Labyrinth of Edwin Muir

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THE LABYRINTH OF EDWIN MUIR

by

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C. T.
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INTRODUCTION

Within recent years Edwin Muir's poetry has gained in recognition. Muir previously had been known primarily as translator, especially of Kafka, and as critic, although his poetry was admired by the small number of people who knew it. The publication of his Collected Poems in 1953 strengthened and expanded his reputation as a poet, and caused critics such as William Arrowsmith to call this book "the finest book of poetry for a long time now, and surely the wisest. Radiant, humane, with direct strength below the words."¹

Muir's humaneness and wisdom radiate through the three pairs of themes of his poetry, namely, time and eternity, the present and the past, and the story and the fable. The labyrinth or maze image, which frequently appears in his poetry, serves as a device to synthesize these three relationships, especially in the most recent separate volume, The Labyrinth.

No systematic, critical study of Muir's poetry has so far been published. One finds brief, general statements about his poems in a few, worthwhile literary magazines, but no one has yet entered the "labyrinth" of Muir's poetry.

My attempt in writing this paper is to penetrate the corridors of Muir's labyrinth and to discover the Ariadne's thread which will lead to an exit. This paper is designed to explore and explain his major themes. In so doing, in the first chapter I discuss the three relationships as they appear chronologically in Muir's poetry, in the second chapter, the development of the maze symbol throughout the Collected Poems, in the third, The Labyrinth volume in connection with the three relationships, and in the fourth, the poem "The Labyrinth" as a microcosm of the Collected Poems. Thus, I hope to show how Muir's poetry, through the recurrence of these themes and the use of the labyrinth image as a synthesizing device, sustains and strengthens man's faith in himself and in life.
CHAPTER I

THE THREE RELATIONSHIPS IN MUIR'S POETRY

Time and Eternity

Muir in his Collected Poems deals with three major relationships, namely, between time and eternity, between the present and the past, and between the fable—the archetypal history of man since the Creation—and the story—the actual life of the individual.

Time in Muir's poetry is the continuous process of the passing moment, the "flying race" in which "the beginning finds the end/Before beginning ever can be." ("The Road," Journeys and Places, p. 41).¹ Muir indicates the continuity of time in his poetry and uses images that give this sense of continuity. Time is presented as constantly affecting life, beauty, and love, which have been ever-existent in nature since the Creation. The ever-presence of the time

¹ The text I use is Muir, Edwin, Collected Poems. London: Faber and Faber, 1953. This collection contains, with some omissions, six of the First Poems (1925), four of the ten Variations on a Time Theme (1934), more than half of the poems in Journeys and Places (1937), almost the entire contents of The Narrow Place (1943), and The Voyage (1946), and all of The Labyrinth (1949). After each citation or quotation of a poem I add in parenthesis the title of the original volume in which the poem appeared, and the page number in the Collected Poems.
process is explicit in Variations on a Time Theme (p. 27).

Time has such curious stretches, we are told,  
And generation after generation  
May travel them. . . .  
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .  
. . We sit where others have sat before us  
And others will sit after us.

In "The Prize" (The Narrow Place, p. 31), the poet speaks  
of time as being a "great turning ring."

Did we come here, drawn by some fatal thing,  
Fly from eternity's immaculate bow  
Straight to the heart of time's great turning ring,  
That we might win the prize that took us so?

The images of road, stream and river are often used  
to stand for time. This specific selection of images by  
Muir immediately communicates the notion of the continuity  
of time. In "The Road" (Journeys and Places, p. 41) the  
identification of time and the road is clear.

There is a road that turning always  
Cuts off the country of Again  
Archers stand there on every side  
And as it runs time's deer is slain  
And lies where it has lain.

That busy clock shows never an hour.  
All flies and all in flight must tarry.  
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

There the beginning finds the end.  
Before beginning ever can be,  
And the great runner never leaves  
The starting and the finishing tree,  
The budding and fading tree.

There in the first line of the last stanza refers to the  
road. The idea of the "runner" never leaving the "starting  
and the finishing tree" is a different way of stating the  
perpetual advance of time given in the previous lines where  
"the beginning finds the end before beginning ever can be."
The sense of continuity is pictured again in "The Wayside Station" (The Narrow Place, p. 66) where the "lonely stream" is the ever flowing stream of time which runs through night and day. The effect of continuity is also given by the accumulation of long vowels (as e.g. in line three of the quotation) and the repetition of the and's in the fourth line.

... The lonely stream
That rode through darkness leaps the gap of light,
Its voice grown loud, and starts its winding journey
Through the day and time and war and history.

"The River" (The Narrow Place, p. 67) once more illustrates the equation of time and the stream. In the glass surface of the stream are mirrored "trained terrors," "well-practiced partings," "Blackened fields," "burning woods," "Great oes and capitals and flourishes," while the stream is constantly flowing on, accumulating more and more disaster in its passing. The only reasonable conclusion that can be drawn from this poem is that the stream is time, since time is a continuous process during which all material things are destroyed.

In contrast to the ever-changing, advancing process of time, eternity in Muir's poetry is a still, fixed, changeless sphere, where all past experience of the race is accumulated and in the foreground of which the passing figures of the time process move. The world of eternity is the "real" static world, the world of eternal truth. In "The Transfiguration" (The Labyrinth, p. 173) the poet refers to
the world of eternity as follows:

... but it speaks
To itself alone, alone it flowers and shines
And blossoms for itself while time runs on.

The earlier of Muir's poems are haunted by the disastrous effect of time. Time is there portrayed as the antagonist, the destroyer of beauty, love, and life. In "Betrayal" (First Poems, p. 19) beauty is time's prisoner:

He slays her with invisible hands,
And inly wastes her flesh away.
And strangles her with stealthy bands;
Melts her as snow day after day.
... . . . . .
He who entrapped her long ago,
And kills her, is unpitying Time.

In Variations on a Time Theme—a journey of man through time—the "long road" will bring man to enter "the unknown, feared and longed-for land" of death. This land seems to be death rather than eternity, because in some other poems, Muir speaks about the "dreaded goal" of time. In "The Stationary Journey" (Journeys and Places, p. 37) he says:

So, back or forward, still we strike
Through time and touch its dreaded goal.

If the "long road" were to bring man to the world of eternity, the poet would not have called it the "dreaded goal," since he considers eternity the "real" world. The fear of the ruinous effects of time leads the poet\(^1\) to wish to escape from time's bonds.

... If I could
I'd leap time's bound or turn and hide
From time in my ancestral wood.

---

\(^1\)Since these poems are lyrics I will be assuming for convenience that the speaker in every poem is the poet himself.
A change in Muir's attitude towards time occurs in his later poetry beginning with *The Voyage*. There, a kind of reconciliation between time and the poet has been achieved. The poet is now not disturbed by the ruin caused by time. He accepts the presence of time as part of the living process and decides that man can enjoy some of life's blessings in "time's despite." In "Time Held in Time's Despite" (*The Voyage*, p. 126) the poet says:

Now there is only left what time has made
Our very own in our and time's despite
The hours that melt like snowflakes one by one
Leave us this residue, this virgin ground
Forever fresh, this firmament and this sun.
Then let us lay unasking hand in hand,
And take our way, thus led, into our land.

The force of time in its passing does not only destroy everything beautiful; it leaves a freshness in the world by means of the continuous process of regeneration of the world of nature, which man can enjoy. The poem: "A Birthday" (*The Voyage*, p. 128) clearly illustrates this acceptance of the presence of time. On his birthday the poet celebrates the world of time and takes delight living in it.

I gather to my heart
Beast, insect, flower, earth, water, fire,
In absolute desire,
As fifty years ago.

He has made his peace with the world and time:

Acceptance, gratitude
The first look and the last
When all between has passed
Restore ingenuous good
That seeks no personal end,
Now that he has reached his fiftieth year, the poet accepts the time process as part of life and rejoices at the fact of his living in the world in spite of time's continuous advance. This celebration of the world of the senses, the transitory world of time, is explicit in the short poem "All We" which immediately follows "A Birthday."

All we who make
Things transitory and good
Cannot but take
When walking in a wood
Pleasure in everything
And the maker's solicitude,
Knowing the delicacy
Of bringing shape to birth.
To fashion the transitory
We gave and took the ring
And pledged ourselves to the earth.

In *The Labyrinth* volume which immediately follows *The Voyage* Muir continues to reconcile himself to time, and also works toward a harmonizing of time and eternity. Time is no longer the destroyer of love, beauty and life, the undefeated enemy before which man and all human expressions stand helpless. The world of time and the world of eternity are no longer vastly separated. In the first stanza of "Love's Remorse" (*The Labyrinth*, p. 167) time seems to be again the antagonist which destroys beauty and youth:
I feel remorse for all that time has done
To you, my love, as if myself, not time,
Had set on you the never-resting sun
And the little deadly days, to work this crime.

Time, however, can wither only the particular expression of the essence, not the essence itself; it can wither the love affair, not love.

'Love is exempt from time.' And that is true.
But we, the loved and the lover, we grow old;
Only the truth, the truth is always new:

'Eternity alone our wrong can right,
That makes all young again in time's despite.'

In "Love in Time's Despite" (The Labyrinth, p. 168) time is the rival of love, especially in the first stanzas. Nevertheless, love can triumph in time's despite. The poet is no longer haunted by the fear of time. He realizes that the time process and the life process co-exist with a certain harmony.

You who are given to me to time were given
Before through time I stretched my hand to catch Yours in the flying race. Oh we were driven By rivalry of him who has no match.

... . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
And we who love and love again can dare To keep in his despite our summer still, Which flowered, but shall not wither at his will.
The Present and the Past

The second major relationship in Muir's poetry is that between the present and the past. It is the influence of the past life of the human race upon the present life of the individual man. The past is the accumulated experience of the human race throughout the centuries as well as the traditional ideas that have been developed and followed in the course of the ages. In every century man's actions are inescapably bound by the tradition of the race. Man struggles to overcome the limitations imposed upon him by the past, but although he may free himself momentarily, he soon realizes that he cannot really break these bonds.

The idea of man's bondage to the past and the close connection between past and present recurs in many of Muir's poems. Throughout the Collected Poems this relation of the present and the past is approached in the same way without any striking change in attitude. In "The Town Betrayed" (Journeys and Places, p. 55) the poet indicates the power that the past exerts on the present and his rebellious attitude towards this limiting force. In his youth the poet wished to escape the ruinous effect of time.

There our ancestral ghosts are gathered, 
Pierce Agamemnon's form I see, 
Watching as if his tents were time 
And Troy eternity.

-10-
We must take order, bar our gates,
Fight off these phantoms. Inland now
Achilles, Siegfried, Lancelot
Have sworn to bring us low.

In "The Fathers" (The Voyage, p. 111) the poet again speaks about the strong influence of the past on the present life of the individual.

Archaic fevers shake
Our healthy flesh and blood
Plumped in the passing day
And fed with pleasant food.
The father's anger and ache
Will not, will not away
And leave the living alone,
But on our careless brows
Faintly their furrows engrave
Like veinings in a stone,
Breathe in the sunny house
Nightmare of blackened bone,
Cellar and choking cave.

... . . . . . . . . . .
We hold our fathers' trust,
Wrong, riches, sorrow and all
Until they topple and fall,
And fallen let in the day.

We bear the imprints of our fathers' life record. We are oriented by the compass of our inheritance.

Muir, in two of the later poems, "The Return," and "Twice-Done, Once-Done" (The Voyage, pp. 97, 106), states the close relation between the past and the present without any sign of fear. The theme of the first poem is the return of the Greek soldiers from Troy. When they come home after ten years of absence they find the scenes of the childhood memories "embosomed in the past," but no visible changes in the world of appearances.

And when they arrived at last
They found a childish scene
Embosomed in the past,
And the war lying between
But everything trite and strange
The peace, the parcelled ground,
The vinerows—never a changel
The past and the present bound
In one oblivious round
Past thinking trite and strange.

In "Twice-Done, Once-Done" Muir says:

Yet we the latest born are still
The first ones and the last,
And in our little measures fill
The oceanic past.

For first and last is every way,
And first and last each soul,
And first and last the passing day,
And first and last the goal.

Muir in pointing out the interrelation between the past and the present adopts a reversal of the usual direction in which the past affects the present. In this poem the present fills the past. The "latest born" are in one sense the first, because they are new-comers into the present, actual life. But, being the latest born, they are the last of a very long series of human births beginning with Adam. Sooner or later, however, they will themselves assimilate with the past; they will then become part of the past, as in the advance of time the present is transformed into past.
The actual life of the "latest born," the story, will in the passing of time become a part of the archetypal pattern of the whole history of man, the fable.

In contrast to the time-eternity relationship, which in the course of the Collected Poems changes considerably, the past-present relation remains fairly constant throughout
Muir's poetry. In *The Labyrinth*, the most recent separate collection, on the one hand the past is presented as haunting the actual life of man and hindering his freedom, and on the other, it is given as an indispensable pillar on which the present life of man relies. The past is the fountain from which man receives guidance and draws conclusions in every generation. These two viewpoints are exhibited in his earlier poems with a certain emphasis on the first.

In "The Usurpers" (*The Labyrinth*, p. 161) Muir at the beginning speaks of the "ancestral voices" as being "old garrulous ghosts" which the present man has silenced to free himself. Thus, this passage indicates that the past has haunted the present. In later lines, however, the poet says that man, now that he has become free from the binding power of the past, moves into nothingness.

> ... we dare do all we think
> Since there's no one to check us, here or elsewhere,
> All round us stretches nothing; we move through nothing,
> Nothing but nothing world without end.

And the remainder of the poem suggests that we are haunted still, if only by the lack of the pillar of the past. The feeling of sterility that these lines convey implies the necessity of the past for the shaping of the present. In "The Debtor" man's bondage to the past is portrayed as contributing to his regeneration.

> I am debtor to all, to all am I bounden,
> Fellowman and beast, season and solstice, darkness and light
> And life and death . . .

> ... The ancient waters
Cleanse me, revive me.

The dead in their silences keep me in memory,
Have me in hold. To all I am bounden.
The Story and the Fable

The relationship between the fable—the archetypal pattern of man's whole history—and the story—the actual life of the individual—is the third major theme which often recurs in Muir's poetry. Every man in his own, actual life in a way re-enacts the fable of the race, and history is itself the lifetime of Adam, lived through succeeding generations. Thus, the events of the succeeding generations become contemporaneous, taking place in a single "Now" through which time runs like a road that can be retraced to its source, "the starting day." In his Autobiography the poet states:

> It is clear that no autobiography can begin with a man's birth, that we extend far beyond any boundary line which we can set for ourselves in the past or the future, and that the life of every man is an endlessly repeated performance of the life of man.²

There are some special times in man's life, when he most closely approaches the fable. At moments of inner crisis man enters the fable, because then he recapitulates a crucial experience which is characteristic of man and recurrent in the history of the race.

---


There are times in every man's life when he seems to become for a little while a part of the fable, and to be recapitulating some legendary drama which, as it has recurred a countless number of times in time, is ageless. The realization of the Fall is one of those events, and the purifications which happen in one's life belong to them too. The realization of the Fall is a realization of a universal event; . . .1

Muir felt that he entered the fable in two crucial moments of his life, when he accepted Christ as his saviour, and when he was converted to Socialism.

It was as if I had stepped into a fable which was always there invisibly waiting for anyone who wished to enter it.2

The idea of the re-enactment of the fable is present in some of the poems of the early volumes, and shows no remarkable change in the more recent poems. The poet's attitude toward the story-fable theme does not undergo any noticeable development throughout the Collected Poems. In "The Fall" (Journeys and Places, p. 48) the poet wonders about the shape and environment he had before the Fall. In this way he identifies himself with the first upheavals of life and gives an ageless quality to his being.

What shape had I before the Fall? What hills and rivers did I seek? What were my Thoughts then? And of what Forgotten histories did I speak

To my companions? Did our eyes From their foredestined watching-place See Heaven and Earth one land, and range Therein through all of Time and Space?

---

1Ibid., p. 114.
2Ibid.
In "Twice-Done, Once-Done" the poet describes the living of his fathers in himself.

Unless in me my fathers live
I can never show
I am myself—ignorant if
I'm a ghost or no.

"The Myth" (The Voyage, p. 116) is a narration of the poet's life, his childhood, youth and manhood. Muir gives a mythical tone to this narration which makes the actual life of the poet part of the fabulous world, part of the fable. The title itself suggests a relation between the story of the poet and the fable of man, because it implies that the poet's life is part of the archetypal life of man.

My childhood all a myth
Enacted in a distant isle;

And at each corner of the wood
In which I played the ancient play,
Guarding the traditional day
The faithful watchers stood.

This vision of the fabulous and actual world, the intermingling of the fable and the story that recurs in Muir's poetry has certainly a direct relation with the poet's early environment. Muir was born in Orkney where "there was no distinction between the ordinary and the fabulous. The lives of living men turned into legend."¹ He spent his childhood in a kind of motionless vision, where he was not conscious of the presence of time.

That world was a perfectly solid world, for the days did not undermine it but merely rounded it,

¹Ibid., p. 14.
or rather repeated it, as if there were only one
day endlessly rising and settling. Our first
childhood is the only time in our lives when we
exist within immortality, . . . simply because
time does not exist for us. We pay no attention
to time until he tugs us by the sleeve or claps
his policeman's hand on our shoulder; . . . .1

The theme of story-fable relationship is particularly
striking in some poems from The Labyrinth which will be
analysed later.

Muir's preoccupation with the theme of the re-
enactment of the fable naturally leads him to use myth in
his poetry as a device to render the communion between the
actual and the archetypal, between the present and the past.
Many of his poems are full of mythic names such as Achilles,
Priam, Troy, Ulysses, Oedipus, Moses, Abraham. His title,
The Labyrinth, represents a myth in itself. The poet by
bringing into contemporary events myths of the past,
achieves a closeness between the past and the present, a
sense of historical continuity of the race by which the
modern is mythicized and the past becomes contemporary.

The sense of continuity is necessary for
human dignity.2

In his Autobiography Muir describes a moment of his
childhood when he went through an experience similar to
Hector's and a poem in which Muir recreated that similarity.

1Ibid., p. 25.
2Edwin Muir, We Moderns (New York: Alfred A. Knopf,
... and a poem on Achilles pursuing Hector round the walls of Troy was a resuscitation of the afternoon when I ran away, in real terror, from another boy as I returned from school. The bare landscape of the little island became, without my knowing it, a universal landscape over which Abraham and Ulysses and Tristram and Moses and all sorts of pilgrims passed; and Troy was associated with the Castle, a mere green mound, near my father's house.

In this poem "Ballad of Hector in Hades" (First Poems, p. 22) it is clear that the poet and Hector are not the same person, since in the last stanza Hector becomes a corpse while the speaker still lives.

The race is ended. Far away
I hang and do not care,
While round bright Troy Achilles whirls
A corpse with streaming hair.

This projection of the poet into Hector, this association of the actual with the mythical suggests the idea of the recurrence of crucial moments in the life of man, and accomplishes a close communion between the present and the past.

In "Moses" (The Voyage, p. 102) Muir brings in the biblical story of Moses in parallel with great historical events throughout the centuries, thus giving another representation of the historical continuity of the race.

He left us there, went to Pisgah hill
And saw the holiday land, the sabbath land.

But we did not see
We did not see and Moses did not see,
The great disaster, exile, diaspora,
The holy bread of the land crumbled and broken
In Babylom, Caesarea, Alexandria
As on a splendid dish, or gnawed as offal.

Nor did we see, beyond, the ghetto rising,
Toledo, Cracow, Vienna, Budapesth,
Nor, had we seen, would we have known our people
In the wild disguises of fantastic time,
Packed in dense cities, wandering countless roads,
And not a road in the world to lead them home.
How could we have seen such things?

Two of the poems in The Labyrinth, "The Good Town" and
"The Interrogation," (pp. 156, 157) seem to be occasioned by
the war and occupation in Europe. But Muir sees all these
events as a single event in human history; that is, this war
that is mentioned in the two poems is presented as any war.\(^1\)
He succeeds in objectifying the present experience and gives
it ageless connotations. "The Interrogation" starts off
with an incident which could have happened in any of the
occupied countries during the war. However, the lack of
specification of the time and place of the incident, as well
as the constant shift of tense from past to present to pres­
et perfect and back to present, helps in giving a timeless
quality to the experience conveyed in the poem.

We could have crossed the road but hesitated.
And then came the patrol;
... ... ... ... ... ...
... He says the whole
Must come out now, who, what we are,
Where we have come from, with what purpose...
... ... ... ... ... ... ... ...
We have stood and answered through the standing day
And watched across the road beyond the hedge
The careless lovers in pairs go by,
... ... ... ... ... ... ...
We are on the very edge,
Endurance almost done,
And still the interrogation is going on.

A sense of historical continuity is also given in "The

\(^1\)Raine, "In the Major Grain," op. cit., p. 18.
Good Town," the theme of which is the degeneration of a town which once was "the good town." It is clear that this destruction of the town occurred during the Second World War:

Then came the second war, passed and repassed,
And now you see our town, the fine new prison,
The house-doors shut and barred, the frightened faces peeping round corners, secret police, informers,

And all afraid of all.

At the end of the poem, however, this particular disaster becomes a manifestation of the effect of evil in general on the human race throughout the centuries.

How did it come?

'Could it have come from us? Was our peace peace?
... but evil is restless
And gives no rest to the cruel or the kind.
... No: when evil comes

All things turn adverse, and we must begin
At the beginning, heave the groaning world
Back in its place again, and clamp it there.
... We have seen

Good men made evil wrangling with the evil,
Straight minds grown crooked fighting crooked minds.
Our peace betrayed us; we betrayed our peace.
Look at it well. This was the good town once.'

These thoughts we have, walking among our ruins.
The labyrinth or maze is a very significant symbol in Muir's poetry; it serves as a synthesizing device which correlates the three relationships that have been discussed in the previous chapter. There are references to the maze in eight of the Collected Poems, beginning with "The Stationary Journey" (Journeys and Places, p. 37). Besides, one volume and a long poem in it have as title the word labyrinth. In six of the poems which contain the word labyrinth or maze this word is presented abstractly; that is, Muir does not describe or render the labyrinth, he merely names it. It is only in two poems, "The Escape" (The Voyage, p. 98) and "The Labyrinth" (The Labyrinth, p. 135) that the reader has a visual sense of the labyrinth. In the first, the poet describes roads running like a web, and in the second, he gives a complete picture of the labyrinth with its countless roads, so that the reader has a vivid image of it. This lack of concrete presentation of the labyrinth image weakens its force and meaning in the other poems.

In "The Stationary Journey" the poet says that if he could "retrace the path" that led him here, if he could go back to the past history of the human race, among other
events he would see:

Saint Augustine gives back his soul
To stumble in the endless maze.

The giving back of Saint Augustine's soul in order to enter the "maze" suggests the giving of himself to the world. It is known that Saint Augustine at a period of his youth wanted to lead a secluded life, to become a hermit. Later on, however, he became an active bishop and through his close association with people he participated in the world, which once he wished to ignore.

The first stanza of "The Prize" (The Narrow Place, p. 81) shows that men came to the world of time in order that they "might win the prize."

Did we come here, drawn by some fatal thing,
Fly from eternity's immaculate bow
Straight to the heart of time's great turning ring,
That we might win the prize that took us so?

The last stanza of this poem indicates that "the prize" lies "within the maze" thus equating the maze with the world of time, the "here."

We hurried here for some such thing and now
Wander the countless roads to seek our prize,
That far within the maze serenely lies,
While all around each trivial shape exclaims:
'Here is your jewel; this is your longed for day',
And we forget, lost in the countless names.

Another illustration of the idea that "the prize" exists in the world is given in the poem "Too Much" (The Labyrinth, p. 135) where the prize becomes a part of the world of time, which the "fathers praised so fondly."

No, no, I did not bargain for so much
When I set out upon the famous way
My fathers praised so fondly—such and such
The road, the errand, the prize, the part to play.

The picture of the prize lying in the maze in the poem previously quoted suggests the futility of life. Man is led to believe that he can "win the prize," that he can realize his goals and ideals in this world. He soon discovers, however, that it is as impossible for him to reach his goals as it is to find the prize in the maze. Man always wanders "the countless roads" trying to reach his goals in this world, but he is never successful, because "the countless roads" confuse him. At the end of "The Journey Back" (The Labyrinth, p. 141) the poet says that the prize cannot be earned in this life, that man can only try to reach it, but he can never possess it here.

There's no prize in this race, the prize is elsewhere,
Here only to be run for.

Another illustration of the equation of the maze with the world of time occurs in "The Escape" (The Voyage, p. 98) where the poet in his effort to escape from "the enemy's vast domain" realizes that he is entrapped.

Escaping from the enemy's hand
Into the enemy's vast domain,
I sought by many a devious path,
Having got in, to get out again.

The endless trap lay everywhere,
And all the roads ran in a maze
Hither and thither, like a web
To catch the careless days.

It becomes explicit that the "endless trap" and maze are the present world, because the poet "saw there" the
"blossoming tree," "the waving yellow harvests" and

... The family group
Still gathered round the dying hearth,
The old men droned the ancient saws,
And the young mother still gave birth.

All these things that he saw "there" belong to the world of appearances; thus, "there" is the present world. Since the poet was entrapped in the maze while he was "there" the maze is the world of "there," the world of time.

In The Labyrinth the maze symbol has more complicated implications than in the earlier volumes. It stands not only for this world of time, which is all it stands for in the poems previous to The Labyrinth, but for the story and the present and the past and the fable. It serves to correlate some of the pairs of major themes that have been discussed above. "The Labyrinth" which will be analysed later best illustrates this correlation of themes through the maze image.

In "The Journey Back" (The Labyrinth, p. 141) the maze image appears in the first line of part 3:

And I remember in the bright light's maze
This line comes right after a description of the wanderings of the poet through the world. His remembrance, therefore, refers to his previous wanderings. "The bright light's maze" is here again the world of nature, the world of time which is illuminated by the sun. The sun image is "a fantastic image of time," Muir says in his Autobiography. In its

1P. 166.
single appearance in "The Transfiguration" (The Labyrinth, p. 173), the labyrinth image suggests the story of man. At the coming of Christ "all stepped out of their own dungeons and were free."

And those who hide within the labyrinth
Of their own loneliness and greatness came,
And those entangled in their own devices

The labyrinth in this passage seems to imply the complexity of actual life, of the story of men. Thus, in the second stanza of the "Song" (The Labyrinth, p. 176), the poet says:

The living and the dead
Centuries separate,
Man from himself is led
Through mazes past recall

The fact that the maze image appears in the plural number for the first time is very significant. The plural form of the maze in this poem combines the various meanings of the labyrinth image: the world of time, the story, the past and the fable.
CHAPTER III

THE LABYRINTH

In The Labyrinth the three relationships previously discussed, between time and eternity, between the present and the past, and between the story and the fable, appear very distinctly. A major change has occurred in the time-eternity relationship as it has appeared in the early volumes. Here a reconciliation has been achieved between time and eternity. Time is no longer the great antagonist in the advance of which man and all human expressions stand helpless. The world of time is no longer cut off from the world of eternity; it has become a part of it. This change in attitude has already been indicated as it appears in two of the poems of this volume, "Love's Remorse" and "Love in Time's Despite."¹

In "The West" (p. 140) time in its everlasting continuity is transformed into eternity. Muir here gives to the world of time an effect of timelessness by indicating the fact that this passing world in the long run acquires a fixed quality, since the same events continually recur. In the second stanza of this poem the poet says that the human

¹Above, pp. 8-9.
"migration" from the east to the west, from life to death—the life process—although it is a "great movement," in its continual sameness becomes changeless, "begets a stillness."

So that when we look
Out at our life we see a changeless landscape,
And all disposed there in its due proportion,
The young and old, the good and bad, the wise and foolish,
All these are there as if they had been for ever,
And motionless as statues, prototypes
Set beyond time, for whom the sun stands still.
And each day says in its passing, 'This is all.'--
While the unhurrying progress goes its way,
And we upon it, year by year by year,
Led through the endless stations of the sun.

The last two lines, however, return us to the present, which we do feel as separate from eternity.

And yet this is a land, and we say 'Now'
Say 'now' and 'Here', and are in our own house.

In "The Transfiguration" (p. 173) Muir gives another illustration of the fusion of time and eternity. Here the speaker believes in a stage of innocence which the second coming of Christ will bring. This stage of innocence, in which Judas will return "from darkness into light," seems to be associated with timelessness. Although the second coming of Christ and the following stage of innocence will occur in a moment of actual time, they will transform time into eternity, so that the moment in time will become a moment out of time, or rather, time will be transfigured into timelessness.

... and the tormented wood
Will cure its hurt and grow into a tree
In a green springing corner of young Eden,
And Judas damned take his long journey backward
From darkness into light and be a child
Beside his mother's knee, and the betrayal
Be quite undone and never more be done.

"The West" and "The Transfiguration" illustrates the fact
that the time-eternity relationship has undergone a significant change in The Labyrinth volume from complete separation to a fusion of the two worlds of time and eternity. Eternity is a static, fixed world towards which the passing figures of the world of time move. However, these figures of time in their endless repetition of the same orbit become stable; they become "a changeless" and "motionless" landscape which, "set beyond time," is blended with eternity, although it moves in time.

The idea of reconciliation between time and eternity is a very wholesome and mature attitude for the life of the individual. It equips man with a constructive and creative force which he draws from a confidence in the relative permanence of the world of appearances and in the harmonious coexistence of time and eternity. The haunting notion of the continually ruinous effect of time in this world paralyses man's productivity and creativity and infects him with the disease of apathy, indifference as well as passivity, an immature attitude towards life. When a man reaches the point where, instead of complaining about the limitations imposed upon him by time, he is willing to accept them and try to do the best he can within the restricted range of his power, he has achieved a state of maturity. He then becomes self-confident, productive and creative, thus bestowing a meaning
on his life.

Muir's second major theme, the relation of past and present, or the influence of the past life of the human race upon the present life of the individual, is also clearly seen in The Labyrinth. In contrast to the time-eternity relationship which particularly in this book takes different form, the past-present relationship does not undergo any remarkable change. As in Muir's earlier poems so in The Labyrinth, the past is presented as haunting the present as well as sustaining it. The idea of the controlling force of the past over man's present behaviour appears in a short poem of this collection called "The Intercepter" (p. 154), the title figure of which seems to stand for the super-ego of the human race; that is, the controlling power of history and tradition upon man.

Whatever I do, wherever I go,
This is my everlasting care:
The Intercepter haunts my ways
And checks me everywhere.

Asleep, awake, at work or play
Whatever I do, wherever I go
The Intercepter bars my way,
And to my "Yes" says "No".

Is he my friend or my enemy,
Betrayer, saviour from disgrace?
The Intercepter frowns at me
With my own frowning face.

The "Intercepter" in this poem is another term for the "ancestral voice" or "the watchers" who check man's life.

The "frowning face" is man's own face, because the super-ego
of the race lies in his inner self.

In the first thirteen lines of "The Usurpers" (p. 161) Muir states the idea that man has ignored the controlling power of the past, that he has become free.

It was not hard to still the ancestral voices:
A careless thought, less than a thought could do it.
And the old garrulous ghosts died easily,
The friendly and unfriendly, and are not missed
That once were such proud masters.

... we dare do all we think
Since there's no one to check us, here or elsewhere.

The two following lines, however, indicate that man, now that he has liberated himself from the binding power of the past, moves into barrenness.

All round us stretches nothing; we move through nothing,
Nothing but nothing world without end.

The sterility that these lines convey implies that man is lost without the guidance of the past. At the last part of this poem again fear penetrates through the lines by means of the poetic device of personification. The day becomes a torturer, the trees and the mountains, a jury. Man stands helpless before the critical eyes of the strong elements of nature.

The day itself sometimes works spells upon us
And then the trees look unfamiliar. Yet
It is a lie that they are witnesses,
That the mountains judge us, brooks tell tales about us.

These are imaginations. We are free.

These lines seem to express Muir's real opinion about the relation between the past and the present; the first passage in which the poet says how easy it is for men to "still the
ancestral voices" is ironical. How could Muir in reality believe that the "garrulous ghosts" of the past can "die easily" and that man is free, since consistently throughout the Collected Poems he repeats the idea that man is bound by the "Fathers," by the past. The poet's attitude is ironic when he says that "we are self-guided, self-impelled and self-sustained." Besides, the two previously quoted lines about the nothingness into which man walks after he has freed himself from the past support the point that Muir considers the past absolutely necessary for the shaping of the present.

In a passage from the "Soliloquy" (p. 168) Muir again states this importance.

Life must be lived; then live. And so I turn To past experience, watch it being shaped, But never to its own true shape. However, I have fitted this or that into the pattern, Caught sight sometimes of the original That is myself--should rather be myself--

The pattern is presumably the pattern of the history of the human race to which the narrator in the poem has adjusted his own life. Once more the idea of the guiding power of the past is repeated in "The Debtor" (p. 176).

I am debtor to all, to all am I bounden, The ancient waters
Cleanse me, revive me . . .
The dead in their silences keep me in memory, Have me in hold. To all I am bounden.

Throughout the centuries man's present actions have always been affected or directed by the rich experience of the past. This great influence of the past on the present,
on the one hand imposes certain limitations on man, and on the other, provides him with a sense of security. The conservative ideas and traditions of the past hinder the spread and application of all radical ideas that may be beneficial for man's progress, and usually reduce man's life to conventionality. The stable foundations of the past, however, gives man a firm ground on which he can securely step and from which he can acquire the raw material to create his life. Man without the help of the past finds himself in a waste land. The influence of the past is very valuable, when, man, instead of repeating the examples of the past in a conventional way, uses them as a starting point, goes beyond and re-creates this material in a way that suits the present.

The theme of the relationship between the fable and the story is more frequent and better developed and emphasized in The Labyrinth than in the previous volumes. The re-enactment of the fable is a particularly striking theme in three long poems of this collections: "The Journey Back," (p. 141), "Oedipus" (p. 163), and "Soliloquy" (p. 168). In the first of these the speaker says:

I take my journey back to seek my kindred
Then he tells us to do likewise:

Seek the beginnings, learn from whence you came.
And know the various earth of which you are made.
So I set out on this calm summer evening
From this my house and my father's.

In the course of part I the "I" acquires a broader, a
collective personality, and the poem suggests a close identity between the speaker and man in general. The poet's journey back becomes a "journey back" of the human race in order to retrace the path of human history and find the "starting day." Part II of the poem develops this identification. Here the wanderings of the poet in seeking his home are identified with the wanderings of primitive man, the beginning of the race.

The well-bred animal
With coat of seemly mail
Was then my guide.
I trembled in my den
With all my kindred when
The dragon died.

Through forests wide and deep
I passed and as a sleep
My wandering was.
Before the word was said
With animal bowed head
I kept the laws.

In the fourth and fifth parts of this poem the identification of the speaker with man is explicit.

For once I was all
That you can name, a child, a woman, a flower,
And here escape
From all that was to all,
Lost beyond loss.

I have stood and watched where many have stood
And seen the calamities of an age
Where good seemed evil and evil good

At the end of the poem Muir suggests a close identification between the speaker and the race by shifting from "I" to "we".

How could we be if all were not in all?
Borne hither on all and carried hence with all,
We and the world and that unending thought
Which has elsewhere its end and is for us
Begotten in a dream deep in this dream
Beyond the place of getting and of spending.

The "unending thought" is the fable, which does not exist in
the world of time, but "elsewhere" in the "real" world of
eternity. The fable, being part of the past (since it is
the archetypal pattern of the whole history of man), is un-
affected by time, and it is changeless and static. The fable
does not exist in time simultaneous with the story. The
fabulous world is other than, not part of, the actual one.

Muir says in his Autobiography:

One or two stages in it (the fable) I can
recognize: the age of innocence and the Fall
and the dramatic consequences which issue from
the Fall. But these lie behind experience, not
on its surface; they are not historical events;
they are stages in the fable.¹

The stages in the fable are not parts of the story; they "lie
behind experience," therefore, the story and the fable are
two different spheres, the former existing in time, in the
actual world, the latter existing "beyond the place of get-
ting and of spending" in the fixed world of eternity. In
connection with this point, W. S. Merwin, in his review of
the Collected Poems, says:

It seems that in his work the fable has been
for Muir a kind of paradigm, ideal and static,
across which move the figures in process,
aspiring blindly and impossibly to its fixity.²

¹P. 166.

²William S. Merwin, "Four British Poets," Kenyon
The literal subject of the poem "Oedipus," is Oedipus' lamentation for his shame and guilt. The Oedipus myth represents for Muir the guilt complex of the human race. It is not only the legendary figure who says:

I see guilt, only guilt, my nostrils choke
With the smell of guilt, and I can scarcely breathe
Here in the guiltless guilt-evoking sun.

It is the voice of the human race after the Fall.

Oedipus in his story has acted out one stage of the fable, the stage of original sin, man's guilt. Muir states this idea in this poem quite explicitly, although rather abstractly.

The poem "Soliloquy" is a record of the life of the human race; that is, a record of the fable. Although it is written in the first person singular, the "I", as in "The Journey Back" and "Oedipus," in the course of the poem acquires a collective meaning, in this case because of the great accumulation of experience the speaker has acquired during different periods in history.

I have seen Alexandria, imperial Rome,
And the sultry backlanes of Jerusalem
One late spring evening thirty years ago
Trouble me still...

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
And some time after a man was crucified,
So it is said who died for the love of the world.
I have passed through war and peace
Watched populations driven along the roads
To emptiness.

I have seen more than I know.

From all this great experience of the past the speaker or man
in general is taught some lessons and arrives at certain
conclusions.

I have learned another lesson:
When life's half done you must give quality
To the other half, else you lose both, lose all.
Select, select: make an anthology
Of what's been given you by bold casual time.
Revise, omit; keep what's significant.
Fill, fill deserted time.

Life must be lived; then live. And so I turn
To past experience, watch it being shaped,
But never to its own true shape. However,
I have fitted this or that into the pattern,
Caught sight sometimes of the original
That is myself-

He has adjusted all experience to the pattern of the race,
and the individual man, the "original," re-enacts the pattern
in his own life.

Set up the bleak worn day to show our sins,
Old and still ageing, like a flat squat herd
Crawling like sun on wall to the rim of time,
Up the long slope for ever.

"Our sins" are "old and still ageing" because they are the
same sins that man continually commits through the centuries.

Muir's idea that every man in his actual life re-enacts
the archetypal pattern of the whole history of man gives man
a sense of security as well as responsibility. The thought
that his story will in the course of the centuries become
part of the fable makes man feel responsibility for his
actions, since the experience of his own life will eventually in its limited way influence the archetype of the life of man. Moreover, when man knows that, instead of walking by himself in an abyss of new experiences, he recapitulates the same cycle of experiences that countless men have gone through in the past, he acquires a sense of security. The thought on the one hand that his life in its restricted power is important for the preservation of the fable, and on the other that he is not alone and new in this life-struggle, but a part of the continual process of the life of man, consoles and sustains him.
CHAPTER IV

"THE LABYRINTH"

"The Labyrinth" is one of the crucial poems in the volume for which it supplies the title. There Muir deals with the same three major pairs of themes of his poetry. All these themes are to a certain extent interrelated in the poem, primarily by means of the maze symbol, which has more than one meaning. "The Labyrinth" is a kind of micro-cosm of the Collected Poems.

The poem is composed of four "paragraphs," containing forty-five, nineteen, six, and three lines, in that order. In the first twenty-two lines of the poem the labyrinth image stands for the past, the super-ego of the human race, which checks man's behaviour and from which man cannot really escape. The poet here indicates that the past--the accumulated experience of the human race--and the fable--the "life of man" are a set of paradigms, the traces of which the actual life, the present, has to follow. Man struggles to overcome the limitations imposed upon him by the past and the fable, but, although he may free himself momentarily, he soon realizes that he cannot really break his bonds. The maze imagery is very appropriate for this suggested meaning,
because the literal intricacy of the labyrinth and the great difficulty of escaping from it are analogous with the complexity and the controlling power of the past. Here, then, the maze has a meaning opposite to its usual meaning—the world of time—in the earlier poems.

The poem begins: "Since I emerged that day from the labyrinth," and the next few lines suggest the means by which the speaker managed the emergence.

. . . . and the bull
Lay dead upon the straw and I remained,
Blood-splashed, if dead or alive I could not tell
In the twilight nothingness. . . .

After an exhausting death struggle with the bull, the victorious speaker comes out to the tangible world, the world of nature, where everything is in constant movement. The picture of the world of time which is given in lines 12 to 23 is exuberant, celebrating.

. . . the still fields swift with flowers, the trees
All bright with blossom, the little green hills, the sea

This brightness of the world of the senses accentuates the contrast to the "twilight nothingness" of life within the labyrinth. Upon his escape from the labyrinth, the poet stares at the world in wonder.

(I stared in wonder at the young and the old,
For in the maze time had not been with me;
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
. . . . . the maze itself
Revolved around me on its hidden axis
And swept me smoothly to its enemy,
The lovely world.)

These lines first suggest the idea that the past is part of
the meaning of the maze symbol. The statements that time is not a part of the maze and that the maze is an enemy to the "lovely world," the world of appearances, show that the labyrinth here is hostile to the actual world of time. He "stared in wonder at the young and old," at the difference of ages, because he had then (after his emergence from the labyrinth) become aware of the presence of time. In the labyrinth of the past the speaker was in seclusion, in complete isolation from the world of appearances, and the concept of time, of change was unknown to him, because time does not affect the past or the fable. They are always there. The "lovely world" portrayed at its best is in this case the temptation of the present, of the actual life of the individual, which gives radical impulses to man and is, therefore, an enemy of the conservative past, just as the maze is an enemy of the lovely world.

In the remaining lines of the first "paragraph," the maze symbol enlarges its meaning. At the beginning of the poem the speaker thinks that only the past is a labyrinth, that once man manages to escape from it, he becomes free; but he soon realizes that he is deceived. Man cannot really escape from the maze. The labyrinth entraps him throughout his life, no matter how he tries to avoid it.

... since I came out that day,
There have been times when I have heard my footsteps
Still echoing in the maze, and all the roads
That run through the noisy world, deceiving streets
That meet and part and meet, and rooms that open
Into each other—and never a final room—
Stairways and corridors and antechambers
That vacantly wait for some great audience,
The smooth sea-tracks that open and close again,
Tracks undiscoverable, indecipherable,
Paths on the earth and tunnels underground,
And bird-tracks in the air—all seemed a part
Of the great labyrinth. And then I'd stumble
In sudden blindness, hasten, almost run,
As if the maze itself were after me
And soon must catch me up.

... 
Haste and delay are equal
In this one world, for there's no exit, none,
No place to come to, and you'll end where you are,
Deep in the centre of the endless maze.

The poet\(^1\) now realizes that this world of time, which at the
beginning he had thought to be free from the labyrinth, is
a maze in itself, that man is always entrapped "in the centre
of the endless maze."

This labyrinth of man's life is created not only by
the binding power of the past and the fable, which are beyond
man's control, but also by the present and the story which
are to a certain extent within his jurisdiction. The great
complexity of life and the intense situations that continu­
ally confront man create a series of walls between himself
and the world around him, so that man finds himself alone in
the various "corridors and antechambers" of his life-maze.

The lack of true communication among human beings, the
feeling of distrust and suspicion that generally underlie the
relationships of man tend to create a kind of barrier between
his own consciousness and the world around him. There is a
a latent fear in his actions which prevents him from free

\(^1\)See footnote above, p. 6.
expression and leads him to a state of reserve and inner isolation. Thus the past and the fable, the present and the story make a single maze, from which man can find no exit.

The second "paragraph" of "The Labyrinth" is a recollection of a moment of illumination, of transcendence from the "maze" to the world of eternity. It is significant that the maze symbol does not appear in this part to frighten the poet. At such a moment of illumination man lives free from the maze made up of both the binding past and the natural world. Once in his lifetime the poet has succeeded in going beyond the illusory, transitory world of the labyrinth to the real world of eternity, the world of eternal truth.

I could not live if this were not illusion.
It is a world, perhaps; but there's another.
For once in a dream or trance I saw the gods
Each sitting on the top of his mountain-isle.

This in the first line refers to "this one world," to the identity of the maze and the world of time where man is haunted by the countless roads of the "endless maze." This transcendence to the world of eternity is true in contrast to the illusory first escape from the labyrinth, although it is achieved in a dream or an ecstasy. Muir in his Autobiography says: "I accept the trance as a revelation of truth."¹

The poet describes this moment of illumination without any noticeable change from the general form of the poem.

¹P. 166.
At this moment, however, the picture of the world of appearances that Muir gives is positive and celebrating, instead of frightening as at the end of the first "paragraph." The speaker now does not see this world as a maze; he sees it "Clear and secure as a limpid dream." During the state of ecstasy, when the speaker goes beyond the world of time, he can look at this world with a clear vision, because at that moment he is not a member of the actual world; he is an observer of it.

Another moment of illumination is suggested in "The Transfiguration," in connection with the first coming of Christ.

Was it a vision?
Or did we see that day the unseeable
One glory of the everlasting world
Perpetually at work, though never seen
Since Eden locked the gate that's everywhere
And nowhere? . . . .

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
Reality of vision, this we have seen.
If it had lasted but another moment
It might have held for ever! But the world
Rolled back into its place, and we are here,
And all that radiant kingdom lies forlorn,
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
. . . but it speaks
To itself alone, alone it flowers and shines
And blossoms for itself while time runs on.

The world of eternity is permanent and fixed, unaffected by the advance of time. It is suggested in "The Labyrinth," however, that the world of time is not completely separated from the world of eternity, but, on the contrary, it is a part of it. The poet at the moment of transcendence in his dream saw the gods on a mountain, while the whole
cycle of life went on:

While down below the little ships sailed by,
Toy multitudes swarmed in the harbours, shepherds drove
Their tiny flock to the pastures, marriage feasts
Went on below, small birthdays and holidays,
Ploughing and harvesting and life and death, . . .

And in "the eternal dialogue" of the gods "all these things were woven." The whole cycle of life becomes a part of the eternal world of the gods.

. . . and this our life
Was as a chord deep in that dialogue,
As easy utterance of harmonious words,
Spontaneous syllables bodying forth a world.

The third part of "The Labyrinth" is a summing up of all the main ideas of the poem. There are clear references to the "real" world of eternity, to the world of time and to the maze. In the opening lines of this part the poet once more states that he has seen the "real" world and that he will always know of the existence of a changeless, permanent world, which sometimes man can grasp momentarily.

That was the real world; I have touched it once, And now shall know it always.

He also knows, however, that . . . the lie,
The maze, the wild-wood waste of falsehood, roads That run and run and never reach an end, will always imprison man. He has discovered that the illusions, the "deceits" of "this one world" are "strong almost as life" and that man, although he might briefly, in dream or trance, escape from the labyrinth of the world, will soon fall into the trap of a new, unknown area of the "endless
maze." This last point is reinforced by the closing lines of the poem where the poet finds himself again in the maze.

Last night I dreamt I was in the labyrinth,
And woke far on. I did not know the place.

It has been previously demonstrated that the labyrinth symbol in "The Labyrinth" stands on the one hand for the world of time and, on the other, for the past and the fable. The world of time, and thus the maze, includes in itself the story and the present, since the actual life of man and the events of the "Now" and "Here" take place in this world, in the "flying race" of time. Moreover, the past and the fable which are also parts of the maze in their changelessness and fixity are linked with the world of eternity as already pointed out.¹ This relation between the past, the fable and eternity does not suggest that the labyrinth is identified with eternity as well; it is only linked with the past and the fable, which are in turn included in eternity. Thus, in this poem the three relationships are actually reduced to one: the relationship between the world of time, which includes the story and the present, and the world of eternity, which includes the past and the fable. It has also been shown that in the second part of "The Labyrinth" the world of time is not completely separated from the world of eternity, that the former is incorporated into the latter. The labyrinth symbol, therefore, serves as a device to

¹ Above, p. 36.
synthesize the three relationships that appear in Muir's poetry as a whole and particularly in The Labyrinth.

"The Labyrinth" is one of the few poems of Muir that progresses dramatically and completes a full cycle, a wholeness, through the growth and synthesizing force of the maze image. Usually Muir’s subjects seem to be static; he is discursive rather than dramatic.¹ For example, in "The Transfiguration," one of the best poems in The Labyrinth, the poet discusses the first coming of Christ, his belief in Christ's second coming and the results that will follow from it, but in these principal metaphors there is no progress which dramatically conveys the idea of transfiguration.

Muir’s poetry is cumulative; it is the whole passage or movement that strikes the reader, not a single line or image.² There are very few lines in The Labyrinth that would affect the reader with startling conceits, although there are a few vivid moments in brief passages:

And the tormented wood
Will cure its hurt and grow into a tree
In a green springing corner of young Eden.

"The Transfiguration"

... and I can scarcely breathe
Here in the guiltless guilt-evoking sun.

"Oedipus"


Set up the bleak worn day to show our sins,
Old and still ageing, like a flat squat herd
Crawling like sun on wall to the rim of time,
Up the long slope for ever.

"Soliloquy"

In "The Labyrinth" there is no single line that would by itself strike the reader. Passages in it, however, are very impressive when taken as a whole. The description of the world of nature, for example, and the description of this world as it reminds the speaker of the labyrinth, are striking (p. 136). In the beginning of this poem Muir accomplishes the construction of a thirty-five line sentence without any forcing of syntax or rhythm. This certainly shows a mastery of technique.

In general, Muir has an objectified dignity and solemnity in his poetry which keep the reader to a certain extent at a distance. To every subject is given an ageless, impersonal and collective quality, which hinders immediate communion between the poet's innermost experience and the reader's sensibility. His preoccupation with eternity, the past and the fable, as well as the frequent use of myth in his poems give a sense of remoteness, a nonhuman quality to his poetry. The same subjects, however,—eternity, past, the fable, myth,—that cause the effect of remoteness on the reader paradoxically serve to uplift and sustain man.
Muir through the three major pairs of themes of his poetry tries to build up man's dignity and faith in himself and in life. He attempts to bring man from "darkness into light." The development of all three relationships leads to one main end: The creation of a sense of security in man. The acceptance of the harmonious co-existence of the world of time and eternity gives man dynamism and optimism, because then he is no longer haunted by the ruinous effects of time on the world of appearances. The realization of the fact that the past is not only a binding force hindering man's actions, but also a stable, fertile source from which man continually receives guidance and support provides him with a feeling of safety. Moreover, the idea that man in his actual life re-enacts the fable and that his own life is important for the life of the fable arms man with courage and self-confidence. Muir, being a great lover of life, successfully attempts through his poetry to make man see life as "a sacrament,"¹ as "a grand and glittering adventure"² which continually awaits man. Such an intense experience makes worthwhile our adventures through the labyrinth of life.

¹Muir, We Moderns, p. 8.
²Ibid.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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