MARIA-ANA TUPAN

BRITISH LITERATURE
AN OVERVIEW
PART I



editura universității din bucurești

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Referenți științifici: ***Prof. dr. Irina PANĂ***
Prof. dr. Lidia VIANU

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Argument

The present survey course covers a timespan of fourteen centuries, tracing the progress of one of the most prestigious literatures in the world. On establishing a great tradition of key texts on an undergraduate course manageable within one year, the author has been faced with difficult choices: whether a comprehensive coverage would be better than an in-depth approach, favouring intense tuition at the expense of wide reading; whether one should think of one ideal syllabus or opt for a realistic one, satisfying both curricular requirements and the amount of information that can reasonably be handled by beginners in literary history and theory. We hope to have untied rather than cut this Gordian knot by including in our canon those texts which are highly representative of each historical paradigm, while being dismissive of those which, although not lacking in literary merit, do no fit into the respective pattern. In this way our students will become aware of the way literature works, of the meaningful design a critical historian will always discover in the apparently chaotic mass of texts makig up a people's literary heritage. It does not necessarily mean that we are going to observe the authority of previous readers, dealing with already classified stuff in a dead museum of literary fossils. As we move back into history, we take the present with us, judging the literary past according to standards of the present, opening new perspectives on tradition and the way it works within our changing horizon of expectations. Our lectures will be little in the way of a "story" or storage of facts, the literary historian being permanently backed by the critic and theoretician. Students are expected not only to amass a certain amount of historical information but also to develop philological skills

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enabling them to identify, when presented with an unknown text, its theoretical and formal (genre, literary convention, rhetorical strategies) features. The new literary history realigns history and aesthetics, exploring the way style develops as an indicator of historical change in the manifold of culture, history and aesthetics. Each main division in the history of English literature from the origins to the present will focus four aspects: a) historical mapping revealing negotiations between literary texts, and non-literary discourses (social, scientific, political, philosophical, etc.) as contexts of culture; b) epistemological frames and tropes supporting the idea of cultural dialogue in a comparative discussion of writings from different periods or "schools"; 3) structural and functional aspects: generic conventions, authority structures, architecturality; 4) genealogy of representations (gendered, classed, and raced) and the historically shifting conditions of their dissemination and reception (including the politics of canon formation).

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THE ANGLO-SAXON FOUNDATION (450–1066)

The shaping of social and political identities. From *aristeia* to *aristobios*: codes of values governing social relationships. Literacy: conditions of composition and dissemination. Elegiac modulation of heroic feeling in the Christian refurbishings of the pagan Scandinavian matter (*Beowulf*). Early medieval sentiment and the negative assessment of life. Generic types: courtly epic, elegies, scriptural and devotional poetry, dream vision, allegorical bestiary, aphoristic and gnomic kinds. Anglo-Saxon prose: chronicles, letters, laws, travel accounts, saints's lives, liturgical books. Beda's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum,* or the teleologic design of medieval historiography.

The term "Anglo-Saxon" has been preferred over that of "Old Englsh" in reference to the Germanic inhabitants of Britain up to the Norman Conquest, as the latter, which has been in use since the seventeenth century, is merely based upon a need for continuity with what went afterwards. However, one should remember that the entire literature that has come down to us from the seventh century to about 1100 is a type of West Saxon, while Modern English is based on a Midland or Mercia type which was almost non-literary **(1). 30,000 lines** have survived from this early period as the fruit of the monks' work in the loth century monasteries. They are treasured in four codices: ***Junius XI*** in the Bodlein library, ***Vitellius*** in the British Museum, ***Vercelly*** (a library in Northern Italy) and the ***Exeter Book***.

Our information of the distant British past is mainly derived from *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* (The Ecclesiastical History of the English Race) written in Latin by the **Venerable Bede** or **Beda** (673–735), a priest who spent most of his time at Jarrow, a Northumbrian monastery. He was also a poet (*A Book of Epigrams*), a scientist (*On the Nature of Things* and *On Time*) and a rhetorician (*The Art of Poetry,* with a small work appended to it: *On Tropes and Figures).*

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The prehistoric populations had inhabited the land for 50 to 250 thousand years **(2)** when, in the last centuries of the Bronze Age, the Celtic tribes made their way to it and settled there mixing up with the natives. Their language was probably first Gaelic, later Britannic, from which Welsh, Breton and Cornish derived. Julius Caesar's expeditions of 55 and 54 B.C. paved the way for the Romans' conquest of Britain (43 A.D. under Emperor Claudius). As a Roman province Britain developed a flourishing urban type of life: forums, schools, theatres, baths, libraries, military roads and camps (*castra*, a word that has survived as a suffix in such names as "Lancaster", "Manchester", etc.). Archeological findings reveal the existence of an orderly civilization, regulated by laws contained in official documents, and of a highly literate society: inscriptions on stone, trade-marks on manufactured goods, letters, wording and images upon coins which might have served as a sort of official propaganda.

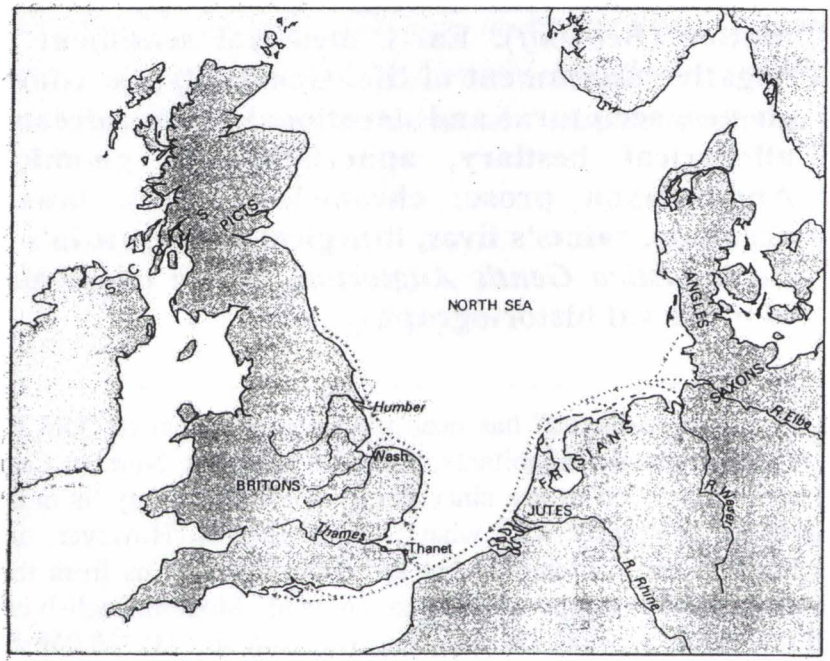


Fig. 1

About 450 A.D. the Romanized Celts were driven west and north by the invasion of tribesmen from the Germanic territory extending from the Rhine to the Elbe Rivers (Old Saxony) and from the present-day Denmark (Jutland and Angulus) **(Fig. 1)**. The language they spoke sprang from that of the Old Teutonic peoples in prehistoric times. At the time of the invasion they spoke dialects of a common language. Old English belongs to the West Teutonic (Germanic) branch of the Indo- European family, and it was related to the North Teutonic languages (Icelandic and Scandinavian languages), to the East Teutonic (Gothic) and to West Teutonic (Frisian and Franconian). The national Germanic alphabet,

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borrowed from the Latin or Greek, was in **runes** (letters of an angular shape), the word itself meaning "mystery", "secret". They were considered to be endowed with mystical powers, the function of communication coming next to that of magic. Odin, the rune-master, was believed to have sacrificed his life in order to learn their use and hidden wisdom. They were engraved (**writan**, which has come to mean "to write") on tablets of wood, staves, coins, weapons, rings, drinking horns, stone monuments. The tablet of wood was called **boc** (book). It was later superseded by a coating of wax scratched with a pointed instrument of metal, parchment or velum (sheep-skin or calf-skin), but it was only in the fifteenth century that paper manuscript, pen and ink-horn became available.

The invaders were organized in small political units, and the chiefs or leaders of the expeditions founded the royal dynasties of the Anglo-Saxon heptarchy, which was later named after the Angles (**Angul-cyn**: "race of the Angles"; **Englisc**): Northumbria, Mercia and East Anglia, populated by the Angles, Kent settled by the Jutes, and Essex, Wessex and Sussex, settled by the Saxons. Originally "Anglo-Saxon" had referred to the Saxons in England, as different from those on the Continent. **(Fig. 2)**. The leading nobles arround the king (retainers) constituted his court, bound by a strong commitment of mutual trust. The Old English for this *comitatus*, mentioned by Tacitus in his *Germania*, was *dright*. The retainers claimed equal lineage with that of the king, who was *primus inter pares*, and was chosen by them. The king made them gifts of land or gold, while they were supposed to defend him in battles and show him loyalty to the death. Family loyalties were also vital. Relatives would avenge one's death or exact the payment of a sum of money (**wergild**) from the slayer, as it was settled by law codes in accordance with the victim's rank.

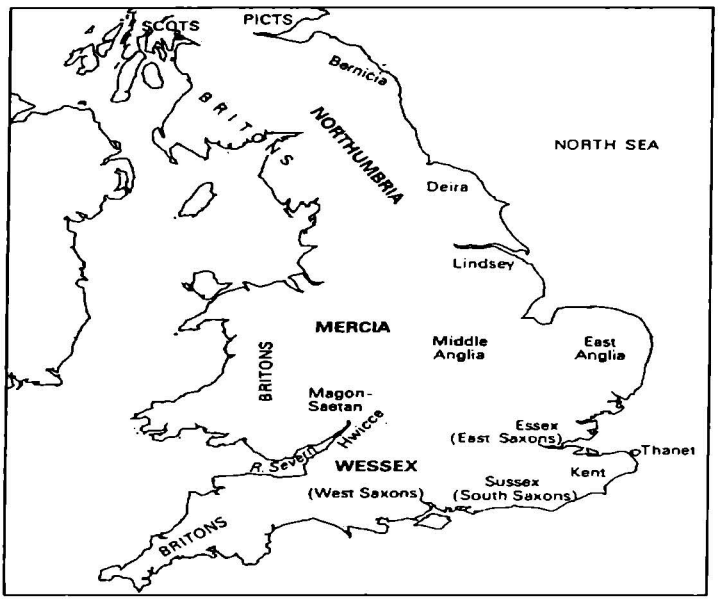


Fig. 2

The Celts had known Christianity through the Roman occupation in the third century, and some of the Romanized Celts in the north and west remained Christians after the Germanic invasion. The conversion of the English was the work of Pope Gregory the Great, who in 597 sent a Benedictine monk, **St**

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Augustine, to Kent, whose king, Ethelbert, had a Christian Frankish queen. On Christmas Day 597 ten thousand people were baptized, following the example of their king, who had been converted but in a few months. **Canterbury** became the seat of the first Englsh bishopric. By the end of the seventh century almost all of the English had been converted, either through the effort of the Irish missionaries of **Aidan** in the north or by Augustine's monks in the south. The difference was that, while the latter disseminated the Roman diocesan tradition, which meant the building of churches for bishops and priests, the monks from Iona in the Hebrides founded monasteries (Lindisfarne, Jarrow, Whitby in Northumbria) in which marvellously illuminated manuscripts and stone crosses were produced. The reason for this remarkable appeal of the new faith might have been that suggested by Beda in his account of the conversion of King Edwin in Northumbria: whereas Fate (**Wyrd**) condemned them beforehand, leading them to their final doom, Christianity offered hope of salvation. Here is Coifi, Edwin's High Priest:

I have long realized that there is nothing in what we worshipped, for the more diligently I sought after truth in our religion the less I found. I now publicly confess that this teaching clearly reveals truths that will afford us the blessings of life, salvation, and eternal happiness (**3**).



Fig. 3

The alliance of Christianity, royalty and writing remained strong throughout the Middle Ages (as in this picture of King Athelstan presenting St. Cuthbert with a manuscript of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* (**Fig. 3**).

However, as revealed by the archaeological excavations (1939) of the Sutton Hoo (East Anglia) royal ship burial in a sanded mound, dating back to the seventh century, the next two or three centuries were a period of transition in which pagan and Christian elements freely mingled. The treasures keeping the corpse company after life coexisted with two silver spoons on which the names "Saul" and "Paul" were engraved (Saul converted to St. Paul) (**4**). C. L. Wrenn also mentions in his book the little box made of whalebone which Bregowine, Archbishop of Canterbury, sent to the Bishop of Mainz in the third quarter of the eighth century (now housed by the British Museum and known as the "Franks Casket"). On each side there are carved

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episodes from Christian history, from ecclesiastical Roman history, and from Germanic heroic legends, with descriptive notes in runes. Such historical circumstances are of great help in any approach of that "melting pot" of heterogeneous elements out of which English literature emerged. As the Latin alphabet travelled with Christian missionaries, the Germanic runes made room for the Roman rustic capital of St. Augustine's monks, later superseded by the Latin half-uncial hand, brought over by the Irish monks – a character of great beauty and precision. Three runes were still preserved to render sounds for which there was no graphical correspondent in the Latin alphabet: **w**, **th** (thorn) and **eth** (this). The manuscripts, of calf skin or sheep skin, were so precious that, in the Middle Ages they were fastened with chains to the shelves (**Fig. 4**).

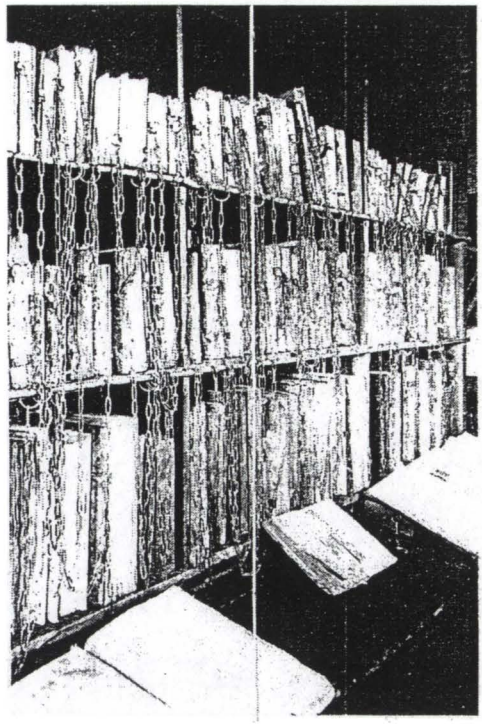


Fig. 4

Popular Literature

The most elementary forms of expression known to the ancestors of the Anglo-Saxons, while they were still on the Continent, were associated with the experience of the community as a whole: forms of work, magic rituals, the socialization process (educating the young in order to help them fit into the patterns of communal life).

The **mnemonic inscriptions** on jewels or household objects usually make known the workman's skill or his patron's name. The oldest runic inscription was dug up on the German-Danish border in 1734 (dated about A.D. 400): *ek Hlewagastir Holtigar horna tawido* (I Hlewagastir Holting made this horn). Sometimes the inscriptions take the form of ***prosopopoea*** or ***personification*** (the object itself is made to speak): *Aelfred mec heht gewyrcan* (Alfred ordered me made).

The **memory verses** were meant to keep alive a knowledge of laws and genealogies (**thula**). They were often included by professional poets in their recitations before the warriors, rekindling the memory of the race, reviving the history of the tribe that was handed down orally, from generation to generation.

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The **wise saying** (**gnomes**) comment sententiously on weather and crops, on the forces of nature and the behaviour of people, at times displaying a genuine touch of poetic imagination:

shall mingle its waves.
as sailyard shall stand.
shall be on one's bosom.
in a cave with its riches.
shall bring forth their kind.
shall deal out treasure.

A stream with the sea
The mast on a boat
A sword – lordly iron -
Old dragon shall live
The fish in the water
The king in the hall

The perfectly balanced clauses, with a pause for breath in the middle (the modern translations of Old English texts observe the main characteristics of the Anglo-Saxon metre, based on stress, caesura and alliteration), point to a stable world of preordained things, reaching out to eternity in its *status quo*. Realistic observation makes room for fantasy, as is the case with those primitive times when people believed that gods still trod the ground, and controlled man's destiny. The **gnomic situation**, therefore, may be known either from actual experience (that of the migratory sea-raiders) or from fairly-tales, which enjoyed an equal share of belief (the dragon hiding a treasure in his den). Action is conditioned by social position and the **values of a heroic society**. The king is expected to be liberal in gifts to a trusty band of followers, from whom he was to receive loyal service in case of war, as well as to the minstrels who chanted and played songs to the harp in the **mead-hall** (the hall where the king and his warriors gathered together and the mead – an alcoholic drink from honey and water – was served).

The **charms** were meant to control the course of nature, ensuring fertility of cattle or fields, keeping off rain falls and droughts. Their structure achieves a sort of hypnotic effect through repetition (the doubling of subject, or elementary imperatives). The Christian heaven was shaped by popular fantasy in the image of everyday realities, saints (here, one named "Garmund") being conceived of as "thanes" (retainers, followers) of God. They could be called upon to recover stolen goods – like any benign spirit of the primitive world of magic – or to punish thieves, as reads the following charm:

Garmund,
Find the cattle
and guide the cattle home.
Let him never have any land,
nor any earth,
nor houses,
Should anyone do so,

thane of God,
and lead the cattle,

he that may lead it away,
he that may take it away
he that may keep it away
may it never prosper for him!

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Pagan deities coexist with Christian saints as products of an archetypal imagination that works in a similar way in various parts of the world, e.g. Woden, a serpent killer (like Apollo battling with the Python or St. George killing the dragon), and Erce, an earth goddess of fertility, reminiscent of the Greek Gaia:

A worm came creeping *he cut at a man,*
Then Woden took *nine glory-rods,*
then he struck the adder *so it burst into nine.*

.....

Erce, Erce, Erce, *mother of earth,*
may the all-ruler grant thee, *eternal lord,*
fields that are growing *and flourishing,*
increasing *and strength-giving*

Courtly Epic

Old English professional writing has only been preserved in copies compiled, in general, by Christian monks, years after their composition. The definite time when these works were produced or the names of their authors are, therefore, a matter of conjecture. Even the pagan tradition emerged reshaped by the monastic scribes, so that we may say that all English writing is Christian. Another conspicuous aspect is the early redaction in the vernacular, preceding by several centuries any form of such writing in the rest of Europe, which was dominated by the Latin of the Church. The earliest example of Old English vernacular is Ethelbert's code laws (c. 600).

In his often quoted book, C.L. Wrenn makes an attemp at identifying those general features of Old English culture which were "carried over from one age to the next" (**5**):

a) a love of ordered ceremony and ornament;
b) a genius in conservation of tradition;
c) gnomic moralizing, and
d) a remarkable power of adaptive assimilation.

We tend to subscribe to all of them, unless the point is stretched too far. On page 12 we can read: *most of the intellectual aspects of Anglo-Saxon culture are derived rather than original, practical rather than creative.* It may be true that Greek and Latin writing (particularly patristic) had provided formal matrices, but these were emptied of their original content and creatively adapted to Anglo-Saxon realities and modes of sensibility. The need for form may inhere in a people's sensibility as the option for a certain literary norm, but it does not necessarily imply lack of originality. If the poetic arts of the Roman-Greek antiquity had defined art as that which ***delights and instructs***, the Anglo-Saxon words for "poet" define artistic creation as a ***form-giving and an entertaining*** activity. They are **scop** (from OE *scieppan*:"to create, form, shape") and **gleeman**

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(from OE *gleoman:* "joyman, musician"). As far as the prose of the time is concerned, it may indeed be *practical rather than creative*, yet it would be unprofitable to ignore it in a discussion of poetry, for which it provided competing and nourishing discourses.

The **epic poetry** is replete with allusions to the legends of the *Völkerwanderung* – the great tribal migrations of the 4th – 6th centuries. The ***prevailing motifs*** are those of the code of values characterizing a heroic age: loyalty to the death, blood revenge, treachery, and exile. From the point of view of the humanity they foreground, there are important differences among them. The *Battle of Finnesburh*, e.g., a 48-line fragment about the defence of a small group of Danes captured in the hall of Finnsburg and attacked by King Finn of the Frisians, is more characteristic of the continental heroic saga (*Niebelungenlied, Chanson de Roland*), with its stress on action and disregard of motivation and moral characterization. In counterdistinction to them, *Beowulf* – the earliest and the only complete Germanic epic – which was probably composed in the first half of the eighth century, displays a ***monumental composition***, with moving, atmospheric descriptions, vivid portraits, dramatic scenes, and meditative passages, probing into heroic or supernatural adventures, reclassified as heroic and moral drama. The red thread of the Danish matter is, at a closer look, woven round the controversy between King Hrothgar's subject, Unferth, and Beowulf, their Geatish saviour, around the issue of true courage versus empty, boisterous tirade. Which be the difference between "foolish boast", or the barbarous display of physical strength and the imposition to abide by one's vows ? Or, between competitive vanity and gratuitous exercise of martial impulses and the testing of heroic virtues that can propitiate even the hand of undaunting Fate? Here is Unferth's reckless challenge:

Are you the Beowulf who competed with Breca,
vied with him at swimming in the open sea
when, swallen with vanity, you both braved
the waves, risked your lives on deep waters
because of a foolish boast ?

Beowulf rewrites the ethos of the primitive migratory tribes, swelling with Achilles's anger and fierceness, in a new key, attuned to the binding constraints of honour, faith and duty to one's people. :

.... Breca and I made a boast,
a solemn vow, to venture our lives
on the open sea; and we kept our word.

Moral qualities can change one's destiny for the better, by tilting in his favour the scales of the higher powers presiding over mankind:

... Fate will often spare
an undoomed man, if his courage is good.

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There is here a very delicate poise between the predestination of pagan Wyrd and the new possibility for judgement, which Christianity would open up to man. The pagan view is doubled up by the scribe's changed religious background.

Finally, the exercise of martial qualities is necessary in the process of socialization. Beowulf's fight with whales and other monsters had prepared him for the confrontation with Grendel, while Unferth's lesser courage and skill were responsible for his land being devastated and his fellow Scyldings (Danes) being killed in the mead-hall. While Unferth had slain his brothers and kinsmen, Beowulf had fought the evil in the world for the protection of the human kind. :

... For that deed, however clever
you may be, you will suffer damnation in hell.
I tell you truly, son of Ecglaf,
that if you were in fact as unflinching
as you claim, the fearsome monster Grendel
would never have committed so many crimes
against your lord, nor created such havoc in Heorot.

Loyalty to the lord and to one's kin has got the upper hand over primitive enjoyment of triumphant martial enterprise. The verbal contest is later tested and Beowulf's promise is made good. Unferth lacks the courage to descend into the lake sheltering Grendel's mother, thereby losing "his renown for bravery". He makes over to Beowulf his beautifully wrought sword, as a token of repentance and recognition of "his better as a swordsman".

Beowulf. Form and Structure

The 3138 lines in alliterative metre draw on events occurring about A.D. 500, incorporating an impressive body of Scandinavian historical episodes as well as folk legends, including the *Finnesburh* fragment. The elements indicative of English civilization would be the use of the harp, the existence of the king's council (*witan*) and of a paved road in the Roman fashion. Anyway, there are textual markers of differences between the time of action and that of narration. The narrator's distancing device is meant to show that things have changed since those pagan events. Christianity is the great issue at stake:

At times they offered sacrifices to the idols
in their pagan tabernacles, and prayed aloud
to the soul- slayer that he would assist them
in their dire distress. Such was the custom
and comfort of the heathen; they brooded in their hearts
on hellish things – for the Creator, Almighty God,
the judge of all actions, was neglected by them.

The text is a very complex one, primarily through this double perspective on events: that of the characters taking part in the action and that of the Christian

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narrator who interpolates his own commentaries. In what way did the change work? It is obvious from this very fragment. Whereas Fate is a must, to be accepted as final doom, whereas the pagan god will slay souls, the Christian God will judge and redeem them: moral values are added.

Leisurely elaboration and expansion by mean of episodic miscellaneous matter became important factors in the retelling of the original stories. Hand in hand with such fashioning of the legends into a poem of epic proportions went a spiritualizing and Christianizing process. A strong element of moralization was mingled with the narrative: the characters became more refined, the sentiment softened, the ethics ennobled. Beowulf rose to the rank of a truly ideal hero, and his contests were viewed in the light of a struggle between the powers of good and evil... **(6)**

Two types of material went into the making of the epic. On the one hand, historical characters, Scandinavian chieftains, attested by documents. On the other, there is the supernatural realm of fairy- tales: water-monsters, fire-spewing dragons who establish kinship with Biblical characters (the monster Grendel is a descendant of Cain). The epic develops an elaborate superstructure through inserted set pieces, such as descriptions and formal speeches.

The epic opens with an appeal to the audience for attention (*Listen!)*, which reminds us of the oral character of all early literature, meant to be recited and to impress the auditory sensibilities of the public. Old-English prosody is a powerful reminder of the oral character of the composition and dissemination of all early literature. As a consequence, it relies heavily on sound patterns for capturing the attention of its auditors. Alliteration (the repetition of the same sound in stressed syllables) and other auditory effects are an essential part of the metrical scheme. The line is divided by a caesura into two half-lines of approximately equal length, with two stressed syllables in each. The sound in the first stressed syllable of the second half-line gives the alliteration for the entire line. The number of unstressed syllables (as different from regular European metre) varies from one line to another, which lends this metre a much more flexible and unrestrained quality. The verses were intoned or chanted, usually with harp accompaniment. The favourite trope is **antonomasia** (a kind of compound metaphor or paraphrase, describing a thing instead of naming it) better known under its Irish name as **kenning**. For instance: *land-dwellers* for "people", *bone-frame* for "body", *house's mouth* for "door", *heath-rover* for "stag", etc. This is a sort of Adamic speech, which appropriates an unknown world, an enigma for the searching mind. The favourite rhetorical strategy is **antithesis**, the same primitive mind usually apprehending or representing reality through sharp contrasts.

The story is broadly that of the Danish king Hrothgar's conflict with Grendel, a monster, of whom he rid himself with the help of the Geatish hero, Beowulf. Even in the redaction of the late tenth century, which is the oldest extant manuscript, the formulaic phraseology and structure of a pagan scop's epic can easily be traced. The poem starts in the usual fashion, with the genealogy of

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Hrothgar, going back to an ancestor, Scyld Scefing, whose glorious life is remembered by his people at the hour of his death. The pagan ritual of the body being entrusted to the sea on a ship piled with weapons and treasures was unrefutably confirmed by the Sutton-Hoo excavations. The reigns of Scyld's son and grandson are quickly passed over, and we are brought to Hrothgar, the son of Healfdene. Hrothgar's building a majestic hall, Heorot, in which to entertain his retinue, has something majestic about it. It is a demiurgic act of ordering a work of art into being, somehow resembling God's creation of the world (the two events are textually related):

to build his henchmen
a master mead-house,
that ever was seen

It came in his mind
a hall uproar,
mightier far
by the sons of earth.

.....

Wide I heard
for many tribe
to fashion the folkstead.
in rapid achievements,
of halls the noblest:

was the work commanded
this mid-earth round,
It fell as he ordered,
that ready it stood there,
Heorot he named it.

As the building of the hall reminds one of the *Urbild* (Genesis), God's archetypal creation of the world, it is subsequently *mise-en-abyme* in the minstrel's song, as if in an endless process of re-figuration:

tales of the early
how the Almighty
fairest fields
set, triumphant,

He sang who knew
time of men,
made the earth,
enfolded by water,
sun and moon...

The heavenly and the earthly are once more brought into union through the motif of the fall: just as Cain's murder of his brother brought doom upon mankind, so did the seed of evil in Heorot (the king's feud with his son-in-law) result in misery for his people (Grendel's raids on his hall of thanes, whom he kills and carries away). As the code of loyalty requires it, Beowulf from Geatland (South Sweden) comes to the rescue of Hrothgar, who befriended his father in youth. Although not lacking in courage, the "grizzled and old" Danish king can no longer be expected to save his people in single combat with the hellish monster, as was the custom in a heroic society. Beowulf is young and a proved hero, who has fought monsters in the night and won perilous contests (swimming in the open sea, braving the roaring waves).

Beowulf crosses the sea, accompanied by fourteen thanes, who, on the way to Heorot, present a dazzling show in their minutely described war apparel.

The road was paved; it showed those warriors
the way. Their corslets were gleaming,

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the strong links of shining chain-mail
clinked together. When the sea-stained travellers
had reached the hall itself in their fearsome armour,
they placed their broad shields
(worked so skilfully) against Heorot's wall,
Then they sat on a bench; the brave men's
armour sang. The seaferers' gear
stood all together, a grey-tipped forest
of ash spears;

In the light of the heroic code, the virtues celebrated in the guests are not humility or the endurance of wretched exiles (which would have gratified a Christian moralist) but "stern-faced" determination and proud quest of ambitious adventures. Here is Wulfgar, one of Hrothgar's warriors, who welcomes them:

You must have come to Hrothgar's court
not as exiles, but from audacity and high ambition

The rest of the moral paradigm is to be inferred from Beowulf's settlement of his combat with Grendel: the monster is a perfect "rascal", because he refuses the use of weapons, like any civilized man, fighting with his hands, like a beast, yet Beowulf is to confront him on equal terms, as it suits a noble thane. That means alone, sparing his followers' lives, and open-handed. The guests are warmly entertained by the king of the Danes, his queen and their thanes. During the night, the monster bursts into the hall, which has been left to Beowulf and his men, killing one of them. Beowulf, without armour or weapons, puts Grendel to flight, after mortally wounding him. During the banquet in honour of Beowulf and his victory other famous heroes of the past are brought to the memory of those present. The Geatish hero receives gifts from Hrothgar and a valuable necklace from the queen, which Beowulf will give to his king, Hygelac, on his return home, being in his turn rewarded with a sword and a large share in the kingdom of the Geats.

During the next night, Grendel's mother comes to avenge her son's death, carrying off the king's chief councillor. Beowulf follows the monster into her den in a pool, apparently connected with the sea. The description of the place is exceptionally moving and atmospheric, conveying all that abysmal terror which the migratory people ought to have felt, as they advanced into new territories, with Death grinning at them from behind every tree or rock. Grendel, making his appearance from the gloomy, misty crags, or his mother, hunted down into the deep waters on which flames dance at night, are embodiments of atavistic fears of people constantly facing the unknown:

Untrod is their home;
by wolf-cliffs haunt they windy headlands,
fanways fearful, where flows the stream
from mountains gliding to gloom of the rocks,

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underground flood. Not far is it hence
in measure of miles that the mere expands,
and o'er it the frost-bound forest hanging,
sturdily rooted, shadows the wave.
By night is a wonder weird to see,
fire on the waters. So wise lived none
of the sons of men, to search those depths!

Beowulf kills the monster and severs the head of Grendel's corpse he finds in the cave, bringing it to his companions as a trophy. After the death of Hygelac and that of his son at the hands of the Swedes, Beowulf succeeds to the throne proving the "kindest, the most just and the most eager for fame" king that has ever been. In old age he gets one more chance to prove his courage and self-sacrifice for the good of his people. As a fire-spitting dragon is ravishing the land, he decides once more to meet the inhuman enemy in single combat. It is only Wyglaf, a young thane whom he loves as if he were his son, that helps him in his final battle, while the other warriors prove as "empty and idle" as Hrothgar's in his old age. Beowulf kills the dragon, but he himself dies from the wounds he receives. The king's body is burnt on a pyre, and the remains are covered by a huge barrow, the dragon's treasure being placed in it. The poem comes thus to a round end. Beowulf's fame, just like that of the ancient Scyld, outlasts his brief journey on earth as the only immortality granted to man in pagan times. The complexity of this gem of ancient poetry may be inferred not only from the substantial body of critical comment it has enjoyed so far, but also from the contradictory opinions ventured by various commentators. It has often proved a stumbling-block for reputed critics, and it is still open for revaluation.

In a famous polemical essay, entitled *The Monster and the Critics (1936)*, R.R.Tokien identifies the following general design: *essentially a balance, an opposition of ends and beginning. In its simplest terms it is a contrasted description of the two moments in a great life, rising and setting; an elaboration of the ancient and intensely moving contrast between youth and age, first achievement and final death.* But Beowulf's final victory over the dragon is also an achievement, the more commendable as it is bought at the cost of his life. Is the ***temporal dimension of existence*** al there is at stake? From this point of view, the poet asserts no difference between the hero and the dragon – one more "enemy of mankind":

Beowulf paid
the price of death for that mighty hoard;
both he and the dragon had travelled to the end
of this transitory life.

They ***both*** are mortals. Time is their common enemy: Beowulf is destroyed by a fifty-foot serpent at the end of a fifty-year- reign. But Beowulf has rescued the treasure from his non-human antagonist. Much has been made of the hero's lust for

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gold: *When a king seeks treasure himself, the cost may be ruinous for his people. Hygelac's Frigian raid and Beowulf's dragon fight are examples. Although Grendel's cave is rich in treasure, Beowulf takes away only a golden sword hilt and the severed head of Grendel: his object is to gain revenge, not treasure. Hrothgar's speech to Beowulf after his return contains warnings on pride in heroic exploits and on the ease with which gold can make a man stingy, hoarding his gold like a monster* **(7).** There seems to be a general misunderstanding about Beowulf taking away a sword from the monster's den. On reading the text more attentively, one can see that the "long-hilted sword" with patterned blade is Unferth's gift to Beowulf, possessed of magic powers, like the rest of the armour he is wearing on diving into the pool. The blade melts when flooded by the poisonous blood of the monster, so Beowulf can recover the hilt. The treasures in the cave are not described, as different from the very special treasure which Beowulf recovers from the dragon, whose symbolism offers the key to the understanding of Beowulf's final acts. We need not complain about "some master key, lost since Anglo-Saxon times" **(8),** since the comprehensive reader is inscribed in the very texture of the poem. Does Beowulf decide to fight the dragon alone because he means to lay hands on the treasure for his private use? He is convinced that the salvation of his people depends on him alone, and he bravely takes it upon himself, even in the eventuality of giving his all, for he does not rule out the possibility of Fate deciding again him:

This is not your undertaking, nor is it
possible for any man but me alone
to pit his strength against the gruesome one...

As for the treasure, he humbly thanks God for having been able to gain it "for the Geats":

With these words I thank
the King of Glory, the Eternal Lord,
the Ruler, for all the treasures here before me,
that in my lifetime I have been able
to gain them for the Geats.

As far as the treasure itself is concerned, its chief value is its immortality: it *will survive its owner... whosoever hidest it!* What else makes it invaluable? It is not a hoard of solid gold, coin or other market-value goods. It is primarily the work of *people of old* – the testimonies of human endeavour and craftsmanship, still to be admired in the *rusty helmets*, in the *cunningly wrought* armlet, in the *standard fashioned with gold strands,/ a miracle of handiwork.* Their value does not inhere in the material substance, it is not a given; it is "created ", "fashioned", added to nature by man's skilled hand. We think we can identify, throughout the epic, a permanent opposition between nature and civilization, a theme which runs, like a red thread, through the entire subsequent history of English literature. Antithesis pits the joyful

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human companionship in the mead-hall – a shelter of humanity, of sharing songs, and stories of old, and memories of valuable works – against the threatening, dark, ragged landscape out of which Grendel emerges in his progress to Heorot. People in the banquet-hall enjoy music, poetry, and conversation. Grendel is only seized with irrational anger. The mead-hall is a space of mutual generosity. Everybody has something to share with the others. The jewels, the gifts are only outward signs of admiration, loyalty, devotion. Grendel or the dragon hide such treasures meant to be shared in their *earth-half.* In vain, the poet remarks, would anybody expect Grendel to pay wergild for the warriors he murdered, as a token of remorse, as was the custom. Of the physical traits of characters, either human or monsters, we know next to nothing (apart from sturdy looks or daring attitudes, or the terrifying effect of Grendel's mother's "infernal" aspect). Instead, the finely wrought pieces of armour are minutely described and implicitly celebrated. As the *poet* of an epic speaks in the name of the race, it is obvious that the Anglo-Saxons took justified pride in their civilization: *in Western or "Latin"-cultured Europe the Anglo-Saxons were pioneers and leaders in such material arts as sculpture, metal-work, and textile embroidery throughout their history, as well as in penmanship and literature* **(9)**. When the world picture and the hierarchy of values pertaining to a particular historical time are misunderstood, we can get distorted explanations for human action, like the following: *All turns on the figure of Beowulf, a man of magnificence, whose understandable, almost inevitable pride commits him to individual heroic action, and leads to a national calamity by leaving his race without mature leadership at a time of extreme crisis, facing human enemies much more destructive than the dragon.* (*Beowulf the Hero and the King*, an essay by John Leyerle – 1965). The question is: are they not facing the outcome of their flight from the devastating raids of the dragon? Is not the new "crisis" brought about by the peculiar circumstances of Beowulf's death? That a hero ***was supposed*** to risk his life the poet tells us plainly. As for Wiglaf's gloomy prophecy, he is literally putting it down to the warriors' cowardice at the time when Beowulf mostly needed them. The king's former generosity is contrasted with the unworthiness of his *faithless men* who well deserve Wiglaf's *angry words for cowards*:

Too few defenders
rallied round our prince when he was most pressed.
Now you and your dependants can no longer delight
in gifts of swords, or take pleasure in property,
a happy home, but after thanes from far and wide
have heard of your flight, your shameful cowardice,
each of your male kinsmen will be condemned
to become a wanderer, an exile deprived
of the land he owns. For every warrior
death is better than dark days of disgrace.

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Recent approaches (among them, Father McNamee in his article, "*Beowulf – An Allegory of Salvation*, and Alvin A. Lee, *Symbolic Metaphor and the Design of "Beowulf"* **(10))** interpret the poem as an allegory of the Christian story of Salvation, with Grendel's defeat as the embodiment of its core, the descent to the mere as the Harrowing of Hell, and the fight with the dragon as the death of the Saviour. R.E. Kaske (*The Governing Theme of "Beowulf" – ibidem)* is right in asking the following question, but wrong in his answer: *what are we to make of the apparently fatal objection that whereas mankind is saved by the death of Christ, the Geats are doomed by the death of Beowulf? I would suggest that in this final decisive difference we are to see the* raison d'être *of the entire analogy. The champion Beowulf, in life reminiscent of the champion Christ in various aspects of his wisdom and power, is in the end revealed to be not God-man but man, his death not a supernatural atonement but a calamitous natural phenomenon* **(11).** In our opinion, Beowulf, inscribed in a numerological pattern suggestive of a Christ figure (**fourteen** companions, saving the Danes after ***twelve*** years of wretchedness, having his heroic life exalted by ***twelve*** worthy warriors who ride round his tomb), justifies the analogy to the end. In *Matthew* 23:29-37, Jesus prophesizes that the murder and persecution of God's messengers will fall upon the Pharisees and their homes will be laid waste. Not all the Geats will be "homeless" but only those who betrayed their lord's trust. While faltering in his mythical interpretation of the epic against a Christian background, R.E. Kaske is most effective, however, in his discussion of the heroic ethos of "sapientia et fortitudo" as a common epistemological link between *Beowulf* and other works produced by the same culture: Statius Dares of Phyrgia and Dictys of Crete, the *Chanson de Roland.* Beowulf is *wise and stout-hearted*, and, according to Hrothgar, *governing with all his strength and in the wisdom of his heart.* The Christian poet himself had the "wisdom" to observe the mentalities and phraseology of the time he looked back to, while manipulating a sophisticated parallel with his own time, to make the story intelligible for his contemporaries. This mythological framing takes us from a cosmogonic myth towards a Last Judgement ensuring both punishment for betrayal and immortality for the hero's soul which, unlike his body, has not been destroyed by the dragon.

Margaret Anne Doody mentions a tenth-century copy of *Beowulf* that has a copy of the Alexander romance annexed to it. The author was an anonymous Greek writer of Alexandria, who based his romanticized version on *The Life and Acts of Alexander of Macedon*, ascribed to Callisthenes, a court historian. Alexander's letters to his mother and to his tutor, Aristotles, who is said to have taught him the *Psalter*, mention his journey to the end of the world and his discovery that the pagan gods were burning in hell, while salvation was possible in the Christian heaven. His invitation to Indian King Porus to confront each other in single battle in order to spare their armies, as a token of his responsibility to his subjects, as well as the Christian rewriting of pagan matter may have influenced the treatment of the *Beowulf* epic, as well as the later romances about King Arthur and his knights **(12)**.

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Courtly Lyric

Social relationships occasioned by the patterns of communal life (even Wyglaff assists his king in battle not out of an individual commitment but as a kinsman and a thane) are foregrounded in *Beowulf*, while personal relationships (Beowulf's marriage, feelings of friendship or love) are completely neglected. The same holds true as far as the "lyric" poems are concerned. The quotation marks are restrictive, as this poetry is only lyric insofar as it is the personal expression of a single mood. Reflexivity is held in check by an early awareness of form and literary convention. In *Widsith*, the poet is actually building his mask as an Anglo-Saxon scop of the seventh century, as a social institution, with a certain career and repertory.

Among members of the military caste there were certain talented warriors who undertook to entertain their fellows in the mead-hall with songs covering a set range of themes or topics: glorifying leaders, urging to combat, or to revenge, mourning the brave who fell in battles. They were rewarded by their patrons with gifts of gold or land, the relationship being the same as the one which held between the lord and the retainer. The economic ties were, however, doubled by feelings of reciprocal affections, and such relationships occasioned the only ***love poetry*** of the heroic age. With one notable exception (the elegiac *Wolf*), it is not earlier than the feudal twelve century, under Norman and Latin influence, that we can trace expressions of love between the sexes in England.

Widsith is a wandering type of scop, the name being maybe a kenning rather than the actual one („he who travels far"). Kemp Madone in *The Old English Scop and "Widsith"* even speaks about "author" and his "hero" as two distinct persons **(13)**, and the narrative framing introducing Widsith's song defends his reading. The famous scop is afterwards allowed to speak in the first person. His speech – which might be considered the first dramatic monologue in English literature (the poet speaking in the guise of a "persona") – displays a five-part structure: an introduction boasting his professional skill, three *thulas* (nomenclatures, the names of princes and heroes, some of whom are celebrated in *Beowulf*) accompanied by his comments which testify to his historical knowledge, and a conclusion proclaiming the poet's pride in the power of his songs to render immortal the people and events of the transitory life on earth.

A companion piece is *Deor*, which introduces the theme of the ***rival poet***, to be found later in Shakespeare's sonnets. The appearance of a more gifted poet could lead to a loss of the patron's favour and gift of land. The poet seeks in stories of former misfortunes, whose pain edged off in time, comfort for his present distress. As the poet speaks about himself in the past, we have a feeling that he is not so much expressing his present grief as somehow writing a poem-epitaph, framing his figure as Wyrd's victim for the ages to come.

> *... once I was a scop of the Heodeningas,*
> *dear to my lord. Deor was my name.*
> *For many years I had a fine office*

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and a loyal lord, until now Heorrenda,
a man skilled in song, has received the land
that the guardian of men first gave to me.

The confident, narcissistic self-assertiveness of Widsith has yielded to an **elegiac** mood. This kind of poetry, growing alongside heroic poetry, expressing regret for the loss of a person or a position, takes the particular form of the **lament**. C. L. Wrenn (*Op. cit.* pp. 140-141) divides the Old English **elegies** into two categories: those nearer to the Old Germanic tradition in point of diction and style, and those which are *clearly the work of poets, probably ecclesiastics, who use the commonplaces of Christian Latin allegorical teaching and familiar Latin devices of rhetoric*

In the first category, he includes such poems as *The Ruin, The Wife's Lament* and *The Husband's Message.*

The Ruin is the first topographical poem in English, the reverse of an *encomium urbis*, as it bemoans the collapse of the works of civilization (probably, of Bath) under the Germanic invaders. The *ubi sunt* lamentations for the fall of ancient cities in the late Roman Empire might have served as a model, yet the phraseology is akin to that of *Beowulf (wrecked by fate... the work of the giants is perishing*).

The Wife's Lament and *The Husband's Message* are usually associated, although they may not have had the same author. They refer to common social conflicts at the time (conspiracy among relatives, exile) while the riddling effect and condensed metaphors draw on Germanic rhetoric. The husband has been banished for plotting and murder, and so has been his wife, to an earth-cave, by his kinsmen. The poem is cast in form of **prosopopoeia**: the rune stave on which the husband's message to his wife is carved is made to speak. Part of the message is encoded in runic letters which need to be explained. The runes apparently stand for *sun-path-ocean-joy-man*, which might be interpreted as: "Take the southern path over the ocean, and there you'll find joy, as your man is waiting for you".

Important changes occur in the other group of elegies, "contaminated' by the spirit and diction of patristic writings. The native genius of creatively adapting alien models is here fully manifest. Pagan Anglo-Saxon realities coexist with the Christian matter and rhetoric. Love is still the bond between the lord and his retainer, that manly attachment which Shakespeare would call a "marriage of true minds", uniting the poet to the fair youth of the sonnets. Here is the Anglo-Saxon "Wanderer":

A man who lacks advice for a long while
from his loved lord understands this,
that when sorrow and sleep, together
hold the wretched wanderer in their grip,
it seems that he clasps and kisses

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his lord and lays hands and head
upon his lord's knee as he had sometimes done
when he enjoyed the gift-throne in earlier days.

The way in which man apprehends his relationship to the conditions of existence, and, consequently, the signifying practices are being subverted by the new values of an increasingly Christian world. *The Wanderer*, as a poem produced by an age of transition, is innerly torn between the two matrices of thought. Providence (God's mercy) and blind Fate (Wyrd meaning "what will be") seem to have cast dice and won man either for the afterlife or for his brief journey on earth, respectively:

Often the wanderer pleads for pity
and mercy from the Lord, but for a long time,
sad in mind, he must dip his oars
into icy waters, the lanes of the sea;
he must follow the paths of exile: fate is inflexible.

Only nine lines below, man's predicament changes again. Even during his earthly life it has become possible for man to withstand Fate through *fortitudo*, which is no longer that of the body but that of the mind able to control the passions of the heart:

The weary in spirit cannot withstand fate,
a troubled mind finds no relief:
wherefore those eager for glory often
hold some ache imprisoned in their hearts.
Thus I had to bind my feelings in fetters,
often sad at heart, cut off from my country....

While the world picture is a movable one, the sense of the importance of ordered discourse remains constant with the English poet. Had not the author of *Beowulf* imaged the antagonism between man and the earth-bound monsters as that between the **patterned** blade of a sword and the **form-dissolving** effect of their life-blood (and not just that between steel and flesh)? The scene of the heroic Anglo-Saxon society is recast in the rhetorical mould of the Ovidian and Chrysostomic **(14)** *ubi sunt*, as the creative act means participation in a structure of ceremonious address and formulaic speech:

Where has the horse gone? Where the man? Where the giver of gold?
Where is the feasting place? And where the pleasures of the hall?
I mourn the gleaming cup, the warrior in his corslet,
the glory of the prince.

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The very idea of exile has broadened into an allegory of the soul's pilgrimage on earth. The exile no longer seeks one more lord or patron, but *the Father in heaven, the safe home that awaits us all.*

With *The Seafarer*, ***exile*** is charged with more Christian connotations: it has become a ***choice*** in view of redemption, *peregrinatio pro amore dei.* The dreary picture of the loneliness and hardships of life at sea shifts into the joyous image of nature waking up in spring – an objective correlative of the pilgrim's spiritual rejuvenescene. The destitute Anglo-Saxon seafarer willingly metamorphosizes into the Christian pilgrim, confident in the "Strength" of his Soul:

He thinks not of the harp nor of receiving rings,
nor of rapture in a woman nor of worldly joy,
nor of anything but the rolling of the waves;
the seafarer will always feel longings.
The groves burst with blossom, towns become fair,
meadows grow green, the world revives;
all these things urge the heart of the eager man
to set out on a journey, he who means
to travel far over the ocean paths.

The characteristic Anglo-Saxon tropes (*the whale's domain, the whale's way*) and atmospheric descriptions are now pasted on the Leviathan world of sin. Such works produced at the origins of English literature most persuasively reveal it as a fortunate combination *of the discipline and fulness of the classical heritage with the freedom and energy of the North* **(15).**

The love of mystery and enigmatic expression bore fruit in the **verse rid-dles** (thirty one have survived unburned and unscarred out of the original ninety-six that were once contained in the Exeter Book), some of which were modelled after Latin forerunners (Eusebius, among others). They are not catch-questions but semi-metaphorical riddles, such as occur in the *Koran* and in the *Bible*. They might also be described as extended kennings, communicating some hidden, coded meanings about familiar objects in the everyday world (plough, anchor, weathercock, key, book), people, or natural phenomena. The hermeneutic situation polarizes the assertion of reality's intriguing and puzzling appearance ("I saw a strange creature"...) and the process of making meaning out of it. The reader is expected to decipher the code:

A creature came shuffling where there sat
many wise men in the meeting-place.
He had two ears and only one eye,
he had two feet and twelve hundred heads,
a back, two hands, and a belly,
two shoulders and sides, a neck,
and two arms. Now tell me his name.

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Being possessed of two feet and two hands, the creature would appear to be human. He has *twelve hundred heads*, yet he does not belong with the group of "wise men". Contrariwise, the "one eye" would rather point to a deficient vision, a mental infirmity. Could the spiritually blind, "one-eyed merchant" of the decaying, commercial West in T.S. Eliot's *Wasteland* be looking back to this Anglo-Saxon "one-eyed seller of onions" ?

Christian Lyric

Christian matter, as we have seen, went into the making of much Old English poetry, yet only some of them drew explicitly on the Bible and Apocrypha, on hagiography and homilies, being also cast in the mediaeval continental convention of a "dream-vision". This was based on a belief, that during the night man's mind is relieved from the siege of the noisy earthly show. Pope Gregory the Great, made known in England not only in the original but also through King Alfred's translations, provided in his *Moralia* a somatic support for St. Augustine's express belief in the virtues of a life of contemplation as against one of action (*The City of God*): *The voice of god is heard in dreams when with a tranquil mind there is quiet from the action of the world, and in this silence of mind divine precepts are perceived* **(16).** However, Caedmon's *Hymn of Creation*, which marks the beginning of English literature, appears to have sprung from personal rather than bookish experience. Beda's account (17) of the first English poet ascribes him a status different from that of the Anglo-Saxon scops, who took twenty years to learn their *metier*: *For himself had learned the art of poesy not through men nor taught by men: but he had received the gift of song freely by divine aid. Wherefore he could never make anything of frivolous or vain poetry, but only those verses which belong to piety, which were becoming to that religious tongue of his.* Caedmon was a simple herdsman, who had been shyly deserting his company every time the harp reached him, out of an inability to sing. One night he had a dream in which a strange man commanded him to sing "of the beginning of created things", and, to his amazement, he discovered he could do it. On waking up, he added other verses "in the same rhythm and metre". It was during the abbacy of Hild at Whitby (658-680), who received him into her community as a monk, encouraging him to write more religious poetry in the vernacular. Caedmon did write poems drawing on *Genesis*, the *New Testament* and visions of Doomsday. Here is the nine-line **hymn** which shows that the God in Cadmon's dream possessed a Germanic scop's lore of kennings, doubled subjects and half-lines…:

Now shall we praise
the might of God
work of the Glory-Father
the Eternal Lord
He first created
heaven as a roof,
the heaven-keeper's warden,
and his mood-thought,
as He of all wonders,
established the start.
for the children of men
the Holy Creator.

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Next the middle realm *the mankind's ward -*
the Eternal Lord - *afterwards fashion*
for men of the earth, *the Ruler Almighty.*

From **Aldhelm**, who enjoyed an immense reputation in Wessex, no writings have been left behind. Apart from Caedmon, only the name of one more poet of the time is known, as it was signed in runes at the end of four extant religious poems, assigned to the late eighth or early ninth century: *The Fates of the Apostles, Christ B, Juliana,* and *Elene.* Although apparently conversant in both the classical and Christian traditions, **Cynewulf** too is indebted to the tradition of secular heroic epics. *The Dream of the Rood,* whose composition started from some words engraved in runes on the famous Ruthwell Cross, is also attributed to him because of a similarity of style The poem combines the Christian dream allegory and the Germanic handling of prosopopoeia. The poet sees in a dream the Cross on which Christ was crucified and hears it speak forth. The cross, bright with gold and jewels but stained with blood, doubles the level of significance: it is a concrete object but also a "beacon", symbolizing spiritual triumph over the death of flesh. Its story, from a tree felled in the woods to the living symbol of Christ"s Victory, is an allegory of the entire earth's redemption through the Crucifixion. A pagan frame of mind might have been unconsciously assimilating Christ to a fertility ritual, and the scene of God's followers, seated at a feast "in eternal bliss", to the Germanic Valhalla. The poem is most impressive in its gradual revelation of the awesome identity of the Cross, colour symbolism, pathos of the Cross' anguished speech, and animistic vision of the entire nature being seized with agony.

Some of the manuscripts in the Exeter Book and the Vercelli Book are attributed to the Cynewulfian School, authorship being uncertain. Cynewulf established the monastic tradition of the early ninth-century (Wessex, according to Wrenn, "probably Mercia", according to Kevin Crossley-Holland, 1982) – based on a Christian Latin education, homiletic and didactic –, which has survived in the Classical Anglo-Saxon of late ninth-century Wessex. However, the **Advent Lyrics** in *Christ A* are close enough to Cynewulf's style to be sometimes associated with the *Christ B* (the *Ascension*) manuscript. These poems, based on antiphons (pieces sung responsively by alternating choirs in Church), straddle the lyric and the dramatic, preparing the way for the medieval religious drama. The best known is a dialogue between Joseph, who expresses his moral doubts about Mary's pregnancy, and her explanations about the Annunciation (the birth of "the child of God").

Allegory is also the rhetorical strategy of the medieval **bestiary** (fables of birds and animals endowed with moral qualities). The Latin translation of the Byzantine *Physiologus* had disseminated the animal allegory with moralizing and Christian didactic purposes throughout medieval Europe. In Anglo-Saxon poetry, this literary mode is represented by *The Panther, The Whale*, and a sixteen-line fragment (believed to refer to the partridge). The Panther, at war with the dragon, conveys that West-European image of God as both destroyer and redeemer

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(unlike the East-European benign, forgiving God). The manner of *The Whale* is more specifically allegorical, in its vacillation between literal meaning and emblematic guise. The poet imagines a crew who mistake the back of a whale for an island, anchoring on it at dusk. During the night, the whale sinks, drowning them. Allegorical interpretation and grave moralizing are immediately added:

Such is the method of demons,
the way of the devils who, by dissembling,
deceive the troop with magic powers:
they tempt them from good works with trickery,
lead them a dance so that sadly they seek
solace from their enemies....

The Byzantine hand had set the mode for the eager Anglo-Saxon poet to follow. The "remarkable power of adaptive assimilation" is to be seen in one more animal poem, which completes the allegorical picture of the elements (water, earth, air): *The Phoenix,* by a poet of the Cynewulf School. Its text, of 677 lines, is divided into two complementary parts: a free adaptation of the Latin *Phoenix*, attributed to Lactantius, and a Christian interpretation. The story of the Arabian bird's death and rebirth is made into an allegory of humanity falling from a happy condition, experiencing the Flood and finally emerging purged and redeemed through apocalyptic fire.

The holy writs are filtered through the recent memories of migration and colonization. Social realities steal into the divine drama of sin and retribution. In the *Genesis* (Junius XI), Satan is "chief of the angels" who, like some rebellious chieftain in the service of one of the kings in the heptarchy, has sinned through pride and greed. He had demanded "to have a home and a throne in the northern part of the kingdom", to partition with God the mansion of the heavenly kingdom. The barbarous "bragging", "boasting", "splendour" and "beauty" are broken and blotted, and the "rebellious army" is sent upon a long journey. Exile, which was the supreme misfortune of the lordless Anglo-Saxon, well matched the hardships of the "journey" to Britain, still lingering in the memory of the race. The making of Adam and Eve sounds like some other episode in the story of the settlement: God was *to resettle the realm with pure souls...*

The *ubi sunt* lament shifts back to *encomium*; the poet no longer exalts "works of the giants" but the tombs of the holy people that had turned *Durham* into a city of "the man of God", serenely awaiting Doomsday. This **topographical poem**, composed shortly after the uncorrupted body of St Cuthbert (a disciple of Bede) was moved into the newly-built cathedral (1104), is the last example of Old English traditional versification. The swiftly-flowing river with fish dancing in the foam, the *rocky slopes*, the Edenic abundance of animals, the liberal expanse of sprawling, *tangled thickets* convey the same grandeur and unstained purity as the city's historical memories and holy relics. A settled people had managed to tame the adversities of monster-breeding nature, making it its propitious home.

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Anglo-Saxon Prose

The earliest examples of Anglo-Saxon prose are generically linked with the narrative of history, and redacted in Latin: *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum (HE)*, produced in 731 by the Venerable Bede, doctor of the Catholic Church and, probably, the most celebrated scholar of his time, and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

In his argument on his sources, method, purpose and structuring of material, Bede expounds the double nature of the medieval historian's enterprise. On the one hand, the accurate tracing of events, "as I have been able to ascertain them from ancient documents, from the traditions of our forebears, and from my personal knowledge"; on the other, the theological orientation of his project, helped along by his knowledge of "the venerable Fathers" of the Church: "to comment on their meaning and interpretation". The imposition of some divine teleology and the anagogical gloss are indispensable to the medieval writer, as we can see, whether he is writing from his own experience or from imagination, whether he is writing verse or prose.

The HE was composed in the context of Bede's Scriptural commentary. Scripture provided Bede with the paradigmatic medieval historical narrative, and the Catholic commentary tradition offered Bede a way of understanding the role of history in the scheme of salvation. (**18**) According to Stephen J. Harris, as a priest of Wearmouth and Jarrow, the author 's aim was chiefly to demonstrate the meaning of historical events within the overall scheme of mankind's salvation. Particularly, the salvation of his own race. Bede relates the notion of race to that of salvation, in accordance with the Scriptural account: the chosen Jewish people and the Jewish faith. He relies upon the story of a famous episode associated with the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons, which was current in the Anglian oral tradition and had also been entered into the Whitby chronicle. It was said that Pope Gregory had been prompted on his work of converting the Angles after having seen two boys exposed for sale in a Roman market. The Pope thought they were destined to be saved, on account of their fair, angel-like complexion (*candidus corporis)*, their language – king Aelle's name was an incipient *Alleluia* –, and their home, Deira (one of the early kingdoms), which seemed to convey the providential urge of saving them from God's wrath (*de ira*). In accordance with the current symbolism at the time, physical beauty, as we read in a letter sent by Boniface, an Anglo-Saxon monk to his disciple Lull, was considered a symbol of God's beauty or even of God's wisdom. Bede goes through all lengths to cast an allegorical net over his historical record, pointing in an allusive manner to the providential design underwriting man's pilgrimage on earth. His own prayer is that God, who had imbibed his words with divine knowledge, would eventually admit him in his presence: "the Fount of all wisdom".

In like fashion, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* ascribes a providential meaning to all major events. The Vikings' first raids, for instance, are said to have been

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prophesied by "dire portents": *immense whirlwinds and the flashes of lightening, and fiery dragons were seen flying in the air.* The battle of Hastings was also preceded by "a sign in the skies... a long-haired star". In **Gildas** and in **Nennius** (two Welsh chroniclers writing in Latin), Aurelianus Ambrosius (the national hero, Arthur, who had managed to gather all the Romano-Britons under his command) was victorious in the battle of Mons Badonicus against the invading Anglo-Saxons, as he was carrying the Virgin's image on his shoulders.

Writing in Latin benefited by the models of a consummate rhetorical tradition. Britain of the first millennium created a new model for prose, in the current, native idiom.

For all the criticism brought up against Anglo-Saxon prose ("clumsy", "utilitarian". "didactic"), the existence of a prose tradition of various use (from epistolary to philosophical) in the vernacular some centuries before any other in the rest of Europe remains an extraordinary fact. *Gloria mundi gentis anglorum* passed in turn from Northumbria (seventh century) to Mercia (eighth century) and from here to Wessex (ninth century). Responsible for this whimsical fate were the raids of the Danes who by 87o had conquered Northumbria and Mercia. It was **Alfred the Great**, King of the West Saxons from 871 to 899, who managed to beat the Danes several times, restricting their rule to a territory called "Danelaw" and converting King Guthrum to Christianity.

The king initiated a national program of education and reforms, in the attempt to restore the heptarchy to its former glory, when English missionaries made a name for themselves in Europe (Boniface, who christened the Germans, becoming their bishop in 675, Alcuin, the learned councillor of Charlemagne). In the late ninth century, the necessity was felt for the teachers themselves to be taught, as the clergymen had so much decayed that few understood any Latin any more. Following famous examples (the Greeks translating the *Old Testament*, the Romans translating from Greek), King Alfred undertook to forge an Anglo-Saxon idiom for liturgical, geographical, legal and philosophical works. He translated Pope Gregory's *Cura Pastoralis* (Shepherd's Book) which he sent to every bishopric in the country. His "Legal Code", having a historical introduction (explaining the legislator's need for precedent, which was found in the Mosaic Law) and an introduction proper, sets out to deal out justice indiscriminately to the rich and to the poor. Drawing on travellers' accounts of the North, the King added his own information to a translation of *Historia adversus Paganos* – a compendium of world history and geography by a fifth-century Spanish monk. The fatalistic bent of the Anglo-Saxons found an affined expression in the sense of an overruling fate, which pervades the works of the philosopher Boethius, imprisoned by the Ostrogothic king Theodric. Alfred translated his treatise redacted in prison, *De consolatione philosophiae*, which had an enormous impact upon English writing. To it, he added Augustine's *Soliloquies* (a treatise on God and the soul), *De Civitate Dei* (extolling the virtues of a life of contemplation as against one of action), and *De Videndo Deo*.

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On the king's injunction, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (the monks' record of important events committed to the pages of the Easter Tables) abandoned Latin for the vernacular after 891.

In the hands of **Aelfric** (955-1020), a monk in Oxfordshire, the English prose vernacular became flexible enough to mix *utile dulci.* He recovers the visualizing quality of traditional epic descriptions and the auditory effects of alliteration. Particularly moving is his account of *The Passion of St. Edmund* – the king of the East Angles martyred by the Danes for having refused to give them wergild. St Edmund became the second (after St. Alban) patron saint of England, being later superseded by Edward the Confessor, Thomas à Becket and St. George.

Aelfric's **pastoral epistles, homilies, saints' lives** display a formal tightness which proves that the road from poetry to prose has been smoothed out.

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THE MIDDLE AGES
(1066–1500)

The symbolic world of the Middle Ages. The Authority discourses of Church and Castle: multilayered medieval allegory and a medieval lover's discourse. Literary kinds (romance, dream vision, bestiary, estate satire, sermon, confession, moral tract, *fabliau, dits amoureux, dits de Fortune, danse macabre, de casibus* stories) and conventions (framing devices). King Arthur's knights and the code of chivalric values. The voices of subversion. William Langland: satirist and preacher. Geoffrey Chaucer, or "God's plenty" breaking out of medieval confines. Medieval drama poised between eschatology and contingency.

The Middle Ages is a period well-defined by the **Norman Conquest** (1066) and the **Reformation** of the Church (1533-1559). The arrival of the Norman conquerors led by William meant the end of a heroic society and the onset of the feudal age. The change had actually started before, as early in the century Wulfstan, Archbishop of York (1003-1023), was already composing a dirge on the loosening of bonds between thane and thrall, father and son, and on the impending collapse of the traditional values of the patriarchal way of life. In any event, it was only after the Anglo-Saxons' defeat by the Norman Gauls, with their different social grammar, that the personal relationships, which could be felt also as natural and affectionate ***bonds*** between king and thane, thane and thrall, began to be rapidly replaced by a rigid and complicated social ***hierarchy***. Being a "bond person" no longer meant "loyalty"; it meant lack of freedom and of the means of personal economic sustenance. The civil hierarchy of king and peers (duke, marquis, earl, viscount, baron) and a middle stratum composed of knight, squire and burgess (well-to-do citizens, who could be elected to Parliament), and the ecclesiastical hierarchy of prelates were towering haughtily above the majority of the population made up of peasants (franklin, yeoman and husbandman) and serfs (tied to the land, with no right over it). The *Domesday Book*, a survey of the land and its inhabitants, compiled by order of William I in 1085-86, leaves no doubt

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about the king regarding them as his own possessions, thus revealing the mercantile nature of the power-relationships informing the entire social edifice: *Patronage was lucrative. Men offered money in order to obtain what the king had to offer: offices (from the chancellorship down), succession to estates, custody of land, wardship, and marriage – or even nothing more concrete than the king's good will. All of these were to be had at a price, and the price was negotiable* **(1).** According to the Book, half the value of the country was in the hands of less than two hundred men. Power and wealth were accumulating at the centre of the feudal state. Another power structure still retained forms of patriarchal gender and age discriminations. A "Roll of Ladies, Boys and Girls", dating from the administration of Henry II (1154-1189), mentions Lucy, the widowed Countess of Chester, who offered the King 1,500 marks for the privilege of remaining single for five years. No wonder that at a time when both marriage and being single were equally subject to taxation we should find the following comment in the *Dialogue of the Exchequer* (1170) by Richard FitzNeal, Bishop of London and Treasurer of England: *the power of princes fluctuates according to the ebb and flow of their cash resources...*

Obviously, such a cold-blooded scheme did not work a favourable impression on those – the greatest numbers of the population – called upon to provide for their betters. Therefore, the dominant classes worked it into a fiction: A sermon delivered in 1370 by Bishop Thomas Brinton of Rochester supplemented the hierarchical view of society with a more organic view of the interdependence of its estates. *We are all,* he says, *the mystical members of a single body, of which the head (or heads) are kings, princes and prelates; the eyes are judges, wise men and true counsellors; the ears are clergy; the tongue is good doctors. Then within the midsection of the body, the right hand is composed of strenuous knights; the left hand is composed of merchants and craftsmen; and the heart is citizens and burgesses. Finally, peasants and workers are the feet which support the whole* **(2).** Once triggered, imagination was quick in producing other seductive images of the organically compounded social body, giving everyone an impression of being needed to fulfil some providential scheme: the kingdom as a well-trimmed garden or as a well-run bee-hive, as we can read in a fragment of 1751 lines of alliterative verse, composed under Henry IV (entitled *Mum and the Sothsegger* by its first editors, M. Day and R. Steele, 1936). Not only images but also literary forms and conventions were inspired by this social outlook: *dits de Fortune* and *De casibus* stories, which bemoaned changes in the social hierarchy (from high to low social position) attributing them to the whims of Fortune, on the one hand, and, on the other, *estate satires* and *danse macabre,* which presented a general picture of all social estates, engaged in a vivid repartee, acting for a common purpose (devotional or economic) or sharing the same metaphysical destiny (all being subject to Death).

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1066 was the beginning of a long period of French influence, during which the native language was replaced by Latin in the theological and ecclesiastical discourse and by French as the language of statecraft, civil record-keeping, entertainment and schooling of the new aristocracy. Beyond everyday speech, English was only employed in oral instruction, i.e., in sermons or addresses from the pulpit to a congregation that did not understand Latin. The native language was thus deprived of the necessary exercise of accommodating new ideas occurring in theology, politics, law etc. The influence of the dominant French culture was reinforced by the Angevin conquest of 1153-4. Henry I (1100-1135), who had succeeded to his brother, William II (1087-1100) had been left without an heir after his son's death. His daughter, Empress Matilda (so called on account of her first marriage to the Emperor of Germany) was married a second time to the much younger Geoffrey Plantagenet (a nickname describing his coat of arms), Count of Anjou. Their son, Henry, who married Eleanor of Aquitaine (previously married to Louis VII of France) became King of England (Henry II, 1154-1189). From King John (1199-1216), who succeeded to his brother, Richard I (Coeur de Lion, who spent most of his time crusading or on his domain in France), after getting rid of his nephew Arthur, the legitimate heir to the throne as the son of an elder brother, the English Royal House descended in straight line through Edward I (1272-1307), and Edward II (1307-1327) to Edward III (1327-1377). The French properties of the English kings and their claims to the crown of France were the cause of the one-hundred-year- war between the two countries. The family policy of Edward III saw to it that his numerous sons held in their power the entire kingdom: Edward, Prince of Wales, who did not live to see the end of his father's long reign, Lionel, Duke of Clarence, John of Gaunt, Edmund, Duke of York. Apparently, another son, Thomas of Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester, was killed on his own father's command, out of his partiality for Richard, Duke of Kent (the son of the Prince of Wales, the valiant Black Prince), who became King Richard II (1377-1399). With the usurpation of Richard by Henry Bolingbroke, Duke of Lancaster (after John's death), the fratricide War of the Roses began. The House of Clarence, united in time through marriage ties to the dukedoms of York (having a white rose as its emblem) and Gloucester and the earldom of March, launched a coalition against the House of Lancaster (the red rose). After the successful reigns of Henry IV (1399-1413), and Henry V (1413-1422), they finally managed to defeat the weak Henry VI (1422-1461), and to put Edward of York on the throne (Edward IV, 1461-1483). The cunning schemes of Richard, Duke of Gloucester, including the assassination of his brother, George, Duke of Clarence, and of his nephew, Edward V (1483), won him the throne in 1483. His defeat (in the famous battle of Bosworth, 1485) by Henry, Earl of Richmond, (a descendant of Owen Tudor of Wales, married to the widow of Henry V) marked the end of the war, as Henry's marriage to Elizabeth of York sealed the peace

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between the two houses. Richard III was the last Plantagenet, the last of the Angevin dynasty. Henry VII (1485-1509) founded the Tudor dynasty (Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary, Elizabeth I), which saw England through the exceptionally flourishing period of the Renaissance, and that meant, as anywhere else, the assertion of the national spirit. But the French spirit had long been extinguished, yielding to the native. In the middle of the fourteenth century, Henry, Duke of Lancaster, wrote a devotional treatise (*Le Livre de Seyntz Medicines*), apologizing for the quality of his Anglo-Norman French: *par seo qu jeo suit engleis* **(3).**

The Anglo-Norman society may be said to have been a literate one, considering that tens of thousand writs were produced, not only for learned people but for day-to-day transactions as well; e.g. eight million charters confirmed the land ownership of smallholders and peasants alone in the 13th century. Whereas in the Anglo-Saxon period a seal had been only the King's privilege, each landowner was now possessed of one. Although people were passing from an oral society to an extended participation in literacy, literary compositions were still meant for an oral, social enjoyment. Mixed assemblies of people would sit about one hearth (not only in the gorgeous dining-halls of peers or prelates, but also under the modest roofs of smaller owners and cultivators of land), listening to readings by private individuals or performers of songs, ballads, romances, mummings, shows, interludes, moralities etc. Even when such compositions were committed to writing, the manuscripts remained in private ownership (sometimes multiplied and disseminated among the patron's acquaintances). The fact was of great import, both in point of rhetoric (the emphasis upon auditory effects and the visualizing potential of the artistic medium), and in that of the manuscripts' chance of being known among a wider readership or of survival. There was no such thing as the homogeneous discourse and the unifying literary consciousness that collects at a certain time (Chaucer, Langland and the *Gawayne* poet, although contemporaries, may not have known each other, which resulted in their widely diverging discourses), and we may suspect that lots of manuscripts have been lost, considering that a masterpiece like *Sir Gawayne* has only come down to us thanks to the chance survival of ***one*** manuscript.

The literature of the entire period was controlled by the power discourse of the dominant ideologies. The paradigms map the three traditional estates of medieval society: the seigniorial, the spiritual, and the agricultural. Those constituting official **authority** were the first two: the discourse of the **church** disseminating received ideas (*auctoritates*) in hosts of homiletic, hortatory writings, and didactic poems, and the discourse of the **aristocracy**, reifying the images they constructed of themselves, codified as chivalry and courtly love (romances and lays). The agricultural communities welcomed the homely tradition

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of the humorous *fabliaux,* Arthurian legends, as well as the legends of the East (those of the Holy Rood contained in the Jewish legends, the *Book of Adam* and the *Book of Enoch,* an Old English version of *Apollonius of Tyre* wooing the king of Antioch's daughter by solving a riddle narrated in Chap. 153 of *Gesta Romanorum*), Oriental stories of magic and wizardry, which were brought to England by crusaders, and by warriors, ecclesiastics and statesmen visiting the great abbeys (St. Alban). The crusades had stirred an interest in the fabulous East which, alongside the institution of chivalry and the mystic symbolism of the Church, entered into the melting pot which produced the modern romance (12th century).

All these discourses knew dynamic exchanges of their semantic energies, literature being very far from autonomous at the time when English came in its own right (thirteenth-fourteenth century). Education was largely responsible for stimulating moral and religious anxiety, even in works of the imagination, created for entertainment.

By 1220 Oxford and Cambridge had been established as seats of learning. They taught as main subjects theology, philosophy, science, poetry, but also much pastoral work: compendia of dogma and ethics, series of model sermons, improving stories, saints' lives, paraphrases and explanations of the books of the Bible. The hermeneutic work on the doubly-articulated language of the New Testament, the structure of the sermons – the most widely-spread form of preaching – helped shape an awareness of multi-layered discourse.

In his authoritative book on *Medieval Imagination* **(4), Jacques Le Goff** comments on the double temporal structuring of an *exemplum.* On the one hand, in order to grasp the interest of the listener/reader, the preacher passes off some anecdote, brief narrative, for recent experience (*audivi, vidi, memini*): this is real, this is no vain talk, it may happen to you any time. On the other, he produces a diachronical narrative, looking back to official authorities (*exempla, auctoritates, rationes,* quotes from the Scriptures) and forward to the end of the world (the time of redemption) – that is, set in eschatological time. Finally he returns to the present moment, trying to persuade his auditors into starting on their work of redemption that very moment (*hodie*). The **medieval discourse** is **hierarchical,** just like the social structure, or the heavenly hierarchy of God on his throne and his angelic company of various degrees.

Northrop Frye, in his *Theory of Symbols* (*Ethical Criticism*), describes the medieval four-level scheme of meanings in a hierarchical sequence, in which the first steps are comparatively elementary and apprehension gets more subtle and rarefied as one goes on. It is not a sequence of meanings, in fact, but of contexts or relationships in which the whole work of literary art can be placed, each context having its characteristic *mythos* (narrative) and *ethos* (characterization), as well as its *dianoia* or meaning **(5).** Frye's word for these contexts and relationships is "phases". Not only allegory but also framing devices produce independent layers of meaning. In Chaucer, for instance, the prefatory phases or the closures

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usually subvert the meaning of the framed narrative, which draws on some pre-existing source, therefore we find rather improper the comparison of this structural technique to that of Gothic architecture, where the various juxtaposed "panels", "masses" and "blocks" do not comment on one another **(6)**.

Medieval Lyric

The linear perspective of a totalitarian society, as was that of the late Middle Ages, streamlined writing practices, even if they were springing from different sources: lay and religious, the seigneurial Castle and the dogmatic Church. In time, they merged into a common tradition, with hybrid generic figures, like the errant knight whose secret love is Virgin Mary (see poem 85 in the Harley 2253 manuscript, collected in Herefordshire and written in a timespan of about half a century, between the late thirteenth and the early fourteenth centuries). The love-quest, the traditional topic of the *chanson d'aventure*, is further purified from the idealistic, non-marital love of the courtly lays, in order for the rider to "cast out fleshly lust" and fuel the sombre teachings about mortality delivered from the pulpit:

Though bright and fair of face you be,
Decay shall fade your flowers.

For almost two centuries after the Norman Conquest, the vehicle of poetry was Norman French or Latin. The male tradition is usually one of stern admonishing, arduous praise, particularly of Virgin Mary, and of self-conscious pride in literary achievement which served the higher purposes of devotion (see poet **Richard's** eulogy of "the finest verses of our time", in poem 74 of the same collection). Famous is *The Love Song of Friar Thomas de Hales*, written around the year 1270 by a Franciscan, the most liberal religious order which did not reject love of nature and beauty or the secular art which could serve God's greater glory. **Friar Thomas** undertakes to write "a lover's lay", as a troubadour used to do, in the romance tradition, yet sending forth a different message: let the lady forfeit worldly deceit and vanity and betroth herself to Christ in a convent. The following picture of the knight-at-arms deceived by love and withering away like meadow grass may have inspired Keats in his refurbishing of a French poem by Alain Chartier (1424), *La Belle Dame Sans Mercy*:

The thanes who once were fierce and bold
Have gone like wind upon the gad;
Beneath the ground they moulder cold,
Like meadow grass which withers dead.

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With its double scheme of worldly trivia pitted against a spiritual heaven, this poem might also have lingered in T.S. Eliot's mind on writing his *Love Song of Alfred Prufrock.*

As the vehicle of sacred learning in the Middle Ages, Latin must have sounded like a firm anchorage for the vernacular. In the following example of **Macaronic** poetry – verse written in two or more languages –, hymn and prayer combine to produce a meditation on the Nativity as humanity's progress from destruction to salvation through Mary, summed up in the key Latin words:

Well he knows he is your Son.	
Ventre quem portasti;	*whom you bore in your womb*
Your prayers to him he will shun,	
Parvum quem lactasti.	*whom as a baby you suckled*
So kindly and so good he is	
That he has brought us all to bliss	
Superni	*of heaven*
And shut for ever the foul abyss	
Inferni	*of hell*

Marie de France, whose twelve Lais have been treasured in the Harley manuscript, was probably a Plantagenet Princess and Abbess of Shaftesbury in the late twelfth century. She puts forth no proud claims of authority and originality, reserving for herself the modest role of interpreting and glossing what the ancients "assez oscurrement dissaint". Her poetry is, however, counter hegemonic, effecting a reversal from *estoire* to *conte*, from the written tradition to the oral Breton lays, from Latin to Anglo-Norman, from monologic to heteroglot narration. As Eva Rosenn says in *The Sexual and Textual Politics of Marie's Poetics*, she was privileging marginality in all respects.

A more relaxed attitude, far from the strictly religious assumptions and dogmas, can be seen in the miscellaneous secular poems of the time, for instance in this poem from the Harley Manuscript about "The Man in the Moon". Associated with Cain, as the humanly shaped patch in the moon appears to be wearing thorns, or with the man in *Numbers* XV, 32-36, stoned to death for gathering sticks on the sabbath, this popular figure of the English folklore invites in this poem commiseration rather than the abhorrence of evil. He is one of the wretched of the earth, impoverished by his bundle of sticks, frozen and paralysed with fear for having trespassed property or for some other transgression of the law („half crippled with dread"). The speaker takes pity on him and imagines a humorous scene in the homely country life, which might release the Man in the Moon from his pledge to the bailiff:

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Your pledge may be taken, but bring home your boughs:
Put your other foot forward and stride out free:
We'll pay host to the bailiff here in the house,
And make him at ease in the highest degree.
We'll give him strong drink till his spirits rouse;
Our housewife will pleasantly sit on his knee,
And when he's as drunk as a drowning mouse,
We'll take back the pledge from the bailiff, you'll see.

The Man gives no reply, as he is imprisoned in his fear of authority, like the sluggish Man in the Moon, choosing wrong idols and masters in Shakespeare's *Tempest*, instead of the true redeemer.

As the young aristocrats enjoyed private tutorship, the students of Oxford and Cambridge were usually middle class – sons of the gentry, burgesses, priests, clerks. There is a liberal tradition in medieval verse, for instance in the political poems produced in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. *The Song of the Battle of Lewes* (1264) is antimonarchic and antiabsolutist, supporting the cause of Simon de Montfort, whose endeavours finally led to Parliament, which limited the king's power. *On the Death of Edward III* is a patriotic poem, allegorizing the state as a ship bereft of its rudder after the powerful king's death. The war with France had created new wealth and had shifted the balance of power. Next to the king, who had secured the whole nation's loyalty, is placed the House of Commons, while the Lords is as "out of sight and out of mind" as the country's glory under Edward III, now that he is dead:

The Commons, by the cross on high,
I liken to the vessel's mast,
Who with their wealth and property
Maintained the war from first to last.

By the end of the thirteenth century the military suppression of the Albigensian and Waldensian heresies had silenced the more unorthodox voices, while the Provencal royal house of the cult of woman, of love and gallantry had symbolically collapsed. It was the decay of the baronial class, on account of the loss of labour caused by the Black Death (1348) that had allowed of the rise of the bourgeoisie and of a renewed confidential tone among the "Commons" in the next century.

In the late fourteenth century subversion takes the form of social satire (Langland, Chaucer), parody of courtly romances (Chaucer), and the transformation of the hegemonic discourses themselves, which are now appropriated by merchants and farmers. The romance, for instance, is rendered familiar, centred on the home, thematizing the common duties of the marital couple, united in a more egalitarian domestic bond (see the Franklin's *romance* in *The Canterbury Tales).*

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Deceptively democratic is the argumentative or debate tradition of the Middle Ages, which, in fact, served the official code of values. *The Thrush and the Nightingale* is a debate poem, opposing the Thrush's misogyny to the Nightingale's defence of women.

Each of them brings in arguments for and against woman's worth, and it is the Nightingale who makes her point by bringing up the issue of Mary who had washed away Eve's fault.

The Owl and the Nightingale, a poem in the vernacular from the second half of the thirteenth century, in French octosyllabics (one of the earliest examples of the shift from alliterative to regular metre), combines the tradition of the **bestiary**, in which birds and animals are endowed with moral qualities (ethos), with that of the French **débat.** The dialogue between the two birds reads on a second, allegorical level as a dispute between a disciple of Eros and a didactic, patronizing priest.

A dialogical form (the popular and the theological) may be identified in a dream-vision allegory, *Piers Plowman*, whose three surviving versions have been recently dated in the 1370s. Of the author of the poem, **William Langland**, we only know what the poem tells us: that he was born in the Midlands, was educated at the Benedictine school at Malvern passing afterwards to London, where he dedicated himself to a professional writer's career. Written in the popular tradition of the ***alliterative verse***, the poem imposes upon us its theological design through a characteristically medieval handling of allegory and prologue framing.

In the prologue, the author tells of his falling asleep and dreaming that he beheld a "field full of folk", going about their daily work, within the space between the Tower of Truth and the Valley of Evil (Death). The setting is at once local and universal, descriptive and allegorical, defining humanity as engaged in a perilous pilgrimage, leading to either doom or salvation. The dreamer – who is dressed like a shepherd, passing judgement on what he sees like a priest or Christ, who are Shepherd figures, blends his account of a society plagued by deceiving friars, merchants and pardoners with a pageant of allegorical figures, which is a comment on the former: Falsehood and his companion, Lady Mead (Reward of Bribary), surrounded by Flattery, Simony, Guile and other sins, more or less deadly. The poem is divided into sections of unequal length, called "passus", while, thematically, it falls into two parts: *Visio* of Piers Plowman, which is a satire of social sins and an exhortation to cure them, and *Vita* of Piers, which shows three forms of the good life, sought under the names of Do-Well, Do-Bet, and Do-Best. These blessed states invite a reading on three levels: literal, moral, and anagogic. Do-Well means living a good life, in accordance with the precepts of the Church, and the practice of Charity – the supreme Christian virtue. Do-Bet is the state which finds its consummation in active religious commitment: preaching to the people. Do-Best is humanity which, having grasped the essence

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of Christianity, is reformed in its spirit, and merges with Christ. Piers, the busy and dilligent farmer, assumes the task of assisting the seven Deadly Sins on their way to repentance (*Passus V*). Their dramatic monologues render them exceptionally vivid, through the details of physical appearance, manners, dress, habits etc. The "visio" of Sloth, for instance, impersonated by an idle priest, looking dirty, shabbily dressed, in love with good food and other worldly delights, illiterate and forgetful of his duty makes us quite oblivious of the allegorical convention. The next metamorphoses of Piers place him within the contexts of the Christian ethos. On one occasion, when the narrator falls asleep again, he has a vision of *Chrystes passion and penaunce.* The "old folks" are now those who have been redeemed through the Crucifixion, singing *Gloria laus* and *osanna.* And who should show up, in a resplendent show, local and universal, medieval and mythic, but Piers himself ? Langland sees him at the climactic point of medieval ceremony, like a knight who comes to be dubbed, "without spurs or spear", but also "semblable to the Samaritan", and, through a third expansion of the allegorical design, barefooted on an ass – a Christ figure. The authoritative Derek Traversi is mostly aptly describing the *allegorical design in its full medieval form (implying) the capacity to see a situation simultaneously under different aspects, each independent and existing on its own level, in its own right, but at the same time forming part of a transcendent order in relation to which alone its complete meaning is to be ascertained* (7).

At the end of a mid-fifteenth-century manuscript of *Piers Plowman*, containing only the first four *passus,* there is a fragment of 93 lines (8), *Mum, Sothsegger (Shut up, Truth-teller)*, which was edited by W.W. Skeat as *Richard the Redeless* and attributed by him to Langland. Apparently it was composed in the last year of Richard's rule, referring to his misdemeanour, under the influence of unworthy royal favourites, and making a splendid allegory of the jewels in the crown as the desirable virtues in a king (a meaning mediated by the metaphysical symbolism of gems in the *Revelation*). The narrative persona falls asleep and comes to an idyllic garden, with fruit coveted by men, children and ladies alike. The gardener explains to him how he keeps the garden free from weeds and caterpillars. The garden is an allegory of Eden, the earthly Paradise which can be regained, if only man will allow the Sothsegger in his heart to speak the truth.

John Burrow Longman included in his 1977 anthology of *English Verse. 1300-1500* a fragment from a later manuscript, dealing with the government under Henry IV, telling the king another cautionary tale on the necessity for the king to be told the truth. The manner of freely mixing up characters in flesh and blood (the Sothsegger) and allegorical embodiments of abstract qualities (Mum) is indeed characteristic of Langland. The end, with the narrator waking up and offering the king a "bag of writings" which will tell him the truth about his subjects is reminiscent of the Welsh bag of poetry (the 7-th century *Gododdin*) (9)

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The anagogic meaning is pointed out by a Latin sidenote quoting *Matthew* 5:10 (*Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice' sake).* This is the Sothsegger who is sitting anointing his wounds, while Mum, the principle of keeping one's mouth shut, is having a great time at a mayor's banquet. The narrator, who is so grieved at Mum *being such a master among men of good* that he falls in a swoon, dreams of the blooming garden and the perfectly-run bee-hive as allegories of a good state and of Eden.

Medieval Epic

The international codes of chivalry and love in the Middle Ages generated a metamorphic genre, gradually emerging through translations, adaptations and intercultural contacts established mainly through the crusaders who tapped the romantic imagination of Eastern fables and magic. The **romances** – a term derived from the Old French "mettre en romanz", meaning to translate into the vernacular French –, were the creation, in Norman-French, of the French feudal aristocracy of the twelfth century. The Angevin court, transplanted, through Henry II Plantangenet and his wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine, to England in mid century, was the cradle of medieval romance, beginning with translations and adaptations of Latin epics and chronicles, to which chronicles of royal genealogies – of the British rulers, from the legendary Brutus, Aeneas's grandson, or of the Norman House (**Robert Wace**, *Roman de Brut* and *Roman de Rou*) – were further contributed in order to connect the "matter of Britain" to the "matter of Rome", and secure a sort of dynastic, heroic and imperial legitimation. Eleanor, whose grandfather, Guillaume IX of Aquitaine had been the first troubadour, sponsored the creation of an elite culture centred on the imagined community, flattering aristocratic vanity, of chivalrous knights and their courtly ladies, engaged in what became an international and normative erotic discourse, for which Gaston Paris coined the term "amour courtois" in 1883. The Celtic tradition, driven underground by the Anglo-Saxon conquest in the southern main island, was revived, merging with the Provencal ideas of chivalry and idealistic love, and enriched with stories of Oriental magic, or the Mozarabic passion of love-lyrics and fables imported from the Middle East. Brian Stone (*Introduction* to *Medieval English Verse*, Penguin Books, 1971) mentions two more possible sources: the religion of love in Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* and the figure of a female character on fire, in Norse and Icelandic saga, a *femme fatale* imposing service to her menfolk through passion. Whatever the inspiration, the myth worked its way into the real world. The fits of bravery performed by a knight in the service of a lady, his chivalrous conduct and accomplishments, the exercise of arms earned him points in an international top of medieval knighthood as sportsmen score points today in world rankings. For instance, a certain Sir Giles d'Argentine was considered the

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third best knight in Christendom. Another interesting story is that of William Marmion, who received agolden helmet from his lady, with the imposition that he would wear it on some perilous adventure. He set out for Norham castle, on the Scotish border, where he engaged the garrison in a battle with the Scots which almost cost him his life....

In the 1160s Chrétien de Troyes cast various elements of the legend of King Arthur and his Round Table into a mixing pot, cooking the first Arthurian romance, *Erec et Enide*.

The pseudo-historical king Arthur was the leader of the Romano-British Celts in their defence against the Anglo-Saxon invaders. He appears in **Nennius**'s 9th-century *Historia Brittonum*, in *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae* – c. 540 - by **Gildas,** and in *Annales Cambriae (*mid-10th-century*)* as a Christian *dux bellorum,* who in 516, in the battle of Mons Badonicus, put the enemy to flight "with great slaughter", aided by the image of Virgin Mary (or of Christ) which he was carrying on his shoulder. As Arthur's body could not be found, he was believed to be living on, in fabled Avalon, wherefrom he would come again to rescue his people. It was **Geoffrey of Monmouth** (d. 1154) with his *Historia regum Britanniae* (c. 1135) that opened Arthur's career as European hero of romance, known as far as Italy and Greece. He concocted a history of Britain going back to a legendary Brutus, a great-grandson of Aeneas, who led a group of Trojans to Britain (so named after him). Arthur was born out of the union of a mortal (Ygraine) and a spirit (Uter Pendragon) disguised as her absentee lord, and assisted by the magic of the Welsh prophet Merlin. **Robert Wace's** *Roman de Brut* (towards 1155), drawing on Monmouth and dressed as a metrical romance, introduced Arthur to France. He invented the Round Table, ordered by Arthur in order to settle all disputes about precedence among his knights. It is the symbol of an active code of chivalry, with "companionship", understood as sharing of values, as the main component.

Layamon, a priest who lived near the Welsh border, produced his own *Brut* in the late 12th century as the first articulate utterance in the vernacular after the Norman conquest. Other imaginative elements were added to round up the Arthur story: his coming into the world, assisted and blessed by elves, who bestowed upon him the necessary gifts for him to become a mighty king in Camelot, Excalibur, his magic sword, Argante (Morgan) Le Fay, Arthur's half-sister, who takes him to enchanted Avalon, and heals his wounds, so that he may come back to his people, Arthur's prophetic dream about his death at the hands of his treacherous nephew, Mordred, a.o. Layamon was the one who introduced the **rhymed couplet** (lines rhyming in pairs) into the English verse, using it alongside the old Anglo-Saxon alliterative metre. Other characters are brought onto the Arthurian stage, after the European pilgrimage, some contributed by Chrétien de

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Troyes and the various authors of the 13th-century collection of prose romances known as the Vulgate Cycle, or derived by them from the original "Matter of Britain": Tristan, Isolde the Beautiful, Isolde of the White Hands, Lancelot, Perceval. New elements of wonder are added: the Grail (a cup in which, according to Robert de Boron, Joseph of Arimathea collected the last drops of blood from Christ's wounds). The original seeker of the Grail was Gawayne, later superseded by Lancelot, who failed on account of his adulterous relationship with Arthur's wife, Guinevere. It was the pure Perceval, Galaad and Bors that finally proved successful in the Grail quest, since, in a Christian world, it is not physical strength but moral integrity that is put to the test. The original Celtic tales are metamorphosed into French romances of courtliness and chivalry, having inscribed in them the spirit of the troubadours. The chivalric tradition of courtly love is described by David Aers **(10)** as a literature of desire, as it presented *a radical alternative to the real organization of Eros and marriage in medieval society.* Female patronesses, especially Eleanor of Aquitaine and her company, were the great image-makers of the nascent love romance of the Middle Ages, which they subsequently brought to England. It was to Eleanor and Henry II that Marie de France dedicated her collection of *lais,* and it was Eleanor's daughter by King Louis VII, Countess Marie de Champagne that gave Chrétien de Troyes the subject for his *Lancelot.* If the veil of romance is torn, the real relationships present an inverted show: marriages (sometimes to fourteen-year-old bridegrooms, like Henry Plantagenet, or to eight-year-old brides, like the second French wife of Richard II) were merely land transactions. On being married, a woman lost all her possessions, undergoing a sort of civil death. She remained as a childbearing appendage to the land, whom nobody consulted for an opinion, and who was the target of the woman-demonizing propaganda sponsored by the church. Women found in this escapist literature a compensation for the social regard that listed them with children and boys, or with land possessions and other goods of their lords, and we may form an idea of its appeal by going through the booklists bequeathed by Isabella of France to her son, Edward III, and passed on to Richard II: French books, including a *Brut*, deeds of Arthur, and Tristan and Isolde, copies of *Aimeri de Narbonne*, a *Romance de la Rose* and a *Romance de Perciuall & Gawyn. Aussi de quelle passion les femmes devaint-elles lire ces romans de la Table Ronde! quelles splendides et ravissantes visions devaint-ils faire passer dans ces faibles cervelles troublées, et combien de pauvres Bovary purent-ils faire !* **(11)** This day-dreaming seems to have sprung from a social phenomenon, though. The personal devotion of the knight to his overlord was extended to his lady, who represented him, when he was away to war or on a crusading expedition. One should not forget, however, that, on such occasions, the lord locked up his wife before his departure, like any other valuable possession. The worshipper, whose poetic gift enabled him to extol his lady's beauty in verse

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(*troubadours*, connected with the baronial courts of the Southern provinces of France) professed to be living for her approval alone, and to owe her what was best in him. As his love was an absolute, removed from any vulgar interest in reward or satisfaction, he was worshipping her from afar, ready to risk his life to protect her, ready for any sacrifice or humiliation to please her will. *Amour courtois* was an extramarital tie between man and woman and a form of love by the book. Under the patronage of Eleanor of Aquitaine, a Latin book was actually written by a priest, Andreas Capellanus, which laid down the rules of the new system of love (c. 1180). As it was incompatible with marriage, the expensive game of love found expression in stories (either metrical or prose narratives) called "romances", because they were composed in a post-classical Romance vernacular. Very soon, however, the term assumed the sense of fantasy in a narrative form, having love for its theme and knights and ladies for its characters. **The motifs** of the Celtic tales which furnished the *materia prima* of the romances composed in Central and Northern France, and later in other parts of Europe as well, were, among others, the union of a mortal with an otherworldly being (Arthur) the boy born to be a king, exiled, growing up in a poor man's hut and in the end returning to claim his rights (Sir Percevall of Galles, providing the model for the lost royal infants in Shakespeare's romances), the contest between a knight and the keeper of an otherworldly castle (*Sir Gawayne and the Grene Knight*). It was only natural that on Arthur's homecoming, with a Welsh poet's assistance (Layamon's), the original symbolism of these motifs should be revived. This happens in a jewel of medieval romance, composed in alliterative metre, preserved in a manuscript dating from the end of the fourteenth century, which also contains other three poems deploying the paradigm of chivalric virtues: *Pearl, Cleanness, Patience*. The story is a test case, whose purpose certainly reaches beyond Morgan's wish to warn Guinevere and the other ladies and knights of the dangers of adultery. On a New Year's Eve, Arthur and his knights receive a challenge to an exchange of blows from an odd knight dressed in green, mounted on a green horse. Gawayne is allowed to answer the challenge, and he severs the knight's head with one single blow. The knight picks up his head, and invites his antagonist to meet him at the Green Chapel next New Year's morning. One year later, about Christmas time, Gawayne, who is on his way to the Chapel on a dreary winter weather, finds lodging with the owner of a castle, who puts his virtue to the test: he will go hunting each day, and in the evening they will exchange what they have received during the day. Gawayne gladly exchanges the kisses he has received from his host's wife, nobly resisting her temptations, while keeping to himself a green girdle which, she says, may preserve him from harm (obviously in view of his impending encounter with the Green Knight). The three blows he receives from his antagonist – no other than his host – cause him only a slight wound, as a punishment for having preserved the lace. However, the Knight

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has to admit to Gawayne having passed the test of virtue: *as pearls are of more price than white peas, so is Gawayne of more price than other gay knights.* On his return, the ladies and knights of the Round Table agree to wear a bright green lace as a badge of honour. As it becomes a member of Christian knighthood, Gawayne modestly confesses to his cowardice and greed, but that, of course, is only the expected exercise in humility. By the end of the manuscript is found the legend of the Order of the Garter, founded about the year 1345, which may suggest a French or Norman source: *honi soit qui mal (y) penc.* However, the world of the poem is characteristically native. The timing – New Year's Eve – would point to the Celtic origin of the knight and his otherworldly antagonist, who were initially distinct phases of one and the same god: the old and the young sky-god, the old and the new year. In our opinion, the symbolism of the poem is the antagonism between nature and the human soul. The time of rejuvenescence, the severed head that resumes its life, like a new nature cycle, the green colour are suggestive of fertility rites. Christianity means nature spiritually transformed: the green of grass made into a chapel, the soul put to the test, the need for a spiritual shelter in the midst of the raging elements (which is also a seat of civilization, the narrator taking much delight in detailing elements of medieval architecture). The metrical unit is a stock of twelve to thirty-eight alliterative lines, with four stressed syllables in each and a variable number of unstressed syllables, followed by a "bob" (a short line of two syllables) leading to a "wheel" of four short lines. The periodic verse contraction and dilation is in keeping with the rhythmic course of nature or man's progress from sin to redemption:

O'er a mound on the morrow he merrily rides
into a forest full deep and wondrously wild:
high hills on each side and holt-woods beneath,
with huge hoary oaks, a hundred together;
hazel and hawthorn hung clustering there,
with rough ragged moss o'ergrown all around;
unblithe, on bare twigs, sang many a bird,
piteously piping for pain of the cold.
Under them Gawayne on Gringolet glideth,
through marsh and through mire, a mortal full lonesome,
cumbered with care, lest ne'er he should come
to that Sire's service, who on that same night
was born of a bride to vanquish our bale.
Wherefore sighing he said: "I beseech Thee, o Lord,
and Mary, thou mildest mother so dear !
some homestead, where holily I may hear mass

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and matins to-morrow, full meekly I ask!
thereto promptly I pray, pater, ave,
and creed."
He on his prayer,
And cried for each misdeed;
He crossed him ofttimes there,
And said: "Christ's cross me speed !"

So poised between Christian piety, chivalric idealism and vulnerability, even if only temporary, to temptation, between his dedication to the bonds of knighthood and his all too human desire to secure some protection in view of his encounter with Sir Bertilak de Hautdesert, Gawain has lost, in this late medieval romance, some of his earlier sternness as nephew (the good one, unlike Mordred, the traitor) and champion of king Arthur, the exemplary figure of a masculine agenda of tournaments, sieges and narcissistic rivalry, keeping aloof from consuming erotic passion or religious commitments. It is he who, in Chrétien's *Yvain*, frees Arthur from womanish snares, who, in other romances, is merciless towards the unfaithful Guinevere, whose ascetic solitude of knighthood is motivated by distrust of female character (in the dogmatic thirteenth century an anti-matrimonial satire currently reproduced in university circles turned on the Gawain figure and status as chivalric hero, whose fighting left him no time for a settled union (**12**).

Chaucer's parody of the romance tradition in his unfinished tale of Sir Topaz, which exasperates his middle class audience of pilgrims, in anticipation of Cervantes's exploration of the untimely in connection with discoursive fashions, signalled the "time out" for the paradigmatic textuality of the medieval aristocracy. By the second half of the fifteenth century the time had come for a final recapitulation of a century-long narrative tradition. This was done by **Thomas Malory**, a retainer of Richard Beauchamp, earl of Warwick, whose *Works*, finished in 1469, was partly the fruit of his imprisonments for turbulent acts and for attracting upon himself the dissatisfaction of King Edward IV. The war with France, which had been raving for a century, represented a masculine enterprise, an affair of bonded men depending upon loyalty, fidelity and skilful use of arms. As Sheila Fisher remarks in "Women and men in late medieval English romance" (*The Cambridge Companion to English Romance, Op. cit.*, pp. 150-164), in Malory's refurbishing of the Arthurian legends, women are marginalized and silenced. They are often exchanged (Lancelot returns Guinevere to Arthur at the Pope's command, in "The Vengeance of Gawain") in order to ciment political alliances or to strengthen dynasties, the orders of chivalry and aristocratic families. The revelation of Guinevere's infidelity causes huge dissentions between Arthur's knights, a fact which wrings from the king the following confession:

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And much more I am sorier for my good knights' loss than for the loss of my fair queen; for queens I might have now, but such a fellowship of good knights shall never be together in no company.

A statement endorsed by Guinevere's whimsical, fickle and intriguing character.

Malory's *Morte Darthur* was printed by Caxton in 1485, the printer recommending it as a book which, through the "depiction of acts of humanity, gentleness and chivalries", can bring the reader to "good fame and renown". The idealization of unity and wholeness in his view of the Round Table fellowship supersedes the interest in individuality (overweighing the former in the romances of Chrétien de Troyes). "Fellowship" meant much more than "companionship": it incorporated a whole code, an **active order of chivalry** that bound the knights together in the name of the "endless knot" (**pentangle**) of **charity, loyalty, fellowship, cleanness and courtesy**.

Medieval romances entered the thesaurus of the world's mythopoetic tradition, whose magic did not fade with time. The Victorian poets appealed to them in order to convey a new ideology. For instance, William Morris, turning the tables in Guenevere's favour in his celebrated *Defence of Guenevere*. Her voice is only heard, and her unrelentless persecutors (Gawain, above all) are exposed for cruel, unnatural and incomprehensive judges.

At other times, the original symbolism is used as the underlying code of a new work of art. Such is *Floire et Blancheflor*, a romance of star-crossed lovers and of religious conversion, enfolded within a contemporary romance, set in New York. The protagonist is a professor teaching medieval literature, whose wife is murdered in a terroristic act of fanatic hate of the elite, induced by the irresponsible host of a radio phone-in item: *The Fisher King*, directed by Terry Gilliam. Crazed by the event, he will take refuge into the world of idealistic love as the knight of Blancheflor, in whose name he will convert the broadcasting man to a more humane and ethical life.

A knowledge of the original symbolism can serve both the production and the enjoyment of such culturally dense works of art.

Geoffrey Chaucer has long ceased to be canonized as simply an augural figure in the history of English literature; he is now apprehended as a poet of genius, extended learning and exceptional formal refinement and complexity. Terms like "unreliable narrator", "dialogical form", "constructed contexts"," interpolation by commentary", "handling of juxtaposition and framing devices", "art of context", "contextualizing received materials", "consciousness of historical distance" construct Chaucer against a background of twentieth-century discourse. The deconstructive approaches laying bare the author's own deconstructive handling of traditional literary forms cropped up already in the mid-eighties.

Apart from being the first major poet who drew on the Continental tradition of metrical poetry, Chaucer also differed from his contemporaries in creating

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dialogical forms, in which the discourses of authority – either of the church or of chivalry – are inscribed only to be subverted, through subtle rhetorical strategies. The superimposed framing discourses usually have the effect of disconnecting the signifying batteries of the framed material, subverting and deflecting their meaning. His work is a summary of medieval literary forms, themes and motifs, which look like a gilded monument on which Chaucer composed an epitaph rather than as the nurturing foundation of what he himself had to say. We shall give only an example here of the way in which what the Parson asserts in his concluding tale to the *Canterbury* collection is denied through the subverting function of rhetoric. The tale is a sermon, meant to persuade the listeners into shunning the Seven Deadly Sins and suppressing the body and all worldly delight, in view of redemption. If persuasion is what the parson is after, his choice of rhetoric is mostly unfortunate. He employs, as is the custom in sermons, a quote from the Bible (*Jeremiah* 6:16) which, through the connotations and sonorities of its alien Latin words presses home an uncomfortable feeling of the body being frozen or congealed: *State super vias et interrogate de viis antiquis que sit via bona; et ambulate in ea, et invenetis refrigerium animabus vestris.* The respective passage, entitled *Israel Rejects God's Way,* expresses God's wrath with Israel for the nation's oppression of others, urging them to return to the old piety, the good way: *Ask for the ancient paths and where the best road is. Walk on it and you will live in peace.* As the story-telling starts with a pagan tale, which might stand for the "old way", and as the Wife of Bath has heartily advocated the satisfaction of desires, as it was God himself that created the body, the reader is prepared to interpret the precept in a sense contrary to the parson's intention: that the new ways of Christianity, unlike the pagan ones, oppress human nature, suppress the healthy life of the body. By way of a conclusion, the parson makes one more unfortunate choice of a trope: that of organic growth in the tree image, as well as of a triad of ***heat, satisfaction and germination*** to refer to the victory of abstract religious concepts over the extinguished life of the body: the root of the tree of Penitence is *contrition*, the branches and the leaves are *confession*, the fruit, *satisfaction,* the seed, *grace* and the heat in that seed, the *Love of God.*This splendid piece of deconstruction might have served Paul de Man in his *Allegories of Reading, Figural Language in Rousseau, Rilke, Nietzsche and Proust* (Yale University Press, 1979). The strategy is so subtle that the tale is generally misunderstood for a boring sermonizing piece and left out in selective editions of *The Canterbury Tales.*

The distance between the writer's social descent (wealthy middling class) and the world into which he moved (appointed to the House of Lionel, Duke of Clarence, later admitted to that of John of Gaunt, as his brother-in-law, and even as *valettus* to King Edward III*)* may have been responsible for his ambiguous oscillation between reverence and slight. Even his career – ebbing and flowing

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between diplomatic mission on behalf of royalty and the successful management of public works and trade policy – maintained him on the threshold towards a feudal order challenged by civil wars, the peasants' uprising and the increasing power of the moneyed burgesses. What his two journeys to Northern Italy (1372 and 1378) revealed to him was not only the dependence of the crowned heads of Europe on the merchant-bankers of the Italian city-states – which certainly meant a long way off from the power relations that had dictated the writing of the *Domesady Book* – but also the new artistic vision that had hurled the potentates of the day into hell while building up on it a *Purgatorio* of the most famous artists in Europe.The suspicion that the poet might be *il miglior fabro* when competing with the makers of history would have been lurking in the mind of Chaucer on bringing back to England works by Dante, Boccaccio, Petrarch. The fact is his works effect a deconstruction of history as transcendental teleology, and of the author as occupying a transcendent position in relation to his writing. When drawing on ancient events or characters, Chaucer no longer assumes the existence of a universal human nature or of a providential scheme of historical development. He is well aware of historical distance, of changing conventions and institutions, of the constitutive and constructive frames, which mediate our appropriation of past events.

The generic model assumed by Langland in his satire on contemporary social evils (the canker of flattery and bribery perverting all social classes, including royalty), is the revealed word of the Bible, with himself a Moses-shepherd figure, and with his allegorical cast of characters set in an eschatological script. With Chaucer, there is a significant mutation from (sacred) history to a series of discourses, to a generalized textuality inscribing differences in beliefs, values, manners, behaviour from one age to another. Instead of ***revelation*** and ***self-identification*** (with Moses, with God through the revealed word, in dreams of supernatural origin, when the word of God may be heard, of Piers with Christ etc.), there is the ***production*** of a new text through ***differentiation*** from those of old: Chaucer will select, or leave out, transform through his own imperfect experience, urge the reader to add from his own, supposedly richer. His authorial activity is one of reinscription and also a limited one: if the reader is interested in the war deeds of Troilus, let him go to Homer and other texts, for his "approach" is confined to the love-story, and impaired by an inadequate personal acquaintance with the subject... The dream-vision, a device meant to construct and augment devotional pieties, deconstructs the reality of the dream into literary convention. In *The House of Fame*, the narration of the dream follows a *Proem* – a classical introductory set piece, which is an exposition of the subject of a literary work. The mystical experience is deconstructed into a ***writing scene***, and the art of narrative is made part of the subject, the author inculpating the reader with his authorial choices, preferences and anxieties, mainly about his moral

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responsibility. The author constructs his mask of a porous ego, of rather poor intellect, tedious and given to apologies and retractions, presenting himself as biased and unreliable.

Chaucer's voice is first heard in disguise: as the translator of a fragment from that epitome of medieval Chivalry and romance, cast in a dream vision and allegorizing love as a knight's quest of the rose: *Le Roman de la Rose*, started by Guillaume de Lorris in 1237 and finished by Jean de Meung about 1277. The octosyllabic couplet (lines of eight syllables rhyming in pairs) is used soon after in an original work: the *Book of the Duchess.* Drawing on the tradition of the *dits amoureux* and *dits de Fortune,* developed, among others, by Guillaume de Machaut (*Le Jugement du Roy de Behaigne* and *Remède de Fortune),* Jean de Froissart and Eustache Deschamps, the book is an elegy on the death of Blanche of Lancaster, the first wife of John of Gaunt. The lament extolling her, uttered by her husband, the Black Knight, emerges in a dialogical form, as the dream-scene is rendered by a narrator of middling intelligence who can hardly take in the Knight's high-flown rhetoric. The traditional motifs and conventions too are significantly modified. The origin of the Book is in a dream but the dream has been induced by the reading of a book in which a dream is said to have come true. In other words, the narrator does not lay a more serious claim to the truth of his dream than that of any story-making. His dream may be said to come true, as he sits down to write it down. The text is thereby made to reflect back upon its own making. As for the *Fortuna labilis* motif, it is troped as a beautiful but deceiving female figure, a seductress as well as a destroyer. Chaucer's departure from Boethius or from Machaut is a very important one, Fortune being further troped as the Knight's chess-mate. She wins because she cheats, while the Knight loses because he does not possess Pithagora's mathematical tricks. The remedy for Fortune's calamities is not a virtuous life with hope in a reward beyond (as in Machaut) but a good knowledge of mathematics. A transcendental *rapport* is thus redeployed on a human, desecrated level, and metaphysical determinism boils down to a mathematical contest. The rigid, all-inclusive value system of the Middle Ages breaks up into an ethical dispersal of individual truths, the supreme good embodied by the duchess in her life having been her ability to understand someone else's motivation. Absolute standards tend to disappear.

Chaucer's creative developments crop up in versification as well, the synchronization with European metres being his own recent achievement. In *The Parlement of Foules* and in *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer creates the **rhyme royal** (seven-line stanzas, rhyming ababbcc), out of the Boccaccian *ottava* (eight-line stanzas of hendecassyllabic – eleven-syllable-line – verse forms, rhyming abababcc).

The Parlement of Foules combines the *bestiary* and the *dream vision* in a parody of the former and the author's particularization of the latter.

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Chaucer's description of the dream machinery resembles what Freud was to call later "condensation" and "displacement". A hunter at rest will dream of the woods, a rich man, of more gold, a sick man, of a banquet, a lover, that he has won the object of his desire. The dream projections of subconscious desires fills in a table of invariants, a taxonomical chain, that is they no longer reside in the phenomenal field of an otherworldly agency, or of chance and haphazard. The dream is displaced from the origin by the act of ***reading about*** dreams. As the narrator says, books will crop up from books of old, just as new harvests will be nourished by the same ancient soil. The text is generated from an abyss of the dream-figure rather than framed by a dream-narrative: The poet's dream is induced by his reading of Scipio (according to Macrobius, the commentator of *Scipio's Dream* by Cicero, whom Chaucer takes for the real author) who, in his turn, dreamed of his grandfather prophesying his victory over Carthage – in fact, his own appetite.

As for the **dream-bestiary**, the narrator tells of the birds flocking on a St. Valentine's Day and chattering like humans in a real parliament. The topic of debate is courtly love. Obviously, the birds of the higher order (the birds of prey, representing the aristocracy) support the code laid down by Andreas Capellanus, prophesying loyalty to the death, unicity of commitment and unflinching devotion, even if unrequited, while the fowls feeding on corn (the peasantry) subject love to a market-value negotiation: *If she won't love him, let him love another.*

Chaucer enlarges more upon the nature of dreams in *The House of Fame.* Actual dreams, with their fundamental ambiguity, cannot be adequately translated into the language of the body (I, *Proem*, 45-50), which Chaucer never forfeits for the sake of some transcendental experience. His dream theory owes more to Galen and Hippocrates, quoted in *The Book of the Duchess,* than to St. Augustine's and Pope Gregory's theological works.

Dante's dream of an eagle carrying him up into the heavens in the second *cantica* of his *Commedia* is not the only element inviting a comparison between Chaucer's *House of Fame* (octosyllabic couplets) and the *Divine Comedy.* Similar are also the tripartite structure, the journey to another world, the supernatural guide. Yet it is differences that really count. Dante is guided by Beatrice (a figure of Theology) to Love of God. The garrulous Eagle, a figure of Philosophy, tells Chaucer, quoting Aristotle, that every thing has its allotted place in the world, towards which it naturally tends. Therefore, he will carry the plump body of the self-deprecatory narrator, complaining about his weight, to the House of Fame. Whereas Dante's journey ends up in revelation, Chaucer has no access to the ultimate revelations on love of some higher authority that never shows up. All he knows of love is his experience of **reading the love story** of Dido and Aeneas. The implicit question would be, how could Dante fail to recognize the purpose of his

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journey in its very beginning with Virgil, the literary founder of Rome ? The temple of art is an artizan's work: *Domus Dedali,* and its inhabitants are not God and His company, but the myriad sounds produced by the breath of Logos. Each whisper, each spoken word is embodied on earth in the image of the speaker. Under its ironic guise, the poem features a recognition scene: the poet mirroring himself in the poem. All that Chaucer knows or cares to know is the language of the body: *the brain* treasuring his transcription of his visions, the *eyes* that contemplate the beautiful female form of the muse Caliope, whom Nature could not give birth to and other scenes from the classical mythology, decorating the temple of glass, the *ears* catching the motioned air from the lips and from the strings of the harp. And what are the whispered *tidings* if not the new, original works of art that are permanently created, like some earthly analogue of the *Annunciation* ? Paradise has been supplanted by a Pantheon of the arts. Chaucer is writing an allegory of art and authorship, with the artist's self-portrait inscribed in his work.

Chaucer's representation of art as breath, speech and memory in the brain rather than in writing was only natural in an age which believed in the centrality and primacy of the Logos as breath (God's spoken word) as well as at a time when literature was still a heard and seen experience, appealing to the auditory sensibilities of the audience **(13)**. It is to this scene of public reading that he draws our attention at the beginning of *Troilus and Criseyde.* It is doubtful whether, in specifying Maximus Lollius as his best source, Chaucer has misinterpreted the first lines in Horace's *Second Epistle (Book I)*, presenting Horace as reading from Homer at Praeneste, while his friend, Lollius, is declaiming in Rome. Chaucer knew very well his sources, Troilus's anguished confession of love (58–60), for instance, being a translation of a very famous sonnet by Petrarch (CXXXII), and not a debt to "bard Lollius" whom he claims to be quoting. Rather than a proof of false consciousness, this seems to be an apology for his very liberal interpretation of the Homeric source: he is not reading or quoting but *interpreting* it in the spirit of contemporary Italy. "Lollius" is just a figure of reinscription and up-dating. His real source is *Il Filostrato* – Boccaccio's romance refurbishing of two minor Homeric characters: the Trojan Troilus falling in love with Criseyde, the daughter of Calchas, a prophet who, having foreseen the fall of Troy, had defected to the Greeks. As history is no longer seen either as an objective record of events or as providential but as textuality, a range of discursive practices which are culture specific, it looks but natural that Chaucer, in producing his own version, should have exchanged Homer for a medieval love-story, with its *amour courtois* values, rites and ceremonies. Troilus is the gay knight of the courtly romances, who is punished by Amor with the qualms of love for his formerly affected indifference to his power. Love comes through the eyes, which are the soul's windows in the

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prison of the body. It is under Criseyde's good influence (her *honour, estate and womanly noblesse* – a language alien to Homer) that Troilus becomes *the friendliest wighte,/ the gentliest... the thriftiest.* As Criseyde is concerned about her reputation, the lovers meet in secrecy, with the help of Pandarus (ever since a household word for a "go-between"), Criseyde's uncle – a shrewd, world-wise old man, in whom Chaucer may have satirized the hypocritical sermonizers of the day, as he is given to quoting proverbs and precedents. While taking all precautions for offering his sympathetic view of this illegitimate love, mainly by blaming it on his lack of experience and by appealing to the reader's complicity, who may have experienced more, Chaucer also finds psychological motivations for Criseyde's betrayal when she is carried away to the Greeks by the young, handsome and unscrupulous Diomede, in exchange for a Trojan, Antenor: she yields to her abductor, as she is a weak woman, having no support among strangers. The final twist to a medieval topos may be an ironical comment on the similar ancient concept of all-powerful destiny, which relieves the individual from all personal responsibility. The world is but a fair of vanities. As Chaucer role-plays himself as an unreliable narrator (**14**), a fundamental ambiguity is playing about this story, which has been classified both as "the first *(psychological) novel* in English" and as a *medieval tragedy*, in its sense of a decline of fortune, a descent from a higher to a lower standing.

Had not a totalitarian society stifled and distorted Chaucer's voice, it may have sent forth to us its pure "renaiscent", Petrarchan sound. His mention of Petrarch's Latin revision of Boccaccio's story in his *Decameron*, challenging the medieval idea about woman as a commodity lacking a will of her own, is telling in this respect. A new ideal, of human fortitude in the face of misfortunes, is replacing Griselda's confession that, on leaving behind her humble froc in her hut, and accepting Walter's rich attire, she has also left behind her "will", her "liberty":

So listen to what Petrarch has to say:
"This tale has not been told so that wives should
Imitate Griselda in humility
They'd find it intolerable if they did !
But that everyone, whatever his degree
Should be as steadfast in adversity.
As Griselda!.
(The Oxford Clerk's Tale)

But social and political developments were slower in England, and so were the power discourses of the age. For his realistic record of a woman's conflicting psychology and of her all but human frailty, Chaucer saw himself forced to write

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a *retraction*, probably his most orthodox writing; *The Legend of Good Women*, a palinode having its generic source in Stesichorus (7th-6th century B.C.) who wrote an ode against Hellen of Troy and afterwards a Palinodia glorifying her. The portrait gallery of the famous women of the world is framed by a *Prologue* which, in fact, extols the glory of books for providing the "key to memory" – the textuality of history as the only immortality. Chaucer's balance of tradition and innovation can be seen once more in his creation of the **heroic couplet** (decasyllabic lines, rhyming in pairs), which would know a glorious career in English poetry, beginning with the majority of his *Canterbury Tales*.

Chaucer's sense of the solidarity between social structure and structurality of discourse is responsible for the writing of an **estate satire** (a survey of all late medieval estates, i.e., social status corresponding to some form of property), and at the same time of a compendium of medieval narrative forms of discourse. The discursive practices display, in Chaucer, an awareness not only of genre but also of the codes of values associated with them. Chaucer uses literary forms, while implicitly commenting on them. His critique of genre takes the form of self-reflexive forms.

It is not certain whether Chaucer was familiar with Boccaccio's *Decameron*, but his handling of the convention of the **framed narrative** (a collection of tales framed by a prologue) differs any way in several respects. Whereas Boccaccio's story-tellers belong to the same social class (a group of aristocrats who leave Rome because of an outbreak of plague, telling a tale every day to beguile their time), Chaucer's thirty odd pilgrims, who gather at the Tabard Inn in Southwark, wherefrom they are to set out for the shrine of Thomas a Becket at Canterbury, belong to all classes of society except the highest (above the knight) and lower than the Plowman (tied labourers). Chaucer was not interested in those who were too few in number to create a common culture or in those who, being serfs, did not have a say in the life of the forum. His comical humanity falls into five groups. The gentry is represented by the Knight and his son, a Squire. The second social estate includes the representatives of various holy orders (lower than prelates: a Prioress, a Monk, a Friar, a Nun, the Nun's Priest and two other priests). The third and largest group are nearly all middle class: the Merchant, the Oxford Clerk, the Lawyer, the Franklin, the five gentlemen and their Cook, the Shipman, the Physician, the Canon, and the Wife of Bath. The fourth group is marginal: the Plowman and the Canon's Yeoman. The fifth is a picturesque gallery of rogues: a Reeve and a Miller, a Summoner, a Pardoner, a Manciple and... the narrator who humorously includes himself among them. The inn-keeper, Harry Bailly, has the idea of each pilgrim telling two stories, two on the way to Canterbury and two on the way back. He is only a master of ceremonies, so that, together with the author diminished to the stature of a witness and story-teller, he

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makes room for a decentred multi-dimensional discursive space, lacking the single theological view of the other texts of the time. Authorship is further deconstructed by the witness-narrator's parody of the extremes of medieval discourse: the ***romance*** as a cliché of popular entertainment (the unbearably boring fiction of chivalry: *The Tale of Sir Thopas*) and the practical inefficiency of ***bookish instruction*** (Melibee's moral tract on Prudence, one of the medieval virtues, often allegorized, which is no solution or retribution for his daughter's wounds). The very name of the inn („tabard" meaning, among others, a herald's coat blazoned with the arms of his sovereign, an emblem of social identity) makes us think of the pilgrims in terms of a human comedy, with social, moral and discursive types. Only twenty-four stories, some unfinished, have been left for readers along centuries to grant the award for the best. However, the fact that Chaucer specifies that the Parson's is *the last* shows that he had in mind a pattern of precise significance. The first is a pagan story (based upon Boccaccio's *Teseida*), while the last is a sermon, paralleling the pilgrims' progress from a place of worldly enjoyment (Tabard Inn, where they assemble for the journey) towards a seat of Christian piety (a shrine). As the journey starts in April (apparently lasting for five days, April 16 to 2o), the year's rejuvenescence is symbolical of spiritual rebirth (a tradition going back to *The Seafarer*). Close reading, however, will disclose another structure of meaning, underpinning the conventional self-replicating code of "church-talk". Unawaringly, the Parson confirms our impression that, in spite of the *retraction* at the end, categorising his fictional work as acts of sin, while acknowledging as virtuous his translations of Boethius and homiletic writs, Chaucer was nostalgically looking back, like a Renaissance man, to the "old ways" of the pagan antiquity.

The Knight's Tale is the only one which is not framed by a prologue, whose function is usually **(15)** a subversive one. Contrary to the opinion that each tale suits the story-teller, we find all the others dialogical in form. The tales fall within ***six narrative types***.

For Chaucer, a proper **court romance** is not just a narrative whose theme is love and other upper-class pursuits, in a court setting with chivalrous knights and virtuous ladies as characters; it also inscribes a code of timeless values, whether those of equality in marriage (*The Franklin*'s), of love as absolute trust (*The Wife of Bath's*), of the forms and ceremonies of civilization versus rude nature (*The Knight's*). Those which are confined to empty story-telling are promptly cut short (The Squire's, Chaucer's).

The structuring of *The Knight's Tale* proceeds through a *mise-en-abyme* of the pilgrimage figure: from Palamon's and Arcite's *roaming to and fro* (see Kolve's most enlightening discussion of imagery) to Egeus's final generalization: *And we are pilgrims passing to and fro/ Death is the end of every worldly sorrow.*

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And yet, through the elements Chaucer has added to the Italian original, this medieval allegory of the soul's wanderings on earth like a pilgrim without a homeland is made into something positive: the victory of Theseus over the Minotaur in the intricate Labyrinth becomes the Ur-deed foretelling his building of the Amphitheatre (already an intimation of the Renaissance and baroque topos of the theatre of the world). This is a representation of the entire civilization: the mathematical and architectural sciences, the worshipped gods, the paintings and the murals, housing the most ceremonious affair of medieval courtly life, that is, a tournament. The building of the amphitheatre (in Boccaccio's *Teseida,* the seat of confrontation is already in existence) is placed in the middle of the narrative, carrying a heavy weight in its economy. The hyperbolic building (*In the whole world there was no place like it*) becomes *axis mundi*, walled in and ditched without, separated from the tangled, chaotic and lawless woods. It makes Theseus a new Hrothgar who has shut Grendel out. The story is richly patterned, in antithetical blocks: the amphitheatre is "most noble in its plan", while the temple of Mars has its walls decorated with "a forest with no plan"; Palamon appeals to Arcite's sense of honour and bond of kinship, while Arcite is in for a lawless competition; Palamon's is a "spiritual love", while Arcite sees in Emelye a woman, not a "goddess from above". Although imprisoned, Palamon is guilty of no devotional breach; he realizes his pagan gods are unjust, yet the remedy for fortune's adversities is to "curb" his will *in all the lusts that cattle may fulfil*, and *pay the duties that are owed/ to God.* Arcite, although set free, yet bereft of more opportunities to see Emelye, gives way to his animal lust (*like a lover on the rack/ Of Eros*) and to an irrational despondency which makes him a prisoner of his own *melancholy madness*. His uncurbed passion makes him stoop down to the humble status of a servant in Theseus's household for the benefit of serving Emelye, his kin, doing all sorts of humiliating chores. When Palamon himself escapes, he can only think of a heroic solution: to rally an army behind his back and either kill Theseus, the conqueror of his Thebes, or perish in battle. Before the final encounter with Arcite he addresses to Venus, the goddess of Love, a most ceremonious prayer, while Arcite prays to Mars, the god of war, hinting at his embarassment when Vulcan surprised him l*ying with his wife* – a speech much more adequate for a *fabliau*. Chaucer's description of their first, informal fight in the woods, before Theseus imposes his (feudal) rites of hunting or ceremonious duels with witnesses and referees, is a methodical (and ironical) deconstruction of humanity as the locus of social bonds, feelings, formal behaviour:

There was no salutation, no "Good day"
But without word or prelude straight away
Each of them gave his help to arm the other

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As friendly as a brother to his brother;....
You would have thought, seeing Palamon engage,
He was a lion – fighting mad with rage,
Arcite, a cruel tiger...

Fabliaux are versified tales designed for the diversion of city traders, guildmen and their associates. Essentially anti-romantic, they picture victimized husbands, the crimes and due punishments of thieves and adulterers through farcical plots, set among the lower orders of society. Chaucer's choice for their story-tellers lies with the rude and drunkard Miller, the Reeve, the Cook, the Friar, the Summoner, the Shipman, the Canon's Yeoman, the Merchant.

Their essential drive is subversive of any meaningful and significant order: *In religious tales and saints' legends, an equally self-transcending system of values operates, in this case proving the significance of life through the demonstration of its ultimate insignificance in relation to life eternal. Comedy sets all this aside, and asserts that there are no values, secular or religious, more important than survival and the satisfaction of appetite* **(16).** The action is not apprehended "under the aspect of eternity", the parodic mode no longer being that interplay of light and shade that gives moral characterization its relief (as in *The Knight's Tale*) but an end in itself. The description of Alisoun, the adulterous wife in *The Miller's Tale* in terms of nature (compared to a frolicking kid or calf, graceful like a swallow, with a mouth as sweet *as mead, or ale or honey* etc.) is a light-hearted ironic comment on the young woman's gratification of her healthy bodily instincts.

Saints' lives and **pious tales** are narratives for edification following a similar pattern: the will to undergo martyrdom, the renunciation of worldly joys, the miracles attending persecution and martyrdom. The Clerk, the Man of Law, the Physician, the Prioress tell such narratives. The artistic illusion is often impaired by what we know about the story-teller (for instance, the Prioress's misplaced charity), or by the prologue to the story. *The Physician's Tale* of Roman Virginius' sacrifice of his daughter lest she should be carried away from him as a slave is framed by an argument on the proper education of children, interspersed with exhortations and parables like the following, which is an ironic hint that Virginius himself has played the wolf:

Beware lest the example you present
Of your neglect in giving chastisement
Cause them to perish; otherwise I fear
If they should do so you will pay it dear.
Shepherds too soft who let their duty sleep
Encourage wolves to tear the lambs and sheep.

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Sermons are exhortations to embrace virtues and shun vices They incorporate biblical and classical stories (*exempla*), quotations, proverbs, maxims, the abstract themes being blooded by contemporary events. By illustrating the downfall of eminent persons from prosperity to a miserable death, the *exempla* have a didactic intention, illustrating precepts like *memento mori, vanitas vanitatum*, which sometimes, as in the Monk's *Exemplum, De Casibus Virorum Illustrium,* are at odds with the narrator's love of luxury, good food and the excitements of hunting. His *Prologue* gives the medieval definition of tragedy as "story", which acts its fictional disintegrating effect upon the characters in the ensuing sacred script (the fall of Lucifer, Adam, Samson...). According to the misogynist view of the Church, "fall from glory" is induced by evil women. Quite unexpectedly, it is a representative of the Holy Orders that deconstructs religion into myth (story), amalgamating Biblical and Greek, historical and fictitious characters:

Tragedy means a certain kind of story
As old books tell, of those who fell from glory...

The Pardoner's *Prologue* to his own sermon is another splendid piece of deconstruction. The exploded myth of the inspired shepherd leaves behind it a metaphysical wreck, whose ruins can only be rebuilt into a rhetorical construct and a deft dramatic show, meant to sell pardons and pseudo relics of saints, like any other commodity, to a gullible congregation. Whereas the metaphysical grounding is gone, the rhetorical recipe for the effective advertising of the means of salvation is unfailing.

In a **confession**, the narrator looks back on his life, usually in sign of repentance, and out of a wish of expiation. This is not at all the case of the Wife of Bath, who takes up this type of narrative in order to launch, from her marginalised position, a fierce attack upon the dominant male discourse, shaped by representations of women as inferior and evil in the tradition of the Church. A woman of liberal means, who has married five times, most often for money, and who has gradually subdued her husbands, cheating on them (in love as well as in affairs), this frank and experienced woman knows that it is easier to change things in the real world (where she has turned the tables in her favour, making good money by treating her own body as a commodity) than to change mentalities. She will not be taken in by the church propaganda, which is cultivating a guilty conscience, particularly in women. The entire issue comes down to the cultural conditions of discourse-making and representations. They are the province of men alone, who take a gender-bound, biased view of mankind's other half. There is no absolute ethical truth, it is only a question of

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point of view: had the lion drawn the picture, would he not have shown himself to be the victor instead of the hunter ?

Make no mistake, it is impossible
That any scholar should speak good of women
Unless they are saints in the hagiographies.
Not any other kind of woman, no !
Who drew the picture of the lion ? Who ?
My God, had women written histories
Like cloistered scholars in oratories,
They'd set down more of men' wickedness
Than all the sons of Adam could redress.

The **moral tract** is a didactic essay, trying to persuade the listener into accepting a certain moral or religious dogma. Chaucer's dismantling of the authoritative medieval discourse, which by the end of the fourteenth century had decayed into empty rhetoric and mannerism, takes one step further in the narrator being talked to and persuaded by his wife – not a common woman, it is true, but an allegorical figure: Prudence. While cowardice and inaction, rhetorically spiced as Prudence, win the argument, true Wisdom (their daughter, Sophia) is left to dress her wounds. The distance between the argument on the virtue of Prudence, conducted with scholarly skill, and its practical inefficiency in redressing the wrongs committed (in opposition to the Wife of Bath's mistrust of the truth of language and pragmatic confidence in taking action) is measured by Chaucer against the new voices of subversion coming from the rising bourgeoisie, the marginalized category of women, and the artist who comes to a realization of the tension between tradition and the need for innovation, between the *long durée* of his art and the necessity to humanize and desublimate the authorities of the age reified in texts.

Chaucer's achievement helped establish English as a fully developed literary language, capable to employ all the genres of the time in a masterly canvas and to plumb human nature to unprecedented depths. Suffice it to compare *The Canterbury Tales* to the highly conventional *Confessio Amantis,* another collection of tales in octosyllabic couplets by Chaucer's contemporary, **John Gower** (died 1488). The poet meets Venus on a May morning, who advises him to make a confession, while Genius, her priest, launches into a blood-freezing treatise upon the Seven Deadly Sins. There is no logical link between the tales and the general framework, the action is full of artificial scenes, attitudes and commonplace ideas.

The fifteenth century brings the Middle Ages to an end. All the sap has dried up from **John Lydgate's** use of literary conventions: of *De casibus* in his *Fall of Princes* (a collection of medieval "tragedies"), which is a rhyme-royal

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version of Boccaccio's *De casibus virorum illustrium,* and of the *Danse Macabre,* in his translation of *Le Pèlerinage de la vie humaie* by Guillaume de Deguileville, where Death the leveller remembers himself to all classes of men, from Pope, Emperor, Cardinal, King down to labourer, friar, clerk, hermit, pointing to the vanity of all worldly glory, and cultivating guilt and anxiety.

Medieval Drama

The growth of towns, and with them the growth of craft guilds, fostered the development of **religious drama** in the vernacular towards the end of the fourteenth century. During the Middle Ages, mimetic performances in Latin were added as an ornament of the liturgical rituals of the church. The quotations and answers introduced into the authorized text of the liturgy as tropes or amplification became dramatic through impersonation. An eleventh-century Easter mass of Monte Cassino in Italy mentions a dialogue occurring before Christ's sepulchre:

When terse has been finished, let one priest go before the altar, dressed in white, and, having turned towards the choir let him say with a clear high voice:

„Whom seek ye ?"

And let two other priests standing in the middle of the choir answer thus:

„Jesus of Nazareth,"

And the one priest:

„He is not here: He is risen"

And they, turning to the quire, shall say:

„Halleluiah, the Lord is risen."

The "Ressurexi" should follow.

In time such mimetic performances were undertaken by laymen (guilds and secular fraternities), removed from the interior of the church outside, on the steps, and, later, in open squares. In England, Latin was first replaced by French, and later, by English. Thematically, they fall into three groups.

The **miracle (mystery) plays** are based on sacred history, from Creation to the Last Judgement. The acting was done on wooden platforms mounted on wheels, called "pageants", which could be drawn from one place to another, their coming being heralded by standard bearers called "vexillatores". The performers were role-playing themselves, in a way, as the scenes were appropriate to their daily work: For instance, at York, the plasterers showed God creating the earth and the cardmakers, the creation of Adam and Eve; the shipwrights undertook the construction of Noah's ark; the bakers staged the Last Supper. Some miracle plays got up saints' lives.

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The language of the anonymous "playwrights" (clerics or minstrels) was fitted to the broad, unsophisticated audiences of towns and villages: the lucid, plain vernacular, condensed and concise, yet not devoid of a certain ceremonious solemnity. The interpolation of comical scenes (**interludes**) was felt as a necessary psychological relief from the strain of an action charged with the complexities of medieval theology, even if the audience was familiar with the dogmatic body of the Church, popularized in the frequent addresses from the pulpit.

The extant cycles of the Biblical plays belong to the Northern districts: the ***York cycle***, begun in the mid-fourteenth century, and the cycle of ***Wakefield*** (the *Towneley Plays*), both of which were influenced by the metrical narrative called *The Northern Passion.* The Wakefield cycle knows frequent lapses into broad comedy, whose social hints and parodic effects de-sublimate the sacred script into a more humane version. *The Second Shepherd's Play* is a burlesque episode describing how a peasant named Mark tries to save a stolen lamb from confiscation, tucking it up in bed beside his wife, and claiming it is their new-born baby. By juxtaposition with the religious logic of the Nativity play of the cycle, this realistic pastoral sketch is a transcription in a comic key, exploring the contemporary relevance of the archetypal scene and symbolism (with lamb, new-born baby, shepherds and even social persecution and threat).

The processional character of the performance was inspired by the triumphal procession on Corpus Christi Day, symbolizing Christ's victory over sin. The Chester pageants – 24 in number, corresponding to the number of Companies in the City -, were wheeled one after the other, from Abbey gates to the Pentice at the High Cross before the Mayor, to Watergate Street, etc., and the complete round offered simultaneously an image of Calvary and Victory and of the contemporary setting: the social life of the community, with its work scenes, occupational chart, power conflicts, elements of traditional and pagan entertainment, etc.

In spite of the dogmatic character of medieval thought, the addressee of the discourse-maker was invited to ponder upon received ideas, to find out reasons, motivations, to exercise one's critical (dissociative) habit of mind. "Compare and contrast" was the favourite assignment in universities, comparative values were pitted against one another in poems drawing on the French debate tradition (love versus asceticism, Eve versus Virgin Mary, etc.), while the dramatizations of episodes from the Bible (with supplementary ones from the apocryphal tradition, for instance, *The Fall of Lucifer, The Harrowing of Hell*) gave reasons for divine as well as human conduct: an enhanced ethical design (Ethos) for the Biblical story (Mythos).

With all its popular interpolations, medieval drama reveals a subtle mind, casting a philosophical net on each happening, with the emphasis falling on causality. The author is a Scriptural commentator, doubling up as dramatist. In *The Creation, and the Fall of Lucifer*, God is making the doctrinal "I am Alpha

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and Omega, the life, the way, the truth" more explicit: *I am maker unmade, all might is mine (...) Unending without ending.* Apparently, in making Lucifer "mirror of [His] might", He displaces Himself from his logocentric, full and unique presence. He changes himself into a sign to be read by Lucifer, to be reflected in a mirror image of Himself. This makes room for Lucifer's, i.e. His specular double's, attempted subversion of the original, which, within a logocentric frame of thought, dominated by the transcendental signifier, is impossible. The moment Lucifer thinks of himself as God's equal, he is tumbled down into Hell - a place of doom which is brought into existence by the rebel angels' transgressive act:

LUCIFER. I shall be like unto him that is highest on height.
Oh, what I am dearworth and deft! -
Oh, deuce! all goes down:
(The bad angels fall from heaven)

God seems to have ... partially learned His lesson, as, in the creation of Adam and Eve on the fifth day of the Genesis (*The Creation of Adam and Eve*) He repeats His mistake of engendering a rational mind capable of worshipping His Creation, of which He was so proud, while trying to repair it by inducing in man a sense of humility:

GOD. Of the simplest part of the earth that is here
I shall make man, and for this skill [reason]
For to abate his haughty cheer,
Both his great pride and other ill;

And also to have in mind
How simple he is at his making,
For as feeble I shall find
When he is dead, at his ending.

The preacher's urge to humility was well served by this scene of God creating Adam out of dust, and so was his cautionary advice about the persistence of the seed of evil by the scene of Satan causing the fall of man in having Eve and Adam eat out of the "fruit of good and ill", in order for them to "be as gods", i.e. "as wise as God".

For all the burden of moral anxiety that was inbred into the believer through the repeated lesson of the omnipresence of evil, the **morality plays**, which enriched the Ethos of the Biblical Mythos on the microscopic stage of man's conscience, wakened up the spectators to a sense of responsibility for the way they lived their lives.

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The morality plays, warning of the existence of evil in the human soul, and pointing to the need for and means of salvation, are allegorical in form. Their characters are personified qualities or ideas: *The Castle of Perseverance, Wit and Understanding, Mankind, Everyman* (indebted to or even the translation of a Flemish play).

The social stratification and the lay power relations are rendered impotent from an eschatological perspective, and from a standing elevated above the entire mankind. The theme of *Everyman* is *memento mori*. The young man, richly dressed, young and handsome, is called upon to make an account of his life before God, as he is going to die. The allegorical meaning thereof is that death may reach you when you least expect, therefore spend your life in perpetual anxiety about the moment when you will be eternally doomed or saved. The scene is allegorical, set between the steps of the cathedral and the open tomb, ready to swallow up its careless victim, while the characters' emblematic dress and appearance make them easily recognizable: Death is a lean figure, with a sickle, wearing a monk's black garb; Riches is a very fat man carrying two sacks of gold etc. The world goes through an apocalypse and emerges reshaped as a code of Christian pieties. Everyman learns that whatever he has relied on in life (Fellowship, Kindred, Beauty, Riches...) is of no avail to him in the hour of his death. It is only his Good Deeds (a frail female figure, suggesting that there have been but few of them) that will lead him to Knowledge (of the divine law and of the divine plan of the universe), and from here to Confession. His worldliness chastised, and his guilt internalized through repentance, he is now prepared for the beatific vision of God.

The most original and fruitful development of English **popular poetry** yielded, in the fourteenth century, the **ballad** and the **carol**. The latter was derived from "carole" or dancing song, connected with fertility rituals (maybe that was how it came to be associated with Christmas). The leader sang the stanza, while the chorus danced round in a circle, stopping to sing the refrain, or "burden", rhyme-linked with the stanza. The ballad, with its alternating refrain, probably developed from another kind of dancing, is based upon a simple verse pattern: four-line stanzas consisting of two iambic pentameters alternating with two iambic trimeters:

God prosper long our noble king,
Our lives and safeties all !
A woeful hunting once there did
In Chevy Chase befall.

(Chevi Chase)

Some ballads are founded on romances (*Hind Horn,* or *King Horn*), on historical events, battles (*The Hunting of the Cheviot*), legendary figures (the *Robin*

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Hood ballads), others are woven round simple life situations: lovers separated by feuds of class distinction, fidelity and betrayal, rescue and sudden death. Supernatural elements are not infrequent, a widespread motif being the dead lover that returns to haunt the living (*The Demon Lover, The Wife of Usher's Well*).

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THE RENAISSANCE AND THE AGE OF MILTON (1500-1660)

Philosophical Roots and intellectual developments. Humanism and the Reformation of the Church. The London Reformers: Colet, Morus, Erasmus, Vives. Early Tudor revival and the Elizabethan High Renaissance. Adaptations of ancient literary kinds and experimentation with continental forms: sonnets, courtly epic. The Renaissance utopian project at either end of the period: Thomas More and Francis Bacon. Contextualizing William Shakespeare: the ideologies of late humanism. Cultural and racial conflicts of early modernity. Formal and rhetorical aspects of Renaissance drama. Generic innovations, the construction of plots and characters, aspects of performance. Jacobean and Caroline drama: the black comedy at the end of a cultural phase. Metaphysical interrogation and the invention of the Cavalier in the poetry of the earlier 17th century. John Milton's imaginative construction of the Civil War.

In his influential book, *The Elizabethan World Picture* (1943), E.M. Tillyard defines the Elizabethan Age as a ***secular period between two outbreaks of Protestantism***, when New Humanism was allowed to shape literature. The religious reform, started by John Wycliffe (1320-1384), was completed by Henry VIII' declaration of independence from the Church of Rome (1533). Chaucer's ironic treatment of a Dominican monk's book (Bernard de Louen's *Livre de Melibée et Prudence*) already pointed to the existence of growing impatience and discontent with medieval scholastic thought in the late fourteenth century. More material signs of the ***humanistic turn*** can be detected during the Tudor monarchs, the Renaissance swelling in its full tide under Elizabeth I (1558-1603), and taking a baroque twist at the hedonistic court of the first Stuart king: James I (1603-1625). The second outbreak of Protestantism was responsible for the Civil War

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and the execution of an absolutist monarch, who had chosen to rule the country without a Parliament: Charles I (1625-1649). The Restoration of the monarchy, that is the return to England of Charles II and his court (1660-1685), marked a complete change in literary diction in the direction of neoclassicism.

The admixture of styles in the seventeenth century makes periodization difficult. John Donne had already launched his flamboyant baroque lyric in the 90s, and the poetry of his Caroline followers (the so-called "Metaphysical School") differs sharply from that of the royalists' (the Cavalier School of Ben Jonson), with their neoclassical taste for order, harmony and discipline. John Milton's classical learning and mixed styles (a Spenser in baroque and neoclassical disguise) borrowed a more factious colouring from his Puritan commitment to the Civil War, whose spirit, apart from administrative action (closing down the theatres in 1644), found a more orthodox literary outlet (allegorical form and theological anchoring) after the Restoration (John Bunyan: *Pilgrims' Progress, 1678, The Holy War, 1682*), ill-assorted with the formal elegance and refined cynicism of the court. Although Milton, Vaughan or Marvell produced the bulk of their work after the Restoration, they do not belong to the characteristic, "Augustan" spirit and movement of the day. Our periodization, therefore, is typological rather than chronological.

For some time now the English Renaissance has been studied less from a morphological viewpoint (inventory of themes, motifs, forms) than as a mode of articulation between history and epistemology. The Renaissance is seen as a poise between the medieval and the modern world, a shift from ontotheology to the centrality of the human being defined through cultural ontology. The prestigious scholastic thought of the twelfth century – **Duns Scotus, John of Salisbury, William of Ockham** – had supported a theocentric perspective, with the world interpreted as the embodiment of the divine Logos (Salisbury in his *Metalogicus*: God's signature). Here is Jacques Derrida, describing the logocentric view of the world: *res* is *chose créée à partir de son* eidos, *de son sens pensé dans le logos ou l'entendement infini de Dieu* **(1).** The modern revolution means a redeployment of the whole structure of values and signification on a human level, and the Renaissance man, centrally situated in the new world picture, took decisive steps in this direction. The mind no longer looks up or beyond; it turns and feeds upon itself. The **experience of interiority** (characters brooding upon what they have said or done and being transformed in the process), self-reflexivity, the dialogue of the mind with itself, our own awareness of role-playing are seen as basic in the shaping of the modern self by Harold Bloom in his recent revaluation of *Hamlet* **(2).** There seems to be no one-to-one correspondence between "thing" and "symbol". Meaning is not ***given*** but ***constructed*** through language. The new world picture is no longer revealed but coming into focus through a plurality of intersecting discourses. The question is: do they mirror what the Elizabethans

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thought or were they **constitutive** of the frames of evaluation against which people measured themselves? Is the writing subjectivity **disclosing** an order of meaning – like Scotus's and Salisbury's hermeneutic efforts to interpret the divine meaning hiding in the things in the world –, or is it assumed as **producing** it through discourse? The reliance on the discursive body of the age – whether philosophical, ethical, legal, religious, artistic – the practice of intertextuality and the foregrounding of a process of linguistic ontology **(3)** – show that the Elizabethans regarded themselves as **meaning beings**, bestowing meaning on the world rather than deciphering one already inscribed in it. The "secularization" process replaces the transcendental attitude by cultural constructs:... *if thought, language, and social processes are mutually interdependent, then meaning itself cannot be a simple question of reference – the establishment of an equivalent between "symbol" and "thing" – but must be a construction in language. It therefore follows that the mechanisms deployed in the construction of language, and the selection of certain possibilities from within those governed by the system as a whole which takes place in the act of reading, are those which, in principle, determine the way in which particular communities make sense of the world. In other words, the means of establishing a hierarchy of values at the conceptual level correspond to a process of differentiation at the material level of the construction of the signifier* **(4).**

I. Maybe the broadest definition of the Renaissance outlook is that the world out there is something different and inferior to the "making sense of it". The Titanic drive of the "self-born" spirit to test all habitudes of thought is manifest in all walks of life. Time, personified in *The Winter's Tale* as a split personality, sees itself either as empty passage, on-going movement, or as meaningful fulfilment of human intentions and purposes; either as the inflexible law of nature's course, or as the realm of human signifieds („custom").

TIME: *Impute it not a crime*
To me or my swift passage that I slide
O'er sixteen years and leave the growth untried
Of that wide gap, since it is in my power
To o'erthrow law and in one self-born hour
To plant and o'erwhelm custom.

The word "custom" here seems to envelop the sphere of Pierre Bourdieu's "habitus" **(5):** a set of interpretations that enable persons and social groups to make a virtue of necessity; the perceptual, evaluative, and classificatory schemata, codes of the social imaginary which have a capacity for self-replication within individual imaginations.

The meaning structure of the Renaissance discourse has received several names – "life style", "heuristic model", "episteme", "framework of evaluation",

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"signifying practice", "semantic energies", "world picture", "habitus", "chronotope" (the time and space inscribed in discourse) – which are, in effect, more or less synonymous, designating analogous codifiers of Elizabethan ideology.

The books relating to history, discovery and navigation, in an age of universal curiosity, were breeding a sense of **the emancipation of the intellect in the general process of man establishing his empire over nature**. Being and meaning-making had grown independent of each other: *there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so* (*Hamlet*, II/2). The unique narrative of Christianity or history was now competing with several histories, several meta-narratives. Historical distancing was a frequent device, the theme was often a conflict of values, pagan or Christian, or a comparison between the present and the past (Here is Thomas Wilson, the translator of Demosthenes: *every good subject should compare the present and the past, when he hears of Athens and Athenians, he should remember England and the Englishmen*). The static world outlook nourished by the immobile medieval status was seriously being challenged by the discovery of human communities with different values and beliefs. In 1492 Columbus discovered America because of an inference made possible by contemporary science. The time had come for new territories to be discovered in the mind before they were discovered on the planet. Or, once discovered, to be reshaped according to the human measure: *Many great regions are discovered,/ Which to late age were never mentioned.// Who ever heard of the Indian Peru ?/ Or who in venturous vessel measured/ the Amazon's huge river found true ?/ Or fruitful Virginia who did ever view ?// Yet all these were, when no man did them know;/ Yet had from wisest ages hidden been:/ And later times things more unknown shall show...(*Edmund Spenser, prologue to the second book of *The Faerie Queene).*

II. New worlds were not only discovered, measured out, colonized through translations but also invented *by* a future-oriented humanity, capable of **projective behaviour** (Hamlet: l*ooking before and after*, IV/4). The convention of the ideal state, not topical but imaginary, which became familiar among the contemporaries of Tommaso Campanella *(La citta del sole,* c. 1602) and Francis Bacon (*The New Atlantis*, 1627) meant pioneer work in Thomas More's *Utopia or The Discourses of Raphael Hythloday, of the Best State of a Commonwealth*, written in Latin, in 1515. Utopian fictions connect the two poles of a great time for change. Their authors reminded their societies, and not generic mankind, of their responsibility to themselves, and not to God, in improving on their social organization, in advancing upon the road of that kind of knowledge which can benefit everyone during one's life on earth, which is not vain, but can be made glorious. *Is truth ever barren?* Bacon's rhetorical question in his essay, *The Praise of Knowledge*, is met with a new pragmatism: *Shall we not be able thereby to produce worthy effects and to endow the life of man with infinite*

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commodities? **The ideal of the life of contemplation is forfeited in favour of active involvement**, for *in this theatre of man's life it is reserved only for God and angels to be lookers on (The Advancement of Learning*, 1605, a philosophical essay, in the manner of Montaigne).

From More's *Utopia* to Bacon's *New Atlantis*, the utopian project disengages history from the medieval theocratic framing, rooting politics in ethics, rational examination (the "good feasts of peace", like Plato's *Symposium*), social consensus, and pragmatic action. The model set forth by the London Reformers - Erasmus, More, John Colet and Juan Luis Vives –, drawing on stoic models (Cicero and Seneca), meant ethically justified power, working in the interest of mankind's welfare and confirmed by social consensus, in opposition to the feudal idea of providential rule by an absolutist monarch. The traditional exchange of ideas in dialogue, from Plato to Lucian, is employed for political rather than philosophical ends. The two Books of More's *Utopia*, the *Dialogue of Counsel* and Raphael Hythlodaeus's *Discourse* about his travel to the New World, or the dialogue between a narrator and a figure of wisdom (the father of Salomon's House in Bacon's *New Atlantis*) no longer seek the excitement of Sir John Mandeville's Oriental monsters, fitting into the medieval *Travels* convention of mirror civilizations (European versus demonized Others). They provide a criticism of contemporary English troubles, removed from the theological script of the original sin and re-located within a man-made history (the pauperization of the farmers through the early capitalist politics of enclosures, the counterfeit pleasures artificially created by the emergence of early modern consumerism, the feudal leftovers: vain ideas of chivalric honour and glory, breeding the minor evil of decadent idleness and the destructive ones of princely tyranny and warfare), and set up an agenda of civil philosophy and pragmatic action of social improvement: good and wholesome laws, under the rule of wise Prince Utopus, life according to reason-curbed will and desires that do not conflict with virtue, inventions improving on nature itself in the *New Atlantis* artisans' encyclopaedia of scientific humanism.

III. Bacon is the maker of the modern mind also in that **combination of empricism and awareness of the need for an adequate method in science**, that is of the mind leaning upon itself. Unlike Aristotle's "organon", his new instrument – *Novum Organum,* 1620 –, has an inductive character, proceeding through comparison, antithesis, distinction and rejection. The Renaissance mind takes nothing for granted, **the epistemological inquiry** (into the grounds of knowledge) being the distinguishing mark of modern consciousness. Bacon uses the word "idol" to describe man's false consciousness coming from philosophical systems, whether empirical, sophistical or superstitious (**idols of the theatre**), from noncritical assumptions about the world's delusive appearances (**idols of the tribe**, for instance the deceiving movements of the heavenly bodies, as they

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appear to the senses, or **idols of the cave**, originating in individual likings or biases), or from the improper use of language **(idols of the market-place)**. Bacon's denial of Cratylism **(6)** and the idea that words react on the understanding were some of the earliest critical and analytical approaches to language. Shakespeare's own awareness of the way language works **(7)** is worth the attention of contemporary semiologists.

IV. ***Printing*** (*Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye* was the first book published by William Caxton in England in 1476) had an enormous contribution to the **dissemination of the new ideas of Humanism and the Renaissance**, while the translation of the Bible, begun by William Tyndale, who, unlike the Lollard Bibles, used the Greek and the Hebrew originals instead of the Vulgate, completed by Miles Coverdale and published at Cologne in 1535, later revised by Coverdale, Matthew and the English exiles in Geneva, and printed there in 1560, made available in great numbers an inspired and refined English idiom. The revised version thereof, in a loftier, aureate diction, known as the Authorized Version of King James Bible, appeared in 1611.

The medieval access to the works of the Greek and Latin antiquity had been a limited one, partly through censorship, partly through distorting commentaries (pagan works valued for supposed prophecies of Christiandom). Lorenzo Vala was the founder of philological and historical criticism, while Erasmus himself, who taught Greek at Cambridge from 1510 to 1513, distinguished (in a famous letter to Martinus Dorpius, 1515) between theology (philological ignorance and rigid *forma mentis)* and *bonae litterae (litterae humaniores, studia humanitatis, humanae litterae, humaniora, studia humanista),* that is, the liberal studies, including grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history, moral philosophy – **set apart from theology**.

Caxton, who had been working under courtly patronage (Edward IV's sister in Bruges) before coming to London, had originally planned to help restore the dying world of feudal chivalry. Malory's *Morte Darthur* proved, however, that Arthur was dead indeed to the dawning modern age, or, anyhow, appropriated and significantly transformed by the rising middle class. The printing press got a life of its own, dissipating the ideology of humanism. John Colet's 1496 Lectures at Oxford on *St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, with their irenic message (the new faith was not to be imposed through acts of violence against the Roman authorities), gave a scholarly garb to a changing attitude towards feudal values, already apparent in *The Book of Noblesse* (1460-75), where noble youths are encouraged to give up on military pursuits for the sake of more peaceful vocations, and in *The Book of Saint Albans*, where the aristocrats' love of hunting is exposed for gratuitous cruelty. The medieval auctoritates and the schoolmen's exercise in syllogistic squibs give way to the new grammatical method and the philological hermeneutics of the true meanings of ancient texts, obscured by centuries of scholastic commentaries, according to the model provided by the Italian humanists. Tyranny and war were indirectly indicted, through translations,

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in order to avoid the king's wrath: Morus and Erasmus translated Lucian's *Dialogues of the Dead*, while providing statesmen with examples of good government in their own writings. Erasmus's *De copia, Adagia* and *Apophthegmata* went into the grammar schools and university curricula, encouraging students to examine human actions and motives, or controversial issues in light of right reason (**8**).

V. **The self is generated within new matrices of meaningful social action,** which is the most important aspect of man's centrality in the Renaissance world picture. In this we differ from E.M.W. Tillyard (**9**), who identifies a *solidly theocentric... a simplified version of a much more complicated medieval picture*, while endorsing Rene Girard's opinion that, in Shakespeare, ***the structure of meaning is based not upon the "stable significance" of the original Logos (natural significance), but on codes built on differences (symbolical order):*** *Le* ***Degree*** *est plus que la source de toute signification stable, plus qu'un mécanisme de différenciation: c'est aussi le principe de l'unité entre les hommes, éminemment paradoxale, puisqu'il est aussi désunion, séparation, distance hierarchie.* (**10**) As this issue is fundamental in any Shakespearean apparoach, let us take a closer look at what Shakespeare himself and the anonymous author of a *Homily* published in an 1547 collection have got to say. The Shakespearean quote is from Ulysses' famous speech in *Troilus and Cressida*, I/3.

When that the general is not like the hive
To whom the foragers shall all repair,
What honey is expected ? Degree being vizarded,
The unworthiest shows us fairly in the mask.
The heavens themselves, the planets and this centre
Observe degree, priority and place,
Insisture, course, proportion, season form,
Office and custom, in all line of order;

Every degree of people in their vocation,/ calling, and office, hath appointed to them,/ their duties and order, some are in high /degree, some in low, some kings and princes,/ some inferior and subjects, priests and/ lay men, masters and servants, fathers and / children, husbands and wives, rich and poor,/ and every one needs of other, so that in all/ things is to be lauded and praised the goodly/ order of God...

The author of the homily does not describe an entire social hierarchy, nor does he stick to a unique criterion, which would make any possible (social estate, family ties, ecclesiastical or lay appurtenance, financial means etc.) These are simply ***binary oppositions*** on which codes are founded. The Renaissance mind is

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more interested in the superstructure of meanings created through social intercourse, than in the fixed social estates which none of the Canterbury-bound pilgrims means to transgress.

Ulysses notices the empty Greek tents and the embittering sight inspires him with a disanalogy: whereas in a hive (the medieval common trope for society), all bees do their duty, humans are in a position to choose, either to act their parts or to play truant. The next opposition between *vizard* and *mask* shows that nothing about the human being is a given. Man can either insert himself consciously into the social cast, in which case there is an identity between self and mask (an individual socialized as warrior, the man and his socially ascribed role), or become an actor, the mask being an empty marker, having no referent out there in the world. However, the identity between self and eidos has been conventionalized and relativized. Both vizor and mask are not solidary with but they merely stand for the actual face (a relationship of the kind establishing between thing and signifier). The difference is that one signifier is full, validated by a necessary or ideal social order, while the other is an empty marker. The truth of the mask is the link between body and social signifier. The mind is permanently on the watch out in order to harmonize the private and public selves (see the conflict between private desire and the requirements of the public office in *Measure for Measure*), to give a good example, when in high office, for rulers are permanently observed, *not only in their open affairs, but also in their secret passe times* (from a sermon, towards the end of the sixteenth century). Failure to fulfil the allotted social role may result in general disaster (see the tragedy of *Gorboduc*, written by Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville, 1562, about the king whose self-willed abdication ends up tragically or Lear's similar fate in Shakespeare's play, 1605).

The **crisis of degree** was the result of the emergence of the new world of mobile liquid capital. The Malta where the action of Marlowe's *Jew of Malta* is set is a fragmented world, lacking historical roots and national identity, a mere knot in the web of financial capital spreading its net all over Europe. The *Prologue* spoken by Machiavell places this shifting, cosmopolitan world under the patronage of the Italian merchant prince, the archetypal subverter of inherited status and under the sway of money heaped up in the opening scene by Barabas. But even this rich Jew can no longer control his own home: his daughter, Abigail (like Jessica, in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*) shifts her allegiances to Christianity. Allegiance versus inherited status was the defining moment in the new construction of identity. According to Jacob Burkhardt, the Renaissance meant the end of feudal collective selfhood (the individual used to be defined through some form of collective identity: a member of a class, religious or lay fraternity, etc.) and the beginning of the era of bourgeois individuality: the self-made capitalist, who feels free from the world. Stephen Greenblatt, a

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contemporary American historicist, reinforces this theory, coining a term for the new sense of identity: **self-fashioning**. The individual feels free to choose his status in the world, to shape his own identity, particularly through discourse. Marx's opposite theory, of the Renaissance man being defined through objects, through the material conditions of his existence, as, in the new market system, commodities have merely an exchange value, wich depends on offer and demand not on the identity of the producer, was adapted by the French poststructuralist Jean Baudrillard to his theory of **simulacra**, or of the empty signs, no longer tied down to a fixed, material referent. Any face can assume any vizor. Money can buy status, power; feudal fixities and aristocratic privileges had come under stress.

In Shakespeare there is a permanent tension between these two constructions of identity. Queen Elizabeth's sumptuary laws had regulated expenditures so as to maintain social distinctions through outward markers of rank, as, for instance, vestments. The Bastard, in *King John*, alludes quite transparently to the new Machiavellian political philosophy of **instrumental rationality** (to pursue what is efficient, irrespective of moral aspects), which had ruled out the Ciceronian imposition of **honesta utilitas** (the useful should also be honest). This is a sort of dematerialization of the world into the emptiness of signs, simulacra („all-changing word") through the exchange value of marketable goods („Commodity"). The whole world, displaced from origin, enters upon a "bastard" stage. The natural countenance, the lively face mirroring the war of genuine emotions, had smoothed down, assuming the immobility of the social mask.

That smooth-faced gentleman, tickling Commodity,
Commodity, the bias of the world;
The world, who of itself is poised well,
Made to run even upon even ground,
Till this advantage, this vile-drawing bias,
This sway of motion, this Commodity,
Makes it take heed from all indifferency,
From all direction, purpose, course, intent:
And this same bias, this Commodity,
This bawd, this broker, this all-changing word...:

The loss of property turns both Lear and Edgar into zero figures (according to the current ideological construction of identity). However, both characters will finally assert their intrinsic human worth, which survives the loss of property. The redeemed Lear, who has learned that the clothes of the rich only serve to hide vices, will freely discard outward garments (*Undo this button...*), as the medicinal effect of changing places with the wretched had taught him the true value of "pomp".

Unlike such attempts to resist the solvent effect of capitalism upon social and human ties, more characteristic of the chronicle plays, lost in legendary times,

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or of the romances, removed from historical time, the black comedies, or *Troilus and Cressida*, an early example of theatre of the mind, privilege a new form of character construction, which anticipates pragmatist theories of identity as constative, shaped by public discourse, or the recognition one gets from his social others. Whereas Ulysses's address to the army stresses the importance of each man's duty according to his degree or place in society, for obvious military purposes, in his conversation with his friend, Achilles, as his purpose changes (to end his sulky and indolent retreat to his tent), this sly, shape-shifting leader of the Greek armies defines human worth as that which resides in the eye of the beholder. If Achilles does not fight, like an actor whose fame depends on uninterrupted acting, his reputation will go over to Ajax. Inherent worth, essential human nature is no longer the issue, it is the "applause", the public ratification that consecrates one's social status.

In *All's Well that Ends Well*, friendship, loyalty, love or virginity are all turned into commodities, goods to be exchanged for the best offer at the timely moment of demand...

The rejection of natural law, of morality, the new politics, no longer constrained by the practice of virtues, represent, according to Leo Strauss, the **"first wave of modernity"** ("The Three Waves of Modernity"), whose signs Shakespeare, Marlowe or the metaphysical poets intercepted with the sensitivity of the immunological system to the noxious germs entering the body.

VI. A more valuable aspect of modernity dawning on the world at the time of the Renaissance was the end of medieval dogmatism and totalitarianism. Modernity, according to Gabriel Josipovici (*The Lessons of Modernism*) meant the end of transcendental authority, contributed by three potent challengers: **Science** (everything was being reexamined in the light of truth and rational investigation), **Protestantism** (according to Calvin and Luther, the Church was no longer needed in the dialogue of the alone with the Alone: the believer and God) and the **Bourgeoisie**, a social class which disturbed the pre-existing hierarchical arrangements.

Two more challengers of medieval hermenutic and of a unified body of belief should be further considered, as they fostered modern relativism, whose first articulations, from Montaigne (16th century) to Chladenius (his concept of "Sehepunkt", in the 18th century) bore upon the structuring devices of the arts and their modes of representation: **Copernican perspectivism and Bacon's critique of language and representation.**

The previous age had been dominated by Ptolemaic cartography, which meant the neutrality and stability of the geometrical vision in constructing maps of the world. The eye was diametrically opposed to the first chosen meridian. Latitudes and longitudes stretched out from this spot to produce a two-

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dimensional representation. Copernican astronomy had rendered this representation problematic. The viewer's correct representation depended on astronomical referents and on the instruments of measurement. It was correct only if the eye was lined up with the North Star. The rules of perspective, laid down by the Italian painter Alberti (*Della Pittura*), exposed artistic representation for an illusion, an artifice, as the artist no longer copied over or faithfully mirrored the world; he set it in perspective. One's sense of reality was going through a crisis, as perspectivism did not echo, it doubled up being. In *King Lear*, Edgar induces his father to believe that he is standing up at Dover, by imaginatively describing a mound of small height according to the rules of perspective. Blind Gloucester jumps from it to his safety, and his belief in a miracle restores his faith in life and divine justice. The time honoured tyranny of the mimetic principle is overthrown, and Philip Sidney can safely proclaim art's emancipation from reality in his *Defence of Poesy*:

... the poet's persons and doings are but pictures what should be, and not stories what have been, they will never give the lie to things not affirmatively, but allegorically and figuratively written. And therefore as in history, looking for truth, they may go away full-frought with falsehood, so in poesy, looking but for fiction, they shall use the narration but as an imaginative ground-plan of a profitable invention.

Perspectivism nullified Aristotle's distinction between the historian's discourse of truth as against the poet's invention. The positionality of the observer, the accuracy of his methods or instruments intervened as uncontrollable variables in his mediation – rather than discovery – of truth. In the playhouse built by Inigo Jones for the Stuart court, according to the rules of perspective, it was only the king's seat that permitted the central viewing position. Only the king's vision was correct...

Bacon's theory of *idols* precipitated the sense of "homini confusio" permeating the arts of the baroque. Ideas of the world can be fallible, he says, on account of misrepresentations, which he calls "idols".

Cratyllic language (words having some precise meaning according to their eidos – their image in the divine mind) gives way to signs as empty stand-ins, whose meaning is negotiated in communication. The theory of the conventional nature of language was to be completed by John Locke (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*).

Such early manifestations of modern scepticism and relativism take us over to the other, dark side of the Renaissance, traditionally associated with the birth of rationalism, the scientific spirit and man's increasing control of the universe.

VII. Is there **an occult side to the Renaissance** as well, as Hélène Védrine would have us believe in her *Philosophies de la Renaissance*? **(11)**. If

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Renaissance belief in the validity of social structures of meanings and values is above all disputation, the interest in the occult or in metaphysical schemes appears to us as a purely rhetorical stratagem. Did people really believe in the validity of their representations of the world, summed up by Tillyard as "chain of being", "cosmic dance", "the doctrine of the four elements" or "correspondences between planes of being" as firmly as the medieval spectator who felt his blood freezing on watching *Everyman*, or were they just tropes? The very amalgamation and repetition confirms the latter suspicion. In his *Fairy Queene*, *(The Mutability Canto)* Spenser tropes the dissolution of the world both as regress from subtler to more inferior elements (fire, air, water, earth) and as the Christian apocalypse. In his sonnets, Shakespeare too inscribes both figures: in sonnets XLIV and XLV, his person appears to be divided between that part made up of earth and water, which pulls him downwards, when his love moves away, and *the other two, slight air and purging fire,* which are his better self, activated in the presence of his love. In sonnet CXLIV, he appears as the Christian split double nature, with his better angel outwardly projected as the fair youth, and his base, or evil self, personified by the Dark Lady. **The recurrent motif of the warring body and soul have become a metaphorical way of speaking** about a psychological polarity: the mortality of the body and the slavery of passions and instincts in counterdistinction to the freedom of the spirit, participating in the immortality of books or seeking eternal glory through them (Castiglione's *Courtier, XLIII*, translated by Thomas Hoby). Ancient and contemporary masters are ransacked for models and precepts: Aristotle' *Nicomachean Ethics,* Cicero's *De Officiis*, Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans, A Mirror for Magistrates* (interrogating aspects of conduct in historical figures), Thomas Elyot's *The Book Named the Governor.* The "chain of being" points to the vector of a human meliorist project, which replaces *natura naturans* by the dramatist's art: Prospero's *brave new world*, rescued from the sub-human Caliban stage (i.e., man in his natural state) and restored, like Ariel to the elements to achieve the fusion of subject and object, of mind and matter. Dropping the magic of the magician's book and staff, Prospero claims applauses for the illusionary power of artistic representation. The self, permanently confronted with models and paragons, is often self-dramatized, and cast into a self-reflexive type of discourse: play within the play, framing and comment on the main action through parallel plots, dumb shows, prologues etc.

Under **Henry VII**, the court became an artistic centre, where drama could grow more secular and less other-worldly. Under **Henry VIII**, it also became anti-clerical, launching fierce attacks on the Catholic Church. The new sites of dramatic performances (in colleges, at court, in aristocratic households) encouraged an appropriation of classical learning and a more developed language

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and structure. Native roots should not be underestimated, however (encouraged even by **the breaking down of the European religious community into national churches**). A metamorphic process, with help from classical models, led naturally from the **morality play** to the Renaissance **historical play**, with the nation removed from an eschatological frame and set within a historical one (*Kynge Johan*, by **John Bale**, dated around 1539); from **interludes** to the **comedies** of the professional scholars from the universities, full of farcical situations, structured into acts and scenes according to classical models, yet dealing with native topics and characters and experimenting with songs, in the unrestrained manner of popular festivals. **Nicholas Udall's** *Ralph Roister Doister* and *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, by an identified author, are the best known. In the latter, the whole sophisticated machinery of classical comedy – a *Prologue* introducing the subject, division into acts and scenes, the unfailing end-line rhyme of the couplets, in sharp contrast to the rudimentary language of the folk songs – is employed for a farcical situation of the basest sort. An old woman loses her needle, a fact which causes an entirely disproportionate despondency and agitation (*so fearful a fray*), only to find it finally in her servant's breeches which she has mended. The homely goods of a village kitchen, the popular superstitions, the colourful language are among the first attempts in the way of a realistic comedy. The prevailing mode, however, is the mock-heroic. **Tudor drama** converted the **morality play**, preaching humility, faith, obedience to God, into a **heroic play**, celebrating power, riches, beauty or knowledge, no longer of divinity but of the world, or into a kind of theatre having a political agenda and targeting specific goals in the context of an altering political map. Characters are no longer disembodied abstractions. In **Henry Medwall's** *Nature*, Pride is a courtly type representing himself in terms of materialistically determined social status: ancestry, a large estate, fashionable dress, being served at the table. Vestments, lifestyle, possessions ascribe him to some particular social class. As Cardinal Morton's chaplain, Medwall served his patron's interests by staging a performance in honour of the Spanish and Flemish ambassadors gathered at Lambeth Palace on the Christmas Eve of 1497. The Cardinal had not been born but appointed to a high social position, therefore he was interested in reclassifying status as individual talent and accomplishment. Henry VII himself, who could not make a very strong case for his accession to the throne, and who was relying on the Commons and on the gentry in his attempt to curb the power and arrogance of the baronial class, was encouraging the new definition of nobility as an acquisition rather than a given. In Medwall's *Fulgence and Lucrec,* a Roman senator's daughter is faced with the problem of choosing a suitor: will she settle for Publius Cornelius, an aristocrat by birth, or for Gaius Flaminius, who had worked his way up in society through virtuous conduct and services to Rome? Unlike the Roman senators, the

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servants in the subplot mirroring the main plot support the privilege of blood. A and B, in love with Joan, "the flower of the frying pan", will solve their rivalry over the same woman according to the rules of courtly love and courtship by tournament. The worthlessness of the aristocratic values is suggested through this parody set in low life.

However, even **Elizabethan** or **High Renaissance drama** continues to incorporate elements of medieval drama as well as of popular culture – folk songs and dances, figures and motifs of the carnivalesque low tradition of village festivals – as well as the double plot mingling the serious and the comic threads of the miracles and interludes, for the sake of a more complex effect, secured by the existence of multiple perspectives on the subject. Elements of medieval morality steal into Elizabethan tragedy, usually broadening its appeal: allegorical characters and pageants of the Seven Deadly Sins in a heroic play (thematizing the thirst for knowledge and power) like *Doctor Faustus* by Christopher Marlowe allegorical dumb shows, commenting on the main action through archetypal or *hic-et-ubique* projections (*Gorboduc*, by **Thomas Sackville** and **Thomas Norton**, *Hamlet, romances*). Apart from being tardy, English Renaissance also chose to take its original course. The Shakespearean genius broke all rules and created its own dramatic forms. As a matter of fact, Aeschylus and Sophocles were not translated at all over this timespean, while Euripides was only known through a paraphrase of the *Phoenissae* (1566). Machiavelli's *Prince,* which challenged the medieval view of a fixed system of hierarchies, divinely ordained, was not translated into English until well into the seventeenth century (164o), Bacon objecting that one ought to write what one should, not what one thinks. The Faustus figure was played down as a conjurer, satisfied to play childish tricks on the potentates of the day. Elizabeth, who was a new type of woman, learned, emancipated, undertook to translate a medieval philosopher, Boethius, while her champion of the sea, Walter Raleigh, was not only a discoverer but also a theologian. Erasmus was more influential through his *Enchiridion Militis Christiani (The Christian Soldier's Textbook)*, echoed in various writings of the time, than through the cunning social satire of *Encomium Moriae* (The Praise of Folly). It is true that Alexander Barclay's *Ship of Fools* (1509) was published shortly after Sebastian Brant's invention of this new narrative convention (*Das Narrenschiff,* Basel, 1494), which is a Renaissance version of the medieval *Danse macabre* or *estates satire:* representatives of all social estates are gathered together for satirical purposes. Barclay's translation includes personal anticlerical attacks, and a detraction of John Skelton, court poet to Henry VII. Unlike him, Shakespeare was an explorer of past worlds and past narratives alike (apart from the *longue durée* of his atemporal romance worlds), and attempts to establish an underground political allusiveness to real people are dismissed with an ironical

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comment by Northrop Frye, in his book *On Shakespeare*. Frye remarks the absence of any reference to contingent political events in the histories, as well, such as of *Magna Carta* in *King John* or of the peasants' revolt in *Richard II*: *I make this point because every so often some director or critic gets the notion that certain characters, such as Titania, refer to her. The consequences to Shakespeare's dramatic career if the Queen had believed that she was being publicly represented as having a love affair with a jackass are something we fortunately don't have to think about* **(12)**. **Censorship** was exercised as a royal prerogative through the Master of Revels who licensed companies, read and approved all plays, for a considerable fee, often demanding changes before they got his assent. Printing was controlled by the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Privy Council through their ecclesiastical authorities and court officials, and enforced through the Stationers' Company, a state-licensed monopoly. What was being suppressed? According to Margot Heinemann, **(13)** *questions of morality or taste scarcely arose except for the banning of oaths in 1606; rape, incest, mutilation, and brothel realism seem not to have troubled the censors at all.* Apparently, a history of censorship will reveal what potentates mostly dislike or fear. The licentious court of King James I, with the king himself guilty of erotic transgression and the queen presiding over an endless revelling in her "dancing barn" of White Hall, to say nothing of a nobleman murdered by his wife and her lover under the court's protection, did not make much fuss about morality. It was only political transgression that mattered.

The sore points of court politics changed from the Elizabethan to the Stuart reign. Elizabeth, who had ordered the maiming of a man who had written a pamphlet on her prospective marriage to the French dauphin (he had his right hand cut off), mostly feared issues of legitimacy and succession, as well as of religious extremism and fanaticism. The Elizabethan Settlement had restored the power of the bishops, according to the principle "no bishop no king", while the Stuarts made further progress on the way to a restoration of Catholicism, dramatically ended by the Civil War. A proclamation of 1559 had even forbidden the treatment of religious and political issues except in front of persons endowed with "discretion" (wisdom, the capacity to discern and discriminate). Marlowe wrote different prologues and epilogues for his *Jew of Malta,* depending on the site of performance. The prologue for the White Hall play alluded to the fact that the play had passed censorship and could now gratify the spectators' judicious "princely ears", while the prologue for the Druary Lane (Cockpit or Phoenix) theatre only advertised the author as the "greatest poet" of the age and commented on aesthetic issues. With all his precautions, his daring idea that hell is only a state of conscience (*Doctor Faustus*) and his opinion that Thomas Harriot, the Queen's mathematician, was a Juggler who used religion to enslave the naive minds of the

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primitive people in Virginia (see Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakepearean Negotiations*, *Op. cit.*, pp. 21, and the following) put down in a police report might have contributed to his early and suspect loss of life.

The state control of dramatic performance made all dramatists dependent upon patronage for security and a livelihood. Shakepeare's patron, the Earl of Southampton, was a friend of Robert Devreux, Earl of Essex, who began by asking subversive questions, such as whether a King might not err, and ended in overt rebellion leading to his execution. Shakespeare's contribution to the cause was probably *The Tragedy of King Richard the Second*, putting on the map questions about a king's worthiness, legitimacy, and deposition shortly before the outbreak of the Essex revolt.

Under James I, it was the king's bent toward absolutism that represented the main concern of his subjects. The king claimed that he was ruling by divine right (no longer, like Elizabeth, "with their love", as she had stated before a deputation of the Commons), that his subjects' lives depended on him, that he could dispose of them as he well pleased, and that he was the father of the nation like a patriarch in his family. The pastoral mode was the frequent attempt at the time to mitigate the asperities of a totalitarian regime. Its founding convention was the oneness of existence, and its integrative poetics spanned the range of drama and poetry from Shakespeare's late romances to **Phineas Fletcher's** *Purple Island,* published in 1633, i.e. shortly before the outbreak of the Civil War. The difference is that, whereas Shakespeare modulated the pastoral stuff into an aesthetic parable, Fletcher shows the new concern of the baroque poet with the human body:

Phineas Fletcher's allegorical atlas of the human body, ***The Purple Island; or, The Isle of Man*** *(1633), models both the geophysical composition and the social character of a fictional Pacific Island on the skeletal structure and anatomical systems of the human body. (...) What is intriguing in Fletcher's treatment of this trope, in his celebration of tributaries as what is perhaps the smallest organ of the human body, is the implicit claim that political agency resides in all aspects of the state and not exclusively in the head of the monarch. Fletcher diverges from the centralized political theodicy offered by the Stuarts and redistributes political agency to the most minute parts of that body politic. Because this strategy is inimical to the prevalent Stuart ideology that sought to redefine the unity of wills between ruler and subject (**unitas in voluntaribus**) as the governing and regulating will of one man (**unitas una et regulatrix**), I argue that Fletcher contributes to alternate traditions rooted in primitive notions of* ***pietas*** *and richly adduced poetically throughout the pastoral tradition. The pastoral tradition, which reached its apogee under Elizabeth, itself becomes increasingly saturated with discussions of a unitary model of political will which will, at this time, also provides the model for poetic patronage in a new political*

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climate. As poets adjust to the absolutism of James's rule, the pastoral landscape becomes increasingly structured from above; it is overseen by a single ruling entity rather than a group of shepherds working in the harmonious pursuit of common interests, necessitating a generic renegotiation to reflect the disparate ruling ideologies in the shift from Tudor to Stuart. (**14**).

Poetry's coverage at the time was much more comprehensive, though. It turned to politics as well as to religion, science or the sister arts. William Harvey's recent discovery of the circulation of the blood had probably spurred Fletcher's imagination, yet a look at the larger historical context can always enrich a literary historian's explanatory narrative.

Renaissance Poetry: Reinscription and Experimentation

English poets displayed an unhibited handling of generic conventions, working freely with forms, thematic elements, topics and conventions.

All the literary forms the English revived from the antiquity or borrowed from the recent developments on the Continent underwent significant transformations, so that the argument on the comparable value of the moderns and of the ancients, imitated in a servile spirit, needed to be imported from France to England towards the end of the seventeenth century, where it knew an unglorious career (settled in favour of the native genius by Dryden and ridiculed by Pope). Instead, the first book of *Don Quixote* was translated into English before the second appeared in Spain, and the "fantastic Spaniard" who loves by the book in Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost* was the kindred offspring of another comic genius. The literary heritage of *Don Quixote* was to be a lasting one among the English authors, interested ever since the Renaissance in the epistemological aspects of textuality (life by the book), in the pilgrimage of books ("errant texts") in the indifferent world of things (**15**).

The ancient literary forms were first recovered either through translation or imitation. Or both, we should say, as the Scots poet, **Gavin Douglas**, translated the *Aeneid* (1513) keeping to the original sense and proportions, yet recasting it into heroic couplets, while the great innovator, **Henry Howard**, Earl of Surrey, reshaped it to **blank verse**, that is unrhymed, enjambed (run-on, instead of end-stopped lines) pentameters – the first in English.

The extensive use of the pastoral mode (originating in the *Idylls* of *Theocritus*, 3rd cent. B.C.) both in poetry (the pastoral eclogue) and in prose romances (**Robert Greene, Philip Sidney**) was, according to William Empson (*Some Versions of the Pastoral,* 1935), the expression of an attempt to break through the strong class system, making the high and the low in status (country and city, shepherds and royalty) feel at home with each other. A deconstruction of social hierarchy in order to reconstruct it as moral hierarchy. The dialogue between shepherds in a world free

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from conflict and temporal decay (a Golden World *in stasis*) is propitious to ecclesiastical and political allegory ("pastor" meaning both "shepherd" and "priest"). **Edmund Spenser**'s *Shepheardes Calender*, a series of twelve **eclogues**, one for each month of the year, looks back to Theocritus and Virgil, but also to more recent pastoralists: Marot and Mantuan. October combines the elegiac autumnal mood with anxious reflections on a poet's calling. As required by the literary convention, the decorative and graceful imagery of a stylized countryside is coupled with a taste for obsolete words, indicative of no particular locale. Political attitudes are, however, manifest, both in satirical denunciations of social evil and in Elizabeth's idealization as Eliza, queen of the shepherds.

Another foreign model which Spenser appropriates and transforms in his *Faerie Queene* is the **poema cavalleresco**, the Renaissance version of the epic, created by Lodovico Ariosto and Torquato Tasso (*Orlando furioso* and *Gerusalemme liberata*, respectively). Spenser, however, is not interested in a time-bound literary form (with topical allusions to the relatively recent crusades and wars, a recital of adventures and romance, with sensational fits of madness and recovery by simply breathing in one's lost senses, brought back to earth in a phial...). Spenser does not write just for entertainment, being intent upon a very serious moral allegory, whose initial design included twelve books dedicated to Aristotle's twelve moral virtues, out of which only six and one fragment (the *Cantos of Mutability*) were written. Apart from the moral allegory, the poem has two more layers of meaning: the legendary story of King Arthur seeing Gloriana, Queen of the Faeries, in a dream and setting out to seek her out in faery land, and a political allegory (Gloriana standing for Queen Elizabeth, to whom the poem is dedicated, other parallels to contemporary persons and events having been identified as well). Framing and allegory make any approach of contingent realities remote and only relevant through re-contextualization. The twelve days of Gloriana's feast may be also linked to the twelve nights of the Christmas Holidays at Elizabeth's court, suggestive therefore of the moral rebirth of the nation which accompanied the expansion of the Empire under the glorious queen. On each day the queen sends forth one of her knights (embodying one of the cardinal virtues – Holiness, Temperance, Chastity, Friendship, Justice, Courtesy, Constancy – which are tested and reinforced in the adventure) to aid one of her subjects in distress. The poem opens thus to the world of philosophical vision and moral admiration, while the descriptions of nature are the fruit of the observation of the Irish countryside, where the poet spent some time as secretary to the governor (1580-1599). From the splendour of the romance world we step down into a homely environment surveyed with the peasant's pragmatic eye for the human relevance and use of nature: the builder oak, the aspine good for staves, the birch for shafts, the sallow for the mill etc. (I/1,8-9). Traditional themes, like the pageant of the Seven Deadly Sins (I/4), the "ubi sunt theme": (*All things decay in time and to their end do draw*, III/6) of

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medieval literature, combine with the newly revived pastoral convention of the "delightful garden", used, however, as the site of socio-political allegory (the Queen, the New World and the civilizing mission), in the manner of Baptista Spagnuoli. The easy flow and musicality of the line is ensured by the metrical pattern, the famous **Spenserian stanza** consisting of nine lines, eight iambic pentameters, followed by a solemn hexameter.

The Italian **canzone** is merged with the classical and Renaissance **wedding ode** in one of the most beautiful love-songs in the language: Spenser's *Epithalamion*, occasioned by the middle aged poet's second marriage, which concludes his 89 **sonnet sequence** entitled *Amoretti*. Elizabeth Boyle is transfigured into the eternal bride, who finds her prototype in Solomon's *Song (her snowy neck is like a marble tower),* for the layers of meaning in the ceremonious proceedings of the day, from sunrise to the rise of the moon, engage all levels of existence, from natural landscape and wedding guests to God Bacchus and the Graces, in a pastoral Echo-world of the universal One:

The whiles the maidens do their carol sing
To which the woods shall answer and their echo ring.

The processional pageant or masque of Hymen is accompanied by the music Plato will have imagined at the birth of the universe (*The Republic*), as well as by the homely carol, natives and myhological figures, Graces (l*et the Graces dance*) and maidens joining in a cosmic dance (*carol*: dancing song).

The **sonnet** was a new form, invented by Jacopo da Lentini (first half of the thirteenth century). Its original, Italian form consists of fourteen lines, divided metrically and rhetorically into an *octave* (eight lines rhyming abba) and a *sestet* (six lines rhyming cdecde) **Thomas Wyatt** borrowed it on one of his diplomatic missions on the Continent, yet changed its form to three quatrains, rhyming abba and a couplet, forcing a cumulative effect into some generalized, sententious statement. The personal experience of the Italian sonneteer is thus made into something of a more universal appeal, in the manner of the sage discourse:

For as there is a certain time to rage,
So is there time such madness to assauge.

The thought content is pretty conventional: codified love attitudes, professions of faith and truth, love complaints (the mistress is cruel or indifferent, as inaccessible as the lady of the *amour courtois* tradition), love pleas. Nevertheless, a decay of fortune could wring from the poet's pen the following touching plaintive tones of sublimated emotion, which were quoted in a story by the 20th century American Thomas Wolfe, on the lost happiness of irreversible time which, Dante says, hurts the most in times of sorrow:

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They flee from me, that sometimes did me seek
With naked foot stalking within my chamber,
Once have I seen them gentle, tame, and meek
That now are wild, and do not once remember
That sometime they have put themselves in danger,
To take bread at my hand, and now they range,
Busily seeking in continual change.
Thanked be fortune, it hath been otherwise
Twenty times better: but once especial
In thin array, after a pleasant guise,
When her loose gown did from her shoulders fall,
And she me caught in her arms long and small,
And therewithal, so sweetly did me kiss,
And softly said: dear heart, how like you this ?

The sonnet form was taken up by **Henry Howard**, who gave it the so-called "Shakespearean form", as it was employed by his brilliant successor: three quatrains rhyming abab and an epigrammatic couplet. The second half of the century produced the English sonnet sequences, in imitation of Dante (*Vita Nuova*) and Petrarch (*Il Canzoniere).*

The **sonnet sequence** is made up of sonnets interspersed with other lyric genres: songs, madrigals, complaints etc. The first in English was **Thomas Watson**'s *Hekatompathia* (1582), a conventional **encomium**. The poet confesses he has written *a derivative song of praise giving fame* to a type-cast mistress. He does not mean to be original, confining himself to working up the received conceits of the modish sonneteering image-makers. The female type of the Renaissance emerged from his pen in a form apt to exasperate Shakespeare, who wrote his own *Sonnet CXXX* as an **anti-encomium**, in response to Watson's: *Her yellow looks exceed the beaten gold/ Her sparkling eyes in heaven a place deserve/ (...) Her words are music all of silver sound./ (...) On either cheek a Rose and Lily lies/ Her breath is sweet perfume, or holy flame / Her lips more red than any coral stone.*

Philip Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella,* consisting of 108 sonnets, declares war on convention and conceited elaboration. The opening sonnet is a poetical art as important as his *Apologie for Poetry,* which outlines the Renaissance idea of the hero (seeking the moral strength and pieties of Aeneas, not physical strength, as in Homer). The poem is a *recusatio,* that is the expression of a desire to redirect poetic tradition. The poet is seen to hesitate between the "derivative" hypostasis of the humble imitator (*Studying invention fine, her wit to entertain*) and the naturally born genius (*Invention, Nature's child*). The imagery properly enacts the

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theme. The octave develops the image of the learned poet: elaborate, artificial *(I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe)*, sterile (*Oft turning others leaves, to see if thence would flow/ Some fresh and fruitful showers upon my sunne-burned braine*), unnatural (*step-dame Studies*). The sestet points to the new direction into which the poet intends to move: originality. The imagery, in sharp contrast to the former, is connected with natural birth: *Thus great with child to speak, and helpless in my throwes/ Biting my truant pen, beating myself for spite,/ Fool, said my Muse to me, look in thy heart and write.* In other sonnets, however, is voiced the Neoplatonic cult of Intellectual Love (Aphrodita Urania), in opposition to earthly love (Aphrodita Pandemos) to which he bids farewell: *Leave me, O Love! which reachest but to dust.* In the Platonizing spirit introduced by Castiglione's *Courtier,* transitory earthly beauty can only serve as an incentive to the contemplation of the immutable and incorruptible Archetypes.

The polarity of heavenly and earthly love has brought us to **William Shakespeare**'s sonnet sequence, which came out in Thomas Thorpe's edition of 1609. Out of the 154 sonnets completed with *A Lover's Complaint* to form a numerological pattern, only two had got into print by 1599. It is commonly believed that they belong together with the two long poems dedicated to his patron, Henry Wriothesly, Earl of Southampton: *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* (1593-94). They could have been composed in the leisurely time the poet enjoyed in the Earl's company at his country residence, where they had taken refuge from an outbreak of plague in London. Irrespective of the date of composition, the sonnets differ wildly though from Shakespeare's early idiom, being characteristic of the late Renaissance, baroque style: the heterogeneous, conceited imagery borrowed from various walks of life, previously considered unfit for literature, the technique of *amplification* (clusters of related images, proliferation of tropes), the *mise-en-abyme* technique, specific tropes, as, for instance, the conceit of the speaker contemplating his own image in the lover's heart, violent oppositions, shocking associations, a.o.

The first 125 sonnets and the 126th poem which is an epigram, are addressed to a mysterious fair youth, while the remaining 28 sonnets are addressed to an equally mysterious "Dark Lady". As for the long poem at the end, John Kerrigan **(16)** thinks he has identified Shakespeare's model in **Samuel Daniel's** *Sonnets to Delia*, followed by *The Complaint of Rosamond*, in which a woman is overheard lamenting her seduction by a handsome young man (alluding to the seduction and enforced suicide of the mistress of Henry II). The attempts to identify the Fair Youth and the Dark Lady in contemporary persons have been, obviously, even more frequent. From what we gather in reading the poems, there are no contemporary persons alluded to; they are simply tropes. The poet's attitude to his two loves changes in time, the sonnets being connected (logically or even grammatically). The first 25 sonnets unfold, in a familiar tone and in a vocabulary

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borrowed from the contingent and the everyday, a common Elizabethan narrative. A young man of exceptional beauty is threatened by the decay brought by the passage of time and the two remedies suggested are either marriage and perpetuity through children (generation ending up in regeneration), or art: in the poet's song, the youth will ever live young. The marriage however is presented not as a *private* affair but some cosmic union, like that between Christ and the Church, or the maiden wailing for her demon lover (God and his people) in *The Song of Songs*:

Ah ! If thou issueless shalt hap to die,
The world will wail thee, like a makeless wife;
The world will be thy widow, and still weep
That thou no form of thou hast left behind
When every private widow well may keep
By children's eyes her husband's shape in mind *(IX)*

The word "issueless" does not imply mixture, blend, but "outgoing, outflow", while the world would remain not only a widow, but uncreated. The imagery is sooner suggestive of God coming out of himself in creating the world (*thou of thou*) than of any equal blend of separate entities. The dubious nature of such union is maybe responsible for the uncommon vocabulary of usurers, legal and market arrangements which constructs the unnatural or impossible marriage and children-bearing:

Unthrifty loveliness, why dost thou spend
Upon thyself thy beauty's legacy ?
Nature's bequest gives nothing but doth lend,
And being frank, she lends to those are free:
Then, beauteous niggard, why dost thou abuse
The bounteous largess given thee to give ?
Profitless usurer, why dost thou use
So great a sum of sums, yet canst not live ?
For having traffic with thyself alone,
Thou of thyself thou sweet self dost deceive;
Then how, when Nature calls thee to be gone,
What acceptable audit canst tou leave ?
Thy unused beauty must be tomb'd with thee,
Which, used, lives th' executor to be.

The fair youth has the aspect of Hermaphroditus, painted by Nature with "a woman's face" to be the poet's "master-mistress", a godly figure, therefore, above the category of sex. First designed as a woman, Nature had changed her mind, so

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that the poet's love would never be carnally consummated, it could only be spiritual *(Sonnet XX)*. Baroque hyperboles (see the images of Time's destructive power in *Sonnet XIX*, with the climactic burning of the Phoenix in her blood, i.e. that kind of destruction which can go no farther but yield in rebirth) and baroque conceits are bracketing the body, allowing of the souls' reciprocal reflection (XXIII, XXIV). This scene of recognition (*marriage of true minds* CXVI) determines a shift in the relationship between speaker and youth. So far, he has been patronizing and showing off as world-wise and skilled in his immortal rhyme; now he admits to a relationship of "vassalage", sending his written "ambassage" to his love (who belongs, therefore, to another world, maybe ontologically distinct) in the graceful and ceremonial address to an overlord (XXVI). From market capitalism, Shakespeare escapes into the discourse of chivalry. The cherished image of the youth is no longer sought out in the real world, but revived in the mind's eye after going to bed in the chamber engulfed in darkness (XXVII). Sonnet XXXV sounds very intriguing, for it seems to be more than a brilliant baroque conceit. As everything in the world of matter and immortality is imperfect (*roses have thorns and silver fountains, mud*), the fair youth's "sensual fault" (presence in the phenomenal world) is taken by the poet upon himself, to wash away his sin. The military and political conceits are so powerful, that they actually induce an impression that the war against the senses is taking place within the poet:

And 'gainst myself a lawful plea commence;
Such civil war is in my love and hate
That I an accessory needs must be
To that sweet thief which sourly robs from me.

The next sonnet intimates something of this kind: although they are one through their spiritual love, let them remain "twain", so that the "blots" would remain with himself. *Sonnet XLII* introduces an unusual theme for the genre: the triangular scheme: poet, youth, Dark Lady. Sophistic reasoning comforts him with the idea that it is the poet's love of the Lady that the youth loves in her, that he is not moved by carnal desire. *Sonnet XLV* is explicit about the barrier between himself and the youth: his bodily self:

If the dull substance of my flesh were thought
Injurious distance should not stop my way

But the poet's body is pulling into different directions, being made of two base elements, earth and water, and the other two, air and fire, driving him upwards to the spirit, to the fair youth *(Sonnets XLIV-XLV)*.

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From *Sonnet LIII* onwards, Platonic imagery and speculation come into focus. The fair youth is an Idea (of Intellectual Beauty), which has *millions of strange shadows* (copies in matter). He stands for archetypal embodiments of beauty (Helen and Adonais, as an ideal Hermaphroditus) in seasonal shapes contemplated in the real world (*your beauty doth appear*), yet is himself present in none. The books of the world are also such copies, so that the youth's beauty can be found in them too *(since mind at first in character was done, Sonnet LIX).* Ideas are inscribed in the mind, the mind only needs to wake up to them. Sonnets LXXX – LXXXIV introduce the theme of the "rival poet", dating back to the Anglo-Saxon Deor. What if some other poet should surpass him in his exercise of admiration? The poet comforts himself again at the thought that, since the object of his love is god-like self- identity, uniqueness (*you alone are you*), any paraphrase or description is impossible or supplementary. The youth is now *primum mobile* (*moving others, are themselves as stones*, XCIV), removed from the *lust of action.* From *Sonnet CV*, the figure of the youth is cast into the even more spiritualized frame of Testamental discourse: three in one (fair, kind, and true), the youth's beauty prophesised by "antique pens", the world dreaming on *things to come*, an echo from *Psalm 115* (*Have eyes to wonder).* The vocabulary is homiletic*: like prayers divine,/ I must each day say o'er the same;/ (...) even as when first I hallowed thy fair name.... (CVIII)'*

The Dark Lady sonnets bring a complete change. Her eyes are mourners, as if seeing that she is the death of him (CXXXII). The sonnets from CXXX to CXXXIV heap up images of bondage (the Lady holds them both prisoners), prison, death, slavey, market-value. Satire and complaint reach a climax in Sonnets CXXXV and CXXXVI, punning on "will" (meaning "testament", the poet's name, genitals etc.) Whereas the fair youth is unique and existing unto himself, the fair woman symbolizes multiplicity (as she's got so many lovers, what's the big deal adding him up?), supplementary, "Will in overplus", confused identity, equivocity, meanings sliding along the chain of signifiers. The imagery is domestic (let her accept him like a housewife gathering chickens scared off by a storm), often grotesque, licentious. The poet is waging his war not only with the woman who has enthralled him against his better judgment, but also with the **blazon** tradition (songs in praise of a type-cast mistress), which lowers the purpose of art (we remember him priding himself on treating of higher subjects than the "antique pen"). He is parroting Petrarch's Sonnet CXXXII which Chaucer borrowed for his *Troilus* :

If that be fair whereon my false eyes dote,
What means the world to say it is not so ?
If it be not, then love doth well demote... *(CXLVIII)*

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and systematically deconstructing the Watson sonnet in an **anti-blazon** (CXXX):

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun:
Coral is far more red than her lips' red:
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
I have seen roses damask'd red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks:
And in some perfume is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
That music hath a far more pleasing sound:
I grant I never saw a goddess go,
My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground:
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
As any she belied with false compare.

Commentators tend to take the couplet in a positive sense: *He finds comparisons odious because, when they conceal what a mistress's eyes might eventually be, they neglect particularity and being* **(17).** If considered in the context of the entire sequence, the meaning can only be this: and although she is odious, I am so stupid as to find her as rare as those women to whom she could only falsely be compared. It is obvious that the poet is not referring to an author's misplaced comparisons but to the mistress comparing herself to others: she would prove unlike if she compared herself to the women constructed through such similes.

The body as a prison ("the sinful earth") with the "poor soul" at the centre (CXLVI) is the source of the conflict, which is now located within the poet, and not in a triangular, outward relationship. In fact, the poet is writing a sequential song about himself:

Two loves I have of comfort and despair,
Which like two spirits do suggest me still:
The better angel, is a man, right fair,
The worser spirit, a woman, colour'd ill.
To win me soon to hell, my female evil
Tempeth my better angel from my side,
And would corrupt my saint to be a devil,
Wooing his purity with her foul pride.
And whether that my angel be turn'd fiend
Suspect I may, yet nor directly tell;

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But being both from me, both to each friend,
I guess one angel in another's hell:
Yet this shall I ne'er know, but live in doubt,
Till my bad angel fire my good one out. *(CXLIV)*

The last four sonnets are "love complaints" *sui generis*: when Ideas or the Platonic archetypes are erased through oblivion (*till each to razed oblivion yield his part – CXXII*), man yields to Aphrodite Pandemos, Venus of the natural world. Innuendo and phallic imagery (Cupid's brand stolen by a nymph of Diana's and quenched in a fountain) is interpreted by John Kerrigan and other commentators as a topical reference to the bath-sweating tubs used to cure pox in Jacobean London.

A Lover's Complaint is, in pure baroque style, a *myse-en-abyme* of the whole sonnet sequence. The fair youth, in control of the elements, subduing his horse into a graceful race (*What rounds, what bounds, what course, what stop he makes!*), wrapped up in the glamour of ceremony and the redeeming logos (*deep-brained sonnets*, built of gems, which symbolize metaphysical power, like the building blocks of heavenly Jerusalem), has seduced and abandoned a female figure focusing an opposite imagery: *tearing of papers* and *phraseless hand* (divorce from logos), *breaking rings atwain* (fall from the original Oneness), *the carcass of a beauty spent* (subject to the spoliation of time). Mortals cherish reflections of the fair youth as if from another land, which they remember and recognize in Platonic fashion:

„Many there were that did his picture get,
To serve their eyes, and in it put their mind;
Like fools that in the imagination set
The goodly objects which abroad they find
Of lands and mansions, theirs in thought assign'd;
And labouring in more pleasures to bestow them
Than the true gouty landlord which doth owe them".

Why look into the world for the icons which are "charactered" in the mind and can only be remembered not actually possessed? On earth, beauty is granted in lease, in due time any dark lady is left a carcass. The mind's homecoming is active spiritual contemplation.

The baroque dialogue between Logos and the World, Self and Soul, Body and Mind etc. finds in Shakespeare the most consummate expression. And what is his entire dramatic work if not an exercise in the recovery of "part" (role) from "razed oblivion", and ideal reinscription of the orderly, archetypal script of the world? Man's redemptive work, made possible through self-consciousness, does not concern only himself. His moral and physical beauty is part of the all-

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enveloping Renaissance meliorist project, ranging from the beautifully trimmed gardens to polite manners, from cultural refinement, whether in discourse or collected works of art, to the need for a meaningful social order. The British historical prototype, the Magnificent Man of the Renaissance was Thomas Morus. Shakespeare did not need to be either Morus or Francis Bacon, to whom his work is sometimes ascribed. He achieved more by patterning this project for al subsequent times. His plays enact a perpetual **recovery from oblivion** of social order (**historical plays**), of identity (**comedies**), of values (**tragedies**), of the original oneness (**romantic comedies** and **pastoral romances**). It is only his cautionary **dark comedies** that remain somehow locked within a crisis, only to show future generations, like Macbeth's head, the grim look of "belying" masks usurping the "vizard" of life "tried" as valid human signified.

Renaissance Drama

The Renaissance and, particularly, baroque representations of the world worked through huge symmetries and a complex system of correspondences **(18).** Human destiny could only be understood in relation to the macrocosm. This world picture was inscribed in the very **building structure of the public theatres** in London. One of them, the most famous, having Shakespeare as actor, share holder and deputy manager, was significantly called "The Globe". The oldest, which had previously served as innyards, were round or octagonal, with the pit (or yard) open to the sky. Tiers of covered galleries ran round the yard, except for the section occupied by the stage, which was a large platform, divided into an outer and an inner stage, which could be curtained off. Above the inner stage was the upper stage, a gallery covered by a thatched roof (the turret). Beneath the main stage there was a cellar (cellarage). The entire arrangement had a symbolical meaning: the theatre stood for the globe (*theatrum mundi*), the turret, with its canopy of painted stars suggested heavens, and the cellarage, hell. The outer and the inner stage were designed to represent distinct realms (this-worldly or other-worldly, for instance, that in which Thaisa is brought back to life through the magic of Cerimon in *Pericles*). Robert Weimann **(19)** considers that the two portions of the stage perpetuated a division existing in the medieval pageants, between the place of the throne (scaffold) and the acting ground, which was not delimited, practically merging with that of the audience. The distinction between *platea* (in close proximity to the audience) and *locus,* or place occupied by figures of power, allowed thus of a dialogue between the self-images constructed by feudal absolutism and the subverting popular voice.

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Obviously, the motif of *theatrum mundi* cannot be reduced to such simplifying sociological explanations, nor does the economy of the main stage give a satisfactory account of the entire hierarchical arrangement. Nevertheless, the various levels of existence were thought to be so intimately linked (in that chain of being running from the humblest forms of existence through man up to God), that transgression from nature to society, to art, or a world beyond did not effect any breach of illusion. The characters afforded to forget themselves and mix up references. For instance, Hamlet, in his odd speech which has elicited such strenuous hermeneutic effort from commentators, refers to "this fellow in the cellarage" (the actor beneath the stage on which he is standing, in the cellar) instead of "my father's spirit imprisoned in hell". Unless we are familiar with the conventions of dramatic representations, we are apt to miss important meanings. Scenery was nonexistent, the whole burden falling on **speech** and **action.** Apart from public arenas, there were also private indoor playhouses.

The **rhetoric** of Elizabethan drama fully explored the auditory and rhythmic potential of the **unrhymed iambic pentameter** cadence, or **blank verse**. Sound (the incantatory effects of alliteration, repetitions, echo, syntactic parallelism) was sometimes privileged to the detriment of meaning.

The **type of conflict** differs from the medieval, in being **redirected from the metaphysical to a moral or realistic frame**. The term "tragedy" undergoes important semantic changes. In the Middle Ages it did not imply "dramatic form", in fact, or conflict. It resembled rather *a narrative recounting the life of some ancient or eminent personage who suffered a decline of fortune towards a disastruous end* **(20)**. Despite Franco Moretti's opinion in *The Great Eclipse* **(21),** the idea of tragedy *does* change in a Tudor work, edited by William Baldwin, entitled *A Mirror for Magistrates,* which ran into six editions from 1559 to 1610. The purpose of the book, the editor makes it clear, is to show how great men are destroyed not only by the vagaries of fortune but also by their personal vices, of which the greatest is ambition, for it challenges the *status quo.* The editor goes on commenting a quote from Plato: *well is the realm governed, in which the ambitious desires not to bear office.* The **moral purpose** of the book is *to show the slippery deceits of the wavering lady (Fortune), and the due rewards of all kind of vices.* To what extent Renaissance man allowed himself to be shaped by current discourses can be inferred from the close paraphrases we read in a rhetorician of the day, George Puttenham (*The Art of English Poesie*, 1589) : *to show the mutabilities of fortune, and the just punishment of God in revenge of a vicious and evil life;* or, in the long title of the English version of *Historia von D. Johan Fausten: The Damnable Life and Deserved Death of Doctor Faustus.* Ambition is the motif triggering the action in the paradigmatic heroic, historical and tragical plays of the time, mainly focusing the disastrous effects of

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transgression. Rulers do not simply fall; they grow tyrants (*Gorboduc*) or choose to enjoy leisure and avoid responsibility (*King Lear*). Their fall is partly their own doing, and their errors bear upon the entire community, normally held in place by precise bonds and degrees. The tragical end is no longer simply a discretionary act of Fate but an act of justice, engaging the hero's own responsibility in his fall.

A sign of modern mentality is the new **association, within the same individual, of homo sapiens and homo faber**, *generating* a new type of conflict: the antagonism between nature and art. Philip Sidney's *Apologie for Poetrie* (1595) argues that: *the poet makes things either better than Nature brings forth, or quite new forms such as never were in Nature.* Improving upon nature becomes Prospero, the playwright. A disanalogy, bespeaking a modern, sceptical mind, establishes between being or reality and imagination (*The Knight of the Burning Pestle,* by Beaumont and Fletcher, in imitation of *Don Quixote).*

The conflict, in most cases, is an ***inner*** one, deriving from the Erasmus paradigm (*Enchiridion*) of the human personality split between angel and beast, mind and body, reason and passions or base instincts, with even greater emphasis upon the individual's worth, which is the Renaissance distinctive mark.

The dramatic stage onto which Shakespeare was brought by a touring company in the late eighties was dominated by the so-called "University Wits". **Thomas Kyd, Christopher Marlowe, John Lyly** (also the author of a novel presenting the 16th century male paragon, *Euphues, or the Anatomy of Wit*, in an artificial, conceited style, imitative of Guevara, from whose title the noun "euphuism" has been derived), **Robert Greene** (the founder of the English comedy with his *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*), **George Peele and Thomas Lodge** were among the first secular professional playwrights, with a good classical background (educated at Oxford and Cambridge, in the new humanistic climate).

The medieval **morality** (preaching humility, faith, obedience to God) is yielding, under the spur of the Tudor myth of the expansion of knowledge and discovery, to the **heroic play**, whose theme is a quest for power, riches, for the individual's self-assertion and control of the world. The late moralities and theological writings already show an interest in the cunning Latin books, in pagan knowledge, which finds an excuse in serving as a progress towards knowledge of God himself (*The Interlude of the Four Elements*). The historical Faustus, alluded to in documents of the early sixteenth century, had probably been an itinerant scholar, a disseminator of the new knowledge, to whom the book of a Protestant theologian (1547) ascribed the practice of necromancy and a death at the hands of the devil. The figure of Faustus could only emerge at the time of the Renaissance, because, unlike Prometheus, he is egotistic, self-centred, obeying the spur of his own arrogant will. Things had changed since the Middle Ages, when people were puppets in the hands of Fortune. The self-reliant Faustus lives in a more liberal

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world, a world of the accumulating capital, in which even metaphysical arrangements are settled through negotiations and contractual bonds, properly signed (in blood). The devil (in **Christopher Marlowe**'s *Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*, for instance, but even in late miracle and morality plays), often plays an unheroic, comical part. As, in Marlowe, Mephistophilis is pleading with Faustus **against the compact**, through his wistful recollections of lost Heaven, **man's centrality**, so typically renascent, in the Faust-plot is challenged by no second party. The hero **chooses** and enacts his own damnation. Saint Augustine himself says, in his *City of God,* that the devil only conquers by fellowship of sin (allegorized in the blood-letting scene, i.e. becoming kindred, accompanying such covenants). Since the devil in Chaucer's tale of the Friar recognizes no kindred voice in the carter's abuse of his horses, he will not take them, even against their owner's express wish (he knows the carter does not mean what he says). In letting the devil conjured by Faustus show up disguised as a Franciscan Friar (*fratris imagine,* in the image of the brother), Marlowe's irony cuts in two directions: an anti-Catholic onslaught and the suggestion of Faustus **belonging** with the devil not through what he has not yet accomplished but through what he thinks. His question about the location of hell is promptly answered by Mephistophilis: *Hell is where we are*. The real conflict is within, in the evil mind becoming conscious of what it is. It is through such subtle mutations, worked by a mind fully apprehensive of the spirit of the age, and not only through the majestic rhetorical effect of his blank verse and tight dramatic structure (twelve scenes framed by a *Prologue*) that Marlowe's play mainly appeals to our imagination today. His text is in fact an exercise in deconstruction: **of the Prometheus figure** in Faustus dumping his projects to benefit his nation (improvement of education, works of civilization, the political independence of Germany etc., all of them worthy of a Renaissance Magnificus), while choosing to gratify his own appetite (a kiss from Helen of Troy), and of Faustus himself, degraded from magician to a clown of the Faustbuch mediaeval tradition, successfully aped by his servant. The play is reversing the Biblical roles and symbolism through the hero's blasphemous techniques (magic circle with astrological insignia anagrammatizing Jehova's name etc.). Faustus takes heart through misquoting – *When Mephistophilis shall stand by me,/ What god can hurt thee?,* parroting *Psalm 22: The lord is my light and my salvation/ Whom shall I fear?* – or misapplying quotes, as when he accompanies his Satanic conversion by Christ's words on the cross: *Consummatum est*. Whereas the pageant of the Seven Deadly Sins is a throwback upon an earlier allegorical mode, Good Angel and Evil Angel, always appearing after Faustus has already made his decision, suggest personifications of his own divided mind. Trained as a divinity student, Marlowe give a Renaissance version to Augustine's Manichaeism and *psychomachia* (fight for the soul between God and the Prince of Darkness).

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Thomas Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy,* dating from about the same time, probes a similar vision of hell, as a state of mind and not as some naive concept about a terrifying underground locale. Hieronimo's heart is torn between his dead son's appeal to revenge him (*Vindicta mihi*) and the Christian precept that *Vengeance belongs to God: And there is the torment, there is hell.* Medieval dogmas about resolutions passively relegated to a world beyond and pagan attitudes to the worth of immediate action, or about due punishment for crime clash in the problematical modern consciousness, whose thinking about action will always take longer than action itself. Idea and deed are weighed against each other, and Hieronimo chooses the latter: not inactive hope in divine retribution, but personal act of justice; not consolation in the fictional truth of art (a painter offering to paint the tragical death of his son) but deconstruction of illusion into brute act (while acting on the stage, he kills in earnest his son's assassin). The **revenge plot** and the **dubitative consciousness** anticipate Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, but the play is overwhelming in itself, through its violent representations of the fallen human world, in which every noble intention ends up in its opposite, in which love itself is described in terms of war: Eros/Ares (II/4). Pluto and Proserpine's kiss (Eros/Thanatos) in the framing *Prologue* becomes the emblem a dramatist of solid classical learning imprints on the restless, warring European countries of the postclassical age. The bridge over time (the present victimizing war between Spain and Portugal reminding Hieronimo of the Trojan precedent) enforces the sense of an eternal human destiny and unavoidable doom.

Whereas in Christopher Marlowe's brief career the conflict remains the same throughout (lust for imperial power in *Tamburlaine the Great*, or for moneyed power in *The Jew of Malta*, loss of power in *Edward II*), in **William Shakespeare, the conflict** changes a great deal by the turn of the century. Walter Cohen **(22)** explains the shift from histories to tragedies as a shift in social conflict: the former pits feudalism against absolutism, while the latter opposes absolutism to capitalism. However, sociological motivation in tragedies is not that important in Shakespeare. A more interesting explanation, an epistemological one, comes from W.R. Elton: *To turn from theological to philosophical contexts, the Renaissance epistemological crisis emphasized the notion or the relativity of perception, recalling the appearance-versus-reality motif recurrent throughout Renaissance drama. Present throughout dramatic history, it was a manifestation as well of theatrical illusion and the new theatre of the baroque. Confusion between appearance and reality, as well as the exploration of their validity, is a feature of such contemporary writing as Cervantes'* Don Quixote *(Pt. I, published in 1605). The separation of reality from illusion, truth from mere hallucination, is, in part, the task set Hamlet by the Ghost. Recognizing the contradictoriness of truth, as well as the conflicts in his intellectual heritage, Montaigne, doubting whether*

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mankind would ever attain certainty, turned inward to explore his ambiguous and changing self. Perhaps, as Merleau-Ponty suggests, Montaigne ends with an awareness, related to the dialectic of drama, that contradiction is truth. As in Shakespearian drama, without dogmatic or reductive exclusions, he experiments, "essays", and questions, in an open-ended and inconclusive manner, the world of experience. **(23)** The "baroque epistemological crisis" would probably sound better. And it is not the Ghost setting Hamlet the task to "separate truth from hallucination", since Old Hamlet well knows the truth, while Hamlet, as different from Horatio, has always been convinced of the Ghost's reality. It is Hamlet himself who undertakes to test, through the heuristic fiction of the *Mouse Trap*, **the truth of the Ghost's words,** which he discovers to be *pound's worth* (having the validity of genuine gold). And this because, whereas his father lives in the medieval time of battles decided in single combat between the leaders and of sternly exacted revenge, Hamlet is a student in Wittenberg, a modern university, associated with Faustus. He is a restless, Faustian spirit, believing in nothing, taking nothing for granted and inquiring into the causes of everything. Lafew's speech in *All's Well that Ends Well – They say miracles are past, and we have our philosophical persons to make modern and familiar things supernatural and causeless* – points to the new sceptical habit of mind. The change in the general philosophical climate will have been reinforced in Shakespeare by the gloomy spirit induced by his son's death. After Hamlet's realization that nothing is but only appears to the self in one way or another, a dialectic of ironies and ambiguities, that cannot be easily sorted out, makes any point of view or solution controversial. The antithetic structuring of tragical actions and characters, making problematical the spectator's identification with any, and the convention of "dark comedy" (a baroque tragicomedy, in which a potentially tragical end is ultimately deterred by doubtful means and procedures) are the formal changes accompanying the modified world view. From the orderly and hierarchical representation of the universe before 1600, when the conflict was generated by the threat to this order, Shakespeare crosses this baroque *chiaroscuro,* philosophical as well as moral (conflict of values), towards the serenity of the last romances. The Jacobean cult of pastoral (a baroque taste) also seems to have been connected with the accession to the throne of James I, when the kingdom expanded to include Scotland, as well as far-off territories through colonization. There was a feeling of general prosperity, of a return to the Golden Age, which received a literary expression in the pastoral mode (masques, romances, in dramatic, lyric or prose forms), and in the encomiastic tropes of the Jacobian image-makers. Even the revisionists of the Bible, headed by the Puritan John Reynolds, who undertook to "purge" the corrupted Tudor versions (under Henry VIII and Edward VI), would labour on the trope of a Sun-King who had dispelled the mists gathering under the "Occidental

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Star of Queen Elizabetth", through his "undoubted" title (unlike that of Anne Boleyn's daughter) and wise "Government". James was growing to a myth of the divine monarch, bringing "peace and tranquillity" to the English in their "Sion" (Preface to the Authorized Version of the Bible, dedicated to the King). In Shakespeare's last plays, the conflict springs from antagonism to the pastoral vision of harmony, unity, oneness (separation of parents and children, lands and leaders, husbands and wives), the resolution being the reconciliation of all opposites, reunion.

A new type of conflict inheres not within the world of representation but in the competing perspectives on it. This is the case when a text is reading another text (reinscription of a subject, literary work, chronicle etc.), i.e. when an author takes a polemical view of a world **already encoded in representation**. Setting out from Roland Barthes's conviction that *a text is not a line of words releasing a single theological meaning (the message of the author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash* (...) *a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture* (*Image, Music, Text,* Glasgow 1977, p. 46), John Drakakis enlarges upon the thesis of a text anonymously elaborated, out of which the "great Will" has completely evaporated: *Attention should rather be drawn to what in Shakespeare's case was an intrinsically collaborative enterprise, the production under determinate circumstances, and with a series of generic models to guide the process, of a dramatic text. Viewed from this perspective, the ascription of the independent authorial "voice" of "Shakespeare" to these texts is tantamount to a collusion of an unstated romantic theory of composition, implying a fully conscious writer occupying a transcendent position in relation to his writing, for which historical evidence is sparse if it exists at all.* (**24**) Such extreme opinions are not tenable, if only because Shakespeare found most such texts brick and left them marble.

The fact is, in Shakespeare, reality has ceased to be one, existing independently of human subjectivity. His inroads into the past are also explorations of time-specific cultural conventions. Apparently finding that every worldview is deeply buried into symbolical forms, rhetorical figures, long narratives, and, consequently, that there is no such thing as **past or present realities** but only **past and present worldviews,** Shakespeare produced his own texts as dialogic structures: by differentiation from or displacement of old. His own texts are highly patterned, imagery is consistently structured. Even in a light comedy like the *Taming of the Shrew* (unbelievably complex, when properly studied), there is not just **one** Italy but several **versions** of it – Virgil's, Ovid's, Boccaccio's, Terence's – which send their echoes into Shakespeare's *mise-en-abyme* of Ariosto's *Suppositti* (the source of the Bianca plot). **All** these palimpsestic

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reinscriptions belong to the geographical and ethnic frame in which the action of Shakespeare's play is set, as if Shakespeare thought they made up a more genuine Italy. In his *Apologie for Poetrie*, Sidney posits the question of representation: I can speak of Peru without being in Peru, but, if the action is set in Peru, then I have to represent it through a native's house. Whenever Shakespeare means to create in his audience a sense of being in some particular locale, he does not resort to scenery (there was so little of it, anyway); instead, he alludes to **texts produced within this space** and only to them. An ethnic group and locale are transferred from *being in the world* to *being in the word.* Italy becomes its own BOOK, or, rather, a whole library in which it is crosslit from various perspectives and progressively constituted **(25).** The *Induction* and the play within the play oppose the British to the Italian world, as well as British to Latin/Italian texts having something in common: they all thematize **deception**, which is also the **theme** of Shakespeare's play. The deception played upon Sly by a lord, or upon Katharina by Petruchio, or by Lucentio upon Bianca's father, or even by Katharina upon herself, claiming to see what Petruchio wants her to see, etc. is thus made into a *figure*, and writing becomes the process of its endless *reinscription*: Hieronimo playing his deceptive game upon the audience of the play-within-the-play (Thomas Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy*), Pantalone of the *commedia dell'arte* being deceived by lovers in the same way as Gremio is by Lucentio and Bianca, Zeus disguising himself to conquer Leda, and Petruchio dressing like a madman to cure his wife's fierce temper, Katharina allowing herself to be changed into a yes-saying doll, while Ovid's *Metamorphoses* offers a *mise-en-abyme* of the whole text's metamorphic and specular nature. There is not one scene or character in Shakespeare's *Shrew* but bears the trace of a previous text, serving it as a sort of *locus of copia.* Most often the model is distorted and parodied, as it will suit comedy. For instance Lucentio professing his love to Bianca among quotes from one of Ovid's epistles – the first *Heroid.* The quote establishes the identity of the place: *Hic ibat Simois; hic est Segeia tellus; / Hic steterat Priami regia celsa senis* (This is the river Simois, this is the Sigean land, here was Priam's grand palace), whereas Lucentio slips in information about his unheroic person, and disguised identity: *I am Lucentio, son unto Vicentio of Pisa, disguised thus to get your love...* The meaning of Shakespeare's treatment of the Ariosto plot is as clear as a pointed finger: the Italian's plot of common tricks and licentious innuendo is trivial, whereas Shakespeare elevates the subject, making it into an experiment in the phenomenology of culture. Although a comedy, the theme of the *Shrew* is as serious as the quoted "authorities": the opposition between the British feudal culture (the Lord's graceful world of ceremonious speech, art, feudal rites), in which even a hoax is not meant for deception, on the contrary, it leads to self-recognition, and the mercantile Padua, where deception is a self-interested game.

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Sly, connected with the Padua scene through his Italian phrases, is actually deceiving himself about his high descent from "Richard the Conqueror". The Lord's game contributes to Sly's awakening from illusion and acknowledgement of his true, humble condition. Petruchio and Lucentio are capable of any hoax in order to get what they want. Petruchio would, in fact, marry anybody for the sake of a fortune, even if he himself is already rich. Money has become an end in itself.

Apart from self-deception, there are other forms of **character destabilization** in Shakespeare's plays. We have seen the role-playing of Ulysses in *Troilus and Cressida*. Or, the dismantling of Cressida's idealistic lover figure in the protagonist's imagination. The floating copula verbs, no longer predicated upon a stable, recognizable identity after her betrayal – *She was beloved, she loved; she is and doth. Was Cressid here? This is and is not Cressid...* – the ghostly poise between affirmation and negation, deconstruct her in Troilus's afflicted language of romantic disenchantment. In language is constructed King Lear, who depends upon others to tell him who he is, after his loss of the economic and social ground of his identity. "Royal father", to Cordelia, "authority", to Kent, whose loyal vision still invests the body of Lear's mortality with the body of his majesty, the king's immortal double, but only "an old foolish man", to his daughters, a mandated identity – "my mistress's father" – to Oswald, a servant, or a zero figure to the clown. E. A. J. Honigmann, in his 1976 *Impressions of Character* and Norman Rabkin, in an essay, "Meaning and the Merchant of Venice" 1981, included in John Russell Brown's anthology entitled *Studying Shakespeare*, 1990, are exploring the complexities of Shakespeare's characters, as the earliest examples of **heroes with identity problems**, emerging as social or intersubjective constructs, as a criss-cross of impressions (**impressionistic portraits**, gradually emerging from the other characters' opinions about them). Who is Shylock ? The money-crazed usurer or the bereaved widower who affectionately remembers the turqoise his former wife had given him as a token of love ? The Christian-hating villain or a victim of the Christians' deception and greed? The heroes are inhabited by the ghostly presence of others, like Hamlet, hooked into an alien signifying battery, speaking and acting his father's words and thoughts. In *Marx's Ghosts*, Jaques Derrida interprets the presence of the ghost in *Hamlet* as an allegory of any text's semantic indeterminacy. There is no unique structure of meaning, there are always other possible meanings lurking beneath. Each text is haunted by other possible interpretations. Another explanation would be the transition from the medieval concept of **the same** – as identity stabilized through the fixities of birth, rank, estate (see J. Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death,* 1976) – to the modern idea of the Other, the symbolical order in whose court the individual self is brought to trial.

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The **generic mix** of Shakespeare's plays provides a frame for a similar juxtaposition of character types from different traditions – "a jumble of schemata" to quote Rosalie L. Colie, *Shakespeare's Use of Genre*, 1974. In Falstaff meet the Vice figure of medieval moralities, the Lord Misrule of popular Carnival, the tempting devil, the burlesque Player King, the braggart soldier. Identity evaporates into simulacra, a pageant of masks hiding no face.

Neither are the **race/gender/class divisions** as stable as they used to be in the Middle Ages. The issue of race polarizes the couple in *Othello* as the white Venetian lady and the Moor, the racial Other. Yet the lovers have crossed over to each other's position. Othello has become, through loyal military service, a wealthy Venetian general, while, in choosing him for a husband, Desdemona has become a "Lady of Barbary". Their love and faithfulness to each other are unquestionable, yet it is the power of the social stereotype that will bring their relationship to a disastrous end. As Alan Sinfield persuasively argues in "Cultural Materialism. Othello and the Politics of Plausibility", Othello is deceived by Iago because the latter exploits the culturally given, Othello's sense, induced by social clichés, of his racial inferiority, of his outsider position. Desdemona cannot truly love him; she must have been sexually aroused – a token of sensuousness which renders her sexual transgression plausible. He had internalized the racial stereotype, the automatic association of blackness and evil: Desdemona's character is as black as his face. Physical features are mapped onto moral characteristics: this is the mechanics of the social construction of reputation which Shakespeare's genius intuited. Othello has been taught, during the process of his socialization, to assume the place of the non-European Other, placing himself within the colonial paradigm together with "an Indian, an Arabian, a Turk, a Judean". As he realizes his mistake, he splits into the Imperial justicier inflicting death upon himself as the barbarian Other who had wasted a Venetian pearl, and who had sinned against Venetian values. He had been blinded by social prejudices and hypocrisy, yet we do not agree with Sinfield, that Shakespeare reinforces here a social stereotype. Othello is not interpellated in the end as a barbarian who has learned his place, because it is his better reason that condemns his own deed.

The importance of voice should be stressed in dealing with such slippery issues. In *The Tempest*, for instance, Europocentrism and the contempt for non-Europeans is voiced from the beginning by unreliable characters, former usurpers and would-be murderers. It is Sebastian and Antonio who express dissatisfaction with Alonso having wasted his daughter on an African prince and their contempt for the Carthagian queen whom Aeneas was wise enough to abandon in order to build an Empire in Europe. Leslie Fiedler's sympathy with Caliban as Prospero's colonial victim ("Caliban as the American Indian", 1973) is objectless. Prospero is not

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idealized, he himself has to part with his vengeful, irrational part, while Caliban, whom Prospero finally acknowledges to be some "thing of darkness" within himself, shows himself capable of spiritual redemption and acculturation.

Two paradigms were current among Shakespeare's contemporaries with respect to gender. Aristotle's *Historia animalum* had encouraged misogyny by ascribing women an inferior biological essence. The female type is quarrelsome, deceitful, false, shameless, but also tameable and submissive. This seems to have been the stereotype behind Shakespeare's construction of Katarina in the *Taming of the Shrew*, yet, by the end of the play, he has exposed the economic ground of gender division: Katarina's will is nullified because a woman possesses nothing of her own, her husband is the bread-winner, feeding and clothing her, and in exchange for his gifts he can afford to be as wild in his demands as he pleases.

The other paradigm, of Platonic origin (*Symposium*), is that of woman as part of an androgynous human nature. *The Twelfth Night* or *As You Like It* play upon the idea of the relativity or reversibility of gender distinctions. On hearing the false report of Romeo's death, Juliet experiences a sense of alienation from her true identity (*ay is not I)*, as it is only through Romeo that she can be complete. The lovers claim their mutual affection despite social divisions, and Juliet appeals to allegory in order to denounce the unnatural character of hate artificially imposed by the Law of the Fathers: that which is a rose by any other name would smell as sweet. In nature, there are no differences, human signifieds lose their validity. However, in man's world, as they tragically discover, a name can kill, because here human artefacts and meanings are as real in their effects as the things in the world. Irrational laws and social arrangements are eventually resolved into a more humane order, but at the cost of the protagonists' lives.

Shakespeare and History

Apparently **William Shakespeare** started his career as a *king's man* (The Lord Chamberlain's Men company, in which Shakespeare held an important position, became "The Kings' Men" in 1603). That is as a writer of **historical plays** echoing the Tudor monarchs' anxieties about the deposition of a king and social rebellion. The genre was a new one, and the interest in it coincided with an inceptive inquiry into the truth of historiographical writings, into the validity of the extant records. A conversation between little prince Edward and Buckingham on their way to the Tower in *Richard III* is an anachronism for it was only in Shakespeare's time that historians belonging to "The Elizabethan Society of Antiquarians", founded about 1586, were taking the trouble to check written records against physical relics and to compare both with oral tradition. Shakespeare's recasting of old matter into new epistemological frames was to become a common "reedifying" practice:

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Prince: *I do not like the Tower of any place.*
Did Julius Caesar build that place, my Lord ?
Buck.: *He did, my gracious lord, begin that place.*
Which since succeeding ages have reedified.
Prince: *Is it upon record or else reported*
Successively from age to age he built it ?
Buck.: *Upon record, my gracious lord.*
Prince: *But say, my lord, it were not register'd.*
Methinks the truth should live from age to age,
And even to the general all-ending day.
(*Richard III,* III/1)

The kind of "truth" Shakespeare was prepared to tell about "majesty" was still coloured by the medieval belief in destiny in his first historical tetralogy: *The First, The Second and The Third Part of King Henry VI* (1589-91) and *The Tragedy of King Richard III* (1592-93). Henry VI appears as a pathetic figure, a Boethian philosopher commenting on the cruel fate that sets father and son in bloody fight against each other, ends up a victim of his wolfish wife, and of the cruel Yorks. As for Richard III, he too is seen as a victim of Destiny which shaped him as a monster already from his mother's womb, denying him any claim to love and predetermining his life of hatred and crimes. A man of fascinating energy, he is allowed to appear somehow as an emissary from the other world, purging the scene of the Civil War of all its crimes (do not George of Clarence himself and other victims of Richard's have their hands stained by fratricide blood?) His dream before the battle of Bosworth would rather suggest that he *did* experience qualms of conscience. Anyway, he is psychologically broken and defeated before the battle gets on the way. In a later historical play, *King John* (1596-97), Shakespeare is merciless in exposing the king's evil temper and acts, the emphasis falling upon **political behaviour** (**man in relation to power,** the relationship between the requirements of the office and the limitations of the man holding it, between moral scruples and political efficiency), which provides **the central conflict in a historical play**. With his second tetralogy (*The Tragedy of King Richard II,* 1595-1596, *The First and The Second Part of King Henry IV*, 1597-98, and *The Life of King Henry V*, 1598-99) Shakespeare goes back in time to interrogate the causes of the War of the Roses, that destroyed families, devastated the land, and made England vulnerable in front of foreign enemies.

As Shakespeare's plays are richly patterned, we can identify an archetypal structure, which they all share. G.B. Gabel and Ch. B. Wheeler, in *The Bible as Literature* **(26),** write that any history written on Christian principles will be of

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necessity universal, providential, apocalyptic and periodized. **Most histories begin with the end of one reign and the beginning of another. The plot covers a period of discord, whether foreign or internal. Almost all of them figure a "salvation history": a providential leader shows up at the end**, promising, as Prince Henry does in *King John, to set a form upon this indigest/ Which he hath left so shapeless and so rude*. King John's crime against the legitimate inheritor of the throne, his nephew Arthur, is a crime against the divinely ordered law of patriarchal succession. The breach of providential order causes a disaster for the entire land: *From forth this morsel of dead royalty,/ The life, the right and truth of all the realm/ Is fled to heaven* (IV/ 3)

Three kinds of conflict lead to breach of order:

The **Machiavellian challenger of providential order (27)** In *Richard II,* the providential view of history (John of Gaunt: the king is *God's substitute, / His deputy anointed... His minister – I/l;* Richard II: *God for Richard hath in heavenly pay/ A glorious angel* – III/2) conflicts with Henry Bolingbroke's Machiavellian trust in military power and his right **to change** the existing order. Shakespeare does not decide between the two outlooks on history, developing another conflict, that between **feudalism** (with the feudal lords enjoying their privileges according to **status and rank**) and **absolutism** (the monarch's own usurpation of Bolingbroke's right over his land, taken away from him while he is in exile)

Take Hereford's rights away, and take from Time
His charters and his customary rights;
Let not tomorrow then ensue today;
Be not thyself – for how art thou a king
But by fair sequence and succession ?
(II/ l)

Richard needs to be reminded of the immutability of status: *If that my cousin be king of England,/ It must be granted I am Duke of Lancaster* (II/ 3). If he is **the King**, so is Henry **Duke of Lancaster.** Finally, however, it is the "issue of these arms" (II/3), Henry's military superiority and cunning, launching the attack, while Richard's army is "despatched for Ireland" (to suppress Wat Tyler's 1381 uprising, which is not mentioned, since popular rebellion was a bit of a taboo) that works the lawful king's deposition. Henry Bolingbroke speaks the **capitalist language of social contract and financial negotiations,** which sounds awry in his "dialogue" with Northumberland, Henry Percy and Lord Ross, who speak the **language of feudal vows and bonds of vassalage**. Bolingbroke goes on raving about his "fortune" "treasury", "bounty", which is now "infant", but will "ripen", "enrich", "come to years", so he makes a "covenant" to "recompense" (repeated twice lest it

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should be missed) what the others define as chivalrous "approved service and desert", being made "rich" by Bolingbroke's mere "presence" – a fine fiction indeed, which the pragmatic Bolingbroke disparagingly dismisses as "the exchequer of the poor"...

Whereas Richard appeals to the authority of his legitimate title (*Arm, arm, my name*), Lord Bardolph's rebels in *The Second Part of King Henry the Fourth* are marked out for Machiavels by their *Realpolitik*, the careful plotting of the whole military enterprise and its grounding in facts and material resources: *The plot of situation and the model (...) or else we fortify in papers and in figures/ Using the names of men instead of men* (I/ 3)

Phyllis Racken *(Ibidem)* identifies a second type of conflict, between a **pattern of masculine order and feminine subversion.** Shakespeare depicts male protagonists defending **masculine historical projects** against female characters who threaten to obstruct them. The champions for the French and for the English in *I Henry VI* are Joan la Pucelle and Talbot (later Earl of Shrewsbury) respectively. Talbot speaks in the name of masculine values, fighting bravely according to the patriarchal order. Joan is a youthful peasant who resorts to craft, subterfuge, sneaking into Rouen, in disguise, to admit the French army and recapture the city. The Countess of Auvergne also resorts to craft and stratagem to entrap Talbot. Whereas Sir William Lucy speaks of the "valiant Lord Talbot" in the heroic language of an epitaph, describing his patriarchal lineage and heroic military deeds, the countess merely desires to be assured of Talbot's physical appearance, as the indubitable proof of his worth. To her disappointment, the hero looks like a "child, silly dwarf". Shakespeare's idea of a hero has obviously worked the shift from the sturdy Ajax to the moral Aeneas. Joan of Arc too shows the same blindness to moral values, limiting her estimation of the hero to the stark fact of his mortality : *Him that thou magnifi'st with all these titles,/ Stinking and fly-blown lies here at our feet (IV/ 7).* Shakespeare sets out Talbot's valour by antithesis to Joan and by parallelism to Talbot's own son. Whereas the hard-hearted Joan rejects her father and shamelessly declares herself a bastard, finally lying about being pregnant in order to save her life at all costs, Talbot's son will not desert the battlefield to save himself. He chooses a valiant death lest his father's renowned named should be abused. Were he to run away, he would lose his title and become *like the peasant boys of France* (IV/ 5, 6) Queen Margaret, another female subverter, sets herself against her husband's desires, orders his most loyal subjects executed in spite of his weak protestations, proving *a tiger's heart wrap'd in a woman's hide* (*III Henry VI*, I/ 4).

One more threat to the established order is Jack Cade's uprising, people in low degree being even less entitled to rebellion than the rackless aristocrats, who, after all, are family...Shakespeare's representation of **social conflict** reveals the Elizabethans' fear of the multitude as a many-headed monster, threatening status

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and the hierarchical relationship within the feudal pyramid. Cade is a leveller, bringing the entire social edifice down to the dead level of a community of property, money and... women. Scholars, lawyers, courtiers, gentlemen are blacklisted, writing and reading are catalogued as crimes and capital offences against illiteracy, a death penalty being the retribution for the erection of a grammar school or the use of Latin phrases.

Like King Midas who turned into gold everything he touched, Shakespeare distils any kind of confrontation (political, social, cultural) into a **conflict of values**.

The language of the first tetralogy is still indebted to medieval rhetoric: **allegorical scenes** (father carrying his dead son's body, whom he killed not knowing who he was, or the other way round), **dream visions**, in which Richard III has to face his victims' trial and sentence, the occurrences portending evil which presided over Richard's birth, the **bestiary** device in reverse: humans compared to beasts and animals of prey according to the *Physiologus* practice of ascribing them moral qualities (vices).

The language of the second tetralogy and of *King John* is one of impressive language-awareness, including reinscription: a war of texts, fictions, discourses, figures. The allegorical characters of medieval popular drama (Falstaff's company: Shallow, Shadow, Wart, Feeble, Mouldy a.o.) are introduced to serve the education of a future king through negativity. Emblems of the time Shakespeare is reconstructing are interlaced with those of the new discourse. Colin Wilcockson (*Ibidem*) identifies the source of the garden image in *Richard II* and of the bee-hive in *Henry V* as allegories of the perfect, organic state, in a comparative reading of *Mum and the Sothsegger*: There are unmistakable verbal echoes in the Gardener's speech in the 14th century fragment:

root away the noisome weeds... keep law... like an executioner... cut off the heads...wholesome herbs swarming with caterpillars

Here are Shakespeare's Gardener and one of his servants, talking of the king's deposition and his neglect of England ("razed Oblivion"), while they are giving substance to the **model** ("charactered in the brain"):

Gardener*: Give some supportance to the bending twigs*
Go thou, and like an executioner,
Cut off the heads of too fast growing sprays,
That look too holy in our commonwealth:
All must be even in our government.
You thus employ'd I will go root away
The noisome weeds that without profit suck
The soil's fertility from wholesome flowers

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First servant: *Why should we in the compass of a pale*
Keep law and form and due proportion
Showing as in a model our firm estate...?
(Richard II, III/4)

The anonymous voice of the 14th century, telling the king a cautionary tale of "razed Oblivion" and its effects on the garden-state (an image echoed in John of Gaunt's feudal discourse about royalty – II/ 1), is met by the Queen's fiction of the "second fall" of Adam, **medieval allegory** being replaced by a **Renaissance analogy** between Adam and Richard, between Christ sold out for thirty silver coins and Richard being betrayed by his subjects. Later, in prison, when Richard himself realizes that he has been guilty in not keeping *the true concord of state and time...,* in breaking *proportions,* he drops this fiction, accepting the **disanalogy**: he cannot answer Christ's summon *(Come, little ones)* because, paraphrasing again, *It is as hard to come as for a camel/ To thread the postern of a needle's eye (V/ 4)*

Of Richard's metaphorical sweeps, symbolical visions and majestic rhetoric much has been written (see, especially, David Green, *The Actor in History. Studies in Renaissance Stage Poetry.* The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988). Less attention has been paid to Bolingbroke's pragmatic discourse of few words, less imagination and inadequate troping (money and the imagery of natural growth, for instance*).* Shakespeare has dropped indiscriminate ornament and authorial comment in favour of coded imagery, working language into the dramatic ***representation*** of a character's mind. Language is no longer reporting but enacting meaning.

Shakespeare and the Tradition of Comedy and Tragedy

A meaning is inscribed in literary forms by association with a certain thought-content from the moment of their birth. Jacoppo da Lentini loves a woman, and it is through her love that he is guided towards love of God. Dante's Beatrice or Petrarch's Laura are such guides in a world beyond. The British sonneteers, unless a contrary desire is conveyed in a *recusatio*, follow into their predecessors' footsteps: Sidney distinguishes between earthly and intellectual love, Spenser sees his bride as his link to cosmos, Shakespeare wrestles with his dark angel, to allow the good one to win. Great writers always display awareness of meaningful form. The word "comedy" means "merry-making", and Shakespeare's traces its model back to the Old Comedy of Aristophanes: a blend of farcical situations, fantastic plots, remarkable characters, combining verse, dance and satire, in a word, closer to the popular festival. In this Menippean (upside-down, from "Menip", a cynic) world, the meaning inscribed as farce, hoax, qui-pro-quo is **problematical identity**. This is the issue Shakespeare's **light**

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comedies – *The Comedy of Errors* (1593-94), *The Taming of the Shrew* (1593-94), *Love's Labour's Lost* (1594-95), *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1598-99) – set out to explore.

In identifying the archetypal pattern each individual comedy shares with the others, Northrop Frye saw himself criticized for reducing the plenitude of Shakespeare's comical textuality to one *Ur*-plot. Yet is there any system that does not run this risk, or is knowledge available in any other than systematic form? In discussing the structure of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (*On Shakespeare,* p. 38), Frye mentions *the three parts of a normal comedy* **(28)**: *a first part in which an absurd, unpleasant or irrational situation is set up; a second part of confused identity and personal complications; a third part in which the plot gives a shake and twist and everything comes right in the end.*

Confused identity has a different meaning in Shakespeare's light, romantic or dark comedies. In the first category of plays, farcical confusion is a temporal overthrow of order and a state of mistaken identities (Menippean carnival), whose paradoxical effect is that it leads not to a mechanical removal of the mask the character has assumed in order to disguise himself from the others, but to an enlightened *recognition* and to a discovery of a deeper, more genuine identity in the characters themselves. They have been deceiving themselves and now they are forced to check what they feel to be their deep self against their social image for others (the Lacanian "mirror stage"). This is no outward deceptive game, but a change in the mind. One of the Dromios tells his brother at the end of *The Comedy of Errors: You are my glass and not my brother.* Unless the two pairs of brothers meet again, they can get no objectified image of themselves, they cannot come to a realization of what they are. Being mistaken for his twin brother, Antipholos of Syracuse, finds himself showered with gifts, including a costume which he puts on, receiving the following comment from his servant (IV/3).

Dro.: *What ! have you got the picture of old Adam new apparelled ?*
Ant.S.: *What god is this ? What Adam dost thou mean ?*
Dro. : *Not that Adam that kept the Paradise, but that Adam that kept the prison...*

His brother actually gets arrested for debt and is tied up as lunatic. His symbolical "apparel" shows him for what he is: a prisoner of the flesh, of his devastating passions. As his wife repproaches him, his shameful life stains herself, as husband and wife are one. The visiting brother has put up at *The Centaur.* The allegorical meaning is that in Ephesus, his good native nature is doubled by people's deceptive association between himself and his sinful brother. The latter lives at *The Phoenix,* his good self being finally resurrected from the ashes of his

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worldly waste. Alexander Leggatt, in *Shakespeare's Comedy of Love,* compares Shakespeare's play to its source in Plautus' *Manaechmi.* Whereas the Plautine Epidamum is a place of Ribalds, Parasites, Drunkards and Courtezans, in Shakespeare's Ephesus there is the *more sinister deception and shape-shifting that attack not only the purse but the body and soul (I/ 2):*

> Ant. S.: *They say this town if full of cozenage;*
> *As, nimble jugglers that deceive the eye*
> *Dark-working sourcerers that change the mind,*
> *Soul killing witches that deform the body,*
> *Disguised cheaters, prating mountebanks,*
> *And many such-like liberties of sin.*

The final image of Falstaff, with horns on his head, beaten and ducked, may resemble what Frye identifies as a "fertility spirit", yet this *tableau vivant* is first of all the hero's objectified realization, pressed home by the community, that he is anything but the flattering Jove and irresistible lover figure he once assumed. Unlike other comedies, *The Merry Wives* demystifies the character's cherished self-image by exposing the more genuine "mask" built by social others, who see him as he really is.

The Katharina at the end of her *taming* has learnt the truth which the other self-willed wives are still ignorant of: in a society in which women are married off after negotiations and financial arrangements like those made for any other commodity, men, as the only possessors of the means of production and providers of the means of consumption are absolute for power, while women, for subjection. It is the social organization of work and retribution that ascribes women the role of the tenderly-pampered dolls, and men, the heroic posture (V / 2)

> *Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper,*
> *Thy head, thy sovereign; one that cares for thee,*
> *And for thy maintenance commits his body*
> *To painful labour both by sea and land,*
> *To watch the night in storms, the day in cold,*
> *Whilst thou liest warm at home, secure and safe;*
> *And craves no other tribute at thy hands*
> *But love, fair looks, and true obedience;*

What best example of self-deception rather than of deception attempted on others is *Love's Labour's Lost ? Love by the book* or "love of books" set against the most natural drives of human nature was a subject in the air in the late Renaissance, which both Cervantes and Shakespeare grasped at about the same

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time (*Don Quixote* had been circulated in manuscripts before the date of its publication). Ferdinand, King of Navarre and his company of "book-men" have decided to break all ties to the other half of humanity, and dedicate themselves to a male project of glory and immortality by sharing in the lives of books. Their deceptive project is self-directed *(war with our affections*) and the recovery of true identity implies a process of removing the ***inner***, self-imposed disguise. The patterned speech, with repetitions and syntactic parallelism is characteristic of Renaissance dramatic rhetoric (IV/ 3):

> Berowne: *Fools to abide by what they have sworn.*
> *For wisdom's sake, a word that all men love,*
> *Or for love's sake, a word that loves all men,*
> *Or for men's sake, the authors of these women,*
> *Let us once lose our oaths to find ourselves,*
> *Or else we lose ourselves to keep our oaths,*

From exploration of the world, the modern mind in the making was turning upon itself. Man, whom Renaissance humanism had placed at the centre of the universe as its microcosm, was growing uneasy about his own nature, pulling towards either escapism into artificial imaginary worlds or the mysticism of the flesh*: We are used to thinking of the period as an era of pessimism, chaos, and violence, succeeding the optimism of the Renaissance when man, having asserted his birthright as the centre of the universe, felt the world his, and himself and the world were one harmonious whole.... we may perhaps call baroque the artistic outcome of this destruction of the balance between feeling and intellect, the distortion of reality through the cravings of unruly emotions and the desperate vagaries of the imagination (...) The senses and the spirit are usurping each other's vested interests; time has split into unconnected moments; the irregular beats of the human heart swing from paradise to hell; what is reality ? Baroque sensibility was bound to question the intrinsic value of its wild flights of fancy. Hence this theme of the confusion of reality and illusion, which is one of the most important themes of the first half of the seventeenth century. In Germany the themes of the "Theatre of the World", of "Life as a Dream", the interplay of* Sein und Schein*, are characteristic of the literature of the period. They are also to be found in Shakespeare, in the French dramatist Rotrou, and in the famous play of Calderon,* La vida es sueno. *The puzzling qualities of Corneille's comedies* L'Illusion comique *or* Le Menteur *may be partly due to the impact of illusion on reality. Misunderstandings, lies, or magic are not merely dramatic devices – they illustrate and stress the repeated assertion that human beings are not what they seem to be, that night is very dark and love uncertain. The fashionable Pastoral,*

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French, Italian, or English, and later the Opera, open the gates of a paradise of fallacies and disguises, an earthly compensation for frustration and failure. And of illusion and reality, which is the more valuable? **(29)** The characters' self-deception has been induced by books; it is books have taught them that life is bogus and they the only immortality. It is books that provide the model: to love like Hercules. The mask is coextensive with the biased self, in-built through fictions. The distance between the individual and his material mask (courting the ladies who attend on the Princess of France, disguised as Blackamoors in Russian clothes, grotesque personages playing gods and heroes, Armado courting a vulgar country wench "by the book", like Hercules and the fashionable sonneteers) is by far greater than that between the characters' natural drive and their self-induced deception. Speech is not only comically dislocated, as in the other light comedies, by being placed in the wrong context (see Armado's rhetorical flourish in a letter addressed to the "base wench", read aloud by the unsympathetic King of Navarre and to the ears of the clown who cannot understand a word) but simply going to pieces, any attempt at communication proving **abortive** (a recurrent image, from the title to the last scene).

Shakespeare's **dark comedies** are **problem plays** approaching the absurd drama in our century through their unresolved tensions and paralysing sense that man does not really have a choice in a fallen world. As the name suggests, they are **plays in which action heads towards a tragical climax and it is only by chance (and not by necessity or some moral design) that it finally reaches a festive (comical) conclusion, without completely dispelling the gloomy picture of the moral ambiguities in society and in man's heart.** Shakespeare produced them by the turn of the century, his writing "hinging" on them in its shift from history and comedy towards the Gordian Knot tied in the great tragedies and cut in the escapist romances:

The Merchant of Venice: 1596-97
Much Ado About Nothing: 15598-99
All's Well that Ends Well: 1602-1603
Measure for Measure: 1603-1604

In a dark comedy, the mask is deliberately assumed in order to play some deceptive game, usually seeking personal gain to the detriment of another interested party. The Duke in *Measure for Measure* may be flattering himself about playing the scheming God for a more fortunate settlement, yet for some of the pawns in his social game of chess it proves more than they have asked for. Angelo does not express his wish to marry Marianna, who has deceived him through a bed-trick. He only says he loves Isabella, and that he wants to die for having blackmailed her and attempted her honour. After all, Shakespeare's model

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for Vincentio, the Duke of Vienna, appears to have been the scrupleless Cesare Borgia, who, according to Machiavelli, employed Ramiro de Orco to redress the lawlessness of the dukedom of Romagna, because he did not want himself to appear cruel in the public eye. The orthodoxy of Vincentio's employing Angelo, known as an unflinching legalist, to do what he did not dare to do with his own hands, returning afterwards in a priest's disguise to eavesdrop on what was going on is highly questionable. And even if his schemes do work in the end, averting unnecessary executions and attempted seduction, the more serious dilemmas – legal social, moral – lurking in the background are still left without a satisfactory solution. Harriet Hawkins is listing some of them: What violation is to be tricked into bed with someone you would not choose to? Which Christian virtue, charity or chastity, must take precedence? Should a brother allow his sister to prostitute herself in order to save him? Should a young novice jeopardise her immortal soul in order to save her brother? What is the value of law when it conflicts with the biological and psychological laws of human nature? Or shot-gun weddings? Can all these dilemmas be solved through bed tricks and marriage certificates? **(30)** Man no longer finds support in his heroic nature. Claudio is designed on a more human scale than the Renaissance Magnifico. When the Duke (in order to test his courage) urges him to be "absolute for death", Claudio cannot help feeling frightened. The votaries of absolutes are pitiable failures. Angelo, in whom Shakespeare inscribes the contemporary issue of the relationship between private man and public man, begins by firmly asserting his invulnerability to temptation Yet too soon is he heard confessing the split between social "ego" and the unsuppressable "id", ingeniously rendered through the rhetorical scheme called "antimetabole" or "epanodos" (repetition of words in converse order):

> Ang.: *When I would pray and think, I think and pray*
> *To several subjects": heaven hath my empty words,*
> *Whilst my invention, hearing not my tongue,*
> *Anchors on Isabel; heaven in my mouth,*
> *As if I did but only chew his name,*
> *And in my heart the strong and swelling evil*
> *Of my conception (...) Blood, thou art blood;*

Isabella is offered no acceptable solution. From our present perspective, that would be: she can only choose between dishonour and a broken heart to see her brother executed whom she could have saved through self-sacrifice. But not from her point of view. Isabella too is as morally rigid and inhumanly upright as Angello. Her brother has been guilty of infringing the law. Premarital sex is a crime, and Isabella, who is to become a novice, abhors the idea of pleading for what is socially tabooed:

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Isab. *There is a vice that most I do abhor,*
And most desire shall meet the blow of justice,
For which I must not plead, but that I must;
At war 'twixt will and will not.

This is the voice of the LAW, which Shakespeare subverts through another voice inscribed in the popular form of the romance. His source, apart from George Whetstone's *Promos and Cassandra*, is a story in an Italian collection by Cinthio. The area of literature made up of euphuistic tales, Italianate novellas, picaresque novellas, Greek romances, Peninsular romances, based upon Spanish and Portuguese originals, adventurous romances inherited from the Middle Ages, is located by John Simon (*Open and Closed Books; a Semiotic Approach to the History of Elizabethan and Jacobean Popular Romance*) in *a space cleared by a tension between an urban middle class, which constituted the reading public of the texts and which was increasingly gaining economic power, and an aristocracy which retained ideological hegemony and, consequently, control over important state institutions* **(31)** The basic plot – Northrop Frye remarks (*On Shakespeare*, p. 141) – has three well-known **folk themes**: the **disguised ruler**, the **corrupt judge** and the **bed trick.** The subverting voice in the play is implicitly posing several unsettling questions: Is Claudio, who means to marry the woman carrying his child, morally baser than Angelo, the "corrupt judge", who has abandoned Mariana because she has lost her fortune? Are law and religion any good when precepts can lead to diametrically opposed conclusions ? For instance, in *Mark*, 4: 21-4, the law *is to be set on a candle-stick, not put under a bed.* Yet in *Luke*, 6:36-42 there is a question whether the blind can lead the blind, whether it is just to see the mote in your brother's eye and not the beam in your own. Is Angelo entitled to deal justice, to impose a law which he proves the first to break? Are the Duke's compromises, manipulations of the others' consciences, contrivances perfectly entitled? What sort of law is that which condemns a man sincerely in love, while releasing a bawd? In confusing "benefactors" and "malefactors", Elbow, a constable, is scarcely mistaken about the moral *chiaroscuro* in Vienna, the same which engulfed the Tudor hierarchy of values in the Jacobean and Caroline age. Now they are decentred, out of focus. In *All's Well that Ends Well* (through another bed trick...), the healing of the king sounds like a medieval romance. Yet the healer is no Perceval, but an orphan lady brought up by a countess, to whom the values of feudal vows are meaningless. She replaces them by social contracts and market exchange of services. If she heals the king, she demands some favour in return; if she appeals to another woman's sympathy, she shows herself ready to pay for it: *Love is to be met with recompense.* Nor does Bertram, the object of her unrequited love, obey the king's command and marry her, as he is expected by the ancient ties of vassalage. Those ties are broken, yet the cunning bourgeois

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individualism achieves as much. Helena is finally pleased to see herself married off to Bertram, even if the means be "unfit".

Shakespeare was prepared to give a voice to those whom the official discourse excluded from power. There were few Jews in England at the time he was writing *The Merchant of Venice*, yet Shylock is no simplified, demonized caricature, like Marlowe's Barabas (mentioned by Shylock in the play, so his bitterness against current representations has at least one identifiable and justified source) or other such characters distorted by social biases. Unlike the light comedies, where the theme is **self-deception**, in the dark comedies characters are **deceived about social others** whom they judge unfairly, with possibly tragical consequences. Human alienation, social disruption, narrow-minded intolerance follow the type-cast social and art representations whose validity Shakespeare is interrogating. Beatrice (*Much Ado About Nothing*) is certainly wrong in considering all males vicious, and it is her own voice that gives her away: How can she pass judgement on the human race of which she is herself a part? What would be the consequences if ideas about human nature represented in the haunts of discourse (of theology, for instance, obsessing with the necessity for man "to make an account of his life") were taken literally by a female Quixote? Are not systems, ideas supposed to bear upon reality? On being asked whether she intends to marry, Beatrice seems to be quoting the *Enchiridion* (enlarged by a knowledge of geology), Benedick's trustworthy nature proving such fictions preposterous. The parodic intention is unmistakable (II/ 1)

> Beatrice: *Not till God make men of some other metal than earth. Would it not grieve a woman to be overmastered with a piece of valiant dust? To make an account of her life to a clod of wayward marl? No, uncle, I'll none; Adam's sons are my brethren; and truly, I hold it a sin to match in my kindred.*

Angelo is deceived about man's vulnerability to temptation before he experiences its power on himself. Shylock's famous discourse in III/ 1 is claiming a recognition of his human likeness to the rest of Christians, suggesting that, while preaching humility and forgiveness of the others' abuse, they will exact revenge just like any pagan: *If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge.* Shylock's psychological motivation for his attempt to "better the instruction" in his revenge as well as his forced conversion at the end by an autocratic society complicate a good deal our response to a controversial issue which was quite familiar, particularly from homiletic, scholastic writing, to Shakespeare's contemporaries: the conflict between the idea of retribution as "eye for an eye" and strict legality and the New Testamental dispensation of Charity, forgiveness. Shakespeare undertakes a critique of the simplified representation through dogmas of such an insoluble lump: *So our Elizabethan, brought up in the general*

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teaching of the Church, found himself in the thick of incompatibilities: logically he was a fallen creature, born in original sin, and therefore liable to suffer the inevitable, just results of sinfulness (...) *On the other hand, his ministers assured him... that the logic of his damnation could be wept aside by heartfelt repentance and, above all, faith in God's mercy through the love of Christ for sinners* **(32)** If a Jew is said to have eyes, hands, organs, dimension, senses, affections, passions (the inferior, vegetative and animal soul), is a Christian any different ? If Portia is admired for her loyalty to her dead father's will, why should Jessica receive public acclaim for walking out on her father and robbing him, being immediately greeted by the Christian majority as "gentile and no Jew" ? The Duke and Antonio even make sure that she gets at the hands of the law what she has not already stolen. Shylock's exacting of a "pound of man's flesh" is an implicit irony on the Christian representations of Jews as having no soul but only a body, and his speech is parroting the discourse of the Church, mockingly representing a Jew in its reductive version as passive biology: *If you prick us, do we not bleed ? If you tickle us, do we not laugh ? If you poison us, do we not die ?* He is intent upon demonstrating the reality of the body in a Christian and *betters the instruction* of the Church by comparing a Christian's flesh to that of dead animals, to the animals' advantage: *not as estimable, profitable neither,/ As flesh of muttons, beefs, or goats* (I/ 1).

In the dark comedies, the show of evil and deception may be extended to the entire society, as in Bassanio's speech in *The Merchant of Venice* (III/ 2), and it is precisely the knowledge of the discrepancy between reality and mask that helps him make the right choice (avoiding the deceiving, polished appearance of the wrong caskets)

> Bassanio*: So may the outward shows be least themselves:*
> *The world is deceived with ornament,*
> *In law, what plea so tainted and corrupt*
> *But, being seasoned with a gracious voice,*
> *Obscures the show of evil? In religion,*
> *What damned error but some sober brow*
> *Will bless it and approve it with a text,*
> *Hiding the grossness with fair ornament?*
> *There is no vice so simple but assumes*
> *Some mark of virtue on his outward parts.*

Is Bassanio anticipating here the "gracious voice" of Jessica's sophistic plea, as is Shylock's speech making us aware of the "sober brows of religion"? Be it as it may, Shakespeare shows himself interested in **deceiving signifying practices** ("ornament") more than in the material aspects of society.

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What about a character like Don John in *Much Ado About Nothing*? Is Shakespeare carrying the idea of evil to its extreme: Don John choosing evil-doing as an end in itself? Or is he mocking the Spanish romances and their Manichaean view of human character, and lack of motivation ? Shakespeare was writing the play at the time he was working on *Hamlet*, where the Prince shows himself completely dissatisfied with the recent books in which authors take a superficial view of human nature (the signs of age, for instance). The source of the celebrated speech of Polonius to Laertes has been identified in a farmer's almanac of the time. Osric finds in Laertes *the very card or calendar of gentry* V/ 2) – naturally, we should say, if this is what his father has taught him – to which Hamlet replies like a humanist: *to know a man well were to know himself.* Human nature is universal, in Laertes I see my own cause, I understand him because I know myself well.. The Renaissance had been urging people to study themselves in the mirror (Hamlet: *his semblage is his mirror... his umbrage, nothing more*), spelling out how people should behave, dress, speak, govern, think, what to do every day of the year, in works ranging from *The Courtier* and *A Mirror for Magistrates* to "farmer's almanacs". All that had bred a monstruous individualism, a self-absorbing interest in the outward show of the human personality, as well as of the mind in its own workings (Montaigne: the world is a deceptive show, let me shut myself up in the prison of my mind) Baroque restlessness was partly due to this maddening Narcissism and abyssmal mirroring. Shakespeare's bitterest tragedies are indictments of individualism (Timon's mysanthropy, Lear's Narcissistic demand for professions of love from his daughters and of unconditioned loyalty from his subjects, Macbeth's belief that Providence should be serving him, Coriolanus 's self-exile). The Baroque was maintaining the outward show of Renaissance thought, while emptying forms and representations of a deeper meaning. Parallelism between planes is still there; but there are no **lower** and **higher** planes, the movement works both ways, either towards the macrocosm or towards the miniature, depending on what end of the telescope one is looking through. The mirroring technique is still there, but there is an abyssmal proliferation of reflections, without the presupposition of an archetype. Forms are admirably symmetrical, but decentred, out of focus, out of origin, Protean. Don John's self-abasement is too radical to be taken for granted. It is only nature that is never motivated, being either canker or rose. In a tragedy, even villains speak a meaningful language: they are motivated for the worse. In a dark comedy, a character is evil for no cause at all, which falls bellow human understanding. Even Richard III practices evil for the lack of a choice. Don John's self-abasement is gratuitous. If the Baroque was the age of the "travestied Aeneid" (hybrid, dialogical forms were created, so characteristic of the sceptical modern consciousness: tragicomedy, mock-heroic, parody, burlesque), Shakespeare is probably giving us in the Don John plot a travestied Spanish romance:

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D. John: *I had rather be a canker in a hedge than a rose in his grace: and it better fits my blood to be disdained of all than to fashion a carriage to rob love from any: in this, though I cannot be said to be a flattering honest man, it must not be denied but I am a plain-dealing villain. I am trusted with a muzzle and enfranchised with a clog; therefore I have decreed not to sing in my cage. If I had my mouth, I would bite; if I had my liberty, I would do my liking: in the meantime, let me be that I am and seek not alter me.* (I/ 3)

Shakespeare's dark comedies mirror not only some of the problems that oppressed the Elizabethan mind, but also their representation in discourse, with an underpinning idea of the discourse-maker's responsibility.

Weary with all the incongruities of reality, Shakespeare turns to fiction, where things can come out all right, divisiveness is laid, and harmony achieved. This is the world of his **romantic comedies:**

The Two Gentlemen of Verona (1594–1595)
A Midsummer Night's Dream (1595–1596)
Twelfth Night (1599–1600)
As You Like It (1599–1600)

Their imaginary space may be ordained to one's liking and delight (*As You Like It*). In their representations of **time**, **space** and **human nature**, the romantic comedies recover the wholeness of the pastoral, in an overall structure of meaning. The twelve nights of the Christmas holidays are an image of Time in the miniature winter festival, while the midsummer solstice **(33)** is another emblem of the One. As the spirits are believed to be released upon the world, whether in the pagan Walpurgis Night or in the Christian St. Baptist, space is enlarged to include both the this-worldly and the other-worldly. Masks, disguises, cross-dressing and cross-coupling are the means of an "honest deception": they point to a structural identity between man and woman, the transformation of gender identity figuring the emergence of the ideal Hermaphroditus, as a complete human being, out of a twinned sexual nature. Unlike other Renaissance stories of social transformations of human beings past all recognition (king mistaken for beggar, pauper for a rich lord), Orsino *(The Twelfth Night*, V/l) delights in unifying, mirror images: *One face, one voice, one habit and two persons,/ A natural perspective, that is and is not !.* The text of the romantic comedies mirrors precisely this dialectic of *is and is not,* that is its own generation as transfer of reality into signs, meaning. Under a categorial aspect, the twin image of the "gentlemen of Verona" works the reunion of Proteus (Protean, shifty reality) and Valentine (the ideal space of the text, Valentine being what his name suggests, a writer of love letters, in time replaced in Milan by his letters). The **world of referentia** is infinite, but the **semiological**

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space constructed through Silvia (the pastoral, "silva" tradition) and Valentine is one reduced to an inventory of easily identifiable cultural forms. It is enough to hear Valentine declare himself a "servant" who obeys Silvia's "command", who professes that Silvia is his "essence" and that *by her fair influence* he is *foster'd, illumined, cherish'd, kept alive* to recognize at once the pattern enacted: *amour courtois.* Last but not least, there is an ontological reconciliation between the represented and representation in the textual self-referentiality of the pastoral: the awareness of role-playing. In the end Rosalind assumes the part of the "epilogue", of the actor convention, yet well does she know that that role is usually played by men, etc.

The pattern identified by Northrop Frye is **action which moves from irrational law to festivity, symbolizing a movement from one form of reality to another.** The characters overcome the power of the irrational law, reinstating order again, through a rite of passage. **They are transformed through the agency of the forest or green world (...), a symbol of natural society which is the proper home of man not the physical world he now lives in but the "golden world" he is trying to regain, associated with dream, magic, chastity and spiritual energy, fertility, renewed natural energies.** (*A Natural Perspective).* In the romantic comedies, the "green world" of pastoral signifies, according to Hellenistic tradition, **literarity**, awareness of form, which reflects back upon itself. The **symbolical space of pastoral** (of woods, shepherds, whereto the Duke and his court, in As *You Like It,* retire for broad comment on political and philosophical issues) is doubled by an inquiry into the nature of figural or semiological space **(34).**

What is in a name? Launce (*The Two Gentleman of Verona*) is able to divine the difference between sign and figure, between his dog "Crab" which will not "speak a word" and himself and his sister: *this staff is my sister; for, look, you, she is as white as a lily and as small as a wand; this hat is Nan, our maid; I am the dog; no, the dog is himself, and I am the dog; O! the dog is me, and I am myself* (II/3)

Launce cannot be himself and the dog whose name suggests (like Caliban as "tortoise") withdrawal, refusal to come out of itself. As Lacan says in his famous essay on Poe's *Purloined Letter* **(35),** *realité est toujours à sa place.* But a sequence of letters or sounds, a thin plate of tin painted blue with a straight white arrow on it, pointing upwards, are themselves while also standing for something else, a street sign (signifying "one-way road"). "Nan", a maid, "Crab", a dog, are "en-tombed" (*sema*: tomb) in or replaced by their **nominal** being. The wand being like the sister works a further displacement, of the sign into figure ("wand" a word standing for a thing and serving as an analogue for another thing/person). If the Quince play in *A Midsummer Nght's Dream* comes out all wrong, it is because the mechanics getting up a mask for the wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta destroy the artistic illusion by robbing characters of their impersonating function. For fear

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he would scare the distinguished company and get imprisoned, one of the actors, playing the lion, warns the audience that he is "Snug the joiner", so they needn't mind his "roaring gently". He remains *à sa place*, refusing to stand for a lion, to enact the meaning of the scene/text.

Intersubjective communication, made possible by a body of meanings shared by a community of speakers, Lacan says in the same essay, is that in which the enunciator gets back his own message in reverse form. Silvia is said to be wooing Valentine "by a figure", because she asks him to write a letter from her to some supposed lover, thereby indirectly confessing her love for him. Valentine can be said to be writing a letter addressed to himself, as he is the intended recipient of the message (II/ 1):

Speed: *To yourself.. Why, she woos you by a figure.*
Val.: *What figure ?*
Speed: *By a letter, I should say.*
Val.: *Why she hath not writ for me ?*
Speed: *What need she, when she hath made you write to yourself ?*

Speed, as a "clownish jester", has something of a fool's wisdom, the idea of that special kind of paradoxical folly having filtered through Renaissance writing from Erasmus's famous "eulogy". Just like Poe's story, in Lacan's reading of it, the scene presents several levels of awareness: Valentine's view, which does not grasp the meaning of the concrete situation, Silvia's "jest", mocking Valentine's naivety, and Speed's view, which is the broadest awareness. Although uninvolved, he is able to grasp the entire situation, thanks to the autonomy of the symbolical space. His lesson on the "figure" comes from his acquaintance not with a **real** situation (the sentimental relationship between Silvia and Valentine) but with one of **signification**: *I speak in print for in print I found it.* Communication through figurative language is only possible through traditional associations in the human subjects inserted into a symbolical order. *La subjectivité à l'origine n'est d'aucun rapport au réel, mais d'une syntaxe qu'y engendre la marque signifiante* **(36).** Speed asking Valentine: *be not like your mistress, be moved, be moved*, has both an immediate, literal meaning (let us get something to eat) and a figurative one: allow yourself to be a mover through a chain of signifiers, from the place of "scribe" ascribed by mocking Silvia, to one of addressee, as the true object of her love. However, Jonathan Goldberg's denial of any depth of interiority in Shakespeare's characters which are reduced to "foldedness within a text" **(37)**, for instance, the literal and figurative genesis of Silvia (*silva*) and Valentine (letter on St. Valentine's Day), which turns them from real persons into mere "figures placed within an image repertoire", fails to rally Shakespeare's nominal representations and their Platonic source. Proceeding to an etymological reconstruction of the words

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"nomos" (name) and "nous" (intellect) in *Laws XII* (958), Plato points to *the divine and admirable law possessing a name akin to mind.* **Anamnesis** is necessary to recover the *eidos*, the archetypal design informing the pastoral world, which is one removed from the accidents of contingency, as is the coded language of pastoral different from the oceanic *referentia* of the common language of the tribe. Shakespeare's amazing awareness of the workings of language, of the way in which meaning is produced or a poetic economy made possible does not remove his romantic comedies from a logocentric frame. The *vertical extension of the action into upper and lower worlds*, identified by Frye (A *Natural Perspective*), is rooting literary conventions in the myths they have descended from: *Shakespeare draws away from everything that is local or specialized in the drama of his day, and works toward uncovering a primeval dramatic structure (...) literature in the form of drama appears when the myth encloses and contains the ritual* **(38)**. Contact with the "green world" of mythical analoga (***unity of nature, man and divinity***) works its spell of healing a conflictual and confusing reality. Shakespeare's romantic comedies, of all his works, come closest to the Renaissance "world picture". The pastoral convention is meant to serve the recovery of a lost Edenic condition (essential speech, like the divine Logos), theatrical representation being usually a source of confusion, leading to an abyss of identity (see the ridiculous mechanics in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or Rosalind's confusion about her being male or female, actor or epilogue).

The motif of the "theatrum mundi" requires qualifications. There are three meanings attached to it in *As You Like It*: the Duke is weighing in the scales the "wide and universal theatre" which "presents more woeful pageants" and "the scene wherein we play", while there is also the scene in which Rosalind appears as merely a signifier, an element in the verbal texture of Shakespeare's text. The first order is that of unruly reality, in which dignities are usurped, people take delight in destroying their kin – a lapserian, Cain world. This world is measured by conventions: the clock, individual names (Frederick), clothes associated with values in an arbitrary fashion. Rosalind's metonymies (*doublet and hose ought to show itself courageous to petticoat*; *therefore, courage, good Alena*) express a common prejudice about men showing more courage than women, which the action of the play proves to be false.

The banished Duke and his company play on a different stage, that of pastoral, a universal one, being the same for Theocritus' shepherds and for Robin Hood of the folk ballads:

Oliver: *Where will the old duke live ?*

Charles: *They say he is already in the forest of Arden, and a many merry men with him; and there they live like the old Robin Hood of England. They say many young gentlemen flock to him every day, and fleet the time carelessly, as they did in the golden world* (I/ 1)

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In this archetypal scene, the "verities" of the real world are meaningless The *truth of experience* is replaced by identity to ideal form (archetype). Anachronism (lions in the forest of Arden) is the very means of suggesting the autonomy of this symbolical space from realistic impositions of the here and now. Names are here based upon a necessary relationship between signifier and signified. The" Duke" needs no further specification, the name denotes his "dignity", his position in an ideal social order, or in a providential script, in which roles are lawfully ascribed. "Silvius" is he who inhabits the woods. Phebe is the traditional shepherdess, not a woman one is most likely to run into in the real Forest of Arden. "Melancholy", associated with madness, in the Renaissance feigning "wise fools" and also with Montaigne's introspective habits, is the proper qualification for Jaques (the play was written at about the same time as *Hamlet*). Time is **subjective**: *staying with lawyers, trotting with a maid between the contract of marriage and the wedding.* **Nature is imaginatively assimilated to the human**: *men are April when they woo and December when they marry.* Rosalind's male disguise (unlike flattery at the court) reveals the moral truth about her courageous heart. The "doublet and hose" no longer lie, they signify what they "ought to". In this world of the "ought to", a Cain figure is converted to genuine love for his brother. In the pastoral tradition, wild beasts symbolize vices of the soul, so Orlando's killing of the lion works a moral redemption in his brother, Oliver. As this is a **Renaissance reinscription** of pastoral, the Duke does not inhabit "the golden world". Nature is not as good and benevolent as it had been for the Edenic couple or for Hesiod's first generation of men. Violence is there to remind man of his lapsed soul and need for redemption, the hardships of winter remind the Duke of *the penalty of Adam, the seasons' differance.* Can man do away with this burden of corrupted nature in his aching body ? Is there a possible return to a golden age, of universal reconciliation (inward/ outward, subjective/objective, material/ideal, soul/body) ? The text of the play is such an autonomous order, in which an epilogue is a form identitical to itself, irrespective of the material, circumstantial conditions of its being represented on a stage, by a male or female actor etc. The story of Pyramus and Thisbe provides the model of love met with parental opposition for any subsequent reinscription of such an action, and it remains valid, irrespective of the mechanics' poor work on it. The truth of the first "theatre" (reality) is **empirical.** It is experience that tells us whether lions do live in England or in some other part of the world. The truth of the second "theatre" – the formalized world of pastoral – is symbolical, encoded in signifying practices, epistemologically grounded. We understand it as long as we are familiar with the generic identity of the text. **This type of convention is rooted in ideology, in epistemology**, therefore it will undergo changes in time. The relationship between man and nature will be seen in a different light by the pagan third-century Theocritus and by a Christian

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Renaissance dramatist, some eighteen centuries later. However, the universal language of pastoral will make itself understood in similitudes as well as in deflections from the initial code. The truth of the third "theatre" (where a text is enacted and the illusion of reality attempted) is one of **representation** (arbitrary convention). It is only here that Rosalind becomes an empty marker, a mover along a chain of signifiers – woman, character, actor, epilogue... It is the deletion of the first two levels that has dislocated textuality from its logocentric positioning, abstracting it to a "voice terminal echo" in postmodernism.

In the romantic comedies, there is no express ontological transgression. Even in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* ambiguity safeguards the ontological stability of the Athenian society. Everything might have been just a dream: Bottom's bottomless communications from the abyss of the unconscious, an oneiro-fantasy of the lovers lost in the woods, who in the morning see "double". Oberon's world is a Platonic-Orphic one, of truth and harmony. The flower working the love-spell is associated with the mermaid at whose song "the sea grew civil" (II/ 1), and with Cynthia, the "imperial votaress", whose chastity quenches the fire of Cupid's arrow. Its name, "love-in-idleness" suggests to us Socrates's "non-lover" in Plato's *Phaedrus*, who opposes the "desire for the beautiful and the good" to the "natural desire of pleasure". Oberon's remedy or love filter is supposed to restore "true love's sight" some *true love turn'd and not a false turn'd true*. (III/ 2). The true Platonic love, opposed to irrational, instinctual infatuation, is the one which had stirred up in Demetrius for Helena in childhood (the time of innocence) and had bound Hermia and Helena *like coats in heraldry* (IV/ 1). It is therefore free from mere bodily desire, it is, as well as in Plotinus, love of intellectual beauty, of ideal forms (archetype, *heraldry*). Demetrius feels as if restored from sickness to health, when his love is thus spiritually purged. Finally, there is the conventional space of the stage and of the theatrical representation which produces its own spell, a paradoxical one, imposing its illusion in spite of its artificiality. The blockage intervening in the Quince representation is caused by the deconstruction of the symbol into sign. The convention is laid bare, the actor is presented as a prop (that which stands for "moonshine"). Hippolyta and Theseus, speaking about the actor in terms of a real moon – *he is no crescent, I wish it would change* or *he is on the wane* – ironically comment on the improvised performers' methodical breach of artistic illusion. The violation of the truth of representation (analogy between signifier and signified, represented and representation) is what mars the Peter Quince performance. The archetype works a reunion of all levels of existence, as Cynthia (the moon in the sky) corresponds to Diana, the virgin huntress, who is once referred to by Ovid as "Titania", and to Hecate in the underworld (Puck mentions Hecate's triple team, he himself being a mischevious spirit). An archetypal story

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of two men's' rivalry over the same woman links Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* to Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream.* Another such story, of parental opposition to youthful love, ranks Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (*Pyramus and Thisbe*) next to Shakespeare's modern "translation" thereof. The poet is defined as the one who *doth glance from heaven to earth,* in the neoplatonic sense of the heavenly ideal forms and the earthly "habitation and name" (V/1) Essential speech, for Shakespeare, is this reinscription of the original pattern: *la verité de l'eidos comme de ce qui est identique à soi... et qui peut toujours être répété comme le même (...) la loi est toujours la loi d'une répétition* **(39).** Structurally, this neoplatonic recourse to archetype, model, pattern finds expression in the Renaissance devices of **analogous action or pairs of characters (foil characters, mirroring one another's situation, the doubling of the plot, mise-en-abyme through dumb shows, play-within-the play, choruses, narrative framing, like Oberon's Orphic "story" of the love-drug)**

In the romances the Platonic forms are extended into the real world. Supernatural agency invades the phenomenal world, proving, alongside art, its restorative force. In point of genre, these plays are tragicomedies, following a pattern of disappearance or even death and resurrection, leading from a tragical situation to a final festive resolution (see Northrop Frye, *On Shakespeare*, and Frank Kermode, *Shakespeare, Spenser, Donne* **(40)**). The romances belong to the last phase of Shakespeare's career:

Pericles – (1608–1609)
Cymbeline – (1609–1610)
The Winter's Tale – (1610–1611)
The Tempest – (1611–1612)

They show the taste of the Jacobean age (and of the baroque, in general) for the pastoral, for which William Empson, in *Some Versions of Pastoral,* provides a sociological explanation: *It is important for a nation with a strong class-system to have an art form that not merely evades but breaks through it, that makes the classes feel part of a larger unity or simply at home with each other.* Whereas the heroes of the tragical part are scaled down to erring common mortals (see Leontes tortured by base jealousy, inquiring into his son's legitimacy in shocking speech, considering it comes from a king), the comical part is cast into pastoral, mounting the staircase of a meliorist scheme. Not only does Shakespeare's pastoral, in its representation of the Many as One, strive to give *a sense of dealing with life completely* (Empson), it also deals with life discriminatively, erecting, on the ruins of the social hierarchy (royal children brought up among peasants, shepherds

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speaking of *the Princess, my sister*), a moral one; Shakespeare found in his escapist romances a **reunion of nature, myth and art.** The redemptive figure is a mysterious healer associated with the metaphysical power (according to Plato) of music (*Pericles*), a prophet (*Cymbeline*), a magician (*The Tempest*) or an artist (*The Winter's Tale*). Nature is spiritually informed. Perdita's recital over the meaning and proper destination of flowers in the order of the yearly round of seasons symbolizes the human assimilation of the natural space. Placed at the centre, humanity plays its parts *sub specie aeternitatis*, in the eye of God. An epistle of mysterious origin, deciphered by a soothsayer, prophesizes the future history of Britain in *Cymbeline* (by analogy with the *Pentateuch*, whose five scrolls materialized into Hebrew history). It is only when man breaks his ties to the other elements in the spiral of being that he fails tragically (Leontes ignoring the oracle which had proclaimed Hermione innocent). Not only the music of Apollo but also the art of Giulio Romano, a painter and sculptor, can restore Hermione (according to Renaissance dictionaries, a variant of *Harmonia*). The good and the beautiful are no longer a natural datum of a pastoral Arcadia. Even the shepherds' world of the second half of *The Winter's Tale* can be hospitable to Autolychus, the bragging thief. In Ovid, Autolychus is the son of Mercury and Chione, who "in theft and filching had no peer". Chione had another son (Autolychus's twin brother) by Apollo: Philemon, who "excelled in music". It is the honest deception of Renaissance art, which requires faith, like religion, that reestablishes Arcadian "harmony" in Sicilia, torn by crimes of jealousy, restoring it to its origin as the cradle of pastoral.

Time in the romances, supposed to cover at least the life of one generation (which caused irritation even among contemporaries, as a breach of the Aristotelian unities), can be interpreted as that of an exemplary biography, as the microscopic image of all humanity, or of eternity. In *The Winter's Tale*, Perdita and Florizel, who come to Sicilia in autumn, after the sheep-sharing festivities (the action had started in winter, the yearly cycle is now complete), are welcomed "as is the spring to the earth". The coexistence of spring and harvest, characteristic of the Golden Age (see Virgil's *Eclogues*), is here a trope. In the first three romances, the action unfolds over the required timespan: Marina is lost by her father in infancy and is only reunited to him as an adult woman (*Pericles*). In *Cymbeline*, Belarius, an exiled nobleman, kidnaps the king's sons, who are brought up in a cave in the woods to full-grown men. In *The Winter's Tale*, Leontes, king of Sicilia, suspecting his wife of unfaithfulness, orders her infant to be put away. Perdita (that which is lost) is saved by shepherds and brought up in Bohemia up to the end of the play, when she is restored to her royal condition. It is only in *The Tempest* that Shakespeare ever observed the unities of time (the action lasts as long as the performance) and space (one locale, the island).

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However, instead of the actual time of Miranda's growth to maturity, we get ***the story*** of her evolution, under Prospero's wise guidance and instruction, from unawareness (*thy crying self*, the inarticulate baby) to the cultivated woman of Prospero's *brave new world.* She is a very young woman, why should Prospero speak about her inability to recover past events as "the dark backward and abysm of time "? If we consider the yardstick imposed on her as the measure of memory (*by any other house, or person*), it is obvious that Prospero, like any Renaissance man, sees it as the history of civilized humanity, the memory of the race. This play has often been considered to be Shakespeare's replica to Montaigne's essay, *Of the Cannibales (*Florio's spelling in the translation published in 1603*).* He actually reverses Montaigne's thesis, according to which man only spoils "our great and puissant Mother Nature" through his inventions, and that the colonizers from the civilized countries had merely corrupted the natives' innocence through their *words that import lying, falsehood, treason, dissimulation, envy, debauchery* etc. Caliban (an anagram of "cannibal"), the son of a water witch (a spirit of Mother Nature), feeding on berries, is obviously the primitive man in his natural condition. Shakespeare enlarges the story into a mythical script. Caliban, the natural man (*thou earth, thou tortoise*), learning from Prospero how to name everything around, attempting a sexual assault on Miranda and being therefore punished to earn his living by hard labour, reenacts the fall of Adam. But Prospero has introduced him to a world not only of names but also of **differences** (*the bigger and the less light*, the sun and the moon), upon which any form of civilization is edified. Caliban recapitulates the history of humanity, rising from the indifference of nature (like the roaring breakers of the ocean, that know nothing of the name of "king") to a meaningful order, making wrong choices (false idols, a clown and a jester taken for gods fallen from the sky), and finally recognizing the supreme power in the master of the "dukedom of books". Prospero, as his name suggests, is an example of *melior natura*, helping the other characters "prosper" in a chain of being which ranges from Caliban to Ariel. In Jewish demonology, names ending in "el", a suffix meaning "god", are given to angels, and in alchemy there is god "Air", of the Intellect **(41)**. They learn how to restrain animal appetite through learning and art, the play abounding in figures of resurrection and redemption: the *brave new world,* the Arabian bird, Phoenix, the banquet of the senses (knowledge offered instead of food), nature emancipated to mythical figures, which are human constructs (goddesses of nature and fertility: Ceres, Isis, Juno), the hunt and the hounds destroying matter to reveal the spirit in alchemy (*Silver*: *argentum vivus*, lapis, the philosopher's stone), a drowned man's eyes transformed to pearls in Ariel's comforting song to Ferdinand, Ferdinand put to the test of carrying logs and proved worthy etc. Individual destiny is projected into a mythical frame, a universal drama is enacted in a timeless world. The

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presence of anachronisms is deliberate, as the **hic et nunc** is like the **ubique.** For instance, in *Pericles*, the parade of the knights at Pentapolis, is a medieval show, yet set at the same time as the worship of Diana at Ephesus. In *The Winter's Tale*, Apollo's oracle belongs to the same world as Julio Romano, a Renaissance artist. In *Cymbeline*, Leonatus goes to a sort of Renaissance Italy, the action being set at the beginning of the first millenium. **Trans-temporality is a test of validity**.

Space in the romances is **symbolical**, values being associated with specific locales. In *The Winter's Tale*, Sicilia, with its luxury and indulgence, its repute for crimes of jealousy, is the world of experience, while Bohemia, where the leading male characters spent their childhood, symbolizes innocence, a sort of Edenic garden, previous to the fall.

The **action** frequently resembles that of a fairy tale (the calumniated virtuous woman, royal children lost and found, a ring of recognition) or of myth (fall and redemption, death and resurrection, hermetic and alchemical *topoi*)

Names display a Cratyllic link between signifier and signified: Perdita is the lost child who, like man, God's lost sheep, will be found; Prospero is a magician in the *commedia dell'arte*; Philarmonius, in *Cymbeline*, remarks "the apt construction" of the name of Leonatus Posthumus: he who was born after the death of his father, Leonatus. The hero is also associated with the divine scroll – Logos – which is embodied in British history; Marina was born at sea; Miranda deserves to be admired etc. The self-referential pastoral has completely transcended the phenomenal world. *The Tempest* – an allegory of art as the great preserver and restorer of the mortal self as a Montaignean figure of the artist in his work – is Shakespeare's artistic will.

Recent epistemology tends to date the great change to the modern world in the seventeenth century rather than in the Renaissance, but the roots were certainly there. The audience of *Hamlet*, in 1600, must have sensed its depth, if not its direction. The bulk of revenge tragedies staged in the second halph of the sixteenth century had familiarized spectators with the theme, the type of action, the stock characters. Shakespeare was challenging the whole tradition. His avenger was quite reluctant about taking action, wasting his time in inquiries **about** the act of revenge: its motivation, circumstantial evidence, the proper timing (which seemed to tarry *ad infinitum*), and finally his "readiness" for it, which *was all*, so the action as such did not much matter. And all this "philosophy" was not even coming from some erudite scholar, stalking about with his disciples, lecturing on everything "in heaven and earth", but from some madcap, whose ambiguous speech threw everybody – characters and audience alike – into confusion about what he actually meant.

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The shift from a medieval type of theatricality – **embodiment** of some idea, concept, or famous character – towards the modern **representation** of the development of character was accompanied by epistemological inquiry and relativism. The transcendental subjectivity of the totalitarian Middle Ages was breaking up into private individual representations of the world, and the characters were mediating these representations for the audience in soliloquies of **increasing psychological and dramatic self-consciousness**.

Montaigne's *Apologie de Raimond Sebond* was an impressive record of all the incoherences, errors and contradictions lurking in the systems and practices that kept changing from one age to another, proving in their chaotic accumulation mankind's impossibility to reach constant truth. While transcendental scepticism ended in universal doubt, man's inquiry into his own nature seemed legitimate. Erasmus had himself fostered the modern sceptical and relativistic attitude in his *Encomium moriae* showing how everything in human existence is Janus-faced. Folly stands at the origin of social evil as of social good, of social injustice and greed, as of human creativity and moral values. Madness can take the form of irrational outbursts with devastating effects or of an enlightened refusal of dogmatism and acceptance of a more complex paradoxical meaning, even if logically inconsistent. Such are Hamlet's madness in his irrational murder of Polonius and his "prophetic soul", divining the truth about the murder and usurpation case, or his final redeeming acceptance of the providential scheme of the universe in spite of all contingent "rottenness".

Not only from an epistemological but also from a structural point of view did Shakespeare revolutionize the classical and medieval tradition of drama. It was modernist criticism that focused on the meaning of form and structure, working with simples and categories. Such was A.C. Bradley's *The Shakespearean Tragedy*, a book based, like Frye's, on a teaching course in Shakespeare and published in the thirties. A general picture is certainly a reductionist one, Shakespeare's manner changing greatly from his first tragedy – *Titus Andronicus* (1592-1593) – to his last – *Coriolanus* (1606-1608).

Simplifying colour allegory in *Titus Andronicus* (Aaron, the moor, whose evil nature is, in medieval fashion, allegorized in the blackness of his skin) no longer works in *Othello*, for instance, where the black moor's crime and suicide are justified by his allegiance to certain values: Desdemona's supposed unfaithfulness is a stain upon the firmament, as is later his own crime, not so much against some particular woman as against Venetian worth, which he has doubted, abused and wasted. However, such basic assumptions about dramatic structure and function are necessary in establishing a canonical picture of Shakespeare's tragedies:

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Titus Andronicus – (1592-1593)
Romeo and Juliet – (1595-1596)
Julius Caesar – (1599-1600)
Hamlet – (1600 – 1601)
Othello – (1602-1603)
Timon of Athens – (1604-1605)
King Lear – (1605-1606)
Macbeth – (1605-1606)
Antony and Cleopatra – (1606-1607)
Coriolanus – (1606-1608)

Etymologically, "tragedy" comes from "tragos" (goat-skin), i.e., from a ritual of sacrifice. Shakespeare retrieves this original sense: Julius Caesar's assassination is envisioned by Brutus as a sacrifice to the gods; Hamlet takes it upon himself to set right the disjointed axe of the world and the "distracted globe" acting like a Christ figure (Saviour through his own sacrifice); Timon's unfaithful guests, on whom he bestowed his generosity, are said to have his *meat* in them, and the frequent references to "eating" Timon and "tasting" Timon would also suggest a Holy Supper *manquée*; Lear's appearance with a crown of wild flowers on his head also suggests a sacrificial ritual. Lavinia's lopped arms like "two branches" and severed hands like "open leaves" prepare us, through what looks like a fertility sacrifice, for her death at the hands of her father in the name of a primitive code of honour, which prescribes the same retribution for violated innocence and for deliberate sin.

A tragedy, Bradley says, is pre-eminently the story of **one person**, the hero, or, in love tragedies, of the hero and the heroine. The Renaissance had its own idea of the hero as the embodiment of the entire society. Hamlet is explicit about his having nothing in common with Hercules – the ancient embodiment of physical strength – and his being closer to the "Nemean lion", which Hercules killed. He is a new Hercules in fighting and finally erradicating the evil in himself („Hamlet's madness"), allowing his reason to suppress irrational impulses and to lay his father's heritage of sin, by recognizing Fortinbras's valour and right over the land. It is rather **Hamlet's victory over himself**, than over his exterior antagonists (Claudius and his instruments of destruction) that finally entitles Fortinbras to declare him a hero.

The story, Bradley goes on, is one of suffering and calamity, conducting to **the death of the hero**. As Troilus remains alive, even if tragically disillusioned with life, *Troilus and Cressida* has been ruled out of the canon, although it is precisely the sense of life's absurdity that makes it a modern tragedy.

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The suffering and calamity befall some ***conspicuous person***, a person of high degree: kings or princes, leaders in the state, like Coriolanus, Othello, Brutus, Antony, or members of great houses, whose quarrels are of public interest. In the *Gorboduc* tradition, the fate of the social leads affects the entire society, according to the medieval conception about king and state as his body politic. Romeo and Juliet is not a simple story of two people in love; it engages a social feud which is a threat to the very stability of the state (I/1):

> Prince: *Rebellious subjects, enemies to peace,*
> *Profaners of this neighbour-stained steel -*
> *Will they not hear ?*

The **total reversal of fortune** for someone who stood in high degree, which appealed to the medieval mind, is still considered a moving subject, as the mortal body was doubled by its "dignitas" in the political economy of the society (see Frank Kermode, *Shakespeare, Spenser Donne, Op. cit.*). According to medieval philosophy, this "dignity" was immortal and and kept alive in the people's memory by ceremonies. Maddened Lear offers *a sight most pitiful in the meanest wretch,/ Past speaking of in a king,* because he has fallen from species to individual, from the perpetuity of his office to the perishableness of his body, whose hand *smells of mortality*. One should be careful, however, about the dramatists' point of view which may differ from that of his characters. It is obvious, in the context of the play, that, having selected an action set in the remote past, Shakespeare, like a cultural anthropologist, conscientiously reinscribes its defining beliefs and discourses (as he had done in *Richard II*, paraphrasing fragments from *Mum*). The end of the play voices (through Edgar or Albany) a different belief, that the future history will be changed by the young. It is obvious that Shakespeare's spokesmen are Kent, Edgar, Albany, who do not need ceremony or the paraphernalia of *dignitas* and royalty in order to stick to the perennial values of loyalty, love and generosity.

Several of Shakespeare's plays oppose epistemological views upheld by different locales (Egypt and Rome in *Antony and Cleopatra*, Venice and the Turkish-moor aliens in *Othello*, Rome and the barbarians in *Coriolanus)* or ages (Old and Young Hamlet, Lear and Edgar/Albany, Timon/Alcibiades or Timon and his servants as the Old Man and the New Man about the time of the birth of Christ etc.), and this is to be expected from a writer living no longer in a totalitarian medieval Europe but at a time of shifting episteme. A.C. Bradley is right, however, in pointing out that, unlike medieval *de casibus* stories, depicting the fall from high estate through the Wheel of Fortune, Shakespeare's tragedies show calamities which are produced by *the actions of the characters themselves.* According to Aristotle, the downfall of the tragical hero is brought about by some

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minor fault. The hero is not absolutely evil, in which case his misery would fail to elicit our pity, nor absolutely innocent or flawless, in which case his tragical end would show the world to be utterly absurd, and life, meaningless. The hero himself contributes in some measure to the disaster in which he perishes, the ***catastrophe follows inevitably from the deeds of men, and the main source of these deeds is in character.*** Ambition rules Macbeth, the vanity of being flattered and weariness about his royal duty leads Lear to disaster, suspicion and jealousy blind the naive moor of Venice, the absolutization of evil makes Hamlet destroy also the good and innocent around him, inflexibility destroys Coriolanus, misanthropy driven to unnatural extremes makes Timon finish off his life among the beasts of the wood etc. Other factors intervening in the unfolding of the action are of minor importance. Bradley lists the following:

a) ***Abnormal conditions of mind***, like somnambulism, hallucinations are themselves expressive of character. Lear's distracted mind is an objective correlative of the social order with the king at the bottom instead of the top which his love of leisure has tragically inverted. Macbeth's hallucination of a dagger in the air is by himself explained as a projection of his own criminal intent (*a dagger of the mind*).

b) The ***supernatural*** is present in some of the tragedies: ghosts, prophetic dreams, witches, possessed of metaphysical knowledge, which cannot be properly translated into the language of mortals (Old Hamlet's complaint) and whose meaning needs to be "negotiated" (Hecate, in *Macbeth,* III/5). Therefore it can be said that they are present only to give a more distinct form to something already looming in the character's thoughts: Hamlet's "prophetic soul", suspecting that something darker than impropriety is hidden in his mother's hasty marriage and his uncle's seizure of the kingdom; Richard III's remorses of consciousness; Macbeth's murderous plan of becoming king. The encounter between Macbeth and the witches is a key scene for the understanding of the way in which the supernatural informs the action of a Shakespearian tragedy. The three witches are only looking into the "seeds" of time, they cannot know the harvest the hero will choose to reap. A sense of indeterminacy hovers over their predicament. Their language sounds oxymoronic, but it is merely ambiguous. *When the battle is lost and won* simply means that it is won on one side and lost on the other. *When the hurleyburly's done* may mean either produced or finished. *Fair is foul and foul is fair*, releasing the energy of the antonyms both ways, affirms as much as Plato in *Symposium* (sometimes that which is beautiful may appear as foul...), and is immediately confirmed by the fact that Macbeth and Banquo react in different ways to the same prophecy of greatness. Banquo, whose conscience is clean, finds no fault with the prophecy (*things do sound so fair*), while Macbeth *starts and seems to fear*, as the idea occurs to him, unless previously entertained, of murdering Duncan and seizing the crown. Later Hecate rebukes the witches for

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daring *to trade and traffic with Macbeth/ In riddles and affairs of death.* As is the case with any "negotiation", Macbeth has added something of his own thoughts and intentions. And, being one who, as Hecate characterizes him, *spurns fate* and lets his hopes carry him *'bove wisdom, grace and fear*, Macbeth lends their voice a murderer's ear, and rounds up their message with his own schemes of usurpation. Unlike the unfailing and explicit oracles of ancient Greek tragedy, this atypic oracle gives Macbeth the possibility to choose. The Anglican Church under Elizabeth had tended towards Calvinism, with its emphasis upon doom and Providence, but the Arminian influence of the nineties had also made room for man's free will and choice. The influence of Jacob Arminius, a Dutch theologian who died in 1610, grew under James I and Charles I. In any event, the supernatural agency in no way removes the hero's responsibility for his deeds.

c) ***Chance or accidents*** may also have some influence on the action (Desdemona losing her handkerchief, Juliet not waking from her sleep a moment before Romeo kills himself), but they occur when the action has already taken a decisive course towards the catastrophe, whose origin is in the characters' fatal errors.

The **conflict** is described as a twofold one: between opposing parties or persons or an inner one, between conflicting passions, tendencies, ideas *within the characters*. This new type of conflict, which complexifies the ancient confrontation between man and man or man and Destiny, is the expression of the Christian internalization of Fate: man's hereditary sin, stamped on his body from his birth. Hamlet fights his stepfather's confederates, but at the same time he acknowledges his own split personality: his rational self and his "madness" (*the faction that wrongs Hamlet*) which kills Polonius. To these two types of conflicts we should add one which, to our knowledge, at that time was Shakespeare's alone. The shifting of epistemological perspectives in some of the plays (particularly, in *Hamlet,* the most "philosophical" of all) allows of **various intersecting and conflicting discourses to coexist**. The author's ambiguous position to the various idioms intertextualized in the play (Plato, Montaigne, Erasmus, contemporary almanacs, the discourse of the Church), has allowed of so many interpretations, including the violent condemnation of Hamlet (by Brecht, among others) and the rehabilitation of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (see Thomas Stoppard's play, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead,* produced in the 1960s*)*. Shakespeare was still trying to tell some ***central story***, but he had become aware of the difficulty at a time when traditional assumptions were receiving serious blows.

The **hubris** of the Shakespearean hero is an infringement upon universal order (the "ought-to" theatre of the world). Individualism is severely reprobated. It is obvious that Coriolanus is an exceptional hero, that he is spiritually superior to the many-headed monster of the Roman mass of citizens.

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Yet Shakespeare does not extol the Renaissance Titan. In his last tragedy, he teaches Socrates's lesson. Individual worth comes next to the values commonly shared by civilized human communities. On being offered the possibility to save his life by "fleeing from well-ordered cities" to the "disorder and licence" of Thessaly, thereby depriving his children of Athenian citizenship and education, Socrates decides that existence *is not worth having on such terms* (Plato, *Crito*). Coriolanus is twice mistaken in his decision to leave Rome: his rebellion is as efficient as that of the head against the belly (an individual's interests are always commensurate with those of the rest of the body of citizens, as Agrippa had taught him in his parable), while his support to the barbarian Volsces in destroying (*plough and harrow*) a flourishing civilization not only hurts his family but also destroys his human identity as the filler of a certain dignity in the social scheme He had been acting as if he had been his *own father,* when in fact each individual is constituted by the anonymous order of his society (V/ 3):

> Coriolanus: *Like a dull actor now*
> *I have forgot my part, and I am out,*
> *Even to a full disgrace.*

Socrates had chosen to be a victim of men rather than of the laws – not only the Athenian "covenants and agreements" but also "the divine and admirable law". Shakespeare's tragedies are not merely crime and punishment cases. Most of his heroes fail because of an excess or insufficiency in relation to this universal order. The imagery supports the universal scope of the moral scheme. Macbeth plans to usurp the lawful king, and his own being is shattered in the enterprise: his hair is *unfix'd*, his *seated heart knocks at the ribs/ Against the use of nature*, his *single state of man* is *shaken and smothered in surmise*. The murder of the king of Denmark disjoints the very *axis mundi. The world is out of joint*, Hamlet complains, *oh cursed spite that I was born to set it right.* The gravedigger, in the churchyard scene, which is no less allegorical than the garden scene narrated by the ghost in the first act, had started his funeral work on the symbolical day old Hamlet had killed Fortinbras, seizing a part of his land. It had been Old Hamlet, not Claudius that had committed the first murder and usurpation act – later traced back to Cain *who did the first murder.* M.M. Mahood, in her enlightening book on *Shakespeare's Wordplay* **(42)**, signals out several cases of possible misprints in the Shakespearean texts. The rather nonsensical "smote the sledded Polacks on the ice" might have been "smote the pole-axe on the ice", which would consort with other images in the play (*disjoint and out of frame*, *distracted globe, out of joint*). Even if the original word "Polacks" was correctly rendered by the copyists, a pun may be suspected here. Lear's "cease of majesty", the murder of Julius Caesar, the breaking of traditional bonds between parent and child, king and subject, are

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prophesied by portentous signs of cosmic disorder (the *late eclipses in the sun*). *Antony and Cleopatra* offers, in Philo's opening speech, the English translation of *hubris* (*overflows the measure*), which shows both Shakespeare's awareness of genre identity (Aristotelian motivation of the hero's downfall) and his special use of it. Opening Plutarch's story, he locates it in the Renaissance world picture:

> Philo: *Nay but this dotage of our general's*
> *O'erflows the measure; those his goodly eyes,*
> *That o'er the files and musters of war*
> *Have glow'd like plated Mars, now bend, now turn,*
> *The office and devotion of their view*
> *Upon a tawny front;*

Philo is less interested in what Antony **does** than in what he **thinks**. His vision is different, like Coriolanus's in exile, who feels that in Rome he had been "carrying" another pair of eyes. Antony's infatuation with Cleopatra makes him forsake Rome completely, and whatever it stands for: art and civilization, addiction to moral order, military virtue, power over the world, choosing instead to become a plaything in the hands of a whimsical woman – a *gipsy* from the Roman viewpoint. Renaissance ideology is insinuating itself into the text: Cleopatra's insertion into an anatomy of the four elements (her spiritual transformation is described as her ascent from the baser elements to air and fire), of Antony into a Christian paradigm of hereditary faults and goodness coming from "what he chooses", Antony's association with the dolphin, the primate of fish (see Tillyard's list of Renaissance primates: emperor, dolphin, lion, eagle), and with the trinity (*one of the three pillars of the world*), universal order pictured as a crown (chain or dance). Cleopatra's death, *after the high Roman fashion* (that is, choosing death over disgrace) reestablishes the world's harmony: Charmian is "mending" her crown. The heroes' destiny engages changes in the world's geometry. As at the beginning their love appears to them as an absolute, the architecture of both Roman and Egyptian civilizations may collapse into the Tiber (into the Nile, respectively):

> Antony: *Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch*
> *Of the ranged empire fall!* (I/ 1)

Cleopatra's angle in her hooking game with Antony and Antony's Philippan sword, which she steals from him, are the mocking substitutes or parody of the world's *triple arch* (the triumvirs of the Roman empire) and of *the soldier's pole* which had made Rome the centre of the world. Antony's return to the Rome values (eventually contented to be by another Roman "valiantly vanquished") and Cleopatra's conversion to the Roman "fashion" reestablish the true hierarchy. Cleopatra finally understands that human valour makes all the difference (degree,

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the odds) in the world, while the rest is Death, the Leveller, Nature's "indifference" (the cloud "dislimmed" in water), Lethe's dulness of beastly "sleep and feeding" :

> Cleopatra: *The crown o' the earth doth melt. My Lord !*
> *O! wither'd is the garland of the war,*
> *The soldier's pole is fall'n: young boys and girls*
> *Are level now with men; the odds is gone,*
> *And there is nothing left remarkable*
> *Beneath the visiting moon.* (IV/ 13)

The protagonists' "last judgement" (V/ 2) feeds back into mythical counternarratives. Gigantic anthropomorphism is Cleopatra's tropic way of absolving Antony of his worldly "delights", which are blamed on the "snares of the world": *His legs bestrid the ocean; his rear'd arm/ Crested the world (...) in his livery/ Walk'd crowns and crownets, realms and islands were/ As plates dropped from his pocket.* Antony had made a heaven of the earth, equal to that of the "injurious gods": *His face was as the heavens, and therein stuck / A sun and moon, which kept their course, and lighted / The little O, the earth.*

Antony is likened to a jewel and a lamp – light and jewels being the consecrated imagery of heavenly Jerusalem in *The Revelation.* As, by Antony's death, the earth has turned to indifferent "dung" – *The beggar's nurse and Caesar's* –, Cleopatra is seeking some meaningful act which might restore the "melted crown of the earth". Contrary to Antony's heavenly ascent, Cleopatra chooses "to rush into the secret house of the dead". Wole Soyinka **(43)** thinks that Cleopatra is alluding to the house of death in the Islamic *Book of the Dead*, and that her entire litany on going and the aftermath of dissolution is redolent of the "Islamic injunctions, prayers and exhortations on the theme of death", imbued "with a measured ritualism that is suffused with the palpable shadowness of the crypt (...) with no parallel echo in the Christian offices of the dead." However, Cleopatra is not descending but changing to air and fire... Her "coronation", mending in her way the world's crown which had gone "awry", is rooted in the wealthier ground of Alexandrian culture: the doctrine of the four elements, or the alchemical progress through *ablutio* to *rubedo*, purifying the woman of the "baser elements" and turning her into an essence of redeeming femininity.

Opening a closed text to engraft a new ideology **(44)** was not a new practice, but by the time Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet*, ideology itself had become problematical. The competition of discourses shows **the human mind in suspense**. Is a metanarrative, a central story, a universal form of life still possible? Is the human self a stable identity? Is there some definite answer to the opening question in *Hamlet*: *Who's there*? Human voices are heard and identified in the dark, while, at the end of the play, Hamlet's dying voice says *the rest is silence.* The hero's concern is no longer the immortality of his soul, but Horatio's ***voice***

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mandated to repair the reputation of his "wounded name" by telling his story. Individuals are reduced to a tissue of languages. Which one is reporting Shakespeare's opinions? Which one is telling the true story, worth *a thousand pounds*? The same events are perceived in different ways by different people. The guards and Hamlet believe in the reality of the ghost, while the sceptical Horatio, recently returned from Wittenberg, says it is all their *imagination*. Similar words are used by various characters (*the world is out of joint, the state is disjoint and out of frame)*, and yet it is obvious that Hamlet and Claudius, respectively, mean different things. As for writing, the historical distance between *tables* of stone, parchments and *folded writ* is much longer than that of a generation. As a "chronicle play" **(45)**, whose source is lost in the mists of an Icelandic legend, reproduced by the twelfth-century Saxo Grammaticus in his *History of the Danes*, *Hamlet* can afford such anachronisms, which lend it the aspect of a timeless story of universal appeal (Hamlet: *hic et ubique,* I/5). However, as well as *Antony and Cleopatra,* which replaces an old, broken measure (the conflict between duty and sexual indulgence) by a new, Renaissance standard (the yardstick of civilization against the dull uniformity of nature), the play inverts the premise: the legend of centuries is not one but several scores, in different keys.

Old Hamlet, walking restlessly in his armour of the day he killed Old Fortinbras, belongs to the Middle Ages: single combat, the ethics of revenge, political view of king and his relationship to the body politic (*A serpent stung me; so the whole ear of Denmark/ Is by a forged process of my death/ Rankly abused – I/ 5),* the Catholic orthodoxy of the need for confession and repentance for sins which are now weighing heavily against the unshriven soul.

Young Hamlet lives in Shakespeare's time, with Wittenberg as an established university, with modern plays of the latest hour (as indicated by Polonious' didactic exposition – the *pastoral-comical, tragical-comical* and *historical* being recent inventions), fencing, readings from Montaigne, Calvinist doctrines of Predestination (Hamlet born to redress the *distracted globe*), Election (Hamlet thinks *the election lights/ on Fortinbras*, who actually shows up like some supreme judge), Providence (*there's a divinity that shapes our ends, there's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow* – V/ 2) and individual relationship with God (seeking in the world signs of what his *prophetic soul had divined*). Hamlet's soliloquies on life and death in the first part of the play are interspersed with paraphrases of Montaigne's essay, *That to Philosophise is to Learn how to Die,* also quoted in *King Lear.* The essays, published in 158o, had been enormously influential in the French edition, before Florio's translation of 1600 entered the Stationers' Rolls, coming out in 1603. Hamlet wonders whether it is nobler to suffer *the stings and arrows of outrageous fortune, the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to* or to *take arms against a sea of troubles, and by opposing end them.* Montaigne's text reads: *the grief, poverty and other*

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accidental crosses to which life is subject (...) whenever it shall please us cut off all other inconveniences and crosses.

Hamlet thinks people are prevented from taking their lives by fear of *the undiscovered country, from whose bourne no traveller returns.* Montaigne describes life beyond *comme en pays suspect,* whose strangeness needs to be atoned by constantly thinking of it. He finds that life is neither good nor evil, but the place of good and evil *according as you prepare it for them.* Hamlet: *for there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so.* Quoting Thales, Montaigne agrees that Death is indifferent: *the water, the earth, the air, the fire and other members of this my universe are no more the instruments of thy life, as of thy death.* Once the mask is gone, man returns to the elements, losing his identity. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who are merely instruments, lacking personal will and convictions, are *the indifferent children of the earth.* Drowning Ophelia *has too much water,* and, through death, *she is neither man nor woman,* but an *it,* like Old Hamlet's Ghost. The way of nature has nothing in common with the way of humanity – the world of differences, of signifieds (Ophelia's *water* versus her brother's *tears*). If Hamlet's rebellious and suicidal mood of the first part seems to be conflicting with the meak and docile *let it be* of the second part, so are Montaigne and Calvinistic thought. There is no psychological motivation to be expected, as Shakespeare is here merely contrasting points of view. Hamlet's theory of man as divided (*quitessence of dust* and *angel, paragon of animals, large discourse*, that is, broad understanding) originates in Erasmus's *Enchiridion* and the subsequent devotional writing of preachers and the Church. Erasmus's Folly, with cap and toga, is the model for Hamlet dressed as a madman, and yet capable of such *pregnant* (full of meaning) *replies* (Polonius, II/ 2), for Yorick's *gambols* and *excellent fancy.* Life is revealing its tragical paradoxes: Hamlet being mostly sincere while role-playing himself, Hamlet fighting Laertes in whom he recognizes his own "cause", his displaced social grammar (*uncle-father* and *aunt-mother*).

The literary self-awareness of Renaissance drama is displayed by Hamlet's concern with the comparative values of speaking and writing, the relationship between art and reality, truth of representation, the art of the actor, the importance of the subject of a literary work, the endurance of a work of art. In a logocentric age, speech, voice are primary (imitating God's creative breath), while writing is derivative and inferior, a mere image of the former. Shakespeare will have had in mind Plato's *Phaedrus*, or St. Paul's *2 Corinthians, 3: 6*, but the subject seems to have been debated by more recent authors as well: Luther's defense of speech, because *Christ wrote nothing*, or Thomas Wilson's contention, of 1560, that *Art without utterance can do nothing*. Socrates says that, once written, words are tumbled about anywhere, they can be misunderstood, read by an incomprehensive reader, when their absent author cannot defend himself *(Phaedrus*). Hamlet too associates voice with breath, memory, and the possibility to defend or repair a wounded name, while dismissing writing as derivative copia *folded... in the form*

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of the other, *base* and *yeoman's service.* He thinks Osric does Laertes no service by *wrapping him in the calendar of gentry*, (probably the farmer's almanac wherefrom Polonius had borrowed his speech), instead of *rawer breath.* Shakespeare's exclusive concern with the theatrical representation of his plays, leaving their writing at the mercy of negligent copyists who gave posterity a hard time deciphering them, must have sprung from a deep Socratean conviction. Barbara Everett (*Essays on Shakespeare's Tragedies,* Clarendon Paperbacks, 1989) thinks, for instance, that *Enter Osric* is a misprint. More plausible would have been *Enter a gentle Astringer* (keeper of goshawks) or *a stranger (A courtier*, in the Quarto). The pedantic courtier resembles Plato's *Sophist* (A Stranger), Hamlet being as exasperated by him as Socrates in Plato's dialogue by Zeno's disciple. Whereas Hamlet is defending a language of natural signification, Osric's art of splitting hairs in matter of words needs "margents", the *glossematique* of formal language (of arbitrary association between signifier and signified, Hermogenes's conventional names):

Hamlet: W*hat call you the carriages ?*
Horatio: *I knew you must be edified by the margent ere you had done.*
Osric: *The carriages, sir, are the hangers.*
Hamlet: *The phrase would be more germane to the matter if we could carry cannon by our sides; I would it might be hangers till then.* (V/ 2)

Osric is preceded in this by his foil, Polonius. Plato's Stranger provides tideous lists and meaningless classifications (for instance, the hunting of animals in water or on the earth, etc.), similar to Polonius's "hurley-burley" of dramatic kinds. Plato's Sophist compares his acquisition of knowledge (which for Socrates, as for Hamlet, is through memory) with "the angler's art". Here is Polonius, instructing Reynaldo in the sophistic art of getting information about Laertes:

Your bait of falsehood takes this carp of truth:
And thus do we of wisdom and of reach,
With windlaces and with assays of bias,
By indirections find directions out (II/ l)

There is much reason, therefore in Hamlet's madness, when he figures out his character as that of a "fishmonger"!...

Ancient, medieval and Renaissance discourses are competing in the play, holding up the mirror to the restless end of the sixteenth century, finding a release into the seventeenth, when their confrontation would take the more radical form of the battle of the ancients and the moderns.

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Finding fault with Shakespeare's plays usually springs from failure to read them in their key. Why does Shakespeare resort to this discursive renovation? *Empiricism constructs an unmediated reality, directly available to the senses*, Malcolm Evans opinates (*Ibidem*, p. 35), *while idealism assumes unchanging essences, a world given and readable rather than constructed and therefore available to be rewritten.* Polonius is avidly nosing about, hunting and fishing for information about everybody, reproducing some banal simulacrum of wise discourse in a popular almanac, contradicted immediately after by his actual behaviour which has nothing to do with his moral precepts. He gives a most attentive ear to everyday conversation: *'Good sir', or so; or 'friend' or 'gentlemen', / According to the phrase or the addition/ Of man and country.* Hamlet supplies a parody in the churchyard scene, lost among the cautionary skull-emblems, so much endeared by baroque art: *"Good morrow, sweet lord! How dost thou, good lord? This might be my Lord Such-a-one, that praised my lord Such-a-one's horse, when he meant to beg it, might it not?* – while dismissing the authors of such trash as the calves and the sheep of whose skin parchments are made.

Shakespeare's world is a formalized one of patterned actions and characters, of universal appeal. His art is not tied down to a concrete referent at a given time and in a given space. In the grammar of his texts, characters are defined in relationship to one another, repetition and difference ensuring a self-sufficient code. There is no need, like in *Gorboduc*, for intuitive dumb shows explained at the end (see Hamlet's explanatory comment on *The Mouse-trap* for the "benefit" of the king). The doubling of plot and characters codifies them into an autonomous structure. The foursome of sons avenging their fathers (Pyrrhus, Fortinbras, Hamlet, Laertes) removes the conflict from a possible concrete context, tracing it back to the origin of human history and writing: the Trojan War, Homer. The revenge plot is made into a pattern of social disruption as a historical datum. The impact of the performance on the audience, the spectator's identification with what is going on the stage are dramatized as part of that **generic awareness** which marked the shift to modern theatricality.

Like most Renaissance texts, Hamlet is a **generic mix.** It incorporates elegies, an aubade, lyrics, ballads, a play within a play, a dumb show, etc. There is a tendency towards carnivalization, a mixture of tragedy and comedy, as the event triggering the plot is itself a combination of mourning and mirth. Hamlet's antics, his slanderous words and conduct, the gravediggers' resentment and objections to the privileges of the rich (a few decades later other Diggers, let loose by Cromwell, were to demand the abolition of private property and communal work of land) foretell social disruptions. Formally and stylistically, it was moving into the baroque world of generic hybrids, such as the tragicomedy or the mock-heroic.

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Basically, however, *Hamlet* belongs to a **subgenre: the revenge tragedy**, structured, after Seneca's model, in five parts. In the **exposition**, a ghost or some other wronged personage is presenting their motifs for seeking revenge. In Seneca's *Hercules Furens*, Juno swears to hunt Hercules down in order to avenge herself on Jupiter's love affair with Alcmena, who subsequently had given birth to the famous hero. In *Troades*, it is the ghost of Achilles who demands that Polyxena be sacrificed to him, while Calchas requests the sacrifice of Astyanax, the son of Hector and Andromache. In Thomas Kyd's *Induction*, the scene is actually set in the underworld, whose king and queen promise the murdered Andrea Revenge, which is personified and is keeping the victim company, glutting in the enactment of the retaliation plot.

In Shakespeare, the model is subtly refurbished to answer the expectations of the anxious early modernity. The ghost is placed on the dissecting table of a sceptical intellect, probing into the nature of whatever comes within its perceptual ken. To the atheistic Horatio, schooled at Wittenberg, the ghost is something that baffles rational thought: it is a "mote" against the understanding. Instead of being struck with awe, Hamlet puts the ghost to the test through what might pass for a very elaborate and carefully conducted scientific experiment. He is possessed by his father's ghost, carried along with it into extremes of passion, and his final liberation in the end – "naked and alone" – may symbolize the Renaissance man's need to unload the heritage of medieval warfare, dogmatism and superstition, substituting for them "youthful observation" (empirical sciences), a *rapport* to God and one's fellows freed from institutional control (Protestantism), and an aesthetic ideal as the modern embodiment of the Stoics' search for some durable good to compensate for the existence of evil in the world. Hamlet commends the manuscripts that outlive the great warrior Alexander, the savings of memory and the story that will reestablish his reputation, for art alone can perform true justice and restoration. What is not articulated as Logos, is a worthless surplus of creation, its rest of silence.

The second part of a revenge play, the **anticipation**, stages the planning of revenge, which, in *Hamlet*, is not confined to Hamlet's personal destiny, it is a plan to redress the whole world, which is out of joint. The other parts are **the confrontation between the avenger and his victim** (eventually it is mundane art that exposes villainy, not some message from the other world), the **partial execution** (of the king's mercenaries) and the **completion of revenge**. The death scene is, in Shakespeare, an instruction lesson, as Claudius is proved a murderer in the very act. In *Hercules Furens*, it is Juno who induces Hercules's madness, which makes him kill his own wife, thinking she was his persecutor. As he recovers from his delusions, he refrains from using the "notched shaft" to kill old Amphytrion, which would have meant a "sin of thine own, will and knowledge". Hamlet is wronged by the evil inside himself, his irrational other, which he also

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views as the beastly, the natural, instinctual self within man. Nature was beginning to be felt as the other of the culturally shaped human identity. Setting the world in a wrong perspective (treating Ophelia as a potentially frail woman, seeing evil everywhere) is Hamlet's error of judgement. As the veil falls from his eyes, he is trying to make amends for his "idols" (false representations). Unlike Seneca, who produced distinct plays for the transgressive Hercules and the redeemed hero seeking heaven, Shakespeare joined the two episodes in the archetypal story of man's fall and redemption.

Versions of .... Shakespeare

Postmodernist criticism is even to a greater extent self-conscious and theorised, but in practice it is also eclectic. The complexities of the Shakespearean text, engendered by a mind endowed with what John Keats called "the negative capability" (letting ambiguities play about a dramatic situation and characters), justify the more recent recourse to a hybrid sort of criticism, combining schools and methods. Deconstructionist criticism, whose main assumptions about texts can be summed up as indeterminacy, deferral or dissemination of meaning, openness, supplementarity or excess versus closure and consistent thematic binaries, reveals oppositional meaning structures within the text; gender studies explore the textual politics of representing the sexes and their relationships, etc. Postmodernism is deconstructing the metaphysically defined categories of status or identity, in an attempt to reintegrate the private and the collective through the liberating narratives of class, race and gender. New Historicism shares with the old an interest in contextual backgrounds, but the premises and procedures are completely different. A historicist critic will focus the way the Shakespearean text enters into meaningful negotiations with other discourses of the time. History is not a faithful and retrievable reconstruction of the past, but an on-going re-invention of the past from the perspective of the present, suffering multiple linguistic and institutional (including a repertoire of conventions of representation and discourse-making) mediations. A tragedy like *Othello* will provide the occasion for an archaeology of late Renaissance discourses, ideology, knowledges, the textual politics of class, gender and race representations, society's practices, generic conventions, etc. One may conclude, that New Historicism combines the formal modernist, and the traditional contextualist approaches, deriving the one from the other. More interpretive flexibility and explanatory force are to be expected. Othello is a good test case **(46),** as modernist commentators (A. C. Bradley, F. R. Leaves, T.S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, William Empson) scaled it down as a domestic tragedy of jealousy, while a contemporary critic of the cultural materialist school, Alan Sinfield, put it on the spot for its racial bias.

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The latter objection can be dismissed in a few words: as the proponents of racial discrimination in Shakespeare are his most cunning villains - would-be assassins, liars, conspirators, drunken clowns in low life, such as Sebastian, Antonio, Trinculo, Stephano, Iago, and Roderigo, one could hardly deem them to be the author's ... spokesmen.

A.C. Bradley's listing of the *actes manqués* in *Othello* includes: *the absence of the allusive widening of scope, no metaphorical creation of a surrounding universe, no choral commentary... no vast world history ... no rich pattern of reference to an other-world... no vital connection between private decision and public event, no... suggestions of huge universal powers working in the world of individual fate and passion* (**47**).

Can *Othello* be cleared of so many charges if brought to trial by New Historicism ?

On going over the passages missing from the Quarto edition (whose editors claim to reproduce the text performed in 1604), listed by A. C. Bradley in his study of *Shakespearean Tragedy*, we can infer that the later revisions introduced or brought new emphasis to three issues: Othello's racial and migrant identity (I. 1. 122-138), the contrast between the senators' concern with "what's probable and palpable", which may suggest that Bacon's empirical rationalism was sinking in (I. 3. 24-30), and Othello's lapse into irrational passion (III. 3. 383-390, 453-460, IV. 1. 38-44), Othello's eschatology (III. 3. 383-389, IV. 2. 73-76, V. 2. 266-272), and the woman question (IV. 3. 87-104).

Iago is an unreflective fighter, looking upon war like a true mercenary: it is to him a trade and an opportunity to put money in his purse in every sense of the word. He embodies the self-centred individualist, put beyond the pale in Bacon's essay *On Envy*, which Iago is actually paraphrasing:

Bacon: *... he that stands at a stay when others rise, can hardly avoid motions of envy*

Iago: *And I (...) must be lee'd and calmed*
By debitor and creditor. This counter-caster
He in good time must his lieutenant be,
And I - God bless the mark - his Moorship's ancient (I.1.)

As Bacon says, self-love is the most uncertain anchorage, Iago's selfishness causing the destruction of those around him as well as his own. He is committed to the "old gradation" of military fits, and his speech is often forced into metaphoric and mythical flourishes, unlike the epistemological language employed by the Venetian senators. Reliance on reason and its empirical ratification, in keeping with Bacon's new injunctions, that the intellect rid itself of *obscurissimis idolis* (1603) – specified as the "darkness of parables", fables and

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hieroglyphics in the 1609 *De sapientia veterum* - ensures Othello's well-being. His covenant with Iago, or, rather, their taking vows, like in a marriage ceremony, with himself becoming the place-holder of Iago rather than with Iago being appointed his lieutenant, leads up to his ousting Desdemona from being: *Dis-demon,* as he keeps wailing on her death bed. Iago is the Spanish for the Hebrew Yaaqobh, meaning "supplanter". The "noble Moor" is temporarily supplanted or possessed by his "ancient", and Iago himself is supplanted by a mask, a "complement extern" to his real self.

A number of verbal echoes refer Iago to Apostle James, "the Lord's brother" (*Galatians* 1:19), whose directions Iago "misdirects" in his speech to Roderigo of Act 2, Scene 3:

Iago: *How poor are they that have no patience.*
What wound did ever heal but by degrees ?
Thou know'st we work by wit, and not by witchcraft
And wit depends on dilatory time.

James, 1:4,5

Make sure that your endurance carries you all the way without falling, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. But if any of you lacks wisdom, he should pray to God ...

The covenenters – for whom Faustus and Mephistopheles, Iago and Roderigo, old Hamlet and the philosopher' young disciples at Wittenberg are Elizabethan dramatic tropes – were divorcing Faith from Actions, which James says should be working together (*James* 2:18). Iago relies on his own wit, which "belongs to the world" (*James* 2:13), and can only be seen in action as "unspiritual and demonic", for wisdom from above excludes jealousy and selfishness:

Iago: *Knavery's plain face is never seen till used* (II, 3)

Altruism, good deeds, the importance of the active pursuit of salvation were Apostle James's message to Shakespeare's contemporary reformers, who were asking for further purification of the church, thereby running against the king's counter-reforming tendencies. They were also contrary to the extremists' solipsism and inaction, their rejection of apostles and of the mediation of the church, rendered superfluous in a scheme of salvation through election or predestination, which had come to look very much like the ancients' Fate. Iago, who confesses to Roderigo that his "outward action" is merely a "complement extern" to the actual "act and figure of his heart" turns inside out James's guidance: *what good is it for someone to say that he hath faith if his actions do not prove it ?* (*James* 2:14).

The renovation of the Senecan model of the revenge tragedy also revived its ethos: leisurely pursuit of wisdom, of art and philosophy, instead of bloody feuds – a warning against the irruption of the ghostly, barbarous past into the

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civilized present. *Vindicta mihi*, running like a red thread through Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedy, meant a setback from the New-Testamental dispensation which James sums up as "mercy triumphs over judgement" (*James* 2:8). In his pursuit of revenge, Iago is an **ancient** in more than one sense of the word. In planning revenge, Othello is reported by Iago to be going back to Mauritania (Mauretania: the ancient land of the modern Morocco) .

The Othello of the first part of the play, judiciously dividing his life between the warrior role (taking precedence) and the lover, seems to be swept back into medieval worlds of romance, absolutizing love: without love his person returns to chaos, his military abilities are gone, his whole being is turned to ashes. It is this "over-flowing the measure", this "loving too well" that leads to disaster.

Othello resembles Lucian in his habit of casting people into dead icons (*Eikones*). In Cassio, who is mocking Bianca, while he, who cannot hear his words, imagines he is talking of Desdemona (IV. 1), Othello sees one of the Roman *triumphatores*, a victorious general, made up to resemble the statue of Jupiter Optimus Maximus in the Capitoline temple (**48**). He freezes Desdemona into a statue, "smooth as monumental alabaster", which is Lucian's rhetorical scheme in his "icon" of Panthea, the Emperor's mistress, and casts her into the same fallen woman stereotype. Shakespeare challenges the idea of identity as essence, insisting on the economic sources of prostitution (Bianca's poverty) and on gender discrimination. As her name suggests, Bianca's soul is white, while Emilia sees women's victimisation as a form of cannibalism.

The protagonist is displaced from the racial and the mercenary stereotype. In one of Shakespeare's sources, Leo Africanus, the North-Africans are described as naive, easy to manipulate, jealous and cannibals. As it has been noticed, Othello's report of his past life before the Senate echoes the career of Leo himself. He is allowed to evolve from an object of discourse to a subject position: the speaking/writing instance. Othello is writing himself into a different scenario, with Iago taking his place as the jealous cannibal and amoral mercenary. He only defers to the Venetian senators because (and as long as) they are "approved" by his moral sense.

Othello has been seen by commentators as "a professed Christian" (e.g. the 2000 Heinemann *Advanced Shakespeare*, p. VI), but there is no textual support thereof. On the contrary, Shakespeare will not convert his moor, the way Spanish moors were being forcibly converted into Moriscoes at that time. Cassio is intimating that the Moor will not be "saved" *(For mine own part - no offence to the general, /nor any man of quality – I hope to be saved.* – II. 3), Brabantio is raging at the "bondslaves and pagans" turned statesmen (I. 3), while Iago is metaphorically putting it to Brabantio, that his Christian daughter, the "white ewe" (the lost sheep) had been wasted on "an old black ram": the black skin acquires the devilish meaning of the "ram's horn". Roderigo is adding the final touch to the

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alien stereotype, fashioning Othello as *the wheeling stranger/ O here and everywhere* (10). Later, in Act 2, Scene 3, Iago plays the Equivocator again, in a syntactically ambiguous passage, which can refer either to Desdemona or Othello, and which can be taken to mean that both of them had forgone the other's baptism, with its specific promise of redemption:

... And then for her
To win the Moor - were't to renounce his baptism,
All seals and symbols of redeemed sin -
His soul is so enfettered to her love,
That she may make, unmake, do what she list ...

Othello himself confesses that, in loving Desdemona, whom she as yet has no reason to suspect, he risks the perdition of his soul (*Perdition catch my soul/ But I do love thee* – III. 3), while Desdemona ascribes him a mythic origin having to do with the four elements: she hopes that the hot clime of his birth will have dried up the humour in him that was responsible for jealousy ...

And yet Othello does talk a lot about God, prayers and "compt" (Judgement). It is only that the entire imagery he employs refers us to another religious text, the Koran, an edition of which had been available in England in the Latin version of Robert of Kettov since 1143, and which may have been a subject of debate at King James's theological conference. The English translation was to come out in 1649. Besides, *General History of the Turks*, by R. Knolles, had come out in 2003, one year before the first performance of *Othello*.

Othello measures time in months (see Sura VI, verse 96). In the Koran, XXXVII: 67, God is said to have adorned the lower heaven with stars as guards against "any rebel devil", the capital sins being apostasy and fornication. Othello calls Desdemona (III. 4) such a rebel devil (elsewhere he calls her a "public commoner": a prostitute):

For here's a young and sweating devil here
That commonly rebels.

and says that "heaven stops the nose at it (her "deeds"), and the moon winks". He gives account to the "chaste stars" for his decision to take her life. For while sinners are doomed to burn in hell, those who pretend not to see the trespassers or do not care are like animals (VII: 179) Othello feels he could put up with becoming "a fixed figure for the time of scorn", but if he fails to exact justice, he will live like a "foul toad" with no hope in the immortality of his soul. In demonized Desdemona he sees a threat to other men (*let her down the wind / To prey at fortune:* III. 3: else she'll betray more men: V. 2), disseminating corruption (See Sura VII). The rebels against the Law would like to put out God's light (IX:

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32), but God will punish them in order to purge and make them undefiled again (IX: 103). Othello will put out the light of her life, in order to restore her to her "former light" (V. 2). On the Day of Judgement, the faces of the sinners will look "begrimed and black" (Koran, III: 106, XXXIX: 60 and *Othello*, III. 3). In the Koran (LXXXVII: 4,5), God is He who sees that flowers bloom forth and then turn to black hay. Othello uses similar vegetal correlatives in his speech, more to himself than to the uncomprehending Desdemona of Act 4 Scene 2. Death will be for him the test of his soul: *there where I have garnered up my heart* - where his immortality will be held in the scales – *either I must live, or bear no life.* Desdemona, the sinner, will look like blackened hay:

> *... thou young and rose-lipped cherubin -*
> *Ay, there look grim as hell.*

Othello is making it perfectly clear, that **his cause is not revenge** but his identity as grounded in a theocratic ontology. Man either observes his covenant with God or descends among monkeys as a rebel, giving up on his humanity.

Eden is a garden with fountains and rivers. Othello's *The fountain from the which my current runs,/ Or else dries up* (IV: 2) is no rhetorical flourish, but a religious concept: In the Koran, man is created out of water: XXV: 84. A mythology of water is Othello's consistant referential background: his idea of supreme riches is "the sea's worth"; he judges Desdemona by her hand's moisture and represents his life like a voyage, with death as the "sea-mark of my utmost sail". God is associated with running water - after all, the most precious element for people struggling for life in the desert -, while Othello's ungodly life would be like foul toads coupling in the stale water of a cistern. His obsessing with his and Desdemona's undefiled name too can be linked to passages in the Koran. There is divine reprieve for those who repent, confess and prey (Sura IX), but, as Desdemona refuses at first to do any, Othello decides that she has doomed herself. Afterwards, he tells her it is too late for prayer, as, according to the Koran, it is no longer received *when death has already come upon the sinner. (*IV: 18). He is not moved by Desdemona taking his crime upon herself, like Christian Emilia, because, in the Koran, *no soul can do anything for another soul* (LXXXII: 19), and, by lying, she has only aggravated her plight.

After finding out the truth, he takes a different view of his future Reckoning with God: Desdemona will testify against him, as God summons witnesses to His trial (XVI: 89), and he will be hurled into hell. We find no such elements in Christian eschatology:

> *When we shall meet at compt,*
> *This look of thine will hurl my soul from heaven,*
> *And finds will snatch it* (V. 2)

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Emilia's diatribe against man's double standards proceeds from the assumption of gender egalitarianism:

Let husbands know
That wives have sense like them they see and smell,
And have tehir palates both for sweet and sour
As husbands have.

The most daring plea for equality between the sexes came from Aemilia Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* of 1611 **(49),** as she claimed women's active role in Christ's healing church. Her model, Countess of Cumberland, held the spiritual power of St Peter's keys to the kingdom of heaven. Her healing ministry could recover the lost sheep:

Thou mai'st convert ....
In their conversion then he may behold
Thy beauty shining brighter than the Sunne.

Shakespeare may have used this source in his 1611/12 version, staged in honour of Princess Elizabeth's wedding, as some of the gendered passages are missing from the early quarto. Othello acuses Desdemona that she is keeping a brothel opposite to Saint Peter and the gate to hell (IV. 2). She cannot heel his headache with the fatal handkerchief, but unlike Emilia, who profers threats (*The ills we do, their instruct us so*) according to the "eye for eye" ethic of revenge, Desdemona preys to God that she be given the capacity to "mend" what is bad. Her sacrifice converts Othello back to faith in Venetian worth, and the prodigal finds her now a "heavenly sight".

And yet it is not religious difference that triggers the retribution plot. According to the Koran, Othello ought to have cleared away his doubts by recourse to four witnesses, to facts and infallible empirical evidence. It is only two people who testify for (Emilia) and against (Iago) Desdemona. If Othello chooses to put his trust in the latter, it is because Iago has "ensnared" his senses and mind. This is a Baconian critique of mythic or paralogic thinking, set over and against the empirical and rational quest for truth at the time of dawning modernity. Iago well knows that Desdemona and Othello's marriage is a prosperous event, but he makes it look foul by forcing it into mythic constructions (the "black ram" and the "white ewe") or racial clichés. In disagreement with Apostle James' guidance against prejudice, that one "must never treat people in different ways according to their outward appearance", Iago casts Othello into frames of racial otherness, which are echoed by other characters in the play, in whom the contagion takes effect: **thick lips, sooty bosom, Barbary horse**, etc. He is the serpent destroying the former, Edenic harmony, with the Moor trusted and admired by the Venetian

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senators (including Brabantio, in whose home he is an honoured guest), with Desdemona choosing him over the Venetian "curled darlings", and Cassio deferring to him despite his scheme of salvation.

The final scene is one of reconciliation – with Othello "adopting" Venetian Gratiano as uncle once more - despite cultural differences that fill signifiers with different representations. The Moor's self-inflicted death is proper retribution in his eyes but an anti-Christian act from Cassio's orthodox position. A believer in fate – *'Tis destiny unshunnable, like death* (III, 3) –, Othello continues to see in Desdemona the "ill-starred wench", the unfortunate one, as well as the **dis-demonized** one, displaced from the "rebel devil" script. The Christian audience were probably taking his word to mean **dis-demoned**: the Christian martyr who has chosen sacrifice, like Christ in the Garden of Gethsemany, freeing herself, through free will, from prescribed Fate or Doom. In the early modern world of incipient colonial wars, Fate, Destiny, along with other cultural signifieds, were losing the univocity they had enjoyed in the ancient world.

Shakespeare dismisses off stage the Venetian-Turkish war, while foregrounding civic values and the need to cope up with differences in the new circumstances of cross-cultural contacts. The unbiased intellect, freed from "obscurissimis idols" (Bacon's topic in 1603), such as "old gradation", the "ancient" sign system and values, ingrained in the patriarchal and self-centred Europe, was to show the way. Likewise, European civilization had much to offer in the way of polis culture, provided it established fair and equitable relationships with its cultural others. Otherwise, humanity would be playing back Pliny's "natural history" of *homo homini lupus*...

In anticipation of contemporary theorists like Cornel West and Andrew Gibson, Shakespeare dismisses the racial or gender issues altogether. Such differences are displaced onto distinctions of universal human worth. One factor analysis, the Cyclopic privileging of one member of the binary over the other is felt to be unnatural, a mere delusion of the intellect caught up in the bondage of its idols - tribal in their genesis and status as public representations even if they be employed for private use. It is the madman who sees in the world more devils than there are. The language of humanism was being called upon to dis-demonize the world.

Renaissance Fiction

If the Shakespearean text appears most often to be the focal point of a mass of discourses circling round it, derived from a dozen systems of knowledge, **Renaissance fiction** too is weaving a panoply of cultural conventions playing against each other. *Amadis of Gaul*, the medieval romance parodied in the *Knight*

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of the Burning Pestle, a comedy by Francis Beaumont, is only one of the texts opened and recodified by Philip Sidney in his *Arcadia,* which exists in three versions: as a tragicomedy in five acts and as a prose romance, subsequently revised. In recreating the pastoral convention, he seeks completeness by selecting his sources from all ages, as if aware of epistemological change from one age to another: a third-century Greek romance (Heliodorus, *Ethiopian History*), a medieval French romance (*Amadis of Gaul*) and a sixteenth-century Italian pastoral (Sannazarius, *Arcadia*). Following his own injunction in the *Defence*, Sidney resorts to "imitative patterns" to give his work form, while shedding on them the light of his own time's eyebeams. With Sannazarius, the closest in time, he shares the feeling that man's alienation from nature is irreversible. It is not a realistic Arcadia his hero Pyrocles is seeking out in Basilius's retreat. The text draws attention to its own literarity and artifice: the artist's golden Arcadia is superior to Nature's brazen work: *Nature never set forth the earth in so rich a tapestry as divers poets have done; neither with so pleasant rivers, fruitful trees, sweet-smelling flowers, not whatsoever else may make the too much loved earth more lovely. Her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden.* Following Pyrocles in his dream of Philoclea („famed for love"), the reader is inculpated with Sidney's writing of the story. The heroes, the landscapes, the actions betray their merely linguistic ontology.

The norms of the ancient and of the medieval romances are inverted. The central chivalric formula in *Amadis of Gaul* is the power of *amour courtois* to inspire "bounteous deeds", prowess. Oriana's love or scorn makes or un-makes Amadis. From a hermit, Amadis is transformed by Oriana's confession of love into the most valiant mortal – the Knight of the Green Helmet. Sidney's heroes embrace the *bastard* love of carnal desire (according to the first version). Pyrocles drags Philoclea into an unlawful union, while his friend Musidorus convinces Pamela to elope together. Sin and guilt enter Arcadia. Perfection, the final prize, is to be reached by a hero who rises from his fallen condition to virtue. In the pagan pastoral, *the clash and identification of the refined, the universal, and the low* (Empson, *Versions of Pastoral,* p. 50), is spatial (Court and country, nature and art, etc.), whereas in Sidney it is ***internalized***. The coexistence of moral good and evil within the same character triggers a story of fall and redemption. Love makes no chivalrous heroes out of Pyrocles and Musidorus: they resort to shameful disguise, lies which lead to fatal consequences, are mocked, humiliated. Pyrocles approaches Philoclea disguised as an Amazon, causing her father Basilius to dote on him. He discloses his identity to Philoclea, who already feels attracted to him in a strange way. Philoclea confesses her love to her mother, unaware that she too loves Pyrocles. To get rid of his lover's parents, Pyrocles makes vain promises to meet them in a cavern. The Duke is thus made to commit adultery with his own

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wife in the dark, and drink from a poisoned cup. Seized with remorses, Gynecia admits to being *a plague to [herself] and a shame to womankind.* Confused and dangerous division in the land are caused by the aristocrats yielding to vice. Yet redemption is possible. The slaying of the beasts, which look like embodiments of their vices, works the princes' liberation from the evil in themselves. In the final trial scene, Heliodorus's heroes prove innocent and worthy, Theagenes passes the fire test, making the astonished witnesses ask for the lovers' pardon. Sidney's heroes have proved lusty and guilty of every possible breach: of hospitality, of virtue, of truth, of civility **(50)**. And yet the trial proves their supreme virtue: generosity to the point of self-sacrifice. Each of them is accusing himself alone, while asking for the others' pardon. A miracle of resurrection (another Christian influence) saves them: Basilius is revived to pardon them all.

The end of the century brings with it carnivalizing tendencies, not only in the superimposition of schemes and conventions but also in the dialogical form of courtly convention and popular subversion. John Simons' essay, *Open and Closed Books: a Semiotic Approach to the History of Elizabethan and Jacobean Popular Romances* (starting from J. Kristeva's *Semeiotike*), analyses the English romances of the turn of the century as derivative from the medieval genre. While opening the closed product of the medieval world to the new mercantile capitalism and absolutism, the chivalric code in describing adventure is still preserved. **Henry Robartes** is typical in this sense, as he recovers a medieval convention, locating it in a new class consciousness. The making of the new merchant prince was becoming a favourite theme, both in fiction and in poetry. Sir Francis Drake maintains an uneasy balance between chivalric glory (contributing political advantage and international prestige to the country) and the demands of the material world, from a different, mercantile perspective; he is requested in *The Trumpet for Fame*, a poem of 1595, to think of England's honour, while *The gain is yours, if millions home you bring*. Robartes, his foil in fiction, sounds a bit more conservative in his *Historie of Pheander the Mayden Knight*. The story of prince Dionisius, whose journey and reward in fame for audacity fail to get the girl as long as he is disguised as a merchant, shows that status and rank still held their sway but merely as conventions in comparison to the substantial reality of individual enterprise.

The departure from Sidney is more obvious in the baroque mock-heroic of **Thomas Nashe**. Neil Rhodes, in *Nashe, Rhetoric and Satire (Jacobean Poetry and Prose. Op. cit.)*, compares and contrasts the chivalric rhetoric of Sidney's *Arcadia*, mannered and ornamental, brimming with tropes and figures, and Nashe's subversive caricature: an elaborate exercise in the low style. Such is the description of the Anabaptist revolt in Munster in the *Unfortunate Traveller*, where Leiden's "flourishing pretensions" are deflated by conveying his martial

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ostentation in terms of worn-out household utensils, culminating with *a canker-eaten scull on their heads which had served their ancestors as a chamber pot for two hundred years (...) dripping pans armour-wise, to fence his back and his belly.* Rhodes aptly defines it as *an extravaganza of base amplification of purest baroque essence.*

Jacobean and Caroline Drama

By mingling the strands of life and literature, **Ben Jonson** had assumed certain risks. Unlike Shakespeare, he saw himself censored by the royal family, whose tendency towards absolutism was also manifest in the patronage, licence and increased control of the arts. Jonson's play, *Epicoene*, the story of an idiosyncretic character, who, hating noise, chooses a dumb bride, becoming the victim of a hoax, was found to be hinting in its fifth act to Stephen, Prince of Moldova, who had courted Lady Arabella Stuart. Jonson replied in amazement that he had meant to make a play, not a slander.

The absolutist Jacobean and Caroline monarchy put an end to the feudal idealistic picture of the mutual love between king and subjects, which was still invoked in Elizabeth's Golden Speech of 1601. The mounting tension between Court and parliament, Puritans and the Laudian faction in the Church, patronized by the King, court and city, aristocracy and middle class, which led to civil wars, bloodshed and political intolerance, ended in 1688, with the deposition of the Stuart monarchy: James I (1603-1625), Charles I (1625-1649), Charles II (1660-1685), James II (1685-1688). The year 1688 meant the beginning of the constitutional monarchy, the victory of the City over the Court, of the middle class, the end of any claim of authority from the Catholic Church. On another level, it marked the triumph of the desacralized bourgeois culture and worldview: the scientific-mechanistic picture of the universe and the mathematical-experimental methods in research.

At the beginning of the century the picture was pretty hazy and contradictory. Political, social and epistemological mobility generated a feeling of insecurity and universal doubt. This is the age of the prose paradox (John Donne and Thomas Browne), of "heterogeneous ideas yoked by violence together".

Under James I, England knew a period of colonial expansion (into the New World as well). Artificial glamour of manners and witty conversation were supposed to make up for the lack of moral earnestness. According to a contemporary, James would never bestow his favour on two sorts of men: *those whose dogs and hawks flew and ran as well as his own, and those who were able to speak as much reason as himself* (scholarship coming next to hunting) **(51)**. Under Charles I, who was reading Shakespeare in prison on the eve of his execution, the royal society grew more temperate and orderly, yet luxury was so

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lavish as to impress Rubens, who was familiar with the splendour of continental royalty. Whereas James, and particularly his wife, Anne of Denmark, had been in the habit of commissioning masques for the twelfth night or other Court ceremonies and celebrations, which were actually royal pageantry, performing the epiphany of the monarch, Charles showed a more refined taste, in his exchange of gifts from his art collection with European prelates and statesmen, as well as in his patronage of the most famous baroque Flemish artists (Van Dyck and Rubens).

The Jacobean masques, to whose staging Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones made the most substantial contribution, presented a world travailing for perfection, over which the king presided as the sun – the favourite image of absolutism. In the 1605 *Masque of Blackness*, for instance, commissioned to Jonson, Queen Anne and eleven of her ladies appeared as blackamoors. The twelve nymphs, daughters of Niger, want to change their complexion, in view of which, as instructed in a vision, they are to seek a land whose name ends in "tania". The moon informs them that their dream can come true in the blessed isle, Britania:

Britania (whose new name makes all tongues sing)
Might be a diamond worthy to inchase it'
Ruled by a sun that to this height doth grace it,
Whose beams shine day and night, and are of force
To blanch an Aethiop, and revive a course.

The *Masque of Beauty* followed, which worked the desired change. The foil or false masque or anti-masque provided the necessary antagonist for the baroque "yoked" opposites and for the neoplatonic allegory of the victory of light over darkness. The Renaissance tradition was continued in the mixture of recital, song and dance, as well as in the final reunion of actors and audience, giving that sense of harmony and oneness, characteristic of pastoral. A new element, however, could be discerned in the architecture of the stage, separating, through its sophisticated machinery, the audience from the space of representation, which functioned like a screen, posing problems of perspective. Inigo Jones, whose ambition to recover the style of classical antiquity urged him to seek instruction in Marcus Vitruvius, a Roman architect of the first century B.C., as well as in the sixteenth-century Andrea Palladio, worked a revolutionary change in **organising space on mathematical principles**. Leonardo da Vinci had used the human figure as a base for the construction of geometrical figures, applied to the planning of buildings, the humanistic symbolism of Renaissance architecture replacing the Gothic aspiration to God. It was Jones who introduced the laws of perspective to England, which make infinite space the effect of an illusionary geometric play: converging lines give an impression of distance, smaller objects on the canvas seem to be placed further away from the viewer's eyes. *Jones's persistent use of perspective in the*

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masque was not only to demonstrate a principle of Renaissance optics; it also had an emblematic function. It reordered the room in terms of optical hierarchy, for the lines of perspective met only in the eyes of the King. The lower a person was in rank, the further away he was from the monarch and, therefore, the more distorted the view. Truth of vision came significantly with proximity to a monarch who claimed Divine Right. The king as the embodiment on earth of the godhead was central to the whole of Jones's thought **(52)**. In a paradoxical way, the invention had also subverted the idea of "universal, unique vision", and the invention of the telescope, which may be considered a symbol of the age, also fostered a sense of relativism of perception and problematized "truth of vision".

Spectators, living their autonomous lives outside the theatre, and the fictional space (no longer embodiment, *presentia*, but effect of illusion and artifice), were no more limbs of the same body (chain of being). The curtain was not the only invention of Jones's dramatic engineering. The machinery of illusion also included the *machina versatilis* (revolving stage), and the *scena ductalis* (use of side wings and backshutters allowing of scene changes and variations. The same mixture characteristic of English Renaissance can be seen however in his graft of classical art upon national history, in his overlaying of a neoclassical structure on a Gothic one (see the *Barriers,* 1610, planned for Prince Henry's knightly exercise). The baroque mixture of mottoes, emblems and inscriptions on his pictures' surfaces is also breaking the neoclassical orthodoxy. And also typical of the artists' vacillation between neoclassic and baroque is Jones's advice to Charles I to invite Van Dyck to England. Rubens's enlarged vision of life's dynamism, the rehabilitation of the flesh and of sensuality in an age of metaphysics under stress, cracking identities and dissolving boundaries, was completed by his disciple's "official" portraiture of the high society and of royalty, which turned fashion into a cherished value for the first time. Van Dyck's paintings of his aristocratic models show them as they liked to see themselves imaged, from the arrogant look and the contemptuous curled lip of the youthful descendant of ancient peerage, from the frozen stance of the modish pursuit, on horseback or dismounted, or posing for the family portrait gallery, to the details in the fine embroidery of the rich coat sleeve and the gleam in the deftly set gem.

The mixture of neoclassical principles of dramatic structure, social realism, satire, and of Renaissance epistemology – the theory of humours, of the four elements, in earnest, and of alchemy in jest – in **Ben Jonson** is telling of an age in which the revolutionary theories of Copernicus and Galilei coexisted with those of Galen and Paracelsus, in which astrology still maintained its grasp on Tycho, in which William Gilbert (theory of magnetism) and William Harvey (the circulation of the blood) were on the staff of the neo-Aristotelian, Galenist, Royal College of Physicians. Here was Montaigne confirmed, and William Drummond of

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Hawthornden did not refrain from stating it plainly: *thus sciences are become opinions, nay Errores, and leave the Imagination in a thousand labyrinths.* **(53)**

In the prologue to his first play, *Every Man in His Humour* (1598), Ben Jonson made an attempt to impose neoclassic principles on the prodigal Elizabethan drama (the bastard chronicle history plays, the fanciful and loose romances, the violent tragedies):

> *Deeds and language, such as men do use;*
> *And persons, such as comedy would choose,*
> *When she would show an image of the times,*
> *And sport with human follies, not with crimes.*

The comedy that Jonson *chooses* is of a type more available in English adaptations than any other dramatic works of the Greek-Roman antiquity: the **New Comedy** of **Terence** (six plays) and **Plautus** (about a dozen). There plots are more tightly knit, observing the unities and lacking Aristophanes's melting pot of folk festival, song, political satire and direct allusions to actual people and events. The theme is usually youthful love in difficulty and finally victorious, while the characters are human types, which remain unchanged throughout the play: Old Knowell, showing his dissatisfaction at his son's *dreaming of not by idle poetry* – a capital sin in an age of material acquisition – is *senex irratus*. Young Knowell is the accomplished youth (*adulescens*) in love, Brainworm is the servant (*dolosus servus*) whose "trick" mirrors a seventeenth-century strategy of making money from fooling other people (by selling a common weapon as a Toledo). Squire Downright makes a convincing *miles gloriosus*. In the upside down world of comedy, it is *the hawking and hunting languages studied more than Latin and Greek* and the aspiration to an upper status than one's own (Master Matthew, a fishmonger's son, aping the aristocracy) that appear as legitimate to the common eye. The ancient, wooden human types are blooded by *the image of the times* and drawn to the force field of a mobile social structure. In England there was no patriciate, no caste of the kind that existed on the continent. If not the aristocracy, the landed gentry was hospitable to the yeomen, city merchants or lawyers who had enough money to afford landownership. Since the first-born son got all the land, the younger brothers would often go to town and enter into trade or marry a rich burgher's daughter. As money could confer *honour, love, respects, long life, valour, safety, victory (*Epicure Mammon in *The Alchemist),* a father disinherits his son in favour of Volpone – another cunning, avaricious Mammon, who feigns sickness in order to see how all his acquaintances (Corbaccio, Corvino, Voltore and the rest) are perching around *to peck for carrion,* as ravens, vultures or crows will do, when sensing imminent death (*Volpone*, 1605). Jonson's alchemy is not meant to transmute inferior metals into gold – it is all a hoax – but to distil social

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models from the human swarm at the beginning of the century. Alongside *Volpone*, *The Alchemist* (1610) illustrates the new type of city comedy, with its ambiguous picture of both the moral evil cropping up in the early capitalist *urbs* and the fascinating accumulation of wealth and power, showering commodities and delights upon its fortunate citizens. The colonial expansion had created a special sort of Epicureanism, to which even the delicate, allegorizing fancy of Spenser had paid its tribute:

> Mammon: *My meat shall all come in Indian shells,*
> *Dishes of agate set in gold and studded*
> *With emeralds, sapphires, hyacinths and rubies:*
> *The tongues of carps, dormice, and camels' heels.....*
> *My foot-boy shall eat pheasants, calvered salmons,*
> *Knots, godwits, lampreys; I myself will have*
> *The bards of barbels served instead of salads....*
> *For which I'll say unto my cook, 'There's gold;*
> *Go forth, and be a knight'. (The Alchemist,* II/ 2)

The story is simple enough, but the grasp of an essential element of change – the old social order going to pieces – is unfailing. The owner of a house, who has taken refuge into the country from the 1610 plague, is leaving behind his butler to play the wizard's apprentice. Face allows a swindler and a woman of the town to settle themselves in the house, and an unscrupulous scheme of deception is set up. Subtle, the would-be alchemist, takes money from gullible people with a vain promise of giving them the philosopher's stone in return. Who are his clients ? A squire wants to sell his land and become a city gallant. A clerk wants to give up his profession and win cups at horse races; a chemist wants to marry into the landed gentry; two Puritans seek the holy pure gold for the brethrens' *pure cause*. There is a chaotic movement, in which every trade loses its traditional hold and meaning, while the gold hunt overwhelms moral scruples. In Squire Kastril – whatever his humour, probably choler – Jonson has immortalized the masses of country gentlemen who abandoned their estates (with the exception of the harvest time) and crowded in London, going all its round of pleasures: swimming and boating on the Thames, dicing and card-playing, attending horse-races, theatres, wrestling matches, Court and city activities – till the King ordered them, in an official proclamation, to return home.

Scholarly accuracy and observance of the unities are all there is "left remarkable" about Jonson's tragedies, *Sejanus* (1603) and *Catilene* (1611).

Under the Stuarts, there is nothing left remarkable about tragedy in general, if measured by an Elizabethan yardstick. The patterned speech of the

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Elizabethans, the majestic breath of the blank verse make room for empty rhetorical verse, irregular metres or even for the plodding rhythms of prose or of colloquial speech. The knowing soliloquy of the self-dramatized consciousness or of the searching mind is replaced by the castrated sound of tirades, adjurations, and addresses. The moral reflector is out, the popular entertainer is in. The plots are no longer developed naturally from situations and character; they are full of exciting events and surprising turns of fortune. Such popular characteristics as clever intrigues, unexpected transformations, and sharply pointed dialogue, betray a relaxation of intellectual and moral anxiety. A hybrid dramatic kind is catering for an audience given neither to serious reflection on the human condition nor to an abysmal view of its scope. The audience would rather be spared the devastating effects of tragical action and its consequences. The **tragicomedy**, mentioned with Polonius's dry didacticism and parodied by the "merry and tragical" play of *Pyramus and Thisbe,* is defined in Guarini's 1601 *Compendio della poesia tragicomica* as a careful mixture of the elements of each kind. The opening scene of the play should already signal to the audience that what follows is not a tragedy (the roaring does not come from a lion). The denouement is supposed to arouse feelings of awe and wonder, while still giving the illusion of a realistic explanation of events

Whereas Ben Jonson was programmatically (see the induction to *Every Man out of His Humour*) holding up a mirror (*As large as is the stage whereon we act*) to the *courteous eyes* of his audience, meant not to flatter but to "scourge" *vainglorious knights and affected courtiers*, **John Fletcher** and **Francis Beaumont**, themselves gentlemen of position, educated at Oxford and Cambridge (unlike Jonson, a bricklayer's self-taught son, who later received honorary degrees from both universities), chose to please their aristocratic audience and to follow the fashion of the day, which they assimilated without criticism. Their up-to-dateness in coming very close to the European Lope de Vega school was something new in England, where writers had used to interpret and transform foreign models. Jointly they produced the most important body of dramatic work during the Stuart period. Fletcher was on his own in the composition of *The Faithful Shepherdess* (1609), which was the first English canonical tragicomedy. Being new, it needed "margins", that is, Fletcher had to introduce this new and popular form of drama. He did so in a reassuring preface, keeping close to Guarini and in a characteristically superficial manner: *A tragicomedy is not so called in respect of mirth and killing, but in respect it wants deaths, which is enough to make it no tragedy, yet brings some near it, which is enough to make it no comedy, which must be a representation of familiar people, with such kind of trouble as no life be questioned.*

The best of the Fletcher-Beaumont canon is dated 1609-1611: *Philaster, The Maides Tragedy* and *A King and No King.* The unexpected turns of situation in

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The Maides Tragedy is balanced by the cast of disillusioning yet truthful characters. Amintor, a noble youth of Rhodos, forgets his former engagement to Aspatia in order to marry Evadne, acting on the king's advice. On the day of the wedding he is appalled to find out that the king has forced him into that marriage bond not out of endearment but out of base self-interest. Evadne is his mistress, and Amintor is to serve as their cover, and official father of Evadne's bastards. The action unfolds through a sequence of scenes of great dramatic impact, culminating in the confrontation between Evadne and her brother. Melantius, who stands for the old, patriarchal moral values and military honour, proves more efficient in breaking down Evadne's cynical view of the situation than the virtuous yet weak Amintor, to whom she shamelessly confesses the whole scheme. It is not to Amintor's moralising speech but to her brother's determinism and physical terror that she finally responds. The "solution" she can think of is both violent and immoral (in their rendering of character, Beaumont and Fletcher pave the way for the amoral Restoration drama). She thinks that by stabbing the king through a cowardly act (while he is asleep), she will win back Amintor's love. On hearing what she has done, Amintor shrinks back in horror.

In the Stuart drama, even if a set of values is present, it is neither efficient (Melantius is more effective in his crude speech and rustic manner than in his moral convictions) nor stable. Characters follow no categorical imperative, and tend to rely on the opinions and judgement of others. Amintor is more interested in saving appearances than in redressing his injured honour. The innocent characters appear to be helpless when confronted with bawds and Machiavels who laugh at them. The King adds to his moral injury an equally outrageous haughty behaviour towards Amintor. Melantius's moral scruples are not strong enough to stop him from playing an opportunist deception by denying in public his asides to Calianax. Characters keep changing sides or moral allegiances, for instance Evadne, turning from the king's passionate mistress into his murderess in a wink of the eye. Her rapid conversion breaks any norm of psychological verisimilitude. The characters' lack of depth is to be expected, as some of them are derived from comic types: the braggart soldier, the forsaken maiden, the cuckolded husband of the *fabliau*, the Tyrant, the virago, the girl page descended from Greene and Shakespeare.

The doubly interrupted plot and the personified audience go well with the quixotic motif which Beaumont translated into the dramatic structure of *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1609, printed 1613. Formerly believed to be the joint work of Beaumont and Fletcher). In this play, composed soon after the publication of *Don Quixote* (I), the dramatist somehow reverses Cervantes's manner, displaying an aristocratic anxiety about invasion of security by the middle class to a greater extent than the burgesses' commonsensical comment on medieval chivalry. Ralph, the "grocer errant", having a burning pestle engraved

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on his shield in honour of his former trade, joins the plot of medieval adventure and feats of love ***by demand of the audience***. The City world embodied by Citizen George and his Wife steps onto the stage, their *point of view* being introduced simultaneously with their vivid image.

The revenge plot undergoes transformations in the direction of desacralization and deflation of scope and cast. The hero inflamed with outrage is replaced by a malcontent (**John Marston** created the type in *The Malcontent*), only seeking social promotion by unorthodox means. **Cyril Tourneur**, in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, eliminates the ghost in the opening scene. It is set in Italy, revealing Vindice (Revenge; the crude symbolism of the names lays bare the allegorical design) holding a skull in his hands. The skull is the motif of his discontent and a favourite image in baroque allegorical painting. We get a reversed Petrarchan blazon, as Vindice is trying to reconstruct his beloved's face from the horrible skull in his hands. The baroque artist takes interest in morbid sights as an illustration of the general rundown of the world:

Thou sallow picture of my poisoned love,
My study's ornament, thou shell of death,
Once the bright face of my betrothed lady,
When life and beauty naturally filled out
These ragged imperfections;
When two heaven-pointed diamonds were set
In those unsightly rings...

However, the scene is set for the revenge and the motif is quite plain: he will avenge his beloved who had taken her life after being raped by the "royal lecher". The world out of joint – a *marrowless age*, and worthless humans, whose hollow bones are only stuffed with low desires – will not be set right. There is no catharsis. There is, in fact, no plan for revenge. Vindice and his brother, Hippolito, are helped by accidental circumstances to carry it out by placing the duke and his bawd of a son in their hands. Instead of valiantly confronting the villain, Vindice and Hippolito kill Lussurioso while wearing masks and one of them unwittingly whispers the secret of their identity in the victim's ears. The plot comes down to a display of sheer violence, emblematic of society's moral corruption and symptomatic of an age beset by tyranny, yet showing an emerging resistance to it. The satirical element drives the heroic asunder. The hero lacks moral authority, turning into a villain himself, as evil is contagious. Man is impelled by instinctual desires, by lust and appetite, which drive him to destruction: luxury (Lussurioso), ambition (Ambitioso), self-promotion (Spurio).

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The *Changeling*, by **Thomas Middleton** and **William Rowley**, casts a set of characters in a sort of crazy dance in which partners keep changing their identities. A slippery and shape-shifting humanity empties out the traditional meaning of all affectionate or loyal attachments. The bonds between lovers, husband and wife, master and servant, host and guest slip away, the plot of actually exchanging some person for another is allegorized in the disappointing "transfiguration" of a beautiful maid into a scheming and murderous whore.

These plays unfold on double layers of reality and fictionality, revealing themselves as empty theatrical representations, with absolutely no effect on the actual evil in the world:

> Alsemero:
> *All we can do to comfort one another,*
> *To stay a brother's sorrow for another,*
> *To dry a child from the kind father's eyes,*
> *It is no purpsoe, it rather multiplies.*
> (Epilogue to *The Changeling*)

Vindice roleplays himself, he confesses to be acting on Saint Michael's behalf (on Michaelmas), whose name means to be like God. He too makes men, that is, produces versions of himself, changing disguises until he is no longer sure of his own identity.

A departure from cynical display of ruthless violence can be noticed in **John Webster's** *Duchess of Malfi*, in the alternative images of the orderly French monarchy and the centrality of a female protagonist; this she-tragedy provides a moving picture of domestic peace and mutual understanding, as a refuge from the public world of cruel deception and state crime. This is no longer a tragedy of state, promoting power as defined by dynastic lineage. The male leaders of Aragon, secular and religious, who are the duchess's brothers, are proved incestuous, sadistic, crazy. The duchess's feminity is undermining the fabric of high politics, while preparing the way for a new set of values centred on the home, on protective womanhood and genuine affections. She steps out of stereotypical representations. As she explains to Antonio, she is not some figure cast in alabaster kneeling at her husband's tomb. She refuses to fit her body into the empty effigy which authority was imposing upon widows of rank. She gives up on the privileges and constraints defining the aristocracy of the blood, marrying beneath her status, refusing an official ceremony, placing private feelings and values above state politics. Moving is the defiance of a woman who asserts her dignity and spiritual strength despite all vicissitudes. If the stars are shining still, as she is mockingly told, so is she Duchess of Malfi still, unmoved in her decisions, with all the outward pressure her antagonists (some of whom are

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her closest relatives) are putting on her. Moral steadfastness as a categorical imperative receives its first expression.

Webster's plays open decidedly to baroque manner and sensibility, yet they are more engaging in their gloomy vision of life's incongruities and man's failed aspirations. They reach the extremes of tragic horror: intrigue succeeds intrigue, crime follows crime, and a pile of corpses mount up before the spectators' eyes. The baroque taste makes itself felt in the exaggerated passions, corruption, perversion and sadistic elements, in the heterogeneous imagery, somehow symbolical of the unreconciled conflicts inherent in human existence (the Eros/Thanatos association: a love-knot used to strangle, a painting poisoned by a husband, knowing his devoted wife will kiss it). In *The White Devil* (1608), the revenge theme is developed into a plot woven around the Machiavellian type of the Renaissance. Brachiano, the Duke of Padua, devises a scheme to get rid of his faithful wife, Isabella, in order to marry his mistress, Vittoria Corombona, a Venetian lady. In her turn, Vittoria has her elderly husband, Camillo, killed with her brother's assistance. Francisco de Medicis, Duke of Florence, plans to revenge his sister, Isabella, through another Machiavellian plot of treachery and poisoning. As it has often been pointed out, Webster's characters, however, are not perfect signifiers of the Machiavellian moral frame, being more complexly built and steeped in a baroque *chiaroscuro*. They have a double nature – not alternating, as in split personalities, but blurred and run together. Dignified and heroic love, supreme beauty and glamour are mixed in Vittoria with lust and selfishness, a mixture which turns her into something defined by the oxymoronic "white devil" of the title. The aspiration to climb in the world of the Malcontent and the readiness to commit any foul deed or murder to achieve this aim combine in Flamineo, her brother, with a heart-felt melancholy about life's meaninglessness and a feeling close to remorse about his "riotously ill" deeds as a tool villain. Brachiano is ready to make profitable use of his wife's love for him in murdering her, and yet he also shows himself full of military qualities, courageous in combat and capable of affection and tenderness to Vittoria, his second wife. Evil seems to come from outside, as part of social entropy, as a by-product of universal decay. If Hamlet appears finally reconciled with himself and the world, the conflicting elements in Webster's characters are neither polarized nor reconciled. Renaissance dialectic yields to a sense of life's absurdity, lack of meaning. Shakespeare's *King Lear* and *Macbeth* are considered his bleakest tragedies. Yet we know why Macbeth finds life *a tale full of sound and fury, signifying nothing:* because this is what he has made of his. In *King Lear*, a contrary set of values works against Gloucester's complaint that the gods are indifferent or cruel (*Like flies to wanton boys are we to gods; they kill us for their sport*). If there is no sign from above, there is the loyal and devoted Edgar to stage a miracle for him, so as to cure Gloucester's apostasy, and *show the heavens more just.* In Webster, there

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is no clear-cut pattern of character. And yet the modern audience will undoubtedly respond even more fully than Webster's contemporaries to Flamineo's anxious plumbing of the mystery hiding in the human heart, at war with itself:

> *There is nothing of so infinite vexation*
> *As man's own thoughts* (V/6)

Evil is not brought up by the Wheel of Fortune, nor is it gushing to the surface from the depth of a diseased mind. It simply cannot be accounted for. The impurity of Webster's drama brings it in the vicinity of the twentieth-century theatre of the absurd.

Seventeenth-Century Poetry. Jonson's Cavaliers and Donne's Metaphysicals. John Milton and the English Revolution

The awareness that something is different from what it used to be, the awakening of the critical consciousness to cultural transformations was quickened in the nineties by the spirit of Montaigne who had said: I *do not depict being, I depict passage* **(54)**. The interest in the exploration of complex and divided states of mind as the true mirros of human condition *(chaque homme porte la forme entière de l'humaine condition – Montaigne*) was fostered in England by the Puritan emphasis upon the individual consciousness, and by the publication of John Davies's *Nosce Teipsum*. We have heard their echoes in *Hamlet*. But there are also other writers, whose strong intellectual fibre became manifest in the last decade of the century, bearing fruit into the next: **Ben Jonson** and, even to a greater extent, **John Donne**. The bifurcating **poetry** stemming from their genius was known in the Caroline age as the **metaphysical** school of Donne and the **cavalier** school of Jonson. The metaphysical, baroque vein, however, gushed to the surface of an entire century, (down to the Restoration, with Henry Vaughan and Andrew Marvell), while the neoclassical principle reemerged distilled into its purest expression in the Augustan Age. The grouping – pointing to different epistemological frames, political allegiances and styles – is not characterized by a clear-cut line, some poets drawing on both masters (see Abraham Cowley – 1618-1667 –, who defected from Jonson to Donne, or Marvell's handling of classical forms, strengthened by the vigour of metaphysical wit). They certainly have something in common: **the rejection of Petrarchan conceits, mythological décor, and medieval idealism, in favour of concrete imagery, passionate argumentation, subtle dialectic, satirical wit**. In counterdistinction to the shallow pageantry commissioned by the Court, they reveal the reverse of the age: **scholarly refinement, earnest engagement with the controversial – political and religious – issues of England's passage to the modern age**.

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Anyway, the **mixture of religion, learning and poetry, as well as ideological commitment** had become a must at a time when they could mean loss of office, possessions, and even life. King James I might well prefer his hawks and dogs over anything else, yet he showed a cunning worthy of Machiavelli's Realpolitik (and Charles I followed his example, in spite of his pose as patron of the arts) when he extended his influence over the two universities, Cambridge and Oxford, in the establishment of curriculum and the election of Chancellors. It goes without saying that Cromwell, who was the better Machiavelli, had the loyalists expelled during his Protectorate. The Renaissance had taught people that knowledge means effective power. The ideal of a gentleman was now associated with that of an educated man, who was no dreamer. Business and a humanistic education went on well together, as proved by the curriculum of the Inns of Court in London (including music, literature, dancing), from which common lawyers or even future MPs graduated. Writers got involed into issues of education or of religion. Bacon and Milton attacked medieval reminiscences in the university curriculum, Ben Jonson praised the Inns as *the nurseries of humanity and liberty*, and joined the Tew Circle, whose members opposed their enlightened humanism and religious tolerance to the religious hysteria mounting all around, while Crashaw and Cowley lived from Fellowships at colleges, until they were ejected by the Puritans.

The poetic diction drawing on heterogeneous walks of life of the "metaphysical school of Donne" betrays a tendency towards a modern empirical grounding of any human activity (science, literature, philosophy). *The Metaphysical Poets* had the capacity, as T.S. Eliot says in the essay so titled, to *devour any kind of experience*. Even the intense religious poetry generated by the change of values and attitudes is sometimes couched in shocking terms of concrete human activity. The interplay of language and science, politics, law etc. is the most important characteristic of this kind of poetry, based upon "concetti metafisici et ideali". The Italian poet Testi (1593-1646) was the one who first used the term, and the conservative English poet, William Drummond of Hawthornden (1585-1649), the first to criticize such *metaphysical ideas and scholastic quiddities*. The Italian tradition of the witty, conceited poetry, enriched by a didactic-encyclopedic vein, contributed by the Huguenot poet du Bartas (translated in the 9o's) cropped up in the most enduring body of poetry of the age, with the exception of Milton's: **John Donne** (1572-1631), **George Herbert** (1593-1633), **Richard Crashaw** (1613-1649), **Andrew Marvell** (162l-1678), **Thomas Traherne** (1636-1674), **Henry Vaughan** (1622-1695). Paradoxically enough, the response to a strikingly innovative language was a charge of "scholasticism". Frances Austen, after summing up the symptoms of *uncertainty in all spheres of Life*, in *The Language of the Metaphysical Poets*, goes on to a Renaissance epistemological explanation of this baroque imagery of shocking

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associations. Hermeticism and Paracelsus' doctrines of correspondences between planes of being are made responsible for the tendency to *yoke by violence* heterogeneous images (**conceits**). But the poetry of the Donne school, often reflecting on political events or on intimate love scenes of unrepressed sexuality, covers a broader range than the *concern with first principles and the essence of being and knowing.* In a recent essay, William Righter considers that, rather than the Elizabethen world picture, it was the epistemological crisis that allowed of the permanent shift between levels of experience unrelated by any fixed philosophical categories that generated the new codifying principle and signifying practice. *A further implication of such a necessary seeing of everything in terms of everything else is that there is no uninterpreted feature of any component of this scene. There is nothing described in a way that does not imply such relations with other elements that the understanding of it is not conditioned or "placed"* **(55)**. The crossing eyebeams come from a Vitruvian macrocosm/microcsom analogy, which Inigo Jones thought to have identified at Stonehenge, but also through the inverted end of the telescope, darting from books of emblems and religious verse, reflected by the homely *pulley* of a fountain or by a dog's *collar*, flashing into the hermetic sublunary world of matter but also *spent* into *squibs* above the *hydroptique* earth of scientific language.

With all his erudition and reputed taste, **Samuel Johnson** (1709-1784) gave a rather simplifying definition of the Metaphysicals' poetic language, associating it with Marino's mannerism and the characteristically baroque taste for unresolved tension: *But wit, abstracted from its effects upon the hearer, may be more rigorously and philosophically considered as a kind of "discordia concors": a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike (...) The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together; nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons and allusions; their learning instructs and their subtlety surprises, but the reader commonly thinks his improvement dearly bought, and, though he sometimes admires, is seldom pleased.*

This statement appears in *Lives of the Poets, Abraham Cowley*, that is, precisely the poet who, in his *Ode; Of Wit,* does his best to defend the concept of **wit** against "odd Similitude" obtruding and forced upon all things. "Wit" is not reduced to a far-fetched metaphor, an ingenious, shocking comparison, with the linking element deleted. It is a language of *presence*, like that of myth, which goes beyond categorial distinctions:

In a true piece of Wit *all things must be,*
Yet all things there agree.
As in the Ark, joyn'd without force or strife,
All Creatures *dwelt; all Creatures there had* Life.
Or as the Primitive Forms *of all*

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(If we compare great things with small)
Which without Discord *or* Confusion *lie,*
In that strange Mirror *of the* Deitie.

It was not only the return to the classical forms and themes in the Cavaliers that offered a firm ground shoring the artist from the political deluge. The metaphysical poets too were fighting the discord and confusion, they were sensing more deeply not only the religio-poltical but also the epistemological impasse. Nothing out of what was shifting ground remained alien to them: modern cosmology which was beginning to be taught according to Copernican views, the developments in physics, mathematics, astronomy, for which three new chairs were created at Grasham's College in the nineties; the rise of the middle class which increased the importance of the city, the changed view of the sexes (no longer polarized, into virgin and whore, rake and Platonic lover), and the rehabilitation of sexual love in marriage by the Puritans, the increasing modern scepticism, the secularization of belief by the realistic location of the golden age in remote historical ages or in far-off places, uncorrupted by civilization (early Greece, Byzantium, the Bermudas), the grounding of power relationships in the material circumstances of an expanding Empire. They took stock of a vast range of experience, but it was filtered through a *mechanism of sensibility*, which allowed them to achieve a ***fusion of thought and feeling*** **(56).** They did not mean to instruct and to improve, like the later poets of Johnson's Age of Reason; their voices were **voices of concern**. A **new language** was needed in order to express the **complexity** (not the intractable **heterogeneity**) of this experience and to **fuse** (not to **yoke by violence**) its contradictory aspects. Thought and language were welded in a new combustion. **What** to say was as important as **how** to say it. **Abraham Cowley**'s *Ode* is, like Shakespeare's anti-blazon in sonnet CXXX, a *recusatio*, an attempt to reshape poetic diction: neither rhetorical bombast (*Lines as almost crack the stage*), and Elizabethan ornament (*Nor a tall Meta'phor in the Bombast way*), nor mannerism (*odd Similitude*) but the embodiment of life's infinite variety (*A thousand different shapes it bears*). In *Jordan*, George Herbet is even more radical, rejecting ***all*** the trends of the early seventeenth century: the Elizabethan myth-making (*Is all good structure in a winding stair?*), Jones' rules of perspective (*May no lines pass, except they do their duty/ Not to a true, but pained chair?*), the medieval romance of *enchanted groves*, the pastoral of *shepherds, nightingale and spring*, ***and*** mannerist hermeticism *(Must all be veil'd, while he that reads divines/ Catching the sense at two removes?).* The dynamic associations of unlike elements is the functional outward expression of complex mental processes which never reach a dogmatic resolution. Why be forced to opt for one out of the three churches that were competing for supremacy (Donne's

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third *Satire*), when the searching mind is its own end (*doubt wisely, inquire right*)? The intellectualized, difficult aspect of poetic language is there in order to render the intricate meanders of thought and the irresolution of the mind for fear of simplifying the irreducible mystery of the human being:

Of any who decipers best,
What we know not, our selves, can know,
Let him teach me that nothing.

(Donne, *Negative Love*)

The fanciful and the mythological are replaced by the realistic and erudite, the "poetical" style by the rhythms of everyday speech and by the ironic realism traditionally associated with satire.

John Donne, the founding father of the new school, created not just a new manner but a new way of looking at the world. The new frame of mind meant the deliberate overthrowal of all traditional assumptions, forcing the mind to take a fresh view and respond in a new, critical way to the experience of the world, which had edged off the exercise of judgement through custom and repetition. Man's cunning reasoning faculty is demonstrated in the distortions of conventional truths through **paradoxical** exercises, syllogistic distortions and baroque amplification (Donne's *Paradoxes and Problems*). What is it that the deft intellect cannot prove? Even that physical satisfaction is the supreme good, only surpassed by women's inconstancy, for whatever does not move is proved to rust (Gold) or get stale (Water).

Donne's **verse satires** are a check on public current opinion, in the manner of Juvenal. He responds fully to the changing economic structure, increase of absolutism, religious intolerance. As W. Milgate remarks in his *Introduction* to Donne's *Satires* (Clarendon Press, 1967), they are remarkably *contemporaneous and up to date*, portraying a crowded, busy London life, from king to kitchen-maid, from patriotic ape to treacherous officer of state.

The traditional **aubade** (song of lovers at parting in the morning) serves just as well to subvert the position of the king, hinting at his common pastime, hunting, and displacing the sun – as the image of the absolutist monarch – from the centre of the universe, while allowing the lovers' room to assume the central position in the Copernican reversal. From symbol, the sun is degraded to sign (pointing *hours, days, months, which are the rags of time)*. The abrupt opening of great dramatic effectiveness has a shockingly deflating effect on the traditional image *repertoire* of the sun: *Busy old fool, unruly Sun (...) Saucy pedantic wretch.* Poetically "deposed" and inserted into the realistic picture of the busy workaday world set moving in the early morning, the king turns up the last but one (preceding *the country ants*)

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Saucy pedantic wretch, go chide
Late school boys, and sour prentices,
Go tell Court-huntsmen, that the King will ride
Call country ants to harvest offices;

The second stanza reveals the world constructed by the poem as one of visionary essence, abstracted by consciousness from the empirical and called into being or extinguished by an act of will: *I could eclipse and cloud them with a wink.* The poet vacillates between internalized cosmic landscape and outward projection of the contents of his mind, in a manner which anticipates Dylan Thomas. The feel of the age is there however, in the fascination exerted by the Indias *of spice and Mine*, in the conceited troping of the relationship between the lovers as that between the Prince and his State:

She's all states, and all Princes, I
Nothing else is.

The positioning of the two pronouns at the end of the line (with the respective violation of syntax) is extremely ingenious, it suggesting the bracketing of the entire universe in the absolute love union, floating freely in the void of "nothing else". Androcentrism is saved in spite of all the other displacements, yet sexuality is no longer inferior to the Platonic "non-lovers". The language framing woman as a Francis Drake enterprise (the Indian woman discovered by the European conquistador) is resumed at the end of the day, in a similar attempt to defend physical, carnal beauty. *To His Mistress Going to Bed* is an openly erotic elegy, where the Petrarchan blazon representing the woman as the embodiment of virtue and spiritual beauty vanishes into a conceited association of sexual and land conquest and a reification of the woman's body, no more conventionally painted but invited to undress. The polyptoton (words derived from the same root: *man/manned*) renders the sexual act both as a concrete colonial conquest – the extension of the empire of masculinity over womanhood – and as a mythical fulfilment of the Hermaphroditus fantasy (one Man, both male and female):

O my America, my new found land,
My kingdom, safeliest, when by one man manned,
My mine of precious stones, my empery
How blessed am I in thus discovering thee!

Even more shocking is the marriage and sexual imagery employed in describing his relationship to God in a "divine poem" (*Holy Sonnet* XIV):

Yet dearly I love you, and would be loved fain
But am betrothed unto your enemy.

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Divorce me to you, imprison me, for I
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

Although a Dean of St Paul's and the first great pulpit orator, Donne was quite unconventional in his treatment of the religious, both before and after his conversion from Catholicism to the Anglican Church. In the two **elegiac** *Anniversaries* (1611-1612), written in memory of Elizabeth Drury, his patron's young daughter, the decay of religious faith is seen as part of the general collapse of the patriarchal structure of affectionate ties within the social hierarchy or the family (*Prince, subject, father, son are things forgot*). The virtuous female figure was supposed to act like Beatrice, admitting mortals to the world above, and interceding with the Divinity in their favour, or like Cordelia, reminding everybody to love everybody else according to their "bonds". But the epistemological matrices that had given them birth were wearing off. The poet communicates no visionary experience, he is simply making the *anatomy of the world (First Anniversary)*, unable to remember Macbeth's *trafique* and *trade* with the otherworldly:

The art is lost and correspondence too.
For heaven gives little, and the earth takes less,
And man least knows their trade and purposes.
If this commerce twixt heaven and earth were not
Embarr'd, and all this trafique quite forgot,
She, for whose loss we have lamented thus
Would work more fully and powerfully on us.

The ingenuity of reversing the object of his lament (it is those left behind that need salvation) is equalled by the baroque amplification of trading imagery.

Donne's religious experience is also communicated in his **sermons** – whose lofty and inspired language, mingling the sage discourse and exhortation is often quoted – and in the **Holy Sonnets** and **Hymns** written after his wife's death (1617). The **Petrarchan form of the sonnet** is employed in order to create a **drama of salvation**. The octave usually evokes the plight of the fallen human soul "summoned" by sickness and death, while the sestet is a pray for salvation, of psalmic intensity.

Images drawn from various fields of experience breathe new life into a type of discourse which is twice canonical (as fixed form and devotional address). The terms and imagery drawn from natural sciences, geometry, physics and astronomy (*The Canonization, A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning, A Nocturnall upon St Lucies Day*) seem to have been borrowed from the notebooks of the Gresham graduates. *A Nocturnall* offers one of the most typical examples of **baroque amplification** on the image of "nothingness", suggested by his lover's death. Love and separation are polarized as cosmos (hemispheres *without sharp North,*

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without declining West) and chaos (when the lovers part, they grow into *two chaoses*). The vision of universal extinction is overwhelming, sometimes in anticipation of contemporary theories. For instance, the notion of "spent light" *(the sun is spent)*.

The **literary-mindedness** of baroque poetry is apparent in the exploration of conventions and traditional tropes, the poet moving from language to the psychological. Donne imitates Ovid's love elegies (*Amores*), while deflecting the subject from love to a heart-searching meditation on death, loss and perpetuity. In *Elegie: His Picture,* he uses the Petrarchan conceit of the lover's image locked in the heart, to which he opposes his reified image in a miniature portrait, which will last even after their deaths:

Here take my Picture: though I bid farewell,
Thine, in my heart, where my soule dwells, shall dwell.
'Tis like me now, but I dead, t'will be more
When we are shadows both, than 'twas before.

The metaphysicals are writing with an awareness of previous literary modes at the back of their minds. It is the idea of art not as lyric expression but as **contained material form** that distances Donne from Petrarch. The sense of different scales prompted by the invention of the microscope and telescope is answered by the *miniaturizing* technique of the age, which replaces **speculation** on the relationship between macrocosm and microcosm by **artistic forms which reify the idea,** encompassing much in little. The allegory of the ashes which are more valuable if contained in *well-wrought urns* than in *halph-acre tombs* (*The Canonization*) glorifies golden art at the expense of Nature's *brazen work.* Unless experience is *patterned* and *canonized,* dislocated from the empirical and *placed* in a constructed frame (*We'll build in sonnets pretty rooms*), it remains meaningless and is doomed to perish. The reification of ideal relationships (love as a relationship between land and landowner, hemispheres, a pair of compasses) is accompanied by a **literalization** of metaphoric speech. For instance, the ecstasy of love is brought down to a literal-minded apprehension thereof in the etymological sense of *ek-stasis*, gone out (*The Extasie*). The poet imagines that their two souls have gone out of their bodies, which are left like two statues on a tomb, while they are negotiating like two armies in combat. The purified souls achieve a subtler, purer union (*the abler soul*), yet the love relationship is not marred when the souls return to the bodies, because it is through the body that they can take stock of each other. The body is the "book" of the soul, the language of the body leads to spiritual disclosure. The concept of ideas and feelings as "elemented" by the empirical experience of the world is already pointing towards Hobbes in his opposition to Descartes's innate ideas. Coined compounds are meant to render this spiritual fusion: *inter-animated, inter-grafted, inter-assured.*

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Donne's manner and representation of the "fragmented rubbige" of the city, with its divided, alienated crowds, to which he opposes his own private world of a personal love relationship or of religious meditation is pretty consistent. One cannot say the same thing about the Caroline **George Herbert**, whose poetry constructs heterogeneous interpretational frames and framing discourses. Sometimes he sounds like Paracelsus or Shakespeare's Ulysses:

Man is all symetrie,
Full of proportions, one limb to another.
And all to all the world besides:
Each part may call the furthest, brother:
And both with moons and tides.
(Man)

Sometimes it is conflict that is absolutized, the poet needing to be raised from the shifting sands of his quarrelsome thoughts to an understanding of the divine, inflexible law, by the... rope of a pulley *(The Pulley).* The record of Herbert's religious experience is however more central and more comprehensive: the rebellious worldly spirit needs to be subdued to the divine will, the inner flame, flickering low, needs rekindling. A parish priest in Bemerton, he was also a scholar who wrote Latin and Greek verse, religious fervour being coupled with a cunning scholarly mind. His effective imagery draws equally on the Bible and on the homely everyday world. The emblem books, with allegorical pictures, whose moral is explained in a versified gloss, had been the fashion since 1586 (the most famous was Francis Quarles's collection, *Emblemes),* and they had a great impact on Herbert's imagination. In *Love Bade Me Welcome,* containing an anecdote of Love's entertaining of a dusty character, whose guilty conscience hesitates to accept the generous hospitality, is an emblem of the Eucharist (wine and bread transubstantiated into the body and blood of Christ) but also an illustration of the New *Testamental* dispensation for sinners who turn to God, even in the last hour (see the parable of the grape gatherers, who get paid the same whether they come to work early in the morning or late in the day). God's infinite love for erring man, based on an Augustinian concept of grace and of man's response to it, creates the possibility of appeasing conflicts, as God can thus return to himself through man (*Romans*, 8:23-7). A constant pattern of imagination in Herbert will consequently be a transposition of the human and the divine. *Easter-Wings* (printed on the page in the shape of wings) casts into the graphical design of the emblem book the idea of fusion between the physical and the spiritual which the Holy Ghost announcing the Incarnation of the divine made possible. The reverse process, man's aspiration to the divine, engages the poet's metaphysical wit. He picks up on images from everyday life – collar, cage, cable, rope, pulley – to describe both the tension and the mutual drive between the human and the divine.

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They all suggest the iron authority which provokes the individual mind to rebel against the Lord, the broken rhythms and irregularities of syntax being formal correlatives of the iconoclastic mood surging in Herbert's real world as well. The end of *The Collar* takes an unexpected turn, the prison image in which the soul seems to be confined being suddenly revealed as a spiritual bond. God does not call out to man like to a servant but to a child: *Methought I heard one calling, Child ! And I replied, My Lord.*

Andrew Marvell, whose popularity has lately been increasing (particularly as a satirical wit), departs significantly from Donne, in the direction of an impeccable, neoclassical control. John Donne had fused directions as different as Ovidian, Neoplatonic, Petrarchan in his *Songs and Sonnets,* in an unmistakeable baroque manner, with miniaturizing, boxing-in-effects (patterns locked within patterns), telescoping stanza forms (starting from a brief rhyming unit which is then "exploded" into lengthening series of lines, the reverse of the *myse-en-abyme*, which proceeds from a broad pattern to its miniaturized epitome). Andrew Marvell employs classical forms together with classical themes and motifs, which he handles with the orthodoxy, ease and grace of "Ben's tribe", the original element being only the fanciful imagery doing violence to life's categories, and sometimes the political concern which was natural in a writer who was personally involved in the Civil War (Joint Secretary of State with Milton, during Cromwell's Protectorate) and a Member of Parliament after the Restoration. Whereas the nineties had displayed the black-and-white picture of a new genesis – allowing of the coexistence of Sidney and Nashe, of Daniel's Petrarchan and Shakespeare's anti-Petrarchan sonnets, of Thomas Campion's lyrics set to music in Elizabethan fashion, and of Ralegh's intellectual strain in seeking new worlds, or trying *desire*, of Michael Drayton's pastoral *locus classicus* and George Chapman's vivid, realistic description of natural phenomena –, under Charles II England needed to be "pieced up together" from the myriad worlds into which it had been split by the war. The lack of a unified culture mirrored the recent political chaos.

Marvell's fame rests on a restricted number of poems, all of which were first published after his death. The most renowned is the *Ode upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland*, an imitation, in form ***and*** spirit of Horace's Cleopatra *ode*. The English Revolution is seen as a turning point in the country's history, as important as Octavian's victory at Actium, which is Horace's subject. One further analogy is provided by the young leader, suddenly coming to power, who makes a conquest upon royalty. Horace depicts a Cleopatra dignified in her defeat, and so is Charles. Although writing in the *encomium* tradition, Marvell maintains an objective attitude, making the poem sound more like a warning than as servile adulation. The king's heroism is to remind people that the sacrifice should not be wasted. Cromwell should not bid his falcon to go and make another kill, but see to the restoration of peace at home, take advice from Parliament and government, and only make war against foreign enemies.

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The *carpe diem* motif ("seize the day": the exhortation to live and love intensely, since life is brief) is recreated in a syllogistic form, and in a wild display of metaphysical conceits. The model is Catullus in one of his fictional dialogues with his lover. Catullus begins in an abrupt way, urging Lesbia to enjoy life *(Vivamus mea Lesbia atque amemus*), exposing afterwards, in a sententious tone, his premises concerning life which motivate his advice. The lines are often quoted: *Nobis cum semel brevis lux/ Nox est perpetua una dormienda* (As soon as our brief life is over, we must sleep an endless night). In order to lend his exhortation more emphasis, Marvel chooses the passionate ratiocination of a logical sequence. He starts from the first premise: **suppose** the lovers could expand infinitely into time so that their lives might go back to the Flood, or in space, covering both hemispheres, then would his lover's reluctance be justified. **But** – second premise – that is not possible, their young bodies will soon lie entombed and know decay which will make her "long preserved virginity" senseless. The conclusion, **therefore,** is: *let us sport us while we may.* The ingenuity of the hyperbole *(I would/ Love you ten years before the Flood:/ And you should if you please refuse/ Till the Conversion of the* Jews*)* consorts with other shocking elements, for instance, the energy of colloquial speech, as if the couple were engaged in some trivial negotiations: *For Lady, you deserve this State;/ Nor would I love at lower rate.* The blazon (description of the lady from head to foot) pattern is tremendously transformed into an anatomy of the woman's body, whose fragments are scattered in the infinite river of time, like Orpheus's dismembered body:

An hundred years should go to praise
Thine Eyes, and on thy Forehead Gaze.
Two hundred to adore each Breast:
But thirty thousand to the rest.
An Age at least to every part,
And the last Age should know thy heart.

The second part of the poem states the grim truth about man's mortality, through a close-up technique, or rather by looking through the other end of the telescope, considering the camera was not available. The scale-shifting device guides the reader's gaze from *winged Chariot* and *desarts of vast eternity* to *the marble vault (...) the grave's fine and private place,* only sheltering decay.

The Definition of Love shows Marvell's mind opening up to the new scientific spirit, which was breaking out in various branches of science, and whose language he assimilates into that of poetry. Love is defined by **Renaissance** analogy with the **modern** matter of chemistry, astronomy, geometry:

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As Lines so Loves *oblique may well*
Themselves in every Angle greet:
But ours so truly Parallel
Though infinite can never meet.

The metaphysical poets turn away from the disappointing reality, taking refuge into a world of harmony, as, in it, the relationship between sign and neaning is stable and full. This can happen in a type of poetry in which the image enacts the sense, like ancient hieroglyphs and in the spirit of the Hebrew mystique of letters and figures. This kind of poetry belongs to the emblem tradition. An emblem poem consists of a text, an image, and a quotation from some authoritative text, all these modes of signification treating the same theme. This type of poetry engages the new perspective techniques in the visual arts. Linear perspective is a mirror-like type of reflection. But no other individual can look at another fellow from the same perspective. That is why, in order to reach the central viewing position, which belongs to God, the poet provides a triple perspective on his subject. Science and religion are called upon to produce some of the best examples of devotional poetry in the language.

Thomas Traherne's *Solitude*, treating of the impossibility of enjoying spiritual joy from the contemplation of things in the world, reminds us of Christ's body being crucified in order for the soul to know the true beatific vision of reunion with God. The poem has the shape of a cross. Devotional poetry often plays upon the patristic trope of the spirit of Christ locked up in the heart of man (Petrarch had developed herefrom the conceit of one's image locked in the lover's heart). In the metaphysical poems, there is a perfect reciprocity between God and man. In *The Temple* or *Sion*, George Herbert is troping on the heart as an altar for Christ.

In a poem from *Commentaries on Heaven*, Thomas Traherne counterpoises perspective and linear viewing. God's central vision embraces all things at once, whereas man can only see one side at a time, before or behind. It is only through faith that man can assume God's all-encompassing vision. In this way, God is seen in perspective as if he were a living tomb, a body and alive. A very daring trope, playing upon the etymological meaning of **sema** as sign for a tomb, a buried body. It is the language of poetry that can reveal God to us.

In his *Canticle*, **Francis Quarles** appropriates the most authoritative model of the reciprocity between God and believer allegorized as the double address of two lovers in *The Canticle of Canticles*, or *Solomon's Song*. The epigraph reads: "My beloved is mine, and I am his; He feedeth among the Lillies". The poem is addressing God in the Biblical manner, of esoteric symbolism pasted on humble images of domesticity:

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He is my Altar; I, his Holy Place;
I am his Guest; and he, my living Food
I'm his by Penitence; He, mine by Grace;
I'm his, by Purchase; He is mine, by Blood;
He's my supporting Elm; and I, his Vine:
Thus I my Best-Beloved's am; Thus He is mine

A number of poets, mainly loyal royalists, were known under the generic "**tribe of Ben**". Unlike the metaphysicals, focused on inwardness, on individualistic concerns with love and religion, the model set up by Ben Jonson was that of the poet playing a major role in the kingdom, emulating in this way Horace, who had acted as an authoritative legislator during the most flourishing period of Roman culture

As a poet, **Ben Jonson** was less innovative than in drama, but he effected a fortunate change in the literary taste and manner, promoting an **intellectual and formal discipline through the handling of codified lyric forms and formulaic imagery**, which tempered the idealizing Elizabethan conceits of the Petrarchan school and the shallowness of the brief lyrics composed in general for music. Jonson and his "tribe", the Caroline **Cavalier** poets (**Robert Herrick**, 1591-1674, **Thomas Carew**, 1594-1640, **John Suckling**, 1609-1642, **Richard Lovelace**, 1618-1656), followed the classical principles:

a) **clarity, cohesion, grace, unity and proportion.**

Jonson's poetry is still attuned to the Elizabethan taste for short lyrics (**epigram, epitaph, the landscape poem, epistle, dirge, the imaginary dialogue with the lover** in the manner of Catullus, **ode**) and the myth of art's immortality and superiority over nature. Although man is not growing *like a tree/ In bulk* or *standing long an Oak, three hundred years*, he stands far above Nature by opposing proportionate forms to its wild shapes and by creating perfect beauty, based on norms, and measure (*Proportion*).

In small proportions, we just beautie see:
And in short measures, life may perfect be

b) **The artist's responsibility for ensuring immortal glory for worthy contemporaries or important events**. In An *Epistle to Lady Rutland,* Jonson praises not only the lady but also himself and the inestimable service he is rendering her, since even if aristocratic blood, natural beauty and riches be a good thing, the mothers' wombs are also tombs for those who have no Muse to make them famous. Poetry acquires a social dimension, as well as a political one. The **cavalier trinity** – beauty, love and loyal honour – show human destiny geared to

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an ideal higher than the individual. The poets' loyalty to the king had an outward correlative in the model courtier: good looks, witty style, of the sententious kind, several phrases having become proverbial It is particularly Ben Jonson who dedicates himself to the praise of public figures in odes, dirge, epitaphs, landscape poems. To *Penshurst*, the famed country house of the Sidneys, he dedicates an **Ekphrasis** (description of art woks, in general), in which the contemplation of the architectural beauty and setting of the house leads to reflections on past achievements and to historical associations. *To Lucasta On going to the Wars* by **Richard Lovelace** mingles love and politics, placing the martial above the idealist lover and associating, in a striking way, the trinity of Love, War, and Death. He goes away *from the nunnery of* (her) *chaste breast,* because even love is meaningless, unless galvanized by some higher social commitment: Wit and paradox are called upon to build the Cavalier code.

True; a new Mistress now I chase,
The first Foe in the field;
And with a stronger Faith embrace
A Sword, a Horse, a shield.

Yet this Inconstancy is such,
As you too shall adore;
I could not love thee (Dear) so much
Lov'd I not honour more.

To Althea from Prison, by the same poet, develops another Cavalier convention, of the prison philosopher (after the noble precedent of Boethius) and of the quiet hermitage of the mind. The reality of the *Thames*, however, is as present as ever, as well as the contingency of *Majesty* and *King*.

Similar to the *Althea* poem is the *Grasshopper,* as it too thematises the frustration of the loyalist defeated by Puritans. The **construction of the cavalier** is completed through the refusal to compromise, like the Compounders – those who gave away their lands almost for nothing, declaring that they had been wrong and promising never to wear arms in return for a peaceful life under Cromwell. Like the grasshopper, looking forward to the coming summer, while freezing in winter, Lovelace recommends endurance, because only "he who wants himself is poor indeed". A poem looking forward to Kipling's *If....*

c) **The cult of classical forms, themes and motifs (57).**

What a difference they make, however, to the metaphysicals' handling of them! See, for instance, the **carpe diem** motif in **Robert Herrick's** *To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time,* almost a paraphrase of Ronsard*'s Mignon, allons voir si la rose (telle fleur ne dure que du matin jusques au soir):*

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Gather ye rose-buds while ye may,
Old time is still a-flying
And this same flower that smiles today,
Tomorrow will be dying.

Passion is controlled by sophisticated gallantry, poise and grace, by structured symmetry, urbanity of tone and smooth variations of rhythm.

Herrick's **priamel** (introducing the subject of a literary work) – the *Argument* of *The Hesperides* – goes through such a wide range of themes (from *Bridal-cakes* to mythology of ancient Britain and *Amber-Greece* alike) that it gives an impression of *cleanly-wantonness,* unless we are familiar with the classical convention which does mean thematic survey and coming to a subject of ultimate interest in the end (in his case, salvation of the soul). What does a Cavalier make of a **blazon** ? Herrick's use of the convention shows something of Van Dyck's delight in details of fashionable dress. The Epicurean love of luxury, of women and nature as *décor* or as lessons in the brevity of life inscribed in the classical models sounds genuine, yet with few modulations. The only revolutionary aspect is the objectification of the woman, which goes even further in the transfer of her moral traits to the sparse fragments of her attire. Her garments assume a strange animation, which makes the woman's individuality and personality vanish altogether:

A lawn about the shoulders thrown
Into a fine distraction,
An erring lace, which here and there
Enthrawls the crimson stomacher,
A cuff neglectful, and thereby
Ribbands to flow confusedly,
A winning wave (deserving note)
In the tempestuous petticoat,
A careless shoe-string, in whose tie
I see a wild civility....

(Delight in Disorder)

The "Age of Milton" is the age of the English Revolution, stretching from the thirties to the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660. The last "squib" of the Elizabethan culture was also the prophet of a new spirit, whose true greatness was recognized as affined in the Europe of the French Revolution and of Romanticism. Critical opinion about John Milton ranges from *magniloquence, the deliberate exploitation of the possibilities of magnificence in language* **(58)** to a status comparable to that of Shakespeare. In an age of absolutism, ill-balanced by

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an equally rigid fanaticism, his voice gathered strength and depth from the mingled strands of a metaphysical quest and political commitment.

The detractors of English empiricism and practical-mindedness see the beginning of the Civil War as a monotonous argument in Parliament over a nobleman's obligation to pay a five-pound tax to the king, comparing it to the French Revolution, where the combatants were delivering idealistic speeches, thundering on either side of the barricade and engaging in heroic street action. The truth about the English Revolution is much more complex. It originated not in a legal but a religious controversy, aggravated by the King's absolutist tendencies. The circumstance of Charles being married to a Catholic – Henrietta Maria of France – was such as to make Puritans suspicious of attempts, on the part of the Court, to guide the Church of England into a pre-Reformation direction. Such biases were not completely ungrounded: The King and his closest adviser, William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury, seemed to favour the more tolerant Arminian minority among the clergy, while spicing Church ceremonial with ingredients of a Roman flavour: stained glass, candlesticks and organs, as well as the ingenious rhetoric of Lancelot Andrewes' sermons and erudite "language of quotations". "Break of Sabbath" with the bishop's dispensation for certain sports to be played after work on Sundays was perceived by Puritans, in their morose Calvinism, as the Devil's work. From 1629 until 1640 Charles ruled England without a Parliament, gathering his taxes as he well pleased. In 1639 he took an army of 20,000 men to suppress the Scottish Covenanters, who resisted the forced introduction of bishops replacing the presbyters or elders (the ministers of a Protestant sect, founded in 1555 by the Scottish reformer John Knox, that had departed from the Church of England). After the execution of the king, in 1649, Cromwell's eleven-year Protectorate instituted a reign of political terror. Puritans proceeded to closing down the theatres, considering them to be places of sin and corruption; fellows suspected of loyalist leanings were expelled from universities, other royalists lost their properties, being obliged to sell them by the Parliament's heavy taxation, fines and sequestration (or sometimes having them confiscated for no better surrogate reason). The mass of London merchants, Parliamentarian officials, army officers, or country gentry and well-off yeomen who afforded to buy that land helped change the balance of power in favour of the middle class. An output of a body of literature catering for the tastes of the rising bourgeoisie was composed after the Restoration alongside the aftermath of the Civil War. The War's "terminal echo" is heard in idioms as different as **John Bunyan's** reinscription of *Everyman (A Pilgrim's Progress)* in a Puritanic spirit and in **Samuel Butler**'s aristocratic parody of it. As for **John Milton**, his is the triumphant logos of the failed political attempt.

Any birth is difficult, and that of the modern world, none the less so. The intricate pattern of the seventeenth century is a proof thereof. The history of

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English Literature displays periods of unity, of epistemological and aesthetic coherence, while others resemble a "mixing pot" of heterogeneous elements. It so happens that Nashe may be discussed in the context of "Jacobean fiction", while Bunyan and Butler are sometimes included in histories of the Restoration. Our reasons in contextualizing them with Milton are mainly formal. In *Palimpsestes. La littérature au second degré* (Editions du Seuil, 1982), Gerrad Genette distinguishes between various parodic modes, among which: the deflating treatment of some serious subject – **burlesque** – and the treatment of banal events in grand style – **satirical pastiche.** We find Butler's *Hudibras* characteristic of the baroque *burlesque* or *travesty (*see Scarron's *Travestied Virgil*) in its reversal of the values inscribed in the Spenserian courtly epic, whereas the Augustan mock-heroic (Pope's *Rape of the Lock*) is an ironic imitation of grand style. The former degrades content, engaging the Renaissance disputes on different sets of values, while the latter takes delight in a formal *pastiche*, an exercise in style common among neoclassic writers.

Born into a well-to-do London family and educated at Cambridge, John Milton was an accomplished classicist by the time he got his B.A. (1629). His early poems, in Latin and English, evolve from a "conceited" rhetoric towards neoclassic concentration, rationality, restraint, the bulk of his works drawing together the separate strands of a literary tradition spanning an entire century. *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity*, occasioned by his twenty-first birthday, brimming full with the exuberance of the Italianate conceits, encompasses much in little by employing, in an occasional poem, the revelatory mode of the epic: the juxtaposition of the birth of Christ and two other supreme events, Creation and the Judgement Day. The next two poems, conceived as companion pieces, *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso,* are more neoclassical in their formal pattern of parallel and contrast. The former describes the bucolic joys of life in the country, while the latter exalts the "hermitage of the mind": the secluded life devoted to study and contemplation. The harmonious ring of the rhyming couplets anticipates the favourite rhythm of the coming Augustan Age. Antoher early work is *Comus*, a masque, recalling the idealism of Dante and Petrarch in the defence of the *sun-clad power* of personified chastity against the ribaldry of the merry-making God.

Lycidas, a pastoral elegy on the death of Edward King, a Cambridge acquaintance, "drowned on his passage from Chester to the Irish sea", possibly suggests a shift from his fancy's youthful wanderings in ancient lands towards the engaging issues of the political confrontation. The classical pattern is maintained close to the end, when, through a distancing device, engaging both voice (no longer that of the shepherd lamenting the death of Lycidas in the pastoral mode) and the metrical scheme of the last eight lines, a change is intimated in the shepherd's turn towards the "fresh Woods and Pastures New" of a present more

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challenging than the decorative pastoral. The model is not only Theocritus but also Virgil's reflections, in his *Fifth Eclogue* (the death of Daphnis), on the meaning of a good life. Should a man abandon himself to sensuous delight or should he abstain and give himself to learning and work for the public good ? Lycidas had chosen virtue, yet what was the good of it now that he was dead ? Divine justice (*theodike*, theodicy) was for the first time questioned by Milton. The structural elements of the lament **(59)** make up a well-defined design in the mass of strikingly majestic and original metaphoric visions (the Evening star sloping "the westering wheel" of Heavens).

– the ***list of mourners*** is recruited from the pastoral pageantry: nymphs, satyrs, shepherds, the pagan gods

– the ***praise of the deceased.*** Lycidas is transposed into the pastoral world as a shepherd skilled in song:

Who would not sing for Lycidas ? he well knew
Himself to sing, and build the lofty rhyme.
He must not flote upon his watery bear
Unwept, and welter to the parching wind,
Without the meed of some melodious tear.

– ***contrast of past and present:*** *But O the heavy change, now thou art gone.*

– ***the image of the disfigurement***, Lycidas being compared to the dismembered Orpheus:

What could the Muse herself that Orpheus bore,
Whom Universal nature did lament,
When by the rout that made the hideous roar,
His goary visage down the stream was sent,
Down the swift Hebrus *to the* Lesbian *shore.*

– ***the complaint***: *What boots it ?* What is the good of choosing right if only the unworthy survive ?

Alas ! What boots it with uncessant care
To tend the homely slighted Shepherds trade,
And strictly meditate the thankless Muse,
Were it not better done as others use,
To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,
Or with the tangles of Neaera's Hair ?

– ***the consolatio:*** those who choose virtue (instead of sporting with the nymphs) are granted immortality, becoming the good, protecting Genius of the

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place. Milton makes a Christian transposition, by showing Lycidas both as Genius of the place and as a soul entertained after death by the company of saints, locked into the pattern of Christ's death and resurrection:

> *So* Lycidas *sunk low, but mounted high,*
> *Through the deer might of him that walk'd the waves*;

Like some virtuous Lycidas, Milton dedicates most of the next twenty years to the public weal and the defence of liberty on many fronts, resting content with occasional sonnets on public men and events. The revolution engaged all his resources as a pamphleteer and public orator in the reform of church and society. In 1640 he returned from a fifteen-month continental tour spent mainly in Italy, where he had met Galileo, who, in Milton's own words, had grown *old a prisoner to the Inquisition for thinking in astronomy otherwise than the Franciscan and Dominican licensers thought.* In 1641-42 Milton wrote five pamphlets against episcopacy, blaming bishops for persecuting the Protestants *no slacker than the Pope would have done.* Within four years episcopacy was abolished in England, an event upon which Milton made the following comment eight years later: *When the bishops, at whom every man aimed his arrow, had at length fallen, and we were now at leisure, as far as they were concerned, I began to turn my thoughts to other subjects; to consider in what way I could contribute to the progress of real and substantial liberty; which is to be sought for not from without, but within, and is to be obtained principally not by fighting, but by the just regulation and by the proper conduct of life (1654).*

The need for internal reformation took care of itself after the Restoration, as the message of *Paradise Lost*, the greatest epic in the language. The forties and fifties were a time for effective involvement in the martial field of politics. In 1644, the year of the first decisive battle of the war, when Cromwell defeated the royalist troops at Marston moor, Milton published one of his most famous pamphlets. *Areopagitica* (Areios-pagos: the judicial court on Mars's hill) attacks a parliamentary decision of the previous year to restrict the freedom of the press, which Milton compares to the arbitrary and often criminal rule of the Inquisition: *That freedom of writing should be restricted by a discipline imitated from the Prelates, and learnt by them from the Inquisition to shut us up all again into the breast of a licenser, must needs give cause of doubt and discouragement to all learned and religious men. He who kills a man*, he goes on, *kills a reasonable creature, but he who destroys a good book kills reason itself, the lifeblood of a master spirit, an immortality rather than a life.*

Four pamphlets advocating the liberalization of the divorce laws were published in 1643 and 1645. In 1649, two weeks before the King's execution, he justified it in *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, claiming that Charles had

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betrayed the trust put in him by the people. Shortly after the proclamation of the Commonwealth in 1649, Milton was appointed Secretary of Foreign Tongues to the Council of State (corresponding today to the Foreign Affairs Secretary), a diplomatic post which he held for over ten years, even though by 1652 he had probably become totally blind because of a tumour of the pituitary gland. The disunity of the radicals, the ambition of the generals ruined Milton's illusions which had made him an ally of the revolutionary forces. By 1657 Cromwell had become king in anything but name, even in appointing his son as his heir to the head of the State. He did not turn up to be much good, and in 1660 the lawful royal heir exiled to France returned in the midst of public acclaim to London. Milton was opposed to rule by any single person, be that a "King" or a "Lord Protector", and his views on the subject were expounded in his last major pamphlet published on the eve of the Restoration in 1660. He had shared the Puritans' belief in the English being the chosen nation, because it had been an Englishman, John Wycliffe (1320-84), who had begun the Reformation in England, wherefrom it had spread to Europe – an opinion expressed in his 1644 address to Parliament. But the English had not proved worthy to answer the call of Providence. They had failed in their attempt at setting up a free commonwealth, they had rushed back to the captivity *from whence* (God) *freed us*. The pessimistic view of the "election" fiction, titled *The Readie and Easie Way to Establish a free Commonwealth,* earned him one month's imprisonment by order of the new Parliament, at the end of which he was released instead of being hanged as it was expected. A relative apparently intervened in his favour, but the explanation may also have been the King's tact in sparing a great public figure. In any event, Charles had not come to England hoisting the banner of a bloody *vendetta.* He showed himself diplomatic and tolerant, allowing for the country's wounds to heal. The outcome of this political decision was the birth of a world classic, as Milton could continue his work on *Paradise Lost,* the greatest epic in the language, which came out in 1667.

The poem raises the question of theodicy: if God is omnipotent, why did He not prevent the fall ? Is He the origin of evil as well? Milton does God justice by recourse to the ancient Christian doctrine of the Fortunate Fall, which claims that the loss of Paradise was in certain respects a good thing for the human race: it enabled man to know good by the emergence of evil, and, in the Augustinian-Armenian version, to exercise his free will. Here is Milton himself in *Areopagitica*: *It was from out the rind of an apple tasted, that the knowledge of good and evil as two twins cleaving together leapt forth into the world. And perhaps this is the doom which Adam fell into of knowing good and evil, that is to say, of knowing good by evil. As therefore the state of man now is; what wisdom can there be to choose, what continence to forbear without the knowledge of evil ? He that can apprehend and consider vice with all her baits and seeming pleasures, and yet abstain, and yet distinguish, and yet prefer that which is truly*

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better, he is the true warfaring Christian. I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreath'd, that never sallies out and sees her adversary (...) that which purifies us in trial is by what is contrary.

An epic poem mirrors a society's ideal of meaningful human action, embodied in the hero. All poets who came after Homer opposed their own ideas of heroism, summing up their contemporaries' set of values. Virgil, in his *Aeneid*, contrasts the old-type hero, Turnus, whose love of battle and **personal** glory proves destructive, with his new hero, Aeneas, more dedicated to **social** values, characteristic of the more developed societies: devotion to his father, obeyance to gods, sacrifice of personal desire for the good of his people. Milton, making archangel Michael his spokesman, criticizes Homeric heroism as a primitive quest of physical force („might"), proposing a new type of hero, who wins a battle against his own passionate and irrational heart, showing *a better fortitude/ Of Patience and heroic martyrdom*. However, even if not deliberately, he has implanted a certain sort of heroism also in his Satan, the ambitious and individualistic Turnus of *Paradise Lost*, in whom the Romantics of the age of revolutions and wars of independence did not fail to recognize ***their*** idea of a hero. The two plots construct the fall – of Satan from heaven and of Adam from Eden – in two different narrative structures. The former is cast in the pagan tradition of dangerous journeys, personal combat, description of marvellous buildings, speeches before the army: Satan, who is also a Faustian tragic hero, defeated by God because His "might ", the thunder, was greater, as well as a villain-hero and a malcontent of Websterian extract, delivers an inflaming speech before his army of fallen angels, plans with them the construction of Pandemonium, plots with them to make it even with his Enemy by destroying his creation – the Edenic couple God was so proud of – in a parody of the revenge tragedy, undertakes a long and dangerous journey to Earth, returns like a mock Odysseus, Aeneas, or Beowulf to Hell, where he sets free Sin and Death (a parody of Jesus harrowing hell and ***defeating*** Sin and Death).

The **heroic** mode – the epic of wrath and strife – is replaced, in the Adam and Eve plot, by the **pastoral** and the **tragic** literary modes. The pastoral tells the story of the Edenic couple before the fall. Adam's aubade, asking his *fairest, latest found espoused* to awake, describes an idyllic nature, not immobile and "trimmed", like a neoclassical landscape, but vital, stirring with life in the early morning, in blessed communion with man: *the fresh fields call us, let's go and see how spring tends our plants, how blows the citron grove, how drops the myrrh, and what the balmy reed...*, etc. To Adam it was given to name the animals (a natural, not a conventional language, as by naming he also understood their nature), and to Eve, the flowers. Ophelia and Perdita, naming flowers and explaining their meanings, ought to have been part of a fiction understood by

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everybody. If nature is alive with will and intent, in greater degree will Adam's creation be not just a question of "clay" and "breath", but one of awakening consciousness. The self-reflexive inquiry into man's origins and "raison d'être" would become a commonplace among the Romantics:

My self I then perused, and limb by limb surveyed...
But who I was, or how, or from what cause
Knew not.

The sight of the animals paired two by two works a Platonic awakening to the need for companionship, which would have given Adam no satisfaction if it had been lust, instead of "rational delight", spiritual companionship.

The tragical pattern encompasses the fall: ***the error of judgement,*** induced by Satan, that, as the apple tree was created by God, it has to be good, like all his other works; the fall (***hubris***, breach of law), the ***anagnorisis***, the recognition of truth and the **cathartic** effect of suffering and repentance. Eve, like Sidney's magnanimous heroes in his courtesy book, **Arcadia**, takes all the sin upon herself, praying that Adam be forgiven and she alone be punished. Raphael pits "heavenly love" (uniting with a fit soul) against "carnal pleasure", of the kind stirring in beasts. However it is not the flesh that is guilty; the fall occurs within the mind. The peaceful minds of Adam and Eve are seized with "high passions, anger, hate, mistrust, suspicion". Passions have conquered reason. The way to redemption is revealed by Michael as the discovery of a "paradise within", earned through faith, virtue, patience, temperance, and love:

.... then will thou not be loath
To leave this Paradise, but shall possess
A paradise within, happier far.

Satan's fall from heaven is also more devastating in the mind than in the cosmic dive into the abyss. He calls it "darkness visible", that is, the mind's self - realization of being evil.

The intricate structure of the twelve books is the effect of combining the **pattern of the heroic epic**, which is **non-linear and episodic**, with on-going action (the episodes of Books I-IV and IX-X: the fall of Satan, the council of the demons, life in Hell, God's parliament in Heaven, Satan's departure for Eden, Adam and Eve in the Garden, the temptation of Eve and the fall of Adam through Eve), interrupted by narrative flashbacks and anticipations (see the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid*), and the **teleological design of the Biblical script,** from Genesis to the Last Judgement. Gabriel's narration (Books V-VIII) looks back to events previous to man's fall but originating it (the war in heaven, and Satan's fall), while Michael's prophecy of man's suffering on earth and eventual redemption through

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Christ (Books XI-XII) foreshadows mankind's historical progress and the eschatological event at the end of time. The interlocking structures, the analogous or repeat-situations provide the third structuring principle, working against the former two and redeploying the mythical plot along the *hic and ubique* of a drama of cognitive and moral enlightenment. The events and the characters are presented *sub specie aeternitatis*.

The prophecy of the future course of history was known from the *Aeneid*, but the use of blank verse instead of rhyme follows Howard's bold innovation. Milton created a flexible metre, the number of stresses varying from four to six or more, the caesural pauses shifting constantly. The opening is an *invocation to the Muse*, which is here the Holy Spirit of God that inspired Moses, the first Shepherd-poet. Apparently whatever seventeenth-century poets touched turned into pastoral. The image of Creation is repeatedly laid in the abyss, in a baroque play of mirrors: the creation of the poem, Moses telling *the story* of the creation of the world to the "chosen seed", God creating the world through the Holy Ghost, *Dove-like... brooding on the vast Abyss*, the restoration of creation in Christ. The opening keeps close to the model not only in the *invocation*, but also in *the outline of the action*, set against a background of maximum expansion, in space and time, also of appeal to the Romantics, through *the extended comparisons and similes*:

Of Man's first disobedience, and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste
Brought death into the World, and all our woe,
With loss of Eden, till one great Man
Restore us, and regain the blissful seat,
Sing, heavenly muse, that, on the secret top
Of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire
That shepherd who first taught the chosen seed
In the beginning how the heavens and earth
Rose out of Chaos;

But Milton does not speak only one language (of *magniloquence*) but several. Satan's rebellion against God's coronation of his son sounds very close to the topical oratory of *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* **(60):**

Will ye submit your necks, and choose to bend
The supple knee ? Ye will not, if I trust
To know ye right, or if ye know your selves
Natives and sons of heaven possessed before
By none, and if not equal all, yet free

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It appears that something of Milton passed into Satan, whose ambiguous figure – fallen yet not completely robbed of his former angelic splendour, punished yet no humiliated, broken yet not defeated – fascinated the Romantics. The doctrine of "free-will", on which his contemporaries were greatly divided, is rendered into a paradoxical, conceited language, coming from God in Book III:

They trespass, authors to themsleves in all
Both what they judge and what they choose; for so
I formed them free, and free they must remain,
Till they enthrall themselves: I else must change
Their nature, and revoke the high degree
Unchangeable, eternal, which ordained
Their freedom, they themselves ordained their fall.

As for the issue of "election" and "predestination", more palatable to the Puritans, *Samson Agonistes* thematizes them in the language of a lyrical drama (1671) whose hero, after failing his historical mission, allowing himself, like Adam, to be tempted, rises again, finally bringing destruction upon his people's foes.

Humming with the voices of a century's mixed traditions, Milton's linguistic genius let forth the inner workings of a great spirit.

John Bunyan knew only the missionary ardour, not also the feel of effective power in the great religious and political divide of the century, being even imprisoned several times between 1660-1666 and only for unlicensed preaching. He speaks a plain, sincere language, figuring a medieval allegory, in a Puritanic version, with emphasis upon the individual consciousness of the believer. The **cautionary allegory** is doubled by a **spiritual biography**, understandable in the light of the Calvinist emphasis upon man's personal relation to God. The author also takes stock of a woman's position in the religious community. Christian's journey from the City of Destruction to salvation and Heaven in the *Pilgrim's Progress* has a corollary in another archetypal allegory: man's life as a war between good and evil (*The Holy War*).

Samuel Butler's *Hudibras* is another dialogical piece of literature, *which cannot be understood without glancing back to* ***The Faerie Queene*** **(61).** This is Ian Jack's complete comment on the genesis of Bultler's mock-heroic: *Butler (1612-80) took the name of his hero from Spenser, (...)* ***The Faerie Queene****. In Book II, which is concerned with Temperaunce, Sir Guyon reaches a castle inhabited by three sisters. The youngest loves pleasure, the second moderation, while the third is a sour hater of all delights. Sir Hudibras, who is contrasted with Sans-loy, the wooer of the younger sister, makes his suit to the eldest. In a stanza which throws a great deal of light on Hudibras (1662-77), he is described as "an hard man".*

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Yet not so good of deeds, as great of name,
Since errant armes to sew he first began;
More huge in strength, then wise in workes he was,
And reason with fool hardize over ran;
Sterne melancholy did his courage pas,
And was for terrour more, armd in shyning bras.

Butler's Hudibras resembles Spenser's in being more famous than he deserves, in having more strength than wisdom, and in being inspired less by courage than by "melancholy" (in this context, madness).

He also resembles Spenser's Hudibras in the contrast between his outward varnish of a medieval warrior and the truth of his cowardly nature, which he deliberately tries to conceal, an inequality between inwardness and outwardness that justifies the schizophrenic language of the poem. In the manner of Spenser, this is a moral allegory and the hero embodies a certain trait of character. This is not one of the twelve Cardinal Virtues but one of the cardinal vices: ***hypocrisy***. The satirical portrait of the Puritanic spirit delighted the aristocracy of the Restoration, but Butler's satire is broader, various other social orders, and the Royal Society itself being presented as afflicted with pedantry. All the elements of the poem fall into pattern, Butler's reputation being constantly increasing in our literary-minded age. The opening is a piece of virtuosity in the richness of its allusiveness:

Sir Hudibras *his passing worth,*
The manner how he sally's forth;
His Arms and Equipage are shown;
His Horse's Vertues, and his own.

„Passing worth" is ambiguous. It may mean shallow, perishable, unsubstantial, or have a concrete reference: moving forth, riding forth. The allegorical manner is thus implicitly defined (concrete and symbolical level), as well as the degradation of "worth", value, into "manner". The third line, with its Virgilian ring (*the arms and the man,* in the English version hendiadys*)*, displaces the fits of bravery on a heroic journey by a modish pastime (taking a drive in a fashionable carriage), while the fourth discloses the model framing the action of the poem: not *The Aeneid* but *Don Quixote*. The reader has the feeling of walking over a familiarly patterned floor, with some tiles in place and others hiding empty slots, or flying an airplane which takes unexpected and precipitous nosedives. The rhetorical strategy of deflation is **bathos** or **anticlimax**, to which Butler adds a deep-cutting irony, playing about the character from the beginning to the end of the poem. By asserting one thing and meaning another (literal encomium and satirical understatement), the poet points to the only acceptable (honest) form of hypocrisy: rhetoric.

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Late Renaissance

The New Humanism of the late 1590s had suffered a loss of confidence and optimism in comparison to the earlier forms of humanism. The alliance of Stoicism with Pyrrhonism (claiming that the truth about past history is unretrievable), Scepticism (ethical latitudinarianism and suspended judgements about truth), and Tacitism (political disenchantment with the "arcana imperii", or the corruption and secrets of state under Tiberius) forced the sensitive minds of the earlier half of the next century back on themselves, seeking in an ideal of self-perfection what a troubled society was denying them. While the nation's political life seemed to get out of control, Self-Policy was still given a chance with the high-minded, scholarly and mannered writers of the Jacobean and Caroline Age. **Robert Burton's** *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) is an example of Renaissance *genus universum*: a cultural manifold, a generic hybrid, a thesaurus of learned sources and references.

Religio Medici, a book of the early forties by Sir **Thomas Browne**, is a meditation on the ultimate things in the refined, stylized, Latinate and sententious manner borrowed from Tacitus. It is also a bridge between the encyclopaedic and esoteric tradition of the sixteenth-century schools of Padua and Ferrara (**62**) and the critical and rationalistic spirit of the on-setting neoclassic age. The verbal icons of kings modelled after Xenophon's *Kyrupaideia*, which had spawned the previous century, are not missing, yet they seem out of tune with the iconoclastic spirit of a revolutionary age. King James's 1598 *Basilicon Doron* was dedicated to Prince Henry, the heir apparent who died young, while Charles I was attributed an *Eikon Basilike*, published in the year of his execution. The theocratic view of kingship in the former is aggravated by the Calvinist belief in election: God "made you a little God to sit on his Throne and rule over men". The KINGS and CHRONICLES in the Bible are holding up the mirror for the prince to identify his place "among the Catalogues"... etc.

Religio Medici is a philosophical inquiry and a spiritual autobiography revealing an altogether different frame of mind. The author's address *To the Reader* in the 1643 edition is casting doubt on attributed authorship at a time when political strife was taking the curious form of fraudulent imprints: the book had been forced into print by its publication, "most imperfectly and surreptitiously", the year before. Unauthorized editions were "the highest perversion" of the press from which not even the highest institutions of the country were excepted: ... *I have lived to behold the highest perversion of that excellent invention: the name of his Majesty defamed, the honour of Parliament depraved, the writings of both depravedly, anticipatively, counterfeitly imprinted.*

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The author's confession that "there are many things delivered Rhetorically, many expressions therein merely Tropicall" should warn us against a literal reading, and, therefore, we do not agree with C. A. Patrides view, in his *Introduction* to the 1977 Penguin Edition, that the book conveys "the expressly Christian view of history as progressively apocalyptic of the Divine Purpose in a linear pattern enclosing all events from the creation to the Last Judgement" (p. 28). Browne's contemporary, Alexander Ross, an extreme Protestant, was right in his tirade hurled against the author: *this may be indeed* ***religio Medici****, the religion of the House of Medicis, not of the Church of England (Ibidem).* It was the *prisca philosophia* school, going back to Hermes Trismegistus and his descent through Zoroastrianism, Orphism, Platonism, gnosis, alchemy, and an undogmatic variety of Christianity, that had united humanists of the previous century from various countries (Italy, Germany, France, England - Bacon, Raleigh, the Essex circle -, Spain) in an attempt to reconstruct the universalist project of humanity at a time of bloody religious wars tearing Christians apart in Europe.

While diplomatically "styling" himself a devout Christian, Browne is subverting the dogmatic aspect - "doctrines and rules of faith" - of religion that had brought King and Parliament in a fatal conflict with each other. Faith is relativized as a form of local mundane politics: *there being a geography of Religions as well as Lands, and every Clime distinguished not only by their laws and limits, but circumscribed by their doctrines and rules of faith; To be particular, I am of that reformed new-cast Religion ....* A roll of Biblical inconsistencies, delivered with unmistakable irony, is taking up considerable printing space, and indirectly asserts the creed of the self-relying intellect that chooses to be his own Oedipus (wrestling with and solving riddles): *where there is an obscurity too deep for reason, 'tis good to set down with a description, periphrasis, or adumbration; for by acquainting our reason how unable it is to display the visible and obvious effect of nature, it becomes more humble and submissive unto the subtleties of faith: and thus I teach my haggard and unreclaimed reason to stoop unto the lure of faith. I believe there was already a tree whose fruit out unhappy parents tasted, though in the same Chapter, when God forbids it, 'tis positively said, the plants of the field were not yet grown: for God had not caused it to rain upon the earth ....* **(63)**.

History is not teleological unfolding (from Genesis to the Last Judgement) but repetitive and cyclic, according to the cynic and misanthropist train of thought uniting Montaigne and Vico and arching over the following paragraph in *Religio Medici - A Physician's Faith* (a physician of the Paracelsus and Suarez school): *one general Council is not able to extirpate one single Heresie, it may be cancelled for the present, but revolution of time and the like aspects from heaven will restore it, when it will flourish till it be condemned again; for as though there were a Metempsychosis, and the soul of one man passed into another opinions do*

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find after certain revolutions men and minds like those that first began them. To see ourselves again we need not look for Plato's year; every man is not only himself; there have been many ***Diogenes****, and as many* ***Timons****, though but few of that name; men are lived over again, the world is now as it was in ages past ....* The conclusion to his critique of fallible metaphysical speculations and redirection of thought towards the visible universe, communicated in the rhyming couplets that anticipate the favourite prosodic cast of the Augustan Age - as does the argumentative style of syllogistic exposition of hypotheses and conclusion anticipate Pope's verse essays - is a Deist's statement of trust in reason and empirical investigation (these verses, interwoven within the fabric of his elegant prose, had been struck out from the unauthorized version for obvious reasons):

Therefore,
Search while thou wilt, and let thy reason go
To ransom truth even to the Abyss below.
Rally the scattered causes, and that line
Which nature twists be able to untwine.
It is thy Maker's will, for unto none
But unto reason can he ere be known.

Satisfied with " the spoils of nature", the mind discovers on earth "more than the heavens". What follows is a Deist's praise of the visible world as the only legitimate object of thought: ***Natura nihil agit frustra*** *is the only indisputable axiom in Philosophy; there are no* ***Grotesques*** *in nature; nor any thing framed to fill up empty cantons, and unnecessary spaces; in the most imperfect creatures, and such as were not preserved in the Ark, but having seeds and principle in the womb of nature, are everywhere where the power of the Sun is ....* The voyage to the setting sun had cast doubts over the Biblical Ark myth, as creatures were discovered that are not mentions in the Old Testament, while an explanation of how all of them had crossed over from the Old World had not been provided either. Art is set above Nature through a deliberately fallacious syllogistic argument, i.e. with a conclusion that contradicts the first hypothesis: Were the world now as it was the sixth day, there were yet a Chaos: Nature hath made one world, and Art another. In brief, all things are artificial, for nature is the Art of God.

Paragraph 32 is starting at a definition of what god he had in mind, in the mention of "an universal and common Spirit to the whole world": *It was the opinion of* ***Plato****, and it is yet of the* ***Hermetical*** *Philosophers.* Socrates himself appears to him as a worthier Religion Martyr than the Christian ones, because he had suffered "on a fundamental point of Religion, the Unity of God". This search for a spiritual community saves him from xenophobic partialities, thereby

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prefiguring the next century's cosmopolitan model of "the citizen of the world": *Those national repugnances do not touch me, nor do I behold with prejudice the French, Italian, Spaniard, or Dutch; but where I find their actions in balance with my countrymen's, I honour, love, and embrace them in the same degree...* The luminaries' age of encyclopaedic studies and works is herein anticipated. Charity, the supreme Christian virtue, is redefined as the mind's gift to affined spirits, united in a "community of learning", a circle of the initiated, of tutors and disciples: *It is an honourable object to see the reasons of other men wear our Liveries, and their borrowed understandings do homage to the bounty of ours. It is the cheapest way of beneficence, and like the natural charity of the Sun illuminates another without obscuring itself. (...) To this (as calling myself a Scholar) I am obliged by the duty of my condition, I make not therefore my head a grave, but a treasure of knowledge; I intend no Monopoly, but a Community in learning; I study not for my own sake only, but for theirs that study not for themselves (...) and in the midst of my endeavours there is but one thought that dejects me, that my acquired parts must perish with myself, nor can be Legacied among my honoured Friends.*

The **enzyklos paideia** had been the quest of the hermetic circles based in Italy in the previous century, but Browne's idea of shared knowledge is more active and socially oriented. His political philosophy, foreshadowing the theory of social contract in Hobbes's *Leviathan* and Locke's two *Treatises of Government*, abandons old-time theses about providential kings and their divine rights. His ideal is the primitive commonwealths of natural dignities, before corruption had made it possible for unworthy people to heap up riches and get a licence "to do or purchase anything". Learning is not destined for esoteric enjoyment by the elected few; it is meant to serve as a weapon on the social battlefield, tilting the balance of power between scholars and princes in favour of the former: *Scholars are men of peace, they bear no arms, but their tongues are sharper than Actius his razor, their pens carry farther, and give a louder report than thunder; I had rather stand in the shock of a Basilisco than in the fury of a merciless pen. It is not mere zeal to Learning, or devotion to the Muses, that wiser Princes Patron the Arts, and carry an indulgent aspect unto Scholars, but a desire to have their names eternized by the memory of their writings, and a fear of a revengeful pen of succeeding ages...*

The shaping of the refined institutions and manners of the Augustan Age was largely the work of Augustan discourses. John Dryden, the most prominent figure of the Restoration, shaped neoclassic aesthetics in such a way as to make room for the irregular, if judged by the ancients' rules, writings of the English Renaissance, as well as for the modern conquests of science. In that he may have owed a debt to Browne's refutation of errors rising from the uncritical respect for authorities in his encyclopaedic *Pseodoxia Epidemica*. The title of one of his

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poems serving political ends – the refutation of religious fanaticism from a sceptical and anti-dogmatic position – was undoubtedly a token of homage to Browne: *Religio Laici (A Layman's Faith).*

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THE NEOCLASSIC AGE (1660–1780)

Historical background and textual politics. The Restoration scene: Court versus City. Restoration drama, or the comic version of the cavaliers' victory over the republicans. Aphra Behn: the first professional woman writer. The rise of England's modern institutions and of literature as public discourse. The Age of Dryden, or the making of the Augustan ideal. The Age of Pope, or the Augustan ideal under stress. Neoclassic poetic arts and socially-oriented literary kinds: satire and pamphlet, praise and descriptive poetry, argumentative poetry (philosophical and poetic epistles), character progress, mock-heroic, travelogue, periodical essay. Plot, character, and structural devices from Defoe to Sterne. Novel versus romance ? The Post-Augustan Age: an age of sensibility. The rise of the Gothic novel, or the sense of an ending: the spectralization of the ancient regime. The cult of supernaturalism and sentimentalism in response to oppressive Augustan rationalism.

By analogy with the reign of Augustus Caesar (27 B.C. – 14 A.D.), which was the golden age of Roman literature, an "Augustan age" means a period of peace, prosperity, and artistic refinement. In England, its most characteristic traits can be identified in a period stretching from 1714 to the mid-eighteenth century, known as the age of Pope and Addison, but it may be extended to a broader neoclassical frame to include the Restoration and a transition period from an age of reason to one of sensibility between 1750-1780.

The Restoration of the Stuarts was a culture of passage, in which two codes were still competing: of the Court and of the City, mirroring the final stage of a confrontation which ended in 1689, with the Whig replacement of the Stuart monarchy by William of Orange, of the Nassau dynasty (married to Mary, the daughter of James II). Queen Anne (1702-1714), James II's daughter, left no inheritor to the British throne, all her children dying in infancy or early childhood.

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The ascension to the throne of George I in 1714 marked off the beginning of the Hanoverian dynasty, which went down to Queen Victoria and her descendants (renamed "Saxe-Goburg and Gotha" under Edward VII, and afterwards "Windsor" – the present royal family). Engineered through the Act of Settlement (1701), the Hanoverian **parliamentary monarchy** (the king as merely an instrument of the Parliament) meant the victory of the Whig party, the onset of an age of political stability, and a *rapprochement* with France.

Towards the end of the eighth decade, Dryden abandoned drama in the Restoration **heroic and heroic-comic tradition**, moving more decidedly into a neoclassical direction, enforced by poetic principles programmatically expounded. Whereas Dryden draws on René Le Bossu and René Rapin in *The Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy* (1679), after reaching a compromise in the comparative evaluation of the merits of the neoclassical French and of the highly irregular English drama in his *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1668), Alexander Pope's model is the fully canonical expression of neoclassical poetic: Boileau, walking in the footsteps of Horace. Maybe that is why Pope succeeded where Shakespeare and Milton had failed: he was the first English poet to enjoy reputation across the Channel, seeing many of his works translated into French, praised and imitated. From the second half of the eighteenth century there were accumulating signs of a transition to a new mode of understanding and sensibility, which triumphed in Wiliam Blake, the visionary prophet of the Romantic school. The English Augustans **consciously imitated and compared themselves to the authors in Caesar Augustus's Rome** (Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Livy, as well as Juvenal, of the first century), **the neoclassic drift being now Roman rather than Hellenic**. The shift is important for the greater emphasis upon the links between a flourishing material civilization and the arts, between politics and artistic Maecenate, between artistic creation and a hedonistic, refined life-style. Writers were known for their elegance, in attire as well as manners or speech, for the social enjoyment of ideas in the coffee-house *coterie*, rather than for a strenuous and scholarly intellectual effort. We may add a philosophical and religious eclecticism, yielding a motley reinscription of various systems. Samuel Johnson dismissed Pope's *Essay on Man*, the most ambitious philosophical poem of the time, as a metaphysical wreck, but that was precisely the point: As the picture of the universe was being challenged and shattered by new scientific discoveries, thinkers felt free to discourse more tentatively and leisurely on such issues, to "tame" the language of the Royal Society "virtuosi" into the common talk of a cultivated society. Joseph Addison, the new voice that could be heard from journalism in a cultural democracy, proposed to bring *Philosophy out of Closets and Libraries, Schools and Colleges, to dwell in Clubs and Assemblies, at Tea-Table, and in Cofee-Houses* (*The Spectator,* No. 10, 12 March 1711).

Although we do not subscribe to Eugenius's (Gr. *eugenes*: well-born) opinion in Dryden's version of the Platonic dialogue – *An Essay of Dramatic*

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Poesy – that the progress of science automatically brings *poesy and other arts (...) nearer to perfection*, we agree that the importance of the social-political and epistemological background in an approach to Augustan literature is paramount. In this age **literature moves from language to society, from history to the contingent, from the memory of the antiquity towards literary models geared to living reality**. Man descends from his central position in the universe, allowing himself to be governed by social rules and necessities, confining his Faustian ambitions to the infinitely more modest requirements of a practical humanism. From aspiration towards universality, the artist turns to the painting of morals, from lyricism, to an impersonal kind of literature and eloquence, from esoteric exploits, to observation of nature, from erudition to modish topics, from idealism to sentimentality, from a metanarrative (a central story) to individual facts.

Theology tended to be replaced by political economy (*Robinson Crusoe).* It was from the picture of England's flourishing industry and commerce, about 1610, that Antoine de Montcrestien (1575-1621), the author of the first treatise of political economy (*L'économie politique*, 1615), derived his notions about the dignity of capitalist enterprise and peaceful trade. **Common man, engaged in his daily practical activities, displaced the hero in literature for the first time**.

Warfare was not entirely absent over this timespan, but it usually led to a more advantageous settlement for the British nation. The Exclusion Crisis provoked by Lord Shaftesbury's proposition in Parliament that the collateral line represented by James, the younger brother of Charles, should be excluded from succession to the throne, in favour of the Duke of Monmouth, Charles' illegitimate son, fell in Parliament and led to Shaftesbury's imprisonment, as well as to an armed action led by Monmouth himself, which was suppressed. As a result of James' deposition three years later (1688), a new political government could be settled under William III: a social contract between King and Parliament, which radically restricted the former's prerogatives, while ensuring the predominance of the Commons, religious tolerance with no more suspicions, more or less grounded, about "Popish plots" (the last, of Titus Oates, had had its share in the Succession Crisis). The rise to power of the middle class, whose upper strata had absorbed a large part of the aristocracy, through the titles sold by the Stuarts to the moneyed landowners and as a result of Cromwell's confiscations from the royalists, was completed by the end of the Whig Prime Minister Robert Walpole's long and peaceful political rule (1721-41), the interests of the two dominant classes having by then completely merged together. Initially ascribed to those who had opposed the exclusion of James, Duke of York, and to those who had supported it, attempting a subordination of the king to Parliament after the 1688 Glorious Revolution, the names of "Tory" and "Whig", respectively, were in time replaced by "Conservative" and "Liberal". The antagonism between them diminished during the Augustan Age, with active support from those who could sway public opinion in favour of a peaceful cohabitation of all social classes.

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The values and taste of the middle class replaced the aristocratic values, **gentility**, as a summation of virtue, religious faith, decorum, mental and physical energy ousted the ideal of the **courtier's** refined appearance, manners, and wit. Essayists and writers of the age undertook to educate the bourgeoisie in respect to manners, urbanity and propriety of address (letter-writing, conversation). John Pomfret's poem, *The Choice (1700)*, defines the ideal way of life as that of a leisurley, civilized golden mean, while Robinson's father's advice to his son (*Robinson Crusoe*) displays a similar appreciation of the ideal middle class way of life. Even the third Earl of Shaftesbury's code of Augustan refinement in art and morals – *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (neoclassic in its import) –, does not make ***Gentlemanliness*** a privilege of caste, but an attribute of a civilized man living in a stable and just society.

The Great War of the Spanish Succession, which ended with the Peace of Utrecht (1713) gave Britain control over Gibraltar, Minorca, North America, as well as the exclusive right to export slaves to the West Indies. The provisions of the treaties concluded between England, France, Holland, and Spain, Savoy, Prussia, and Portugal increased England's participation in the largest slave trade in history, when at least six million human beings were captured and transported across the ocean.

The changes in science and philosophy were deep enough to breed an awareness of a fundamental discontinuity in history. The "Battle of the Ancients and the Moderns", that is between the advocates of the values and spirit of the Antiquity, which had prevailed during the Renaissance, and those evincing a modern consciousness, arising from a scientific-experimental attitude to the world, spread from France to England with the return of the exiled royalists and with the arrival of a French exile, Saint-Evremond. Dryden, who was an acquaintance of Saint-Evremond's, echoes the dispute in his *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*. Important public figures joined the controversy. Sir William Temple supported the Ancients, while William Wotton sided with the moderns. As Sir Temple's secretary, Jonathan Swift gave his own opinion in his usual recourse to irony in his *Tale of A Tub* and in *The Battle of Books*. In the former, the moderns are defined in the manner of the twelfth-century monk, Bernard de Chartre, and of the contemporary Bernard de Fontanelle as the present "pigmies" on the shoulders of the ancient giants, whose fundamental works had germinated into a sprawl of petty lexicons. Conservative attitudes are characteristic among the writers of the age, who support stability, the establishment – as classicists will always do. However, the substance of their work – realistic and satirical – is the very outcome of the scientific and social revolutions. The writers' true political leanings may have remained secret, considering their dependence upon patronage. The story of Daniel Defoe being a Whig mole on the staff of a Tory paper is symptomatic **(1).** Samuel Johnson's 1755 letter to Lord Chesterfield meant the

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declaration of the writer's independence of patronage, but it succeeded a long tradition of flattering and humiliating dedications from authors whose ambition to make a living from writing turned them into trimmers.

If literature displays fundamentally new traits, even less entitled would one be to regard the scientific and philosophical exploits of the age as mere footnotes of classical works. With all his emphasis upon the importance of science and experiment, Bacon had however remained ignorant of a number of important scientific discoveries and advances, which philosophers could no longer fail to take into account: Kepler's astronomical discoveries, Napierian logarithms, the progress of mechanics in Galileo and his theory of the acceleration of falling bodies, the theory of the lever, and of the precession of the eqionoxes, etc. **(2).**

Following Isaac Newton's publication of *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (1687), the universe ceased to be regarded as organic and teleological. The long-cherished Ptolemy-Galen-Pliny-Paracelsus model was discarded altogether, yielding to a **decentered, mechanistic picture of bodies moving in space and time**, according to mechanical and matter-based principles. The book of the universe, according to Galileo, was written in mathematical language. After the Restoration the group of Cambridge Platonists, who had preoccupied themselves with the philosophical impact of Hobbes's empiricism on religion, incorporated the Royal Society "for the Improving of Natural Knowledge", patronized by Charles II. Its members meant to promote not only the New and Real Philosophy, but also a new language capable to word it: of *mathematical plainness*, freed from empty scholastic, syllogistic ratiocination (having a "why for every wherefore", like Butler's Hudibras), of "fruit-bearing" empirical relevance, of use to *the artisan, the countryman, the merchant* (Thomas Sprat, *The History of the Royal Society*, 1667).

The **cognitive turn** (from ontology to gnoseology, from inquiry into **being** to inquiry into the **possibilities and circumstances of cognition**, announced by Montaigne and Bacon and effected by Descartes, Hobbes, Locke, was the one which actually worked the change from the ancients to the moderns, whereas the **hermeneutic turn** (from "what do I know?" to "how do I interpret a world which is in its essence unknowable, how do I represent or constitute it?"), originating in David Hume and Immanuel Kant, with bearings upon the Romantics and the Victorians, was absolutized by the modernists. The **deconstructive turn** (the deconstruction of the logocentric paradigm of primary and derivative terms, like speech and writing, cause and effect, good and evil, straight and crooked, right and left etc into ***differences without positive terms***), originating in Nietzsche and receiving fresh impetus from Heidegger, Gadamer and Derrida, shaped the epistemological matrix of postmodernism.

Religion was going from a doctrinary (inner) towards a cognitive (contextual) crisis. John Locke, a member of the Royal Society, who returned from his French exile (he had been Earl of Shaftesbury's physician) with William

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III in 1689, inquired into *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695), while G.F. Leibnitz set out, in a manner (logical-mathematical) different from Milton's (the theological doctrine of the happy fall), to "justify the ways of God to Man", in *the best of all possible worlds* (*Theodicy*). The philosophers of the age were shrewd in mathematics: Hobbes, who was Charles II's mathematician, entered into controversies with Descartes, whereas Leibnitz discovered differential calculus independently from Newton. The Dutch Baruch Spinoza constructed his *Ethics by the Geometrical Method.* Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746) quantified the morality of social action in a way which anticipated the Victorian utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham in *An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725): *that Action is best, which procures the greatest Happiness for the greatest Numbers; and that, worst, which, in like manner, occasions Misery* (3, VIII). He even finds analytical propositions and mathematical formulations for moral actions in his *System of Moral Philosophy*, posthumously published in 1755: *The moral Importance of any Agent, or the Quality of publick Good produc'd by him, is in a compound Ratio of his Benevolence and Ability: or (by substituting the initial Letters for the Words, as M = Moment of Good, and m = Moment of Evil, M = B x A).* Half a century later, when vehemently exposing the outrage of making God "a mathematical diagram", Romantic poet William Blake might well have been thinking of David Hartley (1705-1757), who used a similar quasi-mathematical formulation to represent man's relationship with God in *Observations on Man* (1749).

The authority of mathematical principles spread quickly to the arts. They could ensure the neoclassical principles of harmony, proportion, symmetry. John Wood the Elder and his son of the same name were two neo-Palladian architects who reconstructed Bath according to "figures and numbers", with no more Gothic or medieval reminiscences. From buildings of monumental classicism to the "model villages", they remained faithful to Palladian proportions, symmetries and rhythms, integrating individual buildings into the general design with a remarkable sense of the ***social organization of space*** **(3).** The individual is conceived of only in relation to the community. Everything is merged into everything else, with an effect of wholeness, integrity. Art is made dependent on reason, truth, craft, elaboration, obeying the commandments of mathematical constructs: *The square in geometry, the Unison or Circle in Musick, and the Cube in Building have all an inseparable Proportion: the Parts being equal, and the sides and Angles etc. give the Eye and Ear an agreeable Pleasure; from hence may likewise be deduced the cube and a half, the double cube, the Diapason, and Diapante being founded on the same principle in Musick* **(4).**

The scientific critical rationalism of the first phase of English Neoclassicism stands under the sign of Thomas Hobbes's (1588-1679) **mechanistic and deterministic materialism**. The royal way to truth leaves behind authorities,

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theoretical systems (*Nulius in verba*), being restricted to inductive and mathematical methods. *Leviathan* (1651) examines the content of the mind, reducing it to sense data, to various impressions worked upon the senses by contact with the exterior world: *there is no conception in a man's mind which hath not at first, totally or by parts, been begotten upon the organs of senses. The rest are derived from that original (Leviathan Part I, Chapter I).* Innate ideas are also denied by John Locke (1632-1704), yet he defines the human being in the same way as Descartes, as *being conscious to himself that he thinks (An Essay Concerning Human Understanding,* 1690, *Book II, Chap. I*), and dissociates between sensations and ideas, the latter transcending the object of the senses: *Whence has it (the mind) all the materials of reason and knowledge ? To this I answer in one word: from experience; in that all our knowledge is founded, and from that it ultimately derives itself. Our observation employed either about external sensible objects, or about the internal operations of our minds, perceived and reflected on by ourselves, is that which supplies our understandings with all the materials of thinking. These two are the fountains of knowledge, from whence all the ideas we have, or can naturally do spring.* Such dichotomies as *sensation* and *idea*, *simple* and *compound ideas (*derived from the first, through the mind's observation of its own operations), perception and reflection do allow of a form of transcendentalism, at a remove from Hobbes's purely empirical psychology. The mechanistic-empiricist representation of the mind was later ridiculed by Laurence Sterne in his *Tristram Shandy* (although it is Locke he mentions*):* when his own father impresses him in so many different ways, can the content of the mind be reduced to a mechanical effect of unique sense impressions (the same for any subject as long as the object of perception remains the same), like the material print of a maid's thimble on wax? (*Book II, Chap. II*) At the other end of the Augustan Age, Imagination struck Tristram as something quite different from Memory of the sense impression when the object is removed, being inferior to actual perception of the object: *From whence it follows that the longer the time is, after the sight or sense of any object, the weaker is the imagination. For the continual change of man's body destroys in time the parts which in sense were moved; so that distance of time, and of place, hath one and the same effect in us.* (*Leviathan Part I, Chap. II, Of Imagination*).

The fascination of remoteness in time and space was already relished by some of Sterne's contemporaries (Edward Young) precisely for the freedom it granted the mind to invent something of larger import than any contingent reality. And what is Uncle Toby (*Tristram Shandy)* at his heart, if not an obsession with something which has never happened – his **invented**, rather than **memorized** "heroic" past? Sterne's criticism was preceded by the philosophers'. There is nothing in the intellect that has not previously been in the senses, Leibnitz (1646-1716) replies in his *New Essays on Human Understanding*, except the intellect

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itself. For *the soul includes being, substance, the one, the same, cause, perception, ratiocination, and many other notions which the senses are not capable to originate* (*Nouveaux essais sur l'entendement humain, II, I,* 2). The monism constructed by Leibniz in his *Monadology* (each monad has its own soul, whereas God, as the largest monad, comprises them all) was the other extreme from atheistic empiricism and different (although equally optimistic in its view of the best of all possible worlds) from Deism, which only derived the idea of God from the contemplation of the universe as a perfect machinery, presupposing the existence of a master-mechanic. Miracles are precluded, God no longer intervenes in his creation, as a personified agent. Spinoza's ontological monism apparently offered a solution to Descartes' dualism (being split into substance-body and substance-soul). In Spinoza, the physical and the metaphysical are merged together, God being the common substance (*Deus, sive substantia*, God, that is substance). Everything is individualized but also merged into its horizon: modes of being included in attributes, attributes, in substance.

Whereas the mechanistic sense theory of Hobbes informs Dryden's view of feelings and states of mind induced by the way musical instruments work upon the senses (the odes composed for St. Cecilia's Day), we think it was the philosophy of Spinoza that provided the arguments of Alexander Pope's *Essay on Man.* In the *Design* preceding the four **verse epistles** – a form of didactic literature (a classical favourite) employed for the exploration of some philosophical, moral etc. idea – Pope thanks Lord Henry Bolingbroke for having been his "guide, philosopher, and friend". Samuel Johnson thought it had been the other way round: Pope had been the one whose ideas had sprouted in Bolingbroke's posthumous papers. The poem has often received charges of doctrinary incoherence, eclecticism, and inconsistency; Colin Manlove, in an essay, *Parts and Wholes: Pope and Poetic Structure* (**5**), mentions some of them, pointed out by previous commentators, which meet with his approval: *Pope tells men they are fools to try to inquire into the nature of the universe, but then has to do the same himself in order to tell them why they should not: the poet who tells his reader that the proper study of mankind is man spends much of the first epistle among the constellations and well above or beneath the sphere of human existence on the great chain of being. Then there is difficulty with Pope's conception of the governing spring of human conduct – the "Ruling Passion", a force conferred by the deity working through nature: where is there to be human choice in such a deterministic arrangement?* Considered in the light of Spinoza's philosophy, and of the *analogical method* worked out by his contemporary, Samuel Clarke (later resumed by Bishop Joseph Butler in his *Analogy of Religion*, 1736), in *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God* (1705-6), as well as of Newton's universal laws of nature, Pope's doctrinaire frame appears less incoherent. If inferior modes of being and powers of perception are included in man, he can obviously know them, and,

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through a study of the general laws at his level, he can speculate on larger "gradations" of the universal "chain of being" or "extent", or "range". It is odd that Colin Manlove does not mention Spinoza, although the following commentary on Pope is perfectly valid with respect to the Dutch philosopher's advance in a rationalist direction, away from both Descartes and Leibniz: *A significant change in the poem is from a vertical to a horizontal conception of being. The prepositions "above" and "below" become fewer, and we deal with a passion that pervades, a social impulse that spreads. This is already happening in that beautiful passage on the activity of God at the end of Epistle I – He is an immanent force that "spreads" through all being and "extends thro' all extent"; His presence in all things removes hierarchic distinctions, levelling all created things in equal importance: "To him no high, no low, no great, no small; He fills, he bounds, connects, and equals all." The ladder of being in which mankind is reduced to a mere point in space, is later in the poem transformed to the surface of a lake over which like a dropped pebble the loving action of one man ripples out to embrace all being; just as the vertical has shifted to the horizontal, so has shrinkage to expansion* (*Op. cit.*, p. 147). Here is Gheorghe Vlăduțescu on Spinoza: *În deosebire de Descartes şi, totodată, cu un grad sporit de autenticitate şi adevăr, Spinoza nu mai aşază cele două mari "trepte" într-o scară a lumii, pe "verticală", ci pe "orizontală". În acelaşi plan, adică, şi, parcă,* à tiroirs, *mai-cuprinzătorul incluzând orizontul subiacent, substanța, atributele şi modurile sunt, deopotrivă, în identitate şi în non-identitate. Venind "de sus" dinspre substanță, totul este în toate, dar venind din "jos", pentru că moduri şi atribute sunt cuprinse (modurile în atribute, atributele în substanță), identitatea presupune şi deosebirea* **(6).**

The term "chain of being" is misleading, Pope proceeding to a systematic deconstruction of the Renaissance overall image of existence. The hierarchy of separate and multilayered individualities, (the level of nature, of humanity, and of God) yields to a more egalitarian picture of Being: *one stupendous Whole, one Body, one Soul.* He maps the Renaissance onto a philosophical concept which is completely different. Pope's contention in the *Design*, that he is *steering betwixt the extremes of doctrines seemingly opposite,* probably means avoiding both the Scylla of Descartes (body/soul dualism) and the Charybdis of Deism (God/creation dualism). The homogeneous element of water is a monistic trope – a universal *substantia* – further qualified by attributes of "range", "extent", "powers" (possibilities of perception individualized for each mode of being, from the lowest, which is the mole's blindness, to man's perception of ideas – in whose description Pope draws on Locke). Pope does not ridicule human capacities in general, but only the Renaissance picture of man in his glory, as the coronation of Creation. His world picture is Newtonian, inferable from a number of general laws, empirically testable. The Renaissance had emphasized ontological split (outside and within man); Pope

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emphasizes connectedness, at equal distance from Hobbes's bleak view of man's instinctive selfishness (*Leviathan*) and Shaftesbury's confidence in man's inborn moral sense and love for his fellow men (*An Inquiry Concerning Virtue*, 1699):

The great directing Mind of all ordains,
All are but parts of one stupendous whole,
Whose body Nature is, and God the soul;

All Nature is but Art, unknown to thee;
All Chance, Direction, which thou canst not see;
All Discord, Harmony not understood;
All partial evil, universal Good:
And, spite of Pride, in erring Reason's spite,
The truth is clear: WHATEVER IS, IS RIGHT.
(Epistle I)

Parts relate to whole;
One all-extending, all-preserving Soul
Connects each being, greatest with the least
(Epistle III)

Remember, Man, the Universal Cause,
Acts not by partial, but by general laws.
And makes what Happiness we justly call
Subsist not in the good of one, but all.

That true Self-Love and Social are the same:
(Epistle IV).

Of the attributes of God or Nature, man only knows range and thought (Reason). Coming from above, from substance, everything is identical to everything else, yet coming from below, from different attributes and modes, everything is confined to a certain "gradation" of the "chain of being":

Far as Creation's ample range extends,
The scale of sensual, mental powers ascends:
Mark how it mounts, to Man's imperial race,
From the green myriads in the peopled grass;
What modes of sight betwixt each wide extreme,
The mole's dim curtain, and the lynx's beam (I, 207-212):

The Renaissance world picture is subject to a sardonic attack.

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a) The humanistic fiction of man as the yardstick of the universe, possessed of the spirit divine (Pope: *Eternal Wisdom):*

Superior beings, when of late they saw
A mortal Man unfold all Nature's law,
Admired such wisdom in an earthly shape,
And showed a NEWTON as we show an Ape. (II, 3l-34)

b) The capacity to know the entire chain of being. Confined to his "gradation" of the "ample range", man is advised to drop all Titanic aspirations and Faustian ambitions, to learn submission (to universal order), acknowledge his own "point" in space and time, and limits (blindness, weakness).

c) The existence of an organic universe, whose general design and purpose (telos) is known to man. Pope draws the picture of the universe as a machine, as aggregates of atoms held together by the general laws discovered by Galilei and Newton, as an anonymous circuit of matter, with creatures feeding upon one another:

See plastic Nature working to this end,
The single atoms each to other tend,
Attract, attracted to the next in place
Formed and impelled its neighbour to embrace.
See Matter next, with various life endued,
Press to one centre still, the general Good.
See dying vegetables life sustain,
See life dissolving vegetate again:
Ill forms that perish other forms supply. (III, 9-17)

d) The pastoral meliorist project: the pride of aiming at more knowledge and Perfection is the cause of Man's error and misery. (I/IV)

e) Knowledge received from transcendental experience: the a priori ideas or operations of the intellect, mysterious communication with the divinity through dreams, visions, miracles, inspiration, divination etc. In purely Lockean fashion, Pope reduces the content of the mind to what comes through a "gradation" of sense, instinct, thought, reflection. A mole's mode of being and attribute (the "powers") are included in those ranging above, and so on, whereas man's Reason is all these powers (sense, remembrance, reflection, thought) in one (I, 212-232). Also in Spinozian fashion, man is supposed to suppress his passions and exercise those rational powers, enabling him to acquiesce in the existing order, which would be ruined if only one element were removed from its place.

From the centre of creation, man suddenly sees himself under the interdiction even to think of the Centre, to *soar with Plato to th'empyrial sphere*,

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unless he means to *drop into himself and be a fool* (II, 19-34). From inquiry into the essence of the world, he starts wondering: What world is this after all? What "gradation" in the Great World? Yet he does not, because Alexander Pope will not allow him to look beyond, and nothing can be defined but by its relation to something else, to everything else. The only knowledge that is still available is not without but within: all our knowledge is *OURSELVES TO KNOW* (IV, 398). The eighteenth-century view of the universe as a perfect machinery is made to serve Socrates' precept, "Know thyself". Such a perspective also justifies social order, the *status quo*: the division into the monadic existences of Beast, Man, or Angel, Servant, Lord or King (III), as well as the inextricable ties between them. Man is made aware of different ranges of knowledge, of different points of view. The images of the New World are not only those of the treasures that could be seized but also of other peoples' modes of understanding (see Friday in *Robinson Crusoe,* praying to Robinson's gun like to a god, because he does not understand its mechanism). The natives are confined within the gnoseological horizon made possible by their particular experience (see the mutual revelation of colonizers and colonized in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko).* Jonathan Swift's work is mainly based upon a manipulation of various points of view. A cultivated man is no longer one who dedicates himself to reading but also one who travels, a citizen of the world, familiar with as many aspects of the human show as possible. A Latitudinarian, if not downright relativistic attitude is characteristic of the Age of the Luminaries, ready for new discoveries, new theories, new experiences of otherness. Fanaticism, dogmatism were buried in the historical past. Robinson Crusoe is capable to see his situation from opposite points of view, which are both true. There is no ending to Swift's and Pope's exploration of paradox. In fact, Locke's *Epistola to Tolerantia,* 1689, the first published on his return to England (1689), heralded the spirit of the coming age. About the same time, Bernard de Fontenelle was entertaining wild fantasies about possible other worlds: lost civilizations in the cosmic space, which the micro-organisms contained in the big meteorites that had hit the earth made one suspect, populated far-off gallaxies. Fontenelle is as severe as Pope in his indictment of man's 'pride" and heresy of trying to know and judge everything: *Nous voulons juger de tout et nous sommes toujours dans un movais point de vue.* (*Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* – conversations with a marquise, 1686). In order to see right, one needs to be outside, a spectator, not the inhabitant of some particular world. Gulliver, the traveller from one imaginary world to another, is trading in biases and monocular modes of vision with the inhabitants of each visited land. In a fragment left out in the final version of *Tristram Shandy,* first published by Paul Stapfer in 187o, after meditating on the infinite relativity of time and space, the author-narrator falls asleep, dreaming that he has become the inhabitant of a plum on a tree in his orchard. Awakening from an apocalyptic experience, he notices that several plums have fallen from the tree,

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shaken off by a gust of wind. No, it had not been a world, but only a bubble that had burst, as Pope says (*Who sees with equal eyes, as God of all,/ A hero perish, or a sparrow fall,/ Atoms or systems into ruin hurled,/ And now a bubble burst, and now a world – I*) If Laurence Sterne had preserved the fragment, it would have served as an appropriate allegory for his characters, each imprisoned in his "hobby horse" (personal obsession). But having journeyed from observation to imagination, from physical sensation and mechanical psychological response to private obsession, from Social Self to Individual Self, we have trespassed the Romantic frontier, so we need to return to the Augustans.

Having outgrown the Protestant emphasis upon individual consciousness, as well as aristocratic egotism, Augustan literature mirrors the relationship between private and social self, and often develops a discourse akin to that of political economy, law, philosophy. The policy of a good government no longer looks up towards the ideal "governor" but down, to the masses of individuals and the way in which they are to integrate themselves in the social order, to harmonize their private interests with those of the community. To Hobbes's absolutism in *Leviathan,* Locke opposes a characteristically Augustan balance between the constitutional power and the subjects' rights. A practical morality replaces the idealism and absolute standards of the Renaissance man, who had lived by models: *If man in the state of nature be so free, as has been said; if he be absolute lord of his own person and possessions equal to the greatest, and subject to nobody, why will he part with his freedom? Why will he give up this empire, and subject himself to the dominion and control of any other power? To which 'tis obvious to answer, that though in the state of nature he hath such a right, yet the enjoyment of it is very uncertain, and constantly imposed to the invasion of others. For all being kings as much as he, every man his equal, and the greater part no strict observers of equity and justice, the enjoyment of the property he has in this state is very unsafe, very unsecure. This makes him willing to quit a condition, which, however free, is full of fears and continual dangers; and 'tis not without reason that he seeks out and is willing to join in society with others, who are already united, or have a mind to unite, for the mutual preservation of their lives, liberties and estates, which I call by the general name, property.* (John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government,* 1690, *Chapter II*).

Consequently, Augustan literature is to a large degree public, occasional, mundane. Generally speaking, this is **a literature predominantly of social record**: comedy of manners, pamphlet, satire, the addresses of philosophers, divines, journalists, authors, essays, periodicals. It serves to popularize philosophical ideas, to educate artistic tastes, to prevent social turbulence, to help polishing manners, and breed civility, and to assist man in any other way in his effort to depart from the "state of nature" and advance towards civilization.

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Writers are now addressing an extended readership, aiming at a general rather than individual reception. In the mid-seventeenth century, Comenius, who had been invited to Britain to help promoting the New Education, was impressed by the amount of books that were being published. In 1709 a Copyright Act granted writers certain royalties, and the large sales signalled the existence of a wide popular market. Circulation increased, and periodicals, such as "The Tatler" and "The Spectator", founded by **Richard Steele** and **Joseph Addison**, disseminating the new ideas in every walk of life, benefited from wide circles of readers. Pope's translations of *The Iliad* (1715-20) and *The Odyssey* (1725-26) sold remarkably well. The taste for reading and the ability to read increased with the spreading of charitable foundations, sunday schools, academies, circulating libraries. Contemporary travellers testified to the existence of a cultivated reading public, and to knowledge of literature circulating in common talk.

The desire for stability in politics and society bred the need for stability in language. Science demanded precision, direct, unelaborate expression, as we have seen, and so did the literary discourse. Florid, conceited style, the uneasy marriage of wit and the puzzling paradoxes had become gratuitous exhibitionism, being replaced by a record of actual experience, perceived in the broadlight of reason, apprehended with the unfailing tools of judgement, and rendered discursively according to precise rules. As women increased the numbers of the reading public, authors avoided the use of "hard words". The ideal idiom, refined in the conversation schools of the literary clubs and coffee houses of Dryden's and Addison's days, was a variety of well-bred speech, free from affectation, pedantry, rusticity, and crudeness. The efforts of a committee set up by the Royal Society, of which Dryden was a member, to "improve the English language", particularly as an instrument of precise denotation in an empirically minded community of speakers, were continued in the next century in the direction of stabilization. The English language had been changing at an alarming rate, so that Geoffrey Chaucer's, for instance, had become obscure within two centuries after his death. Language could only be stabilized through dictionaries, deciding on correct meaning, laying down rules of spelling, pronunciation. Nathaniel Bailey contributed the first lexicographical work including all English words: *Universal Etymological Dictionary* (1721). In 1755, the authoritative, critically and scholarly-minded Samuel Johnson published his *Dictionary of the English Language*, illustrating the meanings of words by quotations from literary works, ranging from Philip Sidney's onwards.

Characteristic of the age was the **periodical essay**, a literary kind invented by Richard Steele in April 1709, when his "Tatler" was first issued. It was followed by other periodicals, whose titles mirror the spirit of the Enlightenment: "The Spectator", "The Connoisseur", "The Citizen of the World". The primacy of knowledge, the cosmopolitanism of the age meant an opening to the world, a

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search for models of civilization, an interest in the new developments in the academies of France, in the revolutionary trends in science and philosophy which emerged on the Continent. Everybody shared Edmund Burke's view: *We are afraid to put man to live and trade each on his own private stock of reason; because we suspect that this stock in each man is small, and that the individuals would do better to avail themselves of the general bank and capital of nations and ages.* Images drawn from the new, powerful world of commerce and finances display a new notion of knowledge, not as the trophy of the closeted scientist, or of the philosopher's "hermitage of the mind", but as that which is common acquisition, coming from minds working together and being shared with the rest of the community. Ideas are no longer privately enjoyed in the intellect's ivory tower, but disseminated like light all around. The Spectator – one of the imaginary personages gathered in Steele's and Addison's literary clubs, with a complete fictional biography, engages in a mutual exchange of ideas with his readers, invited to write back. A hypothetic explanation of the emergence of a persona, of an objectified self in eighteenth-century fiction, of a narrator different from the author (which was a symptom of the general tendency towards impersonality, towards the dissolution of the private into the social self), is Locke's theory of the mind examining its own workings. Be it as it may, the Augustan theory of the imagination expounded in the 44th issue of "The Spectator" (1712) is an aesthetic by-product of Locke's description of psychological processes, which was thus popularized in a big run: *It is this sense* (i.e. sight) *which furnishes the imagination with its ideas; so that by the pleasures of the imagination, or fancy (...) I here mean such as arise from visible objects, either when we have them actually in our view, or when we call up their ideas into our minds by paintings, statues, descriptions, or any the like occasion. We cannot, indeed, have a single image in the fancy that did not make its first entrance through the sight; but we have the power of retaining, altering, and compounding those images, which we have once received, into all the varieties of picture and vision that are most agreeable to the imagination; for by this faculty a man in a dungeon is capable of entertaining himself with scenes and landscapes more beautiful than any that can be found in the whole compass of nature.*

Addison and Steele were not only disseminating ideas but also constructing the Augustan world of peace, tolerance, and social concord. They were helping bridge the gap between town and country, present and past, smooth over differences between the Tories and the Whigs, the hereditary aristocracy and the champions of industry, between Cavalier and Puritan.

The Spectator, as the owner of a hereditary estate which has been in the family since William the Conqueror, suggests the need for continuity in a people's history. Sir Roger de Coverlay is a softened, sentimentalized version of the landed aristocracy. Like Chaucer's "Knight", he is still the first of his society, yet not as

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an awe-inspiring figure but in a demystified travesty, with whom the rest of the company, lower in "estate", could feel at home. The details of his biography are picturesque and amusing. The most important element in the "invention" of the Tory figure, however, is the mutual understanding between himself and his tenants, their prosperity and love for him.

The champion of industry is Sir Andrew Freeport, a merchant of great eminence in the city of London. The upper middle class figure is constructed in a similar idyllic light. New elements have enriched the Augustan code of values: indefatigable industry, strong reason, and great experience. Such qualities, as Robinson and his father are well aware, had earned England a prominent place among the nations of the world. The prosperous merchant figure too is softened and sentimentalized. Even if public opinion suspects such people of some sly way of jesting, yet his ideas of trade are as noble and generous as those inscribed in the Cavalier code. The model of the age goes beyond social distinctions. The human ideal is an image, a construct, not a given. There is a scaling down of man, removed from the centre of the universe into the entertaining society of a "Chocolate-house". Good-breeding replaces Charity at the top of the hierarchy: *the height of good breeding is shown rather in never giving offence, than in doing obliging things. Thus, he that never shocks you, though he is seldom entertaining, is more likely to keep your favour, than he who often entertains, and sometimes displeases you. The most necessary talent therefore is a Man of Conversation, which is what we ordinarily intend by a Fine Gentleman, is a good Judgement. He that has this in Perfection, is master of his companion, without letting him see it; and has the same advantage over man of any other qualifications whatsoever, as one that can see would have over a blind man of ten times his strength.* („The Tatler", May 26, 1709).

The introduction of imaginary readers – persons of different humours and characters – offered the possibility of varying the point of view on different subjects. Conversation, discussion had proved more profitable than the blows of the Civil War. It was the age of the public debate, the Parliament itself, possessed of new powers, was called the "talking shop". Negotiating ideas rather than killing in their name. Tolerance was the pass-word in a century of talk and talkers. Political news and comment were almost absent in the two periodicals, only interested in improving manners, morals, artistic taste. "The Spectator" No 125 was teaching the lesson of recent history: *There cannot a greater judgement befall a country than such a dreadful spirit of division as rends a government into two distinct peoples and makes them greater strangers and more averse to one another than if they were actually two different nations (...) This influence is very fatal both to men's moral and their understanding; it sinks the virtue of a nation (...) and destroys even common sense....* And what could be worse in the "age of reason and common sense"?...

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The Romantics were the first literary "school" – a group of writers sharing a common aesthetic program. The **Augustan poetic arts** are, from this point of view, more divided, in their support of one or other trend of thought, intersecting and playing against each other in the "grey beginning" of the modern age. The Cartesian division of matter and spirit had wedged the critical spirit to the point of a breakdown. The very medium of art, language, was subject to an unprecedented critical examination, words and figures being utterly mistrusted in certain circles (The Royal Society, for instance) as to their capacity to express the true essence of things. The medieval dispute between nominalism and realism had mounted higher than ever. Swift pitches it to an absurd height, in Gulliver's travel to Laputa (standing for the Royal Academy), where the remedy suggested for the words' emptiness and conventionalism is that *it would be more convenient for all men to carry about them such things as were necessary to express the particular business they are to discourse on.*

Thomas Hobbes advises the poet to carry about him the whole known world by adding, to his better "Judgment", some mean "ornament", be it an epithet or a metaphor. The materialist-empiricist version of aesthetics is provided by his *Answer to Sir Will. D'Avenant's Preface Before Gondibert* (a preface written in defence of the heroic poem). His syllogistic progression sounds as dogmatic as medieval scholasticism: *Time and education beget experience; experience begets memory; memory begets judgment and fancy; judgment begets the strength and structure and fancy begets the ornaments of a poem. The ancients therefore fabled not absurdly in making memory the Mother of Muses. For memory is the world (though not reality, yet so as in a looking glass) in which the judgement, the severer sister, busieth herself in a grave and rigid examination of all parts of Nature, and in registering by letters their order, causes, uses, differences, and resemblances; whereby the fancy, when any work of art is to be performed, finds her materials at hand and prepared for use, and needs no more than a swift motion over them...*

In conclusion, if some metaphysical wit runs into such fits of fancy as to associate God with a pulley, that only happens because he has not "scanned" his memory seriously enough to remember not having seen a pulley in such venerable company.

At the other pole, **Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury** (1671-1713), advises the poet to forget about the whole damned world, and to turn to art in order to find true beauty, and to meditate upon the supreme order of beauty, which is the *form-giving form.* Natural beauty does not count, since it is transitory, it vanishes with the recess or withdrawing of the beautifying power (*Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times, Part III, Section II*). One of

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Locke'e disciples, Shaftesbury ended by rejecting his master, turning to Deism and to Platonism. Beauty cannot be separated from moral goodness (beauty and good are one and the same: *kalokagathon*), therefore it cannot rest in Nature. What will a classicist abhor? Obviously, *the shades, the rustic, the dissonancies*, that wild beauty and high irregularities in unspoiled nature, which the Romantics would relish. Taste requires study, science, and learning (*Characteristics, Ibidem*). But even more regular "lineaments" and proportions in the world of matter are inferior to those fashioned by the hand of man as an effect of the forming power of the mind. Highest in rank is a sort of Platonic Nous, or the "living forms" of the archetypes: *that which fashions even minds themselves, contains in itself all the beauties fashioned by their minds, and is consequently the principle, source, and fountain of all beauty*. The text itself is a Platonic dialogue with Philocles as a Socrates figure.

John Dryden and **Alexander Pope** are the only ones who seem to stick to the golden mean, and to talk in the neoclassical language. Dryden's Socrates in his *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* is Neander, one of a company of four gentlemen who are sailing down the Thames in a barge, trying to escape a siege of the Dutch fleet on June 3, 1645. The others are Crites, a severe critic (Gr. *krinein*: to *dissociate*, but also *crisis*, the personage giving an impression of sharp judgement and – a false one – of ill nature) of the Moderns in comparison to the Ancients' greatness (while acknowledging the Moderns' advances in optics, medicine, anatomy, astronomy, to the point where *almost a new nature has been revealed to us)*; Lisideius, who defends the Moderns' (Cavalier and later Augustan) code of aesthetic values, which also leads him to an encomium of French drama, for observing the rules of the Ancients (*Des trois unités, La liaison des scènes)* : *even, sweet and flowing, majestic, correct, elevated, full of spirit, lively image of human nature, representing its passions and humours, for the delight and instruction of mankind.* Eugenius, with his Hobbist expectations of a mechanical link between the development of sciences (a knowledge of natural causes) and the improvement of the arts. Neander shows the broadest understanding of "Nature", whose irregularities English drama could not help reflecting, and of the huge "Diffformities" in the human soul itself, which Shakespeare's more comprehending genius could not ignore. He approves of "tragicomedy", for is not life itself a mixture of occasions for sorrow and for mirth, a sequence of pleasing and disturbing events? Today his attitude would be termed "realistic" rather than "neoclassical". The argument around the comparative merits of English (particularly Shakespeare) and French dramatists had been a long on-going affair, which would culminate in Samuel Johnson calling Voltaire a "petit esprit", for his misunderstanding of Shakespeare's genius, and in Voltaire calling Johnson a "practical joker and a drunk" for talking such nonsense.

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Alexander Pope is the only one who produced a "neoclassical Bible" in his *Essay on Criticism.* The poet is to follow Nature but *Nature methodized,* that is the dramatic representation of the world in the ancients' discourse: fable, subject, purpose, the way they mirrored the social, religious etc, context, the spirit of the age. The best poet is the best student of the ancients, their best imitator. The English should forget their pride in refusing to follow "foreign laws", which resulted in their being "less civilized", and observe the rules and laws of artistic representation (design, language, versification), as they had been laid down by Boileau, who "still in right of Horace sways". John Dryden had created the first body of professional criticism in England, and had launched the idea of "literary age". In his *Preface* to *Don Sebastian* (1690), he says that Materia Poetica is "as common to all Writers as the Materia Medica to all Physicians". The body of nature, the flesh of the world are not subject to historical inflexions. What gives one right of property over the assets of literature is "the contrivance, the new turn" – i.e. the historically specific encodings of the literary discourse. It was Pope's turn to discover the international character of the literary codes at some time or other. With him, the search for common stylistic features, for a rhetorical paradigm as valid in England as on the Continent, replaced the more primitive recourse to alien stuff as random sources of inspiration. It was no longer a matter of adapting, imitating or even stealing...; it was an awareness of the existence of some normative poetics bespeaking the spirit of an age. The individual genius of a Hamlet, who would not play someone else's tune, the originality sought by Sidney, the "Liberty of Wit" which had prompted the wild troping of the metaphysicals were denounced as primitive and counterproductive in an age of cosmopolitan and collective values, European tours, and universalizing spirit. The Britons (the use of the Roman appellative is significant) should follow the example of French intellectual and aesthetic discipline. The illuminizing code of reason and progress found in neoclassicist formality its ally as a formative element:

But Critic Learning flourished most in France
The Rules, a Nation born to serve, obeys,
And Boileau still in right of Horace sways
But we, have Britons, Foreign Laws despised,
And kept unconquered and uncivilized.
Fierce for the Liberty of Wit and bold
We still defy the Romans as of old.

Nevertheless, Pope also mentions the opposite tradition, of inspired art and the sublime, whose definition had been provided by Longinus in his *Peri Hypsous* (1st century). It is true that Nicolas Boileau had translated it into French in 1674, yet his subsequent *L'Art Poétique* had opted for Horace. Pope prefers to straddle the two positions, praising with a vengeance the "offending Wit" capable of

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snatching a grace "beyond the reach of Art", the Lucky Licence which Critics "dare not mend", and the original Example which becomes the Law. Apparently, Dryden and Pope had problems imposing the strict normative usage of the neoclassicalists, as they had to cope with "offending" Shakespeare's genius...

A refined civilization is the joint work of many artisans. Enlightenment poetics is oriented to a practical finality, that of refining manners and of enlarging the minds of men (**Thomas Hayward**, *The British Muse*, 1738, and **Isaac Watts**, *The Improvement of the Mind*, 1741). In his "Life of Addison" (*Lives of the English Poets*), **Samuel Johnson**, the great legislator of the republic of letters in mid century, expresses his appreciation of the more recent literature which, even if, contrary to Locke's prescriptions, is no longer ashamed of pleasing as well, had managed however to breed new standards and values into the society, even among the idle rich, emulating not only graceful manners but also intellectual elegance. Being stylish, classy, had a more serious purport than the shallow fashionableness of the Restoration aristocrats. One also needed a knowledge of Greek and Latin models, of grammar, and a range of experience which betrayed a "citizen of the world".

The recourse to set forms and generic conventions, even if accompanied by small inventions, show the Augustans' penchant for formality. Witty phrasing and expressiveness are not an end in themselves: accurate representation (Pope: "Truth convinced at Sight we find") and the force of the shaping intellect („That gives us back the Image of our Mind") are expected to deepen the effect of the aesthetic (sensory) enjoyment of art. The Augustan concept of "correctness", referring to the metrical structure, was illustrated by Pope in the unfailing regularity of the couplet. Pope condemns the variations in line-length (for instance, the Spenserian use of a final, longer alexandrine), although he highly praises the music of Dryden's poetry, which relies precisely on a very flexible, changing metric scheme. "Neoclassical" also means anti-medieval, Pope placing Boileau at the top of a gallery of enlightened minds, which had put an end to the "barbarous age" and had driven the "holy Vandals" off the stage of history.

The Restoration of the Stuarts (1860-1889) was an age of social refinement and self-complacency. All anxiety had been hushed, and an easily reachable ideal had replaced the baroque impasse with the insoluble incongruities of the human condition.

Dryden congratulates his contemporaries on having outgrown the "less polished" and "unskilled" age of Jonson, the faults and errors of that art, while linking, in a symptomatically neoclassic manner, the present artistic refinement with that of the society in its entirety:

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„tis not the poet, but the age is praised.
Wit's now arrived to a more high degree;
Our native language more refined and free,
Our ladies and our men now speak more wit
In conversation, than those poets writ.
(*Epilogue to The Conquest of Granada, II*)

Obviously, polish of manners, wit in conversation, and refinement in language are not heroic ideals. For all that, the protagonists of an unheroic age cling to a pseudo-courtly ideal, defending heroic literary kinds, heroic plots, which most often than not amount to mere extravagance of events and sentiments. Consequently, Restoration art displays a hybrid character, mingling conventions which neither come together nor serve a meaningful antithesis. They simply turn on their own axes, annulling each other's effects.

The loyalists who had followed exiled royalty to France had brought back with them a rich display of gallantry and conversational cunning, to which witty and polished verse could be added for the mere necessity of amorous conquests. The hedonistic court of Charles II resumed its patronage of the theatre world, rebuilding it in its image. In the eyes of the respectable middle-class, it was a place of vice and corruption. Nor were Restoration playwrights hanging about the Court more interested in winning the esteem of the Town. The middle-class code of values (virtue, marriage, honesty, hospitality) is ridiculed, the respectable squires and merchants being shown as the target of the Court gallants' cunning games and tricks. When it is not **class-drama**, the play thematizes the **battle between the sexes** as an encounter between prudence (a fallen version of virtue) and cunning masculine sexual siege (a fallen version of love). The rich scenery catered for the contemporary concern with a more accurate representation of space, while the introduction of women actresses contributed more relish to the preoccupations with love, primary physical appetite.

The display of cunning in action and of a quick repartee in speech well matches the attitude of cynical detachment. Less fortunate is the combination of love entanglements, with seducers testing a woman's leaning to prudence or surrender, *and* a heroic plot, with characters torn between conflicting loyalties in the Corneille fashion (*The Comical Revenge* by **George Etherege**, 1634-1691). **William Wycherley** (1640-1716) plays on the misanthrope theme in *The Plain-Dealer*, and on the contrast between public pretence of virtue and private reality of lust in *The Country Wife*, with a typical tandem of profligate and cuckolded husband in Mr. Horner and Mr. Pinchwife. Even Dryden yields to the fashion, combining comic action and heroic subplot in *Marriage à la Mode*. From vices, brilliantly satirized by Butler, hypocrisy and cynicism have turned into such tyrannical fashion („way of the world") that characters are ashamed of their more

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humane emotions, doing their best to conceal them behind words and gestures (**William Congreve**, *The Way of the World*).

While almost forgotten as a Restoration dramatist, drawing on the Spanish farcical comedy, or yielding to the literary taste of the time for heroic tragedy in *Abdelazar*, **Aphra Behn** (1640-1689) has been recently rediscovered, particularly by feminist criticism, as a poet and fictionist, with particular merits in the birth of the modern novel. Her novella *Oroonoko: Or the Royal Slave,* written and published in 1688, may also be said to combine a **heroic plot** with a **realistic story** of early colonial venture. The novella received an early recognition as a seminal work in the tradition of antislavery writings, and its staging by Thomas Southerne in 1695 increased its public appeal.

Oroonoko is an early stance of the *self-conscious female narrator*, pondering on her capacities to handle a literary convention which till then had been the province of "the more sublime wit" of male narrators. The spirit of a new age, more realistical and practically-minded, can be inferred from her emphatic profession of truth in narrating events she actually experienced, not imagined.

Oroonoko is a noble African prince, taken into slavery to the West Indies. Reunited to his beloved, Imoinda, in Surinam, a British colony in Guiana, he leads a slave rebellion which leads to the heroes' deaths: Imoinda at the hands of her lover, Oroonoko, executed by the colonists.

Oroonoko's exploits follow closely the pattern of the *hero* from the origins to the present: Homer's hero, invincible in battle, doing single-handedly *such things as will not be believed that human strength can perform*, Virgil's *good conduct*, Renaissance *Humanity and Learning, reigning well and governing as wisely*, Augustan ease in *Wit more quick and a conversation most sweet and diverting*. In everything he does, he is guided by the conventional aristocratic code of love and honour, typical of the Restoration heroic convention. Even killing a tiger proves child's play, and is not considered too high a price for *love and gallantry*. At the same time, the *novella* is an example of the reductive strategy through which the alien figure of the native is assimilated by the metropolitan observer. Natives and Europeans are forcibly brought into contact, and the colonialist-economic relationships engage new psychological realities: both parties confront outsider perspectives, unfamiliar Others. One hypostasis of this cross-cultural relationship is ***identification***. As we have seen, the African native is naturalized within a European's cultural paradigm. Except for his black complexion, his physical appearance can be barely distinguished from the classical beauty of the English princes: he is *most admirably turned from head to foot*, his nose is rising and Roman instead of African, his lips are not *those great turned lips which are so natural to the rest of the Negroes*. Oroonoko entertains a neoclassical admiration for the Roman world, behaving like someone educated in some European court. The native is made to assimilate the imperialist's standards, his insider norms.

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The forcible cultural assimilation has an economic correlate. The listing of all sorts of goods, beginning with *the feathers which they order in all shapes and which adorn the dress of the Indian Queen, infinitely admired by persons of quality, skins of prodigious snakes, baskets, weapons, fish, venison, buffalo's skin...*, the evocation of the brilliant colours of a paradise of birds and beasts betray all the fascination the New World of colonial commerce and luxury was exerting on the colonizers' imagination, including the aristocracy.

The colonial paradigm is enacted by – the least expected – Restoration poetry. The description of the Thames in *Cooper's Hill* by **John Denham** applies the classical *ekphrasis* to an encomium of the economic realities made possible by the river, the order of art and that of nature being brought together in the neoclassical golden mean:

Though deep, yet clear, though gentle, yet not dull,
Strong without rage, without ore-flowing full.

The descriptive details of this **landscape poem** amount in fact to a meditation on the way it affects the life of the community, from the *mowers* and *plowmans* on the banks to the great navigators and colonizers. There is no sparkling imagery of the watery body (as in the Anglo-Saxon *Durham*) but only a dry report on the various profits of the river. Mythological framing (The Thames as a river god, *the most lov'd of all the Oceans sons*) and lyricism dissolve into the language of economy and empire-building, which is curiously inverted, from outward venture into home-coming and abolition of Otherness:

When he to boast, or to disperse his stores
Full of the tribute of his grateful shores,
Visits the world, and in his flying towers
Brings home to us, and makes both Indies ours;
Finds wealth where 'tis, bestows it where it wants
Cities in deserts, woods in Cities plants.
So that to us no thing, no place is strange...

At the beginning of **John Dryden**'s *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, Lisideius drops a "conceit" about those poets capable to write a panegyric upon a victory and at the same time a funeral elegy upon the vanquished, whose courage *deserved a better destiny*. With "neoclassical ease", Dryden passed from the "funeral dirge" of the *Heroic Stanzas on the Death of Oliver Cromwell* (1659), to a poem in heroic couplets welcoming Charles back one year later: *Astraea Redux*. At that restless end of the century a poet's destiny actually seemed to depend a lot upon political commitment. Dryden's genius was even more apparent in 1889, and yet the Poet Laureateship went from him to his dull rival Shadwell on William

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III's accession. Dryden's conversion to Catholicism, apart from his open support of the Stuarts, had its share in his fall from favour. The poet faced it all with the courage and detachment that is always to be expected from a great personality.

The balanced structure of the **decasyllabic couplet**, with the crisp effect of the end-stopped rhyme, which Dryden developed, provided the formally tight and harmonious stylistic matrix of an entire age. The classical bent is also apparent in the **public themes** of his occasional **elegies** (*On the Death of Lord Hastings*), **odes** (*To the Pious Memory of the Accomplished Young Lady, Mrs. Anne Killigrew)*, **satires** (*The Medal*, against Shaftesbury and the Whigs, which meant "against sedition"). The support of the establishment, of the *status quo,* takes two forms: either that of praise, the panegyric of the existing order as the only legitimate one, or of satire against those who subverted social rules and conventions.

Of the greatest satirical poem in the language, *Absalom and Achitophel*, probably written at the request of Charles II, to turn opinion against the supporters of the Exclusion Bill, it may be said that it does both. That is why it is difficult to classify it: the **satire** against Shaftesbury, the Duke of Buckingham, Monmouth and the rest of the rebel party, is doubled by the legitimating story of Charles and his brother, cast as a **mythical allegory** (Absalom rebelling against his father, King David) with several passages sounding like a **heroic poem**. That does not mean that the poem is formally loose, its various threads being woven into a perfectly calculated and harmonious design. The "impure" aspect is the result of an **original development of the English seventeenth-century satire from the Elizabethan Complaint**: *Before the changeover from Complaint to satire fully can be grasped, a brief description (...) of the two forms is necessary. While both types protest current policy and urge the reform, or at least the altering of present conduct in some way, notable contrasts in style and tone, in the use of persona, and in the ultimate objective of the remonstrance divide Complaint and satire. In general, Complaint speaks abstractly, often allegorically (...) By contrast, satire tends to fasten upon the here and now – the temporal rather than the spiritual. Knavery and folly are given a local habitation and a name; satirists draw a hard-edged portrait of the contemporary setting. Named individuals and groups, rather than general types, are depicted engaged in earthly wrongdoing* **(7).** Dryden expounds his views on the nature and particularly formal aspects of this literary kind in his *Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire*, prefaced to verse translations from Juvenal. Its late seventeenth-century form has to be in keeping with the general need of decorum, urbanity and elegant wit prevailing among contemporaries, so it will not clash with the panegyric element*: Yet still the nicest and most delicate touches of satire consist in fine raillery... How easy it is to call rogue and villain, and that wittily! But how hard to make a man appear a fool, a blockhead or a knave, without using any of these opprobrious terms!... Neither is*

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it true that the fineness of raillery is offensive, a witty man is tickled while he is hurt in this manner, and a fool feels it not... I avoided the mention of great crimes, and applied myself to the representing of blind sides and little extravagances.

One of the characters who must have felt "tickled", although the praise is ambiguous, was the King himself. For whereas in David's time polygamy was legitimate, in Dryden's Christian world it was considered a sin, and it had not been "priestcraft" that had declared it so. The issue was important in an argument over legitimacy; for Monmouth was thus reminded of his illegitimacy, but this circumstance also detracted from the king's justness. Dryden's allusion to Charles having a bastard son after David's example is therefore a two-edged strategy: defence or irony? As a consequence, the poem starts both in a majestically panegyric and ambiguously subversive way, which diminishes the heroic aspect, smoothing the transition to the satirical. The comparison between God creating man in his image and the procreative potential of David/Charles has rather a mock-heroic effect.

In pious times ere priestcraft did begin,
Before polygamy was made a sin;
When man on many multiplied his kind,
Ere one to one was cursedly confined,...
Then Israel's monarch after Heaven's own heart
The vigorous warmth did variously impart
To wives and slaves; and, wide as his command,
Scatter'd his Maker's image through the land (I, 1-10).

The portraits of Achitophel/Shaftesbury and of Zimri/Buckingham are both **topical and timeless**, in pure neoclassical fashion, which means description of human nature and character having general validity. Buckingham's verse serving his amoral sensualism and stylized hedonism is easily recognizable, but at the same time the individual is made into a type: the reckless, shifty, Protean philanderer, no more consistent in his opinions than in his gallant games:

In the first rank of these did Zimri stand;
A man so various, that he seem'd to be
Not one, but all mankind's epitome:
Stiff in opinions, always in the wrong,
Was every thing by starts, and nothing long;
But, in the course of one revolving moon,
Was chymist, fidler, statesman, and buffoon;
Ten all for women, painting, rhyming, drinking,
Besides ten thousand freaks that died in thinking (I, 544-552).

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Achitophel/Shafetsbury's portrait is a sketchy, stereotyped character progress (a predictable career, from birth to maturity), the human type (the first in a certain order, the arche-type or original model), which is that of the scheming politician, being individualized only through the physical details of a shapeless body as the proper embodiment of social anarchy. The poetic language has something of a metaphysical quality in the fusion of abstract and concrete images: a shapeless son for an offspring, and a ruined social order as a result of irresponsible political action:

Of these the false Achitophel was first,
A name to all succeeding ages cursed:
Sagacious, bold, and turbulent of wit,
Restless, unfix'd in principles and place,
In power unpleased, impatient of disgrace:
A fiery soul, which, working out its way,
Fretted the pigmy-body to decay,
And o'er-inform'd the tenement of clay.
A daring pilot in extremity;...
Else why should he, with wealth and honour blest,
Refuse his age the needful hours of rest?
Punish a body which he could not please,
Bankrupt of life, yet prodigal of ease?
And all to leave what with his toil he won,
To that unfeather'd two-legg'd thing, a son,
Got, while his soul did huddled notions try,
And born a shapeless lump, like anarchy (I, 150-159, 165-172).

The ethical interrogation is never pitched too high by the classic's moderate and commonsensical appreciation of a good life, including wealth, honour, security, rather than loyalty as an absolute and fight to the death, characteristic of heroic times. In fact, there is no absolute centre of power, but only some anonymous law, governing God himself, and some particular good, to which the king is bound in a way more appropriate to the power relations in a commonwealth.

And public good, that universal call,
To which even Heaven submitted, answered all. ((I, 421-22)
Kings are the public pillars of the state,
Born to sustain and prop the nation's weight (I, 953-54)

For all that, Dryden's choice expressed in *Religio Laici* is revealed religion, of the incarnated God, the poem being a refutation of the Deist conception about

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the universe as a mechanical system, free from God's intervention, and whose law can be completely realized in the finite mind. In a **beast fable** published five years later (1687), *The Hind and the Panther,* Dryden is obviously in favour of the Catholic Church, the *unspotted hind* of Rome. Such vacillations are characteristic of this age of transition to the modern, desacralized world. Dryden's conscious attempt to speak a traditional language is continually subverted by elements of the new world picture coalescing from the new science and philosophy, which steal into his poems.

The **neoclassic mock-heroic** is a sort of Menippean satire, featuring an upside-down world, carnival-like, excentric (off-centred, decentered), effecting a temporary suspension of coherence. The baroque love of opposites urges Butler to redeploy a structure of meaning on a low level, or in low style. Hudibras has not managed to corrupt the fixed stars of his world, which are still shining: Montaigne, Tycho Brahe, Jacob Behmen, the refined science of logic, the gift of "Study, Industry, or Brains"; it is only that he makes such a poor work of them. Dryden's mock-heroic instates a realm of **total non-signification**. One gets the feeling that the negation of cultural order has gone so far as to make no more value possible any longer. This cosmic picture is a sign of a desacralized world, generating a literature of logocentric subversion. *Mac Flecknoe,* Prince of Dullness, appoints a bad poet, Shadwell, as his true successor. The temporary negation of all order is meant, just like in a carnival, to reestablish the Augustan positive side of the coin, with judgement as the supreme aesthetic value.

All human things are subject to decay,
And when fate summons, monarchs must obey,
This Flecknoe found, who, like Augustus, young
In prose and verse, was own'd, without dispute,
Through all the realms of Nonsense, absolute.

Dryden's reinscription of Dante's Beatrice (a dead lady of exceptional accomplishments, admitted to heaven and mediating there for mortals) in Mrs. Killigrew is a transfer from a Theology-figure to a neoclassic artist-figure combining, according to Horace's precept, the gifts of the sister-arts of poetry and music (*ut pictura poesis*). The lady's portrait in a lyrical ode focuses the classic trinity of grace, well-proportioned shape, and beautiful lineaments, while her skill enacts the same aesthetic ideal: truthfulness, visualizing potential, perfect shape (*To the Pious Memory of the Accomplished Young Lady Mrs. Anne Killigrew, Excellent in the Two Sister-Arts of Poesie and Painting*, 1686).

As for music, that of Dryden's verse is unique in English poetry. The changing rhythms, geared to the sense unit of a complete thought, like a musical phrase, the echoing sounds, the vowel variations of his two odes commissioned for St. Cecilia's Day go far beyond neoclassical regularity and uniformity,

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snatching "graces" beyond the reach of prosodic norms. The series of annual celebrations in honour of St. Cecilia's Day (November 22), the patroness of music, mounted on a regular basis from 1683 to 1703, benefited by the contributions of Dryden, Pope, Henry Purcell. The *Odes* were performed by the combined quires of several churches, accompanied by an instrumental ensemble and the theatre orchestras. It was a grand affair, and Dryden's efforts to exploit all the possibilities of the conditions of performance are obvious. Dryden recovers the Pindaric principle of **ring composition** in the overall design. Pindar's structure of strophe and antistrophe (the latter ending with the first line of the strophe, which gives a sense of closure) still left out something supplementary: the epode (sung after), serving as a sort of fixed point (Ben Jonson calls it "stand"). Dryden rounds up the whole structure, the end coinciding with the beginning: from the tuning of the universe to its apocalyptic untuning in *A Song for St. Cecilia's Day*. Circularity or closure are also the effect of the allegorical mediation between planes of being: the power of pagan music to transcend matter (the immaterial sounds of the instrument) and the power of Christian music (vocal music) to enact a sort of incarnation, that of sounds into words, articulated by the human voice. Yet Dryden preserves several elements of the ancient Greek tradition, when armies used to sing as they went into battle: the power of music to arouse the timorous, to calm down the warring spirit, to sooth and comfort over loss, etc.

Although availing himself of traditional mythopoetic material (the Platonic idea of the creation of the universe from music, or the theory of the four elements), Dryden instils elements from a Newtonic cosmic picture into his "hymn of creation" (for ... atoms and Diapason), which opens his *Ode to St. Cecilia's Day*. The world is not created out of nothing, but through a cosmic arrangement of the original confusion of "jarring atoms":

From Harmony, from Heav'nly Harmony
This universal frame began,
When Nature underneath a heap
Of jarring Atoms lay,
And cou'd not heave her Head,
The tuneful voice was heard from high,
Arise ye more than dead.
Then cold, and hot, and moist, and dry,
In order to their station leap,
And MUSICK's Pow'r obey.
From Harmony, from Heav'nly Harmony
This Universal Frame began
From Harmony to Harmony
Through all the compass of the Notes it ran,
The Diapason closing full in Man.

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The poet establishes a sort of Hobbist, mechanistic link between the kinds of musical sounds playing upon our ears and the kinds of affections they arouse: the trumpets stirring the listener to arms, the flute accompanying the "woes of hopeless lovers", the violin inflicting "jealous pangs".

Nor is the end of the *Ode* an orthodox apocalypse, leading to the revelation of a a higher spiritual order. On the contrary, the very moment the harsh sound of the trumpet is heard, the music and the orderly progression of the spheres will cease, the musical design will disappear. The celebration had a religious significance, church music being defended in a special sermon. Yet Dryden makes the end of his *Ode* sound very ambiguous in its terrifying picture of the death of life and the triumph of death, in the dissolution of heaven itself, in the absence of any hint at resurrection. Art, music, the tuned structure of the universe become an end in themselves, ruling out the religious, doctrinary aspect:

So when the last and dreadful hour
This crumbling Pageant shall devour,
The TRUMPET shall be heard on high,
The dead shall live, the Living die,
And MUSICK shall untune the sky!

The power of music is the subject of the other St. Cecilia *Ode, Alexander's Feast.* The refrain, *None but the Brave deserves the Fair,* obviously pits art against valour, triumph in battle, with the former rising higher on the scales of values. It is not music celebrating martial power but martial power competing for the Fair trophy. The great Alexander is completely in Timotheus's power, who can control his martial drive, his state of mind, his visions by simply playing his instrument. The glory of the pagan performer is celebrated almost to the end of the poem, when St. Cecilia is finally brought onto the stage, unable, over the few remaining lines, to conquer Timotheus in a sort of Pythian contest:

Let old Timotheus yield the prize,
Or both divide the Crown;
He raised a mortal to the skies;
She drew an angel down.

Alexander Pope takes over the crown of poetic excellence from Dryden in a cleverly contrived "re-make":

Of Orpheus now no more let poets tell,
To bright Cecilia greater power is given;
His numbers raised a shade from hell,
Hers lift the soul to heaven.

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Almost all Pope's poems may be said to be ***imitations***. What exactly is the meaning of this concept in Pope's case, to which we tend to ascribe a pejorative sense? What elements has Pope substituted, for instance, in this quote from his own *Ode for Music on St. Cecilia's Day*, published in 1713, but written in 1708, at the very start of his career? Dryden is working the theme into an allegory of the supremacy of Beauty. Timotheus's music urges Alexander to battle, inflames him with the desire to march forth and destroy another Troy, not like Achilles, through military valour, not like Ulysses, through cunning, but *like Helen*, through her **beauty**. Pope introduces the **archetypal artist**, Orpheus, and the archetypal shift from a pagan to a Christian world, by reversing Dryden's "directions": an attempted transcendence of that reality which Orpheus lost in looking straight in the face, *to press*, as Pope says in his *Essay on Man, on higher powers*. The object of Pope's art is neither the real Eurydice – individual and empirical experience – nor the embodiment of imagined, Platonic "shadows" drawn from the mind's underworld, but "Nature methodized": the human show in the intersubjective approach which is possible through embodied paradigms, the previous works of art. The typical Augustan writer is self-conscious in the extreme, observing generic identity. Literary conventions are structuring devices which mediate in multiple ways the writer's experience of the world. Pope reaches that healthy condition of art, in which a meaningful pattern can be discerned, without diminishing the impact of a vividly realized experience. The observation of the recurrence of literary ideas, and of the reinscription strategy in great masters of the world accompanied Pope's first awakening to a critical apprehension of the nature of poetry. *In reading several passages of the Prophet Isaiah, which foretell the coming of Christ and the felicities attending it, I could not but observe a remarkable parity between many of the thoughts, and those in the Pollio of Virgil. This will not seem surprising, when we reflect, that the* Eclogue *was taken from a Sibilline prophecy on the same subject. One may judge that Virgil did not copy it line by line, but selected such idea as best agreed with the nature of pastoral poetry, and disposed them in that manner which served most to beautify his piece. I have endeavoured the same in this imitation of him... (Advertisement* to *Messiah. A Sacred Eclogue. In Imitation of Virgil's Pollio).*

Apart from the study of canonical aspects (*the nature of pastoral poetry*), another favourite neoclassic principle is the "parity" between form and content (*such idea as best agreed with the nature of pastoral poetry*). Or, as the poet recommends in his *Essay on Criticism*:

> *When Ajax strives some rock's vast weight to throw,*
> *The line too labours, and the words move slow* (370-371)

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Whether in a contemporary scene laid in the fashionable world of the artists (the garrulous poetasters in An *Epistle from Mr Pope to Dr. Arbuthnot)*, in a reconstruction of medieval pageantry (*Eloisa to Abelard*), or in an imaginary scene, filled with sylphs and Rosicrucian Angellic Intelligences (*The Rape of the Lock*), the same universal human passions are embodied in lively characters, brought to our minds with the vivacity of a heard and seen experience. In what way have they been "methodized"? Pope's view, not only of human character but also of the possibility to understand and articulate it truthfully, is rendered in that double movement of his *Moral Essays* (and of his other "essays" as well): discursive and self-reflexive. Is human nature to be studied in books or through actual experience? The four epistles going under the title of *Moral Essays* provide an answer whose complexity bespeaks Pope's mature vision, as well as his surprisingly modern view of the individual inserted into structures of intersubjectivity. The reliability of actual experience is doubtful, he points out in the first Epistle: a) because there is no such thing in nature as a pure human type, like the Manichean Virtues and Vices of medieval allegories, or a stable human self:

But these plain Characters we rarely find;
Though strong the bent, yet quick the turns of mind:
Or puzzling contraries confound the whole;
Or affectations quite reverse the soul.
The Dull, flat falsehood serves, for policy;
And in the Cunning, truth itself's a lie;
Unthought-of Frailties cheat us in the Wise;
The Fool lies hid in inconsistencies.
See the same man, in vigour, in the gout;
Alone, in company; in place, or out;
Early at Business, and at Hazard late;
Mad at a Fox Chase, wise at a debate;
Drunk at a Borough, civil at a Ball;
Friendly at Hackney, faithless at Whitehall (I, 63-75)

The descent from paradigm – Characters – to ever more particular details until the type is immersed in topographical details is characteristic of Pope. Actual experience is also unreliable because b) our apprehension of the object is filtered through our own subjectivity, coloured by our individual point of view:

Yet more; the difference is as great between
The optics seeing, as the object seen.
All Manners take a tincture from our own;
Or come discoloured through our Passions shown.

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Or fancy's beam enlarges, multiplies,
Contracts, inverts, and gives ten thousand dyes (I, 31-36).

Pope also refutes the ancients' illusion that man can be known through his actions (unless we know their inner motivation), as well as the medieval association between social rank and a set of moral qualities:

'Tis from high Life high Characters are drawn;
A Saint in Crape is twice a saint in Lawn;
A Judge is just, a Chancellor juster still
A Gowman, learned; a Bishop, what you will;
Wise, if a Minister; but, if a King,
More wise, more learned, more just, more everything (I, 135-140)

Pope seems to be questioning Shakespeare: why should wretchedness be *past speaking* only in a king? Human character does not depend upon the outward circumstances of birth. Nor is Pope inclined to believe in the over-optimistic fiction of the luminaries, that education can modify character:

'Tis education forms the common mind,
Just as the Twig is bent, the Tree's inclined (I, 149-15o).

Whereas in the previous quote the poet's irony is most effective in the play of sobriety and colloquial jest, in this last one, his skill can be seen in the most efficacious choice of imagery: one can see the tree bending, under the taboos imposed by social institutions on the social ego, and yet never ceasing to be like a tree, a twig, a natural outgrowth, that which one is by nature.

What Pope seems to suggest through the final example of a man proved, in his last breath, to be different from the one people had known a lifetime, is that it is only in discourse, where the empirical has been abolished (allegorically, at the end of life) that a character can be known in a complete and permanent form. That general human nature appealing to the classic can only be constructed in the intersubjective order of the text, and not within the horizon of the empirical subjectivity. That is why a study of brag, for instance, may prove more profitable in Plautus than either at Hackney or Whitehall. A vivid image of avarice comes out of only a few lines, as persuasively as that which collects in Molière's celebrated play out of a host of circumstantial details:

The Courtier smooth, who forty years had shined
An humble servant to all human kind,
Just brought out this, when scarce his tongue could stir,
"If – where I'm going – I could serve you, Sir?"

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"I give and I devise (old Euclio said,
And sighed) "my lands and tenements to Ned."
"Your money, Sir;" "My money, Sir, what all?"
Why, – if I must – (then wept) I give it Paul."
"The Manor, Sir?" – "The Manor! hold" he cried,
"Not that, – A cannot part with that" – and died. (I, 252-26o)

From his earliest *discourses on pastoral poetry* to the rhetoric lore preceding *The Dunciad,* and to the *Imitations of Horace,* Pope shows himself concerned to the utmost degree with the conditions and strategies of **reinscription**: what use did Virgil make of Theocritus, why did he modernize the language of pastoral instead of sticking to obsolete forms, how can a literary convention be updated, in form and spirit, how can Pope comment on Augustan England by analogy with Horace's commentary on Augustan Rome, how can a heroic convention be naturalized in an unheroic age like the present? The self-possessed, detached tone, the urbane, polished language belong to a strong personality, drawing on classical precedent with the confident ease of a master builder seizing on his bricks rather than with the awed admiration of an apprentice.

Pope's exercise in the **topographical poem** as a kind of descriptive and reflective poetry was occasioned by the Peace of Utrecht. There is something in the shot pheasant episode amounting to a sort of heraldic gloss which tells of proud empires coming and going on the great stage of history. The formal beauty of the shot bird and the colour symbolism is deliberately artificial, suggesting a "cease of majesty" rather than the death of a bird, however rare:

See! from the brake the whirring Pheasant springs,
And mounts exulting on triumphant wings;
Short is his joy; he feels the fiery wound,
Flutters in blood, and panting beats the ground.
Ah! what avail his glossy, varying dyes,
His purple crest, and scarlet-circled eyes,
The vivid green his shining plumes unfold,
His painted wings, and breast that flames with gold?

Eloisa to Abelard is an imitation of the Ovidian **heroic epistle** on the theme of frustrated passion. Conflicting loyalties had been a favourite theme since the Restoration, but Pope enlarges it to an ideological conflict engaging the whole medieval society. The twelfth-century heroine, confined to a monastery after an impossible love for Abelard, a learned theologian, communicates her feelings of frustration in a passionate discourse, vacillating between remorse and defiant acknowledgement of sensual desire, complaint and envy of the other nuns to whom cloistered life comes naturally as the free choice of their ascetic leanings

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and devotion, between repentance and an openly erotic *carpe diem,* summing up the crux of the medieval feeling about sexuality:

Come, Abelard! for what hast thou to dread ?
The torch of Venus burns not for the dead.
Nature stands checked; Religion disapproves;
Even thou art cold – yet Eloisa loves.
Ah hopeless, lasting flames! like those that burn
To light the dead, and warm th' unfruitful urn. (257-26o).

Eloisa's letter, as a response to one of Abelard's to a friend, which had awakened her passion for him (as the reader is informed in the *Argument* to the poem), is in fact a *locus copia (Yet write, oh, write me all, that I may griefs to thy griefs, and echo sighs to thine – 41/42).* Not only a *copia* of the Ovidian convention (love letter). **The heroine is inscribed in Abelard's discourse**, her language echoing the ideas of "conceptualism", Abelard's intermediary doctrine in the medieval dispute between the extremes of nominalism and realism. If Eloisa does not **word** her thought of Abelard – the Idea, or concept – which is mixed with God's in her mind or in her heart, does that mean that she no longer entertains it? Where do reality, presence reside? In the mind that thinks, in the heart that feels or in the words that can suppress them no more than the iron fetters of Religion? Pope's view of the negotiations between language, society and ideology (the way in which man relates himself to the conditions of his existence) brings him very close to us. The closed circuit of the "letter" (graphical sign and discourse), with its autonomous causality and implacable necessity, shows that the reality constructed through discourse is as capable to "awaken" states of consciousness as real events:

Yet, yet I love! – From Abelard it came,
And Eloisa must kiss the name.
Dear fatal name! rest ever unrevealed,
Nor pass these lips in holy silence sealed;
Hide it, my heart, within that close disguise,
Where mixed with God's, his loved Idea lies:
O write it not my hand – the name appears
Already written – wash it out, my tears!
In vain lost Eloisa weeps and prays,
Her heart still dictates, and her hand obeys (7-16).

Satire, however, was the Augustans' favourite, for how else were they to castigate *mores* and to construct their paragon of civilization? As Pope never abandoned his obsession with imitation, he looked back to classical precedent and

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gave a negative reinscription of the heroic poem as **mock-heroic**. The battle of the sexes, another Restoration theme, is broadened into a *tableau vivant* of the fashionable world. The shallow drawing-room society with its petty pursuits is ridiculed in the grand manner of heroic poetry. The story of an adventurous Baron who manages by fraud to possess himself of fair Belinda's lock of hair is cast in Homeric mould: an invocation to the Muse, the ritual of Belinda's (late) morning toilet, assisted by outworldly sylphs, going busy about the fair lady's cosmetic powers, the Baron's ritual of sacrifice to the gods of love, whose assistance in securing the lock is ensured by the incense arising from the *twelve vast French romances*, the three garters, a pair of gloves, *billet-doux* and other trophies of former loves which the Baron burns on the altar of his fireplace, supernatural agency (sylphs, gnomes, demons, the fates) engaging on either side of the battle, which is a game of cards ending with the Baron's revenge in cutting the long-coveted lock. The satirical onslaught on the trivial concerns and passions of the fashionable society depends for its humorous relish on the contrast provided by the framing esoteric doctrines: Platonic, Rosicrucian, alchemical. The drawing-room types are distilled into their eternal essences: If Plato be right about the soul's passions surviving after death, then a woman's posthumous yield will be the love of "Ombre" and other trifling delights. The description of the real characters themselves looking like animated cards is the climax of Pope's reductive game with his society. Antithetical rhetorical frames are brought into collision, the **zeugma** (yoking) figure replacing a logic of parallel by one of explosive contrast, of paradoxical antithesis. If, in the *Essay on Man*, it serves to suggest that everything in the world is relative to everything else, because it can be seen either from below as something superior, or from above as something of trifling importance – *And now a bubble burst, and now a world* –, in *The Rape of the Lock* its rhetorical meaning is the total collapse of values in a world which no longer differentiates between piety and luxury, prudence and virtue, devotion and entertainment, emotional and economic loss etc.

> *Whether the nymph shall break Diana's law,*
> *Or some frail china-jar receive a flaw;*
> *Or stain her honour or her new brocade;*
> *Forget her prayers, or miss a masquerade*
> *Or lose her heart, or necklace, at a ball; (Canto II,* 105-109)

The deconstruction of the traditional code of values, which at that time was another symptom of an incipient metaphysical crisis, is completed in *The Dunciad*. Pope's models range from Homer to Dryden's *Mac Flecknoe* (in which the author acknowledged a debt to *Hudibras)*, in that specifically English poise between the foreign and the native literary tradition, between tradition and

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innovation, between past and present. The mock-heroic reinscription is carried one step further by providing the fictional world of the text with all the para-texts accompanying its publication: two *Advertisements*, an address from the publisher, a letter to the publisher, critical comment, revision of the text. The critical views of Pope's mask, Matinus Scriblerus, are here a feeble echo of his long pedantic mock-treatise on the basic mock-heroic strategy, *Peri Bathous*, where this deflating strategy is given a literal translation – "the art of sinking in poetry" – and a "dignified" status as the modern correlate of the sublime. Scriblerus invokes the ancients' authority in order to legitimise the new literary convention. As Aristotle mentions a treatise on comedy apart from the celebrated one on tragedy, which was never found, Scriblerus infers that he ought to have thought of *The Dunciad.* We wonder whether Umberto Eco, who makes a similar speculation in his novel, *The Name of the Rose*, was familiar with the *Dunciad* case.

The Goddess of the Empire of Emptiness and Dullness dreams to restore her glory after Poet Laureate Laurence Eusden's death, to which purpose she chooses the dull poet Bayes (Theobald, later, Cibber), whom she coronates in the Temple of Fame. The analogy with the epic canon imposed by Homer and Virgil provides a humorous anticlimax: *The King being proclaimed, the solemnity is graced with public games, and sports of various kinds; not instituted by the Hero, as by Aeneas in Virgil, but for greater honour by the Goddess in person (in like manner as the games Pythia, Isthmia, etc. were anciently said to be ordained by the Gods, and as Thetis herself appearing, according to Homer Odyssey XXIV, proposed the prizes in honour of her son Achilles) – Argument to Book the Second.* Another parallel, that between the funeral games of the *Aeneid* and the contests of the "bards of these degenerate days", accompanied by critics and booksellers, carries a powerful intimation of the death of literature in the machinery of book publication, advertising and commercialization in the modern world. Literature was no longer written for a restricted *élite*, it had been subjected to middle-class standards and to the pressure of the market-place. Another bathetic association is that between *The Aeneid* VI, with the Sibyl's famous prophecy of the future Roman Empire, and the visions of the past, present, and future reign of Dulness in *Dunciad III.* Scriptural echoes steal into the last part, with the theme of election and that of revelation of the divinity to her chosen one (Dulness revealing herself to Bays). Communication with the divine, however, is no longer the work of Grace but the catching disease of the "Yawn of Gods"...The triumph of the Empire of Dullness is in fact Pope's triumph in writing it: *The Dunciad,* or the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid* of the eighteenth century. An exorcistic rite of an age setting the highest prize on Reason. The overwhelming show of the extinction of civilization is an implicit encomium of its arts: philosophy, metaphysics, mathematics, morality, all are brought down to the dead level of

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existence. Pope laments the corruption of science to casuistry, of philosophy to empiricism, of metaphysics to mathematical constructs. The negation of cultural order is the very reversal of Genesis, a return to the "uncreating word" of *Night Primeval, and of Chaos old:*

Lo! thy dread Empire, CHAOS ! is restored;
Light dies before thy uncreating word:
Thy hand, great Anarch! lets the curtain fall;
And universal Darkness buries All.

In the preface to the second edition of *Winter (1726),* James Thomson urged his contemporaries to turn towards "great and serious subjects". It is particularly in *The Dunciad* that Alexander Pope shows the negative rhetoric of satire as being the royal road to them.

The eighteenth century saw not only the birth of the English **novel** but also a diversity of narrative strategies which entitle us to consider the general picture as a microscopic image of the entire subsequent development of English fiction.

The English word for the new literary genre stresses its "novelty" and not its origin in romance. In fact, it develops out of **non-fictional material**: **diary, letters, biography, travel accounts, journalism (8).** The great contributors, of which Elizabethan romance remained a minor source, were the straightforward narrative style of *A Pilgrim's Progress,* the periodical essays of Steele and Addison, with their anecdotes illustrative of character, fictional biographies, and attempted psychological characterization, the factual style of Defoe's journalistic work, Aphra Behn's incipient realism in placing heroic actions and character in contemporary society. With their characteristic awareness of generic identity, the English writers – **Henry Fielding, Tobias Smollett, Charlotte Lennox** – acknowledged their debt to Cervantes. Here is Tobias Smollett: *representing familiar scenes in an uncommon and amusing point of view, Cervantes, by an inimitable piece of ridicule reformed the taste of mankind, representing chivalry in the right point of view* (*Preface* to *Roderick Random*). **Realism, familiar scenes, point of view, that is artistic representation not as a mirror but as a narrative perspective on the action, allowing of the structuring of story into plot, as well as the break with pre-modern mentalities** – this is a splendid characterization, in no way inferior to Samuel Johnson's, who was the century's uncontested arbiter of taste: *The works of fiction with which the present generation seems more particularly delighted are such as exhibit life in its true state, diversified only by accidents that daily happen in the world and influenced by passions and qualities which are really to be found in conversing with mankind. Its province is to bring about natural events by easy*

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means and to keep up curiosity without the help of wonder. It is therefore precluded from the machines and expedients of the heroic romance and can neither employ giants to snatch away a lady from the nuptial rites, nor knights to bring her back from captivity („The Rambler", No 4). Charlotte Lennox undertakes in *The Female Quixote* (1752) to awaken the representatives of the fair sex from their dreamy worlds constructed by French romances of the previous centuries. Inflamed with their stories of the ladies' abduction by profligate knights, Arabella sees in every male acquaintance a possible threat, to her commonsensical cousin's embarrassment.

The new form of fictional narrative tells the modern story of humanity's disenchantment with the medieval world: a call for realism, an acknowledgement of facts, a break-up of the feudal immobility of status. The *picaro* (Spanish: a rogue) travels through a variety of low life settings, *where the humours and passions are undisguised by affectation, ceremony or education* (Smollett, *Ibidem*). There is an **explosive broadening of the human spectre and social range** represented in a narrative, as the high road and the inn provide a suitable scene for the testing of character, and for the reunion of the most diverse social types. The novel is **associated with the town**, where large numbers of people mingle their inner, individual lives into the inextricable webs of social intercourse. Characters are no longer atemporal types but **social types, rooted in historical codes, and realized as highly idiosyncretic individuals,** each with his private emotions and personal qualities. In the age of mounting capitalist individualism, the inner self and subjective experience become as important as social determinism, while, in a static feudal community, human destiny is shaped by the circumstances of birth. Alexander Pope is building his argument on the mechanical association of character and status, and on the wooden types of class comedy in his first *Moral Essay* (150-157):

Boastful and rough, your first Son is a Squire;
The next a Tradesman, meek, and much a liar;
Tom struts a Soldier, open, bold, and brave;
Will sneaks a Scrivener, an exceeding knave:
Is he a Churchman? then he's fond of power;
A Quaker? sly: A Presbyterian ? sour:
A smart freethinker? all things in an hour.

Not only the enormous social displacements but also habits of psychological observation and satirical comment on manners and morals in view of improving them – *Hominem pagina nostra sapit* – have made possible a more realistic representation of human character: *We are very curious to observe the behaviour of great men and their clients; but the same passions and interests move men in*

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lower spheres: and I (that have nothing else to do but make observations) see in every parish, street, lane, and alley, of this populous city, a little potentate that has his court and his flatterers, who lay snares for his affection and favour by the same arts that are practised upon men in higher stations (*The Spectator*, 49, 1711). Richard Steele says here as much as John Gay in *The Beggar's Opera*, 1728. It is a collection of lyrics set to popular airs mocking the fashionable Italian opera, whose artificiality is also ridiculed by Pope in *The Dunciad*, and by Addison. The subversion of a discourse of power – an artistic convention hospitable to a feudal mode of vision – is doubled by the subversion of the social power system: the parallels between Gay's plot and the social-political realities of the time show persons in high positions no better than the treacherous highwaymen, and manners in high and low life as strikingly similar. Linked with the habits of mind and artistic tastes of the rising middle-class, the novel tends towards a plain, yet educated language, towards an expository narrative, with a colloquial ring, yet betraying the ease and correctness of the coffee-house conversation. **Augustan diction – balanced, assured in tone, of homely directness and natural ease** – smoothes over the rich variety of the languages absorbed into the force field of fictional narration: Swift's Rebelaisean erudition employed in an extravaganza of plain nonsense, Defoe's fascination with the language of the market-place made to serve the empire-builders, the waste of rhetorical subtlety and the misapplications of the learned wit drawing on the latest philosophical and scientific theories cherished by the members of the Scriblerus Club (founded in 1713 by Pope, Gay, and Parnell), who meant to amend "all the false tastes in learning", the homeliness of serious aesthetic reflection, and the decorum of the low characters' speech.

The "knowledge of the world" mediated by Defoe's *Review*, running in thrice-weekly issues from 1704 to 1713, is also disseminating the language of business and politics. The language of the Church is no longer supposed to be that of inspiration and of devotion, but a recital of the professionals' sermons available in print, and developed into a *continued system of practical divinity.* (*The Spectator*, 106, 1711). Even the language of Swift's satirical prose, reminding of the metaphysicals' genius for metaphorical wit, with explosive puns and compact welds of the erudite and the grotesquely concrete, assumes the natural tone of the matter-of-fact. The enormity of the farcical imagination and the playfulness of the imagistic games lend a fantastic dimension to the usual topicalness of non-fiction. In order to match the philosophers' wild leaps between empiricism and idealism, dualism and monism, the chameleonic discourse turns from the medieval scholastic argument (Chap. VIII of *A Tale of a Tub*, 1704, on the Aeolists) to the dry scientific report on the experimental observation. The most absurd syllogistic ratiocinations are conducted on the most confident and natural tone, the Hobbist theory on the dialectic of sensation/memory of the thing as mental perception is rendered through a trivial object whose name marks the shift from present to past

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visual perception: *They* (the preachers working on the minds of the congregation) *violently strain their Eye balls inward, half closing the Lids; Then, as they sit, they are in a perpetual Motion and Sea-saw... (The Mechanical Operation of the Spirit, 1704).* Swift is comically reversing all the basic assumptions of the age, whether in matters of politics, science or social organization. The extravagant exploitation of learned materials achieves a sort of mock-heroic effects in his **exploratory pamphlets**. The mock-heroic separation of narrator and characters (dramatically presented by the former) is paralleled here by the writer's adoption of a mask. As a *persona*, he dares to advance the most shocking arguments, submitting the reader's logic and common sense to unprecedented violence. In *A Modest Proposal for Preventing the Children of Poor People in Ireland from Being a Burden to their Parents or Country, and for Making them Beneficial to the Public*, 1729, the horrifying suggestion that the children of the Irish poor should be sold as food for the tables of the English rich may, through detachment, be advanced in someone else's person in all its shocking details, with the most audacious intimations: *I believe no Gentleman would repine to give ten shillings for the carcass of a good, fat Child.*

It was William Hogarth (1697-1754) that mainly influenced the eighteenth-century taste for distortion and caricature. His engravings, drawings, paintings reveal, with a satirical force comparable with that of Swift and Pope, the hypocrisy and cruelty of the fashionable society of his day. His **conversation pieces** are a graphical illustration of Steele's and Addison's periodical essay: little paintings of figures in characteristic attitudes and groupings, conversing indoors or in the open. Hogarth's realistic-moralizing bent – *painting and engraving moral subjects, a field not broken up in any country of any age* – influenced the early eighteenth-century novel to a considerable extent. The visual arts were made to narrate a story, just as poetry was expected to have a high visualizing potential. His "conversation pieces" tell a dramatic story of the kind Defoe or Fielding are casting into words: *A Harlot's Progress, A Rake's Progress, Marriage à la Mode, The Four Stages of Cruelty.* The **cautionary tale** of his character progress – Tom Nero starting by torturing dogs and horses, advancing to rape and murder, and ending up on the gallows, his corpse being subsequently dissected at Surgeons' Hall – was another favourite among contemporaries. In his *Preface* to *Joseph Andrews* (a burlesque of Richardson's *Pamela*), Fielding defends Hogarth against the charge of Caricature in painting, which he sees as the analogue of burlesque in literature: even if his characters do not seem to breathe, like humans in flesh and blood, yet they seem to think!

A **cautionary story** is **Daniel Defoe**'s first novel, *Robinson Crusoe* (1719-1720). Yet it is much more than that. Whereas Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* can be traced back to the Faust figure, Robinson Crusoe is a modern myth entirely

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contributed by the young bourgeois civilization of which England was the chief representative in eighteenth-century Europe.

The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robisnon Crusoe is not a quest of honour, happiness or redemption but a factual travel narrative, a story of the struggle for survival and physical comfort. Robinson is not the daring hero of romance but the **prudential protagonist** of a non-heroic age. He is not devoid, however, of his peculiar, new sort of grandeur, which makes him a hero of eighteenth-century Western Europe: he is the **Empire-builder**, who carries the benefits of civilization to savage lands, where he imposes his rule. He is the **economic man,** who recapitulates on his island the basic processes of production and consumption. We also agree with Ian Watt **(9),** that Robinson is not relying on Providence but rather on a secularized version of Puritanism – the capitalist individualistic doctrine of self-help, "unwearied diligence and application". We shall go one step further, and say that Defoe conscientiously develops a story of disenchantment with Providence, this being the first assertion of the modern, empirically-minded **homo faber**. Robinson Crusoe is a modern myth also because it is not centred in the origin. The hero himself was colonized before becoming himself a colonist. He repeats a story, he does not create an archetype. His father had come to England from Bremen, had adopted his wife's English name, and even his son's name – Kreutznaer – had been changed to "Crusoe" *by the usual corruption of words in English.*

The age is full of Horatian (sixth Satire from the Second Book) predicaments on the good life. According to Pomfret or Sir Roger Coverlay, it consists in a leisurely gentlemanly life, preferably in the country, spent in the reading of books and enjoyment of good company. Robinson's father's point of view is middle-class complacency, or rather willing self-delusion, betraying both the satisfaction of being above those in need, and the resentful dismissal of the abused aristocracy's enjoyment of luxury and pride of caste: *He bid me observe it (...) that calamities of life were shared among the upper and lower part of mankind; but that the middle station had the fewest disasters, and was not expos'd to so many vicissitudes as the higher or lower part of mankind; nay they were not subjected to so many distempers and uneasiness, either of body or mind as those were who, by vicious living, luxury and extravagances on the one hand or by hard labour, want of necessaries, and mean or insufficient diet on the other, bring distempers upon themselves (...) that the middle station of life was calculated for all kinds of vertues and all kinds of enjoyments; that peace and plenty were the hand-maids of a middle fortune; that temperance, moderation, quietness, health, society, all agreeable diversions, and all desirable pleasures, were the blessings attending the middle station of life.* In Crusoe there burns the spirit of the new rising bourgeoisie, which was challenging and reaching up to the supreme power in the state, or in the world. As noticed by Hogarth, the alliance between the

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aristocracy and the commercial magnates was the keystone of the Augustan social and political system. Crusoe will rise above the "middle station" of his plantation and trade in "Brasils", he dreams of becoming very rich, even by engaging in the slave trade, for which special licence was needed in the 166os from Spain and Portugal – the most powerful colonizers. He teaches savages the language of master and slave, Friday and his Master, enacting the paradigm of capitalist exploitation and imperialist colonialization with the imposition of the European's values, religion, language. *It would have made a stoick smile to have seen me and my little family sit down to dinner; there was my majesty the prince and lord of the whole island; I had the lives of all my subjects at my absolute command; I could hang, draw, give liberty, and take it away, and no rebels among all my subjects. Then to see how like a king I din'd too, all alone, attended by my servants. Poll, as if he had been my favourite, was the only person permitted to talk to me. My dog, who was now grown very old and crazy, and had found no species to multiply his kind upon, sat always at my right hand, and two cats, one on one side of the table, and one on the other, expecting now and then a bit from my hand, as a mark of special favour.* Crusoe does not love cats, for he has shot some of them, nor parrots, as his first lesson to Friday is not on naming "the bigger and the lesser light", like Prospero's to Caliban, but on shooting a parrot. Yet he enjoys a show of what looks like absolutist feudal power. Although completely merged into the middle-class economy of the production and commercialization of goods, of getting rich and working his way up into the world, Robinson cannot help admiring and envying the aristocratic ceremonial, or being fascinated with status. The language of affections as well as the moral sense are completely missing (see Robinson selling Xury, the moorish boy who had helped his escape from the pirates' captivity in Guiana), having been replaced by practical morality (do not do unto cannibals what you would not like them to do unto you), and by the discourse of utility and economic efficiency. The enumeration of the goods he has rescued from the wrecked ship, the detailed description of the material conditions of his existence – building and working, and extending into "the country" residence etc. – help to construct the *faber* figure which has replaced that of Faustus in a desacralized world.

In matters of devotion, there is an evolution in Robinson from blind belief in Providence towards an empiricism which has extinguished even the last traces of practical or business-like religion. There are several scenes of obviously programmatic demystification: Robinson thanking God for the unexpected harvest of barley, and his disappointment at discovering the *natural cause* of the supposed miracle: the grains of corn he had carelessly scattered on a piece of fertile ground on emptying out a purse he had found on the ship. He hears some secret voice calling out to him in his dream, and, on waking up in terror, he discovers it to be coming from his parrot, whom he had taught a few words. He has a dream

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prophesying his meeting Friday, but not all details coincide with the actual events, nor does he rely on his dream in order to secure himself company. On being asked by Crusoe who he is, the Spaniard he saves from the cannibals' feast, coming from Old Europe, answers in Bunyan's language, which in the state of nature sounds rather obsolete and inefficient: "Christianus". He is *very weak and faint, that he could scarce stand or speak.* Robinson urges him, like Shakespeare's Stephano, to "kiss the book", that is to drink some rum from his bottle, and to accept some weapons. The effect is miraculous: *as if they had put new vigour into him, he flew upon his murderers like a fury, and had cut two of them in pieces in an instant.* By releasing the captain of the mutinous crew, Robinson and Friday are taken for gods, like Stephano and Trinculo – a fiction the "master" discourages with the commonsensical argument that the angels would have been better clothed, while suggesting that, under the circumstances, he makes the more efficient god: "*All help is from heaven, sir", said I. "But can you put a stranger in the way how to help you, for you seem to me to be in some great distress".*

The humanity Defoe set out to represent required **narrative realism** in which his life as a journalist had long trained him. The **I-narrator** (narrative in the first person), also dramatized as the hero of the action (**intradiegetic narrator**), is a guarantor of truthfulness, reinforced by the author's prefatory statement that he merely chanced upon the manuscript, which seems to be *a just history of fact*, with no fiction in it. The powerful impression of verisimility is indeed ensured by Defoe's perusal of the actual accounts of Alexander Selkirk and other castaways. The lucid prose, economic, straight to the point, resembles that of "debtor and creditor", as the narrator himself confesses about his first "balance sheet" of good and evil in his wreck. The narrative structure is programmatically chosen to match, in Augustan fashion, the factual content of the plot. *All narrators and observers, whether first or third person, can relay their tales to us primarily as scene (...), primarily as summary or what Lubbock called "picture" (Addison's almost completely non-scenic tales* in *The Spectator*), *or, most commonly, as a combination of the two* **(10).** Robinson illustrates both, the diary being a sort of quantifier (measuring out in dates, figures, brief summaries) of the actual experience. Inner and outer reality are interconnected, the representation of the world follows the realist convention of (natural) cause-and-effect in constructing the plot, and displays a belief in the knowable and "writerly" quality of experience. The **scenic** (Quote A) yields to the **summary** (Quote B), in Addison's manner, because a **selection** is necessary of the significant elements from among the chaotic mass of facts, as well as their **qualification,** that is, the expression of the narrator's attitude to the situation. The journal is an objectified and "methodized" version of the real self, Robinson referring to himself as if to an otherness. Like in Lacan's symbolic stage **(11)**, the hero contemplates his own image in his text, constructed for intersubjective others. The self-reflexive narrator

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lays bare his stylistic choices in writing *The Journal*. The reader is thus inculpated with the production of the text, noticing, for instance, how the uncurtailed description, the picturesque and the sentimental, tedious details, the real life redundancies have been ruled out.

(Quote A) *I ran about the shore, wringing my hands, and beating my head and face, exclaiming at my misery and crying out, I was undone, undone, till tyr'd and faint I was forc'd to lie down on the ground to repose, but durst not sleep for fear of being devour'd.*

(Quote B) *The Journal. September 30, 1659. I, poor miserable Robinson Crusoe, being shipwreck'd during a dreadful storm, in the offing, came on shore of this dismal unfortunate island, which I call'd the Island of Despair, all the rest of the ship's company being drown'd and myself almost dead.*

The impression of impersonality in a first-person narrative becomes possible through the variation of perspectives in a consciousness which doubles back upon itself, making an effort to present the action from different perspectives (an optimistic pitied against a pessimistic view).

Encouraged by the huge public success of the novel, which shows how much affined it was to the contemporary mode of vision and sensibility, Defoe wrote two continuations: *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, and *The Serious Reflections of Robinson Crusoe*. The habit of reflection has complexified the empirical self. A critique of vulgar empiricism coming from Descartes, Leibnitz or even Locke, who had acknowledged the autonomous workings of the intellect, may be spotted in Robinson's intimation of the mind escaping the slavery of sense impressions. As his brother's son, whom he has provided for, as if he had been his own child, expresses his own secret desire of revisiting the island on which he had spent some thirty years of his life, Robinson launches on the following speculation, redeeming the former purely factual account: *Nothing can be a greater demonstration of a future state, and of the existence of the invisible world, than the concurrence of second causes with the ideas of things, which we form in our minds, perfectly reserv'd, and not communicated to any in the world* (introductory chapter to *Further Adventures...*). In *The Serious Reflections*, Defoe makes a hint that the story is an allegory of his own life. In the opening chapter, *Of Solitude*, he converts Crusoe's experience on the island into a metaphor of man's loneliness as an inescapable predicament: *... it seems to me that life in general is, or ought to be, but one universal act of solitude. Everything revolves in our minds by innumerable circular motions, all centering in ourselves... we love, we hate, we covet, we enjoy, all in privacy and solitude.* The quote is symptomatic of the unexpected consequence of Locke's empirical theory of sensations and ideas: the scepticism of the intellect locked up in its private dream of the world,

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informing the Romantic cult of the idiosyncratic individual self. Robinson's conclusion is also symptomatic of the feeling of alienation which the individualistic capitalist enterprise brought along with it.

His next works of fiction bear titles relating us again to individuals, but the characters are now closer to the picaro pattern: criminals, whores, pirates. In *The Fortunate Mistress* (1724), also known as *Roxana*, the heroine's life of prostitution brings, according to the sombre Puritanic view, a terrible punishment upon her head. Unlike it, *Moll Flanders* (1722), also a first-person narrative, shows the happy reunion of a reformed prostitute to her Lancashire husband, after years of perdition. The economic motivation – she was forced to leave her home in order to make a living – is carried into an amoral picture of a society in which outdated notions like chastity or virtue have been ascribed a certain monetary value. Yielding under the sway of the generalized social market-place, Moll sells her own body because she has nothing else to sell.

The shrewd manipulation of the point of view takes us to the other extremity of the 18th-century narrative range: *Gulliver's Travels*, by **Jonathan Swift**, which draws on the fantastic of medieval romance. It is a ***novel of pattern***, not a novel of life **(12)**, since it is not the illusion of the texture of life, in its reality and normal chronology, that collects at the end of this splendid fictional satire, but a certain symbolical design: the characters stand for different aspects of the human race. We may say, therefore, that this is a **thesis novel**, or a **novel with a key**. Gulliver's Travels is also a **satirical novel**, a naive narrator travelling among strange peoples – not believable characters and situations – on whom he comments from an incompatible perspective. A **double structure of meaning** is thus being encoded: surface and underlying, literal and of rhetorical deviation (irony). It is also a pioneer work of **science fiction** (travel in space and other dimensions), or of **utopian fiction**, with a pastoral element in the satirical comment on a society by comparison with another.

No wonder the idea of a book of travels should have suggested itself at a time when daring colonialist ventures and exploratory voyages had made them very popular, but *Gulliver's Travels* is in a higher degree illustrative of the innovating spirit which was galvanizing the ambitious mid-century English artists. Hogarth was not alone in attempting a formal break-through; Samuel Richardson too boasted having hit upon a new species of writing – the **novel in letters**, *Pamela* –, Henry Fielding himself took pride in his **comic epic in prose**, or prose burlesque, *a kind of writing which I do not remember to have seen hitherto attempted in our language* (*Joseph Andrews*). Laurence Sterne, who in his audacious *Tristram Shandy* (*Book V, Ch. 1*) ridicules the technique of emptying old books into new, or walking the trodden path, exercised himself in a completely new manner of writing. In fact, Henry Fielding concludes, in the first chapter of his *Tom Jones*, it is novelty of form rather than of subject that bespeaks

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a writer's "excellence". Or, in the terms of his delicious gastronomic metaphor, the reader's mental entertainment will benefit less from the sort of subject the author is cooking than from its being well dressed-up. If the piquancy of English eighteenth-century novels has earned them a worldwide readership down to our days, their formal relevance has made them an apt illustrative material for theoreticians of fiction, as different as M. Bakhtin, René Wellek and Austin Warren, Wayne C. Booth.

In Jonathan Swift, the experimenting demon works such wonders that the Gulliver narrative looks like a prose transposition of Pope's *Essay on Man*: the same relativistic worldoutlook motivated by the speculation on the existence not only of different modes of being but also of different modes of perception (in Spinoza, they are the same totality, Hegel says, regarded from either point of view: as range or as thought). The doctrinary stringency of Pope's didactic essay is missing altogether, the author delighting in the upside-down world of Menippean satire (Gulliver finds himself admiring horses, for instance, and feeling inferior). The broad comedy, with grotesque overtones, of the prejudices and partialities of all creatures' ego-centrism („centering on ourselves", as Defoe says) has never ceased to be of topical interest, particularly today when attempts are being made at a reconstruction of world literature canons, freed from the biases of Europocentrism. The function of the picaro, fool and buffoon, according to Bakhtin **(13)**, is that of disengaging the modern worldview from the feudal episteme. The individual is pleading for freedom from all conventional forms of existence, taking the liberty to challenge the establishment, to remove masks, and tell the truth obliquely by miming the stranger's lack of comprehension. Don Quixote, the model of the age, is a characteristic blend of the "strange miraculous world" of the courtly romance "chronotope" and the highway of a familiar world, characteristic of the picaresque novel. The passion for travel takes Lemuel Gulliver, first a surgeon, and then a captain of several ships, to remote nations of the world, where scales and values keep shifting: giants or dwarfs, reasoning horses or human beings without the gift of reason. And yet, from another point of view, he never leaves home. Wherever he goes he takes with him the day's political disputes, the philosophical arguments, the realignment of values, the inquiry into the comparative merits of empiricism and transcendentalism, reason and the senses, pragmatism and idealism. The **love of paradox** Swift shares with Pope sets reality in an ever new and surprising perspective, overthrowing habits of thought and long-cherished values, forcing a fresh response from the bewildered consciousness. **The setting is no longer realistic in novels of pattern, but conventional, symbolic**. Diminutive dimensions symbolize petty pursuits and narrow-mindedness. The inhabitants of Lilliput have been waging endless civil wars caused by a ridiculous argument over the advisability of breaking the bigger or the smaller end of their eggs, of wearing low heels or high heels etc. The

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feeling of a fatal confinement of understanding within the physical horizon of one's existence contributes an underground tragical vein to the comical plot. A limited creature will always measure everything by a yardstick which is in fact his own measure. The Lilliputians trace everything down to their own dimensions. They have placed themselves at the centre of the universe, and their understanding of anything in it is reductive, "Lilliputianocentric". Here is the report on their "pick-pocketing" the "Mountain Man" (Gulliver has also proved remarkably clever, yet it is only physical prodigiousness that impresses them): *we observed a girdle about his waste made of the hide of some prodigious animal; from which, on the left side, hung a sword of the length of five men; and on the right, a bag or pouch divided into two cells; each cell capable of holding three of your Majesty's subjects. In one of these cells were several globes of balls of a most ponderous metal, about the bigness of our heads, and required a strong hand to lift them; the other cell contained a heap of certain black grains, but of no great bulk or weight, for we could hold about fifty of them in the palms of our hands.* If we agree with the classical narrative of the Enlightenment, as a progress from the optimistic belief in the light of reason and the justness of a rational universe imprinting its harmonious design on society as well, towards a less-confident and even satirical view, leading to a bleak recognition of the dark side of life and, consequently, offering up love-kindness, generosity of feeling, sentimentality and the like as solutions, then Swift is located in the middle stream. Universalizing perspectives and ideas yield to a historicist awareness of the cognitive structures mediating, for each people, its knowledge of the world. Gulliver's watch looks totally unfamiliar to the Lilliputians, and, ironically, they take Gulliver for the uncouth primitive man, praying to idols... Advanced machinery is interpreted as a drawback, a recourse to magic. Dissatisfaction with the establishment transpires in Gulliver's actual contact with such practices on the island of sorcerers and magicians. The personages of the past they conjure up – Brutus, Socrates, Cato, Thomas More – share the same attempt of resisting the power structures. From acquiescence and promotion of peace and stability, the age is drifting towards contention. The Rabelaisian mix of imaginary voyage and political satire qualifies Swift's novel for the prestigious tradition of **conte philosophique** or philosophical fable, testing philosophical hypotheses and comparative values. Is man a rational animal? Is universal knowledge possible? Does touring around the world enlighten one's mind? The Augustan ideal is seriously threatened. Actual experience is derealized as some kind of troping, for instance, anthropomorphic gigantism. The land of the giants, Brobdingnag, is that of broad-mindedness as well. From a higher, enlightened perspective, the Tory/Whig confrontation appears as ridiculous as that between Lilliput and Blefuscu. In the light of common sense and reason, intestine strife is absurd. Why have secrets of state when there is no threat from a foreign enemy? Why have a government which should turn half the people against the

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other half? The comments of the uncomprehending Gulliver complaining about the Brobdingnag King's lack of comprehension are an oblique attack upon Gulliver's world, which he naively defends while decrying the intolerable confinement of the art of government within the "narrow" bounds of common sense and reason, justice and toleration, or of research within the ken of applied science, which can improve living conditions, with no regard for "ideas, entities, abstractions and transcendental categories" – the scholastic "chronotope".

Swift's world is that which had been revealed by the magnifying glass and by the telescope. They ought to have had the same effect as the invention of the camera, utilizing long-range and close-up lens. By observing the object at a distance or taking a close look at it one reaches different conclusions. The self and the world are destabilized, threatening to vanish into a game of perspectives or a clash of points of view. The modern relativist spirit has been born, an anxiety can be sensed in the inquiry about the world – not as to being the best, but as to being at all. Is there anything stable at the core, as its essence? Is it merely a shifting representation, disclosing more about the observer than about the observed? Are the supreme Augustan values – reason and judgement – any good? Another symbolical space: a flying island symbolizing a humanity taken up with its own fantasies, losing all grounding in reality and common sense. In the country of the most passionate cult of science and the arts, one cannot find a single straight wall or a single right angle. The land yields little, people are starving. Science is divorced from the practical ends of a material civilization. The members of the academy of Lagado (a satirical portrait of the Royal Academy) are employing their imagination in gratuitous, absurd inventions. Finally there are the reasoning horses. Swift is an Augustan, yet, like Pope, he responds in a fuller sense to experience, in its entire complexity: sense and judgement, reason and feeling, abstract concept and sensuous grasp. The cult of reason as an end in itself may pervert it into something unnatural, inhuman, stifling affections and crippling the complete human personality. These rational creatures do not experience the all too human fear of death as the very end of consciousness; they do not experience love, only coupling for the pragmatic purpose of multiplying the race; their poetry is didactic, offering instruction but no emotional enjoyment. No wonder the most rational creature reaches a point where humanity ceases, going back to beastly mechanical adaptation or fitness of means to ends. Journeying through the world of the mind, Gulliver discovers its triumph in the death of the heart. There is a seed here out of which the Orwell world would germinate. Gulliver's explorative journey into human possibilities has come full circle, and the best of all possible worlds has not been found. Man is locked up in contradictions, life is such an insoluble lump!

The epistemological impasse is communicated through structural and stylistic devices: irony, paradoxes, tricks of logic, outrageous conclusions to false

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premises. Gulliver is un unreliable narrator, an unstable self, who changes from one journey to another, who is shaped by the discontinuities of experience, rather than remaining in (rational) control of reality. Not even in control of his own discourse. He understands less than the reader is given to understand. He aims at one thing, and gets the opposite. He means to prove the superiority of the human race, but the enumeration of the means of destruction perfected by man only yields an apocalyptic show of grim humour: *I assured him that I had seen them blow up a hundred enemies at once in a siege, and as many in a ship, and beheld the dead bodies come down in pieces from the clouds, to the great diversion of the spectators.* The implied author remains at a distance from the **dramatized narrator (intradiagetic**, who is also a character in the story), manipulating him as he would a puppet in the public square shows of the time, while building, through the subverting play of rhetoric, a bridge over to the reader's understanding of the truth of the situation No reader will fail to retrieve the true rhetorical meaning of Gulliver's literal upholding of the wrong point of view.

The programme of formal experimentation is a sign of the shift to modern aesthetics. Ancient ideal beauty is no longer the universal yardstick. Another sign thereof is the divorce between cultural and social norms. Hobbes's *Answer* to D'Avenant outlines a kind of "class poetic", making literary kinds dependent upon social estates and the town/country divide. The heroic poem and tragedy are suitable for the Court, the burlesque – satire and comedy – is the proper medium for the City, whereas pastoral poetry is meant for village life. The Augustan Age is reputed for **letter-writing.** But it was not only **Lady Mary Wortley Montagu** or **John Byrom** that were exercising themselves in the restrained manner and balanced syntax of the Augustan best. **William Shenstone** too was calling upon the attention of country clergy or gentry, sharing his personal experience of landscape gardening, reading, his delight in a Horatian "enjoyment of country air, and retirement". Finally, letter writing appeared to be a legitimate occupation for humble people, in the proper art of which, employed on different occasions, they needed to be instructed. In 1638 **Samuel Richardson** was thus instructing "A Father to a Daughter in Service". That was how *Pamela* was born two years later. Richardson's first long **epistolary novel** emerges as a body of letters from Pamela, a modest girl in service, to her parents, "writing to the moment" on her master's attempting her virtue. For the sake of veridicity, the author reserves for himself the modest role of editor who arranged for print, annoted and indexed the documents. This new narrative technique has certain disadvantages – the imposition to keep characters apart, for why else would they be writing letters? But it also opens new possibilities for the exploration of the mind, of feelings, of states of consciousness. It was an alternative to the picaro convention, with its **unchanging, outwardly described** character, moving through a sequence of

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events, and from one place to another. The new **internal perspective** opens to the reader the characters' states of mind, laying bare their motives for outward action, their reactions. From here the tradition leads to the fiction of centres of consciousness (stream of consciousness, interior monologue). The author is no longer an omniscient god-figure but a privileged observer, claiming no more access to the characters' minds than the readers themselves. The characters are dramatized as individuals distinct from the narrator, possessed of a "mind-style" which matches a certain mental self. The choice of a certain range of vocabulary, rhetoric, mentality dramatically restricts the author's previous liberties. We can see Pamela opposing Mr. B., a profligate aristocrat, in the name of the middle-class principles of prudential virtue, modesty, sobriety. We understand her decision of changing the rich clothes she has received from her late mistress and master for her previous virginal attire consisting in home-spun cloth and hand-embroidered necklace, suggestive of that diligence and industry and self-reliance which made the middle class the true repository of respectability. The folk theme (low-born maid and high-born lord) absorbs a modern ethos: birth no longer determines character. In spite of her base parentage, Pamela displays "born dignity, born discretion". The interface of love romance and the pattern of precise social relationships fuses two opposite chronotopoi. Chastity has become a question of prudence in view of securing a social position. The moral confrontation engages no absolutes, but only aspects of a social and financial arrangement. Mr. B locks Pamela in his castle, like the abducting knight of a medieval romance, placing her under the supervision of his ogre-like servants, Mrs Jewkes and Monsieur Calbrand. The express aim of the story is Augustan didacticism, however – to cultivate *the principles of virtue and religion in the minds of the youth of both sexes,* whereas, in the demystifying light of Fielding's burlesque on *Pamela* (*An Apology for the Life of Mrs Shamela Andrews* and *Joseph Andrews*), the story amounts to a set of *instructions to servant-maids to look out for their masters as sharp as they can...* In any event, the heroes' transformations – from mistrust and fear to love in Pamela, from guilty desire to moral reformation in Mr B., brought about by Pamela's behaviour but also by her diary, which he chances to read – are vividly and progressively realized.

Whereas in *Pamela* Virtue is finally rewarded, as announced by the title (*Pamela: or, Virtue Rewarded*), the less prudential heroine of Richardsons's next novel, *Clarissa,* finds her death after a long run of misfortunes originating in her elopement with Lovelace – the immoral gallant of Restoration comedy – in order to escape a marriage contracted by her parents with the hateful Solmes. *Clarissa* is another **epistolary novel**, the heroine addressing her letters to a lady "of virtue and honour", Miss Howe. Although the primitive or elementary form out of which it develops – the letter – presupposes a narrative of events in their time-sequence, it also quickens an awareness of a **distinction between chronological time and**

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narrative time. The emergence of a **literature of sentiment**, as an alternative to the rational satirical bent of the Augustans – the inward sentimental journey of Sterne versus the picaresque journey through a multitude of worldly shows – may be explained in the light of Wilhelm Dilthey's theory of *Die drei Grundformen der Systeme in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts, Gesammelte Schriften*, Leipzig 1925 (vol. IV, pp. 528-554). Dilthey associates modes of thinking with general psychological attitudes. ***Empiricism***, from Democritus to Hobbes, is associated with reason, the primacy of the ***intellect***; ***objective idealism***, from Heraclitus to Leibniz and Spinoza, with the primacy of feeling, ***sentiment***, and ***dualist idealism*** (the autonomy of the spirit in relation to reality), from Plato to Kant, with the primacy of ***will***. Richardson's emotional outbursts and Laurence Sterne's inward turn, making public private life, in its most intimate aspects, as well as the workings of the mind, point towards the shift in sensibility towards romanticism at the end of the century.

The reaction from the neoclassic critical mind came promptly. **Henry Fielding** turned from dramatic burlesque of Dryden's heroic tragedy in Restoration manner (*Tom Thumb: A Tragedy,* 1730) towards a burlesque of Richardson's *Pamela* in the first **comic epic in prose**: *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews*, 1742. The change in the protagonist's sex is very effective in securing the humorous effects of burlesquing *Pamela* "in the manner of Cervantes": a virtuous young man, following *the excellent pattern of his sister's* (Pamela's) *virtue,* is doing his best to preserve his chastity unimpaired from the sexual assault of Lady Booby, a shameless seductress. A *mise-en-abyme* of the *Pamela* plot – its reinscription as a figure – can be found in *Tom Jones, Book XVI, Chapter VII*, where Mrs. Western is reading *a letter on prudence, and matrimonial politics,* for the benefit of Sophia, her niece. Virtue is degraded as a strategy of pragmatic calculation. A further innovation in *Joseph Andrews* is the narrator commenting on the relationship between reality and its imaginary reflection in a story, openly acknowledging the fictional ontology of actions and protagonists.

The *bathetic effect* of the male character construction as entirely ignorant of the ways of the world (Parson Adams), threatened or guided by female characters (Joseph Andrews), is exploited in Henry Fielding's next attempt on the mock-heroic in prose, *Jonathan Wild*, 1743. Muzzled by the Licensing Act of 1737, Fielding travestied his open attacks on Robert Walpole into an indirect satire of political corruption. The deflating treatment of the **biography of illustrious men** on the Plutarchian model in form of Hogarthian **rogue biography** keeps close to the stylistic pattern of the burlesqued genre: genealogies, accounts of omens at the hero's birth etc. The outrageous treatment of famous heroic models of the past is

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possible through a Swiftian manipulation of the point of view, revealing the dramatic shift in the idea of heroism from ancient times to the Enlightenment: *In the histories of Alexander and Caesar, we are frequently and impertinently reminded of their benevolence and generosity, of their clemency and kindness. When the former had with fire and sword overrun a vast empire, had destroyed the lives of an immense number of innocent wretches, had scattered ruin and desolation like a whirlwind we are told as an example of his clemency that he did not cut the throat of an old woman and ravish her daughters, but was content with undoing them.* The Augustan ideal is going through a crisis which foretells exhaustion. Fielding senses the demise of a traditional cultural and moral order, constantly playing the heroic against a shabby modern reality. Jonathan Wild is not even an impressive villain hero of the Miltonic school. He finds himself tricked and robbed by a harlot, humiliated by the woman he loves. Villainy covers a wide range, yet its extremes are annihilating each other. Jonathan is the Machiavellian schemer, capable, like Webster's Brachiano, to frame a man who trusts him, but also a common thief, who just cannot keep his hands out of a friend's pockets, or who steals a worthless object on the gallows, when nothing could be of any avail to him any more. The show of villainy turned into automatism symbolizes the moral vacuity of a society exposed with the subverting force of the popular farce and puppet show.

It is particularly in Tom Jones (1749) that the I-narrator claims to be the **real author, omniscient and omnipotent, a puppet-master**, pulling the strings of his characters, passing judgement on them, and developing, in an essayistic and argumentative style, **an open relationship with the reader**, whom he instructs how to read the book. In Daniel Defoe, we could see the narrator reflecting on himself, duplicating himself as narrator and character. If Robinson is going to rebuild civilization, then he himself will be recreated as a medium for detached reflection and self-knowledge. Apart from projecting an image of himself as narrator, Fielding is foregrounding **the process of the reader's making sense of the text**. Assisted by Addison's programmatic effort to disseminate literary knowledge outside the traditional elite, Fielding's style displays a similar imaginative and non-conventionl handling of literary concepts. The prefaces to the eighteen books of *Tom Jones* are meant to instruct the reader on various aspects of fictional narrative (on style – *Book I*, on prologues – Book XVI, on the relationship between tradition and original creation – *Book XII*, between art and reality – *Book VII*, on the nature of the Gothic hyperbole – I/3, or of the marvellous – *Book VIII* etc.), yet this is done in such a playful style and with such tropic ingeniousness that the rhetorical continuity with the rest of the narrative is never impaired. As we said earlier, the habit of self-reflection, the sense of a separate, observing self may have been induced by the guiding epistemological concept of the age, which was Locke's divided mind: one part operating on signals

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from without and the other observing these operations. Self-awareness in following models is also encouraged by the neoclassic poetic.

Finally, one needs to remember the hybrid nature of the novel, the heterogeneous character of the elementary forms which generated it. The "foundling" is a folk theme, working all its subversive potential on the image of Mr. Allworthy's gentlemanly household. The parallels between high and low life, trivial adventure inflated to epic proportions bring two worlds into collision. The name of the hero (Tom Jones) is meant to show him as a common man, with nothing extraordinary about himself. The Manichean separation of the Gothic romance between absolutes of honour, goodness or of villainy has been ruled out. As his name suggests, Mr. Allworthy is "all-worth-y", therefore, in order to depict him, the narrator needs to take the reader, in "Gothic style", to the top of a hill, subsequently not knowing how to get the reader down without breaking his neck. The literallization of the abstract notion of greatness explodes any such romantic notion. Jones is generous, honest, grateful, yet neither a hero nor a saint. The author makes sure his readers will approve of **common man as the new moral standard**, by intruding into the narrative with the resolution of a pointed finger: *But whatever detestation Mr. Allworthy had to this or to any other vice, he was not so blinded by it but that he could discern any virtue in the guilty person, as clearly indeed as if there had been no mixture of vice in the same character. While he was angry therefore with the incontinence of Jones, he was no less pleased with the honour and honesty of his self-accusation. He began now to form in his mind the same opinion of this young fellow, which, we hope, our readers may have conceived. And in balancing his faults with his perfections, the latter seemed rather to preponderate (Book IV, Ch. XI).*

As the illegitimate offspring of blue blood, whom Miss Bridget Allworthy has dumped at her brother's door, Tom Jones offers an ideal link between high and low, squirarchy and the highway man, fashionable London and the motley highroad inn, gentry manners and conversation, and the gaming table. Good and evil may spring from the same root. How different Tom is from his legitimate brother, Blifil, the egotistic scoundrel who keeps to himself the secret about Tom's identity, who goes so far as to promise a huge reward to a woman for prosecuting his brother for murder. The good child and the bad child is another fairy-tale motif, exploited for the sake of romantic contrast, yet the substance of real life incorporated by Fielding into such conventional frame does credit to a realist's sense of significant detail in human character and behaviour. The insight into the motifs of human action makes possible not only the delightful human comedy, with picturesque and odd characters, highly individualized, but also general psychological verities, which build individuals into types. Miss Allworthy's exaggerated abuse of the impudent women who walk the line of moral decorum, causing such misery as the birth and abandonment of an innocent, helpless infant,

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makes the reader suspect her from the beginning. The tendency in servants or persons lacking personality to model their opinions on those of their masters or betters is stressed to the point of a Hogarthian caricature: *When her master was departed, Mrs. Deborah stood silent, expecting her cue from Miss Bridget; for as to what had past before her master, the prudent housekeeper by no means relied upon it, as she had often known the sentiments of the lady in her brother's absence to differ greatly from those which she had expressed in his presence. Miss Bridget did not, however, suffer her to continue long in this doubtful situation; for having looked some time earnestly at the child, as it lay asleep in the lap of Mrs. Deborah, the good lady could not forbear giving it a hearty kiss, at the same time declaring herself wonderfully pleased with its beauty and innocence. Mrs. Deborah no sooner observed this than she fell to squeezing and kissing, with as great raptures as sometimes inspire the sage dame of forty and five towards a youthful and vigorous bridegroom, crying out, in a shrill voice, "O, the dear little creature ! – The dear, sweet, pretty creature ! Well, I vow it is as fine a boy as ever was seen ! (I/V)*

To Fielding the novel too is a hybrid species, born of the most heterogeneous parentage, from the drains of the worldly show to the gilded volumes of classical lore, base-born and high-born, absorbing, like Noah's Ark, humanity's multifarious show and Babel's many-tongued discourse. When the author has gone about two thirds of the novel, he remembers he has not said his prayer to the Muse, so he opens *Book XIII* with an invocation in Miltonic fashion. The portrait of the novel as an emerging literary form is exquisitely done, with an unfailing sense of its generic identity and in a rich, Rabelaisian language of enormous lexical and figurative resourcefulness. Fielding goes beyond Samuel Johnson's **Augustan paradigm of the novel** in the above-quoted Rambler No. 4: **learning from books, accurate observation, just copies of human manners, serving as lectures of conduct and introductions into life**. Fielding drops the didactic aim altogether, brings "learning" down into the street of common experience, and makes it subservient to the realistic aim of offering truthful images of humanity throughout history: *to which the recluse pedant, however great his parts or extensive his learning may be, hath ever been a stranger.* Art is that which bridges past and present in the memory of the race: his image of his dead wife will live for future times in his character, Sophia, while the actuality of his textualized self for future generations is the true miracle of the "heroic lyre". To this "lean shadow" of transcendence, he adds the "substance" of contemporary reality, of which no part is left out as vile, as unworthy to be imitated by art. The contemporary world of writing (Pope's Grub-Street society of poetasters satirized in the *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*), literary clubs, printing, serial publication, of the literary market-place had made the novel possible by appealing to the tastes of an enormously extended readership, of large masses of people participating in

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literacy, had lent preeminence to the material circumstances of the production, dissemination, and reception of the work of art. As a new product, in need of commercial success, the novel resorts to self-defence and self-advertising. The **chronodiegesis** (the level of the plot, as a sequence of events) is doubled up by a **metafictional layer**, consisting of **acts of language** and **self-reflexive** statements. Unlike the loose **concatanation of episodes** of the picaresque plot, whose narrative time is proportionate to the chronological time events would be taking if they occurred in real life, or the **sequence of discrete narrative units** (letters) in the epistolary novel, the **self-reflexive narration** holds well together and performs a set of easily identifiable narrative functions. Written in the first person and the present tense, the narratorial plot serves as a **guide for the readers**, assisting their effort of interpretation and sometimes even deploying a plot of imaginary reception. Jeffrey Williams **(14)** also mentions a **narratorial plot** (**characterising the narrator**), a **gnomic** plot of aphoristic observations and generics (comments on universal human nature or conduct etc.), a level of **intertextuality**, tapping, through literary and mythological allusions, the cultural code of a community, and the narrative action of **spinning out metaphors** for the narrative itself. Although the narrator never masses up with the characters in the main plot, he creates a role for himself on this metafictional level, alluding to his beloved wife, to his choices of characters, to his authorial intentions. He compares the novel to a journey and himself to the host of an inn entertaining his guests (readers), spicing his meals (figurative speech), behaving now as an arbitrary monarch who lays down rules for the reader with respect to the genre he has invented, then as a liberal entertainer catering for his client's tastes. Poised at an equal distance from gothic supernaturalism and the dangerous heights of sublimity on the one hand and, on the other, from the reductive, sketchy presentation of a character's life – the so-called **character progress** – inspired by the neoclassical philosophy of character as determined by some ruling passion, Fielding is heading for the golden mean of realist art. The Genius he claims for himself is that of Aristophanes, Lucian, Cervantes, Rabelais, Molière, Shakespeare, Swift, Marivaux. Here is language worthy of any of them, communicating both the drabness and the vital glory of modern fiction in comparison to the traditional "classy" Muse : *And thou, much plumper dame, whom no airy forms nor phantoms of imagination clothe; whom the well-seasoned beef, and pudding richly stained with plums, delight: thee I call; of whom in a terck-schuyte, in some Dutch canal, the fat ufrow gelt, impregnated by a jolly merchant of Amsterdam, was delivered; in Grub-street school didst thou suck in the elements of thy erudition; here hast thou, in thy maturer age, taught poetry to tickle not the fancy, but the pride of the patron. Comedy from thee learns a grave and solemn air; while tragedy storms aloud, and rends th' affrighted theatres with its thunders. To soothe thy wearied limbs in slumber, Alderman History tells his tedious tale; and,*

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again, to awaken thee, Monsieur Romance performs his surprising tricks of dexterity. Nor less thy well-fed bookseller obeys thy influence. By thy advice the heavy, unread, folio lump, which long had dozed on the dusty shelf, piece-mealed into numbers, runs nimbly through the nation. Instructed by thee, some books, like quacks, impose on the world by promising wonders; while others turn beaux, and trust all their merits to a gilded outside. Come, thou jolly substance, with thy shining face, keep back thy inspiration, but hold forth thy tempting rewards; thy shining chinking heap; thy quickly convertible bank-bill, big with unseen riches; thy often varying stock; the warm, the comfortable house; and, lastly, a fair portion of that bounteous mother, whose flowing breasts yield redundant sustenance for all her numerous offspring, did not some too greedily and wantonly drive their brethren from the tea (Book XIII, Ch. l).

The Augustan ideal – *Experience long conversant with the wise, the good, the learned, and the polite* – is enlarged to cover the entire social range: *from the minister at his levee, to the bailiff in his sponging house; from the duchess at her drum, to the landlady behind her bar.*

God's plenty but less art is to be derived from the reading of the typical **picaro novel**, drawing on Cervantes and Le Sage (*Gil Blas*) published by **Tobias George Smollett** at about the same time (1748): *Roderick Random*. The hero is born to an aristocratic and legitimate couple, yet poor. His father is promptly disinherited, his mother dies of a broken heart. After a sequence of extraordinary adventures at sea and on land, with the never missing highroad inn society and imprisonment story, the hero is finally reunited with his father whom he had thought dead. He is now restored to a fortune and capable to marry the woman he loves. The structure is episodic, the sequence of events is simply chronological. Characters – whether the noble yet imprudent main hero, or the brutal captain Whiffle, the kind doctor Morgan, the downright sea-dog Lieutenant Tom Bowling – remain unchanged, in the absence of any pattern of action. There is no plot, no causality, the order of the episodes is irrelevant, things just come about in a world ruled by sheer hazard. The novel depends for its effectiveness on sensational turns of fortune, unexpected overthrowals of the situation, rapid change of scenes, excentricities of character, taste for the grotesque, the picturesque wayside scenes, the raw descriptions of the eighteenth-century social and domestic life. Last but not least there is Smollett's linguistic realism, referring the reader to the coarse language spoken in social environments which were new to literary diction. The author warns the reader against making use of his book in the family or in the classroom, which was a high price for a writer to pay in Augustan England. Nevertheless, Smollett yields to the more powerful drive towards a realistic rendering of the contemporary world, from the language of those blazoned with ermines to the coarsest possible, as one more element in the uncleanliness of the

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cockpick. The narrator is not a reflector but a dispassionate "camera eye", revolving with alacrity for a more faithful recording of the hero's progress in the world of picaresque adventures. In *Humphry Clinker*, published in 1771, there are several such centres of consciousness, from which the same events are narrated, yielding incompatible accounts. The letters written by various characters lend thus a feeling of the individual's isolation from social others, in an act of contemplation rather than one of mutual social intercourse.

The dramatized narrator, exploring and laying bare the workings of his mind is the most daring device of a great innovator: **Laurence Sterne**. Literary awareness reaches a climactic point in eighteenth-century fiction with *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman,* the first two volumes of which came out in 1760. Whereas Pope and Swift associate and reciprocally define modes of being and modes of thinking, Sterne divorces the life of the mind from that of actual experience, to which it may not have the remotest resemblance. The self creates his own world, the mind is its true essence. Tristram's autobiography since his conception to the present is not a social but a spiritual record. His opinions and those of the other main characters – his father and uncle Toby – count more than what has actually happened to them, the novel appearing like a series of essays fictionally connected. That is why, whereas in Fielding commentary is merely ornamental, in Sterne's novel, it is **integrated with dramatic structure**. The author has the revelation of **two worlds**, often at war, in his characters: the one in which they move, and that which moves **inside** their minds. How is the author to get access to his characters' minds? The question rises several times, occasioning ironic hints to Locke's empirical and mechanistic description, or to Pope's "gradations" of the chain of being: one cannot cut a window into someone's breast and contemplate his heart, although things may be different on the planet Mercury (*Book I, Chapter 23*); it is not possible to evaluate the traces of the sense perceptions on the mind in the manner in which one examines the imprint on wax of a maid's thimble (*II/2*); he could not effectively describe the soul with the help of wind instruments, as no mechanical device can account for the vanishing, shallow impressions in our minds – let alone the confusion and delusions induced by words (an issue which, as a matter of fact, matches Locke's own critique of language). Uncle Toby keeps telling a story which, in its minutest details, has been put into his mind by readings of famous battles, descriptions of war machinery, maps, reports on famous military campaigns etc. He believes in the reality of these fictions, like another Don Quixote, maddened by the knightly heroic romance. The theological echo of "homo fuge" (o, uncle, run away from all this) shows the delusion wrought by books as the most dangerous demon of the modern world. Words can poison the mind, can create an autonomous reality. They impress the mind as powerfully and lastingly, or more so, than actual events. The reality of uncle Toby's mind, therefore, is not the memory of his sense

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perceptions but his "hobby horse", a private obsession having nothing to do with his actual experience of life. Books have made a Hotspur out of a Falstaff. The reality of the mind is its own chronotope.

The **intradiagetic narrator** has few and banal incidents to report on, and, moreover, they do not belong to a chronological time sequence but to a distinct *pattern of time: the time of the narrative, of the characters, of the reader, of the author*. Mr. Shandy, the pedant who wants to do everything by the book and is hampered in building the best of all possible worlds by hazard or by some unruly machinery, senses the difference between **the time measured by the clock** and **psychological time:** *It is two hours and ten minutes – and no more... since Dr. Slop and Obadiah arrived... but to my imagination it seems almost an age.* Uncle Toby provides a Lockean explanation *('tis owing entirely to the succession of our ideas)* for the *subjective impression of duration* lengthening out with the expectation of an important event.

The emancipation from the Augustan chronotope is also effected through the figure of Yorick, doubling Tristram as narrator in his second novel, *Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (1768). The sentimental jester, the incomprehensive fool performs a subversive function (M. Bakhtin, *Ibidem)* in his fresh, unconventional response to the inhibited consciousness, nourished by books, false cultural idols, personal delusions, systems, and theories.

The freedom of the mind implies the faithful record of its chance associations, without any external intervention in structuring its content or ordering it into a logical pattern. Consequently the book is highly digressive, following the narrator's whimsical train of thought. His attention to **outward** events is from time to time **inwardly** redirected, focusing processes of the mind: *... the machinery of my work is of a species by itself; two contrary motions are introduced into it, and reconciled, which were thought to be at variance with each other. In a word my book is digressive, and it is progressive too – and at the same time*. (I/2). The revolt from the mechanistic philosophy of the age, including the representation of man as a machine, anticipates Blake's gloomy picture of the "Satanic mills" set working by the rationalists and the materialist empiricists: *Though in one sense, our family was certainly a simple machine, as it consisted of a few wheels, yet there was thus much to be said for it, that those wheels were set in motion by so many different springs, and acted one upon the other from such a variety of strange principles and impulses, – that though it was a simple machine, it had all the honour and advantages of a complex one, – and a number of as odd movements within it, as ever were beheld in the inside of a Dutch silk-mill.*

Sterne's innovations reach even farther than the great Romantic prophet. The ontology of the graphical space – blank pages to mark the time between the characters leaving one room and entering another, the score of a song whistled by uncle Toby, unfinished chapters – anticipates Mallarmé. The inculpation of the

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reader with the fictional reality (asking a reader to go back to a chapter, and proceeding to a digression, while she is reading it), the ontological instability (shift from memory to the present, from reality to narrative time and space), the overt exposition of the principles of composition, the deconstructive drive in the comical deflating of events, characteristic of a chronotope of transition locate Laurence Sterne in the proximity of the twentieth-century epistemology.

In his *Introduction* to a collection of essays entitled *Introducing Criticism at the 21st Century* **(15)**, Julian Wolfreys singles out Laurence's novel as an anticipation of contemporary theories of chaos and complexity. Newtonian physics had disseminated a belief in the order of the natural world, which prompts Tristram to seek out his own place in the universal scheme of things. Yet, from the very moment of his conception, despite his father's attempts to rule our chances and accidents, he can only discover disorder and mischance. The "butterfly effect" theorized by contemporary physicists seems to work underground, ruining, like some undaunted mole, his family's life. Small inputs into his life have catastrophic effects. An inconsiderate question on some untimely occasion, the use of forceps, the alterations of a name conspire to undo his father's plan concerning his son's prosperous progress through life. Failed schemes, maiming, blighted hopes, abortive propositions, early deaths, frustrating the illuminizing ambition of writing treatises for the edification of mankind, of averting the danger of sedition, of redeeming the congregation, etc., weave a plot of family rundown which throws the characters back on sentiment as the only solution.

Trismegistus, the name of the god mediating between humans and divines, imparting messages from beyond, goes through small alterations until it is degraded to Tristram. The heroic is redeployed as romance. Associationist psychology was fostering scepticism and relativism with respect to the unity of the self. Arbitrary associations of ideas, the whims of memory, which is selective, and unpredictable, destroy all hope of reaching stability and reliability of knowledge – the archetypal quest of the Enlightenment. Tristram is left with opinions, the bulky body of real experience vanishes into the mist of swarming partial views, emotions, feelings. His father's *Tristapaedia* and his novel construct him in different ways.

And yet, while it is true that there is both chance and determinism in the novel, they do not, however, belong to the same sphere. Life may well be a blighted journey: why, his father wonders, do we put out the light when we are going to plant a new human being? The black page serving as a funeral slab for Yorick symbolizes the night at the other end of life. The blank page following Toby's abortive marriage proposition to Widow Wadman (his singing *Lilliburlero*, a song invented by a profligate aristocrat, was one more unlucky association) is a textual – graphical comment on frustrated desires. The marbled or motley page is Sterne's metaphor for the printed page, in whose mingled light and darkness there emerges a

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new creation. There is chance in the **shuttling plot** of the chronodiegesis, moving at random, forward and backward in time. But there is orderliness and continuity in the narrative time spent by Tristram at his writing desk. His contract with the reader, unlike his parents' marital contract, will not fail him.

The bonded males engaging in the narrative act in the Shandy Hall parlour, with women sent off to the domestic parts of the mansion, with the female servant as the consistent target of intellectual inquiry into human awkwardness, and the female reader rebuked by the narrator for her absent-mindedness or defective understanding are reminiscent of Pope's condescending attitudes to women. However, the revolutionary plot line with its digressive irregularities and anachronistic jumps across time is symptomatic of the radical departure from the well-proportioned architecture of Fielding's novels, emulating the Palladian geometry of the contemporary urban architecture, planned with mathematical exactness. The endeavours of Augustan writers and journalists had been fruitful; it had created not just taste but a type of culture displaying, as in T.S. Eliot's definition of "What is a Classic (1944), "maturity of mind and manners". An informed citizenry had been shaped for a participatory government, able to debate issues in the public sphere. Henry Fielding's "Essay on Conversation" recommended civility in public human intercourse, a readiness to meet the interlocutor on his own terms. Controversial issues concerning politics and religion, which had caused sore wounds in the past, were carefully avoided. Even the Whig-Tory divide had dwindled away into a more vague Court/Country polarity, mid-century Parliaments being full of independent men.

The political agenda had in fact changed. Political corruption under Whig Prime Minister Robert Walpole and the cultural decline proceeding from the Court's uninspired patronage of hack writers (the obscure talents of Lewis Theobald and Colley Cibber got the "laurels" from the royalty) were breeding discontent. Viscount Henry Bolingbroke's "Idea of a Patriot King" rallied both Whigs and Tories behind him in an attempt to reestablish a humanist tradition of thought. Augustan ideas about imperial greatness and majesty were being abandoned in favour of the values of citizenry, generosity, patriotism and sensibility. A society of status was aspiring, in the late Enlightenment, towards a society of merit. A middle class **culture of sentimentality**, **religious dissent** and the **Enlightenment** critique of the ancient regime and plea for freedom and tolerance contributed to the onset of a new **age of sensibility (16)** in the later half of the century.

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THE ROMANTICS
(1780–1830)

Philosophical sources and aesthetic foundation. The political polarization of the literary scene under the impact of the French Revolution: Jacobins and anti-Jacobins. The politically revised mythology of pre-romantic poets. The romantic smith at his hammers and anvils: William Blake. William Wordsworth: from revolutionary reformer to recluse. Samuel Taylor Coleridge: clerisy, or the social energies of romantic aesthetics. The progress of romantic drama from the history of feelings to the feel of history: Joanna Baillie and George Gordon Byron. Late romantic anarchists: Percy Bysshe Shelley and George Gordon Byron. John Keats, or the new aesthetic order. The politics of late Gothic fiction: Mary Shelley and James Hogg. Versions of the search for continuity in the midst of wars and revolutions: Walter Scott's historical romances and Jane Austen's romantic comedies of manners and sentiment.

The landmarks defining the Romantic age are still a debatable issue among literary historians. The "authorized voices" to be heard from Cambridge in a collection of essays entitled *British Romanticism* (editor: Stuart Curran), with editions running from 1993 to 1996, spans a more restricted interval (from 1785 to 1825) than the earlier Cambridge History of English Literature. The reasons are expounded by Marshall Brown in his essay, *Romanticism and Enlightenment: "Pre-Romanticism", though widely diffused, turns out to be an unwitting and accidental by-product of other impulses, and hence radically different from the consciously worked out aims of the various Romantic writers, richly elaborated in a coherent body of works* **(1).**

Our dissatisfaction with this latest periodization comes from its neglect of the native roots, of the intellectual ferment which gave birth to a radically new poetic movement, and whose traces can be identified throughout the second half of the seventeenth century. Why absolutize (as Peter Thorslev does in *German Romantic Idealism, Ibidem)* the role of Novalis or of Immanuel Kant, when

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Edward Young, George Berkeley, and David Hume had preceded them in the emergent worldview we now construe as "Romantic"? Had not the term itself cropped up much earlier than these recently proposed limits? The "consciously worked-out" and worded aesthetic programme ***always*** comes after a good deal of discursive practice, whose defining design has finally become apparent. Aristotle did not spell out how Greek drama was to be written, he simply derived norms from its already-existing forms. Boileau laid down poetic principles derived from the revived literary forms of the antiquity during the French Renaissance. Wordsworth's *Preface* to the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) came after a half-century movement towards a mode of sensibility different from whatever preceded it. If we compare the works of Blake and Wordsworth, Burke's aesthetic of the sublime (fascination with what is dark, confused and terrible) and Wordsworth's prescription of writing as "recollection in tranquility", the positive connotations of fear and sensationalism in the Gothic novel and the framed historical romances of Walter Scott, we may even infer that the late eighteenth-century sensibility is romantic in excess, while the "canonical" 1800-1830 period is a more tamed version thereof. A mixture of various features (the dark side of the Enlightenment and the conservative aspects of Romanticism) is only natural, and so is the overlapping for a while of mutually exclusive paradigms in the modern world, which no longer relies on a shared context of religious and philosophical values. Writers do not, as a rule, go about with neatly-drawn literary manifestoes in hand, nor do they look up the date in calendars, to decide on the perfect timing for the shift towards a new poetic. Mihai Eminescu was well-aware of his elective affinities when he looked for models not only in Novalis but also in Edward Young, not only in Gautier but also in Rousseau.

The history of reception runs smoothly from Northrop Frye's label of "mythopoetic age" to M.H. Abrams's celebrated "Construing and Deconstructing" and *The Mirror and the Lamp*. The latter is a classical study, introducing valuable distinctions, such as that between mimetic, expressive, and pragmatic art, which would allow one to construct a pragmastylistic picture of classicalist, romantic and avant-garde art. The romantic lamp of genius succeeds cyclically to the mirror of classical and realist art. The trajectory of Romanticism, from the projected return to Eden through revolutionary violence to the imaginative transformation of the self, through Coleridge's clerisy or Shelley's Poets-Prophets and Legislators, so as to see in a new, redeeming light, the world which could not be changed, is rooted in a wealth of empirical material. It is only with the "Yale School" (deconstruction and pragmatism) that revaluation took an unexpected twist. Paul de Man („The Rhetoric of Temporality", *Allegories of Reading*, *Blindness and Insight*) deconstructs myth as figure: there are no epiphanies of a transcendental world, but only acts of language and of consciousness.

The object of desire is always lost within a separate ontological sphere, and poetry is the allegory of this loss and distancing through troping. The meaning

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structure is unstable, pluralistic, so the poem allegorizes its own unreadability. Geoffrey Hartman's work on Wordsworth lays bare the threads of tradition, literary conventions and generic markers under the delusive mask of spontaneity and simplicity of idiom.

Brian McHale **(2)** conceives of two possibilities to construct literary history, either in **narrative form** (as a list of canonical or countercanonical texts, which is what we have been doing so far) or as **spatialized form**. The latter is organized in the form of parallel lists of contrasting or opposing features: in the left-hand column, the defining features of period A; in the right-hand column, the contrastive features that define period B. As Romanticism means a significant break with the entire past, we think that such a picture of Enlightenment and Romanticism defined through binary oppositions will prove most instructive. Marshall Brown himself produces such a contrastive picture of their central concepts and generic forms **(3).** Those ascribed to Romanticism are listed in the right-hand column:

empiricism	supernatural sensationalism
cosmopolitanism	nationalism and indigenous myths
satire, heroic couplets, moral and didactic poems, local poems	blank verse meditative lyrics, mythological or metaphysical poems first-person epics
picaresque or epistolary novels	social, historical or Gothic fictions

Setting out from these epistemological and generic distinctions, we have settled on the following chronology: a period of transition when neoclassic and emerging romantic elements coexist **(1750–1780)**; the outbreak of Romanticism **(1780–1800)**; the progress of Romanticism from generic self-awareness to its own parody **(1800–1830)**.

The shift of population towards the factories of the North and the Midlands caused by the **Industrial Revolution** had awakened people to a sense of loss and nostalgic memories of the time when man had lived in harmony with nature. Even to those who had been left behind, the countryside offered now a different picture: the old open-field system with landowners who cultivated their strips of land and had access to large areas of the common ground for pasture had been replaced by private enclosed farms, which had swallowed the commonly shared meadows, woodlands, and waste. In 1817 Wordsworth bemoaned the dissolution of *the principal ties which kept the different classes of society in a vital and harmonious dependence upon each other*. The communion with nature or the assertion of a sense of fellowship with the other human beings found an anguished expression in the Romantics, as they had become problematical. Unlike the pastoralists, who serenely take such communion for granted, the Romantics apprehended it as something missing and desired in the alienating city-world.

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In politics, this was an **age of social upheaval**; all standards were subject to individual testing, the traditional scale of values was radically modified. The **War of Independence** which freed the American colonies from the rule of the Hanoverian kings seriously diminished the power of the Crown, while the **fall of the Bastille (1789)** was greeted as the symbolical end of tyranny and feudal absolutism. While the neoclassic writers had generally supported the *status-quo*, the Romantic poets decidedly espoused the ideals of liberty and equality. Even Edmund Burke, who declared himself against the supporters of the French Revolution (*Reflections on the French Revolution*, 1790), only did so out of a sentimental commitment to tradition and chivalry. Blake welcomed both the French and the American rebellions, dedicating to them frenzied lyrical projections, mythically coloured and of epic proportions. Wordsworth saw France *on the top of golden hours*, Byron got involved in wars of independence on the continent. Romantic literature was a literature of subversion, which questioned the system into which it was born. William Godwin blamed unjust social organization for the evil surfacing in man. Napoleon's betrayal of the republican ideal deeply affected the second generation of Romantics who took various opportunities of depicting tyranny in the gloomiest colours (Shelley, Byron). The shifting relations of power between creator and creature (*Frankenstein*), the appearance of monsters turning against their creators **(4)**, breaking social taboos and challenging social norms and laws, were outward symptoms of a mentality which valued highly individual judgement and the power of the individual mind to create its own world, through imaginative vision.

The **agnostic and sceptical turn in philosophy** was in a way a natural outcome of Locke's empiricism. The argument that all knowledge comes from experience, and is transferred through the senses to become our ideas, easily led to the conclusion that apart from what goes on in our minds there is nothing of which we have any positive knowledge. George Berkeley **(5)** radicalized the idea carrying it onto the ontological level: bodies are only ideas that do not exist independently of the spirit that has perceived them: *esse est percepi* (to be is to be perceived). The individual souls are spiritual substances – active and invisible – contained in the largest monad which is God. For David Hume too the constantly-recurring mental complexes are our only guarantee of objective reality. This is the foundation upon which, according to Peter Thorslev **(6)**, Kant constructed "a marvel of German intellectual engineering". *In his first great* Critique, *the* Critique of Pure Reason, *Kant conceded Hume's major antimetaphysical thesis. We cannot attribute the extension of time and space, or the relations of cause and effect (to take only the most ready-to-mind of Kant's "categories") to the objects of perception, to the things-in-themselves, as Hume had demonstrated, for if we*

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do, we become inevitably involved in confusion and contradiction (Kant's famed "antinomies"). On the other hand, it seemed perhaps to Kant's Prussian mind too dismissive, too flippant, to attribute these categories to mere "lazy" habits of perception. The categories, Kant maintained, are inevitable, built into the mind; they are also the a priori *conditions of all intelligibility. In this... assertion consists the Copernican Revolution in epistemology that inaugurated the Romantic Age. Concepts without percepts are empty, Kant conceded, but percepts without concepts are blind. From thenceforth, the phenomenal universe became a something that, in Wordsworth's memorable phrase, we half-create, and half-perceive".* (7)

A doubling up of human biography accompanies **the shaping of the self.** In a letter to George and Georgiana Keats, John Keats defines the world as a "Vale of Soul Making", to which the school and the hornbook have their decisive contribution. In *Frankenstein*, the biological facts around the creature's coming into being are an altogether messy affair, but his cultural integration into the semiological orders of the community (through reading) is a *sine-qua-non* condition for his being able to communicate and take part in social life It is only through conceptual frames that reality becomes intelligible to him. The *Bildungsgeschichte* in *The Prelude* spans "childhood and school-time" as inseparable aspects of the process of growing up. Self-development cannot be conceived of as mere biology; the hero's progress in the real world – disparagingly dismissed as "vulgar works of Man" – is cast into epistemological frames. The "Spirit of the universe" sees to it that the facts of life are "intertwined" with the passions, the movements of the "human Soul" (spelt with capital letter, like the affined all-pervading World Spirit). The progress of life are no longer viewed as a sequence of actions, states and events, but as a psychic evolution, described from inside the mind. At the same time, the soul is no more a destitute exile on earth (like the medieval Christian pilgrim). The dynamic and integrative mode of vision, fusing opposites, so characteristic of the Romantics, roots the sprit in the earth. Human existence is defined as "being-in-the world" (*Nature lodges the soul, the Imagination of the whole*) through tropes which assimilate the soul to nature's vegetative life. The same vital sap wells up in man and in the world, the World Soul descends into history with each individual birth:

Fair seed time had my soul, and I grew up
Foster'd alike by beauty and by fear;
Much favour'd in my birthplace, and no less
In that beloved vale to which, erelong,
I was transplanted.

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The naturalization of Hegel's leading concepts in *The Phenomenology of the Spirit* („Wisdom and Spirit of the universe" for "Vernunft", "Weltgeist") could not escape detection by such an authority in Romanticism as M.H. Abrams, who undertakes a brilliant reading of the *Prelude* in relation to *The Phenomenology* in his *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature*, Norton, 1971.

The Romantic preference for **symbols** is grounded in this same particular worldview: It is a finite image expressing **infinite suggestibility**. An iconographic expression of a concept, a perfect union between image, sound and idea, intellect and the senses. Imagination interacts with external reality, contributing its own shaping vision to representations thereof: *An auxiliar light/ Came from my mind on which the setting sun/ Bestows new splendour (*Wordsworth*: The Prelude).* Coleridge (*The Statesman's Manual*) sees the Bible as archetypal imaginative history, as it communicates truth through symbols. Instead of a collection of dead things on the one hand and of their qualities on the other, it exploits the mediatory power of the imagination, incorporating reason in images.

Thorslev too enlarges on the next generation of Postkantian Transcendental Idealists, singling out Hegel from among them as "the Grand Synthesis, the Ring Cycle of Romantic philosophy": *The moral and the creative will become one: the Absolute, the World Spirit, for which he appropriates the name of Reason – having nothing whatever to do with the "reason" of enlightenment philosophy, the mere "analytical understanding" as Coleridge also so dismissively names it. (...). The World Spirit realizes itself in and determines all history; it uses (Hegelian) heroes, world-historical individuals* (weltgeschichtliche Menschen*), but these heroes, like Carlyle's, know not what they do. The World Spirit becomes conscious of itself, but only in retrospect* **(8).**

History is a gradual revelation of the "absolute Idea" (pattern, process, meaning). If it is not apparent to those acting in history but only to philosophers looking back on past events – could we not say that this is a Romantic reinforcement of Augstine's idealization of contemplative minds? It surely explains Wordsworth's definition of poetic creation as "recollection in tranquillity". It also justifies the new literary kinds which Romanticism develops as counterpoints to the picaresque of the Enlightenment, based upon the presupposition of a common, unchanging human nature. The grand Romantic **myth of the developmental self** threads texts as different as Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, Wordsworth's *Prelude* to the *Growth of A Poet's Mind*, the **revisit poems** contrasting present and past selves, the ***Bildungsroman*** inscribed in *Frankenstein*. The **retrospective narrator** is also a cognitive hero of an **epistemological quest**: he tries to interpret his past life, and it is only now that the incoherent experiences fall into an ordered pattern.

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This process finally reaches out to what Shelley calls "Epipsychidion": the soul around the soul, God's Oversoul. Georges Poulet, in *Timelessness and Romanticism (Journal of the History of Ideas*, 15, 1954), stresses *the essentially religious character of human centrality* with the Romantics, *who took hold of the idea of eternity... and removed it from its empyrian world into their own* (...) *between the divine source and the individual source there is identity of origin and identity of growth.* For Coleridge, the highest form of creativity is a repetition of the infinite Mind in the finite mind of the poet *(Biographia Literaria*). Man's god-like capacity of boundless dilation (*to see a world in a grain of sand*) is a leading motif in Blake. The consequence is an arrogant valorization of the subject, who, although a willing social exile, becomes the centre of his all-inclusive, imaginative projection. **Individualism, subjectivity, self-determination,** and **imagination** are the new key-concepts.

One more consequence of the Hegelian dialectical view of the "concrete universal" is organicist historicism, nationalism. The Idea is revealed in organic (having inscribed a certain teleological pattern of development) and time-specific forms. "... *Die seltenste Form bewahrt im Geheimen das Urbild,* says Goethe in *Metamorphose der Tiere*. These embodied paradigms (*Urbild*: archetype) are organic, teleological: *Ganz harmonisch zum Sinne des Tiers und seinem Bedürfnis*. William Blake, who sees in God the Great Designer of the universe, sounds even closer to the Hegelian model (from Idea to its reflection in embodied forms, and from here to recovery of intelligible pattern in the imagination): *There exist in the external world the permanent realities of every thing which we see reflected in their eternal forms in the divine body of the SAVIOUR, the true vine of eternity, the human imagination* (*Vision of the Last Judgement,* 18).

The universal emotions of childhood, the imaginative flights of the people's early histories are treasured over time, **Robert Burns** thought, in the Scottish traditions, in the "old Song of the olden times" ("Auld Lang Syne") which he refurbished for Edinburgh engraver and music seller James Johnson, who published them in his five-volume *Scots Musical Museum* – Max Bruch's source for his *Scottish Fantasy for Violin and Orchestra*. Romantic revolutionary universalism often links the national and international matter in a drama of social salvation. Burns transforms the ancient heroic poem casting it in a popular idiom – a crosshatch of English, the Ayrshire spoken dialect and the obsolete diction of Scottish tradition. The nationalist cause of *Robert Bruce's March to Bannockburn* broadens into a battle-song for the freedom of the Scottish ancestors as well as of revolutionary France and America.

The **sense of the past as the guarantor of national identity** fills **Thomas Moore's** *Irish Melodies* (1808-1834) which were similarly destined for European career. Hector Berlioz set some of them to music (*Neuf Melodies Irlandaises*),

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while Lamartine helped disseminate the European cult of Ossian. The matter of ancient Ireland ties in with contemporary fighters for Ireland's independence (Robert Emmet). The genuine feeling of the haunting presence of all those ancient opponents of oppression can only come, however, with the accentual metre of Moore's Gaelic *amphran.*

As a novelist, **Jane Austen** feels closer to the substantial props of current history: the land, the class system, the institutions shaped in ages until they had assumed the present forms. As well as Edmund Burke (*Reflections on the French Revolution*), she felt those fixities to be threatened by the revolutionary events in France. According to the romantic philosophy of history, gradual improvements were to be preferred over sudden and radical changes, sweeping away the accumulations of the nation's organic growth. Elizabeth Bennet clears Darcy of the imputation of pride, when she visits Pemberley Hall, and realizes that his sense of duty to pass down the estate to the next generation as he had received it from his ancestors had made him suspicious of mixing up with underlings at times of social unrest. Austen's ideal is however an open civil society, in which the aristocracy of the blood is not reluctant to take in talent from beneath. Darcy will overcome his prejudices against the professional middle class (Elizabeth's uncle) and gentry (the Bennets) once he has tested their character.

The house and grounds of Southerton in *Mansfield Park* go through transformations that diminish their value as markers of a people's continuity through the basic units of hearts and family homes. It is for the sake of fashion and convenience that the Rushworths destroy the ancient avenue of trees and discontinue the religious services in the chapel within the house. Fanny, the social outsider while providing the moral centre of the novel, seems to be quoting Burke:

"It is a pity', cried Fanny, 'that the custom should have been discontinued. It was a valuable part of former times. There is something in a chapel and chaplain so much in character with a great house, with one's ideas of what such a household should be! A whole family assembling regularly for the purpose of prayer, is fine!"

The chapel is symbolically replaced by the theatre world of simulations. The staging of Kotzebue's *Lovers' Vows*, the play of a modish, nonconformist German playwright reputed for flouting social taboos, traditions and conventions marks the beginning of the character-actors' moral demise. Maria's is now the derelict course of one unrooted from history and displaced onto the stage of empty representations.

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Revaluations are undoubtedly a condition of each generation coming to terms with the **vision, sensibility and discursive practices** of those remote in time, yet sometimes they may falsify the spirit and scope inscribed in them. Little did we expect to see the British tradition of gothic fiction, which makes one's hairs stand on end, domesticated into a version of Enlightenment renovation: *Gothic romance also aims to demystify the sublime obscurity by which, according to Enlightenment sociology, court culture overawes the whole of society, thereby maintaining the power of court government. In order to do this gothic romances often describe historical and social settings in terms of Enlightenment philosophical history and use of novelistic devices and figures to constitute a critical sociology of power operating in several ways: through institutions founded in the past and now outmoded (in ruins), but nevertheless difficult or dangerous for the outsider to understand, penetrate, or master (secret entrances, passages, labyrinths, pitfalls); through social conventions (conspiracies, secret orders) unrecognized or not understood by their victims; through application of hidden laws and instruments of force (the Inquisition); through an unsuspected, inward-working transformation (by philtres, magic) of the victim's perceptions, values, ideology, or being; and through alien, not truly English values and practices (Mediterranean, Oriental, Catholic)* **(9)**

The ruins frowning in the Pre-Romantic poems and romances are not ascribable to a certain historical or political moment. On the contrary, they have lost any contingent connotations, taking the reader into a fabled past. From actual objects out there in the world, they have been abstracted to **signs** of former presences – that dialectic of presence/absence which allows the *imagination* to contribute its own share of fictional embroidery. In most cases, mystery is not rationalized and explained away as somatic disturbances; the marvellous is an end in itself. Finally, whenever the British meant to demonize un-Englishness, they went no farther than the French, who had really become their *bête noire* in the period stretching from the Restoration (when the king had brought home rather objectionable tastes) to the Napoleonic wars. The Oriental setting of many stories of the age, just like the ruins, is only one form of *constructing* **infinites of time and space**. For a more genuine recovery of the plastic spirit of the age, one need borrow its own voices, which are addressing a readership in quest of **wonder and sensationalism**. The **refuge into the past** is an effective form of ***escapism***.

It is not always that Orientalism satisfies the romantic craving for local colour and sensationalism. As early as 1802 **Robert Southey** joined the new colonial (and Evangelical) policy of sending missionaries to colonies and enforcing conversion where previously there had been unlimited freedom of worship. His Mexican epic *Madoc*, his Hindu epic *The Curse of Keham,* and the Arabian tale of *Thalaba the Destroyer* straddle Gothic fiction and oriental

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romance in order to disseminate fear of the oppressive religions, haunting creeds (vampires), and despotic local clergy. On the contrary, *Lalla Rookh*, an Oriental tale cutting across prose and verse, by **Thomas Moore**, tells the story of the Zoroastrians' persecution under the new religion of Islam as an analogy of catholic Ireland under the English rule

Historically, **"Gothic"** had meant anything wild and barbarous, and destructive of classical civilization. Later it became associated with the pointed arch in ecclesiastical architecture between the twelfth and the fourteenth century. To the Romantics, it meant the age of medieval romance, opposed to the classical culture. Initially, the Gothic was a renovated instrument of subverting it. Later it turned into mannerism: the antique setting of a gothic castle, with secret corridors and labyrinthine passages, haunted by demonic characters, villains who had pledged themselves to the devil, ghosts.

Why not allow a contemporary to explain to us the riddle of this **medieval revival**, and how it was being experienced at that particular time? **Charles Lamb**, the subtle romantic essayist, did not even consider it to be a return to a past mode of vision, but rather the revelation of something deep and permanent within the human being, which the Augustans had programmatically suppressed: *Gorgons, and Hydras, and Chimeras – dire stories of Celaeno and the Harpies – may reproduce themselves in the brain of superstition, but they are in us and eternal (Witches and Other Night Fears)*

The need for the liberation of pent up emotion after the dry and rigidly prescriptive and unimaginative neoclassical age found a release in the previous world of medieval romances. The near past was erased and a palimpsest reconstruction got started.

The word **"Romantic"** too changed from a historical (narrative in a Romance language) to a typological concept (the falsehood of romance as against the truth of nature). From the general meaning "like the old romances", the word came in time to be used in reference to old castles, horrid mountains and gloomy forests, waste and solitary places. But the essential shift in the perception of nature is not just that from the orderly, man-trimmed, domesticated neoclassical landscape to the imaginatively stimulative and wild sights of the later eighteenth century. The difference is described in a very influential book: *The Romantic Agony* by Mario Praz: the term assumes a ***subjective character***, bearing not so much upon the property of objects as upon their effects on an impressionable onlooker **(10)**. The setting undergoes, in fact, a twofold **displacement**: a spatial one – from the actual **topical** dimensions into the realm of **subjectivity**, *i.e.* a psychological translation – and a **temporal** one – from the present into the past or into the future:

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The saint or moralist should tread
This moss-grown alley, musing slow;
They seek, like me, the secret shade,
But not, like me, to nourish woe.

My fruitful scenes and prospects waste
Alike admonish not to roam;
These tell me of enjoyments past,
And those of sorrows yet to come.

Setting out to produce a **landscape poem** – *The Shrubbery* –, **William Cowper** is aware of a generic change pointing to an age of revived sensibility. The poem is not due to an outward event; it emerges out of a state of mind, as the subtitle reads: *Written in a time of affliction.* Whereas the Augustans had imposed **didactic** schemes on poetry (moral or religious), the new poets were aiming at **self-reflexivity**. What they sought in nature was not physical harmony but a match for the inward states, a **consensus** between the onlooker's feelings and a responsive natural background. If this intersubjective harmony could not be reached,

How ill the scene that offers rest.
And heart that cannot rest, agree!,

the natural scene was to be replaced by visionary sights, in-built in the contemplating mind, sharing in its substance, like any organic outgrowth *(my fruitful scenes).* In other words, the onlooker's mind *half-perceives and half-creates*. Nature is not contemplated directly but through a mist of associated ideas and literary memories. The sunset in a churchyard builds into a metaphor for the transience of human life (**Thomas Gray**, *An Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard*). The piteous sight of an unfortunate outcast swept away into the ocean, while the crew makes haste to save the ship caught by the storm, is made into a metaphor of human solitude during the voyage of life (William Cowper, *The Castaway*). Maybe that is why, although the word is used as early as 1654 by John Evelyn to denote "a very Romantic country-seat"... on the side of a "horrid Alp near Bristol", Praz picks up on a different early occurrence: *romantique,* in Rousseau, meant to define the elusive and indistinct things which he would express by "je ne sais quoi". As soon as things lose their precise outline, they can turn into grit for the grinding-mill of the infinitely expanding soul. The relationship between understanding and imagination as conceptualized by Locke or Hobbes is being reversed: *a marvellous light, unenjoy'd of old, is pour'd on us by revelation, with larger prospects extending our understanding, with brighter*

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objects enriching our imagination, with an inestimable prise setting our passions on fire, thus strengthening every power that enables a composition to shine... (Edward Young, *Conjectures on Original Composition,* 1758) It is also Young who supplants the neoclassical concept of the artist as imitator by that of an original creator, who enriches the province of letters, instead of merely duplicating it. **Genius** can dispense with rules and achieve "unexampled excellence". The vitalist view of art as something ***organic, natural, dynamic*** (read: counter to ***imitated, consciously elaborated, static***) anticipates German teleological speculations. *An original writer may be said to be of a vegetable nature; it rises spontaneously from the vital root of genius; it grows, it is not made.* Likewise, his *Complaint or Night-Thoughts* set the fashion for the graveyard school of rhetorical melancholy, as well as the tradition of romantic night musings (Novalis: *Hymnen an die Nacht*).

Freedom of mind consorts with freedom of expression. The break with the neoclassical tradition can be felt in the taste for the genuine pathos and simplicity of folk poetry. The three-volumed *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* published by **Thomas Percy** in 1765 enjoyed wide audience, despite occasional charges of "irregular poetry". The public taste had gone so extravagant as to invite hoaxes, as those played upon their readers by **James Macpherson** (who passed his own *Fingal*: *An Ancient Poem* (1762), followed by *Temora: An Ancient Epic Poem* (1763) for a collection of poems by Fingal's son, Ossian, translated from Gaelic), and by **Thomas Chatterton**, who pretended to have discovered a fifteenth-century monk's manuscript. The latter, an enormously talented poet, died young (suicide), as did most of the Romantic poets (*i.e.* those who were not afflicted with psychic depression or madness for a change), consumed with the flames of their passionate hearts.

A passionate thought content will break with any rhetorical decorum, finding expression in deliberate exaggeration. Edmund Burke (*A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful,* 1757) calls this deliberate process "***amplification***". The "***sublime***" is precisely an inherent tension between finite and infinite, the limits only offering themselves in order to be surpassed. The unresolved tension between opposites means a denial of confinement to only one possibility. The immobile ***statuesque*** is abandoned in favour of the ***picturesque*** (expressive rather than beautiful, intellectual rather than visual, unstable, irregular); classical *claritas* is supplanted by the "mysterious ambiguity" of the *coincidentia oppositorum*. Mario Praz speaks about "an aesthetic theory of the Horrid and the Terrible", which developed during the eighteenth century, the bulk of the examples being provided, in this comparative book on European Romanticism, by English stock (Collins, Walpole, Shelley). William Collins writes an ode on... fear, Thomas Gray, on *the Pleasure arising from Vicisitude*; Shelley is fascinated by the

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tempestuous loveliness of terror, Wordsworth grows up *foster'd alike by beauty and by fear*. In order to define such wild looms of Romantic rhetoric, one needs to step into the acategorial realm of myth.

The dumping of neoclassical aesthetic norms is still a prerequisite of those advancing new aesthetic ideas (Young, or Edmund Burke) in the second half of the18th century. By the end of it, when the new sensibility had settled in, Wordsworth would be able to spell out the Gospel of Romanticism without polemical bitterness.

The historical background at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century was a battlefield of ideas emanating from the revolutions and wars raging in England and abroad. At such times people take sides, and, therefore, unlike the Augustan subjects which are related, the **subjects** that romantic literature deals with are contrasting. **Edward Young's** speculative *Nights* contrast with **Mary Robinson's** journalistic record of days. It may happen that one and the same writer should recant earlier attitudes. S. T. Coleridge, for instance, condemns the prison system (with the Bastille in his mind) which degraded the inmates' souls in the early *The Dungeon*, while later feeling embarrassed at the memory of his "baby-trumpet of sedition" and locating the activity of the poet's mind in separation from nature (reality). From "Pentisocracy" (an utopian scheme of communal work of land on the banks of the New England Susquehanna), he shifts to more conservative attitudes, seeing in the Anglican Church and the clerisy (the learned) counterweights to the workers' organizations which were conspiring to "curb free will under the tyranny of the confederation" (article for "The Courier", October 1814). W. Wordsworth turns from *Descriptive Sketches* of rural life to philosophical odes and epic.

The Romantic gaze is, in conclusion, all-inclusive, ranging from impending social reform to folk myths, impassioned calls to the construction of a "national and constitutional epic" (John Thelwall's 1782 "Essay on Epic Poetry"), which materialized in William Blake's mythic invention of the Albion – the imaginatively reborn nation after its fall into Lockean empiricism and deism, like the New Jerusalem –, devotional and philosophical subjects, rising from the humble lives of the dispossessed to the sublimities of nature and history.

In her attempt to further qualify Northrop Frye's label of "sensibility" applied to the poetry of the late eighteenth century ("Towards Defining an Age of Sensibility"), Patricia Meyer Spacks (**11**) emphasises the importance of the "social content". Augustan poetry too had been socially-oriented, and the change in mid-century was not merely a redirection of the poets' gaze from the top to the bottom of the social ladder: the victims of slavery, of the penal system, of poverty, etc. Suppose we could set form and thought content into polarity, we would still

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have to admit that the change went deeper into the very mode of perception and understanding experience. David Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40) had done much to rehabilitate the discredited "passions" in an age cultivating reason by vindicating their aesthetic effect in tragedy. Pope himself had left open the door to a similar valorisation of the sublime in his *Essay on Criticism*, and even one of the most severe Augustan censors of superstitious thought, John Addison, had written (*The Spectator* 412, 416) on the double entertainment one derives from "The Pleasures of the Imagination": the mind is poised between the defective natural object, causing pain, and the perfection of the copy whereby the artist has mended it, which produces pleasure but also the uneasy realisation of the artifice. The baffled mind belongs to an experience of the sublime. The sublime that transcends the everyday becomes again the proper object of poetry in a mid-century attempt to revive the ode according to its original, lyric (accompanied by the lyre) character. The narrow scope of didactic and moral versification is abandoned in favour of invention and imagination. **Joseph Warton's** *Odes on Various Subjects* (1746) and **William Collins's** *Odes on Several Descriptive and Allegoric Subjects* rekindle the fire of the imaginative vision that partakes of God's unexhausted creative fire (Collins: *Ode on the Poetical Character*). The "boundless reign" of the aesthetic opens up to the supernatural (Collins: *Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands of Scotland*) with no more fear that, whereas "understanding opens an infinite space on every side of us, the Imagination finds itself swallowed up in the Immensity of the Void that surrounds it" (Addison, *The Spectator* 420).

The capacity for feeling deeply and sympathetically acquires positive connotations, of spiritual energy and refinement, as well as an ethical dimension, which does indeed, in some cases, expand the individual soul, urging it to look around to social others: *Theorists like Adam Smith (**Theory of Moral Sentiments**, 1759) elaborately delineated the workings of the human capacity for perceiving resemblance between self and other, thus for feeling the suffering of others by analogy with what the experience would mean for the self* **(12)**. Pleasure seems "vulgar" and "selfish" in comparison with the "transport" of woe (**Hannah More**: *Sensibility: a Poetical Epistle,* 1782). **Oliver Goldsmith** composes a dirge on the "no more"s of the old rural culture destroyed by industrialization: *The Deserted Village*. **William Cowper**, still seeking the pleasures of the Sofa and the garden, away from the "great Babel" of the cities, completes the picture of the first urban society in the world in the language of revolutionary ideas about the missing rights (Thomas Paine: *The Rights of Man*), equality and fraternity, and of the Enlightenment critique of aristocratic heroics and vices in his long poem, *The Task:*

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Hence merchants, unimpeachable of sin
Against the charities of domestic life,
Incorporated, seem at once to lose
Their nature: and disclaiming all regard
For mercy and the common rights of man,
Build factories with blood, conducting trade
At the sword's point, and dyeing the white robe
Of innocent commercial justice red.
Hence, too, the field of glory, as the world
Misdeems it ...
Is but a school where thoughtlessness is taught
On principle, where foppery atones
For folly, gallantry for ev'ry vice.

Charlotte Smith feels strongly her personal grief (*Elegiac Sonnets*), while also urging her countrymen to show sympathy and support to *The Emigrants* who were seeking refuge from the violent events in France.

The London dissent (sectarian religious movements: Methodists, the Church of the New Jerusalem, Muggletonians, Rosicrucian and Swedenborgian circles) were addressing the lower classes in overt opposition to the official polite culture of reason. Their antinomian tracts were spreading a counter-culture of anti-rationalism. A sense of separation from God and insecurity in an uncertain and unknowable universe releases cries of despair at being thrown into the world like a man washed overboard into a rough sea (Cowper, *The Castaway*) and of religious anxiety before God's "unfathomed depth" (**John Wesley**: *Hymn*).

Himself a representative of this counter-Enlightenment tradition (**13**),and a disciple of Volney, the philosopher and ideologist of the French Revolution, **William Blake** launches his ideas of social and aesthetic reform with prophetic and persuasive eagerness, which is a characteristic feature of pre-romanticism, in his *Annotations to Sir Joshua Reynolds* (an emblematic figure of the official, academic and institutionalized Augustan art): *Rouse up ! O Young Men of the New Age ! Set your foreheads against the ignorant Hirelings ! For we have Hirelings in the Camp, the Court & the University; who would if they could, for ever depress Mental and prolong Corporeal War ... We do not want either Greek or Roman models if we are but just and true to our imaginations, those worlds of eternity in which we shall live for ever: in Jesus our Lord.*

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The Romantic smith at his hammers and anvils: William Blake

T.S, Eliot's contention, that William Blake was an uneducated visionary who owed nothing to tradition, would probably have elicited a smile from the prophet of Romanticism. For the Romantic rebels did not believe in institutionalized forms, including those of education. Blake, the son of a London hosier, chose the intuitive art lessons provided by Gothic ecclesiastical architecture or by books on mythology and ancient art which he was called upon to provide engravings for. Besides, his extensive knowledge of esoteric lore emerged reshaped as a personal mythology, for the poet well knew that, unless he created a new system, he was in danger of being ensnared by another's (*Jerusalem).* An attempt to pin it down to its sources was made by Kathleen Raine in a seminal book: *Blake and Antiquity*, Routledge 1963. In order to interpret Blake's symbolic language, one needs to translate it into the familiar mythosophic foundation of western civilization.

Blake's artistic initiation started at an early age. He was only fourteen when he was apprenticed to James Basire, the engraver, who sent him to make drawings of monuments in Westminster Abbey and other ancient churches. Being in a position to judge the differences between two forms of art, medieval Gothic and classical Roman and Greek, the young apprentice, whose visionary designs, illuminations and engravings earned him lasting fame in the history of visual arts, decided in favour of the former, justifying his option in terms characteristic of the shift from the mechanistic view of the Enlightenment to the vitalist-organicist spirit of the new age: *Mathematic form is eternal in the reasoning memory; living form is eternal existence. Grecian is mathematic form. Gothic is living form.* Blake's acquaintance with Hellenistic thought and Eleusinian mythology, which helped shape his own mythopoetic vision, was probably derived from Jacob Bryant's *Analysis of Ancient Mythology* and Erasmus Darwin's *Botanic Garden,* which were published with his engravings. Whereas most Augustans had thought Plato was nonsense, the new age eagerly absorbed Platonic and Neoplatonic transcendentalism. Thomas Taylor was the first translator of Plato and Plotinus into English (1758). The same century saw the translation of *Hermetica*, whose cosmogony is subtly echoed in Blake's *Vala, or The Four Zoas (Night the First).*

The esoteric mixing pot which gave birth to Blake's intriguing and emblematic figures (Los, Vala, Thel, Tharmas, Ahania, Albion, Tirzah etc.), whose meanings have not been exhausted by subsequent interpretations, had mainly absorbed elements of Hellenistic culture – that impressive synthesis of ancient esoteric thought (Platonic philosophy, Hermetic doctrines, alchemy etc.). Some of its assumptions are analogous to Blake' visionary flights of imagination. Our account is partly based upon information provided by Raine's book, quoted above. According to the Neoplatonists (see Porphyry: *De Antro Nympharum* – Cave of the Nymphs), the souls come into generation attracting to themselves a

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watery envelope. The nymphs in the watery cave enact the perpetual cycle of descent through the moon (the northern gate, the Cancer) and ascent through the sun (the Capricorn, the southern gate of return). The nymphs at their looms weave the garments of generation (the moist cloud is a symbol of the body). In the Cabbala, the original pure source is diluted through its successive emanations (sephiroth) until they reach the earth, gross matter. The return to the original purity is possible through purging fire. In the Hermetic cosmogony, likewise, Anthropocosmos gets a glimpse of his own image reflected in water, from the lowest heavenly body, the moon, falls in love with it and dives into the sea. Out of his union with nature, seven children are born, who inherit their father's spirit and their mother's body **(14)**. The Uranian spirit, the divine principle is thus imprisoned in matter, and its release is the great work of the Alchemists.

Blake's Urizen is the God of the Old Testament or the fallen Demiurge of the gnostics, who created the earth in imitation of the divine Intellect's emanation into the heavenly bodies. He is a figure of authority, tyranny, of reasoning faculties (the patron of the mechanically-minded philosophers and mathematicians of the Enlightenment), a defender of an immobile *status quo* and a giver of the Ten Commandments. His antagonist, Orc („orcus" is the word for "hell" in Virgil and Milton), whom Urizen has *chained down with chain of Jealousy* (*The Book of Los*) is the archetypal rebel, a hater of dignities, the spirit of revolt which swells up in revolutionary moments of history (the French Revolution or America's War of Independence). Los (probably "sol": sun), the time-spirit, balances the opposite movements of descent into matter and ascent to the immortals. He is a smith but also a potter, who takes the furnaces Urizen had used in creating the world and "builds them anew". But the creation of Los is no longer one of matter but an imaginative architecture. The "terrible race of Los and Enitharmon" (Harmony) produce laws, religions, philosophy.

On the famous Barberini vase described by Erasmus Darwin in his book, the Eleusian scene of the descent of the soul to Hades and immortality is engraved by Blake with the additional element of a sleeping sun. The idea behind this strange image is that the two opposite worlds, of mortality and immortality are contrary to each other in point of time as well: when one is awake, the other is asleep. Albion, which is Blake's emblem for Britain, is now dead to eternity, as its imaginary vision has been extinguished by empiricist science and philosophy. The people of England, in the age of Newton and Locke, entertained the false belief that the phenomena of nature have an existence apart from that of the mind (analogous to Hegel's World Spirit or to Fichte's non-Ego, unable to recognize the phenomenal world as their own creation). *Jerusalem* is that blessed state of the Spirit's self-awareness: *in your own Bosom you bear your own heaven/ And Earth ... though it appears without, it is within/ In your imagination, of which this world of mortality is but a shadow.* Sacred history intersects the England of mortality. In ancient

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time the Lamb of God was believed to have walked "the pleasant pastures", but now is the time of the industrial revolution, of material progress and mechanistic science. The prophetic tone *(Bring me my Bow of burning gold...)* mounts an apotheotic vision of the New Jerusalem built *in England's green & pleasant Land.* The successive moments of spiritual blindness or enlightenment yield a cyclic pattern of history which Blake describes in *The Mental Traveller*, a poem cast in the swiftly-falling cadences of the folk ballad form. The poem tells the story of an infant boy sacrificed by a Woman Old. But "The Babe" is born again, he grows old and the Old Woman grows young, until he is able to get the upper hand and nail her down. Then the story repeats itself. The pattern of consistent binary oppositions (abstract and concrete, visual and suggestive, vital and sapless, cruel and mild, cunning and innocent etc.) is uncommonly fanciful, the imagery, extraordinarily rich. She grows old, feeding upon his *shrieks & cries*, he grows young nourished by the *honey of her infant lips/ the Bread & wine of her sweet smile.* This troping strategy is meant to render the metamorphic vision of the mind, which can project its own world, irrespective of the data furnished by the senses:

The Guests are scatter's thro' the land,
For the Eye altering alters all;
The senses roll themselves in fear
And the flat Earth becomes a Ball.

The human spirit vacillates between sensuous delight in the world and murdering Reason, which reduces the rich variety of the earthly show to the barren, geometrical representations of Newton's spheres rolling through the void. Blake's pattern of conflicting historical cycles might have been inspired by a passage in Plato's *Politicus*, which was available in English at the time when Blake wrote this poem. Plato sees history as a movement between two poles; sometimes God is in control of the universe, and at that time man grows from age to youth, and sometimes God abandons mankind, those being retrograde cycles, when man grows from youth to age. Plato uses the simile of a spring wound up in a purposeful direction, and then left by God to unwind itself. In *Milton*, one of Blake's prophetic books, the two cycles are called "vortexes": *heaven is a vortex passed already and the earth a vortex not yet passed.* The present moment would be that of the God-forsaken man.

Huge symmetries organize Blake's prophetic books, as well as his *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, as they tell again and again his original version of a traditional myth: the saga of the fall and redemption (descent and ascent) of The Universal Man, or The Eternal Great Humanity. The poet has abandoned the

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Augustans' petty concerns with present social events, taking a view of mankind from the highest standing, as Shakespeare or Milton had previously done.

Whereas the *Songs of Innocence* move from dawn to dark, telling of man's Edenic state (in a metaphorical, not in a topical sense), in the pastoral mode of a Shepherd-Christ figure, the *Songs of Experience* coming from a Bard (Blake's mask) pour forth from dark to daybreak, exorcising, by naming, the evil in the lapsed world.

The universal gospel of love communicated in the *Songs of Innocence*, with the artless rhetoric reminiscent of nursery rhymes (one piece is entitled *Nurse's Song)*, makes one think of Dürer's *Adam and Eve in Eden*, looking pure yet a bit dull. Man's Edenic condition is a metaphor for a set of values universally cherished: kindness, peace, blissful communion. In this prelapserian world, free from death, pain or cruelty, all anatagonisms have been abolished: a little girl who gets lost is safely lulled to sleep in a cave by animals of prey – wolves, tigers and lions, which shed "ruby tears" of compassion. "And the lion will lie with the lamb", as John's *Revelation* prophesizes. For in the world which is still with God, Logos becomes true, reified *(identical in physics and metaphysics* – **15)** The poems do not refer to a reality outside them, they narcisistically mirror their textual nature, the fact that they are a reinscription of the nursery or pastoral convention. In the manner of Milton, in *Lycidas*, Blake mixes up elements of the pagan and of the Christian pastoral: the shepherd's pipe, the hollow reed, the tradition that Jesus is the Good Shepherd and Christians are his flock, or that Jesus is the Lamb of God, sacrificed for the redemption of the sinning man. The colour symbolism (black ***and*** white reconciled) would point to a moment before Genesis (light creating a world separate from God), one of Unity: the *black* boy has a *white* heart, the Chimney-Sweeper is guarded by a white angel, the orphaned child finds in God a father, the lost girl is protected by beasts etc. The Christ figure is also troped as a child, as the incarnated God. The Word is its own World.

The world of the *Songs of Experience* is a postlapserian one, with topical allusions and unresolved conflicts. We recognize names of places, social institutions, the power relations governing Blake's *real* world. Whereas the world of innocence is equal unto itself, a state of perpetuity („echoing green"), the world of experience exists in a time fragmented into "„Present, Past, & Future", disputed by the "lapsed Soul" and the redemptive voice of the Bard. The figure of the Incarnation is replaced by that of the Holy Word of the Old-Testamental Genesis, Jesus by Jehovah, the artlessness of the pastoral by a variety of rhythms and rhymes, most of them breathing the pathos of a psalmic invocation:

Hear the voice of the Bard!
Who Present, Past, & Future sees

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Whose ears have heard
The Holy Word
That walk'd among the ancient trees.

Calling the lapsed Soul,
And weeping in the evening dew;
That night controll
the starry pole,
And fallen, fallen light renew!

Once again the poet combines heterogeneous elements, in his version of the Fall (a Hellenistic mannerism): the myth of captivation (Hermetic), the descent through the watery cave (Porphyry), and the cruel, "jealous" (of the true Divine source), fallen Demiurge of the gnostics. After all, as reads an early prose fragment, he did believe that "All Religions are One":

„Prison'd on wat'ry shore,
Starry jealousy does keep my den..."

Education does not seem to be much good (*The Schoolboy*), churches and priests are exposed as forms of obscurantism and repression (*A Little Boy Lost*), man's vital energies are suppressed by social and religious taboos (*The Garden of Love*). The insistence on the word "chartered" ("charter'd streets" of London, the "charter'd Thames") suggests a doubling of the bodily prison of the flesh by a metaphorical prison of institutionalized forms, pseudo-scientific assumptions, falsifying theoretical systems, which are constantly imposed upon man. Evil lies outside man, in the victimizing social institutions: the monarchy sending people to war, the Church denying natural inclinations and desires, deadening the profusion of the worldly show („blackening" as opposed to the creative white light):

How the Chimney-sweeper's cry
Every black'ning Church appalls
And the hapless Soldier's sigh
Runs in blood down Palace walls.

(London)

While the pastoral allows of the reconciliation of opposites, all the elements of the postlapserian world are mutually destructive. The world is divided against itself: Innocence is corrupted by Vice, birth and wedding already contain the germs of death:

But most thro' midnight streets I hear
How the youthful Harlot's curse

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Blasts the new born Infant's tear,
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse.

The indefinite article is a grammatical index of the present dissolution and fall from unity: *The Divine Image* in the first book of *songs* becomes *A Divine Image* in the second; *Mercy, Pitty, Peace and Love* are supplanted by *Cruelty, Jealousy, Terror and Secrecy.* If Tirzah is the female generative principle of the mortal body, imprisoned in the senses, who will help the ascent from "generation" to "regeneration"? The most often quoted poem in the collection seems to provide the answer. And in order to answer the disquieting question – Did God who created the meek lamb also create the destructive tiger? –, one needs to remember the allegorical significance of the tiger in the Anglo-Saxon allegory, as both destroyer and redeemer of a fallen world. The Redeemer figure, according to Kathleen Raine, is not only Jesus here but also the artist who imaginatively recreates the world of matter, as the type of interrogation reminds of the one in the fifth book of *Hermetica,* the passage about the Workman, the Creator-Artist. Let us compare them:

And what shoulder, and what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? and what dread feet?

Who circumscribed and marked out his eyes? Who bored his nostrils and ears? Who opened his mouth, who stretched out and tied together his sinews?

The shift from past tense to the subjunctive might suggest that the Demiurge who created the tiger in the world *illo tempore* might be different from the present "workman", who intends to produce the *Tyger* poem on the page, in twin likeness to the real one:

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

The Marriage of Heaven and Hell might well serve for an introduction to the **prophetic books** of archrebels. The unprecedented attack on all forms of social and doctrinary tyranny, the overthrowal of the basic assumptions of aesthetics, religion, and ethics find an appropriate language of shocking paradoxes, whose turns are still on everybody's lips, even when the author is not remembered: *The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom; The tygers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction; Prisons are built with stones of law, brothels with bricks*

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of religion; Improvement makes straight roads; but the crooked roads without improvement are roads of genius, etc.

The gnomic phrasing, the grand design of a sage discourse, the epic sweep of the symbolic cast, the sophisticated versification reveal unexpected resources of a poet who had earlier exercised himself in the folk ballad and the pastoral. *The French Revolution,* in almost regular fourteeners, mounts a vision of history, while the succeeding *America* is cast into short-numbered paragraphs, like the verses in the Bible. It opens with a *Preludium,* which provides the mythological context for the events occurring from the early 1770s to the British defeat in 1781. The "red Orc", arisen from hell, where he had been confined, opposes the authority of Urizen's iron laws; he stamps the Ten Commandments to dust and *scatter(s) religion abroad.* In response to his speech, Albion's Angel calls on the thirteen angels of the American colonies to suppress the spirit of rebellion. The thirteen angels hold a meeting and, after some debating, tear off their robes and throw down their sceptres. They descend, taking sides with Washington, Paine, and Warren. In their turn, the thirteen colonies turn from loyalty to Britain to loyalty to each other. The battle between America and Albion is mainly a contest of visions, of values.

Blake has long been apprehended as a poet of wild and uncontrolled visions, yet, as Northrop Frye emphasizes **(16),** his manner is not allegorical but mythopoetic; meaning is not oblique but communicated through the total simultaneous shape of the poem. The looms of his visionary flights are well-tempered by a heightened sense of form. The tightness of an archetypal script is not annulled by the variety of names or accidents it applies to. The structuring principle is provided by the Smaragdine Table of Hermes Trismegistus, poetically explored in Plate 71 of *Jerusalem* ("for that which is above is like that which is beneath"). ***Divine Vision*** is also Living Form, not an abstraction. It received an actual shape in the body of the Saviour (*Milton*). *Human Imagination* is its time- and erath-bound correlative. Urizen's Tent, confined to the facts of the earth, stands for the failed envious imitation of the former. Vala is the soul that makes the descent, accompanied by Luvah, the divine lover who, in the world of mortality, becomes the serpent. Thel is also a soul who descends through the four elements, yet being able, through visionary projection, to escape the prison of "the Clod of Clay". Her name suggests "Thalia", art being a form of escape, of transcendence. Orc, as the timeless Spirit, Imagination, finds in Los an earthly counterpart. Albion is opposed to Jerusalem, the daughters of Albion, at their looms of generation, bind the eternals into mortal bodies, while Enitharmon's looms produce the superstructure of human systems of belief (In *Milton,* humans fall into three categories: the Elect, who live by the Will of God, the Reprobate, who break the Ten Commandments, believing in the imagination, and the

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Redeemed, who "live in doubts and fear"). The mode of vision is defining for a human typology: you are that you believe in. Immortality is always achieved through union with the heavenly emanation, or the earthly counterpart: Urizen and Ahania (Earth), Orc and a daughter of Urthona (possibly, "earth-owner"), Milton and Ololon, Tharmas and Enion. A "marriage of heaven and hell", for, as we read in the homonymous piece, *without contraries is no progression.* Vision is the true demiurge, it transforms the objects it touches: *The microscope knows not of this nor the telescope: they alter/ the ratio of the spectator's organ, but leave objects untouched./ for every space larger than a red globule of man's blood/ Is visionary, and is created by the hammer of Los.* It is not the self that is changed by the world, it is for the self to impose its own world. That is why the process of an artist's growth is only a matter of access to a higher, enlightened vision: Milton, the national poet, is finally able to escape individualism, to discard the empirical rationalism of Bacon, Locke and Newton, to free himself from the "Greek and Latin slaves of the sword", *to cast aside from poetry all that is not inspiration.* Augustan servile imitations *(hirelings)* are making room for the visionary spaces of the "new age".

Traditional myths too undergo assimilation to the new sensibility. The Hermetic cosmogony in *Vala, or the Four Zoas* sets in polarity the vision of the Spirit who makes the descent (Tharmas), diving into the sea, and that of his earthly counterpart, Enion, who weaves the garments of his mortality. Their visions are mutually destructive. She is *heavenly beautiful to draw me to destruction,* yet his soul is to her incomprehensible, and that is even more horrifying than the loss of immortality. While she hides from his "searching eyes", Tharmas, as the broader consciousness, is able to see his soul with her dim sight, as a collection of dry fibres, set under the microscopic lens, the severed, sapless vegetation, strongly suggestive of Dionysus being torn to pieces by the Titans:

> *"Why wilt thou Examine every little fibre of my soul,*
> *Spreading them cut before the sun like stalks of flax to dry?*
> *The infant joy is beautiful, but its anatomy*
> *Horrible, Ghast & Deadly; nought shalt thou find in it.*

The Alchemical **myth of captivation by a mirror** or reflection in water is made into a myth of the **captive artist** of Romantic tradition, locked away from the thoroughfare of the trivial, everyday world. Whereas Jakob Böhme had derived, from the Alchemical tradition, an idea of "the glasss of the Abyss", in which the source contemplates itself, Blake obviously transfers it to the textual nature of his poetry. The "Crystal Cabinet", *form'd of gold,* the golden cage in which Apollo has shut him up to hear him sing (*Song*) are mises-en-abyme of the figure of the artist. Gold as *lapis,* or *opus alchemicum*, is cast into a structure, a

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shape („golden cage", "silken net", "Crystal cabinet"), which is at the same time a **fresh perspective on the world:** *Another England there I saw,/ Another London with its tower* etc. The poet can contemplate himself in his objectified image: the self-sufficient work of art.

The Romantic Legislators

No period in the history of English literature has lately known more radical revisions than Romanticism. In the *Introduction* to a bookcase on the age, first published in 1992 **(17)**, we can read the following statement: *The dominant force in American Romantic criticism in the 197os and early 1980s was clearly Paul de Man. His influence – exerted through such essays as "The rhetoric of temporality" and "The intentional structure of the Romantic image" – was instrumental in making the Romantics one of the prime sites of applied deconstruction. No longer could critics write innocently or confidently about such supposed dualisms of Romantic thought and practice as nature and supernature, subject and object, and, most particularly, symbol and allegory. Gone were the unified verbal icons of the New Criticism and the systematic myth-making of Bloom and Abrams.*

According to Paul de Man (*Allegories of Reading, Yale University* Press, 1979), Romantic texts are based not upon symbols, as traditionally assumed, but on allegorical structures, which imply a disjunction between the origin and the meaning of a sign. In other words, allegory stands on two legs: its own sign value and the sign value of the object it stands for, whereas a symbol stands on one leg, has a fixed meaning. The figurative language which Coleridge himself confesses, in *The Statesman's Manual* (1816) to have deliberately chosen is that of the Bible, communicating truth through symbol: *The mediatory power of the imagination, incorporating the Reason in images of the senses giving birth to a system of symbols, consubstantial with the truths, of which they are the conductors (instead of a collection of things and quantities, hollow abstractions like the present age) (...) Ezekiel and his vision of the chariot in which the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels as well.* The student is now faced with the painful choice of deciding whether a philosopher or a poet is more capable of telling a symbol from an allegory... In this case he may confidently seek advice in a literary theoretician, like Angus Fletcher, who, in his celebrated book, *Allegory, the Theory of a Symbolic Mode*, provides an epistemological grounding of the two: allegory relies on a shared context, both religious and scientific, while the lack of such a shared world breeds private symbolic vision. The Romantic symbol points to a crisis in the interpretative capabilities of the mind, to the limits of understanding. The shared world of a common Christian transcendentalism had given birth to the *Phoenix, Piers Plowman, Faerie Queene, The Pilgrim's Progress*. In all of them

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there is a deferral in meaning – from literal to figurative – yet both planes are interpreted in the same way by an ideally constructed reader. No such easy decoding work is expected by those who read *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* or *Kubla Khan.* In the sceptical postmetaphysical and post-Kantian age, the poet is trying to make **his** own sense of the world, in **his** own language, often prompted by the whimsical free associations of dreams and private visions. Besides, the language of Romantic poets, who no longer rely on pre-existing fixed forms, is not a unified one. While there is plenty of allegory in the didactic and discursive Wordsworth, the Coleridge poems speak a different tongue, reflecting back upon itself, and not referring to a semiological structure preceding it. Any sign (and any trope) is based upon *differance* (a disjunctive temporal structure): it is itself and other. Yet the relationship between origin and meaning in a symbol and in allegory is perfectly distinct. An allegory contains its own interpretation: this is how you are going to read the preceding signs. For instance, Wordsworth, resorting to the familiar medieval dream allegory in *The Prelude*. He falls asleep, and has a vision of an Arab carrying a stone which he takes for Euclid's "Elements" and a shell which he entrusts with the power of the trumpet sounding the apocalypse. The scene is afterwards amply commented as an illustration of the Quixotic nature of books. If Coleridge doubles up a sign system, the symbolical structure (meaning inseparable from sign) is preserved. The effect is one of duplicating an enigma, a mirror-like effect, not a hermeneutic disclosure of a riddle. The Abyssinian maid, singing of Mount Abora in *Kubla Khan*, ecoes *the woman wailing for her demon lover* in the first part of the poem; *the sunny domes, the caves of eyes* are spoken about after having been contemplated, yet they remain as mysterious and untranslatable into a paraphrase. This ***repetition of the same*** (*semper idem*) has, on the contrary, the effect of *doing away with the temporality inscribed in the sign,* making it meaningless, as nothing new ever shows up. It is the repetition of the origin (or a return to it), not a movement away from it (corruption) into a derivative semiological structure.

Another rhetorical structure attributed by De Man to Romantic texts is the deconstructive effect of rhetoric: the disjunction between sign and meaning, irony, the divorce between the semantic and the figurative meaning of words. An illustration is his essay, *Time and History in Wordsworth* **(18)** on the preeminence of language over nature and history in *The Prelude*, and the strategy by which what is asserted on the semantic level (an analogy between the growth of his mind and River Duddon) is denied through "some aspects of the language", as, for instance, the important part played by the word "backward" in the following lines from the *Conclusion.*

For, backward, Duddon! as I cast my eyes,
I see what was, and is, and will abide

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which invalidates the analogy: *This backward motion does not exist in nature but is the privilege of the faculty of mind that Wordsworth calls the Imagination* **(19)**. As Wordsworth sees in Imagination a spark of the Universal Spirit, the distinction between present, past and future is here meaningless. The river is an incremental trope (repeated throughout the poem) for the mind, and it is hard to interpret just one adverb as possibly undoing this metaphor. Deconstruction is inherent in the rhetorical strategy of some modernist and all canonical postmodernist texts (the *écart* between the semantic level and the rhetorical meaning in Eliot, for instance, is enormous, while the Prevert poems sound absurd on the first, only functioning as rhetorical games). However, applying it to the constructive Romantic stylistic matrix is a rather risky affair. If a text by Coleridge did not differ **formally** from one by contemporary poets, there would be no reason for literary periodization. Besides, speaking in general about "romantic rhetoric" is apt to level down important differences. More recent approaches, like those of A.W. Price and Keith Cunliffe, included in a collection of essays titled *Platonism and the English Imagination* (edited by Anna Baldwin and Sarah Hutton, Cambridge 1994), would indicate that the "sound and the fury" of deconstruction misapplied have cooled down.

The fact is Coleridge and Wordsworth differ widely in their aesthetic views and discourses, and they themselves changed a lot in time. *Tintern Abbey*, the poem which Wordsworth added at the last moment to the bulk of *Lyrical Ballads,* seems to belong to a different poet. In his turn, Coleridge made an early escape from the influence of Wordsworth's nature philosophy into Neoplatonic and Kantian visions of the autonomy of Self and art. The corner-stone of his *Logosophia* – a projected prose epic, meant to reconcile religion and philosophy – is the idea that man's life begins in detachment from nature and ends in union with God. Both Wordsworth and Coleridge abandoned in due time the Jacobin revolt and Unitarian radicalism (disappointed at the collapse of French revolutionary ideas during the Reign of Terror and later under the policy of conquest), Wordsworth placing himself in the service of a Tory MP, and Coleridge supporting the established Church in the form of "clerisy" (*On the Constitution of the Church and State*), whose mission was to cultivate people and to mediate between governmental institutions and the civil society. Wordsworth's address to Coleridge is often apologetic, while Coleridge is straightforwardly polemic. We can trace, of course, common, canonical features. For one thing, they do not write collections of unconnected pieces. Their organic theory inspires them with an idea of unique and unitary projects, of the One Book, like the Bible (Wordsworth's *Recluse*, Coleridge's *Logosophia* or *Biographia Literaria*). Their writing has an autobiographical character, focusing **not events but inner growth**: *having for its principal subject the sensations and opinions of a poet living in retirement* (Wordsworth: *Advertisement* to the *Prelude;* Coleridge: *Biographia Literaria: Or, Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*). They both fight the

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mechanistic thinking of the eighteenth century, Newton's atomistic picture of the universe, the narrow empiricism of Locke, the simplifying associationism of David Hartley, while supporting the absolute oneness of being – whether through a return to Neoplatonism (men as parts and proportions of one whole) or by embracing some form of pantheism (Aristotle's *energeia*, revived as the Spirit of the Universe)

Coleridge and Wordsworth met in 1795, and in 1978 they were hastily preparing for print a collection of *Lyrical Ballads*. The collection went into a new edition in 1800, this time preceded by a *Preface* by Wordsworth, which was soon embraced as the aesthetic programme of a group of young poets. Whereas the Middle Ages had imposed a palpable didactic (religious, and moral) design upon art, and the Renaissance and the Enlightenment had drawn heavily upon the poetic of the Greek and Roman antiquity, Romantic aesthetics was the first to match a modern sensibility and worldview. The stress on the perceiving mind (I think, therefore I am, to be is to be perceived, I cannot get any knowledge of reality in itself, I can only control my **representations** of it), the valorization of selfhood at the expense of the material, social circumstances of the individual's personality, originating in the philosophical discourses from the late seventeenth to the early nineteenth century (Descartes, Berkeley, Hume, Kant, Fichte, Hegel) had important bearings upon literature. First of all, it grows **autonomous from either mimetic or formal impositions**. The poet is no longer expected to "hold up the mirror to nature". Physics is sublimated into its representations. A poet has a *disposition to be affected more than other men by absent things as if they were present; and an ability of conjuring up in himself passions, which are indeed far from being the same as those produced by real events.* The stuff of poetry is not provided by things or by a direct contact with them but by emotions – by the individual's **subjective response** to the world, when it is not present to his consciousness (*emotion recollected in tranquillity*). It is no longer controlled by judgement (*the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings*) or by formal norms (*simple and unelaborate expressions (...) no essential difference between the language of prose and that of metrical compositions*). The scene of aesthetic emotion is transposed from the outer to the inner world. Man and nature are *essentially adapted to each other*, but this **consensus** of experience has an epistemological rather than an **ontological** basis: *the mind of man as naturally the mirror of the fairest and most interesting properties of nature.*

In discussing Wordsworth's poetic, critics have lately resorted to *The Prelude* rather than to the celebrated *Preface,* as the former knew several revisions, from the late nineties, when Wordsworth began his work on it to the final edition of 1850. Its textual history mirrors Wordsworth's life-long hesitations in establishing the preeminence of the two factors, Nature and Education, in shaping a self which, in the light of German idealist philosophy had become progressively aware of its separate existence in the world.

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In 1798 Wordsworth launched upon the vast poem *The Recluse*, which was to record the *Growth of an Individual* (later, *A Poet's*) *Mind*, a *Bildungsgeschichte* out of which he only produced *The Prelude* and *The Excursion* (1805-1814).

Cathy Caruth, in her essay *Past Recognition: Narrative Origins in Wordsworth and Freud* (**20**) locates *the origin of the poetic spirit in the baby at the breast" (...) in an empirically situated event, the physical relation of the mother and the nursing baby,* which produces two stories: an affectionate relationship with an empirically situated mother and a propping activity (affection derived from the contact with the mother's body which survives the mother's death, displacement). The respective scene comes only in the second book, and it is not for nothing that Wordsworth also wrote *Book First.* It is here that we are to seek *the origin* of his spiritual development, whether we are lucky to stumble into Freud or not. And we do not. The first book is an account of ***childhood***, and the pivotal experience (there are such moments in each book, anticipating Joyce's epiphanies, i.e. moments of intense awareness, of spiritual enlightenment) is one in which the child looks up into the sky, and perceives *a huge peak, black and huge,/ As if with voluntary power instinct/ Upreared its head (...) with purpose of its own/ And measured motion like a living thing/ Strode after me.* The child's frightened mind (suggested by the repetition of "huge") lends life to the banal "summit of a cragged ridge". Paul de Man, in *Time and History...* is right in emphasizing the importance of such reversals of perspectives in Wordsworth, from earth to the sky, sometimes rendered through the verb "hang". They are emblems of the reflecting consciousness, of the subjective representation of actual experience. Nature is seen from a vitalist perspective, as teleological form (having its own will and purpose, energeia). The child becomes suspicious of "unknown modes of being", of a world beyond that of actual experience. The effect on the mind is one of sublimation (*Aufhebung,* in Hegel): the real shapes are supplanted in the mind by emptied Forms, (see Plato, *Phaedo*, and his theory of our recollections of ideal Forms, from contemplating their shadows in the things of the world). The eclipse of the real world is a sort of apocalyptic end (the figure of the apocalypse is reiterated with each new visionary experience):

o'er my thoughts
There hung a darkness, call it solitude
Or blank desertion. No familiar shapes
Remained, no pleasant images of trees,
Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields;
But huge and mighty forms, that do not live
Like living men, moved slowly through the mind
By day, and were a trouble to my dreams.

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The natural background is erased and supplanted by a subjective representation. And this process is the work of the plastic Spirit of the universe *that gives to forms and images a breath/ and everlasting motion.* A spirit which works through man as it does through nature.

As the poet deliberately sets out to recover his past experiences at the end of the first book, he also shifts from abstract invocations to a precise address. The poem is produced for the benefit of his Friend (Coleridge), not for some indefinite readership. Consciousness is being dramatized, lyric self-reflexivity makes room for a histrionic performance. Wordsworth's self in relation to the world becomes the object of his recollections, and the narrative of this retrieved selfhood is in its turn the object of his friend's reading and examination.

In the second book, the poet feels there was a split within his mind as he went to school. That it had grown divided. It is for the first time that the river metaphor is employed: *This portion of the river of my mind/ Came from what fountain?* If the shapes of things impressing his mind in childhood and the forms imprinted by the plastic spirit of the universe had been in unity, science which welcomes him to school appears to him only as *a prop/ To our infirmity.*

For the question is: do we come to know the world through perception or do we impose our own representations on it *(*things *we perceive* or *we have made*). Here comes the scene with the "blessed baby", which is an allegory for the coming, explicit answer to the above question. The baby sucking his mother's breast also *drinks in the feelings of his Mother's eye*. Physical nourishment is opposed, in the customory antithetic Romantic manner, to the non-empirical emotional relationship (love between mother and child). Yet after his mother dies, and that particular "prop" of his affection is removed, *the building stood, as if sustained/ By its own spirit*. His emotional inbuilt drives are still there, because it had not been his mother that had originated them. His mind had acted as *agent of the one great Mind,* both creator and receiver, working *in alliance with that which it beholds.* In the *Phaedo* fashion, as the infant beholds his mother, or a beautiful flower etc., he recognizes their beauty or goodness. There is a process of the soul recollecting the antenatal existence, before corruption or birth: *Remembering how she* (the soul) *felt*:

let this
Be not forgotten, that I still retained
My first creative sensibility;
That by the regular action of the world
My soul was unsubdued. A plastic power
Abode with me; a forming hand (...)
An auxiliar light
Came from my mind, which on the setting sun
Bestowed new splendour;

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The "residence at Cambridge" in the third book suggests a new birth: *the college labours, of the Lecturer's room,* which is a painful one for it means the severance of the self from the natural habitat, and the suppression of the instinctively emotional life by Reason (*spake perpetual logic to my soul [...] Did bind my feelings even as in a chain*) through acquisition of the purely *human language*. The river could flow *with ampler range*, yet Learning is troped as the Christian warrior of medieval allegories, *errant in the quest* (erring?) for culture means again the apocalypse of the real world, and the creation of *a world/ Within a world, a midway residence* of *human business;*

Fit reverence for the glorious Dead, the sight
Of those long vistas, sacred catacombs,
Where mighty ***minds*** *lie visibly entombed*
Have often stirred the heart of youth...

Yet such emotions do not touch the poet who feels driven out of *that first Paradise* of communion with natural forms. It is *in the hawthorn shade* that he hears Chaucer, *while birds... tell his tales/ Of amorous Passion.* Of school competitions, Wordsworth prefers not to say anything, for, as he warns us, his *theme has been/ What passed within me. Not of outward things.*

After the *summer vacation* of the fourth book we are brought to the topic of *books* in the fifth. The dream allegory with the Arab (the Arabs are credited with spreading the love of science over Western Europe), with the stone and the shell, which to him are Euclid and the Apocalypse, reinscribes the Don Quixote figure of the book addict. The reified order of culture does not impress the poet. The imagery connected with them is apocalyptic, inert or mechanical: *earthly casket of immortal verse, the Arab of the desert, the men that framed them, drop of wisdom as it falls/ Into the dimpling cistern of the heart*. The poet prefers to think of their vital origin: *That sure foundation in the heart of man*, which recognizes the *wiser spirit* at work in *unreasoning nature* (the World Spirit). The famous "Winander boy" episode (the mature man revisits the cliffs of Winander, remembering what he felt when he contemplated the landscape as a boy) is one more allegory of man being exposed to the school of nature and to the school of books (made to act on infant minds *as surely as the sun/ Deals with a flower*). The fragment is typical of the romantic "consensus of experience", of the perfect object/subject fusion in the relationship between self and world. The former boy remembers the places, and they are said to have known him well. The boy used to blow *mimic hootings to the silent owls,/ That they might answer him.* However, the next lines engage the attention of De Man, being brought up as evidence of an irreducible opposition between nature and the boy's self-knowledge (as a reflection) and capacity to transcend the *hic et nunc* and anticipate his own death (the "uncertain heaven" as preknowledge of his mortality):

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Then sometimes, in that silence while he hung
Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprise
Has carried far into his heart the voice
Of mountain torrents; or the visible scene
Would enter unawares into the mind,
With all its solemn imagery, its rocks,
Its woods, and that uncertain heaven, received
Into the bosom of the steady lake.

This Boy was taken from his mates, and died
In childhood, ere he was full twelve years old
(...) the grassy churchyard hangs
Upon a slope above the village school.

If we are to gloss the imagery of these lines, a comparison with a previous fragment may be of help. In the fourth book, there is the passage from line 247 to 263, in which the poet's experience of contemplating his image *o'er the surface of past times* is likened to the contemplation of his face as reflected in the river. Falting memory prevents perfect reconstruction of the past, just as *motions that are sent he knows not whence* prevent the steadiness of his image in water. The *uncertain heaven* is the unsteady image in the lake which ought to be *steady* yet is *motioned* by the Universal Spirit – the same which impresses the observer's otherwise passive mind (the images enter *unawares*). "Uncertain heaven" does not signify "preknowledge of death", since one can only anticipate actual events. As Wordsworth was still very much alive, the meaning in the second group of lines ought to be metaphorical. The boy had been separated from his nature-*mates* (owls, torrents and other partners of conversation) and taken to the "village-school". It had been that self, in a Hegelian natural state (spirit unto itself, immersed in nature) that had died; school had bred in him an awareness of man having an existence separate from nature (spirit opposed to itself): the language of human business.

The poet will speak a different language from now on, the sixth book introducing *that first poetic faculty* – the Imagination. The journey to the Alps is the background of a recognition scene: of the poet in himself. The sight of Mont Blanc brings disappointment, as a *soulless image* replaces a *living thought:* The actual sight is less than that Mont Blanc which the mind had imaged to itself. Imagination rises *from the mind's abyss/ Like an unfathered vapour.* The self, now displaced from the order of nature, recognizes it as its true home and destiny. Similarly to its origin, which has nothing empirical about it, imagination is teleologically defined, in Kantian terms, as its own purpose, seeking *no trophies, no spoils,* no gains from the outside world.

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The seventh book takes the poet to London, in whose description the poet seems to have followed Cowper's view of the city world as *a mutilated structure, soon to fall.* Those tempted by historicist or feminist approaches may find grist to grind in Wordsworth's presentation of foreigners and prostitutes as adding to the other evils of the labyrinthine city, of vulgar people and trivial events. We find it impossible, however, to read it as "literature of the sublime". Neil Hertz does, in his essay *The Notion of Blockage in the Literature of the Sublime* **(21).** The sublime is defined, according to Kant, as *the mind's exultation in its own rational faculties, in its ability to think a totality that cannot be taken in through the senses.* London supposedly functions in Wordsworth's text as a blocking agent, an object of dismay. "Blocking" in what sense? The sublime, in Burke or Kant, refers to something so grand that it cannot be comprehended by man's finite mind or properly rendered through words. The mind takes pride in having conceived something which surpasses its condition (the infinite). Wordsworth's City can be taken in **only** through the senses, as there is no rational structure in it to appeal to reason (block it or do whatever else): *no law, no meaning, and no end.* It is below, not above understanding. A minimal world, not an infinitely expanding one. Its discourses (its reified self-consciousness) are the blazoned names of the shops or the inscriptions upon fronts of houses, or the informative note on a beggar's chest, telling the story of his life. The labyrinth-world and the blind beggar's face become emblems of an epistemological crisis: *This emblem seemed of the utmost we can know,/ Both of ourselves and of the universe.* Man's infinity, which he intimates in his states of inwardness, cannot possibly be reduced to such minimal "texts". The poet turns away from *aught external to the living mind,* as it had proved incomprehensible. Still he admits to nature having been a guide to his understanding of man's superior being, which is his imaginative power. Once awakened, however, the Imagination "burnishes" Nature (the usual apocalyptic imagery):

From touch of this new power
Nothing was safe; the elder tree that grew
Beside the well-known charnel-house had then
A dismal look; the yew-tree had its ghost ... (*Book Eighth*)

The following three books tell of the events of France, from the promising revolutionary dawns (*France stood on golden hours*) to the restoration of tyranny. The twelfth book on *Imagination, how Impaired and Restored* resumes the panorama of his inner growth as a sequence of living moments (visiting of imaginative power) when *The mind is lord and master – outward sense/ The obedient servant of her will.* The mind finds its supreme delight not in what is, not in the language of what has been (an inscription on a monument about a murder

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committed there used to frighten him as if the scene had been real), but in moments of *visionary dreariness,* when words are wonted to express their "radiance". The sight of a woman forcing her way across the blowing wind – that visible effect of an invisible force – is a scene of *recognition*, or of recollection of *the universal heart.* People in the City worship false idols – a Narcissistic reflection of their limited experience in a fragmented, busy and chaotic world. The history of the soul reaches back to prenatal intimation, rises from man's natural history to his social life and culture, and looks forward, in expectation of a life beyond:

we have traced the stream
From the blind cavern whence is faintly heard
Its natal murmur; followed it to light
And open day; accompanied its course
Among the ways of Nature, for a time
Lost sight of it bewildered and engulfed:
Then given it greeting as it rose once more
In strength, reflecting from its placid breast
The works of man and face of human life;
And lastly from its progress have we drawn
Faith in life endless, the sustaining thought
Of human Being, Eternity, and God.

The mind is like a blind cave previously to its conscious states. The nature-world is a contiguous one (*its course/ Among the ways of Nature*) while the human world (of social institutions, culture, history) is transcendent (sublimated in reflected images, self-consciousness). The spirit recognizes in it its own image (*reflects ... the ... face of human life*). The break between them is a sort of death (the buried Boy): death to Nature, rebirth in spirit. The manifestations of non-empirical agencies are the "props" of man's intimations of the World Spirit and of his own immortality. As prenatal recollections are kindled in communion with the actual things in the world (*Phaedo*), the without and the within, subject and object (*object seen, and eye that sees*) are ONE. The poem possesses the speculative charm of a Platonic dialogue, while presenting the formal tightness and rich imagery of a literary composition. The symmetries, parallelisms, repetitions (the moments of visionary enlightenment associated with the figure of the Apocalypse, and intensified through allegory, emblems, metalepsis) testify to an unjustly underrated capacity of rendering meaning through the very structuring of the discourse.

Cowper's conviction that *God made the country, and man made the town (Town & Country*) had mapped out opposite emotional and moral spaces. Wordsworth sets them in polarity in his phenomenology of the spirit, and tropes them in two distinct tongues. It is only in poems of the countryside (as a social

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community, not in the broad sense of "natural background") that his style becomes deliberately homely, lacking literary artifice. However, it is precisely his choice of an adequate discourse that betrays a heightened literary awareness.

His meditative poems are cast in a different language – the canonical sonnet, the epic sweep of blank verse, the disciplined music of the couplet. The folk ballad form, which had been previously revived in Germany, undergoes a Romantic mutation, changing from an epic genre to a "lyric" form, more propitious to the outpouring of feelings than to the narration of extraordinary events. His broadest theme could be defined as a quest, like that in the medieval romance, or like a test-case, common in fairy-tales. It is the mind that is all the time being put to the test in its confrontation with the world and with itself. And the Grail it finally reaches is its own image.

The poems of the countryside are laments upon the disappearance of a pastoral way of life, under the impact of the Industrial Revolution, which also meant the loss of a set of values and modes of vision. Those who leave the village to seek work in the country fall into dissolute ways, become deracinated, bring disgrace upon themselves and family. The unfinished sheepfold in *Michael* (a *Pastoral Poem*) symbolizes the impossibility of rebuilding a culture in ruins. *The Female Vagrant*, dispossessed by a landowner, is forced to leave for America, and her subsequent life is a failure. Those who stay behind find support in a kindred space, with which the spirit of these artless people can freely commune. As death is felt as an integration into the anonymous circuit of nature, of which man is a part, it breeds no anxiety. A child may freely take its meal to the churchyard, where her brothers and sisters are buried, and still count herself as one of them (*We are Seven*). As a good heart is the touchstone of man's character, even the dim-witted can enjoy their parents' entire love, which does not expect any reward, being an absolute (*The Idiot Boy*). A religious spirit can endure with fortitude life's hardships, while the city drives even the most refined minds to madness and suicide (*Resolution and Independence* – which could be paraphrased as "the autonomy of the moral Will"). The realities of the village-world, as we can see, are permanently filtered through emotional response and moral behaviour.

The trajectory of the poet's spiritual biography in his poetry has already been traced in our discussion of the *Prelude*. All experience is a mode of vision

The mind vacillates between passive states and moments of imaginative flights, when it lends the world its own transfiguring powers (*To a Skylark*). Persons or things may be viewed in the "bodily eye" or in the "eye of the mind". His lover's death may be perceived either as return to an impersonal and inert earth (*no motion has she now, no force ... rolled round ... with rocks, and stones, and trees*), as in "A slumber did my spirit steel", or as integration into the all-impelling, plastic spirit of the universe, whereby the mind personifies nature, giving it a voice and a soul, as in "Three years she grew in sun and shower":

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The floating clouds their state shall lend
To her; for her the willow bend;
Not shall she fail to see
Even in the motions of the Storm,
Grace that shall mould the Maiden's form
By silent sympathy

The mind that had perceived nature as a voice and a force distinct from its own plastic vision and logos finally closes in upon itself. The lover who had been left behind can still recover Lucy from his memories of her: although the physical prop has been removed, his feelings feed upon themselves, so that he loves England "more and more" precisely because its sights are charged with recollections of Lucy („I travelled among unknown men"). The rainbow symbolizes this final realization that man's soul must be rooted in a realm beyond that of the empirical universe, which can thus be "bracketed"; and as the child is closer to the divine source, it is decreed *father of the Man* („My heart leaps up when I behold"). A poem of the same year (1807) enlarges upon this idea enunciated in the first line, bringing evidence in support of a Platonic theory about recollection of prenatal existence, which lends a child's visions a heightened emotional colouring: *Ode. Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood.* Although the poet has dropped the traditional formal aspects, the poem is an "ode" through its thought-content (a "song of praise"). The "landscape poem", a favourite genre of the eighteenth century, is made into a "revisit poem" in *Lines composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour.* The poet's attention shifts from nature to the individual, from the outside to the inside, the "revisit" being a modality of contrasting past and present selves. The mind has disengaged itself from "animal" identification with nature, progressing towards vision (*the remoter charm,/ By thought supplied)* and an autonomous space of *a priori* representations (*unborrowed from the eye*). **Experience is sublimated into recollection** (flashes on *the inward eye* – "I wondered lonely as a cloud", *The Solitary Reaper*). In the general metamorphosis of forms, the Romantic epic (*The Excursion*) introduces the Soul-Odysseus, whose mind, with all its autonomous insights, is still *to the external world/ ...fitted,* as it is only through experience of the world that the Ithaca of the mind can be recollected.

The child, the river, and the wanderer figure tell a different story in Coleridge, and in a different language too.

To us, **Samuel Taylor Coleridge** is that **difference** from Wordsworth which results in the basic binary opposition of the Romantic code. Stephen Bygrave, in his essay *Land of the Giants* **(22)** discusses the philosophical background of

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Biographia Literaria also from Coleridge's perspective on the poetic of his literary associate: *The revision of Wordsworth's preface which occupies most of the second volume (of* Biographia Literaria*) asserts the poetic symbol, broadly defined, against literalist interpretations of the programme for "the language really used by men". Coleridge stresses as a contrary "truth" a poetic "genius" which is beyond the language community, a thing* per se *which stands alone. The symbol is therefore claimed as a kind of self-sufficient metaphor. In wishing to distinguish an expressive from a discursive function of language, then, Coleridge tends to posit a language without contingency, like the logic of geometry. This is prefigured by the claim Kant makes for the normative function of geometry and physics in the preface to the second edition of the* Critique of Pure Reason, *recommending that metaphysics imitate the revolution they have undergone.*

The poet's love of pure constructs of the intellect was manifest as early as 1791, when he sent to his brother an ode in which he had inscribed "A Mathematical Problem" (the construction of an equilateral triangle):

On a given finite line
Which must no way incline;
To describe an equi -
– lateral Tri -
– A N, G, L, E.
Now let A.B.
Be the given line
Which must no way incline.... etc.

The poet meant thereby (as he confesses in the letter accompanying the poem) to *assist Reason by the stimulus of Imagination* and *to have drawn the nymph Mathesis from the visionary caves of abstracted idea, and caused her to unite with Harmony.* Whereas Wordsworth refused the assistance of reason (he could not divide his organic soul into geometrical figures, as he says in Book II of the *Prelude*), Coleridge forges his symbolic language by *incorporating the Reason in images* (*The Statesman's Manual*) – a "phantasmatic" sort of speech, of ideas *made apparent* in sensuous images. In Ch. XIV of *Biographia* he recalls the plan for the *Lyrical Ballads* as hinging precisely on this dichotomy: he was to compose poems whose incidents and agents were supernatural, and which were to engage the reader through "the dramatic truth" which would accompany them supposing them real (willing suspension of disbelief), while Wordsworth was to choose subjects from ordinary life, and subject them to a defamiliarization treatment, giving " a charm of novelty" to things of which custom had bedimmed all the lustre. It is easy to ascribe to the former his conception of "primary Imagination" (Ch. XIII) as *repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of*

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creation in the infinite I AM, his discourse being based upon repetitions of symbolic (incarnationalist) structures, and, to the latter, his concept of *the secondary imagination,* which transforms what it touches. In a way, Coleridge appears to have found a solution to that baffling effect of the sublime experienced by Burke in obscurity, infinites of space and time, huge dimensions, abundance etc. He introduces, through geometrical figures, limits by which to reduce the infinite to something known: *the* idea *of the Supreme Being appeared to me to be as necessarily implied in all particular modes of being as the idea of infinite space in all the geometrical figures by which space was limited (Biographia, I).* Burke's threatening obscurity and ambiguity (keeping the mind in suspense) is resolved into unity by the secondary imagination which *dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create.... and unify,* and which (lecture on Shakespeare) hovers between images, reconciling opposites.

Despite the poet's recognition of Kant's *giant grasp* on him, he did not gladly assimilate all there was to his philosophy. He was reluctant, for instance, to prop and test his epistemological constructs on things of the world. His mind is not at all "fitted to nature". In Neoplatonic fashion **(23)**, he pursuits intellectual beauty (intelligible forms) in a circuitous movement of the mind that feeds upon itself. As the initial plan for *Biographia* shows, he identifies the **origin** of the self in its objectified version as text („reception of the Author's first publication"), in the semiological order of culture (the books that shaped his personality, which Wordsworth feels as insufficient, previous literary and philosophical discourses, from Descartes and Spinoza to Kant and Fichte). The range of his formal exercises is impressive: anthem, hymn, ode, sonnet, complaint, invocation, epitaph, ballad, carol... He repeatedly tries his hand at ancient and modern metrical forms, sometimes imitating (from Homer, Ovid, Catullus and Casimir, to Lessing and Ossian), sometimes adapting (both Ben Jonson and John Donne, or some anonymous old play), or translating (even brief inscriptions on churchyard monuments) from Latin or German, stooping to produce a brief metrical "impromptue" *For a Market-Clock,* in the sententious diction of the baroque cautionary verse. There is no "anxiety of influence", only an exhilarated dive into an element which the mind feels to be affined. Newly-coined words, subtly echoing Latin etymologies, give delight under their mysterious garb, never worn before by any words of the tribe: *the Lampads seven,/ That watch the throne of Heaven,* in *Ne plus ultra,* meaning the seven planets which for the ancients – from Aristotle to the hermetics – were the only visible world of uncorruptible substance, produced by Nous (the Divine Intellect). Rare and difficult metres (the paeon), often of his own invention, or in new combinations are a source of perpetual admiration for all those who believe that poetry should be first and foremost the daughter of *Eurhythmia.* But to Coleridge books mean infinitely more than a source of delight; they engage his philosophy of the dialectic of

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human subjectvity in relation to the outside world. To Wordsworth, words seem insufficient in comparison to the emotional experience of the "living soul". To Coleridge, they are the medium through which emotions reach understanding and Being becomes self-conscious In *The Improvisatore*, a prose dialogue by Coleridge, Eliza, one of the participants in the Platonic banquet of the intellect, tells the Socrates-Friend: *There is something **here*** (pointing to her heart) *that seems to understand you, but wants the **word** to understand itself* while the Friend himself praises a ballad for best leading to an understanding of the feeling of love through ***utterancy***: *the outward and visible signs of the sacrament within.* The title of the ballad is *John Anderson, My Jo, John. As* an object for consciousness, John may be either indifferent or appropriated by the lover, "possessed" in a relationship of self-identification which makes him a part of her own expanded being. The problem of "identity" engages both subject and object. Whereas Wordsworth relies on recollection, Coleridge dismisses F.H. Jacobi's "strange assertion" that the essence of identity lies in recollecting consciousness as a reductive nonsense: *'twere scarcely less ridiculous to affirm that the 8 miles from Stoney to Bridgewater consist in the mile stones* **(24).** He is not interested in recollections of inbred prenatal Ideas but in the manifestation of his own self – "phaenomen", made apparent – through projection in an otherness. *A "phaenomenon" of self* – Anthony John Harding remarks – *which is no more than a shadow of the real, substantial self (...) this can only be known through a relationship with what is outside one and the desire for this knowledge is love; love is "Being seeking to be self-conscious"* **(25).** He supports his statement quoting a rather incoherent note by Coleridge himself, which also throws light on the personal and self-reflexive aspects which a symbol presented to the poet: *All our Toughts all that we abstract from our consciousness and so form the Phenomenon Self is a Shadow, its whole Substance is the dim yet powerful sense that it is but a Shadow and ought to belong to Substance/ but this Substance can have no marks, no discriminating characters, no hic est,/ ille non est/ it is simply substance (...) Love a sense of Substance/ Being seeking to be self-conscious, l. of itself in a symbol 2. of the Symbol as not being itself 3. of the Symbol as being nothing in relation to itself – and necessitating a return to the first state, Scientia absoluta*

Love is recognition of the self in an otherness which means nothing in itself but only in relation to the subject. As the Friend says, the heart, feeling the insufficiency of the self to itself, seeks completion *in the total being of another*, yet does not rest there but *finding, again seeks on.* The mirror image seeks to return to the source in a ring movement, for ***absolute knowledge*** can only be reached in the fusion of subject (seeker) and object (mirror-image in the Substance of an otherness), that is the disappearance of any alienation. Freud, in his *Lectures on Sexuality*, describes the sexual drive in an analogous way **(26).** He considers *Ichlibido* or *narzissistische Libido* to be the general and primitive state that

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later led to *Objektlibido,* which *endlich ins Ich zurückgeholt wird, so dass sie wieder zur Ichlibido geworden ist* (love of object which finally leads to the I, so that it becomes self-love once more). *Freud* illustrates the two forms of love in Goethe's *Westöstlicher Divan* (Narcissism in Suleika and Love in Hatem, who says that he only loves what Suleika loves in him), which proves that the theme was circulated at the time. In *Notebook 47,* Coleridge confesses both his need *to pass out of myself,* and his determination *not to suffer any one form to pass into me and to become a usurping Self.* In her splendid essay, *Literary Gentlemen and Lovely Ladies* **(27),** Karen Swann quotes the following notebook entry "from the Christabel period": *Ghost of a mountain – the forms seizing my Body as I passed & became realities – I, a Ghost, till I had reconquered my Substance.* The "phaenomenon" self finds substance in the appealing forms of the mountains – which seem to be emptying his self of its Body – but as soon as it has become attached to the other, his self reverses the libido drive, and recovers its original Substance. As Freud says, *Die Objektfindung ist eigentlich eine Wiederfindung* (The finding of an object is, in fact, a rediscovery). The self realizes that what it likes in the other is its own drive, its appetite. Subject and object become one Substance, no longer distinguished as *hic* and *ille.* Things are displaced, the world is, as Swann so aptly puts it, "colonized by the senses". Her conclusion is, however, debatable: *representations which disrupt the very idea of category by exposing the arbitrariness of the fundamental categories of "inside" and "outside", "self" and "world" (...) the spectator apprehends that the physical shell of the body is no guarantee of the subject's autonomy and difference; and that representations – scenes, images, and ideas, including, perhaps, the "ideas" of body, substance, reality – are in some sense material and primary, constitutive of subjects and objects.* The statement may be true with respect to postmodern writers: representation becomes problematical, because 1. the self is no longer at the centre, but thrown (to use a Heideggerian term, *entworfen*) into a multiplicity of selves with their own representations, **subjectivity** becomes a question of **intersubjectivity**, and 2. the self itself is destabilized, it has got no more inner coherence, it often becomes double, multiple, unable to control its own representations. Contrariwise, the Romantic self-worshipper, while being at the centre, will also seek expansion, acting the colonizing agent, whose final discovery is **self-recognition**. The quest is self-directed. The world is emptied out and chartered as the subject's emotional map; otherwise it remains alien (*cypher*).

for I had found
That outward forms, the loftiest, still receive
That finer influence from the Life within; -
Fair cyphers else: fair, but of import vague
Or unconcerning, where the heart not finds

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History or prophecy of friend, or child,
Or gentle maid, our first and early love.
Or father, or the venerable name
Of our adored country!
(Lines Written in the Album at Elbingerode, in the Hartz Forest)

The love-drive is constitutive of personality and its representations. And the representations are all the poet's world. For his loves are not real and present out there but *fantasies* of the mind (their "history of prophecy"). Obviously, *friend, child, love, father* mean nothing in themselves. Dislocated from reality by prophecy or memory, they have become symbols in which the poet recognizes **himself** as friend, child, lover, father. The poet's world is of his own fashioning. For love, it should be remembered, means self-recognition. Coleridge's poetry swarms with Lesbian and Narcissus figures: Geraldine's interest in *Christabel,* Christabel seeking the image of her betrothed and running into Geraldine; Sapho rejecting Alcaeus, the "Lesbian" woman who carries her own picture with her and remains insensitive to the poet's wooing (*The Picture*). They are tropes, and a charge of obscenity (of which they have not been free) is utterly misplaced. What the lover seeks in love is to **see himself** loving. Narcissistic love is a symbol of *self-consciousness*:

Then grant one smile, tho' it should mean
A thing of doubtful birth;
That I may say these eyes have seen
The fairest face on earth!

In the symbolical language of the poem, the smile is "of doubtful birth", because it is the poet that calls it forth. He asks for it and anticipates the effect of his own desire: it is going to be the fairest smile. Whereas Wordsworth reaches Oneness through infinite expansion and communion, with the all-impelling Spirit of the universe, Coleridge rules out multiplicity and heterogeneity through Narcissistic reduction. Sara is reduced to... Coleridge as his "wife", as the mother of his child, as his poem. *The Day-Dream* is an inscription of Sara's incarnation before his eyes as their child – a symbol of the incarnation mystery which resides both in birth and in the embodiment of the poetic idea in the language of the poem. The final stanza coalesces out of the words and images of those preceding it in which the poet *day-dreams of Sara dreaming of* their child, who actually shows up, awaking him. Fictions acquire the actuality of solid facts. The child is that sort of figure floating unattached between a ghost of his father (*A floating presence of its darling father*) and *its own dear baby self*, a double nature later troped as "elfish". The poem is its own history as a male childbirth fantasy (like

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Frankenstein and his Creature): *eyes idly bright... sweet and playful tenderness...touching my heart as with an infant's finger...I saw our quiet room...something more than babe did seem... I seemed to see a woman's form...*

And now, when I seemed sure thy face to see,
Thy own dear self in our own quiet home;
There came an elfish laugh, and wakened me:
„Twas Frederic, who behind my chair had clomb,
And with his bright eyes at my face was peeping'
I blessed him, tried to laugh, and fell a-weeping!

The smiles of Paradise have turned, through sexual love, into self-awareness (wakening) and weeping. "Sadder and wiser", the parent figure is however redeemed, reminding rather of the Divine Father incarnated in his Son through the immaculate conception of the dream than of the fallen Adam.

The twofold aspects of love (or of woman as Madonna or whore) are present in several poems. In *The Dark Lady* the night/day polarity symbolizes the opposition between chaste, socially acknowledged marriage ceremony and elopement, illicit sexual love, which makes woman an outcast. The poet's pride in *Christabel* – which the moralist Wordsworth struck out from the *Lyrical Ballads* was justified, the language of the poem mediating meaning through a very complex organization. The reader who is not told that it is unfinished, may find the last sentence a master stroke. Altough an early poem, the imagery is consistently and meaningfully structured. The innocent maiden Christabel walks out of her father's house into the neighbouring wood to pray for her betrothed of whom she has been dreaming for several nights. She finds a lady under the oak tree who says she has been abducted by five men, and appeals to Christabel for help. Taking her into her father's castle, the innocent girl discovers a secret about the lady's (Geraldine's) body, but a spell is cast on her, preventing her from disclosing it to anybody. When her father meets the lady, he is impressed by her beauty, and finding himself some pretext in an early acquaintance with her father, offers her hospitality. Christabel notices her father's infatuation with increasing alarm, and finally asks him to drive her out. Baron Leoline thinks his daughter is acting under the spur of undignified envy, so he makes his choice:

And turning from his own sweet maid.
The aged knight, Sir Leoline,
Led forth the lady Geraldine!

The poem might be interpreted as a fantasy of repressed sexuality. Why does Christabel go under a tree (of Eden?) to pray, when she normally prays in her room to Virgin Mary? The way back into the castle is narrated in the symbolic

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language of a nuptial ceremony (Christabel carrying Geraldine in her arms across the threshold, the sexual connotations of furniture etc.). In seeking love, Christabel seems to trigger an archetypal pattern of Innocence leading to Experience, Sexuality leading to Birth and Death. Her mother who had died giving birth to her is now watching over, but it is only Geraldine who realizes her ghostly presence, entering upon a competition with her. Driving away the "wandering mother", she sleeps with Christabel in her arms, like a mother with her baby. Would the mysterious deformity of her body (aspects of sexuality which cannot be told because they are tabooed by social decorum) suggest another "wandering mother"? She also displaces the chaste ghost-mother in her husband's affections, who drives away from him her incarnated image in Christabel. A story of displacement (surrogate lover and mother for Christabel, surrogate daughter for the old Leontine) and ghostliness, which is repeated in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *The Wanderings of Cain.* Initially projected in verse, as a joint work with Wordsworth, the latter finally came out in prose and as Coleridge's alone. Both Cain who killed Abel and the Mariner who killed an albatross („Abel"?) sent by God to save his ship, find themselves rejected, exiled. They belong nowhere, they inhabit a paraxial realm, and experience a form of Life-in-Death. The living Cain meets the ghostly Abel, as the living individual would his Platonic Demon, or archetypal double. The Limbo state, described in a poem thus titled, is one of objectified subjectivity: *He seems to gaze at that which seems to gaze on him!* The Mariner has changed into his own story, which he forces upon all those he meets, as if seized with agony. Like the "elfish" (spirits of the elements) water-snakes (probably the snake Uroboros eating its own tale in the alchemical bowl, as the reader is referred to Hellenistic thought in the marginal notes), the visionary Mariner with his bright eyes feeds on the fiction that has displaced the real events. All these "characters" symbolize the *self-being-in-otherness* of the text. In one of his Letters, Coleridge makes a distinction between Religion and sacred or devotional writing (Luther, the Scriptures), which also holds true for that between the subject/object relationship in Wordsworth and himself: *Revealed Religion (and I know of no religion not revealed) is in its highest contemplation the unity, that is the identity or coinherence, of Subjective and Objective. It is in itself, and irrelatively, at once inward Life and Truth and outward Fact and Luminary. But as all Power manifests itself in the harmony of correspondent Opposites, each supposing and supporting the other – so has Religion its objective, or historic and ecclesiastical pole, and its subjective or spiritual and individual pole. In the miracles and miraculous parts of religion – both in the first communication of divine truths thus communicated – we have the union of the two, that is, the subjective and supernatural displayed objectively – outwardly and phenomenally (...)The insubstantial, insulated Self passes away as a stream; but these are*

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shadows and reflections of the Rock of Ages, and the Tree of Life that starts forth from its side.(...) While *Scriptures bear witness with our spirit, we have received the spirit of adoption* **(28).** The power of the Word is manifest in the Believer. As the Tree of Life on the banks of a river designates that part of heavenly Jerusalem into which immortal men are received, writing is the poet's myth of immortality, metaphorically speaking, of divinities and "adopted" mortals coming together. The above quote may also serve as an excellent gloss on the river image in his best-known poem, *Kubla-Khan* – the Coleridgean counterpart to Wordsworth's Duddon River of individual consciousness. Induced by a dream and nourished by extensive readings of travel books and history, the poem still entices the reader's imagination with its enigmatic symbolism.

The name of the river, Alph, has probably been abridged from Alphaeus, the Peloponesian river-god, who in classical mythology pursues Arethusa, a wood nymph, running under the sea and emerging in Sicily as a fountain, Coleridge's common symbol of the Imagination. The name also suggests the first letter of the Hebrew or Greek alphabet, and, as the river flows down to a *lifeless ocean*, its course resembles the *alpha and omega* of the Godhead – the infinite, of which earth and life or human consciousness are only a portion. The caverns of ice – frozen and immutable geometry – are probably what he calls *visionary caves of abstracted idea,* in the letter introducing a *Mathematical Problem*. The river sinks in *tumult* into a lifeless ocean (because the self-sufficient, *insubstantial, insulated* Divine Spirit is larger than life), where is heard the "ancestral voice" of God himself, like a sound of *many waters* (or, according to other versions of *The Revelation*, God's *voice sounded like a waterfall*). Midway on the waves abstract Idea unites with Harmony: the caves of ice are reflected on a level with the palace of Kubla, whose Imagination has managed to fuse the divine and the human "measure" (harmony). The name of Kubla Khan, as well as that of the land (Xanadu) present a symmetry of the initial letters, a doubling resulting in **Indifference.** This is a word used by Coleridge to designate **(29)** *reciprocation of the Spirit as subjective and objective.* Kubla, the Godhead in history, is also an artisan (*a miracle of rare device*). The assimilation of a mortal to the divines (like John *mingling the measure* of his voice with that of God) is symbolized by the woman wailing for her demon lover and worked out through a series of oxymoronic "reconciliation of opposites". What sort of "apocalypse" is thus enacted as one more repetition in the finite mind, in the second part of the poem, prophesied in the first? The second part is the moment of awakening from the marvellous dream through some banal incident (a man on business). The poet seeks a similar mediator between mortals and divines in an Abyssinian maid he had once heard playing a dulcimer and singing of Mount Abora. If he could remember her song, he could also recover the vision. The displacement strategy

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works a consistently elaborated symmetry to the first part of the poem, as if it were its imprint, or trace on the page. The Abyssinian with the dulcimer echoes *the woman wailing for the demon lover*. In manuscript versions, "Mount Abora" appears as "Mount Amara" **(30)** – a false paradise in the fourth book of *Paradise Lost*. The name of this surrogate paradise yields, in being read aloud, something analogous to "Mount Tabor "- the one on which Christ communed with God. The Abyssinian maiden singing of Mount Tabor could be the tanned lady in *Solomon's Song*, who has been interpreted by Jews as symbolizing the link between God and his people and by Christians as that between Christ and his bride, the Church. If we piece all this together, the first part of the poem appears as a symbolical reinscription of the Genesis (creative act, without any exterior agency, as the impersonal passive forms and the abstracted masons suggest), the second, of its reversal, the apocalypse, and the third, the repeated "Revelation" or return to Logos with each new work of art. The poet, the Kubla Khan foil, entertains a Paradise fantasy (shift from indicative to subjunctive): the possibility to recapture the vision, in which case he would be tabooed as one of the "adopted" to the Paradise of the imagination:

Weave a circle round him thrice.
And close your eyes with holy dread,
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

Bernard Beatty, in *The Sea and the Book* **(31)** identifies in the Romantic transcendentalists two figural matrices: *infinites of temporal and spatial extent* and *infinites of circularity, repetition, equilibrium, brought about by equal and opposing forces*. This is a 1992 description of the Romantic "tension between finite and the infinite" which revises and reconceptualizes a similar dichotomy proposed in the seventies by Northrop Frye (*The Stubborn Structure*), Brian John (*Supreme Fictions*), and J.H. Hillis Miller (*Poets of Reality*): the Platonic running athwart the vitalist tradition of Heraclitus (Logos) and Aristotle (Entelechia). In his book, published in 1974 by Mc.Gill-Queen's University Press, Brian John explains the vitalist shift of most Romantics (Blake, Wordsworth, Shelley) as following a similar one in science: *from the cosmic and mathematical constructions of Newtonian physics to the chemistry of things, the biological, botanical and zoological, organically mutating*. Force is both creative and destructive (Blake: the Prolific and the Devourer), self-originating and self-impelling, without beginning or end (imaged as a river or a fountain). There is a general tendency towards a naturalization of the supernatural, and humanization of the divine – precisely what the Lyrical Ballads were meant to effect. The unifying vision of the **vitalists** finds

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expression, according to Miller, in figures of the **double** articulation of the world: *the tree, the Sphinx, the Centaur, the resonant landscape (echoing green).* The unity of man, nature and the supernatural engages wavering, meditative, organic rhythms. This is a world where anything might flow and change, and become any other thing. *Love of nature leads to love of man* (Wordsworth, *The Prelude*) and, in a natural kinship, further on to the divine, the spiritual source which the child still remembers. Nothing has clear-cut boundaries, being always partly one thing, partly another. The **Platonic** tradition, Frye says, identifies the soul of man with the forms and ideas of the world, accessible through music, mathematics and poetry. At rare intervals a breech of the barrier to the other world is made, and the poet identifies himself with the pure essence of the Divine Intellect (is "adopted"). Colours and forms are only natural symbols of the divine. The poet either knows by intuition these *correspondences* or comes accidentally upon a form which has the power to elicit a precise energy from the supernatural. The world is God's signature or coded message: *so that thou see and hear/ The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible/ Of that eternal language, which thy God utters* (Coleridge: *Frost at Midnight*). The child is no longer "Father to the Man" or "Mighty Prophet". It is God alone who *teaches himself* in the text of the world. The soul of man does not rely on *memory* but on a *hermeneutic* attempt to join, through the synapsis of the imagination (and not through ontological contiguity), the life of the Spirit feeding upon itself (symbolized by *the Phoenix, the unicorn, the Mariner drinking his own blood*). The vitalists will prefer the contiguity of the synecdoches, metonymies, allegory, and, particularly, prosopopoeia, which unite various levels of representation, while allowing of their independent significance as well. In *The Prelude*, the image in the river is so real, that it records the uncertain movements of the element as if it were materially engulfed therein, while, at the same time, being an allegory of faltering memory. The Platonists are ***associative rather than descriptive***, choosing the symbolic type of discourse, which does not represent but connects, where words depend on contexts for meaning, not on sequences of meaning. The temporality of the linguistic sign is tentatively annulled through reinscription of the figure. In *Kubla Khan*, the river and the image have ***one*** symbolical meaning, only valid within that particular context (*Kubla Khan*). The two rival traditions oppose Wordsworth to Coleridge, together yielding the pattern of the Romantic discourse, which continues with Shelley and Keats posed in a similar polarity, and the schizophrenic Byronic discourse of both its reinscription and refutation.

Whether we go in for Frye's "mythopoetic tradition" of Harold Bloom's "romantic ideology", it is obvious that the communality of mental styles is accountable for through participation in a selective and homogeneous cultural code. The feminist school of criticism has been very active of late in editing and advertising the women poets' voices which the male Western canon had

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previously left out. The differences in subject matter, style and tone are immense. **Elizabeth Hands**, for instance, takes a non-sentimental, disenchanted view of family life, in her poem "On an Unsociable Family", which is miles away from Wordsworth's sentimental and idealized sketches of domestic love-kindness and solidarity, particularly among common rustics. Unaware of romantic biases, or choosing to ignore them, Hands employs the neoclassical couplet for a sonnet, whose monotonous rhyme well consorts with the indistinctiveness of the family members gathered round the table at dinner, having nothing to communicate to one other, except for a number of routine exchanges. **Mary Robinson** draws a sketch of the city in a sequence of short lines consisting of nouns and participles with missing links: *Arts and sciences bewailing/Commerce dropping/ credit falling* – a sort of short hand or headlines for an impressionistic view of the city on one particular day: *January 1795*. **Anna Barbauld** gives free rein to a woman's exasperation at the display of erudition in men, living in the shadow of universities or private tutoring. A poem addressed to Coleridge – *To Mr (ST) C(oleridge)*, voices her wish to clip the wings of the poet's "mystic visions" experienced on the "hill of science with steep and rugged paths", which are a woman's confusion („the grove of tangled mazes"), so that he would turn to the more practical duties of social reform: *fair exertion for friends and country*.

To us, this late emphasis on gender appears irrelevant. The fact that these informal poems, recording common observations of everyday life, bear no historical blueprint – they might as well have been written the other day –, has something to do with the cultural background, which is probably responsible for the existence of period styles in general. The writers engaging in various negotiations with contemporary discourses will automatically produce texts informed of similar semantic and ideological energies. Elizabeth Hands was a servant in Rugby and Mary Robinson an actress and the Prince Regent's mistress. Only those who were familiar with the romantic manifesto and emerging body of literature also felt constrained by the "unthought" (Derrida), or what is unthinkable, unsayable, and unwritable at some time in history.

At the other end of the Romantic Age, **Felicia Hemans** produced not only culturally dense poems but also an innovative type of poetry, which favoured impersonation over self-expressionism. In this way she was, in fact, the inventor of the **dramatic monologue**, even if the credit for this graft of the dramatic upon the lyric went to two Victorian men-poets: Tennyson and Browning.

Romantic Drama

Typically romantic, although written by a woman, are *A Series of Plays: In Which it is Attempted to Delineate the Stronger Passions of the Mind*, published anonymously in 1798.

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Joanna Baillie was a Scottish gentlewoman, the daughter of a Presbyterian divine and sister of an eminent doctor. Her family moved to London, where their home became the rallying point of a distinguished literary coterie. With the assistance of the "Scottish connection" (Byron and Scott) and the Lake poets, Wordsworth and Southey, Baillie managed to see her plays performed. Her "Introductory Discourse" to the volume reveals a cultivated mind and an inborn theoretician, with a special feel for dramatic structure and effect. She was entitled to boast pioneer work in her design of a series of plays treating passions in pairs, a tragedy coupled with a comedy on the same subject. Her characters too were complex personalities, no longer under the sway of some ruling passion. "A decided wicked character can never be interesting", she explains. "In the breast of a bad man, passion has comparatively little to combat, how then can it show its strength?". De Monfort, a member of an old yet declining aristocratic family, is said by Manuel, his servant, to have become of late *silent, haughty, difficult, capricious and distrustful*, and yet still capable of "such bursts of natural goodness from his heart" and moments of generosity that he cannot decide to leave him. De Monfort anticipates the Byronic character, contradictory and unpredictable. The play was staged three decades in advance of Hugo's manifesto of romantic drama in his *Preface to Cromwell*, which launched the Romantic/Classic polarity. His Cromwell too is a complex, heterogeneous nature, pulled in opposite directions by generosity and meanness, fanaticism and hypocrisy, etc. De Monfort is a kind of Usher, the descendant of a doomed old family, ambiguously attached to his sister. Orphening, barenness are the symptoms of a family line soon to become extinct. His hatred of Rezenvelt, his sister's suitor, may be aroused by jealousy, but it can also be a reflex response to the opposite figure of the newly rich.

Baillie's literary lore and intuition enable her to deploy an interesting project of dramatic composition. She is interested in the anatomy of passion, in its birth and growth, which owe little to "outward circumstances and events". This is a proleptic psychoanalytic approach, trying to plumb the depths of the soul, beneath the routinized second nature imprinted by habit, until the stage of boyhood is reached, the moment a certain passion (here, hatred) first flares up. As Freud would later say, the "primary scene". The growth of passions or of the mind was a common romantic pursuit. Its bearings upon dramatic structure were simplicity of plot and the stress on the soliloquy, allowing the spectator to access the character's mind through the "overflowings of the perturbed soul". Passion is something liminal, autonomous, overpowering the rational self. It is the "enemy", the subconscious other.

If good judgement and witty conversation were the Augustan distinguishing marks of a person of quality, Baillie divides the humanity of her psychodrama into

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the "powerful, great and interesting" party, experiencing strong passions which mount to obssession, and the "inferior persons", who are "represented in a calm unagitated state". A romantic dramatist will not attempt either a reflection of life or an intervention in society; Baille is only interested in "representation", a poetic similar to that which prompted Shakespeare to associate verse with kings and prose with servants. Baillie does not, however, consider differences of social or economic status: "it is the passion and not the man which is held up to our execration". Freed from the anchorage of material existence or social and historical bodies, the chimeras haunting the restless modern soul take off to a heaven of hellish self-torment. The phrase "perturbed soul", Hamlet's address to his father's ghost, seems to suggest Baillie's deliberate location within the other of the abysmal psyche.

The later Romantics

Classical themes and forms, a return to the neoclassic discipline and satirical bent (Byron), the shift from the lyric mode to the dramatic (Byron, Shelley) or narrative (Keats) reveal the later Romantics at a considerable distance from Blake's assault on Enlightenment ideology and poetics.

Despite his aristocratic heritage and ample means, **Percy Bysshe Shelley** launched upon his poetic career with a Godwinian attack on all social taboos in one of the most nakedly didactic poems ever written, *Queen Mab* (1813). In this pamphlet in verse, with epigraphs from Voltaire, Lucretius and Archimedes, the poet declares himself against monarchy, Christianity, and sexual restraint. This Jacobin attitude will be preserved to the end of his life, and Wordsworth's failure to do the same was the only apple of discord between the two poets, structurally affined. When Wordsworth defected to the other side, serving the aristocratic William Lowther, buying land and selling it to Tory supporters, or writing a pamphlet against Brougham, the Whig antagonist, Shelley compared him to Simonides, the flatterer of the Sicilian tyrants and also the tenderest of lyrical poets. He also produced a poem, entitled *Wordsworth*, in less sharp terms yet to the same effect, as what we can read between the lines is something like: now we can see that those heart-rending laments about vanity and the world's mutability were but sheer hypocrisy:

Poet of Nature, thou hast wept to know
That things depart which never may return:
Childhood and youth, friendship and love's first glow,
Have fled like sweet dreams, leaving thee to mourn.
These common woes I feel. One loss is mine
Which thou too feel'st, yet I alone deplore.
Thou wert as a lone star, whose light did shine

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On some frail bark in winter's midnight roar:
Thou hast like to a rock-built refuge stood
Above the blind and battling multitude:
In honoured poverty thy voice did weave
Songs consecrate to truth and liberty, -
Deserting these, thou leavest me to grieve.
Thus having been, that thou shouldst cease to be.

This may not have been just vain reprobating talk, as Shelley's vision, if not his style, changed substantially in the late years of his brief life. In the beginning though, he sounds Wordsworthian, communicating the same vitalist worldview which accompanies the meditation on social, moral and historical issues of *Queen Mab*:

The Fairy pointed to the earth.
The Spirit's intellectual eye
Its kindred beings recognized.
The thronging thousands, to a passing view,
Seemed like an ant-hill's citizens.
How wonderful! that even
The passions, prejudices, interests,
That sway the meanest being, the weak touch
That moves the finest nerve,
And in one human brain
Causes the faintest thought, becomes a link
In the great chain of Nature.

Sometimes he seems to be paraphrasing Wotrdsworth's give-and-take philosophy in *Tintern Abbey* about the mind's relation to the outside world, as in *Mont Blanc. Lines Written on the Vale of Chamouni: Now renders and receives fast influencings...*

The everlasting universe of things
Flows through the mind, and rolls its rapid waves,
Now dark – now glittering – now reflecting gloom -
Now lending splendour, where from secret springs
The source of human thought its tribute brings
Of waters, – with a sound but half its own.

In Wordsworthian fashion, he revives medieval forms, modulating his meditative discourse into allegory, bestiary or dream vision. For instance, the battle between an Eagle, representing evil, and a Serpent, representing good, in the first canto of *The Revolt of Islam* (1818; originally called *Laon and Cynthia;*

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or, The Revolution of the Golden City: A Vision of the Nineteenth Century), induced by his state of mind when *The last hope of trampled France had failed.* The appetite for the avatars of the historicized Spirit remains, however, an inward drive as well. The story of the reforming couple, finally burnt on a great pyre by the reactionary forces, is described by the author himself in the *Preface* in terms so Wordsworthian as to make the attempt sound revisionist, for we do not quite see how *the growth and progress of individual mind* can well consort with *the awakening of an immense nation from their slavery and degradation to a true sense of moral dignity and freedom; the bloodless dethronement of their oppressors, and the unveiling of the religious frames by which they had been deluded into submission*, unless as an example of the "excellence" poetry can reach when breaking out of its circle of selfhood into a socially committed ideal. Shelley does handle irony in a very cunning way, for instance in his *Defense of Poetry*, when he parrots a poem by Coleridge (*The Aeolian Harp*) on the inflated tone of a patriarch spelling out the laws of the tribe, only to overthrow the statement in the next sentence

In revising Aeschylus's hero, in *Prometheus Unbound* (182o), Shelley is making a more definite – and defining for the second generation of romantics - move from nature to the semiological order of humanity. It is not fire that distinguishes man from beast but language and thought: Prometheus, like the divine Logos, is what his name designates: prophecy. Man's transcendence of the here and now is only possible through thought, speech, the arts, civilization:

> *He gave man speech, and speech created thought,*
> *Which is the measure of the universe;*
> *And Science struck the thrones of Earth and Heaven*
> *Which shook but fell not; and the harmonious mind*
> *Poured itself forth in all-prophetic thought.*

Prometheus being bound is not only a state of fact but also a state of mind: he cannot remember his curse on Jupiter and his prophecy of the downfall of tyranny of every kind. Loss of words means loss of power: the failed promise inscribed in his own name as knowing and naming that which is to come. But the coming together, of word and living action, means, as The Earth tells him, the coalescence of the two worlds of life and death, of things and their shadows. The Platonic doubling of living self and demon, thing and archetype is a language commonly spoken by Shelley, Goethe or Emerson:

> The Earth: *...For know there are two worlds of life and death:*
> *One that which thou beholdest, but the other*
> *Is underneath the grave, where do inhabit*
> *The shadows of all forms that think and live...*

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And every fair and every good
Known in part, or known impure,
To men below
In their archetypes endure.

(Emerson, *The Over-Soul)*

Aeschylus's drama is transposed into an epistemological inquiry around the origin of the spoken word and thought, with Prometheus experiencing the primary Platonic cave scene: *For the cave, on the other hand, the inremitting interchange with the outside world, signifies the surrender of any illusory claim to a poetic enterprise that might evade all relation to the natural (...) For no sooner are we assured of the difference sweet and harmonies divine that arise from within that Prometheus turns to the other sounds that come to the cave from without: "the echoes of the human world". Unlike the natural sounds, what enters from the human world comes by way of "mediators". All shapes and sounds come forth as 'echoes', 'murmurs', 'apparitions', 'phantoms', 'shadows' (...) It is not a question here of simply counterbalancing two realms of absolutes outside the cave, the one of the here-and-now of natural substance, the other, the space of pure representation. It is not that Prometheus' naming of the human implies the displacement of reality by image and art. The human world performs, in the structure of an echo, the menace to the natural realm* **(31).** We are not sure whether Shelley had come so close to the "apocalyptic" Coleridge towards the end of his life – after all "phantoms" still wait for *the gathered rays which are reality* (III, 3, 49-53) to be cast on them – but he had certainly changed a lot. D. W. Harding's study on *Shelley's Poetry* undertakes to free the poet from R.A. Leaves' charges of "modish topic of incest, influences of Sadism, the fascination of physical decay" (*Revaluation,* 1936), placing him within the proper context of the Wordsworthian *idealized soul enlarged to universality (...) and sense of oneness with the movements of vast natural forces, representing the vaster features of the universe.* The response to natural events may be different, but they usually provide symbols of or analogues to human experience. While *The Skylark, spurner of the ground,* symbolizes the human yearning for the absent and the unattainable, echoing Hamlet's definition of man as being capable of transcendence (*We look before and after, /And pine for what is not:/ Our sincerest laughter/ With some pain is fraught;/ Our sweetest songs are those of saddest thought*), the *Ode to the West Wind* voices a Dionysian urge to melt into the natural element, held in rapt, ecstatic contemplation (*Drive my dead thought over the universe/ Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth !*) The "infinite of equilibrium brought about by equal and opposing forces" (Bernard Beatty, *Op. cit.*) hurls exquisitely dynamic images into an oxymoronic shower: the impressive architecture of the Tree of Life and autumnal dissolution, death and fruition, solid mould and substantial breath:

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O thou,
Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed
The winged seeds, where they lie cold and low...
Thou on whose stream, mid the steep sky's commotion,
Loose clouds like earth's decaying leaves are shed,
Shook from the tangles boughs of Heaven and Ocean...
Vaulted with all the congregated might
Of vapours, from whose solid atmosphere...

Transience and the impermanence of things do not spare works of art, either. The colossal statue of Ozymandias, "king of kings", lies shattered in the desert; a wreck is now the work of the sculptor, who *well those passions read / Which yet survive.* The rhetorical deftness of subversive effects makes the poem ambiguous. Is it supporting the conclusion to *Adonais, An Elegy on the Death of John Keats* (1821), that what the poet thought and felt is all that remains out of the wreck of life and history or is it supporting a vitalist gospel about the preeminence of the soul over *techne*? The first ironic reversal is the sculptor's intention: he has deliberately produced a gigantic image of the king, whose conquests have come to nothing, and placed it in the desert in order to ridicule his vanity:

My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!

And then the second shocking paradox: the work of the *hand that mocked* is only outlived by the ironic inscription which now refers to the... sculptor's colossus, while the passions of the king (*the heart that fed*) are still being experienced by what in the preface to the *Revolt of Islam* he calls human *passion in its most universal character.*

It is easier to mark out the distance separating *The Demon of the World* (1816), a refurbishing of *Queen Mab,* and *The Triumph of Life* (1822) or *Alastor* (1816) from *Epipsychidion* (1821).

The Demon of the World is only another name for Wordsworth's Spirit of the Universe, descending upon a mortal fair in a chariot like that in Ezekiel's vision, and inducing recollections of antenatal life (in *Adonais* still that state of bliss which death will reinstate):

Maiden, the world's supremest spirit
Beneath the shadow of her wings
Folds all thy memory doth inherit
From ruin of divinest things.

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The Triumph of Life, Shelley's last and unfinished work, written in *terza rima*, with the obvious purpose of imitating Dante's verse-form in his human comedy, opens with a vision of a multitude of people hastening along a dusty road, whose existential questions need to be answered by themselves, as participants in history: *yet none seemed to know/ Whither he went, or whence he came, or why/ He made one of the multitude...* Such questions which **substitute historical praxis and planned action for Platonic recollection** show those who point to Mary Shelley as the modest scribe of her husband's words that the reverse would rather be the case, because they echo the words of Frankenstein's creature, and both texts quote Milton's Adam. The poem opposes Life (that all-impelling world spirit imaged by Ezekiel) to Love (the human soul's separate life of feelings):

At the centre of the storm, I saw what looked like four living creatures in human form, but each of them had four faces and four wings...and the wheels did exactly what the creatures did... (*Ezekiel,* I: 4-15)

So came a chariot on the silent storm....
The music of their ever-moving wings.
All the four faces of that Charioteer
Had their eyes banded....

In *The Demon of the World,* the visiting spirit is replaced beside the maiden's bed by his earthly counterpart and her lover; *The Triumph of Life* reads that *all things are transfigured except Love.* The title is ironic. It is only the passions of the heart that survive *Life's tears, infamy and tomb.*

In an essay published in *The Review of English Studies, Nov. 1996,* **(32)**, *Patsy Stoneman speaks* about the Romantic poets *representing themselves as exiles from society by a quest for ideal mirrors of themselves in the form of mythological or divine women, spirits of beauty or truth, sometimes conceived as sisters.* Emerson's Over-Soul or Shelley's Epipsychidion (which means the soul outside the soul) reestablish the circularity of the spirit (*the soul knows only the soul* – Emerson) departing from the pantheistic spirit of the universe into a Narcissistic quest *(The Daemons are self-seeking – The Over-Soul*). The nameless hero of *Alastor* leaves his home and travels across the world in search of "the thrilling secrets of the birth of time". He is a perfect example of Romantic self-absorption, the ideal woman being in fact a projection of himself: *He dreamed a veiled maid/ Sate near him, talking in lowsome tones,/ Her voice was like the voice of his own soul/ Heard in the calm of thought...* So must have been that of God, talking to himself, before the birth of time...

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Epipsychidion plays on the twin-soul theme, inspired by his real affection for Emilia Viviani, and written after her confinement in a monastery. The mirror-like Romantic love whose consummation presupposes the elision of the separating bodies to commune through the Soul outside the soul, is thus free of adulterous implications. There are elements in this poem which anticipate aspects of Victorian sensibility, and several conspicuous Victorian writers found in Shelley an affined spirit (Emily Brontë, Browning). For instance, Matthew Arnold's distinction between human values and amoral nature *(Mind from its object differs most in this:/ Evil from good; misery from happiness; / The baser from the nobler....)*, and addition of derived objects of culture (*antique verse, and high romance...*) to the natural order of *rain and passing cloud...* The language has lost both its meditative discursiveness and the violent oxymoronic juxtapositions, weaving a symbolic texture with rich connotative undertones:

This song shall be thy rose; its petals pale
Are dead, indeed, my adored Nightingale!
But soft and fragrant is the faded blossom,
And it has no thorn to wound thy bosom.

Two contradictory readings of the sonnet *On First Looking into Chapman's Homer* by **John Keats** published relatively recently show that the poet may be as misunderstood today as he was at the time when Wordsworth deplored his "poeticisms" and stylish paganism, while Byron dismissed the fastidious "finery" of his language as middle class showing off. A psychoanalytical motivation – the desire for elegance in a social upstart – will not explain away the sensuousness of Keats' s consummate language, which cannot be reduced to an infatuation with dazzling surfaces. Just like Coleridge, Keats started his brief career (he died when he was only twenty six) with exercises of admiration, imitating the atmosphere, vocabulary and metres of literary masters, and appropriating some of the most difficult verse forms in the language: the Miltonic blank verse in the *Hyperion* poems, the *ottava rima* (eight-line stanzas of pentameters rhyming abababcc) in *Isabella,* the Spenserian stanza of nine lines (two pentameter quatrains rounded off with a hexameter) in *The Eve of St. Agnes*. Yet his attitude to past or remote forms of culture betrays the same revisionist attitude as Shelley's, while marking out a decisive departure from Romantic self-worshipping and transcendentalism. The Chapman sonnet is a key text in this respect:

Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold,
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;
Round many western islands have I been

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Oft of one wide expanse had I been told
That deep brow'd Homer ruled as his demesne;
Yet did I never breathe its pure serene
Till I heard Chapman speak out and bold:
Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
He star'd at the Pacific – and all his men
Look'd at each other with a wild surmise -
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.
Sonnet XI. On First Looking into Chapman's Homer.

According to Bernard Beatty, the poem is typically Romantic in its use of the finite symbol to express infinite suggestibility: the measured as a sign of the immeasurable. Set in polarity, infinity and text, Pacific and Homer, sea and Book – are read off in terms of each other. What seems to be a travel account is really reading. Reading Homer is like the awed discovery by the explorer Cortez of the Pacific, while standing on "a peak in Darien". The infinity of the sea can only be measured off against a finite landmark: the peak. Keats, like Cortez, is only a discoverer, never a traveller, on a par with the peak he surveys. The main objection that can be brought up against this reading is, obviously, that Keats is not reading Homer, actually, but an English translation: Chapman's version. Marjorie Levinson in her 1988 book, *Keats's Life of Allegory*, a fragment of which is reproduced in *Romanticism, Op. cit.*, is concerned with this particular aspect: *The experience takes place, significantly, in the breach between the two movements of the sonnet. Rather than imitate Chapman, Keats reproduces Chapman's necessarily parodic (that is Elizabethan) inscription of Homer. The queerness of Chapman's "mighty line, loud-and-bold" version is rewritten in Keats's own Elizabethanism, and, through the queerness of the Cortes/Balboa image. (...) Keats's sonnet breaks free of Homer and Chapman by misgiving both (...) The instance of the poem would suggest that Keats's relation to the Tradition is better conceived as dialogic (Bakhtin) rather than dialectic (Bloom)* **(33)**. The author is contradicting herself. In Bakhtin, dialogics is neither parody nor something one can escape. Dialogue is the very language of Being, and the I-Thou relationship, the realm of **ontology.** Anyway, the poet is here, as elsewhere, a Kantian disciple, dwelling on **epistemology**. The sonnet hinges on recurrent motifs in Keats: the preeminence of vision, in the imagery of the eye (often an eagle's, all-surveying eye), and the appropriation of the object as a provisional epistemologic construct – one of the several which are possible. The poet is convinced that access to the essence of objects is problematical:

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Oh never will the prize,
High reason, and the lore of good and ill
Be my award. Things cannot to the will
Be settled, but they tease us out of thought
Epistle to J.H. Reynolds

The impasse experienced by the mind in confronting the things in the world, which remain incomprehensible (*tease us out of thought*), is caused by its incapacity to make them conform to its constructs: *any standard law/ Of neither earth or heaven.* That is, they remain independent of the human will and consciousness, cannot be appropriated, possessed. The mind can only build its own world, and all works of art are forms of ownership, forms of possession. Such outlook explains the paradox that the poet may feel less at home in "artless" England than in a realm of vision and art (*glance and singing*) which implies a specifically human ontology. The eye and the voice create a *float*-ing world independent of experience, or, to quote the poet himself, they "world" and the act is "worldling" (Heidegger: *es weltet*). The poet is furious for having allowed himself to be tempted by journeys at home and abroad when, in fact, man's proper world is *a priori*:

Happy is England! I could be content
To see no other verdure than its own;
To feel no other breeze than are blown
Through its tall woods with high romances blent:
Yet do I sometimes feel a languishment
For skies Italian, and an inward groan
To sit upon an Alp as on a throne.
And half forget what world or worldling meant.
Happy is England, sweet her artless daughters;
Enough their simple loveliness for me,
Enough their whitest arms in silence clinging;
Yet do I often warmly burn to see
Beauties of deeper glance, and hear their singing,
And float with them about the summer waters.
(Sonnet XVII)

The poem is lifting the reader from the heavy, clinging and silent earth, which does not come out of itself, into a transcendent, visionary world collecting from the sights and sounds intentionally produced and perceived (to see what has been glanced, to hear what is manifesting itself in song). That is being **with** others and **about**, not **in** the world.

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In sonnet XI, there is Homer's **possession** of a "wide expanse" in Apollo's "realm of gold", which is not a given, like any common land, but a colony of the creative spirit. *That deep-brow'd Homer ruled as his demesne* And there is also the issue of *epistemological appropriation (Chapman's Homer, looking into Chapman, looking at the sky, watching the sky, staring at the Pacific)* which, in a formalized universe, unlike in the real one, becomes possible. It is only that it is never final or complete. Chapman's Homer is like one planet among others, like a peak in an immense territory. Coleridge's favourite scene of the subject being seen (and subjectivity understood in its reflection) is here enacted with Keats seeing what Chapman has seen. The Romantic Narcissistic self-reflexivity has yielded to an epistemological inquiry into communication, intersubjectivity. "Ken" is a key word, for the concrete instrument scientists use to explore the sky has been replaced by an abstract word meaning "range of sight or knowledge, esp. in *out of, beyond one's ken"* (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 1964), while the verb means to "recognize at sight, know". For it is in Chapman's translation – still recognized as the most forcible one – that Homer reaches Keats's understanding. Homer is not modified through translation *but allowed to appear, to be present in Keats's consciousness (swim into his ken).* Whereas Wordsworth is looking at things in the world to remember the ideal forms, Keats feeds on the formalized universe of art to the same effect. Homer has been there all the time but it is only now that Keats has discovered him. **Being** and recognition or **knowing** have become distinct acts, and they involve the mutually shared meanings of culture. **In man's world, cognition is always re-cognition**, that is knowledge with others, a shared structure of meanings. Keats is reading Homer with Chapman, just as Cortez was discovering the Pacific with his men. Keats could not have known of Homer's greatness unless his education and former readings (*Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold)* had moulded his tastes. Even discovery implies, for the self inscribed in a semiological order, **recognition**, that is a capacity for integrating or chartering or mapping the new element into that self-same order: one more book, one more planet, one more ocean. The "surmise" of Cortez's men suggests that they can introduce the Pacific into a preexisting epistemological structure, which has made its discovery predictable. An astronomer can only know that a planet is a new one, provided he knows all the others that have already been discovered. The poem is in fact an allegory of the mind meeting in the world its own, culturally inbred, expectations. The aesthetic appropriation of the object is defended as the only legitimate one, and counterpoised to the material proprietorial relationship to it. Knowing is distinct not only from being but also from having (see his approval of Haydon's informed comment of the Elgin marbles, even if his response to them is less self-assured, more tentative and subjective, as well as his disgust at the fraudulent manner of their being "seized" and brought to England). This early awareness of cultural difference would be fully explored by most Victorians.

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About one thing is Marjorie Levinson not mistaken – in her Marxist-psychoanalytic reading of Keats's failure to discover the social code (grammar) inscribed in the poet's cultural fetishes (and this is, she thinks, "just what Keats was after") – namely that he *put the entire poem and all its authorial anguish in aesthetic space: museum space, to be precise* **(34).** But the "alienating closure of Keats's poetry" – formally expressed by framing devices – is precisely a programmatic alienation from any other codes (social, political, moral, religious) apart from the aesthetic. "*I stood tip-toe upon a hill* ", one of his early poems (1817) shows that he launched himself upon writing with a full-grown aesthetic consciousness, that he did not just fumble along, like any beginner, until he developed it. Moreover, that he did not mean to write inside the already-existing Romantic tradition. The simple transformational grammar of bodily response to the world (*delight/ Of this fair world*), that is an appreciation of natural beauty, leading to aesthetic creativity (*to tell delightful stories)* has no cognitive or religious connotations. There is nothing in the real world to feed the imagination. Whoever looks for Pan and the nymphs will only experience the disappointment of stark reality:

how he did weep to find,
Nought but a lovely sighing of the wind
Along the reedy stream:

Therefore he will not waste his time **re-visiting** old and remote places in England and in Europe (being also less amply provided than his aristocratic or well-to-do rival poets); instead he will sit himself down (*sit me down*: his uncommon verbal expression for the objectified selfhood) and read. If Wordsworth and Shelley are recovering their past selves from actual places and experiences, Keats will handle the theme *(re-visit* poem) through a figure: *metalepsis* or the **troping of a former trope**, for the book he is reading is Ovid's story of Narcissus, the first of his *Metamorphoses.* The modish device of **contrasting modes of vision** is substituted by antithetical discourses: the figurative (Caducean charm) language of art (Apollo) which causes ideas to appear in sensuous form (materialize into a beautiful mortal) versus the apocalyptic, abstracting language of science or philosophy (see the knowing gaze and truth language of Lycius, the philosopher, who, by naming *Lamia*'s essence, causes her to disappear.) The philosopher is left with neither the essence nor the appearance of the true Lamia, as her essential serpent nature cannot become apparent (phenomenal). On the contrary, the language of art is creation, increase. A new word is created to illustrate the effect of Apollo's "lythe Caducean charm": The word *lythe* is probably a "portmanteau word", a telescoped form of Gr. *lysis*

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meaning "dissolution" and Gr. *lethe* meaning "forgetfulness". "Caduceus" designates the wand of Hermes, the god who runs messages from gods to mortals, while the adjective also means "perishable". The whole phrase may be paraphrased as the word that links the present otherworldly form of Lamia to her future state of mortality, which will be enacted as a form-dissolving proces (*melted and disappear'd*). This is but one example of the extraordinarily compact poetic idiom which makes Keats, when properly understood, one of the most complex and difficult poets. Each word has its precise function and often an entire history behind it, which would require its own glossing.

In the manner of Coleridge, Keats writes *verse-letters* to express his aesthetic views. Sometimes his choice of an imaginative life divorced from that of nature is motivated by a proleptic Darwinian picture of destructive beasts praying upon one another in a fierce struggle for survival:

> *Still do I that most fierce destruction see, -*
> *The Shark at savage prey, – the Hawk at pounce,*
> *The gentle robin, like a Pard or Ounce,*
> *Ravening a worm, -*
>
> *(Epistle to J.H. Reynolds)*

The Eve of St. Agnes is a masterpiece of **revisionist reinscription**. The poem tells of a maiden's initiation on the night when, according to tradition, young girls are supposed to dream of their lovers (*Christabel*), consummated between the cell of the Beadsman telling his rosary and the guests in the banquet hall of the medieval castle, whose merry-making and music can be heard, *for many a door was wide*. The reader is in the position of the wedding-guest in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, requested to choose between the Mariner's village chapel and the wedding banquet, whose music is coming through the open door. The poem ends up with an Wordsworthian closure which distances the world of the heroes from that of the reader – the inscribed beneficiary of the story – through a shift from present to past tense, and from dramatized to narrated events. Coleridge's polarization of woman into virgin and whore is rejected by Keats, by virtue of his belief in the inevitable course of events in the real world, which is one of necessity. Madeline, who earlier had been praying beneath the Virgin's picture *while rose-bloom fell on her hands* (the Virgin Mary is, in the Catholic tradition, the mystic rose), wakes up and sees Porphyry (a name suggesting the red colour of passion), who has stolen into his enemies' castle for love of her. As fiery erotic passion is making "purple-riot" in his bosom, his devastated face looks quite different from its ideal and dispassionate vision in her dream-world of mystic inspiration:

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" ...those sad eyes were spiritual and clear:
"How changed thou art! how pallid, chill and drear !
"Give me that voice again, my Porphyro,
"Those looks immortal...

But that is not possible (*As though a rose should shut, and be a bud again*), for life pursues an irreversible course, towards the full-blown rose of erotic initiation, decay and death. The Virgin dreaming under the St. Agnes legend will awake *warm in the virgin morn, no weeping Magdalen.* Madeline will not spend the rest of her life in ascetic expiation, like the famous Mary Magdalen, the reformed prostitute, she will follow her lover out of the castle. After their elopement, the Baron and his warrior-guests are nightmared with demons, witches and coffin-worms, which intimates that the lovers died. They leave the orderly castle world (secure, unchanging) of music, beautifully carved furniture, dainty meals (this is Keats at his best in his sensuous describing language), going out into the chaotic nature, ravished by the storm. Keats works a displacement in his literary model: the terms set in polarity are not innocence and experience, but art and nature. Inside the castle, opposites have been reconciled, conflicts have been appeased (Anglo-Saxons and Normans, Hildebrand and Maurice are feasting together), innocence is not bereft of sensuous delight in embodied beautiful forms, and Madeline has her own protecting Angela. Outside there is a world of divisiveness (asceticism or sexual indulgement, life or death), confusion and death.

The *Hyperion* poems, cast in Miltonic blank-verse, show an analogous technique: reinscription of the model and afterwards its deconstruction and re-construction in Keatsian key. Not even gods are spared the effects of time and decay. The Titans led by Saturn are deposed by the Olympian gods led by Jupiter. In Miltonic fashion, the fall is within the mind. They have committed "actions of rage and passion" whereby they have decayed in dignity to the level of "the mortal world beneath". The reprobating speech by Coelus, the Heavenly Father, is strongly reminiscent of God explaining away the "justice" of the fall in *Paradise Lost* (*for I created them free and free they must remain*):

For I have seen my sons most unlike gods,
Divine ye were created, and divine
In sad demeanour, solemn, undisturb'd
Unruffled, like high Gods, ye liv'd and ruled;
Now I behold in you fear, hope, and wrath;

Hyperion's fall (last of all Titans) is his own choice on *recognizing* the difference between his state of mind and the *"bright, patient stars"*. With Keats,

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redemption is no longer religious but aesthetic. Oceanus, one of the deposed Titans, is aware that their fall was not caused by the Father's thunder (Milton's Satan refers in his opening speech to God, *Whom thunder hath made greater)* but by Nature's course, which permanently brings up *a fresh perfection.* Is there no escape from Nature's law? Clymene has heard Apollo's "romanticized" song *of joy and grief at once*, and knows he is the better god. She certainly acts as a ventriloquist on Keat's behalf when she spells out the new gospel of beauty:

'tis the eternal law
That first in beauty should be first in might;

It is through *knowledge enormous* and the gift of music from Mnemosyne that Apollo becomes immortal, no longer subject to Nature's displacements and mutability law. Art and memory are man's Edenic condition. And if there has to be an analogue for the Kubla-Khan poet "adopted" by the Divine Imagination, that is Endymion loved by the moon goddess, that is, the immortality of mortal beauty made into a myth.

Ode on a Grecian Urn is the most typical Keats, not only with its opposition of love decaying yet consummated in the real world, while arrested but eternal in the engraving on the famous Barberini vase (a poetic allegory of the Kantian principle of aesthetic appreciation as disinterested, free of any practical purpose, laid down in *The Critique of Judgement*), but also in the generic awareness of the closure. As the poet is glossing on an art object of the Attic world, he has selected the literary mode of the "Cold Pastoral". The mind cannot survive in the body, yet it can conjecture something of the nature of eternity by contemplating an art object that will endure *when old age shall this generation waste.*

Major writers are those who gear literature towards new modes of sensibility and expression, and this may be counted as one of Keats's great achievements. With all recent revaluation work, his true greatness remains to be fully grasped, which is only possible by enlarging the frame of reference to later nineteenth-century developments, when the Kantian shift from being to episteme, from Nature to "knowledge enormous" engendered a new aesthetic awareness and response.

With Lord **George Gordon Byron**, the Romantic state of mind invades the everyday. The prodigal aristocrat is given to role-playing (building the mask of the contradictory Fatal Man), scandalous behaviour, which would send him on exile, heroic enterprise (swimming the Hellespont, like Leander), and premature death on a romantic quest (while away to Greece, fighting for her independence from the Turks). His poetry is more of a narrative and dramatic quality, while his dissatisfaction with the solipsistic chaos of the unfocused romantic "outpouring of feeling" took the form of a belated, critical Augustan pose, at odds with the first generation of Romantics (the "Lake District" school): Southey, who had relegated

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Byron to the "Satanic School of Poetry", is found boring, Wordsworth, pedestrian, and Coleridge, obscure in a satire in verse, *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*. The poet makes much use of irony (*Yet still obscurity's a welcome guest*), but plain reprobation is not missing either, articulated with that scoffing disdain and *hauteur* which a hereditary peer (the sixth Lord Byron) sucks in with his milk.

His refutation of Romantic modes of writing took three forms.

1. The early verse (*Hours of Idleness*) displays the neoclassic preference for satire, Greek and Roman models, dedications and literary correspondence, for occasional poetry, on trivial events, specified with wealth of detail in long titles, as in this racy piece of gallantry: *Lines addressed to a Young Lady, who was alarmed at the sound of a bullet hissing near her.*

2. Romantic topoi are reinscribed and subverted. Hand in hand with a professed partiality for "the talents of action" and a rejection of the "plaintive mood" goes a rather mechanical recitation of Romantic commonplaces: the Wordsworthian comparison of the past self and the "altered eye" of a more philosophical perception in adulthood (*Epistle to Augusta*); the theme of the Romantic self-exiled wanderer, who spurns the city world, seeking refuge in nature (*Child Harold's Pilgrimage*, a long poem recording his wandering about Europe and as far as Greece); the interaction between the individual's consciousness and the outside world, as reciprocal giving and receiving:

Are not the mountains, waves and skies, a part
Of me and of my soul, as I of them?
(Childe Harold's Pilgrimage. III/72))

Byron anticipated the Victorian double or democratic poem **(35)**, which allows of two contradictory structures of meaning or interpretations. The play upon personal pronouns, the I / thou relationship of direct communication, as well as upon tenses, past and present, achieves in the *Epistle to Augusta* a syntactic ambiguity which deconstructs the Wordsworthian myth of the growth of the mind. The poem is, in fact, a reflection upon the nature of writing, which transposes temporal distance into grammatical oppositions and textual as well as mental co-presence:

For thee – my own sweet Sister – in thy heart
I know myself secure – as thou in mine
We were and are – I am – even as thou art -
Beings – who ne'er each other can resign
It is the same together or apart -
From life's commencement to its slow decline -
We are entwined – let death come slow or fast
The tie which bound the first endures the last.

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The unity of the Romantic self is broken in *Childe Harold,* split as it is into narrator and persona (Byron calls attention to *a distinction between the author and the pilgrim* in a letter prefacing the fourth *Canto*), and so is the unity between word and world, the temporal and the eternal, which Coleridge sought in the use of symbol. No longer a seeker of the neoplatonic Oneness with the Universe, but of the One Word which could render "soul, heart, mind, passions, feelings", i. e. the immediacy and truth of experience, the poet becomes aware of the separate nature of language (*I have found them not (...) Words which are things*), of the deferral poetry (*Harmodia II*: harmony of song, not of the world) effects on life:

Oh, as full thought comes rushing o'er the mind,
Of all we saw before – to leave behind -
Of all – but words / what are they? can they give
A trace of breath to thoughts while yet they live?
No...

Safe on the shore the Artist first must stand -
And then the pencil trembles in his hand.

The *Prisoner of Chillon* sets out from the Romantic thesis of the solipsistic, self-absorbed mind, which is sufficient unto itself, but eventually reaches its antithesis, through allusion and ironic implication. Imprisoned Bonnivard, enjoying the company of rats and stray birds, resembles Defoe's Robinson, severed from civilization and swaying as a parody of an absolutist monarch over a party of... cats and a parrot. The prisoner's final confession of feeling at one with his chains and the society of mice and spiders, as the natural outgrowth of his environment, plays ironically around the dithyrambic invocation of the *Eternal spirit of the chainless mind!/ Brightest in dungeons* in the "Sonnet on Chillon" preceding it. The contrast is enhanced by the shift from the heroic beat of the decasyllabic iamb in the *Sonnet* to the former freedom fighter's combination of two iambs and a paeon (two unstressed syllables in between two beats) – the characteristic rhythm not of celebratory and confident odes but of hymns and prayers. The sense of freedom has been inverted, as the regime's victim has internalized its most oppressive practices – privation of liberty and the monarch's right of life and death over his subjects –, to the point where he can only deny in the same language what he had previously been taking pains to end:

With spiders I had friendship made,
And watch'd them in their sullen trade,
Had seen the mice by moonlight play,
And why should I feel less than they?
We were all inmates of one place,

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And I, the monarch of each race,
Had power to kill – yet, strange to tell!
In quiet we had learn'd to dwell,
Nor slew I of my subjects one,
What Sovereign hath so little done?
My very chains and I grew friends,
So much a long communion tends
To make us what we are: even I
Regain'd my freedom with a sigh.
(*The Prisoner of Chillon*)

Drummond Bone **(36)** is sensitive to the deconstructionist rhetoric of Byron's mature lyrics, reading "She Walks in Beauty", the best known of his *Hebrew Melodies* (a musical volume, written for the Jewish composer Isaac Nathan), against the background of a changed reader response:

This is a "Romantic" poem under deconstruction – the necessities of indefiniteness (escaping the rational and moral light of defining reason and limiting moral code) are superseded by the unambiguous expression of moral certainty. Most readers in the post-Romantic period, which is to say, most readers, have instinctively read it in reverse.

Byron's portrait gallery of contradictory Fatal Men *(Manfred, Lara, The Corsair, The Giaour)* has found a proper description in Mario Praz' *Romantic Agony*: mysterious origin, melancholy habits, traces of a former fatal passion, the suspicion of some ghastly secret, pale face, bright eyes. Lara, for instance, inspires both fear and fascination: *In him inexplicably mix'd appear'd/ Much to be loved and hated, sought and feared.* The characteristic Romantic hero, experiencing a radical split between his twin sides – gentle and destructive -, is constantly driven by contradictory impulses, such as the liberal aristocrat's generous defence of the wretched of the earth (see Byron's maiden speech in Parliament on behalf of the Luddites, the frame-breakers), while still clinging to the status of a hero, set above the rest (*to do what none or few would do),* swayed by benevolent and by criminal instincts alike.

There was a laughing devil in his sneer,
That raised emotions both of rage and fear;
And where his frown of hatred darkly fell,
Hope withering fled, and Mercy sigh'd farewell!
(*The Corsair*)

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Nor was Byron's creation of his fascinating demons a thoroughly original act. Angus Calder identifies **(37)** two new discourses of subversion which Byron put together to give birth to Conrad, Manfred and their company: the **new man of feeling** (Mackenzie's Harley and Goethe's *Werther*) and the **Gothic** (Harold leaves Albion pursuing the Virgilian shadow of Beckford's Vathek, while Juan's startling "Virgin face" is lighted in the final scene through some Gothic window, etc.).

Marie Roberts **(38)** traces the prototype among the brothers of the esoteric order of the Rosy Cross, who had attempted the overthrow of the established order in the name of a meliorist ideal. Their alchemical search for the philosopher's stone had lamentably failed, they had travelled from dream to disenchantment, from **elixir vitae** to **taedium vitae**. A sense of guilt and satanic loneliness accompanied their social heresy and revolutionary fall.

Psychoanalytic interpretations add up to such cultural explanatory narratives. Some obscure drive in the poet (traced by Drummond Bone back to the primary scene of his early life – his being born lame, which, according to his Scottish mother's Calvinist belief, was the mark of Cain, his possibly incestuous relationship with his sister, Augusta), to which we could add his mature associations both with the Italian mob – *La Turba*, or the *Carboneri*a (the freedom fighters) – and the aristocratic Gamba family, whom he joined in their exile for revolutionary activities, or with some robbers/rulers of the Levant, may have been responsible for the symptoms of guilt accompanying the extraordinary abilities of his heroes, while, in the context of the Regency's moral relativism and shallowness, it did not take a calculated cynic to make a mysanthropic "modern Timon" (Childe Harold), or a Satanic rebel against a rotten society (the Conrad/Lara pirate). A degenerate age doomed the earnest moral reflector to an outsider's position, to heresy:

Doomed by his very virtues for a dupe,
He cursed those virtues as the cause of ill
.....
He knew himself a villain – but he deemed
The rest no better than the thing he seemed;
.....
Lone, wild, and strange...

(The Corsair)

As he had outgrown the Romantic temper, the Satanic posture takes a form of studied *malaise*, or of a revisit portrait, such as the following Miltonic re-mix from his *Manfred* – a piece of what he called "mental theatre": the late romantic version of the earlier anatomy of passions:

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The mind which is immortal makes itself
Requital for its good or evil thoughts -
Is its own origin of ill and end -
And its own place and time – its innate sense,
When stripp'd of this mortality, derives
No colour from the fleeting things without,
But is absorb'd in sufferance or in joy,
Born from the knowledge of its own desert.
(*Manfred*, III/4)

Manfred cannot be tempted by the conjured devils with a promise of control over the elements, like his Faustian predecessors; he only demands forgetfulness, peace from his own mind, and he finally disobeys the Spirit's command to follow him to hell, proclaiming himself both self-creator and self-destroyer. The hyperbolic Romantic ego is, however, set in a perspective which challenges his claim to self-sufficiency and diminishes his status: the background of the Gothic gallery in his castle frames Manfred as a sort of medieval ghost, and it is not Manfred but the Abbot of St. Maurice who has the last word: the simple statement of Manfred's disappearance, emphatically and repeatedly stated, reclassifies the metaphysical drama, through the bracketing of the hero's afterlife, as human and finite:

Abbot: *He's gone – his soul hath ta'en its earthless flight;*
Whither? I dread to think – but he is gone.
(*Ibidem*)

3. The third type of detour on Romantic modes of vision is the scaling down of history and the historicization of the past. In his *Preface* to *Marino Faliero, Doge of Venice*, a historical tragedy, Byron provides a list of trivial incidents which had led to huge historical convulsions, in order to prove that history is a collection of "slight causes" taking "a great effect", and, thereby, defend his own choice of an apparently insignificant subject for the grand design of mankind's progress.

Deconstructive is also his argument that there is little connection between the past as it really was and textuality, the fiction which a society sends down in history. He brings in arguments to defend *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* against a charge of anachronisms and historical inaccuracy, more precisely, that the "vagrant Childe", meaning a knight in training, suggested to Byron by "Lord Maxwell's Good Night", in the Border Minstrelsy edited by Scott, "is very unknightly, as the times of the Knights were times of Love, Honour, and so forth". By recourse to documents, other than the *amour courtois* tradition of the troubadours, the author makes his point, that their time was "the most profligate of all possible centuries". The gap between words and world justifies his creation

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of an entirely fictitious character, a literary device, handled in picaresque fashion as the link between the loose episodes of a travelogue providing a meditation on historical events, manners and the arts, as Harold, the protagonist sated with pleasure and *ennui*, proceeds from Portugal to Constantinople, from youth to age, from ancient Greek splendour and civilization to its bondage, as the emblem of modern Europe. It is a historical, not a mental progress, like *The Prelude*, a sequence of mental vignettes and as many occasions for discoursing on change, from ancient belief to institutionalized religions and metaphysical crisis:

Son of the morning, rise! approach you here!
Come – but molest not yon defenceless urn:
Look on this spot – a nation's sepulchre!
Abode of gods, whose shrines no longer burn,
Even gods must yield – religions take their turn:
'Twas Jove's – 'tis Mahomet's – and other creeds
Will rise with other years, till man shall learn
Vainly his incense soars, his victim bleeds
Poor child of Doubt and Death, whose hope is built on reeds.

(*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, II, 3)

The vision of revolutionary achievement as *wreck of old opinions – things which grew,/ Breathed from the breath of time,* is marked out for a new, relativist filtering of outwardness through opinion. The mind is textualized, the self and discourse are historicized, myth and history are reinvented in the light of modern ideas and discoveries.

As he turned away from self-expressionism to drama in his later career, Byron developed a sense of constraining literary conventions and of the provisional character of epistemological assumptions. For instance, his *Cain, A Mystery* is by himself generically defined in the *Preface* as belonging with the medieval Mysteries or Moralities tradition, while putting on a new garb, lent by Byron's textual sources and by his knowledge of modern science. Lucifer's seductive speeches gather new strength of argument (the pre-Adamite world was also peopled by "rational beings") from the contemporary catastrophist theory: Cuvier's (and Lyell's) idea that "the world has been destroyed several times before the creation of man". Lucifer's prophecy to Cain, substituting for Michael's to Adam in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, is less modelled on sacred history than on the new genesis of natural sciences, including the onset of the ice age (Cain: *Snows? What are they?*).

Byron's political views are interpreted by contemporary critics in different ways, as the method, as well as in quantum physics, seems to determine the

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results of the research. Whereas Jerome Christiansen's historicist and psychoanalytic reading (*Lord Byron's Strength: Romantic Writing and Commercial Society*, John Hopkins University Press, 1992) places Byron within the context of the emerging consumer society and contemporary philosophy of history, Bone's deconstructionist method minimalizes the import of his politics:

The politics are angry, but they are the politics of the outsider who has no purchase on power – they are the politics of the tourist observer, angry but without responsibility. The politics of loss in short serve the creation of the texture of the poem rather than informing a political philosophy. Nevertheless, they were sufficiently real to upset the party of government, who perhaps understandably but certainly exaggeratedly) read the ennobling of ennui as political, rather than critical politics as aiding the ennoblement of ennui. (Op. cit., p. 14).

Even in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, which is Bone's subject under consideration here, Byon's politics of opposition amounts to infinitely more than a moody youth's discontent with the world. It is characteristically Romantic in its anti-imperial stance and its promotion of national values and traditions. The fighter for the nations' freedom, who financially supported the Greek troups, a field hospital and a propaganda publication of the Greek Committee for independence, must have felt deeply for the Gladiator dying in the Roman "bloody Circus" for "imperial pleasure" (Canto IV, 140/1), in the acclaimed show whose futile wastefulness of human life and energy ran counter the principles of the Republic of Fraternity in France and of their Jacobin supporters in England: *As man was slaughtered by his fellow-men.* The symbolic code works through binary oppositions: Empire versus colony, the Colosseum versus the Dacian hut, the values of Rome versus the pieties of home, the **here** of alienation and the **there** of psychic homeliness, the father of the nation versus the tribal *pater familias:*

I see before me the Gladiator lie:
He leans upon his hand – his manly brow
Consents to death, but conquers agony,
And his droop'd head sinks gradually low -
And through his side the last drops, ebbing slow
From the red gash, fall heavy, one by one,
Like the first of a thunder-shower; and now
The arena swims around him – he is gone,
Ere ceased the inhuman shout which hail'd the wretch who won.
He heard it, but he heeded not – his eyes
Were with his heart, and that was far away:
He reck'd not of the life he lost nor prize,

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But where his rude hut by the Danube lay,
***There** were his young barbarians all at play,*
***There** was their Dacian mother – he, their sire,*
Butcher'd to make a Roman holiday...

It was a modern version of "the knight in shining armour", taking the risk of rescuing an adulterous woman in Greece, who was on the point of being drowned by soldiers, and putting down the following observations of a woman's fate in Mohammedan society (Canto II, 61):

Here woman's voice is never heard: apart,
And scarce permitted, guarded, veil'd, to move,
She yields to one her person and her heart,
Tamed to her cage...

What Byron does deconstruct is the myth of the absolutist Oriental ruler, or tyrant, and, by extension, of the agent in history, in his historical play, *Sardanapalus*, dedicated to Goethe as an act of homage from a "literary vassal to his liege lord". The historical source is Diodorus Siculus, but a discussion of Delacroix's *Death of Sardanapalus* is relevant in this context, as well as for the late Romantics' shift from the temporality of music (Coleridge and his musical backgrounds and agencies, Wordsworth and his *Prelude*) towards the spatiality of the visual arts. It was a sign of respect for form, what Byron calls, in the *Preface*, "the more regular formation of a structure". The "law of literature", that is Byron's decision to observe the Aristotelian unities is set above the commandments of a truthful historical reconstruction: the long war of history is replaced by a conspiracy exploding and succeeding in one day, for the sake of "dramatic regularity". It is no longer the Romantic organic form, emerging simultaneouly with the content of the work of art (Coleridge's "essemplastic" or form-giving faculty), but the appropriation of pre-existing, generic conventions.

Christiansen is reading the play in the context of England's shift to liberalism, whose political philosophy is summed up in Benjamin Constant's 1813 book, *The Spirit of Conquest and Usurpation and Their Relation to European Civilization*. Napoleon's wars, as an expression of the vain desire for conquest and glory, were seen as an expression of Oriental despotism and as an anachronism, the usurpation of civil society by the state as the instrument of a single man. Peaceful commercial exchanges were infinitely more profitable than martial activities, which could only be justified in light of motives compatible with the present state of civilization. The *Sardanapalus* plot stands in relation to Constant's theory as a photographic negative to the positive snapshot. The protagonist of this Oriental drama, a sort of Haroldian addict of sexual pleasure and luxury, is made, by his mistress and ministers into a martial figure, in the image of the ruthless

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Nimrod and Semiramis, the founders of the Assyrian Empire. Sardanapalus is aroused to sway by an idealizing image of himself **(39)**, held up to him by the object of his consumption, his Greek mistress, Myrrha.

As the master of historical painting on grand, heroic design, Delacroix portrayed the Assyrian king as a spiritualized, pale-faced and self-possessed Oriental ruler, reclining with perfect composure on his sofa, surrounded by his harem of women fawning on and dying for him by the swords of rude, barbarous and dark-looking soldiers.

Byron is re-writing an episode in world history as unheroic, absurd, purporting much more than the Bible of English liberalism. He is concerned with ego-formation and identity construction, located now within the realm of intersubjectivity (as against Romantic self-generation and self-absorption). Salemenes, the king's brother-in-law, experiences the split between personal feelings and the subject positions available for Sardanapalus and for himself along the paradigm of royalty (I/1):

> Salemenes (solus). *He hath wrong'd his queen, but still he is her lord;*
> *He hath wrong'd my sister, still he is my brother;*
> *He hath wrong'd his people, still he is their sovereign,*
> *And I must be his friend as well as subject...*

It is by conformity to social roles that he is as such recognized by Myrrha's recital of his virtues, similar to Ophelia's portrait of the Renaissance polymath prince, i.e., by constructing him as a sign whose meaning resides in his relation to others: *a soldier's trust, a subject's reverence,/ A king's esteem – the whole world's admiration!*

The issue at stake is not a wrong choice of values ending up with the conversion of the sinner, as in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, where the protagonists finally embrace the superior values of Rome versus Egypt. In *Sardanapalus*, there is a battle of values for which a solid case can be made on either side of the tracks. The Attic, Greek ideal of repressing personal desires for the sake of public duty and image is experienced by Myrrha as a painful obstacle against her spontaneous love for the king: she would not have him as a debased monarch, unworthy of her country's ethos. The king would like to remove the third, alienating element in what René Girard calls "triangular desire" (*Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, 1965):

> *There comes*
> *For ever something between us and what*
> *We deem our happiness; let me remove*
> *The barrier...*
>
> (*Sardanapalus*, I/2)

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He worships another God, another Greece, to be later discovered by Nietzsche: God Dyonisos, the cult of the uninhibited consummation of desire, who had conquered more lands than the king's "man-queen" of a grandmother. But for this apparent return to the golden age of pastoral content – "a king of feasts, and flowers, and wine, and revel" instead of a "king of glory" –, there is no present grammar. Sardanapalus can only defend his policy in negative terms, as what he had not done in order to fall in with the others' image of Assyria's king, according to the "annals":

I made no wars, I added no new imposts
I interfered not with their civic lives...

If they rebel, 'tis because I oppress not...
(Ibidem)

Myrrha, the "eloquent Ionian", engages in a crazy talk about civic love as self-love, a sort of proleptically Freudian ego mediating between the id of the libidinal self and the social super ego demanding its suppression; the desire to be admired is the expression of the primitive, self-loving, narcissistic ego. She gets herself trapped in a tangle of contradictions, lying at the heart of king worship:

I speak of civic popular love, self-love,
Which means that men are kept in awe and law,
Yet not oppressed – at least they must not think so,
Or if they think so, deem it necessary.
(*Ibidem*)

Sardanapalus is invited to seek in the annals models for his conduct, to model himself on the empire's founders. It is out of love that he concedes to the effacement of his personality, as suggested by the tropes of giving away his signet, showing up before his troupes, not as active leader but as an image apt to give them courage, putting on his armour, asking for a glass. It is in his dream that the repressed ego returns and its symbolic language that bestows meaning upon his transformation and spiritual miming. It is his father's ghost (and Law) that looses upon him his two ancestors, the founders of Assyria, not heroes but a "bloody-handed, ghastly, ghostly thing" each. The scene symbolizes the spectralization of an individual who allows himself to be possessed by some imagined other. The king invaded by his ancestors' personality inhabits a limbo, an in-between realm:

Till I grew stone, as they seem'd half to be,
Yet breathing stone, for I felt life in them,
And life in me: there was a horrid kind of sympathy between us, as if they
Had lost a part of death to come to me,
And I the half of life to sit by them.

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We were in an existence all apart
From heaven and earth. And rather let me see
Death all than such a being!
(IV/1)

Identity is generated within the in-between of dialogue, the living conversation which is always oriented toward the other. Not only does his wife, Zarina, confess to have been living for years on his image, but he himself undergoes in her presence a transformation, becoming indeed what she fantazises about him and speaking the words she wants to hear:

Had I never loved
But thee, I should have been an unopposed
Monarch of honouring nations. To what gulfs
A single deviation from the track
Of human duties leads even those who claim
The homage of mankind as their born due,
And find it, till they forfeit it themselves!.
(Ibidem)

To Salemenes, he declares that he had married for reasons of state, while to Myrrha, who comes in as Zarina walks out, he promises "I shall be myself again", but it is only the self that is conjured in **her** presence. As the logical conclusion to the unfolding of the plot, the king and his mistress choose to perish in flames, so that no monument would grace their bodies. The king would not be taken by his subjects for their ox-god Apis. **King** or **kine** – this is the ironic final revelation of the emptiness of popular beliefs and myths. Sardanapalus, the effeminate king worrying about his armour's heaviness, had been burdened with idols for which there was no original heroism and greatness.

While *Beppo* sketches a world where commercial goods and fashion have vaporised old values into a Carnival of present, opaque signs, *Don Juan* is the passive modern picaro in a world which has rendered heroism impossible, while the media fabricate overnight surrogate myths of passing public acclaim, dished out to a morally relaxed readership, craving for exotic adventures as an antidote for boredom. Unlike Milton's time of earnest political commitment and steadfastness, Byron's contemporaries only offered examples of compromise, chameleonism and, like Southy, radical shifting of sides. The ambiguity of "want" obscures the author's intention: I desire, or I lack a hero?

I WANT a hero: an uncommon want,
When every year and month sends forth a new one,
Till, after cloying the gazettes with cant,
The age discovers he is not the true one...

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Byron's Don Juan is not, however, the "ancient" antagonist of social taboos, Shelley's Promethean opponent of authority, or Mozart's tormented hero confronting the Commendatore but a new type of hero, effeminate, lost in disguise among the women of a harem, being seduced or resisting female seduction, trying to deal with woman's "mobility", role-playing and change of heart.

A picaresque novel in verse, launching the hero upon six adventures in 17 cantos, by an author who has given up on grand epic design or the inner consistency of organic form in order to adopt the much more modest role of **Improvisatore**. *Don Juan* is often a crafty display of *mock-heroic* cultural critique, as in the Haydee episode, where his love idyll is interrupted by her father's, pirate Lombroso's return. Byron produces a lovely parody of Locke's mechanistic psychology and of aristocratic mannerisms (the absurd duel ceremony) in the high-flown romantic rhetoric. The narrator does not keep company with the "Intellectual Giants" of philosophy, from Pythagoras to Locke, he ranks himself among the day's "little people", amoral and eternal "Children", himself in want of a precise and stable identity: *So that I almost think that the same skin/ For one without – has two or three within.*

Travelling between East and West, Byron acquired a voyeuristic sense of the world as a theatre of depthless shows and floating signs, unattached to historical and national roots, of the schizophrenia produced by globalization. In *Beppo*, the wife surprised at a carnival ball with her lover by her husband returning from the East in a Turk's guise, only fears his "queer dress" could cause a scandal... She starts prattling about his new look as well as hers, as if she hereself had travelled to the Orient, *ou tout est pris à la legère*... As Byron got the story in Italy, from his lover's (Marianna Segati) husband, while visiting a mistress of his own, it is not difficult to guess the experiential source of this exclusive concern with manners, food and luxury in an age of surfaces:

„And are you really, truly, now a Turk?
With any other woman did you wive?
Is't true they use their fingers for a fork?
Well, that's the prettiest shawl – as I'm alive!
You'll give it me? They say you eat no pork...."

In a society taken up with carnival, masques, mime, fashion, Ketchup, Soy, Chili-vinegar and Harvey sauce, Beppo will settle in as just one more, even "true Turkey" merchant "with goods of various manners". The individual is no longer deciding his destiny in a history of displaced civilizations, of palimpsest cultural erasures, similar to the disconnected layers of fossils in the earth's crust. Cast away "about where Troy stood once", Beppo's destiny is shaped by the place's present society (Significantly, cultural law replaces the ahistorical *genius loci* of

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the Romantics). Fate and Providence are only names for the iron law of conquest and cultural substitution. Where he could have been a citizen with a voice in the public forum, he becomes, under the Mussulman rule, a slave. However, in a mobile world of capital and trade, and, consequently, of unstable social identities, he will soon make a fortune.

Back to Venice, he discovers the international workings of capital and the boundless circulation of its consumer goods and exchange values. He will sit down with Laura and her Count in his own house, helping himself to some coffee – *a beverage for Turks and Christians both/Although the way they make it's not the same* –, and to the same way of making love...

The author makes room for his own representation in the story, as a broken, wandering dandy, experiencing permanent displacement on account of external pressures and circumstances. He only chooses verse because it is "more in fashion", and sells well in a commercial and consumer society, he ends his story not because he has brought it round to some conclusive end but because he has reached the end of the page, he is no longer in control of writing: the story slips through his fingers, the norms of poetic form rule his choice: *just as the stanza like to make it... This form of verse began, I can't well break it...* The characters themselves are parodic surrogates of literary prototypes: the present Laura is a mock version of Petrarch's unattainable lover – *Fresh as the Angel o'er a new inn door* –, and a new Desdemona, no longer either pure or ending in tragedy on account of her husband's jealousy, as Beppo will put up with his share in love as the third shareholder... Byron's protest against commercialism and mass culture was a proleptic assertion of the aesthete's revolt against the bourgeois society. A good number of years in advance of Baudelaire, he saw the dandy as the only hero of modern life, the last lamp holder of aristocratic refinement in a philistine, indistinctless, classless, mass society:

For a "mix'd company" implies that, save
Yourself and friends, and half a hundred more,
Whom you may bow to without looking grave,
The rest are but a vulgar set...

This is the case in England; at least was
During the dynasty of Dandies, now
Perchance succeeded by some other class
Of imitated imitators...

In a letter to his publisher dating from April 1819, Byron disclaims his ability to answer his demand for some "great work", "some such pyramid", or "divine poem". He deconstructs history, human agency, authorship and modifies

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literary forms accordingly. For instance, his epic *Childe Harold*, drawing on Renaissance models, also takes up the famous Spenserian stanza, but gives it a new turn by the use of rhyme. He introduces two couplets, at lines 4 and 5, and at the end of the nine-line stanza; the former usually creates a sort of semantic gap, as in the Petrarchan sonnet (for instance, between past valour and present dissolution), while the latter emphasizes repetition. The poem emerges thus through similarity with and difference from the model.

Childe Harold was he hight: – but whence his name
And lineage long, it suits me not to say;
Suffice it, that perchance they were of fame,
And had been glorious in another day:
But one sad losel soils a name for aye,
However mighty in the olden time;
Nor all that heralds rake from coffin'd clay,
Nor florid prose, nor honeyed lies of rhyme,
Can blazon evil deeds, or consecrate a crime.
(*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, I/3)

There is in Byron a keen sense of the cultural or semiologic order as the only marker of human worth. Napoleon had been vanquished by the frost, the elements. Sciences, religion, manners and the arts make up the grammar of civilization (*Our Christian usage of the parts of speech*), while the inferior body of nature, for instance the publicly advertised beauty, is evacuated from language:

Laura, when dress'd, was (as I sang before)
A pretty woman as was ever seen,
Fresh as the Angel o'er a new inn door,
Or frontispiece of a new Magazine,
With all the fashions which the last month wore,
Colour'd, and silver paper leaved between
That and the title page, for fear the press
Should soil with parts of speech the parts of dress.

In midcentury, Wordsworth published the last form of his *Prelude*, a Romantic poem still, proving a remarkable stability of poetic structure among changing literary ideas and forms. But if Byron had outlived his tumultuous youth, he would probably have become a foil to Browning. As such, he is another instance of the black comedy ending a cultural phase.

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Romantic Fiction

Whereas cultural anthropology makes an attempt to meet historical epistemological paradigms on their own terms, the New Historicism school of criticism is often an act of aggressive valorization of texts in terms of social determinism, or power relations. The deliberate attempt to put them into a Procrustean theoretic frame often yields inconsistent readings. This is the case of Gary Kelly, who makes the following contradictory statements about English Gothic:

Gothic romance also aims to demystify the sublime obscurity by which, according to Englightenment sociology, court culture overawes the whole of society, thereby maintaining the power of court government...

The gothic novel was and is known for its effects of terror, supposedly operating vicariously in the mind of the reader through the representation of terror in the mind of the protagonist. But the important point is that this representation foregrounds the mind (reason and emotion) at the expense of physical action and social conduct. Furthermore, terror is depicted less often than perplexity or being of two minds... **(40)**

How can one enforce a social programme while being "in two minds"? What narrative mode can both "demystify" and exercise the art of freezing the blood? What Enlightenment sociology may be said to inform a wandering spirit, incarnated through several ages? How can one pin ghosts down to social ties and determinism? And yet, E. J. Clary, in his essay on *The Politics of the Gothic Heroine in the 179os* **(41)** goes to the ultimate consequences, concluding that, as the heroine gives her property over to her husband, Valancourt, *the gothic castle (is) a metaphor for woman's dematerialization before the law.* What about those gothic castles which are in the hands of male protagonists from the start, or the gothic heroines without a castle to give away? Such statements may rule out any generic definition and make all theoretical distinctions ineffectual.

Except for the Gothic, Gary Kelly's picture of Romantic fiction is a persuasive one, and original in the revaluation of Jane Austen as *centrally a novelist of her time*. He divides the writing of the age into the following trends:

The Jacobin novel: *English Jacobin novelists develop an Enlightenment sociology of knowledge to argue that individual and social groups are constructed by the political and cultural system under which they live. Accordingly, the English Jacobin rhetoric requires detailed representation of social conventions, institutions, and structures of power and a new particularity and authenticity in representing human psychology (...). Although several Jacobin novelists adapted the picaresque form, they give it and other appropriated forms a rigorous connection between character, plot, and setting in order to show how the individual is first constructed by social conditions and then necessarily responds to these conditions by ethical*

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action of certain kinds **(42)** Included here are Thomas Holcroft's *Anna St. Ives,* William Godwin's *Things as They are; or, the Adventures of Caleb Williams,* Mary Wollstonecraft's *The Wrongs of Woman; or, Maria.*

The anti-Jacobin novel: *Anti-Jacobin novelists came from the same social background as their literary foes and shared their criticism of court politics and plebeian unreason and insubordination, but they were more inclined towards a coalition with the dominant classes. Accordingly, they draw on more genteel and learned, less "democratic" literary traditions than their rivals and rely on parody and burlesque. (...) They often use bathos to show the comic consequences of theory in practice (...). They adapt the novel of education to show how a protagonist infatuated with "philosophy" or seduced by a "new philosopher" is either ruined or reeducated to social "reality"* **(43)** *Like a prerevolutionary novelist of manners, sentiment, and emulation,* (Jane Austen) *uses the courtship story, settings in genteel and social life, and the plot of romantic comedy to show the interaction of landed gentry and their professional middle-class dependents and allies, as they negotiate through temptations of courtliness, contamination by vulgarity, or socially destructive independence. More important, Austen also uses a metaphor of reading-as-cognition to show both the priority of the moral-intellectual self and the necessity of integrating that self into landed society and culture. Here she merges the prerevolutionary conduct-book ideology of domestic women with the revolutionary feminist protest that women deprived of intellectual development would be unable to exercise free will correctly in personal and family life and thus would fail to sustain the major ideological and cultural role in state formation that was expected of them in the revolutionary aftermath.* **(44)**

Is book-reading a ***form of cognition*** or of **delusion** in *Northanger Abbey*? Is not Mary Bennett's pedantry (explained away as a desperate need of compensation for her plainness) a figure of fun? Is not the scholarly-minded Mr. Bennet himself, keeping aloof in his library from all domestic trouble, so egotistic and ineffectual, so impotent in allowing himself to turn to his daughter Elizabeth for advice and help? Do not Elizabeth, Jane, and Lydia make their own - sometimes disastrous – decisions in the absence of proper parental assistance? The Romantics are suspicious of ready-made assumptions, of dominant ideological views reified in texts. They would rather choose enlightenment through personal experience. The myth of the "culture heroine" comes later, with the Victorian novelists. Jane Austen is here much closer to the Don Quixote pattern, but that holds true for all anti-Jacobin attacks on the supposedly false consciousness of social reformers, promptly corrected by social practice.

However much these writers might appear to differ from one another, yet common traits may be identified in a circuitous discursive energy informing all of them. They weigh heavenly in one direction or other, yet they could not escape the centripetal forces of what we call the "Romantic paradigm".

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The description of **social comedy** in Jane Austen, her engaging scenes of unheroic domesticity, the focus on the social world (manners, idiolects, mentalities, economic determinism, and whatever else is meant by it), is inseparable from the **epistemological issue** each of her novel poses: can one see straight? Her hero's adventures in the world, which is a limited one, that of the countryside gentry, are backed up by a **cognitive enlightenment**, an awakening to a finer sense of reality, which he is finally prepared to meet on its terms: the final overcoming of self-division, a recognition of what both self and world really are and in what relation they stand to each other.

Scott's novels, harking back on the romance of remote events, are not completely lacking in an awareness of social responsibility and the pragmatic demands of social action. His protagonists are not merely pilgrims in historical time; the perspective is often intradiagetic, revealing a self-developmental process. Ivnahoe allows himself to be corrected in his feudal worship of the heroine in the *amour courtois* tradition (Rowena) by thinking more often than his wife would have liked him to of the temperate, modest and kind-hearted Rebecca. Edward Waverly progresses from infatuation with the reckless devotees to Romantic absolutes to a much domesticated love relationship in choosing to marry a considerate and realistically-minded woman.

Finally, the gothic romances, with all their escapism, are not at all devoid of an awareness of the way social machinery works A lot of Godwin's Rousseauian interest in the savage and Jacobin reforming speculations is incorporated into Mary Shelley's horror story about the demon-bearing Frankenstein. Before the monster is rejected by the humans he approaches with most benevolent intentions, before he is awakened by reading to an awareness of an outcast's condition (*Werther*) and the possibility to turn against his Creator and break all laws and taboos (*Paradise Lost*) and of other wild ideas which are built into his mind by readings, he has time enough to prove his innate goodness, despite the uncommon circumstances of his birth.

If we leave aside occasional exaggerations of one-factor analysis, Clary's reading of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* against the Jacobin tradition of the individual opposing authority is not devoid of interest. There certainly is an "economic structure and cultural law" inscribed in the novel. The discrimination between males and females in point of social acceptance (it is enough for men to behave decently, whereas women also depend upon the tyrannical and often blind public opinion), economic dispossession and despotic treatment does link this novel to Wollstonecraft's *Mary*. Moreover, the confrontation between heroine and usurper, assisted by Emily's aunt in that monstrous coalition of aristocratic mature villains in view of seducing an innocent soul, which De Laclos denounces in *Dangerous Connections,* engages financial and legal aspects which go much beyond the timeless and vague scenes of gothic romance. The narrative convention – the **explained supernatural** – would also point sooner to a tendency

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to translate sensationalist fantasy into a Romantic trope of the subjective vision informing all percepts. Whereas the early gothic fiction displays the Preromantic interest in pre-Enlightenment realms of wonder, the later Romantic works evince a heightened awareness of form and convention. Jane Austen becomes progressively aware of the formal imposition to introduce no character into her stories, unless they are connected with it. Scott sets out deliberately to write in a certain convention: he will try his hand at **romantic composition**, with all the formal characteristics inscribed in it: *pledging the author to some special mode of laying the scene, drawing the characters and managing the adventures* (*General Preface* to *Waverley*).

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* has often been interpreted as some sort of **imitation**, *a telling portrayal of a masculine fantasy... a deliberate miming and framing of a narcissistic masculine discourse* **(45)** This is what Margaret Homans actually says, in her essay *Bearing Demons:* Frankenstein *and the Circumvention of Maternity:*

Now that we have assembled the parts of Shelley's introductory account of the novel's genesis, we can see that she equates child-bearing with the bearing of men's words (...) The conversation between Byron and Shelley probably represents Shelley's and Byron's poetry, the words, for example, of Alastor *that she literalizes in her novel.* **(46)**

It is only that Mary Shelley does not reproduce only the "germinating words" she had heard in the conversation with Byron and Shelley before she went to sleep, or from their works alone. Quotations are much more numerous and diverse, and they have a very important structuring function. In *Frankenstein,* the Romantic fusion of subject and object is as complete as the divorce between creature and creator. Frankenstein reports on the monster and the monster reads his diary; they both judge each other and are in their turn seen and judged. Frankenstein is terrified at the prospect of Walton hearing ***the monster's account of the events and of himself***. He warns Walton not to allow himself to be persuaded by the monster's eloquent speech. Would not that imply that Frankenstein knows the creature's contentions are not only *eloquent* but also just? What can we make of the *mise-en-abyme* provided by the "canon" of the monster's readings? Plutarch's *Lives* are exemplary biographies, illustrious examples of the ancient world. What self-developmental fictions, *Bildungsgeschichte*, biographical novels did the modern world provide? Plutarch's heroes had been statesmen, conquerors. From the stories Mary Shelley had lately heard and read, she could gather that man was now taking pains to conquer not himself but the elements, to double up, in a futile and illegitimate attempt, God's work, while ignoring his true position in the universal hierarchy, the need of compassion for and solidarity with the rest of nature (which the Ancient Mariner is "wiser" for learning). The story is replete with quotes from other Romantic writings apart from *Alastor* (several from *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, which

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serves as a sort of parallel, *Tintern Abbey*, Jacobin political slogans, Goethe, a leading figure of the *Sturm und Drang*). In the Plutarch manner, Mary Shelley sets out to write the exemplary or merely typical biography of the Romantic age. She internalizes and inscribes the **discourse of Romanticism**, and not just a set of values. The man of the Romantic age can see himself in a mirror, which is an abyss of textual reinscription. Could Shelley be contrasting the German spirit embodied in the Faust figure (changing nature's law) and in the Werther figure (the individual destroyed by social division and prejudices) with the English Romantic outlook: **adding** to nature the colours of the imagination rather than actively and destructively intervening into it, challenging social arrogance and fighting for republican ideals of equality and social harmony? Anyway, *Frankenstein*, as a late, self-reflexive form of Romantic fiction, appears to us more as a *refutation* than as a servile imitation of Romantic thought and rhetoric.

The romantic fictional worlds are self-conscious cultural and aesthetic constructs, even if, as is the case with Walter Scott's novels, an Enlightenment agenda of social progress (Scotland's modernization after the 1707 Union Act) is underpinning the "fictionalized encyclopaedia of past times (...) both figural and descriptive (...) of symbolic and emblematic significance" (Garry Kelly, *Ibidem*).

The metafictional statements in the comprehensive prefatory material of Walter Scott's **historical romances** are blocking the readers' illusion of authentic evocation, Scott passing off his narratives as "compositions" and inventions, robbed of their antiquarian appeal through the contemporary idiom of the exchange market of goods. Their free-floating status, unhooked from the real history and turned into vampire "modern antiques" and "antiquated moderns", allows them to become shareholders in the same "joint-stock trade in fictitious narrative", coming out of Scott's "novel-manufacturing machine" and "stock in trade" of castles and caverns (*Preface* to *The Betrothed).*

Although adopting the favourite Augustan script of conversation, **Clara Reeve's** *The Progress of Romance Through Times, Centuries and Manners* published in 1875 reveals an ahistorical conception of the genre. The romance is unstuck in time and free from the present constraint of offering healthy (i.e. didactic stuff) food to a healthy stomach (the rational and moral self). Euphrasia is defending the liberties taken by romance writers (like Clara Reeve, author of *The Old English Baron*) by bringing up the argument of the ancients' example: Lucretius purges neither passions nor superstitions, and Juvenal is sometimes embarrassingly licentious. The **Gothic** variety of romance emerged as a psychological experiment and a heuristic test. Looking backwards in 1824, Walter Scott (*On Romance*), located the genre in literary history as something different from either medieval "concatenation of marvels", or "ordinary train of events and (the) modern state of society", as Johnson had demanded and eighteenth-century novelists had executed. The romance was now exploring what baffled the mind by "deviating beyond the bounds of probability or consistency".

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Horace Walpole, the founding father of the English Gothic novel with his *Castle of Otranto* brought out in 1764, engaged in an act of deliberately counterfeiting older styles and patterns while unrooting them from their original historical and spiritual grounds. The novel was published as the fake work of a certain Italian priest, Onufrio Muralto, Canon of St Nicholas at Otranto, and translated into English by William Marshall. Walpole was not simply avoiding the Augustan censorship of supernatural occurrences, as forgery is the very framing of his narrative. Muralto is said to have revived a story of "the darkest ages", from the time of the first crusade, relating the 1213 events in the contemporary idiom of "purest Italian". His propagandistic purpose had not been far from a hoax: the artful priest had been trying to confirm the populace in their ancient errors and superstitions by letting the narrative work its charm at a time when the letters flourishing in Italy and Luther's religious reformers were dispelling them. The "artful" novelist was himself trying to reform the aesthetic taste of his contemporaries. He was trying to get rid of the oppressive politics and normative criticism of "an age of cold reason", giving free rein to the "visions and passions" that "choked" him (To Mme du Deffand), and hoping some future readership would enjoy them. The origin of the novel, he confesses, had been a dream of a gigantic hand in armour, and he had set down to write it "in spite of rules", and without any preconceived plan. It had emerged as organic growth: "the work grew on my hands". Writing it had provided a sort of psychological relief: it was "automatic writing", the "expression of the unconscious", a kind of "inspired writing". In a letter to George Montagu he is attributing truth-value to his dream visions: "there is no wisdom comparable to that of exchanging what is called the realities of life for dreams". The Epigraph to the second edition, published in his own name, is rewriting Horace:

> *fingentur species, ut nec pas nec caput uni*
> *reddatur formae*
> instead of
> *Fingentur species, tamen ut pes, ut caput uni*
> *reddantur formae* (*De Arte Poetica*, lines 7-9).

What Horace condemns – representations of chimeras, the fact that the head and the foot of different creatures are assigned to a single specimen) - Walpole recommends*: Idle fancies shall be shaped like a sick man's dream, so that neither head nor foot can be assigned to a single shape.*

His narrative was a crossbreed of ancient and modern romance, as the supernatural events in which the lords and ladies of long ago were involved elicited from their domestics psychologically realistic reactions, rendering the miraculous plausible. The ethos of *The Castle* is transhistorical as well, Prince Manfred of Otrantro invoking reasons of state like Muralto's Machiavellian

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contemporaries. As his son Conrad is crushed by a mysterious helmet landing on him on the day of his wedding to Isabella, the daughter of Frederic, Marquis of Vicenza, Manfred, the aristocratic hero-villain, appeals to his wife, Hippolita, to persuade Isabella into marrying him so that the castle, to which Frederic had a claim as the nearest of blood to Alfonso, the legitimate owner murdered and usurped by Manfred's grandfather, should remain in the family's possession. The helmet is discovered to be missing from Alfonso's statue in the church of St Nicholas, and a suspicion arises that the horrible scene may have been the fulfilment of the curse looming on the usurped property: the castle and lordship of Otranto should pass from the present family whenever the real owner should be grown too large to inhabit it. Alfonso's heir, Theodore, shows up at the same time, and the rightful ownership is reestablished at the end of a sequence of miraculous events, mysterious coincidences and horrible deaths.

The ancient regime had become spectral, too large to inhabit the modern world, its assumptions and values being exposed as fraudulent. Baudrillard's historical survey of the relationship between signs and things (*L'Echange symbolique et la mort*, 1976) dates their divorce back to the Renaissance. It was by that time that the medieval bound sign - the natural correspondence between status and material possession of an estate, passed down in patrilineal succession according to the law of primogeniture - gave way to counterfeits of status. The mobile world of liquid capital unfixed the natural signifieds of rank and title from the concrete signifiers of birth and land. Horace Walpole demystifies such "bound signs", reclassifying land ownership as usurpation and crusaders as sinful adventurers. Jerome, a monk in disguise who discovers in Theodore his lost son, has shed off aristocratic pride alongside his noble status: "But what is blood, what is nobility ? We are all reptiles, miserable sinful creatures. It is piety alone that can distinguish us from the dust whence we sprung". Manfred's scheming to keep the castle is the cause of his family's demise, and Marquis Frederic proves no better when it comes to sexual lust. Alfonso's ghostly and thunderous manifestations prevent Theodore and Matilda, Manfred's daughter, from uniting their lives as undauntedly as Manfred, aristocratic feuds being destructive of youthful love. The novel ends up with the emblematic form of Alfonso towering in the centre of the ruins.

The Castle of Otranto set the model for a long and best-selling tradition of Gothic novels placed under the Minoan emblem of the beast in the labyrinth. It is a symbol of power that breeds evil destructive of communities, of art that claims to contain evil making it grow monstrous. The virtuous heroine, pursued by the hero-villain, manages, like Ariadne, to find her way out of the labyrinth of oppressive lordship. The new subspecies of romance was not however built on binaries: Minoan versus Attic, Gothic versus neoclassic, or dreams versus reason.

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The Gothic is transgressive, porous, fuzzy, hybrid and mutant. Pictures come to life, the dead determine the lives of the living, the house of sin is contiguous to the house of worship:

Yet, where conceal herself ? How avoid the pursuit he would infallibly make throughout the castle ? As these thoughts passed rapidly through her mind, she recollected a subterraneous passage which led from the vaults of the castle to the church of St. Nicholas (...) The lower part of the castle was hollowed into several intricate cloisters; and it was not easy for one under so much anxiety to find the door that opened into the cavern. An awful silence reigned throughout those subterraneous regions, except now and then some blasts of wind that shook the doors she had passed, and which, grating on the rusty hinges, were reechoed through that long labyrinth of darkness.

The Gothic was a paradoxical way of carrying out the Enlightenment critique of darkness by taking the low road across its labyrinth of social errors.

Another paradoxical way of supporting the luminaries' agenda was **Ann Radcliffe**'s "explained supernatural": the mists of superstitions were eventually dispersed by the exercise of reason and common sense.

Terry Castle's reading of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* by **Ann Radcliffe,** a writer who has enjoyed renewed attention since the seventies, sets out to demonstrate in a new approach the otherwise traditional view of the Romantics favouring projections of memory, fantasy, love, and desire over the shabby everyday reality. The book, which belongs to a "canonical" phase of Romanticism, presents the symptoms of the *denatured state of our awareness: our antipathy towards the body and its contingencies, our rejection of the present, our fixation on the past (or yearnings for an idealized future) our longings for simulacra and nostalgic fantasy. We are in love with what isn's there* **(47).** The novel is a piece of Romantic displacement, which is a form of expressing discontent with the *status quo* in any walk of life. Somehow in the manner in which, according to Coleridge (*Biographia Literaria*), the "lyrical ballads" were to be accomplished, Radcliffe makes a similar attempt at "the rationalizing of the bizarre by fancy, and the imaginative enriching of the ordinary". A purely rhetorical deconstructive exercise which Paul de Man considers to be constitutive of Romantic poetry. The supernaturalization of everyday life, through distorting sensory experience, absorption in illusion, goes hand in hand with the opposite strategy of the supernatural being all the time explained, demystified. Rational explanations are provided for the mysterious musical sounds, the groans emanating from the walls, the apparent deaths and walking spectres of the castle

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lost in the Apennines. A trail of blood leads to nothing more than a pile of old clothes, a corpse coming back to life proves to be a pirate who had hidden in the castle of Montoni, a hero villain of the most genuine Romantic concoction. The other world of the novel is that of the ordinary, domestic, familiar St. Aubert estate in Gascony, which, gradually, acquires the hues of an enchanted place. *Old-fashioned ghosts have disappeared from the fictional world, but a new kind of apparition has taken their place. To be a Radcliffean hero or heroine in one sense means just this: to be "haunted", to find oneself obsessed by spectral images of those one loves. One sees in the mind's eye those who are absent; one is befriended and consoled by phantoms of the beloved. Radcliffe makes it clear how such phantasmata arise, they are the products of refined sentiment, the characteristic projection of a feeling heart* **(48)**. Thoughts shape reality, magical reunion is possible (Emily St. Aubert thinks of her lover, Valancourt, who presently materializes before her, characters fancy they can perceive the phantoms of the dead walking the scenes before them). The ghostliness of other people is an effect of their being reduced to a thought content, an unchanging spiritual essence which is preferred by the imaginative individual to their bodily presence.

The third phase of gothic writing shows a mannerist handling of stock scenes (mysterious crimes, exaggerated violence), and characters (the Fatal Man, the Fatal Woman), who owe their ambiguous nature – both demonic and fascinating – to the Coleridgean principle of *reconciliation of opposites and discordant qualities.* Such are the leads of *The Monk*, a masterpiece of the Horror School, contributed by **Matthew Gregory Lewis**: Ambrosio, a man in holy orders, who pledges himself to the devil, and Matilda, a woman exceedingly beautiful who turns out to be Satan's instrument. Her sensuous charms blind the monk of blameless reputation, enforcing upon him her skills in the magical arts. Miraculous events spiced with blood-letting scenes and everything besides add to the calculated gothic effects of the terror school.

A mixture of Jacobin reforming ideology and gothic story went into the making of **Mary Shelley**'s *Frankenstein,* in a late Romantic version. "Making" is a proper word to use, as by that time the Pre-Romantic enthusiasm for the "unexampled excellence" of the creative genius had subsided. Mary Shelley voices that anxiety of influence which is the sign of exhaustion. Instead of producing new *substance* (the absolute originality demanded by Coleridge), the epigone consciousness is satisfied to take up and refurbish – however imaginatively – pre-existing stuff. Here is the authoress herself in her *Introduction*: *Every thing must have a beginning, to speak in Sanchean phrase; and that beginning must be linked to something that went before. The Hindus give the world an elephant to support it, but they make the elephant stand upon a tortoise. Invention does not consist in creating out of void, but out of chaos; the materials must, in the first*

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place, be afforded: it can give form to dark, shapeless substances, but cannot bring into being the substance itself (the story of Columbus and his egg). Invention consists in the capacity of seizing on the capabilities of a subject, and in the power of moulding and fashioning ideas suggested to it.

„Moulding and fashioning" would rather suggest a deliberate effort of elaboration, and it is only by contradicting Shelley's express confession that one can impose upon her story a psychoanalytical grid. This is what Jeffrey Berman is doing in one of his essays collected in *Narcissism and the Novel* **(49)** In this respect and others, he walks into the footsteps of Ellen Moer (*Female Gothic*, an essay published in *New York Review of Books*, 1974), who reads Shelley's novel as a "phantasmagoria of the nursery", an elaborate fantasy of birth trauma evoking a woman's deepest fears of conception and child-birth. Shelley is supposed to have been traumatized by her mother's death (Mary Wollstonecraft's) as a consequence of giving birth to her, by her own childbirths and by the circumstance of seeing two of her children dying in infancy. This is not how Shelley remembers her state of mind years later: *I have an affection for it, for it was the offspring of happy days, when death and grief were but words, which found no true echo into my heart* (*Introduction* to the novel). Yet Jeffrey Berman insists on the psychological motivation of her novel-writing as *a magical defense against the fear of death*. The hideous phantom is made into a novel which is no longer an enemy but an ally, capable of delighting as well as terrifying readers, so she bids her mind's offspring *go forth and prosper*. Fankenstein's animation of lifeless matter is interpreted as *a wish to participate in the mystery of sexuality and usurp the mother's role*, to displace *God and woman from the acts of conception and birth*. Quite interesting is Berman's identification of a Lacanian "mirror-stage": the Creature's self-alienation on beholding his reflection in the pool of water. It is actually on the moment he becomes aware of **his image for others** that his personality actually merges with it, becoming monstrous.

In other respects, *Frankenstein* is much more a matter of **word**-ing *death and grief*, of reinscribing the archetypal rebel figure of the Romantic school: Milton's Satan, Goethe's Götz von Berlichingen, Werther, Faust, Prometheus, Schiller's Räuber, Coleridge's Mariner, Byron's Fatal Man, Shelley's escapist, Alastor-haunted poet, etc. The monster reading Plutarch and *Werther* in his hut resembles Schiller secretly reading Plutarch, and Goethe's *Götz* and *Werther* at the time he was unwillingly studying medicine at the Military Academy near Stuttgart, by order of the Duke, which inspired him with ideas for his own works "in tirannos". The monster stealing fire and discovering both its beneficent (warmth) as well as its harmful (burning) effect is a downscaled Prometheus figure. Frankenstein, Walton, or Mr. Waldman, who aspire to benefit mankind, even at the cost of self-sacrifice, embody that modern Prometheus stance of the

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scientist stealing the secrets of the universe in science-fiction, a literary kind whose founding stone was laid by Mary Shelley.

Written in epistolary form, just like *Werther*, the novel progresses through embedded narratives. Robert Walton's letters to his sister, Mrs. Saville, England, provide the broadest frame, into which is cast Frankenstein's narrative, which frames up the monster's account, including the latter's report on his Creator's diary. The beginning is also framed through intertextuality, as it recalls the fearful encounter, at the beginning of the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, between the ghostly story-teller and the wedding guest. Walton, an explorer who voyages north to the farthest inhabited spot of the earth (Archangel: a hint to Milton's Satan?), entertains Faust's thirst for knowledge which is stronger than love of life: *One's man's life or death were but a small price to pay for the acquirement of the knowledge which I sought, for the dominion I should acquire and transmit over the elemental foes of our race.* As he means to kill no albatross (that is, a quest of knowledge which does not run counter God's or nature's law), he does not fear God's punishment: that he should go back to his sister, *worn and woeful as the "ancient Mariner"*. The power of books, of culture to shape vision, to mould personalities is now part of self-*Bildung*: *I have often attributed... my passionate enthusiasm for the dangerous mysteries of ocean to that production of the most imaginative of modern poets... a love for the marvellous... which hurries me out of the common pathways of men.* As if by some magical effect, it is such a "worn and woeful" Ancient Mariner, in striking resemblance to the hero in the poem, who will have him hear out his story, that he chances upon amidst the icy waters of the North: *his lustrous eyes dwell on me with all their melancholy sweetness: I see his thin hand raised in animation, while the lineaments of his face are irradiated by the soul within. Strange and harrowing must be his story.* But Frankenstein is not a common trespasser of the Romantic Gospel of natural religion: he merges with Faust *(it was the secrets of heaven and earth that I desired to learn*) in the guise of a scientist absorbed in the latest research-work in galvanism. In going from alchemy to modern physics and chemistry, Frankenstein seems to be telling the charade of a human archetype which knows various avatars in history. The question is: does Mary Shelly share Walton's enthusiasm for the Coleridge poem? The subversive, deconstructive rhetoric Paul de Man attributes to the Romantic discourse constructs Walton as an unreliable narrator. The reader is left to make his own inferences. Frankenstein's procedure in his horrid experiment follows the Coleridgean definition of imagination as "reconciliation of opposite and discordant qualities": *To examine the causes of life we must first have recourse to death... I must also observe the natural decay and corruption of the human body... all the minutiae of causation, as exemplified in the change from life to death, and death to life...* Everything sounds absurd, of course, and Mary Shelley, educated at the Jacobin school of Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, is here pointing

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to the muddled moral notions that may derive from such poetic art. Man is no longer an agent of firm moral choices; everything becomes double, out of focus. Berman explores the textual traces of Frankenstein's identification with the monster: the fact that Walton mixes them up, the circumstance that the monster kills Frankenstein's bride, denying him a wife as he is denied a female companion, the use of the *Doppelgänger* technique, with Frankenstein and the Creature pursuing each other etc. There is even more textual evidence to support this theory. In her consistent inscription of Frankenstein as the Ancient Mariner, Shelley has him pursued by the Creature in a manner Frankenstein describes through a quote from the Coleridge poem: *like one that on a lonesome road... Because he knows, a frightful fiend/ Doth close behind him tread.* This is the passage where the spectres of the Mariner's former mates, who had died as a consequence of his killing the albatross, appear before him, offering a show *for a charnel-dungeon fitter.* The spectre Frankenstein feels behind him is **his own creation** and victim. As the Creature progresses to a sense of self-awareness, he starts to put himself the fundamental questions which **man alone** among all creatures is able to ask (echoing Milton's Adam in *Paradise Lost)*: *Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come? What was my destination?* Frankenstein's quest is to preserve **life**, to create an immortal race of men, invulnerable to sickness and death. His purpose is not so much Promethean (to benefit mankind) as Satanic (let them worship me as they worship God). The Creature's quest is a hermeneutic one: what is the **meaning** of my being in the world? Shelley seems to be correcting Coleridge: no, man is not just one indifferent link in that celebrated chain of being: *Both man and bird and beast.* Your creature will inquire into the unlawful way of its coming into being, will seek a destination different from mere vegetative existence. Frankenstein sees in Elizabeth a form of possession: *mine to protect, love, and cherish. I looked upon Elizabeth as mine.* The *happy race of people* will make him more of a parent than anybody else, for he will be mother and father in one, his creatures owing their "natures" to him alone. What the Creature expects from some other being is **companionship** – again a feature defining **only man** as "social animal". Frankenstein expects awed gratitude from his future creatures; the Creature asks for **love**. Frankenstein is not even able to give his Creature a name (this being the sign of man's capacity to appropriate the nature of that which he names), while the latter is able to interpret his existence, to project it into a paradigm: the forsaken Adam, the fallen angel. However surprising it may sound, the Creature is more human than his creator. His crimes may also be read as Frankenstein's deserved punishment, an ordeal he has to go through like the Ancient Mariner, by way of expiation. As J. Berman remarks, "the Creature's eloquence renders Walton speechless" and "awed". In this reinscription of a paradigmatic work by a Romantic poet of the first generation, Mary Shelley seems to be denying not only the validity of their philosophy, their

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excessive and potentially dangerous individualism and self-worshipping, but also their obsessions with darkness, death, charnel-houses. Frankenstein's dream, preceding the Creature's animation, is a prophetic one. Not life but only death will yield from death, by virtue of natural causation. His mother's corpse is nightmarishly associated with Elizabeth, one of his Creature's future victims. Frankenstein's friend, Clerval, who does not feel the need of *a remoter charm by thought supplied* (a quote from Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey*), never comes to entertain Frankenstein's wild plans, never loses the sense of responsibility to his fellow human beings.

The failure of the French Revolution had split the two generations of Romantics apart. Frankenstein is an example of failed good intentions. He is aware of a Creator's responsibility to his creation, and yet he leaves him to his own devices. He has had in mind *many happy excellent natures*, yet he proceeds to collecting bodies from charnel-houses, producing *a gigantic eight-foot high creature, with yellow skin, shrivelled complexion, straight black lips, dull, watery eyes...* He promises to create a female companion for him, and then changes his mind, which leads to more deaths. Frankenstein might well be the emblem of the abortive French Revolution. It had sought, to quote Elizabeth, *republican institutions* and social manners so refined as to allow ignorance and lack of dignity not even in servants. And it had ended up in a monstrous hybrid: a restoration of tyranny, without at least a varnish of hereditary legitimacy.

With all its formal incongruities and occasional breach of verisimilitude, Mary Shelley's novel is an important landmark in the history of literary ideas, and an exquisite piece of deconstructive rhetoric.

Even more radical in his experimentation with stylistic registers, narrative voice and structure was a low-born Scottish novelist and poet, admitted later into the best literary society (the Shelleys, among others). With the disrespect for status which is to be expected from someone who transgresses social bounderies, Hogg started his career with parodies, of Wordsworth and Southey, who had acquired an institutional role, in *The Poetic Mirror*, and even of Daniel in pseudo-biblical prose. Generic conventions were treated with a similar lack of deference. He contributed to a generic mix, the *Noctes Ambrosianae* dialogues, published by the Edinburgh Magazine, and wrote a long narrative poem, *The Queen's Wake* (Queen Mary of Scoytland's wake at Holyrood), in which he assumes the masks of seven bards, entertaining the Queen with their verse epics in different styles and moods.

One more generic concoction (*Dramatic Tales*) led him to a daring multigeneric structure, which G. Kelly labelled "quasi-novel": *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. The novel was discovered, recommended to public acclaim and imitated by André Gide, whose *Palude* (meaning parasite or amphibian, i.e. straddling several genres) led to the

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postmodernist metafictional novel. The roles of author, narrator and character are destabilized, Gide also accommodating a virtual reader.

In the *Confessions*, the narrator's story, focalized through the eyes of one of the characters – George Colwan –, encloses another character's version of the same events: Robert Wringhim's confessions. The narrator recovers Robert's diary from his tomb, to which he is prompted to go by a letter to "Blackwood's Magazine" sent by... James Hogg, a wool-stappler, who had witnessed Robert's suicide. James Hogg had been a shepherd in his childhood and youth and had actually published the letter in "Blackwood's Magazine"... The real author and life are incorporated as character and fiction within the plot. Hogg, who had seen Robert while still alive, refuses to accompany the narrator to the grave out of which the manuscript (the novel) is extracted, as if to allegorize the mutual exclusiveness of life and sign. The narrator proceeds from signs (letter) and digs up signs: humans revolve within a sphere of signifying practices.

The novel is a variation on the *Doppelgänger* motif, a current one in Romantic fiction (Schiller, Hoffmann, Chamisso, Poe...). The Romantic project had sought the reformation and melioration of society and had ended in the darkness of the Reign of Terror, despotism and international warfare. It was in the name of the loftiest ideals, degraded to inhuman abstractions and fanaticism, that horrible crimes had been committed. The Romantic rebel felt like a fallen angel, doomed for his heresy against legitimate authority.

The *Confessions* belongs to the Gothic tradition, a metamorphic genre, exploited by Hoggs in its rich potential. George's sense of being persecuted and the victim of a conspiracy against him orchestrated by his half-brother (unsupported by material evidence) qualifies the novel as an instance of paranoid gothic. The intersubjective dimension – Robert is a victim of institutional fanaticism – is complemented by the intrasubjective: Robert internalizes the superego, taking the form of religious dogmatism, and becomes a massochistic ego, denying himself all joys, repressing his body and tormenting his conscience. The Gothic body, in excessive pain, inflicted by religious tyranny, will eventually hang from a tree in a parody of the Crucifixion. His whole life had been nothing else: "Fairwell to the world which has no comforts and enjoyments", he concludes in the end. He had despised and shunned women, and had hated men.

Were the two brothers really haunted, or were they the victims of some psychic disturbance? The novel is steeped in ambiguities. Gide even saw the story as a figment, the exteriorized development of an individual's desires or pride.

The narrator himself wonders whether this is not some allegory or religious parable. The author of the *Confessions* might have been some maniac who was writing about a deluded creature "till he believed himself the object he was describing". The narrator playing editor no longer guarantees the veridicity of the story. He opens it up to a variety of interpretations.

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George, Lord of Colwan, marries the daughter of a Glasgow merchant, who also happens to be a religious fanatic. After the birth of their son, Lady Colwan separates from him to live with her confessor, with whom she shares a belief in the Calvinist doctrines of predestination and election. According to extreme Calvinists, a justified person (whose name is written from birth by the Lamb in the book of life) is incapable of sinning. No transgression in the future could alter that decree – his election for salvation –, everything is permitted, including crimes. Self-righteousness is antisocial: the **society of the just made perfect** demonizes the religious or political (Jacobite Order of the Episcopelians versus the Calvinist Whigs) Others. The French Revolution had offered a similar example.

The psychological explanation remains open as well, and this is what distinguishes crude supernaturalism from the fantasy tradition of the modern scientific age. George is obsessed with his brother's pursuit and persecution. He is always in his neighbourhood, hurting or even trying to kill him. The coincidences, as if Robert had been endowed with prescience and ubiquity, are suspect. It is particularly one of his encounters with his brother that intimates the possibility of his being deluded. During a walk in the mountains, he suddenly sees "delineated in the cloud the shoulders arms and features of a human being of the most dreadful aspect... the face of his brother dilated to twenty times the natural size". What George is describing seems to be the well known Brocken spectre, whose discovery had caused as much excitement among the romantics as Newton's revelation of colours as an effect of light.

In his turn, Robert feels pursued and persecuted by his brother's image which is ever at his elbow in the person of Gil-Martin. This "fiend of malignant aspect", who materializes the moment his father informs him that he is one of the elect, turns Robert into a murderer. The individual's alienation into unnatural and inhuman abstractions takes the form of absolute evil.

Walter Scott follows the symptomatic trajectory of Romantic biography: from early infatuation with revolutionary attitudes (a translation of *Götz von Berlichingen*) to a recognition of the eternal values of prudence and Real-politik in his *Waverly* novels; from an absorbing interest in ballads and ancient folk poetry towards the depiction of an anti-romantic heroine in *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*. His numerous novels fall into three divisions: those dealing with Scottish history (*Waverly, Guy Mannering, The Antiquary, Fair Maid of Perth* a.o.), or private life in historical times (*Heart of Mid-Lothian, Bride of Lamermoor, Rob Roy*); those dealing with English history (*Ivanhoe, Talisman, Kenilworth, Fortunes of Nigel, Woodstock* etc.), and with Continental history (*Quentin Durward, Anne of Geierstein, Count Robert of Paris*). Although, as it can be seen form his *Introduction* to *Ivanhoe*, his focus shifted from an antequarian interest in Scottish manners, dialect, and character, towards "more exotic medieval

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romance", Scott displays that anxiety of influence and literary self-awareness which characterizes the second generation of Romantics. He deliberately makes an attempt at what we might call a *re-invention of Scotland*, out of previous texts. Therein he follows the example of Maria Edgeworth, of whose Irish characters he says in his prefatory notes to the *Waverley* novels *to have done more towards completing the Union, than perhaps all the legislative enactments*. Setting himself in opposition to the Gothic tradition of *spacious miracles of fiction*, Scott proposes that tamed form of *romantic composition*, which combines fantasy and reality, wrapping up a historical core into veils of imaginary projections. The bare reality of Scotland is mediated through its written tradition of legends, romances, "tales of other times", myths, beliefs, customs. Scott finds himself in the position of the hero in the unfinished romance of *Queen Hoo-Hall,* who has to choose between the sword and the horn. It is not the history enacted through the sword but the voices of past times coming to us through narratives **about** the times that he brings out in his many-framed fictions (the text of *Waverly*, presented as the continuation of an extant manuscript, is preceded by an *Advertisement,* a *General Preface*, an *Appendix* to *General Preface* and an *Introduction...*)

The other tradition he openly rejects is the Enlightenment novel of manners, which is time-specific. His interest in "those passions common to all men in all stages of society" prevails over the realist's interest in the colourful social show of the here and now. His peculiar "description of men than manners" carries the weight of characterization from the outward circumstances of social position, mannerisms of speech and behaviour, over to the hero's inner world, which is a mobile one. In counterdistinction to the neoclassical characters, Edward Waverley *changes before the reader's eyes, from an idealistic, day-dreaming and castle-building youth, to a mature man chastened by the harsh realities of war.* **(50)**

Waverley, Scott's first novel, is set in the time of the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745, which attempted to put the House of Stuart on the British throne in place of the House of Hanover. Edward, a young noble Englishman, is sent on a diplomatic mission to the rebellious Highlanders, a journey which turns out to be a test of the hero's character, an initiation quest. He is confronted with two opposite points of view, upheld by the owners of two powerful Scottish settlements: the Tully-Veolan manor-house of Baron Bradwardine, and the conservative Glennaquoich of the royalists, Fergus and Flora Mac-Ivor. In fact, what the author does, in a free indirect discourse rendering Edward's own evaluation, is to oppose the spirit of the age of reason embodied by Baron Bradwardine, the owner of the well-run Tully-Veolan household, to that of an age of sensibility and imagination, whose pulse the hero recognizes in himself and in the passionate Mac-Ivors: *the Baron only cumbered his memory with matters of fact; the solid, dry outlines which history delineates. Edward, on the contrary, loved to fill up and round the sketch with the colouring of a warm and vivid*

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imagination which gives life and light to the actors and speakers in the drama of past ages. The social frescoes of the picaresque novels, teeming with representatives of all social classes, are gone. Social differences are small, but the internal distances are great. To Rose Bradwardine, a gentle and commonsensical girl of seventeen, the time when her father's residence had been a place of fierce encounters between her father and the highlanders has nothing romantic about it, while to Edward, it is a story *which bore so much resemblance to one of his own day-dreams*. In a purely Wordsworthian fashion, Edward communicates to his percepts *a tincture of its* (of his intellect) *own romantic tone and colouring.* He is permanently casting the spell of his artistic associations upon common characters and events. Fergus and Flora are transposed from their Scottish background into figures of romance (Viola and Sebastian). At the beginning, Flora has a greater pull over his imagination than Rose, because of the picturesque background of her residence. The primitive, wild vicinity of the *massive or spiry* rocks, the *ancient ruined tower, frowning from a promontory over the river* makes her *an enchantress of Boiardo or Ariosto.* The codes and traditions of Highland society and culture lend it the heroic status of a community worthy of the ancient epics. When Waverley arrives at Glennaquoich and is admitted into the "banqueting hall", which calls to our minds realities as old as those of *Beowulf,* he finds himself attended *as the heroic travellers of Odyssey,* being offered *the patriarchal refreshment of a bath for the feet.* The family *bhairdh* (bard) with his recital of Celtic verse (*Chapter 20*) revives the themes and manner of the old tribal poetry: *He seemed to Edward, who attended him with much interest, to recite many proper names, to lament the dead, to apostrophise the absent, to exhort, and entreat, and animate those who were present (...). The ardour of the poet appeared to communicate itself to the audience. Their wild and sunburnt countenances assumed a fiercer and more animated expression; all bent forward towards the reciter, many sprang up and waved their arms in ecstasy, and some laid their hands on their swords. When the song ceased, there was a deep pause, while the aroused feelings of the poet and of the hearers gradually subsided into their usual channel.*

The author's point of view does not coincide with that of the character's. Edward is gradually brought round to a proper apprehension of reality and history. The attempted return to the medieval past through the royalists' *military and romantic adventure* yields up the fruit of destruction. Edward can see them all around: the devastated crops, the *broken carriages, dead horses, unroofed cottages, trees felled for palisades, and bridges destroyed.* His final choice lies with the realistically-minded Bradwardines. Rose will make a better lady for Waverley-Honour. The demystifying technique is a proof that the author himself did not believe in the validity of a nostalgic cult of the past. Fergus, the hero who is mostly committed to the Stuart cause, and to a narrow cult of ethnic specificity,

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is cast by the author into a literary type which he had theoretically condemned in his *Preface*: the hero-villain of Gothic-Byronic extract. Fergus, who is haunted by the Bodach Glas phantom of a man killed by an ancestor in a quarrel about division of booty, remains loyal to the king up to the moment of his brave death, yet he is not himself free of an undignified quest of "booty" in encouraging his sister's affection for Edward, in whom he envisages a political and financial catch.

The greatest of the *Waverley* series, *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* develops the realistic side of Scott's narrative art. If Edward chooses Rosa, a commonsensical instead of a heroic attitude to war, the case is still sorted out as one of **"romantic enlightenment"**: the hero is waken up to a sense of reality, a realization of war as *danger and misfortune*. Edward Waverley is a reinscription of the Ancient Mariner: *a sadder and a wiser man*. In *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*, the romantic quest is set aside, and with it the unusual hero. Jeanie Deans is the representative of a humble social class, who differs radically from the conventional heroine of romance: *Her personal attractions were of no uncommon description. She was short, and rather stoutly made for her size, had grey eyes, light-coloured hair, a round good-humoured face, much tanned with the sun, and her peculiar charm was an air of inexpressible serenity, which a good conscience, kind feelings, and her regular discharge of all her duties, spread over her features.* The story, which is that of a conflict of loyalties in a person with a good conscience, is not, however, exempt from gothic sensationalism.

Jeanie's integrity, loyalty and common sense, associated with the un-romantic average looks, make her one of a pair with **Jane Austen**'s heroines of **domestic experience.** That does not imply that Austen's social sweep is a marginal one or of minor importance. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, it was the upper and lower gentry that bore the germs of social change rather than the aristocracy or the proletariat. Scott's great world of history, of poverty or royalty, is narrowed down to a country estate and its neighbourhood, and the romantic quest of absolutes (loyalty, courtly love, freedom, heroism, tradition) is reduced to an exploration of the values of domesticity. Whereas Mary Shelley and Walter Scott, with their techniques of reinscription might appear as a summation – often a critical one – of the Romantic programme, Jane Austen debunks both Enlightenment and Romantic conventions, opening up new vistas which lead directly to the great Victorian classics. She vacillates between light, **romantic comedy** (*Pride and Prejudice, Emma, Northanger Abbey*) and **satirical realism** (*Sense and Sensibility, Mansfield Park, Persuassion*), broadening the scope and range of the narrative voice. In a way, the narrative technique of **multiple voices** rendered through free indirect discourse anticipates Henry James's *focalization* (no character is introduced unless directly connected with the story, and the events are narrated from a character's point of view). The anti-romantic heroine, with

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common looks, and a good judgement, who tames male arrogance and self-sufficiency, looks forward to the Brontës. The female Quixote, cured of romantic delusions through actual experience, women's emotional and sexual self-awareness, the view of the individual as a mere cog in the machinery of social determinism (financial resources, social status, public opinion), pave the way for the midcentury novels of George Eliot and Elizabeth Gaskell. It is not a bookish but a gender and social consciousness that are inscribed in Austen's fiction.

First redacted under the title *Elinor and Marianne* about 1792, the novel which in its final form was published only in 1811 as *Sense and Sensibility* bears traces of the onsetting Romantic age. One of them is the technique of contrasting modes of vision: the rational, self-possessed and altruistic Elinor versus the impetuous, emotional and self-indulgent Marianne; Edward Ferras opposing his neoclassical taste for *tall, straight and flourishing tress* to the picturesque *crooked, twisted, blasted* ones, or *a troop of tidy, happy villagers* to the *finest banditti in the world.* The main theme is also romantic: the gradual maturation of the heroine, who travels through illusion to a recognition (anagnorisis) of reality. If the author picks up on a domestic subject – marriage – it is because that was the time in a woman's life when she was allowed to make a choice and thereby prove the strength of her personality, or, on the contrary, let herself be carried away in a passionate involvement with an unworthy object or risk her security by unwisely pursuing the injunctions of an undisciplined heart. Austen's more realistic temper advises her not to equate the end with marriage bells with perfect happiness. The way of the world is sooner one leading to disillusionment, which is greater in proportion to the character's previous expectations. Instead of a Prince Charming, whom the unrealistic Marianne had envisaged in the reckless and untrustworthy Willoughby, she is going to marry *a man who had loved before, who is a bit too oldish for marriage, and is in the habit of wearing a flannel waistcoat in winter...* Yet there is no Romantic ache in this wakening *on the cold heel side* (Keats, *La Belle Dame Sans Mercy*), nor can we read the end as a reassertion of the Augustan ideal of rationality at the expense of imaginative minds, in excess of the world.

Austen is waging war not only with the romantic self-worshipper but also with the eighteenth-century institutionalized role of the male moral guide. If Emma fails in her attempt to play God at Hartfield, as she feels persuaded by an exalted view of herself (*handsome, clever*) and of her position (*rich*), so do most of the infatuated upper-class males who start a love affair by acting the Virgilian guide. The heroine's suitor undoubtedly helps her to correct her passions, prejudices or illusions which prove a disintegrating force to selfhood, yet he too emerges out of this double initiation transformed. His pride has been thwarted (Darcy learns that individual merit is not wanting outside aristocratic homes, nor unfailing within them), his social armour has been scarred (Henry Tilney discovers that Englishness and aristocratic status are not immune to barbaric

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behaviour or cruelty), his patronizing tone has melted into a penitent confession (George Knightley).

By the time *Northanger Abbey* was published (1818), Jane Austen's posthumous audience had become more mindful of the shaping force lurking in the discourses of the age. A displaced response to reality is here associated with a precise literary convention: the Gothic novel. As Austen proceeds to her description of Catherine Morland, she pits her portrait against Gothic mannerisms, also producing a *mise-en-abyme*, by making her heroine a Gothic addict, given to readings from *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and other "horrid" books. Catherine's mind is "not unpropitious for heroism", but everything else is against her: her ordinary, awkward look, sallow skin, dark hair, as well as family background: *No one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy would have supposed her born to be a heroine. Her situation in life, the character of her father and mother, her own person and disposition were equally against her. Her father was a clergyman, without being neglected or poor, and a very respectable man, though his name was Richard – and he had never been handsome. He had a considerable independence, besides two good livings – and he was not in the least addicted to locking up his daughters.*

The same ironic tone is employed in the demystification of other Gothic cliches: the hero-villain (John Thorpe), the calumniated maid (Catherine prevented from joining Henry Tilney, in whom she took a serious interest, by the scheming Thorpe), the distressed heroine (in the mock-heroic treatment of Catherine's distress at finding herself sitting alone, as Thorpe, with whom she had been engaged to dance, does not show up), the mysterious interior and furniture of Northanger Abbey, which induces Catherine to believe that General Tilney, her host, had locked up and killed his wife, the narrative strategy of the" explained supernatural" (a roll of written papers hidden in a mysterious chest with a folded counterpane turns out to be a ... laundry list). The lesson Jane Austen sets out to teach the belated Romantics is that reality may prove as sensational as the offshoots of imagination. On hearing the General's motives of tempestuously driving her out of his home (the General had found out that she was less rich than he had been told), Catherine feels that *in suspecting General Tilney of either murdering or shutting up his wife she had scarcely sinned against his character, or magnified his cruelty.*

Jane Austen is not satisfied with what she demolishes; she means to put something in its place. The Romantic self-worshipper makes room for the Kantian hero who becomes the moral yardstick for the whole action (*Mansfield Park*). The individual is now seen as a knot in a subjective network of social interaction. The facts of social organization are doubled up by the superstructure of opinions, beliefs, ideological assumptions, by a certain ethos. Individual consciousness can no longer be conceived of as something independent of the collective consciousness of the family circle, of the village, of the neighbourhood: ...*three*

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miles to Uppercross and a total change of conversation, opinion, idea. She needed to clothe her imagination, memory and all ideas in as much of Uppercross as possible (Persuasion).

The wheel has come full circle: the Pre-Romantics had made an inner-directed move, discovering the values of subjectivity in comparison to the material aspects of man's existence. Jane Austen looks both ways, exploring the material as well as the subjective negotiations between individual and society, between self and social mind.

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Arbuthnot, John (1667-1735). Physician to Queen Ann. *The History of John Bull,* 1712 (the typical Englishman).

Austen, Jane (1775-1817). Novelist. Daughter of the rector of Steventon in Hampshire.

Sense and Sensibility, 1811; *Pride and Prejudice*, 1813; *Mansfield Park*, 1814; *Emma*, 1816; *Northanger Abbey; Persuasion*, 1818.

Bacon, Francis (1561-1626). Philosopher, essayist, lawyer, statesman. Son of Sir Nicholas Bacon. Entered Parliament 1584. Knighted 1603. Lord Chancellor (1617-18) *Essays* (1597, 1612, 1625.) *The Advancement of Learning*, 1605; De Sapientia Veterum (1609); *Novum Organum,* 1620; *The History of the Reign of King Henry the Seventh*, 1622; *Apophthegms*, 1624; *New Atlantis*, 1627.

Baillie, Joanna (1762-1851) Scottish dramatist and poet. Daughter of a Presbyterian divine and sister of a famous doctor. Moved from Scotland to London and thence to Hampstead (1791), where she became the "model Gentlewoman" and hostess of a literary society. The first performance of her play, *De Monfort*, on a romantic scale, with Gothic scenery and thirty singers, on 29 April 1800, had the significance of a dramatic companion to Wordsworth"s poetic manifesto, published as "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* the same year. The protagonists' parts were performed by a sibling pair of actors (John Kemble and Sarah Siddons) and the play was enthusiastically reviewed by William Hazlitt. The romantic non-conformist party, from Elizabeth Inchbald to Lord Byron, joined in the acclaim. The play was soon after successfully performed in New York, Edinburgh and Philadelphia. *A Series of Plays: In Which it is Attempted to Delineate the Stronger Passions of the Mind*, 1798; *The Family Legend*, 1810; *Miscellaneous Plays*, 1836; *Fugitive Verses*, 1790; *Metrical Legends*, 1821.

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Browne, Sir Thomas (1605-1682). Scientific and religious writer. Born in London as a mercer's son. MA from Oxford and MD from Leyden. Honorary Fellow of the College of Physicians in London. Knighted in 1671. *Religio Medici,* 1642, 1643 (authorized edition), translated into Latin, French, Italian and Dutch already in the following years. *Pseudodoxia Epidemica, or Enquiries into common and vulgar Errors* (1646). *Hydriopathy* (or *Urn Burial*) and the *Garden of Cyrus* (1658).

Buckingham, George Villiers (2nd Duke of Buckingham) (1628-1687). Playwright. Lived a life of extravagance and political intrigue. Plays: *The Rehearsal*, 1672, *The Chances*, 1682.

Burke, Edmund (1729-1797). Philosopher of art and politics. Born in Dublin to a Protestant lawyer and a Catholic mother. Was educated as a Protestant, studied at Trinity College and read law at the Middle Temple. Was an active member of the literary circles in London which enjoyed the prestige of the cultural establishment (Johnson, Reynolds). However, his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757) was an anti-Augustan aesthetic statement. As a Whig MP, he defended the cause of the American colonists (*On American Taxation*, 1774, *On Conciliation with the Colonies*, 1775), and opposed the royal control of The House of Commons (*Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents,* 1770). His liberalism did not go so far as to embrace overt violence; he declared himself against revolutionary discontinuities, pleading for gradual and peaceful political improvements (*Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 1790).

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Carew, Thomas (1598-1639). Poet of the Cavalier school, and courtier. Employed at court of Charles I. *Coelum Britannicum.* A masque at Whitehall, 1634; *Poems*, 1640.

Chapman, George (1559-1634). Poet, dramatist, translator. *Bussy D'Ambois*, 1607; *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois*, 1613 (plays). *The Whole Works of Homer*, 1616.

Chatterton, Thomas (1752-1770). Poet. Son of a Bristol schoolmaster. Came to London in 1770, where, driven by poverty and frustrated literary ambitions, poisoned himself at the age of 17. Supposed author of the poems and verses he claimed to have discovered in the church of St. Mary Redcliffe, and attributed to Thomas Rowley, a 15th century monk.

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Coleridge, Samuel Taylor (1772-1834). Poet, critic, philosopher (introduced German philosophy to the English public). Tour with Wordsworth in Germany, 1798. *The Fall of Robespierre. An historic drama*, jointly with Southey, 1794; *Poems of Various Subjects*, 1796. *Wallenstein*, a drama in two parts, 1800; *Lyrical Ballads*, 1798, jointly with Wordsworth; *Christabel* (written 1797, 1800); *Kubla Khan*, a vision; the *Pains of Sleep*, 1816; *Sibylline Leaves,* 1817). *Biographia Literaria*, 1817; *Aids to Reflection in the Formation of a Manly Character*, 1825. *Essays and Lectures; Works*, 1828, 1834.

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Congreve, William (1670-1729). Dramatist, poet. Born in an ancient Yorkshore family. *The Double-Dealer*, 1694; *Love for Love*, 1695; *The Way of the World*, 1700; *The Judgement of Paris,* 1701. Lyrics, masques, operas.

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Cowley, Abraham (1618-1667). Poet and essayist; cipher secretary to Queen Henrietta Maria (1647). *Poetical Blossoms*, 1633. *A Satire, the Puritan and the Papist, by a*

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Scholar in Oxford, 1643; *The Mistress: or, Several Copies of Love-Verses*, 1647; *Ode, upon the Blessed Restoration and Return of His Sacred Majesty, Charles the Second*, 1660; *Verses Lately Written upon Several Occasions*, 1663; *A Poem on the Late Civil War* (fragment), 1679. *A Proposition for the Advancement of Experimental Philosophy*, 1661.

Cowper, William (1731-1800). Poet, letter-writer, translator. Unable to continue his promising career as a Parliament official on account of a mental breakdown, which forces him to retire to the country. *Olney Hymns* (among them, *God Moves in a Mysterious Way*), 1779; *The Task*, 1785; Translations of Horace and Homer.

Crabbe, George (1755-1832). Poet. After a failed career as physician, took Holy Orders. Rector of Trowbridge. Admitted into Edmund Johnson's circles. *The Village*, 1783; *The Parish Register*, 1807; *The Borough*, 1810.

Crashaw, Richard (1612-1649). Caroline metaphysical poet. Fellow of Peter House. *Steps to the Temple. Sacred poems with other delights of the Muses*, 1646.

Darwin, Erasmus (1731-1802). Physician, writer and inventor. Formed a botanical garden near Lichfield (1778). Expounded the laws of organic life on evolutionary principles. *The Botanic Garden*; a poem in two parts, 1789. *Zoonomia, or the Laws of Organic Life*, 1794-1796.

Defoe, Daniel (1660-1731). Journalist, novelist, poet and pamphleteer. Son of a London butcher. Supported Monmouth and William III in 1688. Fined and pilloried for *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters* (1702). Prosecuted and imprisoned for Anti-Jacobite pamphlets (1712-1713). *Robinson Crusoe*, 1719-1720; *Captain Singleton*, 1720; *Moll Flanders, A Journal of the Plague Year*, 1722; *The Fortunate Mistress (Roxana)*, 1724.

Dekker, Thomas (1570-1632). Dramatist and pamphleteer. *The Pleasant Comedy of Old Fortunatus*, 1600; *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, 1600

Deloney, Thomas (1543-1601). Ballad-writer, pamphleteer, and novelist. By trade a silk-weaver. *A Joyful New Ballad, declaring the happy obtaining of the great Galleazo*, 1588. *Thomas of Reading. Or, the Six Worthy Yeomen of the West*, 4th ed. 1612; *The Pleasant History of John Winchcomb*, 8th ed. 1619.

Denham, John (1615-1669). Courtier, poet. Followed Prince Charles and Henrietta Maria to France (1648). *Cooper Hill*, 1642. *Cato Major*, 1669.

De Quincey, Thomas (1785-1859). Essayist. Scholar of Greek, Latin, Hebrew and German. *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, 1822

Drummond of Hawthornden, William (1585-1649). Scots poet, historian. A Royalist and an Episcopalian. Author of sonnets and songs dedicated to a girl who died on the eve of their wedding. Entertained Ben Jonson on his visit to Hawthornden in 1619. *The History of Scotland*, 1655; *Conversations of Ben Jonson with William Drummond of Hawthornden*, 1842.

Dryden, John (1631-1700). Poet, dramatist, translator and prose writer. Poet Laureate (1668). Converted to Catholicism (1686). *Astraea Redux*, 1660; *Annus Mirabilis*, 1666; *Absalom and Achitophel*, 1681; *The Medall*, 1682; *Mac Flecknoe*, 1682; *To the Pious Memory of the Accomplished Young Lady Mrs. Anne Killigrew*, 1686;

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The Hind and the Panther, 1687; A *Song for St. Cecilia's Day*, 1687; *Alexander's Feast*, 1697. *The Indian Queen*, 1665; *The Indian Emperor*, 1667; *The Conquest of Granada*, 1672; *Marriage-à-la-mode*, 1673; *Aureng-Zebe*, 1676; *All for Love*, 1678

Edgeworth, Maria (1767-1849). Novelist. Daughter of an Irish landlord and M.P. Founded the tradition of the regional novel. Scott followed her example in attempting a fictional monograph of Scotland, as she had done for Ireland. *Early Lessons*, 1803; *Tales of Fashionable Life*, 1809, 1812; *Harrington; Ormond*, 1817.

Elyot, Thomas (1499-1546). Diplomatist and writer. Ambassador to Charles V. Translations from Classics. *The Book Named the Governor*, 1531; *Of the Knowledge Which Makes a Wise Man*, 1533; *The Doctrinal of Princes*, 1534; *The Education or Bringing up of Children*, 1535; *The Dictionary of Sir Thomas Elyot*, 1538; *The Defence of Good Women*, 1545.

Etherege/Etheredge, George (1634-1691). Diplomatist under the Restoration Stuart kings, dramatist. *The Comical Revenge; or, Love in a Tub*, 1664; *She Wou'd if She Cou'd*, 1668; *The Man of Mode*, 1676.

Fielding, Henry (1707-1754). Novelist, satirist, magistrate. As Westminster magistrate (1748) expounded the social causes of and managed to reduce the crime rate in London. Translated Moliere's *Miser*. *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews and His friend Mr. Abraham Adams. Written in imitation of the manner of Cervantes*, 1742; *The Life of Jonathan Wild the Great*, 1743; *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling*, 1749; *Amelia*, 1752.

Fletcher, John (1579-1625). Dramatist. Nephew of Giles Fletcher the elder – ambassador and poet, and cousin of Giles and Phineas – poets of the Miltonic school. *The Faithful Shepheardesse, 1609; The Two Noble Kinsmen (with Shakespeare); Rule a Wife and Have a Wife, 1640.* For the plays by Beaumont and Fletcher jointly see **Beaumont, Francis**.

Florio, John (1553-1625). Translator. Son of an Italian Protestant refugee; *Italin-English Dictionary*, 1598. *The Essays of Moral, Politics, and Military Discourses of Lord Michaell de Montaigne*, 1603.

Gay, John (1685-1732). Poet and dramatist. An extravagant figure and a popular author. *Poems on several Occasions*, 1720; *Trivia, or, the Art of Walking the Streets of London*, 1716; *The Beggar's Opera*, 1728; *Acis and Galatea: an English Pastoral Opera* (music by Handel), 1732.

Godwin, William (1756-1836). Political philosopher, upholding a Rousseauian view of the innate goodness of man, spoilt by a corrupt society. A theorist of social reforms, exerting a powerful influence on the Romantic movement. Novelist, dramatist. Presbyterian minister who turned atheist, being later converted to theism by Coleridge. His second wife was Mary Wollstonecraft, the mother of Mary Shelley. *An Inquiry Concerning the Principles of Political Justice, and Its influence on General Virtue and Happiness*, 1793; *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Women*, 1798; *Thoughts on Man, His Nature, Productions and Discourses*, 1831. *Things as They Are: or, the Adventures of Caleb Williams*, 1794; *Fleetwood; or, The New Man of Feeling*, 1805.

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Goldsmith, Oliver (1730-1774). Irish poet, novelist, playwright, essayist. Studied medicine at Edinburgh and Leyden. After a two years' journey to Europe, settled in London, making a living as a professional writer, and from various expedients, including schoolteaching. Reputed for his generosity and for his spending habits. Befriended Samuel Johnson, who more than once assisted him financially. His "prospect of society" is that of a "traveller": the cosmopolitan comment on a culture from the point of view of another, characteristic of the broader understanding of the Enlightenment for social difference and cultural others. *The Citizen of the World: or Letters from a Chinese Philosopher, Residing in London, to His Friends in the East* (modelled on Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes*), 1762. *The Taveller, or A Prospect of Society*, 1765. *Poems for Young Ladies*, 1767. *The Good Natur'd Man*, A comedy, 1768; *She Stoops to Conquer, A comedy The Vicar of Wakefield, A tale*, 1766; *The Deserted Village*, 1770.

Gower, John (1330-1408). Writer in French, Latin, and English. Of good Kentish family stock and easy circumstances. His friend Chaucer called him "Moral Gower", as his works never failed to point to some moral. *Speculum meditantis* or *Mirour de l'omme* in French; *Vox clamantis*, in Latin; *Confessio Amantis* in English (octosyllabic couplets)

Gray, Thomas (1716-1771). Poet, classical scholar, linguist and student of science. Toured Europe in the company of Horace Walpole (1739-41), England and Scotland. A Fellow of Peterhouse and, later, Pembroke. Professor of History and Modern Languages (1768). *Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College*, 1747; *An Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*, 1751; *The Bard*, 1757. *Letters*.

Greene, Robert (1558-1592). Poet, playwright, novelist and pamphleteer. Travelled in Italy, Spain, France, Denmark and Polland. After spending his wife's money, went to London where he established himself as a professional writer. *Orlando Furioso*, 1594; *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, 1594; *James IV*, 1598; *Alphonsus King of Aragon*, 1599 (plays). *Mamillia. A Mirror of Looking-Glass for the Ladies of England*, 1583; *Pandosto. The Triumph of Time*, 1588

Hazlitt, William (1778-183o). Essayist and critic. Through lecturing and journalism he bridged the eighteenth and the noneteenth centuries, striking a balance between Enlightenment and the Romantic mode of sensibility. His criticism created a new species of literary character, in which the subject is neither the author as an individual, although the writer's appearance is often described with a painter's eye for significant or picturesque detail, nor his work regarded in itself, but the figure of the author in his work, as the embodiment of a certain *Zeitgeist* (spirit of the time). *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*, 1817-1818; *Lectures on the English Poets*, 1818-1819; *On the English Comic Writers*, 1819; *Table-Talk*, 1821-1822; *The Spirit of the Age; or Contemporary Portraits*, 1825.

Herbert, George (1593-1633). Poet and divine. Public Orator at Cambridge, then rector of Bemerton. *The Temple*, *Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations*, 1633.

Herrick, Robert (1591-1674). Poet and clergyman. Educated at Cambridge. After some years spent in the company of Jonson and the court wits, took Holy Orders, and became vicar of Dean Prior in 1629. In his poetry, he sought to reconcile his state

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of mind, divided between a hedonistic drive and religious piety, securing a more complex effect than the other Caroline Cavaliers. *Hesperides: or, The Works both Humane and Divine of Robert Herrick Esq.* 1648.

Heywood, Thomas (1573-164l). Poet, dramatist and prose pamphleteer. Translated Sallust and other Latins. *A Woman Killed with Kindness* (a play), 1607. *The Life and Death of Queen Elizabeth.* Written in heroical verse, 1639. Mayoral pageants for the City of London.

Hobbes, Thomas (1588-1679). Philosopher, translator and prose writer. Tutor to the Cavendish family and other distinguished persons, mathematical teacher to Charles II, secretary to Bacon. Took refuge in Paris during the Commonwealth period. His mathematical studies brought him into controversy with Descartes. Translated Homer. *Leviathan or the Matter, Form, and Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesiastical and Civil*, 1651; *Mr. Hobbes Considered in His Loyalty, Religion, Reputation and Manners*, 1662. *The History of the Civil Wars of England*, 1679.

Hogg, James (1770-1835). Scottish poet, journalist, and novelist. A self-taught member of the Scottish literary circles, who had risen from the humble condition of shepherd, which he abandoned after repeated failure in trade. In 1816 Countess of Dalkeith, his patroness, died leaving him her manor of Eltrive Lake, where he lived to the end of his life. Edited *The Spy* (1810), a weekly periodical. Contributed (signing as the "Eltrick Shepherd") to the "Noctes Ambrosianae" dialogues, a literary medley published by *Edinburgh Magazine* (1822-35). Re-directed romantic self-expressive lyricism towards narrative (*The Queen's Wake*) and drama (*Dramatic Tales*). *The Poetic Mirror; or, the Living Bards of Great Britain* (parodies), 1816; Some of his best lyric poetry came out in *The Jacobite Relics of Scotland, 1819. The Three Perils of Man, 1822; The Three Perils of Women, 1823. The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner, 1824.*

Hume, David (1711-1776). Scottish philosopher and historian. Studied Law, and completed his education in France (1734-7). Judge-Advocate to General St. Clair, 1747; Keeper of the Advocates' Library, Edinburgh, 1752. Went to Paris in 1765, and retired to Edinburgh in 1748. *A Treatise of Human Nature, being an attempt to introduce the experimental method of reasoning into moral subjects*, 1739; *Essays Moral and Political,* 1741; *Philosophical Essays Concerning Human Understanding*, 1748; *An Enquiry Concerning Principles of Morals*, 1751; *Political Discourses*, 1752; *History of England,* 1754-61; *Natural History of Religion,* 1757; *Essays and Treatises*, 1770; *My Own Life*, 1777; *Natural Religion*, 1779.

Jonson, Ben (1572-1637). Playwright and poet, probably born in Westminster. Served as a bricklayer and soldier before settling in London as a professional dramatist (1597). Temporary imprisonment for killing a fellow-actor in a duel (1598). Tried for murder, escaped by benefit of clergy. Converted to Catholicism, which he abjured twelve years later. Wrote masques for the Court, staged by Inigo Jones, with whom he finally quarrelled. Granted a court pension as poet laureate, although he did not have the title. Received honorary degrees from both Oxford and Cambridge universities. Established the manner for a whole school of poetry the Caroline Cavaliers. *Every Man in His Humour*, 1598; *Every Man out of His*

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Humour, 1599; *Cynthia's Revels*, 1600; *The Poetaster*, 1601; *Sejanus His Fall*, 1605; *Volpone or the Fox*, 1607; *Catilene*, 1611; *The Alchemist*, 16lo; *Bartholomew Fair*, 1614; *Epicoene, or The Silent Woman*, 1620 (plays). *King James's Royal Entertainment* – a masque on the coronation of James I, 1604; *Hymenaei*, 1606; *The Masque of Blackness; The Masque of Beauty (court masques). Under-woods: consisting of diverse poems (*in *Works)*, 1640.

Keats, John (1795-182l). Poet. Gave up his practice as a surgeon to dedicate himself entirely to writing. Went to Rome, seeking a relief from his sickness, and died there with consumption. *Poems*, 1817; *Endymion*, 1818; *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes, and other poems*, 182o.

Lake Poets, or Lake School. Coleridge, Wordsworth and Southey, who lived in the Lake District of Westmorland and Cumberland. So called for the first time in the *Edinburgh Review* of 1817.

Lamb, Charles (1775-1834). Essayist, critic, and poet. Educated at Christ's Hospital, with Coleridge. A clerk in the East India Office for thirty-three years. Nervous depression and fits of insanity obliged him to a secluded life later, in the companionship of his devoted sister. His frequent refuge into the past was was not merely a quest of happier days but a romantic preferment for what, being remote in time, can be more advantageously coloured by the imagination. He was not running away from the oppressive prison of his mind but also from the emerging world of railroad, factory and political economists. Hiding behind a mask, a persona, he talks about the small, reassuring aspects of life in a sophisticated idiom, involving paraphrases, archaisms, puns, ellipsis – a literary, elaborate style behind which Montaigne can be divined. The first writer to describe himself as "introspective". *Tales from Shakespeare*, 1807; *Specimens from the Dramatic Poets*, 1808; *Essays of Elia and Last Essays of Elia*, 1822-1833.

Langland, William. Poet. Born in the Midlands, educated at the monastery of Great Malvern. Probably of poor extraction. Went to London, Cornhill, as a chantry priest, where he wrote *The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman*, which has come down to us in three copies. One of them contains a fragment, *Richard the Redeless*, a poem remonstrating Richard II, formerly attributed to him. The rebel peasants of 1831 recognized their own grievances in his attacks on churchmen and lawyers.

Lennox, Charlotte (1720-1804). Novelist and poet, born in New York, as daughter of the lieutenant governor. A member of Johnson's literary club. Translated from the French. *The Female Quixote; or, the Adventures of Arabella*, 1752; *The History of Sir George Warrington; or the Political Quixote*, 1797.

Lewis, Matthew Gregory (1775-1818). Novelist, dramatist, and translator from the German and French. Diplomat. Died at sea on his return from the West Indies. *The Monk, A romance*, 1796. *Journal of a West India Proprietor, kept during a residence in the Island of Jamaica*, 1834.

Locke, John (1632-1704). Philosopher, Greek lecturer, lecturer in rhetoric, and censor of moral philosophy at Oxford. Fellow of the Royal Society. Physician to the Earl of Shaftesbury. Fled to Holland in 1684 and returned with William III in 1689.

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Rejected the teachings of Renaissance Humanism from a standpoint which combined the empiricism of Newtonian methodology with the systematic structuralism of the Cambridge Platonists' theoloogy. Reformed religious and political thought, educational theory and practice. His application of the physiology of sensation to ethics and politics opened the way to the eighteenth-century "sciences of men". Whereas Bacon had claimed that all knowledge was his province, the more sceptical John Locke set out to inquire into the origin, range and validity of human knowledge. *Epistola de Tolerantia*, (against the abstract universals, and empty words enslaving human minds) 1689; Second and third *Letters Concerning Toleration*, 1690, 1692; *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 1690. Divided into four books I. *Of Innate Notions* II. *Of Ideas*; III. Of Words, and IV. Of Knowledge and Opinion. *Two Treatises of Government*, 1690; *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, 1695; *The Whole History of Navigation*, 1704.

Lovelace, Richard (1618-1658). Cavalier poet, courtier, scholar, musician, translator of Catullus. Imprisoned in 1642 and 1648. His prison poems, *To Althea* (his betrothed) and *To Lucasta* are the best expression of the Cavalier union of love and loyalty. *Lucasta*: epodes, odes, sonnets, songs, to which is added *Amarantha*, a pastoral, 1649.

Lydgate, John (1370-1449). Poet, priest. Received lands and money from his patron, Duke of Gloucester. Later retired to Bury St. Edmunds as a monk. Learned versification from Chaucer. Derivative works, indebted to Guido dele Colonne, Chaucer, Boccaccio, Guillaume de Deguileville, a.o. *The Troy Book* (1412-20) followed by *The siege of Thebes, The Fall of Princes* (1431-9).

Lyly, John (1554-1606). Novelist, poet and dramatist. "A noted wit:" at St. Magdalen, Oxford. M.P. (1589-1601). The creator of an elaborate, artificial style. *Euphues. The Anatomy of Wit*, 1578; *Euphues and His England*, 1580. *Alexander, Campaspe, and Diogenes*, 1584; *Endimion (the man in the moon)*, 1591; *Gallathea*, 1592; *The Woman in the Moon*, 1597 (plays).

Mackenzie, Henry (1745-1831). Novelist and playwright. Red law at the High School and University of Edinburgh, and completed his studies in London. Appointed Attorney for the Crown in Scotland and Controller of Taxes. *The Man of Feeling*, a novel about the sensitive man faring badly in a ruthless society, came out, anonymously, in London in 1771. *The Man of the World* (1773) served as a counter by exposing the self-serving way of dealing with the world. Sentimentalism was Mackenzie's solution to the revolutionary threat from the lower orders, and his tracts were a statement in conservative politics. Edited *The Mirror* (1779-80) and *The Lounger* (1785-7).

Macpherson, James (1736-1796). Scottish poet and translator. A farmer's son, born at Ruthven in Inverness. Went into teaching after his studies at Marischal College (Aberdeen) and at Edinburgh University. *The Highlander* (1758), a poem in heroic couplets, was followed by translations of Gaelic poetry (*Fragments of Ancient Poetry*, 1760), which brought him to the notice of James Beattie and other Edinburgh literati. Funds were raised to support the publication of the Gaelic epic mentioned in his preface. Macpherson published his imitations of the ancient poetry in the Highlands of Scotland as *Fingal: An Ancient Poem* (1762), followed by

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Temora: An Ancient Epic Poem (1763), attributing them to Ossian, a legendary Gaelic bard. The poems became widely popular, not only in Britain but also on the Continent, Napoleon, Goethe and Herder being some of the most famous and professed admirers. In 1805, when the indiscriminating enthusiasm with the past had yielded to a better informed antiquarian spirit, Henry Mackenzie, at the head of a committee, denied the authenticity of Ossian's authorship.

Marlowe, Christopher (1564-1593). Dramatist and poet. B.A. from Cambridge One of the scholarly and versatile dramatists known as the "university wits". Enormously talented, which can be seen in the impressive rhetoric, skilled versification, convincing characterization of powerful human personalities, he was also reputed for many things which cannot be verified: being a member of a secret society of free-thinkers, being a spy or an agent of the secret police. Credited with a warrant of arrest on his name, issued by the time of his death. Died under obscure circumstances in a drunken brawl. *Tamburlaine the Great*, 1590; *The Jew of Malta; Edward II*, 1594; *Dido, The Massacre of Paris.* Narrative verse: *Hero and Leander*, 1598.

Massinger, Philip (1583-1640). Dramatist. Collaborated with John Fletcher, Dekker and others. *The Emperor of the East.* A tragicomedy, 1632.

Middleton, Thomas (1580-1627). Dramatist. Son of a London bricklayer. City chronologer (1620). *The Changeling*, 1622, *A Game at Chess*, 1624. Courtly masques and pageants.

Milton, John (1608-1674). Poet, historian, pamphleteer. Son of a Protestant (disinherited on embracing his creed), who successfully combined prosperous business and a taste of learning and literature. Milton's Latin scholarship made him renowned at Cambridge as well as on the Continent, where he travelled between 1637-39, being introduced to J. P. Manso, Dati, Deodati and other men of letters. In time he abandoned his Presbyterian leanings, moving towards an independent and heretical position, which he expounded in *De Doctrina Christiana*, first published in 1825. Appointed Cromwell's Latin secretary in 1649 (Secretary in Foreign Tongues to the Council of State), a position which he held to the end of the Protectorate, although by 1652 he had probably gone completely blind because of a tumour of the pitulary gland. In 1642 he contracted an unfortunate marriage, which made him support a more lenient legislation on divorce. After the Restoration he spent his life dictating verse to his third wife *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity*, 1629; *L'Allegro and Il Penseroso*, 1632; *Comus*, 1634; *Lycidas*, 1637; *Poems*, 1644; *Paradise Lost*, 1667; *Paradise Regained*, 1671, *Samson Agonistes*, 1671. *Of Prelatical Episcopacy*, 1641; *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, 1643. *Of Education*, 1644; *Areopagitica*, 1644; *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, 1649; *The Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth*, 1660; *The History of Britain*, 1670; *De Doctrina Christiana*, 1825.

More, Henry (1614-1687). Philosopher and poet, member of the circle of Cambridge Platonists. *Platonica*, 1642; *Democritus Platonissans, or an essay upon the infinity of worlds out of Platonic principles* (in verse), 1646; *An Antodote against Atheism, or, An appeal to the natural faculties of the mind of man, whether there be not a God*, 1652.

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More (Morus), Thomas (1477-1535). Humanist, a friend of Erasmus, translator, controversialist. Abandoning Oxford University for Lincoln's Inn in order to become a lawyer. Speaker of the Commons, 1523. Lord Chancellor (1529). A typical New Humanism and Renaissance man, who set a prize on individual worth: studied discourse, fine manners, graceful behaviour whether to peers, family or domestics. Executed for opposing Henry VIII's divorce and for denying the King's headship of the Church. *A Fruitful and Pleasant Work of the New Isle called Utopia,* 1516 in Latin – a fine example of utopian fiction (the description of an ideal commonwealth), ranked by Vives next to the dialogues of Cicero. The English version of Ralph Robinson (1551) is unable to render More's subtle irony in a work urging the reader to reflection rather than to taking immediate practical action. *History of King Richard III* (unfinished), whose dramatic power in laying the scene and characterization was exploited by Shakespeare. *A Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation*, 1553 – a prison work, seeking the "comfort" or consolation of philosophy against the "tribulation" of tyranny. Controversial writings against Tyndale as translator and commentator of the New Testament, More himself being engaged in the translation of the Bible.

Nashe, Thomas (1567-1601). Pamphleteer, novelist and playwright. One of the "University Wits" (B.A. from Cambridge). Anti-Puritanic attitude, bohemian life and sarcastic manner which earned him many enemies. Imprisoned for his *Isle of Dogs*, 1597. Author of a play, *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, jointly with Christopher Marlowe. Author of the first picaresque novel in English: *The Unfortunate Traveller or the Life of Jack Wilton,* 1594.

Newton, Isaac (1642-1727). Scientist. Professor of Mathematics at Cambridge (1669). President of the Royal Society (1703-1728). I Invented the telescope (1668). Promulgated his theory of the law of the attraction of gravity existing between all bodies and varying directly as their masses, inversely as the square of their distance apart (1687.) Knighted (1705). *The Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*, 1687. *Opticks: or a treatise on the reflexions, refractions, inflexions and colours of light, also two treatises of the species of magnitude of curvilinear figures*, 1704.

North, Thomas (1535-1601). Translator. Studied at Lincoln's Inn. Knighted (1591); M.P. for Cambridge (1592). Pensioned by Queen Elizabeth (1601). Translated Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans* (1579) from Amyot's French version, a very influential book among the Elizabethans, who lived by models.

Norton, Thomas (1532-1584). Poet. Lawyer, M.P. Author of the Senecan tragedy of *Gorboduc,* jointly with Thomas Sackville.

Otway, Thomas (1652-1685). Dramatist, poet. Highly successful among his contemporaries, becoming, in the next century, the object of a cult which reached the inflated proportions of a comparison with Shakespeare. *Alcibiades*, 1675; *Don Carlos, Prince of Spain*, 1676; *Venice Preserv'd, or A Plot Discover'd*, 1682 (plays). *Familiar Letters*, 1697

Parnell, Thomas (1679-1718). Irish poet, essayist and divine. A member of the Scriblerus Club. Contributed the essay on Homer to Pope's version of the *Iliad. An*

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Essay on Different Styles of Poetry, 1713. *Poems on Several Occasions,* published posthumously (1721) by Pope.

Parquhar, George (1678-1707). Dramatist. His *Beaux's Stratagem* is a canonical comedy of the Restoration satirical wit, thematizing marriage and class adversities.

Peacock, Thomas Love (1785–1866). Novelist, poet, and critic, a close friend of the Romantics. *The Genius of the Thames. A lyrical poem in two parts*, 18lo; *The Philosophy of Melancholy*, 1812; *Sir Hornbook; or Childe Launcelot's Expedition. A Grammatico-Allegorical Ballad*, 1814; *Rhododaphne: of the Thessalian Spell,* 1818. *Nightmare Abbey* (a novel), 1818.

Peele, George (1558-1596). Dramatist, poet. Ordered out of his father's house on account of his life of dissipation, he supported himself as a playright and as enetertainer of the Polish Prince Palatine.*The Old Wives' Tale* – a comedy, 1595. Pageants

Percy, Thomas (1729-1811). Antiquarian, a pioneer anthropologist. Bishop of Dromore. *Miscellaneous Pieces Relating to the Chinese*, 1762; *Five Pieces of Runic Poetry translated from the Islandic languages*, 1763; *The Song of Solomon, newly translated from the original Hebrew*, 1764; *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, 1765; *Northern Antiquities, or a description of the manners, customs, religion, and laws of the ancient Danes. With a translation of the Edda and other pieces from the ancient Islandic tongue*, 1770; *Ancient Songs, chiefly on Moorish subjects, translated from the Spanish,* 1932.

Pickering, John (1544-1596). Dramatist of passage from the medieval moralities to the popular Elizabethan tragedy: *A New Interlude of Vice Containing the History of Horestes with the Cruel Revenge of His Father's Death upon His One Natural Mother*, 1567.

Pope, Alexander (1688-1744). Poet, translator. Son of a Roman-Catholic linen-draper. Short and crippled, Pope spent his childhood in the country, being privately educated. Introduced by Wycherley into Addison's circle. A member of the Scriblerus Club. The peak of the Augustan movement in a varied range of discourses, from poetics to politics, from economics to ethics, from form to fashion. His cross-discursive practices bring into conjunction various strands of thought: science and philosophy, culture and society, literature and politics His description of the Augustan "soft refinement" and neoclassical taming of the baroque wit is associated, maybe deliberately, with military conquest over France in the *Second Epistle* of the *Imitation of Horace*: *Wit grew polite, and Numbers learn'd to flow* (266). Enjoyed the reputation of the greatest contemporary poet in Europe. His translations of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* sold remarkably well, ensuring him a leisurely existence in the last years of his life, corresponding with his friends and cultivating his garden at Twickenham. *Windsor Forest,* 1704; *An Essay on Criticism*, 1711; *The Rape of the Lock*, 1714; *Eloisa to Abelard*, 1717; *The Dunciad*, 1728; *An Essay on Man*, 1733-1734; *Moral Essays*, 1732-5; *An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*, 1735.

Price, Uvedale (1747-1829). Essayist, theoretician of the picturesque. Illustrated his theories of natural beauty and landscape gardening in the outlay of his estate at Foxley. *An Essay on the Picturesque, as Compared with the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1794-8).

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Puttenham, George (1529-159o). Critic. *The Art of English Poesie,* 1589. Also attributed to his brother, Richard (152o-16ol).

Quarles, Francis (1592-1644). Writer of verse, prose and emblems. Cup-bearer to Princess Elizabeth (1613). *Emblems,* 1635; *Hieroglyphikes of the Life of Man,* 1638 (verse).

Ralegh/Raleigh, Walter (1554-1618). Poet, historian, explorer, politician. The type of Elizabethan courtier. Established the first British colony in America, Virginia. Executed by order of James I on a charge of complicity to a plot and for disobeying his instructions on a gold-hunt voyage to Guiana. *The Discovery of Guiana, 1596; The History of the World,* 1614. *A Discourse of the Original Cause of Natural War with the Misery of Invasive War,* 1650. *The Poems of Sir Walter Raleigh,* 1813.

Richardson, Samuel (1689-176l). Novelist. Made a living in the printing trade, which he entered at the age of seventeen. Earned a reputation on the Continent as well, where he was admired by Rousseau, Lessing, Goldoni a.o. *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded,* 174o; *Clarissa. Or, the History of a Young Lady,* 1748; *The History of Sir Charles Grandison,* 1754.

Sackville, Thomas, lst Earl of Dorset and **Baron Buckhurst (1536-1608).** Poet, man of letters, statesman, barrister. Chancellor of Oxford University. *The Tragedy of Gorboduc,* the first English blank verse tragedy, 1565 (three acts by Thomas Norton, and the two last by Thomas Sackville). The *Induction* and *Complaint of the Duke of Buckingham* in *A Mirour for Magistrates,* completed by William Baldwin and George Ferrers, 1563, augmented in the following editions of 157l, 1574, 1610.

Scott, Walter (177l-1832). Novelist, poet, historian, translator. Called to the Scottish Bar (1729). Journeys into the Lowlands in search of authentic oral versions of the ballads in Percy's *Relics,* which he used to recite as a child. Promoted the foundation of the Tory Quarterly Review (1809). Created baronet (1819). The success of his works was immediate and immense, not only in England but also on the Continent, where translations of his novels would sometimes appear on the same day as the originals. His translations of *Ballads from the German* (1796) and of Geothe's *Gotz von Berlichingen* had important bearings upon the English Romantics. After the crash of the Constable and Ballantyne's printing business, of which he was a partner, he had to work hard to the end of his life to pay off his debts. His "inroads" into Scottish, English and Continental history yield vivid reconstructions, down to the minutest details of costume and environment, teeming with a live and diverse humanity, pasted on a rich emotional canvas. *Lay of the Last Minstrel,* 1805; *Ballads and Lyrical Pieces,* 1806. *Waverley,* 1814; *Guy Mannering or The Astrologer,* 1815; *The Antiquary,* 1816; *Rob Roy,* 1818; *Ivanhoe,* 1819; *Kenilworth,* 1821; *The Fortunes of Nigel,* 1822; *Quentin Durward,* 1823, *Anne of Geierstein,* 1829 *The Life of Napoleon Buonaparte, Emperor of the French,* 9 vols. 1827. *Tales of a Grandfather. Being stories taken from Scotish history,* 1828, *Tales of a Grandfather. Being stories taken from the history of France,* 1831.

Shadwell, Thomas (1642-1692). Dramatist and poet. Open controversies with John Dryden. Never missed an opportunity to dedicate "a congratulatory poem" or "ode" to William of Orange and his wife, Mary: *on His coming into England, upon Her*

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arrival in England, 1689, *on the King's birthday*, 1690, 1692, on the King's *return from Ireland.* He even published one in... Dryden's name: *The Address of John Dryden, Laureate to His Highness the Prince of Orange*, 1689. It was a banter "with a key", the Laureateship going from Dryden to Shadwell in 1688. *The Miser*, 1672; *The Tempest, or the Enchanted Island*, 1674; *The History of Timon of Athens, the Man-Hater*, 1678; *The Lancashire Witches*, 1682 (plays).

Shaftesbury, Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd earl of Shaftesbury (167l-1713). Philosopher whose opinions were, alongside those of Locke and Newton, one of the main shaping influences on the eighteenth-century mind. M.P. A Deist influenced by the Cambridge Platonists. *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, 1711; *Several Letters, Written by a Noble Lord to A Young Man at the University*, 1716; *Second Characteristicks; or, The Language of Forms*, 1914.

Shakespeare, William (1564-1616). Dramatist, poet, actor. A myth growing in time: identified as "the national poet", the soul of England, expressing in his works "the desire for world-order which fabricated the League of Nations" (G. Wilson Knight), even spoken of in religious terms:" If ever a new Messiah is to come, he will come in the name of Shakespeare" (Herman Melville). Little is known about his life, the information which can be deemed from the 1623 first Folio coming from or being confirmed by Ben Jonson. Out of the 37 plays currently attributed to Shakespeare only 16 were anthumously published (quatro editions), the others coming down to us in manuscripts copied by actors, stage directors, full of errors and interpolations. The sixteen years which lapsed from 1644, when the Puritans closed down the theatres to 166o, when they were reopened by Charles II are wrapped in a cloud of oblivion. Only one authoritative image of Shakespeare was available: the copper engraving first printed on the title page of the 1623 first folio. It seems that 147 lines from Sir Thomas Moore were written by his hand –a play to which several dramatists contributed. The parish Holy Trinity Church in Stratford-upon-Avon records his baptism on 26 April 1564. Tradition assigns his birth-date to the twenty-third, as the inscription on the dramatist's tomb reads that he died on 23 April 1616 in his fifty-third year. John Shakespeare, his father, was a tradesman. William attended a free school for some time, which, however, was a superior institution of its kind, the masters holding bachelor's and master's degrees from Oxford University. On 28 November 1582 William Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway of Stratford and on 26 May his first child, Susanna, was born. Between the birth of the twins (Hannet and Judith) and the first reference to Shakespeare in London (1592) the documentary record is virtually blank. He might have joined one of the touring companies – Leicester's, Warwick's or the Queen's – that played at Stratford in the eighties. By 1592 he had established himself in the London theatre world as actor and playwright, successful and envied by fellow-dramatists, as it can be inferred from Robert Greene's venomous attack. In 1598, when the Lord Chamberlain's Men pulled down the regular playhouse, The Theatre (the first playhouse built in 1576, with James Burbage as leader of the company), and used the timber to erect The Globe, Shakespeare entered a form of proprietorship which entitled him to a tenth percentage of the profit. In the royal patent by which the

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Lord Chamberlain's Men (Earl of Leicester) became, in 1603, The King's Men, Shakespeare's name appeares near the head of the list. He made a nice income which enabled him to buy the Great House of New Place, the second largest in Stratford. By 1613 he had retired to Stratford, living there as if Shakespeare had never existed. *I, II, III Henry VI* (1589-91); *Richard III,* 1592-3; *The Comedy of Errors, The Taming of the Shrew,* 1593-4; *The Two Gentlemen of Verona; Love's Labour's Lost, 1594-5; Romeo and Juliet, Richard II, A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595-96); *King John; The Merchant of Venice,* 1596-97; *I,II Henry IV,* 1597-8; *Much Ado About Nothing, Henry V; The Merry Wives of Windsor,* 1598-9; *Julius Caesar, As You Like It, Twelfth Night,* 1599-1600; *All's Well that Ends Well; Othello,* 1602-3; *Measure for Measure,* 1603-4; *Timon of Athens,* 1604-5; *King Lear, Macbeth,* 1605-6; *Antony and Cleopatra,* 1606-7; *Coriolanus,* 1607-8; *Pericles,* 1608-9; *Cymbeline,* 1609-10; *The Winter's Tale,* 1610-l; *The Tempest,* 1611-2. *Henry VIII,* 1612-3. Shakespeare may, however, have contributed to it, as well to a number of other plays: *Cardenio, Two Noble Kinsmen, Sir Thomas More.* Three pages in the manuscript of this last play have been claimed to be in Shakespeare's hand, and so have half a dozen signatures. There are doubts about Shakespeare's authorship of certain parts of *Pericles* and *Titus Andronicus,* and of *Henry VIII,* which is not included in all editions of Shakespeare's complete works. Poems: *Venus and Adonis,* 1592-3; *The Rape of Lucrece, 1593-4; The Passionate Pilgrim, 1599; The Phoenix and the Turtle, 1601; Shakespeare's Sonnets, 1609.*

Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft (1797-185l). Novelist. Daughter of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft and Shelley's second wife. Dedicated herself to editing his works after his death. *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus, 1818; Valperga, 1823; The Lst Man, 1826; The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck, 183o; Falkner, 1837; Tales and Stories, 189l.* Travel notes, letters, a poem on Shelley's death *(The Choice).*

Shelley, Percy Bysshe (1792-1822). Expelled from Oxford for his pamphlet *The Necessity of Atheism* (18ll). In the same year eloped with Harriet Westbrook. In 1815 left England with Mary Godwin. Drowned in Italy. *Queen Mab,* 1813; *Alastor,* 1816; *Revolt of Islam,* 1818; *Lines Written among the Euganaean Hiils,* 1818; *Cenci,* 1819; *Prometheus Unbound,* 1820; *Adonais,* 182l; *Hellas,* 1822; *Julian and Maddalo, Witch of Atlas,* 1824.

Sheridan, Richard Brinsley (175l-1816). Irish dramatist. M.P. and Under-Secretary of State, Privy Councillor and Treasurer of the Navy. *The School for Scandal,* 1780.

Sidney, Philip (1554-1586). Diplomat, courtier poet, novelist and critic. Son of a Lord Deputy of Ireland who became Lord President of Wales, nephew of the Earl of Leicester. Mortally wounded at Zutphen, and died at Arnhem. His works were written between 1580 and 1585, but published posthumously: *Arcadia,* 159o; *Astrophil and Stella,* 1591; *Apologie for Poetrie,* 1595.

Smollett, Tobias George (172l-177l). Scottish novelist. Ship's surgeon, present at the battle of Catagena, 174l. Worked in London as doctor, journalist and novelist. *The Adventures of Roderick Random,* 1748; *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle,* 1751;

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The Adventures of Sir Launcelot Greaves, 1762; *The History and Adventures of an Atom*, 1769; *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker*, 1771.

Southey, Robert (1774-1843). Poet and prose-writer. Converted to Unitarianism and Pantisocracy (the project of an ideal Commonwealth) by Coleridge. Supported himself as translator and journalist at Keswick. Poet Laureate (1813). *The Fall of Robespierre. An historic drama* (jointly with Coleridge). *Joan of Arc*, en epic poem, 1796; *Madoc*, 1805; *Wat Tyler. A dramatic poem,* 1817; *Robin Hood* (a fragment) 1847.

Steele, Richard (1672-1729). Irish essayist and politician. Knighted for political services (1715). Founded the *Tatler* (1709). From 1711 edited the *Spectator* with Addison.

Sterne, Laurence (1713-1768). Novelist. Son of a subaltern stationed in Ireland, of very good stock (his grandfather had been the Archbishop of York), but forced to embrace a military career, as the family estate always went to the first born. A parson at Sutton and Coxwold. *The Life and Opinions of Tristran Shandy, Gentleman,* 1759-67; *Sermons of Yorick,* 1760; *Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*, 1768. *Letters from Yorick to Eliza*, 1773; *Sterne's Letters to His Friends on Various Occasions, 1775.*

Surrey, Henry Howard, Earl of (1517-1547). Poet. Earl Marshal at Anne Boleyn's trial (1536). Translated *The Aeneid* (Books II and III) in blank verse (unrhymed enjambed pentameters), the first in English. Modified Wyatt's form of the sonnet, creating the sonnet form later used by Shakespeare (three quatrains rhyming abab and a final couplet). *Songs and Sonnets* by Lord Henry Howard and others, 1557.

Swift, Jonathan (1667-1745). Irish novelist, poet and pamphleteer. Dryden's cousin. Secretary to Sir William Temple who, as ambassador to the Hague, had brought about the marriage of William of Orange and Mary. Dean of St Patrick's Dublin, 1713. *Battle of the Books, A Tale of a Tub*, 1704; *Bickerstaff Papers*, 1708-9; *Meditation upon a Broomstick*, 1710; *Drapier Letters*, 1724-5; *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World. By Lemuel Gulliver, first a surgeon, and then a captain of several ships*, 1726. *Poetical Works,* 1736. *Journal to Stella*, 1710-1713.

Tourneur, Cyril (1575-1626). Poet and dramatist, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, 1607.

Traherne, Thomas (1637-1674). Metaphysical poems and prose writings on religious topics.

Tyndale, William (1494-1536). Translator of the Bible. Took Holy Orders. Contacted Luther in Wittenberg. (1534). Translated the New Testament from Greek and the *Pentateuch* and the *Book of Jonah* from the Hebrew. *The King James Bible* (The Authorized Version of 1611) is largely based upon Morus and Tyndale.

Udall, Nicholas (1505-1556). Dramatist, scholar and headmaster of Eton and Westminster. Fellow of Corpus Christi, Oxford. *Ralph Roister Doister*, 1553

Vaughan, Henry (1622-1695). Anglo-Welsh metaphysical poet, interested in hermetic, alchemical and other esoteric doctrines. Known as the Silurist poet, because Brecknockshire, the place of his birth, was formerly inhabited by the Silures, an ancient British tribe. Studied law and medicine. *Silex Scintillans*, 1650.

Walpole, Horace, 4th earl of Oxford (1717-1797). Novelist, letter-writer, editor, printer. M.P. Son of Sir Robert Walpole, the first Prime Minister. Bought Strawberry Hill

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(1747), which he outfitted in Gothic style. Founded the Gothic horror school with his *Castle of Otranto*, 1764. Miscellaneous work in verse and prose.

Whetstone, George (1544-1587). Author of prose romances, poems, plays, morallizing discourses. A soldier to the Low Countries (1574). A member of Sir Humphrey Gilbert's expedition to Newfoundland (1578-9). *George Gascoigne, Esq.*, 1578; *Promos and Cassandra*, 1578; *Sir Nicholas Bacon*, 1579. *A Mirror for Magistrates of Cities*, 1584; *The Honourable Reputation of a Soldier*, 1585; *The English Mirror*, 1586.

Wollstonecraft, Mary (Godwin) (1759-1797). Novelist, essayist and educationist, vindicating women's rights. Kept a school with her sister. Married William Godwin and died giving birth to their daughter, Mary (Shelley's future wife). *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, 1787; *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, 1794; *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution*, 1794. *The Wrongs of Women, or Maria* (unfinished novel), 1798.

Wordsworth, William (1770-1850). Poet, born in the Lake District. French tour (1791-2). In love with the French Revolution and with a Parisian woman by whom he had an illegitimate daughter, whom he recognized. Disappointed with the Revolution after the "Reign of Terror", ended up a Tory supporter. Moved to Alfoxden to be near Coleridge (1797) with whom he planned the *Lyrical Ballads* but lived at Grasmere for the greatest part of his life. Succeeded Southey as Poet Laureate (1843). *Lyrical Ballads* (with Coleridge), 1798 (with *Preface*, 1800); *Poems*, 1807, 1815,1845; *The Excursion*, 1814; *Peter Bell; The Wagoner*, 1819; *Sonnets on the River Duddon*, 1820; *The Prelude* (written 1799-1805), 1850.

Wyatt, Thomas (1503-1542). Poet, diplomat. Got in touch with the European Renaissance during his embassies in Italy, France and Spain. Borrowed and adapted the Petrarchan sonnet. Together with Surrey he created the Elizabethan sonnet (five rhymes and a concluding couplet). Translations of Plutarch and David's psalms. His songs and sonnets got into print in Tottel's *Miscellany* in 1557.

Young, Edward (1683-1765). Poet, essayist and divine. Fellow of All Souls. *The Complaint: or Night Thoughts on Life, Death, and Immortality*, 1747. *Conjectures on Original Composition in a letter to the author of* Sir Charles Grandison, 1759.

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The new literary history realigns history and aesthetics, exploring the way style develops as an indicator of historical change in the manifold of culture, history and aesthetics. Each main division in the history of English literature from the origins to the present will focus four aspects: a) historical mapping revealing negotiations between literary texts, and non-literary discourses (social, scientific, political, philosophical, etc.) as contexts of culture; b) epistemological frames and tropes supporting the idea of cultural dialogue in a comparative discussion of writings from different periods or "schools"; 3) structural and functional aspects: generic conventions, authority structures, architecturality; 4) genealogy of representations (gendered, classed, and raced) and the historically shifting conditions of their dissemination and reception (including the politics of canon formation).

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