

A Glimpse of The Beatific Vision

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Abstract

The Blessed Henry Newman who towers high above his contemporaries morally, spiritually and intellectually stands out as a symbol of moral excellence and spiritual vision in his own time as well as the time we live in. His poems dealt with the striking themes of death, burial and resurrection which are very much Christian themes in nature. In *The Poem of Gerontius*, Newman portrays and penetrates into the very theology of the Christian faith contrasted with his contemporaries who were not clergies in the church. Gerontius' passage from theological to intellectual faith, dilemmas of his self and the Christian hope is the chief concern of this paper.

Keywords: Spirituality, Death, Christian, Theology, After-life, Soul, Immortality

Introduction

The Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman (1801-1890) towers high above his contemporaries morally, spiritually and intellectually. Yet he is not as widely or as thoroughly known as his genius and spiritual merits deserve. He was a Fellow and Tutor of Oriel College, Oxford, a priest and religious champion, a symbol of piety, learning, spirituality, a preacher, a counselor, editor, Founder and Head of the first University of Dublin, a prolific writer and a Cardinal. He was both an ascetic and an artist. He was blessed with a mind of kaleidoscopic nature which discerned the underlying unity of the varied ideas and philosophies.

In today's world of a commercialized and consumerist culture psychological unrest and spiritual bankruptcy, John Henry Newman stands out as a symbol of moral excellence and spiritual vision. This champion of a spiritual vision would ever remain as an image of a noble soul clad in moral and spiritual grandeur and as a symbol of the triumph of the soul over materialistic and hedonist urges of human nature in its journey to the Divine. From the very beginning of his life, this brilliant Anglican felt an urge to live in constant union with God in this earthly life and longed to experience an eternal union with the Creator at the end of his life. Newman's masterpiece in poetry is *The Dream of Gerontius* which is a poetic drama and this is our focus of study here. Through this poem he unveils his mystical experiences of an intimation of the Last Four things of Christian Theology: Death, Judgement, Heaven and Hell.

The theme of Death

John Henry Newman, the intellectual saint and seer of nineteenth century England was acutely aware of the transitory nature of this visible world which he considered the outward shell of an Eternal Kingdom. According to him this life received its dignity and value as a preparation for the next life. The mystery of death which would enable the soul to attain that Ultimate Union with the Divine was uppermost in his mind.

Even the early poems titled, 'My Birthday'¹, 'Birthday Offering'² and the 'Trance of Time'³, point to man's mortality and to the higher life which awaits him upon resurrection from the dead. Poem like 'Consolation in Bereavement'⁴, 'A Picture'⁵ 'A voice from Afar',⁶ written at his sister Mary's death and 'Separation of Friends'⁷ deal with death and point towards the Beatific Vision thereafter. In 'Separation of Friends', Newman writes:

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

Death was a vivid theme in Victorian time due to the high mortality rate of the time. Hence the works of many writers portray this social concern. A number of poems and novels of the time have death as a theme. Thus Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, some of Browning's dramatic monologues and such works as *The Ring and the Book* and Hopkin's *The Wreck of the Deutschland* reflect a concern with death. Translations of Dante's work were popular during this time. Southey's poetry with the themes of death and judgement exercised a considerable influence on Newman.

Scripture and the traditions of the Church concerning death and Judgement form recurrent themes in Newman's poems. The medieval culture gave prominence to death as a *memento mori* and the nineteenth century sentimentalized death as is seen in *In Memoriam*. But for Newman death brought him face to face with God: "It is face to face, *souls cum solo*, in all matters between man and his God. He alone creates; He alone has redeemed; before His awful eyes we go in death; in the vision of Him is eternal beatitude."⁸

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

1 Elisabeth, Ann Noel, *An Edition from the Poem by John Henry Cardinal Newman* (Diss.), University of Illinois, 1956, pp. 6-7. (Henceforth Elisabeth)

2 *Ibid.*, pp. 22 - 24.

3 *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

4 *Ibid.*, pp. 33 - 34.

5 *Ibid.*, pp. 34 - 37.

6 *Ibid.*, pp. 42 - 43.

7 *Ibid.*, pp. 179- 180.

8 *Ibid.*

9 *Ibid.*

The poem begins with a welcome imagery of rest which provides a relief to the mourners that their loved ones are at peaceful repose after a care-worn life. Hence there is no reason for 'loud-voiced grief'(3). The poet uses open-ended imagery which provides considerable freedom for the reader to draw fitting and consoling pictures about the state of existence of their deceased relatives and friends. They rest at 'the mountain grotts of Eden'(5). The choice of the words is remarkable. Eden is supposed to be the first delightful abode of man. The word 'grot' stands for grotto or ornamental cave and it conveys also a feeling of 'limbo' or 'Hades' where the deceased souls wait for entrance into a still higher state of life.

The reference to the river that waters the garden of Eden¹⁰ implies the idea of fostering life since these souls are cared for till they become worthy for a holy state of life. There is no indication of any suffering or disturbance that mortals need to face in their earthly existence: "They at eddying pool or current deep/ shall never more grow pale" (9-10). These souls are no more at the mercy of time that brings along with it change and decay and the torments of life on earth have no power over them. An ethereal atmosphere prevails about them and:

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

The words woven together and their sounds have a magical power to soothe: 'sounds blend,' 'water glide,' 'Angelic forms abide,' 'Seraphs chant': in the mid-state between life and eternity. Together with the beautifully achieved 'tone colour,' the intense emotion is in the heart of the poet too adds to the main force of the poem. The repeated use of 'iz' sounds adds to the soothing sense. The alternative use of short and long lines in the poem gives a kind of rocking sensation which is also meant to give a pleasant feeling. Newman's first title to the poem was 'Rest' which highlighted the idea of restful repose. His final choice of title 'Waiting for the Morning' highlights the idea of pilgrims who have almost reached the goal. This poem foreshadows the grand requiem *The Dream of Gerontius*.

Themes of the Invisible Realities

The poem entitled 'Angelic Guidance'¹¹ illustrates the poet's belief in a ministering spirit. The poem 'Guardian Angel'¹² depicts his belief that it will be with him from birth through life through death and will deliver his soul to purgatory. When he achieves Beatific Vision it is the Guardian Angel who will lead him to his Heavenly Home at the end of his pilgrimage. When the pilgrim deals with the world of invisible realities in his masterpiece *The Dream of Gerontius* the true poetry of his soul comes out. Heaven

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Elisabeth, pp. 70-71.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 198-199.

seems to lie about him like a known kingdom and its bright denizens walk with him through many a thorny path. There are several poems of 1850s and 1860s anticipatory of the Beatific Vision towards which the poet saint was advancing. Poems such as 'The Golden Prison,'¹³ and 'For the Dead'¹⁴, speak of the last things death, Judgement, purgatory and heaven. Through his novel of 1856 *Callista* he attempts to present a heroic Christian death with some resemblances to Southey's romances which he admired.

Death and afterlife were subjects which were ever uppermost in his mind. In one of his sermons, 'The Lapse of Time,'¹⁵ Newman has given a summary of the poem. Here he speaks of the awful moment of death, the judgement on the soul when its fate is decided before it begins a new life. Many of his sermons foreshadow the same theme: "and it [the soul] submits itself to things of time so far as to be brought to perfection by them, that, when the veil is withdrawn and it sees itself to be, where it ever has been, in God's kingdom, it may be found worthy to enjoy it."¹⁶

The visible world the pilgrim considered a beautiful veil¹⁷ and spoke of it as a screen between him and the true world.¹⁸ He cautions us in a sermon preached in 1837, 'The Invisible World,'¹⁹ that the visible world may not prevent us from seeing the true Invisible World. In the climax of the sermon he uses a simile drawn from the visible world to describe the Invisible:

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

As time went by and as the seeker was nearing the end of his journey he committed himself completely to the Invisible World. The fleeting mystical experience of the Invisible World he had made it clear to him of the shadowy and the pale nature of worldly grandeur as the poem 'The Two Worlds,'²¹ illustrates. This seeker of the Divine reminds one and all that their only true and lasting joy lies in the Invisible World. What we see around in the world is but *Maya*. Hence in *The Dream of Gerontius* the mystic's passionate concern is that we apprehend the existence of the Invisible World,

13 *Ibid.*, pp. 199 - 200.

14 *Ibid.*, 206-207.

15 John Henry Newman, 'The Lapse of Time', in *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, Vol 7, San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1987, pp.1409-1415.

16 John Henry Newman, 'The Greatness and Littleness of Human Life', in *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, Vol. 4, pp. 861 -868.

17 Mozley, Anne, (ed.) *Letters and Correspondence*, Vol. 1, p.161

18 *Ibid.*, p.213.

19 John Henry Newman, 'The Invisible World', in *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, Vol. 4, pp. 852-860.

20 *Ibid.*, pp. 857-858.

21 Elisabeth, *Op. Cit.*, p. 209.

timeless and immaterial which lies unseen about us now and will be revealed after death. He wants us to prepare ourselves to encounter the Infinite Goodness and Great Judge through the experience of a dying person. The poem succeeds in its objectives.

The Poem of Gerontius: Techniques Used

Newman made skilful use of various literary traditions such as the literature of meditation, the medieval hymn and the medieval and the scriptural dream-vision in the composition of *The Dream of Gerontius*. The practice of meditation played an integral part in the creation of the works of a number of seventeenth century poets, notably Donne, Herbert, Southwell and Crashaw. But it is his own personal experience of the traditional practice which fed Newman's poetic conception and made him write in terms of the internal drama of the soul. The poem resembles a meditative poem concerned with death.

The writers of the Middle Ages expressed spiritual through the dream vision technique. Dante gave this tradition its supreme form in *The Divine Comedy*. The Bible has familiarized people with the literary form of the dream vision. Newman who was well acquainted with the Bible could have learnt the use of visions and dream from the Scriptures alone. But it was the medieval writers who greatly developed this technique. In one of his sermons Newman comments:

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

A Unique Poem

In dramatic form Newman depicts the passage of the soul from life to death and the initial experiences of the afterlife. Gerontius the protagonist of the poem is the representation of all those who attempt to live life according to God's will even when their efforts may be inadequate. The experience of Gerontius is Newman's own experience to come and thus has considerable significance for many of its readers. No poem in the language is so daringly explicit as is *The Dream of Gerontius*²³ in the use of revelation, of metaphysics and in its psychological analysis.

The dramatic experience can be divided into three scenes. The first scene focuses

22 Neale, J. M., (trans. of Latin Hymns) *Medieval Hymns and Sequences*, 1854.

23 John Henry Newman, 'The Greatness and Littleness of Human Life', in *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, Vol. 4, pp. 861-868.

on the death experience of Gerontius which consists of his physical sensations and dreadful fears. In the second scene Gerontius finds himself undergoing new sensations after death which is made comprehensible by his awareness of the Angelic presence. The five hymns of praise by the Angels before the Beatific Vision form the greatest truths of Christian revelation. The moment of Judgement reveals to Gerontius that he is saved even though he has to undergo purgatorial suffering. The last scene of the poetic- drama portrays the nature of Purgatory and the purgatorial suffering that would cleanse the soul until it is made worthy of Heavenly Fellowship.

The nine hundred lines of the poem are wrought out in a single unity in the midst of great variety. Each of the varied characters including the living, the Spirits, the Guardian Angel, the Angel of the Agony, the five Choirs of Angelicals, the demons, the souls in Purgatory, and Gerontius himself speaks in its own personal way; have their own authentic voices.

As in the *Prometheus Bound* of Aeschylus, so in *The Dream of Gerontius* the principal character is everything and the attendant characters occupy only a minor sphere. Gerontius himself takes up our interest so totally that we hardly notice the accessories to the drama. He is brought face to face with what popular medieval preaching styles the Four Last Things: death, Judgement, purgatory, hell or heaven. The setting of the poem is in a Christian atmosphere of hope. Although a believer Gerontius is a mar of the world and therefore the dread of dying, the fear of annihilation, judgement and punishment are uppermost in his mind in the opening verse of the poem. These tears wield unnerving power in the mind and soul of the man at the moment of his death. The poet deals with these fears with psychological, spiritual and poetic penetration and masters them with simplicity.

The Deathbed Scene

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

The dominant subject of this section is the personality of Gerontiu. He has to accept the fact that death is imminent to him: "And Thou art calling me; I know it now" (2). This line focuses on an experience which is beginning to become real to the old man. He tries to define the intuition that dawns on him by using negatives, which is a skillful technique used by the poet: "Not by the token of this faltering breath" (3). The phrase 'faltering breath' denote an unknown experience and the poet makes it clear

that Gerontius finds the process of dying hard. The poet conveys the struggle of the dying man in the verse form with its alternately rhymed lines of iambic pentameter and particularly in the trochaic substitution at the beginning of lines 1,3,5,7,10,13 and 21. Fear overwhelms the faith of Gerontius and his prayer put in parenthesis only highlights the fact that it is subservient to the dominant fears. Gerontius is brought to this awareness of his separation from this life by "this new feeling never felt before" (6).

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

As Gerontius realizes his spiritual disintegration he also perceives his spiritual needs. The 'visitant' 'knocking his dire summons' intensifies the feeling of impending collapse. The lines that follow capture this ultimate sense of self-loss: "As though my very being has given away, / As though I was no more a substance now, / And could fall back on nought to be my stay" (18 -20), and Gerontius appeals to his God: "(Help, loving Lord! Thou my sole refuge, Thou)" (21). The loss of personal contact is brought out. He discerns the passing away of all transitory things and experiences the vanishing of every external support. He must: "drop from out the universal frame" (23) and the dying man experiences panic once again even more deeply. This is best conveyed in negative terms. He has to return to that 'shapeless, scopeless, blank abyss' (24), conveying the lack of an observable and measurable quality of this experience. The final line here is a prayer in a single line of hexameter: "So pray for me, my friends, who have not strength to pray" (28). What we find for example in Tennyson's *In Memoriam* is a longing for communion with his departed friend Hallam who symbolizes the very essence of the life after death but we find that the attention of Gerontius is focused on God.

The lines that follow show that Gerontius is not a coward but an armed Christian who displays his vigorous courage. As admonished in the Scripture: "Let your loins be girded,"²⁴ so Gerontius addresses his soul: "Rouse thee, my fainting soul and play the man; / And through such waning span / Prepare to meet thy God" (42 43 45). The poet wishes the soul to receive the grace of the incarnation, passion, death and resurrection of Christ and also the strengthening grace of the Holy Spirit to endure this difficult yet passing hour. The skilful use of liturgical prayers and litanies by those assisting at the deathbed scene such as: "Be merciful, be gracious; spare him Lord" (50), heighten the

24 John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, London Nicholas Lash, 1979, pp. 15-93.

growing tension as the soul confronts death. The alternative use of Latin and English lines is especially effective in its suggestion of traditional faith fused with personal feeling.

In lines 72-107 Gerontius accepts the doctrines of his faith, even though the sense of disintegration he experiences overwhelms him and threatens his faith in God. He tries hard to believe the dogmas of his Christian faith for if his faith fails he would perish everlastingly. Lines 76-79 reflect the lack of ease Gerontius feels. The intellectual declaration of faith in this section brings about a balance between subjectivity and objectivity producing tension since Gerontius is still very much at the mercy of his self. It is still his self that dominates the declarations of Faith and Hope.

In lines 80-83 Newman puts the dying man in control of his faith. The pronoun 'I' is placed before 'trust' and 'hope' that are declared 'most fully.'²⁵ He accepts wholeheartedly the fundamental beliefs of Catholicism, that is, the Triune God, Man's salvation through the Sacrifice of the Incarnate God, the Church as the institution of God and the expression of His Will, the efficacy of the Mass and the communion of the Saints. The metrical pattern used here supports the external reality to which Gerontius commits himself. The alternate use of Latin and English stanzas provides a repeated pattern of indirect warnings. This is supported by the trochaic metre with its incantatory effects.

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

In lines 100-107, Gerontius seems to have subdued his self and he offers adoration to the Holy Trinity. At this point Gerontius seems ready to die but the struggle is renewed. The lines that follow show his emotional disintegration and they also show the purifying process which Gerontius undergoes to discover a wholehearted acceptance of Faith. Faith of Gerontius starts to suffer the rhyming structure becomes intermittent and his distress is similarly reflected in the metrical collapse between line 112 and 129. Though pentameter is reasserted at intervals, the verse form evades metrical control in the most trying moments of suffering that Gerontius experiences as lines 114 and

25 Lefebure D. G, 'Liturgy of the Dead', in *The Saint Andrew Daily Missal*, Belgium, Abbey of St. Andrew, 1959, pp. 1582-15 84.

124 portray. What Newman tries to convey through this metrical versatility is the dominant sense of self once again rather than that of God.

The senses of Gerontius are shaken by pain and by his terror of death once again. In line 108 'I can' is immediately negated showing that Gerontius has lost God here again with the result that he is only aware of his own self: "That sense of ruin, which is worse than pain" (109) horrifies him. He is here the passive object of: "That masterful negation and collapse" (110). His personality still struggles for identity. Line 111 is so worded that Gerontius is able to observe his own fall: "as though I bent / Over the dizzy brink" (111 -112). The sketch of the dying descent is skilfully worded. The dying man's constant emotional involvement contrasts with the attempt to become detached in line 72-106.

Newman, using 'infinite' in line 113, portrays the never ending nature of the fall over an 'infinite descent,' and a frightening picture with its unlimited associations and the placing of the word 'Or worse' in line 114. Infinity is presented as a continuous process with the use of the continuous verb from: "Down, down for ever I was falling through" (115). Moment by moment the process of dying becomes a more acute reality. The cognizable structured outline established with 'solid frame work' (116) is immediately destroyed in the shapelessness and in the vagueness of 'vast abyss' (118).

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

The poet uses prose rhythm in the last line to refocus Gerontius in the direction of God as he yields to Faith totally. Both urgency and conviction are expressed here. It is then that Gerontius turns to the incarnate suffering Christ who was strengthened by an Angel in His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. Gerontius on his deathbed is also in need of Supernatural help. In the poem "Guardian Angel"²⁶ written in 1853 the

26 John Henry Newman, *Essay Critical and Historical*, Vol.1.7.

pilgrim poet had expressed his mystical conviction that the Angel will be by his side at the moment of his death:

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

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

Newman handles metre most skilfully in his poem. It is as varied as the context demands. It is quickened in time as Gerontius struggles to arouse his fainting energies. The firm rhythms that Gerontius uses at the affirmation of the Creed disintegrate as he confronts the loss of personal identity which stands as security for our earthly individuality. The metre changes again when Gerontius glows with hope and Faith and when his energies begin to ebb the metre falls to a subdued measure.

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

The unvarying repetitions of the litany parallel the cyclic motion of human existence: 'Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.'²⁷ This cycle is meant to make irrelevant any notion of lasting individual achievement on earth. Using contrasts skilfully Newman achieves amazing results. The chant of the assistants low and solemn is full to tender hopefulness. It falls softly on the fearful feeling of collapse which Gerontius feels. It has a consoling effect on his desperate effort to cling to consciousness. In his agonized prayers for help at a time he is wild with horror and dismay the chants of the Assistants strengthen and encourage Gerontius and comfort his dying. The description of death in the poem is not like the stark images of an atheistic existentialist. Hence the 'emptying out' (11) is not into the void but into the hands of the Lord (147-148).

In lines 146-148 Gerontius seems to surrender at his dying moment all the pain and the fears of his life and most of all his own self into the hands of his God. After the agony of fear the metre falls back into an inert cadence which conveys the weariness

27 *The Bible*, 1 Corinthians, 13:12

of Gerontius: "*Novissima hora est;*" and I fain would sleep. / *The pain has wearied me..... Into Thy hands, / O Lord, Thy hands....*" (146-148).

Newman is in close touch with both the words. He perceives that the keenest of the challenges even for the noblest of men come at the last hour when his senses fail him. With this realisation comes the final surrender of Gerontius. The classic words of the Christian ritual are heard in sonorous cadences at this surrender in lines 149-169, which begin: "*Proficiscere, anima Christiana, de hoc mundo!/Go forth upon thy journey, Christian soul!/Go for this world!...*" 149-151), and it is meant to strengthen and to accompany the soul at its journey to the Seat of Judgement. Thus the first scene of the poem closes with the death of Gerontius and his soul is escorted out of his life with the power of the Church.

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

In his 1829 Essay Newman defined poetry as an 'unfettered effusion of genius'²⁸ which is an intensely personal poetry and Gerontius is perhaps the most personal of all. If Newman believed poetry should express personal emotions he believed as strongly that it should serve a moral and religious purpose. Gerontius is not merely a dying man but a devout Christian believer. His psychological perceptions which unify the poem are inextricable from his Faith. His passage from this word to the next follows the pattern set out in orthodox Christian doctrine but the expression of this doctrine, the way it governs versification and the image patterns reveal Newman's own creative skill.

The Ethereal Journey

The journey of the soul after its departure from the body is depicted in the second scene. Here Newman gives the finest and the most subtle expression to his creative genius by his unique spiritual and psychological insight divining the unknown by the known. His mystic soul searches out the depths of the unknown which is beyond experience. Feeling as a means of comprehending the poem begins to fade with the death of Gerontius. From this point the sense of hearing is made to carry on the action. As a result the tension becomes less painful.

The concept of temporal and sensory perception provides the keynote. Time and senses symbolized in the poem are two of the three great temptations facing mortal man. They are the world and the flesh. The scene begins with the awareness in the

²⁸ John Henry Newman uses his word 'apprehensive' in a non-traditional sense, related to 'understanding' rather than to 'worry.'

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

In this section of the poem as the heavenly perspective is introduced Newman uses metaphysics and theology in the description of the disembodied Soul. The poet's use of these means is sure and impressive. When the soul of Gerontius passes out of the body it feels light and free as if it were itself for the first time. In the deep stillness it hears 'no more the busy beat of time' (175). It remembers as in a dream the voice 'He's gone' (179), a sigh going about the room and the voice of the priest raised in prayer: subvenerunt (181) and the other voices joined in prayer. The soul continues to have a lingering affinity with the earth still. The voices that resound in his ears are: "but thin and low, / And fainter and more faint" (182-183).

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

Or am I traversing infinity
By endless subdivision, hurrying back
From finite towards infinitesimal,
Thus dying out of the expansive world? (220-223)

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

helped to guard Gerontius from serious sin. This holy fear has 'forestalled'd the agony' (376). Gerontius faces the Judgement with trust and confidence in the mercy of God.

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

Patterning is used in the layout of the Angel's words in lines 236-257 and the lines of the Guardian Angel brim over with joy as it announces: "My work is done" (236), "the crown is won,/ Alleluia" (240-241).

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

Further the utterances of the Angelical Choirs which also rhyme reveal that true immortals do not make any progress like the mortals. An Angel has a life that knows no change "through those cycles all but infinite,/Has had a strong and pure celestial life" (261-262). It is not an Angel's portion to take part in that: "shifting parti-coloured scene/ Of hope and fear of triumph and dismay,/Of recklessness and penitence" (285-287). These lines describe most beautifully and poignantly man's life on earth which is but 'a shifting parti-coloured scene' that has no stability and permanency. Human life on earth is a flux composed of 'hope', 'fear', 'triumph', 'dismay', 'recklessness', 'penitence' and it is but 'dreary' 'history' and a 'life-long fray!' (288). These lines convey Newman's insight into and his knowledge of human lives in their day-to-day strivings and its ability to portray it vividly and touchingly.

The Angel's description of man's empty history recalls the fifth chapter of Newman's *Apologia* which speaks about the endless series of failures of man's earthly efforts and hopes. Even the crisis of faith which Christ seemed to have suffered in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the cross as well as summary of his teachings to men are highlighted

by the Fifth Choir of Angels, 'to suffer and to die' (813) and it is the predicament of all humanity.

When the Soul meets the Eternal face to face it reaches a sense of that knowledge and understanding of which St. Paul speaks.²⁹ That sense of wholeness and the knowledge of self which comes over the Soul puts everything in perspective as is conveyed through lines 307-312. Thus the Soul becomes a new creation 'whole of heart,' 'self-possess'd,' 'full content' 'apprehensive,'³⁰ 'discriminant,' with 'no temptation' to 'intoxicate,' nor even 'terror.' Such is the transformation that comes upon the Soul which has shed its mortal frame. Therefor the Soul loses the capacity for freedom of choice and sin: "You cannot now/Cherish a wish which ought not to be wish'd" (328-329).

The poet conveys the actions that take place after death such as the journey of the Soul to the Judgement Seat, the explanation of the Guardian Angel on this journey, the glimpse of the Beatific Vision, the entrance into Purgatorial state as taking place in an infinitesimal fraction of time in lines 337-343. Not even before the passing away of a moment in man's time divided 'into its million-million-millionth part' (339) since Gerontius died, the ethereal journey and the celestial experiences of the disembodied Soul take place.

The way in which the spirits measure 'the flow of time' (345) is different from that of men: "For spirits and men by different standards mete/ The less and greater in the flow of time" (344-345). Time is no longer measured by the sun, the moon and the stars nor by recurring seasons nor by clocks but it is measured "by the intensity of the living thought alone" (354) and time grows or wanes by the intensity of the individual thought. For spirits 'time is not a common property' (356) and each mind 'is standard of its own chronology' (360). "And memory lacks its natural resting-points /Of years, and centuries, and periods" (361-362). The Guardian Angel explains to the Soul the particular nature of heavenly time in lines (344-364).

Newman describes after-life as one which is super sensuous. It is a world of signs and types which embody holy truths. Though the Guardian Angel carries the Soul along it does not see the Angel but only hears its voice which is 'a heart-subduing melody!' (235). The Soul cannot differentiate the senses: hearing, touch, sight, taste or smell. Through the faculties of his imagination and inside the seer describes with exactness what words can convey: the feelings of the Soul on its strange journey. The Angel clarifies the Soul's puzzling mode of awareness in lines (252-530) as it clarifies previously the Soul's puzzling relationship to time. The Soul has no real physical attributes such as a living mortal has: touch, taste and hearing. The Soul is given perception which seems to come through bodily sense organs only in order that the 'stem solitude' (531) may not prove too much to bear.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

The Soul is now enfolded and enwrapped in dreams 'that are true, yet enigmatical' (537). It resembles the comprehension of a man who has lost a hand or foot and yet seems to suffer in the missing member. Although the Soul has lost the entire body it still perceives in terms of space and time, of pain and pleasure, and of sensation of odour, taste, touch, and hearing. It is "(a)s ice which blisters may be said to burn" (545). The Soul has not regained what it has lost 'new-made and glorified' (556) Therefore the Angel explains to the Soul: "the belongings of thy present state,/Save through such symbols, come not home to thee" (538-539). The poet creates through the power of imagination and more so through spiritual insights a living, pulsating experience of the life to come. This adds to the power of the poem and speaks for the originality of it.

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

It is already explained that the essence of Heaven consists in [bearing 'to gaze on the unveil'd face of God.' So it follows that except for a single piercing glimpse of the Lord at its Judgement the Soul must remain blind until it is purified by the purgatorial fires. In "The i Pillar of the Cloud,"³¹ the poet had confessed his love of the 'garish day' (11) and his choice of seeing his own path which obscured the "Kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom" (1). Here in this poem the Guardian Angel symbolizes the 'Kindly Light' and serves as the Soul's eyes in its darkness. This poem depends not so much upon the eye as upon the ear and this is because the poem is presented through the consciousness of a sightless man.

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

The liberation of Gerontius from his senses is also traced by Newman in even greater detail than his departure from time. If time limits and defeats a man's aspirations, the senses betray him even at the cost of his soul. As early as 1818 he had written in his poem "Solitude"³² how man's mortal perceptions listen to "the earthly din/ Of toil or mirth" (19-20) letting him miss the angelic voices which beckon from above. It is the senses alone that give Satan his power over the mortal man as lines 480-484 convey. So the lines dealing with the sensory transformation of Gerontius are less subtle than those dealing with the temporal. We may notice the use of the phrase 'a traitor nestling

31 Elisabeth, *Op. Cit.*, p. 152.

32 John Henry Newman, *Verses on Various Occasions*, London, Longmans, 1900, pp.3-4.

close at home' (481). Though 'a traitor,' Satan has comfortably settled down and has 'kept the keys' (483) of the senses. Man in his ignorance and in his search for sensual pleasures unlocks his heart 'to the deadliest foe.' (484)

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

In the second scene the potential for dramatic conflict is transferred to the demons. In lines 450-457 the staccato rhythms of the demons threaten the measured exposition of the Angel and reassert all that Soul has discarded namely, the fear of physical disintegration and: "The mind bold/ And independent,/The purpose free" (440-442). Newman understood the potential for evil and the darker side of human heart. His demons are unlike those of Milton's in *Paradise Lost* full of grandeur and power. Newman reduces his demons to devils whose power over the souls of the upright is limited.

It is true that Newman's demons are not Milton's great lords who in majestic splendor debate in golden pandemonium. Newman's demons resemble elemental, angry, illogical beings whose thoughts sink down in blind opposition and whose glory has vanished completely. Richard H. Hutton remarks aptly: "I know no more powerful conception anywhere of impotent restiveness and restlessness."³³ Those critics who turn away from Newman's demons prefer the grand Miltonic fiends and sympathize with the melancholic grandeur with which Byron reproduces the Miltonic idea of a fallen spirit in his *Heaven and Earth*.

The comic parts of *Doctor Faustus* by Marlowe and *The Screwtape Letters* by C. S. Lewis demonstrate the concept that the demonic is a caricature mimicking and playing upon human weakness. Even in Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* the demons are ridiculous and disgusting while they present the most deadly temptation. The critics who seem dissatisfied with Newman's demons forget that the choruses of the demons are deliberately made 'sour' and 'uncouth dissonance' (400) in contrast to the dialogues of Gerontius and the Guardian Angel. Newman uses this device to throw relief on both sides. The choruses of the demons are filled with such discord as are fitting to their spirit of maliciousness. The demonic choruses are irregular, in harsh rhythms and are in short clacking lines. In contrast to this the cadenced harmony of the angelic verses is most graceful and appealing.

Newman uses images of sense perceptions in some beautiful lines which are successful as they rely on imagery having to do with sound. In the case of the Angels

33 Hutton R.H., *Cardinal Newman*, London, Richard Clay and Sons Ltd, 1890 p 248.

Newman uses melodious lines based on the sense of hearing. After having passed through the House of Judgement the Soul is struck by the first sound it hears: "The sound is like the rushing of the wind/The summer wind among the lofty pines;/ Swelling and dying, echoing round about" (664-666)

Newman being a good musician had a keen aural comprehension and handled harmonies and dissonance well. If the Angel chants a hymn of triumph, a 'fierce hubbub' (390) warns that the demon throng hovers around the Judgement Seat. Their 'restless panting' (436) breaks out in coarse stanzas, turbulent, human and grim as in medieval mysteries. The contrast between the graceful harmonies of the Angelic Choirs and the cacophonous dissonances of the demons is masterful. Newman also calls upon the sense of smell Portraying the foul odour of the demons as "Some bodily form of ill" (121) that pollutes "the hallowed air." He uses a subtle image of decay and repulsion when he describes the demons as 'beasts of prey.' (437)

The Soul hears the Angels sing the Salvation history in relation to Man and the Angels. They describe the nature of sinful Man and pure Angels and reveal the greatness of God and His ways. While the Spirits decide their eternal choice of God humans oscillate between the attractions posed by the senses and time. Man compromises with the material world and thus loses his power to control it. He finds himself in the midst of corruption that torments his own heart. The result is that: "He deed his penance age by age" (648). What ultimately brings about his redemption from sin is 'the Almighty's breath' (652) that is poured out on him. Unlike humans for spirits be they good or evil there exists: "No growth and no decay/ 'Twas hopeless, all-engulfing night,/Or beatific day" (679-681).

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

He portrays in lines 698-701 the cost man has to pay for this. Before he can enjoy the final bliss he must suffer in body and soul, endure the anguish of death and the chill felt at the fading out of the senses which give him his identity as a living being. The soul must face God alone at the last and be consumed by His love. After the mystic cleansing of purgatory the soul would be aflame with selfless and pure love for the Divine alone as its only choice. The result is perfect holiness in this final Union. In a like manner all good Christian souls like the soul of Gerontius could join in changeless

eternity when all journeys are ended on that final Day of Judgement when time stops forever.

With the help of the Guardian Angel, the soul of Gerontius approaches the Judgement Seat and gets an insight into the nature of the Divine. The Soul also becomes aware of its own unworthiness to be in the company of the holy souls in Heaven. The Soul longs for at least a glimpse of the Divine Presence even though its own imperfections loom large before it. When the Angel explained to the Soul that it is blind and that even its purgatory would be 'fire without its light' in lines 561-563 the Soul asserts: 'His will be done!' (564). At the same time the Soul makes known the hope that it had nourished in life that it would be able to have at least a sight of God to strengthen it before it would be "plunged amid the avenging flame" (569). The Angel does assure the Soul that it would have "that sight of the Most Fair" (582) for a moment and the effect of it 'will gladden' the Soul 'but it will pierce' the Soul as well (583). Only then would the Soul realize the depth of the Divine Love against which it has failed and its consequent unworthiness to be in the Divine Presence.

The Soul does not have any fear of Judgement now and looks forward to it 'with a serenest joy' (373). The Angel explains the reason for this as a premonition granted to the Soul: "Straight from the Judge, expressive of its lot" (386). As a result there is no more the fear of punishment due to the self-knowledge the Soul gains after its departure from the body.

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

The relative absence of sensory imagery underscores the other-worldly nature of the mysterious regions beyond earth. In his romantic love of home, Newman paints in the words of the Angel a picture of the Everlasting Home which awaits the Soul in lines 616- 627. Heaven is no earthly temple or palace. We are made aware of a spiritual Heaven where the House of Judgement is made up of living, immortal beings who sing hymns unceasingly in their Creator's praise.

Surrounded by 'a grand, mysterious harmony' (740), the Soul advances for a single vision of 'the face of the Incarnate God' (708). The Angel informs the Soul that it: "Shall smite thee with that keen and subtle pain;/ And yet the memory which it leaves will be/ A sovereign febrifuge to heal the wound." (709-711) The Soul longs for this vision but the result of it would be that the Soul "wilt be sick with love, and yearn for Him" (721). The Angel further informs: "There is a pleading in His pensive eyes" (726) that will pierce the Soul 'to the quick, and trouble' it and that the Soul 'wilt hate and loathe' itself (727 - 728). Consequently the Soul's 'verierst, sharpest purgatory' (737) would be its longing for God coupled with its realization of its unworthiness before the all Holy.

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

At the Court of the Eternal Presence where peace and joy prevail the intervention of the Angel of the Agony conjures up the anguish of Gethsemane and once again supports the mounting tension pleading for a tormented and suffering Soul and inducing even in the readers a deep sense of sadness. Here the poem regains the old spell of the opening scene. The Angel of the Agony who was by the side of Christ when He was: "Lone in that garden shade, bedew'd with blood" (882), intercedes with Christ to have mercy on the soul of Gerontius, "by that shuddering dread which fell on" (825) Christ. The Angel continues the prayer in a sort of litany of the holy name of Jesus recapturing the agony Christ suffered to redeem this Soul.

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

The poet is meticulous about using the most fitting adjective and uses 'eager' to capture the compelling wish of the Soul to reach Christ: "The eager spirit has darted from my hold" (839). The fears and doubts that permeate the self and the Faith of Gerontius are no more there, instead the urgent desire for Christ is paramount in the Soul now. So in line 840 the poet uses the adjective 'intemperate' to explain the love of the soul, for its love now is boundless which goes beyond self to embrace the Beloved.

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

Gerontius is heard in the poem for the last time in lines 849-864. The fluid lyrical structure of the metre reflects his final contentment. Several of the lines have at their beginning trochaic substitutions that capture the note of total acceptance - 'Take,' 'There,' 'Told,' 'Love,' and there is a simplicity in the frequent monosyllables of the two-foot lines. The metrical range of this section is seen in the introduction of one single line of hexameter which marks the end of the lyric of Gerontius and leaves the final stresses on 'Him,' 'truth' and 'day' (864). As the Soul accepts fully the need for a passive role, a state of being rather than action, so it is: 'let me be' (840), as he lets himself be the object: Take me away. ..." (849). The Soul reconciles itself willingly to pain now: "And there in hope the lone night-watches keep" (851). It is 'hope' that would carry the Soul through suffering which is best described as 'lone.' Gerontius and for that matter each individual must suffer alone. The paradox of the situation is brought out: "There, motionless and happy in my pain" (853) the Soul affirms.

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

There will I sing my sad perpetual strain,
Until the mom.
There will I sing, and soothe my stricken breast,

Which ne'er can cease
To throb, and pine, and languish, till possest
Of its Sole Peace
There will I sing my absent Lord and Love: (855-861)

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

The Purgatorial Scene

Newman's sketch of purgatory differs from that of Dante's with its flames and physical suffering. Newman's visualization of purgatory is analogous to that of Catherine of Genoa.³⁴ Even the imagery is much the same. Both Catherine and Newman use the symbolism of 'fire' and 'water.' The characteristics that are found in Gerontius at his entry into purgatory are the same, namely, insight, acceptance, suffering and joy. Newman skillfully portrays the paradox of this purgatorial state that at the same moment of suffering Gerontius also passes through a process of love which as it destroys gives new life enlightens, brings understanding and 'the truth of everlasting day'(864).

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

As the Angel carries the Soul to the penal waters of Purgatory, once again we hear in the poem ethereal harmonies for a soul which has resolved all its discords: "the golden prison ope its gates/Making sweet music" (865-866). The souls in Purgatory receive the soul of Gerontius with a hymn composed of *Psalm 90*. This *Psalm* refers again to cyclic time. Purgatory is a place where Man must wait to free himself from sin in preparation for eternal joy. The holy souls in Purgatory throb, pine and languish due to their separation from God

34 Cf. Catherine, (St. Catherine of Genoa), *Treatise on Purgatory*, (trans.) Charlotte, et.al., London, 1946.

The paraphrase of the *Psalm* chanted by the souls in Purgatory with its mention of the Lord being the 'refuge' of His people 'in every generation' (872) sets the atmosphere of love and resignation to which Gerontius surrenders his soul. It is seasoned in hope and commingled in sadness. Newman gives an altered version of the *Psalm* here to fit the poetical setting.

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

Newman portrays the transformation of a Christian soul as a gradual discarding of its earthly chains rather than as a horrifying and abrupt change. At this most difficult time the Soul is not alone but is in the comforting presence of its Guardian Angel. Both the terror of death and the trial of Purgatory seem very realistic within the context of a devout Christian's earthly life. The Angel calms the fear in its final lyric beginning with the lines: "Softly and gently, dearly-ransom'd soul,/ In my most loving arms I now enfold thee" (885-886). The lyric quatrain provides 'Softly and gently' a consolation to the suffering Soul in Purgatory since its pains will be brief. Gerontius 'without a sob or a resistance' (890) enters the penal waters to live out his night of trial and to await the morning which is its new life in Heaven. The Soul would be ministered to by Angels and supported by the prayers of the faithful.

The farewell of the Guardian Angel with which the poetic drama concludes is a strain of solemn and tender pensiveness. The lines are beautifully rhymed. The last lines of the Valedictory 897 - 900 by the Guardian Angel have two levels of meaning. The 'bed of sorrow' (898) is both the deathbed and the purgatorial fire. The very same Angel who met Gerontius after the 'night of trial' (899) which was death promises that it will also welcome his fully redeemed soul on the 'morrow' (900) of Resurrection. Thus the poem ends on a quiet assuring note and the perfect chord of Hope after passing beyond the bounds of space and time.

Some critics seem to think that if Newman had conveyed the glory of Resurrection and Ascension to complete the theology would have been more majestic. But Newman is not writing a Salvation History and so he confines the poem to the experience of death and transition to Purgatory. Hence the poet strikes the right chord of perfect hope and leaves the Soul to await that future time when the Eternal condescends to 'come and wake him on the morrow'(900).

The Marvel of Reconciliation of Twin Vocations

Newman's greatest success in the poem is in developing the main character in whom we

see our future selves as we encounter the Ultimate. Towards the climax of the poem the poet relies increasingly* on the insight of the Church to complete the drama: the litanies, the rituals and the doctrines take over. But it is Newman's own personal insight which creates the unity. Yet the intensity of the poetry is felt much more keenly when the poet makes use of the appeal to psychology rather than to matters of Faith.

The successful communication of the message of the poem is brought out by effective artistry. The poet makes use of suitable metre, fitting liturgy and introduces the poetry of dogma to bring about the desired artistic effects. At times the use of blank verse has a Miltonic grandeur. The colloquy between Gerontius and the Guardian Angel forms the dramatic element. The choral hymns of the Seraphs whom they pass by on the journey to the Throne of Judgement remove the monotony of the dialogues from time to time. The dialogues are also interrupted by the vicious utterances howled at the Soul by demons who would with pleasure hinder its journey. The lack of sensuous details in the poem is well situated for the desired effect of the poem since the local habitation and the solid frame of things have fallen away at the point of death.

The focus of the poem on the movement of the soul of Gerontius in a growing, developing experience carries the reader to a climax of understanding and identification. Thus the poet exercises an unusual boldness of imagination in the poem. The individuality of the soul of Gerontius is the factor that gives the poem the stature of experience and that which avoids its becoming an expression of abstract statement. The pilgrimage of Gerontius from beginning to end is one of individual feeling, emotions and ideas. At first there is his agony accompanied by the sense of disintegration: "That masterful negation and collapse/of all that makes me man; . . . (110-111), followed by that total resignation: "Into Thy hands/O Lord, into Thy hands..." (147-148). Then the new sense of wholeness is born and there comes a new kind of existence which he does not fully understand. This is followed by the supportive, loving companionship of the Angel, the mounting foreboding as the moment of Judgement approaches, and finally the ultimate comprehended joy and suffering as the Angels sing and the deathbed litanies reproduced constitute one, single intentional movement which is both spiritually and artistically meaningful.

The most original contribution of Newman in *The Dream of Gerontius* is the psychological penetration into the mind of a dying man. The stanzaic variety and the occasional grandeur of the blank verse are also praiseworthy. Here Newman gives in poetry of a high order as exact an expression of deeply mysterious doctrines as may be hoped for; the doctrines of after death such as judgement, reward and punishment are difficult to treat even in the abstract language of theology. The difficulties become greater still when they are transferred to the concrete realm of poetry. Yet from the first grave and solemn scene by the bed of the dying man through the passage of the Soul to the Judgement Seat, and on to the close in Purgatory there is no hesitation in the confidence with which the poet writes.

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

The poem is described as a metrical meditation on death and afterlife. Personal meditation of the soul is strongly supported by the liturgical framework. It is in fact the realization by means of a loving heart and poetic imagination of the state of a just soul at and after death. Gerontius typifies not a particular soul but each of those souls which may be fortunate enough to face a merciful and loving God.

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

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

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

The system of verse notation helps the metrical study of the poem. In the speeches of Gerontius we find the greatest metrical versatility. At times the speeches are in the form of dramatic monologues but the interaction of Gerontius with the Angel is in dialogue. Though the basic form of his speeches is blank verse, in the moments of deepest intensity the verse form adapts.

The second form of primary rhythm based on three beats in the measure is effectively used. This is found in the song of the demons:

Low - bom clods
Of brute earth,
They aspire (401-403)

The contrasting chants of the demons are meant to produce the effects of taunts with two-foot lines based on three beat rhythms intended to produce drama both on paper

and for the ear. The interior non-visual drama of the poem is made up for by a firm reliance on the words and the differing sound effects and rhythms of the verse forms.

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

In his own words:

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

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

His autobiography *Apologia* ends with a scanty reference to his inevitable death. But nine months later he wrote this poem which vividly describes a death and afterlife that could easily be his own even though he lives another twenty five years. Newman continues the significant home imagery of his *Apologia* in the poem. He wrote in the *Apologia* of his leaving his position at Oxford and the Church of England for a new home, the Catholic Church.

In the poem Gerontius leaves his earthly home to reach his final Home. After the soul's departure from the body, the angel speaks: "I came/Taking it home" (238-239), and the last words of the Angel of the Agony are: "and bid them come home to Thee,/To that glorious Home" (835-836). The poem is more than the dream of a dying Christian. It is Newman the pilgrim's triumphant vindication of his entire spiritual

life. His firm belief that the Catholic way of life will lead the obedient soul through the temptations and trials of this earthly pilgrimage to a glorious resurrection in Heaven is given beautiful expression in *The Dream of Gerontius*. This poem alone is sufficient to ensure his place among the ranks of great poets.

In depth of spiritual insight and emotion Newman's poem is similar to that of Dante. Among these poems which depict life after death, *The Dream of Gerontius* can be placed on an equal rank with the *Dies Irae*, and Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* in ecstasy of imagination and akin to Goethe's *Faust* in matter and spirit, According to Maurice Francis Egan a comparative study of *The Dream of Gerontius* with the Purgatorio of Dante, *Book III*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, D.G. Rossetti's *The Blessed Damozel* and Tennyson's *In Memoriam* would reveal that Newman's poem excels in solemn purity, terseness, beauty of expression and musical cadences.³⁵

In Milton's poem of heaven and hell man is not beyond this world, In Dante's poem he is everywhere throughout Inferno, Purgatorio, Paradiso, in relation to his life and works. In Newman's poem nothing of this world is seen other than the saving of soul. The Soul is seen before the Creator and Judge. In no other poem beyond the veil is man so prominent. *The Dream of Gerontius* takes place where the Soul is, where human beings love and suffer but without the solid frame of things. The Soul all by itself utters its beliefs. The outward world is removed like a veil that hides us from God. That vision of the Unseen is the life of a Christian and a pilgrim. Such a Beatific Vision is the end of the quest and the crowning glory of the pilgrimage.

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

The Dream of Gerontius was applauded as a great noetic achievement. Here the mystic and the poet are in the most creative fusion. The warmth of Newman's death notices reflected the evident popularity of the poem which came out in twenty nine separate editions by 1984. It could be compared in popularity with *In Memoriam*. Aubrey de Vere described the poem as: "one of the noblest in the language."³⁶ Even Newman's well known antagonist Charles Kingsley could not but be impressed: "I read the *Dream* with awe and admiration."³⁷ Gladstone derived comfort from the poem on his deathbed having written of it in 1868 that it is "the most remarkable production... since the unapproachable *Paradise* of Dante."³⁸

35 Egan, M. F., *Dream of Gerontius* (intro, and notes), London, Longmans 1906, pp.1-8.

36 Aubrey de Vere to JUN, *Autographs, Letters and Sources*, Birmingham Oratory, VC 75, 1868, p. 23.

37 Charles Kingsley to William Cope, *Autographs, Letters and Sources*, Birmingham Oratory, VC 75, 1868, p. 14.

38 Ian Ker and Thomas Gomall (ed.), *Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*, Oxford, 1978, pp. 24-27.

The popularity of the poem was well established in the Victorian era. Periodicals referred to it as 'a noble drama' remarkable for its unique sincerity. Swinburne admired it for its force, its fervor and its terse energy. An article in *The New English Magazine* after Newman's death in 1890 spoke of it as the greatest poem in the language.³⁹ *The Harvard Monthly* spoke of *The Dream of Gerontius* as Newman's supreme effort in poetry and considered it one of the noteworthy poems of the century and a work of the highest poetic imagination; its scope is tremendous: "a drama with immortality for its subject, saints and angels for its persons, and infinity for its scene."⁴⁰

Sir Francis Doyle found that Newman wrote like a prophet and felt that the poem gives us a sense of "that painful wrestling with the powers of the universe" and of "intercommunication with something higher and deeper than man."⁴¹ C.F. Harrold stated that it was the culmination and summary of Newman's poetic achievement, the fruit and experience of almost a lifetime. He considered this the poem which finally gave Newman major stature in the Victorian mind.⁴² R.H. Hutton referred to it as one of the most unique and original poems of the nineteenth century.⁴³ The poem was widely praised even by those not in sympathy with Newman and even by those who were far removed from Newman in his aesthetics.

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

By the late twentieth century *The Dream of Gerontius* comes to mean Elgar not Newman and scant attention is paid to the range and power of its poetry. In the zenith of his poetic writing Newman's success rested on the fusion of the devotional and the doctrinal into an extensive artistic unity. It is ironic then that it is in the hymns of "Praise to the Holiest"⁴⁴ and "Firmly I believe and truly"⁴⁵ that his work is most widely remembered. The literary achievement of the poem was felt largely in the nineteenth

39 John F. Genung, 'John Henry Newman as a Writer', in *New England Magazine*, Vol. 3, 1890, p. 202.

40 Robert Morse Lovett, 'Cardinal Newman's Poetry,' in *Harvard Monthly*, 1891, pp. 197 - 200.

41 Elisabeth, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 234-236.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 213.

43 *Ibid.*.

44 Elisabeth, *Op. Cit.*, pp. .234-236.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 213

century. Some of the reasons for the loss of interest in the poem may be found in the rejection of Victorian verse forms, changing religious attitudes and preference for a remote approach to one's one death.

Today there is a tendency to consider a poem to be distorted by a message. Just as the Victorians perceived only half of the poem which is its message, so the modern reader and critic seem to perceive only the other half of it which has the intense lyrical expression. But it was Newman's belief that both halves are needed to make a perfect artistic whole. Unfortunately it is rarely read now-a-days and is frequently undervalued.