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The Burning Oracle

STUDIES IN THE POETRY OF ACTION

By G. WILSON KNIGHT

Chancellors' Professor of English at
Trinity College, Toronto

Thou true sun!
The burning oracle of all that live,
As fountain of all life, and symbol of
Him who bestows it . . .

Sardanapalus, II. i

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PREFACE

THE assessment of obligations in literary analysis is never easy, but I hope my text will be found to suggest the necessary acknowledgements. A more important, because more deeply rooted, debt may be emphasized here. My liking for Pope was awakened by listening to Prof. D. Nichol Smith's lectures at Oxford in 1922; and his reading of certain passages lingers with me still.

In giving detailed references I have steered a middle course, offering them where, after a balance of considerations, it seemed advisable. Oxford editions have been used for Spenser and Milton (with, however, a transcription to modern spelling), Swift, Byron, and Marlowe. References to Pope follow the Globe edition, but Prof. G. Sherburn's 'Selections' (T. Nelson & Sons, New York), together with its admirable introduction, has proved helpful.

The chapter headings are intended to facilitate the reading of each essay by an underlining of central arguments. As for my main title, a close attention to all 'sun' tonings (of which, however, I have aimed at no outstanding emphasis) will, I hope, indicate at once a relevance and a unity.

G. WILSON KNIGHT

CHELTENHAM, *August* 1938.

I have now read Mr. Geoffrey Tillotson's excellent study of Pope's literary technique. Mr. Tillotson has, I find, already referred Iago's couplets to those of Pope, though without my own emphasis on rhythmic identity. A previously, and anonymously, published section of Mr. Tillotson's book appears to have given me a point in discussion of Pope's phraseology. There are, I think,

no other clashes, since our aims are different. I take this opportunity of recommending recent books on Shakespeare by Mr. D. A. Traversi and Mr. Narayana Menon, which have impressed me with the keenness of their insight; and of calling attention to the important news of Mr. Mark van Doren's forthcoming study.

Finally, I would record my gratitude to Mr. Charles Williams for valuable criticism whilst my book was going through the press.

G. W. K.

TORONTO, *April*, 1939

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I

THE SPENSERIAN FLUIDITY

THROUGH Spenser Elizabethan England first becomes fully vocal. His frequent excess, though sometimes deplorable, is of the stuff nevertheless that fills the mould of *Twelfth Night* and *Othello*. He offers a fountain of Elizabethanism, neat. Ideals of Queen-worship and courtiership (in his admiration of Sidney especially clear) are strong in him; also an English flowery pastoralism entwined with Greek mythology; and continual sensuous love-awareness. He is both national and lyric. Part of his life a civil servant in Ireland, he aspired to be more, and his disappointment has left certain poetic records of satiric bitterness. But failure did not stifle his more vivid apprehensions. It is that more positive and characteristic quality I shall emphasize.

The Shepherd's Calendar shows a typical profusion, an up-gushing of poetic life. Each eclogue is a miniature lyric playlet, the sequence patterned on the procession of the twelve months. Spenser is self-consciously English, acknowledging Chaucer and attempting to repudiate other, especially continental, sources. Hellenic mythology is, as in Lyly, a natural expression for a native voice. From out a medley-setting of Theocritus and an English spring, Queen Elizabeth is hymned with extravagant praise and shower-garlanded with a stanza of flowers. One of E. K.'s notes (to *April*) is valuable:

> So that by Pan is here meant the most famous and victorious king, her highness' Father, late of worthy memory, King Henry the Eighth. And by that name, ofttimes (as hereafter appeareth) be noted kings and mighty potentates: and in some place Christ himself, who is the very Pan and god of shepherds.

Notice the close texture of Greek mythology, Christianity, and the throne of England. *The Shepherd's Calendar* is

both delicately autobiographical and allegorically allusive: 'By the kid may be understood the simple sort of the faithful and true Christians' (E. K.'s note to *May*). The Roman Catholic Church, Gabriel Harvey, Spenser's own love-affair, appear in turn and in fancy dress. The close-entwining of royalistic and heraldic meanings within the flower-stanza of *April* has been skilfully analysed by Miss Janet Spens. Red and white roses bind civil warfare into an offering to Tudor supremacy, a miniature forecast of Shakespeare's long historic succession that culminates in *Henry VIII*. Subtlety and complexity of symbolic or allegoric suggestion is enmeshed in the contemporary and actual fact or event, whether of the poet's own life or the nation's. Contemporary reference is native to the Elizabethan mind. Abstractions are not, as in medieval literature, allowed dictatorial rights over it: they are twisted into a close texture of a new sort. To the Elizabethan poet the ideal is incarnated and at hand; politically in the Queen, personally in his own love. Neither the medieval nor the modern distinction between the actual and the imaginative can properly be supposed to exist.

Inspection of Spenser's four *Hymns* illustrates the humanistic Eros-cult which is his belief-core, and, indeed, almost central to Renaissance poetry. From them we can pass to *The Faery Queen*.

The *Hymn in Honour of Love* addresses its deity with all the fervour of a pagan worshipper: the love being, of course, of the sexual-romantic kind. His Eros is a 'great godhead', 'thou mighty god of love', 'great god of might that reignest in the mind'—a phrase neatly pointing a recognition of psychological sovereignty. The analogy is frequent: 'sovereign king', 'sovereign lord of all', 'lord of truth and loyalty', 'victor of gods, subduer of mankind'. There is stress on love's power: yet the god is at heart gentle, inspiring a 'gentle fury', taming lions and tigers. It is, indeed, that first creative force playing on chaos (the Holy Spirit of Genesis); and with Venus, beauty-goddess, life-former, blending all four elements in harmony. Notice

the replacing of Biblical by Hellenic deities. Spenser distinguishes his ideal from lust: it rather appeals to man's 'immortal mind', is a matter of 'eternity' and 'beauty'. Such Platonic intuitions would perhaps silence too glibly a profound problem. Yet Spenser does not shirk the unrest of an unsatisfied aspiration which drives men to distraction through 'enravished' sight of a divine excellence, till 'all other bliss seems vain'. That is, he realizes its tragic quality. He realizes the attendant evils, plunging the lover in 'hell', especially that worst monster jealousy that turns 'all love's delight to misery'; which forecasts *Othello* as the greater part of the poem recalls *Love's Labour's Lost* and other kindred Shakespearian imaginations. The whole is heavily charged with light imagery. There is, indeed, too facile and adjectival a use of it. A line such as 'the flaming light of that celestial fire' illustrates an extreme of what is here an habitual overstress, almost a technical vice. There is not enough housing of his fire in continually new, concrete, shapes. But the experience transmitted is clear. The poem ends in flowery delight and with a prayer that the lover may, after his pains, attain paradise:

> Then would I sing of thine immortal praise
> An heavenly hymn such as the angels sing,
> And thy triumphant name then would I raise
> 'Bove all the gods, thee only honouring,
> My guide, my God, my victor, and my king . . . .

His adoration is theologically uncompromising.

The Hymn to *Beauty* is similar, and especially Platonic. Christian thought is present, but his goddess is none the less 'Cyprian Queen' with 'sovereign might'. This beauty it is of 'goodly pattern' that ignites love, a 'light', a 'lively fire' shining in a face and darting 'amorous desire' into the beholder's soul. The inwardness and physical transcendence of it is argued from our not falling in love with pictures or natural scenery: that is, the beauty which inspires love must involve vitality. Human beauty

outwardly seen as 'white and red', 'golden wire', 'sparkling stars' must fade, but not so the spirit-fire moulding that physical form in its likeness. Spenser does not altogether shirk the crucial problem of beauty of face joined to evil of soul; but neither does he solve it. He again waxes fierce against 'that hellish fire-brand disloyal lust' (observe the allegiance-metaphor); as well he may, since it is the main reason why the cult of Eros has not ages ago been royally established. The trust is, however, finally in the true lover, who sees more profoundly than others, admires 'a more refined form', in a sense focusing 'the mirror of his own thought': an act of knowledge channelling full subjective instincts. A reciprocity is set up between lovers' eyes:

> For lovers' eyes more sharply sighted be
> Than other men's, and in dear love's delight
> See more than any other eyes can see,
> Through mutual receipt of beames bright . . . .

It is a revelation, a 'dawning day'. Something is created, or apprehended. This sense of the significance of lovers' eyes is paralleled in Lyly and Shakespeare. Spenser ends his *Hymn in Honour of Beauty* with more regal touches: 'thy great majesty', 'great sovereign', 'great goddess of my life'. It is a force that 'can restore a damned wight from death'. It could scarcely be more highly honoured.

The two Heavenly Hymns parallel and complement these. The four together neatly balance opposing principles in the Elizabethan mind. Miss Janet Spens observes that the *Hymn of Heavenly Love* describes a downward giving rather than an upward reaching: *Agape* rather than *Eros*. It is, as Father E. C. Le Bel has shown, a fairly direct transcription of Christian doctrine. Love starting from the Father begets the Son: from them is derived the Holy Spirit. Spenser phrases also as best he can the illimitable bright splendours of angelic life, stress falling on the infinite and, as before, on light. He

discusses the Fall, Incarnation, and Redemption. King-imagery, as before, is frequent: 'high heaven's king', 'sovereign might'. Christ is 'eternal king of glorie' with 'sovereign bounty' and 'sovereign mercy'. The Hymn ends with exhortations to rise above lesser loves to Christ, couched in the usual blaze of fire-imagery and Platonic excitement. Although the reverse movement and explicit doctrine here contradicts the earlier pagan aspirations, they remain only part of the poetry. In so far as we attend to the massed impressions, the substance appears not so very different. It is characteristically Platonic, characteristically scintillant. Spenser's explicit repudiation of his former 'lewd lays' while offering to sing of 'true love' for a change is quite possibly an artistic device rather than an autobiographical confession of conversion. The Elizabethan poet was not, normally, convertible: since both terms of the opposition are with him quite comfortably together from the start, and to the end. This exact balance is what the four *Hymns* in turn express. The Elizabethan is only doing on purpose what many poets since have done by instinct: that is, aiming to eat his cake and have it too. This is often a poetic necessity.

Poetry cannot be entirely theological and transcendental. God must be continually imagined in ever new materialist terms: as some sort of 'sovereign', 'high eternal power', 'maker', or, in the Hymn to *Beauty*, 'this world's great work-master'. In the fourth hymn, especially, Spenser has a neat problem: how to sing of that Beauty which essentially transcends nature? What, anyway, do we mean by 'eternal', 'divine', 'spiritual'? The concrete quality of poetry cannot rest content with such abstractions. The same road is taken by poet after poet: his whole mind-structure being naturalistic and yet his aim being, at the limit, transcendent, he focuses a reality best termed 'universalistic'. The holistic tendencies of poetry are well seen in such instances.

So we are asked to look on the frame 'of this wide

universe', and thence to dream others 'infinite in largeness'. We are told of 'endless perfectness' and 'infinite delight'. Space-ideas are expanded:

> First th' Earth, on adamantine pillars founded,
> Amid the Sea engirt with brazen bands;
> Then th' Air still flitting, but yet firmly bounded
> On every side, with piles of flaming brands,
> Never consum'd nor quench'd with mortal hands;
> And last, that mighty shining crystal wall
> Wherewith He hath encompassed this All.

Contemplation of the universe rather than 'nature', of *Antony and Cleopatra* rather than *King Lear*, is the way to divine apprehension, spurning earth:

> Air more than water, fire much more than air,
> And heaven than fire appears more pure and fair.

Though all elements are finally transcended, the Heavenly Beauty is imaged frequently as a sun. We are to concentrate on the 'king' and 'queen' of the sky who 'the heavens' empire sway'. 'King' and 'sun', as so often, touch metaphorically: 'their Captain's flaming head' is a good phrase. There are many regal suggestions—'the glorious face of the divine eternal Majesty', the 'sovereign Powers and Potentates' which are said to contain 'all mortal Princes and imperial states'. This Beauty is a 'majesty divine' compared with which Sun and Moon are dark, itself a 'bright sun of glory'. Therefore throw yourself humbly 'before the footstool of his Majesty'. His 'throne' is built on eternity, his 'sceptre' is righteousness. Sapience is his queen, 'the sovereign darling of the Deity', she is 'clad like a queen in royal robes', on her head is set 'a crown of purest gold', all is 'subjected to her power imperial'. 'Beauty sovereign', 'sovereign praises', 'sovereign light'—the poem is dense with royalistic impressions and imagery, perhaps over-insistent, of sun and fire.

What Spenser is doing should be clear enough. To read any absolute division into the two halves of the

sequence is to read that sequence as something other than poetry. His impressionism remains constant, and though this is not the whole of his poetry it is a great part of it. The human is first seen as divine; the divine is later imaged in close human, and in Sapience feminine, terms. At one extreme there are sexual, at the other Christian, apprehensions. They are different-coloured beads threaded on the one golden string twined of royalistic and fire-impressions intertwisted with a Platonic idealism. This balance in opposition or synthesis of Christian and erotic feeling is vital throughout Renaissance and post-Renaissance poetry. Only less interesting is the close relation, almost equation, of kingship and personal aspiration. A king is, as it were, a super-self, and the term may be used to suggest a super-apprehension, or its object. It blends naturally into a sense of the divine, being soaked in centuries of sacramental feeling.

In *The Faery Queen* Spenser seems to have taken all poetic impressionism as his province. It is stocked with folk-lore, myth, and legend of all sorts and crammed with influences Italian, medieval, classical. Especially is his poem rich in pagan lore. His metaphysic of fertility and creation is often rather pagan and naturalistic than Christian, with sense of reincarnation rather than resurrection. It is more a storehouse for poets of the future than itself a poem. In this, if in no other sense, he is the poets' poet, and a study of *The Faery Queen* in great detail should help any one who finds Mr. Colin Still's interpretation of *The Tempest* in terms of ancient legendary and ritualistic correspondences a fantastic conception. Behind all our poetry there is a communal store of semi-consciously possessed legendary material: Spenser seems to have possessed it consciously. As so often, the Elizabethan is fully aware, his mind flooded, where later poets rely on mysterious, not-to-be-accounted-for promptings, controlled or otherwise, from unconsciousness.

But *The Faery Queen* is not concerned mainly with ancient recollections: it is supremely Elizabethan as well.

Its forked meanings are clear from Spenser's own statement:

> In that Faery Queen I mean glory in my general intention, but in my particular I conceive the most excellent and glorious person of our soveraine the Queen, and her kingdom in Faery Land. And yet in some places else I do otherwise shadow her. . . .

A neat statement of the universal and particular in poetic blend: though so tight and exact a fusion as is suggested applies more generally to the work of Lyly than that of Spenser, whose significances are often arbitrary and laxly related; as, indeed, his final phrase suggests. But he is throughout more than a fancy-poet, and also more than a medieval allegorist, though both these he certainly is too. He builds a nationalist and royalist purpose into the scheme. It is 'the eulogy of a patriot addressing a united people', writes Prof. B. E. C. Davis, 'the nearest approach to a national epic in the cycle of English poetry'. He suggests that the constitution of Spenser's Faery Land presents a happy medium between monarchy and oligarchy that reflects 'in vague outline' the commonwealth of Tudor England. The poem is dedicated to the Queen, who, as Gloriana, is supposed to dominate. In the introduction to Book II there is praise of the Queen; reference to recent explorations and discoveries; and a final sense of mystery and magic in the immediate and actual projected into the equation of England and Faery Land under the 'fairest Princesse under sky'. The Queen's chastity, so often found to make a neat blend in the Elizabethan mind of its two dominating positives—royalistic splendour and sexual excellence of one divine sort or another—is to be related elsewhere to Belphoebe; as also, in point of justice, she is 'shadowed' by Mercilla. Similarly, Prince Arthur is, we are told, Leicester; though here the 'general intention' seems more important than the particular. His 'magnificence' is the Renaissance ideal in full show. Says Spenser:

> The general end therefore of all the book is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline.

Not, be it noted, to make a saint. The search for eternal truth (Una), the supplanting of outward deceitful semblances (Archimago and Duessa) are aspects of the humanistic ideal: not vice versa. Again,

> So in the person of Prince Arthur I set forth magnificence in particular, which virtue for that (according to Aristotle and the rest) it is the perfection of all the rest, and containeth in it them all, therefore in the whole course I mention the deeds of Arthur applyable to that virtue, which I write of in that book.

That holiness would not have been one of Aristotle's 'virtues' need not trouble us. Renaissance poets try to *include* Christianity in a new humanistic comprehension. This is their poetic instinct, whatever their occasional explicit religious assertions. With them, the present and actual incarnates the divine: from that sense is born their poetry. This is seen equally in their royalistic and their erotic perceptions: which two are not, finally, distinct. And both are blended with Christianity rather than subject to it.

Besides the specifically ancient or contemporary there are essences everywhere of the universal and timeless. I mean the vivid naturalism and imagistic grace, the luscious stanzaic woodlands and glades of impressionism and event, the featuring of beasts and people, good or evil; of lovely life and hideous fears; the use of cosmic forces, sun or earth; of the seasons; of night and day; death and life in interdependence; and of divine purposes generally.

Nevertheless the poem is, as a whole, unsatisfying. It claims more than it fulfils. The various knights and their quests are surely too shadowy, too slightly distinguished and objectified. And, even if they were not, the dominating and binding presences of Gloriana and Arthur do not dominate and bind as they ought. It is difficult to feel the poem as a whole: and would be even if it were finished. You get a vague quality, not a structure, from it. And this is partly because the symbolic technique is faulty. Although Spenser attempts to inweave his general thinking with the national life of his day, yet, faced by his vast

self-proposed scheme, he falls back on a medievalistic allegory which he never quite controls. When one of his monsters vomits pamphlets we are shocked: too much realism in the beast's creation renders his deeper significance ludicrous—that is, the blend of allegory with realism is not here properly performed. He misses symbol of the more profound sort: I mean that incarnation of significance in fictional person (or beast) so exactly true that every bend of the mould fits, in its degree, the desired shape of the contained fluid. Spenser's moulds are themselves undisciplined and variable. Dante had his rigid theological beliefs and the medieval allegorists normally started with some precise and ruling intellectual structure. Shakespeare has his realism, his unswerving sense of the way things happen, as well as his sources. Spenser has no such discipline: there is nothing to stop his poem going on for ever, and, worm-like, its organic perfection suffers little from its having been chopped off half-way. It is true that in Shakespeare various meanings can be drawn from one symbolic figure: Caliban, for example. But Caliban is first a unit. 'This is the law of symbolism', writes Mr. Charles Williams in discussion of Spenser, 'that the symbol must be utterly itself before it can properly be a symbol.' Whatever Caliban may mean, he is first Caliban, a rounded artistic whole. Spenser's significances are flat: and however many flatnesses are superimposed you do not create a multifacial globe. One sees in his work a transition between old-style allegory and a more rounded symbolism. He is struggling for it. He talks well of 'general' and 'particular' intentions, but in the completed result these are not tied up in a tight knot, it is all loose. His seeming complexity is thus never a complex profundity.

Therefore the main plan, it seems, is a magnificent failure. Yet this does not preclude excellence in its parts. Its national, religious, and social implications are probably weaker than those personal and psychological. But these are often exquisite.

The poem is concerned heavily with man's erotic and

sensuous nature, the problem of good and bad love. 'Love', writes Prof. Davis, 'lies at the very foundation of Spenser's cosmos.' And again: 'Love is a cardinal motive in all his poetry.' In his valuable study *The Allegory of Love* Mr. C. S. Lewis has well analysed Spenser's meticulous impressionism in conveying states of decadent and healthy sex-instincts. In the Bower of Bliss there is stress on idleness, artificiality ('metal ivy'), eye-lust, and excessively conscious sex-appeal, as with the bathing nymphs:

> Then suddenly both would themselves unhele,
> And th' amorous sweet spoiles to greedy eyes reveal.
> (II. xii. 64)

In contrast, the Garden of Adonis offers nature rather than art, frank sex-intercourse and a stress on creation. The naked graces at VI. x are, comments Mr. Lewis, 'engaged in doing something worth doing'—namely, dancing in a ring 'in order excellent'. Mr. Lewis analyses another related and tricky opposition: of passionate yet adulterous love, persistent in medieval poetry, to married faithfulness. The end and aim of the sex-substances in *The Faery Queen* seems to be this marriage-ideal: a thought with manifold implications for the study of Elizabethan drama. So 'chastity to him means Britomart, married love'. The 'romance of marriage' ousts the 'romance of adultery'.

We must, therefore, not complain too readily that Spenser's attractive evils, in the Bower of Bliss for example, prove him a dangerous moralist. Rather he is at work on a very subtle problem. True, certain stanzas may suggest a failure, such as we find in *Comus*, to be sure about his own judgements. But then he is not sure: which, of course, may be an artistic limitation. Mr. Lewis writes: 'The Bower of Bliss is not a place even of healthy animalism, or indeed of activity of any kind.... It is a picture, one of the most powerful ever printed, of the whole sexual nature in disease.' The attraction—and the accompanying descriptions are often attractive—is part of the disease, and the

problem as old as the Garden of Eden. It is similarly insistent in Marlowe and Milton; though there is no touch of it in Lyly or Shakespeare. The puritan, whether Spenser or Milton, opposes, as did D. H. Lawrence, not a physical instinct but an insidious mind-perversion from which few of us can claim complete freedom. It is the enjoyment of an idea rather than a reality: and ideas can have an attractive intensity no reality quite touches. For properly to act and live an experience the mind must be subdued, dissolved, itself unpossessing. Creative things are often accomplished half-aware; while excessive awareness tends to the immoral. Nevertheless, something, some intensity of perception, may perhaps be known in the very mental twist of such evil, some sense of the very life-fire not known otherwise, depending partly on the very breaking of conventional codes, whatever they be; an enjoyment of daring, parasitic on traditional principles. In so far as we describe or imagine an ultimate paradise, where neither creativeness nor ethical codes are properly relevant, a degree of essential freedom may again be helpful, if only to suit the perversions of our minds. Both the Bower of Bliss and the Garden of Adonis have their rights: and maybe this is why Spenser allows so much exquisite description, involving, for example, bird-song, to accompany temptation. The problem is obscure. We shall meet it again in study of Milton.

Spenser's puritanism is, in one sense, a sex-flooded thing. In the Garden of Adonis we hear: 'Frankly each paramour his leman knows' (III. vi. 41)—which is not true of the Bower of Bliss. The Temple of Venus is a place of 'joy and amorous desire' (IV. x. 38) where, writes Prof. Davis, 'every object serves to stimulate passion and the instinct to reproduce, unchecked by moral or religious scruple'. Again, 'No moral law or religious inhibition mars the "sweet love" and "goodly merriment" of the Garden of Adonis, the "spotless pleasures" and unbridled hedonism of Venus' isle.' This is Spenser's central hope: untainted creative joy outside and beyond the world of good and evil,

from a Shakespearian height where the Bower of Bliss will perhaps appear an insubstantial rather than an evil dream. The continual search for truth and reality, the supplanting of impostors and righting of erroneous choice, is an aspect of our problem. The deceits of lust correspond to deceptive occurrences: though these may have ecclesiastical references, there are psychological ones too. Spenser's humanism asserts that virtue is finally the only realism: a fulfilment of nature, not a thwarting of it. This he knows, and describes, yet does not, like Shakespeare, reveal.

For his poem does not quite live the gospel it preaches. It lacks architectonic strength. It is fluid. Of the two qualities needed, that of a time-sequence and a strong, controlling, spatial design, it valuably possesses only the first. Its spatialized scheme, though vast, is insubstantial. Exquisite descriptions of human art and various rich solids are frequent; but the poem as a whole has neither architectural stability nor solid richness. There is an addition of image to image, of verbal music to verbal music, a diffusion rather than concentration, an essentially stanzaic sequence, but no complex intertwisted multiplication of significances. There are modifying contrasts, but no dramatic intensity. Often Spenser seems more interested in his abstract doctrines than his created world; or, if his world grips him, he seems to forget, for a stanza or two, his message, which is temporarily smothered by the luxuriant impressionism. The very nature of his creation, that is, changes indecisively. Aristotle's idea that the constructing of a weighty central plot is a greater art than characterization or rhetoric comes to mind. Spenser's fluid, shifting significances make a boneless, piecemeal work. There is a lack of tough moral fibre in his constructional technique. Any amount of things happen, but you get slight sense of vital action. It is a dream-world, a 'faery' world, perilously near decadence. It is sensuous, yet unreal. Miss Janet Spens writes that 'he never deals so much with the sensuous fact as with the mental translation

of the fact—with the use which the soul's faculty makes of the impact and stir of the physical sensation; and he is more excited by the infinitely various web which man has woven to adorn and clothe the physical universe than by the simple physical facts themselves'. She notes elsewhere that the root evil in Spenser's world is the medieval *accidie*: that is, sloth, melancholia, inactivity. If this be true, there is an interesting relation between the poem's technical weakness and those sensuous and mental errors the poet so skilfully diagnoses. *The Faery Queen* is an eye-feast, an ear-feast, a mind-feast: but it is not a shared action, it is without dramatic suspense. People do things, but at a distance, like figures on a tapestry. It is hard to feel events in relation to the whole. There is really no organic heart. Though Gloriana and Arthur are meant as such, they do not so function, do not receive from the whole action and pump back living significances. Consequently the body-structure lacks organic warmth. It tends to split, dissolve: the whole into books, books into cantos, cantos into events, events into descriptive luxuriance. The proper organic process is reversed. To compare it with a contemporary—in Sackville's Prologue to *The Mirror for Magistrates* you get at least fine separate imaginate blocks (death, hell, Buckingham) in whose service images are powerfully used, thronging all their joint force into each little whole. Even in Spenser's shorter movements each whole is liable to obscurity by its parts. It is less than the sum of its parts. Instead of building up and cohering, the poem is thus always decomposing. Its finest units, being so independently fine, are, even if in themselves organic, rich rather with a cancerous and upstart vitality, drawing attention from that whole they should serve. Hence the baggy, bulgy, loose effect, the fluidity. 'Flowing water', writes Miss Spens, 'always fascinated Spenser.' Naturally. And this corresponds to a sensuousness relaxed, an immorality of technique, which just misses conviction, is over-mentalized and all but decadent. Spenser may explicitly favour his Garden of

Adonis, with its seething and creative upsurge of life: but we must go elsewhere for that. *The Faery Queen* is itself one vast Bower of Bliss.

That is, it may be, an overstatement. I admit that I do not feel at home here. Possibly, were the poem complete and I had it in all detail and as a whole thoroughly comprehended, its design might appear satisfactory and its parts duly contributory. But it is very difficult to reach this, and difficult in a sense that the full mental possession of Dante's poem is not. Spenser asks, and I think has undertaken, too much. It is, after all, a transition poem. It aims at an epic or medieval-heroic manner not deeply suitable to his age. Greek tragedy stands between us and Homer; the New Testament between us and Vergil; and Shakespeare between us and the *Morte D'Arthur*. The dramatic and complex continually supervene on the epic and adventurous. A new dimension of significance interwoven with every action is, in the Renaissance world especially, urgent for expression. Spenser's poem has no *active* meaning, is not dramatically alive, because he has not found the sort of action he believes in: action which, as in Shakespeare, is newly created, not a legendary reminiscence of a past chivalry. Greek tragedy and the New Testament are both powerfully realistic and metaphysical. Spenser's story is usually unworthy of his thought, of his metrical and stanzaic skill, of his impressionistic profusion. The action, as such, is weak.

True, Spenser with his subtle and comprehensive designing and his intention of a Gloriana and Arthur centrality attempts the typical patterning and dominant, fusing symbol that so often lend meaning and power to long works. He has the idea, but his vast scheme is too unwieldy. Many Shakespearian essences, moreover, are here. The heritage of the ages is combined with a contemporary royalism; human instinct, and especially Renaissance sensuousness, subtly analysed; pagan and Christian mythology entwined. Shakespeare's political thinking is forecast. I quote again from Prof. Davis: 'The

national pests disfiguring the land of Faery—Error, Deceit, Tyranny, Anarchy, Lust, Detraction—all spring from the cardinal evil principle, Disorder.' The various knights are at work 'quelling the various forces of disorder'. Spenser is, like all poets, at home among cosmic forces of all sorts. But something is wanting.

That something is to be related to (i) the New Testament and great tragedy generally; (ii) individual human personality as an indissoluble and realized unit. The two are clearly related. Often in *The Faery Queen* there is a subtle sensuous inconsistency. Or if not that, an artistic indecision: he can insert a lovely bird-song stanza in his Bower of Bliss, or associate the most ghoulish horrors with an *intellectual* heresy. There is a certain want of imaginative common sense, and perhaps sincerity: as though ethical principles were not, in the wider issues of this work, perfectly integrated with aesthetic associations into his imaginative scheme. And this indecision—when he is sure of evils he leaves you in no doubt, as in the masque of sins at the end of Book I—precludes the creation of strong human action and a convincing artistic structure generally, though it witnesses itself a certain integrity. There is not that impact of terrific importance and native direction in the human adventure found in the New Testament drama and in Shakespeare: which indeed generally forces a dramatic, often tragic, expression. Conversely dramatic form helps to force creative profundity. Drama, with its close plot-texture and disciplinary limits, its centralized and realistic human concern, was the condition of full Elizabethan expression.. The Elizabethan mind was too flooded with diversity of ideas and images: Shakespeare knew no more than Spenser, but gained by being forced to say less. Steep banks make a stream deep, swift, and forceful which without them is slothful, leisurely, and expansively shallow. And yet the greatest dramatic expression depends also on a sense of human personality which I feel Spenser, to a final judgement, lacks. He is rarely inside his fictions, enduring their joys and

terrors. Shakespeare writes from a hard core of trust in human personality—his own or others'—which Spenser's fluid impressionism does not reach, so getting underneath his dramatic figure or action, creating from within and forcing others to share from within; and finally, the structure of his art-form has, with little explicit doctrine, the tough-corded sanity of an unswerving experienced realism.

The Hymns present Spenser's visionary thought; while his sensuousness is most perfect in *Epithalamion*, wherein that fluid tendency—which indeed becomes an explicit river-symbolism in *Prothalamion* and the union of Thames and Medway in *The Faery Queen*—functions beautifully in torrential celebration of his own marriage. But in referring these twin impulses, emotional and intellectual, to epic action, he fails. *The Faery Queen* has, however, certain passages of deep tragic meditation; its recurrent metaphysic of fertility is most important; and pieces of symbolic description presenting pictures, legends in static design, sculptured figures, &c., have profound psychological meaning. The poem, I think, improves after the more famous, but perhaps less powerful, first two books, moving from religious polemic towards—at times—a blazing humanism, a pagan-ritualistic apprehension wherein the closely related glories of sun-fire and human love are finely advanced. The praise of Venus, sovereign of creation, is especially valuable (IV. x. 37–47). Spenser's ranging cosmic intuition draws level with Bacon's *Advancement of Learning* and Pope's *Essay on Man*, as in the dialogue between Artegall and the Giant concerning the divine ordering of the physical universe (V. ii. 30–50). The poetry grows more plain, virile, and athletic (as at III. xi. 25); with similes of sharp realistic observation and sense of elemental vigour (see IV. vi. 14; V. ii. 50), and a remarkable projection of animal life in fierce action (see V. ii. 15; V. xi. 12). There is, once at least, a truly Shakespearian inwardness of dramatic sympathy in description of Britomart's varying anxiety and distress, compared finally to a child's wayward grief

(v. vi. 1–14); and once, too, strong action becomes itself significant, in Britomart's penetration of fire to rescue Amoret from sensuous enchantment (III. xi. 21–xii. 43). Britomart is, indeed, Spenser's most satisfying person. She is a comprehensive conception, in her masculine dress and armour signifying an integration of sexual principles (as with Venus at IV. x. 41); a creature of romantic action, challenging purity, and—we are told, though perhaps scarcely made to feel—ardent love. Dedicated to a dream-lover, she is meant to attain successful human consummation, though her attractiveness as symbolizing the feminine and, finally, matrimonial ideal is somewhat severely strained by her twice unhorsing and infuriating her future lord before their mutual recognition. Artegall, indeed, cuts a sorry figure: 'Ah, my dear Lord,' says Britomart to him during a characteristic rescue, 'What may-game hath misfortune made of you?' (v. vii. 40). She herself, however, accurately personifies what the fiction as a whole does not attain: the marriage of strong action with emotional purity.

Spenser's expressly *gentle* humanism, which really precludes any convincing presentation of heroic conflict as such and leads to excessive reliance on spiritual content as opposed to realistic form—and this is what we mean by allegory—nevertheless itself draws him finally nearer to the consistently trusting humanists, Lyly, Shakespeare, and Pope, than to the somewhat aesthetically turbulent and variously forceful distrusters, Marlowe and Milton. His attempt to convey in philosophic and epic form a flooding sensuousness which penetrates so many creeks and ramifications of human desire, good or bad, heralds a new line of poetry to be concerned with (i) the erotic impulse as the central drive to an expanding apprehension of man's at once earthy-natural and fiery-cosmic setting, and (ii) the problem of action, involving conceptions royalistic and communal; while both are to be related to man's tragic destiny and the spirit, though not necessarily the dogmas, of Christianity.

II

THE SHAKESPEARIAN INTEGRITY

I

THOUGH in period stretching well into the reign of King James, Shakespeare's work is pre-eminently Elizabethan, rooting from the soil of *The Shepherd's Calendar* and *Endimion*. But *The Spanish Tragedy* is behind him too: that is, if he did not, as I often suspect, write parts of it himself. Certainly its strong action, its pathos, its family sympathy, its use of dark personal symbols (Revenge and Andrea's ghost), its melodramatic yet strangely human horrors, its nature-imagery, the surge and fall of its blank-verse modulations, are closely Shakespearian. Shakespeare includes both the graces and the horrors of his age, working to transmute by a significant action the murder and revenge motifs of *The Spanish Tragedy* into the actualized divinity of *Endimion*.

Alexander and Caesar stride colossal across the Elizabethan imagination, imperial prototypes prefiguring Elizabeth. Ancient Rome was as much a stately ideal as Hellenic mythology a lover's paradise. Both coalesce in the perfect sovereign, Cynthia, whose court according to Lyly searches truth 'not in colours but life' and claims virtues 'not in imagination but execution'. The ideal, to quote a pregnant phrase of Alexander's in *Campaspe*, is a 'joining' of 'letters with lances'. Shakespeare's drama gives us blood and murder: tales of pagan revenge —how else, indeed, can the widest problems of action in face of evil be better dramatized?—and political anarchy. A bloody theme may arrest our attention to the most profound of truths, as in Christianity itself: certainly blood and water equally fertilize both the world of letters and the world of nature. But the Shakespearian poetry aims also to reintegrate its world into some person of royal strength or some lady of sunshine love. Neither may be,

in themselves, Christian symbols: but the process—or fact—I am analysing has vital Christian analogies. The movement, that is, aims to organize itself into a living stillness; the conflict builds a peace; from the temporal action is created the eternal. This is how the interplay of tempests and music becomes the axis of Shakespeare's world.

In all this pre-eminent among his contemporaries, Shakespeare becomes the consummate dramatist. But what is drama? First, it must rivet and hold attention, and at once. The economic pressure exerted on a poet-entertainer by this necessity is, within limits, good: since he is thereby forced to do the very things that are most helpful. And second, it must convince with a truth: startling alone is of no use. The balance of significance and action has been struck by Shakespeare as by no other playwright. *Tamburlaine* has a levelled activity without true progress and little meaning: what would it be, stripped of rhetoric? *Othello*, minus its rhetoric, would still have a gripping plot. *Faustus* has spiritual significance, but the true conflict is ideological and static, and what action it has is silly. *The Duchess of Malfi* holds deepest significances, but they are transmitted almost wholly by impressionistic language or events subdued to, or moulded by, the impressionistic plan: the story is weighted, clogged, stifled. Impossible as it may be to abstract finally plot from poetry, there remains meaning in the statement that Shakespeare gives a good story. Nor in the whole only; each full-length scene has in isolation a significant dramatic value. Just think of what happens in *Richard III*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; in all the plays. Things move from the start and are kept going. Action rises on action, event scrambles over the shoulders of event; it is an attack. On what? On the audience's attention, for one thing; but, deeper, an onslaught on all fundamental negations in terms of positive human energy. In battering down inattention it also batters down a certain blindness. The action is not superficial: it is rather sacramental. Infinite subtleties are involved: irony, suspense, surprise,

tempo-variation, climax, anti-climax; resolution in pathos or humour; channelling of subjective feelings of fear, hatred, horror, pride, and love; all are struts to build into us a lively sense of action shaped by some high-reaching intellectual and spiritual significance. At intensest moments we *are* the action. Shakespeare is the voice of an age which was supremely in love with the various purposes and fortunes of men. He therefore helps to restore mankind's faith in its own existence.

This is why Shakespeare appeals at all times and places—in Germany and the United States; why he is acted in Russia, Japan, and India, surviving the worst translations, lending himself to fantastic theatrical experiments and academic theories alike, twisted, tormented, racked out of shape as well in England as Russia, but alive; and sometimes, indeed, the more vividly so under such treatment.

Action which is truly significant must be, however, or at least seem, natural. And the Shakespearian vitality is organic through and through: you get little feeling of artifice or mechanical schemes. His work is rooted in nature.

All great poetry is to a certain point traditional. Shakespeare has the ghosts and witches of popular superstition, his Hellenic gods, the Christian colourings of his day's orthodox theology, the ingrained classical respect of the Renaissance, the national fervour of Elizabethan England. His stories are not, usually, invented, but sink deep into some historic or mythical tradition. He uses various and often to us contradictory materials, blending a spontaneous contemporary Elizabethanism with a mythological Athens to make *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and an essential Englishness with an Italian setting to create Mercutio. The range of selection is remarkable; and attempts at exact source-tracing variously easy, misleading, or impossible. What, for example, is the exact relation of *Hamlet* to the *Oresteia* on the one side and *Mourning Becomes Electra* on the other? And what is the relation of this relation to the *Ur-Hamlet* or Holinshed? Our understanding

must be comprehensive. In Shakespeare a common racial store of impressions rooted deep in antiquity echo from the fringes of consciousness their ancient significances. All are used with a most delicate feeling for their quiddity, their past; and are never transplanted without a goodly accompaniment of earth. There is a fine sense of the soil in word-derivation alone; and it is the same with historic atmosphere, the British, Roman, or Italian colourings, and the stories themselves. His Weird Sisters are three fateful women (aptly weird = fate) as much as witches; yet again furies of tormenting guilt; while the Scottish setting is also intrinsic to the conception. Cleopatra may ask for her 'lace' to be cut, but hot Egypt is in her acceptation of the Messenger. The greatest poets are as receiving-stations for invisible messages across the ages; they express that 'life through the ages' of the Gospel phrase; and we need not invent boats that never existed. So, though secondary causes spawn themselves multitudinously from our study, no final cause can be isolated to 'account for' the Shakespearian power. The Renaissance, especially, was a comprehensive period: in Shakespeare, its inclusive voice, tradition is one with originality; birth being by nature neither precisely a copy nor a miracle, but both.

So Shakespeare's impressionism is less traditionally second-hand than Webster's. There is little over-emphasis on stock reactions that cannot bear a final analysis: to Webster a 'charnel' must be hideous, but the tomb of Hamlet's father 'wherein we saw thee quietly inurn'd' has also its proper serenity. All Webster's negative associations are to be found, but not isolated and not dominating: they are used when needed. Moreover, Webster's more abstract and universal impressions date mostly from the medieval and Christian era: whether from orthodox religion, folk-lore superstition, or pseudo-science. Shakespeare has these; and indeed may be said to use the best of the two cultures, medieval and Renaissance, as Webster is attracted to the worst. But he is also as likely to over-

wing ten centuries and nestle his mind, temporarily, in a pre-Christian world altogether; or, thrusting forward, to forestall some discovery of modern psychology. His Christianity—as in *Measure for Measure*—may be closer to the Gospels themselves than to any Christian system. His classical mythology strikes one as a spontaneous flowering, as in Lyly's plays and Spenser, without the bookish, learned touch of *Euphues* and Marlowe. There is something fresher than those: since, whatever the outward form, the human essence is primary. Each reference is selected not for itself but to meet a requirement on other, more human, grounds.

His work is thus traditional without being second-hand: similarly, though speaking directly from his own age, he is not what is usually known as realistic. We shall not normally find Marlowe's metallic extravagances nor his harsher mechanistic realisms; the fine 'casques' affrighting the air at Agincourt are more typical than Webster's 'rusty' cannon flying in pieces. Here death certainly does not go on 'strange geometrical hinges'. Nor is there anything like the contemporary cockney realism of *Bartholomew Fair* and *A Shoemaker's Holiday*. You could accuse Shakespeare of an aristocratic romanticism. The middle class—stressed, though satirically, in Webster—gets scant notice; the lower classes are, as a group, blockheads; though as *individuals* any one may be given a fundamental dignity far beyond Tamburlaine. Marlowe who set down Renaissance aspiration beside its ugly and perverted lusts, who saw the damnation awaiting Faustus, the hideous indecencies that may overtake a Bajazet or an Edward II; or Jonson with his stark stripping satire of ridicule butchering natural vices for a Jacobean holiday—these deliver the goods of which it might seem Shakespeare had not heard. But the question is one of stress. You get an especially mechanical or scientific twist in certain images of—significantly—*Troilus and Cressida*; and when we are concerned with a loveless and machine-made type of man or conflict as in *Coriolanus*, city imagery, pipes and

conduits, come in with a clatter, the body of man itself described in their terms. Professions of all sorts are hinted: references to the law, medicine—remember the Apothecary's stock-in-trade in *Romeo*—seamanship, all are there. Indeed, his range of reference has led to his being considered a sailor, a lawyer, and so forth. But such inevitably more abstract references do not overweigh the even more characteristic naturalisms. Nor does satiric realism have any final say. Shakespeare is concerned with a somewhat heroically conceived drama. Now mechanic and city suggestion—or other such 'realisms'—cannot illustrate the emotional directions involved, since man is part of nature just as machines are part of man: and to define human emotions in terms of machines is to explain the whole through the part. When Webster's Duchess compares herself to a rusty cannon the metaphor is the more striking for not being apt. This error Shakespeare tends to avoid. Prof. Fairchild's recent study, *Shakespeare and the Arts of Design* (University of Missouri Press), tends to reveal a reserve in poetic use of the plastic and sculptural. Images, events, persons, all are subordinated to a vital centre. Shakespeare is concerned first with positive, normally with noble, aspects: and selects and emphasizes accordingly. Where the realistic or sharply trivial or mechanic is found it is softened into its context, not sticking out; itself somehow felt as part of 'great creating nature'.

The country of Shakespeare's birth is continually recalled in his writing. His poetry is soil-rooted, nature-rooted. Flowers, weeds, trees, and woodland glades; birds of all sorts, animals kind and cruel; rivers and seas and sea-cliffs; winds and weather in all moods; moon, sun, stars shadowed or shining—they are on page after page, image after image. The elements of earth, water, air, and fire are dramatic persons on his stage of impressions, sometimes with an explicit, sometimes an unobtrusive and embedded, schematic interrelation among themselves or reference to plot and action, but always significant. Impressions of sunrise are peculiarly beautiful, suiting the

upward and energic tendency of Shakespeare's work. The process of the seasons plays its part. Rivers and the sea, especially the latter, are symbols of strength and urgency. The only natural image under-emphasized is, perhaps, the mountain.

This vast mesh of naturalistic impressionism is enwoven throughout with human emotions and actions: as when at the close of *Lear* the impressions become more spring-like to tone with Cordelia's re-entry. Those emotions and actions in their turn are felt as sprouting from a natural context, so that man is known to be no stranger in his world. The synthesis Wordsworth pined for is related to all the complexities of human life, the inward and outward worlds being felt as subtly interaffective. Where images from daily affairs are found, they are more likely, as Prof. Caroline Spurgeon has shown, to be drawn from the country than the town; and natural images in general tend to show first-hand experience and observation, while the associations are, although of communal and often traditional immediacy, nevertheless fresh rather than ready made. The traditional is, as it were, newly discovered at every moment. Appeal is to all the senses in turn. At any moment you may all but touch and smell, not so much by definitive sensory provisions as by direct metaphoric contact with that whole situation of which the 'tactile' or 'olfactory' image is really our own, literary, abstraction. Shakespeare, that is, may often assume a comparison not explicit, though felt; his imagery involve an action or animal not directly named, the ladder he rose by knocked away; and one such, when his more complex manner is at work, may blend into another—the real change taking place behind the words—to give us the sense of vitality without its sight. Analysis of separate impressions only the more clearly silhouettes their nature: they are, like everything else, always parts of an organic whole, impelled by a central unseen, but felt, force. So Shakespeare's language, even when no naturalistic impression is involved, is charged with a vital non-bookish energy; the

speech coheres, in one organic rhythmic indissolubility, without either the assertive intellectual agilities of Donne —since the transferences, however swift, never outpace the already gathered momentum of their context—or the studied mosaic of Milton. Even the best beauties of Shakespearian verse are, as it were, carried on the rising and subsiding swell of the main flood, and you are conscious primarily of that psychic whole behind, calling them into being and calling them back at will. They relate not to each other so much as to this whole, on which their life and meaning depend. A Shakespearian speech is a microcosm of both his own poetic universe and creation in general: where exactly all these qualities inhere. Moreover, style varies from play to play: you have the unmetaphoric lucidity of *Julius Caesar*, the double-harness phrase-coinings of *Hamlet*, the comparative Miltonics of *Othello*, and so on. But all of them are organic to the plays concerned: with the most startling of all themes (to Shakespeare) in *Julius Caesar* there is the less need of a metaphoric richness; the dualistic quality of *Hamlet* blends with its reiteration of twinned-phrases; the style spoken by Othello is part of his tragedy. Shylock has his own cast of phrase; and Richard III, for a reason, swears always by St. Paul. Now this unforced nature-quality does not preclude a certain idealization. There is richness and colour. Riches themselves dominate over all but grand naturalistic and universal splendours: I mean crowns and sceptres, rich jewels, gold and silver; though these are not allowed any Miltonic assertion. Of the middle-class professions merchants are conceived with a glamour touching that of soldiers and kings; whereas man's mechanic and scientific genius is, comparatively, slighted, as it is not in Webster. My emphases are, of course, comparative only: look long enough and you will find pretty nearly every sort of reference. I do not suggest a romantic naturalism with either nature's ferocity or human disease forgotten: nor a limited naturalism ignoring the divine significances of Christianity. But all these—and more—are dominated by

a sense of natural and human vitality, and possess always their own organic cohesion and necessity. Impressions of the human body in action are, as Prof. Spurgeon observes, frequent. Certainly, whether in word, speech, symbol, or human action, Shakespeare has a unique ease and grace, the wheeling of a bird or spring of a cat, especially at a crucial and testing moment. So, though the social problems that worry us to-day may seem to be neglected, yet when he does touch them he says more in short space than many sermons; witness Romeo and the Apothecary, or Lear in the passage that makes Bradley, not unjustly, worship him.

Shakespeare's human drama is organically related to certain widening circles of society and nature. A central person or persons will normally, in the greater plays, be shown involved in some subjective conflict widening out to a family interest; filial in *Hamlet* and *Coriolanus*, paternal in *Lear*, matrimonial in *Othello* and *Macbeth*, romantic in *Antony and Cleopatra*. The family psychology is penetrating and modern. Next, there is the community; most strongly felt in *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Macbeth*, *Coriolanus*, and the Histories where citizens may be used as choric and communal voices. The tragic hero being normally a king or some equivalent the social implications of his fortunes properly go deeper than we, to-day, at first suspect; and his faith in kings clearly gives Shakespeare an advantage in dramatic condensation succeeding generations have lacked. So in each greater play you get a tight social unit of hero, family, and community in reciprocal action: hence the many 'body' metaphors applied to the state and continual thought of social disorder as a disease, in which *Coriolanus* is the best example of a normal Shakespearian tendency. You cannot here uproot the protagonist's psychology from his communal soil: disorder-effects in *Macbeth* apply equally to both. The implied metaphysic corresponds with the Pauline doctrine of the 'body' of Christ. The individual is, in a sense, the community: hence the dramatic advantage of

a king-hero, since in him most clearly personal and general significances coincide. The internal rottenness of Denmark hands over the state to Fortinbras, whose name waits, as a threat, from the very start, and serves to frame the peculiarly meditative and personal problems with the flash of steel. Beyond social limits we may advance to nature: the action is not accompanied by natural imagery but entwined with it. Trees are a usual organic metaphor, especially to denote family descent; a kingdom may be a garden gone to riot in weeds. England's natural loveliness is important to the Histories. Bees are the subject of a long speech on communal order in *Henry V*. Animals may be used to raise certain stock reactions of liking or disgust; but may also be presented with an inward sympathy and vital apprehension to point human analogies; and, of course, other natural impressions, as I have noted, are always being involved. The interplay and procession of seasons is integral to imagery and sometimes, as in *The Winter's Tale*, plot. Belief in cosmic disruptions corresponding to political disturbance is continual; sun and stars may be blacked out for a murder in *Macbeth*, but shine for love in *Antony and Cleopatra*; the music of the spheres accompanies a mystic resolution in *Pericles*. Man and his actions are felt as a microcosmic reflection of a macrocosmic whole: or perhaps I should put it the other way round, since to Shakespeare man's experience is central. But it is never isolated. Each person is, poetically, the universe: 'What observation mad'st thou', is an eager question in *The Comedy of Errors*, 'of his heart's meteors tilting in his face?' The elaborate equating of Antony with the universe in Cleopatra's dream is therefore a logical act pointing ahead to the creation of the god-man Prospero.

Notice that his contemporaries accomplish less. The family interest in *Tamburlaine* is unconvincing, and the hero somewhat isolated; and *Faustus* shows a man at grips with God and Devil, family and nature alike overleapt in his star-grasping desire; though in *Edward II* we draw

nearer Shakespeare. Webster in *The Duchess of Malfi* has a strong family interest, but communal and princely reference is most satiric. Ben Jonson in the great comedies appears to me to present an aggregate of isolated individuals mechanically combined rather than the close-tissued body of a play: action is invented for the persons, not of equal rights with them; whereas even the Shakespearian comedy tends to preserve the balances just noticed. Parolles and Ford are one with a richly humorous action; but Bobadil and Kitely are left to provide a large part of their own, keen, analysis. And because the Shakespearian art-form has at once an organic indissolubility and compact universality, all that happens within it appears natural. Any error gains readjustment from its context. Each word derives peculiar force from its own speech, each speech from personality and situation, situation from action, action from play, and every play from the collected works. The focus of the greater whole always being right, no details can go far wrong.

Shakespeare's stress is primarily on man. His wider universe is naturalistic—a science of elements in ascending grades is sometimes explicit in statement and continually implicit in imagistic management—and angelic hierarchies play no real part. Much of Spenser's Heavenly Hymns is excluded. Angelic symphonies as well as sordid realisms are, on the whole, avoided. Yet the Christian values and sentiments are found often more sensitively and inwardly conceived than by professional propagandists. Friars dominate action, and love, as in Lyly, is religiously haloed. Portia is almost a Christian symbol. The interplay of church and state in the Histories may be powerfully dramatized on occasion: and the feeling which accuses an Archbishop of becoming an 'iron man' of war is as deep as that which admires Hotspur and glorifies Henry V. Shakespeare is not anti-Christian; nor even—except for the graveyard scene in *Hamlet*—anti-ecclesiastical. *Macbeth* reveals a very orthodox opposition of grace and evil in verbal suggestion, however naturalistically the larger

symbols and actions are conceived. But Shakespeare's main issues are fought out in terms of a humanistic conception setting man between subhuman tempests of nature and a superhuman music blending with the universe and thence the divine. The Christianity of *Henry VIII* is thus, in its dramatic, as opposed to imagistic and philosophic, stress, new.

The Shakespearian art-form reflects both the Queen-centred nationalism of its birth and that organic stability claimed by the British constitution to-day. The whole swarming resources of this most holistic period are at his finger-tips. No aspect is quite neglected—numerous quotations could be adduced against any one of my statements—but the stresses are his own. He is always in masterly fashion recognizing the significant, winnowing it from the chaff: not only his kings, but his most important symbols of all, his sea-tempests and music, are beautiful dominant abstractions from the Elizabethan world. His recognition of the significant, the apparently romantic directions, are one with the nature-quality: since he uses mainly, and with an unswerving insight, only what has positive strength and survival-value. That is, he is prophetic. To recognize, explore, and express what was most significant in England during the medieval–Renaissance transition was necessarily to be prophetic: since we still, as a nation, as men, move by the momentum then generated.

II

The central thrust is thus positive and creative; indeed, a love. This is both an outward sensuousness and an inward sympathy. The sensuousness is not Marlowe's. Marlowe's descriptions of Leander are sensuous to danger-point; and the danger will be found to lie in his abstracting tendency. His sensuousness is mental, and therefore limited. In *Venus and Adonis* you get an even stronger sensuousness: and yet it appears, because not so limited, healthy in the sense that Lawrence is, or tried to be, healthy. Marlowe's poem concentrates on Leander's

especially beautiful body; the blue sea in which he is swimming; and, when we get to shore, on artificial metal-work. Smooth water may be by itself a too facile way to sensuous description; and, for the rest, the poem's territory is both mentalized and narrow; and there are, moreover, touches bordering on the lascivious charged here with poetic approval, yet with ever so faint a sense of sin to increase the delight. Shakespeare's physical descriptions work outside the sin-consciousness altogether; apply equally to nature as to man; and do not expand the superficially desirable, any more than he elsewhere descends to the superficially ugly. The beauty of Adonis, seen through Venus's mind, is indeed most lusciously felt; but so also is the horse, restless with hot instincts, his stallion magnificence, buttock and all, finely described. There is an inclusive purity in Shakespeare's sensuousness; and a wide realization of animal vitality, as in the baying hound's lifted head, the snail's withdrawn antlers, the 'chafing' boar. Moreover, everything is inwardly conceived: he even imagines the darkness closing over the frightened snail in his tiny shell-house. Adonis's blood-life is felt through his physique: he is, as it were, a body lighted from within, and you get more of a real physical existence than in Marlowe's description of Leander's nakedness. Shakespeare is inside one object after another: which is, paradoxically, the one condition of being properly outside it, and able to show it in convincing action. The famous description of 'poor Wat' the hunted hare shows, even more strongly, this universal inwardness and sympathy. In *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece* Shakespeare gets his main sexual, and general, poles of reference clear; and his later extreme intensities of love and evil are already implicit. The subjectively conceived agony of Venus predicts the later tragedies. Study of this poem alone, therefore, reveals the psychological centre of Shakespeare's work: a love rather than a lust; a vital identification rather than a confined sense-relation whether of eye or touch, as in Marlowe's Leander; and this not limited to the beautiful, and thence

by a rebound to the satirically ugly as in Marlowe, but dispassionately universal. Exact differentiation is hard since every one of the opposite qualities is contained: lust, sense-perception, beauty. The difference is one of direction. All is so trusted—as Marlowe seldom trusts—that each object expands, dissolves into a universal particularity where inward and outward are not distinct: which is perhaps what the Gospels mean by being pure in heart. Thence everything becomes sacramental. The difference is analogous to that between marriage-love and flirtation; between a dynamic adventure and a static enjoyment. Shakespeare is continually *married* to whatever he is treating, accepting it as itself and as a whole. His animals and people are thus neither ideal nor realistic, but real: the vital principle of each is apprehended and their actions therefore powerful.

This integrity is a matter not of unique instincts but rather of an orderly arrangement that cannot be achieved whilst a sin-sense of the Marlovian type blots the actual with a fear. Though it might be rash to press any charge against so beautiful a work as *Hero and Leander*, if we take a wider field of inspection the nature of the difference becomes apparent. Recall those passages in *Edward II* and Greene's *James IV* where some one schemes to influence an idle king with sensuous and artistic delights; or a set-piece of Renaissance exuberance (delights offered to a lady) in *James IV*, associated with callous wrong; or the Helen and Homer passages in *Faustus* related to moral damnation; or Jonson's satire on Sir Epicure Mammon's projected sensuous pleasures. There is nothing of this in Shakespeare. Positive impressions are never impregnated with an admittedly evil force or association: except, indeed, for Claudius in *Hamlet* where the problem is clearly faced and, indeed, as I shall show, a necessary part of the conception. The Induction to *The Taming of the Shrew* has passages of the sort with no shred of evil suggestion; which are exactly expanded through the early acts of *Timon* with a similar, though more

powerful, impact of essential good. Natural human pleasures such as good food and fine clothes are—unless apish foreign fashions are the comic argument—creative forces. Consider Katharine's punishment: not to eat, not to have pretty clothes. On such fundamental simplicities the Shakespearian imagination works, echoing the Gospels. His greater works use feasting, child-symbols, sex-impressions with a fine integrity. His villains tend to the puritanical: deformed Richard sneers at the 'lascivious' (a word entirely dependent on the sin-morality sex-complex) pleasures denied him; Iago is a Manichean moralist worse than Bosola; Lucio in *Measure for Measure* is as much a study in puritanism gone wrong as vice gone right. Shakespeare can present wicked lust with evil tonings, as in *Lucrece*; laugh at it in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*; can cram his pages with sex-neurosis; and point a moral in *Lear*. But there is a central artistic sanity never disturbed that prevents his either presenting with positive tonings an evil he distrusts; or, conversely, distrusting as evil any essence demanding positive associations. His metaphysic and ethic ultimately obey rather than dictate to imaginative law. A speech of Tamora in *Titus Andronicus* is, I think, the only possible exception. Shakespeare's finest 'set-piece' is the description of Cleopatra on Cydnus: and notice how, and at what supreme moment in his development, this occurs. Indeed, *Antony and Cleopatra* is almost an expansion of Spenser's Bower of Bliss: in both soldierly honour is shown as disgraced by a sensuous fascination. There may be disgrace: but the disgrace, if it be one, is shared by forces of nature beyond personal failings. A vital and energetic principle is touched that releases power: Shakespeare exploits the dynamic within an experience that if static (when limited to the visual-sensuous in abstraction) is immoral. Such vital recognition renders the creation of a Falstaff possible; the humour of Falstaff being ultimately dependent on a simple, yet deep, recognition of ultimate physical fact. Therefore Falstaff is a precise and universal *embodiment*. He is himself humour;

and his weakest wit more significant than the brilliances of lesser creations. He is always, in one grand sense, right: the 'honour' speech serving as an approach to a conception formulated in deadly poetic earnest two hundred years later by Byron. Jonson who freezes himself in firmly on the other side of puritanism knows where he is, as Marlowe does not: and his comedy is therefore satiric. The ruling ethical direction of his mind forbade the Shakespearian sympathy; and, therefore, power.

The originating source of such creation should be already, in its general nature, clear. If one were to press for a personal and less valuable deduction there is, I think, evidence. The sonnets express a tortured heterosexual desire and idealize a homogenous love. *Venus and Adonis*, more likely to be in this sense revealing than any play, is written from the woman's view and the sensuous attractiveness is masculine. *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* celebrates the victory of a masculine friendship over sexual love; and the Antonio-Sebastian drama in *Twelfth Night* is a miniature *Othello*. Antonio in *The Merchant of Venice* loves Bassanio as warmly as Portia (and indeed their loves are once finely compared by Antonio with a touch of jealousy); while we somehow feel that every one would be most uncomfortable were a wife, instead of ships, found for him at the end. I have heard it suggested that Mercutio was in love with Romeo, which might explain much, including both his love-ridicule and flare-up at the word 'consort'. Cassius is a fervent lover: of Brutus, of Titinius. *Timon*, a play whose artistic cumbersomeness joined to titanic power might well present an imperfectly objectified experience, displays a universal love of man to men with—outside the dance—no feminine persons except, significantly, two prostitutes. The one play that seems to need a key we have not got, *All's Well that Ends Well*, dramatizes a woman's terrifically sincere tracking down of a young man; and an obscure speech of Helena goes nearer than anything in Shakespeare to characterize the sweet, almost feminine, abandon, the seeing into persons and forces

generally, that is the essence of Shakespeare's art. The admiration of masculine action and the heavy stress on loyalty throughout—as in Enobarbus—might derive from some especially fiery centre of a man-to-man love or admiration. Such a tendency would be for the most part expressed dramatically in heterosexual terms; whereas a purely 'normal' nature would scarcely have left these hints. The boys who turn out to be girls in many of the plots may be in his regard deeply significant. Of course, 'lover' to an Elizabethan can denote a relationship at once less than sexual and more than friendly; and the Sonnets probably reflect a complex of love and social worship similar to the allegiance-love unity of *Endimion* which we, in a less aristocratic and royalistic age, cannot quite understand. I have no desire to stress a point some might find disconcerting. There is, however, further evidence of a somewhat bisexual temperament, as I shall shortly indicate. But whatever the personal facts there is no unhealthiness: by which I do not mean no perversions. Rather the reverse: a nature not afraid of, and serenely able to create from, whatever so-called perversions it possesses. Sadism, such as you get in *Hassan*, is quite absent: that is, cruelty is not presented with pleasing associations. The whipping incident in *Antony and Cleopatra* is precisely used to meet a correct demand; nor do the horrors of *Titus Andronicus* or eye-gouging in *Lear* come under the meaning of the term.

The first half of Shakespeare's work concentrates on two primary emotional positives: (i) the normal romance interest of human love, and (ii) the king-ideal, with especial reference to martial action. Both are approached with a profundity too easily missed. The two are related imagistically as eros-charged symbols: love is often compared to a kingly presence, and both love and kings are associated with the sun, repeating age-old religious associations.

Shakespeare's love-understanding goes deeper than Lyly's, with emotions more rounded and convincing. The comedies have always deep tragedy-contacts and smiles

play through tears. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has nightmare fears, and *Twelfth Night* a melodic pathos. In *As You Like It* melancholy and bitter satire, as in the Seven Ages speech, are interspaced with happiness, all toning with the shadowed glades of the forest to make a dappled world. Feste is a wistful figure, so is Touchstone: and both are deep, sometimes trenchant, thinkers. But most depends on the heroines. They are sunshine, laughing women in touch with a wisdom and happy mockery unknown to men. They are conceived as superior beings, with Christian sympathies, able to teach their men like children, as in the hospital passage at the conclusion of *Love's Labour's Lost*; or to right the plot gone wrong through masculine error as in *The Merchant of Venice*. Both Rosalind and Viola show a maturity of love, almost maternal in wisdom, yet paradoxically half on the brink of tears, sunshine and rain together as in Cordelia (again a maternal figure), that contrasts with the more showy passions and petulant jealousies of the men. Shakespeare shows a less inward sympathy for masculine love. Venus and Helena I have already noticed. Orlando, Orsino, Bassanio, and Romeo are, as lovers, weak, often somewhat rhetorical, figures compared with their ladies. What actor of Romeo has not felt instinctively that something, not all his own fault, has gone wrong during the Balcony Scene? Yet again, when tragedy thickens, what Romeo can fail to gain a new lease of life? Shakespeare's men become grandly and purposively tragic as his women do not. Then at once he is within them. They endure conflicts unknown to the singly purposeful heroines, and the specifically tragic resolution is theirs. Compare Romeo's death with Juliet's, Othello's with Desdemona's. The women show fear—as in Juliet's potion-speech—never the men, except in face of the supernatural, and then only temporarily. The greatest of his women miss *tragic* stature at their end: Lady Macbeth dwindles off somnambulistically; and Cleopatra inverts death to life. Even Queen Katharine's end is somewhat weak in self-pity. Compare Romeo's set purpose in the

tomb; the grandeur of Lear and Timon; the almost heroic self-pity, because less than self-condemnation, of Othello and Macbeth; the noble reserve of Buckingham and Wolsey. Shakespeare is most with his men when tragedy overcomes them, lending them strength to overcome tragedy. Yet he is not really then so much inside his heroes as inside the whole somewhat ritualistically conceived tragic sacrifice of which normally men are the protagonists. This sacrifice in its reversal of material action might again be called feminine. Those heroes Shakespeare seems most 'within' for a long period, such as Richard II and Hamlet, tend to the philosophic and feminine, the death-shadowed. And yet the word 'within' begs the question: since it is really we who feel ourselves 'within' certain sorts of writing, not others. Finally, love and death are bound to hold a subjective appeal over fine action. In making women strongest in love, and men in action, Shakespeare is the voice for a deep truth. But in tragedy you get a union; and so we have the eternal marriage and archetypal sacrifice in Cleopatra's self-immolation for Antony; a woman at once becoming and conquering that whole destiny whose maternal presence encloses earlier heroes. We can hazard at least this: a certain feminine or masculine-subjective strain, in Shakespeare, or in us, or, still better, in creation, is to be associated with love and death; a certain masculinity with action of a more superficial sort. These wrestle for mastery. Full of action as Shakespeare's stage is, it yet continually works to transmute action to a peace. That peace is in his heroines from the beginning: notice how the women in *Richard III*, *King John*, *Richard II*, *Henry IV*, and *Julius Caesar* suffer from man's political conflicts, sometimes pathetic, sometimes denouncing, as from a deeper wisdom, man's schoolboy quarrels; and how the heroines of the later plays (Ophelia, Desdemona, Cordelia, Hermione, Imogen, Queen Katharine) suffer instead from man's psychological conflicts. Moreover, ultimate forces of evil and love, negative and positive, flow most directly from two women,

Lady Macbeth and Cleopatra. These tap, without conflict, the universal energy, good or evil, as the men do not. The sunshine fun and deep unrhetorical love of his ladies suggest, as does Falstaff, some universal force beyond man's philosophy or ethic. Shakespeare's three most rounded and complex figures are Falstaff, Hamlet, and Cleopatra: the non-ethical mountain of fleshly enjoyment and keen satire on masculine ideals and action; the figure of man and all his problems shadowed by the mothering nearness of death; and woman in her unmoral, cosmic fascination, overarching empires and transmuting death to life. From the start feminine love is as the 'star to every wandering bark', unshaken by tempests. It is a deep marriage-consciousness, unlustful: witness Katharine the Shrew's final speech on marriage; or Portia's equally lovely surrender to Bassanio. I emphasize the deep conception of marriage here: it is something implicit equally in Shakespeare's drawing of a snail; a perception of the self-hood's integrity, its inward music. There is a metaphysical depth, a totally non-moralizing yet Christian profundity about it. I point again to Helena's 'Not my virginity yet . . .'.

It is the same with Shakespeare's more masculine themes. There is any amount of felt nobility but no tinsel glitter in his perception of soldiership or kings. Kingship is presented as a burden. Kings may be saintly as Henry VI, villainous as Richard III, weak as Richard II, practical as Henry V: all are human individuals as well as sacred symbols. Indeed, the dualism of sacred office and human character is pregnant here, especially in *Richard II*; the balance struck dramatically forecasting the balance of constitution and monarchy England enjoys to-day. The matter of divine authority in *Richard II* blends into problems of political order in *Henry IV*, and leads up to the all-but-perfect king *Henry V*, where kingship becomes one both with religion and (as Mr. Middleton Murry has well observed) comradeship. The 'Crispin' speech has a profound emotional honesty. Outwardly Shakespeare's world

is often intensely selective, if you like romantic, especially in sublimation of soldierly valour and honour: but his inward realism is unmatched. There is no superficial glory-sense such as in *Tamburlaine*. Shakespeare's mind is married to, while Marlowe has an affair with, valour, honour, kingship: he takes each and all for better or worse with their rooted tentacular relationships, sins, and responsibilities. So kings are conceived tragically. The three burdened soliloquies of Henry VI, Henry IV, and Henry V, especially the last two with their thoughts of sleeplessness, reflect strongly, I often feel, the spiritual royalty of Shakespeare's mind: since he too aims to hold vast conflicting forces in a peaceful balance. Himself a king of one sort, he sees and feels into kingship of another. And, indeed, kingship is always dramatically a centralized intensification of personality in general, raising to the highest power the wider significances inhering in any one person at all. The King is the objectified super-self of each subject: from ancient ritual to modern times he holds an especially dramatic office. So Shakespeare's kings have an inward dignity and the sequence of their stories an epic, if tragic, strength we find nowhere else in our literature. In them there beats, as a heart in a body, a deep romantic yet spiritual perception, reaching to the inward music of man and community alike.

Having so felt into the essence, the outside he recreates with full yet never assertive splendour; having recognized the suffering passivity in all things, he can infuse into them the energies of action. The rough English type of a Faulconbridge is as typical as Richard II. His martial splendours and kingly sceptres, deeds of turmoil and battle, never appear materialistic, since they are fed from something deeper. Any one person or event, as we saw with any one image, is a provisional expression only, pointing to a greater whole. Again we are drawn to think of a somewhat feminine nature, yet only in the sense that Christ might be called 'feminine', because cosmic, in comparison with Alexander or Caesar: in other words, creative.

Whatever it be, this love accomplishes something in the way of princely action and communal insight that levels all other English poets but Byron on the plain beneath, their differences unnoticed; and fills his stage with ever new creative significance, working not from the outside, but from the inner springs. Again, the inwardness is one with the objectivity; the feminine strain in man's nature, as so often, the condition, paradoxically, of any masculine achievement that shall last. The passive and the active blend. Henry V, the hero-king, must be apprenticed, not to arms, but to the critical satiric humour of a Falstaff. For Shakespeare in these plays is always the poet of national action not deceived by its surface glory; the great prophet of kingship never forgetting the pygmy stature of kings; the poet of active life, remembering death. The working out of a sequence leading to the accomplishment of Tudor supremacy was a task far greater than is usually supposed; dependent on a unique insight into social forces, in order and disorder alike, and a central honesty of love—human and thence national—intrinsically outside the range of any other poet of his—or our—day. Shakespeare writes, as it were, the Old Testament of the Elizabethan age; and, alone joining perfectly 'letters with lances', shows the slow resolution of discordances towards that high, if temporary, harmony of which his own art is the sovereign flower.

If Shakespeare's kings are men, so all his men are, in their way, kings. All are, in comparison with those of other writers, whatever my previous distinctions *within* Shakespeare, conceived inwardly, with native force, direction, and wholeness. Each, with whatever faults, asserts himself in his own right. Hotspur is typical. Bottom has his own royalty, and the humour he radiates is one with our recognition of this, especially during his boldness before Theseus. When Shakespeare comes near ridicule, as with Malvolio (and note that excessive puritanism is here in question), the man's dignity is handed back at the end with a fine exit. Shakespeare's humour is eminently sympathetic. Parolles, his braggadocio ludicrously ex-

posed, remarks to himself that, if his heart were great, it would crack: but it is not, so 'simply the thing I am shall make me live'. Each, however dishonourable, is himself, and neither man nor God can take that from him. Autolycus needs no advertisement: the humour is one with an admiration. So, too, with protagonist villains: Aaron and Iago, the worst, do not repent, and they at least have the virtue of consistency. The villainy of Richard III is subtly motivated in terms of inferiority, and his integrity, though weakened during the ghost scene, magnificently recaptured; while Shylock is in danger not of despisal but of excessive sentiment. At the extreme Caliban has *spiritual* dignity. The poet sees each, not perhaps precisely as he sees himself—since rationally one may be seriously deluded about oneself—but with an objective conception taking into full account all subjective and emotional profundities. He knows all men with that sympathy each feels for himself. To complain of Shakespeare's aristocratic sympathies and lack of interest in other social strata is superficial: whenever he is dealing with an individual from another class—and he has little interest in men in the mass except through symbolisms of order or kings—he crowns him before our eyes; as, for example, the gravedigger who outwits Shakespeare's most profound hero, Hamlet, with a profundity; or the Messenger's 'I have done my duty' in contrast to the childish petulance of his most showily regal figure, in *Antony and Cleopatra*.

His fondness for kings and dukes is one with his fondness for lovers. The equating of kingship with successful love you get in the Sonnets; and it is, indeed, a universal association. Aristocratic themes are used partly as the cinema to-day shows the heroine in a fine dress: and what hard worker, having paid for a seat, would wish it otherwise? Shakespeare exploits dramatically the kingship in every man: as, indeed, does the kingly office itself, being a communal possession. Therefore his greater heroes are not 'characters' known as we know acquaintances, but aspects of our own, kingly, selves; just as his love-themes

are our own fine love-affairs, not the somewhat silly business of our neighbour's. Such identification is, of course, the quintessence of the properly dramatic. A significant moment occurs between Falstaff and Doll Tearsheet: from a sordid background, with a fat drunkard and a prostitute as principals, and a few prose utterances, is created a romantic intensity in comparison with which Milton's Eden pales. Why? Falstaff and Doll may seem very different from a Romeo and Juliet: but not to themselves at that moment. Shakespeare here allows himself music. He is indeed always recognizing and objectively dramatizing the inward music, the deepest self-hood, the very 'I'-ness, so to speak, of his persons. This is precisely what is meant by love. And, since people do not always know their own self-hood, one of his major themes, from Benedick, Orsino, and Katharine the Shrew through Lear to Enobarbus and Leontes and Wolsey ('I know myself now'), is the gradual recognition by his heroes of their own deepest selves; which is, normally, a kind of love; a kind of eros-music, at once a humility and a royalty. And for a similar reason we too read Shakespeare: to dig deep enough to recognize ourselves. The dignity of human personality is thus central throughout. His people are therefore, unless of the Sir Andrew type, nearly always courageous, Parolles not excepted: indeed, he is perhaps the bravest.

In this sense Shakespeare is profoundly Christian: though it is important to remember the total acceptance conditioning such integrity. Many passages and many persons, especially Friar Laurence and Cerimon, tone with traditional religion. Moreover, Shakespeare shows properly no conflict of the sexual and the Christian: indeed, Christian sanctities are consistently invoked in the cause of dramatic love: which is, however, conceived as an enduring emotion. His ladies are allied continually with Christian associations. New Testament references and half-conscious reminiscence often witness a coincidence of the human with the archetypal and Christian; as when

Othello's bearing towards his armed retainers recalls Jesus's dignity in face of arrest; or when, as Mr. Middleton Murry has suggested, Antony's tragedy has its 'last supper' and the desertion of Enobarbus is patterned on that of Judas. Timon and Richard II are impressionistically related to Christ himself. But I point rather to that even more deeply embedded and instinctive Christianity in the very conception of human personality. In both Christianity and Shakespeare you have a central humility and passivity violently creative, radiating action, a process, as it were, of continual incarnation; and both finally reach, through this, the farthest death-illuminations of the Western world. Shakespeare is, however, too truly a dramatist and a Renaissance artist, and perhaps also too good a Christian, to place his sole trust in poetry or religious meditation. His studious princes (as in *Measure for Measure* and *The Tempest*) must take up their burdens again; Fortinbras brings his name and army to right Denmark of its mentally insoluble disease; and the last play of the long sequence is *Henry VIII*. Theseus, I think, comes nearest to Shakespeare's ideal of manhood, slight sketch though it be. See how, after the moonlit night of fears and fancies, he enters with the rising sun, to wake the lovers from their dreams.

III

This self-identification with all human positives was not, from the start, presented uncritically. Mercutio is set beside Romeo, Falstaff's honour-speech beside Hotspur's; Feste is there to criticize Orsino's love, Jaques to criticize Orlando's. Moreover, violent lust has been presented as a nightmarish evil as early as *Lucrece*; and indeed *2* and *3 Henry VI* and *Titus Andronicus* have passages of black intensity unequalled again until the great tragedies. All Shakespearian profundities are in his imagery—and often more than that—from the start. Advance is mainly exploitation and rearrangement of old resources: an ever-deeper penetration of himself. At the turn of the century

the darker elements gain force. Disloyalty and ingratitude have been for long reiterated and emphatic revulsions: to which the supreme giving of himself that his works reflect may have rendered him quiveringly susceptible. His other main negation, apart from death itself, is a blackish lustful sort of evil such as you get in *Lucrece* and *Macbeth*: the tonings of those two being imaginatively identical. From such disturbances the great tragedies arise.

Two main issues are involved: sex and death. With the first an inward integrity has already made possible a success beyond Spenser and Marlowe, similar to, though far richer than, Lyly's. Webster's human feeling is not incomparable with Shakespeare's, but with death he, if not his Duchess, fails. Against extremes of ingratitude, marital infidelity, sex-nausea (related to jealousy), all evil and death, the Shakespearian trust is now advanced. The very sympathy which sees so deep into human essence that it creates with equal ease and sureness Juliet and her nurse, cynic Mercutio and romantic Romeo, forces the creation of Iago, Regan, Apemantus, Lady Macbeth. The Shakespearian love is challenged by its own children, as in *Lear*, and we get a universe in self-conflict.

Hamlet is harshly confronted with infidelity and death. The play turns on the baffling of action, and so questions Shakespeare's profoundest sense of the human. Hamlet's is precisely the dramatist's normal problem: to find an action which can objectify the unrestful and groping intuition. In this Shakespeare's normal success is due to an inward integrity and correct balancing of imaginative material. Here the balance is, for once, gone. Aesthetic positives of feasting and music, kingly dignity, love, are alined with Claudius, the murderer; negatives of death and cynicism with Hamlet, the philosopher-hero. *Hamlet* is thus a questioning as is no other play of the central integrity at the back of, or rather within, the very nature of Shakespeare's creative art. Not only the goodness, but the very dynamic, of life is here questioned. What strong action can be, to a sensitive intelligence, inherently poetic?

The situation demands coarse, material revenge, and Hamlet, the poet-hero, is at a loss. But static drama is impossible, at least to Shakespeare, and the conflict is resolved by an oscillating action. When in Act IV natural loveliness alines itself with Claudius, or at least against Hamlet, we have Shakespeare fighting beside his villain to preserve that cosmic, human, and natural trust he, as Hamlet, is losing. The result is indeterminate but satisfactory: the crisis is objectified, and afterwards the sense of human force and direction never wavers; the imaginative balance is not again unsteady. But meanwhile *Hamlet* has pointed on to the especially inward conflicts, the spiritualized action, of the great tragedies.

Troilus and Cressida is concerned with sex and war, satirizing both, the hero, however, surviving madly idealistic and active, with a most impressive romantic force, at the end. Ulysses's order-speech earlier sums up the cosmic trust that is felt to be shaking. The material is carefully ordered. *Measure for Measure* analyses the inherent difficulty of practical government to a sensitive mind while also unfolding a deeply Shakespearian sexual ethic, close alike to Gospel teaching and modern psychology, and bearing directly on my present arguments: since pharisaic righteousness is shown as superficial and natural instinct treated with sympathy. In *Othello* Renaissance villainy attacks a romantic faith, the cynicism-love opposition of Mercutio and Romeo repeated to darker purpose; in *Macbeth* ultimate evil, supernatural, nightmarish, medieval (with strong tonings of folk-superstition), is a rampaging force of murder; in *Lear* a world of agony, related to a broken love, writhes towards a purgatorial resolution with the world of the comedies trailing behind pathetically in the Fool (as Hamlet's words on Yorick's songs recall Feste). In *Timon* loss of love starts a torrent of curses against all decency and order. Observe that the greater tragedies work out aspects of *The Duchess of Malfi*: a thought that helps our respect for that massively crammed work. But the human contacts are closer and

more vivid, usually concerned with excruciating pain at some sense of blank desertion; the ingratitude-*motif* driving the play now to the borders of sanity. Yet there is no Websterian paralysis of pain. Thought and imagery are carried easily, thrown up by but never clogging the action. Protagonists are never inwardly conquered, are never passive sufferers. They remain kings in a deeper than the obvious sense. There is always an energy of which, indeed, Webster shows something in *The White Devil*. Othello's love endures; Macbeth accuses himself long before others accuse him, and ends with an honest relation to men, fighting bravely, unrepentant though self-condemned. The force and felt optimism within *Lear* are generally recognized; and I have written with fervour of *Timon* as a positive document. The balance of human freedom and outward coercion is always exactly held, destiny, or chance, urging equally Macbeth to crime and Cleopatra to nobility. The theme of indomitable aspiration running from Marlowe through Milton to Goethe and Shelley is here more closely defined in terms of human limitation and consequently more compressed and explosive. Our sense of victory finally derives from a tough, unburstable, instinctive grip on the human essence and its native invulnerability; barks may be tempest-racked but cannot be lost; the personality, the 'I'-ness of the universe and its creatures, is felt as indivisible; and death cannot enclose the life that contains it. The 'I' cannot, indeed, properly recognize death, which is known only through the mediation of another: a thought relating to Shakespeare's final plays. Every hideous evil is thus felt to be purified by man's native, though constricted, royalty, every sting of satire subdued to a non-satiric direction in the whole. Pride and humility are, in that whole, one. The negative forces are all dramatically related and objectified, and never exert an unconditional and suffused mastery. Even the evil in *Macbeth* is associated consistently with the unreal and infra-human and dispelled at the end; death's macabre mockery comes too late to prevent Cordelia's

reunion with Lear; the curses of Timon are not those of an Apemantus. The prevailing energy is related to courage, the hero always being, or having been, a soldier. This is again the joining of 'letters and lances', the warrior-ideal contributing to intense psychic and spiritual conflicts in brave dramatic action. These conflicts concern mainly that romantic and energic faith central in Shakespeare: the opposition of love and cynicism clearly implicit in *Othello* is explicit in *Timon*; and *Hamlet*, *Troilus*, *Lear* have related essences. You can feel the poet asserting his central faith against apparent hostilities. Though Iago is certainly part of Shakespeare's mind, Othello's lost and recaptured faith is the emotional heart of his work: while Thersites knows himself the universal deformity, 'in everything illegitimate'.

The Shakespearian strength arises equally from an inward profundity and a generous sensuousness. Both are necessary to a universal as to a human marriage; both needed to cope with tragedy—that is, with death.

Remember how the animals in *Venus and Adonis* are so created that sense-impression is one with an inward sympathy (e.g. the baying hound's lifted head). Such an intuition accepts experience whole, and with a love that induces a harmony, seeing things precisely as they are, as their dynamic selves, rather than blurred by subjective and static associations. Though Shakespeare's world is crammed with all kinds of evil, loathing, horror, it is not itself evil, because ordered; and could not have been ordered without first being, all of it, understood and therefore loved; and could not have been loved if it were not, in essence, vital and therefore good. A crime in *Lucrece* or *Macbeth* may be compared to a foul smell: but neither the inward reality of moral evil nor the sensuous reality of foul smells necessarily meets Shakespeare's *final*, that is artistic, condemnation. They are felt as similar, that is all; as vital forces of unhealth to the communal and individual organisms respectively; and either may also be compared to disease. Marlowe's wicked lust=bright joy is seen,

on this level, merely as an untidiness; nor would Shakespeare allow Webster's murderous horror = ritualistic dignity. These could not happen because they are false to human existence as he knows it; and yet a perfect organization, which alone assures correct ethical associations, depends on a clarity impossible without love. That is, you can never properly distinguish good from evil whilst you are hating either, still less if you are fearing either; and indeed must love both before you are in a position to prefer one. Which thought goes far to remove certain obstructions to an understanding of the ultimate evil, death. Webster's horror is largely sensuous: cords and coffin; cold corpses, mouldering bones, earth, worms. Much of it you get, too, in *Hamlet*, the ultimate evil appropriately emphasized in this crucial play. The part played by such impressions in our horror at another's death is probably larger than we think. Yet a wide enough extension of sensuous acceptance and inward sympathy will love earth and worms too (as in Blake), seeing sense-horror as a trivial reaction on a limited human and biological plane: since rotting sea-weed or leaves are normally a health-smell. But such acceptance cannot come without an embracing of all negations, spiritual and physical, which involve each other. Shakespeare's matchless ordering of his material shows such an acceptance.

My argument is recapitulated in *The Tempest*: Prospero's art is a drawing towards him of evil, at once a mastery and forgiveness of it. So, having as it were everything in its right place, Shakespeare's sense of human and cosmic energy, or life, does the rest. Since he is not clogged and hampered by ultimate taboos, power breathes through. Milton seems to be hampered at the first, sexual, step: and until the mind is integrated there it will be powerless with death. Observe that in both these disturbances physical disgust and a sense of sin are often twin hindrances: Claudio's death-speech showing both strongly.

The interdependence of deep spiritual understanding and a wide sensuous receptivity is intrinsic to poetry;

since depths of individual being in the unseen world of human personality are only to be expressed through a vital and energic language born of sensory perception. It is, indeed, too common an error to think we can explore the Shakespearian profundity without exact attention to his surface. Such poetry must be weighty to balance the 'ponderous and substantial' essences it weighs; also, to match what is organic and natural, must itself have nature-quality and organic, fibrous strength. Poetry sees into the 'forms of things unknown' and re-creates them in sensory 'shapes': in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* it is also once suggested that art and love show a similar penetration to the 'heart' of their objects. In Shakespeare, his greater plays especially, the process is apparent in not only language but action and general organization. The unveiling and re-expressing of hidden psychic depths that characterize all poetic drama is here found in action and symbol on a wide front. The poetry tears away the superficies of human affairs, penetrating essence; re-creates, not copies, from sight of the source. The ship's engine-room is shown us, we hear its clang and hiss. I hope none of my remarks on Shakespeare's 'orderly' world or feminine and passive nature have been misread. These qualities are—have been all along, but especially are so now—a transparent medium for projecting terrific conflicts. Action was always Shakespeare's strength: a sense of human—or other—energy. In the greater plays violent forces are let loose often related to those energic sources of life we call sexual: a stormy and wrenching agony is his theme. Whatever feminine gentleness conditioned his art a masculine agony of conflict was its rough material.

This clash of forces, both communal and psychological, he reveals, naked. A veil is lifted in *Julius Caesar* disclosing disorder-portents drizzling blood over Rome, the life-blood of the community exposed; Hamlet is confronted by death's naked terror, his mind flayed by a hideous revelation of sexual unfaith in a mother; in *Macbeth* the outward show of phenomena is blasted to show infra-natural

horrors, weird sisters, ghosts, apparitions, nightmarish things, and a woman's mind sinks shafts into bottomless evil; in *Lear* a madness-phantasmagoria dances mirage-like, capering grotesquerie of unreason led by naked Tom. There is a tearing-off of a covering, an exposure. Timon goes naked to his sea-shore tomb, willing that all superficies of orderly life be destroyed. And the resolution of all this is to come through the sensuous and burning fascination of hot sun-bred instincts in *Antony and Cleopatra*. Through all, even as the outward is stripped off, sloughed off, a new structure of inner experience forms: clouds puffed away to reveal a vaster, numinous, substance of the quality which Nietzsche in his study of tragedy called 'Dionysian'. Exact analysis reveals significance on significance in this structure.

I have often analysed the logic within Shakespeare's symbolisms: the extremely subtle impressionism, especially the interchange of moonlight and dawn, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; the deep unity of *The Merchant of Venice* (pound of flesh, three caskets, and the Shylock-Portia conflict all contributing to a single, profound statement); the subtle conception of disorder and central authority in *Julius Caesar*; the baffling opposition in *Hamlet* of an ethical good associated with death against an evil backed, as it were, by forces of life. The tempest which was used mainly as a symbol of adverse fortune in the comedies and more subtly, though only imagistically, in the histories, from *Julius Caesar* on becomes violent in effect and meaning, closely in-knitted in the whole. A usual construction involves: order and music; thunder of conflict; plaintive or broken music, a backwater of momentary peace following the New Testament pattern; and the tragic conclusion. Other clustering symbolisms grow and form from the normal symbolic colourings of the language. In *Othello* the handkerchief both focalizes and universalizes the action; in *Lear* the storm is the occasion for a terrific dramatization of passionate energy as well as pathos, with a purpose forming on the fringes of consciousness from the

tempestuous pain, if only in the wedding of man's agony with cosmic turmoil. In *Macbeth* the miniature conflict of death and life in the three thunderous apparitions opposed to the creative royalty of the musical procession of kings is an especially beautiful example of a revealed and finally optimistic pattern bursting through, interpreting, and binding the main surface action of nightmarish evil. But there is nothing schematic or mechanical. Symbolism blends with iterative imagery and that with the persons of the play themselves. So there is scarcely an isolated or isolatable heart, though the apparitions in *Macbeth*, the handkerchief in *Othello*, the tempest in *Lear*, might provisionally be called so. For the *Lear* tempest, in expressing the relation of protagonist to environment, reflects the conflict, that is the action, and therefore the whole play, as does no one person: and the organic heart must sometimes be seen rather in these symbols than in the tragic hero. Such are not added to the story-action: they contribute to it, are at once thrown up from the depths by it, are part of it, and urge it on. The play's deepest inwardness expands and encloses it, as in *Lear* where the unveiled and psychological almost bursts the apparent universe, almost *is* the objectively natural and cosmic. And, indeed, these symbolisms I have considered inward must be equally regarded as evidence of an action not so much seen deeply into as widely expanded. A human story is given its only full and proper context in that manifold relations of society, nature, the universe are built round it, grow from it. The human action is shown in its context of the whole of life: and to do so much, in so short a space, often demands the shorthand statement of symbolic extravagances. The extreme inward and outward, as so often in our study of Shakespeare, coincide: while all intermediary sorts of appeal in imagery, characterization, historic authenticity are contained.

Shakespeare's symbolism, like his imagery, is based continually on feeling for nature-forces, life-forces: the child, feasts, music on the one side; ghosts, ill portents,

thoughts of disease on the other. The implied metaphysic is optimistic in so far as it regards the created world as good and in the main—certainly in the long run —victorious. Moral law is observed, but only as an aspect of a greater, more universal whole. The apparent disasters of Macbeth and Antony derive not from condemnation, but understanding of the way things happen. And a deeper ethic matures from a more careful inspection. *Macbeth*, dealing with evil, is crammed with ghosts and semi-realities; *Antony and Cleopatra*, dealing in love, has the most realistic surface of the great plays; love tuning, as it were, with creation. But the evil also throws up more life, denying itself, as in the child-apparitions of *Macbeth*. And the worst conflicts are never depressing. They reflect a health and sense of energic being denied to the horror-paralysis and nightmare harmonies of *The Duchess of Malfi*. Lear's 'No, I'll not weep' is a key passage in the Shakespearian victory. Moreover, spiritual conflict tends to objectify itself into armed opposition and the wound contributes to its own closure. Yet that wound is itself creative: from it the passionate and naturalistic poetry swells out and the whole action is inspired. The poet's task is, indeed, easier in *Macbeth* than in *Antony and Cleopatra*, since artistic intensities are often happiest with evil. An inrush of power is shown attending conflict. Only then do Romeo, Macbeth, and Lear become truly powerful. The agony *is* poetic definition, their suffering felt as of no greater discordance than nature's tempests. The energy and meaning exist in this very effort of reconciliation; and poetic mastery is often the more evident, indeed easier, the more wild the conflict to be resolved. Finally, we must always remember what the plays are, not only what they say: what they say, indeed, seeming sometimes merely as dust obscuring the poetry's ultimate direction. Yet also their artistic structures, though only a medium for power, a wire white with electric heat, have their own inevitable, because organic, precisions. There is formal pattern as well as action. In the middle, usually, is our

climax, with sense of the swing and leverage of existence; at the end, there is peace. The plays work up to a wild sort of unstudied ritual, with pictorial and sacrificial quality: Hamlet carried off to a dead march, with cannon; the tragic loading of Desdemona's bed; Cordelia limp under the white hairs and burning eyes of Lear; Cleopatra's self-dramatized immolation, guided and guarded by her two girls in their dying loyalty. In close relation are reminders of the community's continuance. The purgatorial conflicts hurl themselves up to these almost formal and ceremonial conclusions, recalling the equally positive, yet equally unforced and naturalistic, beauty in agony of the Crucifixion. The protagonist is happily withdrawn, as it were, from the front line of a terrific and painful, yet creative, action. A relation to the Christ-tragedy is sometimes suggested: but, in a deep sense, always embedded—not so much by direct, or even unconscious, influence, but because the same piece of work is being done according to the laws of the same universe: the steady generation from instinctive energy of spiritual power.

We are left with a feeling of both power and peace; of a rhythm, deep as winter or night or sleep necessary to the pulses of existence; of emotional depths that therefore are not finally thwarted; of a thunder that is but a part of some universal music. Shakespeare's naturalistic quality lends itself only provisionally to metaphors from architecture. But the structure of verse and symbol makes always something of a musical-tempestuous design, or, rather, a breathing organism, building one living whole, so that, remembering that a passivity and a psychological harmony were the condition of the play's creation, we find them mysteriously the reward of our reading. Action and inaction, conflict and peace, tempest and music are, in the completed whole, one. And, just as the generated emotion of a Shakespearian speech out-distances its own expression, as each person and event aims not to assert but submerge itself in the whole, since all and each live entirely on the central creative energy; so something greater

than the play itself, which, as in all greatest art, you feel to be no finished and polished finality but rather a rough approximation and provisional expression only, is felt calling each separate work into being and back at will, like the heave and subsiding of a wave, the ocean mass itself profoundly undisturbed. By its very accepted limitations—it is their especial office—each tragedy throws up the shadowings of some mysterious otherness, a something behind, which is also the inmost vitality of its own poetry, rooted like that in the depths of *personality*; which is, too, felt within the play's symbolic direction and ritualistic conclusion, its whole-searching quality. Towards a further inclusion beyond tragedy the sequence accordingly moves.

IV

Macbeth, *Lear*, and *Antony and Cleopatra* are toned respectively as experiences of Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise. In the last-named all natural elements intermesh for celebration of a sovereign love. That love, though backed by impressions of sun and fertility, is, however, shown vividly as in conflict with the social order and needing death for its proper consummation: 'Husband, I come.' Death is here dynamically conceived as entrance into, no retreat from, the cosmic music. The autonomy of human instinct creates, through Cleopatra, its own paradise. The organization and balance of materials is very delicate. Nor is realism slighted. Indeed, the often harsh phraseology would continually drag back the aspiring theme, which wins in its despite: a tendency especially clear in the fine adulation of Cleopatra spoken by the critical Enobarbus. Shakespeare's dramatization of the final mystery is established in terms rich in physical sex and, for once, a barbaric regality; yet also deep in conception of personality, as when Cleopatra's dream-lover becomes himself the universe: as usual, the strongly sensuous and authentically spiritual being interdependent. If, however, we want a more directly idealistic treatment of similar penetration

we can turn to *The Phoenix and the Turtle*: a poem which matches the work of Donne in the delicate refinement of a style 'like gold to airy thinness beat'.

The resurrection and reunion plots that logically follow stand alone in our literature. A comprehensive recognition of their importance is the final aim of all my literary interpretations. My reading has been outlined often, in *Myth and Miracle* and elsewhere, and Mr. D. G. James, in *Scepticism and Poetry*, has further valuable remarks. Here I can only offer yet another outline. Regarding them as a further exploitation of the mysterious power generated through the great tragedies and *Antony and Cleopatra*, we can say that they dramatize a victory over death. Their nature is, however, foreshadowed in certain earlier romances: and indeed the comedies, with their mistakes and discoveries, their untying of tangles and ceremonious conclusions, often contain, as does Lyly too, hints of a universal. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* might be compared with *Comus* in point of maze-suggestion. Shakespeare's work develops through a reorganizing and repenetration rather than a change of material. In his last period favourite poetic impressions tend to present themselves as dramatic actualities: as persons, or events, or both. Poetry is itself the solution, its power the revelation.

There is, however, no dissolution of the individual into nature, or a world-soul. Personality must, in the Shakespearian art, remain at least one certain term of reference. So Hermione is restored as herself, and this is presented as a natural fact: there is no 'black magic', she is 'warm', Leontes's embrace as 'lawful' as 'eating'. Also the hero does not die: rather his experience of another's death is dramatized. Leontes's repentance and 'faith' (Paulina acting throughout as his *conscience*) condition the resurrection. In *Pericles* and *The Winter's Tale* the discovery after loss of the child born in tempestuous conflict reflects nature's creative onwardness as the resurrections of Thaisa and Hermione represent the victorious eternity of love. Gods—Diana, Neptune, Apollo, Jupiter—have, variously,

significance; especially Jupiter in *Cymbeline*. In *The Winter's Tale* country scenes, golden comedy, and young love balance tragic nausea, bitterness, and death, with final emphasis on creation and peace. *The Tempest* is both an artistic autobiography and a universal pattern of man's relation to the divine, the final identity of the individual and universal soul being reflected into the very structure of its symbolic action. Prospero's 'cloud-capp'd towers' speech magnificently sees creation as ephemeral in a way that does not appear pessimistic: a similar positive being implied to that otherness always felt behind Shakespeare's own poetic impressions, plots, persons, and plays. The language of this last group may be far from smooth; often abstract, elusive, twisted; at the bitter passages reaching an explosive compression even greater than in the tragedies. The final period of composition marks not so much a changed approach to human existence as a new *totality* of comprehension; within which death is itself annulled, while the inherent Elizabethan pastoralism, and that positive human, and especially feminine, trust, which have vitalized the whole progress, are found the resolving elements of its close.

Prospero's return to Milan is balanced by Shakespeare's writing of *Henry VIII* (analysed in my book on Shakespearian production), which completes the series ending with *Henry V*. The play is massive and epic with three personal tragedies; the usual ingratitude-*motifs*, self-discovery through disaster, and a newly emphatic Christianity. The vision and miracle quality of other last plays recurs in Queen Katharine's Vision of the immortal life. *Henry VIII* recalls the early *King John* in balance of a national and royal ascendancy against individual suffering; its last movement celebrating both the rise of the king and the birth of Elizabeth. Each of the last plays has a birth-interest, if we include Miranda. The conception of Cranmer sets humility beside the more normally Shakespearian pride of the three tragic persons; and to him Shakespeare entrusts the final prophecy. Such an acceptance of the

contemporary and national is not strange. We tend to pass over the direct national feeling in the show of kings in *Macbeth*; from which *Lear* is not quite independent either. *Cymbeline* works out a studied union of Britain and Rome; and indeed things Roman, of central positive importance to all Elizabethans, are especially so to Shakespeare: hence the terrific and archetypal significance of his theme in *Julius Caesar*. Though capable of sharpest social and militaristic satire, Shakespeare concludes his life-work in praise of England's destiny.

This whole last series corresponds to the tragedies as the resurrection to the crucifixion in Christian belief. It is the inevitable and only proper fulfilment of Shakespeare's genius: from the start his ghosts were more alive than other dramatists' men. As in Goethe's *Faust*, the solution comes through the more feminine element (as opposed to nationalism and soldiership) among the Shakespearian values, including a most vital feeling for the marriage bond and family issues generally; although this leads back to the spiritualized historic conception of *Henry VIII* with, however, its strong feminine sympathies. The theme of wronged women is found from beginning to end of Shakespeare; the extreme agony induced by suspicion, or proof, of their unfaith is proportional to their felt importance; and, at the last, they are redeeming forces. That is why Act V of *Antony and Cleopatra* has so great an importance. The story of Leontes's error may be well contrasted with the view of woman expressed in *Samson Agonistes*. Shakespeare's last works show virtue everywhere as a rarer act than vengeance. They are written from a consciousness of eternity that reflects itself into a new emphasis on arts of design such as embroidery, carvings, and Hermione's living statue; with religious impressions of oracles, chapels, temples, sacrifice, and incense; and, too, an especially *sacramental* approach to nature, as in the emphasis on the 'fire-robed god' Apollo and his plot-directing oracle, together with the fertility-festival, in *The Winter's Tale*, and the pagan sun-worship of Guiderius

and Arviragus in *Cymbeline*. To withhold the mystical sympathies demanded is to shirk the first duty of interpretation. Eventually the resurrection of Hermione must be considered the most strikingly conceived, and profoundly penetrating, moment in English literature.

Shakespeare's various conflicts of romantic emotion and critical cynicism, order and disorder, soldierly honour and feminine devotion, life and death, all from a final view dissolve into the opposition, especially strong in the last plays, of his dominating symbols: tempests and music. These apply in turn to conflicts psychological, communal, and cosmic; to the interactivity of static pattern and dynamic rhythm in the art-form itself; and to the blend of masculine and feminine, active and passive, elements in the creating mind of the poet. The Shakespearian poetry grows from a certain wholeness responding directly to the wholeness of creation, with all opposing tendencies allowed to mature in fullest freedom under the final synthesis; which in turn becomes a channel for an almost god-like power. That power is personified in Prospero, to whose 'so potent art' even graves are obedient. Such an imaginative and holistic medium alone can crash the barriers of human death. So Shakespeare's universe is fundamentally poetical, not philosophical; nor, in our usual but limited sense, exactly dramatic. In it we finally meet no negation, but listen rather to a vast breathing, a rhythmic pulse, the surge and sob of a great ocean, that may remind us of Keats's last, and best, sonnet.

III

THE FROZEN LABYRINTH: AN ESSAY ON MILTON

I

THIS cannot be an easy essay. No great writer in English presents so many opportunities for critical confusion as does Milton. Fortunately, however, his early poems themselves serve admirably as a clarifying introduction.

The *Nativity* Ode has many typically Miltonic images. Here are some: the sun's 'burning axletree', 'the well-balanced world on hinges hung', the 'enamell'd arras of the rain-bow'. In these observe the concretizing of the natural, the mechanical approach to the cosmic. The star, we hear, 'hath fixt her polish'd car', and attends with 'handmaid lamp'. Often a smooth and polished surface is suggested, a rounded and perhaps shining completion. This particularizing yet romantic concreteness turning out references to 'urns and altars', 'chill marble', and a 'furnace blue' blends with an exquisite realization of pagan ritual.

L'Allegro and *Il Penseroso* are mosaics of impression. They resemble inlay-work or embroidery, choice pieces meticulously arranged according to a preconceived design. Other ingredients are a subtle use of folk-lore and country superstition; an equally subtle and yet truly Elizabethan sense of pastoral merriment; a varied play of light and darkness; with a loving memory of literature, classical, Chaucerian, Elizabethan; and of Greek philosophy. Each image in the sequence is of gem-like worth, reflecting the unearthed riches of a studious and cloistered mind.

Aspects of nature are often solidified into persons, sometimes helped by reference to fabrics. The nightingale 'smoothes the rugged brow of night', evening comes in 'a robe of darkest grain' and 'a sable stole of cypress lawn',

forgetting herself 'to marble' with a 'leaden downward cast'; the 'civil-suited morn' is 'kerchief'd in a comely cloud'. The ethereal and evanescent are rendered weighty (as in 'labouring clouds') by images from human civilization, clothes, sculpture; something of nature's Shakespearian and dynamic otherness being lost nevertheless in the process. There is, moreover, little feeling for organic, pulsing life as such: all is levelled under a sculptural impressionism. Effects are usually pictorial and still, to be contrasted with the tingling apprehension of nature's vital movement in, say, Goethe. And yet results may be admirable, as in the royalistic grandeur of:

> Where the great sun begins his state,
> Rob'd in flames and amber light,
> The clouds in thousand liveries dight.

Notice how finely light is rendered solid, its glory both refracted and concretized, weightily embodied and momentously, darkly, colourful.

Such a love for the solid leads naturally to the architectural dignity of oaks (noted as 'aged' and 'monumental'); 'glimmering bowers' suggests human artistry as much as leaves; 'twisted eglantine' gets the outer design, though less of the sap, of the flower. There is a chequer-board effect in 'russet lawns and fallows grey', a mosaic suggestion in 'meadows trim with daisies pied', a solidification of liquid in 'spicy nut-brown ale'. Dawn is 'dappled', the lark sings from his 'watch-tower in the skies'. A smooth-surfaced and architectural delight in nature is apparent throughout, as in 'smooth-shaven green' and 'arched walks of twilight groves'. Milton habitually feels foliage and vegetation as an over-arching canopy. Such impressions are summed in:

> But let my due feet never fail
> To walk the studious cloisters pale,
> And love the high embowed roof,
> With antique pillars massy proof,
> And storied windows richly dight,
> Casting a dim religious light.

Milton's love of architectural weight, dim light, and legendary colour suffused by religious solemnity is here perfectly condensed; and the whole illustrates the first point I wish to make—Milton's innate sympathy with the weighty, monumental, and architectural.

Next, there is his feeling for music and other sounds. The *Nativity* Ode asks for a 'solemn strain' to offer the Infant God. There is 'no battle's sound', the winds are 'with wonder whist' for the occasion. The shepherds are greeted by divine music elaborated through two stanzas, a harmony of 'blissful rapture' unifying Earth and Heaven; and then three more stanzas are given to their harping 'in loud and solemn quire'. We are told that this repeats the first creation-music: it is associated with 'crystal spheres', 'the base of Heaven's deep organ'; and is called an 'angelic symphony' and 'holy song' which, if it 'enwrap' our 'fancy', will reintroduce the golden age, reverse time, kill sickness, and make the 'dolorous mansions' of Hell pass away. Music is, indeed, Milton's natural approach to cosmic resolutions. Later we have the 'trump of doom' thundering with 'horrid clang' such as once was heard on Mount Sinai. At Christ's birth oracles are 'dumb', no 'voice or hideous hum' runs 'through the arched roof', Apollo flies 'with hollow shriek', there are no more 'breathed spells', the 'resounding shore' hears weeping and laments, Lars and Lemures 'moan with midnight plaint', flamens are disturbed by a 'drear and dying sound'. In vain cymbals ring for Moloch, and Osiris ceases to trample the grass 'with lowings loud'. The emphasis is strong. There is often—here and later—suggestion of resonance and echo, as though sounds were enclosed in a building. Notice Milton's Keatsian apprehension here of pagan sanctities, and, indeed, nature generally.

L'Allegro is, strangely perhaps, less full of sound than *Il Penseroso*. Its best passage I shall return to shortly. We have the 'hounds and horn' to wake the morning, 'echoing shrill' through woods; the ploughman whistling, the cock who 'rings' his 'matins', the 'busy hum' of human cities.

There are 'merry bells' and 'jocund rebecks', people are lulled to sleep by 'whispering winds', Shakespeare 'warbles his native woodnotes wild'. *Il Penseroso* is more musically rich. Melancholy, though a creature of 'peace and quiet', hears the muses singing round 'Jove's altar'. There is to be 'mute silence' except for the nightingale, 'musical' and 'melancholy' 'chantress' who shuns the 'noise of folly'. The 'far-off curfew' sounds across water singing 'with sullen roar'; far from 'resort of mirth' you hear only the cricket or the 'bellman's drowsy charm'. We listen to Orpheus warbling to his string; or to symbolic melodies in the 'sage and solemn tunes' of old romance, where 'more is meant than meets the ear'. There are winds 'piping loud' and 'rustling leaves', the bee 'singing' at work, waters 'murmuring', the music of the 'unseen genius of the wood', pointing on to *Comus*. Both poems have their appropriate sounds, and each has its own crowning music passage. The first from *L'Allegro* is this:

> And ever against aching cares,
> Lap me in soft Lydian airs,
> Married to immortal verse
> Such as the meeting soul may pierce
> In notes, with many a winding bout
> Of linked sweetness long drawn out,
> With wanton heed and giddy cunning,
> The melting voice through mazes running;
> Untwisting all the chains that tie
> The hidden soul of harmony.

The passage is important. Music dismisses cares; the marriage of music to words is followed by a meeting of the soul and music; 'linked sweetness' recalls 'leading him prisoner in a red-rose chain' from *Venus and Adonis*, harsh metal turned to flowery delight; direct opposites are blended, resolved, as in *Kubla Khan*, the 'winding bout' paradoxically 'long drawn out'; 'heed' and 'wantonness' converge, also 'cunning' and 'giddiness', under the spell of music; 'mazes', an important symbol (to be found throughout Milton) for distress and confusion, are the

scene of a happy chase; while the heavy chains that manacle the mind are 'untwisted'—remember the weighty, solid succession of Milton's habitual images—to reveal and unleash a carefree universal harmony. In such lyric music Milton can lose his weightier self. But most of his references are to 'solemn' music, and *Il Penseroso* has also its star passage, neatly following and blending into the ecclesiastical and architectural description already quoted to build a perfect condensation of the specifically Miltonic:

> Then let the pealing organ blow
> To the full-voiced quire below,
> In service high and anthems clear,
> As may with sweetness through mine ear
> Dissolve me into ecstasies,
> And bring all heaven before mine eyes.

We are at the very heart of Milton here. The short *Arcades* has music lines of high interest. It is there felt as intrinsic to all ultimate understanding, the bed-rock of creation, a matter of 'sweet compulsion' (again a paradox and again recalling our *Venus and Adonis* line, or St. Paul's statement of happy bondage); as something that conquers destiny, lulling the 'daughters of necessity', that is, resolving antinomies of free-will and fate; keeping nature at her work and drawing it to the divine. Of course, to know this resolution whilst listening to music, or drinking (like Burns's *Tam o' Shanter*, 'o'er all the ills of life victorious'), is one thing; to possess it on a wider front of action quite another, as we shall see when we come to *Paradise Lost*.

Architecture is spatial and static, music dynamic and temporal. Milton is strongly sensitive to both. We can say, by metaphor, that in the greatest literary art-forms these two qualities, the architectonic and narrative, are perfectly fused, as in Shakespeare. There, however, you have very rare notice of architecture specifically, and, though we may often use metaphors from building and design provisionally for our own analysis, they do not, to a final judgement, reflect the organic and natural energy of Shakespeare's work. Similarly with music. Tempests

and music are there our bed-rock dualism, our final terms of reference. But actual music description or suggestion of it in metaphor is comparatively slight; nor is its dramatic use at all excessive. In the greater plays it occurs at the limit, so to speak, crowning, but never replacing, other positive effects, the other more human melodies of passion and action: it is heavily stressed at a high moment, say in *Lear*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, or *Pericles*; and in *The Tempest* (Miltonic in its fondness for sounds and especially solemn music) it helps to mark the culmination of a movement composed of many plays. Now these arts so persistent imagistically in Milton's early work can both be felt implicit in the more purely poetic fusion of Shakespeare: where, however, you cannot disentangle passion's music and action's thunder from dramatic and architectural stability. Neither art exists *as itself* in Shakespeare. The *Nativity* Ode, though it offers a satisfying lyric integrity, remains somewhat fluid in its addition of stanza to stanza: there is no complex inter-knitting, that is, of central action with design, nor is such necessary. *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* present a dualism of mood important to our understanding of Milton. But the texture of each is loose: no more is needed than a succession and addition of 'objective equivalents' to the feeling in question. The poems are static. The images are themselves pictorially still, a sequential arrangement of tiny solids with no sense of any dynamic, evolving energy. The task of marrying movement and action to design, the realizing of an organic cohesion of motion and solidity, of the melodic and the architectural, remains unattempted: though the arts corresponding to each of these elements *in isolation* are insistently, almost excessively, emphasized.

Paganism and sensuous feeling are strong in Milton from the start. In the *Nativity* Ode Christ is Himself, as in Spenser—where He once shares the title with Henry VIII—indirectedly associated with the 'great Pan'. And, though *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* in opposition hold the germ of Milton's main conflict, the richness

of both witnesses his sensuous vigour, just as their suffusing solemnity and scholarly cast of thought witness his ascetic control. In *Comus* Milton attempts a complex work, with a central opposition of sensuous temptation and religious abstinence.

It repeats former essences with a more spontaneous up-gushing of pure Elizabethanism, which does not blend any too easily with the poem's ethical nature. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has been a helpful, and understood, influence. The setting continues Milton's love of nature architectural, and the prevailing darkness his feeling for subdued light. The wood is expressly both an overarching dimness and a maze:

> their way
> Lies through the perplex'd paths of this drear wood,
> The nodding horror of whose shady brows
> Threats the forlorn and wandering passenger. (36)

The heroine is lost 'in the blind mazes of this tangled wood' (181), it is a 'leavy labyrinth' (278), with 'paths and turnings' (569). The Lady's song (230) addresses Echo (notice Milton's fondness for *echoing* sounds), who lives unseen by the river 'Meander'; the song itself remarkably suggesting a winding, labyrinthine movement that recalls the 'winding bout', 'sweetness long drawn out', 'giddy cunning', and 'mazes' of the dualism-resolving song in *L'Allegro*. The express purpose of both is, indeed, to match labyrinthine distress with labyrinthine harmony. The mazes of life in general are in the wood of *Comus*: especially psychological ones. Darkness has cruelly muffled the stars

> That nature hung in heaven, and fill'd their lamps
> With everlasting oil, to give due light
> To the misled and lonely traveller. (198)

Observe the concrete mechanizing and civilizing of nature in 'everlasting oil'. *Comus* is a moral parable of spiritual error and divine guidance, recalling certain parts of *The Faery Queen*, and *The Tempest* as interpreted by Mr.

Colin Still. 'Chastity' here is the safeguard against both unruly fears and disordered imaginations; since light, we are told, may reign in the soul whatever the surrounding darkness. As the Lady meditates on Christian virtues a sable cloud is seen to 'turn forth her silver lining on the night' (224). Notice the textile quality of 'lining'.

The poem is highly psychological and moralistic. Comus and his rout suggest the evils of unrestrained, especially mental, lasciviousness. The opposition is ethically direct and the logic coherent in so far as we neglect the poetry: but once admit that, and a difficulty appears. To put it bluntly, Comus is far too attractive. His misbehaving rout and Bacchic exuberance generally may be readily placed; but he as often reminds us of the more guiltless joys in *L'Allegro*. He defends his point of view in natural and cosmic terms fine as the Helen-poetry in *Faustus* (93–144): he enlists the 'starry choir', 'spheres', the procession of months, years, seasons; vast sounds, seas; the moon, 'wavering' morris-dancers, fairy dance on sands, books and fountains. Indeed, he reminds us of Oberon and Titania, and many mythological or romantic associations before and since ranging from elfin loveliness to cosmic grandeur. There are other tonings, of course: but the difficulty remains. 'A light fantastic round' replaces the 'light fantastic toe' of *L'Allegro*. In his invitation (706–55) later Comus's reasonings are far from unconvincing. He accuses the Lady of a too exclusive chastity in words recalling a New Testament parable; and had he accused her of a somewhat too self-conscious chastity our sympathies would hardly be in doubt. How closely Milton is dramatizing a conflict in his own mind (to be made even more explicit in *Lycidas*) appears when Comus blames her for following 'budge doctors of the stoic fur', fetching precepts from 'the cynic tub' (note how the Miltonic condensation and solidification of image on occasion gets very awkward, as also in 'Jonson's learned sock' in *Il Penseroso*). Comus urges the fecundity of nature in poignant phrases, the one so praised by Dr. F. R. Leavis

in *Revaluation* for what he considers an un-Miltonic sincerity significantly among them. Indeed, Milton never in all his work shows so convincing a cosmic apprehension. Comus concludes by asserting that if all nature followed the Lady's course the result would be creative disaster.

It must be admitted, however, that the Lady's answer (756–99) is equally fine; with a true dignity recalling Vittoria Corrombona, Hermione, and Queen Katharine. The defence emphasizes the danger of enlisting nature on the side of vice instead of 'temperance'. Chastity is a 'sun-clad power'. The speech has fire and vigour; and indeed enjoys an Elizabethan and dramatic force unique in Milton.

The evil here is, as in Marlowe, a very mental thing, something 'that fancy can beget on youthful thoughts' (669); and I am not suggesting that it is not evil. But what, precisely, is it? We are not directly told. And, in so far as we seek definition in atmospheric and poetic suggestion—our main, and in any case our final, guide—we have all cosmic and natural excellence such as Shakespeare incorporates into *Antony and Cleopatra* ranged with the evil force, whereas the brothers and the Lady are, in their earlier moralizing, dull. True, they talk: but after a lengthy speech by one brother it needs more than the other's reply 'How charming is divine philosophy' (476) (contrast the exquisitely humorous parallel spoken by the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*) to get our sympathy. The statement that nature itself demands continence and that virtue is the only true freedom, we need not deny: but 'virtue' is finally as undefined as the evil of Comus, except by the poetry, which upsets the ethical balance. Of course, we may say the temptation—there is authority in the text—is the straight one of sexual intercourse; but this is really to lay too heavy a stress on the play's realism, since that could scarcely be a serious temptation under the circumstances. The drink offered by Comus suggests something at once more inward and more subtle.

Music and sounds play a heavy part; indeed, they are in

this darkened wood our main terms of reference. There is a 'soft pipe' to still winds and 'hush the waving woods' (86–7); the Lady hears a noise of revelry and listens, describing the 'ill-managed merriment' of 'jocund flute' and 'gamesome pipe' (172–3). Her Echo song (230) itself carries music-references. Comus and his rout first enter with a 'riotous and unruly noise' (92–3). Later he compliments the Lady on her singing (244–70), comparing music to a fog-dispelling power, a phrase whose psychological undertones are plain enough. The brothers talk of farm-yard sounds (345–7), philosophy is 'musical as is Apollo's lute' (478). The Shepherd's music is said to delay a stream and sweeten musk-roses (494–7): music has material power. The Spirit's description of Comus tells how the sorcerer's cup is mixed 'with many murmurs' (526); he speaks, moreover, of his own 'rural minstrelsy' (547) and the 'barbarous dissonance' (550) of Comus's followers. The lady's song is such as 'might create a soul under the ribs of death' (561–2): the unforced compression of the thought is Elizabethan. The temptation is staged in a 'stately palace' (typical of Milton) to 'soft music' with a table spread with 'dainties' (658–9), pointing on to *Paradise Regained.* After the rescue the Attendant Spirit again speaks of pastoral music and Sabrina is invoked by song. The mask ends with song and happy, even rollicking, dance.

Mr. Francis Berry has called my attention to an interesting stress on the importance of Comus's rod for the Lady's release. This is my reading. Mental inhibition is shadowed by the frozen paralysis during resistance imposed by Comus. The reversal of Comus's rod (816) is needed to unbind the spell: which suggests a *redirection of the same instinct.* But the rod is lost; instinct sunk in repression. Therefore assistance is invoked from Sabrina, a virgin river-goddess who controls the 'Severn stream' with 'moist curb' (825), symbolizing, it seems, some mastery of passions. Her 'chaste palms moist and cold' contrast with the 'gums and glutinous heat' of lust fixing the Lady to the

'marble' seat (917–18). She is associated with liquid freshness from 'snowy hills' as against 'summer's drouth' (928). A poetic emphasis on transparent waters and their jewelled beds further indicates (i) cold, if natural, purity, and (ii) high ethical transcendence. Words like 'virgin' and 'chaste', as well as 'holier' (943), 'Heav'n' (970), 'virtue' (1022), and 'grace' (938) are significant. Though 'victorious dance' succeeds 'sensual folly' (974–5) and the Attendant Spirit, left alone, talks finally of Cupid and Psyche (1004–5), nevertheless the resolution seems to come rather through a transcendence (explicitly a second thought) than the more human process implied by the reversal of Comus's rod: though the imaginative distinction is subtle, and must not be pressed too far.

I have compared *Comus* to *The Tempest*, its conflict, though narrower, being similarly universal (966–73); Mr. Richard Prentis has recently noticed its stylistic resemblance to some lines in Prospero's mask; and the Attendant Spirit vividly recalls Ariel at the end. Milton starts his life-work with the grave manner and 'solemn music' of Shakespeare's close. Moreover, if we allow *Samson Agonistes* to correspond very roughly to *Hamlet* in point of (i) self-disgust, (ii) feminine disillusionment, (iii) a supernaturally enjoined revenge, and (iv) final holocaust, we find Milton ending where Shakespeare's greater work begins. Milton has, to borrow a phrase from Mr. Eliot's poetic criticism of our own age, advanced 'progressively backwards', his poetry maintaining a petrified resistance with only intermittent release into the Sabrina melodies: the Christ of *Paradise Regained* is significantly static. The loss of Comus's rod therefore reflects a wider poetic *loss* where there might have been a *reversal*, while a rooted trouble persists. Though profoundly Shakespearian, the later Milton shows a rigidity which is also an opposite, if static, direction; as when here the Spirit talks like Caliban while Comus and his wand recall Prospero (653). Shakespeare's power seems to derive from trust in a vitality Milton rejects. Milton's substances are often

Shakespearian but they point very differently. So, though the usual reading of *Comus* as a simple moral antithesis may miss the striking precision of its psychological penetration, its diagnosis may nevertheless be applied to hint a weakness behind Milton's own development.

Lycidas, short as it is, presents many more problems than we can properly discuss here. Milton's early work plays on a conflict of the pagan-sexual with the Christian-ethical. *Lycidas* is therefore interesting in its attempt at friendly association of the two pastoral traditions, ecclesiastical and literary, in one poem. There is a clear personal cry questioning the wisdom of losing amorous joys with Amaryllis and Neaera through the high seriousness of a poetic temperament that may be allowed to illuminate the problems raised by *Comus* and *Paradise Lost*. Exquisite Spenserian melodies and flowery description do not cohabit very happily with the thunderous St. Peter. Learned references are perhaps too thickly clustered without context enough to create the interest they demand. Personification of the Cam is of doubtful success, but the use, as in *Comus*, of a river-symbol is interesting with reference both to Spenser and later English poetry; and, indeed, the main theme of 'death by water' has numerous fascinating analogies. Exquisite in parts and most valuable as a whole, *Lycidas* reads rather as an effort to bind and clamp together a universe trying to fly off into separate bits; it is an accumulation of magnificent fragments. The elegiac interest itself has some pregnant moments in the association of human immortality with the natural process of sunrise; of Heaven with 'nuptial song'; and, especially, in hint of some creative purpose within human disaster.

II

In *Paradise Lost* Milton attempts at once a rational cosmology and an epic of powerful action. Either alone would be hard: the artistic combination is infinitely more so. That such an attempt written from an age of political and religious conflict should result in a magnificent failure

does no discredit to the author: though certain confusions in conception and design must be nevertheless related to Milton's poetic life-work as a whole. The subjective conflict of *Comus* is the main irritant behind the creation of *Paradise Lost*. There is little real change, though we watch a slow strangulation of one of the two contestants. Twenty years of political activity have made slight difference. Poetry works from a deeper, more personal level than that; and personality is not readily altered.

The central fortunes of Adam and Eve constitute the heart not of this poem alone but of Milton's work as a whole. Their connubial joys are emphasized with a deliberate repudiation of wrong-thoughted ascetic idealisms. Milton's 'puritanism' must not be misunderstood:

> Nor those mysterious parts were then concealed,
> Then was not guilty shame, dishonest shame
> Of nature's works, honour dishonourable
> Sin-bred, how have ye troubled all mankind . . .
> (IV. 312)

Like D. H. Lawrence, Milton attacks primarily a lustful or unduly mentalized development of sexual energy, as well as many sophisticated and respectable pleasures, indeed the whole chivalrous and idealistic approach:

> Not in the bought smile
> Of harlots, loveless, joyless, unindear'd,
> Casual fruition, nor in court amours,
> Mix'd dance, or wanton mask, or midnight ball,
> Or serenade, which the starv'd lover sings
> To his proud fair, best quitted with disdain. (IV. 765)

In strongest opposition we have marriage love and its permanent physical rights. Those who think of abstention from sexual intercourse in terms of 'purity' and 'innocence' are 'hypocrites' or ranged with the devil (IV. 744–9). The Fall is therefore carefully shown as inducing a peculiarly mental lasciviousness; and my discussion here might be compared with the contrast of Orsino's with Viola's love in my *Principles of Shakespearian Production*. The forbidden fruit acts as an intoxication, till Adam and

Eve 'swim in mirth', each casting 'lascivious eyes' (IX. 1008–16) on the other. There is an unpleasant, heavy humour:

> if such pleasure be
> In things to us forbidden, it might be wish'd
> For this one Tree had been forbidden ten. (IX. 1024)

There are 'glances' and 'toys' of 'amorous intent', raising in answer 'contagious fire', till they retreat to a shady spot for 'love's disport' and 'amorous play' (IX. 1034–45). There is a new self-conscious enjoyment. Intercourse takes place now by daylight, a thought relevant to Lawrence's emphasis on the dark unconscious in matters sexual. That the increase in pleasure felt by Adam and Eve is entwined with a nasty humour and lasciviousness suggests that the pleasure occurs in close relation to a sense of sin. The final stage is an awakening to shame at nakedness; followed by wrangling and the birth of evil passions; leading finally to evil in the natural and animal world. Yet the peak, as it were, of *mental* enjoyment—we are discussing something more subtle than physical intercourse—was so intense that it was given divine associations. Some glow of exquisite sensation is touched beside which the joys of innocence are 'flat' and 'harsh' (IX. 987). Milton skilfully allows a doubt as to whether the delight is real or fanciful (IX. 788–9); but it is definitely involved in thoughts of 'godhead' (IX. 790).

This baffling complex of the divine and shameful is the heart both of *Comus* and *Paradise Lost*. Nor has any writer more closely and fearlessly analysed it. Shakespeare has a sonnet describing something of the sort, but he never gets close up, never pushes inside, content rather to speak in terms of those various passions here shown as derivative, or shadowing such psychic contradictions through light wit or sympathetic humour. In so far as Shakespeare speaks seriously, there is never this agonizing and final dependence of the divinely pleasurable on the ethically repellent. Milton is perhaps the closer realist, as Marlowe

is a closer realist than Lyly: yet those who fearlessly attempt such realism invariably seem to end by fogging their art. For the pleasure is, in itself, and at the *moment of impact*, a positive; and no later results must, to the poetic intelligence, be allowed to distort its essence. Milton is forced on to a rejection of human culture comparable with that of Tolstoy and Lawrence. For this complex of divine pleasure and sinful shame so truly objectified at the climax of his greatest poem is unfortunately also subtly at work throughout its philosophy and technique. There is a final rejection of some authentic positive to avoid inroads of some ugly lasciviousness. Horror at indignity, at the ludicrously shameful, in human nature works at the back of the Miltonic repressions: hence the emphasis on an ugly, rather than a redeeming, humour. The Shakespearian alternative is a complete acceptance, creating next harmonious works of art that do not attempt such naked disclosures of subjective experience, clothing it in more respectable habits (as, for example, dramatic themes of murder, direct physical lust outside the marriage bond, warlike ambition, jealousy, &c.), sometimes with accompanying and purifying comedy. Milton is almost too honest. He brings into the full glare of daylight something perhaps better left in half-obscurity until a deeper solution is reached. For that instant of exquisite pleasure he describes, though its content may seem, and indeed prove, both fictional and dangerous, was nevertheless a spark struck from some significant opposition, some contact of shivering delight with the very dynamic of creative life more ultimate than good or evil; though each of these may seem to be involved in an inextricable and hopeless tangle, as they are, indeed, in God's creation. Moreover, the swing-over from pleasure to intense reaction in itself proves nothing, and may succeed the most sanctified forms of conjugal intercourse. Now, in recording this little psychic drama from the negative aspect I believe Milton negates the dynamic of human life at its origin. He writes from a deep awareness of *fallen* human—and other—

nature; which is poetically fatal. The results are, in Milton—and indeed our society as a whole—a denial of the specifically vital with a corresponding emphasis on the mechanical: utter ethical confusion. The provisional mental acceptance required may well appear dangerous and perhaps all but impossible for any sensitive and refined personality: which may explain why genius is rare. I say 'mental acceptance': for where actions are concerned respect for society and all the usual ethical values must normally come into force. Shakespeare, as I have noted, does not regard naked desire as fit even for artistic comment without a certain translation, at once an enlarging and a weakening, of it, into more conventional forms: of these he next aims to distinguish fairly clearly the good from the evil, prior to that artistic sanctifying of all essences in the completed whole which corresponds to the acceptance conditioning his start.

But there is in Milton a clash of forces. An all but irrepressible sensuousness is clamped down. The lascivious-divine (remember Cleopatra was 'riggish') fights a battle to the death with an iron ethical will. Some force partly divine is rejected and cast out, like Satan: from which thought we may pass to the power-symbols in *Paradise Lost*.

The down-thundering of the Son of God 'gloomy as night' on the rebel host (VI. 824–66) is one of the supreme things in our literature. Nowhere is Milton's love for the semi-mechanical so nobly projected as in that winged and eye-blazing chariot. It lives and moves, as his natural phenomena do not: it 'rowls', it 'bickers'. It belches 'smoak' and 'pernicious fire'. Yet is the image Christian? True, the Son is specifically opposing guns and horrible militaristic inventions; and Milton claims to have advanced beyond the crudities of heroic and martial poetry (IV. 25–47); the chariot slays with eyes, suggesting a spiritual victory; and the narrating angel expressly warns us that he is translating things heavenly into earthly terms. The Son's spectacular arrival on the

scene of battle may be felt to reflect—there are touches which suggest it—Christ's spiritual victory of the New Testament after ages of insoluble conflict. Yet that victory is one of love; which here becomes 'pernicious fire'. The normal discrepancy between outward expression and inward meaning in literature is driven to a jarring discordance: the best Christian emotions are negated. In his dealings with man, the Son is nearer the true Christ; indeed, somewhat milder than that incisive, penetrating, and uncompromising figure shadowed in the Gospels. But Adam and Eve after the Fall are so pathetically weak and so eminently excusable that divine tolerance is scarcely tested: whereas, when pitted against something of comparable stature, the heavenly authorities are ruthless. In the surface fiction the difference appears, finally, one not of good against evil but purely, as Satan says elsewhere (I. 258), of force. There is, however, a fine repudiation of militarism in Book III of *Paradise Regained* pointing towards Pope and Byron.

The difficulty becomes more confusing when we turn back to the early books. Milton's later treatment of Satan cannot obliterate the first impact. It is *unnecessarily* heroic. Probably the poet started by determining to make a rebel strong enough to resist the Almighty, little guessing how fatally easy his task was to prove:

> What though the field be lost?
> All is not lost; the unconquerable will,
> And study of revenge, immortal hate,
> And courage never to submit or yield . . . (I. 105)

Satan loses nothing in our eyes by the 'immortal hate', since that is for him the convincing emotion; whereas God and the Son are not given equally strong Christian tonings. Moreover, the first felt futility of Satan's determination—although, of course, he does finally succeed—serves to increase the heroism. Armed force can only become effectively heroic in our era on one condition: that it be felt as tragic. Compare the regular treatment of kingship or soldiership overthrown by some more spiritual power in

Shakespearian tragedy with the attempt to create a non-tragic yet heroic fiction in *Tamburlaine*; Henry V being only saved, if at all, by strong religious backing. So Satan becomes a profoundly satisfying figure, into whom Milton injects large part of himself, his own political fortunes and that indomitable will and lack of humility that rings in his iron verse. Satan is as a Cromwellian chieftain who 'darts his experienced eye' with unbroken pride down the lines of his vanquished host; a born leader offering himself to danger for the public good. His countenance has human and tragic dignity:

> . . . his face
> Deep scars of thunder had intrench'd, and care
> Sat on his faded cheek . . . (I. 600)

'Deliberation' and 'public care' engrave the forehead of Beelzebub (II. 303). Such phrases transmit a specifically communal feeling not found elsewhere. The parliament of fiends is a parliament of noble, fallen, yet dauntless men: the intuition, at this moment, is Byronic. How well this suits the advance of man to maturity after the irresponsibilities of youth:

> Farewell, happy fields
> Where joy for ever dwells. Hail horrors, hail
> Infernal world, and thou profoundest Hell
> Receive thy new possessor: one who brings
> A mind not to be changed by place or time.
> The mind is its own place and in itself
> Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven.
> What matter then if I be still the same,
> And what I should be, all but less than he
> Whom thunder hath made greater? (I. 249)

However the poet may try from time to time to right the balance with an ethical comment, an underlying and insistent, if unintended, personal sincerity shatters the surface fiction. For in this very act of creation Milton *is* Satan, himself engaged in making a poetic heaven out of a social, political, and maybe religious hell. Insight and honesty together create a figure touched with that mysteri-

ous tragic aura, that wholeness and infinity, so much more poetically impressive than the harsher glories of victory. There is, moreover—and in consequence—a unity of protagonist with setting, an organic plant-and-soil relation, for lack of which Heaven is uninteresting. In Hell material power is truly heroic, because tragic, as in Shakespeare. It is defined by means of its failure; and something other shadowed, yet not directly expressed, and certainly incapable of expression by Milton's theology, in terms of the forces vanquished. The first two books exist in a different dimension from the rest: and nothing those say hurts them.

This grandeur of conception is maintained in the meeting with Sin and Death. The first is Satan's daughter, the birth from his head suggesting the mental origin of evil; the second, fruit of a further incestuous union. A certain semi-sexual element is integrated into Satan's ambition, similar to that complex shadowed by the total impact of *Macbeth*. He confronts the loathly figures like Macbeth before the Weird Sisters, the protagonist's human integrity in both fictions contrasting proudly with the subhuman and absurd evil that is nevertheless in part its own. So Satan towers: and, indeed, his vast size, imaged to fine effect, seems to symbolize an assertion similar to that embodied by Swift in *Gulliver's Travels*; both writers probably feeling themselves to be channels of gigantic, if thwarted and unrecognized, power. But as his story develops, Satan certainly becomes more distant, our subjective sympathies transferring to Adam and Eve; the soliloquy in Book IV, which recalls the prayer-conflicts of Claudius and Angelo, marking a transition from heroic integrity to self-conflict. Our admiration is finely recaptured during his first sight of Eve (IV. 358–92) with its generous and noble emotions. When eventually he slips into the conventional, and finally the shrivelling and dust-gorging, serpent, the process is both necessary and blasphemous: the logic being schematic only and imaginatively incoherent.

The story of Satan is a universalization of the Fall of man. The story spirals in and down to earth after the first grand introduction, and there is an intended relation of the one fall to the other. The figures of Sin and Death suggest a sexual element; the serpent carries it on; and the later gorging of Hesperian fruit which turns to ashes completes the analogy. Moreover, just as the determination of Satan and the unforgiving wrath of God present something of an indomitable force repressed by an omnipotent and irresistible control, so, in the sexual-lascivious matter generally, the Miltonic scheme presents, it would seem, a repression rather than a sublimation of instinct. The 'unconquerable will' is felt on both sides. When Milton suggests it is 'in our will to love or not' (v. 539) he speaks what is half truth and half most dangerous fallacy. Somewhere there is a failure in acceptance, in generosity, in elasticity, in humour; with an implied critical rejection of nature, especially of those undignified lascivious instincts of which Milton feels most ashamed. The doctrine precisely opposes that of Pope. Nor can a cosmic poem develop correctly under so rigidly ethical a compression.

Here are some of the tangles. Satan and his followers suggest man's own nobly tragic destiny; the 'truth, wisdom, sanctitude, severe and pure' (IV. 293) of Adam and Eve indicate rather a future perfection than an original innocency, the words denoting spiritual victory, not happy inexperience; while the thundering Messiah is scarcely expressive of a love-conquest. Again, this sequence of Hell, Eden, and triumphant Messiah might be taken to shadow a progress from tragedy through purgatorial wisdom to vision of established divinity. Now I doubt if these are legitimate 'ambiguities'—I borrow the word from Mr. Empson's valuable book—since they tend to contradict rather than expand the surface meanings; as though the poet were trying to string out in a story-sequence impressions that might have been less logically but more precisely ordered. Moreover, not only

do the iron bands of the design bulge dangerously under the upheaving emotional force of Satan's tragic grandeur, but passages concerning the Deity sag. Expostulation of his own blamelessness before the Fall, asserting predestination ('which had no less prov'd certain unforeknown' (III. 119) in the very act of its denial is surely neither good theology nor sound philosophy. The Son eagerly attempts to follow up any gleam of compassion in the words of his Father, who, nevertheless, while praising and entering into the Son's graciousness, keeps returning (especially at II. 330–3) to images of condemnation, as though himself not getting the point, and thinking still on a more primitive plane. The sending of Raphael on a long embassy of warning known to be fruitless in order further to throw full responsibility on man is, to say the least, considerate neither to the angel nor to Adam and Eve. The traditional redemptive mechanism in terms of payment (from the start a dangerously rigid expansion of a Pauline metaphor) can seldom have seemed more arbitrarily unconvincing than in Milton's treatment. You would often almost suspect an ironic intention did you not know its impossibility in a poem explicitly written with the somewhat presumptuous aim of justifying God against human charges. Certainly, when Adam meditates at length on the strangeness of the Deity's ways, every phrase rings far truer than the trite arguments of admitted self-blame which seem somewhat unconvincingly inserted. Relevant passages occur at X. 720–844, where God's 'justice' is felt to be inexplicable, and XI. 497–511: and one might adduce *Samson Agonistes*, 300–25, 358–60, 667–704. Some burning resentment is being sternly, yet not quite successfully, bridled. For the central fact of evil is, as I have remarked, itself very insecurely defined; as in Comus, where the magic cup exactly corresponds to the apple here, and both to Satan's ambition which, as in Dryden's Absalom, is felt as 'a spark too much of heavenly fire'. The Deity's conditions are acutely questioned (IV. 515–26). The temptation of Eve is deliberately made overwhelmingly convincing

(IX. 679–732) through the miraculous presentation of a talking, rational, and beauty-recognizing snake, grown newly human through tasting the forbidden fruit. In comparison Christ's temptations in *Paradise Regained* are extremely weak. Eve is most carefully made to sin through obedience to a semi-divine ambition, self-persuaded that God could never repudiate such an act. The tree has 'sacred fruit' (IX. 924), it is of 'Divine effect' (IX. 865), lifting the mind 'to Godhead' (IX. 877; see also IX. 790), inducing a pinnacle of consciousness intuitively recognized as high:

> but I feel
> Far otherwise th' event, not Death, but Life
> Augmented, open'd eyes, new hopes, new joys,
> Taste so divine, that what of sweet before
> Hath touch'd my sense, flat seems to this and harsh.
> (IX. 983)

Partly in loyalty to her, Adam eats too, and they 'swim in mirth', fancying they feel

> Divinity within them breeding wings
> Wherewith to scorn the earth. (IX. 1010)

This 'mother of science' (IX. 680), this fruit of 'sciential sap' (IX. 837) is hallowed, and the sin partly exists in its desecration (IX. 903). The baffling alinement of intuitive positives with the supremely evil is in the Marlovian tradition, directly un-Shakespearian, and vital to our understanding of Milton. This paradox is presented in naked distinctness. It is both profoundly human and yet profoundly unsatisfying; and, when expanded to epic magnitude, reveals the provisional nature of its realism.

For, apart from all questions of structure and levels of meaning, an untenable philosophy emerges. The static and sculptural quality of Milton's nature-imagery, together with his mechanized cosmology, all constitute a rejection of the specifically vital. This tones with his attitude to sinful instincts; which in turn leads to a final rejection of women and the very principle of beauty. I

cannot quote the passages involved: but they are striking enough, especially those attacking women which occur at IX. 1182–6, X. 137–56, X. 867–908, XI. 628–9. In *Paradise Regained* Satan does not confront Christ with feminine allurements because he considers them beneath such notice (II. 153–234). *Samson Agonistes* is one massive tirade against feminine wiles and guiles. Though evil comes through a lust in *Paradise Lost*, what positive hopes are hinted have no erotic relation. Here Milton draws apart from Dante and Shakespeare, and, too, the New Testament, itself fertile in erotic imagery positively toned. Angels, we are assured, know sexual intercourse in Heaven (VIII. 614–29): but the passage is slight, and it is never sexual intercourse, as such, that most bothers Milton, but rather the consciously lascivious instincts of the mind, together with the dangers of feminine domination. Yet creative thinking must be sex-flooded; risks Milton will not accept may condition a final imaginative integrity. Through loathing of the lascivious he performs finally a dual rejection. He stands for the proud and critical, rather than the interpretative, humorous, and gentle approach to the baffling complex of foulness and divine pleasure entwined in the human consciousness. He gives evil expression in ugly and heavy humour twice (in Adam and Eve directly after the Fall, and in Satan's mockery of the opposing angels after the success of his artillery), but, although he may assert 'smiles' to be a distinguishing mark of human reason (IX. 239–40), he cannot apply a sympathetic Byronic humour—perhaps the most valuable approach—to the solution. He is therefore barred from natural and cosmic sympathy, repudiating the knowledge of good and evil together, considering the one to be bought too dear at the cost of the other. The blindness so nobly treated in his poetry becomes a cruelly apt symbol of another opacity. The sun to him is 'dark' in more senses than one, and his great invocation to light takes on new pathos from such a reading. For no natural scenes are more vitally projected in Milton than the

burning lake of Hell and the bottomless vacuities of Chaos: wherein only is he properly at home.

The repressed instinct is eventually soaked up into the repressive will, which becomes all-powerful; yet, since there is now nothing for it to control, lacks purpose, and so looks about for something to destroy. Milton's most faultlessly organized work is probably the granite-like and deadly sincere *Samson Agonistes*, with a theme, forecast in *Paradise Lost* (IX. 1059–62), which exactly dramatizes his thesis concerning woman in terms of a story ruthlessly dedicated to a pre-Christian conception of physical force and bloody destruction in the name of God. Where such force is positively forbidden by his story—as in *Paradise Regained*—the result is static. The New Testament supersedes the ten negatives of the Decalogue by two positives; but Milton reduces it again to negation by isolating and expanding the temptations. He compasses violent force and frigid virtue, but does not blend action *with* passivity to project Shakespearian or Byronic figures of creative power. His Christ is actionless, the poem expressive of a frozen and paralysed will to good. There is, certainly, a more positive message in terms of 'reason': and for an admirable appreciation of this I would point to Mr. Charles Williams's *Reason and Beauty in the Poetic Mind*. But there is, I feel, little love in Milton's later work. He is, moreover, untrue to himself and his own peculiarly academic genius; his Christ logically now rejecting Greek literature with scorn (*Paradise Regained*, IV. 221–364) and ratifying the earlier placing of the Hellenic in Hell. The elements of nature are themselves now under the dominion of evil spirits (*Paradise Regained*, II. 124). All is forced by Milton's dogmatic position, and intellectually coherent; yet it remains at the opposite extreme from Shakespeare. Milton writes of angels, Christ, and God from a consciousness saturated in the knowledge of sin; whereas Shakespeare—or Milton in his own creation of Satan—sanctifies sin by writing of it from a godlike understanding.

III

No important poem can, however, be satisfactorily analysed in terms of its ideological scheme alone. Yet, when we turn to inspection of Milton's more sensuous achievements, we find a balance of excellences and limitations corresponding with those inhering in the intellectual and emotional structure.

The descriptions of Eden show an approach which tends to harden and solidify what is more properly flexible and yielding. The divine profusion is supposed to go beyond nature (IV. 207–8) but instead falls short of it. A certain deliberating aestheticism insists on translating the natural into terms of human artistry, and you have excessive luxuriance side by side with a stony, carven immobility. Though Milton deliberately asserts the rule of nature as opposed to art in his Eden (IV. 242), his poetry, here and elsewhere, does not substantiate the claim. You get too many 'arbours' and 'alleys', with phrases such as 'floury roof' (IV. 772) and 'verdurous wall' (IV. 143). Plants are 'gay enamell'd' (IV. 149). Nature is seen pictorially, from without: it is at once sapless and static. But the manner has its delights, as in the exquisite description of the nuptial bower:

> the *roof*
> Of thickest covert was *inwoven* shade
> Laurel and myrtle, and what higher grew
> Of *firm* and fragrant leaf; on either side
> Acanthus, and each odorous bushy shrub
> *Fenc'd up* the verdant *wall*; each beauteous flower,
> Iris all hues, roses, and jessamine
> Rear'd high their *flourish'd* heads between, and *wrought*
> *Mosaic*; underfoot the violet,
> Crocus, and hyacinth with rich *inlay*
> *Broider'd* the ground, more colour'd than with stone
> Of *costliest emblem.* (IV. 692)

I italicize significant words. Nature is approached through feeling for artistic design: its life is that neither of nature

nor divine purpose, but static art. Elsewhere—outside Eden—we meet the ornate humanizing of

> Forth *flourish'd* thick the clust'ring vine, forth crept
> The smelling gourd, *up stood* the corny reed
> *Embattl'd* in her field: add the *humble* shrub,
> And bush with frizzl'd *hair* implicit. (VII. 320)

Sense of motion in 'crept' is entirely subjected to realization of a pictorially still object. In Eden the plan certainly intends to show nature as hospitable; and as we watch Adam and Eve wondering 'whether to wind the woodbine round this arbour' (IX. 216) we see the beginnings of human civilization. But one cannot quite credit Milton with a full awareness of the problems he raises. For, in the rough approaches to Eden, a silvan slope is called a 'woody theatre' (IV. 141); while in one of the wilder districts expressly compared to an Indian forest we find

> a pillar'd shade
> High overarch'd and echoing walks between. (IX. 1106)

'Echoing' is a deliberate falsification, though the image as a whole undoubtedly realizes the weightiness intended. Indeed, nature is continually felt in three dimensions, with depth as well as outline; in Milton's own, not exactly fortunate, word from a different context, it is 'globose'. There is at once a tactile pleasure and a jewelled richness: dew-drops are pearls (V. 74), trees 'gemm'd their blossoms' (VII. 325), fruit is 'burnish'd with golden rind' (IV. 249), the Tree of Life bears 'vegetable gold' (IV. 220). We are not surprised to hear stage thunder rolling through the 'dark aerial hall' (X. 667); to be told the earth itself is founded in a 'glassy sea' (VII. 619), or to find the air in its translucent purity called 'pure marble' (III. 564).

Such phrases do not, however, argue a lack of natural enjoyment. If anything, they spring from an almost too greedy desire that translates the vital into plastic terms the more surely to possess it; a desire to capture and eternalize each essence in statuesque permanence. It is a poetic idolatry. I agree with Dr. Tillyard's general emphasis on

Milton's sensuousness; and would point to Mr. C. S. Lewis's discussion of lust as (i) uncreative, and (ii) related to metal-work imagery *imitating* nature in his analysis of Spenser's Bower of Bliss. Milton's rich and weighty luxuriance resembles that of Keats. Like Keats, Milton engages the reader deeply in the allurements of exquisite smell and appeal to the taste. The flowers breathe 'morning incense' from 'earth's great altar' (IX. 192–7). The sanctity attributed to nature by later romantic poets is found in Milton's Eden before the Fall. There is naturalistic ritual. Adam offers 'sweet-smelling gums and fruits and flowers' from 'grateful altars' (XI. 323–7). The best scent-passage shows Satan's arrival welcomed by 'odoriferous' airs and 'native perfumes' lengthily compared by the poet to scents blowing from 'the spicy shore of Araby the blest' (IV. 153–65) to ravish the senses of mariners at sea. The forbidden fruit has 'ambrosial smell' (IX. 852). Milton steadily sets himself to realize an earthly paradise through use of smell; though again, when the visiting angel's sense is struck by 'groves of myrrh', 'flowering odours', 'cassia, nard and balm' (V. 293), an overstress of literary associations exerts a hardening influence detracting somewhat from the primal sweetness. Eden's pleasures are similarly rich to the taste, a sense catered for continually in Milton's poetry. So we have 'nectarine fruits' with 'savoury pulp' (IV. 332–5), draughts from a 'milky stream' (V. 306), 'juiciest gourds' (V. 327). Eve's preparations of hospitality for their angel guest are lusciously described (V. 331–49). The pressing of this sense to a sinful extreme is symbolically central in both *Paradise Lost* and *Comus*; while later the dangers of intemperance are shown among the evils in store for mankind. Whatever the limitations of Milton's impressionism, his use of smell and taste is probably more abundant than that of any English poet but Keats, who directly follows, while revitalizing, the Miltonic emphasis.

The 'smell' and 'taste' impressions are not, however, so thickly massed as my quotations drawn from various books

suggest; and there is a heavy preponderance of legendary and mythological learning with lists of proper names in the earlier introductions to Eden which blend into the artificialized tendencies of nature-solidification. The total result is too academic to be purely aesthetic. Moreover, a quite different and more realistic nature-poetry occurs, describing the approach of evening, which I shall discuss later; so that there is scarcely a satisfying unity of impression. With this reservation, we may suggest that the heavy tangle of ensnaring smells, rich tastes, literary learning, and luxuriant if immobile and sculptural vegetation with which we are confronted is slightly too sophisticated and might have been more appropriately placed in Heaven, with Eden left in naked purity like Adam and Eve. Indeed, from this luxuriant Eden-bed of perfumed and colourous description—for there is colour, too, in description of fruits and sky, especially the 'purple and gold' (IV. 596) of sunset—Milton praises 'wedded love' in a fashion worthiest of the highest heaven:

> Here love his golden shafts employs, here lights
> His constant lamp, and waves his purple wings,
> Reigns here and revels. (IV. 763)

This may be grouped with the best of my other recent quotations—I am making an abstraction from a wide area and the massed effects are not exactly Milton's—to suggest a vital richness which might more widely have been trusted and exploited. Nor does this passage quite suit the innocent purity of Adam and Eve, or nightfall over Eden. The somewhat literary, aesthetic, and religious-ritualistic phrase-colour denotes something nearer Keats's *Psyche* or Pope's *Eloisa to Abelard*; something at once human and divine that might have saved Milton from certain infertile directions and barren conclusions; as well as proving the true, because creative, antagonist to his lascivious evil. See the lovely blend of movement and stillness; the wealth, warmth, and colour suggested in turn; the exquisite entwining (through alliteration) of sovereign dignity with an

un-Miltonic merriment in 'reigns' and 'revels', the regal association being so much more apt and effective here than in Adam and Eve's 'naked majesty' (IV. 290). The passage accepts, uses, and transcends Milton's own native and admirable sensuousness to the full. It burns steadily, illuminating a path that does not point to *Paradise Regained*.

It is sad to turn from this to the mirthful elephant performing to amuse Adam and Eve with his 'lithe proboscis' (IV. 346). There are, perhaps fortunately, few striking references to animals in Milton. Animal grandeur is here his main success, as in the preying tiger changing 'oft' his 'couchant watch' (IV. 405); or the swan who

> with arched neck
> Between her white wings mantling proudly, rows
> Her state with oarie feet. (VII. 438)

As with vegetation, human associations recur in 'state' and 'oarie'. Fish swim with 'skulls' (VII. 402), watching their food in 'jointed armour' (VII. 408). Here fishes are of metal and the leviathan stretches like a 'promontory' (VII. 414). Birds rise from the ground with a 'clang' (VII. 422). But when a flock 'wedge their way', making an arrow-head formation of their 'airy caravan' (VII. 427–8), the same mannerisms attain a certain charm. One cannot say as much for the beasts in procession 'cowering low with blandishment' before Adam, nor for the birds who stoop each 'on his wing' as they pass (VIII. 350–1). Vegetation and animals alike are often fitted into arbitrary and variously unsuitable schemes of association or behaviour.

All that Milton touches tends to exist in stony separation. We have little sense of any underlying spirit informing each woodland mosaic, tendril elaboration or fruity rondure, while his animals are slightly mechanical. There is a tactile, outward pleasure, but less in-seeing, none of those lightning exploitations of Shakespeare and Byron focusing that whole and vital universe of which they are felt to be authentic parts. In those everything exists for

something greater and beyond itself. But Milton's nature has no such underlying, informing spirit. His wider universe therefore tends to go by machinery: it is mostly mathematical and mechanic.

Heaven's gate turns on 'golden hinges' framed by the 'sovereign architect' (v. 255). Here God is a designer, a mathematician, setting out on the business of creation with a pair of 'golden compasses' (VII. 225). Fine images occur of the earth spinning noiselessly 'self-balanc'd' (VII. 242) on her 'soft axle' (VIII. 165). Such circling mechanisms are, indeed, demanded by the mysterious and ordered harmonies of the cosmic scheme. But, again, the trick is driven too far. 'The wheel of day and night' (VIII. 135) is a good enough phrase for our own world; but there is less value in the somewhat over-precise explanation of the revolving light-and-dark mechanisms in Heaven (VI. 4–12). This, however, at least maintains the mysterious harmony of the circular: and there is much talk elsewhere of orbs, spheres, centres, &c. But the tendency does not stop there. We are confronted often by words such as 'eccentric', 'oblique', 'parallel', 'triform', 'quaternion', 'rhomb', 'cone', 'sextile, square, and trine and opposite' (X. 659), 'cubic phalanx' (VI. 399), 'mighty quadrate' (VI. 62). That is, mystic circularities form only one element in a universe composed as often of obliquities and angularities: an exact reverse of the Dantesque scheme where all is imaginatively subordinate to the circular; that is, to an ultimate harmony. There is no ultimate harmony about Milton's cosmic structure: his universe cannot be felt as one satisfying, organic whole. Though the bridge built by Sin and Death is to us scarcely impressive, yet the poet, whilst superficially deploring the intention, is yet characteristically abased in admiration of the 'wondrous art pontifical' (X. 312) that goes to its construction; since his love for all such arts of solid fabrication exists at a deeper, more poetic level than any ethical contrasts. But this bridge, and the rope-ladder let down from Heaven, the earth as a suspended ball beneath, the sun as a great

sugar-plum of jewels, all make for a universe of separate detail and linear connexions, without a central organic heart or any vast mass. Shelley's *Prometheus* has, as a whole, far greater cosmic mass, though its parts are less weightily globed: his Caucasus, for example, weighs more than Milton's metal sun. No central cosmic energy is here tapped. Energy is mechanic rather than natural, reaching terrific explosive force in the heavenly war with the 'hollow cube', 'devilish enginry' (VI. 552–3), and 'iron globes' (VI. 590) of the rebel angels, clearly enough to be despised yet opposed by something not altogether dissimilar in the grasped bomb-like 'thunders', the electric poisoned-rayed chariot-eyes and 'pernicious fire' of the Son of God, riding to battle 'gloomy as night' (VI. 832). There are the 'rapid wheels' of the games in Hell (II. 532). As early as the *Nativity* Ode, Milton showed a love for cars and urns similar to Keats: so stars are 'golden urns' of light (VII. 366). Anything metallic takes his eye; his is a polished, burnished, almost a brazen universe. 'Celestial armoury' (IV. 553) is no mean part of the Heavenly equipment. The astronomer's 'glaz'd optic tube' (III. 590) sums our impressions. The smooth finish and workmanlike glint of the Miltonic mechanisms are indisputable; but his whole universe is unconvincing. Our direct visual experience and whatever of religious insight we possess both demand some ultimate enclosing circularity, some all-inclusive harmony, such as Dante's; or some vast and massive life, as in Shelley. Milton's cosmology is different: his scientific, geometrically oblique, and mechanical emphasis misses alike cosmic mystery, cosmic mass, and cosmic harmony. There is at once slight sense of a single whole and slight feeling for inner significance.

Paradise Lost (and also *Paradise Regained*) contains brilliant architectural descriptions—one of the finest I shall quote later—and aims often to express itself through elevations. Eden is on a mountain, Satan alights on Mount Niphates. Such blend into architectural splendours,

as when the gate of Eden is described as partly an inaccessible and overhanging 'craggy cliff' but partly also a smooth 'rock of alabaster pil'd up to the clouds, conspicuous far' (IV. 543). Satan has a

> royal seat
> High on a hill, far blazing, as a mount
> Rais'd on a mount, with pyramids and towers
> From diamond quarries hewn, and rocks of gold . . .
> (V. 753)

God sits on a 'flaming mount' (V. 598; V. 640). Lifting and brilliant masses excite the eye, as when Satan sees Heaven as

> a kingly palace gate
> With frontispiece of diamond and gold
> Embellish'd, thick with sparkling orient gems
> The portal shone. (III. 505)

Our world is next compared to the view of a man seeing from a mountain-top 'some renown'd metropolis with glistering spires and pinnacles adorned' (III. 549), gilded by the morning sun. And yet these isolated excellences scarcely build the marvels intended: each seems strangely small, somehow, in the vast spaces. The 'jasper' courtyards and pearly floors of Heaven stare a little coldly. Jewels and glittering buildings need close human associations, erotic associations, to render them fertile symbols. These are not even cathedral-images or temple domes; they aim not at the sublime—Milton's safer territory—but the brilliant and scintillating; and this seems an insincere, an insecure, not fully won province of Milton's mind. True, the move from ideal nature in Eden through mountains to architecture (as in the bi-form Eden gate just noticed) and thence to City-of-God symbolism in Heaven is a usual development, as in *Kubla Khan*; and the poem as a whole uses this. My complaint is merely that the cosmic or Heavenly brilliance is not informed by the necessary emotions: it lacks eros-force and nature-force. The two 'brazen mountains' in Heaven (VII. 201) are significant. The weakness is clear in Milton's descrip-

tion of the sun on his 'meridian tower' (IV. 30): a phrase pathetically detracting from, whilst trying to inform, our sense of a vast supremacy, reducing an expansive radiance to a journey on stilts. Elsewhere he describes it in detailed terms of glowing iron, 'potable' gold, silver, carbuncle, chrysolite, ruby, topaz (III. 592–612). Nothing is sacred to his concretizing and metallic technique. Set beside this barbaric and amazing conception the greater mystery and truth of Keats's 'visible god' and Byron's 'burning oracle of all that live' and you see the difference. Indeed, the continual emphasis on jewels serves no better by itself to establish the cosmic or the divine than the almost burdensome references to power and regality. The sun and moon are given regal connotations; God, his Son, and Satan possess them in turn; Adam and Eve enjoy 'naked majesty'; and the swan has his 'state'. Instances are everywhere. Milton's poem abounds in images of materialistic splendour.

There are, however, moments when the divinely high might seem to be celebrated becomingly, even admirably, in terms of light and perfume. The light-invocation at the start of Book III is justly famous: but when during the colloquy between the Father and Son we hear that 'while God spake ambrosial fragrance fill'd all Heaven' (III. 135) we are peculiarly able to see how little the ideological content helps such impressionism; since the more proper accompaniment to the Deity's sentiments would have been sulphur. Indeed, Milton's artistic confusion is especially clear in Heaven, where a greater poetic integrity and sincerity would have given his God only sublime and awful associations. However, a fine passage of angelic adoration (III. 344–71) has an exquisite use of solids. The most usual difficulty in realizing the highest radiance, the attainment of solidity, is necessarily no hardship to Milton. The angels cast down their 'inwoven' garlands of 'amaranth' and 'gold', till the pavement shining 'as a sea of jasper' is 'impurpled with celestial roses'. Amaranth, we are told, is an 'immortal flower' set by

the Fount of Life and River of Bliss that rolls her 'amber stream' through Heaven. The imagistic fusion is admirable enough; for here we expect an idealized approach. Music accompanies. The only trouble is that such glimpses of Heaven never enough dominate. Indeed, many of the scattered effects are less striking than my grouped selections would suggest, since without a close marshalling of similar images you cannot attain a weightily spatialized significance. Of Hell and Eden we are given long consecutive descriptions, and a mental structure has time to establish itself. But I always visualize Heaven as small, tucked away in the top left-hand corner of Milton's universe; a little swirling vortex of music, circular grouping, and garlands (together with some disturbing theology) apart from the empty vastnesses, confused geometry, and somewhat insecure mechanisms of the main action. In contrast to the disasters outside—since the activities of Heaven tend to fail—the praises and harping sound a trifle forced.

The truth is, *Paradise Lost* not only presents a cosmic disharmony, which is, indeed, its explicit theme; but, further, is in itself disharmonious, and therefore as a *whole* artistically fallacious. Though parts are superb, it is nevertheless designed from that very consciousness art exists to replace.

I turn shortly to an inspection of Milton's 'style' in the narrower sense.

From the start, his best phrases have a finished, slightly assertive excellence. The Miltonic richness has many accents of traditional belief, folk-lore, and actual observation; but they are earth-born rather as nuggets earth-mined, with mould lingering about the edges but no fibrous, rain-sucking roots. Milton has often been accused of offending against the genius of our language; and indeed his vocabulary tones with his nature-imagery in its premature solidification, its clasped and finished, yet uncreative, beauties. The massed classical learning and abstruse Hebraic or Egyptian mythological references,

together with a heavily Latinized syntax and word-choice, make the poetry somewhat remote. Yet there is subtle variation in colour-perception. The mechanical and scientific imagery is often softly toned. There is little of the musty, the cobwebbed association, as in Webster; little of the harsh ordinary surfaces of daily affairs. Nor are there, for all the striking kinship, the naïve, glaring, unblended effects of Marlowe. Milton is Shakespearian in his depth, richness, and refusal to be dominated by a discordant world. But in this he goes farther than Shakespeare. Every phrase and image comes out saturated, as it were, from the habitual feeling of one romantic and scholarly mind. The poetry is personal; and because personal, a little unyielding and hard, and, however deeply burnished, however lustrous, a little esoteric in its appeal. Often his phrase-magic tends, instead of tapping our subconscious recollections, to force on us rather his own abstruse and learned enthusiasms. But all his relics burn newly in the act of presentation. In his finest passages there is no obscurity, no impediment to an immediate response; while even his more personal and irritating mannerisms may exert a peculiar fascination, his worst faults having exercised a wide, if dangerous, influence. Whatever our adverse criticism, one thing remains certain: Milton's mind is dominating at every instant; and that mind is a storehouse of coffers and caskets weighty with the most rich and glamorous substances.

This mental, and often metallic, domination characterizes his verbal music generally. His sounds match his images. Especially in Hell, where the clash of forces is extreme, the quintessentially Miltonic most powerfully declares itself:

> Him the Almighty Power
> Hurl'd headlong flaming from th' ethereal sky
> With hideous ruin and combustion down
> To bottomless perdition, there to dwell
> In adamantine chains and penal fire
> Who durst defy the omnipotent to arms. (I. 44)

Clanging stresses re-enact the cataclysmic event. The lightly vowelled 'flaming from th' ethereal sky' gives swift falling and the assured ease of victory; followed by the held-up agony of 'combústion'; the remorseless stresses of 'bóttomless' and 'perdítion'; with inevitable and unending security of doom in the riveting and levelled weight of the last line but one. In such clangours Milton is surely the world's master.

Here, and in all such—and many other—passages there is a heavy reliance on 'm's and 'n's, especially in combination with 't's, 'g's, and 'd's. There are the 'fens' and 'dens' in a passage to be quoted shortly. Read the following aloud, stressing all nasals:

> The Stygian counsel thus dissolved; and forth
> In order came the grand infernal peers,
> Midst came their mighty Paramount, and seem'd
> Alone the antagonist of Heaven, nor less
> Than Hell's dread Emperor with pomp supreme,
> And God-like imitated state; him round
> A globe of fiery seraphim inclosed
> With bright imblazonry, and horrent arms.
> Then of their session ended they bid cry
> With trumpets' regal sound the great result:
> Toward the four winds four speedy cherubim
> Put to their mouths the sounding alchemy
> By herald's voice explain'd: the hollow abyss
> Heard far and wide, and all the host of Hell
> With deafening shout, return'd them loud acclaim.
> (II. 506)

The consonantal, nasal, and brazen note throughout the first eight lines develops into description of actual trumpets resounding and shouts echoing. Favourite words, such as 'firmament', 'empyrean', 'adamant', illustrate the general tendency; as, too, Milton's proper names very often: 'Blind Thamyris and blind Maeonides', Phineus, Sion, Aonian, Aspramont, Montalban, &c. There is thus, as it were, a metal clangour in what we tend to feel as the specifically Miltonic. This we can associate with his Latin-

isms, Latin being probably heavier in such sounds than English. True, you do not get the nasal note always: it is especially strong in Hell, for obvious reasons. But always the poetry might, I think, be termed 'consonantal'. This is, in part, the key to the gong-like effect of Milton's verse, its metallic yet mysterious reverberations sending echoes wandering in the cathedral-lofts of the mind. Vowel-colour may often be powerful: but it is, in Milton's later work, often sternly compressed, closely defined, the resulting aural solids suggesting a clamping down of mental control on an otherwise expanding sensuousness. The frequent Keatsian warmth in *Paradise Lost* has to fight for itself against this domination. We may remember the almost Spenserian fluidity and luscious music of, say, the flowery passage of Lycidas, and the names 'Amaryllis' and 'Neaera'. Yet even when speech is thin and pale there may be now a nasal tone as in the exquisite 'Chineses' driving their 'cany' wagons with the 'wind' (III. 438–9); or, again, when soft and fluid, as in

> Lethe, the river of oblivion rolls
> Her watery labyrinth (II. 583)

and

> Then feed on thoughts that voluntary move
> Harmonious numbers; as the wakeful bird
> Sings darkling, and in shadiest covert hid
> Tunes her nocturnal note. (III. 37)

In *Paradise Lost* nasality seems definitely stimulated by, whilst also assisting, any grand exuberance. Such passages do not thereby lack authenticity. The repressing power finally *is*, as I have already argued, the instinct repressed; and Milton's grandest passages hold, as passages, the very essence of greatest poetry. In them Milton is utterly sincere, since the peculiarly metal tone now conditions his properly organic utterance.

Not only does the control of emotional substance lead to a peculiarly effective organ-voiced music that is new, but the paragraph-technique suggests a unique

self-possession in metrical and rhythmic patterning. The lovely lines on the nightingale just quoted are a precise record of ultimate loneliness, of musical and metrical harmonies brought to birth in dark mental solitude; and I suggest we may feel these technical subtleties almost as a separate quality of Milton's mind, brought to bear on a discordant world. But one cannot safely argue any extra degree of conscious design; while twice in *Paradise Lost* Milton definitely asserts the spontaneity of his art.

There is a studied variation of pause. Clauses often play against the line-unit with peculiar effect. Line or paragraph repetition may be happily used, as in Eve's loving address to Adam. Repetition of rhythm with differing phrase-content or repetition of word or phrase with changed line-position and syntactical stress are employed with extreme aural subtlety:

> Where pain for *ever* dwells, hope *never comes*
> That *comes* to all.

Here, of three parts, number one is linked to two while two is linked to three. This 'linked sweetness', to recall *L'Allegro*'s lines on song-music, is a typical trick. But technical resource does not stop there, and any amount of interweaving patterns may inform the paragraph-texture:

> Thus roving on
> In confused march forlorn, th' adventurous bands
> With shuddering horror pale, and eyes aghast
> Viewed first their lamentable lot, and found
> No rest: through many a dark and dreary vale
> They passed, and many a region dolorous,
> O'er many a frozen, many a fiery, alp,
> Rocks, caves, lakes, fens, bogs, dens, and shades of death,
> A universe of death, which God by curse
> Created evil, for evil only good,
> Where all life dies, death lives, and nature breeds,
> Perverse, all monstrous, all prodigious things,
> Abominable, inutterable, and worse
> Than fables yet have feign'd or fear conceiv'd,
> Gorgons and hydras and chimeras dire. (II. 614)

Notice the nasalized word-music especially at the start and close; the use of vowel-colour for atmospheric effect, in 'forlorn', 'lamentable', 'dreary', 'dolorous'; the careful and varying arrangement of pauses; internal rhyme ('fens' and 'dens') and alliteration; a monosyllabic group set against polysyllables five lines later. Especially note the continual slowing-up of pace by pauses, by a monosyllabic line, or by chiasmus; and how the chiasmus of 'created . . . evil, evil . . . good' links on to 'life dies, death lives'. Movement evolves out of movement, there is a continual circling back and then again a drawing out, like a soft substance drawn out stringily; it is a spiralling, labyrinthine movement. We are insistently reminded of the lines in *L'Allegro* on words fitted to music (such as those of the mazy 'Echo' song in *Comus*):

> with many a winding bout
> Of linked sweetness long drawn out,
> With wanton heed and giddy cunning,
> The melting voice through mazes running;
> Untwisting all the chains that tie
> The hidden soul of harmony.

Such technique is to resolve impossible antinomies: the 'linked sweetness'—notice the metallic touch—is to unloose, *untwist* the other heavier chains. In *Paradise Lost* Milton is expressly at work to use this technical mastery to dominate a discordant world. That its aural qualities may be related to his love of music has already been suggested (though with reference rather to the 'music' as against the 'sense' of separate passages) by Mr. T. S. Eliot in his 'Note on the verse of John Milton' (*Essays and Studies by members of the English Association*, vol. xxi). In *New Bearings in English Poetry* Dr. F. R. Leavis has referred to Milton's creation of a verbal music 'outside himself', and in *Revaluation* has written of 'effects analogous to those of music' in the *Comus* 'Echo' song. Music is to Milton almost a material, a creative, force. He advertises *Paradise Lost* by complaining that rhyme has no 'musical' delight, and saying he prefers blank verse with

'the sense variously drawn out from one line to another': for all time surely the perfect comment on his technique, and one which renders the *Allegro* music-relation especially clear, 'drawn out' occurring in both passages. Whatever harmonies Milton's verse attains, they are, in this sense, especially and explicitly related to his music-interest. By the 'giddy cunning'—notice the 'conscious' suggestion in 'cunning'—of this mazy circling, this convolution and involution, the interweaving of cadences, he would resolve those other 'wandering mazes' of 'Providence, Foreknowledge, Will and Fate' (II. 559): compare the relating of music to 'necessity' in *Arcades*. That frustration is a general meaning of mazes and labyrinths in ancient magic and myth has been shown by Mr. W. F. Jackson Knight in *Cumaean Gates*. Life's difficulties, as in *Comus*, are to Milton especially labyrinthine: and no wonder, considering the critical complexities his work forces on us. Sin leads to 'mazes' of self-conflict (x. 830) and 'paths indirect' (xi. 627). The resolution is to come, as in the 'Echo' song and final dance in *Comus*, through a 'victorious' (974) maze-tracing. Here, as there, there is something linear and geometrical in the complicated rhythmic designs. Dr. Leavis speaks of the 'ritual' movement of Milton's verse; and Mr. Eliot actually uses the phrase 'mazes of sound'. My analysis indicates the justice of both terms, though I should not develop either to an adverse criticism of the passages concerned. Now the maze is in Milton clearly a symbol with both evil and good directions. The serpent is used by the Devil to approach Eve like a tacking ship (IX. 516–18), curling a 'wanton wreath'; and a river flows with 'serpent error' (VII. 302) or 'mazy error' (IV. 239). The serpent lies in 'mazy folds' (IX. 161), making a 'labyrinth' (IX. 183). But the maze may be equally a symbol of harmony. The Heavenly company delight

> In song and dance about the sacred hill,
> Mystical dance, which yonder starry sphere
> Of planets and of fix'd in all her wheels

Resembles nearest, mazes intricate,
Eccentric, intervolv'd, yet regular
Then most when most irregular they seem. (v. 619)

Which is exactly the sort of harmony Milton's cosmic machinery does not quite attain (though that envisioned by Comus, with its 'wavering morris' of elements, certainly does), but which the verse-technique often masters, matching its own ritual against the labyrinths of cosmic evil. The whole poem meanders—from Hell to Heaven, Heaven to Earth; retracing its steps in time, then going ahead again, like Adam and Eve, with 'wandering steps and slow'. Scene and subject may change in a single book. The final transmutation of Satan and his crew to serpents is, indeed, paralleled by the whole poem's move from dramatic thickness to narrative tedium at the end. It is melodic, serpentine, rather than symphonic: so is his verse-structure, recalling his meandering Eden rivers or the 'watery labyrinth' (II. 584) of Lethe. Again, we come up against the essentially *thin* structure of *Paradise Lost*, its lack of mass and weight: this time to be referred to the poet's love, not of architecture, but of music or technical rhythmic and verbal mastery as a thing in itself to be applied, rather than an harmonious, and therefore musical, alinement of energies. Many separate passages may, indeed, be truly and finely organic. But such subtlety of technique cannot of itself harmonize a wide chaos, though it makes separate verse-movements of unsurpassed rhythmical precision and outline. Verbal music is, in the whole, an imposition on his wider material. The result is, too often, a thin, wavering time-stream rather than a created world. Rhythmic and verbal modulation work to remedy a preliminary weakness in organization. This is how Milton becomes, in places, our most perfect 'technician' while failing as a 'maker' in the wider sense. He tries to do by art what art by itself cannot do.

As with architecture, so, too, Milton's love of grand sounds finds unlimited scope in *Paradise Lost*. Trumpets or shouts in Hell resound and reverberate in the gloom;

there are arms 'clashing' with 'shock' of 'horrible discord', and 'madding wheels' of 'brazen chariots', in the Heavenly war (VI. 205–14); the 'steadfast empyrean' shakes (VI. 833) to the thunderous onslaught of the Son. Continually, by use of echo, sound both gains mysterious overtones and is itself given architectural reference. Hell 'scarce holds' the 'wild uproar' of the Satanic games (II. 541). But next the harmonies of song

> Suspended Hell, and took with ravishment
> The thronging audience. (II. 554)

There is the hymning of God's angels in Heaven, elaborately described; the story of the Creation to the sounds of spheral music; the hush of an Eden night with the 'solemn bird' (IV. 648) so loved since *Il Penseroso*, softly melodious, till 'silence' itself is 'pleased' (IV. 604). The tendency is so obvious that to name more instances is unnecessary: the poem is built expressly of brazen clangours and dulcet harmonies. In such terms the Miltonic powers attain their maximum nobility. Indeed, behind the whole conception lies the desire to transmute the one to the other.

We have discussed (i) the sculptural and architectural and (ii) the musical elements in *Paradise Lost*; its spatial and temporal essences. Certain fine architectural images and certain exquisite technical units have been inspected; yet both the architectonics and the massed music of the whole have been found unsatisfying. I next attempt to define my meaning more closely by examining two large movements where the spatial and temporal elements coexist in organic fusion, each being now in separation merest abstractions from the space-time complex of epic or dramatic poetry; that is, action and atmosphere, movement and solidity, are felt as interdependent.

IV

I have already noticed—and directly or by implication both praised and criticized—some of the richer, more colourful Eden descriptions. But at the approach of night

in Book IV there is a different excellence altogether. This is the beginning:

> Now came still evening on, and twilight grey
> Had in her sober livery all things clad;
> Silence accompanied, for beast and bird,
> They to their grassy couch, these to their nests
> Were slunk, all but the wakeful nightingale;
> She all night long her amorous descant sung;
> Silence was pleas'd; now glow'd the firmament
> With living sapphires: Hesperus that led
> The starry host, rode brightest, till the moon
> Rising in clouded majesty, at length
> Apparent queen unveil'd her peerless light,
> And o'er the dark her silver mantle threw. (IV. 598)

Every word contributes to a close realization. There is an exact wedding of Milton's mind and manner with the mysterious nature of a *living* universe: one does not ask that his manner be changed, only that it shall be fitted, subdued, to his matter; and here it is so fitted. Though the stars are 'sapphires' note that they are 'living' ones: and this blend of the pulsing *with the solid* is all but the supreme excellence, as Keats knew, in any poetry. Life breathes from the description. There is a soft, almost unnoticed movement within the stillness. The sequent rule of stars, Venus, and the moon is precisely graduated. 'Clouded majesty' is far from a loose phrase, with its feeling for low-lying evening mists: the first vague and atmospheric abstraction 'majesty' is subtly balanced against the clarity of 'apparent queen', which leads, further, to the decisive action of 'unveil'd', and so on to accomplished victory in 'peerless'. The vowellings of 'apparent' match both the gliding and silent ascendancy and its expansive splendour. 'Silver mantle' in the last line is faultless as 'sober livery' earlier. For a certain levelling, almost muffling, of nature's particularities is needed for dusk; and an unearthly, almost deathly, yet magic transmutation for the moonlight. The verbal technique is in closest relation to its subject-matter as a whole; the music is the music of

organic perception. Finally, see the unerring realization and Shakespearian felicity in 'silence was pleased'. The whole of the nightingale's song (in its traditional quality) is there, together with the very mystery of darkness, of otherness, of nothingness charged with a presence. This very thought is the concern of Eve's question a little later concerning the stars, so beautiful while men sleep. When Adam answers,

> Millions of spiritual creatures walk the earth
> Unseen, both when we wake and when we sleep . . .
> (IV. 677)

those beings are of a different and more convincing order than Milton's usual angels. They are continuous with the nightingale itself, their 'celestial voices' sounding from 'hill' and 'thicket'. They grow from a soil, an atmosphere, already realized. Eve's speech on the wondrous beauties of creation has an unforced feeling for nature's sap and fertility, as in 'fragrant the fertile earth after soft showers' (IV. 645), that Milton's more decorative phrases lack. 'Soft' is a repeated word. Adam tells (IV. 659–73) how the stars' 'soft fires' exert an 'influence' on earth with their 'stellar virtue' quite irrespective of their visual glory; and his statement exists in and enriches that traditional mass of poetic feeling and poetic lore that Milton so often stands outside. He is working at the essence of creation's unseen energies instead of merely copying, with a view to possessing, its miracles of design. Set, for example, his equating of the sun and moon with masculine and feminine principles of existence (VIII. 150–2) against his description of the sun in terms of valuable metals, where you get again a most important contrast. So this Eden fragment coheres with a natural coherence depending on deepest insight. It is an organic whole where each unit is at once dissolved as a unit and made infinite as a constituent part. Consider how jarring here would be one of Milton's abstruse scholarly and exotic references. And my point is, not that his 'cassia, nard, and balm' (V. 293) are neces-

sarily bad poetry and his damp earthy fragrance good; but that the latter is perfectly placed in the story and exquisitely mastered, whereas the former was not: I rather feel much of the tangle of scents and 'nectar' streams and sculptural luxuriance that is lavished on his Eden earlier —and my close grouping of quotations tended to establish a more organic selection than Milton's own—might be far more appropriate among the amaranth and jasper of his Heaven, which needs all the natural assistance available. Finally, this new and atmospheric recognition, itself a kind of love, blends delicately into the human love of Adam and Eve: the two are interdependent. The fusion is dramatic, the thoughts and feelings of Adam and Eve both growing from and contributing to their setting:

> But neither breath of morn when she ascends
> With charm of earliest birds, nor rising sun
> On this delightful land, nor herb, fruit, flower,
> Glistering with dew, nor fragrance after showers,
> Nor grateful evening mild, nor silent night
> With this her solemn bird, nor walk by moon,
> Or glittering starlight, without thee is sweet. (IV. 650)

See how simple the vocabulary, a mere list of nouns and adjectives: there is no straining at all. It is, of course, significant that Milton accomplishes this reserved excellence in terms mainly of evening, with a particular success in the thought of fertilizing rain and earthy scents. These all appeal to a mental territory nearer the orthodox Christian emotion of *agape* than that of the unrestful sweetness of *eros*: which latter is to be felt rather in association with spring bird-song and roseate dawn, the province of Shelley's *Prometheus*. Byron's ironic phrase 'the indecent sun' points the distinction neatly.

We next turn to the early scenes in Hell, where power-images attain excellence comparable to the nature-excellence just noticed. We have just enjoyed a glimpse of nature as we know it islanded in a morass of nature exotic and ideal. It is the same here: Hell is real. A deep experience is transmitted. There is little pedantry. Images

rise from depths, soaked in emotional suggestion, possessing an aura of indefinable magic:

> . . . and what resounds
> In fable or romance of Uther's son
> Begirt with British and Armoric knights;
> And all who since, baptiz'd or infidel,
> Jousted in Aspramont or Montalban . . . (I. 579)

How it burns with a steady consonantal and darkly glinting worth, and with what feeling for virile and heroic action. An especial vagueness overspreads the historic conceptions of the early books, while a glamorous geography makes the inhabited globe one wide romance. All ages of legend and myth pass, like the spirit of tragedy in *Il Penseroso*, sceptred 'in sweeping pall', the muffled tramp of their hosts waking the inmost recesses of the poet's blindness; while the 'dim suffusion' (III. 26) of the setting at once darkens and enriches. It is the same with light. No scintillating extravagance of the later books holds half the integrity, the essential power, of that image of Satan's diminished glory:

> . . . as when the sun new ris'n
> Looks through the horizontal misty air
> Shorn of his beams, or from behind the moon
> In dim eclipse disastrous twilight sheds
> On half the nations, and with fear of change
> Perplexes monarchs . . . (I. 594)

What vistas of human and ancient history are suggested; and how constant is the reference to monarchy. All that is kingly, noble, glamorous, nerves Milton's genius here to its most consummate achievement. His jewels are never more potent than when felt embedded in the depths of Hell:

> This desert soil
> Wants not her hidden lustre, gems and gold. (II. 270)

'Hidden lustre.' The glittering realms and crystal battlements of Heaven have less poetic weight than the more

humanly warm and darkly glowing emblems of Satanic sovereignty:

> High on a throne of royal state, which far
> Outshone the wealth of Ormus and of Ind,
> Or where the gorgeous East with richest hand
> Showers on her kings barbaric pearl and gold,
> Satan, exalted, sat . . . (II. i)

The darkness ennobles and softens, lending at once significance and mystery. Each image blends into its setting with no hardness of outline. Of the persons in the poem Satan alone enjoys this same vagueness which is also an emotional precision. When he leaves Hell, he takes it with him for a while, matching his dark virility against the castrated glories of Milton's universe. No mountain, no towering edifice or cosmic height, in the later books is so vast as when he stands

> Like Teneriffe or Atlas unremoved. (IV. 987)

Not only do those proper names themselves exert lines of force drawn from well-known historic or mythological associations often lacking to the more abstruse references elsewhere, but the human and dramatic significance with which they are fused makes them to exist in another dimension from the poetically lighter, more trivial, if more Heavenly, elevations. In Hell all is both weighty and mysterious; dark and glamorous; Satanic and yet royal. But the weightiness is one with human personality, human destiny, summed in the royalty of Satan. Indeed, no such royalism as Milton's ever burned through the poetic phrase: less inward and spiritual than Shakespeare's, the sense of a premeditated and assured pomp, of symbolic potency and legendary magic, yet plays on certain territories unexplored and undesired by him. It has something of the Shakespearian dignity and depth joined to the barbaric grandiloquence of Marlowe.

You can see what has happened. Milton writes, as in the Eden passage I have praised, of a real world, a

self-consistent world, a world of experience. And it is a tragic world. Those symbols of wealth and domination that tend to sully both his nature and his Heaven, here, in a more humanistic setting, attain sublimity. Felt as tragic, they are sublime; they achieve their whole being, and that is why the darkness ennobles. For Milton's true experience is one of tragedy, the sun itself, in his hands, becoming more authentic in this mode.

As his sex-philosophy derives from an excessive sensuousness, so Milton loves sovereignty and power as things in themselves; whereas Shakespeare sees his kings as part of a wide, natural, human and divine context, never expecting too much from them. Milton is in this regard a grand pagan, and half knows it. Therefore his barbaric splendours are necessarily most convincing when most condemned, with a condemnation that yet enhances their essential glory. In Hell Milton buries the whole heroic past of the race, its intellectual and artistic achievements, its ambition and greed, courage and futility; while the requiem is his noblest poetry. The willed effort to create a corresponding grandeur for Heaven from the materials already, and in part rightly, repudiated, is necessarily unconvincing, as Dante's love-perfumed rose-path and the tingling dawn of Shelley's *Prometheus* are not; while, conversely, Dante would never allow the imperial though shadowy splendours of Milton's Hell. Whatever his claims, Milton never, as a poet, penetrates beyond tragedy, and *Samson Agonistes* is the fitting conclusion to his life-work. His best nature-poetry is toned for the mood of *Il Penseroso*, not *L'Allegro*. At the extreme, subnatural energies create a fiery lake, a 'burning marl' (I. 296) and cavernous immensity in Hell that can challenge the sea of Byron or the mountains of Wordsworth. Finally, these early books are, if a reasonable allowance be made for Milton's love of academic reference, perfectly organic: they, action and atmosphere alike, exist in vassalage to a single quality made of both, a single music. They are imaginatively compact.

In so far as we view the whole poem expansively, we find a Milton who too often loves kingly titles, jewels, and fine architecture as things in themselves, while showing less rich and architectonic realization of those spiritual energies to be poetically ordered. Therefore the poem's massed wonders never quite accumulate in the right directions, the stresses go wrong, their weight as often retards as assists the movement, leaving the poem, for all its first gathered momentum, variously forceful and sluggish.

Now also the poet seems to be more adept at music proper than is proper for a poet, who should find his music implicit in the—or his—created world, whose deepest harmonies should be just one aspect of harmonious orderings. Music should flow from, not be applied to, the creation: just as pleasure, though the proper result of poetry, should never be its considered aim. But the Miltonic music, whether in rhythmic subtleties or metal resonance, together with the use of actual music-references, points back to his offering architectural descriptions, or nature described in terms of human arts of design, rather than a poetic architecture. That is, he tends to rely a trifle too heavily on non-poetic arts.

The weakness is purely in the reliance. If mastered and properly subdued each weighty elaboration, each curve of modulated skill, would contribute mass and music to the whole. And in that whole the spatial and temporal, the architectural and musical, would exist not in separation but in interdependence.

In two short passages these twin arts are explicitly his descriptive theme, exquisitely blended (as once in *Il Penseroso*) to become, if we so wish to regard them, objective symbols of an ultimate poetic reality. Here is the first.

The fallen angels start building in Hell. They are led by Mammon, who, we are told, even in Heaven loved best (somewhat like Milton himself) its pavement riches of 'trod'n gold':

> by him first
> Men also, and by his suggestion taught,

Ransack'd the centre, and with impious hands
Rifl'd the bowels of their mother earth
For treasures better hid. (I. 684)

That may be: but what would Milton's poem be without them? So the labour starts:

A third as soon had form'd within the ground
A various mould, and from the boiling cells
By strange conveyance fill'd each hollow nook,
As in an organ from one blast of wind
To many a row of pipes the sound-board breathes.
Anon out of the earth a fabric huge
Rose like an exhalation, with the sound
Of dulcet symphonies and voices sweet,
Built like a temple, where pilasters round
Were set, and Doric pillars overlaid
With golden architrave; nor did there want
Cornice or frieze, with bossy sculptures graven,
The roof was fretted gold . . . (I. 705)

How dark the gold burns; how much nobler, more weighty, and deeply signifying, is this building than any outside Hell. Observe the 'organ' comparison and the light, soft, 'dulcet' music: weight and intangibility cohere. The vast structure is raised to, or by, music, as in *Kubla Khan*, symbolizing either Milton's whole attempt in *Paradise Lost* or his achievement in Books I and II. The universal creation in Book VII is weaker. Music certainly *follows* arbitrary action, but mystery is all but reduced to mechanism.

Recall again my two instances of perfected creation in *Paradise Lost*, where scenic atmosphere and the fiction of human feeling and speech in the one, or strong action in the other, exist in mutual enrichment and organic indissolubility: nightfall in Eden, and Hell. What seems to be happening there?

In creation a moment may come when suddenly all units cease to exist except as parts of a whole which at once softens and interpenetrates all its parts; separate pieces no longer repel, but cohere; a myriad details move in one

direction, in obedience to a single artistic purpose; while most weighty substances become miraculously light as a feather. Action and atmosphere make one architecture, one music. Now note the exquisite manipulation of mass, sound, and movement in our second passage:

> Then straight commands that at the warlike sound
> Of trumpets loud and clarions be uprear'd
> His mighty standard; that proud honour claim'd
> Azazel as his right, a cherub tall:
> Who forthwith from the glittering staff unfurl'd
> Th' imperial ensign, which full high advanc'd
> Shone like a meteor streaming to the wind
> With gems and golden lustre rich imblaz'd,
> Seraphic arms and trophies: all the while
> Sonorous metal blowing martial sounds:
> At which the universal host upsent
> A shout that tore Hell's concave, and beyond
> Frighted the reign of Chaos and old Night.
> All in a moment through the gloom were seen
> Ten thousand banners rise into the air
> With orient colours waving: with them rose
> A forest huge of spears: and thronging helms
> Appear'd, and serried shields in thick array
> Of depth immeasurable: *anon they move*
> *In perfect phalanx to the Dorian mood*
> *Of flutes and soft recorders . . .* (I. 531)

Notice the metal-throated sounds, the solid wealth of imperial and warlike colour, with rich gems, dusky-mantled, burning in darkness; the simultaneous and instinctive shout reflecting a communal unity, repeated in the simultaneous advance of ensigns and spears. It is all of a piece, this 'thick array', this 'depth immeasurable'; defined, yet infinite; solid, yet composed of a myriad individual lives, like the wondrous Eagle and Rose in Dante's *Paradiso*. See also how, after the marshalling of forces, the verse next lightly moves to set the squared masses in easy, yet disciplined, movement, weighty phalanxes light as a feather to the motion tune of expressly 'soft' music.

This is precisely how we would wish Milton's *whole*

epic structure to accumulate mass and move. Instead, the reverse holds: its design, as a whole, is tenuous, its movement heavy. Significantly, the massive harmony is apprehended in terms of military discipline as opposed to Dante's supernaturalistic organisms; significantly, too, the scene is in Hell. For only the early books show a fusion of poetic density and human action in organic stability and interdependence. Only on the 'burning marl' of Hell do we find at once strong action, depth of protagonist personality, communal reference, and a convincing density of imaginative atmosphere. Those books only are at once poetic and dramatic.

Indeed, my whole complaint may be reduced to the statement that Milton writes an epic from an age and thought-scheme demanding a more dramatic technique. For heroic narrative is concerned mainly with material action, as drama with spiritual conflict; while Milton attempts to express the latter in terms of the former. The myth is falsified by too precise elaboration. The steady loosening of grip in the move from a dramatic opening to a graphic middle and so on to a flat conclusion (in the panoramic views of future history) reflects the essential weakness. But the very faults of such a poem, at such a time, are a valuable part of its statement. Milton's rejection of nature and human instinct leads to a final infertility in *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*, though *Samson* has its own peculiar greatness. But meanwhile he has imposed the 'sounding alchemy' (II. 517) of his private architectural visions and organ harmonies, his dreams of sovereignty and power, on a communal and universal chaos. If these had been less dominating, if the poetic will had been less unbending, there would have been no *Paradise Lost* at all. That ironside strength of the seventeenth-century imagination that he shares with Browne and others, the gun-metal and blue-black glint of phrase, here compresses both a Renaissance humanism and a psychological and cosmic exploration that lesser, more purely 'religious', writers ignored. If we praise Satan at the expense

of the completed epic—the choice is partly ours, and we cannot have it both ways—that is only because we have in him a record of greater value: that is, a dramatization of Milton's own heroic, and tragic, self. His work is a superhuman effort that becomes 'marble with too much conceiving'. So, with one foot in the age of Shakespeare and the other in the age of Bunyan, he stands across the centuries as a Colossus—of stone; or, rather, like those impressive monoliths in Butler's *Erewhon*, or the ruins of Norman Abbey in Byron's *Don Juan*, on which the winds of nature harp something of an inhuman and unnatural music.

Additional Note: MARLOWE AND MILTON

The sexual in both writers is approached through a subtle feeling for its complex fascinations. It is at once self-conscious and self-contradictory, as in Eve's

> Coy submission, modest pride
> And sweet reluctant amorous delay.
> (*Paradise Lost*, IV. 310)

Compare this from *Hero and Leander*:

> Treason was in her thought,
> And cunningly to yield herself she sought,
> Seeming not won, yet won she was at length,
> In such wars women use but half their strength. (II. 293)

The finely aesthetic may blend with connotations of sin: Gaveston's description of visual delights to tempt Edward (*Edward II*, 51–72) relating to the whole conception of Comus and his poetry. Here and in the second part of *Hero and Leander* there is strong feeling for human nakedness, with reference to both excellence and shame: this recurs in *Paradise Lost*. Luxuriant and exotic Hellenic or other embellishments such as Milton uses in his Eden ('cassia', 'nard', 'nectar', fruit of the Hesperides, &c.) to thicken his sensuous atmosphere are Marlovian in tendency. There is in both an inflaming of the eye and mind, almost an aesthetic greediness, which has a corresponding ethical reaction. Elaborations of human artistry, interior decorations, all rich appearances, &c., please both.

The two poets share a strong military enthusiasm. The tendency is definitely materialistic. The flash of steel in Marlowe corresponds to deeper burnishings in Milton, but both are grandly

metallic. Images of gorgeous state with rich jewels support themes of barbaric self-assertion. Emphatic royalism is tyrannic and lust for power excessive. Contrast Marlowe's

> A god is not so glorious as a king . . . (1 *Tamburlaine*, 762)

with Shakespeare's

> How many thousand of my poorest subjects
> Are, at this hour, asleep. (2 *Henry IV*, III. i. 4)

The military sympathies of Marlowe and Milton need no detailed argument: outward power is felt as an absolute, not, as in Shakespeare, all but essentially tragic.

More complex are the intellectual ('spiritual' would not quite fit the case) adventures that engage both. Tamburlaine's lines on the ranging human intelligence, 'still climbing after knowledge infinite' (1 *Tamburlaine*, 875), correspond closely to Satan's

> this intellectual being,
> These thoughts that wander through eternity.
> (*Paradise Lost*, II. 147)

Marlowe's thirst for mental satisfaction is paralleled by the probing soliloquies of Satan and Adam, and the latter's insistent questionings of Raphael. Aspiration is a key-theme in both poets, leading to a similar theological challenge in Tamburlaine and Satan; while Faustus's dissatisfaction concerning the justice of divine law is a forecast of many Miltonic passages. Compare, too, Mephistophilis'

> Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscrib'd
> In one self place, for where we are is Hell . . . (*Faustus*, 553)

with Satan's 'Which way I fly is Hell; myself am Hell' (*Paradise Lost*, IV. 75). The cosmic (sky, sun, stars, spheres) bulks heavily in both, though remaining somewhat 'literary'. Both poets enjoy references of bookish learning and proper, especially geographical, names. Their essential qualities are reflected in their verse: the regularized anvil-ring of the one having a certain kinship with the more varied but gong-like harmonies of the other.

There is correspondingly a weakness in treatment of earth. Marlowe is poor in earthy or arboreal images; in Milton such are mainly sculptural and visual. Neither, normally, touches their life. With this goes an uneasiness with women: here Marlowe is definitely weak, Milton hostile. A strong sense of the vicious gives us the 'hot whore' incident in *Faustus* (581), balancing the Miltonic emphasis of 'venereal trains' in *Samson Agonistes* (533). Both poets

use the words 'wanton' and 'lascivious' for key incidents (*Paradise Lost*, IX. 1014–15; *Faustus*, 573). Milton shows an utter absence of kindly humour, but two instances of ugly mockery, paralleled by the sadistic fun of *Tamburlaine*, the horse-play of *Faustus*, and cruel farce of *The Jew of Malta*.

All this leads to an un-Shakespearian scheme of association. Aesthetic positives are ranged together beside lascivious and perverted lusts; all being pitted against the Christian ethic. Mephistophilis brings Homer and Helen to Faustus: Milton is forced into a similar position. The conflicts are identical, though Marlowe finally tilts the balance one way and Milton the other. No synthesis supervenes; we are left with the respective and one-sided victories of *Hero and Leander* and *Samson Agonistes*. Neither poet writes pure tragedy in the Shakespearian sense. The epilogue to *Faustus* underlines its morality-structure; Edward II is a pathetic example rather than a tragic hero; while the chorus of *Samson Agonistes* helps to set the action in an ethical, though not narrowly didactic, framework.

Lyly and Shakespeare pursue a different course; or perhaps start from a different psychic structure altogether. There is far less poetic enjoyment of the aesthetic and barbaric. Nature is given greater rights. Human love is at once more real and more inwardly conceived; so is kingship. The terms of the Miltonic sensuous-ethical conflict do not for Shakespeare exist in such vivid abstraction. He shows a complete absence of fascination with human nakedness, while nevertheless using it, for a more inwardly conceived purpose, with a greater essential power than Marlowe or Milton: as in *King Lear* and *Timon of Athens*. Marlowe and Milton are more normal than Shakespeare, and certainly more masculine; but their art is the less perfect, too often itself torn asunder by the conflicting tendencies it aims to master; though the Byronic synthesis—forecast, perhaps, by parts of Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*—shows a solution to be possible.

Milton's similarity to Keats is equally important. I find myself in agreement with Dr. Tillyard's emphasis in *The Miltonic Setting*, though my own argument would be somewhat differently developed.

IV

SWIFT AND THE SYMBOLISM OF IRONY

SATIRE, that in Dryden conditions his best work and in Pope expresses a final disparity, is congenital in Swift. His disappointed ambition is of secondary and surface interest only. Psychological guesses, if based on the works, can reveal little beyond the works themselves: and, if independent, not nearly so much. Moreover whether and why Swift was neurotic concerns us less than why his work seems to us important.

Therefore biographical analysis must remain tentative. On the personal plane, I doubt if Swift's genius got so far as the sex-thwarting sometimes suggested. His fascinated disgust of ordure seems to reveal an even more fundamental disorder. Yet the cause may as well turn out a symptom even here. Pope's own comprehension, his at the same time whole and therefore holy intuition, forced a similar break. You can thus suppose Swift also a giant among pigmies, the hideous disparity using neurosis as a relief. He was politically ambitious; but probably no material success would have removed a disease deep as Hamlet's. As with Hamlet, blame cannot be apportioned where the relation is so utterly disorganized and the time 'out of joint'; Pope's progress indicating as clearly as may be how and why this was so. The friendship between them was natural: they would, even when their work appeared outwardly most dissimilar, have understood each other; as would also Webster and Lyly, negative and positive profundities of the same *genre* being complementary rather than contradictory. Whether superhuman or subhuman—always a hard distinction—Swift clearly felt himself isolated, and, with or without justice, considered himself wronged. But his best work always either satirizes abuses deserving attack, or throws into relief questions we are significantly loath to ask. He

has two directions: physical nausea and intellectual scorn. The first probably deserves more serious attention than we feel disposed to give it, our reluctance itself marking an unconscious concern; and his intellectual attitude to church and state, with the numerous problems involved, though it might, or might not, have derived from this, is certainly not unrelated to it. So from the centre outwards, from sensory and immediate human experience to the free range of a rational inspection over a wide communal front, ripples expand of bitterness and disgust. Reverential and heroic traditions are alike deflated.

Swift's prose is noted for control and reserve. He is a master of lucidity and understatement. The reading aloud of any long sentence of Scott's will probably involve you quickly in misplaced stresses: you need to know the end before you start. But you can slip through any long sentence of *Gulliver's Travels* without fear or forethought: there is a swift forward-flowing transparency. The experience may be one of disorder: the stylistic reaction is superbly ordered. Yet Swift's style, like Milton's, may in its own fashion prove a barrier to understanding. Milton's puts an opacity over his passionate meanings, cramming vizarded and plated helmets on each; while Swift's very lucidity may head off our appreciation from close concern with his more rich effects. The heavy symbolisms in thought and language of *Sartor Resartus* might seem utterly alien to anything in Swift, Defoe, or Addison; with the difference appearing to some supporters of 'plain prose' as a mark of necessary superiority in these last. But this is a most unfortunate judgement. Rather the very quality they share with Carlyle raises such authors from 'journalism' and 'fiction' to the level of 'literature'. Addison's characterizing and peculiar strength lies in his adept handling of concrete symbolisms: and probably this rather than prose 'style' or profundity of sentiment lifts his reputation above Steele's. *The Vision of Mirza* is an allegoric design; *The Golden Scales* has a precise symbolism briefly radiating a host of observations; and *The Dream of*

Judgment is a powerful eschatological myth. There is human creation in the *Roger de Coverley* essays (for which Steele holds part credit) and atmospheric description in *The Royal Exchange* and *Westminster Abbey*. Addison is, indeed, a poet, a maker, first; a preacher second. We are brought to live his statement. So, too, *Robinson Crusoe* is not 'just a tale': nor any book of long renown ever was. We need not expect exactitudes of correspondence with Defoe's own life: but the narrative projects a sense of loneliness and conversion both personal and universal. By skilful use of his island and animals to replace men Defoe dramatizes loneliness. The adventures are charged with an inward, psychological, and spiritual meaning, that makes contact with *The Tempest*. Both Addison and Defoe, however plain their prose, use it in service to a rich impressionism. It is the same with Swift.

The Battle of the Books is a highly allegorical affair, with a wealth of meaning struck from the opposition of ancient and modern literature. How exquisitely are the limitations of Swift's own day outlined in the comparison of spider and bee: the one exuding 'excrement and venom', the other 'honey and wax'. This neat antithesis of objective health and its reverse is, indeed, widely valid, and covers Swift's own work, its envenomed self-exuded loathing as well as its fine balance and objectification in symbolic narrative. *A Tale of a Tub* is similarly allegoric, with a central clothes-symbolism akin to that used by Carlyle in *Sartor Resartus*: the coats left to the three sons representing the Roman, Anglican, and Puritan obediences. Swift's ecclesiastical satire from the start may apply to all Christian churches equally: as when Elizabeth makes laws against the 'recent books' of Peter from whom the greater part of her own 'dispensary' was 'stolen'. Skilful use is made throughout of varied symbolism: the shoulder-knots, silver fringe, the linings; the ludicrous descriptions of the visionary Aeolians and the unsavoury suggestions of 'wind'; the physical causes of madness, making tyrants go to war and philosophers compose

systems; the woman flayed, and the beau stripped; the satirizing of Jack's use of the 'will' (i.e. Bible) for *all* occasions whether as nightcap or umbrella; and, when taken short', his inability to find a suitable phrase, with dire results; Jack again asking for blows and showing his body, proud of martyrdom; the section on 'ears'; religions conceived as salves, powders, pills, plasters. Especially powerful, after the dominating clothes-symbolism—at one point Swift elevates clothes into a universal symbol in the manner of Carlyle—is the use of food to satirize the Mass, as when Peter invites his brothers to a feast and gives them nothing but dry bread. Food and clothes are primary simplicities which only the greatest literature, such as the New Testament and Shakespeare, endue with a consistent positive power. But Swift's more negative use of them is neat. The section on critics shows skilful irony entwined with references to asses, serpents, rats, wasps, vomit, and mud. In all this I point to the heavy reliance on sensory or other concrete suggestion to create a living action. Swift's narrative may seem colourless, but the materials within are not. The plainness consists rather in continual emphasis on noun and verb with rejection of the *qualifying* adjective.

Gulliver's Travels, however plain and realistic its surface, depends likewise on a symbolic, sensory-physical structure. Books I and II use people either dwarf-like or vast. And the logic within this imaginative structure repays exact attention. Compare with Shakespeare's and Milton's feeling for kingship this description of the King of Lilliput:

> He is taller by almost the breadth of my nail than any of his court, which alone is enough to strike an awe into the beholders. His features are strong and masculine, with an Austrian lip and arched nose, his complexion olive, his countenance erect, his body and limbs well-proportioned, all his motions graceful, and his deportment majestic. (Ch. II.)

And his proclamation:

> Golbasto Momaren Evlame Gurdilo Shefin Mully Ully Gue,

> most mighty Emperor of Lilliput, delight and terror of the universe, whose dominions extend five thousand *blustrugs* (about twelve miles in circumference) to the extremities of the globe; monarch of all monarchs, taller than the sons of men; whose feet press down to the centre, and whose head strikes against the sun; at whose nod the princes of the earth shake their knees; pleasant as the spring, comfortable as the summer, fruitful as autumn, dreadful as winter . . . (Ch. III.)

These rely for their satiric force on our knowledge of his size. His *pride* is felt to be absurd—compare Pope's hatred of pride—when we remember his pigmy physique. Yet size is only relative. The King of England viewed by a hypothetical creature much larger would appear correspondingly small; but so, for that matter, would the larger person in similar plight—as indeed Gulliver himself does in Book II, where it is clearly stated that the King of England must have suffered similar indignities had he been there. So a sequence of bigger and bigger people can be imagined indefinitely. Swift has therefore, in playing with size, said precisely nothing. But see what has happened. Pride has been condemned, not by the author but by the reader. A new perspective reveals a truth which, once recognized, stands independent of any particular perspective: while, the recognition being our own, knowledge of the trick played on us will not invalidate it. Or we see that pride, so easily dethroned by an unreality, can only be so satirized since it depends on one. It is felt to be fundamentally a make-believe: whereas self-sacrifice, courage, simple good sense, are not: for all qualities in the book inherently praiseworthy do not appear invalidated at all. Something similar happens in Byron's otherwise very different *Don Juan*. The judgements are all the time our own—a thought I shall return to in discussion of Swift's irony—Swift merely forcing them to daylight recognition. This recognition is not always bitter, and may touch pure humour, comparable with that of Pope in *The Rape of the Lock*: as when, in Book II, after Gulliver's elaborate and proud exhibition of nautical skill in a tank with Glum-

dalclitch's breath for wind, the girl, it is quietly and unobtrusively observed, hangs the boat on a nail to dry. The humour depends on recognition of a possible context in which any pride may appear funny. Such ludicrous events condition, with Swift, true narrative power and sincerity, his admirable scheme leaving him nothing to do but the barest description of—and this is characteristic—a simple *action*. Having the right nouns ready, he has only to attach the verb. The power of surface simplicity is fed entirely from the symbolism beneath.

Reliance on direct sensory-physical effects is greater in Book II than Book I. Especially interesting is Swift's use of small animals of a supposedly disgusting or absurd sort. The first Brobdingnagian he meets looks on Gulliver as 'a small dangerous animal' that may 'scratch' or 'bite', such as a 'weasel'; while Gulliver himself fears he may be dashed to the ground as 'any little hateful animal' a man has a mind to destroy. The man's wife screams on seeing him as 'at the sight of a toad or a spider'. When the boy is to be punished for holding him up in air by the legs, Gulliver intercedes, remembering a boy's natural mischievousness towards sparrows, rabbits, kittens, and puppy dogs. To him a cat is now three times the size of an ox. Gulliver's fight with the two rats is satirically heroic and his pride ludicrous: especially when the maid picks up the dead one with a pair of tongs and throws it out of the window. He sleeps in a doll's cradle in a drawer. They consider him a *splacknuck*. Glumdalclitch was once given a lamb which later went to the butcher and she fears the same may happen to Grildrig. He is carried in a 'box' with gimlet holes to let in air. The dwarf, in professional jealousy, drops him into a large bowl of cream, but, being a powerful swimmer, he survives. His legs are also wedged by this dwarf during dinner into a marrowbone 'where I stuck for some time, and made a very ridiculous figure'. Flies, 'odious insects', trouble him, and he is admired for cutting them in pieces with his knife. Fierce wasps steal his cake but he shows courage in attack and

'dispatches' four of them. There is the spaniel carrying him in its mouth to its master, tail wagging. This was hushed up: 'And truly as to myself, I thought it would not be for my reputation that such a story should go about.' A kite swoops down on him, he falls into a mole-hill, breaks his shin by tumbling over a snail-shell. He fights a thrush that snatched a piece of cake from his hand, but the birds beat him off and return to hunt for 'worms' and 'snails'. He throws a 'thick cudgel' at a linnet, and, knocking it down, runs 'with triumph' to his 'nurse', but the bird recovers and causes great trouble. A frog gets into his boat and daubs his face and clothes with its 'odious slime'. And then there is the monkey catching and squeezing him and taking him on to the roof, feeding him with food from its own mouth, patting him when he will not eat. And all this is built into that explicit statement of the king who sees Gulliver's kind as 'the most pernicious race of little odious vermin that nature ever suffered to crawl upon the face of the earth'.

I apologize for this rather obvious list. But observe its emphasis on actions. Swift follows the Shakespearian tradition of nauseating animals: spiders, toads, monkeys, &c. The experience is similar to that Shakespeare projects into *Othello*. (The comparisons aim at outlining sense of both indignity and disgust.) The substance is to this extent quite non-rational, and of an immediate and sensory sort, however it may be used to blend with rational thinking. In contrast we may point to Pope's more cosmic sympathy for all small life, and his apparent fondness for spiders; though he and Swift are one in their condemnation of pride. Indeed, *Gulliver's Travels* almost reflects that sense of mankind's purely *relative* importance found in the *Essay on Man*.

(Sense-reaction may be specifically human: as when Gulliver in Lilliput puts out the fire burning the palace with his own water; in the heavy emphasis on ordure in the same book; and the descriptions of a meal and execution in Book II. The most precise expression of such sensory

feeling comes in the exquisitely devised Book IV. Book I is sometimes indecisive: as when the Lilliputians, usually reflecting European weaknesses, are suddenly made to present Utopian ideals of education and justice; and in Book II the King and his people, who stand for reason, justice, and intellectual precision (as in references to neat prose and learning), are also horrible, because large, examples of physical coarseness. The confusion is unavoidable. But Book IV, where none occurs, is the more perfect work. The author has found exact equivalents to his intuition in the Houyhnhnms and Yahoos.) The choice of horses may be related to Swift's excretory prepossessions, since the scent of stables is strangely non-abhorrent to man. Consider this passage:

> The first money I layed out was to buy two young stone-horses, which I keep in a good stable, and next to them the groom is my greatest favourite; for I feel my spirits revived by the smell he contracts in the stable. (Ch. XI.)

In contrast Gulliver is disgusted by human odours. (Horses thus become Swift's highest creatures, the intellectual design being clearly dictated by a sensory, almost poetic, aversion.) Of course the psychological reverberations of the horse go deep: as in Shakespeare's *Henry V*, *Macbeth*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*; also in Lawrence—his *St. Mawr* and a fine passage in *Apocalypse*. Recent work on horse-magic in the ancient world (in, for example, *Vergil's Troy*, by Mr. W. F. Jackson Knight) is relevant. (As for the Yahoos, they are nauseating beasts in human form, disposed to 'nastiness and dirt'.) Ironically they are defended in terms of swine:

> I could have easily vindicated human kind from the imputation of singularity upon the last article, if there had been any swine in that country (as unluckily for me there were not), which, although it may be a sweeter quadruped than a Yahoo, cannot I humbly conceive in justice pretend to more cleanliness; and so his Honour himself must have owned if he had seen their filthy way of feeding, and their custom of wallowing and sleeping in the mud. (Ch. VII.)

In the Yahoo physical and intellectual satire are beautifully at one. Gulliver's Houyhnhnm master tells how five of the Yahoos will quarrel violently over enough food for fifty, each wanting all for himself, and only failing to kill each other for want of the human inventions Gulliver has described; how they will dig with their claws for coloured stones, carrying them to their kennels and pining away if they be removed. As for drink, they suck a juicy root that goes to their heads:

> It would make them sometimes hug, and sometimes tear one another; they would howl, and grin, and chatter, and reel, and tumble, and then fall asleep in the dirt. (Ch. VII.)

The physical is one with the moral satire. The hatefulness of the Yahoo form is emphasized together with its comparative uselessness and limitations in strength and speed, and subjection to cold and heat. The concealing by clothes of otherwise 'hardly supportable' human 'deformities' (cp. the same word in Webster and the use of 'semblable' in *Timon*) appears to Gulliver's master thoroughly wise. Indeed, the Yahoos hate each other presumably because of their 'odious shape'.) The Houyhnhnms

> had very imprudently neglected to cultivate the breed of asses, which were a comely animal, easily kept, more tame and orderly, without any offensive smell, strong enough for labour, although they yield to the other in agility of body; and if their brayings be no agreeable sound, it is far preferable to the horrible howlings of the Yahoos. (Ch. IX.)

Such a passage shows clearly how Swift's famous understatement and lucidity depend mainly on his first finding satirical-symbolic schemes so exactly suited that barest narration releases all the emotional force desired. No first-order writer is independent of sensory symbolisms; and Swift's striking realism and fine use of the active verb measure the madness of his tale.

Book IV repeats much of Books I and II. The satire on European wars, politics, and professions generally is

a more direct reworking of similar substances in Book II; while the Utopian suggestions in Lilliput are elaborately redeveloped in description of the Houyhnhnms. Rational simplicity is the keynote of Swift's Utopia. No one lies, because language exists to convey meaning; and opinions cannot differ since, where passions are absent, truth, in so far as it is not unreachable, will be self-evident (cp. Pope's 'Truth breaks upon us with resistless day'). Marriage is eugenically arranged with no unnecessary play of emotions; there is no possessive fondness for children; nor any distress at death in a relative, nor fear of one's own. The whole race is equally loved by all. Women get the same education as males to avoid the error of entrusting children to inferior beings. Notice how close this rational levelling is to (i) New Testament teaching and (ii) certain ultra-modern theories; but also how abhorrent it remains to the more sensitive intelligences of Christian tradition. This is no place for an attempt at elucidation; but Swift's reasoning appears rather as a facile retreat from emotions than as a mastery and use of them. There are correspondences with Sir Thomas More. Poetry and athletics are important, the one used to celebrate victories in the other. Hellenic and rational sympathies recall Milton but accompany an implicit aversion from Christian supernaturalisms. This is very different from Pope.

And yet Swift is scarcely a 'rationalist' or 'intellectualist' in any modern sense. He desires a simple state of nature. Book III shows how little he trusts man's scientific advances. Here, as often in *A Tale of a Tub*, he is very modern, attacking all over-intellectualization and a will-o'-the-wisp science; in which he may be related to Marlowe's *Faustus* and certain passages in *The Duchess of Malfi* before his day as well as Butler and Lawrence after. Hence the Laputians and their need for 'flappers'; their clothes decorated with suns and moons, fiddles and lutes; food cut into geometrical shapes; phraseology drawn from science and music; clothes elaborately constructed from scientific calculations and eventually turned out ill-fitting;

and absurd fears of planetary disaster. Music and mathematics go together, the most abstract of the arts with the most abstract of the sciences; both considered as irrelevant to human existence as abstruse theories concerning the heavenly bodies. Swift has no sense of a possible music-cosmic intuition where all such could find place, and which would indeed help to unify much else; his view drawing apart from that of Aldous Huxley in the Beethoven incident in *Point Counter Point*. Often he is especially modern: the Laputians' fear of the sun's going out corresponding with certain 'thermo-dynamic' arguments to-day that can only be opposed by a non-scientific vitalism such as that expressed in Pope's *Essay on Man* and Lawrence's *Fantasia of the Unconscious*. Swift grossly underestimates the great advances potential in contemporary science: but, looking deeper, we can recognize many profound truths. He sees the land of Balnibarbi uncultivated and wantonly misused, and contrasts the general ugliness with a fertile district that brings mockery on its owner: which may be taken as a dark reflection of that future mechanization he could not be expected to describe more closely. There are the mad schemes of 'projectors', who plough by setting hogs to root up laboriously buried acorns, aim at extracting sun-beams from cucumbers, and spoil a good mill for absurd theoretic proposals concerning a better that never gets built. Much finds its mark to-day. The Laputians miss all 'common pleasures' and spend their time worrying about politics and continually fearing, the country meanwhile running to ruin. Learning becomes mechanized, a kind of turnip-machine rolling out sentences ready-made so that any one can compose fine books without knowledge or genius: our recent mass-production in books and education getting a palpable hit. An arrow is levelled at church ritual: the student swallows a wafer bearing an inscribed geometrical proposition with a view to assimilating its truth. If there is any danger to-day that the evils of science may out-speed its benefits, a fear most easily defensible in consideration of war, then the Swiftian pro-

phecy is not all jaundiced. Any great writer, being by definition one who senses significant directions in his own age, tends inevitably to reflect the future. So aerial warfare is shadowed in the floating island, whatever other symbolisms either royalistic or national may have been implied; particular and general implications, in important literature, always coalescing. Swift's brilliant satire on European wars, whether in *A Tale of a Tub* or *Gulliver's Travels*, demands to-day an especial respect for his insight. In Books I, II, and IV there are harsh criticisms, social, political, and ecclesiastical; in Book III they are less subtle, jostling each other somewhat chaotically. But the same tendencies are being attacked. At Glubbdubdrib a vision of the Roman senate is contrasted with modern assemblies, and modern history shown as one list of crimes. The King of Luggnagg poisons nobles by infecting the dust they are made to lick: a concrete symbolism recalling the stick-jumping, ribbons, and 'king's cushion' in Lilliput. Church baptism gets a knock from the immortal Struldbrugs with the red spot on their foreheads: which witnesses Swift's slight sympathy for the mystical and ritualistic. No defence of his fundamental religious orthodoxy can stand the test of such writings. He is a sceptical humanist who again and again tilts at Christian belief. The geometrical wafer in this book; the wars of Big-Endians and Little-Endians (another very concrete mechanism) in Lilliput, and the burial upside down among the Lilliputians in hope of resurrection the right way up; together with obvious analogies from *A Tale of a Tub*—all serve to establish his scepticism. The Houyhnhnms have no religion.

He does not, normally, give any impression of actual savagery. He is well above his subject, not inartistically involved in it: hence his deadly ease of statement. Which brings us to his famous irony. *A Modest Proposal* is only the most celebrated instance of a continual technique. Irony says one thing while aiming to make the reader think its opposite: that is, the reader himself produces the

required thought from his own mind. This is, of course, the secret of persuasion in general: rhetorical questions are its crudest, and irony its most concentrated, form. So Swift, by commenting on his carefully invented situations with a quietly exaggerated respect to conventional values, releases in the reader a sudden revulsion from those values. What we call 'control' in any art is similar: it is the technique of leaving certain things out, the use of suggestion, relying on the reader's—or, in acting, the spectator's—ability to do the rest. It is therefore easy to see why lack of it may offend, though it is equally clear that since few readers normally do their share, the more violent artist may have as good a case as the other. Pope, for example, seems to be aiming always at couplet-rhyme, his thought not stressed, to be received almost by mistake with a half-awareness that is a deep awareness: with the unfortunate result that we have taken him at his face value. Jesus speaks in parable to awake, rather than inject, the thought required; to release an automatic recognition. All symbolism takes you to the threshold: no more. Swift's irony is, compared with those, scarcely profound; nor can it be missed. But its nature poignantly condenses a universal truth: that to force people's minds may be less valuable than to engage their co-operation; as when Dryden, by masking his attack on Buckingham through the character of Zimri, makes his audience itself perform the act of recognition before weighing its justice, which is by then already admitted. All this relates closely to Swift's use of sensory symbolisms: the one is allied with the other, mad schemes chosen which lend themselves to ironic comment. Besides, as I have earlier noticed, his use of size similarly relies on raising judgements really instinctive to the reader. So Swift *proves* nothing. The general result is always an especially powerful effect with an appearance of effortless ease that impresses with a sense of necessity and truth, and causes us to think the author an intellectual giant, though there is little close thinking, as such, in these works. He is not exactly an emotional giant either. Yet

certainly he seems to be a giant of some sort. In Lilliput Gulliver's size may be taken to symbolize a sense of superiority, as I think the vast stature of Satan symbolizes Milton's: a wish-fulfilment in material terms of that ease and mastery he feels within him, yet can only attain in literature. It has been observed that in Brobdingnag you tend to see Gulliver as tiny, still identifying yourself with the big people; which, if it be so, might reflect a similar identification in the writer. The cat and thrush we may see, for a short while, as vast, but not the men—though there are other possible reasons for this.

The richest negative profundities, Milton's Hell or Webster's charnel-mongering, are absent from Swift; and, perhaps, from Pope. A certain dark intensity is left unexperienced: Pope's *Dunciad* satirizes the mentally absurd, asses his symbol; Swift's Yahoos are ape-pigs, corresponding to a more physical disgust. Pope's appears the more healthy, and clearly, in view of his other work, the more just. Certainly Swift's concentration on ordure suggests a limitation. Three sense-complexes may trouble the growing human organism: ordure, sex, death. Two organic negations seem to enclose a positive: but the sequence, I think, exists. The first normally gets and deserves slight attention: though we may remember excretion is a miniature death in its expulsion of poisons, and all sensory reactions hold interest in reference to death itself. Sexual troubles of one sort or another are the natural playground for adult agonies; and their solution seems to condition the deepest understanding of the final mystery. Much of our horror at death is, at bottom, a physical repulsion, and may be related to both the earlier stages. It seems that Swift, on this plane of analysis, was stuck at the first obstacle and we may suspect a corresponding limitation in his gospel. He resembles Apemantus in *Timon*.

Any work so truly rooted in sensation will be, however, organic: and Swift's statements are human documents of considerable importance. They reach back to, and expand, many passages from the Elizabethans, where *Gulliver's*

Travels may often be discovered, as it were, in embryo. They must also be felt in direct relation to the steady, and general, deflating of the heroic tradition that makes Pope's more complex development so fascinating. It is a good idea to remember Shakespeare's and Milton's conceptions of royalty and historic romance whilst reading Swift; though he, like Pope, goes rather to the beloved 'ancients' than any so recent giants for the inspiration of contrast. *A Tale of a Tub* has epic parodies like those of Pope and, later, Fielding, where you can catch the author trying to relate, by means of irony, his own present experience to a traditional nobility. An especially quick revolution is hinging on this period as aristocratic symbols of fine action lose repute—Dryden's heroic drama is an attempt to stem the process—while a more mentalized activity, in letters and science, gains force and influence. Both Swift and Pope, being as it were conscious of themselves as hinges, necessarily feel the strain. The science which Milton everywhere accepts to the disruption of his cosmology is already violently suspect. At the same time the literary fisticuffs of the age show letters themselves wide awake to their new power, and heroic contest sinks—or rises—to a 'battle of the books': Swift's title going right to the ironic heart of the matter. Yet he follows Milton in aiming at direct influence through literary action, as in the *Drapier's Letters*; and for a while knows and enjoys a secondary sort of political power. Dryden had written his *Absalom and Ahitophel*: a stern compulsion grips the creative artist, and the good old days—if such ever existed—seem gone for ever. The bitterness produced by the age is symptomatic and its impact remains general. Swift's best strokes rely as successfully now as when they were written on releasing an immediate recognition of discrepancy between the heroic and contemporary. We cannot consistently blame him for cynicism whilst simultaneously enjoying the quiet power of its result: for that were to blame ourselves. Nor, where his less savoury physical impressions give us a jolt, can we level an artistic objec-

tion, since the jolt itself argues the very response aimed at by the text. The only real criticism of Swift's negative position would be a complete indifference.

One can, however, notice that he offers no powerful assertion to lend his attacks a fuller meaning. You cannot altogether wisely condemn the whole race and leave it at that, unless, indeed, you go on to counsel racial suicide, which could, through an enforced birth-control, quickly solve all human problems. Therefore any consistent satirist should sooner or later put his positive cards on the table, as Lawrence tried to. Swift has none of any *emotional* power: which differentiates him very strongly from Pope. His Hellenic sympathies are all castrated before fit for use. His Utopia is as coldly rational as Milton's Christ. Erotic emotions are either ignored or impregnated with disgust. He seems to endure a stoppage when there should be a flow, and you could not find a better commentary on him than Mr. Eliot's essay on Hamlet.

Nevertheless, his apparent suffering elevates him far above the more smug and contented satirists. Moreover, his symbolic schemes aim at a deeper, more emotional redirection, as I have shown, than would more facile surface arguments lacking sensory-appeal. He is not merely 'intellectual'. But his strong sense-aversions which we may, in view of their overpowering emphasis, suppose to be, originally at least, troubling elements in his own life, are fundamentally a denial of the poetic essence; and it is to his credit that he so finely reversed that denial to poetic account. We can say either (i) that his psychological peculiarities prevented his finding a positive and dynamic pattern, and that his thwarted genius did the best it could, by wrenching nausea to prophetic standard; or (ii) that in this age such a man was best equipped for literary genius, since satire alone conditioned that entwining of symbol and story basic to the greatest works. But our view must be measured against the comparable but different development of Pope. Though he is merciless to the main activities of Western civilization, Swift respects the heroic

traditions of Greece and Rome; and this sympathy is reflected into his own narrative skill and even sentence-construction, wherein the best points are continually being made through lucid statements of action. Most great writers express somewhere or other the best possible unconscious commentary, whether critical or appraising, on their own work. Here is Swift's, from *The Battle of the Books*:

> For anything else of genuine that the Moderns may pretend to, I cannot recollect; unless it be a large vein of wrangling and satire, much of a nature and substance with the spider's poison; which, however they pretend to spit wholly out of themselves, is improved by the same arts, by feeding upon the insects and vermin of the age. As for us the Ancients, we are content with the bee to pretend to nothing of our own, beyond our wings and our voice, that is to say, our flights and our language. For the rest, whatever we have got, has been by infinite labour and search, and ranging through every corner of nature; the difference is, that, instead of dirt and poison, we have rather chosen to fill our hives with honey and wax, thus furnishing mankind with the two noblest of things, which are sweetness and light.

The beautiful handling of the symbol contrasts strongly with Arnold's prostitution of it in *Culture and Anarchy*. Swift here glimpses, if insecurely, a positive human excellence not incomparable with Pope's; and his satire, like Pope's, is directed against an age poisoned by petty wrangling; it is satire against satire. If the medicine is strong, so was—or is—the disease. Indeed, though this passage may to-day be read as self-condemnation, its beautiful strength and precision of statement—relying almost entirely on concrete nouns and active verbs with scarcely an adjective to assist—range Swift in the company rather of those ancients whose art he describes.

V

THE VITAL FLAME: AN ESSAY ON POPE

I

THE early *Pastorals* are rich and valuable; but in *Windsor Forest* Pope is already a poet of first importance. Deep submission to nature is felt expanding into communal and national prophecy. The forest becomes a universal symbol:

> Not Chaos-like together crush'd and bruis'd,
> But, as the world, harmoniously confus'd:
> Where order in variety we see,
> And where, though all things differ, all agree. (13)

Those four lines, balancing man and nature with feeling for an enclosing and permeating whole, are the key to Pope's work.

Descriptive phrases are often somewhat general:

> Bear me, O bear me to sequester'd scenes,
> The bow'ry mazes, and surrounding greens . . . (261)

Instead of the chiselled image of Milton we have a queer refusal of visual outline, 'bow'ry mazes' being only superficially Miltonic. A quality rather than an object or set of objects is transmitted. Nor is the result necessarily vague:

> There, interspers'd in lawns and op'ning glades,
> Thin trees arise that shun each other's shades. (21)

General nouns balance a vivid feeling for natural life. Notice that the personification of the trees is not a weak artifice: rather their felt stillness, their living identities, are realized. Personification in Pope is never driven to any rigid extremes. When corn is seen 'in waving prospect' (39) we have movement and a whole, steady scene, together with an abstract word: and all, movement, wholeness, and the abstract well used in service to a

physical impact, are characteristic. Notice that one word describes the object, one the unifying mind of the spectator: this union is often at the back of Pope's method. You find it in 'quivering shade' (135), where 'shade' touches human affections. There is thus precision without a materialized limitation. Even when Liberty leads 'the golden years' (92), though the phrase be ornate the expressed quality is fairly exact. In Pope any humanizing of nature is really a partnership with nature: the condensation of feeling into a choice diction that already has classic impact assists, but the feeling is always there.

Moreover, phrases do not assert themselves in isolation; a 'predominating passion' renders every image soft; one inward life warms each unit of any single description. A vital context is ready for any striking impression as in the generally admired lines on fishes (141–6), where 'bright-ey'd' graduates into 'silver' and 'shining' and sets a context for 'yellow', 'bedropp'd with gold', and 'crimson': there is nothing sudden or rigid; and, the whole movement being so organic, no complicated efforts at realization are needed —simple nouns with the occasional well-selected adjective drop into place, and all goes smoothly. The poet is well above his work, or rather, well inside it, or both. A lovely passage on reflections in water (212–18) pictures the miracle of 'headlong mountains' and 'downward skies', trees that are 'absent', and 'floating forests' that 'paint the waves with green'; while all the time the water is rolling 'slow' through the 'fair scene' it holds. The description becomes a symbol of that repose mysteriously one with a vital yet undisturbing movement that characterizes Pope's major art-forms and tiniest phrases alike. For the descriptions, being inward, penetrate to the dynamic centres of life, and give, without effort, pictorial quality and action, as in the well-known

> 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? (111)

Rich as is the description, the phrases work in obedience to a whole drawn directly from the energies of nature. Each image is apt, but none superlative. There is a reserve of power and a poetic humility; that is, power is felt in the conception, not just the expression. The regularity of couplet-rhyme helps in checking all separate excellences, levelling and subduing them, with a corresponding release to the central experience, while poignant action informs a poetic tranquillity; as in our former phrase 'waving prospect', where the still and vast abstract conception checks the more lively movement which is somehow then enclosed in stillness. This is Keats's 'might half-slumbering on its own right arm'.

Pope's animal apprehension is one with animal sympathy. The destruction of bird-life is again vigorously imagined when a fowler is described roving with 'slaughterous gun' in winter:

He lifts the tube, and levels with his eye:
Straight a short thunder breaks the frozen sky:
Oft, as in airy rings they skim the heath,
The clam'rous lapwings feel the leaden death:
Oft, as the mounting larks their notes prepare,
They fall, and leave their little lives in air. (129)

You could complain of 'tube', though the word may also mark an isolated visual exactitude. Pope is no specialist at mechanic imagery, and avoids it consistently. But the first couplet so precisely integrates action with atmosphere, the metallic suddenness of sound across the wintry landscape, that you almost smell powder in the keen air. A whole experience is given, an authentic instant of actual existence, a piece of a living universe. The realization is stark, sudden, and unerring; as, too, in the phrase 'leaden death'. 'Clamorous' and 'mounting' are careful epithets, and 'little' denotes the sympathy implicit throughout;

with a clever silhouetting of life's mystery in the thought of its loss, the birds as tiny flamelets puffed out in song. Animals are inwardly felt, as in the 'ready spaniel' shown 'panting with hope' (99–100) or the 'impatient courser' ('courser' because he is felt as dynamic) seen as excited in 'every vein', pawing the ground and tingling for 'the distant plain' (151). The animal's power and swiftness is admirably caught in 'earth rolls back beneath the flying steed' (158), the phrase aiming to net the paradoxical quality of speed. Animals are usually created in their vital and peculiar movement from an inward sympathy comparable with Shakespeare's, and continuous with the apprehension of dynamic quality, as well as shape and colour, in nature generally. The stallion and hare of *Venus and Adonis* are both recalled by *Windsor Forest*:

> To plains with well-breath'd beagles we repair,
> And trace the mazes of the circling hare:
> (Beasts, urg'd by us, their fellow beasts pursue,
> And learn of men each other to undo). (121)

The animal's characterizing behaviour is noticed and exactly, though unobtrusively, recorded.

Such recognition will naturally widen beyond nature and animal life to a vivid feeling for human vitality in action, such as we find in Pan's pursuit of Lodona (171–218). A tense realization of movement and fear is projected through numerous precisions involving bird-comparisons, the sound of steps, Pan's shadow lengthened by the sun, the feeling of his very breath: it is vivid without being visual, an inward experience expressing itself freely and variously. And it should help us to understanding of Shakespeare's own similar mastery. The little drama leads up to Lodona's transmutation to a rivulet and this exquisite couplet:

> The silver stream her virgin coldness keeps,
> For ever murmurs and for ever weeps. (205)

The real stream is in every accent. That process of nature-feeling which creates so many lovely Greek myths, and

which Keats understood so well in his own fluid personifications, enjoys an equal perfection here. The fusion of the human and the natural is not ever, in itself, a weakness: rather it is the farthest aim of all nature-mysticism, and implicit really in Wordsworth's own message.

The poem expands further, Windsor Forest becoming a national symbol, one with 'Britannia's goddess', Liberty (91–2). Oaks are 'future navies' (222), with no straining of association. An Elizabethan royalism is recaptured, Windsor boasting in Queen Anne 'as bright a goddess and as chaste a queen' as Diana in 'old Arcadia'; at once protectress of the 'sylvan scene', 'earth's fair light', and 'empress of the main' (159–64). So the courtier ranks above the poet, whose 'chymic art' reading magic lore from nature and history is a brilliantly characterized second (235–56). The Thames recalls past nobilities, river-feelings forming organically among the paradisal, yet contemporary, impressions. Again, as in the days of Elizabeth, 'discord' has been quelled, only this time by 'great Anna'; while the 'sacred' blessings of a peaceful reign are expected, with the building of 'temples' replacing civil war and bloodshed (321–78). England is finally seen as supreme arbiter and 'great oracle' of the world (382). All evils are to be stilled on that day when

> Unbounded Thames shall flow for all mankind. (398)

The vision expands the Shakespearian prophecy in *Henry VIII*. Pope expects his country to oppose 'slavery' (408). He proclaims the end of conquest (408) and ambition (416) with the advent of universal peace.

This felt organic continuity of nature, animal-life, and human civilization is most important. It is not a logical sequence; my quotations are drawn from various parts of what may well seem an untidy poem. The form is inherently, not studiously, organic. The generalizing tendency never loses contact with perceptual impressions. Feeling rather burrows into the underlying essence, catches the spirit and atmosphere, enjoys possession with

freedom, and so moves on to the universal. The process is Shakespearian, and the final inclusion a natural result of any contact with an inner vitality. *Windsor Forest* is felt as a teeming world: there are no limits to its boundaries. We are pointed on, through thoughts of imperial expansion as creatively interlocking one's own country with a great human whole, to the 'naked youths' (405) of America; and though the positive trust in a mercantile peace—to be alined with Addison's *Royal Exchange* and poetically forecast by the glamour of Shakespeare's merchants—is, with much else in *Windsor Forest*, superficially reversed in Pope's later writings, the essential statement of the poem is never repudiated. Evils are keenly remembered: the forest's past as a setting for savagery and oppression (43–92) is set beside its present placidity and expected future. Such Shakespearian inclusiveness, covering a number of geographical references, points towards the *Essay on Man*. Pope's life-work is rooted in *Windsor Forest*. It holds the germ of all the rest, the satires too. The ultimate significance which Milton, starting with a religious poem, searched for in the organ music of his own mind, is here again sought in natural affinities. Nature and man are again in partnership: which recaptured sense of harmony is reflected into an assured poetic ease, the rose-chain and bowery prison of the couplet.

II

Shakespeare gives us drama and Milton epic, while Pope builds on both in *The Rape of the Lock*. The poem has Lyly's feeling for the delightfully evanescent, the poignant attractiveness of a brilliant society. Yet Lyly offered no strong action: and against this subtlest of poetic problems Pope very early pits his genius, preserving the essences of heroic poetry on condition of a semi-humorous treatment. Attempts to idealize the crown in Dryden's *Absalom and Ahitophel* are weak; and in *Windsor Forest* the national fervour barely, if at all, carries off the more royalistic

idealism. But, by full acceptance of a changed mental horizon, we may regain an integrity comparable with Shakespeare's:

> Here thou, great Anna! whom three realms obey,
> Dost sometimes counsel take—and sometimes tea. (III. 7)

The compliment is made possible and even powerful by the joke. And by just such humour Pope integrates his whole poem into the heroic and religious tradition. For religious tonings take place beside those royalistic and heroic, under similar semi-humorous conditions. The poem is not iconoclastic, but holds a warm humanism as surely as the somewhat similar *Love's Labour's Lost*. It is written not from a scorn but a love. The whole is a flirtation with the sublime.

By seeing Belinda's toilet preparations as a ritual the poet channels reverend associations that build his scene and its action into both a more convincing and a more memorable impressionistic whole than would otherwise be possible. Nor is this merely a technical fancy, since the religion of post-Renaissance literature is, fundamentally, an Eros cult. So, in blending religious tonings with feminine vanity, Pope makes a synthesis of the Christianity–Eros conflict on a comparatively superficial, but delightfully human, plane; the rich humour being both the measure of a relation and the resolving of a conflict. Here it is:

> And now, unveil'd, the toilet stands display'd,
> Each silver vase in mystic order laid.
> First, rob'd in white, the Nymph intent adores,
> With head uncover'd, the cosmetic powers.
> A heav'nly image in the glass appears,
> To that she bends, to that her eyes she rears;
> Th' inferior Priestess, at her altar's side,
> Trembling begins the sacred rites of pride . . .
> Unnumber'd treasures ope at once, and here
> The various off'rings of the world appear;
> From each she nicely culls with curious toil,
> And decks the Goddess with the glittering spoil.

This casket India's glowing gems unlocks,
And all Arabia breathes from yonder box.
The tortoise here and elephant unite,
Transform'd to combs, the speckled and the white.
Here files of pins extend their shining rows . . . (I. 121)

He goes on to imagine a 'purer blush' suffusing her face, and 'keener lightnings' starting from her eyes. The delicate fun is obvious; other significances are less so. There is the same sense of wealth we found in *Windsor Forest*: the poet feels his own corner of life interlocking with a vast whole of human co-operation. The use of perfumes is noteworthy: Pope consistently relies on them to establish his impressions. The whole passage is, to use a fine term A. C. Bradley applied to Keats, 'dense'. There is nothing visually flat. Pope is not an extremely visual poet: rather he tells facts, names concrete objects, attaches needed epithets. But his reserve attains great richness, and his epithets modify with precision and force: as in the adjective 'mystic', both helping the main analogy and underlining the maid's professional care—it serves a realistic purpose. The sacramental associations concretize, and give depth to, the whole business: objects are made alive, till they breathe out significant energy. Pope twice elsewhere in the poem uses such ritualistic colourings. There is the altar made of four French romances, and its offerings of love—I quote the passage later; and here is a pretty description of coffee-making:

On shining altars of Japan they raise
The silver lamp; the fiery spirits blaze:
From silver spouts the grateful liquors glide,
While China's earth receives the smoking tide. (III. 107)

This is symbolism in a very valuable sense of the word: dynamic associations are used to realize, seriously or humorously, some whole event or scene, objects and atmosphere, facts and implications, together. Here the ordinary and trivial spring to sudden life, a hidden magic released.

Warfare, so continual in heroic—and, given a more

psychological significance, in dramatic—poetry, is likewise used, twice: the one instance forming a neat forecast of the other. First, there is the card-game. The emotionally heroic treatment is not illogical. Games are civilized substitutes for physical rivalry, and the kings and queens in chess or cards symbolize existent meanings. An age of settled culture, as Castiglione knew, needs an outlet for warrior instincts. So phrases such as 'now move to war her sable matadores' (III. 47) and 'th' imperial consort of the crown of spades' (III. 68) reflect a truth. People *do* take their games seriously; they *have* been known to lose their tempers at bridge. Remembering this, ask whether the following lines overload their context; and if the rich humour is not dependent, as finest humour should be, on the holding up of a mirror to nature:

> And now (as oft in some distemper'd state)
> On one nice trick depends the general fate.
> An Ace of Hearts steps forth: the King unseen
> Lurk'd in her hand, and mourn'd his captive Queen:
> He springs to vengeance with an eager pace,
> And falls like thunder on the prostrate Ace.
> The nymph exulting fills with shouts the sky;
> The wells, the woods, and long canals reply. (III. 93)

The ordinary word 'thunder', without any attempt at original phrase-coining, nevertheless starts from its context with crashing impact; next, the movement curves over to a quiet end with sense of a completed whole, the usual Shakespearian technique in the organizing of speech, scene, or play. The rich humour here is proportionate to our recognition not of a distortion but a truth; depending, indeed, on a central, somewhat Shakespearian, humility before the simple and the vast in human instincts. It is something which tends to elude the puritanical consciousness.

Our other war-incident is the general mêlée in Canto V. Though feminine dignity may be for a while lost as 'whalebones crack' (V. 40), it is often cleverly preserved

in delightfully mock-heroic terms, as when Thalestris 'scatters death around from both her eyes' (v. 58), or Belinda scores a victory with a charge of snuff thrown at the Baron till 'the high dome re-echoes to his nose' (v. 86). There is, too, the Shakespearian realization of personal dignity where you least expect it, in the brainless aristocrat Sir Plume, with 'earnest eyes and round unthinking face', who has nevertheless also the mystery of his own precise individuality and therefore his own causes of pride:

> Sir Plume of amber snuff-box justly vain,
> And the nice conduct of a clouded cane. (IV. 123)

The persons, it is true, are not strongly individualized except for this exquisite vignette of Sir Plume and his cleverly characterized words: but the presentation of people in general has a warmth, conviction, and sympathy that might well, at another time, have created drama on a wider scale. The fun is not derisive but cathartic.

Pope's use of supernatural 'machinery' is clever. These 'light militia of the lower sky' (I. 42; observe the skilful 'i'-sounds) increase dramatic suspense and therefore story-depth, since they foreknow and warn of the central disaster; help to universalize semi-humorously the whole action, forming, indeed, the binding symbolism of the little drama; are related to certain paradisal and—in Umbriel's journey—hellish colourings touching Dante, Shakespeare, and Milton; and finally reflect the implied belief of poetic art-forms in general that humanity and its sensible world do not exhaust the total of a comprehensive psychic statement. They are of a race that lives in the pure upper light; that guides 'orbs' in heaven, like the child-spirit in Shelley; or follows shooting stars by moonlight; are indeed variously associated with the rainbow, mists, tempests, and earth; and the guardianship of the British throne (II. 77–90). As unseen helpers they recall the Attendant Spirit in *Comus*. They are explicitly related to traditional beliefs, both trivial and profound:

Fairest of mortals, thou distinguish'd care
Of thousand bright inhabitants of air!
If e'er one vision touch'd thy infant thought,
Of all the Nurse and all the Priest have taught;
Of airy elves by moonlight shadows seen,
The silver token, and the circled green,
Or virgins visited by Angel-powers,
With golden crowns and wreaths of heav'nly flowers . . .
(I. 27)

They are thus in part quite seriously imagined, and exquisitely realized, with names delicately composed to suit their peculiar charges: Zephyretta, Brillante, Momentilla, Crispissa corresponding to fan, drops, watch, and lock. And nowhere is Pope's artistry in vowel-colour more evident than in the description of Belinda's setting out on the Thames by sunlight with sylphs invisibly attending. The passage is introduced by three lines of light 'i'-sounds, followed by weightier though soft vowellings to match the expansive peace:

But now secure the painted vessel glides,
The sun-beams trembling on the floating tides:
While melting music steals upon the sky,
And soften'd sounds along the waters die;
Smooth flow the waves, the zephyrs gently play,
Belinda smiled, and all the world was gay. (II. 47)

Soon after, the sylphs' introduction is accompanied by a growing accumulation of 'i' vowels, steadily increasing in clustered force for eight lines, before giving place to heavier sounds:

Some to the sun their insect-wings unfold,
Waft on the breeze, or sink in clouds of gold;
Transparent forms, too fine for mortal sight,
Their fluid bodies half dissolv'd in light,
Loose to the wind their airy garments flew,
Thin glitt'ring textures of the filmy dew,
Dipt in the richest tincture of the skies,
Where light disports in ever-mingling dyes,
While every beam new transient colours flings,
Colours that change whene'er they wave their wings.

Amid the circle, on the gilded mast,
Superior by the head, was Ariel plac'd;
His purple pinions opening to the sun,
He raised his azure wand, and thus begun . . . (II. 59)

In the couplet starting 'While every . . .' heavy and light sounds interpenetrate to match the formation of deep colours from out aerial brilliance. Continual change and movement is cleverly expressed: it is a various dance of evanescent impressions, very different from Milton's more static, or at the best solemn, appeals. The final lines grow thicker with vowel-weight to establish a mock-heroic grandeur and cause the little speaker to swell out in close-up significance. Such delicately rich and substantial impressionism cannot be exhausted by categories of social satire. You could seriously compare this river-and-lady sun-piece with Shakespeare's Cleopatra on Cydnus. The description, as 'insect-wings' implies, depends on observation of nature. Pope's sympathy with small life-forms is continual, and leads here to exquisite apprehension of a sylph's (or fly's) punishment:

Gums and pomatums shall his flight restrain,
While clogg'd he beats his silken wings in vain. (II. 129)

Heavy vowels oppose light ones. Later (II. 135) there is the horror and rounded sounds of 'fumes of burning chocolate'. Triumphant Umbriel (lovely name) is shown mischievously clapping his wings 'on a sconce's height' during the mêlée (v. 54). The sombre effects of his descent to Hell, with comic description of the objects there, are done, again, with a glorious sense of the trivial sublimated to heroic stature. The dark and light tonings throughout expand far beyond 'mockery': rather mockery is the preliminary condition of a final poetic achievement.

The poem has imaginative solidity—which is not the same as the imagining of solids in separation—presenting a certain perceptual density and close-packed unity. I have noticed the perceptual quality of Belinda's toilet. But whatever is noticed, the lock itself, the guarded petti-

coat, Sir Plume's 'amber snuff-box' and 'clouded cane', bodkins, sconces, coffee-pots, all are rounded and convincing: moreover, they cohere together in their particular world. There is a heavy stress on bright substances, which are here peculiarly fitting. Silver is a persistent impression: 'The press'd watch return'd a silver sound' (I. 18), a 'silver token' (I. 32), 'each silver vase' (I. 122), the 'silver Thames' (II. iv), the petticoat's 'silver bound' (II. 121), the 'silver lamp' and 'silver spouts' of coffee-pots (III. 108–9). There is gold also: angels with 'golden crowns' (I. 34), 'golden scales' (V. 71), 'liquid gold' (IV. 45) in the Cave of Spleen, 'clouds of gold' (II. 60). It may take the form of gilt: 'gilded chariots' (I. 55), the 'gilded mast' (II. 69), the French romances 'neatly gilt' (II. 38). But these rich solids—there are jewels too—blend naturally into the silvery glinting wings of sylphs in sunlight, the recurrent 'i'-sounds, the 'lightning' of Belinda's sparkling eyes, the glitter of wit everywhere. Belinda dreams of 'a youth more glittering than a birthnight beau' (I. 23), her jewellery is a 'glittering spoil' (I. 132), the scissors to cut the lock a 'glittering forfex' (III. 147). Over all is raised the Lock, itself finally carried with a 'radiant trail' of light (V. 128), to 'bespangle' the heavens. These impressions are gained almost entirely by naming appropriate objects: there is no over-plastering of descriptive imagery. Nor is the aggregate result itself metallic, but rather warm with human contact, the prevailing impression one of softness. Moreover, that most poignant method of bodying out the subtly atmospheric into poetic solidity, the use of smell, assists: 'Arabia' breathing from a box (I. 134), 'imprison'd essences' (II. 94), 'fragrant steams' (III. 134) of coffee. A profoundly sensuous nature is creating.

Though the humour is never bitterly satiric, Pope does sometimes appear as an amused grown-up writing of children: but then each of us is a grown-up, and the rest all children, where emotions are concerned. So we get a delicate treatment of girls' amours with suggestion that the gnomes

Teach infant-cheeks a bidden blush to know,
And little hearts to flutter at a beau. (I. 89)

A strangely purified sexuality is attained by this blend of child-innocence and desire, as in Byron's *Don Juan*. There is, as it were, a love for the object's very littleness; as in the larks of *Windsor Forest* or the creation of the sylphs themselves, who guard young ladies from unchastity by keeping their attention on the move:

When Florio speaks what virgin could withstand,
If gentle Damon did not squeeze her hand?
With varying vanities, from every part,
They shift the moving toyshop of their heart. (I. 97)

Though lightly, a deep enough psychological truth is hinted. The gentle mockery may go still deeper as in

What guards the purity of melting maids,
In courtly balls, and midnight masquerades,
Safe from the treacherous friend, the daring spark,
The glance by day, the whisper in the dark,
What kind occasion prompts their warm desires,
When music softens, or when dancing fires? (I. 71)

—where the guarding sylphs may be allowed to shadow something similar to the Attendant Spirit of *Comus*: what psychologists would call 'inhibitions'. But notice especially the warm, sensuous creation here; the exquisite subtlety of verbal tone, consonants and vowels variously inter-shading.

In this last passage observe the central pauses in lines 2, 3, 4, and 6, and their comparative absence in lines 1 and 5. Such significant interplay is constant throughout Pope and should be carefully watched and followed in reading. Often contrasts are neatly balanced within one line. Study the internal pauses here, where the antithesis of lines 1 and 2 with no internal pauses speeds up to internal antithesis in 3 and 4, gathers into the tripartite formation of line 5, and ends with a falling, run-on, pauseless unit in line 6:

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;
Or whether Heav'n has doom'd that Shock must fall.
(II. 105)

The contrasts of the important and trivial are quite vitally organic, one at least definitely balancing flirtation and religion, playing on the usual conflict. The use of caesura is interesting: often you have in reading to change your vocal colour and even pace in mid-line. Here pauses hold up the speed for couplet after couplet, with a final swift release and run-on. You find something similar in Vergil, and my understanding has been assisted by the study of Vergilian verse-groups in Mr. W. F. Jackson Knight's *Accentual Symmetry in Vergil*, from which I take the term 'release'. Other variations are employed. You can discover them by reading aloud, often altering the pace and *vocal colour* in mid-line, with especial attention to stops, commas especially, which are carefully placed. Striking subtleties will reveal themselves. You must, however, never ignore the couplet basis and its rhymes: since only in close reference to these do the variations hold precise value.

The love-feeling, the erotic warmth, is at once soft and burning; the poetry too attaining a perfect poise of relaxation and control. Indeed, the society Pope writes of is felt as eminently desirable. We may be amused at the Baron who builds an altar to love of 'twelve vast French romances neatly gilt' and lays on it

. . . three garters, half a pair of gloves;
And all the trophies of his former loves. (II. 39)

Yet when Belinda's toilet is seen as a 'holy ritual' and her lock called 'sacred', it is not all comedy. She presides over the poem, her especially spirited attraction lies behind its making:

Her lively looks a sprightly mind disclose,
Quick as her eyes, and as unfixed as those:
Favours to none, to all she smiles extends;
Oft she rejects, but never once offends. (II. 9)

Such is the vital centre of Pope's inspiration: and not here alone. Shakespeare's Rosalind might be so described; or Portia. They, too, are felt as all but divine, without losing humanity. Pope writes from a half-feminine gentleness often; and can create sunshine feminine *vitality* from loving admiration. His light, humorous touch continually here blends, as Milton—except once in Eden—cannot or must not do, romantic and religious emotions; but perhaps never so perfectly, in terms precisely suited to this glittering world, as when he thought of setting on his heroine's 'white breast' a 'sparkling cross' (II. 7).

The manipulation of the action as a whole is dramatic rather than epic: and in this, if we remember the comparative failure of long narrative in *The Faery Queen* and *Paradise Lost*, we may consider Pope's judgement sound. The excitement may be of a sort often found in epic, as at the vividly presented climax:

> Swift to the Lock a thousand sprites repair,
> A thousand wings, by turns, blow back the hair;
> And thrice they twitch'd the diamond in her ear;
> Thrice she look'd back, and thrice the foe drew near . . .
> (III. 135)

But this rises from a dramatically conceived whole, with Shakespearian forewarnings and fears. After the central event the held-up suspense finds violent release with discordant passions and Umbriel's visit to the Cave of Spleen: as though a glittering outside were shattered to disclose gloom. But there is a return to sympathy, dignity, and an almost tragic pathos. The poem is close knit with a dominating central climax and a curve over, more like a Shakespearian play than any epic; and it concludes on a note of quiet power.

A deeper note is struck towards the end. Clarissa urges that women should be gentle, not angry; else—'why angels call'd and angel-like adored?' (v. 12). The thought recalls similar speeches at the conclusions of *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Love's Labour's Lost*, where ill moods and

superficial glitter are respectively reminded of the tragic undertones of human existence. She continues:

> Oh! if to dance all night, and dress all day,
> Charm'd the small-pox, or chas'd old age away . . . (v. 19)

—then gaiety alone might be our guiding star.

> But since, alas! frail beauty must decay,
> Curl'd or uncurl'd, since locks will turn to grey . . .
> (v. 25)

Read the last line slowly, dwelling on the vowels and wistfully stressing 'will'. Pope's profound treatment of superficiality is to be rigidly distinguished from the more facile, and more usual, brilliance of a superficial treatment of human profundities. No poem ever had a more exquisitely sensitive introduction than that addressed to Miss Arabella Fermor; nor any ended with so sure and sweet a pathos that, in placing the heroine's beauty in a context of ultimate defeat, somehow crowns it with an immortal lustre. He imagines the Lock lifted as a starry constellation, which is, also, the constellation of his poem glittering through the centuries:

> Not all the tresses that fair head can boast,
> Shall draw such envy as the lock you lost.
> For, after all the murders of your eye,
> When, after millions slain, yourself shall die:
> When those fair suns shall set, as set they must,
> And all those tresses shall be laid in dust,
> The Lock the Muse shall consecrate to fame,
> And 'midst the stars inscribe Belinda's name. (v. 143)

'Consecrate': notice again the recurrent sacred and ritualistic colourings. Reading, let the commas hold up the movement with positionally varied pauses, changing your vocal colour deeply for 'as set they must', till in line 6 there is a quick release; then let the last couplet go with stately, measured emphasis. Again, notice the verbal statement and the concrete nouns. Though there is deepest sympathy, emotion never overspills the control; you read from a height, with sense of a unit completed at each

instant, with each couplet also organic to the paragraph whole: his 'holistic' instinct is, indeed, at the back of Pope's allegiance to the couplet.

A synthesis of the sexual and religious is often organic in the humour of *The Rape of the Lock*. The depths lightly tinted there are next more richly blended in *Eloisa to Abelard*, with the same balance assuming a poignant emotional and tragic force. This is certainly Pope's greatest human poem and probably the greatest short love poem in our language. Pope's early development is peculiarly Elizabethan: from the idyllic nature of the *Pastorals* to the blend of rustic idealism and national vigour in *Windsor Forest*, through the scintillating and courtly, yet never superficially 'witty', *Rape of the Lock*, itself, like Shakespeare's comedies, showing deep tragic relations; and so on to the tragic music of *Eloisa to Abelard*.

Religion is early impregnated with sombre tonings:

> In these deep solitudes and awful cells,
> Where heavenly-pensive contemplation dwells,
> And ever-musing melancholy reigns,
> What means this tumult in a vestal's veins? (1)

Its sanctity is imbued with a Websterian grimness and pallor:

> Relentless walls! whose darksome round contains
> Repentant sighs, and voluntary pains:
> Ye rugged rocks! which holy knees have worn;
> Ye grots and caverns shagg'd with horrid thorn!
> Shrines! where their vigils pale-eye'd virgins keep,
> And pitying saints, whose statues learn to weep . . . (17)

Remorseless repetition and craggy consonants first toll the eternal sameness, rising to the thin tortured vowels of the last line but one. The nunnery is an old Websterian building, almost, you feel, a ruin, like Byron's Norman Abbey, whose 'moss-grown domes' and 'awful arches' (142–3) make of noon an eternal night; whose 'dim windows', reversing the Miltonic pleasure, shed a

grave-like calm (144). Watch now for the darkly rich vowel-colourings and held-up movement of this speech of death:

> But o'er the twilight groves / and dusky caves,
> Long-sounding aisles, // and intermingled graves,
> Black Melancholy sits, // and round her throws
> A death-like silence, // and a dead repose:
> Her gloomy presence / saddens all the scene,
> Shades every flower, // and darkens ev'ry green,
> Deepens the murmur / of the falling floods,
> And breathes a browner horror on the woods. (163)

My reading is as I have marked. The four strong internal pauses occur naturally where Pope has used commas: his use is precise. Other internal pauses are slighter, and the last line shows a release, the assonance and close epithetical union of 'browner' and 'horror' forcing, I think, the run-on. Pope's full-throated mastery of vowel-colour is rich as Keats's, when he needs it. Both favour a subtle interplay of light and shade, often a dark richness atmospherically suggesting woodland depths, with the same sacramental vowellings of emotions grave yet lovely. Both project the numinous and atmospheric through heavy sensuous perception, as many trees making one woodland company. Milton's exquisite—and, indeed, often Keatsian—solids are rarely so subdued: though his work was, no doubt, a most generous assistance to Pope. See again this labouring movement:

> When round some mould'ring tow'r pale ivy creeps,
> And low-brow'd rocks hang nodding o'er the deeps . . .
> (243)

Nature is here part of a mood, one with an emotion. The created whole has a mysterious life Milton's grouped individual excellences do not normally attain: Pope's nature-paragraphs, that is, cohere, and build a living, semi-human presence. Here a deathly stillness is required: but he is equally at home with vital movement and sun-sparkling gaiety, as in *The Rape of the Lock*.

From this world of Websterian ruin and forbidding death Eloisa asserts poignantly her own, natural, desire:

> Though cold like you, unmov'd and silent grown,
> I have not yet forgot myself to stone.
> All is not Heaven's while Abelard has part,
> Still rebel nature holds out half my heart. (23)

The use of ruins, statues, and here 'stone' to build a specifically religious eternity in contrast with love exactly resembles Byron's. Eloisa accuses religion of killing those 'best of passions', love and fame; the erotic and power instincts, ideals of emotion and action. Married love she is proud of having refused, despising any such compact: 'Curse on all laws but those which love has made.' Honour and respect are nothing in comparison with so jealous a god. If the other God offered her Himself and the whole Creation, she would 'scorn 'em all'; would rather be a 'mistress' to the man she loves than a Caesar's empress (73–90). She aspires to absolute unmoral freedom in love's bondage. Yet this sin-tormented desire is close to Dante's, and indeed Milton's, Paradise:

> Oh! happy state! when souls each other draw,
> When love is liberty, and nature law. (91)

But neither Dante nor Milton would dare a dramatic sympathy to Eloisa's over-leaping of moral canons in order to get there; which imaginative willingness is precisely the condition of Pope's advance to the poetic stature of *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Don Juan*: a symptom, we can call it, of his clear, objective, ordering of emotions. Milton's ethical sense in *Comus* attempts a premature and disrupting resolution where Pope allows full speech to the opposing principles. When Eloisa, nearing the 'dread altars', made her final vows, her eyes were fixed, not on the Cross, but on Abelard (115–16). He is, to her, Christ. Sin or god, he remains 'delicious poison' (122), an 'unholy joy' (224). Her reason is shown as unable to fight her whole life, of which it is itself a part: a thought deep in Pope's more explicit psychology in the *Essay on*

Man. Desire she may conquer by day; but in sleep, when 'nature' is free—and what power lies in this easy expression of a simple yet terrifying thought—it rises newly strong and unconquerable. For then: 'all my loose soul unbounded springs to thee' (225–38). There is here more of a Byronic sin-sense in the protagonist than in *Antony and Cleopatra*: 'glowing guilt' itself 'exalts the keen delight' (230). But there is no imaginative confusion, however complex the issues; nor any pronouncing of judgement. And it is interesting to find so Shakespearian an artist clarifying objectively this experience (of sin *increasing* delight) on a comparatively high plane: this it is which so troubles Spenser and Milton, and which Shakespeare leaves almost untouched, except perhaps in Angelo, or the imaginative texture, as distinct from the persons, of *Antony and Cleopatra*; though, to be sure, Eloisa's 'delicious poison' was first spoken by Cleopatra of Antony. In her dream every 'source of love' is alive, she sees Abelard vividly present: 'I hear thee, see thee, gaze o'er all thy charms' (232–3)—only to wake, phantom-deceived.

But from this burning conflict serene poetry may build in piling couplets a massed movement crowning human instinct with accomplished and inevitable victory:

> I waste the matin lamp in sighs for thee,
> Thy image steals between my God and me,
> Thy voice I seem in every hymn to hear,
> With every bead I drop too soft a tear.
> When from the censer clouds of fragrance roll,
> And swelling organs lift the rising soul,
> One thought of thee puts all the pomp to flight,
> Priests, tapers, temples, swim before my sight.
> In seas of flame my plunging soul is drown'd,
> While altars blaze, and Angels tremble round. (267)

Never is Pope happier than when writing in terms of ritual. Here read the first four lines quietly, but let sound a heavier note thereafter. Notice the reliance on smell in the 'fragrance' of incense; and how the organ grandeur and the weighty nouns of sacred reference find each their

place but no more, showing an effortless control of the magnificent comparable with Milton's, though less assertive than his; no grandest part stifling, even for an instant, the breathing life of the whole unit. All dissolves into that whole, Abelard and Eloisa too, into a burning yet concrete whole, a human blaze that is its own flame-tipped altar, till Angels themselves tremble at the might of a human sanctity. The solidity and crystallization of indefinable experience is maintained till the last; indeed most of all then, with a rounded, effortless perfection, mastering and liberating the whole statement. This is an embodiment of Keats's counsel to surprise 'with a fine excess'—though one, paradoxically, subdued to the whole movement always, as Keats, too, surely intended—his 'might half-slumbering on its own right arm', his rise and sunset fall of image. Pope, as surely as any English writer, in his best work in this kind 'loads every rift with ore'. You need to weigh every word in turn: how easy it is, for example, to miss here the terrific force in the admirably placed word 'plunging'.

Abelard is thus, to Eloisa, all but the divine, his voice in the hymn, his presence obscuring, replacing, God's. That is, the opposition almost becomes a synthesis. So, elsewhere, starting from the divine, we are made to imagine a blessed sanctity enclosing all human richness. Here it is, the other—and yet not dissimilar—synthesis, starting not from 'nature' but from 'grace' (the words occur in Pope's preliminary note). Eloisa describes the saintly life:

> Desires composed, affections ever even;
> Tears that delight, and sighs that waft to heaven.
> Grace shines around her with serenest beams,
> And whisp'ring Angels prompt her golden dreams.
> For her the unfading rose of Eden blooms,
> And wings of Seraphs shed divine perfumes,
> For her the Spouse prepares the bridal ring,
> For her white virgins Hymenaeals sing,
> To sounds of heavenly harps she dies away,
> And melts in visions of eternal day. (213)

'Melts': the warm sensuousness I noted in *The Rape of the Lock*—'melting maids' and 'midnight masquerades'—is built into a statement of the divine richly impregnated with marriage-symbolism. Remember the earlier, erotic, phrase 'when music softens': here is the heavenly softness —'wafts' at the start, 'melts' at the close, and, between, 'whisp'ring', 'rose', 'Hymenaeals', with numerous 'f's and 'v's. Again observe the 'perfumes'. The lines are best given a slight midway pause until a delicate run-on for the last. Pope's angels, seraphs, altars, incense, and such-like, are vital beyond those of other English poets. They are sensuously felt. The softness, however, never becomes a total relaxation: the poetry controls its own sensuous abandon, at every instant objectifies and projects the dissolving subjectivity, crystallizing a melting emotion into verbal weight.

He is Dantesque, yet perhaps more human, to us, than Dante. And there is no rigid line of demarcation to be drawn between his seraphs and delightful sylphs: Pope's mind is all of a piece, his poetic world—nor only in this period—a single whole.

About to surrender to this dream of the divine, Eloisa again rebels, crying out, in the manner of Drayton's Sonnet, even while 'dawning grace' is 'opening' on her soul:

> Come, if thou dar'st, all charming as thou art!
> Oppose thyself to heaven; dispute my heart . . . (281)

'Penitence and prayers' are 'fruitless'. Therefore

> Snatch me, just mounting, from the blest abode;
> Assist the fiends and tear me from my God! (287)

I do not think another example in English of the recurrent conflict strikes so shivering a climax. Notice the hampering pauses, aiding the sense; and how that last line of unsurpassed, perhaps unequalled, force is done almost entirely by plain concrete nouns and active verbs.

The general effect is one of sharp, agonizing conflict tragically resolved; though it is a conflict aspiring to a blend, as I have shown, since in the poetry nature touches,

or rather overwhelms, grace at one point, just as grace absorbs nature at another. We who read feel a resolution Eloisa cannot be supposed to know. A vast nature broods over the whole. The dark eternity was from the start imagined largely in natural terms; the conflict is unobtrusively related to tempests, seas, winds. There is graver nature-imagery, of pines, wandering streams, and lakes that 'quiver' in the breeze (155–60); and a calm sea (253). The poem's end is calm. Abelard from the start is 'mixed' in Eloisa's mind with the image of God (12). He seemed 'angelic', as some 'emanation from the all-beauteous Mind' (60–2); but she loves him as a 'man', not an 'angel', envying no 'joys of saints' nor any heaven lost for love (70–3). There is one resolution only wherein the divine hymenaeals will be one with the human: death. There frailties fall away, it will be no longer sin to 'mix' with Abelard (176). A voice speaks to her, as she rests 'on some tomb, a neighbour of the dead' (304). One who once suffered likewise calls her to peace. Is that peace a living heaven or an everlasting night? We are told

> . . . All is calm in this eternal sleep.
> Here grief forgets to groan, and love to weep. (313)

And yet she who speaks is a living, 'sainted', maid. Anyway, in death God absolves all 'frailties'. So now Eloisa would die with Abelard in 'sacred vestments' and with 'hallow'd taper' presenting the Cross to her eyes, to symbolize, as it were, a transition from lover to Christ (325–7). And at this last moment, when tragic serenity holds all in a final union, comes that final withering bitterness which is yet no bitterness but another blessedness, a paradox revolving on the very axis of death's mystery. Eloisa is dead. Let Abelard come:

> Ah then, thy once-lov'd Eloisa see!
> It will be then no crime to gaze on me. (329)

And yet, again, death 'all eloquent' proves 'what dust we dote on when 'tis man we love' (336). The very negation of death is, here, a voice, a statement.

Heavenly love resembles Abelard's (342). Abelard, Christ, Death, each is all at the last, confusedly, mystically. But the whole poem is its own only answer. Our earlier love-victory passage must be set beside and complementary to the Dantesque paradise and both related to the conclusion: we must think diversely in terms of what, in writing of Byron, I call the 'bright' and 'dark' eternities. The unity within the conflict and controlling it throughout is remarkable, the very agony creating resolution before our eyes, nature and grace felt as one at the very moment of intensest conflict. The more forceful the emotion, the more serene the poet's mastery. Certain couplet paragraphs attain to intense and well-varied dramatic expression, with a natural, almost Shakespearian, coherence and rhythmic subtlety; others, as I have noticed, build separate excellences of sensuous warmth. The poem is strangely serene. Its emotional structures form and dissolve, it lives with a softly beating movement, glowing and fading, like the pulsing of a star.

III

Superficial difference should not preclude our feeling the close Shakespearian kinship of Pope's first period in subject, emotional sympathy, and general control. His verse technique itself derives ultimately, it would seem, from Iago's speech to Desdemona after their landing at Cyprus: variations of exactly the same sort are woven across a similar regularity of couplet and caesura. Therefore his two more philosophical poems, his *Essay on Criticism* and *Essay on Man*, can be supposed to reflect not only his own views on literature and life but something also of Shakespeare's; there is, probably, no nearer analogy. Although the two poems were written at different periods —the first when Pope was only twenty—they develop a single *coherent* argument. Pope resembles Shakespeare and Milton in his straight-line development: his axes of reference are the same from first to last. These concern

(i) nature, and (ii) a sense of the whole; with, too, a heavy stress on pride as the main hindrance to creative understanding. I offer next—with apologies for what I none the less feel to be necessary and unavoidable—short précis-paraphrases of the two poems. I shall not give references except when my analysis departs from the order of the text.

The *Essay on Criticism* is strikingly modern. It is, unfortunately, only too easy to let Pope's trenchant exposition pass over the surface of one's understanding. The argument is often challenging; and many of his points, if offered to-day, might incur the charge of excessive romanticism.

The critical intelligence is severely handled. Let those censure, we are told, who can write themselves; 'false learning' has damaged good sense; much poor criticism derives from inferiority and jealousy. Pope's centre of operation is an implanted faith in 'unerring nature': that is, creative life. This is the 'source', 'end', and 'test' of all art. Nature always 'works without show and without pomp presides' (true of Pope's work eminently, but far less so of Milton's); it informs the whole organism as 'soul' a living 'body'; 'unseen', it yet imparts vitality to all else. But instinctive power is not by itself enough. 'Wit' (i.e. native ability) needs the control of judgement, which two should work in harmony: ' 'Tis more to guide than spur the muses' steed.' Nevertheless nature remains primary and is only restrained by laws of her own making (compare Polixenes' lovely analogy in *The Winter's Tale*), all critical precepts coming, not from man's reason, but heaven: that is, nature in its widest sense. Critics often, being creative failures themselves, seize on rules easy to understand, pronounce judgement on their betters, and 'write dull receits how poems should be made'. If you should respect Homer, that is merely because Homer—we to-day might add Shakespeare—introduces you direct to nature. But no 'rules' are absolute; there is a 'grace beyond the reach of art' and any licence that works is itself

a 'rule'. Rules are aids to expression, not limitations of it, and the end, not the means, is important.

Pride blurs understanding and leads to folly, but, pride once banished, 'truth breaks upon us with resistless day'. That is, many universal truths which cannot be positively demonstrated are self-evident once certain rigid mental hindrances related to intellectual pride are removed. Truth is in this way almost a moral quality. The thought relates to the New Testament and Pope's own *Essay on Man* very closely. Much faulty criticism, we may suggest, is due to the critic's not being able to conceive that a writer has touched an apprehension beyond his own, and a consequent unconscious abstracting of what he himself can most easily receive: the usual stressing of Perdita to the neglect of the Hermione-resurrection in *The Winter's Tale* being a modern instance. Which leads us to Pope's next point.

The art-form must be understood in the spirit of its composition and seen, or felt, as a *whole*. If it is vitalized by 'nature' and warmed by feeling, 'slight faults' are irrelevant. Cold correctness is not art. Parts, as parts, do not count in themselves, any more than a 'lip' or an 'eye' can make human beauty. Therefore no single element should obtrude overmuch. But critics, too often themselves 'fond of some subservient art' (e.g.—as we may suggest—history, theology, economics, biography, stage-technique, psychology, or indeed literary criticism—or interpretation—itself), some private interest of their own, 'make the whole depend upon a part'. This continual doctrine of the whole is, of course, complementary to Pope's emphasis on a central life-force, 'nature', with derogatory remarks concerning the 'false learning' (25) of critics: since, as Pope observed, it is the unifying life that makes any whole organic. As a corollary it follows that excessive ornament and verbosity are bad, departing from nature, that is, from sincerity: we may remember Pope's own instinctive reliance on nouns and verbs. Too much concentration on 'language' is bad; originality is as

dangerous a temptation as copying; avoid 'laboured nothings'.

Critics who think only of surface smoothness and metrical delight miss many more important substances:

> In the bright muse though thousand charms conspire,
> Her voice is all these tuneful fools admire.

Notice the word 'thousand'. That is, they miss the statement of the whole comprised, we may add, of sense-suggestion, subtle associations, ideas and symbols of all sorts, and much else; so dissolving it away into metrical and verbal technique, as people go to church for the music rather than the doctrine and substance. Literary cliques, we are told, are a danger, since 'wit' (i.e. poetic talent) becomes the supposed possession of a few with the rest damned. Do not ask whether a work be new or old: only if it be true. Critics who judge an author according to his personal importance rather than his works are a 'servile herd'. The vulgar err by imitation, the learned by a forced, that is inorganic, originality: rather than follow the crowd they 'purposely go wrong'. Praise is of little value that waits till others approve. A critic should preserve humanity and good sense: if all 'seems infected' the disease may be not in the object, but the critic's own eye. Right criticism is as much a matter of moral fibre as of learning; and true counsel is not effective unless offered with tact. Pope's emphasis is everywhere *vital*. Every point scores, though I doubt if the last caution is sufficiently observed in such lines as

> The bookful blockhead, ignorantly read,
> With loads of learned lumber in his head . . .

In Horace cool judgement is one with poetic inspiration; whereas to-day, says Pope, the reverse holds: critics judge violently but write weakly.

The contemporary challenge to us is obvious. A creative intelligence opposes the academic and formalized mind. It is the old unfortunate opposition of the New Testament and we seem to advance not at all: unless, it

may be, we attend to Pope's own clarifying of the issue in terms of two specific concepts: (i) nature (i.e. vital power), and (ii) the whole. These may be considered respectively as centre and circumference of Pope's universe. It is clear why to Pope 'the last and greatest art' is the 'art to blot' (*Epistle to Augustus*, 281), since concern for the whole organism must sometimes involve the removal of some cancerous growth, itself aspiring to an independent and therefore hostile organic life of its own; as in Milton's Satan, though we can be heartily glad of the error. So 'nature' and 'judgement', power and control, instinct and art, may be readily unified under the holistic concept: for stern control of any part is itself constituent to the organic quality of a whole existing, as an organism, through the infusing power of its own central, and instinctive, life. That is, control is used in service to nature, not to dominate it, as Pope clearly asserts; and his own paragraph-units illustrate the maxim.

The *Essay on Man* (written late in Pope's life) is a precise development of the same doctrine on a much wider front. It is not only a poetic philosophy, but the universal philosophy, not so much of poets as of poetry; and is, exactly, the philosophy implied by Shakespeare's work. Epistle II starts with a reaction from Milton ('presume not God to scan') the more clear from the claim at I. 16 to 'vindicate' instead of 'justify' His ways. Pope still stresses the whole, nature, and the opacities of pride. As before, I give references only when my order differs from his.

In the first Epistle our attention is drawn early to the vast cosmic whole, a 'mighty maze, but not without a plan', recalling *Windsor Forest*. To criticize it from the limitations of human reason is absurd:

> He, who through vast immensity can pierce,
> See worlds on worlds compose one universe,
> Observe how system into system runs,
> What other planets circle other suns,
> What varied Being peoples every star,

May tell why Heaven has made us as we are.
But of this frame the bearings, and the ties,
The strong connexions, nice dependencies,
Gradations just, has thy pervading soul
Look'd through? or can a part contain the whole?

With what imperturbable and untroubled ease, comparable to that of Shakespeare in his 'cloud-capp'd towers' speech, the couplets roll out their mighty images. So the poet asks why man complains. Weak though he be, why expect to be strong? Just as the lamb is ignorant of human purpose, so is man of the divine. The lamb 'licks the hand just rais'd to shed his blood', merciful providence blinding it. Sympathy with small animals is again noteworthy. But, small or large, to God it is the same, whom we are shown in a great passage intent on His purposes, seeing 'with equal eye' either 'a hero perish or a sparrow fall', atoms or whole systems destroyed, 'and now a bubble burst and now a world'. The smooth and controlled statement here lifts the mind to the final serenity conditioning all tragic art. Death will answer questions. Meanwhile, however, a life-force beats in us with resurgent hope, and to that we must trust. Pope's vitalistic philosophy is at once vast and simple: it works from the patent fact that the race does not commit suicide. It aims at interpreting life itself.

As before, the hindrance to cosmic receptivity is 'reasoning pride', pride working through reason. Thus order is disturbed: 'Rejudge His justice, be the God of God.' Man would invert the universal laws. In pride he assumes the world was created for him alone, that nature's riches are all for him. Yes, but what of nature's cruelty? Of earthquakes and tempests? Are not these natural as a spring morning? If so, why should not human evil, that of a Borgia or a Catiline, form needed part of the great one design? Notice (i) the reference of human evil to earthquakes and tempests as in the Shakespearian symbolism; and (ii) the preliminary forgiveness of all evil I have argued to be at the back of Shakespeare's work. Sound

reason, says Pope, must 'submit'. Jesus' doctrine of God's non-human justice was somewhat similar. Pope sees conflicts as necessary. The great 'all' is based on elemental strife, and 'passions' are the *élan vital* of existence: the Shakespearian analogy is again obvious, passionate conflict there exposing the very hub and axle of creation. All this—whatever its limitations—is nevertheless the philosophy integral to tragic art. Moreover, though these disquietudes occur, the 'general order' in nature and man, the stability of the whole, is not in danger. This, too, closely reflects Shakespearian tragedy: as in *Richard II*, *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, where order is felt as ultimately and inevitably undisturbed.

The nice balance of human and animal faculties is analysed. Do we envy the fly's 'microscopic eye'? Given a more delicate sense-perception, who knows but we might 'die of a rose in aromatic pain'? Were our hearing keener, tuned to a different wave-length, we might be stunned by the thunders of the cosmic music. Each life-form has its gifts, the hound his keen scent, the lynx its sight. Great nature beats in his lines, its vast and tiny miracles equally inspiring awe:

> The spider's touch, how exquisitely fine!
> Feels at each thread, and lives along the line.

This is the Shakespearian in-feeling into an animal's very life. Man's sense-perception and thought are subtly balanced with thin division. In this vast mystery of air, ocean, earth, all alive and pregnant with creative energies —'all matter quick and bursting into birth'—this *living* universe where life is graded step by step upward, magnificently ordered into an 'amazing whole', where one disruption might upset all, why should man complain? It is as though the 'foot' or 'hand' should rebel against the head: the thought is continually of nature and organic life. Shakespeare's 'great creating nature' is Pope's explicit theme. He senses the creative forces tingling in Goethe's *Faust*, however they be levelled under his own smoother

harmonies. Would you have angels and suns, he asks, reorganized for your needs? That were at once madness, pride, and impiety. Pope attacks man's self-confident *reason*. It was, earlier (123), his violent aversion:

> In Pride, in reasoning Pride, our error lies;
> All quit their sphere, and rush into the skies.
> Pride still is aiming at the blest abodes,
> Men would be Angels, Angels would be Gods.

Which may be read as an unintended criticism of Milton, whose nature is so continually humanized, eternalized, and in whom human impulse is all but petrified through a too tyrannic 'reason'. The truer wisdom is piety towards God; that is, Nature. For

> All are but parts of that stupendous whole,
> Whose body Nature is and God the soul.

An inexhaustible and magical life-force 'operates' ubiquitous and eternally 'unspent':

> As full, as perfect, in a hair as heart:
> As full, as perfect, in vile man that mourns,
> As the rapt Seraph that adores and burns.

The natural and the divine are thus not in conflict: there is a graded ascent, but no opposition. Therefore,

> Submit—In this, or any other sphere,
> Secure to be as blest as thou canst bear:
> Safe in the hand of one disposing Power,
> Or in the natal, or the mortal hour.
> All Nature is but Art, unknown to thee;
> All Chance, Direction which thou can'st not see;
> All Discord, Harmony not understood;
> All partial Evil, universal Good:
> And, spite of Pride, in erring Reason's spite,
> One truth is clear, Whatever is, is right.

See how the thought moves in terms vast and unethical corresponding to the symbolisms rooted in Shakespearian drama. This trust, lucid and impregnable in its cosmic grip, is necessary alike to any poetic or religious conception of the whole. It may be related in particular

to the New Testament, Shakespeare, and Shelley's *Defence of Poetry*. Such pre-eminently positive and vitalistic works may to-day be grouped together to form the basis of a new classicism, at once naturalistic and religious: that is, a body of doctrine which can be accepted, normally, by every educated person. And there are few safer guides to such a faith than Pope, since he is never submerged by his own ocean-roll of rhythm, as Milton, nor burned by his own fire, as Shelley. He offers what is perhaps the most valuable of all insights: a coherent romanticism. This is reached through (i) a sense of ever-springing life in nature, the continual miracle of existence, and (ii) a dominating sense of the cosmic whole. Each, of course, involves the other. The doctrine is positive, not negative; interpretative, not critical; got by a humility washing the mind transparent to see what is in any case before its eyes. It is the conditioning starting-point for all wisdom.

Why, then, does it fail to satisfy? Only because a static philosophy, as such, must: must, indeed contradict itself. If all is perfect, how complain of man's absurd pride? Why indeed write any poem at all, since all action implies dissatisfaction? Yet Jesus' philosophy of love fails before the Pharisees who raise his wrath: there is always a good and evil while man remains an active force. Universal acceptance will never lead to an ultimate placidity in, at all events, a western mind; and observe that the discrepancy involves the problem of *action*. And yet this very discrepancy points us back to a provisional solution: for the final test is not static either. We should not ask 'Is the world as I see it perfect?' but rather, 'Does the belief in a final harmony *in practice* lead me to action that proves, however illogically, creative?' The problem centres finally on this question of subjective experience; and it will be seen how Pope in his second Epistle takes more precisely into account the dynamic of individual psychology. That is not, however, his business here.

As a statement of a positive acceptance conditioning

creative action the *Essay on Man* and Jesus' central assurance God = Love remain impregnable; and likewise seem to condition any satisfactory creations of epic or dramatic force in poetry. But, again, it is one thing to know God's love when you read a ghastly news-story in the morning paper: quite another to feel the same when such a shadow creeps near your own life. That is, utter trust in the universal harmony, though it may easily be known, is very rarely indeed to be lived through to the end. The best philosophic poetry—even the creative psychology of Pope's second Epistle—leaves a want: if it did not there would be no need for the New Testament drama, as complementary to its doctrine, Shakespeare's plays, or *Eloisa to Abelard*. For these hold an extra dimension of shared action and shared experience. We are made to feel, however weakly, the hero's agony, whilst at the same instant knowing, however confusedly, the more inclusive harmony. The sharing is now part of our acceptance: dramatic, not philosophic, with an emotional validity beyond static theory. Hence *Paradise Lost* must be considered a far greater work than Pope's *Essay*. Though Milton be wrong and Pope right on the most crucial of poetic issues, Milton's Satan remains of more worth than any philosophies. This is, fundamentally, the cause of the disparity between Christ's simple doctrine and the complexities of Christian ritual and dogma. It follows that the Christian Church errs in opposing pantheism to the death rather than working for an inclusive assertion. For Pope's first Epistle remains, like Jesus' faith, as true as any such philosophic statement can be. Though itself static it takes fully into account the dynamic of life, stressing the upsurging forces of nature continually; and specifically includes all evils. As a static philosophy, it will never be superseded while the human race is here to philosophize. But such philosophy, as we know it, may, and indeed must, be complemented by a more dynamic, subjective thinking such as Pope moves to in his second Epistle: which depends also on our understanding of the New

Testament drama, religious ritual generally, and especially tragic literature. Milton flies, like a moth to a flame, and with something of the same noble and selfless perversity, into the very centre of this problem; always working from the disharmony between nature and God, and caught in the spidery web of the problems involved by human free will and action. He is in *Paradise Lost* too much involved in his own fiction; Pope in the *Essay on Man* too little; blend the two and you get Shakespearian tragedy, Milton's own Satan, or *Eloisa to Abelard.*

Pope, indeed, once (57) finely approaches the mystery in his Essay:

> So Man, who here seems principal alone,
> Perhaps acts second to some sphere unknown,
> Touches some wheel, or verges to some goal;
> 'Tis but a part we see, and not a whole.

Which darkly shadows a very great truth indeed, the exploration of which is the central purpose of all my interpretations. For this sense of some new *dimension* beyond direct knowledge exactly corresponds to the shared, lived, mystery of tragic ritual, whether religious or artistic: and see how a geometrical and mechanical symbol—so unusual in Pope—assists for once this deliberate penetration. Such higher dimension is often reflected in any work of great literature into some cogent, often supernatural, symbolism thrown up by, overlooking, interpenetrating, or surrounding the dramatic conflict; and yet also the very heart of the organic work concerned. The voice of eternity in the 'sainted maid', together with earlier similar impressions, is such an integrating and resolving symbol in *Eloisa to Abelard.* As Pope's thought often suggests, the central principle is, also, the encompassing whole. Throughout the *Essay on Man* there is an explicit belief in extra dimensions of existence beyond the sensible-human, of angelic hierarchies and purposes. They are, unlike Milton's divine beings, left undefined: and this lack corresponds precisely to that sense of a great otherness so

often given, as it were, negative definition by a work of tragic art. Indeed, all art works as much through what it leaves unsaid as through what it says: hence the positive force so mysteriously inhering in the baffling technique of reserve generally which Pope so finely masters. Our four lines here thus neatly express the fundamental meaning of tragic art: the revelation, through experience, of some purpose, beyond the individual, fulfilled by suffering.

In Epistle II Pope concentrates on man. He attacks science, contrasting its supposed certitudes concerning the majestic and mysterious universe with man's hopeless ignorance of, and lack of mastery over, himself. It then concentrates on the instinct of self-love as the primary thrust of human nature. The psychological thesis is very modern and well beyond the thinking of Pope's day. Reason, we are told, can look ahead and guide but is not the motor force. Pope sternly reproves thinkers who regard instinct and reason as enemies: 'more studious to divide than to unite', they are happiest when 'at war about a name'. To which we may relate certain concepts that have since helped to fog the naturalistic synthesis of Pope's own *Essay*. So Pope's attack is levelled against reason *in isolation*, when out of touch with the creative principle. When he rejects a virtuous stoicism 'fix'd as in a frost' we may be reminded of Milton's motionless and resisting Lady in *Comus* and Christ in *Paradise Regained*. In a passage closely following a speech of Nestor in *Troilus and Cressida* we are shown the grandeur of 'exercise' under spiritual 'tempest': God himself then 'mounts the storm, and walks upon the wind'. All passions can be directed for good, they are indeed the necessary gale to drive on the ship; various emotions may be harmoniously blended; man cannot, we are told, destroy what he is himself composed of. We are urged towards a light-and-shade harmony tuned, with reason's help, to natural and divine purpose. There follows a piercing analysis of dangerous 'master passions'; how such draw to them all natural forces of the personality with deadly success. They are

mothered by 'nature' and nursed by 'habit', and grow stronger by the help of other faculties. Evil is here deliberately related to nature. But Pope's ordering and directing of the psychological drama are very different from Milton's. He repudiates mental for more vital categories. 'Rules' are no help where 'arms' are needed; to 'mourn' (i.e. through a sense of sin) is not to 'mend'; conscience may be 'a sharp accuser but a helpless friend'. He suggests such thinking may prove deceptive and insidiously make matters worse; as indeed seems to happen with Milton and Marlowe whose poetry is far more dangerously sensuous than Shakespeare's or Pope's: as though they are simultaneously condemning and enjoying. Pope's way is eminently practical. Nature's road 'must ever be preferred'. Reason by itself is no 'guide' here at all: that is, of no *positive* help. But it may well be of negative use and 'guard' against disaster:

> 'Tis hers to rectify, not overthrow,
> And treat this passion more as friend than foe.

It is a psychology of integration that fits the facts of Shakespearian tragedy, and the sense we receive that the energy there displayed, as Keats once said in another context, remains, in essence, fine. It also ranges itself with Pope's holistic arguments elsewhere. You can see how through the medium of a personal psychology Pope has gone far to blend a universal acceptance with moral categories. He does not repudiate his first Epistle, but shows how, even though 'nature' may originate evils, the trust in her harmony remains *creatively true*. And he next outlines examples of dangerous passions proving creative if well used. A virtue rooted in instinct—almost, one might say, in vice—grows strong, body and mind acting as one whole, 'wild nature's vigour working at the root': the fine naturalistic emphasis recalling certain of Jesus' parables. Lust, we are told, may become love, sloth turn into philosophical meditation; while thought of what vices lie at the root even of our virtues may serve as a salutary check to pride. As

for any more immediate and practical distinctions of good from evil, that is left, as indeed it must be, to 'the God within the mind'—probably a more secure trust than modern scepticism would allow. It is admitted that vice, as vice, can be real and increase through habit, though it should, normally, be instinctively hated and therefore, we may suppose, transmuted, in so far as seen and understood: that is, virtue is fundamentally the more instinctive. Yet we must always remember that virtue and vice are both parts of the self; and each self part of a greater whole, with which Heaven is mainly concerned, using different personalities for different, subsidiary, purposes; and building from defects the glory of creation. The thought reflects the Shakespearian integrity while helping to define the Miltonic indecision. The good-and-evil antinomy is all but resolved through a dynamic psychology serving as a *transition* from total acceptance to ethical discrimination.

So the third Epistle widens again from the individual to society, itself part of a cosmic drama felt as *positive activity*, wherein atoms cohere, matter blends with matter, dying vegetation produces new life, all perishing forms are aspects of one vast vitality like bubbles on water—'by turns we catch the vital breath, and die'. All parts blend into a single whole, one 'soul' connecting and preserving all, nothing (the rule is observed by Pope's own poetic phrases) existing for itself alone. Man must not centralize nature in himself (Milton's imagery did this), the bird does not sing primarily for him, the horse enjoys the ride (again Pope's animalistic altruism). However, man alone attains unselfishness and imaginative power: the jay cannot admire the 'insect's gilded wings' (note the Shakespearian echo in 'gilded'). Animals preserved for slaughter have a good time first and do not foresee the doom man ultimately shares with them. So by a similar prevision of nature death never *seems* near to man. Notice the illumination of a simple but vast human truth through a natural analogy.

There is again an emphasis on the respect due to

instinct. Reason—we should say 'intelligence'—is generally slow to serve, but 'honest instinct comes a volunteer', and, moreover, invariably hits its mark: the contrast is that between intuitive genius and laboured skill in any activity whatsoever, in life, art, or play. Instinct is 'quick' and tireless, reason 'heavy' and soon weary. Instinct *originates* action; reason is merely a 'comparing' power. The one is permanent and 'must go right', whereas the other is intermittent and 'may go wrong'. So

> . . . reason raise o'er instinct as you can,
> In this 'tis God directs, in that 'tis Man—

'this' being, of course, 'instinct' in Pope's slightly latinized syntax. The argument is part of a general tradition, or development, from the New Testament to Blake and Nietzsche. Nor is it quite so mad as it sounds: Keats likewise urged the sanctity of the heart's instinct. Nature that made the 'spider' design his 'parallels' can look after man. Pope, unlike Shakespeare and Swift, seems to have a warm corner in his heart for spiders. In this, as in much else, he is with Byron.

God, in designing the great whole, plants various bounds to the nature of all beings, whose bliss depends on mutual help. Union is really an instinctive end, since one nature feeds the vital flame of all creation:

> Whate'er of life all-quick'ning aether keeps,
> Or breathes thro' air, or shoots beneath the deeps,
> Or pours profuse on earth, one nature feeds
> The vital flame, and swells the genial seeds.

In the 'fierce embrace' of sexual love nature's essential harmony is realized. This expands to love of children and, with reason's help, farther. Men know 'habitual' as well as 'natural' love: that is, lasting and deep emotions. From these charity is born. This use of parental love as a transition from the sexual-erotic to what St. Paul called 'agape' is most important. Yet the use of 'habitual' is also neat, since the deeper love may often develop through habit alone.

Nature's absolute rule was God's rule and at first all was

peace. But, since then, man has fallen to blood-sacrifice, slaughtered beasts for food, and become an enemy to himself. Pope does not reconcile this directly with his former optimism and the many obvious cruelties within nature. Man's slaughter of animals has from the start troubled him, and may seem to dislocate the precision of his *Essay* considered as a whole. But he has been steadily making a most difficult transition—from general acceptance to moral distinctions. I have already suggested that no static conception can do this: and we must not contrast Epistle III with Epistle I without remembering Epistle II. Until the very complex implications of this process are fully grasped, the separate Epistles are perhaps best read as independent approaches to the mysteries of human life: the first philosophical, the second mainly psychological, the third ethical. 'Nature' is throughout a binding and fusing concept; and the whole poem may be thus felt to enjoy primarily an artistic rather than a purely logical coherence. Yet perhaps nowhere in literature can we so clearly see, by regarding the place of Epistle II in the sequence, how there is logic of the most subtle and profound sort within the *arrangement* of any true artistic whole. For we are watching something very rare: a poetic genius of the first order deliberately setting himself in maturity to create a compact and coherent system from his own creative centre.

Pope next describes man's progress to civilization, how human art copies birds, ants, and bees: the close reference of human and natural communities reminding us of *Henry V*. Nature, with finer laws than man, knows 'anarchy without confusion', a phrase throwing back to *Windsor Forest*; and this cannot be improved on by reason, which only entangles 'justice' in 'law'. So societies and kings come into being. At first the patriarch was 'king, priest, and parent' in one, and led to the worship of a single father God. All was well before 'wit oblique' scattered the 'steady light'. Disasters follow: tyrants, conquests, superstitions, devils. The analysis here is very trenchant and reads in parts almost as a criticism of Milton. Pride and

force come into play. The weak 'bend', the proud and Pharisaic 'pray'. All emotional directions go crooked. 'Fear' makes 'devils', and 'weak hope' only constitutes religious faith. The divine is felt as 'partial, changeful, passionate, unjust', gods are made in the likeness of 'tyrants', 'pride' builds a heaven, 'spite' a hell. Some of this fits pre-Christian theologies. But if we remember Milton's excessive and barbaric royalisms, Pope may be felt closer to his own day whenever he refers to force, or when he sees 'zeal' rather than 'charity' at the helm of religion. Now all pantheistic faith is quickly lost:

> Then sacred seem'd th' ethereal Vault no more.

Remember how the elements of nature are in *Paradise Regained* felt to be under demonic domination. Pope, like Milton, believes in a 'fall': but there is a vast difference. His centre of judgement is never the fallen consciousness, which cannot prescribe to man's sinful state any more than the blind can lead the blind. Rather he is to be ranged with Keats in his emphasis on a past naturalistic piety; with Byron in his horror of blood-sacrifice; and with Shelley in his hatred of theological tyrannies. Milton, of course, has similar 'romantic' directions; and probably later poets owe him more than they think. But his poetic faith is disrupted by a noble, even if unwise, attempt to force together incompatible systems.

To continue: that self-love driving man to crime makes him also protect himself against it: 'all join to guard what each desires to gain'—which reads like a prophecy of the League of Nations. The bad logic and suicidal quality of selfishness is, indeed, excellently shown. Any great 'follower of God', 'poet' or 'patriot', aims only to rekindle nature's ancient light; that is, to restore mankind as a whole to its fundamental instinct. This is precisely the doctrine of both Jesus and Shelley. All Pope's thought is based on such vast natural directions: so, though different forms of government and religion arise in turn, that man 'can't be wrong whose life is in the right'. Truth is thus

felt as a vital direction, not a mental concept or any arrangement of concepts: and the resolution of the *Essay*'s central paradox is again implicit. So charity—which involves action—is greater than faith or hope, being 'all mankind's concern', inevitably and instinctively, however little they know or like it. Man, 'like the vine', can only gain strength from an 'embrace': self-love and social love are, at the last, identical. The argument has a beautiful simplicity and precision; and may be profitably related to our economic and international problems. One passage (289–302) on order recalls *Troilus and Cressida*.

The *Essay*'s four parts are alternately general and personal, and the last Epistle treats of happiness:

> That something still which prompts th' eternal sigh,
> For which we bear to live, or dare to die,
> Which still so near us, yet beyond us lies . . .

The touch is wistful, humble, yet serene, and throughout deeply understanding. Pope brings a Shakespearian insight to this simple yet vast issue, on which the 'learned' are consistently 'blind', running to extreme positions, either trusting in 'everything' or utterly agnostic: nor will a proper sympathy with Pope's whole argument properly accuse his own *Essay* of the facile trust indicated. It shirks no tragedies of mortal existence, nor any moral evils, but rather sees into and through them. Behind the isolated selfishness of robber, tyrant, hermit, or proclaimed hater of man, he sees a lurking love, a desire for admiration or friendship. One common longing is felt behind all humanity. Happiness is not therefore a matter of material circumstance, which indeed tends to negate itself, since wealth of any sort leads to fear, while lack of it may condition hope. But the final peace rests in simplicity and virtue. Virtue naturally meets man's approval. The statement here bears to the acceptance of moral evil in the first epistle precisely the somewhat obscure relation borne by Macbeth's (or Richard III's) necessary condemnation within the play to the equally important artistic delight

the spectator derives from his crime: Pope's thinking all along running parallel to the issues raised by study of Shakespeare or any great tragic artist. We are reminded that noble self-sacrifice proves rather a willing 'scorn of life' than the inefficiency of virtue. God is next cleared—not altogether satisfactorily—of responsibility for certain evils in terms of general law: that is, He does not abrogate the law of gravitation to prevent a death; the thought really again involving the concept of the whole. There follows an incisive argument on simple virtue's essential independence of outward suffering or rewards, giving instead 'the soul's calm sunshine and the heart-felt joy'. It is very acutely observed that fame is really a matter of one's own circle: the rest does not touch you. A striking autobiographical paragraph asserts that superior gifts bring only trouble: 'All fear, none aid you, and few understand.' An expanded contrast of simple integrity with the shams of worldly place and power follows Wolsey's advice in *Henry VIII* and points towards Pope's own satiric doctrine. The way to happiness is through identity with the vast chain of being and rising whole that is the *Essay*'s main argument. Our very aspirations are evidence of something beyond, since nature does not ever implant meaningless faculties: as so often, the thought is flashingly new. We are last brought to a vision of widening circles of altruism and a reiteration of the claim implied in nearly every line of the poem to have held up 'nature's light' instead of 'wit's false mirror'. 'Wit' in Pope is variously used: here it means 'human reason', normally something like 'intellectual talent', sometimes even 'poetic genius'. It is here felt as specifically academic, perhaps contemporary: Pope's thought probably dwells on writers of his own day.

Pope's mature theory on man and his universe clearly relates exactly to his *Essay on Criticism*, his own poetic practice, and his satires: to his nature-feeling, sympathetic human warmth, and sense of the artistic whole. His *Essay* is far from easy; but much of its difficulty is removed once it can be felt as a dynamic rather than a purely static

statement. Continually it works to substitute vital directions and a living psychology for dead concepts, with a strong sense of the marsh-like insecurity of rigid terms, as when Pope suggests that too strong an ethical sense may surreptitiously pander to the very vice it condemns; or when, towards the end of Epistle III, he considers arguments concerning the 'forms of government' mere folly whilst putting emphasis instead on the *way* those forms are administered. He keeps his eye steadily on the final test of action, individual or communal. The cosmic trust throughout relates both to Bacon's *Advancement of Learning* and to Shelley's *Defence of Poetry*; and clearly touches certain modern tendencies with which it has not been as yet associated: as, for example, the naturalism of M. Bergson; the holism of General Smuts (whose remarkable book *Holism and Evolution* adds a valuable concept to our vocabulary); and the all but excessive vitalism of Lawrence's *Fantasia of the Unconscious*. This only those, to use Pope's phrase, 'more studious to divide than to unite' can fail to recognize. Such all too rigid divisions are, it would seem, rooted in an unconscious fear that wills the dispersal of positive forces in order to avoid their massed significance.

IV

The Dunciad has an extra dimension of artistic importance beyond either the *Essay on Man* or the satiric epistles. Here Pope fuses the extreme opposites (to him) of poetic sublimity and those personalities of the book-world he most despises. The result is a mock-heroic of the same genre as *The Rape of the Lock*, but with a diametrically opposite tone. It is Pope's attempt to fit his worst particular experiences into the harmonies of great art: somewhat like Dante's final vision of the divine circle mysteriously fitted to and enclosing—though how the poet cannot say—the human form. The resolving medium is humour as rich in its way as that of *The Rape of the Lock*.

The particular references, on understanding of which the humour must partly depend, are unfortunately somewhat tedious: though they occasion some entertaining notes by the author. That the subject should be so personal may seem regrettable: yet the poem appears to define the conditions under which alone a work of art, especially one of heroic poetry, is now felt to be possible. As in Dante, the poet's own negative experiences force themselves shamelessly forward. But, while personal records are certainly involved, general experiences, and not persons, are really in question; though the poet himself cannot quite be expected to know this. Moreover, literature was at this period the medium through which an old culture was felt to be in transit to a new; and the nature of its contemporary practitioners was intuitively recognized as a matter of vital national, if not racial, concern. *The Dunciad* thus objectifies the essential genius of its age and remains an artistic document of high importance.

The irritating preponderance of forgotten names is, as one of the notes all but suggests, itself part of the design: the persons seeming the more boring and therefore fatuous for our ignorance. Moreover, the darkness of poetic atmosphere is thereby increased. You are forced to wade through a stifling, clinging, muddy, bog-like substance of intractable references. The poem has actual bogs, mud, even 'mud-nymphs' (II. 332). It is couched in Pope's more sensuous, rich-throated, slow manner and most precisely loaded with naturalistic and biological reference. Pope's work never shows the Miltonic emphasis on the hard or metallic. 'Brazen brightness' and 'polished hardness' are terms of critical opprobrium here (I. 219–20) while his own impressions are naturalistic. The atmosphere is thick and heavy with fogs, clouds, 'rolling smoke' (I. 248), 'vapours blue' (III. 3), and, generally, palling darkness. A 'veil of fogs dilates' the awful face of the Goddess of Dulness (I. 262). People move in a 'black troop' (II. 360). The darkly vowelled name 'Mundungus' (I. 234) sets the tone. Many small or supposedly dull-witted

animals are used with normal derogatory associations as in the second book of *Gulliver's Travels*: such as donkeys, apes, puppies, owls, crabs, bugs, maggots. A strongly physical impact is usual, as in the exquisite

> Round him much embryo, much abortion, lay,
> Much future ode, and abdicated play. (I. 121)

The animals may, when more fully realized, both help the poem and yet show Pope's own natural sympathy, as in

> So watchful Bruin forms, with plastic care
> Each growing lump, and brings it to a bear. (I. 101)

Or the picture of 'huge Lintot' running:

> As when a dab-chick waddles through the copse
> On feet and wings, and flies, and wades, and hops.
> (II. 63)

The cramming of jerky monosyllables into one line is a usual trick in Pope where absurdity is to be indicated. The awkward motion implied may recall his own expressly athletic grace, sense of vital movement, and consummate ease: correspondingly he sees his opponents as dull, and heavy in motion. Mechanic imagery is a precise association for the dull and inorganic: so bad poetry makes the muses 'scream like the winding of ten thousand jacks' (III. 160). Dull creaking brains work strangely like the 'ponderous slugs' of lead (I. 182) which are pumped into motion by an air-gun; or clocks that go by the movement of a weight beneath (I. 183–4). The poem's hero, guided by the Goddess, is as a bowl that goes 'obliquely waddling to the mark in view' (I. 172). Dulness 'lumbers' like a 'rolling stone' (III. 293–4). The joy is in translating to clear physical terms the cumbersome inefficiencies of so abstract an art as literature. Pope makes the ordinary man realize how a bad artist appears to himself, and the humour is often richly satisfying. All movement is slow, as when old Dulness 'heaved the head' (I. 257). The

world of *The Dunciad* is ludicrously organic: stupid, dull, sleepy, with its sleepy 'poppy' (III. 317), 'sacred opium' (I. 288), and 'drunken vine' (I. 303). The Dunces start their ludicrous harmonies, like asses braying:

> So swells each wind-pipe; ass intones to ass
> Harmonic twang! of leather, horn, and brass. (II. 253)

Subtle nasality and inanimacy ('brass') are used by a poet of warm natural affinities to convey his impression of a dead art. But the impression may be more naturalistic, as when

> Keen, hollow winds howl through the bleak recess (I. 35)

to signify music caused by emptiness. *The Dunciad* relies throughout on heavy sensuous appeal, as when, again, the poets drive their audience to sleep:

> Then mount the clerks, and in one lazy tone
> Through the long, heavy, painful page drawl on;
> Soft creeping, words on words, the sense compose;
> At every line they stretch, they yawn, they doze.
> (II. 387)

Which must be read very, very slowly, giving the vowels and 'z' sounds their full chance. *The Dunciad* is the condemnation, by as vital a poet as any in our literature, of the insidiously academic writer, the poet of outward form lacking spiritual energy—in short, the charlatan; one who, because he is out of contact with the springs of life, is necessarily dull.

Heroic action is strongly physical; indeed, you may feel, too much so, with Curl's misfortune in the race, his prayer to Jove, and subsequent recovery of speed 'renewed by ordure's sympathetic force' (II. 103); and his later engaging in competition with 'salient spout' (II. 162) for a well-known authoress 'with cow-like udders and with ox-like eyes' (II. 164). The booksellers' competition is not for the squeamish. Sensibilities may well be offended, even when we rule out all consciousness of contemporary and personal reference. And yet the references are often

such as, being fictional physical impressions of an inward reality, ought not to hurt more than direct reference to the vice intended: which is normally both dangerous and respectable. Pope gives full reasons in his notes, and we must suppose him sincere. Where there is a true humour, the physical images perform a cathartic purpose of the most general kind. The mud-diving competition, with the exquisite 'mud-nymphs', is surely most happily conceived to objectify the muck-raking of slanderous authors. It attains a mock solemnity that is too deeply humorous to be finally cruel:

> When lo! a burst of thunder shook the flood;
> Slow rose a form, in majesty of Mud;
> Shaking the horrors of his sable brows,
> And each ferocious feature grim with ooze. (II. 325)

To be read with a reverential and measured sonority. The humour often depends ultimately on a discrepancy between true dignity and Pope's long-standing *bête noire* of unjustifiable and ludicrous pride. It can scarcely have done these heavy gentlemen harm for once to see themselves sinking 'with all the might of gravitation blest' (II. 318). A fine Miltonic transposition shows us one of them waiting his turn at the dive:

> In naked majesty Oldmixon stands . . . (II. 283)

What soft cohesive grandeur in the stately utterance! The image remains a noble warning to the human race.

The epic's beginning sets the note of gravity and bathos in happy balance:

> The mighty Mother, and her Son who brings
> The Smithfield muses to the ear of kings,
> I sing. (I. 1)

Book II starts with a Miltonic parody. But the essence of grandeur is quite purely transmitted: it is real, though its application be mockery. Just as the Goddess's temple has its 'sacred Dome' (I. 265), so the poetry has its own

sanctity and shadowed grace, often with a mighty voice softened to nature's splendours:

> . . . in yonder cloud behold,
> Whose sars'net skirts are edged with flamy gold,
> A matchless youth! his nod these worlds controls,
> Wings the red lightning, and the thunder rolls. (III. 253)

Which seems almost wasted in a passage which is, as a whole, a magnificent exposure of absurd stage elaborations, that make 'a world to nature's laws unknown' (III. 241). As in *The Rape of the Lock* ritualistic dignity is used, though with a greater satiric intention. So we watch Cibber setting the flames to his sacrifice of unsuccessful tragedies:

> And thrice he lifted high the birth-day brand,
> And thrice he dropt it from his quivering hand;
> Then lights the structure, with averted eyes:
> The rolling smoke involves the sacrifice.
> The opening clouds disclose each work by turns . . .
> (I. 245)

The first two lines are a parody on epic narrative that may remind us that the satire is throughout two-edged: there is a criticism of vacuous sublimity as well as criticism of trivial substance. But we can also feel, in these 'huge cloudy symbols' of an absurd pomp, these domes, temples, and altars, or the 'reverend flamen' of II. 354, a rich, almost Keatsian, apprehension of the sacred.

The whole work has, to quote Flecker's *Hassan*, a 'monstrous beauty like the hindquarters of an elephant'. It moves with a similar cumbersome ease. The imaginative consistency recalls Dante's *Inferno*, which it resembles far more closely than Milton's Hell. As with Dante, it is, to quote this time from *The Testament of Beauty*, cluttered with 'earthly tangle', though whether it lie equally near to the 'throne of God' will perhaps be questioned. It has at least one claim to lie nearer, since there is a strange and happy absence of the sadistic. The comedy is not precisely cruel: the dunces are all happy, are not shown as realizing their absurdity. They are allowed to maintain

a certain physical, though ludicrous, dignity. Pope respects the physical to this extent; whereas he is merciless when explicitly referring to ethical or artistic faults. So Cibber, Oldmixon, and even Curl, have, in a sense, their own personal rights, like Sir Plume. Dante's whippings and bodies stuck upside-down are, of course, part of a deadly serious vision: but Pope's delicate emotional and sensuous touch—seen in the softness, the nature-tone of the whole atmosphere—is evidenced by his avoidance of what in his poem of mainly humorous intention would have been dangerous indeed. His few but somewhat callous references to poverty may be felt as part of the metaphoric scheme: they help to underline a mental and spiritual poverty. Moreover, Shakespearian phrases often ring similarly callous with less excuse: as though a certain delicacy has since become innate, whereas to a more crude society vagabondage and villainy were one, and felt to be so. *The Dunciad* is Pope's *Inferno*, his *Macbeth*. That it refuses any violent evil is characteristic, for he writes from a mental horizon where such depths are not of primary importance: he feels 'letters' taking the place of 'lances', to use Lyly's clever phrase. That is why his accusation of 'dulness' goes deeper than you might think. It implies lack of vital energy and therefore of all those cosmic contacts on which the *Essay on Man* insists. Moreover, the poet's most intense personal antagonisms are next lifted as a weighty mallet to drive in his more general challenge. The whole mass of his emotional abhorrence in Books I to III—and they are mainly emotional and impressionistic, with slight attempt at rational analysis—is propelled in the subsequently added Book IV to establish a more philosophical charge, levelled at a whole culture.

In Book III the dunces are warned 'not to scorn your God' (III. 224). Book IV at once introduces us to abstract terms: science in chains, logic 'gagged and bound', &c., 'mathesis' alone given freedom for her madness, but the Muses in 'ten-fold bonds' (IV. 21–35). The charge later

emphasizes all the usual complaints, flattery in a 'sacred gown' (IV. 97), and 'last and worst' that hypocrisy of the Muse, 'wit' without 'soul' (IV. 99–100). School education is become a meaningless discipline:

> To ask, to guess, to know, as they commence,
> As fancy opens the *quick* springs of sense,
> We ply the *memory*, we load the brain,
> Bind rebel wit, and double *chain* on *chain*;
> *Confine* the thought, to exercise the breath;
> And keep them in the pale of *words* till death. (IV. 155)

I italicize crucial concepts. Universities come off no better. They dole out 'fragments, not a meal' (IV. 230). The 'critic eye' acts as a 'microscope of wit', studying 'hairs and pores' while quite missing how 'parts relate to parts or they to the whole', blind to 'the body's harmony, the beaming soul' (IV. 233–5). Something of the sort, surely, has happened with the study of Pope's own work, weighting him with labels. His own emphasis is still on the organic, the vitalistic, and set dead against all rigidities that would '*petrify* a genius to a dunce' (IV. 264), the 'cement' that binds, and reduces all mentalities to 'one dead level' (IV. 267–8). The stony and infertile are images of evil. The poetry, as before, is scattered with animal references (though these scarcely always maintain the precise animal tonings of Books I–III): to the silk-worm (IV. 253), the adder (IV. 373), the fox (IV. 351), the humming-bird (IV. 446), with a delightful couplet on bees (IV. 79–80). True, he ridicules two natural scientists: but, characteristically, shows them as having unnecessarily killed a plant and a butterfly, the latter's earlier movements being prettily described (IV. 421–30). We must not let Pope's or Swift's seeming overstress of scientific indictment blind us to the substantial truth of their charges, at least where the humanities are concerned:

> 'Tis true, on words is still our whole debate,
> Disputes of *Me* or *Te*, of *aut* or *at*,
> To sound or sink in *cano*, O or A,
> Or give up Cicero to C or K. (IV. 219)

'Mechanic' causes now lock divinity in 'matter' and 'space' (IV. 475–6), stupid pride making man 'the final cause' of the universe (IV. 478). Thinkers

> See nature in some partial narrow shape
> And let the Author of the Whole escape. (IV. 455)

The proper *Dunciad* atmosphere is, on the whole, maintained, but the verse gets more taut and swift, as in the Horatian Epistles, and the philosophy more clearly fuses the statement of this poem with the *Essay on Man*: 'Be proud, be selfish, and be dull' (IV. 582). It ends with a prophecy of utter chaos, the heavy abstractions falling like the vast folds of a curtain to blot out the shows of human civilization:

> Thus at her felt approach, and secret might,
> Art after art goes out, and all is night.
> See skulking Truth to her old cavern fled,
> Mountains of casuistry heap'd o'er her head!
> Philosophy, that lean'd on Heaven before,
> Shrinks to her second cause, and is no more.
> (IV. 639)

All knowledge, losing contact with reality, turns 'giddy'; turns in on itself, as to-day we have seen it do so clearly:

> See Mystery to Mathematics fly!
> In vain! they gaze, turn giddy, rave and die.
> (IV. 647)

The exact penetration into the chaotic and undisciplined, because *unrooted*, thought of the next two hundred years is almost uncanny. And now, since without the inner pulse of vital experience all sanctities are nothing,

> Religion, blushing, veils her sacred fires,
> And unawares Morality expires. (IV. 649)

'Chaos', the great 'anarch', rules. It is only too easy to shirk this challenge to our whole culture; to deny its precise relation to Bacon's *Advancement of Learning* and Shelley's *Defence of Poetry*; to forget that respect for secondary causes still lingers deep in the twentieth-century mind; and that Pope's message stands above us, and beyond us, to-day.

V

From the start Pope's diction, and in *The Rape of the Lock* and *Eloisa to Abelard* the whole artistic structure, showed a neat synthesis of the general and particular. In the *Essay on Man* the individual personality faces its universe, as in Wordsworth and Shelley. *The Dunciad* wills to create an artistic harmony from the particular experiences Pope neglects in his *Essay*: but there is a wide surplus, which finds expression in various epistles. They are as particular and contemporary as the *Essay* is timeless and universal. This move registers, in one sense, a fall, as Pope's compact line half-acknowledges, saying how he '*stoop'd* to truth' and 'moralised' his 'song' (*Epistle to Arbuthnot*, 341). We watch poetry discarding heroic themes and aiming to achieve direct social impact: rather than describe actions, it becomes itself active. The pen was rapidly becoming a force comparable with the sword, and more is involved than literary jealousies or personal antagonisms. Moreover, the nature of Pope's attack is of an importance reaching far beyond his own age. His *Essay* presents a substantially new and vitalistic synthesis, which, though in spirit deriving from the New Testament, was nevertheless academically unorthodox and did not find another full poetic voice for half a century; one which is, moreover, of a positive power to meet with misunderstanding, resistance, and even hatred, in any age. Only in terms of this visionary positive can the satires receive a precise understanding.

Pope's negative position may be more closely defined, and is therefore more valuable than Swift's. Images of disgust are rather ethical than physical in their direction, resembling Shakespeare's. The ethic is, moreover, strictly limited. Full-blooded crimes we have already seen equated with tempests and set among the harmonies of the *Essay*. These, being easily recognized, are felt of comparatively slight danger; while a more profitable attack concentrates on more insidious and respectable vices. Such

are seen continually as some form of untruth to nature, loss of vital centres, insincerity, dishonesty, or pride. The conception is never rigid. There is rather an attempt at a very subtle, though often virulent, diagnosis. Society is shown as intrinsically self-contradictory; individuals as lacking any wholeness of personality, any health.

In his *Epistle to Lord Cobham* Pope attacks those who concentrate on 'second causes', and continues with a profound commentary on human nature. Personality, he says, cannot be reduced to reasoning and principles, any more than the dissecting of an animal can isolate its life for analysis. Moreover, in personal relationships all is relevant to the observing subject. We are, indeed, very far from attaining to clarity concerning our own motives. Men change from hour to hour, according to their employment, the time of day, the company they mix with. Reasoning will therefore never bring down the elusive essences of such 'flying game'. All who argue from data and facts with 'retrospective eye', attempting to find the cause from inspection of the thing, the 'motive' from the 'deed', are on insecure ground. A good action need not originate from true goodness; nor does wise reasoning prove wisdom. We are urged to discover, presumably through intuition, a man's 'ruling passion', the centre of energy, after which all should fall into perspective: otherwise you mistake 'the scaffold for the pile'. Somewhat similarly the discovery of certain centres of energy in Shakespeare or Pope serves to clear up many confusions on the plane of motives and causation.

Pope's sense of vital direction rather than any moral absolute or set of absolutes determines his human analysis. He sees wealth—as in the amazingly compact narrative of Sir Balaam (*Moral Essays*, III. 339–402)—doing the devil's work. His sense of the concretely vital is used to expose the appalling dangers inherent in the ever more abstract tendencies of finance; a hundred oxen being ironically imagined as arriving at a statesman's levee from a foreign country (*Moral Essays*, III. 58), the essential intangibility

of the most dangerous vices being shown to work in double harness with the growing intangibility of wealth. Pope's positive emphasis is simple and concrete:

Pope. What riches give us let us then enquire:
Meat, fire, and clothes.
Bathurst. What more?
Pope. Meat, clothes, and fire.
(*Moral Essays*, III. 79)

In opposition he paints the typical vulgarities of his age (*Moral Essays*, IV. 99–168), with description of a garden-design showing no 'art-ful wildness', each 'alley' symmetrically balanced by a 'brother', and 'trees cut to statues, statues thick as trees': the last image compressing his habitual aversion from the statuesque to the denial of organic life. We are taken to a library well stocked with unread books, a lavatory where 'gaping Tritons spew to wash your face', and a dining-room of solemn grandeur more appropriate to a 'temple' or 'tomb'. It is all insincere and out of touch with the real situation, a forced hospitality:

In plenty starving, tantalis'd in state,
And complaisantly helped to all I hate.

Against this we have a characteristic longing for golden corn again to 'embrown the slope' and wave above the forgotten ruins of a fallacious gaudiness.

The conception is Shakespearian. *Timon of Athens* shows wealth and entertainment as utterly depending on living sincerities: those gone, the palace crumbles. Enobarbus's allegiance to Antony's fortunes is conditioned by Cleopatra's faith. Pope's close kinship to Shakespeare is felt in his *Epistle to a Lady* (*Moral Essays*, II). The feminine temperament is vividly and variously characterized, with no shirking of evils: Atossa is an amazing study of dangerous vitality. But Chloe neatly personifies a violent reaction to the non-vital, recalling the Messenger's description of Octavia in *Antony and Cleopatra*. Later a sympathetic paragraph on feminine complexity fits

Cleopatra neatly. There is, as so often, clear sense of an ultimate and vital positive, and Pope's view of women does not take the Miltonic turn, though he is severe, as Byron very seldom is. His worst satiric characters, even Chloe, are all very much alive: and yet the most vivid are scarcely credible. Dryden in *Absalom and Ahitophel* perhaps gains as a dramatist what he loses as a satirist: his Ahitophel and Zimri being too well rounded, too composed, for the intended condemnation, at least for the kind of condemnation Pope brings to the creation of Sporus in the *Epistle to Arbuthnot* (305–33).

But Sporus is no mere personification of a single thesis, nor even a 'type'. He could not properly be fitted with a Jonsonian label:

> *Pope.* Let Sporus tremble—
> *Arbuthnot.* What, that thing of silk,
> Sporus, that mere white curd of ass's milk?
> Satire or sense, alas! can Sporus feel?
> Who breaks a butterfly upon a wheel?
> *Pope.* Yet let me flap this bug with gilded wings,
> This painted child of dirt, that stinks and stings;
> Whose buzz the witty and the fair annoys,
> Yet wit ne'er tastes, and beauty ne'er enjoys . . . .

That he should be shown as not enjoying any full-blooded pleasures is necessary. Smiles show his emptiness 'as shallow streams run dimpling all the way'. He is created largely from vivid sense-impressions of disgust, and is a 'toad half-froth, half-venom' who 'spits' himself abroad

> In puns, or politics, or tales, or lies,
> Or spite, or smut, or rhymes, or blasphemies.
> His wit all see-saw, between *that* and *this*,
> Now high, now low, now master up, now miss,
> And he himself one vile antithesis.

He is utterly insincere, a 'cherub' face disguising a serpentine nature. The whole—I quote only part—has striking and unforgettable vitality drawn from the poet's intense loathing, expressed first in jets of venom, then speeding

into accumulations that whirl giddily, inducing sickness at an everlasting self-contradictory Nothingness. An utter lack of self-realization, of psychic *wholeness*, is indicated; together with a failure to fuse the masculine and feminine elements ('master' and 'miss' and, later, 'head' and 'heart') in the personality. 'Antithesis' sums the indictment, its strong force yet weak vowels neatly reflecting a psychological discrepancy which has not attained the status of conflict: the subject is *content*, yet every instant offends against and denies Pope's philosophy of integration in the *Essay on Man*. See the use of monosyllabic jerks to give at once a puppet-like movement—though Sporus is far more than a puppet—and to act as a fusillade of scorn; and the vitriol that charges the exactly placed 'blasphemies', blasphemy being perhaps Pope's worst hatred. Whatever or whoever the human prototype this is scarcely a rounded study; but neither is there any single *idea* behind its creation, as there is, for example, behind Sir Epicure Mammon. It is caught straight from contact with those human personalities stated by Pope himself to be irreducible to concepts or principles of reason. There is a far more intense poetic energy, a greater compression of passion, than in Dryden's Zimri. That glows, this is white-hot. Dryden draws a real man, but Pope distills, compresses, and ejects through one person the living essence of a whole poisoned society. Sporus—set between Shakespeare's Lucio and Byron's Steno—is a poetic archetype.

Yet the creation is paradoxical, since its very intensity is set to constitute a condemnation of not-being. Sporus is vigorously inactive and powerfully a nothing. The lively essences are, of course, Pope's, and these are strongly emotional. Had the condemnation depended on pure reasoning rather than on analytic impressionism it would have cut across the poet's own human understanding as expressed in his *Epistle to Lord Cobham*. The emotional and sensory nature, the personal and relative quality of the portraiture, indeed save it from certain charges, since there is no claim to dispassionate consideration.

The feeling is against a person, or society, not being properly itself; and the more cool, less sensory, yet equally unreasoned, scalpel incisiveness of the Atticus analysis earlier, being a study of insincerity, luke-warmness, and petty pride, is at root a similar indictment. Both are creations drawn from real persons; and, as such, scarcely charitable. It may be hard to isolate a purely receptive and imaginative understanding. Yet we cannot know the provocation: and any final judgement on the original situation must, it seems, include precise information of a sort quite impossible to obtain. All fiction has its germ in personal experience, and Lord Hervey may well have provided merely a release-moment to a piled-up disgust of society as a whole, like the bursting of a dam. The compressed venom, indeed, is very close to that found in Shakespeare's own final period, and substantially the same experience is being transmitted. Conditions now force, or at least allow, a shameless, to us it seems a libellous, directness of reference: the context is different, but Pope is perhaps no more to be blamed than Shakespeare. For all we know there may have been living originals of Osric or Caliban.

The *Epistle to Arbuthnot* itself gives us Pope's most comprehensive defence:

> Curs'd be the verse, how well so e'er it flow,
> That serves to make one worthy man my foe. (283)

He is here and elsewhere certain of his rectitude. This Epistle is especially rich in the blend of violence and gentleness, varying between attack and pathos, social criticism and autobiography. Its emotions swell and subside, with a very careful and skilful undulatory movement, whose balance repays attention. His chief boasts, of looking after his mother to the last and cherishing a deep friendship, are not those of a neurotic misanthrope: he is never, indeed, submerged by his own satire but well above it. He may have been mistaken in actual judgements: how can any man be certain of another's worthiness or

knavery? But purely personal reactions are being used as the energic and explosive force for what is elsewhere a quite general indictment. I believe a final understanding will acquit him of unnecessary cruelty: though it might have to be couched in intellectual terms which his more intuitive sense of his own righteousness need not have taken into account. Anyway, his persons are to-day as fictional as Iago and Cloten; and the writing indisputably holds the kind of integrity which is needed for great poetry. I ask that we bring such a view to a short inspection of Pope's Horatian imitations. Such a view is really forced: since these epistles, like that to Arbuthnot, sometimes dramatize the poet himself, showing him in a most favourable light.

They are marked by a new agility, a delighted freedom; with a strangely non-sensuous appeal, and a vivid use of abstract nouns; a continual, if reserved, nature-reference helping to preserve the usual Shakespearian kinship. They are often dramatic, a dialogue structure showing Pope's discussion with some friend on his own paradoxical position as satirist. Dissatisfaction with his calling alternates with sublimation. The stimulus behind is at once a general irritation and a happy sense of power. For, though he knows himself part of the process he deplores—the loss of contact, the flinging apart of ideals and actions, literature and life—though he is forced back continually on discussion of great writers or himself instead of other heroisms, yet his ethical mission grows more concrete, and his verse becomes more sinewy, purposive, and fast. Just as dynamic ideals are pitted against a putrefying society, so the language, like Shakespeare's later style, continually is at work to transmute living essence into a compact yet lightning phraseology, as in the pith and pregnancy and mastery of the abstract and universal in 'puff'd prosperity' (*Horace*, *Sat.* II. ii. 126) or

> Oh *impudence of wealth*! with all thy store
> How dar'st thou let one worthy man be poor?
> (*Horace*, *Sat.* II. ii. 117)

The abstract personification is carried swiftly enough to prevent a premature solidification of the vital. Pope wields these vast abstractions like a club—'prosperity', 'impudence', 'violence', 'antipathy': he now fights material inertia with an especially spiritual energy. The process is one with the general aim to inject poetic vitality into the communal mind without relying on traditional and stock forms.

These self-dramatizing epistles are therefore deeply important and as little negative as *Timon of Athens*, a play which covers all Pope's major attacks. There the felt positive, the purposeful direction, is in the hero; here in Pope himself. He becomes his own protagonist, and separate satiric thrusts are subsidiary to discussion of their own nature and necessity. Having followed his own teaching in Epistle II of the *Essay on Man* by perfectly trusting those ruling and envenomed passions that create Sporus, he often rises beyond them: mounts on his own emotions, brings his whole self to the launching of a less personal yet even more violent attack. The sublimated emotion is continuous with the other; but it is qualitatively different. The expression is non-sensuous and the emotion impersonal:

> Farewell then Verse, and Love, and ev'ry Toy,
> The rhymes and rattles of the Man or Boy;
> What right, what true, what fit we justly call,
> Let this be all my care—for this is All.
>
> (*Horace*, *Ep.* I. i. 17)

He feels newly grown up, his writing takes on a truly Pauline fervour. A new inclusiveness makes his earlier work seem to him—not necessarily to us—comparatively weak. This extra dimension of impersonality is further marked by the self-dramatization—either through dialogue or general approach—which, though not new, exerts now a new importance, especially in the second *Epilogue*. There is a delighted excitement, with a corresponding lessening of personal hostility, his interlocutor sometimes interrupting to create a subtle dramatic humour. He is

often more interested in himself as satirist than in any satire. He presents himself as a dramatized universal: the voice of a communal vitality divorced from the community. This, his own vital direction, is the true gist of the little dramas. They are therefore in essence positive.

The explicit attacks continue as before against luxury and corruption with usual reminders of temperance and simplicity. Commercial enterprise has become a mad race for wealth at whatever physical risks (*Horace*, *Ep.* I. i. 67–72); flattery has undermined Church teaching (*Horace*, *Ep.* II. ii. 218–25) and letters (*Horace*, *Sat.* II. i. 21–2). Party politics (*Epilogue I*, 106) and patriotism (*Horace*, *Sat.* II. i. 23–8) are alike corrupt. The old aristocracy has fallen before a new order of 'booby' lords (*Horace*, *Sat.* II. ii. 175–6). So

> In soldier, churchman, patriot, man in power,
> 'Tis avarice all, ambition is no more! (*Epilogue I*, 161)

The throne itself is vigorously attacked, especially in the *Epistle to Augustus*, where the old thought of England as a dominating and central influence recurs with ironic intention (*Horace*, *Ep.* II. i. 390–419). The swing-over from Elizabethan royalism to the piercing revolutionary visions of the early nineteenth century pivots on Pope's work. He writes of war like Byron:

> . . . let Jove encrust
> Swords, pikes and guns with everlasting rust!
> Peace is my dear delight . . . . (*Horace*, *Sat.* II. i. 73)

While his 'Yes, the last pen for freedom let me draw' (*Epilogue II*, 248) suggests that pen to be rather the first of a new than the last of an old, order.

Since the main complaints date back at least to the New Testament, though nearly as far from satisfaction now as then, they are not in themselves so important as is their vigour of transmission. Besides, the aim is towards an emotional redirection more fundamental than any specific teaching. Certainly what Pope regards as ugly, stupid, evil, or what not is, to any right-thinking person,

ugly, stupid, and evil. There is no indecision: ethical fervour and imaginative virility are co-active in as sure and indissoluble a partnership as you will find anywhere. But the vigour *is* the teaching. That is why personal disgusts must still be allowed reference, and Pope refuses to limit himself to attack on abstract sins (*Epilogue II*, 13), since that lets slip the very dynamic he would exploit. The concentration on such is itself a danger: the 'fear' of desiring advancement as bad as the desire, since each equally argue an admiration (*Horace*, *Ep.* I. vi. 18–21). And this is not to be cured by any thinking, any *static* doctrine; yet neither are bold bad crimes attacked. The dispute seems to involve an essence at once more than mental and less than properly instinctive. So 'a fool quite angry' is 'quite innocent' in the *Epistle to Arbuthnot*, 107. Passionate vitality gets respect: it is the test of highest poetry (*Horace*, *Ep.* II. i. 343). After all, he praised Sir John Blunt in a difficult passage (*Moral Essays*, III. 151–62) for rationalizing a 'ruling passion' into a mad scheme, with sharp condemnation of purposelessness even though purpose be taken to 'extremes'. Certainly Sir John's passion seems to have been itself good; and you could argue that greed for wealth (as at *Horace*, *Ep.* I. i. 65–72) is equally a mad rationalization of 'ruling passion'. But Pope's ultimate gospel is not reducible to a static logic, and must be referred to the dynamic psychology in Epistle II of the *Essay*. Indeed, in both his doctrines of natural 'power' (*Moral Essays*, III. 159–68) and his main satiric aversions, Pope draws close to the (often misunderstood) teaching of Nietzsche.

The poetry, though tense with passion, is always superbly at ease. There is a white purity as well as a white fury. It is, indeed, itself happy, with a continual gay variation, showing often a delightful friendship in the manner of address, with diction chatty, forceful, amiable, and resonant, by turns. Separate lines exert a stripped athletic grace, as in the clean action of 'The devil is in you if you cannot dine' (*Horace*, *Sat.* II. ii. 148) or 'The worst

of madmen is a saint run mad' (*Horace*, *Ep.* I. vi. 27). There is a Shakespearian control of vast concepts, as in this reminiscence of *Troilus and Cressida* followed by one of Pope's new running lucidities:

> This subtle thief of life, this paltry Time,
> What will it leave me if it snatch my rhyme?
> (*Horace*, *Ep.* II. ii. 76)

A darker, though no less brave, cosmic apprehension than that of his *Essay* draws him now closer to *King Lear*:

> This vault of air, this congregated Ball,
> Self-center'd Sun, and stars that rise and fall,
> There are, my friend! whose philosophic eyes
> Look through, and trust the Ruler with his skies,
> To him commit the hour, the day, the year,
> And view this dreadful All without a fear.
> (*Horace*, *Ep.* I. vi. 5)

See the careless handling, the reckless poetic out-tossing, of immensities; and the new intensity shadowed of a *Macbeth* fear, as again at the solemn meditations of his epistle to Colonel Cotterel (*Horace*, *Ep.* II. ii), especially at lines 304–15. We may leap the centuries to find a quatrain of Byronic detonation:

> Say, does thy blood rebel, thy bosom move
> With wretched avarice or as wretched love?
> Know, there are words, and spells, which can control
> Between the fits this fever of the soul.
> (*Horace*, *Ep.* I. i. 55)

The word-music is precisely one with meaning: it is rather a vibrancy than a music. There are swinging blows and hammering repetitions. The couplets break free of old constraints, they ripple, ring, dance, volley, joke, and reverberate, using a whole armoury of technical resource; scatter a hail of monosyllables, tilt with alliteration. Scorn of militaristic heroisms rolls out in the heavy ironic assonance of

> Rend with tremendous sound your ears asunder,
> With guns, drums, trumpet, blunderbuss, and thunder . . .
> (*Horace*, *Sat.* II. i. 25)

Or equal scorn is meted to Miltonic excellences of

> Gold, silver, ivory, vases sculptur'd high,
> Paint, marble, gems, and robes of Persian dye . . .
> (*Horace*, *Ep.* II. ii. 264)

Pope's own mind runs rather to nature and man than to inventions, crafts, and arts. But a different appreciation together with hint of an earlier style murmurs in the delicate fervency of 'Then marble, softened into life, grew warm' (*Horace*, *Ep.* II. i. 147). The best strength does not show itself in short quotation; rather in paragraphs, where couplet-modulation is utterly malleable as in any Shakespearian sequence, a muscular cohesion rippling vertically down the page. Such evolve organically, couplet answers couplet, as in the run-on movements of the conclusion to the epistle to Bolingbroke (*Horace*, *Ep.* I. i. 161–88). The dialogue form may assist delightful humour as at the conclusion to the epistle to Mr. Fortescue (*Horace*, *Sat.* II. i), or the split line-units and tennis-ball toss and return within and across the couplet in the second *Epilogue*, 10–27. Pope's humour is never unhealthy, never itself cruel, though on occasion he himself is: nor is it ever far off.

There is no bitterness, since at every instance there is creative direction; but neither is there any weakening of scorn. He would 'cure the arrant'st puppy of his pride' (*Horace*, *Ep.* I. i. 60) and plant a scorching, branding impress:

> Yes, while I live, no rich or noble knave
> Shall walk the world in credit to his grave.
> (*Horace*, *Sat.* II. i. 119)

Yet all must be felt as flotsam on the torrent of the one swift passion. He answers objections from an impregnable ethic: if a distasteful image turns your stomach, so, he replies, 'does flattery mine' (*Epilogue II*, 182). His calling is one of national importance 'useful to the state' as any soldier's (*Horace*, *Ep.* II. i. 204), provided it does not sink to praise of some 'monster of a king' or turn

religion to sport (*Horace*, *Ep.* II. i. 210–11). In straight-line development from *Windsor Forest* Pope's patriotism is no whit abated. But now his 'country's ruin' makes him 'grave' (*Epilogue II*, 207). Friends recognize and acknowledge his integrity (*Horace*, *Sat.* II. i. 138). They are dramatized as warning him continually against the dangers that must certainly have been risked (*Horace*, *Sat.* II. i. 101–20), but he insists on driving his attacks far beyond personal animosities against people in high position against whom he has, as an individual, no possible complaint (*Epilogue II*, 157–67), following 'virtue' alone (*Horace*, *Sat.* II. i. 121), 'indebted to no prince or peer alive' (*Horace*, *Ep.* II. ii. 69). Enjoying a brave independence won by his pen, he now feels that pen a pistol (*Horace*, *Sat.* II. i. 105) or a sword (*Epilogue II*, 248), with satire a 'sacred weapon' (*Epilogue II*, 212). Grouping St. Paul with Aristippus, he acknowledges no final intellectual authorities except 'righteousness' (*Horace*, *Ep.* I. i. 23–34) and that 'priestless Muse' which preserves good men with fire caught from her 'shrine' and opens the 'temple of Eternity' (*Epilogue II*, 232–5).

So a happy valiancy, a buoyancy and triumphing certitude ring through a confidence resting on 'the strong antipathy of good to bad' (*Epilogue II*, 198). Though he is surely too bold, trusts too uncompromisingly in a human intuition, and thus himself incurs the charge of pride, he makes of his answer at once a final defence and a further thrust:

> Yes, I am proud; I must be proud to see
> Men not afraid of God afraid of me.
>
> (*Epilogue II*, 208)

He is proud, as St. Paul is proud, with a righteous, because now wholly impersonal, intolerance. The lines speak with a vigour and transparency of syntax deriving from the utter simplicity and irresistible force of the indictment. The teaching is never static, since that is the way to a thousand self-deceptions, mistaking the 'reverse of wrong

for right' (*Moral Essays*, III. 198). The burning sincerity of a more dynamic gospel is implicit throughout these epistles and shines in their very militancy. For his aim is single: to set 'the *passions* on the side of truth' (*Horace*, *Ep.* II. i. 218) and take Heaven by 'violence of song' (*Horace*, *Ep.* II. i. 240).

The keen religious fervency that projects itself into such phrases as 'virtue', 'Heaven', 'priestless Muse', 'Temple of Eternity'—these last coming, as a climax, in the *Epilogue*—may recall Pope's own early *Dying Christian to his Soul*, his *Messiah* eclogue, and *The Temple of Fame*, a poem deserving close attention in terms of its vital, spiritualized, use of the architectural. These poems stand slightly apart from Pope's naturalistic development. But in the *Messiah* the divine is itself a super-sun: there was never a final antagonism. In Milton a great force turns inwards, becomes rigid: in Pope an original gentleness widens to an overpowering prophetic challenge. His life-work shows a steady expanding, a flowering, of natural impulse into the ethical fervour of the Horatian epistles; with, too, the lovely *Universal Prayer*, specifically written to assert the synthesis.

VI

THE TWO ETERNITIES: AN ESSAY ON BYRON

I

A POET'S work may often appear to contradict his life. With Lord Byron this is not so. He is, as a man, a vital embodiment of post-Renaissance poetry: a proud individualist, asserting the primacy of instinct through an agonized self-conflict. His social sympathies are violently given to causes of liberty. He incurs charges of immorality. He lives what others so often write, leaving his native land somewhat as Timon leaves Athens. That insistent aspiration, that aristocracy of spirit, met with variously in fiction after fiction, is here incarnate: more, it is given, as in Shakespeare's plays, an outward formulation in aristocracy of birth. Such aristocracy may be used in poetry to materialize an inner, spiritual, royalty, as in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*: and Byron is so much the more effective, as a dramatic figure, by reason of his title. In close alliance he shows an ingrained Shakespearian respect for tradition, for history, increasing the agony and tension of revolt. He has weakness, and is tortured by a sense of sexual sin. The vice, weakness, and nobility behind all high literary adventures are his, as a man. How slight some famous poets might appear should we choose to scrutinize their apparent littleness, their failure to match in life the spectacular essences of their work. A slight shift of perspective and Wordsworth looks like an old maid; Coleridge becomes a not very pleasant blend of talkative don and dope-fiend; Keats an adolescent; Shelley a seraphic blur. But Byron has warm flesh and colour. His life itself falls into poetic and tragic form. Mediterranean coasts are perennially fertilizing forces to northern

poetry. Italy floods the Renaissance and particularly the Shakespearian consciousness; poets from Chaucer and Milton to Browning and Lawrence have travelled there; and many have managed to die there, or thereabouts. But Byron does it all more superbly than any. Greece—to put a subtle matter crudely—seems for some time to have been challenging our traditional Christian culture, many poets offering an Olympian or Dionysian theology as co-partners with the Christian. Moreover, liberty—of spirit, mind, body, and community—has been for centuries a widening and pressing imaginative demand. Our dominant personal and communal poetic directions from Marlowe and Milton through Pope to Shelley, Browning, and Lawrence are, I should suppose, (i) something closely related to erotic instincts, and (ii) the cause of liberty. Byron suffers social ostracism and banishment for the one and death for the other. Incest, says Shelley, is a very poetical thing: presumably since every act of artistic creation involves a kind of incestuous union within the personality. Byron is suspected of it in actual fact. Next, he dies fighting for the perfect sacrificial cause: the liberty of Greece. He lives that eternity which is art. He is more than a writer: his virtues and vices alike are precisely those entwined at the roots of poetry. He is poetry incarnate. The others are dreamers: he is the thing itself.

His literary work (our only present concern) is continuous with these impressions. He did not at first see himself as a poet, as an early preface shows; and when he did start writing in earnest, went after stories of colour and action. His human understanding is glamorous, his incidents well costumed. Piratical adventure mixes with passionate love; there is the flash of steel and smell of powder. His is a cruel, yet romantic, world where blood flows hot. It is objectively conceived. Byron can lose himself in creation of emotional shapes outside his direct experience. He will use a reverential Christianity for his purpose; but can equally well salute a dying

Moslem in *The Giaour* with the consummate technical ease of:

> But him the maids of Paradise
> Impatient to their halls invite,
> And the dark heaven of Houris' eyes
> On him shall glance for ever bright.

This is a truly Shakespearian power, one with the impersonal historical interest of *Childe Harold* and his love of peoples and places generally. A strong sense of a particular and honourable past lingers round each person or place he touches. He is poetically sensitive to variations in human tradition and culture. He is cosmopolitan and extraverted. And yet his tales also express a certain violent and recurring psychological experience with mysterious depths of passion and guilt variously hinted or revealed. To this I give my primary attention.

The Giaour is a powerful example. The inside of mental agony is revealed, Byron's poetry piercing and twisting into its centre:

> The mind, that broods o'er guilty woes,
> Is like the Scorpion girt by fire;
> In circle narrowing as it glows,
> The flames around their captive close,
> Till inly search'd by thousand throes,
> And maddening in her ire,
> One sad and sole relief she knows,
> The sting she nourish'd for her foes,
> Whose venom never yet was vain,
> Gives but one pang and cures all pain,
> And darts into her desperate brain . . . .

The rhetorical tension is maintained with a never-failing grip. Each word is charged, each sentence tight. What universes are here housed in the tiny yet deadly form of the scorpion: its own venomous nature makes its agony the more terrifying. The little drama symbolizes the horror, which is one with the energies, of biological existence: it gets at the very nerve behind ecstasy and

anguish alike. Byron's in-feeling into animal life and energy is from the start distinctive. *The Giaour* is rich with it:

> Go when the hunter's hand hath wrung
> From forest-cave her shrieking young,
> And calm the lonely lioness:
> But soothe not—mock not, my distress!

He continually attributes sensitive nerves and minds to the animal creation; or may delight in its more lyric vitalities, as when he sees a butterfly

> . . . rising on its purple wing
> The insect queen of eastern spring

being chased by a boy, and makes subtle comparison between this and love. Either the fleeting loveliness rises far above the 'panting heart', or, if caught

> With wounded wing, or bleeding breast,
> Ah! where shall either victim rest?
> Can this with faded pinion soar
> From rose to tulip as before?

See the choice placing of a well-considered diction; also the peculiarly soft use of consonants. Stern as are his tales, Byron's poetry masters with equal ease a lyric grace and wrenching guilt: and through all burns deep sympathy for animals, often small ones (as in Pope); which is again one with his penetration to the central energies, the springs of action, in beast or man. The two are continuous. The hero of *The Giaour* is typical of Byron's tales, a man in hell, yet unbowed, and with a certain obscurity as to the dark cause of his suffering:

> Wet with thine own best blood shall drip
> Thy gnashing tooth and haggard lip;
> Then stalking to thy sullen grave,
> Go—and with Ghouls and Afrits rave;
> Till these in horror shrink away
> From spectre more accursed than they!

This ends a passage of towering satanic virulence; and its compressed explosiveness must surely win respect even from those whose direct response will be most impeded by the traditionally modelled—though pulsing—phraseology. Though the hero retires to a monastery where it 'soothes him to abide', for 'some dark deed without a name', he nevertheless 'looks not to priesthood for relief'. The balance of some irreligious passion against orthodox Christianity approaches in tone that of *Eloisa to Abelard*; while the rejection of religious assistance as powerless to ease the dark anguish and alter an inevitable course recalls *Faustus*, *Wuthering Heights*, and Byron's own *Manfred*. The close is subdued:

> I would not, if I might, be blest;
> I want no paradise, but rest.

He would be buried with no record but a simple cross. The Moslem's hatred for the infidel is here burningly proud and fierce; but Christianity is also at the last reverenced. Such opposites of pagan fire and Christian gentleness are characteristically Byronic; and they are to be in poem after poem subdued, as here, to an eternal peace.

Perhaps Conrade in *The Corsair* is the finest of his early human studies:

> Lone, wild, and strange, he stood alike exempt
> From all affection and from all contempt. (I. 11)

The narratives revolve generally on an inward psychic, or spiritual, conflict. Though Conrade is a pirate chief of stern and ruthless action, his is a deeply spiritual bitterness. His anguish is almost brutally revealed:

> There is a war, a chaos of the mind,
> When all its elements convulsed, combined,
> Lie dark and jarring with perturbed force,
> And gnashing with impenitent remorse. (II. 10)

The lines suit Macbeth: and though we may be reminded

of Crabbe the Byronic hero has a tragic direction not found in *Peter Grimes*. He is noble and Miltonic:

> His was the lofty port, the distant mien,
> That seems to shun the sight—and awes if seen:
> The solemn aspect, and the high-born eye,
> That checks low mirth, but lacks not courtesy . . . .
> (I. 16)

No captive girls ever seduce his attention from Medora. 'None are all evil' (I. 12), we are told, and at the core of his personality is a love, a 'softness'; this word, or 'soft', recurring throughout Byron's work with the deepest central significance. In this very poem Antony is the 'soft triumvir' (II. 15). Conrade is, however, a grim figure; and his endurance whilst awaiting torture is given terrible poetic disclosure. Yet he refuses to save himself by a cowardly murder and is nauseated by a woman, Gulnare, doing it for him. Indeed, all horrors of his wide piratical experience or natural imagination are shown as nothing to that arising from this desecration of feminine gentleness. From none

> So thrill'd, so shudder'd every creeping vein,
> As now they froze before that purple stain. (III. 10)

The passage is most powerful, tracing territories explored in the conception of Lady Macbeth. The hero suffers originally through determination to save women from his own piratical massacre: which, though perhaps irrational, is intensely Byronic. Frequently we come across such ruthless evil and cynical callousness enshrining a strangely soft, almost feminine, devotion. Conrade's heart 'was form'd for softness, warp'd to wrong' (III. 23). The poem's conclusion holds a reserved depth of feeling reminiscent of Pope. He finds Medora dead:

> He ask'd no question—all were answered now
> By the first glance on that still, marble brow. (III. 21)

Notice how strongest emotion is uttered through a simple statement: 'all were answer'd now'; and how that makes

of one human death a vast eternity, almost an assurance. So

> his mother's softness crept
> To those wild eyes, which like an infant's wept . . . .
> (III. 22)

Yet he is not sentimentalized. As in *Macbeth*, the poet dares to end with a condemnation, leaving the human delineation to plead its own cause:

> He left a Corsair's name to other times,
> Link'd with one virtue, and a thousand crimes.
> (III. 24)

From the start, the central complex of loneliness and cruelty is undefined. The same figure recurs in *Lara*. Though cold, ruthless, and with a smile 'waned in its mirth and wither'd to a sneer' (I. 17) the hero is yet one 'with more capacity for love than earth bestows' (I. 18) on most men. The dark mystery shrouding his past is never lifted. They are all, like Heathcliff and Captain Ahab, personalities tugged by some strange evil between time and eternity.

The poetic vigour of each narrative, depending on choice and exact statement rather than abstruse analogy or magic sound, never fails. Subtle rhythmic variation may finely realize description, as this of a floating corpse, from *The Bride of Abydos*:

> As shaken on his restless pillow
> His head heaves with the heaving billow. (II. 26)

Continually a fine thing is said as a way to realize some great feeling. Especially strong are the darkest moments, as 'I want no paradise, but rest' and 'This brow that then will burn no more' from *The Giaour*. The decasyllabic couplets of *The Corsair* hold an equal tragic force:

> Oh! o'er the eye Death most exerts his might,
> And hurls the spirit from her throne of light. (III. 20)

Verbs play a major, often a dominating part, as in the remorseless beat of the line 'Eternity forbids thee to forget'

(I. 23) from *Lara*. The diction accepts personifications of a vast yet simple and un-ornate kind, and traditionally 'poetic' words of various sorts. These, as in Pope, are chosen to express a ready-made fusion of the particular and general. The influence of Pope may be at times very obvious, too, in couplet-modulation, as—to take random examples from a wide field—in *The Corsair*, I. 11, and the lines beginning 'No danger daunts . . .' from *The Bride of Abydos*, II. 20. As in Pope, each word is exactly used but loaded with more than its natural maximum of force. The lines cry to be uttered and can be understood, if not fully appreciated, at once. The emotional precision is unerring, defined yet never metallic: like the twang of a taut string.

However perfect the control, the energies—spiritual or physical—set in action are striking. Many fine animal creations are symptomatic of the Byronic mastery of the vital and organic, as in the wild Tartar horse of the later story *Mazeppa* with the 'speed of thought' in his limbs, and the other thousand with

> Wide nostrils never stretch'd by pain,
> Mouths bloodless to the bit or rein . . . . (XVII)

Byron feels in and with the animal. There is the 'stately buffalo' with his 'fiery eyes' and stamping hoofs attacked by wolves in *The Siege of Corinth* (XXIII); the insect stinging to save its property (compare the wren in *Macbeth*) and the adder seeking vengeance when trodden on, in *The Corsair* (I. 13–14). The end of *The Prisoner of Chillon* provides perhaps the best; where the hero, after an eternity of dark imprisonment, has actually made such friends with the spiders of his dungeon and so long loved the mice at their 'moonlit play' that he is reluctant to leave; and I doubt if the whole range of Byron's work provides a sweeter instance of his uncanny penetration into the most secret chambers of a mind in agony and loneliness. The moon in Byron has elsewhere such tragic associations. Continuous with these animal intuitions is the Shakespearian

feeling for human personality, characterized by ability and desire to give vital action and project figures of innate dignity—quite apart from their ethical standing—and blazing courage; and women, including Gulnare in *The Corsair*, of an utterly instinctive, yet magnificent, devotion.

The tales are characterized by (i) vivid and colourful action, and (ii) a recurring psychological conflict normally related to some feminine romance-interest. You may get mainly action, as in *The Bride of Abydos* and the nightmare frenzy of the ride in *Mazeppa*; or mainly a psychological study, as in *Lara*. *The Corsair* I think the finest in its balance of both. The atmosphere of *The Giaour* is powerfully realized, but the hero's remorse seems disproportionate to the occasion. The central guilt-complex is, of course, always best left without premature definition, as in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. We can feel the poet aiming at a story-action that fits his intuition. However, in the tightly woven and sustained power of *Parisina* a short plot is cleverly devised to condition logically the mind-state of the Byronic hero, the story stopping where he begins. The perfect fusion of inward experience and active plot is never perhaps quite mastered. There is no deeply significant outer conflict, no clash of universal forces, unless the balance of religions in *The Giaour* might so qualify. Profundities are found in most searching human comment continually, but the action is not by itself profound. A bridge of some sort is needed; a conduit to flood the whole setting with something of the hero's tragic power. The narratives are to this extent slightly inorganic in comparison with Shakespeare: they have a hero, but no heart. A field of dramatic meaning has not been generated—an individual psychological and spiritual study, however deep, cannot quite do this—and the incidents and persons accordingly lose generalized significance and stature: though the tragic direction generally works to create a sense of some mysterious eternity at the close. Only a judgement most insensitive to the deadly marksmanship

of Byron's peculiar excellences would stigmatize them as 'melodramatic'.

II

These tales of action and geographic colour are strung together by a central, expressly personal, experience. The human penetration, the revelation of mental suffering, is always primary. But *Childe Harold* is more consistently extraverted, though it has a similar twofold appeal, with, again, a separateness: nature-descriptions, however, doing something towards a fusion, as I shall show. A series of meditations on places and events is given unity by the shadowy conception of Harold, that is, Byron. Yet, this once forgiven, we are struck by the amazing vitality of creation. Byron is the only poet since Shakespeare to possess one of Shakespeare's rarest gifts: that of pure artistic joy in the annals—after searching I can find no better word—of human action; in close association, moreover, with places. He feels the tingling nearness of any heroic past. Gray had something of this; so had Scott; and Hardy gets it in his *Dynasts* as a whole, perhaps, if not in the parts. This is something quite beyond our contemporary sophistication. It is an ability to love not mankind, as did Shelley, but men; and men—or women——of various sorts, places, and times:

> Is it for this the Spanish maid, aroused,
> Hangs on the willow her unstrung guitar . . . . (I. 54)

Or, of Waterloo:

> And wild and high the 'Cameron's gathering' rose!
> The war-note of Lochiel, which Albyn's hills
> Have heard, and heard too have her Saxon foes—
> How in the noon of night that pibroch thrills . . . .
> (III. 26)

And this of the dying gladiator:

> He reck'd not of the life he lost nor prize,
> But where his rude hut by the Danube lay . . . .
> (IV. 141)

He is fascinated with the persons of one scene or event after another. The scattered incidents are given a sincere unity by the autobiographical thread; this extraverted interest, almost love, being integral to the Byronic imagination.

But the suffering behind every glamorous association is not forgotten. Historic excitement is often one with a condemnation of history: since a fundamental love of men is involved and history often cruel. For example:

> Ah, monarchs! Could ye taste the mirth ye mar,
> Not in the toils of glory would ye fret;
> The hoarse dull drum would sleep, and Man be happy yet!
> (I. 47)

There is no facile militarism: but rather an opposition to the clang and fury of world affairs of simple—and often, as here, sensuous—joys. On the eve of Waterloo a 'heavy sound' of cannon breaks short the pleasures of the dance. Then are there

> cheeks all pale, which but an hour ago
> Blushed at the praise of their own loveliness;
> And there were sudden partings, such as press
> The life from out young hearts, and choking sighs . . . .
> (III. 24)

I point not merely to verbal excellences but to the especially impersonal, yet warm, sympathy with human instincts. So from 'Beauty's circle' they are shown next in 'battle's magnificently proud array'; and finally hurled, horse and rider, friend and foe, 'in one red burial'. The fervour which so admires courage and battle-finery is one with that which pities the transition from dance to slaughter. It is a total awareness of the Shakespearian sort. Byron can start to describe a bull-fight in a glamorous stanza (I. 73) of steeds and spurs and ladies' eyes; only to give a poignant sympathy to the suffering of bull and horse in a 'brutal' sport. The same sympathy is accorded the dying gladiator in Book IV butchered for Rome's enjoyment: yet this does not preclude a feeling for Rome's

imperial greatness. The poet is aware of emotional opposites involving each other, or rather of a single emotion taking opposite forms of assertion and pathos: just as the agonized conflicts and evil passions of his heroes are somehow one with their instincts of chivalry and tenderness. So he lets himself be, as it were, annihilated continually before each splendour and pathos in turn.

His feeling for human nobility past and present is also one with his acceptance of a traditional poetic diction. This repays our close attention. Few poets have accomplished so much effortless force in single lines, as, for example:

> Stop!—for thy tread is on an Empire's dust! (III. 17)

Or

> The spouseless Adriatic mourns her lord .... (IV. 11)

Or

> Oh Time! the beautifier of the dead .... (IV. 130)

The utterance is weighty yet carried easily: the thing said seems to be all in all, with no attempt at original expression. There is a play of metaphor and often what Ruskin—in a confused and misleading essay—named the 'pathetic fallacy': but such call no attention to themselves and are accompanied by no especial excitement. The style here, as in the tales, is peculiarly assured, involving a use of words where the fusion of general and particular, philosophic meditation and objective description, has already been performed; though in *Childe Harold* both the general scheme and stanza form alike demand a more fluid and less packed and explosive language. No effort is expended on abstruse comparison or the jerking of word or image from its habitual use or associative value. Personifications and abstractions are frequent but never cloudy, denoting concepts generally accepted. They are always words of an adequate syllabic weight; words, as it were, tested in the past and found to ring true; words of poetic lineage. In

the first two lines just quoted 'tread', 'dust', 'spouse', 'mourns' all strike me as examples of what might be called a middle diction, a workmanlike poetic, but not too poetic, manner. This may rise even to

> Their praise is hymn'd by loftier harps than mine
> (III. 29)

without loss of sincerity. So we have strong nouns, plain, usually active, verbs, sentences cleanly turned out, well drilled, and marching to their purpose. No verbal magic is allowed at the expense of clarity. Similarly, Byron's religious intuitions are based on a preliminary acceptance of the conventional, seen in the robust Johnsonian phraseology—as well as thought—of

> I speak not of men's creeds: they rest between
> Man and his Maker. (IV. 95)

As a rule every accent is poetically distinguished with none superlative: nor meant to be. But the thing said, or the object seen, may be of superlative grandeur, as this, of Rome:

> The Niobe of nations! There she stands,
> Childless and crownless, in her voiceless woe. (IV. 79)

The sympathy with the present pathos of ruins cannot be detached from that acceptance of the one-time historic splendour which also chooses well-worn associations such as the splendour of 'nations', the awe of crowns, the traditional poetic appeal of a word such as 'woe'. Byron likes, as a poet, what is already warm with human contact. He injects into it his own vitality, whether in admiration or rebellion. He likes human society and its history: which is but a surface effect of that deeper infeeling into animal or human vitality that enables him to display both convincing action and a moving pathos.

And yet again he stands outside the world he writes of, balancing human purpose against human futility. *Childe Harold* is a lamentation in noble phrases over the widespread ruins of a dead chivalry and a dead tyranny. Byron is

superbly conscious of the whole of Europe. But he also sees it as one vast theatre of tombstones: though at his touch the dead are temporarily raised, and in the poetry there is no futility. He ranges across the centuries accepting and cherishing a past—or recent present—which he simultaneously repudiates and regrets. So he hymns empires whilst hating the wrongs of tyranny; recognizes the 'lion' in Napoleon whilst decrying servility to 'wolves' (III. 19); glories in patriot battle-fields though attacking the iniquities of wars by which monarchs 'pave their way with human hearts' (I. 42); at the limit, he praises life whilst entranced by death. He is a militant pacifist, exposing the fallacies of ambition (I. 42–4). The tragic notes are his surest, the richer for the human excellences apprehended. The whole poem is written from a vast eternity-consciousness to which historic events, as events, are the negative symbols of its expression. There is thus a very 'life' in 'despair', a mysterious 'vitality of poison' (III. 34). Particulars are vivid chiefly by reason of their felt transience. Somehow their transience *is* their eternity:

> Far other scene is Thrasimene now . . . . (IV. 65)

Or, when we come to Rome, the mystery of time itself takes ghostly form, entwined with infinite space and natural magic:

> But when the rising moon begins to climb
> Its topmost arch, and gently pauses there;
> When the stars twinkle through the loops of time,
> And the low night-breeze waves along the air
> The garland-forest, which the gray walls wear,
> Like laurels on the bald first Caesar's head;
> When the light shines serene but doth not glare,
> Then in this magic circle raise the dead:
> Heroes have trod this spot—'tis on their dust ye tread.
> (IV. 144)

The grandeur of Rome lives most in its ruins. After visiting the Coliseum and wandering through memories of a dead empire we come to St. Peter's, which strikes from

the poet both a magnificent religious fervour and subtle architectural appreciation in living terms, characteristically, of the *human* mind unable to take in the whole splendour with a single glance, yet at last distended to eternal comprehension; and end with the great invocation to the sea, imperial beyond all empires—

> Roll on, thou deep and dark blue Ocean—roll!
> Ten thousand fleets sweep over thee in vain . . . .
> (IV. 179)

With what sureness are handled, as in Gray's *Elegy*, the noble platitudes so often composing the greatest poetry. 'Assyria, Greece, Rome, Carthage, what are they?' he asks. Their life was conditioned by that spirit (he calls it 'freedom' but perhaps we should give it a wider name) that alone can preserve, without which they are dust. That spirit is reflected by both (i) the poet's ranging consciousness—the 'eternal spirit of the chainless mind' of his Chillon sonnet—autobiographical soliloquy significantly alternating with the scenic progress and reaching its culmination in the great personal apologetic and satiric outburst near the close; and (ii) the sea, unfettered by temporal law.

> Time writes no wrinkle on thine azure brow:
> Such as creation's dawn beheld, thou rollest now.

This vast unfathomable interlocks itself with that humanism, that social and historic sympathy, so dearly deep in Byron; something other, drawing him near the awe-struck naturalism of Wordsworth.

Childe Harold has, continually, passages of more elemental sort, with also a continual swerve in comment from particular to general. My remarks on diction do not say the whole truth. Often a metaphor may start up with at once surface flash and revealing psychological depth, the more vivid for the generally level style:

> And how and why we know not, nor can trace
> Home to its cloud this lightning of the mind . . . .
> (IV. 24)

Natural immensities fill out wide areas of the later Cantos III and IV, acting as a bridge between the hero and his world: his own consciousness is shown as, personally, more akin to them than to the human drama that was his first story. The process reflects that dissociation found first in *Timon of Athens* and urgent since: but no other poet of Byron's period shows a range of sympathy sufficient to include both sides of the opposition. So the sea is felt as a bounding freedom (as in *The Corsair*), especially freedom from stifling human contacts (III. 2, 3). He now invokes 'maternal Nature' (III. 46). That other vastness of mountains so weightily insistent in the imagination of Byron's day is duly honoured:

> Not vainly did the early Persian make
> His altar the high places, and the peak
> Of earth-o'ergazing mountains . . . .
>
> (III. 91)

Such an association may be referred back to both Wordsworth and Coleridge. But there are passages more finely detailed, more energy-striking than this: as that describing the roar and hell-cauldrons of a *Kubla Khan* mountain waterfall, the rising mist above, the ever fertilized green turf, the peaceful river of the plain; and, as we look back, an Iris rainbow shot through the dreadful waters, still and brilliant above agonized distraction, like 'Love watching Madness with unalterable mien' (IV. 69–72): a line whose depth and fervency of human—or other—understanding shows the author to be, potentially, a tragic artist of Shakespearian stature. Often such a swift transition transfixes its mark with quivering intensity: Byron's nature-images are, normally, made to serve, or at least blend into, some human purpose. But they are also great in their won right: so we have 'shaggy summits' (IV. 73) where, when storm and darkness riot, there are flashes lovely as—typically—a woman's 'dark eye', as

> From peak to peak, the rattling crags among
> Leaps the live thunder! (III. 92)

'Live': a living ecstasy continually energizes Byron's work. But he can also treat of mighty glaciers or the placid Rhone with immediate descriptive force. All such vast natural symbols objectify that in himself that demarks him from men's society. Any man 'who surpasses or subdues mankind' is as a mountain looking on the hate of those below (III. 45). Himself he is a 'portion' of that nature 'around' him, rejecting the agonies of human society, finding life in natural kinship with the 'mountains, waves, and skies', as 'part' of his soul, and looking to death for cosmic freedom (III. 71–5). He knows the secrets of 'pathless woods' and 'lonely shore' (IV. 178). They and their eternity are the watch-towers from which he looks down on the rise and fall of empires. But he never for long forgets man. 'I love not man the less but nature more' (IV. 178) is really an over-statement. All his finest nature-impressions up-pile to blend with the supreme human grandeur of Rome. His mind outdistances his companions, that is all: if he could put all of himself into one word, that word were 'lightning' (III. 97). The choice is exact: and the image can be reversed. His brow, like that of his own Azo ploughed by the 'burning share' of sorrow (*Parisina*, 20), may be, metaphorically, felt kin also to that of Milton's Satan which 'deep scars of thunder had intrench'd'; or the She-wolf of his own description, the 'thunder-stricken nurse of Rome' whose limbs lightning has blackened (IV. 88); or, best of all, the bust of Ariosto 'doubly sacred' by the thunder-flame that stripped it of its crown (IV. 41).

Few poets show so instinctive a human insight: yet he is being forced against his will into the individualism of Wordsworth and Shelley. Yet there is a difference. He assimilates, but is not subdued by, the splendours of nature. He has been blamed for lightly and theatrically making poetic gestures not deeply felt; and it is true that certain lines in *Childe Harold* appear to merit the charge. Sometimes the transition from the more Augustan diction of the tales (mostly written before the latter Cantos of *Childe*

Harold) to a newly vital nature-imagery is not perfect. Byron seems to gather in his new material with something of too sweeping a gesture, too aristocratic a superiority: he takes it for his own, more human, purpose. He is not, any more than Shakespeare, subdued to nature-mysticism. Yet he can, when he cares to, turn it to a far finer, because more human, account, as in the image of love and madness recently noticed, than any poet of his day. He is always above, not below, his contemporaries. The others rave over cataracts and mountains: and he too goes to mountains for inspiration. As it happens, they serve him magnificently: probably as a man, certainly as a poet. But they do not rank so importantly with him as that other more Shakespearian vastness, the sea. That from *The Corsair* (which contains some fine sea-poetry) to *The Island* and *Don Juan* is a permanent possession, whereas mountains affect him deeply only now, in mid-career. No English poet has written more finely of the sea, as in the rolling volumes—got by 'o'-sounds—of

> Thou glorious mirror, where the Almighty's form
> Glasses itself in tempests; in all time,—
> Calm or convulsed, in breeze or gale or storm,
> Icing the pole, or in the torrid clime
> Dark-heaving—boundless, endless, and sublime,
> The image of eternity, the throne
> Of the Invisible; even from out thy slime
> The monsters of the deep are made; each zone
> Obeys thee; thou goest forth, dread, fathomless, alone.
>
> (IV. 183)

'The image of eternity': the concept pulses throughout Byron's work. Contrast this with his great denunciatory and prophetic passage (IV. 133–7) where he piles on the heads of mankind his curse of 'forgiveness'; next strikes the exact note and manner of Pope's satiric epistles ('petty perfidy', 'the small whisper of the as paltry few', 'venom', 'reptile'); and finally asserts the undying powers ('something unearthly') of his poetry to reassert his rights. You can see how the two elements—objective human

interest and lonely individualism—of the early narratives are rending apart. He is torn between history and tragic insight, mankind and lonely self-conflict, time and eternity. The disparity is bridged by sea and mountains, infinite expanse and lifting mass, each at once symbols of both the natural and the eternal.

III

The transition from *Childe Harold* to the great dramas of spiritual conflict resembles nothing so much as Shakespeare's development at the turn of the sixteenth century. The manner, too, definitely changes. Augustan influence is no longer evident, though the basic vocabulary remains slightly traditional. For the most part Byron's style is now unassertive and utterly at the disposal of whatever thought, image, or passion requires: with, however, his usual reliance on nouns, verbs, and clear syntax.

The whole setting and action of *Manfred* is devised to express an intense spiritual conflict:

> It is an awful chaos—light and darkness,
> And mind and dust, and passions and pure thoughts
> Mix'd, and contending without end or order.
>
> (III. i)

'I plung'd amidst mankind', says the hero, only to be 'dashed back' into the other gulf of his own 'unfathomed thought' (II. ii); though the image might better have left him high and dry on a rocky eminence. The setting is mountainous and elemental—the Alps, cataracts, sun, and stars interwoven with titanic spiritual drama. *Manfred* is a miniature *Faust*, with perhaps a greater intensity and condensation of spiritual issues and elemental impressionism: the two go together, the Witch of the Alps here being conjured from a cataract. The stage-directions—one involves a 'cataract', another a 'tower', and all of them, by implication, mountains—are explicit, building a height-symbolism to match the sickly towering solitude of the

protagonist. Manfred is in direct descent from earlier heroes: 'I am not of thine order' (II. i), he says to the Chamois Hunter. But his spiritual aristocracy is even more emphasized when he shows himself a greater than the spirits he calls up and refuses the Witch's help unless given unconditionally. She is his slave, not he hers: which recalls that innate because human sovereignty of Macbeth and Satan in similar situations. So, clogged by sin and a guilty horror, he yet challenges the presence of Arimanes himself, the god of natural creation, or some similar great, yet not final, divinity, such as Shelley's Jupiter, with a throne called a 'Globe of Fire'. The attendant spirits all realize Manfred, who will not kneel, to be of 'no common order' (II. iv). There is an 'infinite' beyond Arimanes and to that alone he is dedicated. And this is reached not through nature but *human personality*; so the figure of Astarte belongs to 'powers deeper still beyond' all natural splendours; and leaves even Nemesis 'baffled' (II. iv). Manfred feels himself to be above men and spirits alike, bearing in his life 'what others could not brook to dream' (II. i). He was not a ruler of men since he could not 'tame' his nature to their service; the crowd are 'mean', he a 'lion' among 'wolves' (III. i). An inward and Timon-like profundity is shown scorning either the lower group-consciousness or any persons seen in objective unreality. There recurs the characteristic reservation: he has not been 'cruel' (III. i). Whatever wild arrogance or intolerable sin torments the Byronic hero, there is, at the personality's core, a love, a softness.

Manfred is agonized by 'some half-maddening sin' (II. i) like Conrade and Lara. Its 'uneradicable taint'—the phrase comes from *Childe Harold* (IV. 126)—possesses him. He knows a 'deep despair' which is 'remorse without the fear of hell' (III. i): the same old mysterious guilt. In *Manfred* it is given final form: and the mystery is deliberately embodied in that crushing appearance of the 'beautiful female figure', the one shape that utterly subdues him.

She is resurrected from the dead, at once a 'madness' and a 'mockery'. In her is yet hope of peace:

> I will clasp thee
> And we again will be—— (I. i)

But the figure vanishes. Later we have her resurrection as Astarte by Nemesis:

> Can this be death? there's bloom upon her cheek;
> But now I see it is no living hue,
> But a strange hectic—like the unnatural red
> Which Autumn plants upon the perish'd leaf.
> It is the same! Oh, God! that I should dread
> To look upon the same—Astarte!—No,
> I cannot speak to her—but bid her speak—
> Forgive me or condemn me. (II. iv)

He would hear again 'the voice which was my music' (II. iv), yet recalls some deadly sin between them. He sees blood,

> the pure warm stream
> Which ran in the veins of my fathers, and in ours
> When we were in our youth, and had one heart,
> And loved each other as we should not love,
> And this was shed. (II. i)

Yet she has been his guiding memory; he has searched for her in nature and man and not found her likeness. What is this memory of the years?—this

> . . . sole companion of his wanderings
> And watchings—her, whom of all earthly things
> That lived, the only thing he seem'd to love,—
> As he, indeed, by blood was bound to do,
> The lady Astarte, his—— (III. iii)

'Bound to' love her. Yet himself he called it 'deadliest sin' (II. iv). She is not dissimilar from the maternal figure of Moneta, in Keats: before her he is not all a lover, but at least half a child. Elsewhere she seems a sister; he disclaims fathers and mothers in comparison. She is his own *double*, in looks and soul, but with 'gentler powers', and

becomes a symbol not of passion so much as of 'pity and smiles and tears', raising his own 'tenderness' (II. ii). She corresponds to Isabel in Melville's *Pierre*. The specifically family emotion of identity—whether mother or sister be involved—is both contrasted and entwined with the specifically sexual passion of opposites. The desired union of the root principles has taken place on the sexual side of the balance. There is a corresponding guilt, with condemnation flashing from both sides. For these will to fling apart and the violent union offends both in excess. Astarte embodies both a dual accusation and final synthesis, being deity at once of (i) fruitfulness, and (ii) licence. She is both the great principle of cruel and tender purity that tortures man's sexual instincts, spurning them till they writhe under its heel; and the very aim and consummation of those instincts. The two Aphrodites, *Agapé* and *Eros*, the maternal-sisterly and sexual impulses, are in her swiftly unified, only to make of some uncanny heaven a too realistic hell. So, though a guilty love, like Eloisa's, it is no cruelty nor love of cruelty, but rather some passionate union with that first principle of softness and peace that sleeps at creation's centre. Remember how 'his mother's softness' crept even into Conrade's eyes, at sight of his loved one's death. Manfred boasts he has never quelled an enemy save in 'just defence': but his 'embrace was fatal' (II. i). Lust and sweetest tenderness are, in Byron, changing facets of one reality: that reality is Astarte. She embodies the lascivious-divine complex I have argued to be the disrupting force as well as the primary cause of Milton's poetry. His error was to read it as a static two-way sign-post statement, to submit to the pointing accusation; instead of willing its transmutation into a single one-way dynamic symbol of movement from this to that; as a direction. The very creation here of Astarte is such a single recognition and transmutation.

The nature poetry of *Manfred* is both closely referred to the inward conflict and sublime in its own right; whether in the mountains and plunging cataracts, the

moon rising on snows never trod by 'human foot' (II. iii), the stars as a 'language of another world' (III. iv), or the sun, magnificently invoked, as the idol of 'undiseased mankind' (III. ii). See how substantial each inhuman splendour remains through some human reference: there is a warmth, a close realism, even here that Shelley's *Prometheus* neither attains nor expects—seen also in the realized persons, the Chamois Hunter and the Abbot. Moreover, even here Byron's close imaginative dependence on the past—the play opens in an old 'Gothic chamber'—his feeling for its living and speaking presence, is given expression in Manfred's meditation from his tower (III. iv) on the ruins of Rome seen first on just such a moonlit night as this when he speaks. He recalls a grove that 'twines its roots' among 'imperial hearths', with the moon's 'tender light' softening all and filling up 'the gaps of centuries',

> Leaving that beautiful which still was so,
> And making that which was not, till the place
> *Became religion*, and the heart ran o'er
> With silent worship of the great of old—
> The dead but sceptred sovereigns, *who still rule*
> *Our spirits from their urns.*

The italics are mine: the phrases go deep into the acceptances and revolts alike of Byron's work.

So among mountains and cataracts, beneath the stars of night or facing the 'glorious orb' of the sun, Manfred's tortured existence, that has inhabited arid deserts too long like 'the red-hot breath of the most lone simoom' (III. i), reaches its end. Having long rejected material ambition, not caring to be 'mighty' among the 'mean', willingly 'averse from life', refusing to be 'a living lie' (III. i) in the world of men, the world of Pope's satires, he challenges death and all spiritual powers that may meet him on the way. The Abbot plays the part of the Old Man in *Faustus*, of Nelly in *Wuthering Heights*. Manfred in quiet confidence puts him and his religion on one side, yet with the typical Byronic reverence: 'I do respect thine order' (III. i). There is intense significance

in Manfred's refusal to abnegate his human sovereignty at the close. He will neither 'falter, nor repent', to borrow a phrase from Shelley's *Prometheus*. That 'lightning' of his personal being, that 'darts far as any force of nature' (I. i), recognizes no final authority in any religion of man. No hell can equal that already in his mind, no accusation pierce keener than his own. He fears no damnation—'Must crimes be punish'd but by other crimes and greater criminals?' (III. iv)—but rather plants his direction in a more single faith. The last spirit of guilt is passed:

> Back, ye baffled fiends!
> The hand of death is on me—but not yours. (III. iv)

It is a proud and subjective trust, an assertion of some utterly instinctive and innate royalty. *Manfred* is a tight compression of essences primary in writer after writer from Marlowe and Shakespeare onwards. It dramatizes a struggle to preserve intact the faith of Pope against the faith of Milton. The preliminary guilt is terrific:

> a tyrant-spell
> Which had its birth-place in a star condemn'd,
> The burning wreck of a demolish'd world,
> A wandering hell in the eternal space . . . . (I. i)

Such is the 'strong curse' binding his 'soul' (I. i). Byron's great importance rises from his battling honesty, the powerful sexual thrust of his imagination, conjoined to keenest intellectual awareness of all the issues involved.

This recurring theme of guilt points naturally to the Biblical legend of Cain, whose 'curse and crime' was one with Byron's conception of his tragic hero as early as *The Giaour*, and indeed mentioned also in *The Bride of Abydos* and *Manfred*. There is from the start much of Milton in Byron; more than there is in Pope and Shakespeare. His respect for orthodoxy is ingrained and he naturally relies on the traditional mythology of the Church, whose teaching he will, however, through a subtle dramatic suggestion, nevertheless repudiate.

In *Cain* God's apparently—according to the Old Testa-

ment—somewhat arbitrary law is balanced against a very reasonable Lucifer, one who

> dare look the Omnipotent tyrant in
> His everlasting face, and tell him that
> His evil is not good! (I. i)

We must, of course, translate the dramatic figures into *conceptions*: the Old Testament conception of God-as-Law is therefore being attacked, no more. Lucifer makes out a good case. The tree of knowledge was what it claimed to be, God's arbitrary rule alone turning its enjoyment to sin. Lucifer claims never to have tempted man, yet he would have made them 'gods' (I. i). The reading of the Fall as an evolutionary ascent is by now—though of course not in Byron's day—respectable Biblical interpretation: but, if developed into a living ethic, the intended direction might still seem appallingly dangerous. Byron is grafting the energies of Renaissance poetry on to Europe's traditional religious orthodoxy; is relating Pope's *Essay on Man* to Biblical mythology; and simultaneously throwing a shaft of light on to the Miltonic—and our own—confusions by using Milton's own devil as an admittedly—instead of insidiously—sympathetic figure. For Lucifer here, like Goethe's Mephistopheles, supports, if he does not instigate, man's quest of knowledge and life, regarding despair as a 'grovelling wish' worse than sin (I. i). What is sin? Is it arbitrarily decided from without, or has it an absolute, inherent quality? The discussion acutely concerns both sin, and death.

And the poem next opens out to infinity (II. i) as Lucifer takes Cain on a tour of inspection. The conception is daring but successful; aiming to exploit to the full that mysterious 'eternity' so insistent in Byron's tragic approach from the start through the medium of that eternity-symbol met in *Childe Harold*, as also in Shakespeare's *Timon*, the sea. Impressions of depth replace the heights of *Manfred*.

Lucifer symbolizes the poet's ranging *imagination*, Pope's 'priestless muse', guiding Cain through immensities

without demanding any 'conditional creed'. They pass through a 'beautiful and unimaginable ether' with 'multiplying masses' of 'still increasing lights' in the 'blue wilderness' that sweep in 'unbounded revelry' through an 'aerial universe of endless expansion'. Cain is 'intoxicated with eternity', yet when the earth looks a tiny spark only, Byron characteristically remembers insect-life:

> The little shining fire-fly in its flight,
> And the immortal star in its great course,
> Must both be guided . . . .

Which strikes me as a poetic thought of far higher importance than many passages of an apparently more richly substantial poetic phraseology. So they 'cleave the blue' —earlier the voyage was compared to one over the sea— and now the 'limpid streams', 'enormous liquid plains' and 'floating moons' and other glories begin to darken, and beyond space Cain is introduced to realms of death and phantoms, to the 'phantasm of the world' of which our world is a 'wreck' only. It is fearfully dark, with only 'huge dusky masses'. Continually the journey is thought of in terms of a typically Byronic conquest of dark fears. This past infinity is moreover an extension of his habitual fascination with the historic. Time and space are both as vast seas. They are now (II. ii) among 'swimming shadows' and 'floating' phantoms, once great and noble beings on a greater and nobler earth; 'mighty pre-Adamites'. There is an 'immeasurable liquid space of glorious azure' that 'looks like water' and turns out to be 'the phantasm of an ocean'. Various colourings present light and twilight, darkness, glimmering depths, and 'empurpled' (II. i) shadows. Lucifer will not, or cannot, disclose to what extent these realms of death are evil. Every stress is on 'infinity', 'immensity', and such like. Cain is told he cannot wholly die, and that after death these glooms will seem qualitatively different. The exposition is really concerned to depict what Berdyaev in *The Destiny of Man* finely calls 'bad infinity'; that is, the eternal felt as dark. It nakedly objectifies those half-guilty eternities so fearful in Byron's earliest heroes.

The thinking plays round all the ultimate problems. The serpent-image, so frequent in Byron and correspondent to his strong feeling for sexual guilt, runs persistently throughout, and once attains gigantic proportion in the 'immense serpent' which 'rears his dripping mane' from out the 'abyss'. The sexual act is cynically referred to (by Lucifer) as 'a sweet degradation', an 'enervating' and 'filthy cheat' to lure man to procreation (II. i). There is no facile emphasis on Biblical absurdity and simple solutions: rather the tangle gets more and more complex, as though the imagination may be stimulated but can never be satisfied by these dizzying mental excursions and deathly infinitudes: the one is cleverly shown as leading to the other.

The relation of these scenes to Cain's later crime obeys the same law as *Macbeth*'s presenting of what I have called 'naked spirit' in close relation to human murder. But here, of course, both the 'bad infinity' of wondrous lights and blue depths and the crime that follows are far less evil. For Cain's is a soft, kindly nature caught out by a ruthless providence. His fall is referred to a laudable hatred of animal-sacrifice. Abel's sacrifice is accepted, his of fruits rejected. The sympathy is striking:

> His pleasure! What was his high pleasure in
> The fumes of scorching flesh and smoking blood,
> To the pain of the bleating mothers, which
> Still yearn for their dead offspring? Or the pangs
> Of the sad ignorant victims underneath
> Thy pious knife? Give way! This bloody record
> Shall not stand in the sun to shame creation! (III. i)

Earlier (II. ii), explicitly at grips with the deepest problems of evil, Byron concentrates his challenge in terms of the suffering of animals: 'Did they too eat of it that they must die?' Again:

> I lately saw
> A lamb stung by a reptile: the poor suckling
> Lay foaming on the earth, beneath the vain
> And piteous bleating of its restless dam .... (II. ii)

It is given medicinal herbs and the mother all 'tremulous'

licks its 'reviving limbs'. Yet why should it so have to purchase its 'little life' with 'agonies unutterable'? Similarly with men: what, asks Cain, has man done to be considered guilty even before a crime? What need of any future 'atonement' (III. i)? He refuses all 'base humility' and hypocritical gratitude. His poetic vision, the

> Suns, moons, and earths, upon their loud-voiced spheres,
> Singing in thunder round me (III. i)

have made him 'unfit for mortal converse'. Yet his sister-wife Adah—again the sister-emphasis first met in *The Bride of Abydos*—remains (as so often with Byron's and Shakespeare's women) outside the hero's conflict; a figure of sweet simplicity and unquestioning virtue. She alone stands by Cain at the close. Their child is poignantly used, too, to point a contrast of natural innocence with destiny's or God's unreasoning cruelty; to negate, we may suggest, those promptings of original sin that Byron has found so appallingly powerful within himself. Cain, like Manfred, will not submit. 'That which I am, I am.' But he would willingly die to revoke his deed (III. i), if only that were permitted.

Heaven and Earth dramatizes, somewhat lyrically, the sinful union of angels with men recorded in Genesis; and can be supposed to symbolize from a very different view that complex of lust and divine intuition so deeply rooted in Milton. Aholibamah asserts the equality of her own to an angel's love; her possession of a 'ray' at present 'forbidden' to shine yet originating from God; and her fearless welcome of her angelic lover even though his love coil round her 'like the serpent' (I. i). You could have no clearer statement of our old complex from the wholly positive aspect. Japhet, a typical Byronic spokesman, has also a more positive vision than Cain of a future paradise on earth, accepting the Christian terms of a 'Redeemer' coming first in pain and next in glory, and opposing this to the scoffing 'spirits' from 'the cavern' (I. iii). He wills to believe in a final 'celestial mercy' (I. iii) in spite of the shortly expected Flood. He cannot believe 'rage' to exist with 'justice' (I. iii). But the 'implacable

omnipotent' (I. iii) is found unalterable. The two girls are taken off by their angels to a happier life; a distraught mother with her child is brought in to point Jehovah's cruelty; but another voice preserves a typical Byronic balance by accepting God's ways with unquestioning submission. The poem has a more assured and positive direction in parts than *Manfred* or *Cain*, while approaching a resolution of their conflicts. It contains some of Byron's finest nature-poetry on his trinity of favourites: sun, mountains, and sea. The circling rhyme-schemes and line-variation seem to mark an attempt at expression of an especially lyrical harmony, though the form is, finally, tragic.

On these three visionary dramas pivots a central transmutation which must be closely referred to the teaching of both Pope and Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*. And now for Byron's greatest work.

IV

The more spiritual and cosmic energies in *Manfred* and *Cain*—not incomparable with those of *Lear* and *Macbeth*—are in *Marino Faliero* and *Sardanapalus* closely housed in a realistic plot, lonely experience brought back to a human service: behind or within their at first sight quiet manner burn both cosmic vision and intense thought. These may respectively be compared with *Coriolanus* and *Antony and Cleopatra*; though Byron's order of composition *within* the series bounded by *Manfred* and *Sardanapalus* seems uncertain.

The royalist ideal central to the Shakespearian scheme we have watched losing prestige in Milton, Swift, and Pope. Yet its essence persists for various reasons basic. Aristocratic scorn of the mob in a Shakespearian or Byronic hero reflects not so much snobbishness as the assertion of individual personality against a group-consciousness. Closely akin is the problem of soldierly honour. We have seen Byron both glorify and deplore military splendours. The thought of his day tends to push the revolutionary instinct of Pope's epistles against both church and throne farther: sometimes too far, making of revolution itself a positive. Byron now

aims to preserve intact the royalistic spirit whilst rejecting its formal degradations. In pressing for a new *personal sanctity* he logically conceives a new *sovereignty*, dramatizing stories of (i) a revolutionary duke, and (ii) a pacifist king. His deep interest in the story of Marino Faliero, recorded in his long preface and additional notes (where we can profitably watch a dramatist of Shakespearian calibre revealing the historical interest behind his work), is understandable. For it strikingly symbolizes some of the most complex issues of post-Renaissance Europe: of which Byron, the revolutionary aristocrat, is himself a symbol.

This, in outline, is the story. Marino Faliero, Doge of Venice, has served his people as a great general before advancement to the ducal office; and is now, in age, married to Angiolina, a young and high-minded wife. Steno, a youthful member of the decadent but all-powerful and oppressive nobility, writes an insult to Angiolina on the Doge's chair; and is given by his peers a purely nominal sentence. The Doge, who is both fiery in temper and deeply public-spirited, plots with his people to overthrow the nobility. The plot fails.

First, I offer a short description of Marino Faliero himself. His heroic service is emphasized, and also his original unwillingness to undertake supreme authority. But, having it, he has a deep sense of its dignity and honour. Though nearly eighty years old, his passions are still youthful, and his eye 'quick' and impatient (I. i). Hearing of Steno's sentence his proud and curbless temperament reveals itself in speeches of fiery and rising impetuosity. He would have the Saracens, Genoese, or Huns victoriously overrunning Venice, his passion instinctively falling to treasonable thoughts. Then, alone, he meditates on the ducal cap, seeing it as a gilded 'toy' with the 'thorns' but not the 'majesty' of a crown:

> How my brain aches beneath thee! And my temples
> Throb feverish under thy dishonest weight. (I. ii)

The Shakespearian depth is obvious; but complexities of a later day are now involved in both the associations of 'thorns'

and the implications of a constitutional and limited monarchy. An essential falsity and insincerity is given by 'dishonest'. In a noble speech later (III. ii) he expands on the mockery of his position as both man and ruler:

> Begirt with spies for guards, with robes for power,
> With pomp for freedom, gaolers for a council,
> Inquisitors for friends, and hell for life!

He longs both to 'free Venice' and 'avenge' his own 'wrongs' (I. ii). This subtle continuity of personal and general emotions remains evident throughout the interview with Bertuccio (I. ii) which leads to his association with the conspiracy: if his people could share his 'sovereignty' and both together master the 'aristocratic Hydra', he would at last rule indeed. His agreement is most skilfully motivated; Bertuccio—formerly a soldier—immediately channelling all his sense of comradeship; and recollection of his son's death in battle being swiftly turned to thoughts of his people's 'filial' love. Them, not the senate, he served as a soldier. Left alone, he feels 'unworthy' of his ancestors; yet in terms of that unworthiness must have 'revenge' on baseness and create true freedom. These paradoxes are emphasized.

We heard from Angiolina (II. i) that his passions go deep, everything wearing in him 'an aspect of eternity'. He is thus a true successor to other heroes. His faults are those naturally allied with his military past: his fiery and patrician passions, and a sense of honour so keen it approaches a 'vice'. The analysis might suit Coriolanus in Shakespeare. 'Pride' is a fault in both. She urges her husband in vain to give Steno's fault the neglect its triviality merits; to dwell less on honour, and more on Heaven's charge of forgiveness. But when his passion does cool its place is taken by a deadly and a hated duty. Especially the betrayal of all honourable tradition appals him. His integrity refuses to call it anything but 'treason' (III. i). Success will win the gratitude of prosperity, but failure leave only a record of baseness: a stern realism seeming to allow the quality of an action to depend on its result. The nobles' villainy itself forces the

'means' (III. i). Yet again, asked whether all the nobles should fall, he answers

> Ask me not—tempt me not with such a question—
> Decide yourselves . . . . (III. ii)

His decision, tilted by remembrance of personal ingratitude, is for general massacre; though afterwards recollections of past social and military companionships crowd back to make each 'stab'-to-be seem a 'suicide' (III. ii). But the strange magnanimity of a prince who risks all in plotting for his people is set in contrast to the conventionally honourable 'tyrant' impervious to remorse though he depopulate 'empires' rather than punish a few 'traitors' (III. ii). And yet, just as we are again convinced, mention of Steno elicits two lines which recall with unerring insight the seething personal resentment:

> Man, thou hast struck upon the chord which jars
> All nature from my heart. Hence to our task! (III. ii)

The balance of impure motive against revolutionary idealism is maintained.

As action draws near the Doge becomes calm:

> It was ever thus
> With me; the hour of agitation came
> In the first glimmerings of a purpose, when
> Passion had too much room to sway; but in
> The hour of action I have stood as calm
> As were the dead who lay around me. (IV. ii)

Which is one of many deep human penetrations that need not be limited to the person concerned. He determines to resign after the plot's consummation, and meditates again on the wrongs and justice of his course. When his expectations are reversed he bears sudden failure with stoic calm. At the trial he recapitulates his unwillingness to take office, and resentment at the nobles' insult, but remains proud and aloof:

> I deny nothing, defend nothing, nothing
> I ask of you, but silence for myself,
> And sentence from the court. (V. i.)

Alone with Angiolina (v. ii) he tells how the priest he once struck prophesied that in maturity a 'madness' would seize him at an age when 'passions' should properly 'mellow' into 'virtues', Byron's respect for religion and uneasy relations with priests both finding a home in this story too. He sees his life as a 'maze' and his pride takes pleasure in yielding only to an over-ruling 'power' greater than men's understanding. At his final speech (v. iii), standing 'within eternity', he bitterly denounces Venetian vices and prophesies a shameful future; and dies with a gesture more toweringly proud than Coriolanus.

The human delineation is Shakespearian, especially in its feeling for destiny interwoven with close ethical penetration into the springs of action, and the combining of personal traits with general issues. The Doge could not exist in any other play; he and the action inform each other; the comments of others help, technically, to realize his personality. The texture of the whole is tight, yet we also get an insight into the man comparable to that we have, not of our friends, but of ourselves. He is complete and individual, an honourable past and some faint feeling for an undefined future lingering about the tragic conception.

Our quotations have already hinted at the verbal power. The language is reserved with no especial striving after any overlay of metaphor and image, every accent rising from the tense thought or smouldering passion concerned, every speech from the speaker's nature and situation's demands. The utterance is transparent, yet weighty: the weight now owing little or nothing to any poetic tradition. Yet Byron's Augustan apprenticeship has served to winnow away all trivialities, leaving him instinctively free for an unfettered, yet well-sorted, diction, that carries quiet profundities with Shakespearian ease, as in

> . . . as yet 'tis but a chaos
> Of darkly brooding thoughts: my fancy is
> In her first work, more nearly to the light
> Holding the sleeping images of things
> For the selection of the pausing judgment. (I. ii)

Continually comment strikes home into human psychology, into the human soul itself, as when the Doge remarks how, once bloodshed starts, 'the mere instinct of the first-born Cain' (IV. ii) will render brutal those to whom such acts were recently abhorrent. When a speech catches fire the passion curves up like a wave, fierce as a crested snake:

> Yet for all this, so full of certain passions,
> That if once stirr'd and baffled, as he has been
> Upon the tenderest points, *there is no Fury*
> *In Grecian story like to that which wrings*
> *His vitals with her burning hands*, till he
> Grows capable of all things for revenge. (II. ii)

The passion plays against the line-units, starting with a pointed intensity, relaxing to a swift parenthetic realism ('as he has been . . .'), then towering steadily to the moment of striking ('his vitals . . . hands'), and next withdrawn, relapsing as an ocean breaker, at the close. It suggests and demands the pulsing vocal variation which is the very life-blood of stage utterance. Such variation works continually to define passionate depth against colloquial changes, and is here, as in Shakespeare, carried into manipulation of scene-movement too. The Doge's early dialogue (II. i) with Angiolina has a wavelike undulation, with, after extreme rhetorical fury, such a powerfully dramatic pause as

> What matters my forgiveness? an old man's
> Worn out, scorn'd, spurned, abused . . . .

You almost hear the quiet voice and deeper note. Shortly the passion again rises (at 'this blight, this brand, this blasphemy'), though not so high as at first. He is what he says, an old man, tired. 'Come hither, child . . .' marks a new movement. Such changes are continually making psychic disclosures; and both suspense and discovery are age-old dramatic tricks, the one preparing for, and the other reflecting, that depth-seeing and revelation of new psychic dimensions, dark underground rivers or cloudy heights, that is the business of drama. Here both surprise

and discovery are frequent. We wait anxiously for the court's first judgement. The Doge's interview with Bertuccio is a clever partnership in dual unmasking; his sudden appearance later among the conspirators a powerfully staged surprise; and the development of his mental conflict a gradual and ever more deep disclosure of tangles and emotions as you feel him tearing out his own existence at its roots. A key-incident is Bertram's discovery of the plot to Luigi. The whole action is by way of being one half-paralysed struggle to overthrow an invincible, though rotting, order; and one long suspense waiting for the pealing of the great bell in Act IV. At the last, the Doge works through a long and steadily rising invective to die on as sudden—even in that context—and shattering a stage climax as you will find in our literature. The mind is thus continually both awakened by surprise and distended by suspense to receive the deepest human, or other, revelations; and the play's weighted thoughts and emotions take on profound subjective importance. We are united to the action on a deeper plane than one of interest or entertainment.

Though the style is mainly direct and unmetaphoric and the whole most carefully constructed, yet the lucidity and care are both thoroughly organic. The reserved nature-imagery is subtle and important. As so often in Byron, human actions are felt shading into comparisons from animal life, and we have a normal assortment: scorpion, silk-worms, viper, tiger, raven, wolves, eagle, geese, adder, worm, dog, lion, and a lamb 'bleating' before a butcher (v. i). The list speaks for itself, toning into the fierce and poisonous passions and thoughts that are involved. But more important are those directly relating human society to organic nature. My next quotations all occur in III. ii, the scene of the conspirators' meeting. The final massacre is to

> unpeople many palaces
> And hew the highest genealogic trees
> Down to the earth, strew'd with their bleeding fruit,
> And crush their blossoms into barrenness.

The metaphor shows the aristocracy as having grown from the soil of its own past: the play sharing continually the typical Byronic sense of tradition, of a present deeply rooted in history. But the nobility are also felt as a single insidious, living, body: to aim primarily at Steno being to 'lop the hand' rather than its 'head'. To show mercy to any individual is to give

> such pity
> As when the viper hath been cut to pieces,
> The separate fragments quivering in the sun,
> In the last energy of venomous life,
> Deserve and have.

The extraordinary virulence and impact derives from a strong feeling for biological energy, such being, paradoxically, most intensely realized when both (i) dangerous, and (ii) suffering destruction, as with the scorpion in *The Giaour*. Elaborate 'organic' metaphors cluster: we hear that all must die since it is the 'spirit' of the aristocracy that needs to be 'rooted' out, whereas one 'single shoot' of the 'old tree' would only 'fasten in the soil' and give rise to more 'gloomy verdure' and 'bitter fruit', the last phrases neatly characterizing the play's view of a forbidding, threatening, social combine. The whole passage both recalls and reverses the logic of a similar speech and context from *Julius Caesar*; and might be used as evidence —if any were needed—to rebut any charge of plagiarism in these Shakespearian comparisons. Indeed, the play can quite safely hold its own with such a work as *Coriolanus* (which is similarly rich in 'organic' metaphors), at least with reference to political and social analysis: in which, indeed, it strikes more cleanly to the heart of our contemporary situation than any Shakespearian plot. How modern rings the Doge's asseveration that the 'present institutes of Venice' nourish a 'fatal poison to the springs of life', to all 'human ties', and, finally, 'good order' itself. Though the proposed deed may be only hideously fertilizing in Bertram's horrified thought of 'blood which *spouts* through hoary scalps', another view may see the

dead 'gather'd' in to 'harvest' and reaped with a 'sword' for 'sickle'. So all the nobles must die since

> all their acts are *one*—
> A single emanation from one body,
> Together knit for our oppression.

As in *Julius Caesar* the act is viewed as a divinely appointed 'sacrifice'. Moreover, the willed harmony-to-be is, very subtly indeed, conceived not precisely as a living organism but, being still a dream in the mind only, as a work of art, a temple. Opposed to the decadent and decaying living death of the present order imagined as a 'monster of a state' and 'spectre' to be exorcised with 'blood' is set the artistic vitality of a 'fair free commonwealth', a considered art-form with no 'rash equality' yet with 'equal rights',

> Proportion'd like the columns to the temple
> Giving and taking strength reciprocal,

where no part may be removed without infringing the general 'symmetry'. The old order was not truly an organism, but a ghost only; and the new remains a planned symmetry with ever so faint a suggestion of the artificial. A deep reading of the whole play leaves any truly *willed* social development problematical.

The balance of sympathies is markedly just. You are continually caught by an unexpected reverse of what you thought the play's 'thesis': whereas the thinking is moving all the time on a deeper level. So, though the action depends on our recognition that the nobility are a poor lot; though they are imagined as 'a few bloated despots' (IV. ii), and the Doge honestly thinks he is helping to free the 'groaning nations' from an ever-tightening grip (v. i), yet they are shown at the trial as perfectly just, though austere and cold. To them the Doge's treason is, quite naturally, a thing of unrecorded villainy (again emphasizing its relation, or lack of relation, to the past) comparable with 'earthquakes' and 'pestilence' (v. i). Their imputation of 'wild wrath and regal fierceness' strikes home. Moreover, they deliberately pride themselves on

remembering what they consider the Doge himself has forgotten, his own 'dignity', and in the very order of his punishment acknowledge 'their prince', so that he dies in state. The terms are, however, not really kind: since the cruelly apt reference to 'dignity' must be intolerable to so fiery-proud a temperament; and the Doge, himself sincere to danger-point, has for long been bitterly sickened by that hypocrisy of respect of which this formal mockery is but the last towering example. Indeed, we can strike something of a correct balance by regarding the Doge's final speech, which it will do us no harm to consider as levelled at ourselves. From the start the nobles' insult was subtly intangible and perhaps defensible in view of Steno's emphasized youth. Their virtues are all those of respectability, convention, and the outward shows of rectitude: correspondingly, their vices are anaemic and frigid. So the Doge, at the point of death, levels his last scalding and prophetic denunciation of future shame to Venice in the strikingly Lawrentian terms of

> Vice without splendour, sin without relief
> Even from the gloss of love to smooth it o'er,
> But in its stead, coarse lusts of habitude,
> Prurient yet passionless, cold studied lewdness
> Depraving nature's frailty to an art . . . .

Their 'smiles' shall lack 'mirth', their 'pastimes' bring no pleasure; and so on, up to the shattering climax. But, meanwhile, we have lived through precisely the mental territory of Pope's satires; just as Steno is a variation on Sporus.

The gloomy passions and shadowed thought throughout produce a dark impressionism. The word 'black' is peculiarly insistent. Steno's deed is a public 'blackening' of the Doge's wife (II. i); the nobles are men of 'black blood', their faults causing the 'black deeds' (III. i) of the rebels whose action, if a failure, will be written 'black' in the calumnies of time (I. ii), the dark day itself being henceforth one 'black' in the calendar, to be, perhaps,

succeeded by days of brightness (IV. ii). Here is a typical phrase:

> When you lie down to rest
> Let it be black among your dreams . . .

with a following suggestion of 'ill-omen'd cloud' obscuring the 'sun' (I. ii). The play works up to a 'funeral marriage' and 'black union' (V. ii). Throughout we have 'darkly brooding thoughts' (I. ii), and hear of senators

> In dark suspicious conflict with the Doge,
> Brooding with him in mutual hate and fear. (III. ii)

'Stifled treason' lurks in 'narrow places' and whispers 'muffled' curses to the night (IV. i). The nobles' vices are 'gloomy' (III. ii). 'Freedom' is a sun (IV. ii) and so is virtue (II. i), but the play emphasizes far more the presence of 'souls obscured' (IV. ii). The weather is gloomy, not violently tempestuous, since that would not suit its shadowed gravity, but rather sultry and ominous:

> *Doge.* At what hour arises
> The moon?
> *Bertuccio.* Late, but the atmosphere is thick and dusky,
> 'Tis a sirocco. (I. ii)

Later Lioni remarks that 'the cloudy wind' blowing from the Levant has subsided to leave the moon unobscured (IV. i). The play is, indeed, mostly in half-light. The Doge is at the 'twilight' of his life (I. ii). Angiolina imagines Steno 'grovelling by stealth in the moon's glimmering light', and struck by conscience at 'every shadow' (II. i), to perpetrate his ugly deed. The Doge's fortunes are early seen

> Now darkling in their close toward the deep vale
> Where Death sits robed in his all-sweeping shadows.
> (II. i)

He naturally dwells on death. Quite early he hints of an impending doom to make the 'cemeteries populous' (II. i); and later feels the 'destroying angel' above Venice (IV. ii), finely imagined as a swooping bird. When he and his

companions are in their 'graves' (III. i) will future generations, he wonders, revere those 'tombs'? Death and moonlight pervade the atmosphere. The moon dominates, not for romantic glamour, but rather for its steely pallor suiting the hard ethical precisions, cold vices, and chaste virtues of the somewhat grave conception. The persons are all touched by the ghostly finger of it, and walk near death.

This more imaginative atmosphere is concentrated and focused into certain crystallizing scenes, somewhat as Enobarbus's description of Cleopatra distills the essential quality of the various tonings in *Antony and Cleopatra*. The first (III. i) discovers the Doge alone by the Church of San Giovanni and San Paolo before which stands an equestrian statue. It is a moonlit night.

His sense of guilt imagines the midnight bell pealing across the 'arch of night' to wake all sleepers from hideous dreams of the fate overhanging them. Then in weighted accents he addresses the church, home of his dead ancestry, the building

> whose dim statues shadow
> The floor which doth divide us from the dead,
> Where all the pregnant hearts of our bold blood,
> Moulder'd into a mite of ashes, hold
> In one shrunk heap what once made many heroes,
> When what is now a handful shook the earth—
> Fane of the tutelar saints who guard our house!

He addresses the past which lives still in him. Two doges, his 'sires', rest there. He stands before them, sinks himself beyond the transient moment to ask grace or condemnation of the eternal. He would have the dead rise to people the dim aisles, lending their 'high blood' and 'blazon roll of glories' as witnesses to his integrity, even though in him their 'mighty name' lies 'dishonour'd'. Such intuition of the living dead, of the past within the present, you find nowhere outside Byron; nor so noble a feeling for the ancestral honours of the race. And both are one with the sacred building where those dead rest. The Church is a symbol of eternity. So the Doge would

draw strength and justification from the dead, share with them his scarcely endurable responsibility. 'Spirits! smile down upon me,' he prays. His cause is theirs, their fame mingles into his, and if he prospers he will make their city for ever 'free and immortal'. The noble religious and ancestral conception is so inevitable in its context that we may too easily pass over its other interest in relation to that historic eternity and respect for religion so important throughout Byron's work. But here his deepest feelings are, as in Shakespeare, unobtrusive, within, not crowning, the action. The Doge's soliloquy, that has already made of the Church an actor in our play, leads on to an even greater dramatic intensity after Bertuccio's entrance:

Bertuccio. 'Tis not the moment to consider thus,
Else I could answer. Let us to the meeting,
Or we may be observed in lingering here.
Doge. We are observed, and have been.
Bertuccio. We observed!
Let me discover—and this steel——
Doge. Put up;
Here are no human witnesses: look there—
What see you?
Bertuccio. Only a tall warrior's statue
Bestriding a proud steed, in the dim light
Of the dull moon.
Doge. That warrior was the sire
Of my sire's fathers, and that statue was
Decreed to him by the twice rescued city:
Think you that he looks down on us or no?
Bertuccio. My lord, these are mere phantasies; there are
No eyes in marble.
Doge. But there are in Death.
I tell thee, man, there is a spirit in
Such things that acts and sees, unseen, though felt;
And, if there be a spell to stir the dead,
'Tis in such deeds as we are now upon.
Deem'st thou the souls of such a race as mine
Can rest, when he, their last descendant chief,
Stands plotting on the brink of their pure graves
With stung plebeians?

I do not remember a more powerful instance of a stage-object used to share in, focus, and universalize the action. This is, precisely, the play's heart. Notice that a statue, as so often in poetry, symbolizes eternity.

Such an opening towards the infinite applies, as in *Sardanapalus* too, to *both* sides of the dramatic conflict. The cosmic symbolism of moonlight thus helps to bind the plot and realize a super-personal dimension. Our second example (IV. i) involves mainly spatial, as our first temporal, infinities. Lioni returns suddenly from a dance full of a foreboding that has chilled love-flirtations with deathly fears, turning the music to a 'knell'. Opening his window he watches the night's expansive 'stillness' under a 'broad moon'. An interesting repudiation of the erotic—the pleasure was explicitly one of 'love' in its way—follows; of age trying to appear young by artificial light and youth wasting its energies on misconceived attempts at pleasure. Feminine attractions and the whole 'dizzy' delusion of 'false and true enchantments', of 'art and nature' mixed, are both recalled and probed. Contrasted are the moon, stars, and waters, and buildings ghostly-sweet as vast 'altars' or ancient pyramids. Next he dreams of some true-love serenade in the moonlight, the phosphorescent plash of an oar, the twinkle of gondola lights. Both in its repudiations and serenity the speech is important; the moon, symbol of chastity, blends with a romantic integrity, but its steely truth is set right against those social superficialities the play, as a whole, strongly condemns.

Later the Doge waits (IV. ii) for the dawn that is to bring dark conspiracy to an open triumph:

> Will the morn never put to rest
> These stars which twinkle yet o'er all the heavens?

He is impatient for daylight action after our play of half-light indecisions, anxiously sensing a 'morning freshness' and noticing that the sea looks 'greyer', while his keener-eyed nephew thinks he sees the dawn already 'dappling' the sky (IV. ii). The suspense is breathless:

Thou day!
That slowly walk'st the waters!—march—march on—
(IV. ii)

But no dawn can come to Venice: for that we must turn to *Sardanapalus*. The bell indeed strikes; but the night of dishonesty and hatred is not lifted.

The great bell of St. Mark's symbolizes an ultimate authority. Its use by the Doge, who alone can sound it, as the signal for massacre, helps at first to justify his right as sovereign to exert full power. He uses this 'last poor privilege' left him (III. ii) to herald the last blow for justice. It is to strike 'at dawn' (III. ii) and wake the city. The poetry is charged continually with thought of the 'sullen huge oracular bell', which 'knells' only for a 'princely death' or a 'state in peril', pealing 'bodements' (IV. ii). This is to be its 'awfullest and last' office. That office is, indeed, precisely, 'oracular'. The bell with its traditional and royal associations becomes the voice of those eternal dead to whom the Doge prayed; but falls instead as a condemnation, throwing its balance against the Doge. It overhangs the action, oppressive and awful; and may be referred to that other irony of the Doge's guilty but prophetic fancy of a great bell rousing the city from dreams of conspiracy (III. i). The stage effect when at last it does strike should be overpowering.

Angiolina alone expresses an ultimate righteousness. Her original attitude to Steno's fault was one of pity or scorn, almost unconcern. To her, shows and words mean nothing, substantial values are everything. 'What is virtue', she asks, 'if it needs a victim?' (II. i). She is undisturbed by slander. To desire even 'justice' proves you prefer a name to a quality (II. i). No 'base passions' rule her, no image of a younger lover than the Doge ever entered her head. When told that others are less pure-minded she replies:

It may be so. I knew not of such thoughts. (II. i)

She is not even interested. She urges the Doge to Christian

forgiveness, and is, indeed, herself a personification of uncompromising Christian idealism, pointing a solution beyond the mazed troubles and vices of the rest. But when at the Doge's trial (v. i) Steno asks Christian forgiveness, her severe purity shows a doubtfully Christian refusal of any emotional compromise. She recounts her previous utter unconcern while remarking that some (like the Doge) cannot altogether remain unaffected by 'shadows', and are troubled by unreal conflicts; in whom resentment becomes a fault, especially at that sternest test of greatness, an insult to a 'proud name' and 'pinnacle' of honour. An 'insect' may well hurt beings of a higher order. She recounts examples from history of some communal disaster brought on by questions of personal honour; and even such a thing as Steno has now

> put in peril
> A senate which hath stood eight hundred years,
> Discrown'd a prince, cut off his crownless head,
> And forged new fetters for a groaning people.

Her icy integrity easily involves all—Doge, Senate, and Steno—in a level, critical judgement, like the steely fluid of moonlight washing away both shadows and colours, levelling all under the one steady gaze. The white integrity of her attack recalls Pope's in the Horatian Epistles. Images of reptile and venom have elsewhere been applied to Steno, and, in view of the whole action, Angiolina's speech may well serve as a new clarification of Pope's satiric fury. The play's statement narrows down to condemnation of Lucio-like superficiality, sexual parasites such as Sporus, just as that in our thinking which makes them possible—and they are aspects both of their creators and of ourselves—might be named the root evil of our culture. Her words are cold and hard:

> Nothing of good can come from such a source,
> Nor would we aught with him, nor now, nor ever:
> We leave him to himself, that lowest depth
> Of human baseness. Pardon is for men,

> And not for reptiles—we have none for Steno,
> And no resentment: things like him must sting,
> And higher beings suffer; 'tis the charter
> Of life. The man who dies by the adder's fang
> May have the crawler crush'd, but feels no anger:
> 'Twas the worm's nature; and some men are worms
> In soul more than the living things of tombs. (v. i)

The clever pauses and metrical disruptions, the mastery of the colloquial, the reserved dignity and purity of winnowed diction, joined to scorn more scalding because less involved in the object than even Pope's, witness Byron's powers in maturity.

Angiolina's relentless, almost cruel, perfection will not, of course, serve as a final Byronic solution, though his enduing a feminine figure with an idealized distinction is normal enough. The specifically sexual is here definitely under a cloud. The Doge boasts of his utter mastery of such instincts even in youth (II. i); Angiolina leaves even Shakespeare's Isabella behind in chastity; and their marriage arrangements—carefully described—do not appear to have been altogether romantic. Here fiery pride is a lesser fault than sexual licence, and Lioni's repudiation of the dance quite integral to the general conception.

And yet the conspiracy fails through neglect not of firm ethical principles so much as the personal feelings of the 'soft' Bertram. His typically Byronic softness is vividly discussed and sharply distinguished from cowardice (III. 2). That is, destiny exposes the revolution's inorganic weakness through Bertram's inability to crush *personal* gratitude. The Doge himself has to fight against his own nature, crushing memory of former aristocratic comradeships to be destroyed in the approaching massacre. You can feel pressing through the play's structure an implied pattern where the sexual and soft personal emotions might *together* reach some solution. For the chaste fervours of Angiolina are not all attractive and blend with the play's moonlit, dawnless quality, while a fine speech of the Doge's

on virtue, in II. i, has the icy ethical touch of *Comus*. Angiolina's utter scorn of Steno must be contrasted with her earlier unwillingness that his 'young blood' (II. i) be shed. She does not compass the 'Christian' forgiveness Steno pathetically asks, in a speech finely exemplifying Byron's almost Shakespearian generosity of emotional balance. But the other pattern, which Byron exploits in *Sardanapalus*, is to be flooded by the sun; transfers sexual enjoyment to the more positive side of the conflict; and presents not a revolutionary but a pacifist sovereign. Which is the more Christian? The Doge's deep meditations tremble on the brink of the solution:

> Oh world!
> Oh men! What are ye, and our best designs,
> That we must work by crime to punish crime?
> And slay as if Death had but this one gate,
> When a few years would make the sword superfluous?
> (IV. ii)

That is, from the view of eternity man's attempts at all justice are necessarily childish. Yet the very failure has its own eternal sanction:

> That moment would have changed the face of ages;
> This gives us to eternity. (IV. ii)

But again, had the plot succeeded, would not a better Venice have matured? Byron clearly, in his own prose comment, means us to realize that the Doge's prophecy of a shameful future has indeed been fulfilled. Does success or failure define the quality of a deed? Or does the quality determine the deed's ultimate success? But perhaps the plot was, ultimately, successful, in so far as its whole nature, including the judgement of St. Mark's bell, that is, its condemnation, receives a full, though tragic, understanding. Our next play, *Sardanapalus*, directly projects the eternal values into single, positive action. It is accordingly simple where this is complex, and bright where this is dark.

The Byronic conflicts achieve an all but final resolution

in *Sardanapalus*. The hero is a king sternly criticized for lax rule with a corresponding abandon to sensuous delights. His brother-in-law Salamenes is given authority to crush a rebellion which nevertheless through the king's clemency ultimately succeeds. A powerful love-force is present in the person of Myrrha, a Greek slave for whom the king has left his own wife. Sardanapalus, after showing extreme though futile bravery, dies finally with Myrrha on a lighted pyre. As in *Antony and Cleopatra* a certain relaxation of sexual ethic deliberately alines a fiery eroticism with certain positive values against efficiency and war.

Sardanapalus is, however, not rashly idealized. He enters to 'soft music' (I. i),

> . . . effeminately dressed, his head crowned with flowers, and his robe negligently flowing, attended by a train of women and young slaves. (I ii)

Salamenes hates the 'lascivious tinklings' of his attendant music and the 'reeking odours of the perfumed trains' (I. i). He accuses the king of 'sensual sloth' and lack of 'virtue', despising his 'feasts', 'concubines', and 'lavish'd treasures' (I. ii). Elsewhere the king is called an 'effeminate thing', 'silkworm', and '*she* Sardanapalus' (II. i). He himself admits having 'wasted down' his 'royalty' (IV. i). Salamenes' faithfulness has in contrast a manly strength:

> I will not see
> The blood of Nimrod and Semiramis
> Sink in the earth, and thirteen hundred years
> Of empire ending like a shepherd's tale. (I. i)

References to ancestry are even more continual here than in *Marino Faliero*. The rebels would extinguish 'the line of Nimrod' (IV. i). Nimrod and Semiramis are frequently quoted to shame the king. They symbolize respectively the chase and war, which Salamenes equates with (i) health and (ii) glory, while disgusted that his king takes part in neither (I. i). 'A line of thirteen ages' comes to an end with Sardanapalus's fall (III. i).

But the hero makes out a good case. When confronted

by the ancestral example of Semiramis in leading her people as far as the Ganges and returning unvanquished though with only twenty guards, he has a powerful answer:

Sardanapalus. And how many
Left she behind in India to the vultures?
Salamenes. Our annals say not.
Sardanapalus. Then I will say for them—
That she had better woven within her palace
Some twenty garments, than with twenty guards
Have fled to Bactria, leaving to the ravens
And wolves, and men—the fiercer of the three,
Her myriads of fond subjects. Is *this* glory?
Then let me live in ignominy ever. (I. ii)

To him she was only 'a sort of semi-glorious human monster'. He realizes he might quite easily have himself shed blood 'in oceans' till his name became a 'synonym of death', at once 'a terror and a trophy' (I. ii). He has not 'decimated' his people with savage laws, or 'sweated' them to build pyramids, but instead pursued civic ambitions, founding cities:

What could that blood-loving beldame
My martial grandam, chaste Semiramis,
Do more, except destroy them? (I. ii)

His motto 'Eat, drink, and love; the rest's not worth a fillip' (I. ii), though it may at first shock us, sinks deeper as you meditate it; and set against his ironic picture of a trophy raised over fifty thousand dead certainly makes one pause. His aim is that all—not only the privileged—should be happy (I. ii). He has aimed to lessen 'the weight of human misery' not increase it (I. ii). He loathes 'all war and warriors' (I. ii) and prefers the pleasure that 'sparkles' at a feast to all 'Nimrod's huntings' or 'my wild grandam's chase in search of kingdoms' (III. i). His logic is often witty:

Myrrha. Look to the annals of thine empire's founders.
Sardanapalus. They are so blotted o'er with blood, I cannot.
But what would'st have? The empire *has been* founded.
I cannot go on multiplying empires. (I. ii)

Yet he is simultaneously aware of his limitations. Salamenes is 'stern' as he 'heedless', and 'slaves' deserve to feel a 'master' (I. ii): so he gives his brother-in-law authority to crush the suspected insurrection. We are shown a king quite lacking in that particular hardness so often conditioning virtue and efficiency. He can regard his strong supporters as 'better men' than himself (II. i). But also a conscious royalty renders him proudly independent of the 'vile herd', whether in 'noisy praise' or 'noisome clamour' (I. ii), and a superb confidence rings in his threat to prove himself more fierce than 'stern Nimrod' conjured from his 'ashes' (I. ii), should his people insist on brutality of rule and refuse their potential humanity.

He is a man of unpractical enlightenment beyond the superstitions of his day. When the Greek Myrrha shows surprise at his actually enjoying, like Cassius, a thunderstorm that strikes others with awe, and says how she herself respects all such portents as 'auguries of Jove', he replies:

> Jove!—ay, your Baal—
> Ours also has a property in thunder,
> And ever and anon some falling bolt
> Proves his divinity—and yet sometimes
> Strikes his own altars. (II. i)

Notice the clever touches in 'your Baal' and 'property'. Sardanapalus shamelessly blasphemes 'the worship of the land' (II. i) and shocks the priest Beleses. For to him the stars are most wonderful when unsullied by religious connotations:

> Oh! for that—I love them;
> I love to watch them in the deep blue vault,
> And to compare them with my Myrrha's eyes;
> I love to see their rays redoubled in
> The tremulous silver of Euphrates' wave,
> As the light breeze of midnight crisps the broad
> And rolling water, sighing through the sedges

Which fringe his banks: but whether they may be
Gods, as some say, or the abodes of gods,
As others hold, or simply lamps of night,
Worlds, or the lights of worlds, I know nor care not.
There's something sweet in my uncertainty
I would not change for your Chaldean lore . . . . (II. i)

Such an immediate contact with a living universe is set against the horror of being 'sermonised' and 'dinn'd' with memories of 'dead men', 'Baal', and 'Chaldea's starry mysteries'. We are clearly made to feel the faults of priest-craft, traditional superstitions, and ancestral domination. Salamenes accuses Beleses of 'smooth words and juggling homilies' (II. i), and even Arbaces sees in him a 'subtle spirit' of more 'peril' than a 'phalanx' (II. i). Priests have 'codes', 'mysteries', and 'corollaries' of right and wrong far too tortuous for a 'plain heart' to understand (II. i). The satire may be very up to date and amusing, as when Sardanapalus says the gods never themselves speak to him except through the priests, and then usually for some 'addition to the temple' (I. ii). Yet, with all this, there occurs one powerful and typically Byronic example of respect to religious office; when Sardanapalus, meeting Beleses in battle, refuses at first to dip his hands in 'holy blood' (III. i). There is deliberate emphasis on the priest's magic insight: his prophecy proves true, suggesting, as in *Marino Faliero*, an almost superstitious feeling of the Church's invisible power, however the enlightened hero may enlist our immediate sympathies. Our response to him is usually direct. When the overflowing Euphrates breaks its bulwark and strikes awe into Pania, Sardanapalus answers curtly: 'I can forgive the omen, not the ravage' (V. i). He repudiates conventions and superstitions in the cause of a health, sanity, and realism that his opposers cannot understand.

He is, even to himself, something of a paradox, at once effeminate and exceptionally brave. Salamenes, he says, should have been king: 'and I—I know not what, and care not' (II. i). In which we can detect a resemblance

to earlier, and darker, heroes. To his wife he is humble:

> My gentle, wrong'd Zarina!
> I am the very slave of circumstance
> And impulse—borne away with every breath!
> Misplaced upon the throne—misplaced in life.
> I know not what I could have been, but feel
> I am not what I should be. (IV. i)

His very truth to central impulses makes him a continual paradox. He is not exactly effeminate; and indeed analyses the dangers of the feminine temperament, how it may become 'timidly vindictive' to a 'pitch of perseverance' beyond masculine passion (II. i); and talks of a mother lion 'femininely' raging 'because all passions in excess are female' (III. i). Yet Myrrha speaks some exquisite lines on the basic nature of the specifically feminine behind all man's activities; the earliest and the latest troubles of his existence being nursed by maternal or some other feminine gentleness (I. ii). The hero, poet-like, is somewhat bisexual, aiming to fuse man's reason with woman's emotional depth, whilst repudiating the evil concomitants. Sardanapalus is a 'man-queen' (I. i), though the phrase is used by Salamenes as a condemnation of pure effeminacy. There is, perhaps, evidence of some womanly streak in the incident of the looking-glass (III. i): but next the action drives him to a pitch of efficiency far surpassing, yet perhaps including, all soft and generous qualities. It teaches a simple thing: the value of water, as opposed to wine: a significant contrast, suggesting an advance beyond the sensuous. 'All the gold of earth' could not repay 'the pleasure' of this water (III. i). The plan demands that he should show himself to lack no atom of that manliness characterizing his inferiors in vision. But, though astounding every one by both his swift efficiency and valour when tested, his scorn of military glory persists:

> *Salamenes.* This great hour has proved
> The brightest and most glorious of your life.
> *Sardanapalus.* And the most tiresome. (III. i)

His arms are 'toys' (III. i), the sword-hilt hurts his hand (II. i), his throne is uncomfortable (III. i). He must mock at all the baubles of respectability. He is, indeed, 'inscrutable' (III. i). He is Byron's 'superman'.

Like the Duke's in *Measure for Measure*, his clemency, however unwise, is conscious and purposeful:

> To love and to be merciful, to pardon
> The follies of my species, and (that's human)
> To be indulgent to my own. (I. ii)

This, not glory, is the only 'godlike' thing about him. The execution of rebels would leave him no sleep (II. i). His virtues are felt to be one with his sins which 'have all been of the softer order' (IV. i). He is of 'softer clay' than his rock-like brother-in-law (II. i), our 'soft sovereign' (III. i); the word is recurrent. His first entrance was heralded by 'soft music'. It is an *Antony and Cleopatra* favourite: and Antony was the 'soft triumvir' in *The Corsair*. Sardanapalus deliberately aims to avoid piling burdens on a mortality already overweighted, and to set instead an example of 'mild reciprocal alleviation' (I. ii) of life's agonies; to make his 'inoffensive rule' an 'era of sweet peace 'midst bloody annals' (IV. i). That is 'the sole true glory' (III. i) and the only victory he has ever coveted (IV. i). 'Bloodshed' is a 'mockery' of a 'remedy' against evil (II. i) and conquest no 'renown' (IV. i). Idealized romance in 'Grief cannot come where perfect love exists' (II. i) blends into the wider implications of 'I seek but to be loved, not worshipp'd' (III, i); and that into a gentle, pastor-like concern and a desire to convert the realm 'to one wide shelter for the wretched' (III. i). Whatever the exact prophetic statement intended, the firm erotic basis is undeniable. Such thoughts as 'My very love to thee is hate to them' and 'I cannot love thee when I love mankind' from *The Corsair* have matured to a wider unity. Love's 'devotion', though it makes him faithless to his wife, comes on him like a 'duty' (IV. i). The very softness and weakness of which we hear so much is a duty: as in a wider context

it is felt to be a strength. 'I have loved and lived', he says, and 'my life is love' (I. ii), all empires being nothing to that one blazing central fire he would express; hence his strong desires for a simpler, rustic life, apart from the 'falsehood' of his 'station' (I. ii). He asks Myrrha to define that 'unknown influence' and 'sweet oracle' of love that makes wordless communion between him and her:

> *Myrrha.* In my native land a God,
> And in my heart a feeling like a God's,
> Exalted; yet I own 'tis only mortal. (I. ii)

Like Sean O'Casey to-day Byron closely entwines his most positive statement with a fearless eroticism:

> I would not give the smile of one fair girl
> For all the popular breath that e'er divided
> A name from nothing. (I. ii)

Yet a deeper, or at least a more tranquil, a more Wordsworthian, experience is elsewhere shadowed, though still in association with 'errors' of a gentle sort:

> If I have err'd this time, 'tis on the side
> Where error sits most lightly on that sense,
> I know not what to call it; but it reckons
> With me ofttimes for pain, and sometimes pleasure;
> A spirit which seems placed about my heart
> To count its throbs, not quicken them, and ask
> Questions which mortal never dared to ask me . . . .
> (II. i)

This is a state of listening passivity. Sardanapalus is conceived as, in essence, a saint. 'If then they hate me, 'tis because I hate not' (I. ii) he says. There is a profound insight elsewhere (IV. i) in discussion of ingratitude: how kindness too often raises precisely its reverse; while those on whom one has no claim 'are faithful'. But, unwise or not, Sardanapalus is the 'king of peace' (III. i). His courage is that of warrior, king, and martyr in one. He

forgives 'royally' (II. i), yet fights 'like a king' (III. i). It is, too, an innate royalty:

> Methought he look'd like Nimrod as he spoke,
> Even as the proud imperial statue stands
> Looking the monarch of the kings around it,
> And sways, while they but ornament, the temple.
> (II. i)

'Sway' is earlier contrasted with 'subdue' (I. ii). A closely Biblical and Shakespearian use of royalty enlists all the splendours of an outworn value to establish poetically a new. So Sardanapalus refuses a strong plain helmet for one lighter and more regal, against all advice given on grounds of practical utility and danger of recognition by the rebels, with the shatteringly royal phrase: 'I go forth to be recognised' (III. i). He would quell rebellion with spiritual, not merely martial, authority. His bounty to his followers after disaster is golden as Antony's. The sublime pride and utter scorn of compromise often catches some essence from the New Testament drama. He is, as Christ, utterly alone in his instinctive royalty:

> *Sardanapalus.* This is strange;
> The gentle and the austere are both against me
> And urge me to revenge.
> *Myrrha.* 'Tis a Greek virtue.
> *Sardanapalus.* But not a kingly one. (II. i)

At the herald's infuriating message after the final defeat he first, in a flash of anger, determines to execute swift punishment; but, being implored in the name of a herald's 'peaceful' and 'sacred' office, replies, with a New Testament echo blending into a delicate irony:

> He's right—Let him go free—My life's last act
> Shall not be one of wrath. Here, fellow, take
> This golden goblet, let it hold your wine,
> And think of *me*; or melt it into ingots,
> And think of nothing but their weight and value.
> (V. i)

When early in the action his friends kneel to him as a god,

the conception is pagan; but when at the last his soldiers throng round 'kissing his hand and the hem of his robe' (v. i) we have been trained to a deeper insight.

Byron maintains, however, a happy balance of sympathies to counteract any danger of an excessive idealism. Against the hero Salamenes stands out with a manly and conventional kind of strength demanding respect, his allegiance remaining unaffected by a sister's cruel treatment. As in Dryden's *All for Love* the hero's sexual fault is emphasized by the actual entry of his wife, and frequent mention of his children; though it is also suggested that no warm-blooded king can be bound by a state marriage (I. ii). The uncomplaining and faithful Zarina is beautifully drawn, and at his interview with her Sardanapalus seems to recognize both a value and a virtue beyond him; while foreseeing the remorse which attends on 'a single deviation from the track of human duties' (IV. i). The old Byronic guilt is not quite exorcised; and the conception of Sardanapalus, though of greatest importance, is never left *in vacuo* as an absolute. For that we must consider the whole play, conclusion and all. Myrrha, the Ionian slave and Sardanapalus's mistress, is similarly important. Her devotion puts Greece and all its emotional and cultural connotations, literary and political, at the hero's feet: such Greek references being frequent and contributing an added richness to the scintillating impressionism. She serves as a critical standard, as it were, meditating on the meaning of her love for so strange a man, and variously relating his weaknesses and nobility to her native traditions. Both Zarina and Myrrha are beautifully drawn, ranking high among Byron's succession of fine women.

There is a very pleasing interplay of glittering impressionism, to which the many proper names, whether Greek or Assyrian, contribute; with, moreover, a happy blend of nature with a romantic humanism in the many rose-references, as when the hero is 'crown'd with roses' (I. i), refuses to crown himself 'with a single rose the less' (I. ii) whatever dangers are afoot, prefers a cottage with

Myrrha and 'crowns of flowers' to his kingdom's 'dull tiara' (I. ii), or equates his own fall to that of a 'pluck'd rose' (I. ii). The bee gathering 'honey' from 'wholesome flowers' only is beautifully contrasted with mankind's ability to transmute evil to good (IV. i). We have an adder and flowers in II. i. There are references to natural disturbance such as tempests (I. ii) and some larger symbols to be noted shortly; but Sardanapalus loves tempests as a pleasing variation (II. i). His new strength is compared to a 'twilight tempest' thundering from out a hot summer's day (III. i). The suffusing tone is summery, as in the 'gay pavilion' thought of as the king's 'summer dotage' (II. i), and 'the big rain pattering on the roof' (III. i). Moreover, the moon breaks through in 'brightness' after storm (III. i), and the king's 'silk tiara' and 'flowing hair' are seen making 'a mark too royal' in its 'broad light' (III. i). Beleses points to the 'earliest' and 'brightest' of the stars

> which so quivers
> As it would quit its place in the blue ether. (II. i)

There are Sardanapalus's lovely star-lines already quoted. The heavens are alive here, bending down and speaking alike to saintly king and plotting priest. The priest reads their hieroglyphic meanings; but Sardanapalus feels rather an exact coincidence of the cosmic on the human. His flowery banquet

> Shall blaze with beauty and with light, until
> It seems unto the stars which are above us
> Itself an opposite star . . . . (I. ii)

But the most indicative and compact of all minor impressions here is that of a 'crimson' blush on Myrrha's cheek

> Like to the dying day on Caucasus
> Where sunset tints the snow with rosy shadows (I. ii)

or that of her arms 'more dazzling with their own born whiteness' than the sword-steel she brandishes (III. i).

Such fusion is compact and twined in further with many brilliances of human civilization, with 'glittering spears' (II. i), a sword that shall 'out-dazzle comets' (II. i), the flash of steel generally in heroic combat, Sardanapalus's mirror 'of polish'd brass from India' (III. i), his diadem'd helmet (III. i) and continual gold—the 'golden realm of Ind' (I. ii), 'all the gold of earth' (III. i), a 'golden reign of peace' (IV. i), Nimrod's chalice as a 'golden goblet thick with gems' (I. ii), the 'golden goblet' and other gold treasure at the close (v. i). Especially beautiful is Sardanapalus's thought of himself as a poor miner and Zarina as a 'vein of virgin ore' which he may discover but not himself possess though it 'sparkles' at his feet (IV. i). And all blends with and clusters about the king's throne, the music and feasting and wine so deeply praised (I. ii), and the fiery conclusion. These many transverse glintings of a rosy nature, sparkling heavens, and flashing civilization, like shot silk or the iridescence of a bird's plumage, both combine with the scintillations of the hero's wit, and at once irradiate, enliven, and interpret the whole massed statement.

The use of impressionism, and still more the dramatic value of stage symbolism, is Shakespearian; as in the music, garlands, and banquet, and the interruption of the latter by storm and thunder; the comments thereon; and the rising Euphrates. The play comes indeed so close in feeling (and phrase-reminiscence) to Shakespeare that it runs inevitable risks: but the cohesion is thoroughly organic. It has depth as well as a beautiful surface clarity. It is not one of those many would-be poetic dramas where you cannot 'find a heart within the beast'. I point next to the negative and positive pulses of that heart: which relate respectively to (i) the ancestral taboos against which the hero is fighting; and (ii) that cosmic and fiery energy of which his life is conceived as an immediate and spontaneous expression.

The negative extreme is given in Sardanapalus's nightmare in Act IV. We start with Myrrha's lovely lines

spoken over his sleep after the battle. One might compare the exquisite sleep-speech in *Lara*, a fine example of Byron's Shakespearian ability to maintain a purely objective and human reserve to realize an ultimate mystery. The 'God of Quiet' is felt as brother to Death, as in Shakespeare. She watches the 'play of pain' on his features, and exquisitely the poetry uses natural imagery in service to human description: the 'sudden gust' that 'crisps' the 'reluctant' mountain lake, the blast ruffling autumn leaves. Now Sardanapalus's dream concerns (i) Nimrod the Hunter, and (ii) Semiramis the fighter. These two, founders of his Assyrian empire, represent all traditional values, and suggest the dark ingrained fear of ancestral authority whose weight so often masquerades as conscience. They oppose respectively Byron's sympathy with the sanctities of animal and human life; and may be equated with the 'ancestral voices prophesying war' of *Kubla Khan*. Sardanapalus is shown in the play as not having used his 'bow' and 'javelin' for years, not 'even in the chase' (I. ii). Now, yet half in his dream, he cries:

> Hence—hence—
> Old hunter of the earliest brutes! and ye,
> Who hunted fellow-creatures as if brutes!
> Once bloody mortals—and now bloodier idols,
> If your priests lie not!

Both are 'bloody'. But he awakes to find their opposite: Myrrha, symbol of *pure sexual* passion. It is a move from death to life: 'I've been i' the grave—where worms are lords.' He has seen 'a legion of the dead'. Something of *Cain* is neatly entwined with Sardanapalus's experience. He describes Nimrod as possessing a certain cold dignity with a 'haughty, dark, and deadly face', his quiver holding 'shaft-heads feather'd from an eagle's wing'. The scene is a guest-hall and he invites his ancestor to fill the cup between them; next fills it and offers it himself; but the vast figure with changeless expression refuses the symbol of convivial joy, preserving a deadly immobility. He turns and faces Semiramis. She is a more gruesome figure:

bloody, withered, 'sneering' with the passion of 'vengeance' and 'leering' with that of 'lust'. Sexual suggestion is entwined with cruelty: which is clearly symbolized by her goblet 'bubbling o'er with blood', the connotation being similar to that transmitted by Flecker's *Hassan*. There is another goblet whose contents are left undefined. Other figures are there, but none of them either eat or drink. They are opposites of the festive and sensuous. He feels himself turning to stone, yet alive and breathing, like them. There is a 'horrid sympathy' between these dead and the living—indeed, the nightmare figures are made of the negative elements of the old Byronic hero as Sardanapalus mainly of his 'softness', and a state is outlined next of living death, apart from both Heaven and Earth. At length the lips of both smile. At this extremity a 'desperate courage' infuses his limbs and, fearing them no longer, he laughs 'full in their phantom faces'. He grasps the hunter's hand, which melts away. There is a reconciliation: the man at least looked a 'hero'. But the woman is less easily conquered. She attacks him with 'noisome kisses', spills both goblets till their 'poisons' flow round him, while he shrinks as if he were the son who slew her for 'incest'. Loathsome objects cluster round. He is dead, yet feels; buried, yet raised; consumed by worms yet purged by flames; wither'd in air yet—the rest is vague save that he searches for Myrrha and awakes to find her beside him. The reaching of a positive beyond death by relegating death's realisms to a dream state is a clever mechanism implied also by the structure of *Hassan*. The progress through death is found in Keats's *Hyperion*, a very similar statement; and the hideous woman and the figures round her point to Keats's *Belle Dame*. The dream is loaded with suggestions of incest and cruelty: and may be related variously to an over-emphasis of power-instincts to the exclusion of sexual health; to the domination of ancestral authority; and to sadism. Semiramis is a 'homicide and husband-killer'. Nimrod comes off better, but every time he is called 'hunter' there is

blood-insinuation. The death-impressions are icily sculptural, suggesting a forbidding eternity: 'If sleep shows such things, what may not death disclose?' The answer can only be in terms of a corresponding awakening or some vast apprehension of cosmic life hinted by Myrrha's reply:

> The dust we tread upon was once alive
> And wretched.

This, then, is the negative heart: its dramatic place is apt —Sardanapalus has been fighting, shedding blood. The leers and sneers and welcomings have an obvious reference to this: just as the Weird Women get Macbeth after a bloody battle. Myrrha sees it as 'mere creations of late events': it is that—and more. Afterwards, the king reports again how his ancestors have been trying to '*drag me down* to them' (IV. i).

For the positive heart: to Byron the sun is all but God, as in the opening of Canto III of *The Corsair*. His early tales are, of course, set by choice in sun-warmed regions. *Manfred* has an interesting invocation, close to the sun-worship in *Cymbeline*, and central to an understanding of Byron's mind and work:

> Glorious orb! the idol
> Of early nature, and the vigorous race
> Of undiseased mankind, the giant sons
> Of the embrace of angels, with a sex
> More beautiful than they, which did draw down
> The erring spirits who can ne'er return.
> Most glorious orb! that wert a worship, ere
> The mystery of thy making was reveal'd!
> Thou earliest minister of the Almighty,
> Which gladden'd, on their mountain tops, the hearts
> Of the Chaldean shepherds, till they pour'd
> Themselves in orisons! Thou material God!
> And representative of the Unknown—
> Who chose thee for his shadow! (III. ii)

Notice that the sun's sacred life is related to some past golden age. It is next 'chief star', and 'sire of the seasons',

alone making earth 'endurable'. Also the 'inborn spirits' of man still have a 'tint' of it: the relation is all-important, the sun having powerful psychological associations. On that thought Byron-Manfred plays, asserting that sun-qualities of 'life and warmth' have been of a 'fatal nature' to him. Arimanes, grand divinity of nature, is throned above a 'globe of fire'. Now *Sardanapalus* powerfully develops the symbol. As with the moon in *Marino Faliero*, the sun here covers both sides of the human conflict, though with subtle differences in conception.

It is first entwined with worship of Baal, the orthodoxy of the realm. The priest Beleses watches its setting in II. i. He searches for its 'edicts', would read the 'everlasting page' of this 'true sun', this

> burning oracle of all that live,
> As fountain of all life, and symbol of
> Him who bestows it . . . .

His understanding is superstitious in comparison with Sardanapalus's: but he has his own dignity. Why, he asks, must the sun's 'lore' be limited to 'calamity'? Why not herald a day more worthy its own 'all-glorious burst from ocean'? Why not a 'beam of hope' to replace omens of 'wrath'? He talks of fear and sacrifices. His religion is negative: but in terms of it the sun is felt as a dominating force. Its red setting appropriately gilds this scheming revolutionary. We watch it, as it were, deserting its worshipper: 'While I speak, he sinks—is gone.' The speech concludes with an equation of sunset and death. Later Beleses is shocked at the king's disrespect for Chaldea's 'starry mysteries'. Yet Sardanapalus has, as we have seen, his own way of worship, and his particular approach—at once erotic, aesthetic, and agnostic—is developed farther in our second sun-incident in Act V. Two great sun-symbolisms thus frame the central storm and nightmare movements of Acts III and IV. Moreover, this, as tragedy gathers round, is not a sunset, but a sunrise, relating to the spiritual victory of

Sardanapalus and his love. Myrrha and Balea are at a window. Storm has broken night's loveliness. The contrast in nature is beautiful; but what, she asks, of that other stormy chaos on earth of evil passions? What dawn-fire of resolution can rise on that? As with Shakespeare and Pope (in his *Essay on Man*) the human-tempest analogy is exact. The dawn is splendid:

> And can the sun so rise,
> So bright, so rolling back the clouds into
> Vapours more lovely than the unclouded sky,
> With golden pinnacles and snowy mountains . . .

till it makes heaven a glorious replica of earthly forms. This sun-splendour is related precisely to the 'soul' of man. It 'dwells upon', 'soothes', and 'blends into' the 'soul'. Sunrise and sunset are the 'haunted epoch' of 'sorrow and love' (the respective arrangement seems a slip). Both are needed for spiritual insight: they are 'twin genii' that 'chasten' and 'purify', more sweet than 'boisterous joys', and build palaces for choice souls to possess peacefully apart from, whilst enduring, the agonies of existence. 'Pain' and 'pleasure' are 'two names for one feeling' surpassing speech, like some *Kubla Khan* dome above antinomies, a unity 'which our internal, restless agony' would 'vary in the sound'. She describes the super-consciousness all poetry aims to create. She speaks with the dawn streaming in on her, flooding her with gold. She, knowing like Antony she may not see its rising again, regrets having not felt more of the 'reverence' and 'rapture' due to that power which keeps earth warmly living though mortals die. She almost becomes a 'convert' to Baal. Once, says Balea, the Sun reigned on earth: the usual golden-age reminder. But Myrrha prefers him in heaven, where he sways more powerfully than any 'earthly monarch', each ray more potent than empires: which precisely relates to Sardanapalus's preference of love to kingdoms of the earth. The sun is, indeed, here expressly the transcendent reality. Balea calls it, surely, a god. Myrrha answers that her own, Greek, belief is the same: yet she thinks it rather the abode

of gods than itself one of the 'immortal sovereigns', repeating Sardanapalus's conception of the stars. The meaning of all this goes far beyond my transcription. The rising, flooding, sunlight increases with developing stage dialogue. It is dramatically active. Moreover, the usual association of royalty, sun, and love becomes a personified association, since Myrrha is the play's love-force. So the moving dialogue adds wonder to wonder till the blaze shuts out the world, dissolving it in light which Myrrha can no longer face. The sun all but equals the divine: though with a slight reservation, felt also in *Manfred* where Arimanes, with his globe of fire, is not all-powerful over the protagonist. The human, in Byron, must preserve its integrity to this extent: hence the sense of the stars earlier and the sun here being the 'abode' of more human gods rather than themselves divine.

The sun thus dominates imaginatively, in twin rhythms of evening and morning associated with the two sides of the conflict: but more directly with Myrrha, the love-centre, to whom the king earlier compares the stars. A golden haze encircles, aureoles, the central action of battles, storm, and nightmare, the sun blazing from each side. And when there is more battling and tragic failure, the movement dissolves into a sovereign nobility as the lovers die on their chosen sacrificial pyre, loaded with frankincense and myrrh, the throne its 'core' (v. i). This is the dawn implied by Myrrha's earlier question; it is a 'leap through flame into the future'. Sardanapalus wants the *future* to 'turn back and smile' on his reign (iv. i), recalling Marino Faliero. So, too, he addresses his ancestors, bearing home to them the insignia of his lost empire through the 'absorbing element' of fire. His faults have been great, but he writes his name on the memory of centuries:

> Time shall quench full many
> A people's records and a hero's acts;
> Sweep empire after empire, like this first
> Of empires, into nothing; but even then
> Shall spare this deed of mine . . . . (v. i)

The blazing palace shall be more firmly established than Egypt's pyramids. A torch from Baal's shrine 'lights' the lovers 'to the stars', in an embrace of 'commingling fire'. The orthodoxy of the realm contributes to the originally conceived sacrifice.

Sardanapalus is a less complex and at a first reading probably a less profoundly moving work than *Marino Faliero*; but the simplicity is integral to its peculiarly monistic statement, and the final violent equating of dawn-fire with human tragedy is necessarily not easy to probe though obvious enough to the view. It marks the resolution of former conflicts and corresponds to *Antony and Cleopatra* in the Shakespearian sequence; though its cool classic purity of diction and beautiful lucidity of symbolism differ slightly from Shakespeare's more masked effects. What is implicit in Shakespeare is continually here, as often in *Marino Faliero* also, explicit. The ritual-conclusion is, for example, definitely a 'sacrifice' (v. i), Myrrha pouring a libation to the gods and Sardanapalus drinking a formal farewell to his pleasures. There is, too, something statuesque about the whole and a new plastic quality in certain references to sculpture, in longer visual-descriptive passages of persons, as in that of Myrrha fighting, with 'her nostril dilated from its symmetry' (III. i), and in stage-pictures, that differentiate it from Byron's more usual inward and energic effects and mark a transition to certain elements of *Don Juan*.

Sardanapalus ranges a non-moral eroticism with a Christian idealism; and the transference is quite pivotal. Though forcing as well both a tragic conclusion and a subtle humour, its positive alinements might be said to dramatize eternity in action: and hence it has a certain stillness, a plastic quality. In *Marino Faliero* the grave eternity of the equestrian statue was contrasted with action; and what other such impressions there may have been in Byron's earlier work were dominated by more inward energies. His poetry has been peculiarly non-sensuous. But in *Don Juan*, which aims at a further

penetration not so much of energies as *essences*, the visual and plastic are emphatic. But these cannot be finally abstracted from the poet's humorous and agile approach: which precludes any danger of Miltonic stiffness.

V

The occasional flamboyance of *Childe Harold* derives from its too aristocratic temper, using traditional forms and invading contemporary territories like a monarch. *Don Juan* carries this peculiar superiority farther. The poet deliberately asserts his own, technical, supremacy:

> Prose poets like blank-verse, I'm fond of rhyme,
> Good workmen never quarrel with their tools . . . .
> (I. 201)

Continually he allows some dissyllabic or trisyllabic word to set him a seemingly impossible task, while our own pleasure is a recognition of mastery. The slightly theatrical tone of *Childe Harold* resembles the stage-intonations of an actor who is proudly conscious of himself as an actor. Now satire, as in Pope, is often poetry especially conscious of itself as poetry, and in *Don Juan* the composing poet is the poem's real hero. In long digressions he discusses his own satiric and humorous approach, the charges brought against him of immorality and irreverence. The widest social implications of poet-become-satirist interest Pope. But, though all Pope's ground is more than covered, Byron is mainly concerned with the complexities of an erotic gospel forcing his own delightful but baffling technique. That technique cannot be discussed without a preliminary knowledge of those substances with which it entwines. To these I now pass, returning eventually to Byron's humour, in attempt to characterize the poem's whole statement. We are to notice certain recurring and related tendencies: (i) visual and statuesque descriptions; (ii) correspondences with Shakespeare, especially in his final period; and (iii) further variations on the imaginative concept of 'eternity'.

The tempest-wreck and parching agony leading to the Juan–Haidée episode recall *The Tempest* and *The Ancient Mariner*; while Haidée's innocence has a remarkable similarity to Perdita's or Miranda's. The essence of immediate love, excluding any depths involved with tradition, forethought, and social complexity, is distilled. Child-innocence is projected into sexual relations (a dream basic to all humanity's hope of progress), side-stepping the usual conflicts whose intrinsic necessity is thereby denied.

The imagery tends to show the whole incident as dewy and dawn-suffused. Haidée's cheek is not only 'rosy' as a sunset-tinted sky but when meeting the morning 'face to face' on her way to Juan she is flushed with 'headlong blood' (II. 141). The physical is lit by the inward emotional flame. The continuity does not exist at the expense of any inclusion of either suffering or wide nature, but rather extends to such a Shakespearian simile as

> like a young flower snapp'd from the stalk,
> Drooping and dewy on the beach he lay. (II. 176)

The boy thrown up in half-naked loveliness and pathos originates a blend of physical personality with nature that recalls Shakespeare's—or Venus's—feeling for Adonis:

> For still he lay, and on his thin worn cheek
> A purple hectic play'd like dying day
> On the snow-tops of distant hills; the streak
> Of sufferance yet upon his forehead lay,
> Where the blue veins look'd shadowy, shrunk and weak;
> And his black curls were dewy with the spray . . . .
> (II. 147)

The inmost self is felt physically, the physical inwardly; and also all but cosmically. The straight sensuousness is thus alined with deep tragic feeling. Haidée drinks his breath (II. 143), and air breathes over his mouth as the 'sweet south' upon a 'bed of roses' (II. 168). Continually we are pointed to his nakedness, his 'so white a skin' (II. 129), and even later they are 'half-naked, loving, natural, and Greek' (II. 194). But all blends with the purity of

naked sea and sand, the rosy evening with one star like an 'eye' from a living universe (II. 183). As with Juan's first lovely pathos, so delight and loving-kindness are one. Haidée comes on Juan sleeping in his cave, and stops: 'for sleep is awful' (II. 143). Both *Lara* (I. 29) and *Sardanapalus* touch sleep's mystery; but here no joy on earth is felt equivalent to that of watching over what you love 'sleeping', helpless, unconscious, somehow most utterly itself when its whole self, all past actions and passions, are 'hush'd into depths beyond the watcher's diving', like 'death without its terrors' (II. 196–7). The watcher's emotions then find tranquillity unknown in the thrust and parry of the most loving wakeful intercourse: the eternal essence is captured, out of time. The intuition is tragic. Here—as so often—Byron treads the knife-edge between the spiritual and physical, eternity and time; which delicate balance is also in our human descriptions. Haidée's cheek is called 'transparent' and 'warm'; of 'pure dye' like 'rosy' twilight; that is, its texture is vital and illuminated by its inner pulse, the blood-flame. Yet she is also 'fit for a model of a statuary', though surpassing any 'stone ideal' wrought by a 'chisel': the statue-thought getting at her eternal essence of beauty, felt as timeless (II. 114–19). Description is visual yet deeply significant; aiming to capture an essence, not to inaugurate action. So Haidée's tenderness suffuses the story; her love originates in a maternal care deeper than desire. He is her 'infant' (II. 143),

> Fair as the crowning rose of the whole wreath
> Soft as the callow cygnet in its nest. (II. 148)

Her voice is a 'warble' (II. 151). They are both young birds (II. 190). She bends over him 'hush'd as the babe upon its mother's breast', still as a drooping willow or calm ocean depth (II. 148). The maternal impressionism blends into the sexual, both bathing innocently naked (II. 172) and talking a private language like birds (IV. 14). Haidée —and the 'lovely' and 'fearful' love of woman is of main

importance here (II. 199)—comes to love without thought or sense of sin (II. 190–3). All ages of child, lover, and mother are throughout implicit in Haidée's essential girlhood: see too IV. 26. She is 'Nature's bride' and 'Passion's child' (II. 202). The 'mountain-crescent' and continually 'rosy' sky, 'glittering' ocean, purple twilight, and the waves plashing (II. 183–5), at once condition and impregnate their romance. Their kisses are kindled from 'above', controlled by a cosmic power beyond both (II. 186), they cling naturally, as 'swarming bees', their hearts at once 'flowers' and 'honey' (II. 187). The stars burn as 'nuptial torches' to shed 'beauty upon the beautiful', they are hallowed by their own emotions, ocean is their witness, and Solitude their priest (II. 204). They are alone in the silence of a magic universe and feel their 'life could never die' (II. 188). Their love is timeless, an eternity that makes of their clinging forms a sculptured 'group', that is, an eternal essence (II. 194). So 'each was an angel and earth paradise' (II. 204). Haidée at the first bent over Juan as an angel over some one lately having died 'in righteousness' (II. 144): she is his Beatrice. We are very deliberately pointed to love's 'mystic' art (I. 106), something 'celestial' (III. 5), a perfect beyond-sin consummation, carefully conditioned, but potentially at least human, and negating Milton's Fall; which, through intuition of an erotic centre in perfect unity with those gentler instincts that our religious mythology isolates, suggests an inclusion and an absolute that challenge the traditions of orthodox Christianity.

Byron knows very well what he is doing. An antithesis of orthodoxy and eroticism is often phrased. Juan the woman-lover always even in church turned to images of the Virgin rather than 'grisly saints' (II. 149). Eden is clearly in Byron's mind (II. 189, 193), and commentators who reduce Dante's Beatrice to a symbol of 'theology' (III. 11) are given an ironic reference. That Haidée should have no thought of marriage (II. 190) is necessary. Pope's Eloisa rates the position of mistress above that of wife, since such

poems—it is the same with *Antony and Cleopatra*—aim to isolate that erotic essence finding no place in orthodox hierarchies. Byron works round and round the problem: since love cannot be a 'devil', yet is clearly a god, we must have it for 'god of evil' (II. 205). He remarks, somewhat in Lyly's manner, how it has both subdued greatest heroes and made philosophers (II. 205–7). The essence is not necessarily lasting: Juan has forgotten Julia (II. 208). Yet such love remains a super-consciousness and a cosmic insight, an admiration of 'nature's profusion' exceeding any adoration of a lovely 'statue'; a 'fine extension of the faculties', starry in origin and 'filter'd through the skies' (II. 211–12). Byron is, of course, conscious of every criticism: such are offered as readily as in *Romeo and Juliet*. Often he presents a stern or humorous realism, as when Zoe cooks eggs whilst Haidée plays the angel (II. 144). Feeding is strongly used to underline the physical. Ironic moral viewpoints are offered, with an honest distinction of the romance depicted from all marriage-permanencies. Fragility is its essence, and one with that very value for which Byron feels so deep a reverence. Though the whole is strutted and built firm on an uncompromising honesty, and its narrative is as objectively conceived as any in English, yet the 'burning tongues' of a speechless wonder are made to interpret 'nature's oracle' of 'first love' (II. 189) in ultimate revelation of feelings 'universal as the sun' (II. 167).

There are two eternities: one of death and dark otherness, variously kind or cheerless; and one of perfect consummation in time, of the temporal become timeless since shot through with the eternal, by love. Both will tend to expression in terms of stillness, or motion subdued to stillness. Clearly Milton's motionless and sculptural imagery is an extreme development of eternal cravings, a too eager will to impose eternality on time. A dark eternity has often in Byron overshadowed energies and conflicts: but *Sardanapalus* projects bright eternity; and so does the early *Don Juan*. Hence the essence of its love,

though starting with nature and instinct, gets expression next through an emphasis on many arts of barbaric finery recalling certain passages of Marlowe and Keats. The description is foreshadowed by a reference to 'cherubs round an altar-piece' (III. 60). So (III. 61–73) we have 'fair slaves', carvings, tapestry, an 'ivory inlaid table'; ebony, crystal, marble, porcelain; carpets with gorgeous pictorial designs; splashes of colour, gold, crimson, blue; with fine dresses (Haidée's particularly) and most extravagant foods and drink; with, finally, ritual sacrifice (III. 32), dance (III. 30), and song. Earlier description has been visual and naturalistic but now the poetry becomes more richly ornamental. The move would be dangerous were Haidée, herself plastically described (III. 71–2), not still central to make the 'atmosphere' alive (III. 74). The plastic or ceremonious expresses here a timeless, flame-vital essence. The balance is, however, precarious, a thought shadowed by the narrative scheme too, where all this revelry is seen treading, as it were, a precipice edge before disaster. Desire is often a greedy craving to render permanent what is more properly a fleeting delight: and hence its poetic use of static arts. Here lust is not in question: but the solidification of any winged vitality is dangerous in life or poetry; and the many statuesque essences in *Don Juan* need, and get, an extreme delicacy of technical presentation. The magnificence touches *Lamia* as the earlier love-warmth *The Eve of St. Agnes*. The 'Isles of Greece' lyric is proper enough in so paradisal a setting of 'classical profiles and glittering dresses' (III. 33). But Byron knows that 'there is no sterner moralist than pleasure' (III. 65): and is not confined by any limited Hellenism or limited eroticism. So sense-extravagance matures into the quietude of the 'Ave Maria' stanzas, with the lovers facing the 'rosy flood' (III. 101) of evening, hour at once of 'love' and 'prayer' awaking reverential thoughts of Virgin and Son. Byron pauses to assert his faith: such pictorial images are too true for fiction (III. 103). His worship is not less than orthodox but greater, like Pope's, expanding to the 'great Whole'

(III. 104). Soft thoughts of the young bird under its parent's wing and the child at its mother's breast lead to a typically Byronic, maternal, gentleness: how, even at Nero's death, 'some hands unseen strew'd flowers upon his tomb' (III. 109).

Haidée's story closes pathetically. She dreams of a cave of 'marble icicles', the 'work of ages' on its 'water-fretted halls' where her tears 'froze to marble' as they fell (IV. 33). It is perhaps an ancestral accusation from the other eternity. She awakes to stand 'pale' and 'statue-like' (IV. 43) before her father, who is remorseless. There follows a reworking of the heroine's madness in *Parisina*. Her head droops in death 'as when the lily lies o'ercharged with rain' (IV. 59); she lies, for a while, like Juliet, untouched by 'corruption', like the 'exquisitely chisell'd' marble of an unchanged Venus 'for ever fair', or those sculptured groupings of 'eternal' agony where 'energy' is, and yet is not, 'life' (IV. 61). Such sculptural eternities relate both to Keats's *Grecian Urn* and Hermione's statue, and return to that coincidence of the eternal on time noticed already in the descriptions of sleep. The episode—once we rule out the poet's own lightly objective approach—is mainly Haidée's, and seen through her eyes, as with Venus in *Venus and Adonis*. No English poet more closely than Byron approaches Shakespeare's darkly inward penetrations and fierce conflicts; but another Shakespearian gift is his too, a sense of the delicate yet fine texture of physical personality, the supreme value yet 'fragile mould' of the 'precious porcelain of human clay' (IV. 11). Haidée and Juan are its dual personifications.

Though the Juan–Haidée romance is saved from oversensuous dangers by its tragic conclusion, the poem itself next deliberately advances among such with an easy mock-prudery:

> I therefore do denounce all amorous writing
> Except in such a way as not to attract. (V. 2)

We leave Keats for the subtly different despotic barbarism

of *Tamburlaine*. We have, as with Marlowe, slaves, and a sense of human beings as cattle which is an extension of the earlier visual excess: or rather a contraction, as 'lust' is a contraction of 'love'. We find a 'Circassian', a 'sweet' girl 'warranted virgin' (IV. 114) going for fifteen hundred dollars. Juan's tears stealing down his cheek are a pathetic reminder (v. 8) of what seems now a dissolved dream. When bought for the Sultana's craving, he is taken (v. 45–56) to a 'noble palace' with a 'fine hall' and 'marble fountain' and through an 'enormous room without a soul' recalling Pope's view of extravagance; relevant also to my own strictures on Milton's architectural exploits—Byron himself notes that such unsocial interiors may do well enough for a church (v. 59); and expressly defining the new tone here, with an explicit further criticism of the masonic and architectural, and more ornaments embarrassing nature with art (v. 63–4); gorgeous divans, sofas it seems a sin to sit on, 'glittering galleries' and 'marble floors', carvings of 'gilded bronze', a gate of 'pyramidic pride', and, in short, so much perfume and dazzle that you can make nothing of it, as with certain Western falsities, 'bad statues', and so on (v. 85–94). Such is the stage-setting for the Sultana's lust. That is not, however, itself inhuman, and her cheeks' flush comes, like Haidée's, 'blood-red' as clouds in 'sunset' (v. 108): or in temper she is an 'embodied storm' (v. 135). She is visually projected. And the origin of her own desire is entirely visual: she 'eye'd' Juan 'o'er and o'er' (v. 107) on his arrival. The dressing of Juan in woman's clothes has interesting reference to the poem's continual admiration of an almost feminine beauty in its hero. Descriptions of persons are aesthetic and pictorial, Gulbeyaz rising like Venus 'from the wave' (v. 96). Her final fury is staged in a room with 'many a vase' of 'porcelain', and pearl, porphyry, and marble, to the sound of warbling birds (VI. 97–8), as in Spenser's Bower of Bliss. The 'heart's dew of pain' is seen standing out on her forehead 'like Morning's on a lily'; she stands as a 'pythoness'; dramatic postures are

locked in statuesque poetry as the poet sees her head 'hung down' and one hand drooping all 'white, waxen, and as alabaster pale', and ends by wishing himself a painter with 'colours' and 'tints' at his service (VI. 105–9). Notice that, however plastic the approach, there is no devitalizing: Byron's own vivid poetic life burns throughout every sculptural phrase. Moreover, such imagery relates dynamically to the aesthetic and sensuous atmosphere needed. A 'poet's' dream-god incarnated in 'marble-chisell'd beauty' stands out once as an image of sexual appeal from the chaste moonlit imagery of *Marino Faliero* (II. i). Here sexual feeling is strong throughout the amusing incidents, in Gulbeyaz's 'Christian, canst thou love?' (V. 116) and Juan's having to go to bed with Dudù, and her resulting 'dream' (VI. 75–7). Pageantry in the harem is formal, almost ritualistic, yet also humorous, as when the Sultan arrives with his eunuchs 'black and white' and train a 'quarter of a mile' long (V. 146); or Juan is led off with the crowd of harem girls, 'lovely Odalisques' (VI. 29),

> with stately march and slow,
> Like water-lilies floating down a rill. (VI. 33)

The girls Lolah, Katinka, and Dudù are softly and luxuriantly felt: yet also may be seen sculpturally as with Dudù's 'Attic forehead' and 'Phidian nose' (VI. 42). One girl smiling in sleep is given an exquisite nature-comparison (VI. 66), while another is seen 'statue-like and still' like a 'frozen rill' (VI. 68). The tendency is strangely persistent, as also in the 'urns' and 'clay' of V. 138. Again, it marks a desire to project essence rather than energy.

The massed formations of barbaric splendour, lust, and strong sexuality blend naturally into Gulbeyaz's wilful revenge, which further emphasizes the move from Haidée's island, though, with the help of a rich humour, the harem is entertaining enough. Indeed, Byron is including, and in his way purifying, that very area of dubiously aesthetic sexuality so insistently a trouble to Milton and, in *Faustus* at least, an artistic disturbance to Marlowe. The whole

incident is a happy, but temporary, poetic flirtation with a barbaric impressionism. We must note, however, that we are shown Gulbeyaz's lust contradicting its own essence through revenge (VI. 115), and the implicit condemnation helps to make a transition from the innocent Haidée romance to war.

Juan's adventures later at the Court of Catherine of Russia lead to similar descriptions. Dress is, indeed, emphasized throughout the whole poem; and here he is given a gorgeous uniform and stockings

> uncurdled as new milk
> O'er limbs whose symmetry set off the silk.
>
> (IX. 43)

So nature is improved by 'art'. He is placed 'as if upon a pillar' for our inspection like 'Love turn'd a lieutenant of artillery' (a phrase of carefully pointed militaristic satire); he is a 'Cupid', 'blushing and beardless'; angelic, yet with an 'eye' and 'turn of limb' promising erotic adventures; indeed, a 'most beauteous boy' (IX. 45, 47, 53). A Pygmalion statue-reference occurs at IX. 51; and a mercurial Shakespearian snapshot at IX. 66. The femininity of Sardanapalus and Juan—with 'features' earlier suiting feminine attire (V. 115) and complexion varying from blush-warmth to pallor and tears (V. 117) as does Gulbeyaz's (V. 124)—is interesting: and may be related to that feminine strain discussed in my essay on Shakespeare. Byron deliberately creates in him a bisexual essence: Juan is *passive* throughout, the energy in Byron's approach.

The poem might be divided into (i) amatory adventures, and (ii) militaristic and social satire. But these do not quite correspond to what I have called the two 'eternities', since the darker of those is nobly tragic and war is here presented mainly as ruthlessly and stupidly evil. Hence plastic imagery, which we have seen first as a glowing expression, and next as a more artificial accompaniment, of desire, and shall find later as grave monuments of a dark but noble past, is, in these war scenes, absent. True,

strong action always negates such impressions: and it is the business of literary art to give action stable 'form', or work it up to some final ritual. But in this poem of essences war-action is left nakedly unadorned: indeed, as a destruction of all essence.

Byron sees his satire in the tradition of Falstaff's (VII. 21). 'The noble art of killing' (VII. 58) goes on for 'cash and conquest' (VII. 64). A couplet may remind us of Pope:

> Bombs, drums, guns, bastions, batteries, bayonets, bullets;
> Hard words, which stick in the soft Muses' gullets.
> (VII. 78)

Homer's descriptive art may outreach us but we leave him far behind in brute 'fact' (VII. 81). A warlike hero is merely a 'butcher in great business' (VII. 83). 'Common fellows' are left to 'shriek for water' (VIII. 11) while attention is given to a prince. We are forced to look on

> the all-white eye
> Turn'd back within its socket. (VIII. 13)

After all

> War's a brain-spattering windpipe-slitting art,
> Unless her cause by right be sanctified. (IX. 4)

Byron's pacifism is never absolute: if the cause be truly noble a battle-field may well be 'holy ground' (VIII. 5). But mostly he sharply opposes war and Christianity: Catherine is ironically called a 'Christian' empress (VII. 64); her army 'Christian' soldiery (VIII. 37); and carnage itself 'Christ's sister' (VIII. 9). Byron's deepest feminine sympathies are all antagonized as 'babe and mother' shriek to Heaven (VIII. 69). For

> The drying up a single tear has more
> Of honest fame, than shedding seas of gore.
> (VIII. 3)

War can be ranged easily against true Christian emotions. But Byron is equally concerned to involve the sexual. Like Swift he decries decorations (medals, ribands, &c.),

comparing them, through a pointed transition, to the purple of 'the Babylonian harlot' (VII. 84), so switching a conventional sexual disapproval into horror of war's slaughterous decorum. Though Don Juan fights, like Sardanapalus, finely, yet he remains 'feminine in feature' (VIII. 52), and ever 'hated cruelty' as all do 'until heated' (VIII. 55). 'Sovereigns', not human nature, inculcate the arts of war-lust (VIII. 92). A life close to nature is contrasted, just for 'variety', with these bloody 'joys of civilization' (VIII. 61–8). Later, after considering national glories, Byron indulges in a Shakespearian nostalgia for a simple peasant existence (IX. 15). Juan, symbol of sexual promiscuity, rescues Leila, a child with

> A pure, transparent, pale, yet radiant face
> Like to a lighted alabaster vase. (VIII. 96)

Perhaps the most exquisite of all our vital yet plastic imagery, recalling the flame-lit personality of Haidée, and many other impressions of blushes and facial *light*. Here it is solitary and pathetic as the child amidst carnage. But 'one life saved', as we are told later, is, especially if youth or prettiness be involved, a greater deed than all the 'fame' ever sung for heroism (IX. 34). So Juan saves Leila, a child 'parentless and therefore mine' (VIII. 100). Byron delights in the child's refusal later to be converted although three Bishops get to work on her (X. 55–6). He has, for obvious reasons, a sympathy with the Muslim faith: and the siege of Ismail gives him a neat antithesis of ruthless Christianity and brave Turkish defence. The Khan's dying son sees 'bright eternity' flashing like 'ceaseless sunrise' where houris are mixed with angels in one 'voluptuous blaze' (VIII. 115): which holds the precise transition of erotic brilliance into the eternity-concept which is the poem's heart. The old Khan himself has a noble death (VIII. 116–19). We end with the exquisitely comic emphasis on the good Russians' chastity when sacking the city, their content with slaughter and comparatively little raping, and a remark on the disappoint-

ment among certain ladies 'of single blessedness' (VIII. 131) whose minds had been preparing for the worst.

Byron's satire is both humorous and religious (though religion, for him, includes the erotic), aiming to make us 'ponder what a pious pastime war is' (VIII. 124). It develops into a denunciation of Wellington (IX. 1–13) and indeed England (X. 66–8) for missing the greatest of opportunities in liberal action. Byron clearly has regarded his country, as did Pope, as, potentially, the world's exemplar and liberator. But now all monarchs are suspect. The Empress' delighted receipt of the news of 'thirty thousand slain' (IX. 59) speaks for itself. But Byron does not like 'mobs' any better than 'tyrants' and is no facile 'demagogue' (IX. 25): what he does like his whole life-work is left to define. He is implicitly aiming to swing over certain powerful human instincts from a destructive to a creative direction.

Juan's move to England occasions a social satire following mainly Pope's—and most other satirists'—aversions: e.g. hypocrisy (X. 34; XI. 86), supposed purity (XI. 10), respect for 'fashion' (XI. 33), literary critics (X. 14), the mentalization of passion (XI. 34), sexual coldness (XII. 63), gossip (XII. 43), pride (XIII. 19), politicians' 'double front' and tendency to lie without daring a 'bold' wickedness (XI. 36), the appalling dangers of wealth and the growing power of capitalism over Europe (XII. 5–14), England's pretence to freedom (XI. 9). This is a random list only. England is shown as a race of 'haughty shopkeepers' (X. 65) which nevertheless 'might have been' the 'noblest nation' (X. 66). The satiric arrows are multidirectional and ironic: kings must nowadays at least 'talk of law before they butcher' (X. 74). Byron fights, like Pope, a swarming complex of insincerities: at one moment attacking sophisticated and cold women who 'hate all vice except its reputation' (XII. 25), at another those who fear discovery without shame of deeds (XII. 80). Aristocratic sport gets a lash, with a kindly wink at poachers (XIII. 75); so does, typically, the lack of sympathy with post-horses

(XIII. 42). The 'ennui' of aristocratic pleasures (XIV. 17) and the 'dreary void' of 'high life' (XIV. 79) are well characterized. A miniature drama is conjured up of a pretty country girl brought before a justice for immorality (XVI. 63–5). Though the fluid technique does not always attempt and cannot be expected to maintain the compacted energy of Pope, yet certain phrases or lines have an equal sting, as in the dynamic compression of 'ambrosial cash' (XIII. 100) and 'the snake Society' (XIV. 96). Were we to strip off appearances and reveal the psychological fact, what new geography of the social problem would be revealed:

> What icebergs in the hearts of mighty men,
> With self-love in the centre as their pole!
>
> (XIV. 102)

Byron matches Pope often in epigrammatic pith, as also in so running and swift a grammatical lucidity as 'Caesar himself would be ashamed of fame' (XIV. 102).

Continual analysis of love occurs. No writer has less shirked its complexity. Sometimes its vanity and selfishness are admitted with a nevertheless ironically humorous emphasis on the idealistic:

> The noblest kind of love is love Platonical
> To end or to begin with; the next grand
> Is that which may be christen'd love canonical,
> Because the clergy take the thing in hand.
>
> (IX. 76)

Yet both neglect those awkward realities, the 'senses'; and love and lust are not easily distinguished (IX. 73–7). Marriage is vividly satirized: men are snared into it by an unfair social technique (XII. 58–60). Why do we indulge romantically in poetic phrases concerning love's supremacy which we next contradict by pretending we regard all love outside marriage as sinful? (XII. 13–16.) Passion is admired in a lover but is considered 'uxorious' in a husband (III. 6). The union of sensual and sentimental has a dangerous aspect (XIV. 73). No sex really under-

stands the other and only a Tiresias can make love properly (XIV. 73). We do not understand ourselves: 'She knew not her own heart; then how should I?' (XIV. 91.) The marriage state may be either the best or worst of any (XIV. 95); yet the essence of love is change (XIV. 94), and female friends have proved truer than lovers in trouble (XIV. 96). But from this tangle emerges a simple faith in the romantic essence: in feelings which, since they are 'divine', are therefore 'real' (XVI. 107); in the revelatory quality of 'moments when we gather from a glance more joy' than from any of those causes for pride that may 'kindle manhood' but never 'entrance the heart' with its own, yet selfless, existence (XVI. 108). Since the poem is working through complexities to essences, the essence of love is here given a theological dignity. Anacreon alone has properly honoured 'Eros' with 'unwithering myrtle', and Byron therefore, just before the long poem's climax, offers formal respect to 'Alma Venus Genetrix' (XVI. 109).

The opposition of the Byronic Eros to war and social insincerity is clear and, in so far as there is conflict, its victory easy. A sterner and subtler problem awaits our attention. Briefly, the poem's last movement offers the old 'dark eternity' of ancestry, ruins, death, and the Church.

Byron is no facile rationalist in his approach to final mysteries. All philosophical schemes, he suggests, are vain. We know only that we are born to die: and even that may be untrue (XIV. 3). Some 'Font of Eternity' (that is, ever-springing source of immediate essence) may be attained where 'new' and 'old' (that is, time) lose meaning (XIV. 3). We fear death, yet what is sleep? (XIV. 3.) The suicide often dies paradoxically through the very 'dread of death', as men desire to leap down a precipice (XIV. 4). Byron hints at that perversity of mind that makes man aim, like Macbeth, at what he fears most, since in all fear there is a fascination, just as there is in fascination a necessary fear: a paradox through which a new equation of love and death might be reached. For the unknown draws us with a 'secret prepossession' (XIV. 6); a thought

relevant to many passages in Wordsworth's *Prelude* and the normal human interest in horror-stories, ghosts, &c. The poet claims himself to have once had an experience he prefers to suppress, and will not mock that 'source of the sublime and the mysterious', the supernatural (xv. 95). His comprehensive awareness sees man as inhabiting 'two worlds', as a star on the horizon "twixt night and morn', with a mighty mystery enclosing and awaiting our destiny: we know neither what we are nor what we may be (xv. 99). So the Black Friar on whose ghostly legend so much depends is shown as not conquered:

> Amundeville is lord by day
> But the monk is lord by night.
>
> (XVI. 40–1)

Which might serve as a motto for Byron's work, its balance of the two eternities, of the historic and the prophetic, of death and love. His respect for the Church is, too, one with his respect for what I call 'dark eternity': and both are integral to the conception of Norman Abbey.

The description occurs at XIII. 55–74, balancing a different architecture and sculpture against former examples. Once an old monastery, it lies in a valley where a 'Druid oak' stands 'like Caractacus'. The 'Gothic pile' rises with a 'grand arch' awaking thought of ruinous time. A Virgin image with God-born Child in her 'blessed arms' alone survives among the empty niches, causing the poet to feel the ground beneath as still 'holy', however he may incur charge of a too superstitious reverence. There is a window once filled with stained glass through which the sun's 'deepen'd glories' used to pass, but now the gale 'sweeps through' the 'fretwork' and the owl sings his anthem. At full moon, if the wind be from a certain quarter, there 'moans a strange unearthly sound', soaring and sinking, which Byron says he has heard 'once too much'. The courtyard has a fountain with weird facial carvings; the mansion 'huge halls' and 'long galleries' joined by architectural styles out of period, with a grand irregularity.

The ancestral pictures are described, of ladies, churchmen, soldiers, and classic landscapes. All is weighty with the past. In our latter cantos we again find statuesque metaphors. The world of yesterday is gone like a shivered 'globe of glass' (XI. 76). Hypocritical society is—or pretends to be—a 'china without flaw' (XII. 78). The reserved dignity of an aristocratic dinner-table is

> polish'd, smooth, and cold,
> As Phidian forms cut out of marble Attic.
> (XIII. 110)

Where the intended tone is correct though the Hellenic reminder may slightly disturb the balance; for the poem itself is to be now 'high and solemn' like 'an old temple dwindled to a column' (XIII. 1). We have the 'bust of Brutus' at XV. 49; and reputation as a marble statue at XIV. 56; Holbein's 'Dance of Death' at XV. 39; and a Titian at XVI. 56. The sculptural and plastic again are prominent, though the tone is now heavy, solidifying the old dark eternity of historic ruins.

From this setting grows Aurora, as important as Haidée. Though she is a 'gem' (i.e. more spiritual) to Haidée's 'flower' (XV. 58), she is also a rose 'with all its sweetest leaves yet folded' (XV. 43); and, like Marina, an 'orphan'. She dwells in eternity: her eyes shine as a 'seraph's' wearing an 'aspect beyond time', at once 'radiant' and 'grave'. She is seen pictorially as though she were 'pitying man's decline', mourning sins not her own:

> She look'd as if she sat by Eden's door,
> And grieved for those who could return no more.
> (XV. 45)

She is a 'young star' above our world, 'too sweet an image' for its 'glass' (XV. 43); and her spirit

> seem'd as seated on a throne
> Apart from the surrounding world, and strong
> In its own strength . . . . (XV. 47)

She resembles Shakespeare's 'Patience gazing on king's graves and smiling extremity out of act' in *Pericles*. Byron

himself feels the kinship. She was 'more Shakespearian', since

> The worlds beyond this world's perplexing waste
> Had more of her existence . . .

her 'depth of feeling' embracing thoughts infinite yet 'silent' as space (XVI. 48). Both Haidée and Aurora have affinities with the younger heroines of Shakespeare's last period. They personify respectively the bright and dark eternities, Eros and religion, though in each there is a blend of both, Haidée being herself 'devout as well as fair' (II. 193) and expressly maternal, and Aurora 'radiant' as well as 'grave'. Aurora is a Catholic, loving that 'fallen worship' partly because of its fall (XV. 46). She is Haidée fully conscious of Haidée's tragic fate.

Juan is alone (XVI. 15–19) looking at the moon (generally sombre in Byron) from his Gothic chamber, with its ornaments of 'chisell'd stone and painted glass' (XVI. 16) and old pictures of 'knights and dames'. All is ghostly in the sepulchral light. At this hour 'voices from the urn' of death are aroused in a world where all else 'should sleep'. He watches the 'pale smile of beauties in the grave', their 'buried locks' still waving on the starlit canvas. The portrait of even a living subject records an uncapturable past (XVI. 19): the mystery of stillness, of time, of eternal essence is transmitted, something akin to that shadowed in Keats's *Grecian Urn*. When the ghost comes Juan is himself turned to stone, 'petrified', and stands as a 'statue'. The next night (XVI. 113–23) he waits all but undressed (a neat hint of what is coming), uneasy lest the ghost appear. It does. There is the last vivid scene, Juan's thrusting by only to touch the moon-silver'd 'tracery' of the old walls, the monk's eyes not precisely those of 'stony death', Juan's hand pressing on a 'hard but glowing bust' which strangely 'beat as if there were a warm heart under', his seeing a 'dimpled chin' and 'neck of ivory'—how *sculptural* it all is—and, behold, the amorous Duchess of Fitz-Fulke!

All our solemn impressions of ancestral ruin and statued

dignity, indeed, the whole poem's plastic symbolism, piles up to this climax. The monk's ghost symbolizes all haunting mystery, Church tradition, death itself—in short, the dark eternity in its most forbidding aspect; the merry Duchess, a flirtatious 'full-grown Hebe', the most trivial of all our long gallery of ladies, with more prettiness than intelligence (XVI. 49), symbolizes precisely, as would none of the others, that erotic essence undiluted with which Byron would challenge our culture. The staggering humour is one with a profound conflict: it is Byron's equivalent to Shakespeare's resurrection of Hermione, and hence the at first sight unnecessary statue-impressions. It is the final, humorous, opposition of essences, of the bright and dark eternities in *extreme* forms: though each properly, as in Haidée and Aurora, includes both.

Byron's view is kindly, radiating outwards from a spontaneous affection, especially for women, good or bad. In *Don Juan* alone his Julia, Haidée, Gulbeyaz, Leila, Catherine, Adeline, Aurora, and Fitz-Fulke make a striking company. His reverence for petticoats (XIV. 23–8) is central and from that heart no ultimate bitterness can arise. Continually he defends himself against charges of both bitterness and irreligion, though only a very blunted criticism could accuse him of either: *The Vision of Judgement*, at least on the theological side, might serve as a test of healthy reaction. He is accused of scoffing at 'human power and virtue' when all he says is covered by Solomon, Cervantes, and Dante (VII. 3). His satire is always light; his muse has no reproof worse than a 'smile' (XI. 63), she is a butterfly that does not 'sting' and rarely even alights, though, were she a hornet, there are vices that would soon hear of it (XIII. 89). 'Bitters' are mixed 'slightly' with her 'sweets' (XVI. 3). It is all true. Byron is not out for 'poetic war' (IV. 98). While sharply attacking all 'hatred', he himself would 'rather check than punish crimes' (XIII. 6–8), and is indeed 'the mildest, meekest of mankind' who has never been cruel, whose sins were of the instinctive and warmer kind only—why then is he charged with

misanthropy? (IX. 21.) 'They hate me,' he adds, 'not I them.' As for religion, the world is at the very worst a 'glorious blunder' (XI. 3) and he half-seriously—and here that may mean something very deep indeed—subscribes explicitly to orthodoxy (XI. 6), while an implicit reverence is continual. The poem is really an attempt at elucidation of his relation to the 'creed and morals of the land' (IV. 5). But he discovers that 'a jest at Vice by Virtue's called a crime' (XIII. 1). Remember that he lived in an age when poachers were caught in a steel trap, and, wounded, awaited prison instead of hospital (XVI. 61). To-day we should understand many of his revulsions the better for a century's advance. He compares himself humbly with other 'persecuted sages', Locke, Bacon, Socrates,

> and thou, Diviner still,
> Whose lot it is by man to be mistaken,
> And thy pure creed made sanction of all ill,
> Redeeming worlds to be by bigots shaken,
> How was thy toil rewarded? (XV. 18)

An old thought, but not a dead one. His own Muse is 'the most sincere that ever dealt in fiction' (XVI. 2): though that is not to deny its humour. He believes all poetry to be true conditionally on the reader's proper understanding of its nature; and that religion has the 'clue' to reality: perhaps all the varied sects are right (XV. 89). But it is time 'some new prophet should appear' or else some 'old' one indulge mankind with 'second sight' (XV. 90). The prophets are, indeed, there, waiting for us: and among them Byron's work stands high. Especially, perhaps, is his humour profound. He feels humour to be close to tragedy, and *Don Quixote* is to him the saddest of tales because it 'makes us smile' (XIII. 9). Or again:

> And if I laugh at any mortal thing,
> 'Tis that I may not weep. (IV. 4)

The cosmic philosophy to which he strains is a monistic faith like Pope's, believing all things ultimately 'kind' (XIII. 41); and with a short notice of the kindly quality

in Byron's humour I must close my summary account of his work.

A deep human sympathy enweaves with light irony; as in Shakespeare's last plays where the simple and romantic asserts itself against a keen play of critical intelligence. In *Don Juan*, manner and matter alike, this sympathy is basic.

When Haidée's father is called 'the good old man' (II. 130) we know he is, in one very obvious sense, the precise opposite:

> A fisherman he had been in his youth,
> And still a sort of fisherman was he . . .
> (II. 125)

Within the fun exists a wide comprehension, almost *sub specie aeternitatis*, wherein the distinction between suffering fishes and suffering men may not be so all-important as we think. He is next a 'fisher of men' like 'Peter the Apostle' and we balance piracy and proselytizing (II. 126): the humour depending on recognition of a possible breakdown of our most cherished illusions, with, however, a *happy* result. Haidée makes love 'whilst her piratical papa was cruising' (III. 13): the word 'papa' enlisting soft family emotions on the side of villainy. Next, it is suggested that were he a 'prime minister' his way of 'raising cash' would be 'nothing but taxation'; he just practises as a 'sea-attorney' (III. 14). As so often in writers like Byron, the obvious crime is thrown into sharp and significant relation to the more subtly insidious dangers of convention; though the pirate's ruthlessness is not watered down (III. 16). Yet he remains 'the best of fathers' (III. 17) bringing back a present for Haidée. A slight shift of perspective and we recognize a man no worse than ourselves, with a certain delight in the recognition. Besides,

> He was the mildest manner'd man
> That ever scuttled ship or cut a throat. (III. 41)

He had been hardened partly by continual abuse of his mercy (III. 54); the 'spirit of old Greece' was in him, with

no honest way open for expressing his force of personality (III. 55); and he loves music and flowers (III. 56). He is a usual Byronic figure. But see how what first appeared a light humour gradually reveals itself as a wide, and deep, recognition of common humanity beneath the level of social morality.

Whatever the variations played—and they are many—a certain optimistic universal underlies the poem's humour. Apparent cruelties are superficial. A slave-market is lightly, and it may seem callously, described: yet, look deeper, and are we not all slaves? (V. 25.) 'By God's grace' (II. 132) many wrecks throw up firewood on Haidée's island: yet what philosophy has yet penetrated God's certainly non-human categories? Suffering and advantage are reciprocal throughout the fabric of the universe: we recognize a sudden truth with an equally sudden delight. Continually we are so directed to a pleasing profundity:

> Let us have wine and women, mirth and laughter,
> Sermons and soda-water the day after. . . . (II. 178)

Which circles above the necessary rhythms of psychic variation too often reduced to an artificial unity. Attacks of ill health, we are told, have developed the poet's orthodoxy until the Trinity is so uncontrovertibly established

> That I devoutly wish'd the three were four
> On purpose to believe so much the more. (XI. 6)

Which is, precisely, true: the whole poem dallying with the thought of a new sanctity, a new Eros-god, or 'Alma Venus'. And meanwhile the mockery hints at the provisional nature of all man-made schemes. The humour is substantial, resolving conflicts of deep importance and never existing for itself alone. But when the parched survivors from the wreck eat Juan's tutor, the manner of approach is its own solution, not allowing our emotions to get too seriously involved. Where the satiric attack is fierce, as with the war incidents, the humour fades out.

Pope and Byron are alike in their inability to be at once humorous and cruel; the best *humour* of *The Dunciad* tending to blunt the keen edge of its intended attack. The light irony of *Don Juan* acts like Swift's—only with far less bitterness—to raise our own instinctive judgements. Social insincerities are easily and neatly handled: but the deeper human substance those insincerities obscure is not suspect. I cannot here analyse the many variations; and my remarks aim only to characterize at least the prevailing spirit and the main incidents. The approach might be defined as one of good-natured mockery through which certain human qualities, and in particular sexual desire, kindliness, and bravery, assert themselves pleasingly, while certain respectable vices, especially those concerned with social insincerity and war, appear to condemn themselves. The Pharisaic is forced to reveal itself. People are attacked, but no person, not even Catherine, is *created* in cruelty: as persons, they are either partly sympathetic or ludicrously dignified, as is the Sultan at v. 147–55.

A distinction of sympathetic from derisive humour may help. Smiles or any lighting up of eye or face may be seen in child and savage and are accordingly to be regarded as primary, more ultimate than intellectual categories or humour itself. They reflect, simply, joy; with, in maturity, close sexual affinities, the very ripple of laughter being perhaps not unrelated to sexual rhythms. Now whenever some intellectual mechanism releases such primal joy in terms of ideas troubling us all, we have rich humour: a brittle surface, itself either akin to or poles apart from the happy substance, (comparison or contrast being variously employed) is either merged in, or shattered to make way for, a larger recognition. That recognition involves a certain basic and golden human centre; and therefore basic human dignity, especially the often questionable dignity of sex-rhythm and joy, must on no account suffer degradation. The lilting and titillating rhymes that percolate through Byron's narrative mark an inclusive subjugation of *mock* dignities to a spontaneous merriment

which itself accordingly gains prestige. You can see why humour decrying the basic instincts will be necessarily unhealthy. For two main elements are involved: (A) a basic humanity with its 'golden' centre, and (B) a host of conventional value-judgements. When B is dissolved in A we have a pure unity-experience comparable to that of tragedy, suffused by forgiveness of all elements dissolved and joy in the golden centre revealed. But if certain values (e.g. ethical) of B are so inextricably entwined with any concept of the good that no dissolution occurs; still worse, if, as—to hazard a suggestion—in Ben Jonson's great comedies, A seems deliberately dissolved into B; we have what I call 'derisive' humour, hostile, on the whole, to both basic instincts and cosmic penetration; cruel rather than loving. This sort will always seem at first sight the more moral and important; but the other humour, as with tragic insight, exerts a slower, yet more lasting, ethic. There is often point in satiric bitterness: but not, perhaps, humorous point. I mean, one should not know the joy of comedy in the act of knowing *Volpone* to be a true statement: such satire demands the manner of Pope on Sporus or Byron's Angiolina on Steno. Otherwise the golden centre is desecrated: than which you can find no worse blasphemy. That is my reason for not giving full approval to the humour of Jonson in *Volpone* or Marlowe in *Tamburlaine* and *The Jew of Malta*.

My use of the word 'golden' clearly relates to Byron's strong feeling for the sun in close relation to sexual instincts. It is itself the 'golden centre' of the macrocosm, exerts royalty over true humour, and must have place in any bright eternity:

> It was upon a day, a summer's day;
> Summer's indeed a very dangerous season,
> And so is spring about the end of May;
> The sun, no doubt, is the prevailing reason . . . .
> (I. 102)

Often the poem strikes a similar note (I. 63; V. 157), especially in the relating of Russian chastity to the cold

north (VIII. 128; X. 33). The moon is 'chaste' (X. 11) in Byron. The Juan–Haidée romance, with its 'feelings universal as the sun' (II. 167), stands as a direct flowering of what is implicit in the humour of the whole. Juan is the erotic personified: hence bisexual, courtly, at once reserved and fascinating (XV. 12), loved by all the ladies in turn. Less a realized person than an essence vitalized by the poetic approach (like Sporus), he runs as a gold thread through the vast design. Incidents themselves are contrived to reveal love-instincts gloriously shattering conventional surfaces, as in the delightful irruption of Julia's husband at I. 138. Notice how the wife's delightful over-statement of loyalty (I. 145–57)—

> Is it for this that General Count O'Reilly
> Who took Algiers, declares I used him vilely?—

with its 'two bishops' later, balances the more usual technique of understatement elsewhere, since here the real facts are already dramatically vivid. Such humour marks an ability to break free from all conventional values, if only for a moment: in service, however, to something at once healthy and 'universal as the sun'. The qualification is utterly necessary: Swift's use of ordure performs a vastly different function for a very different, strictly non-humorous, purpose. The whole Byronic enjoyment in paradox is distilled in the lovely phrase 'that indecent sun' (I. 63). The springlike and rebirth quality of the sheep-shearing scenes in *The Winter's Tale*, a play dominated by Apollo as the 'fire-robed' and 'golden' god, naturally produces Autolycus, whose essence is (i) melody, sunshine, and flowery song, and (ii) shameless disrespect for social values. In Falstaff there is a similar antinomy of all but cosmic physical proportions against the trimmed and athletic exercises of man's civilized ideals. Our most deep-rooted, least questionable, and most dignified value is that of death, the dark eternity, religion: and see how the lumbering resurrection of Falstaff, whom we thought dead (towards the end of the first *Henry IV*) and for whom we

were getting our best tragic emotions in order, shatters, as it were, the dark eternity itself with the other eternity of a vast, but living, body. Which all points to that purest essence of humour in *Don Juan*, when, after the last movement has been at pains to create a nobly dark eternity, with all its legendary fears, architectural gloom, and finely chiselled creation of the girl Aurora to balance Haidée and her island with something of equivalent Byronic appeal, the whole poem's meaning is crystallized in the revelation of a warm and amorous duchess beneath the ghostly cowl; of a 'warm heart', as the poem says, instead of 'stony death'. Essence is pitted against essence; flesh against stone. The final conventional value, death, is being melted by rays from the heart of life as surely as in the restoring of Hermione. For resurrection itself may be allowed to be rather funny; just as in true humour there is always something of a re-creation and rebirth from the golden centre, that is, from Byron's 'bright eternity' (VIII. 115); which is nothing if not resurrection.

A full treatment would give detailed notice to *The Deformed Transformed*, which has an importance in conception perhaps not quite borne out in execution: involving realization of a power-dream, consequent desecration by war of Church and heroine, with a suggested resurrection after apparent death (that recalls *Pericles*) of the lady concerned. I should also like to have noticed the psychological tension of *The Two Foscari* and the specifically dramatic excellences of *Werther*, with its dark background of guilt and Oedipus-discovery.

Byron's poetic interests are, like Shakespeare's, at once subjective, personal, social, political, naturalistic, and cosmic. No writer has exposed a more agonized sense of sin and psychological conflict; yet none finally mastered a more exquisite unity. His revolutionary thinking is grafted on to as keen an awareness of and feeling for tradition—whether social or religious—as any in English literature: no one but Milton and Blake has made such

use of Biblical mythology. He is master equally of deepest pathos and richest comedy, showing in the latter a fine Chaucerian kinship. In Shakespeare alone will you find such stabs, again and again, of human insight. His feminine sympathy approaches Shakespeare's and surpasses Pope's, with a fine and varied succession of heroines. In the eight hundred double-column pages of his stupendous output—he died at the age of thirty-five—there is scarcely one really weak line, and perhaps not a single obscure one. He is equally at home with the primary symbols of sea, mountains, and human architecture; with an additional specialization in use of the sun and moon. His sympathy with animals and ability to create either animal or human life in convincing action is matched by Shakespeare only. No poet shows a more delicate sympathy with the lighter aspects of human love-intercourse, seen best in his many references to the dance culminating in the fine description of Juan's grace and skill: something I mean found also in Lyly, Shakespeare, and Pope, but later diverging into the novel to leave poetry the worse. His progress closely reflects Shakespeare's with the main difference of a more challenging, less provisional, humour and erotic faith at the close. He is from the start as ready as Shakespeare to use the conventionally established emotion or phrase for his own, more complex, purposes. But he is also happy with, and uses, the best 'romantic' insight of his own day; while relating it, as others do not, to the further complexities of action. Master of two periods in English poetry, he is mastered by neither: he is as often above as within his own creation. Moreover, no English poet has left a message more directly relevant to our own, twentieth-century, problems. His sympathies are equally European and Oriental: he is our only cosmopolitan poet. As a satirist, he stands second only to Pope, though his own field of inspection is the wider: his balance of religious orthodoxy with sexual sympathy recalls Pope's. Outside Shakespeare no one even distantly approaches him in range and variety: while that

disturbing sexual complex in Marlowe and Milton, not *directly* attacked in Shakespeare, is deliberately faced and resolved. His blend of vitality with plastic or sculptural image to create a living eternity is matched by Keats alone. He is at once, to use his own phrase from *Manfred*, a 'Croesus in creation', and, to use Shelley's remarkably precise title (it is strange how often Shelley's phraseology turns out, after all, to be 'precise'), the 'pilgrim of eternity': though we must remember that with him both eternities, the solemn and the radiant, get equal notice. Indeed, his work shows a balancing of the one against the other similar to that dramatized in Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*: a similarity felt also in the steady development from Satanic power to rich generosity in his sequence of protagonists. He is deeply, because essentially, Christian. A human figure burns through his pages either thunder-scarred or touched with some new sovereignty from a height which civilization, as we know it, can only with difficulty conceive. He is the only English poet of the modern world making direct contact with the ideals of chivalry.

VII

CONCLUSION: CHRISTIANITY AND EROS

THE selection and analysis in juxtaposition of the writers here treated, together with the differentiation of Milton from the others, is itself my book's chief argument. But a few points of central importance may profitably be given retrospective emphasis.

The poetry discussed has been concerned with human affairs, and particularly human action, on a wide front. In this it appears to me to be, other things being reasonably equal, of far greater consequence than any insight, however excellent, limited to a narrower field. Certainly positions can be held and poetic gestures made in lyric and ode which at once reveal their purely provisional and partial value the moment the sterner task of epic or dramatic composition is attempted.

Historically we have watched the interplay of materialistic with innate, or spiritual, forces. Shakespeare holds a balance; Milton tilts it one way, Swift, in scorn, the other. Pope in attempt to inject a new positive through a virulent personal and impersonal attack, and Byron in his greater plays and *Don Juan*, cut out directions of the highest importance; directions which were, however, foreshadowed in *Henry IV*, *Hamlet*, *Measure for Measure*, *Troilus and Cressida*, and, most important of all, *Timon of Athens*. Continually in Shakespearian tragedy the hero's soldiership is seen invaded by a more inward and feminine yet cosmic and mysterious power; *Coriolanus* and *Antony and Cleopatra* being the clearest examples. Our whole study has revolved about an opposition taking chameleon forms of action and passivity, the vital and the rigid, time and eternity.

The world-view of a poet is not to be distinguished finally from the type of poetic expression it dictates.

Milton's obedience to certain traditional religious mechanisms lays too great a strain on the poetic will. As a poet he is trying through a verbal technique to master final antagonisms that do not exist, as such, for the others; except, perhaps, for Byron, who aims to resolve them on a deeper level. Milton's peculiar quality of surface richness and thence hardness grows from this iron surface control, this willed effort of poetic domination. Pope alone shows—in his early work—an equivalence in verbal *lustre*, without, however, a sacrifice of deeper contacts. Milton is an extreme instance. But wherever we find a poet, or critic, laying too final an emphasis on verbal, or linear, poetry, or even on paragraph movements or whole short poems, as distinct from the marshalling and manipulation of imaginative substance, there is a corresponding danger: since often the very excellence, indeed the seemingly stiff integrity and organic cohesion, of certain passages or of short poems, may be won through a willed rejection of those more far-reaching and romantic energies that constitute the poetic challenge of Pope and Byron. There is such a thing as a pressure of *ex*clusion. I suspect that to Byron, as to Shakespeare, composition was swift. They had only to let power, not exactly their own, breathe through. Their surface errors never matter as do Milton's, since their surface calls less attention to itself.

Such creation depends on the union, or the ever-present felt possibility of union, of two sets of positive forces that might be expressed as those clustering about the dual conceptions of (i) Christianity, and (ii) Eros. Put otherwise, the union craved is that of the parental-filial and erotic impulses; of gentle love and sexual power. The very dynamic of life from which all thought, religion, art, and action originate is here at stake. This I have already urged in my book *The Christian Renaissance* (parts of which might be profitably compared with Miss Maud Bodkin's important study *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry*), where I relate the New Testament teaching and drama to the Renaissance imagination in general and the

work of Dante, Shakespeare, and Goethe in particular, while emphasizing the necessarily erotic core of literary creation. I do not suggest any neglect of the specifically tragic: Shakespeare and Byron are our two greatest masters of tragedy. Both, moreover, press beyond it, as Milton does not. They are, too, together with Chaucer and Pope, among the great humorists of poetry; whereas the Miltonic approach must always maintain, at peril of a comedy both ugly and indecent, its own high seriousness.

In the study of the poets here grouped lies the germ of a new psychological, social, and religious reconstruction. For that *simultaneous* manipulation of personal, family, social, natural, and cosmic forces that makes the Shakespearian or Byronic artist so tower above those whose attempts are more limited is the only true, because comprehensive, realism, and may be felt further as a condensation of the wider problems in actuality of personal, national, and international action. In them we can detect the working of certain creative laws equally valid beyond poetry. It is, for example, significant that in the writers here discussed the more objective and narrative, as opposed to the inward and dramatic, manner has only succeeded on condition of a semi-humorous treatment. Such works point the condition and direction of any advance towards a civilization at once more divinely inclusive and instinctively human.

We must, however, beware of any too facile definition of the relation borne by poetic art to ethics, sexual or political. Each of the writers discussed in my book has felt himself a national prophet. They remain such: and sometimes most valuably so in rebellion. Yet no poet has left a 'programme' any more than the New Testament itself: Sardanapalus is not shown as an efficient king. We should attend rather to qualities and directions without expecting too precise a gospel. The denunciations of Pope and Byron may then be felt as complementary to, rather than as contradicting, Cranmer's prophecy at the conclusion of *Henry VIII*. Finally, our present group of writers have all—with the

possible exception of Swift—explicitly forced our intuitions beyond all temporal interests into realms of the infinite and eternal.

I cannot here trace the more recent developments of such poetry in our literature. Tennyson (well treated in Mr. Humbert Wolfe's admirable but short study) strove hard for fullest poetic inclusions. Browning's poetic insight penetrates deeply the springs of Christianity and erotic power alike—I point to Mr. F. G. Duckworth's and Miss Dallas Kenmare's excellent appreciations; while Arnold's emphasis on the importance of action in poetry is clearly relevant. Hardy, whose *Dynasts* has received an intensive interpretative analysis by Lascelles Abercrombie, and, more recently, in Mr. Amiya Chakravarty's sensitive study, is in the tradition. Thereafter the complexities become rapidly too great for even summary notice. Mr. Eliot's *Waste Land* and *Triumphal March* are undoubtedly most distinguished examples; and Mr. Sean O'Casey's *Within the Gates*, a remarkable play, is another. Relevant material is to-day more likely to appear in prose, as with Mr. John Cowper Powys's *Glastonbury Romance*, perhaps the greatest work of our generation. My own attempt at a modern art-form of concentric circles, with discursive views on the general situation, has appeared in *Atlantic Crossing*. Among our younger writers, Mr. Francis Berry's recently published poem *The Iron Christ*, with its reach of reference and vital centres of action, together with dynamic associative transpositions, possesses a profound contemporary interest and poetic importance. Its theme is that underlying the movement traced by my present study: the slow transmutation of volcanic and destructive into creative energies, together with the substitution for the power of the sword of the power of Christ, the sun.