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Three American ambivalences in the works of Sidney Lanier

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THREE AMERICAN AMBIVALENCES IN THE WORKS OF SIDNEY LANIER

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ABSTRACT

Because of the many flaws in his verse, the post-Civil War Georgian poet Sidney Lanier cannot be considered a truly major artist. Nonetheless he exemplifies a number of recurring American concerns which are also found in the works of more important writers. This paper focuses on three of these concerns, which are interesting not only because they involve typical ambivalences of American culture, but because they are also to a great degree interrelated: ambivalence toward the South, conflict between agrarianism and industrialism, and, most importantly, tension resulting from the simultaneous co-existence of romantic and scientific strains in American intellectual life.

As can be determined from careful readings of his fiction, essays, letters and poems, Lanier struggled over these three ambivalences, which existed within both himself and his society. For Lanier, the dominant strains proved to be devotion to the South, to agrarianism, and to romanticism, but the influence and attractiveness of the opposing viewpoints are always apparent, if only as suppressed undercurrents. Sensing his and society's ambivalence, Lanier sought to compensate for the conflicts through his writing, because he felt the poet had a moral duty to lead and instruct his audience. With his art, he tried to aid the South in its political, economic and aesthetic troubles, to praise the agrarian lifestyle as the spiritual and practical ideal, and to restore romanticism to an age which was ever turning toward cold, empirical pragmatism. As a result, he tried too hard to be a poet; he was trying to convince himself as well as society as to the proper paths to take. Many of the flaws of his verse can be directly traced to an anxious desire to compensate for his ambivalence.

Though he achieves at least one major triumph in verse--"The Marshes of Glynn," in which he puts his ambivalence to work for him rather than fighting a losing battle against it--Lanier must be seen as something of a failure. His failure, however, is instructive. In his struggles, he becomes a representative American, the ambivalences which defeat him being ambivalences which have plagued American thought for as long as there has been an American literature.

THREE AMERICAN AMBIVALENCES IN THE WORKS OF SIDNEY LANIER

INTRODUCTION

In the 1930s Sidney Lanier was the subject of considerable debate in the field of American literature, a debate which began with Aubrey Starke's 1933 critical biography of the late-nineteenth-century Southern poet.[1] Robert Penn Warren and Allen Tate, two of the chief proponents of the Southern Agrarian movement, each reviewed the new biography, and in both cases they used the occasion to criticize Lanier for flaws they perceived in his work, opinions and personality. Warren and Tate not only considered Lanier a poor artist, but something of a turncoat Southerner as well.[2] Starke quickly responded in an article entitled "The Agrarians deny a Leader," in which he asserted that Lanier was a precursor of the Agrarian movement and that Warren and Tate were unjustified in their attacks upon Lanier's socio-economic views, if not upon his art.[3] Immediately following Starke's rebuttal in that same issue of American Review is a rebuttal of Starke, written by John Crowe Ransom, another of the Agrarians. Ransom declared that even if Lanier could be considered an agrarian, he was a failed one who deserved to be rejected by the twentieth-century Agrarians, his lack of perception, sentimentality and ambivalence making him an unfit "leader."[4]

The controversy died down for a while, until 1940 when

J. Atkins Shackford came to Lanier's belated defense in "Sidney Lanier as Southerner--In Response to Certain Charges by Three Agrarians."[5] Shackford refutes many of the Agrarians' points, often, when he cannot disprove them any other way, by showing how Lanier's accusers are guilty of the same crimes for which they condemn him. Shackford concludes that the Agrarians "charge Lanier with betrayal because he refused to be, as they are, merely sectional" (p. 492). And while Shackford concentrated on disputing the Agrarians' attacks on Lanier's life, personality and ideas, other scholars have subsequently defended Lanier as artist--a consideration more wide-reaching, subtler and ultimately more essential to Lanier's claim to attention in the study of American literature, yet no less controversial.

From the time of his own life to the present day, Lanier the poet has always been a figure of much disagreement. Regularly but scantily anthologized, virtually every scholar who has written about him concludes that only four or five of his poems can be considered first-rate. Hardly anybody, however, seems to agree on exactly which four or five poems. (The most frequently-noted "best" poems are "Corn," "The Symphony," "The Marshes of Glynn," "Song of the Chattahoochee" and "Sunrise.") Modern critics often relegate him to the position of an interesting but minor poet. Still, his finest poems assure him at least some degree, however small, of permanent attention. He has inspired a minute but steady flow of articles and books ever since his death in 1881, and the flow continues to this day. Indeed, as we approach the centennial

of his death, we may well expect a sudden surge in studies of this poet, a second-rate personage in the history of American letters, but a figure who nonetheless demands consideration.

Even Lanier's best works are marred by consistent flaws--noted by even the most dedicated of apologists. So why is he studied? No doubt his brief but interesting life (which has been described and summarized so often that only those aspects of his life which are directly pertinent to this paper will be mentioned here) has something to do with it. His wide range of interests, which is reflected in his multi-faceted career as poet, essayist, lecturer, musician and editor of children's books, also accounts for much of his attraction. But, as will be argued in this paper, Lanier can also be seen as a figure closely tied to fundamental concerns of American cultural and intellectual history. His status as a "minor" poet does not prevent him from being illustrative of various recurring motifs in American culture. In fact, his shortcomings, the problems that can be seen in his work and which relegate him to minor status, are in themselves instructive as we examine various ambivalences of American culture. More successful writers, such as Hawthorne, Melville and Whitman, deal with similar concerns more artfully. These conflicts often are the source of the underlying tensions in their works, while their writing, rather than being hindered by the conflicts, is enhanced in the process. But Lanier frequently stumbles with the weight of these American concerns. He becomes, more so in his failures than in his successes, an

archetypical product of recurring American ambivalences. When he fails, he is often a representative failure.

While any number of American concerns may be singled out for examination in relation to Lanier, three particularly predominant and inter-related ones will do to illustrate this idea of Lanier's representative problems. Perhaps the most obvious of these concerns, in the face of his treatment in the hands of fellow Southerners Warren, Tate and Ransom, is his relationship with the South, both as Southerner and as American. The widely-recognized phenomenon of the ambivalence of Southern writers toward their native region, especially prevalent in post-Civil War authors such as Twain and Faulkner, appears within the character of Lanier. Furthermore, William R. Taylor's Cavalier and Yankee demonstrates that confusion over the nature of the South is a national concern as well--that ambivalence with regard to the South appears with regularity in the literatures of both North and South.[6]

The second concern that will be examined is another issue raised during the Lanier/Agrarians controversy, that of the conflict between the common view of America as the second Eden, an unspoiled paradise in which man could once again achieve a close relationship with nature, and the growth of technology and industry. Leo Marx ably explored this American concern's reflection in literature in his book, The Machine in the Garden.[7] As Marx shows, Americans have been traditionally torn between the static pastoral ideal and the progressive admiration for technology. Lanier, as

pointed out by the Agrarians, also experienced this ambivalence. But whereas the Agrarians faulted him on this point and rejected him, we will study more closely his ambiguous stance regarding the machine and the garden. When Lanier falters in his approach to this typical American concern, we may learn more about not only Lanier's artistic and intellectual struggles but also the continuing American inability to resolve, or even to recognize fully, the conflict between the pastoral and industrial ideals.

The third and final concern we will examine in depth is closely related to that of the machine in the garden--that is, the common nineteenth-century intellectual and spiritual confusion resulting from the overlapping of romantic sensibilities and the ideals of the New Science. More than just an American problem, it encompasses British artists as well during the Victorian Age. Raised in a world in which nature-worship, sentimentality, mysticism and the idealization of freedom and the emotions were artistic precepts, the writers of the mid- and late-nineteenth century faced as adults a world in which new scientific discoveries and theories were recreating a universe in which the struggle for survival, staunch empiricism, utilitarianism and determinism were givens. These artists experienced acutely the struggle between head and heart, intellect and emotions. As Marx also notes in <u>The Machine in the Garden</u>, many American authors, among them Poe, Hawthorne and Melville, deal with this concern in their works. Lanier, too, faced this problem. His writing style itself reveals devotion to both romantic sentimentality and progressive

experimentation with scientific overtones, an ambivalence for which he has been labeled inconsistent, vague and philosophically unsound. These charges are at least partially true, but they also indicate that Lanier was typical of his environment--an environment of intellectual and spiritual ambivalence.

Ultimately, as we examine Lanier and these three major concerns, we can see how even a comparatively minor literary figure illustrates many of the same ideas and tensions that we focus upon when we study the acknowledged masters. As Warren concedes, "Perhaps we should know Lanier. He may help us to assess our heritage" (p. 45). In fact, we can hardly study Lanier seriously at all without assessing our heritage.

I

Lanier's Love-Hate Relationship with the South

Warren writes that in advocating American nationalism in "Psalm of the West," Lanier was unwittingly advocating "a nationalism of Trade," which Warren hints is equivalent to a Northern nationalism (p. 35). Tate, not content to hint, more directly challenges Lanier's loyalty to his Southern homeland, stating that the poet flattered

> the industrial capitalism of the North in a long poem, "Psalm of the West," a typical expression of Reconstruction imperialism. "There is nothing sectional," writes Mr. Starke, "in this chant of the glory of freedom." On the contrary it is all sectional--with Northern sectionalism, which became the "nationalism" of the Southern liberals in the generation of Harris, Grady and Lanier (p. 70).

Ransom supplements this view of Lanier as disloyal Southerner by characterizing him as thoughtlessly fighting for the Confederacy, as having no "resistance" left in him after the war, and as getting out of the South "as soon as he could" (pp. 555-557). Lanier's idealistic postwar doctrine of love and forgiveness is said to have not been in the South's best interest, which "lay in maintaining against tyranny its own particularity" (Ransom, p. 558). The Agrarians depict Lanier as a Southerner who knowingly (as weakened opportunist) or unknowingly (as proponent of naive, confused benevolence) supported the North against the South after the Civil War.

The question of Lanier's feelings about the South is a complex one which must be approached from several different perspectives. The very fact that he left the South in 1873, fleeing from the poverty and frustration he sensed as his fate in the South, invites discussion of Lanier's relationship with his native region. At times he heaps praises on the South, while at other times he passionately rails against its faults and criticizes others for praising it. Indeed, there is a thin line between love and hate, and as far as the South is concerned, Lanier appears continually to walk that line, leaning first one way and then the other--although late in his life bitterness toward his homeland began to predominate.

In a letter dated December 6, 1860, written when he was not quite 19 years old, Lanier makes clear to his father his stance regarding the question of Southern secession:

> I firmly believe, Sir, that our sacred memories of the revolution have been violated: our national Commerce has been suspended: our people thrown into distress: our fifteen Southern states been compelled to secede: all, by the uneducated emotion of a single man, together with his educated intellect--: that man, the founder of the Black-Republican party . . . .
>
> I am a full-blooded secessionist . . .(VII, 34).[8]

Years later, a far more experienced and wiser Lanier would look back upon his impetuous youth, when he typified the young Southerner considering the ever-approaching possibility of direct conflict with the North:

> The author thinks it was in the year 1857, at which time he was a college-student and had resided only about fifteen years upon this planet, that he became convinced of his ability to whip

> at least five Yankees, by his own personal puissance, in a fair fight. . . . He was moreover confident . . . that any Southern boy could do it. Indeed the whole South was confident it could whip five Norths of the same fighting-weight each (V, 205-206).

Distanced from his youthful exuberance and chastened by defeat, Lanier had gained a remarkable insight into the source of that war which would remain the focal point of Southern history. "[T]he War was based upon a Weakness," he wrote, ". . . this embodiment of a people's egotism: this perpetual arrogant invitation to draw and come on . . ." (V, 206-207). If not for this weakness, this over-confidence and arrogance on the South's part, in which he himself had participated, Lanier felt that the disastrous war could have been avoided.

In his only completed novel, Tiger-Lillies, which was begun during the war and finished soon after, we can sense the blending of Lanier's youthful romantic confidence with his later, more objective perspective. The first 85 pages of the book present a romantic, idyllic, yet probably largely accurate vision of the genteel side of the prewar South. The household of John Sterling, a wealthy Tennessee planter, is filled with music and polite conversation about art, politics, society, religion and philosophy. Contact among people is dominated by civility and chivalric manners. The gentlemen's deer-hunt which opens the story recalls an English fox-hunt; the deer, collectively chased by the planter and his friends, even gets away. Among the various young men and women of the novel, there is a restrained undercurrent of passion, reminiscent of the medieval chivalric concepts of knightly competition and courtly love. Such images of idyllic Southern life

were, as Taylor has shown in Cavalier and Yankee, typical of prewar plantation novels, such as John Pendleton Kennedy's whimsical Swallow Barn, which depicts the South as a land of squires, cavaliers, knights-errant, and damsels not so much in distress as in a swirl of "outlandishly romantic notions" (Taylor, p. 183). Lanier's prewar South in Tiger-Lillies also is treated light-heartedly at times, but, in general, it is presented as a romantic, idyllic, yet exciting world.

Yet war comes to disturb the Southern idyll. In one of the more memorable passages in the novel, Lanier writes:

> The early spring of 1861 brought to bloom, besides innumerable violets and jessamines, a strange, enormous, and terrible flower.
>
> This was the blood-red flower of war, which grows amid thunders . . . . It blooms usually in the spring, continuing to flower all summer until the winter rains set in: yet in some instances it has been known to remain in full bloom during a whole inclement winter, as was shown in a fine specimen which I saw the other day, grown in North America by two wealthy landed proprietors, who combined all their resources of money, of blood, of bones, of tears, of sulphur and what not, to make this the grandest specimen of modern horticulture . . . (V, 94).

The author expresses his wish that the seeds of this "pertinacious" flower might be totally eradicated, and he briefly discusses the causes of the recent blooming--at least those causes attributable to the more southerly of the two proprietors:

> But these sentiments [of the desire for peace], even if anybody could have been found patient enough to listen to them, would have been called sentimentalities, or worse, in the spring of 1861, by the inhabitants of any of those States lying between Maryland and Mexico. An afflatus of war was breathed upon us. Like a great wind, it drew on and blew upon men, women and children . . . .

> [I]f there was guilt in any, there was guilt in nigh all of us, between Maryland and Mexico; that Mr. Davis, if he be termed the ringleader of the rebellion, was not so by virtue of any instigating act of his, but purely by the unanimous will and appointment of the Southern people . . . (V, 96-97).

So the war comes to the novel's characters, and we can see how closely the story is attached to Lanier's own experience in the fact that one of its heroes, Philip Sterling, is undoubtedly based upon the author himself. Philip, who plays the flute like his creator, is a college-educated soldier captured by the Yankees and sent to the prison at Point Lookout, Maryland--again parallelling the author. He is released from prison just in time to witness the fall of Richmond and to be reunited with his surviving friends.

Though most of the book's major characters are of the Southern upper-class, Lanier can understand the feelings of those poor white Southerners who resent their involvement in the war by the aristocrats. He makes just such a figure a villain (though not the main one) in Tiger-Lillies, but a rather sympathetic villain whom we sense as being not entirely responsible for his crazed actions. As a despairing Gorm Smallin, his wife dead and house burned, plots revenge upon the man he blames for his misfortune, he thinks:

> "Hit's been a rich man's war an' a poor man's fight long enough. A eye fur a eye, an' a tooth fur a tooth, an' I say a house fur a house, an' a bullet fur a bullet! John Sterlin's got my house burnt, I'll get his'n burnt. John Sterlin's made me resk bullets, I'll make him resk 'em! An' ef I don't may God-a-mighty forgit me forever and ever, amen!" (V, 166).

Lanier surely does not condone Smallin's eventual actions (the murder of John Sterling and his wife, and the burning of

the Sterling house, a presaging of the South's fall), but he nonetheless, in an almost Faulkneresque manner, spreads the guilt, shame and sympathy around, showing how the entire South, rich and poor, is united in sin and suffering.

It is also interesting to note that, in Gorm Smallin, Lanier creates a figure which in many ways anticipates some of Faulkner's memorable characters--most particularly Wash Jones in Absalom, Absalom! Jones, a poor uneducated white like Smallin, murders the aristocrat whom he had formerly looked up to. Of course, Thomas Sutpen is far more directly responsible for Jones' hatred than John Sterling is for Smallin's, and Smallin, unlike Jones, lives to gloat (rather unrealistically, considering his previous despair) over his destruction of the aristocrat. Still, a number of critics agree that Gorm Smallin is Lanier's greatest achievement in Tiger-Lillies, a character far more realistic and sympathetic than any of the book's heroes or heroines.[9] The existence, so early in his career, of Gorm Smallin makes one regret that Lanier did not pursue fiction any more than he did.

The war brought out some of the South's finest traits as well as its worst, as Lanier often points out. "That the Confederate army starved, and yet was a confessedly virtuous and patriotic army,--let men give them credit," Lanier writes in Tiger-Lillies (V, 152). Admittedly these words express an ideal, perhaps too-glowing view of the Confederate soldiers: were they truly any more virtuous and patriotic than other armies, at least of that period? But Lanier can support his claim with an important point. Emphasizing the fact that

this beaten and demoralized army returned to a devastated and poverty-stricken land, Lanier notes that many doomsayers had predicted that wholesale violence and barbarism would erupt throughout the region after the war's end:

> But was this prospect realized? Where were the highway robberies, the bloody vengeances, the arsons, the rapine, the murders, the outrages, the insults? They were not anywhere. With great calmness the soldier cast behind him the memory of all wrongs and hardships and reckless habits of the war, embraced his wife, patched his cabin-roof, and proceeded to mingle the dust of recent battles yet lingering on his feet with the peaceful clods of his cornfield (V, 302-303).

Again, Lanier no doubt idealizes--surely the period immediately following the war in the South was not totally devoid of criminal acts--but he is correct in his basic observation. Considering the violence, the physical, economic and spiritual chaos which the South had experienced first-hand, the initial restoration of peace and lawfulness was amazingly complete.

Lanier had much to say after the war in praise of his fallen comrades-in-arms. In an address he delivered before the Ladies' Memorial Association at Rose Hill Cemetery (in Macon, Georgia) on April 26, 1870, Lanier hails "bright companies of the martyrs of liberty," "glittering battalions of the dead that died in glory" and "stately chieftains that lead in Heaven as ye led on earth!" (V, 272). This last epithet refers specifically to Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson, whom Lanier singles out as "two figures, wherewith . . . my beloved land shall front the world, and front all time, as bright, magnificent exemplars of stateliness" (268).

Another address, written only a few months later upon Lee's death, relates Lanier's remembrance of a time when he personally witnessed the General in prayer at a battlefield religious service. In an almost deific tribute to the deceased "chieftain," Lanier writes:

> General Robert Edward Lee, in the fullness of fruitful life, in the consummation of heroic patriotism, in the majesty of silent fortitude, in the glory of splendid manhood, in the security of an entire people's faithful and enthusiastic regard, is gone unto that brilliant reward which Almighty Providence will assign to a Christian soldier whose heart was as humble as his deeds were illustrious (V, 275).

Of course, Lanier is being rhetorically excessive for the sake of his audience. But from such words we can infer that he had high, romantic, chivalric ideals upon which he based many of his judgments. Despite what Mark Twain might say about the negative influence of Sir Walter Scott's brand of romanticism on the South, and despite what some historians may label as Southern hypocrisy when they compare the ideals to real life, it is difficult not to admire the code of conduct which Lanier describes and advocates in his introduction to The Boys' Froissart:

> To speak the very truth; to perform a promise to the uttermost; to reverence all women; to maintain right and honesty; to help the weak; to treat high and low with courtesy; to be constant to one's love; to be fair to a bitter foe; to despise luxury; to preserve simplicity, modesty, and gentleness in heart and bearing: this was in the oath of the young knight who took the stroke upon him in the fourteenth century, and this is still the way to win love and glory in the nineteenth (IV, 349).

Friends and acquaintances who wrote of Lanier following his death unanimously note that he exemplified these ideal traits

in his personal conduct.[10] In his biography of Lanier, Edwin Mims concludes from personal accounts that "[s]weetness of disposition, depth of emotion, and absolute purity . . . . were fused with the qualities of a virile and healthy manhood" in the poet, who displayed "a certain inherent knightliness in his own character."[11] And from his writings we can tell that Lanier felt the chivalric ideals which guided his life were typical of the South--typical as ideals, at least.

In keeping with his chivalric reverence for women, Lanier attributed much of the strength of the South's past and much of its hope for the future to its ladies. Describing the ideal of womanhood in a commencement address presented at the Furlow Masonic Female College in 1869, Lanier maintains that women control society because they control men. "When we discuss society," Lanier tells his female listeners, "we discuss <u>you</u>" (V, 250). Writing with a florid style that betrays the oratorical genesis of the prose, Lanier praises his audience even as he exhorts them to remain faithful to the chivalric ideals of womanhood:

> Ah, I do not forget, that I speak to the mothers of the heroes of the Southern Confederacy!
>
> I do not forget, that I speak to the sisters whose cheerful alacrity in hurrying brothers forward to the field of battle, has ennobled and sanctified all sisterhood forever.
>
> I do not forget, that I speak to the sweethearts whose contempt for cowardice and admiration for bravery were at once the most dreadful punishment for the coward and the most thrilling inspiration of the brave.
>
> I do not forget, that I speak to the wives whose kisses, lingering on the lips of husbands, did, in the day of battle, burn them onward right into the blazing hell of hostile batteries (252).

In the "Confederate Memorial Address" Lanier makes a similar assessment of the role of Southern women in sustaining the struggle for secession. He speaks directly to the dead soldiers, commanding that they "eternally remember, the uncorrupted souls, the gracious hearts, the brave characters, the stainless eyes, the radiant smiles, and the tender fingers, of the women who glorified and sanctified the Southern Confederacy" (V, 272). Of course, these words, spoken before the Ladies' Memorial Association, are meant more for the living than for the dead, praising the ideal of Southern womanhood, inspiring pride in those who had survived defeat. Lanier could play the role of sectional cheerleader and confidence-booster quite well. He saw that his people needed new pride to replace that which they had lost, and he did his best to help restore it.

Like many Southerners, Lanier dwells upon the region's past, particularly the Civil War. But he is equally, if not more, concerned about the South's present and future. Expressions of his feelings regarding the South in the years following the war appear in poems, essays and letters. One of his primary concerns is with the changes that had been caused by the war in the lives of Southerners, and the ecnonomic devastation that followed in the war's wake. In his aborted novel, John Lockwood's Mill, Lanier notes how former members of the aristocracy now worked hard for their very survival:

> A land of leisure became suddenly a land of labor. A people which had dreamed away half a life, instantly began to work away the other half. Idleness became the one crime, in a country where, for years, Leisure had been the popular pride (V, 231).

Lanier does not altogether frown upon this change, for in a letter dated December 16, 1867 he tells a friend that some members of his own family "who used to roll in wealth" are now "with their own hands" working in the fields and doing their own cooking and washing. "This, in itself," he adds, "I confess I do not regret: being now a confirmed lunatic on the 'dignity of labor'" (VII, 358-359). Since his immediate family had been considerably poorer than those relatives, it is not surprising that Lanier felt a little hard work wouldn't hurt anybody, particularly former aristocrats.

But, more often than not, Lanier eyes the South's new state of affairs with dismay. Employing a brand of dark comedy to which he occasionally resorts in expressing indignation, Lanier, in a short prose piece called "The Sherman Bill," has his narrator walk through a formerly prosperous Southern town. The narrator talks to three men: a black waiter, a white real-estate agent, and a German-immigrant saloon proprietor. For each of the three, the quality of merchandise has deteriorated and business is bad. Each miserably attributes the sorry situation to "The Sherman Bill," the first of several Reconstruction Acts, which placed the Southern states under direct military rule. The naive narrator does not know what this bill is, but he realizes that, whatever it is, it "has killed this country" (V, 209-212). Lanier clearly believes that the Reconstruction Acts are anything but constructive.

In an even more bitterly satirical piece, Lanier uses dialect to assume the role of a rudimentarily-educated ex-slave

writing to the editor of a small-town newspaper. The persona describes the economic and social troubles of whites and blacks alike, the political anarchy of the neighborhood and the splitting-apart of the plantations. Lanier's black man hates the present situation and longs to be a slave again. "Does you call dis freedom?" he asks. "I calls it free-dam! I wants suf'fen to eat" (V, 202). He concludes his letter:

> I is sorry dat I has to sign myself,
>
> No longer yours
>
> Jim Stevenson (203).

These are, of course, the words of a created character. But if there is any doubt as to Lanier's true feelings, we can turn again to his letters to discover his candid opinions. Writing to a friend on June 29, 1866, from Montgomery, Alabama, Lanier describes the environment:

> I despair of giving you any idea of the mortal stagnation which paralyzes all business here. On our streets, Monday is very like Sunday: they show no life . . . . I dont [sic] think there's a man in town who could be induced to go into his neighbor's store and ask how's trade; for he would have to atone for such an insult with his life. Everything is dreamy, and drowsy, and drone-y. . . . Our whole world, here, yawns, in a vast and sultry spell of laziness (VII, 229).

Lanier echoes these impressions in a passage from John Lockwood's Mill, in which he says that only through labor could the South escape its horrible past and present, and gain hope for the future. Yet, "today, we cannot labor, for there is neither reward nor demand for labor. . . . [O]ur life is filled with the intolerable gloom of idleness" (V, 233).

While, as we have already seen, there was no shortage of labor in the struggle for survival, the economic slump in the postwar South had made work for pay scarce. Lanier's formerly wealthy relatives at least had fields in which to work. Others were not so lucky, and the "gloom of idleness" made time itself a plague.

Where did the blame lie for the South's postwar troubles? We have seen that Lanier finds the South itself guilty of the war because of collective arrogance and egotism. And, despite his depiction of a black man wishing to return to slavery, Lanier in his later years came to see shaveholding as an evil which deserved extinction,[12] so again the South was culpable. Lanier, however, saw the North--or, more specifically, the United States Congress--as being primarily responsible for the abject poverty in the postwar South. This opinion comes across strongly in several poems, such as "Laughter in the Senate," written in 1868:

> In the South lies a lonesome, hungry land:
> He huddles his rage with a cripple's hand;
> He mutters, prone on the barren sand,
> What time his heart is breaking.
> . . . .
> The tyrants sit in a stately hall;
> They jibe at a wretched people's fall;
> The tyrants forget how fresh is the pall
> Over their dead and ours (I, 14). [13]

Congress could help the South, but Lanier senses that the controlling Radical Republicans wish to wreak vengeance rather than to heal wounds. (He directly accuses the Radicals of causing Southern disorder and of egging the ex-slaves toward violence in a letter dated January 12, 1868.)[14]

In an 1867 poem, "To Our Hills," Lanier employs these same ideas, especially the emphasis on Northern vengeance and its role in "staining" the South, in an even more bitter and wide-reaching manner:

> Sad-furrowed hills
> By full-wept rills,
> The stainers have decreed the stain shall stay.
> What clement hands might wash the stains away
> Are chained, to make us rue a mournful day.
>
> O coward hand
> Of the Northland,
> That after honorable war couldst smite
> Cheeks grimed in adverse battle, to wreak spite
> For dainty Senators that lagged the fight.
>
> O monstrous crime
> Of a sick Time:
> --Forever waging war that peace may be
> And serving God by cheating on bent knee
> And freeing slaves by chaining down the free (I, 166-167).

In reaction to the "crime" he accuses the North and Congress of committing, Lanier states his defiance in verse:

> Poor Bayonets seized by Tyranny,
> With battle-blood still red-frothing,
> Ye crushed our Lee,--but souls are free
> And ye cannot kill our loathing
> (from "Steel in Soft Hands," 1868; I, 169).

Sometimes Lanier is too weak for defiance, and he despairs in thinking of the South's future:

> Our hearths are gone out, and our hearts are broken,
> And but the ghosts of homes to us remain.
> . . . .
> O Raven Days, dark Raven Days of sorrow,
> Will ever any warm light come again?
> Will ever the lit mountains of To-morrow
> Begin to gleam across the mournful plain?
> (from "The Raven Days," 1868; I, 15).

And at still other times, in a mixture of defiant anger and despair, Lanier calls for an apocalyptic solution to the South's woes:

"Wind and Fire, Wind and Fire,
--O War, kindle and rage again.
The stubble is rank, and we desire
To burn Life off, for the coming grain.["]
. . . .
--O gasping Heart, with long desire,
Endure, endure, till the round earth turn.
O God, come Thou, and set the fire.
O Heart, be calm, till God shall burn
(from "Burn the Stubble!" 1868; I, 169-170).

Anger and despair aside, Lanier at times considers means by which the South might overcome its sad situation, both through its own internal strengths and through an enlightenment on the part of the North. True to his ideals, he sees the solution in the major positive characteristic of the antebellum South, the chivalric "code." In the "Confederate Memorial Address," the poet-turned-orator tells his audience:

> I know not a deeper question in our Southern life at this present time, than how we shall bear out our load of wrong and insult and injury with the calmness and tranquil dignity that becomes men and women who would be great in misfortune (V, 269).

He points to the ground upon which he and his immediate audience stand, the hallowed resting-place of the fallen soldiers, as a source of "calm strength." The Confederate dead had sacrified their lives as they fought against the very forces which Lanier sees as persecuting the postwar South. What better way to achieve the final victory, to keep the dead from having died in vain, than to refuse to permit the Northern forces of "wrong and insult and injury" to overcome the South by reducing it to their own level? The South must achieve victory through the chivalric-Christian ideal of returning good for evil:

> To-day we are here for love and not for hate.
> To-day we are here for harmony and not for discord.

> To-day we are risen immeasurably above all vengeance. To-day, standing upon the supreme heights of Forgiveness, our souls choir together the enchanting music of harmonious Christian civilization (V, 271).

As Lanier said elsewhere, "when our conquerors shall discover that insults are not peace-makers . . . and that magnanimity is infinitely more powerful and less expensive than standing armies" (V, 248), then the South will be able to recover fully from the effects of the war and the nation may once again become whole.

That Lanier dearly wished the United States might truly be united again, and that his love for America was deep and profound, can be ascertained from the facts surrounding his being chosen to write the lyrics to a cantata commissioned to celebrate the American centennial. Lanier immediately perceived the symbolic significance of the choice (by a government commission) of a Southern poet to write the cantata's lyrics. (A Northerner, Dudley Buck of New York, was chosen to compose the music.) Lanier jumped at the chance. In a January 8, 1876 letter to his wife, Lanier states that it "is very pleasing" that he was "chosen as representative of our dear South." He also perceived the practical advantages of his appointment--"the matter puts my name by the side of very delightful and honorable ones" (IX, 294). For a short while he received a great deal of attention because of his selection as cantata-poet.

"The Centennial Meditation of Columbia--A Cantata," perhaps because of its required brevity, does not actually refer to the Civil War and sectional split. After all, the

work was meant to celebrate union, not separation. The lyrics emphasize the colonization of America by Europeans, the struggle for independence from Great Britain, and the emergence of a new nation (I, 60-62). At about the same time as the cantata's composition, however, Lanier wrote another commissioned work, a much longer piece entitled "Psalm of the West," in which the poet seems to take advantage of this opportunity to say things he was unable to in the cantata. The longer poem, another celebration of the nation, is similar to Whitman in its nationalistic exuberance if not in its style. "Psalm of the West" also contains references to the sectional split and the war:

> Now, O Sin! O Love's lost Shame!
> Burns the land with redder flame!
> North in line and South in line
> Yell the charge and spring the mine.
> Heartstrong South would have his way,
> Headstrong North hath said him nay:
> O strong Heart, strong Brain, beware! (I, 78).

As in "Burn the Stubble!" the Heart symbolizes the South, ruled by its passions. The North Lanier symbolizes by the Head or Brain, dominated by rationality. (The significance of the Heart/Brain dichotomy will be discussed in depth in Chapter III.) After a brief war in verse, Lanier has the North and South reunite, each realizing that it is incomplete without the other:

> Heart and Brain! no more be twain:
> Throb and think, one flesh again!
> Lo! they weep, they turn, they run;
> Lo! they kiss: Love, thou art one! (79).

Federally-imposed Reconstruction was over in the South by this time, and the country was united politically, if not spiritually.

Though Lanier's depiction of the reunion of North and South may be more wishful-thinking than anything else--and both Warren and Ransom are quick to point out the unrealistic sentimentality of these lines--it appears that he himself believed that true reunion had been achieved by 1876. It is rather unfair of the Agrarians to accuse Lanier of disloyalty to the South on the basis of such verse. Lanier's nationalism was not a Northern sectionalism, as they suggest--revealing, as Shackford notes, their own sectionalism. Lanier sincerely wished that the wounds of war might heal, though his pleas for unity were not what many Southerners--in the 1870s or in the 1930s--wanted to hear.

Yet the argument for Lanier's disloyalty to the South is not entirely unjustified. It is in relation to his views concerning the state of the arts and the artist in the South that we can see the roots of Lanier's greatest complaints about his section of the country. In his address at Furlow College, Lanier tells his listeners that life in the South may have "tended to develope [sic] your muscles at the expense of your aesthetic faculties" (V, 248). Using the metaphor of war, he warns the South not to get so caught up in material progress as to forget the arts:

> . . . in the midst of our hot attack upon the impurities and poverties of our new life, let us have an unremitting care lest our ears be so deafened that we cannot hear the noble voices of Poetry and Music, singing to us through the battle; and lest our eyes be so blinded that we cannot see the fingers of Painting, of Sculpture, and of Architecture, beckoning upward through the dusty smoke (V, 259).

Lanier at the same time rejects the notion of a strictly regional

art, as advocated by those Southern extremists who wish their artworks to belong exclusively to the South, needing neither the North nor the rest of the world for influence, appreciation or patronage. Lanier considers the basis of such purely regional art to be "hate, and Art will have nothing to do with hate" (260). He instructs his audience:

> If then we would be genuine artists, let us love true Love, let us hate false Hate. If we sing, let us sing for the ear of the whole world; if we write, let us write for all the nations of all ages . . . (261).

Lanier dreamed of art blooming in his homeland. But as the postwar years crept by, he despaired of thinking that the South's sad state of affairs with respect to the arts might ever improve. His letters are especially revealing, progressing from sorrow at the South's aesthetic shortcomings, to the ultimate rejection of the South because of its apparent unwillingness or inability to foster the arts. In 1866, referring to his and his brother's difficulty in getting any of their works published (for his brother, Clifford, was also a poet, though not so prolific or talented), Lanier wrote to a friend:

> Our literary life, too, is a lonely and somewhat cheerless one; for beyond our father, a man of considerable literary acquirements and exquisite taste, we have not been able to find a single individual who sympathized in such pursuits enough to warrant showing him our little productions. So scarce is "general cultivation" here! (VII, 222).

In an 1873 letter, Lanier, as he had in the Commencement Address, attacks the practice of those Southern editors who praise a book merely because it was produced by a Southern writer. Referring to a volume of poetry by a man named Fred

Williams, he angrily writes:

> . . . 'tis a most villainous poor pitiful piece of work; and, so far from endeavoring to serve the South by blindly plastering it with absurd praises, I think all true patriots ought to unite in redeeming the land from the imputation that such books are regarded as casting honor upon the section. God forbid we would really be brought so low as that we must perforce brag of such works . . . and God be merciful to that man (he is an Atlanta Editor) who boasted that sixteen thousand of these books had been sold in the South! (VIII, 348).

Lanier even suggests that information about the book's success in the South should be "concealed at the risk of life, limb and fortune" (348). He found the book's popularity the most grating aspect of the affair, perhaps because of his own lack of success at the time. But, we should note that Lanier feels he is doing the South a service by criticizing it in this manner--he is being a "patriot."

In that same year, 1873, Lanier went north, desperately hoping to escape the intellectual and artistic ennui he suffered from in the South. (An 1866 letter shows that he was considering "emigrating" much earlier--VII, 228). Writing to his father from Baltimore after a trip to New York, he assaults "the uncongenial atmospheres of a farcical college and of a bare army and then of an exacting business-life," and explains that he is fleeing from "all the discouragements of being born on the wrong side of the Mason-and-Dickson's [sic] line and of being wholly unacquainted with literary people and literary ways" (VIII, 423-424). Lanier would eventually settle in Baltimore, which, although a Southern city then (if not now), was large enough and far enough north to

offer the poet-musician the atmosphere and opportunities he felt lacking in his native Georgia. Soon he was playing flute in a symphony orchestra and writing more poetry than ever before.

But Lanier felt out of place after his initial departure from his homeland. He was never entirely at home in either the North or South. After returning to Georgia for a brief time, he wrote on May 23, 1874 to an associate that he would be leaving again for New York soon. With an air of wry envy, Lanier writes:

> Happy man,--you who have your cabin in among the hills and trees. You who can sit still and work at Home,--pray a short prayer once in a while for one as homeless as the ghost of Judas Iscariot (IX, 57).

Does the reference to Judas Iscariot reveal that Lanier sensed himself guilty of betrayal? Lanier wanted very much to stay in the South, but he was unable to since his home offered no peace and comfort for him. Five days later he wrote to his brother:

> . . . I am again all afloat, and must mature some plan by which to get back to the Northern air, which seems the only one where life is possible (IX, 59).

From the context of the letter, Lanier is clearly referring to his tubercular condition and the difficulty the Southern heat and humidity made for his breathing. He adds, however, that he has "shed all the tears about it that [he is] going to," and he excitedly talks about the artworks he feels sure he will produce in the North (59-60). Lanier's words are marked by ambivalence, and his anxiousness to return to the North can be attributed to more than simply physiological reasons.

But as the months passed and Lanier spent more time in New York and other northern locales, the ambivalence faded and he began more rigorously to reject the South. To his New York literary friend, Bayard Taylor, Lanier wrote on August 7, 1875:

> I could never describe to you what a mere drought and famine my life has been, as regards that multitude of matters which I fancy one absorbs when one is in an atmosphere of art, or when one is in coversational relation with men of letters, with travellers, with persons who have either seen, or written, or done large things (IX, 230).

These are things Lanier could not find in the South. He then adds one of the most poignant statements ever to come from his pen:

> Perhaps you know that with us of the younger generation in the South since the War, pretty much the whole of life has been merely not-dying (230).

He became increasingly skeptical of the possibility that the South might ever be hospitable to the arts and to artists. In complimenting a Southern literary critic--which he rarely did[15]--Lanier writes:

> I used sometimes to despair of ever seeing such a thing as a Southern critic, particularly when I observed how completely our people were under the dominion of that provincial habit of thought which confounds the obligation of personal friendship with that of fidelity to the truths of art.[16]

Undoubtedly Lanier believed that the chivalric ideal of loyalty applied to "truths of art" before it did to friendship. At about this time (April, 1876), he was receiving attention for his Centennial Cantata. While reviews in the North were mixed, the Southern reviews were almost without exception laudatory.

Lanier doubted the worth of these Southern notices:

> . . . I am being received with a perfect ovation in the South. Of course I understand this is purely local pride, and not at all any guarantee of sympathy with artistic purposes (Anderson, p. 172).

In another letter written at about the same time, Lanier accuses the Southern people of being "prepared to accept blindly anything that comes from [him]" because of his new-found fame, and he calls such success "cheap." He expresses the surprisingly cynical, almost jaded view that such a loyal following will at least serve to keep his name alive long enough for him to achieve fame earned on "a more scientific basis" at some later date (Centennial Edition, IX, 360).

By 1879, Lanier was not only a confirmed Southern expatriate, but he was actively trying to convince others to come north as well. To his brother he wrote an impassioned plea that contained more than a hint of indignation:

> I cannot contemplate with any patience your stay in the South. In my soberest moments I can perceive no outlook for that land. . . .
> . . . [I]t really seems as if any prosperity at the South must come long after your prime and mine. Our people have failed to perceive the deeper movements under-running the time; they lie wholly off, out of the stream of thought, and whirl their poor old dead leaves of recollection round and round, in a piteous eddy that has all the wear and tear of motion without any of the rewards of progress. . . . Whatever is to be done, you and I can do our part of it far better here than there.
> Come away (X, 122-123).

Lanier's observations about the South's economic and cultural troubles were made even more intolerable by the irritating factors of poor health and an unsteady literary reception. His public writings (such as "The New South," which will be

discussed in Chapter II) betray relatively little of the ill feelings he seems to have harbored for the South toward the end of his life. Despite what friends and associates said after his death about his absolute lack of bitterness, his later letters frequently reveal a rejection of his homeland which, if not bitter, was certainly desperate.

But though the South's inhospitality for the artist made life in the North preferable, Lanier did not become a Northern sectionalist. In his letters, Lanier is as willing to criticize aspects of the North as of the South. One of the most remarkably imagistic passages to be found in his writings is an unpleasant depiction of New York City. In an 1867 letter to his father, Lanier describes the scene from a high vantage-point:

> What a view!--Yet, the grand array of houses and ships and rivers and distant hills did not arrest my soul as did the long line of men and women which, at that height, seemed to writhe and contort itself in its narrow bed of Broadway, as in a premature grave. Like a long serpent, humanity here twisted itself and turned itself about and crawled up and down, as if Nature, like a mischievous boy, had thrown it upon the hot coals of desire and disappointment to laugh at its ludicrous pain. From a thousand steam-jets, this serpent's-agony of life hissed an impotent protest (VII, 279).

The people in the Northern city seem almost inhuman to the Southerner--"I have not seen here a single eye that knew itself to be in front of a heart." The only exception was an eye belonging to a little girl, the daughter of his distant cousin, J.F.D. Lanier, who lived in New York (VII, 270). At other times Lanier writes of the "monstrous turmoil" of New York, calling it the "most ingeniously perverted and most

exquisitely distorted of all civilizations" (VIII, 21-22), or of "the intense spirit of hurry" and "killing pace" of the city streets (24-25). "Scarcely a day" went by when he did not see in the "streets of these great cities, the forlorn faces of the starving, of the rag-people, of the criminals, of the all-wanting, anything-grasping folk . . . who suffer, suffer throughout life" (VIII, 431). (Certainly, Lanier's perception of Northern suffering may have been influenced by the frequent anti-industrialistic attacks of Southern apologists and English reformers.) More than once Lanier noted the corruption of the Tammany Ring in New York, and compared it to the evil he saw in Southern Reconstruction governments (VI, 265; VIII, 204). While he often enjoyed his days in the North, with its concerts, operas, literary groups and fine restaurants, he is far from blind to the darker aspects of life above the Mason-Dixon line.

Shackford capably argues that, despite his flight north, Lanier remained ever faithful to the South. Lanier's urgings to his brother to join him in Baltimore can be associated with his desires to do something about Southern problems. "How long is it going to take us to remedy these things?" he asks, and then he says that both he and his brother would be able to help the South more from the outside, in Baltimore, than from the inside (X, 123). To another fellow-Southerner, Lanier writes of his "sense of exile" that makes him "prize any words from those dear old Macon hills." He adds, "It seems a particularly hard cross-purpose that I--who love them surely better than any other of their children--must remain

away from them in order to sing about them" (IX, 317). Of course, considering the fact that in both of these cases he was writing to people who chose to remain in the South, his assertions of loyalty may be mere posturing. However, there can be no doubt that even in his final years, Lanier was still devoted to the South, at least in the sense that he continued to write about it. In the face of the evidence, the accusations of disloyalty by the Agrarians and the claims of unshaken dedication by apologists are equally simplistic. Lanier clearly had a love-hate relationship with the South, much like those of Twain and Faulkner, attached as he was to the land of his upbringing and its traditional ideals, yet disgusted by its problems and the uncomfortable atmosphere it presented to the artist.

Some of Lanier's most famous works, the poems by which he has earned our attention today, pay tribute to the beauty, wonder and mystery of certain parts of his homeland. "The Marshes of Glynn" and "Song of the Chattahooche" (I, 119-122 and 103-104) do not contain any separately-quotable lines which can tell us anything about Lanier's feelings about the South. The poems must be read in their entirety and appreciated for their beauty. These evocative poems are obviously the work of a man who feels a great sentimental attachment to the natural phenomena he describes.

But of the Lanier poems widely recognized to be important, it is "Corn" that contains the most revealing poetic assessment of the author's South. The last stanza of the poem finds Lanier addressing the hills and fields (symbolic

of the South itself) as the tragic hero in a Shakespeare play, "more sinned against than sinning," deserving punishment for its crimes but having received greater punishment than due:

> Old hill! old hill! thou gashed and hairy Lear
> Whom the divine Cordelia of the year,
> E'en pitying Spring, will vainly strive to cheer--
> King, that no subject man nor beast may own,
> Discrowned, undaughtered and alone--
> Yet shall the great God turn thy fate,
> And bring thee back into thy monarch state
> And majesty immaculate.
> Lo, through hot waverings of the August morn,
> Thou givest from thy vasty sides forlorn
> Visions of golden treasuries of corn--
> Ripe largesse lingering for some bolder heart
> That manfully shall take thy part,
> And tend thee,
> And defend thee,
> With antique sinew and with modern art (I, 39).

Lear is crushed and defeated by the madness of the physical world, and by 1874, the year of the composition of "Corn," Lanier had begun to believe that the South's plight, physically, was also hopeless. But Lear overcame in spirit, his majesty and might triumphing as monuments to human nobility, even in the face of disaster. And so with the South. For even as Lanier abandoned his homeland in the flesh, giving it up as lost, he still strove in his writings to maintain and express that ideal he saw as being the South's greatest characteristic: the nobility of the human spirit in its various manifestations. He in all likeliness perceived himself to be the "bolder heart" which would take up the cause, to tend and defend the South with "modern art," if not with "antique sinew." Even if he did not succeed, finally crushed by opposing forces, his spirit as expressed in poems like "Corn" exemplifies human

nobility. The poems themselves become part of that golden crop of corn which Lanier sees as emerging from the South's "vasty sides," symbols of the human spirit.

II

Agrarianism and Industrialism in Lanier's Works

Warren, Tate and Ransom not only chastised Lanier for his ambivalence concerning the South, but also for his apparently conflicting views with regard to agrarianism and industrialism. Indeed, the reader of Lanier's poems, essays and letters is confronted by a virtual spectrum of opinions and stances on the matter of commerce and agriculture in both the South and in the nation as a whole. But before we can investigate the nature of this agrarian-industrial ambivalence in Lanier, we must find out what he meant by a term used again and again in his works: "Trade," almost always with a capital "T." In his "Confederate Memorial Address" Lanier identifies this grave enemy:

> In this culmination of the nineteenth century, which our generation is witnessing, I tell you the world is far too full of noise. The nineteenth century worships trade; and Trade is the most boisterous god of all the false gods under Heaven . . . . In these days, there is so much noise that we cannot hear ourselves think (V, 266).

Lanier saw Trade as having taken over Europe and the North (particularly Congress), and he saw its growing dominance in the South as well. "Trade," for Lanier, can be defined as excess commercialism and materialism, the domination of economic and commercial concerns over humanistic and aesthetic ones. And Trade was appearing everywhere and corrupting

everything. In an April 17, 1872 letter, Lanier praises a fellow poet, Paul H. Hayne, for the absence of Trade in his verse. Then Lanier rails:

> Trade, Trade, Trade: pah, are we not all sick? A man cannot walk down a green alley of the woods, in these days, without unawares getting his mouth and nose and eyes covered with some web or other that Trade has stretched across, to catch some gain or other. . . . Our religions, our politics, our social life, our charities, our literature, nay, by Heavens, our music and loves almost, are all meshed in unsubstantial concealments and filthy garnitures by it. . . .
>
> . . . You know what the commercial spirit is: you remember that Trade killed Chivalry and now sits on the throne. It was Trade that hatched the Jacquerie in the 14th Century: it was Trade that hatched John Brown, and broke the saintly heart of Robert Lee, in the 19th (VIII, 224).

Lanier did not wish to see the South or the nation idly allow Trade to destroy the last vestiges of the non-commercial life. "Trade has now had possession of the civilized world for four hundred years," he wrote to a Northern associate on November 15, 1874. If humanity waits much longer, Trade will crush all opposing spirits in mankind and will be too strong to be defeated. "[N]ow the gentlemen . . . must arise & [sic] overthrow Trade. That chivalry which every man has, in some degree, in his heart . . . must in these later days . . . burn up every one of the cunning moral castles from which Trade sends out its forays upon the conscience of modern Society" (IX, 121-122). In this war Lanier again pits heart against head, especially in his major anti-Trade poem, "The Symphony," the opening lines of which are:

> "O Trade! O Trade! would thou wert dead!
> The Time needs heart--'tis tired of head["] (I, 46).

Whether in this instance, as in others, "heart" can be interpreted as representing the South and "head" the North is debatable. But, obviously, Lanier attacks the dominance of rationality over the emotions to the detriment of humanistic society, a tendency that accompanies the growth and dominance of Trade.

In "The Symphony" (1875), a long poem which can be divided into four distinct movements (as Jack De Bellis convincingly argues),[17] but which should not be read as an attempt to duplicate symphonic structure,[18] Lanier has various instruments of the orchestra speak out against the evils of the age. It is the violins which cry out for Trade's destruction at the beginning of the poem, and they are followed by the other strings, the flute, the clarinet, the French horn, the oboe (archaically called the "hautboy" by Lanier) and the bassoon. After the strings have lamented the poverty and lack of humanity wrought by the dominance of Trade in the world, the flute sings a romantic nature song, which contrasts the cold, mechanistic world-view of Trade with the pastoral values of the Heart.[19] The third section of the poem concerns the position of women in the world, with the clarinet attacking prostitution, citing it as the ultimate debasement of femininity at the hands of commercialism, and the French horn advocating the proper attitude toward women--in Lanier's frame of reference, the chivalric worship of women. The brief final section is in many ways the most interesting and revealing, with the oboe pleading <u>not</u> for the death of Trade desired by the strings, but for the proper placing and functioning of Trade in the

world; as De Bellis puts it, the oboe urges Trade "to return to innocence" (p. 78). "Huge Trade!" says the child-like oboe,

> "Would thou wouldst lift me on thy head,
> And run where'er my finger led!
> Once said a Man--and wise was He--
> Never shalt thou the heavens see,
> Save as a little child thou be" (I, 55).

Now Lanier seems not to wish the total destruction of Trade, the commercial dealings and spirit in the world, but only the subordination of it to higher values. With these lines, wishing for Trade to be guided by innocence, the child-like Christian ideal, Lanier clearly illustrates Leo Marx's thesis--commerce and industry would seem to pose no threat in the pastoral world as long as they are governed by the pastoral ideals, a long-standing American belief.

"The Symphony" concludes with the song of the wise old bassoons, which assure the other instruments and the reader that Love will conquer all. Love will rectify previous wrongs:

> ["]And ever Love hears the poor-folks' crying,
> And ever Love hears the women's sighing,
> And ever sweet knighthood's death-defying,
> And ever wise childhood's deep implying,["]

but Love will have nothing to do with Trade's guileful history--

> ["]But never a trader's glozing and lying.
>
> "And yet shall Love himself be heard,
> Though long deferred, though long deferred:
> O'er the modern waste a dove hath whirred;
> Music is love in search of a word" (I, 56).

Love will redeem the "modern waste" left by Trade's old ways and, presumably, Love will place Trade on the correct path, that of innocence and subserviance to chivalric ideals. The new trade (the lower-case "t" more appropriate now, being quite different from its earlier manifestation) is acceptable

to our poet, accounting for the later Agrarians' distrust of Lanier. Lanier's views are indeed rather unrealistic, but no more unrealistic than traditional American attitudes toward industry. "The Symphony" is a poem with many flaws--ridiculous archaisms and often jarring structuring of lines--but it is hailed by a number of critics as a major poem, possessing, among other things, "a richness of imagery" (Starke, p. 210). Nonetheless, as Starke notes, it is "less important as poetry than as protest" and as a clue to Lanier's philosophical outlook (p. 210).

How would Lanier respond to those who would maintain that in Trade lay the South's hopes for economic recovery? Lanier offers his own observations in several essays and poems about the means by which the South may recover without succumbing to the excesses of Trade, although his arguments are often more idealistic than practical. In "The New South" (a term which Lanier used far differently than Henry Grady) for instance, Lanier anticipates to some extent the views of the Southern Agrarian movement of fifty years later. Writing in 1880, Lanier says, quite simply, that "[t]he New South means small farming" (V, 334). Elaborating upon this initial definition, Lanier believes that "large farming," at least as it is usually practiced, is an evil that wastes land and human resources. "While large farming in the South means exclusive cotton-growing,--as it means in the West exclusive wheat-growing or exclusive corn-growing--small farming means <u>diversified farm-products</u>" (338). By growing many different products, farmers can become more self-sufficient and not so dependent

upon outside markets, subject to external economic variations. Through crop rotation, land will not be exhausted, as it had been by "earlier immigrants, who scratched the surface for cotton for a year or two, then carelessly abandoned all to sedge and sassafras, and sauntered on toward Texas" (358). But much land in the South, he argues, still craves for cultivation: "these blissful ranges are still clamorous for human friendship; it is because many of them are actually virgin to plow, pillar, axe or mill-wheel" (358). If more men owned smaller farms and worked their land faithfully, the South would prosper. Lanier maintains that more Southerners, both white and black, are working the land than ever before, producing diversified crops (343-347). What he fails to recognize, however, is that a great many of the small farmers to whom he so proudly points are actually sharecroppers, who do not share in the wealth as ideally as Lanier would have them. Lanier's agrarian dream often blinds him to harsher realities--historically, a blindness common to Americans.

One poem in particular succinctly illustrates Lanier's "New South" agrarian ideals. "Thar's More in the Man Than Thar Is in the Land" (written sometime between 1869 and 1871) tells, in dialect, the story of Jones, a lazy, shiftless Southerner who lets his land go to waste. He sells his farm eagerly, thinking it worthless, and moves to Texas. The land's new owner, Brown, works long and hard hours, and in a few years the land is fruitful and he is prosperous. Meanwhile, Jones returns, a disgruntled figure; Texas was also unproductive for him. Brown moralizes at the end of the story:

". . . whether men's land was rich or poor
Thar was more in the man than thar was in the land"
(I, 23).

The fruitfulness of the land depends upon the hand working it as much as, if not more than, the land itself. Lanier had no patience with men who would not use the land wisely.

The most important poem in which Lanier's agrarian ideals come to the fore is "Corn," written in 1874. The poem begins as a typical nature-lyric, with the persona walking through the woods, singing the praises of the richness of the wilderness. De Bellis writes that the poet is responding "to Emerson's command in 'Nature' (1836) to go into the woods and let the spirit of the universal being flow through him" (p. 63). (Lanier was aware of Emerson, but we are not sure if he had read "Nature" at this time.[20] But he needn't have read "Nature" to engage in poetic communion with nature.) Indeed, the poem has a mystical, pantheistic air about it, and William Dean Howells, spokesman for American realism, had rejected it for publication in Atlantic largely because of its mysticism (De Bellis, p. 62). At any rate, the poem's narrator, passing through the woods, comes upon a field of corn at the forest edge. Skipping over more mystical visions (which are less effective as poetry than those which would come later in "The Marshes of Glynn"), we come upon that part of the poem in which Lanier's agrarian views are most clearly stated. The narrator says that the corn

rebukes the land
Whose flimsy homes, built on the shifting sand
Of trade, for ever rise and fall
With alternation whimsical,
Enduring scarce a day,
Then swept away
By swift engulfments of incalculable tides
Whereon capricious Commerce rides (I, 37).

As De Bellis notes, Lanier here once more chastens Southerners for the "misuses [they] had made of their land" (p. 64). By relying on a single money-crop, cotton, the South had exhausted the soil, prevented itself from becoming self-sufficient and instead had become subject to the fluctuations of "capricious Commerce." The narrator then relates a parable about a man

> who played at toil,
> And gave to coquette Cotton soul and soil.
> Scorning the slow reward of patient grain,
> He sowed his heart with hopes of swifter gain,
> Then sat him down and waited for the rain.
> He sailed in borrowed ships of usury--
> A foolish Jason on a treacherous sea,
> Seeking the Fleece and finding misery (I, 38).

The man sinks deeper and deeper into debt, and fortune, by way of drought, pests and weeds, deals his money-crop harsh blows year after year. Eventually he gives up, ruined financially and spiritually, and, like Farmer Jones, sells his land and heads west.

Corn becomes for Lanier a symbol of the New South, of diversified crops and subsistence agriculture. The "golden treasuries of corn" Lanier mentions in the poem's final stanza represent the prosperity he envisions for the region if only it would learn the lessons of the past and adopt his agrarian theory. Though the South had always been considerd an agricultural region, the agriculture of money-crops such as cotton and tobacco Lanier recognized as being no less commercial than the industrial North or England. The North manufactured steel; the South manufactured cotton.[21] Lanier's agrarianism, much like that of his twentieth-century detractors, held up the hard-working, self-reliant small farmer as the ideal.

As Marx tells us in The Machine in the Garden, this image of the small farmer was an American ideal long before the Agrarians or Sidney Lanier. Bejamin Franklin, St. John de Crevecoeur and, most importantly, Thomas Jefferson (among many others) each stressed the belief in the innate moral superiority of the agrarian lifestyle as opposed to the urban, commercial (later, industrial) lifestyle. Jefferson has long been recognized as an American ideal, whose name has been historically invoked to support even diametrically opposing viewpoints--especially since association with his name has always lent respectability to persons, groups and causes in the minds of the American majority. He wrote in his Notes on the State of Virginia,

> Those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever He had a chosen people, whose breasts He has made His peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue.[22]

Furthermore, Jefferson felt that an urban, commercial life by definition implies dependence, and "[d]ependence begets subservience and venality, suffocates the germ of virtue, and prepares fit tools for the designs of ambition" (p. 157). Such ambition threatens the government of, by and for the people. Thus, an urban, commercial lifestyle threatens the very being of America as a republic. If the nation is to remain free, strong and uncorrupted, the agrarian lifestyle must predominate. This concept is deeply ingrained in the American psyche, as Marx (and, before him, Henry Nash Smith in the third section of Virgin Land)[23] has shown, and has traced through several generations of American literature.

But the agrarian ideal is only half of Marx's thesis. The co-existence of a progressive, technological ideal alongside of the pastoral ideal, and the accompanying tensions and ambiguities this co-existence has inspired, completes Marx's image of the machine in the garden. Jefferson himself is, once again, archetypical of this ambivalence, his fascination with technology and his utilitarianism leading him often to encourage the growth of industry in America in spite of his agrarianism (Marx, pp. 146-150). Though Marx does not mention Lanier in his examination of this motif as it appears in the works of American writers, Lanier, too, closely follows the pattern.

In 1869 Lanier (at that time working with his father's law firm, dilligently striving to be a good lawyer and/or businessman--Starke, p. 136) went to New York to conduct some business on behalf of his father's office. Letters to his father reveal that at least part of his mission was to check into the possibility of some New York or Boston manufacturing companies expanding into the South. At one point Lanier writes that he is "wonderfully encouraged . . . as to the value of the iron property" and that he feels "sure that the time is not far distant when the great iron-manuf[actur]ing interests of the United States will transfer themselves to Georgia & Tennessee & Alabama" (VIII, 21). (A few days later, however, he changed his mind--"I begin to think the Iron business an improbable job" in the South--VIII, 27.)

As we have seen, "The Symphony" contains references to Lanier's ability to recognize the legitimacy of Trade--and,

by logical extension, industry--under certain circumstances. But the poem most often cited by the latter-day Agrarians as evidence of Lanier's supposed advocacy of industry is "Psalm of the West." Lanier's most blatantly nationalistic poem (as well as his longest), the "Psalm" clearly illustrates the traditional edenic view of the nation. America is repeatedly called the "tall Adam of the West" (with variations), and, toward the poem's conclusion, God is depicted as marching "all the beasts" of the world before this new Adam for the purpose of their naming. The poem primarily celebrates, aside from the nation itself, freedom, which becomes the Eve of the new Adam (I, 62-63).

The poem fleetingly celebrates other things as well--friendship, law, sex, marriage, science and art among them (I, 63)--proclaiming their sanctification and enrichment in a land of liberty. But industry and commerce are not even mentioned in the "Psalm." Rather, there is the usual attack on Trade and acquisitiveness, and the assertion that such things do not belong in the new Eden:

> Land of large merciful-hearted skies,
> Big bounties, rich increase,
> Given rests for Trade's blood-shotten eyes,
> For o'er-beat brains surcease,
> For Love the dear woods' sympathies,
> For Grief the wise woods' peace,
> For Need rich givings of hid powers
> In hills and vales quick-won,
> For Greed large exemplary flowers
> That ne'er have toiled nor spun
> For Heat fair-tempered winds and showers,
> For Cold the neighbor sun (I, 66-67).

In the new land, as Lanier points out, humanity has a second chance, for there is bounty and peace which will enable man

to return to the prelapsarian state, with sins and discomfort left behind in the old world. Trade, at least in its old sense as the domineering, corrupting commercial spirit, also seems to be left behind. Lanier's wording, however, is curious. While the negative concepts of Grief, Need and Greed are nullified by the richness of the new land (just as the extremities of weather are idealistically nullified by the temperate climate), Trade does not appear to be erased. Instead, Lanier writes that the green bounty of the new land provides rest for Trade's blood-shot eyes. (Quite literally, America is a sight for sore eyes.) Does this line mean that Trade is also nullified, or is it merely transformed into a state more acceptable to the pastoral vision? Again, is malevolent Trade replaced by benevolent trade? If so, Lanier seems to be indulging in escapist rationalization--of a typically American sort, Marx would remind us. Trade was bad in the old world, but we can make it new and good in the new Eden. In this sense, the complaints of the Agrarians against "Psalm of the West" are justified.

But it is going too far to say that in the "Psalm" Lanier sings the praises of industrialism simply because he celebrates a nation in the throes of industrialization, as Warren, Tate and Ransom would have us believe. The fact that a man praises his nation does not imply that he supports everything his nation does, just as Lanier's complaints about the South do not prove that he hates the South. Judging by the text of "Psalm of the West," Tate's claim that the poem "is a praise of nationalism, argal of Northern sectionalism, argal of industrialism"[24]

is extreme to say the least--"esoteric" as Starke puts it ("The Agrarians Deny a Leader," p. 539), and an "absurdity" according to Shackford (p. 354). Warren's sentiments are virtually identical to Tate's, but he expresses them more palatably when he writes that Lanier failed to see "that the nationalism mystically embodied in the Psalm of the West was a nationalism of Trade. Amor vincit omnia--even the contradiction" (Warren, p. 35). While Lanier does not praise industrialism per se (all argal's aside), his fervor does blind him to those aspects of American nationalism which were inexorably linked to industrialism. Warren is not entirely unfair when he calles Lanier a "blind poet." But he wasn't a prophet; he was only as blind to the future as most Americans. Nineteenth-century Americans were widely succeptible to the hypnotic mystique of Progress.

The agrarian strain in Lanier was decidedly stronger than the industrial, despite his ambivalence. In "Sunrise" (1880), the poet's last major work, he writes that "the hell-colored smoke of the factories" will not hide the sun from him (I, 149). On April 16, 1874, Lanier spent half of a letter to his wife expressing his disgust at the effects of industry in Wheeling, West Virginia (IX, 49-50). And in "The Hard Times in Elfland," an amusing 1877 poem with a serious message, Lanier has Santa Claus making a financial and physical wreck of himself after trying to apply modern technology to his business. Santa has fallen prey to "a smooth-tongued railroad man" who convinced him to invest everything in a plan to replace his reindeer and sleigh with an efficient

elevated railway. But the stock-market and litigations destroy the plan, Santa is sunk into poverty, and Elfland is mortgaged (I, 105-111). These are powerful reservations to progress. Though at times Lanier believed, like Henry Grady, that the growth of industry in the South was desirable, from his writings we can gather that, to the end of his life, he felt that the South's hopes for recovery lay in agrarianism, but of a significantly different kind than the antebellum plantation agriculture.

Still, in his position on the matter of Trade, he reveals a certain willingness to find a place for technology in the new world. Again and again he denounces Trade, but almost as often he allows the existence of commercial interests in his ideal visions--as long as those interests do not threaten or conflict with agrarian dominance. More than likely, he realistically understood that America could not, or would not, do without commercialism. And commercialism in an age of technological progress means industry, just as commercialism in a democratic republic means competition. He was realistic enough to see this fact of American existence. He was unrealistic enough to think that agrarianism and industrialism could co-exist in such a way as to maintain his Jeffersonian ideals. As a result, his works betray an apparent philosophical inconsistency that was certainly even more infuriating to the latter-day Agrarians than were fire-eating industrialists. When his works are judged on this basis, on consistency of content, they frequently leave much to be desired. As for the more pertinent question of how this ambivalence affected

the aesthetic quality of his work--if, indeed, the effect is adverse--critics continually debate. Before we consider this aspect of Lanier's work, let us look at one more of the basic ambiguities that recur in both his corpus and in the history of American culture, an ambiguity which is closely related to the matter of the machine in the garden.

III

The Romantic Versus the Scientist

Leo Marx often refers to "the opposition between head and heart" as a continuing motif in American literature (p. 279), and he cites Hawthorne's "Ethan Brand" and Melville's Moby Dick (particularly the chapter entitled "The Symphony")[25] as primary examples of this conflict. Basically the struggle is between rational empiricism--dedication to the immediately discernable, the logical and the pragmatic--and the irrational aspects of the human experience--emotions, sentiment, mysticism and myth. This conflict appears to some extent in all periods of history, in all cultures, reflecting the very nature of the human being as a rational, sensitive (in the literal sense, meaning "receptive to sense-stimuli") creature which must always strive to satisfy its physical needs, but which also has the capacity to transcend the purely physical, sensually-discernable, and must try to explain those aspects of its being which cannot be accounted for by physical phenomena or through rational means. Man is a creature of both head and heart. In Western culture during the nineteenth century, man's awareness of this conflict within himself was especially acute. The reason for this awareness was the overlapping and, for a considerable length of time, the co-existence of two powerful, articulate intellectual atmospheres which between them paralleled the struggle of head and heart within man--the Romantic Age and

the Age of the New Science.

The United States itself represented, perhaps as consciously to Americans as to non-Americans, an ambiguity quite similar in nature. The Founding Fathers were products of the Enlightenment, in which rationalism and empiricism were fundamental precepts. They were, for the most part, deists for whom the political philosophies of empiricists like Locke and Harrington had profoundly influenced their decisions to rebel against Britain and to set up a democratic republic. The modern concept of democracy, particularly in America, was born of the Enlightenment.

Yet also born of the Enlightenment was its converse, the Romantic Age. This birth may be explained by the frequent reversals of fashionable ideas that occur from generation to generation. It may also be explained (in an admittedly oversimplified way) by the progression from Lockean concepts of liberty and natural rights, to individualism and equality, and from there (since the presupposition of universal equality makes for a fascination in the obviously talented or unusual person) to interest in the inexplicable aspects of individual and collective man. "The romantic sensibility" manifested itself in a fascination with personality, emotionalism, mysticism, the grotesque, and other irrational aspects of life. It is instructive to note that this new creature in the family of national characters--the American, a man from the pastoral fields of the new Eden, with his democratic beliefs and his rustic wisdom--was a romantic figure in the eyes of Europe, particularly France (where Franklin became incredibly popular

as a diplomat). Equally interesting is the fact that though America had had a colonial literature, the first major literary movements of the new nation were decidedly romantic in nature--gothicism and transcendentalism.

But in both gothic and transcendental writings we can see the perpetual undercurrent of America's dualistic background--head and heart. The tension was aggravated with the growth of the New Science and rationalism in the mid-1800s, with the theories of Spencer and Darwin, and the technological breakthroughs of steam power and electricity. While the Enlightenment's science had been largely theoretical (as in the work of the greatest Enlightenment figure, Isaac Newton), with relatively little direct application and influence on the lives of the populace, the New Science of the nineteenth century emphasized the application of new discoveries to everyday living--technology. Once again, empiricism and rationality became an ideal, with the added impetus among the general public of utilitarianism. Technology would make the world better, and "progress" was the word of the day. If it couldn't be proven by empirical means, and if it couldn't be put to practical use, what good was it?

Artists in the middle of the nineteenth century had inherited romantic ideals but were surrounded by scientific ones. It is small wonder that the struggle between head and heart should become a fundamental concern of American writers (as well as of British writers) of the period. Lanier, though born later than the major authors of this period, was born in the South, which lagged behind the rest of the nation in the

discrediting of romanticism and in the spread of the ideology (with material benefits) of the New Science. There should be no surprise to find Lanier confronting the head-heart problem in his work.

Lanier rather unsubtly pits head directly against heart--as head and heart--in his writings. The Head (commonly Brain) frequently stands for the North and the Heart for the South in these contests, but they also represent the empirical world-view as opposed to the romantic (which, as we know from Taylor's Cavalier and Yankee, were the views generally associated with North and South, respectively).[26] Lanier was no objective reporter of these ideological battles; he clearly sympathizes with the Heart. In one of his earlier extant poems, "The Tournament: Joust First" (c. 1865), he presents Brain and Heart as medieval knights facing each other in battle.[27] Heart, a "youth in crimson and gold," is merry, and concerned more with watching his lady-love than with the joust at hand. He wears in his plumed helmet three favors given him by his lady. By contrast, Brain is "Steel-armored, dark, and cold," and remains "cynical-calm." He wears no favor in his plumeless helmet--"not he/. . . favor gave or sought." We know whom we are supposed to root for.

While a prewar Lanier would probably have given the victory to the good-guy, the defeated Southerner grants victory to the villain. In fact, it is made quite plain that the reason for Heart's defeat lies in his romanticism. When the trumpet sounds for the joust to begin, Heart's first act is "to find his ladye's eye." But Brain will have none of

this nonsense, and he takes careful aim with his lance.

> They charged, they struck; both fell, both bled.
> Brain rose again, ungloved.
> Heart, dying, smiled and faintly said,
> "My love to my beloved!" (I, 6).

Heart stays faithful to the romantic ideal, but it costs him his life at the hands of cold, calculating Brain. Lanier means for us to admire Heart, but he comes off looking rather foolish, even irresponsible to the modern reader. The story ultimately has a happy ending, however. In the companion poem, "The Tournament: Joust Second," the allegorical knights Love and Hate do battle, and Hate is mystically annihilated by a prayer from Love's lips. At the moment of Hate's destruction, the dead Heart is resurrected. Notably, Brain is nowhere in sight, intentionally or unintentionally forgotten by the poet.

Of course, the moral of this pair of poems is that love conquers all, Lanier's recurring theme. If we apply the allegory to the romantic-scientific tension of the age, we see that Lanier is at heart a romantic, but that he recognizes the doom of romanticism in the midst of a world dominated by rationality and science. And though Brain may be a villain, he is not without redeeming qualities. After all, he is the superior warrior and, at least to us, his serious attitude toward the joust speaks of wisdom. But, unwilling to allow romanticism to remain dead, Lanier believes that if the spirit of love should prevail in the world, romanticism will be returned to life. Though it is tempting to associate knight Hate with knight Brain, Lanier does not make such a connection.

He describes Hate as a satanic, bestial figure, "foam[ing] at mouth," with "breath hot upon the air" and "hairy hands." He fights bitterly, with none of Brain's cool (or cold) detachment. Brain is unemotional, concerned only with the business at hand. Hate "scorched souls"; his intent is purely murderous. Lanier obviously means to show us that Love will defeat Hate, not Brain, but will defeat the adverse effects of Brain's previous dominance. Hate must be eliminated, while Brain must only be put in its proper place--one of subordination to Love and co-existence with Heart. If this idea seems unrealistic and philosophically unsound, perhaps that is why Lanier does not even mention Brain at the conclusion of the story. Both the poems and the concept are simplistically mystical, and cannot be reconciled to reality and reason.

Tiger-Lillies is central to an understanding of Lanier's perception of the romantic-rational ambivalence of his age. Garland Greever writes that the novel is "a-bristle with the ideas which the author was to amplify and expound through the rest of his life" (Centennial Edition, V, xvii), and Starke agrees, calling the book an "essay on all that seemed to Lanier most important" (p. 98). The novel's title itself, which puzzled contemporary critics, symbolizes the concept of intellectual and spiritual duality. Greever explains it about as succinctly as is possible:

> In the novel Lanier speaks of "lithe Temptation" as a "swift tropical tiger" leaping upon a man who stoops to pluck a flower in the jungle. In "Retrospects and Prospects" he connects a water-lily with music. In "Nature-Metaphors" he quotes

> the Gita-Govinda on love as a tiger which springs upon a woman whose "face is like a water-lily" [V, 165, 292-293, 313]. From these passages it is to be surmised that he thought of a lily as innocence or love or the beloved person, and of a tiger as a ferocious force--if love, then love sundered from its gentler nature (V, xviii).

Greever goes on to tell us that in the novel Lanier employs tiger-lillies as a symbol of a dichotomy in nature. Paul Rubetsahl, one of the book's heroes, says that nature "has converted the boisterous sins of her youth into the enchanting virtues of her age. Her wild oats have blossomed into mountain-roses and tiger-lillies!" (V, 87). Greever writes that "the flowers represent, not two forces, but one--and that one virtuous."

But the symbol of tiger-lillies extends beyond nature. Greever notes that Lanier also uses the flowers to represent "two opposing forces" which "embody . . . not harmony, but conflict" (V, xviii).

> "Retrospects and Prospects" has Nature juxtaposing "tiger-hates" and "lily-loves" [V, 284]. In an apostrophe to music an earlier draft of the essay brings the warring elements together into a single entity: "Thou beautiful Fury, thou fierce Flower, thou Tiger-Lily of matter as Love is of spirit" (V, xix).

And Greever cites as a passage which "seems to bear definitely on the meaning of Lanier's title" an excerpt from the pre-Tiger-Lillies essay, "The Three Waterfalls":

> [Love] came up slowly [in the eyes of the narrator's beloved], in the likeness of a lily, and rested on the quiet eye, as on a quiet lake, one second--then, in a flash, he had become a spotted tiger, with tense muscles and still, gleaming eye, in the attitude of springing: and then the tiger wavered out of sight, and the lily reappeared, quietly hovering, daintily undulating.

> Upon this lily my soul descended. O, love , thou tiger, I said to myself--O, love, thou lily, I love thee best in thy lily form: and so, upon this infinite petal of thee let me float over life forever! (V, 220-221).

Here we see the duality of love, the animal aspect and the floral aspect: as Greever puts it, bestial "selfish love" and pure "etherealized" love. Lanier obviously prefers the latter (V, xix).

The tiger-lillies concept of love and nature have several manifestations in the plot and characters of the novel. The primary opposition of characters lies between the main hero, Philip Sterling (who, as we have seen, is modeled on the author), and the main villain, John Cranston. Needless to say, Sterling is a Southerner, Cranston a Northerner. They typify traditional American concepts of the personalities of men from each section, and of the atmospheres of the sections themselves. Sterling, son of an aristocratic planter, is a chivalric, romantic, idealistic young man, with "large, gray, poet's eyes." A believer in "the love-at-sight theory" and even a "transcendentalist" (V, 12-14), he quotes Richter, Emerson and Carlyle to legitimize "the strong painful yearning created by the beautiful" (32). When he plays his flute, the music flows "like a rivulet shooting down smooth moss," with the air of "a thin clear romance," pouring out "a stream of tender appealings" (28). With the female characters he is always the perfect gentleman.

John Cranston is another story altogether. Like Milton with Satan, Lanier spends considerably more time describing his villain's character than he does that of his hero. Cranston's

father (also named John) is sarcastically said to have "done much for the country, with his charities, his dry-goods, and his prosperity on Broadway" (36-37). Cranston, junior (no doubt the image of his father), thinks only in terms of money, commerce and practicality. He has no romantic illusions:

> When Cranston thought of virtue and such things, he formed to himself a vague idea that the earth was a mysterious wild-cat bank, doing a very inflated business by brazenly issuing, every day, multitudes of irredeemable bills in the shape of hypocritical men; and in his heart Cranston was certain that the teller of this bank had long ago robbed its vaults of all the virtue, or bullion, and absconded to very unknown parts (V, 37).

Lanier quickly informs us that Cranston has many good traits, but he has one major, all-encompassing flaw:

> . . . thoroughly selfish, and without even the consciousness that this last was his bad trait--John Cranston was capable of building up many things; but his life was nothing more than a continuous pulling down of all things (37).

Surprisingly, Cranston has managed to learn how to play the violin sometime during his life, but even his musicianship puts him in sharp contrast to Philip Sterling, revealing his inner nature. Cranston's violin-playing is improvisational, and

> it made one think of some soul that had put out its own eyes in a fury, and gone blindly dashing about the world in spring, wounding itself against fair trees, falling upon sweet flowers and crushing odors out of them . . . . [U]ntil I heard Cranston, I never saw [the darker strains of music] assume such fantastic and diabolical patterns (32).

As for his dealings with the fair sex, "Cranston was a veritable woman-eater" (36), and he had secretly seduced and abandoned one of the novel's heroines long before the story's

start. In everything, except perhaps his violin-playing, Cranston is cool, calm and calculating.[28]

The forces associated with Cranston--the North, anti-romanticism, capitalism--bring destruction to the South and, almost, to Philip Sterling by the novel's end. But Lanier's realism is eclipsed by his romanticism long enough to allow the various heroes and heroines to be reunited and to pair off into couples in a scene worthy of the conclusion to a "modern musical comedy" (Starke, p. 101). The most interesting aspect of the conclusion of Tiger-Lillies is Cranston's absence; like knight Brain, the lack of his presence at the end is unexplained. It would seem Lanier has trouble getting rid of his more admirable villains. At any rate, Head (with its accompanying virtues and vices) has once again defeated Heart in Lanier's work. But Love again resurrects Heart, making everything all right.

Lanier himself exemplifies the struggle between head and heart in a number of ways. His wide-ranging interests are well documented, and among his interests aside from music and poetry was science. Joseph Beaver, in his article "Lanier's Use of Science for Poetic Imagery," writes that the poet not only had an interest in science, but "considerable academic training in the sciences" as well.[29] Lanier, as Beaver demonstrates, makes relatively frequent use of contemporary scientific knowledge and theory to create imagery and metaphor in his verse. For example, in the following lines from "Corn"--

> As poets should,
> Thou hast built up thy hardihood

> With universal food,
> Drawn in select proportion fair
> From honest mould and vagabond air (I, 36)--

Lanier has employed the scientific fact of photosynthesis (which had only lately come to be understood) to devise a complex metaphor. As Beaver explains (p. 523), the carbohydrates the corn (as well as any other green plant) creates from out of carbon dioxide (from the "vagabond air") and water (from the soil, or "honest mould") in the presence of sunlight is indeed a "universal food," since nourishment for all creatures eventually comes, through plants, from sunlight. The poet should also obtain spiritual nourishment with universal food, through a close communion with and dependence upon nature, and, like the corn, serve as the source of others' nourishment.

Beaver notes how Lanier also put scientific knowledge concerning the light spectrum, astronomy, rudimentary atomic theory, and other areas to poetic use. "Lanier was experimenting boldly," we are reminded--and he was often unsuccessful.[30] "The Dying Words of Jackson" (I, 156-157) is one of several poems Beaver cites, attributing the "confused and shifting imagery" and "overextended analogy" of the work to Lanier's experimental impulse (Beaver, p. 157).[31]

Lanier's overlapping artistic and scientific tendencies also appear in his major work on prosody, The Science of English Verse--the title itself being indicative of devotion to both art and science. A descriptive rather than prescriptive work (Lanier's intentions have frequently been misunderstood because, according to De Bellis, "of the book's ambiguous

writing"--p. 127), The Science of English Verse (1880) is the culmination of Lanier's long-held belief in the close relationship of music and poetry, that poetry could be described in terms of musical rhythms. He was convinced that verse could be analyzed scientifically, in much the same way music can. Lanier uses musical notation to scan lines of poetry, analyzes the nature of the sounds of words, considers various types of rhythm, and conducts many other studies of different aspects of verse. (It is a long work, 239 pages in the Centennial Edition.) It has come to be regarded as a flawed, yet important work in the history of prosody. Karl Shapiro, in A Bibliography of Modern Prosody, calls it "the most famous and influential [work] in the field of temporal prosody . . . in no sense dated . . . one of the best expositions of its theory in the literature of metrics."[32] De Bellis adds that "[m]ost critics agree" with this evaluation today (p. 128).

In his various statements on the nature of poetry, we find apparent contradictions which may account for some of the shortcomings of Lanier's verse. Many of these conflicts center on the questions of the relationship of form and content in poetry, and of poetry's function. Allen Tate is particularly distressed at Lanier's theory that "all ideas may be abolished out of a poem without disturbing its effect upon the ear as verse" (II, 21). Tate says that The Science of English Verse, from which the quotation is taken, is "a rationalization of his inability to set forth a clear image" in his work (Tate, p. 69). We cannot blame Tate, a skillful poet himself, for being alarmed at the extreme implications

of Lanier's words, but Lanier was certainly not advocating nonsense verse. Rather, he was considering at that moment poetry as sound, and the element of pure sound, divorced from meaning, as an aspect of versification. Two sentences after the line Tate quoted, Lanier clarifies his intent: "Upon repeating aloud the poem [in which nonsense-syllables phonetically analogous to the original words have been substituted] it will be found that the verse-structure has not been impaired" (II, 21, my emphasis). We can hardly disagree with this idea--except in the sense that form and content cannot be totally separated in poetry, since form affects interpretation and meaning affects our perception of form. Tate's apprehensions in this case, though understandable, can be largely discounted.

Though he was concerned enough with the formalistic aspects of poetry to write a scholarly book on the subject, in which he virtually ignored the question of content, Lanier firmly believed in the importance of meaning in poetry. In fact, his poetry is more often than not extremely didactic. His "poetry of social consciousness," as De Bellis calls much of the verse composed between 1865 and 1875 (p. 46), finds Lanier protesting against the evils of Reconstruction government, railing against Trade, advocating many of the agrarian ideals he would later express more succinctly in "The New South," and, as he would be throughout his career, trying to teach moral lessons, promoting the cause of love. The endless didacticism, with the poet feeling the need to italicize particularly aphoristic lines, can get very annoying.

Lanier steadfastly opposed the notion of "art for art's sake," which he felt was a decadent movement from which young people should be rescued. In one of his Johns Hopkins lectures, in which he defended the work of George Eliot (to him, the greatest English novelist) against its critics, Lanier rejected the arguments of those who felt "that the moral purpose of [Daniel Deronda] has overweighed the art of it, that what should have been pure nature and beauty has been obscured by didacticism[.]" He attributes such objections to "the whole question of Art for Art's Sake which has so mournfully divided the modern artistic world" (IV, 227). He also soundly disputes the claim of the aesthetes "that a moral intention on the part of an artist is apt to interfere with the naturalness or intrinsic beauty of his work, that in art the controlling consideration must always be artistic beauty, and that artistic beauty is not only distinct from but often opposed to moral beauty" (IV, 232-233). His audience is assured that if an artist creates a work with any hint of "moral ugliness," "Time, whose judgments are inexorably moral, will not accept his work" (233). Lanier then cites Keats, Emerson and Mrs. Browning to show how great poets achieve great beauty with great morals (233-238).

For Lanier, the ancient view that the purpose of art is to delight and to instruct would be a truism, with "instruct" italicized. We can gather from the last stanza of "Corn," in which "modern art" is said to have its role in serving the land, that Lanier felt that the poet had a moral duty, in which instruction played no small part. Tate justifiably

(though perhaps for reasons other than those we would adhere to) says that "one must admit that his instruction could have been better than it was," both in form and content (p. 70). Again, we will postpone final judgments on the quality of Lanier's work until later.

On the surface he seems sure of his own ideas, but Lanier is torn between opposing viewpoints with regard to artistic matters. He approaches poetry as a science and emphasizes its formalistic aspects. Yet he insists on writing and defending didactic poetry. (His defense of George Eliot can be read as a defense of his own work against those who would later despise its constant moralizing.) The head and heart conflict can be applied to this situation in two ways. We can view head--rationality and science--as governing his formalism and theorizing, while heart lies behind the didacticism, upholding moral virtue in the face of cold calculation and practicality. Or, we can assign to heart the sentiment on Lanier's part that allows him at least to consider the beauty of pure sound in poetry, aside from all rationalizations regarding poetry's function, while head rejects the advocates of Art for Art's Sake, insisting on teaching and being taught by art, thus giving poetry a utilitarian purpose. It is no easy question, and no easy lines can be drawn. Lanier no doubt also struggled intellectually over his divided sympathies.

The most troubling aspect of the whole head-versus-heart, science-versus-romanticism duality for artists of the mid-1800s lay in the effect the co-existent opposites had on

conceptions of nature. Nature has, since the dawn of civilization, been man's primary subject and source of inspiration in art. One of the oldest poetic traditions is that of the pastoral, and the imitation, adoration and mythologization of nature have always been among the traditional functions of the poet. Even before the Christian era, the poet's perception of the beauty and order in nature became his prime opportunity to sing the praises of his God, and Christian poets continued this tradition. The infinity of variety and size man saw in the universe was the most obvious sensually-perceptive analogue to his conception of God, so he quite naturally sought God in nature. Similarly, the perfection of nature, with its endless capacity for self-perpetuation and its reflection of the principle of discordia concors led man to consider nature to be God's greatest, most perfect creation--though perhaps second only to prelapsarian man, man's ego being what it is.

The Romantic Age rebelled against the "classical," rationalistic ideals of the immediately previous generations. Such neo-classical systems as deism recognized the clock-work precision of the universe, scientifically reduced to a marvelously complex but ultimately comprehensible series of laws and formulae. The element of the unknown was purged from the realm of final acceptability. The Enlightenment wasn't willing to go so far as to deny God--Newton steadfastly professed his Christianity, and even the deists admitted the concept of a Creator--but it denied God's intrusion upon the everyday

workings of the universe He created. (Like the teller of John Cranston's "earth-bank," God might have run off to "very unknown parts.") Mysticism had no place in such a rational world.

But the Romantics refused to maintain such a stiff, empirical world-view. They saw in it mechanistic, potentially inhuman overtones. Man was an imaginative creature, capable of transcending the purely sensual. Surely he had a mystical aspect. And so should nature, the infinitely various and large: to the Romantics, the ultimately rationally unknowable. But to approach knowledge, on a level beyond that of mere reason, was not only possible, but desirable.

So the English Romantics of the late 1700s and early 1800s went out into the woods and fields, and, idealizing the pastoral, sought God and truth in nature. So did their American counterparts, though, as usual, a generation or two afterward. The American Romantics of the mid-1800s also looked for beauty and truth in nature, their searches having a profound effect on the literature. Thoreau left Concord to spend two years communing with nature at Walden pond. The Transcendental movement, so powerfully influencing artists who either directly participated in it or reacted to its teachings, proclaimed that through a closeness to nature, man could be close to God.

But also in the mid-nineteenth century, Darwin spoke. Haunted by the spectre of deism--now revitalized and given tooth and claw by the Darwinian struggle of the species and evolution, and Spencerian survival of the fittest--the late

Romantics acutely felt the undercurrents which would transform their mystical, natural house of worship into a vast laboratory in which the skylarks and nightingales were fighting for their lives. The nature of the New Science was not so much a clock as a random battleground, filled with impersonally threatening forces.

Moby Dick, as Leo Marx points out, is a major statement reflecting the tensions evoked in the clash between romanticism and the New Science. In it, both Ishmael and Ahab are torn between the "oceanic pastoral," the beauty of the sea and its paradisiacal islands, and the malevolent forces of ocean storms, sharks and, most particularly, the white whale. Yet even the whale has its beautiful, romantic aspects, such as its "mighty tail" which is capable of "gestures . . . that would well grace the hand of man." In its gracefulness, "no fairy's arm can transcend it."[33] But this same tail can be "used as a mace in battle," and Ishmael speculates that if anything were capable of the "annihilation" of matter, "this were the thing to do it" (p. 293). The dualism can be seen in Ahab just as clearly, the romantic versus the monomaniac, especially in the chapter entitled "The Symphony."[34]

This dual perception of nature appears in Lanier's work also. Among the symbolic significances of the titular image of Tiger-Lillies is that of nature's duality--the gentle lily and the ferocious tiger, nature as both comforting source of beauty and life, and realm of storms, struggle and bestiality. But Lanier's most important work in relation to the tradition

of nature-poetry is "The Marshes of Glynn," a poem in which a background of romantic nature-worship is immediately apparent. The poem opens with a gothic description of the marshes (and what in nature lends itself better to gothicism than marshes, except perhaps a cliff overlooking the sea on a stormy night?)--

> Glooms of the live-oaks, beautiful-braided and woven
> With intricate shades of the vines that myriad-cloven
> Clamber the forks of the multiform boughs,--
> Emerald twilights,--(I, 119).

As the narrator passes through the marsh-land, with its "soft dusks" at mid-day, and its "chambers" built of leaves and vines, he senses the atmosphere of worship created by nature--

> Cells for the passionate pleasure of prayer to the
> soul that grieves,
> Pure with a sense of the passing of saints through
> the wood,
> Cool for the dutiful weighing of ill with good;--

and he is moved to a state in which he is receptive to a "mystical experience."[35] The narrator enters a spiritual realm where

> the scythe of time and the trowel of trade is low,
> And belief overmasters doubt, and I know that I know,
> And my spirit is grown to a lordly great compass
> within,
> That the length and the breadth and the sweep of the
> marshes of Glynn
> Will work me no fear like the fear they have wrought
> me of yore (I, 119).

These lines speak of a transcendental approach to nature, and they simultaneously reveal the narrator's past of doubts and fears. The doubt which Lanier mentions is unobjectified--"of what?" we want to ask--which in the twentieth century would be identified with <u>angst</u>. But in the mid-nineteenth

century, the question of belief and doubt, with no object stated, could only mean one thing--doubt in God, or at least in a transcendent reality beyond the material world. The marshes of Glynn, however, induce the narrator to leave such doubts--as well as the fears of encroaching time and trade--behind. In this new relationship with nature, the marshes themselves do not frighten the narrator as they had before. Here and now, at least, God is real, unassailable by the New Science.

Now firmly under the spell of nature, the narrator realizes the union of the marshes to the limitless seas and, through the common connection of sea and sky (blue expanse meets blue expanse), to the universe: "unafraid, I am fain to face/The vast sweet visage of space" (120). Awed, he begins to ask questions, and, under nature's instruction, answers them as well:

> And what if behind me to westward the wall of the woods stands high?
> The world lies east: how ample, the marsh and the sea and the sky!
>
> . . . .
>
> Oh, what is abroad in the marsh and the terminal sea?
> Somehow my soul seems suddenly free
> From the weighing of fate and the sad discussion of sin,
> By the length and the breadth and the sweep of the marshes of Glynn (120-121).

The marshes are "candid and simple and nothing-withholding and free," open to the sea, sky and, by implication, all things, including man. Their "spread and span" reminds the narrator of "the catholic man who hath mightily won/God out of knowledge and good out of infinite pain/And sight out of blindness

and purity out of a stain" (121). Robert Penn Warren says that this "conveys nothing" to him, being "nothing more than verbalism" (p. 42). We must take issue with Warren's assessment and, like Jack De Bellis, note that these lines signify "the traditional paradoxes of religious conversion placed in terms of a comparison between the human soul and natural imagery" (p. 120). Indeed, the marshes are working a type of religious (or, better yet, spiritual) change over the narrator. Furthermore, the reference to acquiring "God out of knowledge" immediately after a discussion of the marshes' openness indicates Lanier's appreciation of the transcendental ideal: a spiritual knowledge of nature leads to, even is equivalent to, a knowledge of God.

Robert H. Ross finds fault in Lanier's imagery in the poem, calling the work "a study in symbolic obscurity."[36] He is particularly distressed with the following lines, believing the image inappropriate to the subject matter, involving a strained and trivializing simile:

> As the marsh-hen secretly builds on the watery sod,
> Behold I will build me a nest on the greatness of God:
> I will fly in the greatness of God as the marsh-hen flies
> In the freedom that fills all the space 'twixt the marsh and the skies (121).

It is hard to see Ross' complaint with these lines, unless it is with the obvious religious sentimentalism. As De Bellis once again points out, the marsh-hen functions less as simile than as "'emblem' stimulating meditation on God's greatness. Identification with God by way of nature has superseded the impressionistic intimations of Him" earlier in the poem (De Bellis, p. 120).

The water of the marshes, by way of the sea, flows "Here and there/Everywhere," encompassing the earth. Seeing his exuberance over this fact, we feel that the narrator has obtained a sense of his spirit also flowing through the world, though Lanier does not actually say as much. But night soon comes, and the narrator must leave his freedom-granting sanctuary. With the night, the tide has come in and, perhaps inspired by the knowledge that he must return to the less hospitable world outside, the narrator ends the poem with some disquieting questions:

> And now from the Vast of the Lord will the waters
> of sleep
> Roll in on the souls of men,
> But who will reveal to our waking ken
> The forms that swim and the shapes that creep
> Under the waters of sleep?
> And I would I could know what swimmeth below when
> the tide comes in
> On the length and the breadth of the marvellous
> marshes of Glynn (122).

Lanier works deceptively in these lines, achieving one of the greatest triumphs of his career. He could have easily concluded the poem with assurances of God's greatness and of the revitalizing power of nature. But, instead, he perceives the fact that the marsh-creatures come to life with the descending of night. They are called by the disturbingly indefinite names "forms" and "shapes," and in their swimming and creeping we imagine the waters and marshy soil literally teeming with animals engaged in the business of life's struggle for survival. Metaphorically, Lanier links these indefinite shapes to those belonging to "waters of sleep" in "the souls of men," suggesting dreams and the unconscious. Though we should not

ascribe to Lanier any anticipations of Freud, he obviously recognizes the darker, unknown elements lying deep within man, circularly linked to the doubts and fears of the poem's early lines. Lanier courageously, curiously wishes that these unknown forms, both within man's unconscious and beneath the marsh-waters, might be revealed to him, in the hope that they may be as inspirational and instructive as the glooms of the "marvellous" (a word suggesting both the beautiful and the sublime) marshes have proved to be. Perhaps this is too much for Lanier to hope, optimistically thinking that the revelation of the unknown will always have good results. Is knowledge always a blessing? After all, scientific knowledge had inspired many of his and other Victorians' doubts and fears. Is Lanier whistling in the dark?

Despite the clumsiness and vagueness that critics like Ross, Warren and Tate attribute to the poem, it stands as Lanier's greatest achievement in verse, a poem rich with ambiguities, effective images, and shifting, irregular, but pleasing rhythms (reminiscent of Poe at his best). Longfellow thought it worthy of inclusion in an anthology of verse he was working on (Starke, p. 316), Anderson considers it "essentially original, the poem of Lanier's aesthetic and spiritual maturity" (I, lxiii), and De Bellis calls it "a poem with integrity of vision," though he may be going a bit far when he proclaims it typifies the "unique voice that made him one of the nineteenth century's major poets" (p. 125).

Although we may disregard much of Ross' judgment of "The

Marshes of Glynn," he does have a few noteworthy things to tell us about the poet. "In him Wordsworth and Darwin were at odds," Ross writes. Like many poets of the second half of the nineteenth century, Lanier felt pulled between a scientific view of nature "as an amoral, impersonal force," and "his inherent romantic belief in a sentient nature, the benign healer of man's torn spirit" (p. 404). Ross suggests that Lanier might have found the resolution of this ambiguity in the transcendental "spiritual science" of Emerson. Lines from "The Marshes of Glynn" indeed indicate that Lanier leaned in this direction, though he never clearly articulated such a philosophy in his writings. Of Emerson, Lanier wrote, "[he] gives me immeasurable delight because he does not propound to me disagreeable systems and hideous creeds but simply walks along high and bright ways where one loves to go with him" (IX, 446). Though he quotes Emerson as early as Tiger-Lillies, from what we can gather he did not acquire more than a passing acquaintance with Emerson's work until late in his life, 1877 (IX, 446, n. 41). "The Marshes of Glynn" (written in 1878) shows clear Emersonian influence, the same influence that embraced Hawthorne, Melville, Thoreau, Whitman and many less important artists.

Despite his knowledge of science and his attempts to employ it in his art, Lanier had to reject it as final interpreter of truth and meaning in the world. Science is a means of knowing reality through the senses and the brain, but not through the heart, and Lanier wished for more heart-knowing in the world. (We recall his youthful disgust with "uneducated

emotion" coupled with "educated intellect"--VII, 34.) Love and forgiveness were his professed solutions to any dilemma he or anyone else might face. After all, there were times when science could not help man's ills, in spite of all progressive protestations otherwise. In one of his poem outlines, Lanier writes:

> Come with me, Science; let us go into the Church here . . . . [F]ix thine eye on these grave-faced and mostly sallow married women who make at least half this congregation . . . . See, there is Mrs. S, her husband and son were killed in the war; Mrs. B--her husband has been a thriftless fellow . . . .; Mrs. C. D. and the rest of the alphabet in the same condition: Science, I grasp thee by the throat and ask thee with vehement passion, wilt thou take away the Christ (who is to each Deficiency in this house the Completion and Hoped Perfectness) from these women? (I, 264).

We must note that Lanier is not necessarily witnessing to the reality of Christ here--from all indications, though he was a Christian, he was a rather unorthodox one in many ways[37]--but he is witnessing to the void filled by belief in Christ which Science cannot fill. There is some aspect of humanity which craves for the transcendent, the mystical. In the battle for human loyalty, knight Brain may have all physical evidence and practicality on his side, but our sympathies go with knight Heart, even to the point of death. Perhaps this is why in American literature, even as progress, industry, utilitarianism and science have come to dominate most other aspects of life, and even as realism and naturalism have made their social statements and aesthetic triumphs, the dominant strain has remained romantic.

Conclusion

Now we must consider the charges of those critics who feel that Lanier is, at best, a minor poet, many of whose faults as artist can be directly traced to his intellectual inconsistencies and shortcomings. First of all, however, we have to clear the air of the idea that inconsistency in itself is a killing fault. If it were, virtually every major American writer--indeed, every major writer, period--would be done in. Leo Marx tells us, "The first step in understanding Jefferson, as Richard Hofstadter suggests, is to dispense with shallow notions of consistency" (Marx, p. 135). Emerson's assertion that "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds" (from Self-Reliance) has become a cliché, and when Whitman admits and even relishes in his self-contradictions, we take it as symbolic of his universality and poetic breadth. So, if Lanier were not inconsistent, he would certainly be a rare bird in the realm of letters. In fact, an absolute intellectual consistency on his part would likely arouse our suspicions regarding the validity of anything he has to say, and we would probably dismiss him as simplistic, narrow-minded and naive.

Once philosophical inconsistencies are put aside, we are left with the problem of Lanier's verse itself. Of the faults which are commonly found with it, the two most often

cited by critics--the generally favorable critics as well as the unfriendly ones--are Lanier's alleged vagueness of expression, caused by unclear images, strained metaphors and weak analogies, and his sentimentality, particularly as reflected in his self-consciously "literary" style. To varying degrees, Warren, Tate, Ransom, Ross, Parks, even his sympathetic biographers Mims and Starke, all point out the poet's weaknesses in these areas. Because of the frequency of occurance of these and other less annoying tendencies in the vast majority of his poems, Lanier is kept from being considered one of America's foremost poets. To take just a few quotations from those who are most willing to overlook Lanier's problems as poet:

> It is a thin sheaf of authentic poetry that we can salvage from the occasional and the sentimental . . . . Lanier never attained his goal of writing major poetry . . . (Parks, p. 201).

> It is futile to deny these tendencies [to be strained in expression, to be stiff, and to "indulge in fancies"] in Lanier. They vitiate more than half his poems, and are defects in some of his best (Mims, pp. 367-368).

> [T]he language is the lush language of sentimentalism, and sentimentalism combined with didacticism is an almost inescapable blight to any poem.
> . . . [T]here is in his poetry so little of the natural magic that is the supreme felicity of the great poets, though so much in his work just fails of achieving this magic, this poetic perfection--as if Pegasus leapt but could not soar (Starke, pp. 443-444, 446).

Of the major scholarly works published concerning Lanier, only that of Jack De Bellis avoids criticizing such weaknesses: he spends a great deal of time citing other scholars' reservations about the poetry and refuting them, though he deals with

relatively few works. Feeling that Lanier has been too harshly treated in the past, especially by the Agrarian critics, he professes that among his objectives is "to show that Lanier's position in American letters is solid" (pp. 10-11). Of all commentators on Lanier, other than the unscholarly and sentimental popularizers, De Bellis has the highest opinion of him. But despite De Bellis' admirable intentions and persuasive arguments, far too many scholars have found serious flaws in Lanier's verse to be ignored. A reading of the Lanier corpus reveals poem after poem which suffers from these defects--clumsy figurative language and excess sentimentalism--to the point that they are definitely inferior productions. Of course, even the greatest artists create bad works. But major artists do not create so many bad works with so few great ones to compensate.

There is no need to belabor the matter. Though it is simple enough to point out bad poems and serious faults in rather good ones (as the Agrarians do quite well), it is less simple to offer possible explanations for those failures. Naturally, we may say that Lanier is a weak poet, comparatively untalented, overly romantic and thus ridiculous; but these accusations, based on solid evidence as they are, still do not explain why a man who could achieve the overall triumph of "The Marshes of Glynn" was unable to transcend his weaknesses more often. Lanier may be a minor poet, his few good or nearly-great poems not justifying higher status, but <u>why</u> was he not a better poet, when he obviously had the ambition, intelligence, sensitivity and, indeed, even potential

talent to be one? Having diagnosed the illness, can we find the cause?

It seems a matter of time and place, of conflicts arising from out of his environment that caused a lack of poetic self-assurance on Lanier's part that prevented his greatness.[38] As we have seen, Lanier was, deep down, a Romantic, in spite of certain scientific proclivities. Born in the antebellum South, he inherited a strong romantic tradition which remained essentially vital in the regional temperament many years after the North had moved toward pragmatic, scientific realism. By 1842, the year of his birth, major American Romantics, among them Poe, Emerson and Hawthorne, had already begun to publish important works, such as Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque, Nature and Twice-Told Tales. Even the most important prewar Southern artist, William Gilmore Simms, had been writing for several years. And by the time Lanier was at the peak of his poetic powers, the mid- and late-1870s, the great American Romantics were all either dead (Poe, Hawthorne, Thoreau) or well past their prime (Emerson, Whitman, Melville). The rise of literary realism--led by Howells and Twain--with its break from genteel traditions, was underway. With the nation in a mood of postwar commercial progressivism and utilitarianism, Lanier was in many ways out of step with his times.

It is not that Lanier did not have the potential to get more nearly in step. His scientific awareness (and willingness to use science in his work) and recognition of the possible benefits of industry prevented him from being an absolute fossil

in relation to his age. But the romantic strain was by far the stronger. If he was not actually intellectually aware of the ambivalences and tensions existing both within himself and his society, he at least sensed them, and he sought to compensate for them. With his view of the poet's moral duty, he preached love, forgiveness, anti-materialism and moderation in his prose and poetry. This effort was no doubt conscious. What was more than likely unconscious was the effect his ambivalent romanticism had upon his writing style.

He had often reached back into the past, to the days of knighthood, chivalry and gyniolatry, to illustrate his moral ideals as he tried to educate the public. His writing style also harkens back to earlier times in several ways. The archaisms, such as the excessive thee's, thou's, ye's, art's and -eth's, are distinctly Elizabethan (or Biblical). Lanier seemed to think such words were innately poetic. He also recognized another bad trait in his verse which was reminiscent of past poetry:

> I have frequently noticed in myself a tendency to the diffuse style--; a disposition to push my metaphors too far, employing a multitude of words to heighten the pat-ness of the image, and so making of it rather a conceit than a metaphor, a fault copiously illustrated in the poetry of Cowley, Waller, Donne, and others of that ilk--(VII, 136).

Though we would today dispute his disparagement of the metaphysical poets, Lanier's insight here is remarkably acute. For although this statement appeared in an early (1864) letter to his father, the fault he notes in himself persisted throughout his career. His attempts at metaphors and beautiful images are often so over-written as to render them either absurd or

almost incomprehensible. His style is regularly artificial--an assessment made by Warren (p. 39) and Tate (pp. 67-68) that we have to agree with--because he was trying too hard to be a poet.

The same can be said about his effusive sentimentality, which Warren illustrates with a line from "The Marshes of Glynn," "Of the dim sweet woods, of the dear dark woods" (Warren, p. 43--I, 119).[39] A Romantic in an age in which romanticism was becoming increasingly passé, Lanier compensates for his audience's assumed moral shortcomings and "uneducated" hearts by overdoing it, pouring out his own heart unreservedly in his verse. As a result, his poetry is often precious and syrupy. It is almost as if he felt he had so much romanticism in himself that he could afford to flood his readers with it--that it was even his duty to do so. Rather than to move with the times and adapt himself to the changing environment, he seemed to think he could make the times adapt to him, and thus reverse the wretched course things had taken. Such a sense of mission is almost as admirable as it is foolish.

Lanier's eagerness to compensate for various flaws he detected in society--the anti-romantic, anti-pastoral, anti-Southern and, in the South, the anti-artistic strains--explains at least some of the weaknesses in his writing. And that eagerness, the anxiety and sense of need, would probably have not existed were it not for the ambivalences within the poet which paralleled those within society. Lanier was trying to correct the ambivalence in himself even as he tried to correct

society's. So we find a poet struggling over his feelings about the South, his divided sympathies for agrarianism and industrialism, and his split loyalties to romanticism and science. And we find a canon of poetry which reflects these tensions in both form and content: a canon which is short of greatness largely because its writer was trying too hard to make up for the ambivalences, trying too hard to be a great poet.

Allen Tate says, derogatorily, that Sidney Lanier "helped to make us what we are today" (p. 70). A slightly different perspective, however, would bring us closer to the truth. The same things that have made us what we are today made Lanier what he was, and what he is to us: a poet who may not be great, but who is profoundly American.

NOTES

[1]Sidney Lanier: A Biographical and Critical Study (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1933).

[2]Warren, "The Blind Poet: Sidney Lanier," American Review, II (Nov. 1933), 27-45. Tate, "A Southern Romantic," New Republic, LXXVI (Aug. 30, 1933), 67-70.

[3]American Review, II (Mar. 1934), 534-553.

[4]"Hearts and Heads," American Review, II (Mar. 1934), 554-571.

[5]Sewanee Review, XLVIII (in 3 parts)(Apr., July, Oct. 1940), 153-173, 348-355, 480-493.

[6](1961, rpt.; New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1969).

[7](1964, rpt.; London: Oxford University Press, 1976).

[8]The Centennial Edition of the Works of Sidney Lanier, gen. ed. Charles R. Anderson, 10 vols. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1945). All quotations from the writings of Lanier in the text of this paper are from this edition unless otherwise indicated.

[9]Starke says that "as fiction the two chapters that make up the episode of Gorm Smallin's desertion are the best in the book, and almost a short story in themselves" (p. 100). Mims (see note 11, below) believes that Lanier never again came "so near creating a scene of real dramatic power" as the scene in which Gorm's brother, Cain, confronts him with the fact of his desertion (Mims, p. 84). Garland Greever writes that "Gorm's disloyalty and Cain's reaction to it supply the one absorbing theme of the plot" of Tiger-Lillies (Centennial Edition, V, xxxii). And an associate of Lanier's told the author in a letter dated January 4, 1868, that the character of Gorm Smallin "is well done . . . a touch of the Shakespearean faculty of nestling into a man's brain and thinking from thence and not from your own" (V, xxxii, n. 62).

[10]The Centennial Edition contains a collection of "Reminiscences of Lanier" (X, 343-367). Judging from these descriptions, had Lanier been a Roman Catholic, he would be a candidate for sainthood. Of course, many--though not all--of these personal accounts are from close friends and relatives.

[11]Sidney Lanier (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1905), pp. 308-309.

[12]In "Retrospects and Prospects" (V, 301), Lanier discusses various advances and reforms which had taken place over the previous fifty years, such as the freeing of the serfs in Russia and the continuance of the South American republics "to perfect themselves." Included in this list of praise-worthy events is the fact that in "the Southern portion of the United States, the last five years have witnessed the extinction of negro slavery."

[13]All lines of verse included in the text are excerpts from the indicated poems. Line-numbers are not included in the Centennial Edition, therefore the inclusion of line-numbers in the text of this paper would not be especially helpful.

[14]"The Radicals, in pursuance of their keeping-the-steam-up policy, must needs hold a meeting in the streets of the town, and make speeches to a crowd of foolish negroes who, as is their usual custom, were armed with all manner of muskets, shotguns, pistols, bludgeons &c &c." Lanier then describes an ensuing riot, in which five persons were wounded--"four negroes and one white" (VII, 365). A subsequent letter (January 21, 1868, pp. 371-372) speaks of "much bad feeling between whites and blacks, especially those engaged in the late row at this place[.]"

[15]Lanier was especially virulent in his attacks upon Southern literary editors. Referring to an article in the Atlanta Constitution, Lanier writes in a May 18, 1876 letter: "Such articles as this . . . are precisely the sort of things that have rendered it so hard for a Southern man to make any headway in the North: for if you examine it a moment, you find that there is absolutely no coherent purpose in it, the middle does not hang by the beginning, nor the tail by either, and the whole is a mere piece of tobacco-sodden bosh such as the Southern editors are prone to eject from their pen-points" (IX, 368).

[16]The letter from which this and the next quotation are taken does not appear in the Centennial Edition, because it was not discovered until after that edition's publication. It is printed in Charles R. Anderson, ed., Sidney Lanier: Poems and Letters (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1969), p. 171.

[17]Sidney Lanier (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1972), pp. 78-94.

[18]Edd Winfield Parks, "Lanier as Poet," Essays on American Literature in Honor of Jay B. Hubbell, ed. Clarence Gohdes (Durham: Duke University Press, 1967), p. 190. This article is essentially identical to the central chapter of Parks' major study of Lanier, Sidney Lanier: The Man, the Poet, the Critic (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1968).

[19]The various published explications of "The Symphony" say basically the same things. The best in-depth explications are in Starke (pp. 205-210), Parks (Gohdes, pp. 190-193) and, especially, De Bellis (pp. 73-94).

[20]Philip Graham, in his article "Lanier's Reading"--Studies in English (Austin), XVII (1937), 107-111--writes that Lanier had read a few of Emerson's essays, but does not say specifically which ones. He suggests only a passing acquaintance with Emerson's work, but greater familiarity with British and German writers who had influenced Emerson. Anderson, writing in 1945, confidently says that Lanier read Emerson seriously for the first time in 1877, and supports this statement with considerable evidence (I, lvii, n. 101).

[21]This parallel was sensed by the antebellum Southern defenders of slavery. They pointed out that Northern "wage-slavery" was used for manufacturing steel and other products in factories, and that the South's less hypocritical outright slavery merely substituted cotton for steel and plantations for factories. And, the Southern system was proclaimed to be the less cruel.

[22](New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1964), p. 157.

[23](Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), pp. 123-260.

[24]This quotation presents some problems. Several critics quote it (Starke, "The Agrarians Deny a Leader," p. 539; Shackford, p. 354; De Bellis, p. 102) and give the same source for it--the New Republic article by Tate (cited in note 2, above). However, the quotation is not to be found in that article. Nor have I been able to locate it in other essays by Tate. Since Starke was the first to cite it, we can probably attribute to him the original error, carelessly perpetuated by the others. Still, this quotation, wherever it comes from, is in keeping with Tate's sympathies, and is too good to ignore.

[25]Graham's list of Lanier's reading (see note 20, above) does not include any works by Melville, which is not surprising considering Melville's negligible reputation in the 1860s and '70s. The fact that Lanier's and Melville's "symphonies" have closely related subject matters, the struggle between head and heart, is a fascinating coincidence.

[26]Taylor writes that by the mid-1800s Americans had come to see the Yankee as a member of "a leveling, go-getting utilitarian society" and the Southerner as belonging to "a society based on the values of the English country gentry." The inhabitants of the North were generally looked upon as the descendants of the Puritans, while the South was filled with the offspring of Cavaliers, thus "the difference between the two was at least partly a matter of blood" (p. 15).

[27]The similarity between this poem and the section of "Psalm of the West" involving the Civil War is not accidental. Lanier incorporated whole stanzas of "The Tournament: Joust First," with only minute changes, into the "Psalm."

[28]De Bellis goes into considerable detail in analyzing Cranston's character in relation to Lanier's philosophical beliefs (pp. 24-28).

[29]American Literature, 24 (Jan. 1953), 520-533. The quotation is taken from pp. 520-521.

[30]Beaver notes that Lanier was not alone in this type of experimentation. Whitman also applied scientific knowledge to his poems, sometimes with less, but usually with more success than Lanier (p. 533). See Beaver's book, Walt Whitman: Poet of Science (New York: 1951).

[31]Beaver explains:

> "The Dying Words of Jackson" . . . suffers heavily from confused and shifting imagery. In this short poem Lanier considers Jackson first as the earth, about to turn, and "loth to turn away" his face (from the sun). Darkness and night are standard figures for death, but Lanier's astronomical viewpoint forces us to reflect that the same part of earth turning now into night will within twelve hours turn again into the sunlight. Then, violently, Lanier shifts the figure and calls Jackson the day, "about to yield his breath." Still later, Jackson's life is likened to the sun, and his words to the stars. Inaccuracy, shifting of figures, and overextended analogy are here among the factors contributing to the poem's mediocrity (p. 527).

[32](Baltimore: 1948), p. 16--as cited by De Bellis, p. 128.

[33]Moby Dick (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1956), pp. 293-295.

[34]Leo Marx discusses the struggle between these "two kingdoms of force" in Moby Dick to far greater depth (pp. 277-319).

[35]Harry R. Warfel, "Mystic Vision in 'The Marshes of Glynn'," Mississippi Quarterly, 19 (1966), 34-40. Warfel explicates the poem as a highly-organized, step-by-step progression to a mystic experience.

[36]"'The Marshes of Glynn': A Study in Symbolic Obscurity," American Literature, 32 (Jan. 1961), 403-416.

[37]Citing Lanier's poem "The Crystal" (I, 136-139) and other writings, Starke convincingly argues that the poet believed Christ to be "the perfect man" and an example to be followed, but "not God nor of God save as all men may be of God. . . . He is not God to be worshipped, but an ethical figure to be admired and adored" (Starke, pp. 401-402). Lanier disliked and distrusted organized and ritualized religion, and turned away from his Calvinistic background, though he recognized its potential viability for others (pp. 401-402).

[38]At a time when he was discouraged by difficulty at getting "Corn" published, Lanier wrote to his wife a letter (October 23, 1874) in which he sought to lift her sagging spirit. The letter reads like an effort to boost his own confidence as well: ". . . I know, through the fiercest tests of life, that I am, in soul, and shall be, in life and utterance, a great poet" (IX, 105). These are not the words of a confident man; a man truly confident of his own greatness does not feel the need to say so. The letter wreaks of disappointment, anxiety and even sour-grapes: "If I were like Bret Harte, or Mark Twain, and others of this class of wonderfully clever writers, my path would be easy: but . . . I can not dream any fate more terrible to me, than to have climbed to their niche,--the ledge where Lowell, and Holmes, and that ilk, rest" (106). Lanier closes the letter by asking his wife to burn it (107).

[39]Warren dislikes this "abstractness" because of its frequency of occurence in Lanier's verse, and because "Lanier insists on an emotional attitude for which he can provide no stimulus; the reader is asked to accept the poet's experience on trust, the one thing a reader declines to do, unless he, like the poet, is a sentimentalist" (p. 43).

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