PATTERNS OF IMAGERY AND SYMBOLISM
IN THE POETRY OF E. J. PRATT

by

VINCENT DOUGLAS SHARMAN
B. Ed., The University of Alberta, 1956

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS
in the Department
of
ENGLISH

We accept this thesis as conforming to the
required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
AUGUST, 1963
In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the Head of my Department or by his representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Department of English

The University of British Columbia, Vancouver 8, Canada.

Date Sept. 9, 1963
ABSTRACT

From the canon of the poetry of E. J. Pratt emerges a composite picture of man, the various elements of which are given cohesion by patterns of images and symbols. It is the purpose of this thesis to trace these patterns, to discover their relation to Pratt's main themes of man and the mechanical universe, and to reveal his view of man.

Chapter I discusses the patterns of images and symbols that exist in Pratt's lyrics and less successful narratives. Image patterns of the sea, ships, machinery, heroes, light and religion reveal that Pratt sees man as surrounded by death, which he fights with machines, the products of his reason, and with his feelings which may lead him to sacrifice himself so that others may live. The two most significant image patterns in these poems are those of the sea and of light. The sea symbolizes both death and the Void of the universe, from which, in Pratt, all life comes and to which all life returns. Light symbolizes the determination of the human spirit to overcome death, but in images of hell-fire, light symbolizes the evil in men. Christianity is not so important in Pratt's work as Desmond Pacey and John Sutherland maintain. Pratt does not view Christ as divine. God is no more caring of man than He is of his other natural products.

Chapter II deals with The Roosevelt and the Antinoe as
Pratt's greatest expression of the conflict between man and death. Common men rise to godhood when they overcome the forces of death (symbolized by the sea) through feeling for others and through their determination to succeed (symbolized by light). A pattern of images of machines reveals that the power of men acting for others' benefit transcends the power of the natural universe. Religious images suggest that, to Pratt, God is uncaring of men and that those who believe that He is beneficient are deluded. Pratt's world emerges as a world of chance.

Chapter III examines The Titanic, in which Fate, rather than death, is the antagonist. The transience of the material world of man (symbolized by the "Titanic") is posed against the permanence of the natural world (symbolized by the stars). Fate is an eternal force. Patterns of imagery of light dominate the world of the ship and symbolize men's illusions of strength over death, nature, and Fate. A pattern of images of heroes is discussed in relation to the wealthy passengers whose self-sacrifice is a ritual atonement for their hubris, and for the catastrophic results of their materialism on the rest of mankind, represented by the immigrant passengers.

Chapter IV examines the patterns of fire, religion, and hero images in Brébeuf and His Brethren. These patterns present Pratt's view that the Jesuits are misguided. Their ambition to succeed as martyrs and as Jesuits blinds them to the need for communication of feeling among men. The Jesuits
exist in the illusion that religious abstractions are more vital to men's welfare than are kindness and charity. Both Jesuits and most of the Indians, in their zeal, devote their energies to death rather than to life, and both exhibit in extreme the misdirection of the human will to succeed.

Chapter V presents minor patterns of imagery and symbolism in which images are contrasted or balanced to reveal the strengths and weaknesses in men. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the total image of man in Pratt's work: man is both good and evil; he rises to his highest levels through communication with other men in transcending death by heroically opposing it; he sinks to his lowest levels when he becomes an incommunicative agent of death. Man exists in illusion when he believes that his machines or his faith in God and hope in religious systems can overcome death.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.................................................................ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....................................................v
ACKNOWLEDGMENT........................................................vi
CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION AND MINOR POEMS..............1
CHAPTER II. THE ROOSEVELT AND THE ANTINOE...........26
CHAPTER III. THE TITANIC..............................................42
CHAPTER IV. BREBEUF AND HIS BRETHREN...............63
CHAPTER V. CONCLUSION...............................................84
APPENDIX.................................................................99
BIBLIOGRAPHY.............................................................100
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I should like to thank Dr. D. G. Stephens for his valuable assistance in the preparation of this thesis.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND MINOR POEMS

E. J. Pratt left Newfoundland in 1907, when he was nineteen years old, and his first important volume of poems, Newfoundland Verse, was published in 1923, when he was forty. The poems in Newfoundland Verse are concerned almost solely with the sea: even after sixteen years away from it, Pratt was still under its influence, and the sea proved to be a force that never left him for long. After the Second World War, when he was sixty, he published Behind the Log, a narrative of the epic journey of a convoy crossing the Arctic Ocean during the War, and his last long poem, although it is set on land, draws some of its best images from the sea.

With the exception of Brébeuf and His Brethren, the sea vitalizes the best of Pratt's poetry. It invests the

---

Rachel was privately published in 1917. Its poems were concerned with life in Newfoundland, and in Edwin J. Pratt: The Man and His Poetry (Toronto, 1947), p. 17, H. W. Wells reports:

Dr. Edgar has been heard to deplore the lack of sea-side odour in the Laureate's pretty tales about fisher folk.

Dr. Earle Birney comments in, "E. J. Pratt and His Critics," Masks of Fiction (Toronto, 1962), p. 73: "...Rachel...was imitative, apprentice stuff...."
poems with a starkness and simplicity of imagery that is as deceptive as the sea itself, and as elemental. For Pratt, the world of the sea is a universe in which the processes of life and death go on mechanically and eternally. The sea is filled with dangers to man. Above it winds rage, and blizzards blind men; in it, murderous animals live in cold silence, and reefs lurking half-hidden bring down the ships. Men who find their living in the sea, or on it, must fight it merely to exist, and the lights of cottages and lighthouses burn hopefully.

Above all, Pratt writes of the relationship of man to the power of the sea. Machines, the land, determination and reason are man's chief means of survival. The essence of the poetry is conflict, and although the conflict may be superficially between man and nature, it is finally between life and death, in a universe that Pratt represents by nature.

Pratt emphasizes that man is a creature who has evolved to a position above nature, although he is still subject to it. His evolution has given him both reason and emotion which are the mainstays of his existence, but which can also cause his destruction. Man may use his reason to construct ethical and moral systems to bulwark his life in a universe of death, but those same systems can become so coldly reasoning, that martyrdom, for instance, becomes the desired end in life, rather than the maintenance of life. For Pratt,
emotion is the necessary adjunct to reason if men are to be humane, for emotion is the empathetic link between them to alleviate suffering and, as far as possible, death. Pratt accepts even the emotion of hate if it is expressed through human contact, for in the nearness of two humans to each other there is the possibility of reconciliation. What the poet fears is the expression of the cold, inhuman perfection of the mechanical universe through men's machines, men's reason, or their ethical and religious systems.

Patterns of images that run through Pratt's work are directed largely to either the expression of life or of death. Many of his images are ambivalent. Thus, light may symbolize the life of the human spirit, and the sea, death; but, conversely, the light of exploding shells at Dunkirk produces a hellish atmosphere of evil and death, while the darkness of an Arctic night might be pregnant with life in furtive ships.

There are two scales on which the material of Pratt's poetry forms itself. The first scale, which is primary to his work because it forms the intellectual basis on which the patterns of symbols and images evolve, is one of time. It extends from the creation, in the Void, of worlds and stars, and moves through the beginnings of earth and life on it, to the appearance of humans, and marks their history of suffering and heroism in the conflict with death, to the period of World War II.
The other scale, on which form the majority of patterns of images and symbols, has at one end images of the sea with its cold-blooded animals and, at the other end, images of human life and light. Symbols on this scale, which runs parallel to the other scale, are in reference to the geological and historical events in time. Whales, mammalian ships, and effective instruments of communication, for example, appear in clusters of images on the scale toward the upper end, because they promote, or are representative of, the struggle towards life. Conflicts emerge on the scale, between the warm and the cold, between the evolved and the less-evolved or regressed, between land and the sea, and between life and death. The primary scale suggests a scientific and historical view of existence; the secondary scale is one of ethics, morality, symbols, and drama. On both scales, man is the focus. Without man the universe has no meaning. Without man's awareness that to sustain the life of the human spirit against the forces of death, his existence is merely animal. Pratt's view of existence is one of vast scope, and the patterns of images and symbols are most evident and significant, poetically, on the second scale, in the conflict between higher and lower levels.

The canon of Pratt's poetry can be divided, with a few exceptions, into two large groups, the narratives and the lyrics. It is for the former poems that the poet is most highly regarded. Many of the lyrics, however, deserve
critical attention for their considerable value, and in them are important aspects of the image and symbol patterns which with those in Pratt's less successful narratives are most fully developed in his three most important narratives, The Roosevelt and the Antinoe, The Titanic, and Brébeuf and His Brethren.

An examination of the minor poems reveals that there are several increasingly complex patterns of images of the sea, which associate with death. The sea is usually a grave, or sometimes, a winding sheet, into which men disappear, or are wound for eternity. Not only man, however, finds his end in the sea, but all that has risen from it. In Towards the Last Spike, the tides, waves, and even rivers work in league with the parent sea to take the land, man's great refuge, and land-buried men (suggested in the following quotation by the "worm-casts") back to their place of origin:

```
...the rivers cut
The quartzite, licked the slate and softened it,
Till mud solidified was mud again,
And then, digesting it like earthworms, squirmed
Along the furrows with one steering urge
To navigate the mountains in due time
Back to their home in worm-casts on the tides.²
```


All references to the poems of E. J. Pratt are from this edition and will hereafter be cited in the text.
"The Way of Cape Race" introduces a further consideration of the eroding sea. It stresses, by personification, the purposeful, active nature of the sea's assault on men and the land associated with them. The attack is eternal and relentless:

The waves are bred no other way;
It was their way when the Norsemen came,
It was the same in Cabot's day:
A thousand years will come again,
When a thousand years have passed away—

("The Way of Cape Race", p. 36)

The personification is repeated in *Behind the Log*, in which the sea battles the ships with its fists and mocks them with its caresses as it breathes "its prophecy of death" (p. 333). The North Sea rings out its victory over men, in "On the Shore", after it has claimed the life of a ship. In poems such as these, the sea actively attempts to claim men's lives; it is not an impassive grave. The concept that develops through the pattern of these images is that the sea strives to kill man. It is an agent of death, or death itself.

Man is circumscribed by death, as land and ships are circumscribed by the sea. Death is man's great sorrow: in "Erosion", the death-sea erodes lines into a woman's face, lines that it takes the sea a thousand years to put into a cliff (p. 37). "The Ground Swell" also suggests the relentless force of death and the puny stature of man before it, in images of the sea reaching for life in the cottage by
the shore. The sea moans and raps at the window over which the blind has been drawn in an attempt to shut it out (p. 5). It is death at the window, and man has given death meaning, although it existed

Before the winds of God had learned to strew
His harvest-sweepings on a winter sea
To feed the primal hungers of a reef.

("The Ground Swell", p. 5)

Generally, the sea may be treated, in Pratt, as a symbol of death. "The Cachalot" makes use of this symbol as the form that consumes even the most heroic of men and beasts and remains implacable and inviolate (p. 150). This poem and others make apparent another aspect of the sea, however. The whale and the kracken are products of the sea. Man and other animal forms evolve from the sea, in "The Great Feud", and the latter return to it, carried by the lava of the erupting volcano (p. 180). In the same poem, Tyrannosauros Rex, a dinosaur newly hatched from a 3,000,000 year-old egg, throws himself into the sea, which is both his grave and "the cradle of his race" (p. 177). Pratt implies evolution, life, and death, in Towards the Last Spike, when the workmen are confronted by fossils in the walls of rock through which the C. P. R. must pass (p. 380). The sea produces life, as well as consumes it, an ambivalence that likens it to the Void of the universe, from which all life comes and to which it returns.

The use of the sea and a symbolic animal, which suggest
both life and death, is present in several poems. In *The Witches' Brew*, the central figure is Tom the Cat from Zanzibar, an unevolved feline, whom Pratt introduces in the following manner:

It's not for us to understand
How life on earth began to be,
How forms that lived within the sea
Should leave the water for the land.

("The Witches' Brew", p. 125)

The Cat's link is wholly with the sea—he has refused to evolve—and his desire to kill all who have evolved to warm blood, and his hatred of those fish whose form is different from his (and none are the same), suggest that he is the force in the life-producing sea, which strives to destroy. Although the sea-cat begins as a comic figure with "whiskers that from ear to chin/ Ran round to decorate his grin" (p. 125), he becomes increasingly frightening, and at the conclusion of the poem is a terrifying abstraction of the onslaught of death:

A deep ferment in his soul
Or something psychic in his hair,
Of some ulterior mystic goal,
He sharply turned, began a lonely
Voyage pregnant of immortal raids
And epic plunder. But the Shades
Saw him no more in the flesh.

("The Witches' Brew", p. 136)

The patterns of images of the sea as both life-and-death-producing, which symbolize the Void, signify the state of non-existence which excludes an Afterlife. The Void is that state to which, in "The Great Feud", the volcano Jurania
attempts, in its eruption, to return:

It shot a fifteen thousand feet
Straight to the sky, then billowing higher,
And outward, made as if to meet
Its own maternal stellar fire.

("The Great Feud", p. 179)

The "maternal stellar fire" lies symbolically in the Void, as Oceanus, the "father" of Tyrannosauros Rex, lies within the Austral sea, the grave and cradle of the race of the dinosaurs. The volcano, unable in reality to reach the Void, returns instead to the sea.

The position of man in relation to the sea is that, having risen from it, he possesses within him the same capacity as the sea has, and as the Void has: he can bring or create death or life, but because of the fact of his reason and feeling he cannot kill amorally. In the pattern of images of sharks which are metaphors of submarines, the sharks symbolize the evil of the men responsible for the submarines. The actions of the submarines go beyond those of amoral sharks, because behind the machines is human reason. Pratt makes the point in "Dunkirk" in which the power of the calm sea seems to have been transferred to the German animalized tanks and airplanes which are mechanical symbols of the pure intelligences which direct them.

Pratt's use of images of machinery has been commented on by many of his critics, most of whom link it to his concept of the universe as mechanical. Louis Dudek, in The Tamarack Review, refers to Pratt as "Poet of the Machine
Age" and comments that "In Pratt, the machine appears as the latest evolutionary stage of the natural weapons of destruction." He states that "Pratt's concern with a naked power-urge as the substratum of nature, of man, and of civilized life is only the antithesis of a moral and intellectual struggle". Northrop Frye suggests as distinctive Pratt's ability to make "unforced and spontaneous" use of mechanical energy, and adds that he is one of the few modern poets who have done so. H. W. Wells feels that Pratt interprets nature as "a vast mechanism" and that he views the machine as an "extension of nature". Not all machinery in Pratt can be said to be an "extension of nature", however. The wireless in "The Radio in the Ivory Tower" suggests a miraculous transcendence of nature (p. 86), and in other poems images of the machinery of ships are almost benevolent. The pattern of machine images reveals that those machines which destroy human contact and prevent communication are extensions of nature. There can be no blame placed on nature in man's misapplication of reason to destroy life.

4 Ibid., p. 80.
The poem "Cycles" is probably definitive in this respect:

We need no more that light of day,
No need of faces to be seen;
The squadrons in the skies we slay
Through moving shadows on a screen:
By nailing echoes under sea
We kill with like geometry.

("Cycles", p. 112)

The blame is clearly men's own. The removal of human contact is evil because, in "Silences" (p. 78), it allows no opportunity for men to "flaw the crystalization of the hate":

Two men may end their hostilities just with their battle-cries.
'The devil take you,' says one.
'I'll see you in hell first,' says the other.

("Silences", p. 77)

It is ironic that man's reason, his greatest aid for survival in a world in which he is beset by death, may make him less humane and cause his reversion to the ways of primeval beasts of "Silences", who live below the "threshold of light" (p. 78).

With the disappearance of communication between men, goes even the dignity of death. In the poem "Come Away, Death", even nature stands still in silence with the poet when the airplane drops its bomb: there is only a drone, a shattering blast and death (p. 95). Pratt alludes to Medieval and Classical times when human communication gave death its dignity. There is now no chivalry to death's coming; there are no acanthus leaves or libations of wine. There is no longer time for leisured communication through art, suggested in the following quotation by the "flame of
the capitals" and the manuscripts:

His [Death's] medieval grace is gone--
Gone with the flame of capitals
And the leisured turn of thumb
Leafing the manuscripts.

("Come Away, Death", p. 95)

The pattern of images of ships reveals that they are man's greatest life-giving machines. They are warm and mammalian. With their bodies they give men life against the death of the sea. The contrast between two mother images in "The Submarine" shows the essential conflict in Pratt's poetry between life and death. The submarine is a shark and the torpedoes are her children, her "foetal young" which, like the young of the tiger-shark, are expelled from the mother to begin their attacks on other life-forms (p. 92). The ship, however, is described in terms of warmth, generosity and sympathy. She is a "rich-ripe mamal", fat and "heavy with maternity":

Within her frame-work iron-walled
A thousand bodies were installed,
A snug and pre-lacteal brood,
Drawing from her warmth and food,
Awaiting in two days or three
A European delivery.

("The Submarine", p. 91)

Another contrast of mothers is in the poem, "The Ice Floes". Here Pratt reminds men of their position out of nature and of their subjection to it. The mother seal can return from many miles out at sea to the spot at which she left her young. The ship, "The Eagle", is lost to her men
in the blizzard that develops as the men kill seals. There is little distance between the ship and the men, but...

...in that blast
The mother was fully as blind as her brood.

("The Ice Floes", p. 22)

Ships symbolize men's need for sustenance against death, and a form of the sustenance is human communication, as crowds of men within the ships often suggest. The merchant ships of *Behind the Log*, while not specifically mammalian, are packed with men, and the ships carry the essentials of life to the starving people of Europe (p. 313). "Dunkirk" epitomizes the symbolic pattern of communication between men. Throughout the poem, the English ships are closely associated with their strongly individualized crews; the two become almost one, and the touch of those ships' decks is, to the rescued English soldiers, like "a hold on the latch of the heart of God" ("Dunkirk", p. 308).

Pratt's poems of World War II reveal his recognition of the consequences of the domination of men by machines. But Pratt does not blame the individual men in the impersonal machines for the evil they commit. Rather he blames the human capability to bring death, which is manifested in the leaders behind the machines. The inherent unfeeling qualities of mechanical entities are initially evil for Pratt when men become mechanical in their relations with each other. The
Dictator in "The Baritone" becomes a radio voice, only:

A wind-theme swept his laryngeal reeds,  
Pounded on the diaphragm of a microphone,  
Entered, veered, ran round a coil,  
Emerged, to storm the passes of the ether,  
Until, impinging on a hundred million ear-drums,  
It grew into the fugue of Europe.

("The Baritone", p. 70)

Men reply materially to this mechanism. Money, battleships, submarines, and airplanes come to life in dreadful symphony. The abnegation of human responsibility is fitly symbolized by mechanism. If there is communication, it is heartless. There is no reception to man's warmth, frailty, sorrow, and suffering.

In contrast to the pattern of mechanical expressions in men is a pattern of images of highly individualized men who refuse to accept themselves as machines. The "genus homo" of "The Truant", for instance, confronts and confounds the All High of the Universe, with his humanity. The Great Panjandrum, The All High, insists that man can, like everything else in his universe, be measured. He finds, however, that there is one element that is not measurable. The report from his chemists asserts:

'There still remains that strange precipitate  
Which has the quality to resist  
Our oldest and most trusted catalyst.  
It is a substance we cannot cremate  
By temperatures known to our Laboratory!'  

("The Truant", p. 101)
That element is man's spirit—his fortitude, his capacity for suffering, his sensitivity, and his resilience, all of which he has taught himself in his struggle to maintain life in the overwhelming forces of death. The Truant rejects the All High for his non-humanity, for his mechanical nature. That the Panjandrum is God is clear from the following passage:

'Boast not about your harmony,
Your perfect curves, your rings
Of pure and endless light—'Twas we
Who pinned upon your seraphim their wings....'

("The Truant", p. 103)

The image of God, who coldly ignores humanity, is present in the early poem *The Iron Door: An Ode*. The association here is, again, of God and the unfeeling, frigid universe, specifically the stars, which are his guards (p. 30). The poet, in his dream of apprehending the dead before a door which later proves to be the entrance to some glowing afterlife, hears in the dismal environs of the iron Plutonian door, the moving cry of a human soul questioning the purposes of life; but his questions are doomed to go unheard by God:

Above all the other notes, arose--
A miserere flung out to the sky,
Accompanied by a knocking
So importunate,
It might have been the great Crescendo from the world of human souls,
Gathering strength to assail
The unhearing ear of God, or else to hail
His drowsy warders at the stellar poles.

(*The Iron Door: An Ode*, p. 30)
This image of God is important to the theme of the poem in that it reveals something of the nature of the brilliant land beyond the door, which the poet, finally, but only barely, glimpses: it is not a land of God, whatever else it may be.

Patterns of mechanical imagery are balanced by patterns of images of selfless, humane men whose heroism lies in their abnegation of the self in the conflict with death. By willingness to die for others, men accept death and prove the superiority of the human spirit over it. Heroes often give their lives unobtrusively for others and with no conscious awareness of heroism, as in Behind the Log and The Iron Door. "The Deed" searches for an answer to the question, "Where is the beauty still inspired by rhyme?" (p. 114), and finds the answer in a man's attempt to save a drowning boy. There is a simplicity about much heroism in Pratt that is dramatic understatement, as in "Newfoundland Seamen":

This is their culture, this— their master passion
Of giving shelter and of sharing bread,
Of answering rocket signals in the fashion
Of losing life to save it.

("Newfoundland Seamen", p. 115)

The effect of underplaying the dramatic possibilities of heroism is to suggest that such things are merely a matter of being a human being. It is as if they are to be expected of those who are aware of the importance of life, an awareness that in Pratt's work is particularly well-developed in those who are aware of the strength of the destructive power of the
sea, that is, of death.

The human ability to outface death by suffering and by self-sacrifice is sometimes exemplified in Pratt in images of Christ. It is, however, erroneous to consider Christ a more important example of love and sacrifice, than, for instance those who dive into the sea to attempt to rescue others, as in "The Deed" or The Iron Door, or as more heroic than the criminals in "The Convict Holocaust", who are being finger-printed by guards as they lie, dead, in rows, though they

Gave proof of valour, just before their death,
That Caesar's legions might have coveted.

("The Convict Holocaust", p. 57)

Christ is no more loving than those exemplary men of "Newfoundland Seamen". Christ is a symbol of human endurance and sensitivity, but many critics over-emphasize the importance of Christ and Christianity in Pratt's works. Sutherland, Frye, and Pacey are the chief critics at fault. Sutherland's thesis that the poet's work is centered specifically on Christianity is based on images which he deduces are symbols of Christ and Christianity. The whale in "The Cachalot", he says, is the "piscene symbol" of Christ, and is the fulfillment in Christ of the "Messianic prophecy"
in Ezra:7

...thou didst see a man coming up from
the heart of the sea....

This in spite of the fact that the whale is described in
the poem as the greatest killer in all the oceans (p. 139):
hardly a picture of Christ. It is fanciful interpretation
such as this that makes Sutherland's views on Pratt suspect.
He says, further, of Tyrannosauros Rex that he, too, is a
symbol of Christ because he "Rises above the petty allegiances
of the other animals" and because he "voluntarily accepts
the fact of his death: he appears to sacrifice himself to
a higher principle."8 The conventional image of Christ is
hardly compatible with a creature who on the morning of the
pleiocene Armageddon is

...bloated, angry and unsound
Of wind and reeling down the height
For flesh, his object of the fight.

("The Great Feud", p. 168)

"The Great Feud" and "The Cachalot" are two poems that Suther­
land considers among Pratt's greatest. Indeed, he suggests
that the former is the poet's best poem. Invalid interpre­
tations of what the critic considers the poet's best work

7 John Sutherland, The Poetry of E. J. Pratt: A New
Interpretation (Toronto, 1956), p. 68.

8 Ibid., p. 103.
hardly instil confidence in his abilities. Desmond Pacey agrees with Sutherland that "Christ's self-sacrificing death on the Cross forms...the chief symbolic center of his [Pratt's] poetry"\textsuperscript{9} although he disagrees with Sutherland's interpretations of Tyrannosauros Rex and the whale!\textsuperscript{10}

It is extremely important that the place of Christ be established in Pratt. The evidence shows that Pratt does not suggest, anywhere, that Christ is the son of God. He is not presented as divine. In "The Highway", a poem that Frye speaks of as being "definitive",\textsuperscript{11} Christ is the product of natural evolution, the perfection of development in nature. He appeared on earth:

\begin{quote}
Late in the simian-human day,
When Nature kept her tryst
With the unfoldment of the star
and flower--
When in her sacrificial way
Judea blossomed with her Christ!
\end{quote}

("The Highway", p. 44)

Christ is the symbol of man eternally sorrowing, of man

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{9} Desmond Pacey, \textit{Ten Canadian Poets} (Toronto, 1958), p. 175.
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., p. 167.
\end{flushright}
dependent for his life on other men's knowledge of the value of life over their "snarl Neanderthal" ("The Highway", p. 44). The poem, "Magic in Everything", refers to Christmas as "The story of a Birth bequeathed to men," (p. 118). The importance of the celebration is in the fact of the tradition of the story, and in the opportunity it affords for the expression of human love, through gifts given with "living hands" (p. 118). There is no suggestion in his poetry that Pratt considers Christ to be anything more than a mortal whose understanding of humanity was so great that he could forgive his murderers. His suffering is the suffering of the drowning men anointed in the oil-covered North Atlantic (Behind the Log, p. 341).

Patterns of other religious imagery stress the warmth and humanity necessary to give meaning to religion. Beautiful products of nature are manifestations of the God of the universe and must, because they are not of man, pass meaninglessly away. The iceberg in "The Sea Cathedral", although "fairer than a Phidian dream." (p. 37), is doomed to be drawn down by the "inveterate sea" into nothingness because it is not built by human hands. Its beauty is only "immaculate". It is a show-piece of nature that is temple-like but is

Without one chastening fire made to start
From altars built around its polar heart.

("The Sea-Cathedral", p. 37)

Similar imagery of the illusion of nature as an expression of religious feeling is present in "The Mirage". A cloud structure is there described in religious imagery that
suggests that the cloud has a spiritual significance. In the light of the poet's intellect, however, the cloud loses its value. It is only a thing of nature; it has no "lineage of toil"; it has no contact with man (p. 76).

In a mechanical universe which brings death or life with equanimity, men's immortality is in their insistence on the value of life over death. They accomplish this through human contact, communication, sensitivity to others' misfortunes, endurance, and willingness to sacrifice the self. Men's determination to assert life is symbolized in a pattern of images of light made up of the light of tapers, cottages, rockets, ships, and lighthouses. These lights are frail, but are warm and vital, and in them is the warmth of human love. The success of the human struggle against death may often lie in death, for to accept the challenge of saving another's life is to reject fear of death and, thus, to out-countenance it. The flames will still burn. The heroism of the British at Dunkirk will be included in the significance of the "Canterbury tapers" ("Dunkirk", p. 302) which are the culmination of the spirit of heroes from the cave-dwellers to modern man. The tender flames transcend Christ and include all human struggle against the betrayers of life. These images of light contrast to those of another pattern of light images which includes the Great Panjandrum's "rings/ Of pure and endless light" ("The Truant", p. 103), which symbolize the cold, mechanical perfection of the
universe, and the "patterns from a flame" ("The Highway", p. 44), which signify the mechanical resurgence of the life-force of the Void, in the creation of new worlds.

Pratt's ironic use of light forms also a pattern in which the enormity of evil is revealed. In Behind the Log, German submarines turn the Arctic into a flaming hell when they torpedo ships in the allied convoy (p. 330). To those on the merchantmen, light becomes the enemy, because it will betray them to the submarines. Even the moonlight is feared (p. 326). The ships must imitate non-existence in order to survive. So great is the enemy evil that the light of human identity must be hidden: men should be able to proclaim their humanity, not have to stifle it.

In further use of irony in images of light another pattern evolves. Sunlight bejewelling water foreshadows the destruction of the whale in "The Cachalot". The whale has won his great battle with the kracken, and as he speeds through the surf to claim his lordship over all the whales in the oceans, the sea water breaks over him in the sunshine, clothing him in monarchial garments:

Over his back the running seas
Cascaded, while the morning sun
Rising in gold and beryl, spun
Over the cachalot's streaming gloss,
And from the foam, a fiery floss
Of multitudinous fashionings.

("The Cachalot"; p. 143)

These images climax the glory of the whale's strength. Fate is about to strike in the form of the crew of the "Albatross",


who, although they themselves will succumb to the whale's force, are the nemesis that proves the illusions of strength. Death, only, survives the battle. Rainbows glow in the wine that christens the ship in "The Ritual", but the ship, of which men are so proud, proves to be as ephemeral to nature as are the rainbows. Built in the illusion that man may be supreme over nature without due regard to her power, the ship sinks on a hidden reef (p. 61).

These patterns of images, and those of hell-fire and of light that must be hidden to sustain life, are ironic because they are inversions of the major pattern of light imagery—the victorious, humble spirit of man which should shine out. The ironic images reveal some aspect of human nature which appears to be triumphant, but which is ultimately unsuccessful against the forces with which it conflicts or comes in conflict. The summation of the pattern of images of ironic light appears in The Titanic and in Brébeuf and His Brethren, in which, respectively, the lights of the great ship and the Jesuits' fires of enthusiasm symbolize the enormous illusion under which man can operate.

Historical fact and geological and anthropological theory form a solid basis for Pratt's ideas concerning the nature of man. The poet's premises, coming from history and science, have the weight of authority behind them and have, consequently, an academic validity that strengthens the
images and symbols by which he expresses his view of man. Harold Horwood, writing in *The Dalhousie Review*, says that to Pratt, "not only all gods, but all godliness, dwell in the human breast."12 This accurate conclusion implies the center of Pratt's thought—Man, to whom, only, does the universe and its process of construction and destruction have meaning.

Pratt does not write of power, of machinery, of nature, or of religious systems. He writes of the complex human being who is surrounded by death, and yet who is loath to learn the fact that death, and not other men, is the only enemy. But the history of the world shows that most kinds of men have learned it, and because this is so, it may be possible for all men to learn it. Pratt does not argue in his poetry. He merely presents the situations which show men at their worst and at their best. There is a note, however, that suggests that men must make their choice for the human spirit quickly, for the threat of the machine, to which men all too easily transfer their human responsibilities to other men, grows in intensity throughout the poetry, culminating in the poems of the horrors of the Second World War.

Men are often isolated in Pratt, in machines, on the sea, in mountain ranges, and they seem pathetically small against the universe. But there is no isolation of the

---

spirit where men reach out to touch each other; and then the vast, uncaring universe is overcome.
CHAPTER II

THE ROOSEVELT AND THE ANTINOE

The Roosevelt and the Antinoe, published in 1930, is the culmination of Pratt's poetry of the conflict of man and nature, and is the resolution of his despair at the hopelessness of man before death, a despair that is predominant in poetry that precedes The Roosevelt and the Antinoe. In Newfoundland Verse (1923), 'The Witches' Brew' (1925), Titans (1926), and The Iron Door: An Ode (1927), the images and symbols of the sea and of death overwhelm those of light and life: there seems to be little hope for man to survive death in any way. But in The Roosevelt and the Antinoe there is little doubt about who will be triumphant, the sea or man, or about the manner of the victory: Man overcomes the sea because of his "indomitable courage in pitting his strength against [nature's], no matter how great the odds".¹ In poetry after The Roosevelt and the Antinoe, Pratt's concern becomes increasingly with the conflict of man against man, and man against himself,²

¹ Quoted from a letter from Dr. Pratt. See Appendix, p. 99.

² The Titanic, with its emphasis on both man's conflict with nature and his conflicts with himself, is the bridge between the early and the late poetry.
and the imagery of the sea, while still important, tends to be less vital to the poetry than imagery of light. The summing-up of the man-nature conflict, The Roosevelt and the Antinoe draws together the sea imagery of previous poems into a powerful and complex whole that is balanced by simple and effective light imagery.

E. K. Brown's criticism that in The Roosevelt and the Antinoe, "The heroism blots out the forces of the sea which are the cause of all that occurs in it"\(^3\) is difficult to appreciate. The sea is scarcely absent from the conflict. Each stage of the rescue is written with reference to the force of the sea, and the sea's lurches and heaves give rise to a variety of forceful images that includes mythical, grey-fanged beasts and Death, itself. Rather than blotting out the sea, heroism would seem to enhance its power.

In none of Pratt's poems is the sea so violently and vividly portrayed, and in none does the poet use such a variety of images to portray it, as in The Roosevelt and the Antinoe. The most effective device that Pratt uses is personification, which focuses the sea's immense power into several clearly-drawn figures whose business it is to destroy man and his ships. The total image of the sea is of

---

a definite character whose wild, untamed power is bestial, monarchial, or ghostly, and the expression of his rage is so particular and vehement that it reveals almost hatred of man. The sea smashes lifeboats so that splinters seem to fly through the air; waves cover the ships, which are already wrapped in shrouds of snow, and try to carry victims back to its own graves; the sea is a hammer against the ships; its mood is of iron. Death is not an atmosphere in *The Roosevelt and the Antinoe*; it is a character in dramatic action.

Images of the violence of the sea develop quickly after the leisurely introduction that depicts the routine of preparing the "Roosevelt" for her voyage. There are warnings of very rough seas, given by stations along the coast, but it is not until the "Roosevelt" has passed Cape Race, Newfoundland, that images of the sea begin to form a pattern of the personification of its power:

> ...never--it was claimed--had tides so climbed
> A slope of shoal from such a depth to feed
> The tumult of the upper waves; so timed
> Direction with their volume and their speed,
> To meet both wave and wind that might lock
> In foam above so high a line of rock.

*The Roosevelt and the Antinoe,* p. 186

The personification, which is vague here, is fully developed at the height of the storm in images of mythical sea beasts that inhabit the ocean. They hide in "unlighted caves", have "grey fangs", and run, coil, and spring at the
boat in an attempt to consume it. The waves are "great-bellied" mothers, and the births of their young are "monstrous" (p. 195). Further, the sea is made that which in other poems it only symbolizes: death. In the "Roosevelt's battle with the sea, the stakes of which are the lives of twenty-five seamen aboard the "Antinoe", the issue is clear. The antagonist is identified; it is Death with "his salt countenance" (p. 194) with whom the crew of the "Roosevelt" conflicts.

Pratt is not content to leave the image of the sea with this description. Further personifications are added. the sea has a "pagan face", and its way is primordial (p. 199), both of which suggest the amoral ferocity of death. The image of the sea as the "storm-king" (p. 203) provides the final aspect of the personified sea. The sea is the monarch of the elements, in the sea is Death, rather than in the wind that lashes the ship, or in the snow that covers it.

The sea beasts are the most important images of the sea actively attacking man, but there are other images that add to that particular pattern. The sea hurls itself against the "Roosevelt" in "walls" and "volleys" (p. 198); it is like a "shifty pugilist" (p. 203), and it is like wolves attacking the bison, "Antinoe" (p. 200). These images, seen in relation to those of the sea as death, augment the total
image of death by suggesting the force of the attack against man. The "pagan face", the "salt countenance", and the "storm-king" have not only the fangs of "fabled beasts", but the craftiness of a boxer, the intensity of wolves, the dead weight of walls.

The pattern of the sea as the grave strengthens the finality of death, as suggested by the "inviolate element". The pattern is evident in four images. A "burial wave" (p. 190) and "the body of a wave" (p. 187) strike the ship. The sea may come to be the "grey...grave" (p. 198) of the "Roosevelt" herself, and "Atlantic crypts" (p. 188) lie at the bottom of the ocean. These images link with the beast images: the "Atlantic crypts" recall the "unlighted caves" in which the beasts live. The sea is the grave; it is eternal and unchanged from pre-human times; it is monstrous, it is Death.

The pattern of imagery which in the minor poems depicts the sea as life-sustaining also appears in The Roosevelt and the Antinoe, significantly at a crucial point in the action: Captain Fried of the "Roosevelt", with the "Antinoe" lost in the black storm, cannot decide whether to abandon the search or to keep it up. The decision to continue is based on the hope that the "Roosevelt" will stay afloat, ironically, on "The firm up-heave of Atlantean hands" (p. 192). The image leads to the symbolism of the sea as the universal Void, and reveals the mechanical life-giving aspect of it,
which is conjoined to the death-producing aspect.

In The Roosevelt and the Antinoe, there is a pattern of images of the sea which attributes the expression of the power of the Void to chance, or Fate, a pattern that is later fully developed in The Titanic. Fate is implicit in images of the sea which lurches with maddeningly precise timing and causes lifeboats to swamp at the moment that the rescuers seem to be successful in reaching the "Antinoe". Pratt directly associates the heaving sea with Fate when "an adverse hand" (p. 201) causes a lifeline between the ships to snap. Attendant on this pattern are references to the "Roosevelt's" success being dependent on luck, chance, and "the toss of a coin". Pratt describes the storm as

... a shifty pugilist,
Watching for some slight turn of luck
to slay
The rescuer with an iron-knuckled fist.

(The Roosevelt and the Antinoe, p. 203)

Fate does not allow men to escape death entirely in The Roosevelt and the Antinoe, and the sea is seen as inevitably triumphant in life, although its gains in the action of the poem are few. A lifeboat full of seamen from the American ship is upset by a sudden heave of the sea, only twenty feet away from the side of the "Roosevelt". This misfortune is followed by a series of others in which two men lose their lives. Six of the eight men in the lifeboat are rescued immediately, but the seventh, Heitman, is crushed between the upset boat and the liner. Before he can be rescued he
floats away and disappears under the propellers of the ship. The injured man's friend, Wertanen, tries to rescue him, but drifts out too far, completely at the mercy of the sea. Wertanen tries to grasp a lifebelt, but the very oil that has been put on the sea to help calm it blinds him and makes his fingers slip from the lifebelt. The succession of misfortunes is concluded by an image of the sea, which may be interpreted as symbolizing the universal Void, in which man is nothing. He is indistinguishable in the vastness:

Within the spindrift, a tide-revolving speck—
A belt perhaps or human head or hand.

(The Roosevelt and the Antinoe, p. 197)

In the death of the heroic sailor is seen, inevitably, all heroes, all men.

The image pattern of selfless heroes in The Roosevelt and the Antinoe is the same as that in the minor poems. The rescuers do not act with a consciousness of heroism but undertake their roles with "the heart's assent unto the hand" (p. 195). Those who volunteer to row to the "Antinoe" are from a variety of nations. They include Wertanen, Jacobowitz, Fugelsang, Franelich, Arandea, Diaz, Roberts and Beers. They are not only sailors of all ranks, but they are passengers, also. They are, symbolically, Man. The selflessness of these men is underdrawn, and relies on a total dramatically exciting effect. To have made the images
continuously vivid would have been to belie the predominant attitude that Pratt wishes to communicate—acts may be undertaken by men without their being conscious of any heroism. Their actions are a part, simply of everyday life, of being a worthwhile human, of undertaking to "outstare Death to his salt countenance" (p. 194).

C. F. Klinck sees the heroism in The Roosevelt and the Antinoe as the "human desire to serve nobly", claiming in his parallel of the poem to Beowulf that "Christianity appears about equally in the background of each, while a somewhat pagan view dominates the foreground". There is nothing particularly Christian about The Roosevelt and the Antinoe. In fact Christians are shown to be deluded because they look to God for sustenance. The pattern of images relating to God is consistent with those of The Iron Door, "The Truant", and "The Ground Swell". The crew of the "Roosevelt" gathers on the deck to acknowledge, through religious service, the drowned men. In their bandages and slings, they hear a hymn which in the howls of the storm is only partially audible. The images of the Roman Catholic priest raising his crucifix to the sea, giving absolution to the dead men, and his prayers, are made pathetic by Pratt. Pratt describes

---

the storehouse of God's goodness as a cupboard that still has much in it despite the many demands that have been made on it that night. That which the priest begs is a "crumb of favour from it" (p. 199). The images are a *reductio ad absurdum* of God. That the priest is sincere is not in doubt, but his gesture is impotent. The images underline the terrible frailty of man, and the degree of his illusion in his need to find sustenance against death.

The hymn which the sailors hear informs them that it is God who commands the seas, which obey Him. He is a "father to the fatherless", (p. 198), and the "God of all comfort" (p. 197). But God is no "father to the fatherless": the drowned men float in the "grey...grave" (p. 198) which He commands; they lie, not with God, but in the "sea's stern foster-lap" (p. 199). The priest, the Captain, and the crew are all deluded. Their father and comfort is the same as that which would have them all destroyed. They are blind to the irony of their own words; the crucifix that the priest holds up is "heroic" in its attempt to give hope in death—to calm the force of the sea—but it is ineffectual. It is a "pale", if "heroic suasion" (p. 199). In reality, the men have only themselves to rely on, and their spirit and determination are symbolized by light.

Images of light are first presented at the time that the "Roosevelt" receives the SOS from the "Antinoe". When "The world is carried away with the last gust to the void"
(p.187), her light is the only thing that identifies her in the world of cold and darkness. The light creates a path of "day between two walls of night" (p. 187). It continues to shine throughout the conflict, except for one brief moment. When Captain Fried briefly considers abandoning the "Antinoe", the light is momentarily smothered in impenetrable "black hail" (p. 192), as if abandonment, or the thought of it, would replace life with death and the warmth of communication with evil withdrawal into self-concern. When the Captain's temptation is rejected, the "Roosevelt's" light reappears. It "rips fissures" (p. 199) through the darkness in the resurgence of life and human will which is culminated when the actual rescue of the "Antinoe's" crew is effected "down the beam-path of the searchlight" (p. 204), an image in which light and human action are fused.

While the "Roosevelt's" light burns brightly, the lights of the "Antinoe" gradually disappear in the force of the storm, as death nears and hope of survival dies. The pattern of images is of feeble light which, however, never completely vanishes. Aboard the British ship, for instance, there is no light of dawn to transfuse despair with promise:

...the grey
Sterility of hope with each life-boat gone,
Dusk followed by the night, and every dawn
A slattern offering dust instead of day.

(The Roosevelt and the Antinoe, p.202)
The crew's hopelessness and their proximity to extinction are measured by the little light that remains burning on the heavily listing ship. One of the "Roosevelt's" men says of the other ship's small hand-signal light: "'A dollar flashlight! All she's got to signal'" (p. 193). Between the two ships there is still realistic communication, but more importantly, symbolically, there is communication of the human spirit.

The victory of the forces of life over those of death is emphasized at the conclusion of the poem in an image of light. The men on the "Antinoe" have been saved; the worst of the storm is over. From the sun comes "A level shaft, the first one for the week" (p. 208), and it emblazons the name of the ship, honoring it and rendering it mystical. There seems to be a direct attempt by Pratt to disassociate the victory from any religious connection. "As if a god might thus salute the deed" (p. 208), seems distinctly to repudiate God as the source of the praise. It is man's victory only. The victory of simple humanity. If there is any God-relationship it is ironic: the operation was successful in spite of God, in the darkness of an obscured sun that only now, after the conflict, shows itself.

On a primary level it is a happy coincidence, and ironic, that nature should honor the victory of man over death. The appearance of the sun indicates, too, that the forces
of the Void are indiscriminate in their actions—light and darkness, warmth and cold, come and go irrespective of man. Symbolically, the sun, which is the source of man's own warmth of life, joins with him in celebration of the victory of life-forces over those of death. The mystical quality of the ray of light suggests the poet's attribution to man, of the transcendence usually ascribed to the Deity:

...it reached the lettering where it ran
In crimson coronation of her name,
As if a god might thus salute the deed,
And ratify the venture with the screed
Of an aurora milled in solar flame.

(The Roosevelt and the Antinoe, p. 208)

The virtues by which man overcomes the death-sea, in The Roosevelt and the Antinoe, are selflessness and determination, both of which are powers that raise his spirit above death. Each is an expression of communication among men, which in the sun image is shown to deify man.

Closely associated with this deification are patterns of images, of machines of communication, which portray the wireless and the direction-finder as miraculous. The power of these machines opposes the mechanical power of the sea, and becomes an extension of human beings. The signals from the wireless are "Magnetic messengers" (p. 188) that carry everywhere the frantic messages of the "Antinoe". But they lie unheeded where there are no responsive men in dark graves beneath the Atlantic, or in the ether where they become part of the power of the universe, that is useless to the helpless
ship. The great mechanical universe is "sterile". Only men are responsive to men. The small sending power of one of their machines and the receiving power of another are worth more than the infinite energies of the Void:

Legions
Unnumbered moving at the rate of light,
Pushed out beyond all navigated regions,
Exploring every cranny of the night,
Reaching out through dusky corridors
Above the sea to uninhabited shores,
Or taking undecoded human cries
Below the keel to the Atlantic crypts.
And millions undulated to the skies,
Through snow and vapour and the cloud eclipse,
Past day and night and the terrestrial air,
To add their wasted sum to a plethora
Of speed and power in those void spaces where
Light-years go drifting by Andromeda.
And yet in all that sterile plenitude
A few were harnessed to a human mood.

(The Roosevelt and the Antinoe, p. 188)
Pratt calls the wireless signals "human speech" (p. 191), and combines two aspects that Northrop Frye sees as basic in the poet's outlook: his fascination with "the intricate machinery of signals and response", and the human word, which is "Of all conscious signals the most important" in Pratt's poetry.5

The direction-finder is responsible for actually locating the stricken ship which, when the wireless messages first reach the "Roosevelt", does not know her exact location. To find her, the "Roosevelt" moves in the general direction of the "Antinoe's" signals, as recorded on the direction-

finder. If the liner moves away from the correct direction, the machines notes the weakening of the signals. The direction-finder indicates on a "dummy compass-card" the route to be followed. Pratt records the process with awe:

...the hair-line on the face
Of the dummy compass-card...

************
From neither sense nor reason,
pointed There,
At a figure stamped in black
upon the dial:
For when it moved to either side
with the wheel,
It came back ever...
To the source of the signal like
a steadying keel
Demanding its position.

(The Roosevelt and the Antinoe, p. 189)

These two machines symbolize the transcendent values of human communication, and the images of the wireless messages as "human speech" (p. 191) suggest the association of the machine with humanity.

The straightforward imagery and symbolism of The Roosevelt and the Antinoe is consistent with the simplicity of the conflict, in the poem, between life and death. Everything is clear-cut; there are no subtleties to the opponents. The images are grouped, accordingly, into two distinct areas, those associated with the preservation of life, and those which would destroy life. The balance of imagery is, itself a feature of the patterns of Pratt's imagery. Prominent balances, in The Roosevelt and the Antinoe, are the
lights of the ships and the darkness of the sea and the storm; the men on the ships and the storm-king and personified Death; the "beasts of a fabled past" and images of the ships and lifeboats as warm-blooded animals. The "human speech" of the wireless balances the mocking voice of the mechanical universe that "thundered down the ventilating shaft" during the religious service. The Roman Catholic priest raising his crucifix against the sea is impotent, as Christ would be with his "word's magic" that had stilled Galilee (p. 199); but the "Magnetic messengers" and the direction-finder, evidence of a human mood to help men to live, are efficacious. The mechanical power of the universe and the mechanical power of machines of communication are balanced one against the other, and the light of the sun in the sky balances the lights of the ships on the sea.

The dramatic action of the poem is framed between a lackadaisical introduction, in which images of the dockside stress the routine nature of the coming voyage, and a conclusion in which the "Roosevelt" continues her journey as if nothing unusual had happened. C. F. Klinck writes: "The story as Pratt tells it...gives final emphasis to the sobering and truly majestic thought that all this [the rescue] lies merely in the day's work."6 The Roosevelt and the Antinoe is Pratt's

testament to the superiority of the human spirit over the external natural world.
CHAPTER III

THE TITANIC

In *The Titanic*, the sea unifies the worlds of nature and of man and, finally, consumes the artificial world of man. Throughout the poem the sea is implacable, and its undramatic role suggests that the poem is not concerned directly with the conflict of man with death. Indeed, there is scarcely any conflict between man and any aspect of nature: the collision of the ship with the iceberg is hardly felt on the "Titanic". The conflict is between men whose primordial instincts for self-preservation are opposed by those who desire to save others. The poem deals then with man's relationship to the universe and with the need for him to atone for his *hubris*. Men die needlessly on the "Titanic", not from the active attempts of death to re-claim them, but from their illusion that they are superior to Fate, which can place the first "unsinkable" ship and an iceberg in the same place at the same time.

Because *The Titanic* is concerned with both the relationship of man to the universe, and with illusion within man, the poem is a bridge, along with *Many Moods* (1932), between *The Roosevelt* and the *Antinoe* and its predecessors, and the later poems which stress illusion and death in inter-human conflicts. As the poems move away from the man-nature conflicts,
changes in imagery reveal Pratt's new interest in man. Imagery of light, always important, is often used ironically to present the enormity of evil; the sea is no longer dominant in the poems; many images of machines tend to become connotative of evil. The Titanic is the first of Pratt's major poems to use light to reveal ignorance, rather than enlightenment, to reveal false pride, rather than sincerity.

The irony of the basic situation on which The Titanic was composed is reflected in the complexity of image patterns. The sea, the stars, and the lights, machinery, and decor of the ship are viewed by the poet with the illusion of the passengers on the "Titanic"; but Pratt also insinuates the reality of nature and of the ship, and the resulting dramatic irony sustains the suspense of the poem. Another aspect by which Pratt maintains interest in a tale whose outcome is well-known is that he succeeds, by the very absence of overt conflict, to direct the reader's interest to the possibility of great tragedy without great conflict.

Pervading The Titanic is an icy, almost eerie, calm broken only occasionally by sorties of open conflict on the ship. A pattern of images of silence, contributing much to the strange atmosphere of the poem, begins in the first line: "The hammers silent and the derricks still" (p. 212). It moves to great intensity of pregnant malevolence in the image of the iceberg which floats with "no sounds, except
the grind/ Of ice, the cry of curlews" (p. 213); it becomes filled with pathos and tension in the many images of resigned or deluded men on the stricken ship whose signals go unheard by the only ship close enough to help her, the "Californian". The final images of silence, in the epilogue of the poem, contrast to the preceding description of the noise of "the engines as they tore/ From their foundations" (p. 242), as the ship sinks, and emphasize not only the careless malevolence of the iceberg, but that of the whole universe, outside of man, that is totally unimpressed by the disaster that has just occurred.

The silence which surrounds the iceberg is similar to that which surrounds the wealthy passengers as the ship sinks. The iceberg contrasts, in its mechanical change from beauty to ugliness, to the moral changes of Guggenheim, Straus, etc., from arrogance to selflessness. There are two aspects to the imagery of the iceberg, its empty beauty and its ugliness, which are conveyed in religious and scientific patterns of imagery, respectively. The religious images are in the pattern of those in "The Sea Cathedral" (p. 37) and "The Mirage" (p. 76), in which the appearance of beatitude in nature is illusory. The iceberg, before its change by the sun into an ugly grey shape has

...façade and columns with their hint
Of inward altars and of steepled bells
Ringing the passage of the parallels.

(The Titanic, p. 214)
As the iceberg begins to melt, it loses "the last temple touch of grace" (p. 214). Underlying the appearance of the temple is ice of the "consistency of flint" that has been pressed by "glacial time" (p. 213). The "paleolithic face", into which the temple deteriorates and "shambles like a plantigrade" (p. 215), is no different, basically, from the beautiful iceberg. Both appearances are accidents of climate; there is no opposition between the "façade and columns" and the "paleolithic face". Both are merely aspects of nature. The iceberg is the same thing both before and after the sun has changed its external appearance: underlying its superficial nature is its destructive potential. The actions of the iceberg are mechanical. Because it drifts with the currents of the ocean, its actions are amoral. The iceberg symbolizes Fate, the "inexorably tragic universe cutting down the pride of man"¹ and can be combatted only by man's reason and the attributes that make him human—sacrifice, kindness, forgiveness and gentleness.

Pratt's use of the image of the iceberg is appropriate to the patterns of nature imagery in his poetry. The iceberg epitomizes the vast natural world that Pratt designates in his poetry as being cold: the primal forces away from which man has moved in his evolution. The image of the iceberg hovers over the poem like a spectre, and its appearance in the epilogue is as a visitation. From the moment that it

---

comes to its hiding place, the iceberg ceases to be only an iceberg; it is "something alive" (p. 228), but intangible, a grey ghost" (p. 242), a "thing unfelt" (p. 230). It is a symbol of Fate.

Sutherland's interpretation of the "paleolithic face" of the epilogue (p. 242), as being man's primitive nature that is opposed to his civilized existence, is hardly credible. He seems to miss one of the main points of Pratt's imagery: man is warm-blooded and is endowed with reason. Those are the sources of his antagonism with nature. Man is a creature of fire—not only fearing it, but claiming it as a part of his existence, the "Allurement, primary to our blood" that is "Safety...warmth.../ Night and the candle-quietness of sleep" ("Fire", p. 71). In Pratt, man often retrogresses to a non-human condition, but he begins as a warm creature, or there is no retrogression. His retrogression to the symbolic cold state is evil because it is a desertion of his heritage, of the responsibility that is inherent in his evolution to the reasonable, warm-blooded human.

As the images of the iceberg reveal its illusory aspect, so do a pattern of images reveal the placidity of the sea to be illusory. To the passengers, the "Titanic" travels in water that is oil (p. 217); it is a "cat's paw" (p. 213),

---

and no one, apparently, is aware that it has claws;\(^3\) and although death is at their ear, the passengers do not hear it:

\[
\text{...the low wash of the sea} \\
\text{Against the hull bore the serenity} \\
\text{Of sleep at rural hearths with eiderdowns.}
\]

(\textit{The Titanic}, p. 217)

They sleep in ignorance of the reality of their personal impermanence, contrasted to the permanence of the death forces of the sea.

The pattern of images of the sea as death is mainly suggested in the "jet expanse" of the sea (p. 232), and in the slow climb of water below the decks of the ship; it measures the proximity of the end of the ship:

\[
\text{...through the hawse-holes, water flowing—} \\
\text{The angle could not but assault the eyes.} \\
\text{A fifteen minutes, and the fo'c'sle head} \\
\text{Was under. And five more, the sea had shut} \\
\text{The lower entrance to the stairs...}.
\]

(\textit{The Titanic}, p. 235)

The last image before the epilogue, however, identifies the sea as "the grave" (p. 242) of the ship and fourteen hundred of her passengers.

The sea is most significant in images in which it reflects the stars which are brilliant in a moonless, cloudless

\textit{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{3} The iceberg has} \\
\textit{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{3} A sloping spur that tapered to a claw} \\
\textit{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{3} And lying twenty feet below...}.

\textit{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{3} (The Titanic, p. 214)}
sky. The sea reflects the zodiac (p. 223); its foam is "bevelled mirrors" (p. 225), and it is coupled with the sky, in "blue sky/ Blue water" (p. 218). At the time of the collision the sea is black like the Void above it, and in its reflection of the stars, the sea becomes the Void in which the iceberg floats, and whose currents lead it. The iceberg, then, becomes a force in the Void, governed by the mechanics of the Void. It is a third of a trinity: life (the stars), the grave (the sea), and Fate (the iceberg). The further significance of the pattern of images of the sea as reflecting the stars is apparent in a parallel that is carried onto the ship where the "gods" (the first class passengers) see in the ship's many mirrors not the reality of life and death of the Void, but their own likenesses. Their equation with the stars suggests their hubris and parallels the illusion of the power of the ship, which moves through the water "shattering constellations" (p. 225). In reality, the constellations are not shattered; only their reflections are, and they re-form quickly after the brief passage of the ship. Sea, stars, iceberg, and ship are all a part of the Void which surrounds them, but so blind are the passengers that they believe that the ship is its own universe and is impervious to natural forces. The "Titanic", in which man "in his power over crude nature sails heedlessly forward blinded by his own brilliant
illumination...", 4 is a symbol of hubris in man. There are few images of the ship itself; rather, Pratt creates a total impression of her, largely by images of her lights, decor, and her machinery, all of which are indications of man's reason misdirected to intellectual and material extravagance. As image patterns of the natural world outside the ship are inter-related, so are those of the human, artificial world. They are centered in the ship, and make it a mechanical universe of illusion. The "Titanic" has its own stars; its lights turn night into day; the ship is land; its machinery is almost self-running; it has its own deities. There is nothing beautiful about the ship. She is grotesque, and man has allowed himself to be displaced by her. He has made himself god in his creation of this Titan and acts the part.

He will not demean himself with running her. Images of machinery reveal that there is scarcely anyone "behind the log":

```plaintext
...the Watch had but to read
Levels and lights, meter or card or bell
To find the pressures, temperatures, or tell
Magnetic North within a binnacle,
Or gauge the hour of docking; for the speed
Was fixed abaft where under the Ensign,
Like a flashing trolling spoon, the log rotator
Transmitted through a governor its fine
Gradations on a dial indicator.
```

(The Titanic, p. 218)

---

Except for

"...stokers and the engineers, she's run
By gadgets from the bridge—a thousand and one
Of them with a hundred miles of copper wire."

(The Titanic, p. 223)

There is little for man to do. He has perfected machines to supersede him:

"A filament glows at the first sign of fire,
A buzzer sounds, a number gives the spot,
A deck-hand makes a coupling of the hose.
That's all there's to it; not a whistle; not
A passenger upon the ship that knows
What's happened. The whole thing is done without
So much as calling up the fire brigade.
They don't need even the pumps—a gas is sprayed,
Carbon dioxide—and the blaze is out."

(The Titanic, p. 223)

At times the "Titanic" is a sort of floating Tower of Babel, with "seven decks of steel" (p. 216), with "tiers/Of decks" (p. 217). She is a brilliant, mechanical wonder:

Science responded to a button press.
Three electric lifts, that ran through tiers
Of decks, the reading lamps, the brilliancy
Of mirrors from the tungsten chandeliers....

(The Titanic, p. 216)

The grotesque extravagance builds. The vulgar decoration of the "Titanic" suggests that from past ages, man has acquired outward form, but little else. There is a "surfeit of secu-

ity" (p. 216), of empty brilliance, of comfort, of simulation:

The crowds poured through the sumptuous rooms and halls,
And tapped the tables of the Regency:
Smirked at the caryatids on the walls;
Talked Jacobean-wise; canvassed the range
Of taste within the Louis dynasty.
Grey-templed Caesars of the world's Exchange
Swallowed liqueurs and coffee as they sat
Under the Georgian carved mahogany....

(The Titanic, p. 217)

A pattern of images of cities and land associates with a similar pattern in the minor poems in which the security of land blinds man to the reality of death-sea that awaits him. On the decks of the "Titanic" there is light from a "thousand lamps as on a city street" (p. 231); the ship is a crag, a Gibraltar (p. 216). Palm trees line an avenue "With all the vista of a boulevard" (p. 233). The object of man's faith is a vulgar bauble. His greatest nautical achievement is a garish foppery. This is his universe; his "first unsinkable" (p. 212); and faith in her is absolute: "Even the judgment stood in little need/ Of reason" (p. 218).

The first of the many light images in The Titanic appears at the launching of the ship and foreshadows her end. The image is of "the sunlight in a shower of pearls" (p. 212) that appears in the burst of wine when the ship is christened. The image is in the pattern of those ironic images in "The Ritual" (p. 60) and "The Cachalot" (p. 138) wherein unwarranted pride in overcoming nature, or pride in strength, is manifested.5 The pearls in The Titanic image provide an

---

5 R. E. Rashely, however, in Poetry in Canada: The First Three Steps (Toronto, 1958), p. 120, interprets this pattern of images as "...the familiar cluster of jewel colours which...seems to symbolize for Pratt the significance of life."
added irony to the glory that will come to nothing. Pearls have the traditional associations of both purity and sadness. The "Titanic" signifies gross over-indulgence, and the deaths of the fourteen hundred are lamented in the foreshadowing.

Images of the lights of the "Titanic" symbolize man's vanity and the illusion of his greatness. They contrast, in one pattern, to the images of the various constellations in the black sky; in the wake of the gaudily-lit ship, "Jupiter hung like a daffodil" (p. 225). After the collision with the iceberg, many passengers cannot realize their danger. As the lifeboats lower into the water, those in them find the necessity of the descent unreal. For them the ship is still secure; the lights burn invitingly--they are the stars of the impregnable universe that man has created, and they have superceded the stars of the natural universe:

How easy seemed the step and how secure
Back to the comfort and the warmth--the lure
Of sheltered promenade and sundecks starred
By hanging bulbs....

(The Titanic, pp. 232-33)

The lights illumine and are a part of many of those pretentious aspects of the "Titanic" that make her great in men's eyes: the boulevards, the palm trees, the saloons in Regency and in the taste of the "Louis dynasty". The ship's meridian lights illumine her gigantic size: "From gudgeon to the stem nine hundred feet" (p. 232). In an image suggestive of modern hellish alchemy, "Electric elements were glowing down/ In the long galley passages" (p. 215) where are prepared the
epic meals that give "the sense that all is well" (p. 216). All contributes to the illusion of safety. "the light/
From a thousand lamps as on a city street" (p. 231) assures it, and even the light from cigarettes gives confidence, as the men stand elegantly dressed against the glow of the ship after the iceberg has ripped a three hundred-foot gash in her:

...the silhouettes
Of men in dinner jackets staging an act
In which delusion passed, deriding fact
Behind the cupped flare of the cigarettes.

(The Titanic, p. 231)

Dramatically, the listing "Titanic" glows on the ocean, a pathetic creation, contrasting to the stars, but to the last, turning night into day. But it is light that "cheats" and "beguiles" (p. 239). The suggestion of safety is an illusion which many passengers choose to the safety of lifeboats; the light is ironic in its appearance of security:

Then, with the electric circuit still complete,
The miracle of day displacing night
Had worked its fascination to beguile
Direction of the hours and cheat the sight.
Inside the recreation rooms the gold
From Arab lamps shone on the burnished tile.
What hindered the return to shelter while
The ship clothed in that irony of light
Offered her berths and cabins as a fold?

(The Titanic, p. 239)

Finally, in an image filled with irony, the stern of the ship lifts "Against the horizon stars in silhouette" (p. 241),
the eternal and the temporary and illusory posed against each other. The ship's lights flash off and then on again, and the terrible reality of destruction strikes. Without her lights, the "Titanic" becomes a part of the night that she had tried to displace, a part of the Void, that "jet expanse of water", her black grave.

Contrasted to the lights of the ship is a pattern of lights that is indicative of the expenditure of human energy to save the ship. Such lights are the Morse signal lamp, the spark of the wireless, the shower of sparks from the "Carpathia" and her searchlight as she races to the "Titanic", and the "Titanic's" urgent signal rockets which are small against the vastness of the placid sea and the lights of the great vessel:

...more a parody
Upon the tragic summons of the sea
Than the real script of unacknowledged fears
Known to the bridge....

(The Titanic, pp. 231-232)

Associated with these symbols of human communication are images of the wireless, which early in the poem is a piece of machinery that will guarantee the safety of the ship. The image there is in the pattern of miraculous machines as in The Roosevelt and the Antinoe (p. 188):

Through wireless waves as yet unstaleed
by use,
The wonder of the ether had begun
To fold the heavens up and reinduce
That ancient hubris in the dreams of men....

(The Titanic, p. 213)
As this image of the machine suggests, the use of the wireless as a life-saving device will be supplanted by a "greater" use: to notify Cape Race of the "Titanic's" speed. Other ships' warnings to the "Titanic" are rejected because they interfere with signals to Cape Race. The "Californian" is told to "shut up, keep out" (p. 224) with her reports of ice. Symbolically, the "Titanic", in her arrogance, has rejected mankind; but after the collision, when she becomes aware of the necessity of others, the wireless crackles out its frantic messages. Response to the messages is immediate: the "Carpathia" rushes to aid the "Titanic" to try to undo by emotion and sensitivity the damage done by men's faith in cold reason and machines:

From coal to flame to steam—
Decision of a captain to redeem
Errors of brain by hazards of the heart!

(The Titanic, p. 235)

This humane response proves to be too late. The fate of the "Titanic" is foregone. She had rejected humanity; now the "Carpathia" is too far away, and the "Californian", close enough to help, is deaf to the pleas of the sinking ship. The "Titanic's" isolation is completed by this irony. She must pay for cutting herself off from other men.

Man is, however, redeemed, symbolically, by acts of heroism on the sinking "Titanic". There are two patterns of heroic actions, both typified by the self-control of the
heroes. One pattern is of the wealthy "gods" and the other, a minor pattern, is of the overt heroism of crewmen, who function in the usual way of Pratt's heroes, by fighting actively against death. In the conflict, the crew of the ship are revitalized. Their usefulness and humanity are restored. The operators of the wireless remain at their posts for ten minutes after they have been released by the Captain. The engineering staff, off-duty,

Of their free will to join their mates below
In the grim fight for steam, more steam, to drive
The pressure through the pumps and dynamo.
Knee-deep, waist-deep in water they remain,
Not one of them seen on the decks again.

(The Titanic, p. 235)

In images of music, the heroism of the musicians is suggested. The strains of their music drift over the ship until the last moments of life on the "Titanic":

...the bows
Of the immortal seven that had swept
The strings to outplay, outdie their orders ceased.

(The Titanic, p. 241)

The seven musicians exhibit in extreme the self-control that characterizes a pattern of heroism in the poem. Although their first orders to play are based on the cynical words of the Captain that happy music, the appearance of normalcy,
will prevent the steerage passengers from "getting wise" (p. 232), the jollity of their music builds suspense and becomes tensely ironic in view of the imminent disaster. As the poem progresses, the musicians and their music become the outward center of order on the ship, sustaining those passengers of weaker will. The musicians' heroism is a total devotion to selflessness. They are willing sacrifices. Their attempts to allay panic are successful, a lure of illusion to those who wish to find hope in the violins:

And when the whiz of a rocket bade
men turn
Their faces to each other in concern
At shattering facts upon the deck,
they found
Their hearts take reassurance with
the sound
Of the violins from the gymnasium....

(The Titanic, p. 240)

Pratt seldom mentions the steerage passengers. He concentrates on those in the first-class, among them Guggenheim, Astor, Straus and Froham. They are the gods whose "Wireless hieroglyphs" (p. 217) rock the commercial world; they are the gods who command the world of materialism that produces and adores objects such as the "Titanic." The sin of hubris lies in the gods and it is they, not the steerage passengers, who must atone for it. The steerage immigrants are imaged indefinitely as "a throng" (p. 236),
as "diverse races" (p. 235) who have no common tongue and are bewildered at what is happening. It is they, however, who will suffer, as well as the gods, but through no fault of their own. Symbolically, they represent the mass of mankind whose welfare is in the hands of the giants of the world. The atonement of the Straus's, Guggenheim, Astor, Millet and the others is for the throngs of mankind, representatively, as these men stand back and let the foreign women take their places in the lifeboats. It is significant, too, that it is, largely, women who occupy the lifeboats, as if in them there may be the capability for propagation of a new understanding of the need for man to realize his subordinate position in the universe.

Seats are given up for the steerage women by first-class passengers whose actions are suitably formal, and contrast to the simple "will to save" (p. 240) of the sailors in lifeboats, or to the "hazards of the heart" (p. 235) of the captain of the "Carpathia" in his attempt to save the "Titanic". The latter phrase, suggestive of emotion, parallels the "heart's assent unto the hand" (p. 195) with which the volunteers on the "Roosevelt" row to the "Antinoe". The description of "Castilian courtesy" (p. 237) of the first-class "Titanic" passengers is consistent with the lack of emotion that accompanies all of their actions:
Without commands
Barked from the lips of officers; without
A protest registered in voice or face,
...the men stepped out
Back to the crowded stations with that free
Barter of life for life done with the grace
And air of a Castilian courtesy.

(The Titanic, p. 237)

Men stiffen with the discipline of the heritage of the sea,
as they are about to panic (p. 237); calmly the elderly
woman, Ida Straus, gives up her place to her maid so that
she can stay with her husband--she does so without tears,
motivated by pride in her love (pp. 237-238). A young boy
gives up his seat in a lifeboat to an immigrant woman and
her child (p. 238). Controlling most actions on deck is
an icy fortitude. The lack of emotion becomes terrifying:
at first the music, the ironic remarks of the passengers
to those going over in the lifeboats ("Don't forget the
fingerbowls" [p. 235]), and the calm aloofness of many of
those who remain on board, are irritating ironies. As the
awareness of the disaster grows, the tension and calm be-
come wierd. Heroism becomes almost absurd as the lifeboats
go over the side half-empty. There seems, indeed, to be a
spell on the ship (p. 239). It is as if many are mesmer-
ized by the need for heroism. It is different heroism,
however, from that engendered by the overt conflict of man
and death in The Roosevelt and the Antioe, for instance,
and does not include those who are still under the illusion
of safety in the ship. The heroism among Millet, Straus, etc., is deliberate self-sacrifice in the name of all those aspects of civilized life that make man more than animal: love, fortitude, kindness—all that are opposed to the egocentricity implied in the images of the ship and the early appearances of the passengers. The half-empty lifeboats cease to be only ironic: they are symbols that man's folly has been atoned for. Men and women have chosen to let them go unfilled. The self-control that contributes to the overwhelming tension is the deliberate rejection of any desire for survival; it is the acceptance of death, the conscious decision to be sacrificed to atone for "That ancient hubris in the dreams of men" (p. 213).

In the face of death, men rise above the mean appearances they had previously presented. They shuck off the over-indulgence, the carelessness, the insouciance of sophistication, and Man, thereby, is redeemed. And if in the image of the "icy broods" (p. 242) ringing the iceberg is implied the continuation of antagonistic nature and the eternal presence of all-ruling Fate, so in the lifeboats surrounding the vacancy where once floated the "Titanic" are men implied as rising from the desolation of their false pride. But the image is not entirely optimistic. Pratt is too realistic to say that because Man is redeemed from hubris all men are made selfless: among the survivors
in the lifeboats is the woman whose jewelled hand strikes at the face of the drowning man seeking help (p. 241).

To the last, the "Titanic" is true to her designation as a machine, and the sound of her engines tearing loose, "taking everything/ Clean through the bows" (p. 242), is a roar against which "all cries upon the deck" go unheard (p. 242). But the monstrous roar is finally ephemeral. Remaining, in silence, are the eternal, mechanical forces of the Void--creation, destruction, and Fate--the memories of the men who redeem mankind for the "arrogance of his setting forth", and those in the lifeboats, in some of whom may rest a new understanding of man's inferior position to the mechanical universe.

The image of the "Titanic" is, like that of the iceberg, a triumph in the poetry of E. J. Pratt. It dominates the surface of the poem as the iceberg underlies it. Pratt's presentation of the "Titanic" and the horrors of the domination of men by machines is unrelenting. The ship is, on a large scale the perfection of the mechanical images in "The Submarine" (p. 89), of the tanks in Dunkirk (p. 300), and of "the eight-cylinder streamlined," in "The Man and the Machine" (p. 39). The lights of the "Titanic" are dark-

---

6 Desmond Pacey, Ten Canadian Poets, p. 185. Pacey tends to weaken the nobility and grandeur of those who sacrifice themselves on the "Titanic" when he adds that they "approach the status of saints...in humble service."
ness and are as cold as the ice of the iceberg; her "heart and lungs" are made of gadgets and "a hundred miles of copper wire" (p. 233). She is the antithesis of those other ships in Pratt's poetry in which man is in the foreground and the machine is his servant and sustainer of life in a world of death. Those ships are warm and vital. The "Titanic" is cold and deadening. The image of her as rock, a crag, a fortress, typifies her barren constitution. She is doomed, and man must be chastised for the folly of his faith.
CHAPTER IV

BRÉBEUF AND HIS BRETHREN

Brébeuf and His Brethren is Pratt's most consciously epic poem. It is a sardonic national epic which reveals the strength of the human spirit that Canadians have as their heritage, a strength that is based on the illusion that unflagging devotion to an ideal that by-passes simple charity and good-will, in favor of cold reason, builds a desirable civilization. Brébeuf and His Brethren is divided into the twelve traditional books of the epic, of which Pacey notes that the "major interest is concentrated in the third, sixth, ninth, and twelfth books".¹ In scope the poem moves from France to Quebec and Huronia, and from the hell of the wilderness to a stylized, heaven-like vision of France. Darkness and light fill the poem; epic voyages fraught with dangers, a long catalogue of saints-heroes of the past, the building of forts, digressions to the exploits of several minor Jesuits, and the dramatic expression of heroic energy contribute to the epic qualities of this poem. Brébeuf, himself, is a character of epic stature and background. His ancestors were great voices in ancient councils and were great warriors on the battlefields. He has

¹ Ten Canadian Poets, p. 186.
a great, towering physique; he is shrewd and intelligent, and is capable of great emotion that moves from deep despair to lion-like anger and mystical elation. He is also a tragic character, whose classical flaw is his inability to see the humanity in himself and in other men. His blindness is manifested through the Jesuit code which requires reason to rule without the tempering of the heart. The tragedy is that Brébeuf's great abilities and his potentially profound humanity are led to self-willed, self-sought destruction.

Besides being more definitely an epic than his other major poems, *Brébeuf and His Brethren* differs from *The Roosevelt and the Antinoe* and *The Titanic* in that it is set on land and deals not with life and death through a form of nature, but with life and death through the conflict of men. To absent the sea from a major rôle is a great departure for Pratt, and is one that gives the protagonists a stature that is undwarfed by the overwhelming Void in which man is merely a speck. The poem is the fulfillment of many of the patterns of imagery in the other major poems, particularly imagery of light, of heroes, and of religion. Fate has little place in this poem which narrates the exploits of Roman Catholics, and images of machinery are necessarily few because the poem is set in seventeenth century Canada. In place of a pattern of images of the sea, Pratt uses the earth, as a reverse symbol of the
continuum of existence, from which only apparently the human spirit is resurrected. The Jesuits are too concerned with the Indians as plants, and not enough as human beings. They are too concerned with God's eventual harvest and the warmth of the sun of Christianity on the soil, to understand that the natives are not merely "flowers", but men who possess among their other virtues and failings "charity and gentleness" (p. 262).

It is important to establish that Pratt's point of view in *Brébeuf and His Brethren* is not the same as the priests'. The poem is not a eulogy of Christian missionaries, or of Christianity, or of the effects of the spirit of the Christian men possessed of it. The poem is a eulogy of the triumph of the human "spirit over failure" (p. 270). There is a clever, though subtle, division of poet and priests. It appears most often in quiet irony which arises from the safety of historical record which enables Pratt to write about the Jesuits' religious exploits without necessarily giving them his approbation. Pratt often smiles at the methods that the Jesuits use to impress the Indians and, thus, shows his disassociation from them. Brébeuf is not above impressing the Indians with his knowledge of the eclipse, and associating secular abilities with the Christian cause. Patterns of images of machines and of religious ceremony reveal Pratt's point of view. The machines in *Brébeuf*
are seen as miraculous by the Indians, not by Pratt, as they usually are. The mechanical devices that the Frenchmen have—a lodestone, a magnifying vial containing a flea, a lens, and a clock—are marvels on which the Fathers built A basis of persuasion, recognizing The potency of awe for natures nurtured On charms and spells, invoking kindly spirits And exorcising demons.

(Brébeuf and His Brethren, p. 256)

Yet, Tsiouendaentaha (christened Peter) is baptised in a manner which suggests that the Christian performance may not be so different from Indian sorcerers' acts:

With salt and water and the holy chrism, And through the signs made on his breast and forehead The Huron was exorcised, sanctified, And made the temple of the Living God.

(Brébeuf and His Brethren, p. 267)

The baptism and mass which follow are impressively conducted "With all the pomp transferable from France" (p. 267). By linking pagan and Christian images, the poet makes an absurdity of the priests' faith that it is their prayers that cause the rain to fall and ease the drought that is ruining the Indians' crops:

...the priests formed their processions, Put on their surplices above their robes, And the Bird of Thunder came with heavy rain, Released by the nine masses at St. Joseph.

(Brébeuf and His Brethren, p. 257)

Pratt's ironic treatment of the Jesuits and their cause is
further revealed in a pattern of imagery of light which forms, with other light imagery, the center of the poem. Images of fire in the Christian hell relate to the pattern of the fires of evil with which the Indians torture their captives. Fires at the stake, torture by coals, and flaming pitch-belts attest to the horrors of life in the wilderness. It is fire only that can break the impassivity and courage of the Indians, and their cries under torture by fire are "triumphs for the victors" (p. 262). This pattern of images of destructive fire comes to a climax with the destruction of the French forts. Hundreds of occupants are murdered by the Iroquois in these fires. From Ste. Marie Ragueneau and Bressani watch the burning of St. Louis:

...sheets and tongues of flame
Leaping some fifty feet above the smoke
Meant to their eyes the capture and the torch....

(Brébeuf and His Brethren, p. 291)

The priest Daniel is thrown naked into the burning church at St. Ignace (p. 289); Fort St. Jean goes up in a "whirlwind of fire" (p. 297). Paralleling these images are those of the Christian torture fires in the pictures of Hell. The pictures are used to impress the Indians, whose greatest fear is fire. The suggestion is, by comparison of the two tortures, that the Jesuits are no less at fault in using such threats to attain their ends, than are the pagans. The pictures for which the priests send to France are to teach
the Indians the virtues of Christianity; they ask for only one picture of "souls in bliss":

...of âmes damnées
Many and various—the horned Satan
His mastiff jaws champing the head of
Judas;
The plummet fall of the unbaptized pursued
By demons with their fiery forks; the lick
Of flames upon a naked Saracen;
Dragons with scarlet tongues and writhing
serpents
In ambush by the charcoal avenues
Just ready at the Judgment word to wreak
Vengeance upon the unregenerate.
The negative unapprehended forms
Of Heaven lost in the dim canvas oils
Gave way to glows from the brazier pitch
that lit
The visual affirmatives of Hell.

(Brébeuf and His Brethren, pp. 266-267)

Ironically, the priests will have their examples before them.
Among their pupils are "demons"; flames will lick not a "naked
Saracen", but blackrobed and naked priests; Brébeuf and others
will walk the "charcoal avenues" with bare feet; lighting the
wilderness will be humans in blazing pitch.

The pattern of images of fire and light associated with
the priests balances, in general, the images of light associ­
ated with the Indians and furthers Pratt's disassociation
from the priests' religious aims. The "white heat" of rel­
ingious enthusiasm to which all of France is fanned is given
detailed presentation in individual Jesuits. One, Chaumonot,
is relieved of his introspective torturing by a letter from
Brébeuf which "would come to burn the torpors of his heart/
And galvanize a raw novitiate" (p. 253). Loyola's Relations are "fire" (p. 251), and stories of the priests' lives and deaths in the wilderness find eager listeners, among whom the stories "burn like fuel of the faggots" (p. 282). Brébeuf's letter ("Herein I show you what you have to suffer" [pp. 262-264]) gives purpose to men whose lives promise little:

Their names would rise from their oblivion
To flame on an eternal Calendar.

(Brébeuf and His Brethren, p. 264)

Brébeuf's vision of his historical place "in the line" of martyrs for the Jesuit cause (p. 293) is expressed in an image of light in a pun:

He knew his place in the line,
For the blaze of the trail that was cut on the bark by Joques
Shone still.

(Brébeuf and His Brethren, p. 293)

These images of fire reveal the nature of the Jesuits' aims. There is escape from the self, in the case of Chaumonot, and for the others there is the possibility of martyrdom and its honor. The "white heat" lacks human warmth. Brébeuf's response to his mystic vision is notable for its absence for reaction to human need; martyrdom is his aim, per ignem et per aquam (p. 245). That the fire that is associated with the priests is flaming, as is that associated with the natives, suggests their respective determinations to succeed in their struggles. Neither flame, however, gives warmth. Both
bring only the cold of death, but to the Indians, outrageous fire is fearful, as Pratt would have it; to the priests, fire is a way to a desirable, selfish martyrdom. The fire of the Indians, although it is evil, symbolizes, with the fire of the Jesuits, the unfeeling determination of humans to achieve their ends. Both groups of men are misguided extremes of humanity.

As Brébeuf is marched through the snow to his death by torture at the hands of the Iroquois and Huron apostates, his thoughts go to France in a vision which contrasts vividly in its tenderness to the dreadful end awaiting him:

Had dawn
This very day not flung her surplices
Around the headlands and with golden fire
Consumed the silken argosies that made
For Rouen from the estuary of the Seine?

(Brébeuf and His Brethren, p. 294)

This image of idealized France represents one of those "two nostalgic fires" between which, twenty years earlier in Paris, Brébeuf was torn, the other being the Canadian wilderness. His question at that time, "...of which home, the son? From which the exile?" (p. 251) is merely rhetorical. The "golden fire" of idealized France is the beauty of the uninvolved world, stylized, and contrasted to the wilderness of snows and savage fires. It is an unrealistic world, though, and it is unrealistic to attempt without warmth to

---

convert the Indians to belief in the abstractions of Paradise and Hell, however golden the one, however fiery the other. The image suggests by association that the Jesuits' lives in France, spent in scholarship and peaceful hours of prayer, are not reality, and that reality is the wilderness, conflict, and the acceptance of challenges. Brébeuf accepts the challenge and succeeds on his grounds of martyrdom. On the poet's grounds he fails because his motivation and energies are misdirected.

The Jesuits' efforts in Huronia end in an image of flame. Ft. Ste. Marie is burned, not by attacking savages, but by Ragueneau, "The Shepherd":

It fell
To Ragueneau's lot to perform a final rite—
To offer the fort in sacrificial fire!

_(Brébeuf and His Brethren, p. 297)_

The procedure of the sacrificial fire is non-Christian. The fire then, is not a sacrifice to God. That which is burned represents "ten years labour" (p. 297) and is sacrificed to the Jesuit ideal: "Loyola's mountains...were scaled" (p. 297). Sacrificial fires are timeless in the history of men trying to live in relation to an ideal. The Jesuits' ideal is removed from the warm, human impulse that generated it, Christ's. But the image of the sacrificial fire is ambivalent. It must also suggest the victory of the Indians' will to drive out the enemy. What rises,
then, from Ft. Ste. Marie is the vast power of the human will to succeed.

The selflessness of Jesuit heroes shows their total devotion to their ideal which is removed from the warmth of human communication that Pratt insists, throughout his poetry, is necessary if men are to survive. The priests are concerned with the "will of God", with the welfare of souls, and with their own triumph over emotion (p. 246). They agree, before the fact of torture and the nearness of death, to subject "Desire and sense...to the reason" and to trample "the body under" (p. 246). Their mutilated bodies are nothing to them. They serve to teach the neophytes the nature of faith:

"'Only show us,' the neophytes exclaim, 'The wounds, for they teach better than our tongues Your faith, for you have come again to face The dangers. Only thus we know that you believe the truth and would have us believe it.'"

(Brébeuf and His Brethren, p. 282)

In Joques, who, in spite of the terrible mutilation of his body and in spite of his knowledge that he will not survive another visit, returns to the wilderness and to his death, Pratt has created a human completely involved in dedication. There is scarcely any humanity in him. He is, as Harold Horwood says of the characters in Brébeuf, an allegorical
He is Martyr. Although Joques' efforts are religiously of the highest level, they reveal that his consideration of the Indians is nearly completely for their "souls' beautitude" (p. 246). When he is weak from the torture of hanging by his wrists and manages to free himself, his first effort is to reach two other prisoners and baptize them with "dew from leaves of Turkish corn" (p. 276). To return to Huronia to absolve and baptize in fulfillment of his own martyr-vision is to act for a removed ideal and does not involve communication of the human self. He and the other Jesuits act ultimately through the intermediary of Christianity, rather than through direct communication. Joques does act with some humanity, however. He saves a child from the stake. All of the priests have varying degrees of humanity which are subverted to the supremacy of their Christianity, which is centered around death, and not life (to love "thy neighbour as thyself" is mentioned only once, on p. 267, and is merely part of the baptismal ceremony). The Jesuits espouse death, not meet it and struggle to overcome it. In the pattern of Pratt's images of conflict, this is tragic; the priests are unwitting agents of the death-force.

The greatest tragedy and the greatest triumphs are in Brébeuf, for he is the most nearly human of all of the French Jesuits. He would react violently and humanly to the Indians' disregard of privacy—and to all the other

annoyances of Huronia—but he subdues his reaction and transforms "hoary Gallic oaths/ Into the Benedicte" (p. 254), as he does in a similar way at the climax of the poem, when (in a repetition of the animal imagery associated with him), he rebels at the injustice of the Indians torturing him,

...giving them roar for roar.
Was it because the chancel became the arena,
Brebeuf a lion at bay, not a lamb on the altar...?

(Brêbeuf and His Brethren, pp. 295-296)
Then he subsides again into the passive role of the religious martyr. When he roars out, Brêbeuf acts in the manner that Pratt describes in "Silences", by which the first step towards salvation is through communication of emotion, "for who would not prefer to be lustily damned than to be half-heartedly blessed?" (p. 77). The "lion at bay" is Brêbeuf humanized. It does not last, and the tragedy is that a man of such nobility, courage and strength should submit his great and warm human character to a cold ideal and die in ignorance of the futility of that ideal.

Of the many religious images throughout the poem, the crucifix, the symbol throughout of martyrdom, is especially relevant to Brêbeuf. At Bayeux, as a novice, he passionately caresses a crucifix (p. 245); eight years before his death, he sees in a vision which foreshadows his death
...a moving cross,  
Its upright beam arising from the south--  
The country of the Iroquois: the shape  
Advanced along the sky until its arms  
Cast shadows on the Huron territory,  
"And huge enough to crucify us all."

(Brébeuf and His Brethren, p. 273)  
The final image of the crucifix, in relation to Brébeuf,  
is one of the most ironic. The Indians search for the  
source of Brébeuf's strength. They tear out his heart,  
but the source is not there. It is  

...in the sound of invisible trumpets  
blowing  
Around two slabs of board, right-angled,  
hammered  
By Roman nails and hung on a Jewish hill.

(Brébeuf and His Brethren, p. 296)  
John Sutherland misinterprets this image when he says that  
Pratt lauds the Jesuit's martyrdom, the strength for which  
is in the "'two slabs of board, right-angled'".4 He misses  
the irony. Brébeuf's strength is in "the sound of trum­
pets". The sound of trumpets may be heavenly, but there  
is nothing of the human in it, nor is there in "two slabs  
of board", around which they blow. Both the music of the  
trumpets, the trumpets themselves, the boards and the  
"Roman nails" are cold. As the mystical nature of Brébeuf's  
mission is removed from humanity, and as the logic of his  
Christian direction is cold, so is his martyrdom. The suc­
cess of Brébeuf and of the other priests, which Pratt

4 The Poetry of E. J. Pratt, p. 11.
lauds, is their human will to succeed. The priests' religious failures in Huronia stem superficially from their inability to communicate the intricacies of their dogma to the Indians. There are a few converts whose actions indicate their actual reception of Christian behavior—Eustache, for example—but the great majority of the Indians are fickle. The priests fail to eradicate the Indians' evil traits because to the Indians the Jesuits' theology brings nothing to them: it is illogical to desire a Paradise in which there will be starvation because there can be no hunting; in which their enemies will exist side by side with them; in which there will not be the comforts of tobacco and feasts (p. 266). The Jesuits' response is to double their efforts to try to impress on the pagans a further abstraction: eternal torment. The Jesuits' success can be measured only in the degree to which they fulfill the Jesuit code. In Pratt's terms they must fail because their motivation denies the warmth of humanity in man:

This the end of man—Deum laudet,
To seek and find the will of God,
to act
Upon it for the ordering of life,
And for the soul's beatitude.
This is
To do, this not to do:

(Brébeuf and His Brethren, p. 246)

The Indians are courageous in battle and of marvellous physical endurance; they have, in spite of Brébeuf's reproof that they are "unlike men," great "charity and
gentleness'':

Fugitives
From villages destroyed found instant welcome
To the last communal share of food and land.

(Brébeuf and His Brethren, p. 262)

The virtues of the Indians are epitomized in two converts to Christianity, Eustache and Onnonhoaraton, whose actions contrast to those of the Jesuits, Joques and Goupil. Eustache, at the Iroquois stake, pleads with his friends

"...to let no thought of vengeance Arising from his anguish at the stake Injure the French hope for an Iroquois peace...."

(Brébeuf and His Brethren, p. 276)

Onnonhoaraton offers himself as a sacrifice in place of Joques (p. 277). The concern of these two Indians is with life, through peace and the charity of self-sacrifice so that others may live. The Jesuit Joques, at the same "festival of torture", uses his last energies to baptize two prisoners and give them the sign of the "last absolution" (p. 276). Goupil is killed, by a sorcerer, when he tries to place the sign of the cross on a child's forehead (p. 277). The concern of the two Jesuits is with death and preparation for it. Their symbolic actions are vapid. The pattern of images of the Jesuits' sacrifice is consistently one of waste of life. The pagan Indians and the French Jesuits do meet, however, on the common grounds of charity and perseverance, but to the Jesuits this communi-
cation is insignificant: they must scale "Loyola's mountains.../ Sublime at their summits..." (p. 297).

Pratt does not idealize the Indians, however. They balance, in the extremes of their evil which are given in a pattern of images of torture often related to fire, the religious enthusiasm of the priests. Natural death forces which are in conflict with man, in Pratt, usually have something of a magnificence in their power: there are the monarchical iceberg in *The Titanic*, the mountains in *Towards the Last Spike*, the violent sea in *The Roosevelt and the Antinoe*, and the whale in "The Cachalot", to mention a few. There is nothing magnificent or noble about human death-forces; they are always despicable, in Pratt, and though their power is exuberant, it is undignified and gory. The power of the Indians when it is directed to the ruin of the priests is evil because it is expressed by reasonable creatures who take delight in bringing death. Some of the earliest images of deliberate evil in the poem are in the torture of an Iroquois by the Hurons. He is made "to state/ His willingness to die...":

"See how your hands
Are crushed. You cannot thus desire to live.
No.
Then be of good courage—you shall die.
True!—What shall be the manner of my death?
By fire.
When shall it be? Tonight.
What hour?
At sunset.
All is well."

(*Brébeuf and His Brethren*, p. 260)
The victim is made to run, pitch-covered through fires, is revived, spoken to compassionately, and subjected to blows and more fire until he dies.

The images of evil are the most moving in the poem. Their gruesomeness underlines the depths of terror that the application of intelligence can produce, for the Indians are rational creatures; their ways of torture are a refinement to them:

A human art was torture,
Where Reason crept into the veins,
mixed tar
With blood and brewed its own intoxicant.

(Brèbeuf and His Brethren, p. 261)

Paradoxically, intelligence makes them worse than animals. The Iroquois "macerate" with their teeth the finger tips of the missionary Joques. They wrench off the thumbs of Eustache, a Huron convert, and probe the wounds with a stick

...which like a skewer
Beginning with the freshness of a wound
On the left hand was pushed up to the elbow.

(Brèbeuf and His Brethren, p. 276)

The images are vivid in their presentation of evil; they carry the poem when other images fail because of their "muzzled rhetoric" when the rhythmical presentation of

---

historical fact leads to dullness, as in the first eighteen lines of part VIII or the 69 lines that narrate Joques' escape from the Mohawks and eventual return to Rennes. These images present the horrors against which the priests work to instil Christianity into the savages, and they portray the distance of the evil from the mean of the candle-flame. The images of evil contrast effectively to those of the priests whose

...hands were never put to blows
Nor the swift tongues used for recrimination.

(Šrêbeuf and His Brethren, p. 258)

There can be no sympathy with the evil aspects of Indian culture; torture is "sport for children and squaws" (p. 294).

The tragedy of the Indians, in general, is that despite their human virtues, they are bound by example and habit to an easy disrespect for life. They are intellectually imprisoned by fear and prejudice. They have not freed themselves from the wilderness of their "nebulous minds" (p. 268). Their virtues become lost in the darkness of ignorance; the delicate flame of human decency and goodness within them transmutes quickly and becomes the fires of evil. Will and discipline are turned to the destruction of others. There is a perversion of human capability, a denial of the existent flame of kindness and charity.

But the Indians are no more the victims of their own
traditions than are the Jesuits. Their minds, too, are closed; their virtues are lost in their own illusion; their flame of decency and goodness becomes a force that operates blindly, and the energy of their spirits is turned to bending others to their will. Both groups function in ignorance of each other; both symbolize, largely, aspects of the death-force, the wholly unreasonable and the completely reasonable.

The pattern of images of the soil which runs through Brébeuf and His Brethren begins early in the poem, and is culminated, as are the important images of light, in the epilogue. Indeed, it is the pattern of images of the soil, with those of seed, planting, growth, and harvest, that reveal the significance of the enigmatic epilogue. The literal, virgin soil of the wilderness is paralleled in the Huron Indians; but the soil is not easy to till. From the arrival of Brébeuf, the time of the original ploughing, until the appearance of "the first blades" (the first converts), eight years pass (p. 249). Then:

A year's success flattered the priestly hope
That on this central field seed would be sown
On which the yield would be the Huron nation
Baptized and dedicated to the Faith;
And that a richer harvest would be gleaned
Of duskier grain from the same seed on more
Forbidding ground when the arch-foes themselves
Would be re-born under the sacred rites.

(Brébeuf and His Brethren, p. 255)

The priests' good works are "soil" which produces, not more
sensitive and refined Indians, but

Those passion flowers and lilies of the East,
The Aves and the Paternosters....

(Brébeuf and His Brethren, p. 258)

The "roots" of the faith of the aged converts do not go deeply, and there is for the priests no proof of Christianity. Young men, however "flower from the stems" (p. 284) with their martyrdom, sufficient proof. Later, the Jesuits send to France for more workers, to help bring in the crop of converts from "the apostolic field," Which more than ever whitens for the harvest" (p. 286).

To view the Indians as plants growing from the soil is to view them as mechanical entities. Men do not arise from the soil; they are human beings, not vegetables. The martyred priests become, in the epilogue "The Martyrs' Shrine" (pp. 297-298), seeds which modern Jesuits try to force to grow, but all that arises, in reality are empty symbols. The striking irony of the epilogue, what Professor Birney calls the "mordant reversal theme that Pratt loves", begins with the repetition of the phrase "the winds of God" (p. 297) with which the poem begins. The "winds" in twentieth century Canada have produced not rugged forts in a gigantic wilderness, but a shrine on a hilltop in the woods outside

---

6 "E. J. Pratt and His Critics", Masks of Poetry, p. 85.
of Midland, Ontario. Out of the moulded trails of the forests of three hundred years ago rise highways, the ironic blossoms of "fern/ And brier and fungus" (p. 298); out of the fantastic struggles between the cross and the hatchet, and out of the heroism which ended in "the carbon and calcium char of the bodies" (p. 298) rise delicately ascending prayers, and only "Holy Bread is broken" (p. 298).

These are all that attempts to resuscitate heroism produce. The crop which the seventeenth century Jesuits tried to raise and harvest failed, and the venture ended with the sacrificial burning of St. Ignace. But men do not let past follies lie; the Jesuits returned to Canada. The "Mission sites...returned to the fold of the Order" with ease (p. 298). The Jesuits and other Canadians today can gain no strengths without their own heroics. The ashes of St. Ignace are dead, and only through illusion can they be resurrected, and to build a nation on misguided heroes is folly.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Because patterns of imagery and symbolism run through the most of Pratt's work, his canon has a cohesion that is striking in its intensity. Images are not merely repeated; they are given new vitality through irony, perhaps, or through slight variations of form that provide vibrancy without fragmenting the force of his thought. Pratt's poetry, which is largely non-didactic, has a depth that can best be reached through the imagery and symbolism which, because of their patterns both within single poems and among various poems, communicates increasingly as the patterns become more apparent. Although the most complete and fruitful patterns are those discussed in Chapters I-IV of this thesis, others are apparent, most of which are based on the balance of one image against another for the purpose of picturing the strengths, weaknesses, or similarities in men.

The most important of these minor patterns is the contrast of images and symbols of man to those of the natural universe. The pattern is developed primarily from the vast scope of Pratt's view which includes the Void and its suns and planets, the seas and mountains of earth, and man himself. The pattern contrasts the warm and the cold elem-
ents in the universe, and the large and the small. It presents two aspects, essentially, the mechanical death forces of the Void and of man, and the life forces which in the Void are mechanical, but which in man are derived from emotion. It is the mechanical expression of life and death that Pratt speaks against. The capacity for men to act as merely a part of the cold mechanism of the universe is in men, but they must learn to overcome it through communication of the warmth of their spirit.

At its broadest, the pattern consists of such contrasting elements as ships' lights in the immensity of the black sea, the smoke from the fires of an Indian village in miles of wilderness covered with snow, or a lighthouse or bell-buoy in the eternal crash of the sea. By these contrasts Pratt not only identifies the natural world around man as cold, but he expresses paradoxically both the frailty of men and, in their survival of nature's force, their strength. For men's triumphs against nature are in spite of their puniness before it. It is because of their physical insignificance that men must overcome nature: men's greatness is in their insistence on the value of human life, "not as an end in itself but as a necessary condition for the maintenance of human domination over the destructive forces forever at war with him...."¹ The dignity and

¹ Earle Birney, "E. J. Pratt and His Critics," Masks of Poetry, p. 90.
heroism with which men struggle against overwhelming odds are the greatest fulfillment of humanity; self-sacrifice is the greatest charity. In those images, in Pratt, in which men become animals or super-animals in their machines of war, they are humans no longer; they become one with the sea, for instance, and do not contrast to it.

In time man is nothing; the Void creates its stars and planets eternally, and the sea, eternal and inviolate, rages; but the Norsemen, Cabot, Franklin or the sailors of Greece and Tyre show by their heroism what being human can mean. The rebel Man, in "The Truant", is contrasted to the All High who scarcely knows that man exists amid the plethora of measurable life in the universe. In his argument with the All High God, Man proves by his rebelliousness, emotion, reason, and fortitude, that he is greater than the All High, and thus triumphs over his position as a product of nature (p. 105). In Towards the Last Spike, the Canadian Pacific Railway is an infinitesimal mark on the back of the giant reptile, the Laurentian Shield. The railway is merely a petty annoyance, but men's tenacity in laying the difficult line proves their humanity (p. 388).

---

2 In Ten Canadian Poets, p. 168, Desmond Pacey quotes from a letter from Dr. Pratt in which the poet says, "My own profession of faith was expressed in 'The Truant'..."
In the same poem, in contrasting images of men and fossils in the rock of the Rocky Mountains, Pratt states the paradox of man explicitly:

...an enemy was rock and time.
The little men from five-to-six feet high,
From three-to-four score years in lease of breath,
Were flung in double-front against them both
In years a billion strong; so long was it
Since brachiapods in mollusc habitats
Were clamping shells on weed in ocean mud.
Now only yesterday had Fleming's men,

Five thousand feet above sea-level, set
A tripod's leg upon a trilobite.

(Towards the Last Spike, pp. 380-381)

The patterns of contrasting images include contrasts not only of opposites, but of related images. Particularly in poems after The Roosevelt and the Antinoe, Pratt pits equivalents against each other and reveals thereby weaknesses, rather than strengths, in men. The ignorance of men's presumption of superiority over the natural forces of the universe is seen in The Titanic in the lights of the ship, which try to outdo the stars in brilliance; the former are merely gaudy; the latter are pure and intense (p. 225). The transience of men's mechanisms is apparent when the lights of the sinking "Titanic" flash vainly against the stars, moments before she goes down (p. 241). Men's incompetence in nature, without constant awareness of its dangers, is shown by contrasts between the mother seal and the mother ship in "The Ice Floes". The ship cannot find her crewmen
in the blizzard, although they are very close to her (p. 22). The mother seal is able to return from miles at sea to the very spot at which she left her young (p. 20). Images of the priest, in *The Roosevelt and the Antinoe*, raising his crucifix to the stormy sea, and of Christ raising his hand to quieten Galilee, are compared (p. 199). Christ's miracle is denigrated as insignificant, and consequently, the priest's faith in Christ is illusion. In *Brébeuf and His Brethren*, sorcerers and priests are contrasted. But finally there is little to contrast, and the weakness of the priests becomes apparent. "Magic" and threats are the tools which both use to influence the Indians.

Between significant poems there are often similar images which enrich each poem by comparison. Outstanding are the images of light on the "Titanic" and on the "Roosevelt". The latter symbolize the determination of humans to struggle for life against death, and the former symbolize the degree of illusion to which men can raise themselves in their attempts to survive death. The comparison of the two patterns of light imagery intensifies the total images of men that arise from each poem. The dramatic irony of *The Titanic* is increased by comparison with "The Great Feud" in related images of flags, cheering crowds, and the implication of Fate waiting for men. In "The Great Feud", the anthropoid

---

3 The priests do not take money for their spiritual works and do not urge war.
gathers representatives of the land animals together to hear her plan to conquer the sea animals; she unfurls "Her simian marvel to the world" (p. 158). While she speaks, Jurania (Fate) smoulders unheeded in the background. At the conclusion of the ape's peroration,

"...every throat and lung
Of herbivore and carnivore,
In volleying symphonic roar,
Rang...."

("The Great Feud," p. 162)

The ambition of the builders of the "Titanic" is no less than the ape's. Both wish to win complete physical supremacy over marine adversaries and ignore or do not understand the power of Fate. The simian is the first reasoning creature, and the "Titanic" is referred to as the "Primate" of all the ships in the world. At the ostentatious launching of the first unsinkable, the roars of the crowds inundate fears that the ship is ill-fated. The images compare to the reception given the ape's plan:

"...whatever fears
Stalked with her down the tallow of the slips
Were smothered under by the harbour cheers..."

(The Titanic, p. 212)

Balancing the unfurling of the simian's plan to the world, are, in The Titanic, "flags strung to the halyards of the ships" (p. 212), which help to smother the fears of the interference of Fate. Finally, the comparison with "The Great Feud" shows that the arrogant passengers on the great
ship are no more reasoning than the primeval beasts of Australasia, who lack the power to reason. There is a further important comparison possible with images in The Titanic and The Roosevelt and the Antinoe: the wealthy passengers beneath the florid lights of the "Titanic" are self-constituted gods who think they can ignore Fate; the crewmen of the "Roosevelt" are ordinary men who are completely aware that the success of their venture depends largely on Fate, rather than on their skills (p. 200). These men, unwittingly through their heroism become deities saluted by the sun itself. The sea in these two poems invites comparison. The "Titanic" sinks with fourteen hundred aboard, in a perfectly calm sea; faith in mechanism has been so complete that the sea requires no violence to conquer men. But in The Roosevelt and the Antinoe, the rampaging sea, is conquered by reason, heart, and by men getting down into it and fighting it, symbolically, without the aid of machinery. The two men who die in the rescue defeat death by their heroism; those passengers on the "Titanic" who sacrifice themselves for mankind also rise above death, but there are many on board whose deaths achieve nothing, not even freedom from their illusion of man's mechanical grandeur.

Another aspect of the patterns of imagery and symbolism in Pratt's poetry is ambivalence. The sea is productive of life and is death or the cause of death. It is both the
grave and the womb. Machines may be useful to man, and miraculous in effect, as in The Roosevelt and the Antinoe, or they may be destructive of human life. In their symbolism, machines signify either man's attainment of godliness through reason tempered with the heart, or the death-force which, combined with reason only, can be so monstrous that it is unnatural. Machines are, in Pratt, what men make them. Although the wireless is the greatest mechanical life-saving device in The Roosevelt and the Antinoe, it is, in The Titanic, a prime cause of the destruction of the ship, because it re-engenders "that ancient hubris" in men (p. 213). Images of light in the Pratt canon vary from the gaudy electric lights of the "Titanic" (p. 233) to the candle flame on the altar at Canterbury (p. 302), and from the pathetic flashlight that is all the hope left on the sinking "Antinoe" (p. 193), to the frigid stars which are God's guardians, in The Iron Door (p. 30). Light symbolizes such opposing qualities as the selflessness in common men (The Roosevelt and the Antinoe), the illusion of men's supremacy over nature (The Titanic), the extremes of fanaticism and the hell of other men (Brébeuf), and the perfection of the life-force of the universe (The Iron Door).

Above all, the double aspect of many of Pratt's images reveals his view of the nature of man. The early poems are concerned largely with man in the uncaring universe; the later poems, with men among men. However, this is not to
imply that the expression of the death-force is absent in the later poems, which deal, generally, with relationships among men. Death remains, quite constantly, as the reason that men must devote themselves to the furtherance of life, and in *The Titanic*, for example, although death is a secondary theme to self-knowledge in men, the purpose in the attainment of self-knowledge is that with it men will be better able to thwart death, as far as it can be thwarted. Men must be aware of their inferior position in the universe; they are at the mercy of Fate, and death, therefore, is always a possibility.

The forces of mechanical life and death are a framework within which Pratt sees men. Both forces emanate from the Void, which is careless of men, who are to God, the ruler of the universe, only equivalents of trees, or stones or fish. Men, because of their reason and feeling, cannot accept this rôle. Creation and destruction have meaning only to men, and destruction, death, is their great sorrow. Pratt specifically images men as the products of nature in "The Great Feud", and as subject to its forces in many poems, including *The Roosevelt and the Antinoe*, *The Titanic*, "Erosion", and "The Cachalot". Against this image of men, Pratt reveals the paradox of man out of nature by virtue of intelligence and emotion. The simian of "The Great Feud" escapes the red hot lava by using her reason: all other animals, none of which have reason, are swept to death.
Machines, the products of reason in men, are the most prevalent symbols of the human removal from nature. The ambivalence of many images of ships as both machines and mothers reveals both the reasoning and emotional part of man, and also points to his position in nature as a creature evolved to the mammalian state. That men are ever subject to the force of death in the universe is amply illustrated in The Titanic and in many minor poems, "The Cachalot", The Iron Door, and "The Ground Swell"; for example. Pratt balances the inferior position of men in relation to death by images in The Roosevelt and the Antinoe and The Titanic particularly, wherein men rise above death through heroism and dignity. In the virtues of heroism and dignity, Pratt finds human qualities that are greater even than the irrevocable death-force of the universe, and they form a mainstay of his later poetry. Behind the Log, "Dunkirk", "Newfoundland Seamen", "The Truant", and "The Deed" are only a few of the poems in which the optimism provided by the virtues of selflessness overcomes the pessimism inherent in the vision of man as an insignificant speck in the mechanical universe.

But if man thwarts death, he does so because he is aware of, or is made aware of, the power of Fate and death. The passengers on the "Titanic" are not aware, and only some of them ever become so; nor are those men aware who are on the ship in "The Ritual", which was built in the
illusion that death can be completely overcome. The tragedy of the deaths of the sixty sealers in "The Ice Floes" and of the crew of the "Albatross", in "The Cachalot", results from their greed which seduces them into forgetting their human position. Men are always at the mercy of death through nature, and they must be always aware of their subordinate position. These images of men, Pratt balances by images of the crew of the "Roosevelt" and by sailors who successfully scale the cliffs of the Rocky Mountains, in Towards the Last Spike. These men are aware of the dangers of nature, and being aware, approach her cautiously, bringing into play against her, all of their skill and knowledge.

The total image of man in Pratt's poetry comes to fulfillment in those poems in which the inter-relations of men are predominant, and again, the poet presents a realistic picture of humanity: men are not only either selfish or good, but are both; the evil in some is balanced by the goodness in others, although the unresolved illusion that pervades Brébeuf leaves the total image of man weighted towards that human weakness. The symbolism of Christ, and of men who "raise lightless sockets" ("The Truant", p. 105) to the skies while enemy planes rain down bombs, is balanced by the symbolism of machines to which men have abrogated their humanity. The sin of modern warfare is that it is carried out in human silence, without expression of emotion
between men. There is no communication between the disputants. There is no opportunity for humans, by their contact, to understand each other and come to love instead of destroy. For men, to Pratt, are essentially warm and communicative, and to surrender these qualities to the incommunicability of the machine is to lose humanity. Evil machines, in Pratt, do not contain humans. They contain either nothing specific, as in the tanks in "Dunkirk" (p. 306), or they contain beings fossilized by wires and gauges, as in "The Submarine" (p. 91). Balancing images of men turned into machines, or men reduced to intelligences, are the sailors of Behind the Log, The Roosevelt and the Antinoe, and "Newfoundland Seamen", whose willingness to help others leads them to the brink of the abyss of death. Always there must be, for Pratt, someone "behind the log" if men are to succeed against death and rise above it. The maintenance of humanity depends of the expression of human virtues. Men must reach out to each other with will and determination. Men must be involved in life, and the involvement is most complete in utmost selflessness for the benefit of others. If men are not involved in life, there is no humanity in them. If there is no humanity, there is no value to existence.

There is within men, the frightening capability of acting apparently with sensitivity and warmth while actu-
ally being the machines of reason. The French Jesuits in *Brébeuf and His Brethren*, who follow Loyola rather than Christ, are such, and the poignancy of the poem is in the discrepancy between their actions and Christ's actions for the benefit of mankind. The Jesuits seek martyrdom for themselves, and the Indians are only a vehicle for their ambition. Nowhere in Pratt is the tragedy of illusion so forcefully illustrated.

Against death, men seek religion to comfort them, but Pratt sees the crucifixes and prayers as symbols of the illusion that men are not completely subject to the death-force of the universe. Even in nature, men may be tempted to see holiness. But holiness in nature is illusion. Beneath the beauty of icebergs lies the primevality of the amoral universe. To Pratt, only the things of man have value, and only man gives meaning to the universe; other than man, the entities of the universe are barren and mechanical, without intrinsic meaning; among them man is a tiny speck, but it is in his heart that "all godliness"\(^4\) lies.

E. J. Pratt writes of such a variety of human experiences that there is scarcely a significant aspect of life

---

that is untouched. Life, death, war, mechanization, reason, hate, love, illusion, reality, and political and economic oppression are the content of his poems, and their presentation is firmly rooted in historical and scientific validity. The total image of man which emerges from Pratt's canon is a very real and complete human. There is little that is startling about it, except, perhaps, the aura of glory that surrounds it in spite of men's imperfections. In Pratt's concept, men can encompass the universe, for they have in themselves all that nature has. But they are more than microcosms. They have the capability of communicating their feelings and they have reason; by them together, though not alone, men can take the constellation Taurus and roast it to provide an epic meal for the neglected of the world, or they can invent and use, for others' benefit, machines whose power makes insignificant the energies of the Void. In Pratt's view of man, defiance, not sainthood is desirable.5

The image of man rises from Pratt's poetry and effects a reversal of the magnitude of natural imagery. The forces of life and death in the universe, the flames and blackness, the sea, and the ice and marine animals diminish before the

5 Defiance is Earle Birney's designation ("E. J. Pratt and His Critics," p. 90); sainthood is Desmond Pacey's (Ten Canadian Poets, p. 174).
light of man's reason and his heart. Although individual men may fail and regress to cave-men or sharks, man endures as essentially noble by accepting the challenges of death and overcoming them in the heroism of his struggle. In the mechanically perfect universe, imperfect men must make direct their feelings for other men for the sake of life. For life is all that men have; nature, death, and Fate are men's only necessary enemies, not other men.

---

The following letter from Dr. Pratt was in response to my request for his opinion of my interpretation of the concluding thirty-six lines of The Roosevelt and the Antinoe:

Dear Mr. Sharman:

Thank you very much for your kind and interesting letter. It is gratifying to know that one's work is understood....

You have expressed exactly what I meant to convey in the conclusion of The Roosevelt and the Antinoe, and indeed in the whole of the poem: man's unremitting struggle with Nature, and his indomitable courage in pitting his strength against hers, no matter how great the odds. The whole of the gallant rescue was ready made for my purpose, and every detail was as accurate as careful research and re-enactment could guarantee.

Sincerely yours,

E. J. Pratt
PRIMARY SOURCES


________. Brébeuf and His Brethren. Toronto, 1947.


________. Newfoundland Verse. Toronto, 1923.

________. The Roosevelt and the Antinoe. New York, 1930.

________. Still Life and Other Verse. Toronto, 1943.

________. They Are Returning. Toronto, 1945.

________. The Titanic. Toronto, 1935.

________. Titans. London, 1926.

________. Toward the Last Spike. Toronto, 1952.

SECONDARY SOURCES


Knox, R. S. "A New Canadian Poet," Canadian Forum, III (June 1923), 278-279.


Watt, Frank W. "Edwin John Pratt," *The University of Toronto Quarterly*, XXIX (October 1959), 77-84.
