommon merit."

While subject and style played important roles in the treatises on didactic poetry, we hardly find any attention given to these by Goldsmith (?) and Blair in their directions for descriptive poetry. Method is the foremost consideration. It has been shown that the indirect transference of instruc-

tion often lay in description. Blair was well aware that description was generally introduced as an embellishment and offered his suggestions that these delicate digressions from the main subject of the work proceed without harm to the poem. He pointed out that description always distinguishes an original from a second-rate genius, and stated:

"This happy talent is chiefly owing to a strong imagination, which first receives a lively impression of the object; and then, by employing a proper selection of circumstances in describing it, transmits that impression in its full force to the imagination of others."<sup>4</sup>

The highlight here will be the "selection of circumstances" for which he gave four rules:

1. "They ought not be vulgar and common ones, such as are apt to pass by without remark; but, as much as possible, new and original, which may catch the fancy and draw attention.
2. "All the circumstances should be uniform, and of a piece; that is, when describing a great object, every circumstance brought into view should tend to aggrandize; or, when describing a gay and pleasant one, should tend to beautify, that by this means, the impression may rest upon the imagination complete and entire.
3. "The circumstances ought to be expressed with conciseness and simplicity; for, when either too much exaggerated, or too long dwelt upon and extended, they never fail to enfeeble the impression that is designed to be made. Brevity always contributes to vivacity.
4. "They ought to be such as particularize the object described, and mark it strongly. No description, that rests in generals, can be good. For we can conceive nothing from the abstract; all distinct ideas are formed upon particulars."<sup>5</sup>

About this last principle there was considerable difference of opinion. Goldsmith (?) was contrary:

"The error which young people run into is that of dwelling too long on minute circumstances; which not only renders the piece tedious and trifling, but deprives the reader of the pleasure he would have in making little discoveries of his own; for in descriptions that are intended as ornamental, the poet should never say so much but that the reader may perceive he was capable of saying more, and left some things unobserved in compliment to his sagacity."<sup>6</sup>

The question which arises is this: to particularize or to generalize in description? There has been much written on this subject, one of the most important aspects of nature poetry, and an attempt will be made here to balance the arguments on both sides and show how Thomson, the arche-typal descriptive poet, successfully painted broad scenes as well as those which involved minute knowledge of natural history.

At a time when nature poetry ranked much lower than the poetry which spoke of the human mind, "it was not the poet's task to give an enumeration of particulars; he was rather to select the most salient features, such as constituted the mental aspect of reality rather than reality itself,"<sup>7</sup> observes A. Bosker in his Literary Criticism in the Age of Johnson. Johnson, Reynolds, and Goldsmith, staunchly neo-classic, believed that the poet was not to depict reality, but the general notion which the mind abstracted from reality. Reynolds stated that a mere copier of nature could never produce anything really great.<sup>8</sup> The poet and the painter, according to him, should try to correct nature, which is far from perfect; ideal beauty should be their leading principle. The most dangerous error into which an artist was apt to fall was minuteness: he should avoid the detailed discriminations of individual



nature: what he had to consider was nature in the abstract.<sup>9</sup>

Johnson also wrote: "Poetry pleases by exhibiting an idea more grateful to the mind than things themselves afford."<sup>10</sup> This theory is best of all illustrated by the dissertation upon poetry in Rasselas, (1759), where Imlac calls it the business of the poet to remark general proportions and large appearances, to exhibit such prominent and striking features as recall the original to every mind.<sup>11</sup> In his praise of Thomson for his Seasons, Johnson characteristically remarked: "His descriptions which are extended scenes, and general effects, bring before us the whole magnificence of nature, whether pleasing or dreadful."<sup>12</sup>

Goldsmith's attitude was much the same as Reynolds's and Johnson's: "to copy nature is a task the most bungling workman is able to execute,"<sup>13</sup> though he added a compliment to those poets who were possessed of the uncommon talent to select such parts of nature as delight. He, too, insisted that nature must be adorned and beautified, and he was certain that this could not be done with a servile pencil.

Treating nature in the "ideal" manner advocated by the writers named above led to stereotyped conventionalities, or to a "vague, glossy and unfeeling language." The adjectives for the natural objects were always the same, indistinct and meaningless, it seemed. Nature was unvaried, often tiresome. Circumstantial imagery had been avoided; the external aspects of nature had to be generalized.

But it was not long before the natural historians were

opposing such a school of thought. William Pennant and John Aikin were the prominent antagonists. The latter in his Essay on the Application of Natural History to Poetry (1777) advanced:

"...the descriptive poet, who does not habituate himself to view the several objects of nature minutely, and in comparison with each other, must ever fail in giving his pictures the congruity and animation of real life."<sup>14</sup>

In direct contrast to Johnson's statement, he wrote:

"It is in that truly excellent and original poem, Thomson's Seasons, that we are to look for the greatest variety of genuine observations in natural history, and particularly in that part of it which regards the animal creation."<sup>15</sup>

But Aikin was not so overcome with the excellence of Thomson's treatment of natural history as to overlook an instance in which Thomson failed, and he pointed out that the image of the snakes in "Summer"<sup>16</sup> is too general and indiscriminate to please. His contention was that "objects little and inconsiderable when taken singly, may acquire importance, and suggest ideas of grandeur and sublimity when presented in collected numbers."<sup>17</sup> A grain of sand, he observed, might lead to the consideration of the seashore.

Henry Home, Lord Kames, in his Elements of Criticism agreed with this opinion:

"The objects should be painted so accurately that a distinct and lively image is formed in the mind of the reader. ...but if a circumstance be necessary, however slight, it cannot be described too minutely."<sup>18</sup>

Blair also pointed out in his treatise that:

"A hill, a river, or a lake, rises up more conspicuous to the fancy, when some particular lake, or river, or hill, is specified, than when the terms are left general."<sup>19</sup>

The question, to particularize or to generalize, is now even more complex. The answer? Each descriptive poet must be considered separately to obtain it. Thomson has been chosen here because his descriptive poetry is not only representative, but superior, to all of the nature poetry of the century. Durling points out that Thomson "introduced the long episodic 'descriptive poem' as a fully developed genre, and was recognized in England, France, and Germany as one of the poets who presented 'originals'--poems which were the foundations of new schools."<sup>20</sup> For this poet the answer was both, to particularize and to generalize. Thomson showed minute observation in his descriptions which pertained to the objects of external nature which were close to him. We have only to remember the poet's account of the different places where birds build their nests, detailed and particular, for proof.<sup>21</sup> Yet we know that this poet preferred general effects. We know his sublimity when he is addressing the source of Light, or the Essential Presence. The landscape treated in the "picturesque" manner was another sublime spectacle when Thomson described it. His diction itself can be shown to be somewhat generalized; did he not offer "falling verdure," "lucid moisture," "milky nutriment," "treasures of clouds," and "promis'd sweetness" as epithets for rain? Myra Reynolds in her book, Nature in English Poetry, summarizes Thomson's attitude thus:

"All is superlative, exaggerated, scornful of limits. It was 'the unbounded scheme of things' that most appealed to him. The same point receives illustration in his sense for landscape. He rejoiced in a wide view."<sup>22</sup>

To obtain the effects he did achieve, it was necessary for Thomson to leave minute descriptions and to let himself wander 'far excursive' and dwell on 'boundless prospects.' The distinction seems to be between the 'microscopic eye' and the 'philosophic eye.' In the chapter on "Description and Science" in his Background of Thomson's Seasons, Alan D. McKillop has cited those passages which represent Thomson's most minute descriptions, whereas the chapter on "Philosophic Views" shows Thomson in his illimitable philosophical flights. Where Newtonian science might lower the eye to study animalculae, so might it raise the eye to the study of the sun. Where physico-theology might lead to the consideration of the smallest objects in nature, so might it lift the mind to speculations on the Universal Soul.

Blair, though he saw the necessity for the revelations of natural history and natural science in nature poetry, also realized that the imagination was likely to take a greater perspective of things. He explained the treatment of such description thus:

"It is to be observed, in general, that, in describing solemn or great objects, the concise manner is almost always proper...where a sublime or pathetic impression is intended to be made, energy is above all things required. The imagination ought then to be seized at once; and it is far more deeply impressed by one strong and ardent image than by the anxious minuteness of laboured illustration."<sup>23</sup>

Before leaving this particular study in the Method of the descriptive poet, Marjorie Nicholson's Newton Demands the Muse ought to be praised for its chapter on "Color and Light in the Descriptive Poets." The author has treated much more completely this turn of description which Myra Reynolds and C. E. DeHaas in his Nature and the Country in English Poetry merely touch. As relates to the topic under discussion, Nicholson shows how Thomson excelled in his descriptions of the light which streams from the central sun as well as its effects in every part of nature, animate and inanimate. She learns from Thomson how this light dives beneath the "surface of the enlivened earth" into the "embowelled cavern...darting deep" and awakens the precious stones. The description of these jewels which follows in "Summer"<sup>24</sup> is truly "sublime" in its minuteness.

Another element of Method next comes forward for examination. Blair advised:

"...in describing inanimate natural objects, the poet, in order to enliven his description, ought always to mix living beings with them."<sup>25</sup>

At this point it becomes necessary to take a lesson from another art, that of painting. A glance at the eighteenth-century landscape will serve as the lesson. Here we observe living beings whether human or animal intermingled with the prospect painted. This was not accidental treatment. The Italian school of "picturesque" landscape painting\* included life-figures to animate their canvasses as represented in Salvator Rosa's "St. Jerome," Claude Lorrain's "The Morning,"

\*Elizabeth Manwaring, Italian Landscape in 18th Century England

and Gaspar Poussin's "The Cascade." The influence of this school was widespread in England and reflects in the works of the most eminent artists; Gainsborough and Constable are examples. There are evidences of pure landscapes upon which some representation of animate life was superimposed in order to give the painting a more personalized tone. Sir Joshua Reynolds's Discourses, published in 1801, and Lessing's Laocoon, 1766, are but two major treatises which propounded this view. But Joseph Warton, also, saw the significance of painting and poetry made personal by the introduction of living figures and in his Reflections on Didactic Poetry advised the poets to employ this method. But Warton did more, he suggested that these descriptive passages be sometimes pathetic and affect the passions and feelings of the reader. Thomson had known of the importance of this feature and had created lasting human interest episodes in his pastoral digressions on Lavinia and Palemon, Celadon and Amelia, and Damon and Musidora. Warton was a romanticist in many respects, but especially in this, that he always stressed the importance of the personal, pathetic, and emotional.

John Aikin was not without a word on the inclusion of life in description:

"The animal race, who, in common with their human lord and head, have, almost universally, somewhat of moral and intellectual character; whose motions, habitations, and pursuits, are so infinitely and curiously varied; and whose connection with man arises to a sort of companionship and mutual attachment; seem on these

accounts peculiarly adapted to the purposes of poetry. Separately considered, they afford matter for pleasing and even sublime speculation; in the rural landskip they give animation to the objects around them; and viewed in comparison with human kind, they suggest amusing and instructive lessons."<sup>26</sup>

Aikin pointed out many of Thomson's scenes which involved the depiction of the members of the animal race. Who can forget the wolves descending ravenously from the Alps and the Apennines, the insect blight, and the migrations of the countless numbers of birds? But Thomson also took direction from the popular conception of the great chain of being.\* "Full nature swarms with life," he versed, and drew his chain from the mineral to the vegetable to the animal aspects of earth. The pervasiveness of life in all things was as poetic a conception for Thomson as it had been for Milton, and their descriptions, as well as the descriptions of their followers, are greatly influenced by it.

An interesting observation has been made by Myra Reynolds, who recognizes that in The Seasons both Man and Nature have a place, but who also recognizes that a great transfer of emphasis has been made. Where Man had once been highlighted and Nature made to adorn him, now we find the opposite situation in which Man adorns Nature. For this change to have taken place in an age when neo-classicism flourished is significant enough to have provoked the attention paid to it in literature.

Having considered the significant elements of method in nature description, it remains to make mention of style. We have seen how the more purely didactic poetry sought blank

\*A. O. Lovejoy, The Great Chain of Being

verse and Miltonic diction as its artifices of versification and style. That Thomson's Seasons should have employed blank verse was probably the encouraging force in determining a form of prosody which lingered throughout the century in the descriptive as well as the didactic poetry. Certainly most of the longer descriptive poems were written in blank verse, and many have definite traces of Miltonic diction. But the influence of Milton on the diction of the poets of the century dwindled, whereas the use of blank verse continued popular right into the nineteenth century.

To this matter of style, the author of The Art of Poetry on a New Plan added:

"Descriptive poems are made beautiful by similes properly introduced, images of feigned persons, and allusions to ancient fables, or historical facts...."<sup>27</sup>

Simile and metaphor are the primary devices of style of the descriptive poet. The most quotable passages of this genre of poetry usually include a metaphor or simile. Prosopopaea, or personification, is also advised for the use of the descriptive poet as it had been employed in Milton's L'Allegro and Il Penseroso. In this respect we recall the train of personified abstractions with which Collins and Gray adorned their descriptive and allegorical odes.

Up to this point this section has been devoted to the evaluation of the treatises on descriptive poetry and related topics which deserved documentation. The remaining portion of the study will be confined to a general examination of



the major blank verse poems usually considered "descriptive," as well as the blank verse "didactic" poems insofar as they include description.

The statement of Hugh Blair previously quoted that there are few compositions of any length that can be called purely descriptive was earlier contradicted by John Aikin when he commented:

"I shall justly remark, that the merited success of this piece (Thomson's Seasons) has proved a refutation of those critics who deny that description can properly be the sole object of a poem, and would only admit of its occasional introduction as part of a narrative, didactic, or moral design."<sup>28</sup>

Of course scholarship has since bent toward Blair's opinion more consistently than in the eighteenth century, and Thomson is now hailed as a didactic poet for his Seasons as well as a descriptive poet. The association of Vergil's Georgics and the application of the rules for didactic poetry inaugurated by Addison are sufficient evidence to warrant such an opinion. Aikin, interestingly, made the bold statement that:

"If Vergil really designed to instruct the farmer by his Georgics, he might have done it much more effectually in plain prose: if it was his purpose to inspire a true relish for the beauties of nature, we may lament his georgic plan which threw so much of his work into details which even his versification cannot render pleasing."<sup>29</sup>

Aikin was convinced that any material extraneous to description introduced in such a descriptive poem was unnecessary and distracting. He would have gladly removed all historical relations, philosophical systems, and rules of art from the poems which might otherwise have been purely description.

The fact remains, nevertheless, that many of the blank verse poems under survey in this thesis have definite mixtures of description and precept. The treatises on didactic poetry taught indirect instruction through descriptive digressions, and Warton wrote in his Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope (1756):

"It is one of the greatest and most pleasing arts of descriptive poetry, to introduce moral sentences and instructions in an oblique and indirect manner, in places where one naturally expects only painting and amusement. We have virtue, as Pope remarks, put upon us by surprise, and are pleased to find a<sup>30</sup> thing where we should have never looked to meet it."

But the didacticism of the compositions has already been discussed; let us look at the description in the twelve major blank verse poems selected.

First came Cyder. Description in this poem is, of course, the subordinate element. In both books there are short descriptions of the seasons of the year, especially of that "best season," autumn. There are also scenes depicting the mountains of Penne-maur and Plinlimmon and the fall of the ancient city of Ariconium. Myra Reynolds first, and more completely Marjorie Nicholson later, draw our attention to Philips's delight in color, which may be seen from his specific descriptions of apples. There is also a sensitiveness to odors, she observes, and cites the "faintly sweet" cowslip-posies and the fragrance of apples on a dewy morning as examples. But the pictures presented are of a more general kind; it was not until Thomson that the poet's attitude toward nature was marked by first-hand observation.

To what has been said of The Seasons, little need be added regarding description. But one phase of natural observation ought to be given due notice. The term applied to that phase is "physico-theology," or the evidence of the divine in nature. Shaftesbury, a deistic philosopher, had written:

"All nature's wonders serve to excite and perfect this idea of their author. 'Tis here he suffers us to see, and even converse with him, in a manner suitable to our frailty. How glorious it is to contemplate him, in this the noblest of his works apparent to us, the system of the bigger world!"<sup>31</sup>

Other precedents for Thomson in this light were Richard Blackmore's Creation, 1712, Richard Collins's Nature Displayed, 1727, and Henry Baker's The Universe, 1727(?). In form The Creation owes a large debt to Lucretius's De Rerum Natura, though its intention is directly opposed to the anti-religious one in the latter poem. Durling has brought out the influence of these poems on Thomson, who regarded nature as a revelation of the deity. Where Blackmore used Lucretius as a model, Thomson used Vergil; therefore, Thomson's exposition is less scientific than Blackmore's. Where Blackmore presented nature to the analytical reason, Thomson presented nature to the senses and emotions. This deistic conception of natural revelation was dominant in many of the nature poems of the century.

Another poem on the georgic model, The Chase, contains passages of descriptive beauty. The animated accounts of the hunt are foremost in this respect. Somerville had accurate

knowledge and his enthusiasm for the sport is well reflected in the poem. His animal descriptions are also quite good, filled with reality. There is the most minute treatment of the kinds of hounds, the breeding of dogs, the care of whelps, their habits, their diseases and the best remedies, and the most desirable kennels. The lines in Book II on the Dawn are Thomsonian in accent as are most of Somerville's descriptions:

"Hail, gentle Dawn! mild blushing goddess! hail!  
Rejoic'd I see thy purple mantle spread  
O'er half the skies, gems pave thy radiant way,  
And orient pearls from ev'ry shrub depend."<sup>32</sup>

A more purely didactic poem, The Art of Preserving Health, has gained no particular prestige because of its descriptions, but there are some Thomsonian descriptive reminiscences. The storm in Book I and Armstrong's delight in the pleasures of melancholy are examples.

This melancholy strain, however, was more prominent in the poetry between 1740 and 1750, DeHaas notes, and he suggests that the attitude may have originated in the craving for solitude. This seems a plausible explanation since Edward Young's Night Thoughts, Robert Blair's Grave, and Thomas Warton's Pleasures of Melancholy, the three most representative poems to consider here, deal with the poet's love for solitary contemplation and have about them an aura of melancholy. The poetry of this period contained enough of the stuff of melancholy and dejection to warrant a classification of the poets. DeHaas has made this attempt:

"The wistful and pensive man will find food for  
philosophic reflection in nature and will trans-

mute its phenomena into spiritual values; the brooding man will find a mournful pleasure in its gloomier side, and feel attracted to the subdued colours of evening, the darkness and mystery of night, the moonlit churchyard, the desolate rain, all of which minister to his sense of the insignificance of man, the vanity and transitory nature of life and the inevitability of death."<sup>33</sup>

Robert Blair is cited as "the brooding man." His Grave is called "the outpourings of a hypochondriac soul, creating a mood of dejection in the reader," by DeHaas. Though this critic seems to have made an extreme judgment on the poem, nevertheless, the distinction between its treatment and the treatment of The Pleasures of Melancholy by "the wistful man" is pronounced. The latter poem is not the outpourings of a hypochondriac soul, creating a mood of dejection in the reader; Warton merely wallows in melancholy with genuine enjoyment, DeHaas comments. In comparison with Young, Thomas Warton's melancholy pleasures were of a more universal kind. With Young melancholy was inherent with his religious convictions... Warton, who was in reality one of the most easy-going of mortals, was not weighed down by religious dejection. He was stimulated by the sheer joy of gloom.

Another connection between Robert Blair and Young must be made: both poets blended nature description with speculations on life, death, and eternity. The precedent poems in this regard were Lady Winchelsea's Nocturnal Reverie, 1714, Parnell's Night-Piece on Death, 1721, and Mallet's Excursion, 1728.

"To paint the gloomy horrors of the tomb" was the inten-

tion of Robert Blair, whether he has done just that or not in The Grave. There are purely descriptive passages, the church and the churchyard scenes, for example, in the poem. Realistic descriptions such as the row of ragged elms, the unsocial yew, the wan moon, the howling wind, the screech owl, and the moss-grown stones skirted with nettles can be found also. But there are many instances when Blair leaned on periphrasis and conventionalized epithets when he might have animated his descriptions with more originality.

The Pleasures of Melancholy "is to all purposes and intents a concatenation of all the gloomy scenes depicted in contemporary literature. Warton shows himself a lover of rural life and scenery without contributing anything original to descriptive poetry."<sup>34</sup> Thomson-like, it may be added, the poet described scenes of twilight and midnight and he deserves praise for his exact and faithful account of the sounds of the night.

Young's Night Thoughts, the third of these poems of melancholy tones, is only slightly concerned with the features of the outer world. Margaret M. Fitzgerald in her book, First Follow Nature, shows that Nature to Young connoted the glories of the infinite heavens, the grandeur of the star-spangled firmament. "The heavens," she observes, "proclaimed the glory of God to him never more grandly than in terms of the universe of the new astronomy, but it was a religious rather than a scientific inspiration which the skies exercised upon his poetry. To Young, Nature was the 'proud sceptic's foe,'

the oracle of God, the standard of good."<sup>35</sup> Young did not go to the deistic extreme as Thomson had done; he was more conservative, but there is evidence that even he could be infected with the book of nature.

The next poem which should chronologically follow is The Pleasures of Imagination, a philosophical poem written in the decade when the melancholy poems were prominent. But Akenside had an aversion to the poetry of the grave; he wished his powerful verse to dispel the "monkish horrors" of

"...the ghostly gloom  
Of graves, and hoary vaults, and cloistered cells."<sup>36</sup>

Rather than this popular theme of poetry, he chose to poetize the great, the wonderful, and the beautiful in a philosophical manner which Pope observed made him no common poet. This writer, too, believed that all the forms of the external world are but visible expressions of such thoughts of God as the mind of man is fitted to receive. He is also one of the first poets of the age to insist on the beauty of all nature, and to show an abiding sense of the spiritual elements that give significance to the external forms of nature.

The Enthusiast, or the Lover of Nature reflects a genuine feeling for nature untouched by man. There is little original description in the poem, but there is a new idea which Myra Reynolds notes:

"This poem marks a new phase in the feeling toward nature, because...with no theory to propound, no moral to teach, no human interest to exemplify, the poet with rapt fervor and intensity cries out for solitary communion with nature as a necessity of his own being."<sup>37</sup>

Again we find Joseph Warton, its author, pushing the consideration of the romantic tendencies of the age upon us.

The Fleece, Vergilian and Thomsonian in the georgic pattern, is notable as having so many full and often exact descriptive references to the rivers of Great Britain. Dyer often wrote of rivers, rills, streams, or waterfalls in his landscapes. In general, however, the descriptive parts of the poem are conventional and add little to the genre. His Grongar Hill and The Country Walk, captivating descriptive pieces, handle nature with all the loving minuteness and sincerity of a genuine nature poet. In the latter poems, Dyer's great delight was in mountain scenery. The poems are much shorter than The Fleece and were written in octosyllabic couplets much earlier in Dyer's career.

Another didactic poem, The English Garden, has a descriptive cast. In the poem Mason's purpose was to state the principles for the new irregular landscape gardening. The poem is like Joseph Warton's in its contempt for the French formal style of gardening. His subject so intimate with nature, Mason gave many lines to descriptions of which the most poetic and pleasing are those on the "picturesque" landscapes.

The last poem in this survey is Cowper's Task, which came late in the century, 1785. The Miltonic diction of the earlier poems had been steadily losing prominence, and in Cowper's poem there is hardly a trace of it. The simple, lucid diction replaced it, but blank verse remained the choice of versification. Cowper's Task is more purely des-



criptive than any poem considered in this section, including The Seasons. However, Cowper's knowledge of nature was limited, whereas Thomson could range over broad areas of earth and treat them as though he had lived in those places all of his life. Or as Macaulay compares them:

"Thomson had a certain largeness of view, a power of presenting his scene in masses and in generalized form, which Cowper does not attain to."<sup>38</sup>

But Cowper knew the country around Olney and described it truthfully and with charm. Nature is used as a background for his meditative figure, and every scene seems to take added interest from his own personality. Yet, Grierson and Smith in their Critical History of English Poetry interestingly point out that "in purpose and general theme The Task does not differ essentially from the earlier poems. This too is a series of sermons--sermons on the religious life and the vanities of the world."<sup>39</sup>

R. A. Aubin's quotation may serve as a suitable conclusion for this section in that it successfully reminds us what the descriptive poem was, and that its primary use in the eighteenth century was to delineate the forms of nature. He writes:

"The descriptive poem is one of the peculiar tastes of the eighteenth century. A sort of genre-of-all-trades, it may embrace topographical, pastoral, didactic, narrative, political, and practically every other sort of stock poetic interest, but its primary function is to depict scenes, more frequently rural than urban."<sup>40</sup>

## IV

The Eighteenth-Century Story  
of  
Two Literary Genres

The didactic and descriptive poetry of the century was so varied that it became necessary for literary men to divide the genres into separately-defined groups. But before these groups are spoken of, it may be advantageous to comment on the acknowledged eighteenth-century types of poetry in general in order to grasp an idea of the complete classification of poetry at that time.

The neo-classical age of Pope and Addison was strongly bent toward the veneration of the literary types. This classical ideal of order, which placed everything in its proper slot, continued throughout the century overcoming any opposition through the strength of literary support. John Brown, in his History of the Rise and Progress of Poetry through its Several Species (1764), wrote of the "greater" and "lesser" kinds of poetry. Of the greater kinds in ancient Greece were: the Lyric, the Epic, the Dramatic, and the Pastoral.<sup>1</sup> Of the lesser kinds were: the Elegy, the Satire, and the Didactic.<sup>2</sup> In general, with the addition of the descriptive genre, these types of poetry may be regarded as the acknowledged genres of the eighteenth century. The poem primarily descriptive of the natural objects of the world was relatively new. Up to the time of Thomson only short poems and parts of longer poems might be found to be pure

nature description. But The Seasons introduced the type which gained prominence in the century and is recognized, without refutation, as a distinct type in itself. One critic, Nathan Drake, tracing the genres in the tradition of English literature from Elizabethan times, recognized six major types of poetry: epic, dramatic, lyric, didactic, satiric, and descriptive.<sup>3</sup> These are essentially the same categories into which the poetry of the ancients falls with the exception of the "descriptive" which must be taken to mean "poetry descriptive of nature," for Drake included in this category only poets who had given major emphasis to describing the natural world, such as Cowper, Bidlake, Hurdis, Gisborne, etc. Drake recorded only the names of poets who were contemporary with himself and were of the last generation of the century.

Wordsworth later gave the same major classifications to poetry under slightly different titles. He called them the narrative, the dramatic, the lyrical, the idyllium, the didactic, and the philosophical satire groups.<sup>4</sup> The "idyllium" includes the pastoral and loco-descriptive poetry and is a more applicable name for the poetry which describes nature than the broader tab, "descriptive." The idyllium is "descriptive," he wrote, "...of the processes and the appearances of external nature."<sup>5</sup> Such a classification suits The Seasons well and that is how Wordsworth resolved the problem for himself.

Having thus named the types of poetry prevalent in the

eighteenth century, a new focus must be taken on the two genres appropriate to this section, one, the didactic, and the other, the descriptive, which we must understand to be the idyllium of Wordsworth.

The didactic genre is the more complex of the two because it denotes lesser types of poetry. But before the documentation of the kinds of didactic poetry, according to the literary scholars, let us first note the origin of this species of poetry in Greek antiquity as expounded by John Brown:

"With Respect to the Didactic; it appears...to have its natural Birth in the occasional Traits of Remark, Proverb, or Exhortation, thrown out in the Enthusiasm of the musical Contest or Song-Feast. When Time, Experience, and Letters, had strengthened the reasoning Powers of the improving Tribe, then it would of course receive the Addition of speculative and natural Subjects. This Improvement grew into a distinct Species in ancient Greece; but few of these Poems have come down to us. Of this Kind, it is manifest from their Titles, were many of the Songs of Linus, Orpheus, Musaeus, and Thamyris, composed on the Generation of the World, the Motions of the Stars, Chaos, Creation, and the Rise of Things. Hesiod's Theogony still remains, as an original Model of this Species. Of the same Kind is his Georgic; which, though it be composed on a Subject oeconomical, is yet essentially mixed with Doctrines religious, moral, and political."<sup>6</sup>

The subject matter dealt with here is closely related to the second section of this thesis, since both deal with didactic poetry and both rise from the treatises on this genre which were written in the eighteenth century. Chronologically, Addison was first to record the didactic types. He spoke of instructive poems of

"...moral duties, as those of Theognis and Pythagoras, or philosophical speculations, as those of Aratus and Lucretius, or rules of practice, as those of Hesiod and Vergil."<sup>7</sup>

Addison named his piece An Essay on the Georgics. The critics who followed him in delineating the genre, however, used "Didactic Poetry" in the titles of their contributions and gave more attention to the kinds of preceptive poetry. Thomas Tickell and Joseph Trapp are two of these; both first delivered their opinions in the form of lectures given at Oxford in 1711, as has already been pointed out.<sup>8</sup>

Tickell is less thorough in his separation of the types, for he recognized three kinds of didactic poetry, and a fourth kind composed of the three, whereas Trapp recognized four kinds and suggested that a preceptive poem may be a combination of all of them. Tickell observed:

"The themes, of which Didactic Poets have treated in verse, fall into the following classes: of Morals, of Philosophy, of Arts, and a fourth kind compounded out of these."<sup>9</sup>

We see that this critic has added one category of didactic poetry of which Addison had not written in his Essay, that category wherein would be placed poetry preceptive of the Arts, such as Fresnoy's Art of Painting, Charleton's Art of Fishing, and King's Art of Cookery.

The four kinds of instructive poems of which Trapp lectured were: those dealing with morals, those dealing with philosophical speculations, those dealing with the occupations and amusements of human life, and finally, those dealing with poetry itself as a poetic Art.<sup>10</sup> Any combinations of these is regarded by Trapp as legitimate didactic poetry. It would

seem that Trapp's classifications are the most complete, since there have been no major alterations to his pattern.

Joseph Warton did not categorize didactic poetry as we might have expected him to in his Reflections on Didactic Poetry. In his advice regarding the subject matter, however, he wrote:

"...the various employments, businesses, and amusements of life, together with the elegant arts and sciences, are more proper subjects for didactic poetry, than such as are purely speculative and metaphysical."<sup>11</sup>

His central interest, much as Addison's, was the georgic, though in the quotation he recognized "the elegant arts and sciences" as fit subjects for didactic poetry.

Hugh Blair, in his lecture on didactic poetry, was not as definite as were Tickell and Trapp in their divisions of the genre. He was less concerned with the georgic than Warton or Addison, and more interested in the philosophical and moral didactic poem. His views are recorded thus:

"The highest species of it (didactic poetry), is a regular treatise on some philosophical, grave, or useful subject. Of this nature we have several, both ancient and modern, of great merit and character: such as Lucretius's six books of De Rerum Natura. Vergil's Georgics, Pope's Essay on Criticism, Akenside's Pleasures of the Imagination, Armstrong on Health, Horace's, Vida's, and Boileau's Art of Poetry."<sup>12</sup>

Where one might accurately guess which poems are meant which treat philosophical and useful subjects, it would be difficult to ascertain which would or would not be considered "grave." Blair further drew his indefinite scheme:

"...or, without intending a great or regular work, he (the poet) may...inveigh against particular vices, or make some moral observations on human life and characters, as is commonly done in satires and epistles. All these come under the denomination of didactic poetry."<sup>13</sup>

We have already been informed that the didactic poet may make moral observations, but this is the first we have heard of satires and epistles included under the head "didactic." Blair's opinions in this respect do not jibe with the opinions of the other critics who classified the didactic types of poetry; nevertheless, his place here, though insecure, is justifiable.

The author of The Art of Poetry on a New Plan agreed with Trapp's divisions of this species of poetry. His scheme is not original as may be deduced from his sentence, "According to the usual divisions there are four kinds of didactic poems."<sup>14</sup> He wrote:

"Didactic or Preceptive Poetry, has been usually employed either to illustrate and explain our moral duties; our philosophical enquiries; our business and pleasures; or in teaching the art of criticism of poetry itself. It may be adapted, however, to any other subject, and may, in all cases, where instruction is designed, be employed to good purpose."<sup>15</sup>

From the above documentation, it may be safely said that there were four recognized kinds of didactic verse in the century. For clarification, each type will be defined in the approaching paragraphs.

(a) The type which deals with morals:

In general, the opinions of the critics were unfavorable

regarding this didactic division of poetry, sometimes called "gnomic" poetry. Addison remarked:

"Precepts of morality, besides the natural corruption of our tempers, which makes us averse to them, are so abstracted from ideas of sense, that they seldom give an opportunity for those beautiful descriptions and images which are the spirit and life of poetry."<sup>16</sup>

Trapp's views were similarly negative:

"Of this type we have those of Pythagoras, Theognis, and Phocylides. There are none worthy of memory among the Romans, nor of our own, whose type is moral. These indeed have very little poetic taste."<sup>17</sup>

Tickell, though he knew its unpopularity, saw the necessity of moral poetry in teaching the youth:

"You, most excellent young men, before whom the field of Knowledge spreads more widely than before the mercenary Horde of Hacks and parasites, should receive with hatred and hisses writings that threaten to wage war on Virtue and modesty, and should esteem draughts, however bitter, be they but healthy, above the sweetest poisons."<sup>18</sup>

Goldsmith (?) named Pope's Essay on Man and Ethic Epistles as major eighteenth-century contributions to this category of poetry.

(b) The type which deals with philosophical speculations:

Addison recognized the fact that natural philosophy has sensible objects for the poet to work upon, but thought that it often puzzled the reader with the intricacy of its notions and the multitude of its disputes. Much later Warton held the opinion that subjects which were speculative and metaphysical admitted only few embellishments, but he wrote that "all parts of natural philosophy in particular as being



conversant with sensible images, seem the best calculated to shine...."19

Tickell said of philosophical poetry:

"To Philosophical Themes there is attached, by an inevitable bond, Obscurity, which of all qualities is most incongruous with the Nature of Poetry, unless Poetry is taken in at the first glance, it immediately loses its force and point."20

Trapp, however, was fond of the poem which expounded natural philosophy. The scientific analysis of the natural objects of creation fascinated him; his enthusiasm is reflected in his words:

"How can poetry be better employed, or more agreeably to its nature and dignity, than in celebrating the works of the great Creator, and describing the nature and generation of animals, vegetables, and minerals; the revolutions of the heavenly bodies; the motions of the earth; the flux and reflux of the sea; the cause of thunder, lightning, and other meteors; the attraction of the magnet; the gravitation, cohesion, and repulsion of matter; the impulsive motion of light; the slow progression of sounds; and other amazing phenomena of nature."21

Lucretius's De Rerum Natura was, of course, the classical precedent for this poetry which dealt with the philosophical aspect of nature. The eighteenth-century contributions in this category were many, most notably, perhaps, being Blackmore's Creation, Thomson's Seasons, and Akenside's Pleasures of Imagination.

(c) The type dealing with poetry itself as a poetic Art:

In his scheme Addison did not recognize this type of didactic poetry, but not much later, both Tickell and Trapp gave it stress in their treatises.

Horace's Ars Poetica, Vida's and Boileau's Art of Poetry, and Pope's Essay on Criticism are representative of correct classification in this category. It was Trapp who confined this form of didactic poetry to poetic Art; Tickell gave the division a broader definition:

"...it either teaches rules for some Intellectual Art, whence it labours under the same evils as Moral Instructions, or else gives precepts for a Manual Art with such Mathematical Precision as to recall the natural obscurity of the Theme of Philosophy."<sup>22</sup>

Tickell was not quite satisfied with placing Ars Poetica under this head because, he observed, it was first written as a "Letter," not an "Art." He dismissed the poems of Vida and Boileau, saying that they more nearly approached the category of pure poetry. If there is to be any consistency in classifying the pieces which deal with the art of poetry, however, they must be classed here.

(d) The type dealing with the occupations and amusements of life:

Now we have come to the division of didactic poetry which holds chief significance with respect to this study. Of it Addison wrote:

"...this kind of poetry I am now speaking of addresses itself wholly to the imagination; it is altogether conversant among the fields and woods, and has the most delightful part of nature for its province."<sup>23</sup>

Only a slight familiarity with georgic poetry presents one with the wide variety of subjects chosen by the poets. A few of the English georgics of the eighteenth century were:

Sugar-Cane by James Grainger, The Hop-Garden by Christopher Smart, Poem on the Cruelty of Shooting by John Aldington, Barbados by Nathaniel Weekes, and The Plants by William Tighe. All of the poems named here were written in blank verse, the versification preferred by the georgic poets after the example of Philips and Thomson, though this is not true in every case.

Marie Loretto Lilly in her dissertation, The Georgic, has separated the georgic types very elaborately, perhaps too elaborately. She has divided this type of didactic poetry into five groups:<sup>24</sup>

- (1) Didactic poems on general farming
- (2) Didactic poems on gardens
- (3) Didactic poems on silkworms
- (4) Didactic poems on sheepraising
- (5) Didactic poems on miscellaneous agricultural subjects

In the last group may be found those poems which have field sports as their subject, and here are the Cynegetic, of hunting with dogs, the Ixeutic, of snaring birds, and the Haliutic, of fishing, the three kinds of field sports which were rendered into poetry by the ancients and imitated in the eighteenth century.

These distinctions within the georgic apply only to compositions which are purely georgic, either in subject matter alone, or both in subject matter and in plan.

Addison spoke of this type of poetry with praise since "It raises in our minds a pleasing variety of scenes and landscapes, whilst it teaches us, and makes the driest of its precepts look like a description."<sup>25</sup> Such a statement

may be used as an introduction to the consideration of the descriptive species of poetry, for we have done with the didactic. Descriptive poetry did not have an origin in antiquity as did didactic poetry; if we regard the genre as truly beginning with Thomson, we must agree with Durling when he remarks, "The Seasons are offshoots of the Georgics."<sup>26</sup> The episodic Vergilian form is turned to the uses of description, which now becomes the primary theme instead of the secondary one. Thomson's treatment of nature, Durling observes:

"...differed from that of the important earlier poets in that he painted a systematic series of pictures, each one detailed and complete in itself, like the landscapes of a painter, the whole series representing the typical changes of the English year, ideal representations, true 'mutatis mutandis' for any year or for all years."<sup>27</sup>

A large school of followers took Thomson's suggestions and gave importance to a new literary genre. In Section II of this thesis<sup>28</sup> attention was given to the descriptive digressions and episodes, which are the embryonic types of descriptive poetry of the century as reflected in the poetry of the Thomsonian following.

From the discussions of didactic and descriptive poetry, the classification system would appear simple. But what answer would be reached in the case of a poem which seemed to have much didacticism and much description scattered among its lines? What answer would be arrived at in deciding whether a poem is more philosophical than religious if it contained elements of both in perhaps the same quantity?

Not one of the poems studied in this thesis is merely didactic, or merely descriptive.

Wordsworth, I believe, had the most unique system of all. In an unnamed genre he might have placed all of the twelve poems considered here. A joint category, he suggested, might be constructed of the idyllic, the didactic, and the philosophical types of poetry into which one might place The Seasons, The Task, and Night Thoughts.<sup>29</sup> When we consider the possibilities of such an easy, ingenious plan, we are tempted to pity the earlier eighteenth-century critics for not having such a man among them.

The job of classifying did not appeal to Havens who wrote:

"Intellectual speculation, religious emotion, comment on human life, and description of natural scenery abound in all literature and sometimes form the most significant parts of works into which they are introduced incidentally; yet if we ask ourselves whether a work is primarily concerned with religious teaching, technical instruction, or philosophical speculation, we can usually determine under what class it falls. To continue this separating process, however, so as to collect all the philosophical, didactic, technical, or descriptive passages of any length to be found in the poetry of the time, would be an interminable task that would defeat its own end."<sup>30</sup>

We must not overlook the fact that the eighteenth-century literary critics and classifiers met the same obstacles of which Havens speaks; hence, there is often diversity among them in their classifications of the poetry as we shall see in the concluding section which follows.

## V

The Classification  
of  
Twelve Major Blank Verse Poems

The four preceding sections of this thesis might be taken for individual, singular studies, related only incidentally; however, there has been an attempt to establish a continuity among them which, it is to be hoped, will become immediately apparent when the present chapter is concluded. The first section is devoted to an examination of the state of non-dramatic blank verse and its adaptability to the principal didactic and descriptive poems of the eighteenth century. The second and third sections are evaluations of the treatises on didactic and descriptive poetry with considerations of the same poems respective of their relations to the two genres. And the fourth tells of the types and turns of didactic and descriptive poetry, introducing the subject of this final study, the classification of these representative poems according to the critics of that century and ours.

By way of recalling the subject in an eighteenth-century light, this quotation by Joseph Warton will serve:

"If it be a true observation, that for a poet to write happily and well, he must have seen and felt what he describes, and must draw from living models alone; and if modern times, from their luxury and refinement, afford not manners that will bear to be described; it will then follow, that those species of poetry bid fairest to succeed at present, which treat of things, not men; which deliver doctrines, not display events. Of this sort is didactic and descriptive poetry.

Accordingly the moderns have produced many excellent pieces of this kind,..."<sup>1</sup>

According to Warton and to many other critics of the century, the two genres were almost inseparable. That this is true will appear in the succeeding documentation of the remarks of these critics, remarks which are doubly significant in that they aid in the classification of the poems to which they apply. The poems will be discussed in the order of their publication in the eighteenth century.

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Cyder, by John Philips, 1706

- Joseph Warton: "Cyder is a very close and happy imitation of the Georgic...."<sup>2</sup>
- Monthly Review: "Cyder affords an example of its (blank verse) powers in the didactic genre."<sup>3</sup>
- Dr. Johnson: "...his greatest work, the poem upon Cyder, in two books; which was received with loud praises, and continued long to be read, as an imitation of Vergil's Georgick...."<sup>4</sup>
- Robert Anderson: "It was read with wide approbation as an imitation of Vergil's Georgic, which emulated the beauties of the finest productions of antiquity."<sup>5</sup>
- Myra Reynolds: "On the whole this poem is of the didactic classical order, but...we come upon indications that the poet was not insensible to the charms of Nature in other than the utilitarian aspects."<sup>6</sup>
- C. E. DeHaas: "On the whole it is a didactic poem... containing many horticultural precepts of real practical value. It is, however, interspersed with picturesque descriptions of a more general kind...."<sup>7</sup>

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The Seasons, by James Thomson, 1726-30

- Joseph Warton: "It would be unpardonable to conclude these remarks on descriptive poetry, without taking notice of The Seasons of Thomson, who had peculiar and powerful talents for this species of composition."<sup>8</sup>
- Edinburgh Review: "...The Seasons represent to us imitations of nature, which the eye delights not merely to revisit, but to rest and to muse upon."<sup>9</sup>
- John Scott: "Thomson, in the course of the preceding strictures, has been considered chiefly in his principal character of a descriptive poet; the delineatory part of his work affording the best specimen of his peculiar manner. His poem, however, has other merit, for it abounds with noble strokes of pathos, natural philosophy, civil liberty, morality, and piety."<sup>11</sup>
- John Aikin: "That Thomson's Seasons is the original whence our modern descriptive poets have derived that more elegant and correct style of painting natural objects which distinguishes them from their immediate predecessors, will, I think, appear evident to one who examines their several casts and manners."<sup>12</sup>
- "Essentially different from a didactic piece, its business is to describe, and the occupation of its leisure is to teach."<sup>13</sup>
- Hugh Blair: "Of all professed descriptive compositions, the largest and fullest that I am acquainted with, in any language, is Mr. Thomson's Seasons; a work which possesses uncommon merit."<sup>14</sup>
- Oliver Goldsmith(?): "We cannot quit this subject (descriptive poetry) without taking some notice of that excellent poem, left us by Mr. Thomson, entitled The Seasons; which, notwithstanding some parts of it are didactic, may with propriety be inserted under this head."<sup>15</sup>



"In this work, the author has given us a poetical, philosophical, and moral description of the four seasons."<sup>16</sup>

Robert Burns: "...sweet poet of the year...."<sup>17</sup>

Robert Anderson: "...Winter, written at first in detached pieces, or occasional descriptions...."<sup>18</sup>

"Considered in his principal character of a descriptive poet, he is well entitled to the exclusive denomination of the "Poet of Nature."<sup>19</sup>

William Hazlitt: "...the best of our descriptive poets...."<sup>20</sup>

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The Chase, by William Somerville, 1735

William Somerville: "I have intermixed the preceptive parts with so many descriptions and digressions, in the Georgic manner, that I hope they will not be tedious."<sup>21</sup>

Joseph Warton: In his Reflections on Didactic Poetry, Warton cited The Chase as an example.<sup>22</sup>

John Aikin: After showing how Somerville's subject was suited to didactic poetry, he asserted, however, that:

"He is strictly and almost solely a descriptive poet."<sup>23</sup>

Robert Anderson: "It is written with equal vigour and elegance, and justly ranks among the best didactic poems in the English language."<sup>24</sup>

C. E. DeHaas: "The Chase...is a didactic poem like its predecessor, Philips's Cyder,"but, "...the descriptions of the various kinds of hunting are more interesting."<sup>25</sup>

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Night Thoughts, by Edward Young, 1742-46

Monthly Review: "Among the excellencies which he (Courtney Melmouth) has distinguished in the Night Thoughts are, chiefly, the spirit of sublime piety and strict morality

which breathes through the piece...  
bold and lively descriptions...."26

Hugh Blair: "Among moral and didactic poets, Dr. Young is of too great eminence to be passed without notice."27

Dr. Johnson: "Of Young's poems it is difficult to give any general character."28

"...variegated with deep reflections and striking allusions, a wilderness of thought...."29

Robert Anderson: "The Night Thoughts, a species of poetry altogether his own, were begun immediately after the mournful event of 1741 (death of Young's wife)."30

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The Grave, by Robert Blair, 1743

Robert Anderson: "It is composed of a succession of unconnected descriptions, and of reflections that seem independent of one another, interwoven with striking allusions, and digressive sallies of the imagination."31

"He is always moral...."32

The Freeman: "The Grave is romantic in spirit and style, and in these qualities it ranks easily as the best of the many didactic poems produced in England during the eighteenth century."33

Myra Reynolds: "Its aim is a moral one...."34

C. E. DeHaas: "The Grave is above all meant to be a didactic poem." And, "There are also a few purely descriptive passages in the poem which show Blair's power of observation and indicate his love of nature."35

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The Art of Preserving Health, by John Armstrong, 1744

Joseph Warton: These critics cited this poem as a  
Nathan Drake : major example of didactic poetry.36  
Hugh Blair :

- Oliver Goldsmith(?): "Among poems of the useful and interesting kind, Dr. Armstrong's Art of Preserving Health deserves... particular notice."<sup>37</sup>
- John Aikin: "With respect to the Piece before us, its subject seems on the whole, calculated for didactic poetry."<sup>38</sup>
- Speaking of the wonders of the Naiad kingdom in the poem, he added:
- "The awful sublimity of the scenes themselves...elevate this piece to the very summit of descriptive poetry."<sup>39</sup>
- Alexander Chalmers: "Dr. Armstrong's fame as a poet must depend entirely on his Art of Preserving Health, which, although liable to some of the objections usually offered against didactic poetry, is yet free from the weightiest."<sup>40</sup>
- "There are, however, descriptive passages even here that are very grand."<sup>41</sup>
- 
- The Pleasures of Imagination, by Mark Akenside, 1744
- Joseph Warton: "The Pleasures of Imagination are, in their very nature, a most popular and pregnant subject for a didactic poem,"<sup>42</sup>
- John Gilbert Cooper: "...Dr. Akenside, the worthy author of The Pleasures of Imagination, the most beautiful didactic poem that has ever adorned the English language."<sup>43</sup>
- Thomas Gray: "...poem of your young friend (Dr. Akenside)...rises to the best, particularly in description."<sup>44</sup>
- Dr. Johnson: "Akenside is to be considered a didactick and lyrick poet."<sup>45</sup>
- Hugh Blair: "In English, Dr. Akenside has attempted the most rich and poetical form of didactic writing in his Pleasures of Imagination...."<sup>46</sup>
- Mrs. Barbauld: "...as the author's aim was not so much to give formal precepts, or enter into

the way of direct argumentation, as, by exhibiting the most engaging prospects of Nature, to enlarge and harmonize the imagination, and by that means insensibly dispose the minds of men to a similar taste and habit of thinking in religion, morals, and civil life."<sup>47</sup>

Robert Anderson:

"Akenside, considered as a didactic and lyric poet, ranks with the most eminent writers of the didactic and lyric poetry, in ancient and modern times. In his Pleasures of Imagination, he has attempted the most rich and poetical form of didactic writing."<sup>48</sup>

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The two blank verse poems of the Wartons are related to the other blank verse poems considered here in their description, but not in their didacticism. The Edinburgh Review praised "the two Wartons for their exceeding love of description"; however, the character of the poems can more justly be known in the light of the eighteenth-century melancholy, of which some note was taken in the third section.<sup>49</sup> In The Pleasures of Melancholy and The Enthusiast, this melancholy is toned down to an inclination to meditate, and to a vague fear of loneliness.

The Enthusiast, or Lover of Nature, by Joseph Warton, 1744

C. E. DeHaas:

"The poem is a rapturous vindication of nature and the natural life versus the artificial tendencies of the age."<sup>50</sup>

Dwight Durling:

"The poem is exceptional for its notations of birds, animals, insects, the sounds of the seashore, the appearances of fields, and the phenomena of the sky. Joseph Warton is one of many after Thomson who finds in nature powerful influences on the moral nature of man."<sup>51</sup>

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The Pleasures of Melancholy, by Thomas Warton, 1747

Robert Anderson: "The Pleasures of Melancholy, one of his earliest productions, is a beautiful Miltonic poem, abounding with bold metaphors and highly-coloured pictures."<sup>52</sup>

"The indulgence of melancholy...and the luxury of tragic tears at the theatre are feelingly and poetically described."<sup>53</sup>

Dwight Durling: "The Pleasures of Melancholy celebrates the 'mother of musings, Contemplation sage,' but it is often strikingly exact in description."<sup>54</sup>

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The Fleece, by John Dyer, 1757

Nathan Drake: "Dr. Warton, has classed The Fleece, in every edition of his Essay on Pope, among the excellent pieces of the didactic kind ...and even our Biographer, Scott of Amwell, has termed it the 'noblest of didactic poems.'"<sup>55</sup>

Robert Anderson: "...few material rules relating to sheep or the woolen manufacturers are omitted."<sup>56</sup>

Myra Reynolds: "As has been observed, Dyer speedily left his first love (description in Grongar Hill and The Country Walk) and devoted himself to laborious, didactic blank verse (The Fleece)."<sup>57</sup>

C. E. DeHaas: "The poem, written in imitation of Philips's Cyder, is a long didactic poem of more than 2700 lines...interspersed with several graphic lines and passages, which show Dyer's love of the country...."<sup>58</sup>

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The English Garden, by William Mason, 1772-82

William Mason: After balancing the relative merits of the didactic-type poetry of Vergil and the preceptive-type epistolary poetry of Horace, he concluded:

"I thought the didactic method (of Vergil) not only more open but more proper for my attempt."<sup>59</sup>

Monthly Review:

"Whatever may be the case with respect to the other arts in general, England certainly claims pre-eminence of taste in that delightful one which is the subject of this didactic poem."<sup>60</sup>

Alexander Chalmers:

"In 1772, he published the first book of The English Garden, a work in which Mr. Warton says, 'didactic poetry is brought to perfection, by the happy combination of judicious precepts, with the most elegant ornaments of language and imagery.'<sup>61</sup>

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The Task, by William Cowper, 1785

Monthly Review:

"The poet's eye is awake on the various objects of creation, and all the scenes of public and domestic life; and from all he draws those moral lessons which tend to refine and improve the heart."<sup>62</sup>

Edinburgh Review:

"He passed from the imitation of poets, to the imitation of nature, and ventured boldly upon the representation of objects that had not been sanctified by the description of any of his predecessors."<sup>63</sup>

"...he has found a multitude of subjects for ridicule and reflection, for pathetic and picturesque description, for moral declamation, and devotional rapture...."<sup>64</sup>

"...we admire his powers of description ...."<sup>65</sup>

Alexander Chalmers:

"Cowper was found to possess that combination of energies which marks the comprehensive mind of a great and inventive genius, and to furnish examples of the sublime, the pathetic, the descriptive, the moral, and the satirical, so numerous that nothing seemed beyond his grasp, and so original that nothing reminds us of any former poet."<sup>66</sup>

The London Mercury: "One has only to read the argument at the top of the third book, called "The Garden" in order to see in what a dreary didactic spirit it was written."<sup>67</sup>

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The opinions of the critics regarding the separate poems have been documented; however, group classifications have been attempted. Joseph Warton, who saw the close relationship of the two genres of poetry, placed the following poems in a single didactic and descriptive group: Cyder, The Chase, The Pleasures of Imagination, The Art of Preserving Health, The Fleece, and The English Garden.<sup>68</sup> Recent literary men, Havens, Durling, and McKillop have gone decisively farther in this system of classification.

In a chapter named "Meditative and Descriptive Poetry," Havens discourses on The Seasons, The Task, The Chase, The Enthusiast, The Pleasures of Melancholy, The Fleece, and Cyder.<sup>69</sup> Another chapter of the same study is called "Technical Treatises in Verse," and includes Cyder, The Chase, The Art of Preserving Health, The Fleece, and The English Garden.<sup>70</sup> Night Thoughts, The Grave, and The Pleasures of Imagination take lead parts in a chapter entitled "Philosophical Poetry."<sup>71</sup>

Durling's classifications lack finality in that they, also, are too general. He remarks that "didactic and descriptive poetry mingle, until a clear distinction often becomes difficult to draw,"<sup>72</sup> and proceeds to cite the eighteenth-century didactic and descriptive poems under such chapter heads as

"Early Georgic Essays in English," "The Poetry of Country Occupations," and "The Muse of 'Utility'."73

The most accurate classification of those poems which include the intermixture of descriptive and didactic elements has been that used by McKillop. In his books and lectures, Dr. McKillop makes use of the term DESCRIPTIVE-DIDACTIC, a very successful twin-tab for the poems. Into such a composite class may be placed all of the blank verse poems of this study, except The Enthusiast and The Pleasures of Melancholy, which may more aptly be called reflective-descriptive poems.



## CONCLUSION

Since limitations must be drawn for theses, only twelve blank verse poems have been classified here. But, more important, a classification has been suggested which may be extended to include many more poems. Confining the process to blank verse poetry is not necessary, though the majority of descriptive-didactic poems were written in that prosodic style. The expanded list might include such poems as Smart's Hop-Garden, Dodsley's Agriculture, Weeke's Barbados, Grahame's British Georgics, Dyer's Ruins of Rome, Gisborne's Walks in a Forest, Grainger's Sugar Cane, Tighe's The Plants, and many others.

From the reading done for the purposes of this study, it has been unmistakably evident that many writers were "feeling" for a catch-all classification for this eighteenth-century poetry, which was composed of a "wild diffusion of sentiments," a "wild expansion of general views," and "digressive sallies." The descriptive and didactic genres so nearly fused into one genre that, indeed, such remarks as these may be found in literary critiques:

"...descriptive poetry should not only move, it should instruct."

and

"The true idea of a didactic poem...its real purpose is not to teach, but to amuse under the semblance of teaching...."

The two genres of poetry, however, were not always joined. Separate treatises were written on both species, as has been

seen, and there were, of course, poems written in the one genre which had no trace of the other.

The classification "descriptive-didactic," it must be explained, might just as well have been "didactic-descriptive." The former has been decided upon merely with deference to Thomson for his Seasons. Actually, the more thorough classifier would vary the two heads, the initial word of the hyphenation indicating the primary classification of the poem. However, such thoroughness might also lead to confusion in determining the proper category for a poem whose character is as much descriptive as it is didactic.

Throughout the individual sections has run a steady stream of remark on this blank verse poetry; the accumulation of material relative to the poems has, for the most part, been the product of research in eighteenth-century publications. Except for the suggestions of Wordsworth, no opinions of nineteenth-century scholars have been recorded regarding the classification of these poems--that facet of the subject could be interesting. From such recent publications as The Background of Thomson's Seasons and Newton Demands the Muse, it can be seen that our own generation is not lacking in an interest in this poetry.

## NOTES

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- 10 Alan Dugald McKillop, English Literature from Dryden to Burns, p. 412.
- 11 Cecil A. Moore, "Shaftesbury and Ethical Poets in England," PMLA, XXXI (1916), 289.
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- 3 Joseph Trapp, "De Poemate Didactico," Praelectiones Poeticae.
- 4 Richard E. Tickell, Editor, "De Poesi Didactica," trans. by J. L. Austin, Thomas Tickell and the Eighteenth Century Poets.

- 5 Joseph Warton, "Reflections on Didactic Poetry," The Works of Vergil, I, 395.
- 6 Addison, op. cit., p. 14.
- 7 Warton, op. cit., p. 394.
- 8 Hugh Blair, op. cit., p. 447.
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- 10 Alexander Pope, "An Essay on Criticism," Eighteenth Century Poetry and Prose, p. 352, ll. 573-74.
- 11 Addison, op. cit., p. 17.
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- 13 Loc. cit.
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- 15 Warton, op. cit., p. 400.
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- 18 Goldsmith (?), op. cit., I, 15.
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- 35 Margaret Fitzgerald, First Follow Nature, p. 112.
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- 40 R. A. Aubin, Topographical Poetry of the 18th Century, p. 46.

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- 49 Section III, p. 47.
- 50 DeHaas, op. cit., p. 208.
- 51 Durling, op. cit., p. 132.
- 52 Anderson, op. cit., "Life of Thomas Warton," XI, 1059.
- 53 Ibid., p. 1059.
- 54 Durling, op. cit., p. 132.
- 55 Drake, op. cit., "On The Fleece of Dyer," VIII, p. 140.
- 56 Anderson, op. cit., "Life of Dyer," IX, 549.
- 57 Myra Reynolds, op. cit., p. 106.
- 58 DeHaas, op. cit., p. 92.
- 59 Mason, op. cit., "Preface to The English Garden," p. vi.
- 60 "The English Garden," Monthly Review, XLVI (1772), 219.
- 61 Chalmers, op. cit., "Life of Mason," XVIII, 311.
- 62 "The Task: a Poem in Six Books," Monthly Review, LXXIV (1786), 419.
- 63 "Hayley's Life of Cowper," Edinburgh Review, II (1803), 81.
- 64 Ibid., p. 81.
- 65 "Mant's Poems," Edinburgh Review, XI (1807-08), 168.
- 66 Chalmers, op. cit., "Life of Cowper," XVIII, 601.
- 67 "William Cowper, by Robert Lynd," The London Mercury, II (1920), 60.
- 68 Warton, op. cit., An Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope, II, 55.

- 69 Havens, op. cit., "Meditative and Descriptive Poetry," p. 236.
- 70 Ibid., "Technical Treatises in Verse," p. 359.
- 71 Ibid., "Philosophical Poetry," p. 382.
- 72 Durling, op. cit., p. 60.
- 73 Ibid., pp. 33, 59, 108.

#### Conclusion

- 1 "Les Saisons, Poeme," Monthly Review, XLI (1769), 496.
- 2 Somerville, op. cit., "Critical Essay by John Aikin," p. 1.

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