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A.D. Hope describes his traffic, like that of Autolycus, as being 'in sheets', and the sheets as being the results of his curiosity and speculation over many years of exploring the corners and byways of literary history.

The books that aroused Hope's curiosity range wide and far over time, from Beowulf to Kangaroo. He is, for example, intrigued by variations on the theme of Venus and Adonis as presented by Ovid, Titian and Shakespeare; he responds to the spell of Wuthering Heights and Emily Bronte and to the challenge of Tennyson's attitude to women in The Princess; he brings a poet's sensitivity to understanding the apocalypse of Christopher Smart.

Readers who appreciate wit, intelligence, knowledge and understanding will value these essays.
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The Pack of Autolycus
Books by the same author

Poetry
The Wandering Islands (1955)
Poems 1960
Dunciad Minor (1970)
New Poems 1965–1969
A Late Picking (1975)
A Book of Answers (1978)

Critical work
The Cave and the Spring (1965)
A Midsummer Eve’s Dream (1970)
Native Companions (1973)
'Autolycus: a rogue' is how the Names of the Actors, as the folio calls it, describes him. He did not deny it and says roundly:

Let him call me a rogue for being so far officious; for I am proof against that title and what shame else belongs to it

He himself preferred a less downright description:

My father named me Autolycus; who, being as I am, littered under Mercury, was likewise a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles.

Like Autolycus who was an entertaining scoundrel, 'my traffic is in sheets' and these sheets are the result of forty years spent in hanging around the purlieus of scholarship and criticism. They are trifles snapped up without much pretence of either because of an idle curiosity which led me into all sorts of corners and byways of literary history. Curiosity begot speculation and speculation in turn led to an attempt to solve a problem. The speculations are my own: any evidence with which the answers are supported has been appropriated, like a true son of Mercury, from the erudition and research of others. I cannot claim to be an expert in any of the fields I have intruded on. In the highly specialised world of literary scholarship today, such an admission may well stamp a man a rogue. I can only hope that, like Autolycus, I may prove an entertaining one.

I should mention in passing that my title does not indicate any intention to rival the selection of essays on literary topics by Alice
Meynell which appeared in 1965 under the title *The Wares of Autolycus*. The reason for that title was that the essays republished in the selection were mainly taken from a column Mrs Meynell contributed to the *Pall Mall Gazette* between 1895 and 1899 and which bore that name. Her Autolycus was an innocent and delightful picker-up of trifles; mine is more properly a son of Mercury.

I should like to express my thanks to various scholars who have helped me in the work: Dr W.H. Bond of the Houghton Library, Harvard and Dr Ian Jack of the Pembroke College Library, Cambridge, Miss Virginia Spate of the Fine Arts Department of the same university, the curators and staff of the National Galleries at London and Washington, Mr T.P. Dobson of the Department of English of Melbourne University and Dr R.F. Brissenden and Professor Wesley Milgate of the Department of English, Australian National University. There are many others to whom I am grateful for the expense of much valuable time and expert advice with great generosity and good will. I should, however, like to mention one name to which I owe a great debt, my old master and tutor, the late C.S. Lewis, with whom on several occasions I have had to disagree. He was a great teacher because he made his pupils feel that they were part of an exciting expedition into new territory, and because he always gave them ground for exploring on their own. The fact that I seem in this and other books only to have cited him to contest his views, must not be allowed to hide the fact that my debt to him and my admiration for him have grown greater with the passing of time.

Finally I owe a debt of gratitude to Miss Pamela Nase for her generous help in allowing me to use her as a sounding board for many of the ideas in these papers and in particular for undertaking the typing and checking of half the text and to Miss Teresa Mannix for checking the rest.

A.D.H.

Canberra, 1977
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Epic poetry occurs in two forms: what we may call primary or primitive epic which is either a product or a survival of an heroic age of which it celebrates the heroes and the battles and the feuds; and what we may call secondary or literary epic which draws on the tradition of primary epic for the creation of great narrative poems often of a very different sort and spirit. It is sometimes difficult to say just where a particular poem should be placed. Virgil's *Aeneid* is definitely a secondary epic but it is hard to say how far the *Iliad* as we now have it is really a primary epic. *Beowulf* itself, though it has much of the character of primary epic, is a sophisticated poem written in a later age by a poet who was educated, perhaps had read the *Aeneid*, and who lived in a society which in religion, organisation and culture was very different from the age it celebrates. In many ways it seems best to class it not among the original Germanic epics but with those poems which deliberately imitate and are directly inspired by these originals.

Unfortunately real comparison is impossible, for the heroic literature of the Germanic peoples, which we know to have been a vast and a rich one, has almost entirely disappeared. Much of it was probably never written down and perished, as oral traditions often do, or was gradually corrupted and diverted till only vague memories of great heroes like Widia and Wada and Wayland survived into the late middle ages. But there is evidence that in England at least some of them were written down by the only people who wrote things down
for preservation—the monks. Alcuin had to reprove the monks of Lindisfarne for listening to recitations of poems like the *Lay of Ingeld,* whose story forms an episode in *Beowulf*; and there is evidence that churchmen took an interest in learning and in collecting such tales. Fragments of two epics exist: one on the subject of the Finnnsburh episode in *Beowulf,* and the other on the story of the famous hero Waldere or Walter. Both tales are set in a period more remote than that of *Beowulf* and deal with actual historical characters and events, however legendary the present version. Both manuscripts were probably written and copied in monastic scriptoria. There may have been many more such manuscripts. But several things probably contributed to their disappearance. Towards the end of the Old English period there is evidence that the popularity of the old heroic lays declined and was replaced by a taste for historical narrative of another kind. Though the memory of some of the ancient heroes survived into the later middle ages, their stories seem to have been forgotten. Thus the oral tradition apparently died out. Monastery and cathedral libraries continued to house those lays which had been written down when this form of literature was popular but literary taste changed to romance after the Norman Conquest, and the language also changed rapidly, so probably few could read these old tales even if they had wanted to. The dissolution of the monasteries at the Reformation resulted in wholesale destruction of their libraries and many cathedral and private collections met the same fate in the English Civil War. Scholars began to be interested in Anglo-Saxon from the sixteenth century onwards but Anglo-Saxon studies did not begin in earnest till the end of the eighteenth century and by that time most of what may have been available earlier was lost. The same fate, more or less, overtook the heroic literature of the Germanic peoples on the continent. Iceland alone continued to develop the native Germanic tradition well into the middle ages. But this branch of it began a little too late. The heroic lays and epic sagas which survived there, survived in so distorted or so romanticised a form that they give us little idea of the originals of the heroic age. Of original Germanic epic we have only three fragments, two English and one German, and these are of late date. *Beowulf* itself is the only full length poem attempting to recreate the old epic style and treatment, but it is probably little more than a literary and a Christian reconstruction or imitation of the older form.

Part of its interest for us is that it preserves as episodes and allusions
in the main story, some record of a large number of heroic legends from the older stratum of the literature of the age of the Germanic migrations. Such heroes as Breca, Ongentheow, Eormenric, Finn, Hama, Heremod, Ingeld, Offa, Sigmund and Weland must have had their own lays and epics to celebrate their deeds. In fact the author of \textit{Beowulf} plainly expected his audience to know the full form of these stories and poems about them would be the main source for this knowledge. We know from Alcuin that there was probably a poem about Ingeld. We have part of the actual lays on Finn and on Walter. Another Old English poem \textit{Widsith} has left us a list of chiefs and peoples, many of whom, it is safe to assume, also had lays about them. For Widsith is a minstrel and the poem has every appearance of being, in part at least, the description of a minstrel's repertory. It gives the minstrel's credentials, the courts he has visited, the honour shown him by various princes for his skill, lists of peoples and heroes whose stories are known to him, more extended references to tales which he wants to interest his audience in hearing, such as, for example the later story of Hrothgar and Hrothwulf and the attack of the Heathobeards on Heort—a story referred to in \textit{Beowulf}, in Norse literature, and in \textit{Saxo Grammaticus}. There was undoubtedly a poem on the subject and Widsith, in this and a number of other cases, seems to be the professional minstrel giving a foretaste to whet the appetites of his audience. Moreover he behaves like a true court poet, dropping broad hints at more than one place in the poem of the reward he expects from a generous patron. The fact that the whole thing is fictitious, that Widsith could not have visited the courts of princes living many hundreds of years apart, and that he includes characters like Alexander the Great and the emperor at Byzantium, peoples like the Saracens, the Finns and the Celtic Scots, the Assyrians, Hebrews and Egyptians need not worry us. It may simply indicate that, when the poem was written, tales from some of these sources had been added to an English minstrel's repertory. Even if \textit{Widsith} does not represent an actual minstrel's catalogue of his wares—it seems more like a literary version of such a poem—it is reasonable to suppose that it reproduces the features of such a catalogue poem, that real minstrels did follow this practice and that, at the time when \textit{Beowulf} was written, minstrels and court poets possessed a large repertory of Germanic heroic tales which they varied with lays based on biblical, classical, oriental and even Celtic sources. This view that \textit{Widsith} represents the type of an actual minstrel's exordium has not been sufficiently considered by
scholars, who have perhaps been too much obsessed with treating it as an artificial literary production, as a composite poem made up of fragments from various sources.

From the first century A.D. there is plenty of evidence that all the more famous heroes, and all the more impressive disasters and victories of the heroic age, were celebrated in songs which passed from one Germanic tribe to another. *Beowulf* and *Widsith* are Anglian poems and are weighted heavily on the side of poems from peoples living in North Germany and Scandinavia—and this would be understandable if tradition were correct in supposing that the Angles came from the area later occupied by the Danes. But Gothic, Lombard and Burgundian tales were also among the repertoire. It was their *fame* and not national or tribal sympathies that made these epic heroes popular. It was, one might say, the sentiment for the heroic tradition, continuing into a later age, that preserved the taste for heroic literature as such. Even in late Old English times we can see this. Contemporary battles such as that of Maldon are put into traditional heroic verse and form. Churchmen who were either worried about the influence of the old lays of the heathen society, or wanted to exploit their popularity to recommend Christian material, composed poems on subjects such as the Book of Judith, Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt or lives of saints like St Andrew and St Guthlac, and they composed them in the forms of real heroic poetry. *Beowulf* itself, which seems to be an attempt at an heroic epic in Christian terms, may very well owe its composition to one or both of these motives. The author, instead of providing an alternative, boldly enters the field as a competitor, just as General Booth took over the tunes and to some extent the spirit of popular songs for his Salvation Army hymns.

However that may be, it is plain that the ideals and attitudes of the heroic age continued to be admired in Anglo-Saxon England and the author of *Beowulf*, whatever his Christian purpose or views, obviously shared this admiration. In order to understand the poem we must understand some of the main features of heroic society and the relation between the structure of heroic society and the function of heroic literature in promoting and maintaining it.

The Heroic Age of the Germanic peoples may have lasted over many centuries. It probably goes back in time to the period before the Indo-European peoples split up into separate groups and developed their separate languages and cultures (in fact no backward date could possibly be set) for any society that depends on primitive warfare for
its defence and maintenance is bound to be more or less heroic in structure. That is to say, it is organised round the idea of maintaining a supply of fighting men and its social, ethical and moral ideals are centred in the idea of the hero or the hero-King. Primitive societies of quite different pattern exist. But the commonest pattern of a primitive society is heroic.

However, what we mean specifically by the heroic age of the Germanic peoples is the age of the migrations when most of the main tribes and nations were displaced from their home territories and moved about Europe maintaining themselves by constant warfare and plunder of the peoples whose territories they invaded. Many great nations disappeared entirely in the process, for the consequences of defeat in battle were apt to be enslavement or annihilation of the tribe as a separate entity. Thus the heroic virtues and abilities were not simply desirable, they were, in the period, absolutely essential for survival at all and hence came to be the main theme of literature and the fundamental interest of life.

Tacitus wrote his account of the Germans in A.D. 98. The society he describes is a fairly settled one and has many of the features of the society of the heroic age as described for example in Beowulf. Warfare is the chief occupation and interest of the tribes and their societies are organised for war. Some of them seemed to have a more or less aristocratic 'democracy', if one can put it that way, electing their war chiefs and magistrates by popular vote, others seemed to be under the rule of hereditary chiefs or kings and others again, the account suggests, had a sort of sacerdotal basis. They lived by hunting and a primitive agriculture which involved shifting to new ground when the old was exhausted. Each powerful tribe was separated by wilderness and forest from its neighbours owing to the ceaseless tribal raids. But the impression Tacitus gives is one of a precarious balance of power among the main nations. Once this balance was upset of course tribes would be driven from their hereditary territories to avoid annihilation and would have to attack and drive out the tribes in other areas. Something of this sort seems to have set the great movements of the age of the migrations going. Already in the second century B.C. the Teutones and the Cimbri had begun to migrate and, after invading Italy in immense numbers, they met defeat from the Romans under Gaius Marius. These tribes seem to have moved all the way from Jutland and must have fought all the way, displacing or being defeated by other nations. Julius Caesar in the first century B.C. gives an
account of other German tribes who, driven out by more powerful nations in Germany, crossed the Rhine and invaded Celtic territory. When the great migrations came, Germanic tradition assigned as part of the reason a great increase in population in some nations, especially the Goths, Burgundians, Vandals and other East German peoples, such that the nation was forced to divide in two and to emigrate as a whole or in part. Later incursions of people from Asia, the Avars and the Huns increased this tendency by driving East Germanic peoples westward into the territory of their neighbours. Finally, when the defences of the later Roman Empire began to crumble, there was the added incentive to migrate into, to plunder and finally to settle in the rich provinces of the Empire itself.

Such a state of affairs could not last forever. A people cannot live forever on the march, nor can it live forever by plunder and conquest. Sooner or later an equilibrium is bound to be established and this is what happened. Many Germanic tribes were conquered and incorporated, others like the Franks, the Lombards, the Goths, the Vandals, the Gepidae and others formed military aristocracies in Spain, Italy and North Africa and Gaul and were soon absorbed by the conquered peoples to the extent of losing even their language. Little by little settled, permanent and organised kingdoms replaced the picture of nations on the march. When *Beowulf* was written the invasions of the wandering Angles, Saxons and Jutes, each band and tribe carving out its own conquest and fighting its neighbours, was already over. England was divided into fixed kingdoms and principalities and the next stage of welding them into a permanent national group was already under way. The spread of Christianity and with it Mediterranean civilisation had a considerable effect in this process. Except in Scandinavia the heroic age was over and the feudal age was beginning.

The essential feature of the life both of men and of peoples in the age of the migrations was its instability and precariousness. The very existence of the tribe depended on strong military organisation, powerful leadership and a supply of heroes, and from this central fact the whole ethos of the tribe and its organisation proceeded. The society pictured in *Beowulf* exemplifies it in every detail and its main features are all developments of the social organisation described by Tacitus four hundred years earlier. It is useful to compare the two periods. What Tacitus described—the old loose organisation of the tribes—had now been replaced by a military aristocracy serving a
hereditary king whose court was the centre of their life and interests. Each of these chiefs had his own band of retainers and fighting men but they themselves formed a comitatus or central fighting force owing unswerving loyalty to the lord or king. This virtue is the central and essential virtue. Tacitus mentions it as a peculiarity of the Germans and says it was regarded as a disgrace to survive one's lord in battle. So it is in Beowulf. The grief and shame of the Geats when they are left sitting by the mere thinking their chief has perished under the waters is a case in point. Later in the poem the young hero Wiglaf bitterly reproaches the followers of Beowulf who have failed to support their king in his fight with the dragon:

I remember that time when we were drinking mead, when in the beer-hall we promised our lord who gave us these rings, that we would requite him for the wargear, the helms and sharp swords, if need such as this came upon him. Because of this he chose us among the host of his own will for this venture... Let us go to help our warlike prince, while the fierce, dread flame yet flares... It does not seem fitting to me, that we should bear back our shields to our dwellings if we cannot first feel the foe, guard the life of the prince of the Weders.

When Beowulf is dead he taunts them again. Not only have they earned lasting shame by failing their king. Without a king the Geats themselves will be destroyed by their neighbours and hereditary enemies:

Now the receiving of jewels, giving of swords, all the splendid heritage, and life's necessities shall pass away from your race. Every man of the people shall wander, stripped of his rights in the land, when chieftains from afar hear of your flight, the inglorious act. Death is better for all earls than a shameful life.

Beowulf dying says much the same. This is an interesting passage for it shows how clearly the practical necessities of the splendid and ceremonial court life were recognised. The picture of honour, service, rewards and loyalty in Beowulf is no mere romantic picture of a primitive chivalry and an ornamental code of honour. It is a matter of actual survival. Again and again in Beowulf the point is stressed, and these ideas and ideals persisted throughout the Old English period. They would have been well understood by the audience of Beowulf and not as a mere historical reconstruction of the manners and ideas.
of a past age. Almost contemporary with the poem, if scholars are right about its date, is the account of an incident from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* of a petty Anglo-Saxon king called Cynewulf who was surprised, with a band of followers, by one of the king's enemies. The house was surrounded and the king was killed. The retainers were offered honourable terms if they would recognise the victor. They replied:

that they had nothing dearer than their own lord
and that they would never follow his slayer. And
they chose all to die fighting where they stood.

Not only was this absolute loyalty expected of the *comitatus* of the chief. What they won in battle belonged to the lord.

You notice that Beowulf, returning from what is quite a private expedition to the court of Hrothgar, also, as the expected thing, hands over the princely gifts of the Danish king to his uncle Hygelac who in turn rewards him suitably. The retainer, even if a prince of the royal house or an earl with estates and followers of his own, or a champion famous throughout the Germanic tribes who as an exile from his own people or to win fame attached himself to a foreign prince, in theory owed everything to his lord, the weapons and armour he carried to battle, his wealth in gold rings, lands, slaves, horses and ships. He ate the lord's food in the lord's hall; he slept on the benches in the hall: the relationship was based on an almost romantic tie governed by dignified ceremonial and an aristocratic code of behaviour. Of course this, like the ideal chivalry of feudal literature, was not as simple in practice as in theory. The other deep and inviolable loyalty was to one's kinsmen. Unferth in *Beowulf* is a man under a cloud because he has let down, if not actually betrayed a kinsman. The greatest tragedy for a man, next to being an exile, a lordless man, was to be caught in one of those situations of divided loyalties which so often arose. The original Hamlet story taken from ancient Danish history is a good example and that of Hengest in the Finn episode of Beowulf even better.

The ideal Germanic hero, then, was expected to be of great physical strength and indomitable courage and unflinching loyalty to kinsmen and lord, eager for fame which was the one permanent thing in life and fully conscious of his own merit. The habit of boasting may seem strange but it is easy to see its point. A man is expected to boast of his exploits because they are a glory not only to himself and his
tribe but to his lord. In the beer hall after the feast the warriors rise and, recounting their past exploits, boast of what they will perform in their lord’s war. Thus Beowulf names his ploy before he encounters Grendel. He will beat the monster or perish in the attempt and he will beat him with his bare hands, without the help of weapons. This may seem a bit overdone but it is quite in keeping with the heroic spirit. A man names his feat beforehand. He puts the stakes high. Then he must live up to it or be disgraced. There is no getting away with some lesser feat. That this was actually the case we see from the story of the Jomsvikings, who were tricked at a feast by the king of Denmark. He got them drunk on purpose and then got them to make rash vows at the feast which they were afterwards obliged by their commitments to attempt, and nearly all of them perished in trying to carry them out.

On the other side of the picture the relation of the king or lord to his retainers was equally exacting. Unless like Hrothgar, too old to fight himself, he was expected to be a leader in war and a champion of champions. He was an absolute ruler who was in the position of still holding his place by the respect he could inspire not by his office but by his personal qualities: military prowess, wisdom and diplomacy, largeness of mind, generosity and discrimination, a splendid court and personal prestige. The most frequent epithet applied to a chieftain is ‘giver of rings’; the essential feature of a successful court was splendid and continued entertainment and princely gifts for services rendered. A stingy king could not command the loyal service of heroes. A peace-loving king could not, no matter how generous, expect heroes eager for fame and bred to war as their profession to remain idle in his service. There was only one answer to this: continual warfare against one’s neighbours. It is the picture drawn by Tacitus and it was still true—perhaps even more true in the period that Beowulf deals with—the sixth century. Hence the instability of heroic society. The weak and the unwarlike went to the wall. The strong and successful had to keep on making war in order to remain so.

In such a society we can understand the pre-eminent value placed upon the warlike and manly virtues, we can understand why the romantic and splendid emotions are concerned with loyalty and generosity, courage and honour and why they are celebrated in literature, to the exclusion of domestic and private virtues, why love has so little place in heroic literature, except as the unhappy cause of feuds or divisions of loyalty.
We can also understand the importance of literature in a heroic age. Its conditions were such that no nation, no tribe, no dynasty and no individual could expect to continue for long. Sooner or later the tribe would be defeated, its fighting men killed, the rest enslaved—or it would be absorbed by its stronger neighbours or it would be driven out of its lands and have to fight its way to new territory or perish on the way. By the sixth century the mighty nations of the Goths, the Vandals, the Gepidae and the Longabardi, once the terror of all Europe, had perished in these ways and the sole survivor of all the East German peoples, the Burgundians, had been conquered by the Franks a few years before Hygelac's raid into Frankish territory recorded in Beowulf. Beowulf's people the Geats were soon to suffer the same fate from their enemies and neighbours the Swedes, and Beowulf on his deathbed predicts the fate that awaits them now they are left leaderless. Hrothgar maintains a splendid court at Heorot, but the poem is full of warnings and forebodings. Hrothgar's queen foresees the internecine strife between the heirs to the throne and their uncle which, as Norse sagas record, actually occurred; and Beowulf foretells the attack by the Heathobards in which the famous hall was burnt to the ground.

If the life of nations and dynasties, even the most powerful, was precarious, that of individuals was even more so. A man expected to die in battle. The more famous the hero, the more certain that sooner or later he would perish among his foes; the more foes a man killed, the more battles he won, the more persons there were with the duty of exacting vengeance. In such a world the thing that made life worth living was not material reward or possessions passing on to one's descendants but the only thing that did not die with a man, his fame. The Goths, the Burgundians, the Lombards and the Vandals had perished, but the fame of their great heroes was as much alive when Beowulf was composed as it had been four hundred years earlier. Widsith can tell of Gifica the Burgundian hero, Attila of the Huns, and Eormanric of the Goths. The author of Beowulf can refer to them casually as to well known tales. And Widsith tells of the essential part played by the minstrel in preserving the fame that alone makes life worth living:

Thus the Minstrels of men [he says] go wandering as fate directs...south or north, they always meet one wise in measures, liberal in gifts, who wishes to exalt his glory before the warriors,
to perform valorous deeds, until light and life fall in ruin together: he gains praise, he has lofty glory under the heavens.

Similarly in Beowulf, in spite of its Christian tone, earthly fame after death is the greatest good a man can aim at. After the killing of Grendel, on the way back from following his bloody tracks to the mere, the warriors engage in horse races and in the composition of a lay in praise of the hero:

the king's thane, a man proud of exploits, mindful of measures, he who remembered a great number of old tales, made a new story of things that were true. The man began again wisely to frame Beowulf's exploit and skilfully to make deft measures, to deal in words.

It is good to remember this, if one wants to recapture the spirit of heroic poetry. This is not mere literature or simply entertainment. Literature has an essential function in maintaining society for, if fame is what makes life worth living, literature is what preserves fame. Tacitus speaks of the mythological poems of the Germans before the heroic age. It is probably no accident that court poets engaged to sing the praises of living heroes began to appear about the end of the fourth century. We first hear of them among the Ostrogoths. They were an essential part of the equipment of a Germanic prince and remained so among the Scandinavians, where the heroic age lasted till the tenth century. Beowulf was written for an audience which understood this sentiment and looked on epic poetry in the spirit in which we visit monuments and famous places as well as in the spirit in which one enjoys a spirited tale.

In the late nineteenth century, under the influence of the sort of scholarly criticism that denied that the Odyssey and the Iliad had been the work of a single poet, and treated them as composite epics, it was the fashion to regard Beowulf in the same way. It was supposed to be a reworking of older lays rather clumsily joined together and garnished with Christian interpolations. Scholarly opinion has now swung the other way, as it has with Homer. Beowulf is now regarded as probably the work of a single poet, though none would deny, I suppose, that it is probably based on older materials and that these were probably in poetic form. Still the poem shows that this material must have been fairly thoroughly reworked. The author plainly knows
little about life in the sixth century in Denmark, Gautland and Sweden, apart from the ceremonial life of the courts. There are none of the homely touches of ordinary occupations and interests such as one gets in the *Odyssey*, for example. And even in describing the court the author has had to fill out, with details from contemporary experience, the adornment and furnishings of Heorot, for example. He does not know that masts and sails were not used by the sixth century Scandinavians and he gets the details of funeral ceremonies a little wrong—and so on. More significant is the fact that he knows that the Danes and the Geats of the sixth century were heathens; indeed they still were in the eighth century when the poem was probably composed, yet he makes Hrothgar and Beowulf at least talk like Christians—an entertaining anachronism which cannot be explained away as later interpolations in older material. Because, if the Christianity of Beowulf is not really Christian, limited as it is to generalities and with specific reference only to the Book of Genesis, on the other hand its pagan references are equally limited. There is a generally expressed belief in *Wyrd*, the Teutonic Fate or Nemesis, but no references to pagan gods or pagan mythology and there are no signs that these have been cut out, for the mere omission would still have left hints, allusions and attitudes of mind which scholars would have detected. The poem is discursive and broken by a number of episodes but it is all of a piece and does not support the theory of a patchwork of old epic lays, folk-tales and Christian accretions.

Nevertheless neither its theme nor its structure are immediately apparent. The author is plainly both a *laudator temporis acti*, with an admiration for the heroic past, and a supporter of the Christian ideals of a later age which seem incongruous with the ideals and values of the pagan past. It is curious, as some critics have pointed out, that with so much genuine epic material to work on he chose to frame the action, not on actual wars and dynastic struggles, heroic feats of arms and acts of treachery, but on fairy-tale and folklore incidents of fights with monsters and dragons. The setting is thoroughly epic but the action belongs to folklore and fable. Beowulf's uncle Hygelac was an actual historical person and the raid in which he was killed at the mouth of the Rhine is an historical fact. So in all probability were the principal persons at the courts of the Danes, the Heathobards and the Swedes. Yet the hero himself looks like a fictitious character. He is unknown to Germanic heroic legend which has preserved the names and deeds of the other principal persons of the poem. The one
Beowulf and the Heroic Age

quite fanciful detail of the poet's account of Hygelac's raid is his nephew's swimming home all the way from Holland to the Baltic carrying thirty suits of armour with him. Moreover all the other members of princely houses who are historical characters have names that alliterate with the other members of their families. This was an historical custom. But Beowulf's name does not alliterate even with his own father's name. After becoming the king of the Geats he appears to have made no attempt to marry or produce a son and heir—very curious in a king of the heroic age for whom ensuring a successor to the throne was a duty and a necessity. He has in fact every appearance of an invented character from folklore, ingeniously inserted into a genuine epic setting. It is much as though Jack the Giant-Killer had been rewritten with the Spanish Armada, Sir Francis Drake, Raleigh, Good Queen Bess and Philip II of Spain as the setting for his exploits.

The second puzzling thing about the poem considered as an epic structure is its apparent lack of cohesion. We need not imagine the poet deliberately flouting rules of epic structure which he had probably never heard of. But the poem falls into two parts, two separate stories only perfunctorily connected—one the killing of Grendel and Grendel's mother at the court of the Danes, a feat performed by the hero in early manhood; the other the killing of a dragon in his old age, as king of the Geats. What happened in between is briefly recounted by the old warrior and by the poet at various points but there is no attempt at a continuous story and the transition from the first episode to the last is very abrupt. The poem has been severely criticised for its lack of unity even by those who do not see it as two separate lays forcibly joined together. Yet otherwise the poem does not give the impression of a clumsy or inexpert work. One feels in it a unified conception that matches its splendid and ceremonial tone, its poetic force and its epic dignity and power.

The solution to the problem lies, I think, in rightly guessing the author's purpose and the clue to this lies in the picture of the conditions of heroic society already outlined.

The whole tone and treatment of the poem is courtly and aristocratic. Not only does it stress the etiquette and ceremony of courts, the aristocratic ideals of behaviour but it is also deeply imbued with the sense of a great tradition which has absorbed and assimilated Christian values, rather than of a Christian outlook trying to assimilate the heroic tradition and values. For this reason I would imagine it to be the work of a Christian layman, a court poet who was himself
an aristocrat, like Deor or Widsith, rather than a cleric of the type who probably wrote Guthlac and Andreas and adapted a religious subject to the conventions of heroic poetry.

The poem opens with an account of the dynasty of the Scylding kings. It stresses the qualities required in a good king of the heroic age and his successor:

Often did Scyld Scefing wrest the mead-benches from troops of foes, from many tribes; he kept the earls in awe... he lived in high honour, until each of his neighbours over the whale-road must needs obey him and give tribute. That was a good king.

Scyld makes the Danes powerful, rich, respected and feared. His successor preserves and extends what his father began. His splendid gifts attract and retain the willing service of a first-rate fighting force, and his warlike spirit ensures that they win fame and honour. And so the line continues down to Hrothgar at whose court the story opens.

The poem ends with the praise of Beowulf as a king and hero, as the twelve sons of chieftains will ride round his funeral mound:

They exalted his heroic life and praised his valorous deeds with all their strength... they said that among the kings of the world he was the mildest of men, and the most kindly, most gentle to his people and most eager for praise.

The contrast between the passages is striking. The first stresses the material and warlike virtues of a king, the second qualities of gentleness and peace. But both present an ideal of kingship and this I believe is the actual theme of the poem. Beowulf represents the ideal Germanic hero in his two most important aspects—first as the ideal champion and hero, fearless, loyal, of tremendous strength and skill, of fine breeding and manners, able to speak out and act as a hero should. The end of the first part of the poem sums up these qualities:

Thus the son of Ecgtheow, a man famous in battle, was bold in brave deeds; he lived honourably; never did he slay his hearth companions in drunkenness; his was not a savage mind, but fearless in fight, he guarded the precious gift which God had given him with the greatest strength among men.

And as the first part of the poem shows the ideal hero the second part exemplifies the ideal king—generous, prudent, careful of his
people, willing to lead and to sacrifice himself for them, eager for fame but, this is the interesting thing, not a raider of his neighbours, a terrifier of earls, and an exacter of tribute. Beowulf is terrible in battle but he does not seek battle for its own sake, and as a king the only wars he engages in are defensive ones.

I think this points the theme of the poem: it is what the Germans call a Heldenleben, an ideal hero's life in its two most important aspects. It preserves all that was best of the virtues of the heroic age but it adapts them to a new state of society. It recommends the virtues of a king like Alfred the Great rather than the virtues of a king of the older period whose fame rested on conquest and subjugation. Its keynote is courage combined with gentleness and love of peace, a mastery of the art of war in order to protect his people rather than to lead them into endless military adventures. At the end of the first section of the poem we learn that as a youth Beowulf had by no means conformed to pattern. Because he did not seem eager to fight for the sake of fighting the Geats thought him at first a worthless fellow, slothful, unfit to be a chieftain. His first feat that won him notice was the swimming match with Breca, prince of the Brondings, when he became known as a monster-killer and a monster-killer he remained for the rest of his life.

Looked at in this way the apparent lack of unity of the poem disappears. It has two main episodes which are distinct and separate actions separated by many years in time. Its unity consists in the fact that these two episodes supplement each other in giving the two aspects of a single ideal hero, seen as retainer and as king.

The description of Beowulf's arrival at the court of Hrothgar emphasises the splendour of court life, the way Beowulf and his companions impress by their soldierly bearing and discipline, their knowledge of the proper procedure and etiquette. Next we learn that the expedition to help Hrothgar is not merely prompted by desire to win fame and to secure the friendship of a powerful neighbour. It is also prompted by a desire to repay a debt of honour. Beowulf's father, though a famous warrior, had been forced to leave the court of the Geats to avoid involving them in a blood feud. Hrothgar had taken him in, given him protection and afterwards settled the feud by paying the blood-money for the slaying of Heatholaf, a prince of the Wulfings whose territories were just across the Baltic from the land of the Geats.

The first test of Beowulf comes when the envious Unferth taunts
him with having lost his swimming contest with Breca. Beowulf's reply is masterly. He gives a candid account of the affair, then he speaks firmly to Unferth. He reminds him that he himself has small reason to boast. It is well known that he failed a kinsman in battle and was the cause of his death, and what is more he has done nothing to help his lord against the Monster that ravages the hall. Moreover, Beowulf tells him, he is drunk. The point of this of course is not to reproach him for drunkenness. It was a point of honour to get drunk at a feast. But a good man ought to be able to hold his liquor and not insult a friendly guest. In addition Beowulf is really excusing Unferth and indicating that what he says when drunk is not to be held against him. As a result Unferth is won over, especially when he sees the monstrous arm and claw of Grendel the next day. When Beowulf goes to fight the second monster it is Unferth who lends him the famous sword. After the feast the Danes retire and the Geats take over the hall for the night. Beowulf commends himself to God and tells how he will encounter Grendel. When the dreadful creature appears, the hero does nothing rash. He pretends to be asleep and watches; he is learning the tactics of his enemy before he starts the fight. Grendel kills one man before Beowulf can intervene, tears the body to pieces and devours it. Next he approaches the hero and as the frightful claw approaches for the quick tearing stab which is Grendel’s mode of attack, the monster feels himself gripped by the mighty handgrip—as strong as thirty men. He pulls back and this is just what Beowulf wants because he is at a disadvantage lying down. Grendel pulls him up and thus loses his advantage. Then the tug of war goes on. Beowulf is dragged inch by inch to the door and there props himself until Grendel, panic-stricken, escapes by tearing his own arm out at the shoulder. The whole battle builds up the impression of the warrior's skill and courage that makes a good fighting man.

The second fight with the female monster is a less formidable affair in itself but more terrible in its circumstances for the hero has to dive beneath the waters of the terrifying mere to unknown perils. So the hero is less confident of success and, before he plunges into the depths, he makes proper arrangements for the return and care of his followers if he should fail to survive. He succeeds after a desperate struggle and that night the third of the splendid feasts is celebrated with gifts and speeches. Hrothgar plainly indicates that Beowulf is marked out for kingship and his queen Wealtheow is of the same mind for she recommends her young sons to his friendship and
protection. The Geats then set off home. Beowulf is greeted by his uncle the king and his young queen. In his account of his adventures he shows another characteristic of a promising man. Although he has given no hint of it at the Danish court, he has kept his eyes and ears open and he gives his uncle a diplomat’s report of affairs in the neighbouring kingdom with an intelligent and shrewd account of trouble that is brewing between the Danes and their neighbours the Heathobards. He hands over his gifts to the king, presents the famous necklace to the queen and is himself suitably rewarded with a king’s sword, an estate and princely rank.

One more touch remains to be added to this picture of the ideal champion and it comes as a flash-back early in the second part of the poem. Beowulf has earned the right to rule. When his uncle was killed in the Frisian territory, the Geats were left in great danger for the heir was still a child. Hygd the queen offered Beowulf the throne, with the consent of the people. It was a great temptation; one to which Hrothgar’s nephew, it is hinted, succumbed when Hrothgar died leaving a young son. Beowulf shows the perfection of loyalty by acting merely as counsellor and support to the young prince. Only when he was killed in the Swedish wars did Beowulf accept the throne with the consent of the Swedish king.

Beowulf’s exploits as a king are kept in the background of the poem and only briefly enough touched on to fill the gap between the two monster fights. But he shows the qualities already mentioned as those of the ideal warrior king and he perishes protecting his people from the dragon, after giving warning of the political dangers that lie ahead. Lastly he gives instructions for his burial and the preservation of his fame. His last act is to reward his faithful follower and kinsman Wiglaf.

The various episodes and references to other tales introduced into Beowulf all have their artistic purpose and many of them are obviously cemented in one way or another with the main theme. The first of their functions is to give variety and contrast. There are three great feasts and one feast is after all very like another. The poet uses episodes skilfully to this end. In the first there is the story of Breca and the swimming match which fills in for us the earlier part of the hero’s life and shows young men, no more than boys, toughening and preparing themselves for heroic life. It also gives us a picture of Beowulf’s tact and social skill in dealing with a difficult situation. The second feast is enlivened with the long lay of the fight at
Finnsburh and its sequel. It is a stirring and tragic story in itself, and it stresses the way in which the very virtues and loyalties that were essential to defend heroic society were also liable to be its downfall. Finn perishes in spite of the wise provisions for healing the feud, because in the end loyalty and the duty of blood-revenge are stronger. The same lesson is stressed in the case of Hrothgar's attempt to settle the Heathobard feud by marrying his own daughter to their chief. Both episodes stress the tragic position of a princess caught between two camps. The third feast instead of an episode has the long speech of Hrothgar which has sometimes been called a sermon. This long Christian homily by the king of the heathen Spear-Danes has often been thought to be a later interpolation. There is reason for considering it, on the contrary, the very centre of the whole poem. The argument for this will best be given when we consider the Christian aspects of the poem.

The second purpose of these episodes and references to other heroic tales, and to the Swedish wars and Hygelac's raid which are more essentially part of Beowulf's own life story, is to set the tale of the monster killing firmly in a background of actual heroic life and legendary history. If I am right in suggesting that Beowulf is meant to represent a higher conception of the champion and ideal king, then the episodes have the function of providing a contrast to the bad old days which were still the bad old days however glorious and exciting they may have been. And it builds up the sense of history. For Beowulf is full of the sense of history. It carefully builds up the distance between its own day and the age in which the story occurs and the story itself is placed in time by windows into a still more remote heroic past, the references to Sigmund, Heremod, Offa and Eormenric, for example, and to the unknown king who three hundred years earlier had placed the tragic treasures in the mound. And behind this remote heroic past the poem suggests further vistas of the dark background and the abyss of time to the very creation of the world sung by the minstrel at the opening of Heorot. Such too are the constant references to the ancestry of Grendel, the descendant of Cain, and the giants before the flood who fought with God and the sons of men. One of the most impressive things about the poem is this feeling of vast time and space, the whole pageant of history, the great perspective of old unhappy things and battles long ago. It serves to stress the glory of great men and great actions which alone outlast time. The splendid funerals of Scyld and Beowulf of course are particularly effective in
this respect. For when the poem was written these were ancient ceremonies that had long passed away—the cremation ceremonies at any rate. To the original audience of Beowulf they would be charged with a sense of magnificent antiquity and the poetry of ancient custom recalled.

Other episodes in Beowulf plainly have the function of pointing the moral or underlining characteristics of the hero on which the theme depends. For example after the court has gone to see where the wounded Grendel plunged into the mere, the warrior poet on the way back not only composes a lay in honour of Beowulf, he follows it or incorporates in it—it is not clear which—the tale of Sigmund and Fitela and the tale of Heremod.

The first was a noted giant killer and dragon slayer and the comparison and the implied compliment to Beowulf are appropriate. But there is also of course a hint of the future, for Beowulf himself is destined to slay a treasure-guarding dragon.

Heremod's is a more interesting case. He is mentioned again by Hrothgar when he gives advice to Beowulf and in both cases the warning is the same. Heremod was, as a champion, like Sigmund or Beowulf, distinguished by his deeds. But as a king he was a failure. Once again it is a picture of the very virtues the heroic age demanded, proving disastrous. The qualities of toughness, of fighting courage and eagerness for battle were apt in some characters to bring out a savagery and ferocity that turned to indiscriminate blood lust. Heremod turned to the slaughter of his table-companions and counsellors. He became brooding, suspicious and niggardly and brought such distress on his people that they had to get rid of him. It is against this that Beowulf is warned when as Hrothgar predicts he will one day come to rule a people. Eormenric, the famous king of the Goths, who is brought into the poem as an example of malicious hostility, was known in Old English poetry as a similar case of the heroic toughness overshooting its mark and producing a monster of cruelty.

The only episode which it seems difficult to account for is the Tale of Thryth, the bad queen of Offa, king of the Angles. It is true that she is brought in to contrast with Hygd, the queen of the Geats, who was a good queen. But otherwise the story has not much point or relevance and seems to be rather clumsily dragged in. Scholars have suggested that the poet may have had some reason to pay a compliment to Offa of Mercia, a descendant of the original Offa. It is possible, but it is rather an odd way of paying a compliment to remind a man
that his great-great-great-grandmother had been a thoroughly nasty piece of work, only reformed at length by a good husband.

What I have suggested about *Beowulf* so far is that it is a courtly heroic poem which celebrates the virtues of the heroic age and at the same time suggests a new type of hero-king suited to a warlike but more settled and definitely Christian state of society. The author is perfectly aware that the Danes in the sixth century were heathens. Under the attacks of Grendel and their own powerlessness to meet them, he says of them:

Many leading Danes held councils to devise some plan to discover the best and boldest course to take against this reign of terror. Sometimes they promised sacrifices to heathen shrines, sometimes praying to the Devil for help against the oppression which afflicted them all. Such was their practice—and such the hope of heathen people. Hell was in their hearts; they knew nothing of the Creator, the true God, judge of all acts; nor did they know how to worship the glorious King of heaven. Woe to him whose perversity shall thrust his soul into the abyss of fire, with no hope of change or of consolation. But well for him who can stand before God after death and invoke the protection of his Father's arms.

This is a curious and interesting passage. As the author knows, and says quite clearly, that the Danes were heathens, it is a bold thing to make the king of the Danes and the visiting hero both *Christians*. We can regard it as evidence for a Christian reworking of an original tale of pagan times but it seems to me that the author in that case would have left out the point that the Danes were heathens. Why stress the fact and make the poem incongruous? It seems to me that the point is *deliberately* introduced as there can be no doubt that *Beowulf*'s and Hrothgar's Christianity are deliberately stressed and that they represent a falsification of what both the author and his audience knew to be the facts of the case. They knew well enough that the Danes were still heathens. This can only mean that the audience of *Beowulf* were not expected to take the poem as a genuine heroic poem or an authentic picture of the heroic age, however authentic the background may have been. How were they meant to see it? The only alternative seems to be that they were expected to take it as a sort of ‘let’s suppose’ and that this ‘supposition’, this imposition of a Christian hero in a pagan world, was meant to demonstrate something important.
What this was is, I think, illustrated by the passage just quoted. The heroes and kings of heroic paganism could deal with human foes. But here was a spiritual evil, a terror not to be fought with swords and military skills. The Danes are helpless. They turn to idols and heathen beliefs but these are vain, for their enemy Grendel is of the kin of Cain and the giants who fought against God. Now we learn from Bede’s *History of the English Church* that this was precisely the situation in the English Kingdoms of the seventh and eighth centuries. The Kingdoms were in a constant state of war. The heroic virtues were still necessary. But in each the Church was established, the court was Christian and so were many of the people. But heathen beliefs and worship still persisted. In country districts among the common people and even among members of aristocratic families in the seventh century heathen beliefs remained and were still practised. Mercia did not admit Christianity till the middle of the seventh century. Sussex remained obstinately pagan till long after the other English Kingdoms had gone over to the new religion. When a disaster such as famine or plague struck the land, Bede records that the people would do exactly what the Danes are pictured doing. They reverted to heathen practices. In 665, for example, the people of Essex began to rebuild the ruined pagan temples and restore the worship of idols, ‘For’, says Bede, ‘they did not seek the life to come nor even believed there might be one’—precisely the point made by the poet of *Beowulf*. This sort of relapse, again, is against disasters of a more intangible sort than human foes and the Christian author of the poem seems to me to be giving in the first instance a direct warning of the limits of heroic virtues in his own day, however necessary and admired, and in the second, to be showing in *Beowulf* the sort of virtues in a king and in a champion that were held to be adequate to a new conception of life and a new order of society. What is stressed by both Hrothgar and Beowulf about his conflicts with the monsters is that it is God’s help, not human prowess alone which is the deciding thing.

From this point of view Hrothgar’s ‘sermon’ at the feast before Beowulf goes home points the theme and the moral of the whole poem. Hrothgar warns Beowulf to avoid pride in his own amazing qualities as a champion and refers to his own case:

I reigned over the Danes for half a century and defended them with all my might against many nations of the earth until I did not suppose I had an enemy in the world. See what a reverse
of fortune overtook me in my own house, what disasters followed in the steps of success when the ravaging Grendel became my enemy!

And Hrothgar illustrates his remarks with the reference to Heremod, the unsuccessful king:

within him arrogance grows and festers. Conscience which is the sentinel of the soul, falls asleep. Surrounded as he is with worldly cares, that sleep is too profound: for a killer is at hand who shoots wickedly from his bow . . . the sinister promptings of the Devil.

The theme of Beowulf in this sense is that of a new order of society in which the enemy is not a foe to be met with sword and cunning but an enemy within the heart of the chief or the king himself. Ruin comes on a people not from the neighbouring kingdom but from corruption in the court and in the ruler himself. The old style champion’s virtues were based on pride, pride in himself, his nation and in his own achievements. The new style hero needs faith in God, and conviction that for all his prowess, the victory comes not from himself but from God. His heroic virtues have to be based on gentleness, humility and desire for order and peace.

Looked at in this way the incongruities and lack of unity of conception criticised by earlier scholars largely disappear. Grendel’s descent from Cain so often insisted on is extremely important, for though he is a real monster who destroys the bodies of men in the poem, he represents not merely physical ravages, he represents the disastrous physical effects of a spiritual evil, the direct descent of the original curse of Adam through the fall that brought sin into the world. The Dragon in the second part is to be seen not only as the Teutonic dragon of folklore but as the symbol of the great dragon of Scripture, Satan, the destroyer of mankind, the spiritual foe who destroys a nation precisely in its period of power and prosperity and destroys it from within.

Does this mean that Beowulf is, in the cruder sense, an allegorical poem? I do not think so. It is a fable set in heroic times and to be taken in its literal sense. The symbolic meaning is left for the audience to educe for themselves. It does not form part of the structure of the poem itself. Had this been the case Grendel and the Dragon would have appeared not as real monsters but like Spenser’s monster Error
and his Dragon in the *Faerie Queene*: as abstractions of evil, clothed in physical forms. The monsters of *Beowulf* on the contrary are not personifications of sin or corruption, they are real monsters who, when we reflect on them, suggest a proper symbolic interpretation which the poet feels will come naturally to those educated in the Christian faith. For this double purpose, of course, the folk-tale element is just right. The monsters of folk-tale and fable are genuine flesh-and-blood monsters but they symbolize and draw on the feeling of a dark world of hostile and supernatural forces surrounding human society. In this sense they can be attached to the Christian view of evil. They also, as ancient and as native figures, enter into the world of heroic legend and can be more easily assimilated to the heroic background of *Beowulf* than could the introduction of the actual devils and spiritual foes of Christian theology. Satan in the sixth century as an actual protagonist would be less credible and less forceful than Grendel who is part of the natural world, but a *lusus naturae*, a perversion of nature caused by Satan's original seduction of man. Just so in his use of biblical references limited to the Old Testament, the author shows his poetic tact in dealing with the heroic age. He contrives that everything shall be as much in *keeping* as possible.

But having set out a view of what the aim and purpose of the poem might be said to be, we still have to ask how far it is successful—successful in its theme, successful as a story and successful as a poem. We can ask this question in much the same way as we can ask whether the *Aeneid* is successful or *Paradise Lost* is successful both as poetry and as conveying their respective themes: the idea of the Roman state and the justification of the ways of God to Man. One criticism that might be made of *Beowulf* is that there is perhaps too wide a gap between the ideals and virtues of heroic society and those of Christian society. Against a foe like Grendel Beowulf forswears weapons, which are in any case useless. He relies on courage and the strength of his bare hands and the help and grace of God. He is successful where the armed warriors had failed. But it is still a battle that goes by physical strength and it is still a battle against an external foe. Except by a sort of symbolism it does not touch the heart of the problem which the Christian view presents, namely that the evil against which men and societies do battle and which destroys them if they fail, is an evil *within*, against which physical force and skill are useless. The values of Christianity, in spite of the poet's tact and ingenuity, are imposed on those of heroic society rather than assimilated with them.
However, this objection is one that has more or less force according to the way the poem is taken and the view I have suggested, it is fair to add, is not that taken by most critics and commentators. In support of it, however, one might point out that Milton (and his critics) recognised a similar problem with the wars in heaven in *Paradise Lost*. Milton manages it very ingeniously, but in the last resort there is an incongruity between the spiritual contests of good and evil, and their representation in terms of Homeric warfare, which Milton never completely resolves.

Considered as a narrative I think the poem does hang together. It is dramatic, varied and unified and the action has dignity, importance and beauty. The hero himself is perhaps a little too idealised. Unlike Odysseus, Achilles, or Aeneas he has not quite enough human failings and idiosyncrasies. He never makes mistakes of judgment and he seems to lack the wider range of passions that make Achilles sulk in his tent, Odysseus unfaithful to Penelope, or Aeneas unmindful of his mission when he falls in love with Dido. In lecturing on *Beowulf* a few years ago I said there was perhaps a bit too much of the ideal boy scout about him, and I am still inclined to think so. He is a hero of romance rather than epic.

But when all criticisms are made this only means that *Beowulf* ranks below the great classical epics. It does not mean that it is not a noble and splendid poem.

It is of course as a poem that it is most difficult for the reader to judge it in translation. Even if we do not know Latin or Greek, we can still get an idea of the poetry of Homer or of Virgil because they are at the bottom of our own literary and poetic tradition. The actual poetry is lost in translation but it is possible to capture a shadow or echo of its feeling.

But Anglo-Saxon heroic poetry is a lost tradition and belongs to a poetic method rather remote from our own. Its method of verse was one which English finally abandoned altogether in the fourteenth century. It depends on a feeling for vigorous short lines, divided in the middle by a strongly marked break, so that to our ears it is apt to have a rather monotonous rocking horse effect. Its rhythms depend on two or three strongly marked stresses in each half line, pointed by alliteration on at least two and usually three alliterating syllables. But the number of light syllables varies from line to line, certain types of rhythmic half lines constantly recur but not in any definite pattern. It is a pattern quite alien to our expectation of regular recurrences.
and it is not susceptible to most of the effects we look for in our own poetry. In a prose translation we can usually catch no echo or suggestion of the original poetic effect at all. What it does seem to indicate is a good deal of unnecessary repetition. The poet rarely seems content to say a thing once, he adds phrase after phrase varying the original statement or idea. This was regarded obviously as one of the great beauties of the original. The poetic language had large numbers of terms for prince, warrior, battle, swords, ship, armour and everything connected with courtly life and the profession of arms. These were largely archaic or literary terms and the poet displayed his skill in weaving them into sounding and contrasting patterns of statement. The technical term for this art was apparently 'wordum wrixlan'—to 'interweave with words' or to 'ring the changes on words'. But modern English is poor in the necessary synonyms and lacks in any case a range of variants each with a sense of splendid and ornamental poetic diction, so it is difficult not to find the more elaborate passages a bit tedious in translation.

In spite of this the dignity and pathos of the great funeral scenes, the romantic description of the weird scenery round Grendel's mere, and many other of the fine descriptions of the poem can be felt in something like their original force even in translation.
2

What Happened to Rum, Ram, Ruf?

What happened to the flourishing system of alliterative verse in England in the fifteenth century? So much of the poetry of the middle ages has been lost and what has survived has done so so very much by chance that we can only guess at the reasons for its disappearance. But when we look at the surviving examples of alliterative poetry in the order in which they were probably composed, it does seem possible to make a reasonable guess at what happened. The end of this ancient and noble metrical art would seem to be connected with another mystery of the fifteenth century, what C.S. Lewis has called 'the most perplexing and repellent feature of late medieval poetry',¹ that stumbling, clumsy and often quite unscannable verse that so many fifteenth-century poets fell into when they tried to write iambic pentameter lines. What happened, I believe, is that alliterative verse was first assimilated to and then absorbed by the new metrical patterns established by Chaucer and Gower, and that bad poets like Barclay and Hawes tried to write in these new patterns with the alternative patterns of the alliterative line still ringing in their ears. They were clumsy as a man may be clumsy trying to waltz while the orchestra is playing a polka or a schottische.

The alliterative poetry of the Anglo-Saxons did not die out after the Norman Conquest but, as J.P. Oakden has shown,² the old

¹English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, excluding Drama, Oxford 1954, p. 123.
techniques were largely replaced by new metrical forms, possibly influenced by alliterative prose. It also appears to have lost its standing as a literature of the upper classes, who were now so largely Norman French. Scholars have argued as to whether there was a ‘revival’ of alliterative poetry in the fourteenth century or not; but it does seem at that time to have changed its themes and improved its social status. With the exception of Layamon’s Brut in the late twelfth century, all the earlier alliterative verse that has come down to us after the Conquest is moralising or religious in subject and it comes mainly from the south of England or the central and eastern midlands. We do not know what went on among the unlettered speakers of English, but as a literary form it looks very much as though alliterative poetry had retired to a monastery. Then in the fourteenth and the early fifteenth centuries, there was not only a great increase in the number of alliterative poems, to judge by the survivors, but also a clear difference in style and in the sorts of subject treated by the poets. The new style is heroic, the subjects in the main epic and these new poems come chiefly from the southwest and northwest Midlands. Whereas the earlier poems from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries give the impression of having been composed in and for the cloister, the later ones give more the impression of having been composed by professional minstrels for the secular entertainment of the upper classes in their manors and castles. Now a well-known passage in John of Trevisa’s translation of Ranulph Higden’s Polychronicon remarks on the fact that about the time of the first ‘moreyn’, the Black Death of 1349, the children of the upper classes began to be taught in English, instead of French as had been the case before. By 1385, he says, this was the universal practice in English grammar schools. The reason for the change was that French was no longer spoken at home and indeed the present generation, says Trevisa, ‘Know no more French than their left heel’. The new alliterative poetry may well have arisen to meet the needs of a provincial aristocracy and gentry who could no longer enjoy poetry of their choice, epic and romance, in French, whether it was the French of Paris or that of Stratford-atte-Bowe.

But it looks as though this may have been a fashion of brief duration. After the early fifteenth century most of the poems in this style come from the north of England or from Scotland. The alliterative poems

\[1] Polychronicon, ch. lix.
of the late fifteenth century are nearly all Scottish, and fifteenth-century alliterative poetry was mainly written in dialects which Trevisa had claimed a few years before were scarcely comprehensible to southern Englishmen.

What had happened to alliterative poetry in the south? Chaucer's Parson in the *Canterbury Tales*, when called on to tell a story, says he would willingly entertain his fellow pilgrims, but lacks the skill to do it in verse:

> I wol ful fayn, at Cristes reverence,  
> Do yow plesaunce leeful as I kan.  
> But trusteth wel, I am a Southren man,  
> I kan nat geeste 'rum, ram, ruf,' by lettre,  
> 'Ne, God woot, rym holde I but litel bettre;'

If there is a strain of contempt in this, as of course there is, it does not seem to be specifically directed at alliterative verse but at poetry in general. 'Rum, ram, ruf' is not necessarily a depreciative term, it is simply, perhaps, an easily grasped description to distinguish it from metrical rhymed verse. What is interesting is that the Parson clearly expects his listeners, who come from several parts of England, but mainly from the southern counties, to know and to be able to enjoy both the current forms of poetry, the heroic tales or 'geestes' in alliterative verse, with two alliterating head-stresses in the first half-line and two with one alliterating in the second—and the other the rhymed poetry in metre in which most of the *Canterbury Tales* are composed. Chaucer seems to imply that alliterative poetry was known and enjoyed—we know that *Piers Plowman*, at least, was current and popular in London—but that, though popular, it was not a practice of southern poets. And this supports the evidence of dialect which indicates that most fourteenth-century alliterative poems, including *Piers Plowman*, originated in the midlands.

The alliterative metre of the fourteenth century was essentially a line with four well-marked head-stresses, distinguished normally by alliteration on the first three. It was divided by a strong caesural pause

*Canterbury Tales*, Fragment X (Group I) ll. 40-4. This distinction of 'rhyme', 'geeste' and prose seems to be indicated when the Host interrupts Chaucer's tale of Sir Thopas:

>Sire, at o word, thou shalt no longer ryme.  
>Lat se wher thou kanst tellen aught in geeste,  
>Or telle in prose somewhat, at the leeste . . .

(Fragment VII, ll. 932-4)
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into two half-lines. The number of unstressed syllables and syllables not counted as head-stresses might vary but the rhythmic patterns so formed, tended to fall into a few common types, as Oakden has shown. By far the most popular were the following: a trochaic-dactylic line of the general type:

Álisaundrine anon. áfter that ílke

and iambic-anapaestic:

And fondes to dô the ðuk. what ðurnesse ye mây

and a mixed rhythm, the extremes of which are represented by head-stresses at the beginning and end of the half-line or side by side in the middle of it:

Knelyng on his íne. çurteysli and ðaire
Lest any fals fortune. forderde him thurgh šinne

The examples are all from the ‘geeste’, William of Palerne, a poem of about the mid-fourteenth century. There is a great variety of minor patterns but the overall effect of the verse is the same to modern ears: a vigorous, agreeable rattle in which one hears two thumps and a pause, two thumps and a pause, for run-on lines are rare. The alliteration is very irregular, often absent in one or both half-lines, often falling on a syllable other than the head-stresses and sometimes falling on as many as six syllables in the full line. In fact, in contrast to Old English verse, it is used for ornament rather than as a structural device. Rhyme and assonance are frequently used to link half-lines and, less often, whole lines, a device continued from Old English times. In Gamelyn, also of the mid-fourteenth century, rhyme is largely used to replace alliteration, though there is a good deal of this as well, and the poem is in galloping couplets. Chaucer may have known the Tale of Gamelyn, since it occurs in six of the MSS. of the Canterbury Tales after the Cook’s unfinished tale and it was ascribed to Chaucer. Though not by Chaucer, its rhythms, or ones like them, were possibly running in his head. Another tale in the same doggerel rhymed metre is The Tale of Beryn, another of the spurious Canterbury Tales. In both cases the origin of the rhythmic structure appears to be the

The Pack of Autolycus

medieval alliterative line, with medial caesura and two main stresses to each half-line:

Beryn goith to counsell. and his company
And Gefrrey bode be hynde. to here more, and se.
And to shewe the burgeyse. somewhat of his hert.

The effect of these devices is to produce something between the old alliterative line and a sort of doggerel metre. At the same time there were movements towards combining the alliterative long line with stanza forms as well as with rhyme as we see in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, in the political poems of Lawrence Minot and a number of lyrics from before 1350, for example:

Heyl be thou Marie. milde quene of hevene
Blessed be thi name. and, god it is to nevene
To the i mene mi mone. i preie the her mi stevene,
Ne let me nevere deie. in none of the sennes severe.

But there are also signs that the alliterative line during the fourteenth century was beginning to be influenced by the metre of the new iambic pentameter. In all the main alliterative poems of the period, while the number of syllables in the line may vary from eight to fifteen, the norm is around eleven or ten and every now and then one comes across passages which could almost be read as iambic verse:

They cryedde upon hyge. with dolefull stevene
They chyverede for cold, as cheveryng children
They yoskened and cryde out. and that a man herde
An holy hermyte was by. and towarde hem cometh

[Chevelere Assigne (106-109)]

Harm for me, I hope. schul ye have never
For as gost on goddis name. ich gaynli to you speke
Of swich kinde ar we come, bi crist as ye arn

[William of Palerne (3134-36)]

Thei ferden to a cite. faste bi-syde
that was called Sarras. ther Sarsyns sprongen

[Joseph of Arimathie (54-57)]
What Happened to Rum, Ram, Ruf?

[And] all gilden was hir gong. with golden feathers
All hir hames behind. was hewid as a purpure
[And al] the body and the breast. and on the belly undir
Was finely florrischt and faire. with frekild pennys
Of gold graynes and of gules. ful of grey mascles.

[The Wars of Alexander]

The lines are not meant to be read in this way, of course, but they lend themselves to it, whereas the alliterative measure in general is quite intractable to an iambic-trochaic treatment.

What I am suggesting is that the alliterative measure was not simply displaced by the iambic trochaic metre and so fell into disuse or emigrated to Scotland, but that the fourteenth-century alliterative poets consciously experimented to bring the two systems of verse closer together.

I think there is evidence that the 'metrical' poets were similarly, though perhaps less consciously, influenced by the rhythms of alliterative verse, and tended at times to fall into it when they were writing iambic pentameter. Some, like Chaucer and Gower, the authors of Generides and The Libell of English Policy, were able to combine the two without stumbling, but Hoccleve, Lydgate, Nevill, Cavendish, Hawes and Barclay were less successful, and this is the reason for their wealth of seemingly barbarous and unscannable lines.

They are of course only unscannable if we try to read them as the five-stress verse of the iambic-trochaic line. If we read them according to the principles of alliterative verse with four head-stresses they go perfectly well, though the effect of the contrasting metres is odd to our ears. The tune they require is that of a metre with four (or six) strong beats to the line, which is common in the lyrics of the fifteenth century.

He cam al so still. ther his moder was
As dew in Aprill. that falleth on the gras

This is a ten or eleven syllable line with a marked medial pause which can often be read as though it were iambic-trochaic metre:

He ćam al ȝo stiȝl. thér hís móder ȳ was
As dəw in Aþril. thát fálleþ ůn th̀ gɹas

Some twenty years ago I thought I had made this discovery for myself and then found that my old master C.S. Lewis had anticipated
me ten years earlier in an essay: 'The Fifteenth Century Heroic Line'. Lewis offered the pattern I have just illustrated—he even used some of the same examples—as explanation for the apparently unmetrical lines of poets like Barclay and Hawes. I believe his explanation is the correct and perhaps the only possible one. However, Lewis appeared to leave several questions unanswered. As he did not see the origin of this metrical form in the medieval alliterative long line, he gave no plausible answer to the question of how the fifteenth-century poets came to introduce it into iambic-trochaic pentameter poems. The reason for this seems to be that he looked for his archetypal patterns not in Middle English but in Old English verse. This has little relevance since Sievers’ five types of Anglo-Saxon half-line had fallen into disuse for centuries and had been replaced by a single basic pattern, with main variants, of the types I have mentioned.

Moreover Lewis did not satisfactorily explain how the poets could confuse two rhythmical patterns which to our ears sound so very different. His explanation is that from the start they had trouble in hearing the pattern of Chaucer’s iambic line. They were unfamiliar with the language of Dante and Boccaccio which served as one of Chaucer’s models and they could not have got it from the French ten-syllable line, because French verse had already lost its stress rhythms and counted, as it still does, only by the number of syllables in the line. Poets, said Lewis, whose ears were not as good as Chaucer’s or Gower’s, went astray because they were not familiar with the iambic-trochaic rhythm.

But this will not do. The four-beat iambic-trochaic line was already well-established by the beginning of the fourteenth century. An ear attuned to the four-beat line will have no difficulty in familiarising itself to the same pattern when an extra foot is added. From

\begin{verbatim}
The way was long, the night was cold
The minstrel was infirm and old
\end{verbatim}

to

\begin{verbatim}
The way was long, the night was bitter cold,
The weary minstrel was infirm and old
\end{verbatim}

is by no means a difficult advance for a professional poet. And these poets were professional. The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries are

distinguished by the variety, dexterity and inventiveness of their verse forms, particularly in lyric poetry. Why should the poets have suddenly lost their ear for metre and scansion in one type of verse alone?

The true explanation must surely lie elsewhere. I think it lies in three things: a more evenly distributed stress pattern than we know today, a greater tolerance for mixed and ambiguous verse patterns and the influence of a strong caesural pause in the majority of iambic pentameter lines.

The weakening of the vowels of unaccented syllables, and their reduction to a more or less indistinguishable vowel-murmur which is so characteristic of modern English, was already on the way throughout the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and had already largely led to loss of final e after the fourteenth, except in poetry where it tended to survive as a literary archaism. But in polysyllabic words and in words commonly grouped together, the stress accent seems to have been less emphatic and more apt to be evenly distributed as it is in words like ‘penknife’, ‘cocktail’ or ‘headlamps’ today. Particularly in words borrowed from the French, Chaucer is able to put the stress indifferently to suit his metre, on the first, or the last syllable of words like ‘nature’, ‘mariage’, ‘pilgrimage’. He will write

\[
\text{Therto he strong, was as a champioun;} \\
\text{He knew the tavernes wel in every toun}
\]

and in another couplet

\[
\text{As riot, hasard, stywes and tavernes} \\
\text{Wheras with harpes, lutes and gyternes . . .}
\]

So that the difference between the four-stress line

\[
\text{He cam al so still. Ther his moder was}
\]

and the same line with five (or six)

\[
\text{He cam al so still. Ther his moder was}
\]

might not have been very noticeable to fifteenth-century ears more accustomed to what Gerard Manly Hopkins called ‘sprung rhythms’, of which the alliterative system was a common example. Moreover
they had the example of the popular romances in four-beat iambic-trochaic metre from which iambic pentameter can so readily be generated. Chaucer and Gower keep the tetrameter to a regular beat, but the romances do not. They are constantly breaking the steady march,

Alas thi rode that was so red
Is al wan as thou were ded!

by a mixed tripping and skipping metre:

Alas mi lord, Sir Orfeo
Seththens we first to gider were,
Ones wroth never we nere,
Bot ever ich have, yloved thee
As mi luf and so thou me,
As now we mot delen a to . . .

It is probable that fifteenth-century poets and their readers were not as worried by a mixture of the iambic pentameter marching line and the tripping ten or eleven syllable line with four main stresses as we are apt to be. We have been trained by several centuries of more or less ‘regular’ metrical verse. But the chief difference between our own habits of hearing such lines lies in an expectation common to iambic pentameter in the late middle ages and to the run of the modified alliterative line: the expectation of a strong medial pause in both. Lewis has noted that the opening two lines of the Prologue to the Canterbury Tales have each only four strong stresses and medial caesura so that we can read them either as:

Whan that Áprille. with his shóures sóte
The dróght of Mérche. hath pérced to the róote

or as:

Whán that Áprille. with his shóures sóte
The dróght of Mérche. hath pérced to the róote.

But in fact the whole of the opening passage can be read in this way except perhaps the line:

And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes
which is awkward because we have to put the medial pause in the wrong place—

And palmeres for to seken | straunge strondes

Moreover, four of these lines:

Inspired hath. in every holt and heeth . . .
Hath in the Ram. his halve cours yronne . . .
And smale foules. maken melodye . . .
That hem hath holpen. when that they were seke . . .

would pass unnoticed in any alliterative poem of the period, conforming as they do to some of the commonest patterns of alliteration noted by Oakden.

The importance of this medial pause for the correct reading of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century verse was recognised by the poets, or their copyists, who often in pentameter poems mark it with a gap, a dot or small transverse or vertical stroke. This was also a common practice in the alliterative poems and is further evidence of influence of this verse on the practice of the pentameter line. With even stress and medial pause, the two metres in fact blend together better than we might now think, as in this example from Barclay's *Fourth Eclogue*. We can mark the lines I.P. (iambic pentameter) or A.M. (alliterative measure):

I.P. The famous Poetes. which ornately indite
I.P. or A.M. Have founde no matter. whereof to sing or write,
I.P. The wit thus dyeth. of poetes auncient;
A.M. So doth their wryting. and ditie eloquent
A.M. For lacke of custome, thought care and penury
A.M. These be confounders. of pleasant poesy
I.P. But if some prince. some King or conqueror
I.P. Hath won in armes. or battayle great honour.

Up till the time of Wyatt, iambic pentameter verse, thanks to this medial pause, can be read in either way and this four or six beat line, heir to the old alliterative long line, can fit in with the pentameter without offence. But two things made for a change in the mid-sixteenth century: one was that the distinction between stressed and unstressed syllables became clearer and sharper so that the peculiar gliding rhythm of Chaucer's verse was lost. It was not only the loss of the final e that made his verse seem unmetreical to later ages.
Richard Tottel’s editor in his Miscellany could no longer hear the old pattern in Wyatt’s verse and attempted to emend the metre of what is probably Wyatt’s most splendid poem:

They fle from me. that sometyme did me seke
With naked fote. stalking in my chambre
I have sene theim. gentill tame and meke
That nowe are wild. and do not remembre
That sometyme. they put themselves in daunger
To take bred at my hand; and now they raunge
Beselly seking. with continuell chaunge.

Tottel’s version has replaced this beautifully varied dance of the four (or six) beat line with a solemn, iambic tramp:

They flee from me, that sometime did me seek
With naked foot stalking within my chamber.
Once have I seen them gentle, tame, and meek,
That now are wild and do not once remember
That sometime they have put themselves in danger, etc.

It is a sure sign that somewhere between Wyatt’s day (1503–42) and Tottel’s edition (1557) the old scansion with its splendid resources which no great poet arose to exploit, had been lost or was at least well on the way out. What might have been the fruitful union of two major systems of verse was wasted by poets like Hawes and Barclay unable to comprehend the treasure they had inherited. And once gone, it was gone forever. Scholars may recover its rhythms: poets and their readers have lost it. And even scholars can fail to recognise the treasure-trove when they stumble on it. Dr E.M.W. Tillyard blames Tottel for meddling with Wyatt’s text. He remarks that, ‘much of the poem’s charm and force lies just in the expressive irregularity of the rhythm that the E Ms gives and which Tottel emends away’. But there is nothing irregular—that is to say, arbitrary or wilful—about the rhythm unless we judge it by the standards of a later day, habituated as we are to regular iambic pentameters with a movable caesura. Wyatt’s poem represents the last, late twilight of that ancient sun, the rhythms of the old alliterative long line, illuminating and adding a new grace to the monotony of the medially divided and end-stopped pentameter. Only Wyatt appears to have hit on its possibilities.

'The Poetry of Sir Thomas Wyatt, London 1949, p. 155.'
Surrey's translation of the second and fourth books of the *Aeneid* shows that he was aware of them, but he rarely succeeded in making them work. Wyatt's success lies in the tact with which he constantly departs from the pentameter pattern without ever clashing with it or disrupting it. When Surrey attempts the same thing he stumbles and is unscannable. Perhaps his best effort is the sonnet 'Brittle beautie . . .' in which the provenance of the rhythm is made clear by the too deliberate and artificial alliteration, indicating the head-stresses of what is for the most part four-stressed, two-stave alliterative verse on the late fifteenth-century pattern:

I.P. Brittle beautie. that nature made so fraile  
I.P. Whereof the gift is small and short the season  
I.P. Flowring today. tommorowe apt to faile,  
A.M. Tickell treasure. abhorred of reason,  
I.P. or A.M. Daungerous to dele with, vaine, of none availe  
I.P. or A.M. Costly in keping, past not worthe two peason,  
A.M. Slipper in sliding, as is an eles taile  
A.M. Harde to attaine, once gotten not geason  
A.M. Iewel of ieopardie, that peril doth assaile  
I.P. or A.M. False and untrue, enticed oft to treason  
A.M. Enmy to youth: that moste may I bewaile.

The rhythms are pedestrian, the methods of assimilating the alliterative and the pentameter metres clumsy, unimaginative and archaic; whereas Wyatt's are dexterous, inventive and imaginative.8

It is probable that this mixed form of verse was already dying of inanition in the early sixteenth century. George Gascoigne in the first professional technical discussion of such matters in English (1575) mentions verses of the form:

No wight in this world, that wealth can attayne

as obsolete and disused and gives as the model of his day the regular pentameter of the form:

I understand your meaning by your eye.9

8I am aware that some editors assign the poem to Lord Vaux, but there seems no reason to doubt Tottel's ascription of it to Surrey.
A poet of genius, able to follow in Wyatt’s steps, might have given it a few decades more of life, one of those brilliant flowerings that sometimes mark the end of a tradition. But its doom was assured because it depended, as we have seen, on a caesural pause somewhere about the middle of the line. In Surrey’s invention of pentameter blank verse, which probably belongs to the 1540s, the lines were mostly endstopped with a medial caesura and this rather stiff and wooden verse became the model for the next half century. It is the model for tragedies such as Gorboduc (1562) and Jocasta (1575) and even for the miracles that Marlowe made it perform in Tamburlaine (1587). Gascoigne prescribes a fixed caesura at the end of the first four syllables. But the dramatists, in spite of Marlowe’s mighty line, were soon to discard these practices. They wanted a form of verse that should have more of the flexibility and variety of ordinary speech. Thomas Kyd’s Spanish Tragedy (1585-7?) is in the old mode; the verse additions of 1602 by one of the new dramatists is totally unlike it and spells the end of any possibility that Rum, Ram, Ruf could have survived even in its mutative fifteenth-century form. The famous scene which kept Elizabethan audiences enthralled for so many years, the scene in which Hieronimo, in his shirt, discovers his own son hanged in an arbour by night, appears in the older version in verse such as Surrey would have recognised:

Alas it is Horatio, my sweet sonne.
O no, but he that whilome was my sonne,
O was it thou, that call’dst me from my bed?
O speak, if any sparke of life remaine
I am thy Father; who hath slaine my sonne?
What savadge monster, not of humane kinde,
Hath heere beene glutted. with thy harmles blood,
And left thy bloudie corpes. dishonoured heere,
For me amidst these darke. and deathful shades,
To drown thee. with an ocean of my teares?

This, while respectable and even moving pentameter verse, can still be read as stave verse, with two head-stresses in each half-line. The new poet varies the position of the caesura in such a way as to make this equivalence almost impossible.

10Ibid., p. 471.
It was a man, sure, that was hanged up here;
A youth, as I remember. I cut him downe.
If it should proove my sonne now. after all,
Say you? say you? Light, lend me a Taper;
Let me looke againe. O God,
Confusion, mischiefe, torment, death and hell,
Drop all you stinges at once. in my cold bosome,
That now is stiffe with horrow; kill me quickly;

The process of loosening and varying the run of the pentameter line

goes on through Shakespeare and the Jacobean dramatists and it issues
in the work of one of the great metrical geniuses and inventors of
the language, as the new music of a new age:

Of Mans First Disobedience. and the Fruit
Of that Forbidden Tree. whose mortal tast
Brought Death into the World. and all our woe,
With loss of Eden, till one greater Man
Restore us. and regain the blissful Seat,
Sing Heav'ny Muse, that on the secret top
Of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire
That Shepherd, who first taught the chosen seed . . .

These linked run-on lines, this caesura artfully and successfully
changed from the seventh (eighth?) to the fifth, seventh, fourth, third,
fourth, third and sixth and third syllables of the pentameter line defies
any possible assimilation to the four-six beat line. At this point Rum,
Ram, Ruf can be declared extinct.

It was not only the end of an old song. It was perhaps the end
of the oldest song of which there is record in the great family of Indo-
European languages. There is some, though not conclusive evidence
that the alliterative long line with its four head-stresses marked by
repeating vowels or consonants and its medial caesura is the oldest
verse-form of this linguistic family.
The so-called Scottish Chaucerians, while they undoubtedly admired and diligently studied their avowed master, resolutely went their own independent ways. The most obvious thing about Henryson's Testament of Cresseid is that it is so unlike Chaucer in manner, in intent and in method and the fact that the subject of the later poem covers some of the ground of Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde only serves to point the difference. The same is true of Sir David Lindsay of the Mount's little romance of real life in which, more than once, the author hints at parallels between his hero and Chaucer's Troilus.

The last of the medieval Scots poets of renown, Sir David Lindsay was born about 1486 and died about 1555. England by then was in full Renaissance and had been more or less so since the turn of the century but Scotland, or at any rate Scottish literature, was still medieval in its outlook in spite of the close connection between the Scottish and the French courts. Janet Smith thinks that, although Lindsay pays the usual tribute of Scots poets to Gower, Chaucer and Lydgate, he is actually indebted for most of his materials to contemporary French poets. He was several times in France and as Lyon King at Arms, the chief herald of Scotland, he had to undertake a number of missions to the continent. Nevertheless his poetry is thoroughly Scottish in outlook and character. C.S. Lewis thinks him

1 Janet M. Smith, The French Background of Middle Scots Literature, Edinburgh 1934, pp. 124–137.
an example of the successful use of ‘the single talent well employed’—but rather oddly goes on to speak of the many different fields in which Lindsay excelled, courtly poetry, satire, allegorical drama, romance, moralising, and indeed every contemporary species except lyric for which he shows no gift. This hardly looks like a single talent. Lewis no doubt means that Lindsay was not original or an originator but that he made the most of the literary forms he found to hand. His directness, control and feeling for poetic sobriety and correctness, elegance and concentration, he thinks, make him resemble the eighteenth century poets in style. But there seems little point, after saying that his verse is marked by ‘decorum, discipline, a perfect understanding of his aim and of the means to that aim’, in calling him a medieval ‘Augustan’. For the name Augustan has other implications, an attitude to language, to the classics, to society, to the theory of poetry which it would be most misleading to apply to Lindsay, who on all these points is closer to Dunbar and to Skelton than to Pope and Johnson. It is true that for the most part he follows in the paths of his predecessors. He probably knew Dunbar, who would have been an older contemporary at court. Like Dunbar he indulges in a flyting or exercise in poetical abuse. This was when Lindsay was in his forties and the young King James V was in his twenties. As the King was the other partner in the flyting, no doubt Lindsay was rather nervous of being too abusive, as, indeed, he points out in the poem. A subject cannot very well let himself go, and no holds barred, in abusing his sovereign even by permission. James’s poem has been lost but apparently it accused Lindsay of being no good at making love and Lindsay, after admitting it and paying some compliments to the King as a poet, replies in kind with some humorous and scurrilous accounts of the King’s too frequent and indiscriminate love-making to all and sundry, including some of the kitchen and cellar staff of his own palace. It is reasonably amusing but even making allowance for the fact that Lindsay is under restraint, the poem lacks the tremendous energy and gusto of Dunbar and Kennedy’s flyting. This sort of thing must go with rumbustious force or it had better not be tried at all. But the chief thing wrong with it is its lack of invention, especially that wild verbal invention of scurrilous terms that marks Dunbar.


3 Ibid., p. 105.
Nevertheless the charge that Lindsay lacks novelty and originality cannot be maintained in the case of his two most considerable works, the long morality called *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis* and *The Historie of ane Nobill and Vailyeand Squyer*, William Meldrum, umquhyle Laird of Cleische and Bynnis, or, as it is usually known for short, *Squire Meldrum*. Lewis admits this in the case of the first, but overlooks the great originality of the second.

*Squire Meldrum* must be one of the latest of Lindsay’s works for the poem ends with the death of the hero and is followed by his supposed ‘testament’ or poetic will. The man about whom it was written did not die till 1550, only four or five years before Lindsay himself. The first and great originality of the poem which is a medieval romance in form and in treatment is that it tells the history of an actual man, a contemporary and friend of Lindsay’s, and that while a few details are inaccurate, there is no sign that the poet tried to introduce marvels or incredible adventures in the manner of romance. He hardly needed to, for the true history of William Meldrum was as extraordinary as most fiction. He was a member of the minor aristocracy, the laird of Cleish and Binns born in Fifeshire about 1493. At the age of twenty he was an accomplished champion in all the exercises of arms—what we should think of today as a sort of all-round Olympic sportsman. He joined the expedition of the Earl of Arran against Ireland where Lindsay, who knew him, probably heard from his own mouth the romantic tale of his saving a beautiful young woman from two plundering soldiers. They had stripped her naked and were interrupted in their designs by the young squire. In the poem the soldiers seem more intent on the lady’s rich clothes and jewels than on her virtue but at any rate she protests that Meldrum has saved both and offers to marry him—she is, she says, a rich heiress. As she is also extremely beautiful, he is strongly tempted but says that duty calls him to go to France with his commander. If she will wait for him he will return when he can. The lady very sensibly refuses to be left to the mercy of the squire’s fellow soldiers and offers to dress in boy’s clothes and come with him. But he refuses, stays with her till the trumpets summon the soldiers to embark and sails away, never to see her again. It sounds a thoroughly romantic story but so do most of the other incidents and they are mostly vouched for by independent accounts. In the wild anarchy and, even at best, the lack of central control that marked Scottish life at the time, almost anything could happen and there is no reason to think that Meldrum or his friend made up the story.
Going to France Meldrum distinguishes himself in several jousts, battles and affrays and becomes as well known in his own country and France as a popular athlete or sportsman might today. He is noted for his simple, honest and generous nature and his good looks as well as his prowess in arms. Finally he collects his retainers and sets sail for Scotland, capturing an English galleon much bigger than his own ship on the way. The description of the sea-fight is particularly vivid. Arrived in Scotland he comes to the castle of Lady Gleneagles whose husband had been killed at the battle of Flodden in 1513. Meldrum had been making a sort of triumphal tour of Scotland, everyone being anxious to see and fête him. He falls in love with his hostess, who sits up late at night to hear his adventures. Like Dido listening to Aeneas she falls equally in love with him and contrives next morning, while her women are asleep, to come to her guest's bedroom on pretence of looking for some clothes—she is only half dressed anyway. Squire Meldrum too has been lying awake most of the night thinking of her and longing for her and this is too much. He leaps from his bed and embraces the lady who confesses that she returns his love. In a sense the scene is reminiscent of the incident in the late fourteenth-century romance, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, in which the lady of the castle enters Gawain's bedroom while her husband is away hunting and tries to tempt Sir Gawain to make love to her. The knight resists her advances. Lindsay, who cites many romances, probably knew the story, if not the actual poem. But in spite of a number of similar touches, the lover wakened by the stealthy entrance of the lady early in the morning, the description of the bedchamber, the barring of the door, the temptation and the conversation in the conventions of courtly love, Lindsay is no simple imitator and Squire Meldrum is no Sir Gawain. He loses no time in getting the lady into bed and she, though she puts on a show of coyness, shows herself as eager for the encounter as her lover. It is true that she makes him promise to marry her, but as it turns out they live together in great pleasure for two years: Meldrum on one occasion besieges and recovers a castle which a neighbouring lord had taken from his lady. They had two children, but their marriage was held up because they had to receive an official dispensation from the Pope—the lady's late husband was a close kinsman of Meldrum's and this raised some theological difficulty. Before they could be married, however, one of the lady's neighbours, Stirling or Striveling of Keir, who had possibly been engaged to the lady or fully expected to marry her himself,
revenged himself on the noble squire. He followed him out of Edinburgh with fifty men. Meldrum and the lady had only five retainers. The squire challenged Keir to a duel but Keir was too sensible or too cowardly to take the challenge. The six men put up a magnificent fight and Meldrum wounded or killed some twenty of his opponents but all were finally overcome and left for dead. The lady, who was not carried off, got help and, although Meldrum had been repeatedly run through the body and limbs as he lay on the ground—in addition to the wounds he had received in the fight—he recovered and lived to a ripe old age during which time he studied and practised medicine. But he lost his love. One chronicle says that the papal dispensation was held up. Lindsay says she was forced to marry someone else. Meldrum never married and remained faithful to her memory till his death. In his later years he was in the service of the Lindsay family—not Sir David Lindsay, but Lord Lindsay of Byres.

The history of Squire Meldrum, as can easily be seen, is of the very stuff of romance, and there is enough of the conventional treatment of romance writing to keep up the feeling. At several points Lindsay compares his hero to the heroes of the romances of chivalry or the worthies of classical history and legend. But it is part of Lindsay’s originality that he not only writes a romance that happens to be true, he combines the methods of romance with the methods of history. His matter-of-fact account of details together with a romantic admiration for his hero reminds one of Barbour dealing with his hero the Bruce—and the metrical style is often very similar. His appeal to Cleo, the muse of history, at the begining of the poem shows that he is conscious of writing history. Janet Smith thinks Lindsay may have got the idea of portraying a real character as the hero of a verse romance from Antoine de la Sale’s *Petit Jehan de Saintre*, but she makes no case for it and this suggests that the two poems have nothing in common but this bare fact. The heroes of medieval romance were, in any case, often real people in the sense that their adventures were attributed to historical persons such as Charlemagne, Richard Cœur de Lion, Guy of Warwick, or Athelstan. And many purely legendary heroes were believed at the time to have been historical. Lindsay’s originality, therefore, does not reside in this, but in his picking a character known to all his contemporaries, a man

*The French Background, pp. 131-2.*
only recently dead, and in telling the actual facts of his life as a romance of love and chivalry and yet as a true history.

There has been a good deal of criticism misspent on the poem through assuming that it is meant as a parody of the romances. This is a mistake. Lindsay's touch is light in places. Where there is a resemblance to romance either in love passages or in great feats of arms, he is often mildly humorous. But his purpose is to smile at the way real life can sometimes outdo romantic imagination, not at his hero or his deeds, though Squire Meldrum has a sort of simplicity about him that makes us, too, smile at the way he does things while admiring what he does. Lindsay, in fact, as the following lines show, is writing an exemplary life to encourage honour and chivalry in an age which was badly in need of both. For this reason the love is not the adulterous courtly love of the romances. He makes this clear at the beginning of the poem.

With help of Cleo I intend,
Sa Minerve wald me Sapience send,
Ane Nobill Squyer to discryfe,
Quhais douchtines, during his Lyfe,
I knaw myself; thairof I wryte,
And all his deidis I dar indyte:
And secreitis that I did not knaw,
That Nobill Squyer did me schaw.
Sa I intend the best I can,
Descryve the deidis and the Man,
Quhais youth did occupie in lufe,
Full plesantlie, without reprufe;
Quhilk did as monie douchtie deidis
As monie ane, that men of reidis
Quhilkis poetis puttis in Memorie
For the exalting of their glorie.
Quhairfoir I think, sa God me saif,
He suld have place amangis the laif,
That his hie honour suld not smure,
Considering quhat he did indure
Oft times for his Ladeis sake.
I wait Sir Lancelote du Lake
Quhen he did lufe King Arthuris wyfe
Faucht never better with sword nor knyfe
For his Ladie in no Battell,
Nor had not half so just querrell.
The veritie quha list declar,
His Lufe was ane Adulterair,
And durst not cum into hir sicht
Bot lyke ane Houlet on the nicht.
With his Squyer it stude not so,
His ladie luifit him and no mo:
Husband, nor Lemman, had scho none,
And so he had hir lufe alone.
I think it is no happie lyfe,
Ane man to jaip his Maisteris wyfe,
As did Lancelote: this I conclude,
Of sic amour culd cum na gude.

Lindsay, in fact, while giving it the colouring of romance, begins his poem with a repudiation of the basic principles of the theory of courtly love: that true love is always outside the bounds of marriage, that it is adulterous and that it is secret. The poem pays a sort of lip-service to these principles in the conversation of the chief characters but the facts of the narrative make it clear that they are only keeping up a conventional and polite make-believe. Squire Meldrum spends a solitary night complaining aloud of his hopeless passion for his hostess. The lady overhears him and decides to exercise 'mercy' in the best romance tradition. The lover declares his love and says he is on the point of death unless she will yield to him. But Lindsay makes the reader quite aware that his lovers are only going through the expected motions. The squire does not wait for the lady's acquiescence but seizes her in a forthright embrace and takes advantage of the fact that she has not laced up her gown and is naked underneath. The lady, while showing a perfunctory concern for her 'honour', that is to say her reputation, makes no bones about love as a thing distinct from marriage. Why should she? There is no jealous husband in the offing. In fact the first thing she does is engage the young squire to marry her. We need not see in this, as some critics have done, a satire or parody of the courtly love conventions. The unreality of the lady's exercise of a kind of feudal overlordship, in regard to her lover, is not in question. It was simply a fact that the women of the upper classes in Scotland at the time were remarkably independent. They could dispose of themselves and of their property with a freedom unknown to their sisters in England or on the continent. The realities of ordinary life, as it were, shoulder aside the velleities of the game of courtly love. What Lindsay makes clear is that Lady Gleneagles simply annexed Squire Meldrum, made sure he got her into bed at once and proceeded to set up house with him. Of course, as well-bred and well brought-up persons, they are shown
practising the motions of the literary game. He vows to be her 'serviture', but hardly has he said so than, without waiting for her say-so

Than in his armis he did hir thrist
And aither uther sweitlie kist
And wame for wame thay uther braisset.

One cannot help comparing the squire’s behaviour with that of Troilus in a similar situation. Troilus at the cost of a long wait and infinite anxiety (which well justifies Pandarus’s exasperated taunt:

Thow wrecched mouses herte
Artow agast so that she wol the bite?)

a patient session on his knees and a deadly swoon, is at last, thanks to the efforts of Pandarus, not of his own initiative in bed with his Criseyde and embracing her. But he still has to get her permission to take the next step, using the ‘you’ of politeness, not the ‘thou’ of intimacy:

This Troilus in armis gan hire streyne,
And seyde, ‘O swete, as evere mot I gon,
Now be ye kaught, now is ther but we tweyne!
Now yeldeth yow, for the other bote is non!’
To that Criseyde answerde thus anon
‘Ne hadde I er now, my swete herte deere,
Ben yold, ywis, I were now nought heere!’

Exquisite as this is, and so far beyond anything that Lindsay’s imagination could summon up to give the sense of what Sappho calls ‘grace’, the moment when the woman yields in love, the courtly love relationship is still hard and clear in it. Troilus, however timidly, is urging his love to yield at last and Criseyde is reminding him that had she not already done so, he would plead in vain. The choice is hers and even at this point he remains the suppliant.

There is as much difference in the way the two authors present the situation as in the way the lovers behave. The long delayed consummation moves Chaucer to a lyrical and imaginative description in which the reader enters into the emotion of the moment as it appears to each of the lovers in turn:
The Pack of Autolycus

Criseyde al quyt from every drede and tene,
As she that juste cause hadde hym to triste,
Made him swich feste, it joye was to seene,
When she his trouthe and clene entente wiste;
And as aboute a tree, with many a twiste,
Bytrent and writh the swote wodebynde,
Gan ech of hem in armes other wynde

Hire armes smale, hire streghete bak and softe,
Hire sydes longe, flesshly, smothe, and white
He gan to stroke, and good thrift bad ful ofte
Hire snowisshe throte, hire brestes round and lite:
Thus in this hevene he gan him to delite,
And therwithal a thousand tyme hire kiste,
That what to don, for joie unnethe he wiste.

No such problem presents itself to Squire Meldrum. He knows exactly what to do and Lindsay, with an equally knowing aside to the reader, asks him to guess how he set about it:

Thay micht na maner of way dissever,
Nor ane micht not part fra ane uther,
Bot like woodbind thay wer baith wrappit,
Thair tenderlie he hes hir happit
Full softlie up intill his Bed.
Judge ye gif he hir schankes shed.

The rough humour of the final remark does not work against the sense of genuine love, tenderness and humane desire. But it brings us down, and I think quite deliberately, from high romance and the conventions of courtly love to a realistic view of what such encounters involve. In Chaucer’s poem Pandarus discreetly fades out before the more practical activities of getting to ‘the right true end of love’ begin. Lindsay stays to let us see how the innings opened and then closes the commentary with the words:

I can not tell how thay did play,
Bot I beleve scho said not nay.
He pleisit hir sa, as I hard sane,
That he was welcum ay agane.
Scho rais and tenderlie him kist,
And on his hand ane Ring scho thrist;
And he gaif hir ane lufe drowrie,
Ane Ring set with an riche Rubie.
Troilus and Criseyde also exchange rings (it is of course a commonplace of romance) but taken together with the image of the woodbine and the other similarities already noticed, it is hard not to think that Lindsay had the scene in *Troilus and Criseyde* in mind. C.S. Lewis is probably right in saying that there is no attempt at burlesque or parody of courtly love conventions but Lindsay makes it clear that the conventions have passed away and that what remains is something between a literary custom and a customary code of social intercourse, an expected and habitual etiquette which is not meant to be taken literally.

He makes this plain in dealing with the third requirement of courtly love, the need for absolute secrecy. Lindsay treats this with gentle but quite explicit amusement. The parallel with *Troilus and Criseyde* is instructive. In both cases there is really little need for secrecy at all. Criseyde, like Lady Gleneagles, is a widow, rich and independent, and if a king’s son falls in love with her and she with him, there is no reason, and no valid reason given, why they should conceal the fact—except the convention that true love only occurs outside marriage. The real cause of the tragedy in Troy is that Criseyde, acting on this nonsensical principle, refuses to let Troilus go to his father (or at least to Hector) and reveal the fact that they are lovers. In Lindsay’s poem the lovers with equal lack of need and equal service to conventional principles try to conceal their liaison, and nobody believes a word of it.

After leaving Squire Meldrum’s bed, the lady returns to her own sleeping apartments to find her maids, who in medieval fashion share her room, sleeping peacefully. They immediately awake and ask her where she has been. She tells them a tale of cock and bull which they as immediately tear to pieces:

> And than scho passit unto hir Chalmer
> And fand hir madinnis, sweit as Lammer,
> Sleipand full sound; and nothing wist
> How that thair Ladie past to the Kist.
> (Quod thay) Madame, quhair have ye bene?
> (Quod scho) Into my Gardine grene
> To heir thir mirrie birdis sang.
> I lat yow wit, I thocht not lang,
> Thocht I had taryit thair quhill None.
> (Quod thai) quhair wes your hois and schone:

¹*English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*, p. 103.
The Pack of Autolycus

Quhy yeid ye with your bellie bair?
(Quod scho) The morning was sa fair:
For be him that deir Jesus sauld
I felt na wayis ony maner of cauld.
Quod thay, Madame, me think ye sweit.
(Quod scho) ye see I sufferit heit;
The dew did sa on flouris fleit
That baith my Lymmis ar maid weit:
Thairfoir ane quhyle I will heir ly,
Till this dulce dew be fra me dry:
Ryse and gar mak our denner reddie.
That salbe done (quod thay) my Ladie.

It is a delightful piece of satire on what the Knight of the Tour Landry had stressed centuries before, the impossibility of keeping anything secret in the crowded conditions of a medieval castle. At any rate Lindsay makes sure that such of his readers who might themselves be courtly love addicts get the point by making the lady swear by that pillar of integrity, Judas Iscariot. It comes as no surprise that when the squire decides to prolong his visit

Ane certane time with his Ladie

Lindsay does not expect us to believe that no one in the castle knew what was going on:

Quhat sall we of thir Luiferis say
Bot, all this time of lustie May
They past the tyme with Joy and blis
Full quyetlie, with monie ane Kis.
Thair was no Creature that knew
Yit of thir Luiferis Chalmer glew.

Credat Judaeus Apella! Those maids, already on the alert, would certainly have noted all their mistress’s goings and comings which must have been contrived after she thought them asleep and before they would be likely to wake. If Lindsay sometimes seems crude beside Chaucer, he has his own brand of subtlety and implies much where Chaucer, with more room to spread himself of course, tends to spell things out. At any rate we may miss the point, but Lindsay could rely on his readers, who lived under similar conditions themselves, to take the passage as one of humorous irony. The lady’s subsequent pregnancies are simply presented as a matter of course. It is, in passing, a measure of the artificiality of the courtly love convention,
that the results of the first and subsequent encounters of Troilus with his Criseyde arouse all sorts of problems and discussions, political, moral, emotional and even philosophical, when Troilus, instead of taking practical action, goes off to discuss Boethius on free will, but nobody even considers the possibility that all this fine talk might be overtaken by Criseyde finding herself with child. It is a measure of the more realistic world that Lindsay presents us with, that he takes it for granted that all that enthusiastic going to bed, however well concealed, would have its natural conclusion and that in the Scotland of his day it would be taken as a natural and acceptable conclusion, as it apparently was.

We then have to ask ourselves what sort of book this is? Romance or anti-Romance or something else altogether? What is at first obvious is that Lindsay saw in his friend Meldrum a real-life example of a dying ideal, the Christian ideal of the Knight embodying the order of chivalry, champion in the lists, defender of ladies, true in love and true in fealty to his lord. He has also a quality less common in the heroes of medieval fiction, an intense patriotism, a burning love and pride in his native land. The first answer to the question, then, is that the book, as the opening passage makes plain, is first and foremost a monument to the memory of a most remarkable man. In this sense, the love affair is not the central concern of the poem, but the deeds of daring and valour for which Squire Meldrum was renowned in his lifetime. The last thirty years or so of his life when he was occupied as a lawyer, sheriff-depute and a physician are summarily treated by Lindsay. It is the figure of the hero, the champion, the great-hearted man-at-arms which is the centre of the picture and the reason for the poem. The constant comparison of Meldrum to heroes of history and romance serves several purposes. They touch the modern story told in a bare factual way, with a light of romance; by comparing the young squire's duel with Master Talbert, the English champion, to David the shepherd boy's fight with Goliath, or by comparing his fight against great odds when ambushed in 1517 to the greatest exploits of Roland at Roncevalles, Gawain against Golagrus or Oliver against the saracen Fierabras, Lindsay indicates the scale against which Meldrum's feats are to be estimated. He is not turning his subject into a hero of romance: on the contrary, he is stressing the modern instance, making it stand out as a true contemporary story against a literary or legendary background and showing that truth is not only sometimes stranger than fiction, but better, more satisfying and more edifying.
The matter of edification is important. C.S. Lewis, who had as high an opinion of the poem as I, is right in saying that it is a sort of transitional poem:

This wholly delightful poem stands, as it were, at the triple frontier where the novel, the romance and the biography all march together.6

But there is something to add. This is not a biography in the modern sense. It is not, as I have suggested, a romanticised biography. Meldrum’s life is not assimilated to romance, its themes or its exaggerations and marvels, but is given a light emotional colouring of romance. Otherwise it tries its best to present the naked truth about an actual person.

But neither is it merely an account of an interesting or important man presented simply for its own sake which is the model on which most modern biographies are constructed. It follows rather the model of most medieval and renaissance biographies in being what we can call an ‘exemplary life’, that is to say one chosen to exemplify some outstanding virtue or talent and presented so as to provide a model for others to follow. This involves a certain distortion of the picture as a whole since the less relevant parts of the life for the writer’s purpose tend to be played down or even suppressed. Walton’s *Life of Donne*, for example, tends to worry us because it subordinates the younger man and his poetry, for which we today chiefly prize and remember Donne, in favour of Donne the divine and the preacher. Walton is writing a biography to edify a Christian audience, not to glorify a poet. A modern biographer would almost certainly have found the thirty last years of Squire Meldrum’s career as a lawyer and a physician as fascinating as his earlier life as a champion and a hero, if only because the combination of the two talents is so unusual. But Lindsay is interested only in giving the youths of his own degenerate, treacherous, self-seeking and demoralised generation a model to inspire them, an example to persuade them that courage, honour, loyalty, true love and patriotism are not figments of a literary or a legendary past.

Behind all this, as so often in Renaissance history or biography, stands Plutarch’s *Parallel Lives*. The emulation in virtue, genius and achievement of great men of various nations and the consequent justification of one nation’s claim to standing and dignity with others,

6Ibid., p. 102.
even the most illustrious, is plainly part of Sir David Lindsay’s purpose, for he, like the hero of his poem, was a patriotic Scotsman and a frequent advocate of his native land. In a sense, after a lifetime spent in deploiring the corruption and abuse in its body politic, the chaos of its morals and the shambles of depravity into which its religion had fallen, he wrote *Squire Meldrum* almost at the end of his life, as a last testament and act of faith.

Something needs to be added about Squire Meldrum’s ‘Testament’ which ends the poem, with a different metre and in aureate style. Lindsay has been suspected of parody even here. It is true that it follows a tradition of such poems in which the service prescribed for the dead is a service for one of Venus’s martyrs and a parody of a Christian funeral. Venus gets her place in Lindsay’s version but he makes the squire say, as he probably said in life, that he did not want a mourning funeral surrounded by monks and dirges. He wanted a soldier’s funeral. He had had a good life and had triumphed and he wanted people to rejoice for him at the end of it all. The real tone of the Testament is indicated by the following passage:

> Duill weidis I think hypocrisie and scorne,  
> With huidis hekilit doun ourirthort thair ene.  
> With men of armes my bodie salbe borne;  
> Into that band see that no blak be sene.  
> My Luferay sal be reid, blew, and grene:  
> The reid for Mars, the grene for freshe Venus,  
> The blew, for lufe of God Mercurius.

> About my beir, ‘sall ryde ane multitude  
> All of ane Luiferay of my cullouris thrie;  
> Erles, and Lordis, Knightis and men of gude,  
> Ilk Barroun beirand in his hand on hie  
> An Lawrer branche, in signe of victorie,  
> Becaus I fled never out of the feild,  
> Nor yit as presoner unto my foes me yield.

> Agane that day faill not to warne and call  
> All Men of Musick, and of Menstrallie  
> About my Beir with mirthis Musical  
> To dance and sing with Hevinlie harmonie,  
> Quhais plesant sound redound sall in the skye  
> My spreit, I wait, salbe with mirth and Joy;  
> Quhhairfoir with mirth my corps ye sall convoy.’

"The text used throughout is that of James Kinsley, *Sir David Lindsay, Squire Meldrum*, London and Edinburgh 1959."
This is no parody of a Christian funeral. The summoning of Venus's chapel clerks is not to be taken literally. It simply means: I was a happy lover and may the priests who officiate be happy lovers too. But he is to be buried in church and await the Christian last judgment. If anyone doubts this they should read what Lindsay, though no heretic, says about the clergy on the eve of the reformation. His lines are ironical. It will not be difficult to find devotees of Venus among the priests and bishops and, of course, the service will be perfectly efficacious. A bad priest does not make the sacraments invalid.

We have taken one of the last examples of verse romance—seen at a point where it is passing over into something else, as we see in Thomson's *Seasons* the declining pastoral form passing out into something like naturalistic description and celebration of the real life of the country. *Squire Meldrum* stands between medieval romance and Renaissance biography, but in a sense which Lindsay could not have foreseen, it belongs to neither and constitutes a form of its own. In this he stands with the other great innovators of the Scots medieval tradition.
One of the poems on which critics have found it hardest to agree is the *Hero and Leander* of Marlowe and Chapman's continuation of it. Opinions range from the raptures of Swinburne, which are too well known to need quotation, to the total rejection of F.L. Lucas:

A writer can sell himself to cleverness, as Faustus sold himself to Mephistopheles; but a bout of tawdry brilliance in the world is a poor exchange for a soul.

Marlowe (though he wrote a tragedy on Dr Faustus) made this very mistake in his *Hero and Leander* . . . His poem, with Chapman's continuation, is seven times as long as Musaeus', but quantity is not quality. Every paragraph is bedizened with quips, quirks and conceits . . . This curious poem has pleased: power of some sort it must therefore possess. Marlowe's part of it does offer moments of beauty, moments of genuine feeling; it is at least much superior to Chapman's continuation, which combines shuffling obscurity with snuffling morality; but it may be wondered whether the gift of sincerity is really so common in life that critics need lavish eulogies on a work so void of it.1

Differences of taste account for some of these failures to agree about the poem. Swinburne's own literary inclinations led him perhaps to sympathise more readily with that baroque exuberance and that fondness for verbal fireworks which mark so much Elizabethan poetry. Scholarly tendency to understand therefore to condone the literary

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fashions of other periods may account for other differences of opinion. I recall the indignant defence of my tutor at Oxford, a great Elizabethan scholar, when I ridiculed the scene in Ford’s *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore*, in which Giovanni confronts the banqueters with his sister’s bleeding heart spitted on his dagger. There is not much to be said in favour of Chapman’s continuation of *Hero and Leander* and Marlowe’s fragment deserves at least some of Professor Lucas’s strictures. But I believe that a closer reading of the poem will show that most of them are misplaced. In particular, Chapman’s disastrous attempt to imitate Marlowe’s method while changing his theme may help us to see what Marlowe was really about. Lucas is probably right in supposing that Marlowe’s poem is indebted more to Ovid’s *Heroides* than to Musaeus and he is as severe with Ovid as he is with Marlowe:

These verse-epistles are typical Ovid; neat, smooth, bright—and heartless. Not a tear stains his Muse’s paint; not a sob cracks the enamel on her cheek. Leander’s passion is so hot that he does not feel the coldness of the water; he has swum so often that there is almost a beaten track across the Hellespont. Hero, practical maiden, suggests that if he cannot swim as far as Sestos, they should at least meet and kiss on a wave-top. And both lovers keep mythological dictionaries under their pillows . . . The trouble with Ovid is that he really wants his reader, not to pity his lovers, but to admire the poet himself.2

Lucas might well have gone on to deplore the tendency in Ovid to make his lovers argue like Roman lawyers, citing cases—the reason for their keeping classical dictionaries on hand—and appealing to tradition and precedent in apparent ignorance of the principle that

None rat is rhymed to death or maid to love.

Ovid was possibly less the victim of his own vanity than of the Roman system of rhetorical-literary education in his day. But Ovid, no less than Marlowe, has some power to please. He has pleased, inspired and been a reservoir of imagination, for almost two thousand years, to the greatest poets of Europe. This in itself should have given Professor Lucas pause to reflect. The cheap literary show-off, the able poetic technologist which is all his Ovid amounts to, will not explain his enormous influence in European civilisation.

2Ibid., pp. 374–5.
A Fellow of King's College, Cambridge, no matter how great his repute in classical studies, exceeds his brief when he condemns a poet like Ovid and dismisses him in these terms. He forgets the proper modesty of criticism in the presence of works of genius and in this respect I do not mean Ovid alone, whom I would claim for that company, but the greater company of witness of those who have drunk at his source, which includes a number of the finest minds and the great creative geniuses of our tradition.

When Lucas asserts that Ovid or Marlowe is artificial and lacks sincerity, he is on dangerous ground. Love in every age and in every nation has its cults, its fashions, and its approved ceremonies and modes of behaviour and feeling. Our own may seem 'natural' to us but to other cultures they may seem highly stylised and artificial. When Stendhal classified love in his time into *amour-passion*, *amour-gout*, *amour-physique* and *amour de vanité*, he was not only distinguishing four of these social stylisations of love, but also attempting to claim for one of them, *amour-passion*, a clear primacy as natural and genuine against artificial simulacra of love. But it is clear from *La Chartreuse de Parme*, where he gives an actual example of *l'amour-passion* that it is simply our old friend 'romantic' love in Italian dress. We can trace it back through Heroic Love of the seventeenth century, Platonic Love of the Renaissance and Courtly Love of the later Middle Ages, all of which appear extremely stylised and literary. And yet as works like *Troilus and Criseyde* demonstrate, genuine passion can operate within and adapt itself to the most elaborate set of conventions. The elaborate stages of the development of *amour-passion* with its two crystallisations as experienced by Fabrice del Dongo and his Celia can become a discipline and convention as consciously practised as any other. And, while it may attain its end to everyone's satisfaction it is no more necessary to the development and fruition of passionate love than spiritual exercises are to the occurrence of mystical states. The Duchess of San Severino is even more passionately in love with her nephew Fabrice than the jailer's daughter; and with her it appears to have been a case of

Whoever loved that loved not at first sight?

Ovid's earlier works give a prospectus of a system of social and literary love-conventions as artificially modish and sophisticated as ever existed and yet Propertius, Tibullus (and Ovid himself at times)
succeed in adapting the system to genuine passion. In an equally artificial world of love conventions we are equally convinced by their respective authors that Beatrice and Benedick and that Millamant and Mirabell are people deeply in love.

In spite of the display of arid rhetoric in Ovid’s *Heroides*, as L.P. Wilkinson admits, ‘Here and there, amidst the desert of debating points, we do come across cases of what seem genuine feeling or pathos, when the poet forgets himself and his audience’. One such passage he chooses from Leander’s epistle at the very point at which Lucas chooses to condemn it for rhetorical absurdity. One Fellow of King’s College, Cambridge, and an equally eminent classical scholar, would seem to have met the other head-on.

We can leave them to settle a matter of taste between classical scholars since Marlowe’s handling of Ovid seems to have slipped between both critical views. Marlowe’s poem is clearly and effectively conceived in its own right. He has taken what he needs for his purpose from Ovid and he has fitted it to that purpose, which is quite a different one from Ovid’s, and has only been confused with it by critics who thought the purpose was to smother a simple story in irrelevant ornament and tasteless displays of verbal cleverness.

The clue to Marlowe’s purpose is that Hero and Leander are so young and guileless that they simply bypass the elaborate and sophisticated conventions of their society and the code of love observed in Sestos and Abydos. The elaborate descriptions of the first part of the poem are intended to provide a contrast of their rich, ornamental and elaborate social setting with the almost naked ‘innocence of love’ displayed by the two chief characters. If we find this setting overelaborate we have to reckon with that Renaissance exuberance which we see, for example, in the great golden salt-cellar which Benvenuto Cellini designed for the Cardinal of Ferrara and actually made for King Francis I. It can still be seen in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. Cellini’s own description of this elaborate piece, nearly a foot high in gold and enamel is as follows:

I made an oval shape of the size of well over half a cubit and on this base I made two figures to represent the Sea embracing the Land, each more than a palm in height. They were sitting so that their legs were between one another just as we see arms of the sea enter into the land. And in the hand of the male

figure of the Sea I put a ship richly decorated. This ship could easily hold a large amount of salt. Under this figure I had fitted four sea-horses. In the right hand of the Sea I had placed his trident. The Land I had made a female as lovely and graceful as I was able and skilful enough to make her, by whose hand I had placed a temple rich and adorned, set upon the ground and she was leaning against it with her hand. I had made this to hold the pepper. In her other hand I had placed a horn of plenty, decorated with all the fairest things in the world that I knew of. Beneath this goddess in that part meant to represent the earth, I had fitted all the fairest beasts which earth produces. Under the part for the Sea, I had depicted all the most beautiful kinds of fish and shell that the small space could take. The remainder of the oval I filled with a very large number of the richest designs."

The salt-cellar, as finally completed for Francis I, is slightly modified but just as rich and elaborate and Cellini does not mention the architecture of the pepper temple which, in its way, is as elaborate as the whole design and surmounted by another naked female figure lying at length on the roof. There is no place for naturalism in this design nor for criticism of the representational school. All is gorgeous, ornamental and symbolic. It is also very beautiful. Beside it Marlowe’s description of Hero’s costume as priestess of Venus or his description of the temple of the goddess will seem a perfectly acceptable example of Renaissance taste. We only find them extravagant and out of place if we limit our enjoyment to the demands of naturalistic depiction. The decorations of the temple of Venus at Sestos are not only like those of Cellini’s masterpiece of the goldsmith’s art, rich and gorgeous but symbolic of the Triumphs of Love:

The walls were of discoloured jasper stone,
Wherein was Proteus carved, and o’erhead
A lively vine of green sea-agate spread;
Where by one hand light-headed Bacchus hung,
And with the other wine from grapes outwring.
Of crystal shining fair the pavement was;
The town of Sestos call’d it Venus glass.
There might you see the gods in sundry shapes.
Committing heady riots. incest. rapes:
For know that underneath this radiant floor

Marlowe has evoked a baroque temple in classical terms and, in its own terms, it is both impressive and magnificent. There is no point in disparaging it by comparing it with any actual Greek temple. It belongs rather to the elaborate masks and entertainments of Renaissance courts than to any real architectural style or structure.

Marlowe is perhaps less successful with Hero's priestess-costume. This remarkable dress is made of purple silk covered with transparent lawn. The sleeves are embroidered with the story of Venus and Adonis. Her skirt is blue and covered with scarlet splashes meant to represent the blood of unhappy lovers who died for love. She wears a wreath of the myrtle, sacred to Venus, on her head from which a veil worked with flowers and leaves hangs to her feet. The flowers and leaves are so convincing that everyone including the beasts think them real and bees are lured by the sweet smell which really comes from Hero herself. She wears a necklace of polished, coloured pebbles and knee-high boots encrusted with silvered shells and with branches of pink coral at the knees. Perching on the coral are artificial hollow sparrows, birds also sacred to Venus. These curious birds are made of gold ornamented with pearls and have water-whistles in their throats so that when Hero's attendant fills them with water, they cheep and chirrup as Hero walks. Marlowe's heroine would seem to fit the description of the over-dressed woman: everything on but the kitchen stove! It is an extravaganza. The bird-whistles might have drawn a smile even from an Elizabethan courtier. But the costume as a whole would not have seemed bizarre to him. He would be perfectly accustomed to such elaborate, fantastic and symbolic dress from many a royal entertainment, masquerade and pageant. Indeed for elaborateness and ornament many a great noble could have outdone Hero on occasion. One thinks of Nicholas Hilliard's famous portrait of Queen Elizabeth painted in 1580 and therefore almost certainly before the
Goose after Swan 61

poem was composed. The dark red dress, with its ballooning puffed shoulders surmounted and outlined to the armpits with contrasting tufts each topped with a huge pearl, is almost obscured by a series of jewelled chains embodying ropes and clusters and drop-pendants of pearls interspersed with other gems. Above this flares the enormous elaborate ruff with its layers and volutes of delicate starched lace; behind this and sweeping round over the shoulders are diaphanous wings of lawn or gauze outlined and supported by jewelled wire. And on top of this again the pale face of the queen surmounted in its turn by an elaborate stiff crown of curls. A great single pearl on her forehead is suspended from a fantastic and airy diadem. Contrasting with the dress are the elaborately slashed and gathered sleeves in white silk or satin, banded with further armlets of alternate pearls and set gem stones. Beside this magnificence, Hero's costume could almost be called modest.

But even if Marlowe can be accused of sowing with the whole sack, his prodigality is perfectly under control and is directed to a clearly defined end. That end is to build up the impression of the riches, the splendour and the sophisticated civilisation of the two cities on the Hellespont where the lovers have their homes. This is the setting for the elaborate cult of Venus and the religion of love with its festivals and ceremonies which characterise their social life. What distinguishes Leander and even Hero, of course, is that they take no part in this ritual and ceremonial cult. They fall in love at first sight and the directness and simplicity of their passion is meant to be set off by the elaborate rites and theories which they ignore.

It is here that the homosexual element in the poem, which has puzzled some readers and offended others, finds its explanation. After Marlowe has described Hero dressed, if not overdressed, he turns to an elaborate description of Leander's naked beauty and the emphasis of the effect of this beauty is on the way it arouses male passion and desire. Later when he swims the Hellespont, Neptune himself falls in love with him and tries to make love to him. It is one of the richest and most ornamental passages in the poem and seems a gratuitous intrusion on the main theme until one realises that it is part of the setting. The cult of homosexual love is the final indication of the cultivated and formalised eroticism with which the simple and entirely natural passion of the young lovers is meant to contrast. Leander remains as indifferent to the whole thing as Hero, 'Venus's nun' to all her suitors, or Adonis as pictured on Hero's sleeve to the naked Venus herself.
If there is a fault in Marlow's description of Leander's body, it is not the homosexual tone which has an integral part to play in the poem, but what might be called the *cannibal* tone:

Jove might have sipt out nectar from his hand.  
**Even as delicious meat is to the taste**  
So was his neck in touching, and surpast  
The white of Pelops' shoulder: I could tell ye  
How smooth his breast was, and how white his belly.

Leander was no doubt pretty enough to eat but the idea has no relation to the theme of the poem and is one of those whimsical conceits that amuse only by their vulgarity.

Hero and Leander may be examples of artless and untutored passion, but they are not Daphnis and Chloe. Marlowe has his theme well in hand and knows just how a young man brought up in the school of Ovid might be expected to behave when he found himself suddenly and deeply in love with a young woman he had never met. First he has to find a means of getting to talk to her and second he has to argue her into agreeing to go to bed with him. With Ovidian lovers this was easy. They knew the rules of the game and so, Marlowe assumes, did educated Elizabethans. Most of young Leander's persuasions are in fact commonplaces of Elizabethan love-poetry. Leander argues very prettily in this style but we must not imagine, as some critics have done, that Marlowe means us to take his 'desert of debating points' seriously. They are subject to two ironical considerations which make them comic. The reader is aware that all Leander's legalistic persuasions and intellectual subtleties are wasted since Hero is already deeply in love with this 'bold sharp sophister'. She needs no persuading and only listens to him for the pleasure of hearing him speak.

These arguments he us'd and many more  
Wherewith she yielded, that was won before.

Hero too has some little artifices and coynesses which betray the influence of her sophisticated background and while she is practising them and delaying, she is overcome by her own unintended invitation to visit her tower.

For unawares 'Come thither' from her slipped;
When Leander promptly does so and they embrace passionately in
the solitude of the tower it appears that neither this brisk and eloquent
Ovidian lover, nor the priestess of Venus herself has, in fact, the
slightest idea what to do next. These young, ardent, innocent creatures
have remained quite untouched by the whole elaborate religion and
theory of love, and have to find out everything for themselves by the
light of nature alone. This they proceed to do and at this point the
stiff, mannered and gorgeous setting recedes and the poem changes
tone. Apart from the Neptune episode, the lovers are henceforth alone;
there are no rich or ornamental descriptions of the setting, the tower
or the bed-chamber of Hero. A new directness and simplicity in the
emotions of the lovers bound for the 'right true end of love' and rapt
in their delight with each other is matched by a new directness in
the verse itself:

By this Leander, being near the land,
Cast down his weary feet and felt the sand.
Breathless albeit he were, he rested not
Till to the solitary tower he got;
And knock'd, and call'd; at which celestial noise
The longing heart of Hero much more joys
Than nymphs and shepherds when the timbrel rings
Or crooked dolphin when the sailor sings;
She stayed not for her robes, but straight arose,
And drunk with gladness, to the door she goes,

The first night the lovers spend together is recounted with equal
directness, simplicity and tact.

Here Marlowe's poem breaks off. How he intended to bring it to
its conclusion we cannot know. But we can hazard a guess. No doubt
the rich, sophisticated and ornamental background would have in­
truded from time to time. The simple love-story against a gorgeous
setting would have been continued. The mythological framework with
the gods rather formally and symbolically irrupting into the human
story could not be suddenly dropped, but both must surely have receded
into the background as the tragedy approached. The baroque and
Ovidian opening would have given way to the Musaean climax. At
any rate it looks as though Marlowe was moving in that direction.
Now Musaeus is essentially simple and straightforward in his
approach. Parents, he hints, and the fact that Leander is an alien
may well make their match difficult if not impossible. The lovers
therefore decide on a liaison in secret. Leander will swim to Hero's
tower each night and in their infatuation with each other they forget
the dangers of their situation as winter approaches and the straits
are subject to fierce storms. Hero in her inexperience and longing
sets her light on the top of her tower on just such a night and Leander,
unable to resist, plunges into the Hellespont to his death. Musaeus
simply hints that the deaths of the young lovers were not just the
result of rashness and inexperience but were decreed by Fate.
Marlowe, in his rather too elaborate myth as to the reason why the
Destinies rejected Cupid’s prayer on Hero’s behalf—the myth of
Mercury’s rejection of their love—has, of course, committed himself
to further mythology on the subject when the moment of tragedy is
at hand. This, in Musaeus, is the moment when Leander, his strength
failing in the stormy sea, makes his last prayer to sea-born Aphrodite
and to Poseidon himself. But otherwise Marlowe must surely have
proposed to tell the deaths of his lovers in the same simple and
unaffected way as he had told their lovemaking.

It is at this point—the point at which Leander, after their first
night of love, returns to Abydos that Marlowe’s poem breaks off and
Chapman takes over.

It can be said of the two authors that Marlowe has his occasional
lapses of taste or judgment, and that Chapman has his occasional
moments of felicity, but that for the most part he rarely ‘deviates into
sense’. The one sails superbly like a swan, the other waddles like
a goose. By the light of nature he had not the gifts to match Marlowe’s
easy, fluent and superb line, his control of the narrative and his power
to modulate from the richly baroque to the direct and simple. But
Chapman complicated his want of genius by two self-imposed defects:
the first was that he believed that poetry must be obscure:

The prophane multitude I hate, and onelie consecrate my strange
Poems to these serching spirits, whom learning hath made noble,
and nobilitie sacred; ... But that Poesie should be as perviall
as Oratorie, and plainnes her speciall ornament were the plaine
way to barbarisme and to make the Asse runne proude of his
eares; to take away strength from Lyons, and give Cammels
hornes. ... Obscuritie in affection of words, and undigested
concets, is pedanticall and childish; but where it shroudeth it
selfe in the hart of his subject, uttered with fitnes of figure, and
expressive Epethites; with that darknes will I still labour to be
shadowed.5

(Chapman’s dedication to Ovid’s Banquet of Sense).
The unfortunate effect of this view that poetry must keep the vulgar at bay by an obscurity that only the initiated and the worthy can interpret, was exacerbated in his case by his conviction that the incoherence and ambiguity to which he was prone were justified by the belief, drawn from Ficino's *Epitome* of Plato's *Ion*, that poetry is divinely inspired and that, as Socrates explains to Ion:

For the poet is an airy thing, a winged and holy thing; and he cannot make poetry until he becomes inspired and goes out of his senses and no mind is left in him.7

Chapman had, in addition to these handicaps, a faulty ear, an entire lack of any sense of the ridiculous or the grotesque and a good deal of indifference to the craft-work of poetry. It is therefore strange to find C.S. Lewis maintaining that his masterpiece is this clumsy continuation of Marlowe's poem and that Marlowe and Chapman share the honours equally between them:

In 1598 Chapman achieved the work that he was born to do; which was not, as he imagined, translating Homer but finishing *Hero and Leander* . . . There it so happens that the very nature of the story utilizes the differing excellences of its two narrators and gets told between them better than either could have done it alone. Chapman has well described the central impression which any adequate telling of it must produce:

> Love is a golden bubble full of dreams
> Which waking breaks and fills us with extremes.

It is certain that Marlowe could not have done the tragic waking very well.8

The reason he gives is that Hero in her grief would have been a woman, and Marlowe's women are uninteresting. It is not perhaps as unlikely as Lewis supposes that Marlowe could have handled the tragic waking, but that is beside the point, for there is no more reason for a 'waking' in Marlowe's design as far as it goes, than there is in Musaeus. There is no hint in Marlowe that love was a golden bubble, an unreal dream. That is Chapman's invention. On the contrary love is the intense reality to which the lovers have awakened

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6Ibid., Introduction, p. 1.
from the dream of love imposed on them by their society. Their tragedy is one of circumstance and, indeed, as in Musaeus, leaves no time for ‘awakening’ at all. Leander drowns praying for help and has no chance to reflect on the philosophy of love. Hero no sooner sees his corpse at the shore than she hurls herself to her death. It is Chapman who makes them moralise their situation as unnecessarily, in view of Marlowe’s treatment, as it would have been in the case of Romeo and Juliet.

But the accusation against Chapman is not so much that he changed the tenor and aim of the narrative, as that he did it so ineptly. One can grant all the occasional beauties in his part of the poem which Lewis enumerates, but they cannot prevail over the crass language of most of the rest, the obscurity of most of the argument and the absurd management of the narrative. Let us look chiefly at the last, noting some of the first two defects by the way.

Chapman’s inferiority is immediately apparent in the beginning of the third Sestiad where his work begins. He announces a new treatment, ‘more harsh . . . more grave and high’. In other words he intends to moralise the story. But the verse, after Marlowe’s clear and lucid line, is wordy and fussy; the syntax is crabbed and clumsy; and almost at the start he tries Marlowe’s rich, sensuous effect in an image that falls flat on its face. Leander is returning to Abydos:

Leander into Hellespontus throws
His Hero-handled body whose delight
Made him disdain each other epithite.

It makes one think not of a lover who has just spent a first night of love, but of a footballer coming away from a massage after a strenuous game.

Chapman’s purpose is to divert the original course of the story—a pair of star-crossed lovers—into a moral inquisition of the results of those lovers’ having neglected the proper ceremonies and conventions associated with marriage. He takes his hint from Musaeus, who, in describing the bedding of Hero and Leander, treats it as a wedding without the usual sanctions and ceremonial observances. Musaeus notes the fact but makes no comment. Chapman tries to make it the motivation of the rest of the action of the poem. Marriage, not love, is the theme of Chapman’s part of the poem. We cannot be sure, but love, not ceremonial systems of love, including marriage, would
seem to be Marlowe's. And if he perverts the original theme, Chapman at least has a point. As Lewis says:

It is significant that Chapman's condemnation of lawless love is based neither on the Christian law nor on any admiration of virginity. Leander is rebuked neither by Diana nor Juno but by Ceremonie. This goddess clearly fills the same place in Chapman's thought as Concord in Spenser's or Degree in Shakespeare's: 'From her bright eye, Confusion burns to death'.

This is true. Chapman may have been ill-advised to change the direction of the poem, but having done so his rearrangement of the treatment of the theme is sensible enough. What is in question is his handling of the rearrangement. If in the bright eye of Ceremony the confusion in Leander's ideas burns to death, it is otherwise with Chapman himself. And the confusion of his ideas is reflected in his language. Speaking of the neglected goddess Ceremony who now appears to give Leander a good talking to about not getting Hero to church before he gets her to bed, Chapman says,

Time's golden thigh  
Upholds the flowery body of the earth  
In sacred harmony, and every birth  
Of men and actions makes legitimate  
Being used aright. The use of time is fate.

_Time_ here represents timely action, the carrying out of man's activities with due regard to their proper order, as the flowery body of the earth represents the natural energies which replenish the world and sustain it. Marlowe would never have left us in doubt as to the meaning. What does 'the use of time is fate' mean? Possibly that we can control our destiny if we observe the right use of time through ceremony and order—but we cannot be sure that this is what it does mean. Nor would Marlowe have left us wondering whether the earth is the body of which time is the legs, a grotesque image, or whether the Earth is sitting on time's knee, a comic one.

But worse is to follow. When a goddess appears to a mortal she should just appear. But when Ceremony appears to Leander she does so by breaking a hole in the roof and descending like a Christmas tree of allegory hung about with all her attendant powers and symbols.

She is wearing a crown of all the stars of heaven, her hair consists of flames which extend to her feet and all the gods are hanging on like so many parachutists. On a chain made up of eyes and ears she leads Religion. She has six shadows representing Devotion, Order, State, Reverence, Society and Memory. Her body is made of transparent glass and on her chest Policy is drawing snaky figures. In one hand she carries a mathematic crystal, with the other she holds a laurel rod

To beat back Barbarism and Avarice  
That followed eating earth and excrement  
And human limbs.

and so on. Hero's dress as Marlowe describes it is a mere circumstance to this farrago. This time we get the kitchen stove as well.

Her arguments are as tasteless as her get-up. She tells Leander that his failure to arrange himself a proper wedding before going to bed is like giving or receiving a bill of exchange—today we would say a cheque—without signing his name: in other words it is profitless; that it is like desires without delights—an obscure reproach since Leander has had the desires and the delights—but anyway, she means that it is empty; that it is like eating meats without salt, pepper or mustard; that is, it is insipid; and finally, that it is like self-sown corn on a cottage roof, in other words it is useless.

Oddly enough Leander is convinced by these curious arguments. Perhaps the hole in his father's roof, which would need some explaining, weighs with him. At any rate he promises to marry Hero properly and trots off to see his father who says he will send a ship to Abydos to bring Hero over for the wedding.

But in this orgy of respectability Chapman forgets that, in making his hero moral, he is in danger of making him seem a half-wit. Now that everything is fixed up there is obviously no need for Leander to swim the Hellespont any more, even to let Hero know that he is going to make an honest woman of her. But the legend demands that he perish swimming the straits and this is just what the silly fellow does later without any good reason at all. Chapman appears not even aware of the difficulty. Why should Leander swim when a ship is going anyway? Chapman without a word leaves him to this ridiculous enterprise and returns to Hero.

His inspired crassness does not desert him on this theme either. The difference between Chapman and Marlowe is well brought out
by a comparison of the charming extravagance of Marlowe's description of Hero's blush when Leander catches her slipping naked out of bed and a kind of false dawn in the bed-chamber:

Thus near the bed she blushingly stood upright
And from her countenance behold ye might
A kind of twilight break, which through the hair
As from an orient cloud, glimps'd here and there;
And round about the chamber this false morn
Brought forth the day before the day was born.
So Hero's ruddy cheek Hero betray'd
And her all naked to his sight display'd.

This is perhaps a little laboured but it is undoubtedly charming—a conceit whose ingenuity is justified by its complete success. See now how the prentice tries to improve on the master when Chapman gets to work:

Her blushing het her chamber: she look'd out,
And all the air she purpled round about;
And after it a foul black day befell
Which ever since a red morn doth foretell.

After this masterpiece in the Art of Sinking, he has the misfortune to address an irrelevant and unsolicited testimonial to his own poetic inspiration which he plainly thinks would cause Marlowe to pledge him in the cup of poesy. I can imagine few more jolly entertainments than listening to Marlowe's ribald comments on Chapman's continuation.

Not content with this he then proceeds to compare Hero's state of mind with the condition of Cadiz taken by the Earl of Essex, which leads him to a tasteless allegory of Essex as a Leander to Cadiz's Hero, in any case ruining the 'keeping' by this ingenious modern instance.

Not yet content he embarks on a new monsterpiece of ingenious metaphor in which Hero becomes pregnant with her thoughts. She then brings to birth a whole litter of them and, making her way through a wilderness of tedious conceits, breaks down, weeps, shrieks and faints. Recovering, she goes to bed and indulges in a series of rationalising arguments which leave Leander's earlier Ovidian sophistries far behind for silliness and improbability. As a specimen which touches perhaps Chapman's rock-bottom for wit, logic, syntax and metre, we could take the following. Hero is condoning the loss of her virginity:
That is a good deed that prevents a bad:
Had I not yielded, slain myself I had.
Hero Leander is, Leander Hero;
Such virtue love hath to make one of two.
If then Leander did my maidenhead git,\(^{10}\)
Leander being myself I still retain it:
We break chaste vows when we live loosely ever,
But bound as we are, we live loosely never.

After this miracle of ratiocination Hero recovers her composure but not her wits. She collects the torn fragments of her clothes and the bunches of hair she had torn out in her frenzy before her swoon and decides to sacrifice them to Venus. For this purpose she sets to work to embroider a wonderful scarf. Chapman was obviously unused to needlework. The design includes a sea full of ships, Leander swimming naked and seen through the water, the moon and some shooting stars sending out beams of blood, a fisherman pulling in his nets while a snake rather oddly is springing at his chest and biting him to death, a country girl guarding or cultivating a vine and laying traps for grasshoppers, with two foxes stealing her neglected lunch and so forth. This ‘conceited scarf’ must have taken Hero at least six months work but she manages to have it done in time to sacrifice the same morning wearing it. Hero’s sacrifice, which is described in rather tedious detail, is unsuccessful and Venus descends to scold her. This time the goddess enters by the window and the roof remains intact. The doves light on Hero’s shoulders and the swans preen themselves in her mirror. One of them even dares to plead for Hero. Venus becomes so angry that she grows incandescent:

And through her naked breast shined streams of fire.

This speech of Venus, besides getting mixed up in the metaphors between false coin and pied garters, is quite out of character for the Venus of the ancient world. This is a new-fangled Puritan Venus, whose chief concern is what I should have thought was the province of Ceremony. In fact the point is made grotesquely enough by a speaking swan. Chapman so far forgets her to be a bird as to give her lips instead of a beak.

\(^{10}\)Chapman’s usual spelling of the word is ‘get’ and though ‘git’ was an acceptable variant and did not have the modern overtone of illiteracy, he seems in addition to his other problems to have been desperate for a rhyme.
Chapman really excels himself in tasteless nonsense in his description of the maid-formed flame that consumes Hero’s sacrifice. This is supposed to be ‘Dissimulation’ newly created. Venus, by the way, has no answer to the speaking swan’s criticism of her own dissimulation.

Chapman goes on to explain, however, that Venus was angry because Hero had caused her to lose a bet with Diana, surely an odd intrusion of a sporting note into what is supposed to be a case of high moral indignation.

In Sestiad V, Chapman describes Hero as a priestess officiating at a wedding but most of this book is taken up with the long interpolated tale of Teras which is told at the wedding. By this time it seems that the original story is almost forgotten. But NO! In Sestiad VI we get back to Leander who now has a whole fleet of ships going to Sestos to fetch Hero. Chapman at this point appears to remember that Leander must be drowned. He tries to get out of it by making Leander pretend he is going in another ship so that he can swim instead and be drowned as the story requires. But apart from the cryptic statement that he could not go by ship

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\text{For no means there was}
\]
\[
\text{To get his love home but the course he took}
\]

which seems a plain lie, Chapman attempts to give no reason for Leander’s last swim. He could at least have suggested that Leander wanted to see Neptune again and invite him to the wedding.

The actual catastrophe when it comes is handled a little better but still tends to lose the tragic death in a mass of detail, ornament and spurious ingenuity.

One might be tempted to exclaim: Poor Marlowe! It should be a warning to all poets, at any rate, not to leave poems unfinished. But I suspect that in a way Chapman has done Marlowe a service. His continuation is so incredibly inept that Marlowe’s very real faults seem like triumphs of art beside it. And after all Chapman’s continuation is a rumbustious bit of comic vulgarity. In 1819 Leigh Hunt thought he could do better and treated the subject again. Hunt’s continuation is vulgar too, but it is a genteel, insipid and flat vulgarity to which one would prefer Chapman’s jolly knock-about travesty at any time.

Perhaps some day someone will do Marlowe justice but it seems unlikely and perhaps the poem is better left as it is.
One of the more delightful armchair sports of scholars is hunting for the sources of works of art and literature. Like other forms of hunting it has its dangers, the chief of which is a tendency to underrate the capacity of genius for original invention. A case in point is the labour of scholars and critics to account for the fact that Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis* alters the myth as he found it in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. In the original, Adonis is a young man with a passion for the chase but he does not repel Venus and allows her to be his companion and apparently his mistress. In Shakespeare’s poem he is a sulky young adolescent who despises love and remains totally unresponsive to the charms of the queen of love and beauty. What can have been Shakespeare’s source, they ask, for this alteration of the myth? So far they have failed to find one in classical or in Renaissance literature. Spenser knows nothing of it. His Adonis is the delighted lover of Venus after death as before.¹ Marlowe it is true in describing the pictures on Hero’s sleeve speaks of

Her wide sleeves green, and bordered with a grove,
Where Venus in her naked glory strove
To please the careless and disdainful eyes
Of proud Adonis that before her lies.²

¹*Faerie Queene* III: i and vi.
²*Hero and Leander*, I: 11–14.
But was Marlowe following Shakespeare’s lead or was it the other way about? Both *Venus and Adonis* and *Hero and Leander* were entered in the Stationers Register in 1593. No one knows exactly when they were written and they may both have circulated in manuscript long before going to print. What is curious is the unreadiness of scholars to take for granted that the man who was so soon to re-model the old stories about King Leir and Prince Hamlet almost out of recognition would have needed a ‘source’ or an authority for altering the character of Adonis. They are driven to the desperate expedient of supposing him to have conflated this myth with that of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus also recounted by Ovid.

In the Wrightsman Lectures for 1968 the art critic Erwin Panofsky suggested that Shakespeare may have taken his cue from Titian’s version of the story because, he says, ‘Shakespeare like Titian interprets Adonis as a reluctant lover’ and he quotes the stanza of the poem in which Adonis breaks from the arms of Venus and runs home through the darkness vanishing like a shooting star. He goes on:

Shakespeare’s words, down to such details as the nocturnal setting and love upon her back deeply distrest, sound like a poetic paraphrase of Titian’s composition. And, given the fact that the painting ordered by Philip II had remained in England for several years and was widely accessible in sixteenth-century prints by Giulio Sanuto (dated 1559) and Martino Rota (died 1583), I venture to propose that Titian . . . inspired Shakespeare with a new version of the Venus and Adonis story, a version well motivated on artistic grounds (i.e. by the painter’s intention to present the principal figure from the back) but not anticipated, it would seem, in any literary source.¹

The painting must have remained a long time in England if Shakespeare (and possibly Marlowe) were to see it. It arrived ten years before Shakespeare was born in 1564 and Philip left for Spain on the death of his wife Mary Tudor in 1559. In 1593 Shakespeare was twenty-nine and known as a rising young dramatist, but is unlikely by then to have done much frequenting of the palaces of princes. Still Panovsky’s suggestion is a possible one and I shall assume for the sake of argument that Shakespeare could have seen Titian’s picture or a print of it, because the interpretation both of the picture

and of the poem, big bold compositions as they are, depends on our noticing a number of small details which provide the clues. There can be no doubt that Ovid’s account in the tenth book of the Metamorphoses was the basis of both works and that both Titian and Shakespeare studied their Ovid very attentively—rather more attentively perhaps than some of the critics who have been puzzled by the departure of these two great artists from their source.

The first thing to realise is that the story of Venus and Adonis as told in Ovid’s tenth book is not an isolated incident and is not meant to stand by itself. If Titian and Shakespeare confine their account to the one fable, it can be assumed that they had read it in its context and, because of the great popularity of the Metamorphoses, that they in turn would have assumed that their contemporaries would know the context and be able to interpret their works in the light of it.

The tenth book is clearly planned as a single developing theme about hapless love. The series of tales purports to be told by Orpheus who is himself suffering from the loss of Eurydice and he proposes to tell, or rather to chant to his lyre, tales of boys beloved by the gods and girls inflamed by unnatural passions and suffering the punishment due for a criminal infatuation. This program is not very strictly carried out but at least it begins and ends with two parallel tales of unhappy divinities who fell in love with mortal boys. In the first, Apollo is so deeply in love with the young hunter Hyacinthus that he forsakes his usual pursuits and even consents to carry the nets and look after the dogs in order to accompany Hyacinthus in his pleasures. One day they pause at noon for rest and entertainment at throwing the discus. Apollo with the unlimited strength of a god, hurls the discus till it enters the clouds and, when it returns at last to earth, the unwary Hyacinthus rushes eagerly to catch it for his turn; but the discus rebounds with such force that it hits him in the face and kills him. Apollo is overcome with grief, utters a prophecy and in the end Hyacinthus is transformed into the flower that bears his name.

The matching tale with which the series ends is that of Venus and Adonis. Venus falls hopelessly in love with the beautiful youth whose interest like that of Hyacinthus is hunting. Like Apollo, she deserts her usual habits and comforts and shares with Adonis the hardships of the chase, her skirts kilted above her knees like Diana, suffering the discomforts of rocky terrain and thorny bush, cheering on the hounds and hunting down the less dangerous game herself. As in the
other tale the hunters pause for rest but instead of a contest they make love and Venus tells Adonis a story, which though not very apposite is meant to warn him against hunting the more savage beasts such as boars, bears and lions. She then enters her chariot drawn by swans and sails away to Cyprus. Neither Ovid nor Orpheus tell us why she leaves him just when her soul warns her that Adonis is in danger.

But of course if Venus had shown more common sense there would have been no story—a point that Shakespeare was quick to take up later. Adonis pays no heed, goes hunting the boar and is killed, and Venus returning finds his body. As in the other story, she laments, utters a prophecy and changes her lover’s body into a flower.

Between these matching tales occurs a number of others for the most part illustrating the power and divine functions of Venus. In the first she punishes the wicked Cerastae of Cyprus who had polluted the altar of Jupiter Hospes at their gate by sacrificing their guests on it. This double crime is punished by Venus as tutelary goddess of the island, by turning the Cerastae into young bulls; as such they are appropriate animals for sacrifice to Jove so that the punishment is made to fit the crime. Here Venus is a responsible deity meting out exact justice—she considers the crime deserving a punishment more than exile and less than death—and careful for the welfare of the cities which pay her devotion, and for the honour of the divine pantheon.

In the next story her conduct is more ambiguous. Some Cyprian women called the Propoetides—we know nothing about them from other sources—dared to deny the divinity of Venus. For this blasphemy she punished them appropriately by making them take to prostitution and persist in it without love until they are completely hardened and finally Venus turned them to stone. Again the punishment fits the crime, but Venus here is seen acting for personal interest as well as to maintain the divine order.

The next four tales form a connected sequence in which Venus appears in various aspects. The first, the story of Pygmalion, is still set in Cyprus. Pygmalion is so horrified at the behaviour of the Propoetides, which he attributes to natural female depravity rather than to the instigation of Venus herself, that he forswears marriage. But he cannot avoid love and falls passionately in love with the ivory statue of a beautiful girl which he has made. He dresses, adorns, caresses it and tries to make love to it, all in vain. On the occasion of the festival of Venus, Pygmalion takes his gift to her altar and
The goddess answers his half-uttered prayer. When he returns home the statue has come to life. Pygmalion marries her and Venus attends the wedding and they have a daughter whose name is Paphos from whom, says Ovid, the island takes its name.

Venus here appears as a gracious and benevolent deity but we must not forget that Pygmalion's unnatural love was the result of her savage punishment of the Propoetides and now the clemency of Venus leads to a crime worse than theirs. Paphos the daughter of Pygmalion has a son Cinyras whose daughter Myrrha falls madly in love with her father and, rejecting all her suitors, and with the help of her old nurse, contrives to sleep with him in darkness until he discovers the crime and pursues her with his sword. She escapes and, after wandering pregnant through foreign lands, prays to be metamorphosed; whereupon the gods change her into a myrrh tree.

The role of Venus in this tale is rather ambiguous. At the beginning Orpheus, or Ovid speaking through Orpheus, speaks of Myrrha's incest with the utmost horror and detestation. It is pictured as love of the most uncontrollable kind which drives her on in spite of her full awareness of the guilt and shame of the deed, a guilt which at one point she tries to avoid by suicide. Venus is not mentioned, but Cupid explicitly denies having any hand in Myrrha's infatuation and Orpheus offers the lame suggestion that one of the Furies must have incited her to so horrid a crime by touching her with her flaming torch or her bunch of snakes. It is a lame suggestion because all Ovid's readers would have known that it was the function of the Furies to punish such crimes, and not to provoke them except as a punishment for some other more heinous crime.

As it happens, we know from Hyginus and Apollodorus something of the form of the legend before Ovid manipulated it. The collections of myths preserved under the names of these writers were probably written down after Ovid's day, but are based on ancient writers well before Ovid. Now both Hyginus and Apollodorus tell a very different story. Hyginus says that it was Venus who inspired Smyrna (Myrrha) with an incestuous passion for her father Cinyras, as a punishment for her mother's boast that her daughter was more beautiful than Venus herself. This is a common motif in classical legend: a self-destructive frenzy as punishment for blasphemy or neglect of the gods or profanation of their cults or their temples. Apollodorus says that

Smyrna (Myrrha) was afflicted with a guilty passion for her father in consequence of the wrath of Venus because Smyrna did not honour the goddess. Something of this sort is obviously needed to make mythological sense of Ovid's story. If the Fury acted as the agent of Venus in his original, it would be a tale on a par with that dealing with Juno's revenge on Athamas and Ino in Book IV of the *Metamorphoses*. Juno, declaring that Athamas and his wife have treated her with contempt, goes to the underworld where the Fury Tisiphone undertakes to avenge the divine honour. She appears with her torch and snakes in the doorway of Athamas's palace, drives him insane and causes him to murder his wife and children in his insanity.

Why did Ovid fail to follow his source and implicate Venus at this point in his narrative? We can never know, but a cogent reason does suggest itself. Ovid's treatment of the gods in the *Metamorphoses* is fairly free and sceptical and one of its themes is the frequent cruelty and injustice of divine beings while at other times they support order and justice. But his purposes are literary rather than moral or philosophical. It contrasts with his more serious treatment of the myths in the *Fasti* where his purpose is to explain the religious practices that marked the Roman Calendar. One can contrast the humorous treatment of Venus in the *Metamorphoses* in incidents such as her being caught in adultery with Mars and exposed to the laughter of the gods and the solemn celebration of her in the *Fasti* where she appears as the founder and protector of the Roman state, ancestress of Aeneas and Julius Caesar and the consort of Mars. At a time when Augustus, the adopted son of Julius Caesar, was trying to reform Roman morals, restore the old Roman virtues and dignify and strengthen the state religion, one can imagine that Ovid might have hesitated to represent the tutelary goddess of Rome as the instigator of a crime so terrible and abhorrent to conventional morality as Myrrha's incest.

However that may be, Ovid, by failing to mention Venus's part in Myrrha's tragedy, which must have been well enough known to his readers, and by exculpating Cupid but not his mother, probably made the case clear to his contemporaries without actually saying what it was; and at the beginning of Orpheus's next tale he deliberately lets the cat out of the bag.

The child born to Myrrha after she had been turned into a tree

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was Adonis who was endowed with such marvellous beauty that Venus herself, when he grew to manhood, fell as helplessly and wildly in love with him as Myrrha had been with her father. But this time Cupid was implicated for it was he who caused the infatuation by wounding his mother's breast with one of his arrows while embracing her.

iam placet et Veneri matrisque ulciscitur ignes.
Now Adonis arouses even Venus to love him and avenges his mother's passion,

remarks Orpheus, casually revealing that he knew all along who was responsible for the tragedy of Myrrha. By omitting any reference to Myrrha's offence (or her mother's) towards the goddess he has however made Venus appear more arbitrary and cruel than if he had told the whole story. And he strengthens this impression by the story of Atalanta and Hippomanes which Venus tells Adonis while they are resting from the chase and she is warning him against hunting the more ferocious animals. She had helped her devotee Hippomanes to win Atalanta by defeating her in a footrace. She had given him three golden apples and told him how to use them to delay the swiftest-footed girl. But Hippomanes neglected to thank her. Venus was furious and planned a terrible revenge not only on graceless Hippomanes but on innocent Atalanta as well. She inspired Hippomanes with insane desire as the lovers were passing a cave sacred to Cybele and filled with very ancient holy statues of the gods. He committed the horrible sacrilege of coupling with his bride in the holy place and for this the Great Goddess turned them both into savage lions. The story is sufficiently like that of Myrrha to illustrate the arbitrary and ruthless character which Venus bears in these episodes. The tale she tells Adonis, though she intermingles it with kisses, is a ferocious piece of divine bullying: 'So keep away from the boar as I tell you or, remember, something like that or worse might happen to you!' However, Nemesis had a different fate in store for Adonis, a fact which Venus recognises after she returns from Cyprus. His death is the second retribution on Venus for her cruelty to his unfortunate mother. Ovid's deep sympathy for Myrrha's predicament is evident through his whole account and I think there can be no doubt that the story

\[\text{Metamorphoses, X: 724-5—'Questaque cum fatis "et non tamen omnia vestri iuris erunt" dixit.'}\]
of Venus and Adonis, as he tells it, is meant to be one in which justice is done or at least vengeance repaid. Still it is done lightly and tactfully. Venus is made to suffer as she made others suffer but she is not diminished or condemned. She is never less than the immortal and divine goddess and the tale of her unhappy passion for a mortal youth, while it is the culmination of all the stories Orpheus has been telling, has another purpose which reflects back to the matching tale of Apollo and Hyacinth. It stresses the fact that the gods themselves, even the goddess of beauty and love, are not immune to the ordinary ravages and miseries of love and the whole series culminates in Venus’s prophecy about love: that every year from now on shall see the re-enacting of her grief for Adonis just as every year the anemone will flower as a symbol of his death. Immortal love and immortal grief are the keynotes of the story in which we can easily overlook the minor theme of the biter bit.

Both Titian and Shakespeare knew their Ovid intimately and, when they retold the story of Venus and Adonis, studied Ovid’s account attentively and knew it in its context. One of Titian’s earliest recorded paintings has as its subject the birth of Adonis. If Shakespeare did actually see Titian’s picture it must have been the version now in the Prado. That in the National Gallery in London remained in Italy for the next two and a half centuries, mainly in the Palazzo Colonna. It is thought to have been the model, kept in Titian’s studio for the numerous copies which he made himself or which his studio assistants produced. It is therefore possibly earlier than the Prado version but the two are extremely close in size, treatment and detail. It may have been acquired by Tintoretto after Titian’s death. The great picture is so well known that it is hardly worth while to describe it in detail. In the centre of the canvas, Adonis, a well set up muscular youth of apparently at least sixteen or seventeen is setting out to hunt, for which he is appropriately dressed. He has stopped to listen to Venus, naked except for a light slip of clothing, who is sitting on another garment, turning and embracing her lover and obviously trying to restrain him. Adonis in his left hand holds the leashes of three large hunting dogs who are pulling him forward. In his right is a large boar spear with a feathered butt. He anchors himself by the spear which is plainly set point-downward in the earth while he listens to what Venus has to say. His demeanour is serious, attentive, determined but not in any way hostile. She is plainly pleading with him and
her superb naked body, her half-recumbent position and her expression would lead one to think that she is urging Adonis to abandon the chase and come to bed, while his attitude, leaning forward and listening, but non-committal in his expression, might suggest that he is refusing her love. On the left Cupid is asleep under a tree and his bow and quiver are hung high above in the branches, level with Adonis's hunting spear. This again could be interpreted as a piece of obvious symbolism. Cupid is not helping his mother. Love is asleep and Adonis is untouched by the ardour of the goddess and indifferent to her wooing. This is how Panovsky interprets the scene and it was how at least one contemporary of Titian and Shakespeare interpreted it. Panovsky quotes a well-known sixteenth-century dialogue by Raffaello Borghini in which one of the speakers takes Titian severely to task for 'showing Adonis fleeing from Venus who is in the act of embracing him, whereas in Ovid he very much desired her embraces'.7 If Shakespeare saw the picture he may well have interpreted it in the same way.

However, pictures can be ambiguous and there is reason to think that Borghini, who may have seen the present National Gallery version, or some other but probably not the Madrid version, was in fact mistaken and that Panovsky looking at the Madrid and the National Gallery versions with Shakespeare's poem in mind has allowed it to distract him from a more probable explanation.

In both pictures high up in the sky on the right of the canvas is a sort of glory or sunburst in which can be dimly seen the outlines of a chariot. It cannot be Apollo's, as used to be thought, for the daylight is coming from the other side of the landscape so as to shine directly on the back of Venus and the face of Adonis. A close inspection shows that the chariot in the Madrid version is harnessed to doves and, on rather long traces, in the National Gallery version, to swans. The figure in the chariot is hard to make out but appears in both versions to have well-developed breasts. It is in fact the chariot of Venus herself. As in Ovid's account, she is setting off for Cyprus after warning Adonis against hunting the boar. But how can she be shown in two places at once?

Crowe and Cavalcaselle in the last century discussing the various versions of the picture remark that 'none of the finished repetitions are equal to the original sketch which is now preserved at Alnwick

7Raffaello Borghini, Il Riposo, Florence 1584.
Far away the tale of death is told after the medieval fashion by a distant episode, and in a grove to the right the boar attacks and wounds, the hunter . . .

And indeed in the National Gallery version, if one sees it in the right light there can be dimly seen on the sloping ground far off on the right, among the trees, indications of figures and what appears to be a boar lying on the ground. They may have been painted out as they do not appear in other versions. Titian's original intention appears to have been to depict the parting of Venus and Adonis and to indicate in the background the later course of events. But this puts a different complexion on the parting. Adonis in neither version looks angry or sullen as Shakespeare pictures him. Nor is he struggling against the embrace of Venus. He is simply standing firm and looking at her with the attention of someone listening to a serious appeal. His stance and his bearing show that he is not likely to respond to the appeal or heed the advice. But there is nothing to show that he is refusing to make love or that he does not in fact, as Borghini says, very much desire the embraces of Venus. The chariot in the sky in fact indicates that what Titian is representing is not Adonis resisting the advances of the goddess, but Adonis, as in Ovid, listening to her last appeal not to hunt the boar, before she sets off for Cyprus. It is the scene in which Venus leaves Adonis and not the other way about. Cupid asleep with his bow and arrows hung up out of reach may symbolise not Adonis's rejection of love, but simply the fact that, as in the case of Myrrha, Cupid is taking no part in the sequel to that case. Fate must take its course and Venus meet her retribution. It would of course be the easiest thing in the world for Cupid to wound Adonis and change his comradely or normal affection into the frenzy of desire he has aroused in Venus. But dis aliter visum.

Titian, I believe, has followed Ovid closely apart from a pictorial change to represent more than one stage of the narrative in the same frame. He has combined Venus's last warning with Adonis's setting out in defiance of it and with Venus's departure for Cyprus. The look on Adonis's face as he listens to Venus is not meant to portray impatience with her or unwillingness to accept her love but the manly firmness and energetic vigour which the Romans called virtus. And it is virtus, in Ovid, which is Adonis's undoing. Venus's last words to him are to avoid the more dangerous beasts—

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ne virtus tua sit damnosa duobus
‘lest your manly courage be the ruin of us both’—

but, the narrative continues

sed stat monitis contraria virtus
[but his manly courage prevails against her advice].

Titian’s whole figure of Adonis, the strong, powerful, masculine frame, the pride and energy of his features and the arrested drive of his pose speak of *virtus* as he listens to those last words of Venus and not to any appeal to make love.

Titian’s picture was not meant to be viewed alone. In a letter of 1554 to Philip, announcing that the *Venus and Adonis* was on its way to him he says that it was intended as a companion piece to a picture Philip had already received, showing Jupiter visiting Danae in the form of a shower of gold—another story from Ovid. They would be a matching and contrasting pair since the naked figure of Danae is seen from the front and that of Venus from the back. But of course this is painter’s talk. The two pictures, both in the Prado, form a pair in other ways. In one the god descends on a mortal girl who accepts the divine will with an expression of rapture and wonder akin to mystical awe. In the other a goddess pleads with a mortal youth who rejects her will with an expression of confident self-direction. In one the *numen* is just arriving and the scene is the prelude to the birth of the great hero Perseus. In the other the divinity is just leaving and the scene is the prelude to the death of Adonis and the ‘end of an old song’. Titian’s two pictures form a pair very much as Ovid’s two tales that begin and end the song of Orpheus.

If Titian in fact kept very close to Ovid’s account, Shakespeare’s version of the tale deliberately changes the treatment and the intention of the myth in more ways than one, and these changes have perturbed and puzzled readers whose eyes were so fixed on the original that they could not see what Shakespeare would be at.

Shakespeare, like Ovid and Titian before him, produced two works meant to be considered together as similar and yet contrasting. *The Rape of Lucrece*, published the year after *Venus and Adonis*, seems to be the ‘graver labour’ promised the Earl of Southampton in the dedication to the earlier poem. The theme of *The Rape of Lucrece* would seem to be: ‘the expense of spirit in a waste of shame’ or ‘lust
in action'. Tarquin has no personal feeling about Lucrece at all, nothing that could be remotely called love. His motive is rape and nothing else. *Venus and Adonis* considers the urge of the female to the male on lighter, on almost humorous grounds. Yet it is a serious poem on the subject because it is concerned with love as well as with sexual urgency. It is indeed serious precisely because it takes lust as seriously as love, as a plain fact of life in both sexes and without moral prejudice or theoretical hair-splitting about where one leaves off and the other begins. The later poem proposes 'lust' and 'love' in their conventional categories put side by side and suitably contrasted with a good deal of rather superfluous commentary; the earlier gives us a light-hearted, ironical, but profound questioning of the conventional categories suitably distanced in the world of myth, but made immediate by treating myth as realistically as it would appear in ordinary life if we were, in C.S. Lewis's phrase, to know 'what the wooing of Adonis by Venus, supposing it to be a real event, would have looked like to a spectator'.

Just what it looks like and what it is meant to look like is, of course, the question. To C.S. Lewis it looks disgusting:

as we read on we become more and more doubtful how the work ought to be taken. Is it a poem by a young moralist, a poem against lust? There is a speech given to Adonis (796 et seq.) which might lend some colour to the idea. But the story does not point the moral at all well, and Shakespeare's Venus is a very ill-conceived temptress. She is made so much larger than her victim that she can throw his horse's reins over one arm and tuck him under the other, and knows her own art so badly that she threatens, almost in her first words, to 'smother' him with kisses. Certain horrible interviews with voluminous female relatives in one's early childhood inevitably recur to the mind. If, on the other hand, the poem is meant to be anything other than a 'cooling card', it fails egregiously. Words and images which, for any other purpose, ought to have been avoided keep on coming in and almost determine the dominant mood of the reader—'satiety', 'sweating', 'leaden appetite', 'gorge', 'stuff'd', 'glutton', 'gluttonlike'. Venus's 'face doth reek and smoke, her blood doth boil', and the wretched 'boy' (that word too was dangerous) only gets away 'hot, faint and weary with her hard embracing'. And this flushed, panting, perspiring, suffocating, loquacious creature is supposed to be the goddess of love herself,

the golden Aphrodite. It will not do. If the poem is not meant to arouse disgust it was very foolishly written: if it is then disgust . . . is not either aesthetically or morally the feeling on which a poet should rely in a moral poem.¹⁵

Lewis is not the only critic who finds the poem a bewildering mixture of exquisite poetry and rather revolting detail. The reaction of such critics is partly due to the fact that Shakespeare has deliberately chosen to ignore certain literary conventions and certain social prejudices such as the feeling that wooing, particularly forceful and ardent wooing, is a man's job and is ridiculous or offensive in a woman, that women should not take the initiative in love and love-making. There is in many of us, and Lewis is obviously one, a hangover of the Victorian theory that right-minded women do not display passionate ardour, or should be passive in sexual matters and in physical responses generally: 'Horses sweat, gentlemen perspire, ladies only glow'. A vigorous and candid sexual appetite in a woman is taken as evidence of a morbid condition: she is said to be 'over-sexed' or 'nymphomaniac'—diseases unknown to scientific medicine and psychology. Shakespeare knew better, and his readers knew better too. They would have found Lewis's response to the poem odd and a little prudish.

But they had their own conventions and prejudices. From the Middle Ages they had inherited the idealised view of woman associated with the theory of courtly love and the view that love is an ennobling passion. Shakespeare makes the Petrarchan conventions a source of light parody and of a current of comedy that runs all through his poem. Lewis by missing the fun has missed the point of what he takes to be a heavy-handed and inappropriate vocabulary. On the other hand the Elizabethans had inherited the other medieval view of woman as the source of evil, the cause of the fall of man, as a being inferior to man in intelligence, by nature inconstant and irresponsible, and, unless disciplined, promiscuous, lustful and insatiable.

Behold yond simpering dame [says Lear] whose face between her forks presageth snow; that minces virtue, and does shake the head to hear of pleasure's name. The fitchew, nor the soiled horse goes to't with a more riotous appetite. Down from the waist they are Centaurs though women all above: but to the girdle do the gods inherit, beneath is all the Fiends.¹¹

¹¹King Lear, Act IV, Scene 6.
An audience acquainted with this tradition would not find Shakespeare's Venus and her 'riotous appetite' as much a travesty on the goddess of love as Lewis does.

Our own age, again, has conventional views of sexual relations between adults and children which once led to the banning of Nabokov's *Lolita* in many countries. The Elizabethans were accustomed to child-marriages. Many a girl of Lolita's age was already married. That Venus should make love to a 'boy' would not seem strange or repulsive. He is after all adolescent and the word 'boy' itself would hardly have had the effect on them that it has on Professor Lewis.

But when these misunderstandings are cleared away, there are others which are simply caused by the fact that Shakespeare expected the readers of his day to know their Ovid and to see the poem with all its divergences from Ovid's treatment in the context of the original. There is no preamble to the poem and no setting of the scene. The reader is expected to know Ovid's setting well enough to get his bearings at once. With this knowledge and with attention to hints in the text many of Lewis's objections begin to lose their force.

For example the grotesque effect of Venus being so much larger than Adonis that she plucks him off his horse and tucks him under one arm while tethering the horse with her free hand is not justified by the poem. Venus is not a giant virago but she is a goddess and as such endowed with supernatural power just as Apollo is when he and Hyacinth play at the discus. Like Apollo, Venus forgets this supernatural strength and she actually hurts Adonis when she only means to press his hand. She draws Adonis's attention to her divinity more than once and makes a point of her weightlessness. The flowers and grass on which she lies and dances are not bent by her body:

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Witness this primrose bank whereon I lie;
These forceless flowers like sturdy trees support me.
Two strengthless doves will draw me through the sky
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Though she has to describe her charms herself, it is clear that Shakespeare does wish us to see her as divinely beautiful, charming and attractive. She is not to be confused with any voluminous female relatives of C.S. Lewis's childhood. She is indeed the golden Aphrodite, and the irony of the poem hinges on seeing her as such, while seeing just as clearly the paradox of her all too human behaviour.
The key to this behaviour is given us in the first few lines of the poem:

Rose cheeked Adonis hied him to the chase.
Hunting he loved, but love he laughed to scorn.
Sick-thoughted Venus makes amain unto him
And like a bold-faced suitor 'gins to woo him.

Venus is 'sick-thoughted'; she is not in a normal state of mind; she is in the grip of a frenzied infatuation over which she has no control and readers remembering their Ovid will recognise the state of mind of Myrrha, Adonis's mother. Shakespeare deepened the irony by making Venus apparently oblivious of Adonis's descent. She can ask, in apparent ignorance of Myrrha's fate:

Art thou a woman's son, and canst not feel
What 'tis to love? how want of love tormenteth?
O, had thy mother borne so hard a mind,
She had not brought forth thee, but died unkind.

But the reader is expected to remember, even if Venus has forgotten. Once we see Venus as victim of the kind of insane infatuation which she visited on Myrrha or Hippomanes, and Adonis as the instrument of Nemesis, most of Lewis's objections and doubts should disappear and it becomes clear why Shakespeare made some of the changes he did. The sense of retribution is heightened by making Adonis indifferent to love. Myrrha fell hopelessly in love with her father: Venus falls equally hopelessly in love with a child who could be her son. There is no need to think of Adonis as frigid or homosexual as some critics have done. He is simply, as he says himself, too young to have any idea of love or love-making and, like many boys of his age, he is contemptuous of the whole business, and immersed in manly pursuits. So Shakespeare is forced to make him younger than Ovid's Adonis who is already virile (*iam iuvenis iam vir*). Moreover Adonis knows that he is the victim not of a mere woman but of a divine being. Her physical strength makes this clear but her person, though her charms are ineffectual, is enough to daunt him; he is not merely angry at losing his day's hunting, shamed by the sudden demands he has no power nor wish to meet and bewildered by subtle argument that he finds it hard to counter, but he is also in awe of the goddess just as Danae, accepting and returning the love of Jupiter, was also
in a state of religious awe. In her case the two worked together: in 
that of Adonis they are in sharp conflict, the worse because he can 
do nothing about it—so that his response is naturally sullen resent-
ment, baffled anger and calculating evasion. Not too much is to be 
made of Adonis’s little sermon on the difference between love and 
lust. It is simply part of his attempt to get himself out of an awkward 
situation. It is a conventional moral argument which he recites like 
a lesson and owns that he is too inexperienced to know what it is 
all about:

More I could tell, but more I dare not say:  
The text is old, the orator too green.

In any case, whatever Venus’s state of mind, she really is in love 
and the distinction Shakespeare intends us to draw is not between 
love and lust but between two kinds of love which philosophy and 
the medical science of the day distinguished. One is normal and 
rational, the other is violent, uncontrollable and morbid. ‘Sick-
thoughted’ Venus is in the latter state and Shakespeare has given her 
the symptoms of love-madness as Elizabethan psychology and medicine 
understood it. Her case is a counterpart to that of Orlando Furioso. 
In both cases a violent infatuation meeting with sudden and complete 
frustration results in grotesque and uncontrolled behaviour. The divine 
frenzy pictured by Ovid has been brought down to earth and expressed 
in psychological, even in clinical terms. The only English work on 
insanity published before Shakespeare’s poem, Timothy Bright’s A 
Treatise of Melancholie (London, 1586) has little to say about love-
madness, but Robert Burton’s Anatomy of Melancholy, published a 
few years later (London, 1621), devotes nearly a third of the work 
to this subject. Burton distinguishes between ‘natural, sensible and 
rational love’ and a morbid state due to excessive fixation and 
infatuation which he calls ‘heroical love’. Like Thomas Bright he 
believes that physical and mental causes are at work and in the morbid 
state the two sets of symptoms exacerbate each other to the pitch of 
insanity. A common cause is frustration of natural impulses, such as 
we see in the situation of Venus:

But this love of ours is immoderate, inordinate, and not to be 
comprehended in any bounds. It will not contain itself within 
the union of marriage or apply to one object, but is a wandering 
evagant, a domineering, a boundless, an irrefragable, a
destructive passion: Sometimes this burning lust rageth after marriage and then it is properly called jealousy; sometimes before, and then it is called heroical melancholy it... begets rapes, incests murders... it is confined within no terms of blood, years, sex or whatever else... Human, divine laws, precepts, exhortations, fear of God and men, fair, foul means, fame fortunes, shame, disgrace honour cannot oppose, stave off or withstand the fury of it.\textsuperscript{12}

A few paragraphs later he adds:

They that are in love are likewise sick; \textit{lascivus, salax, lascivens, et qui in venerem furit, vere est aegrotus.}

Describing the symptoms of this state of mind he says:

These doubts, anxieties, suspicions are the least part of their torments; they break many times from passions to actions, speak fair, and flatter, now most obsequious and willing, by and by they are averse, wrangle, fight, swear, quarrel, laugh, weep and he that doth not by fits, Lucian holds, is not thoroughly touched with this loadstone of love.\textsuperscript{13}

It is clear then that the evidences of Venus's passion which offend Lewis's sense of decorum in poetry are no more than an accurate description of the symptoms of the state. Venus is 'trembling with passion', 'red and hot as coals of flowing fire', 'so enrag'd' she sweats and weeps, she is compared to a gorging bird of prey, she argues, pleads, faints, scolds and cajoles and uses excessive physical force. She is physically and mentally out of control.

We must keep this in mind because it will not do to see the goddess merely as a stupid woman and most of her behaviour is stupid. Ovid's Venus did what any sensible woman would do. She goes hunting with Adonis, shares his interests and engages his friendly companionship. Shakespeare's Venus makes every mistake in the book and each artifice and trick arouses Adonis's resentment and shame more and more. And she makes the worst mistake of all: that of repeating herself. But she is not stupid: she is sick. Had she not been so her elaborate but largely irrelevant 'witty' arguments would seem artificial; as it is they have the effect of desperate rationalisations proper to an obsessed or deranged mind.

\textsuperscript{12}Robert Burton, \textit{Anatomy of Melancholy}, Pt 3, Sec. 2, Mem. 1, Subs. 2.
\textsuperscript{13}Ibid.
But she is not completely deranged nor should she lose our sympathy. She talks a great deal and not much to the point but what she says is often exquisite poetry and when the shock of Adonis's death brings her to the edge of despair her lament for him as his body changes to a flower and her prophecy of the twofold nature of love from now on, restore her as the goddess of love and beauty—a character which she has never lost throughout the poem. And suddenly the comparisons with ravening and greedy animals of the earlier stanzas fall away and are replaced by images of tenderness and motherhood. She runs to meet Adonis at his hunting

Like a milch-doe whose swelling dugs do ache
Hasting to feed her fawn hid in some brake.

and:

By this, far off she hears the huntsmans halloa.
A nurses song ne'er pleased her babe so well.

and speaking to the flower as she plucks it:

Here was thy father's bed, here in my breast;
Thou art the next of blood, and 'tis thy right.
Lo, in this hollow cradle take thy rest;
My throbbing heart shall rock thee day and night.

But this change is not a recovery. She has moved on to the next stage of melancholy as it was viewed at the time. As she surveys the body of Adonis dead, her 'brain being troubled', she sees things double and her lament for Adonis is that of someone in a state of fantasy: none of the events she pictures actually took place and she even entertains the nonsensical idea that the boar, like all the rest of nature, was in love with Adonis and killed him in a clumsy attempt to kiss him. Venus's lament is a mad-maid's song comparable, in the state of mind it reveals, to Ophelia's when she appears distraught and singing before the Court of Denmark.

The final stage of love-melancholy appears in the last stanza where she retires to Paphos with the resolve to 'immure herself and not be seen'.

Shakespeare has supported the theme of beauty and love against the theme of animal passion and infatuation by the series of exquisite
vignettes or inserted pictures, Adonis's horse with the breeding jennet, the hunting of the hare, the meeting with the hounds of Adonis after their encounter with the boar: the ecstasy and elevation of love are set against its miseries, insanities and abject follies, neither denied and both inevitable, as they are pictured in Venus's prophecy at the end of the poem.

But the tone of the poem is meant to contrast with the other picture of 'Tarquin's ravishing strides towards his design'. That is meant to be heavy with tragedy and morality; this, like Ariosto's masterpiece, to be shot through with delighted irony. Venus's summary treatment of Adonis at the beginning is meant to be comic. Here is a goddess confident in her divinity and the force of her beauty and in consequence overreaching herself, and Adonis, poor child, believing that he will escape if he gives her a kiss and coming up to it like a dab chick only to duck under again—this line of light and cheerful fun is carried right through to the point where Venus singing her 'tedious song' hears the echoes like mocking tapsters in an inn.

It puzzles me that so perceptive a man as Lewis should have overlooked so much in this magnificent poem where the three elements of poetic myth, realistic psychology and delighted irony are able to combine because of the energy and intellectual vigour that animate the whole.
It is a curious thing that the greatest master of English verse satire and a critic and theorist of such standing that he has been called the Father of English Criticism, should have left us such a disappointing work as his essay, *A Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire*. This work appeared in 1692, when Dryden was sixty-one, as a preface to the volume of translations of the satires of Juvenal and Persius by Dryden and others. It is disappointing for several reasons. A good deal of it is rather secondhand material from treatments of the subject by the earlier French scholars Dacier and Casaubon; it contains a number of digressions which Dryden admits have very little to do with his subject; the treatment is rambling, diffuse and sometimes repetitive; Dryden's own views on satire are never properly developed and, above all, there is only the most perfunctory reference to the great satires on which his fame principally rests. This is unlike Dryden, whose prefaces are usually very much concerned with explaining his theories and defending his practice. Dryden himself keeps apologising to his patron, Charles Sackville, Earl of Dorset, to whom the essay is addressed, for the faults and inadequacies of the essay and he puts down its defects to the rambling and lack of control natural in an old man. At the end of his longest and most irrelevant digression he says: 'By this time, my Lord, I doubt not but that you wonder, why I have run off from my bias so long together, and made so tedious a digression from satire to heroic poetry. But if you will excuse it by the tattling quality of age ... etc.'
One cannot help feeling that this is disingenuous. For one thing, a writer who realises that his essay is rambling and ill-composed, has a very simple remedy to hand. He can recast it before sending it to the printer. For another, the digression on heroic poetry is continued at two further points in the essay in spite of Dryden's awareness of its irrelevance. And lastly, Dryden's excuse will not bear a moment's thought. At sixty-one he was by no means senile and in fact eight years later in the splendid essay which precedes his Fables Ancient and Modern, he admits that in spite of age, illness and misfortune, he was at the height of his powers—and the composition of that essay bears him out. The individual parts of the Essay on Satire show no hesitation, confusion or lack of vigour and grasp. One cannot help feeling that Dryden is playing some sort of game with his patron and his readers in this preface. It is my purpose to suggest just what the game may have been and why Dryden thought it worth his while to play it.

Another curious thing about Dryden is that his only extensive discussion of the art of satire should have been written so many years after the appearance of his great examples of the art: MacFlecknoe was probably written fourteen years before, Absolom and Achitophel eleven, The Medal ten, and The Hind and the Panther five years before the essay. All except The Medal represented a new form of satire which Dryden was proud to have introduced: 'If anything of mine is good', Spence reports him as saying, 'tis my MacFlecknoe, and I value myself the more upon it because 'tis the first piece of ridicule written in heroics'. Yet the prefaces to his satires do not follow his usual habit of explaining and defending his methods. They have in fact very little to say about satire at all. It is so unlike Dryden to be silent that when we place this beside the curious tactics he adopts in the essay on satire written so many years later we may suspect that there was a special reason for his silence. One may point out that not only did he write elaborate prefaces to most of his plays, but that he preceded his dramatic career by a theoretical and critical discussion of the art of drama. This was his Essay of Dramatick Poesie, published three years after his first play and before his main work in this field. In the same way, between 1672 and 1676 when he was seriously contemplating the writing of an epic poem, he seems to have undertaken a study of ancient and modern epic, including Milton's Paradise Lost, and of such critics and theorists as Aristotle, Rapin, Boileau and Le Bossu. All this is in keeping with Dryden's idea of
his calling. It was his conviction that a poet should prepare himself by study before he essayed to practise a particular form or a particular subject, and that he should be equipped with an explicit theory of his subject. He was always eager to explain and defend his theories in other fields. Why then did he neglect to do so in the case of his satires?

Dryden came fairly late in life to the writing of satire, and his critics and biographers have usually assumed that it was more or less an accident that he did so. Private resentments against Thomas Shadwell perhaps led to the circulation of *MacFlecknoe* in manuscript in the 1670s; the king’s suggestion to his poet laureate led to the production of *Absolom and Achitophel* in 1681 and *The Medal* in the following year; James II’s policy towards the Catholics and Nonconformists led him to write *The Hind and the Panther* in 1687. It is a plausible conjecture but it is not enough to explain the problem and it was unlike Dryden to engage in a form of literature for which he had not prepared himself by study and exercise. In fact there is some evidence to suggest that he did so prepare himself and that he did not take up satire by accident.

*MacFlecknoe* may be a clue to the problem. It was probably written in 1678 and may have circulated in manuscript till 1682, when the publication was possibly prompted by an unauthorised and imperfect edition of the poem. Dryden, by 1682, had good grounds for attacking Tom Shadwell. There seems not much reason for his having done so in 1678 and the reason he did not publish at the time may well have been that he wrote the poem as an exercise in a literary mode that had interested him for other reasons—reasons which I believe are to be found in his *Essay on Satire*.

However that may be, the 1670s were a period in which the art and theory of formal satire were much discussed and practised. Dr Johnson bears witness to the excitement caused by the production of Butler’s *Hudibras* between 1663, when the first part appeared, and 1678 when part three was published. But Butler had also written and circulated a number of formal satires, not published, for the most part, till the early eighteenth century. Between 1666 and 1673 had appeared a number of able, trenchant and often obscene comments on public corruption and private vice each called *Advice to a Painter*. The first of these was a perfectly serious poem by Waller praising the conduct of the naval battle which Dryden also celebrated in *Annus Mirabilis*. The second, third and fourth were satires attributed at that
time to Sir John Denham, the last three were by Andrew Marvell. The Earl of Rochester, between 1669 and 1676, but mostly in 1674 and 1675, produced a series of famous satires roughly modelled on Horace and Juvenal, *Tunbridge Wells, Timon, a Satyr, A Session of the Poets, A Satyr against Mankind*, and the highly obscene but quite entertaining and forceful *A Ramble in St James's Park*. Rochester or Sir Carr Scrope in 1676 wrote *In Defence of Satyr*. The Earl of Mulgrave published anonymously his *Essay on Satire* in 1675 and an obscure young schoolteacher, John Oldham, won immediate fame and was taken up by the nobility and the wits for a series of *Satires on the Jesuits* published between 1679 and 1682. Of these Juvenal was the model, but Oldham also caused interest and discussion by his imitations of Horace's *Art of Poetry*, of the Thirteenth Satire of Juvenal and the Eighth Satire of Boileau. There is thus plenty of evidence that in these dozen years or so, satire was very much discussed and Dean Lockier, quoted by Spence in his famous *Anecdotes*, gives an actual account of such a discussion in Will's Coffee House about 1685 and not long after the publication of *MacFlecknoe*.

It would be odd for Dryden who was at the centre of the literary world not to have taken some part in all this and indeed there is evidence that he did. A letter to John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, which is probably dated in 1673 urges Rochester to write a satire on the Duke of Buckingham and outlines some of the points that could be made against him, points which are curiously like the famous portrait of Buckingham as Zimri in *Absolom and Achitophel* written eight years later. This portrait Dryden thought the best in the poem and worth all the rest of the work. He certainly had the idea of a poetical attack on Buckingham in mind for he writes to Rochester after his remarks on the Duke:

> These observations would easily run into a lampoon, if I had not forsworn that dangerous part of wit, not so much of good nature, but at least from the inborn vanity of poets. I should show it to others and betray myself to a worse mischief than what I do give my Enemy . . . Because I deale not in Satyre, I have sent your Lordship a prologue and epilogue which I made for our players when they went down to Oxford.¹

If Dryden deliberately refrained from satire in 1673 he certainly shared the general interest and in the same letter he mentions

Etherege's having read a translation of one of Boileau's satires with English names in place of the French. He read it so often that word got around to the victims and Etherege was forced to abandon the project to avoid reprisals. Dryden was obviously present at some of these readings of the half-finished translation and he mentions that one of Etherege's friends suggested a change in one couplet where minor figures of vice were mentioned:

But one of his friends, imagined those names not heroique enough for the dignity of a Satyre.²

He suggested substituting well-known figures from the aristocratic world. Dryden may have been the friend since the lines stuck in his mind, but in any case it is evidence that he had taken part in discussions of that 'heroic satire' which he prided himself on introducing into English poetry.

In 1675, which seems to have been the year in which this interest in satire was at its height, Dryden was a celebrated playwright and pamphleteer, poet laureate and historiographer royal, but had published no satires. The fact that he took part in the common interest and discussion, however, is shown by the fact that he mentions in his Essay on Satire among the squibs and lampoons to which he did not reply, the fun made of him in the Duke of Buckingham's (and others) satire on heroic plays, The Rehearsal; and there is the more painful evidence for poor Dryden of his being beaten up by thugs in Rose Alley in 1679. The reason for this was thought to be that he was suspected of being the author of the anonymous Essay on Satire later acknowledged by the Earl of Mulgrave. In spite of its title this work has not much to say about the theory of satire beyond the notion that it should rise above scurrility and lampoon and choose subjects worthy of the art, a view which Dryden himself is known to have held. Otherwise it is an attack on various contemporaries, including the Earl of Rochester, and would be better entitled 'An Essay in Satire'. But its remarks fit in well enough with Dryden's later views to suggest that people thought that he held them at the beginning of his career as a satirist. MacFlecknoe was then circulating in manuscript and must have been known to some of his friends among the wits. In 1684 Dryden wrote a short but moving elegy on the young poet John Oldham who had died the year before:

²Ibid.
Farewell too little and too lately known
Whom I began to think and call my own.
For sure our souls were near allied, and thine
Cast in the same poetick mould with mine.

One common note on either Lyre did strike
And Knaves and Fools we both abhorred alike:
To the same goal did both our studies drive;
The last set out the soonest did arrive, etc.

This, and the fact that a copy of MacFlecknoe now in the Bodleian Library is in Oldham's handwriting, are good evidence that, in the years Oldham was in London, Dryden and he discussed and studied the theory and the art of satire together and that they were agreed as to the end and purpose of that art—the correction of vice and folly. The common note struck on both lyres, however, cannot refer to similar methods since Oldham's practice was an imitation of classical satirists, the formal satires of Juvenal, Persius and Horace. His tone was fierce and denunciatory, his language rough and his style forceful but not graceful. Dryden's first satires, Absalom and Achitophel and MacFlecknoe, had just appeared and were of a totally different kind, narrative in form, mock-heroic and genial and laughing in tone. Dryden was proud of having invented this new kind of satire. In Dean Lockier's anecdote about hearing him talk in Will's Coffee House at the time, he records that Dryden acknowledged Tassoni's La Secchia Rapita and Boileau's Le Lutrin as his models in mock-heroic satire.

Dryden, in a later part of his elegy on Oldham, deprecates though he excuses it, the rough style of Oldham's satires. Now the Elizabethan satirists, Donne, Marston and Hall, had adopted and perpetuated a view that satire originated in the drama of ancient Greece, the satyr play, and that the language appropriate to it should be rough, uncouth and forceful, the style low and rustic as befitting satyrs, creatures half-brute and half-man. In the seventeenth century the mob of gentlemen who wrote with ease, as Pope called them, while they modelled themselves on the classical Roman satirists, continued to regard rough language and low language as appropriate to formal satire, and one thing at least that Dryden approved of in Oldham's satire was the noble and elevated style even if the metre was still rough. In the preface to The Hind and the Panther the last of his great satires, he distinguishes between the public affairs to which he thinks 'the Majestick turn of Heroic Poesy' is the appropriate style, and the 'domestick' conversation to which a colloquial and familiar style is
appropriate. But elsewhere his style is epic. Indeed, as critics have often pointed out, it is the genuine language of the stately and dignified epic style and not a parody or burlesque of it:

\begin{quote}
Some Beams of wit on other souls may fall
Strike through and make a lucid interval
But Shadwell's genuine night admits no ray
His rising fogs prevail upon the day
Besides his goodly Fabrick fills the eye
And seems designed for thoughtless Majesty
Thoughtless as Monarch oaks that shade the plain
And spread in solemn state, supinely reign.\footnote{MacFlecknoe II. 21–28.}
\end{quote}

This is the true language of epic, and the fun arises from the incongruity of the exquisite and dignified language applied to such a subject. The only poems in which this sort of thing had been attempted before were the Secchia Rapita of Tassoni (which is a burlesque of epic rather than a true mock epic) and Boileau's Le Lutrin, which is seriously epic in tone while treating a comic subject. We know that Dryden about 1680 was reading Boileau and helping his friend, Sir William Soames, translate Boileau's L'Art Poetique into English verse. It is no accident that Dryden's satires reflect Boileau's practice and theory of the mock-heroic poem. Moreover it is interesting that Dryden should have written his heroic satire, MacFlecknoe, shortly after the year in which he seems finally to have abandoned his project to write a serious epic.

This leads up to my reading of A Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire written so much later. It is avowedly a discussion designed to introduce translations of the formal satirists, Juvenal and Persius. But I believe that its curious arrangement arises from the fact that it is really a plea for and a defence of Dryden's own kind of satire, while pretending to do something else.

It begins with a glowing tribute to Lord Dorset, as a poet and a satirist, in which Dryden appears guilty of gross flattery. He places Dorset with Shakespeare among the modern writers who have excelled the best of the ancients, Dorset in satire and Shakespeare in tragedy. It is flattery of course. One remembers Dr Johnson's restrained sarcasm on this passage:

\begin{quote}
Would it be imagined that, of this rival to antiquity, all the satires were little personal invectives, and that his largest
\end{quote}
composition was a song of eleven stanzas. The blame, however, of this exaggerated praise falls on the encomiast, not upon the author.  

One must also remember, however, that Johnson thought Dorset's verses worthy of praise and that Pope, according to Spence, placed him, as a craftsman, above Oldham and Rochester for delicacy and exactness. It is precisely these qualities that Dryden praises and says he has imitated in his own satire, and the point is the reform he felt Dorset had accomplished in the art—the raising of its tone and the improvement in its style. It is for lack of these qualities that he condemns Donne's satires, great as he admits Donne's genius to have been. Cowley has the same faults as Donne. The rest are mere lampooners. Having cleared the field of modern rivals, except Butler whom he reserves for later treatment, Dryden goes on to say that some particular ages seem to be more fortunate than others in producing geniuses suited to the spirit of the times. His own age, he feels, is peculiarly suited to tragedy and satire and likely to produce as great a genius in the latter as she had already produced in Shakespeare in the former. He then gracefully hands the palm to Dorset's little epigrams but one suspects that he had himself in mind. Who else had produced anything comparable to MacFlecknoe or Absolom and Achitophel? Dryden, I think, could afford to pay Dorset this compliment, knowing perfectly well that no one, including the Earl himself, who was a man of wit and sense, would be at all deceived. His own masterpieces will speak for themselves.

This impression is confirmed in the long digression on the nature and practice of epic. This digression is in fact no digression at all though Dryden pretends to think so. One excuse he gives—the tattling of old age—we have already dealt with. Another, that it is the last preface he is likely to write and so he cannot forbear to set down his views on this topic, is equally implausible. Dryden had written at length on this subject before and the views he expresses here are not new. The third excuse, the usefulness of a short essay on epic in the middle of an essay on satire is never explained and seems absurd, but is I believe the real one. For Dryden is once again concerned with the ancients versus the moderns and once again he finds that the great modern epic poet who might equal Homer and Virgil has

not yet arisen. Not even Milton will do: the subject of *Paradise Lost* is not an epic theme, its fable is more suited to tragedy, its style and versification also have objections to them. Moreover he deals with some serious doubts as to whether a Christian epic is even possible, since Christian virtues are not those of epic heroes, and a Christian poet cannot employ the pagan 'machinery' (as the term then was) of gods and goddesses who participate in the human action. At this point he brings in an invention of his own to deal with this last problem and proceeds to outline a scheme by which a modern poet might yet produce

a more beautiful and more perfect poem than any yet extant since the Ancients.

And now Dryden admits that the poet he has long had in mind is himself: he himself designs to be the epic poet of the age:

Thus, my Lord, I have, as briefly as I could, given your Lordship, and by you the world, a rude draught of what I have been long labouring in my imagination, and what I had intended to have put in practice . . . and to have left the stage, (to which my genius never much inclined me) for a work which would have taken up my life in the performance of it . . . [He then outlines the subject and the patrons, the patriotic topics and so on he has had in mind, and concludes] with these helps and those of the machines I have mentioned, I might perhaps have done as well as some of my predecessors. But being encouraged only with fair words by King Charles II, my little salary ill paid, and no prospect of future subsistence, I was then discouraged in the attempt; and now age has overtaken me and want, more insufferable evil, through the change of the times, has wholly disenabled me.

Dryden in the last words quoted is referring to his loss of position and salary at the abdication of James II. But he still plainly has his great design in mind. Dorset is his only hope in the new regime, a generous patron and rich, and Lord Chamberlain to boot. A delicate reference to his previous generosity which follows shows the way the wind is blowing. Dryden could still be made independent and could still write his great epic.

He now returns to his subject, but everything from now on is designed with this epic scheme in mind. The long discussion of the origins of satire is not merely an historical introduction. It is designed
to discredit the English view that satire arose from a form of drama, the satyr play, and is therefore a subspecies of dramatic art. On the contrary Dryden wishes to ally it with epic as a subspecies. The even longer comparisons of Horace, Persius and Juvenal are not merely relevant to the translations they preface. They are designed to establish that the most perfect satire on the classic model is that of Juvenal, in that his language and public themes are closest to the dignity of epic style, though Horace is allowed to excel him in one respect: his choice of laughter as the means of attacking folly and vice. In all this section, the longest and most closely argued part of the essay, Dryden has been criticised for not being original. W.P. Ker in his edition of the essays of John Dryden says:

it is not one of the best of Dryden’s critical papers as a great part of it is little more than an adaptation from Dacier’s account of satiric poetry in his translation of Horace.\(^5\)

This is true; but Dryden’s purpose here is to lean heavily on the authorities since he is about to add to the species of satire without much authority at all. His history of the progress of satire is presented as a sort of evolution from coarse lampoon through primitive satire to Ennius and Lucilius with Horace and Juvenal representing two types of mature satire, each with its virtues but with Juvenal’s representing the higher type. Highest of all he places a third type not perfected in antiquity and his method of introducing this is curious and in keeping with the odd comedy of the whole essay. Between the discussion of Horace’s poetry and that of Juvenal and before the main comparison of the two he inserts a short passage on another sort of satire which he calls Varronian, that is of the kind practised by Cicero’s friend Varro. He describes it in the vaguest terms and candidly admits that we know little about it since none of it has survived from classical literature. Nevertheless, following the account of the scholars Casaubon and Dacier on whom he has been relying, he gives a list of works that could be called Varronian satires—the lost satires of Varro, Petronius Arbiter’s novel Satyricon, some of Lucian’s dialogues; The Golden Ass of Lucius Apuleius, Seneca’s Pumpkinification of Claudius, the emperor Julian’s Symposium. Then (leaving out Boethius) he adds his own modern instances: a German work, probably the famous Epistolae Obscurorum Virorum, Erasmus’s

Praise of Folly, George Barclay's Euphormio, Spenser's Mother Hubbard's Tale and, finally, John Dryden's Absolom and Achitophel and MacFlecknoe. It is enough, for the moment, to insert his own pedigree in the scholarly tale. He then goes on to discuss the satires of Juvenal and the reader is left without reason to suspect that he is to hear any more about Varronian satire, obviously a minor branch of the art. Dryden's purpose here is clearly to cause the reader to remember vaguely, when the subject is raised later, that his pedigree had solid scholarly backing which of course it has not. Dryden has invented it from a medley of dissimilar works in prose and verse.

Raised again the subject certainly is. Although Dryden places Juvenal first for his heroic style, he deprecates the saeva indignatio of his satire and prefers to it what he calls a fine raillery. 'There is still a vast difference betwixt the slovenly, butchering of a man, and the fineness of the stroke that separates the head from the body and leaves it standing in its place.' And the example he gives of the superior type of satire is the character of Zimri in his own Absolom and Achitophel. It is a mere hint and he is off again discussing Horace and demolishing Heinsius's definition of satire. Another cautious approach leads to what he calls 'my own trivial thoughts how a modern satire is to be made'. Then Varronian satire is reintroduced and it is plain that he considers its perfection is reached in mock-heroic. Butler's Hudibras is considered and praised only to be condemned for its burlesque manner, trivial metre and low style. The true examples cited are Tassoni's Secchia Rapita and Boileau's Le Lutrin. It is left to the reader from earlier hints to add MacFlecknoe and Absolom and Achitophel. Dryden now comes out in the open and argues that heroic satire is not only the finest kind of satire: it is true epic poetry.

This, I think, my Lord, to be the most beautiful, and most noble kind of satire. Here is the majesty of the heroic, finely mixed with the venom of the other; and raising the delight which otherwise would be flat and vulgar, by the sublimity of the expression . . . Had I time, I could enlarge on the beautiful turns of words and thoughts, which are as requisite in this as in heroic poetry itself, of which the satire is undoubtedly a species.

*It is, in fact, possible that Dryden drew up his list with a similar list in mind: that with which Erasmus, writing in a playful vein, establishes the pedigree of his Encomium Moriae in the preface addressed to Sir Thomas More.*
This is the culmination of the essay: after a few words on how Dryden himself studied, found and mastered this style, he breaks off to talk about the translation and the translators, so keeping up the appearance of rather inconsequent and rambling argument. But it is anything but that. From the beginning Dryden has set out to prove 'heroic satire' (or mock epic as we call it today) a true form of epic poetry. His lifelong dream of being an epic poet has not been in vain. He had abandoned successively serious epic and heroic drama, but in MacFlecknoe, Absolom and Achitophel and the first part of The Hind and the Panther, he has nevertheless shown himself a master in what he describes in the same essay as 'An Heroick Poem... certainly the greatest work of human nature'. It may be a pathetic or an amusing spectacle—according to the way you look at it. To my mind it is neither. Dryden is perfectly right. The matter of these great poems may not be the highest kind of subject, but their poetry is the highest kind of poetry. They are in this respect truly epic.

The question that must naturally be asked is: why should Dryden have contrived this curious comedy instead of coming into the open? I can think of several reasons. First there was the question of expediency and prudence. Dryden was old, the party he was attached to was out of power. He was hated and suspected for his attachment to the Stuarts; he was abused and vulnerable for having changed his religion and having stuck to the change.

Though there were severe laws against the Catholics and they were subject to many disabilities and double taxation, they do not appear to have been persecuted unless they were active against the government and Dryden was able to return to writing for the stage with some success and encouragement. Nevertheless his position was precarious. He had refused to take the oath of allegiance to the new sovereigns William and Mary and in the preface to his first play, Don Sebastian, written after the Revolution, he speaks of the many enemies who knew how vulnerable he was. Writing of the favourable reception of the play, he says:

While I continue in these bad circumstances (and, truly I see very little probability of coming out,) I must be obliged to write; and if I may still hope for the same kind of usage, I shall the less repent of that hard necessity. I write not this out of any expectation to be pitied, for I have enemies enow to wish me yet in a worse condition.²

The Earl of Dorset, his only powerful patron, was the man who had as Lord Chamberlain deprived him of his offices at the accession of William and Mary. The subject of *Absalom and Achitophel* was obnoxious to the new regime. The object of *MacFlecknoe*, the monstrous Shadwell, had replaced him as poet laureate and Dorset had appointed him. The subject of *The Hind and the Panther*, defence of the Catholic Church against the Church of England, was positively dangerous to him at the time. He could not make much of his masterpiece without seriously embarrassing Dorset and risking his own safety and livelihood.

But a more serious objection must have been that his many enemies would surely have ridiculed and torn to pieces the arguments—not very convincing from the scholarly point of view at the time—by which Dryden attempts, for reasons of patent self-interest, to prove mock epic a genuine species of true epic rather than a branch of a lower form of poetry—burlesque satire.

Lastly he might well have considered that he might have exposed himself to ridicule by what must have appeared to others a pathetic attempt to claim a place with Homer, Virgil and Milton. The time was not then ripe for recognition that, as a poet, he is of their company even if not quite of their stature.

After all *subject* does count for something in estimating the greatness of poetry.
The critical history of Christopher Smart’s *Jubilate Agno* or *Rejoice in the Lamb* resembles that of his most famous poem, *A Song to David*. To the later eighteenth century *A Song to David* seemed an insane poem, demonstrating that though its author had been discharged from the asylum, he was as mad as ever. To the nineteenth century it seemed a glorious extravaganza displaying a wild and unusual imagination, but not insane. Only in the last forty or fifty years has it become apparent that it is in addition a highly organised poem, extremely complex in its design and as intellectual as it is ecstatic. Admittedly it conceals a system of ideas which no one has quite succeeded in making explicit and a mysterious symbolism of numbers and correspondences which still eludes complete explication. But it is neither an insane poem in itself nor does it suggest an insane mind. *Jubilate Agno*, on the other hand, may be both a poem written by a deranged man and itself an insane poem. It was probably begun in the early part of 1759 when Smart was living in lodgings near St James Park after he had been discharged from St Luke’s Hospital for the Insane uncured and with no prospect of cure—in fact he probably went from St Luke’s to a private madhouse. Before the end of the year he was probably back in confinement at Turlington’s Asylum in Chelsea where he remained till his release in January 1763. Dates, and

*This essay was originally published in R.F. Brissenden (ed.), *Studies in the Eighteenth Century* (ANU Press, Canberra, 1968).*
probably datable remarks, in the text of the poem show it to have been written over this period. If Dr Johnson, Mrs Piozzi, and other friends of Smart were right in thinking that he was not seriously deranged, neither they nor his enemies, nor specialists like Dr Battie, the superintendent of St Luke’s, were ever in any doubt that he was mad to some extent.¹ The first reactions to the poem were probably that it was clear evidence of Smart’s insanity, since the Reverend Thomas Cawardine and William Hayley, friends of Cowper, seem to have been interested in it as an illustration of poetic mania when Cowper became insane in 1763 shortly after Smart’s release from his final period of confinement. Thereafter the manuscript, or the fragments we have, remained in the possession of the Cawardine family, and the poem was only discovered and published by William Force Stead in 1939.² Stead was able to show that many of the ideas, and the association of ideas which at first glance look like the ravings of a lunatic, are in fact often lucid enough reminiscences and associations based on Smart’s immense and curious readings in the natural sciences, the occult and mystical writers, especially the Cambridge Platonists, in books of travel, Biblical criticism, and so on. But Stead’s introduction and notes show that he did not credit Smart with more than an extraordinary memory. The poem as a whole he treated as naïve, incoherent, and the work of an author not in control of his associations. W.H. Bond’s edition, published in 1954 under the title of Jubilate Agno,³ showed, I think convincingly, that the text published by Stead was not complete, but a series of fragments of a mutilated original of which some two-thirds is now missing, and in which each verse beginning with Let was meant to be followed or matched by an antiphonal verse beginning with For. He was able to restore the original order in the surviving fragments and it immediately became apparent that the work is less incoherent and more rationally planned than had been suspected. Bond has pointed out that the peculiar verse form is almost certainly Smart’s attempt to adapt to English verse some of the principles of Hebrew poetry as expounded by Bishop Lowth in his De Sacra poesi Hebraeorum published in 1753. He has pointed out its resemblance to some of the Psalms and to parts of the Anglican Liturgy, has noted the fact

¹C. Devlin, Poor Kit Smart, London 1961, chapters 6–10.
³References to the text throughout are to Jubilate Agno, ed. W.H. Bond, London 1954, by fragment and line.
that Smart's *Psalms* were designed to replace the Prayer Book version, and suggests that 'the *Jubilate* was initially conceived as the opening move in this campaign of reform'\(^4\) of the Anglican order of service. This is getting warm. But Bond I think has missed the fact that *Jubilate Agno* contains in itself the explanation of a plan of reform, if it can be called that, so revolutionary, that it amounts to an apocalyptic vision. Smart's references to his theory of the universe are by no means systematic, as is natural in a hymn of praise, but they are sufficient to show that the poem itself is based, not as Stead and Bond seem to think, on chance reminiscences from Smart's extensive reading and on a random collection of rather cranky theories about numbers, letters, names, animals, angels, the composition of matter, contemporary politics, mystical and symbolical history, and so on; but on a single fairly coherent theory of the universe which must have been elaborated before his confinement and which he probably continued to hold after his cure, for it appears to some extent in *A Song to David* and in the *Hymns* and *Psalms*.

But before going on to outline Smart's theory of the universe I should like to say a little more about the plan and method of the poem itself.

Basically it is planned on the lines of the *Benedicite Omnia Opera*, which begins:

\[
\text{O all ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord} \\
\text{praise him and magnify him for ever.}
\]

And then it proceeds to invoke all creatures in their classes and calls on them to praise the Lord. Finally there are the specific names.

\[
\text{O Ananias, Azarias and Misael} \\
\text{bless ye the Lord, praise him and magnify him} \\
\text{for ever.}
\]

These three characters reappear in Smart's poem in consecutive verses, showing that he had the *Benedicite* in mind. What Smart apparently decided to do was to extend the notion of the *Benedicite* and the *Te Deum* in such a way that not only the main classes of non-human created things but each subspecies should be named with its appropriate qualities and should be invited to praise God in conjunction

\(^{\text{Ibid., p. 20.}}\)
with a human being in each case. As the poem stands it begins with this program.

Rejoice in God, O ye Tongues; give the glory to the Lord, and the Lamb.
Nations, and Languages, and every Creature, in which is the breath of Life.
Let man and beast appear before him, and magnify his name together. (Fragment A, ll.1-3)

The list begins, appropriately enough, with Noah and all his company, and runs through the patriarchs, each praising with one of the beasts which may be naturally associated with him, Abraham with the ram, Balaam with the ass, Ishmael with a tiger, and so on. Old Testament names keep Smart going for a fair time; then he moves into the New Testament. We do not know how the series went in the middle of the poem for here only the For verses have survived, but when we come to a series of Let verses again Smart is using Hebrew names, sometimes of places and sometimes of persons, taken mostly from the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah. The beasts in the earlier part were taken first from all orders of creatures, and these were followed by lists of birds and fishes. Now Smart gives lists of plants. After another gap in the manuscript we find lists of Englishmen, now asked to praise God in company with various precious stones, then with plants and an occasional bird or beast.

The reason why Smart includes precious stones among his creatures and why the list of human names in the pairs is confined to Biblical characters and Englishmen will become apparent later. It is not as mad or as arbitrary as it looks and neither is the scheme of this immense Te Deum of all the living creatures by species and of men by individual names. Smart calls it his Magnificat.

Smart apparently took the antiphonal form of the Let and For verses from the Psalms and the Book of Job where such verses occur sporadically. He may well have taken verses such as 34 and 35 of Psalm 69 for his model:

Let the heaven and earth praise Him, the seas, and everything that moveth therein;
For God will save Zion, and will build the cities of Judah; that they may dwell there and have it in possession.
The connection between *Let* and *For* verses here is not at all clear. Smart sometimes connects the *Let* with the *For* verse, but often there is little or no connection, and he may in fact be following the Bible in this. The *Let* series is more often continuous with itself and the *For* series with itself. But both have odd and often inexplicably abrupt changes of subject, or intrusions of what were obviously some of Smart’s fixed ideas. As the poem goes on it appears to lose order and control in details though it retains the general plan of an enormous hymn of praise based on the last three of the Psalms of David, in which Smart himself appears as the singer of a new song unto the Lord, a sort of super-psalm with himself in the character of the new David, celebrant of the new Israel at the coming of the millennium. The poem itself is incoherent enough, especially in its fragmentary form. Though it depends on a system of ideas, it does not expound these ideas systematically. Indeed it is not concerned to expound, but to praise the Lord. It is the hymn of creation, not its conspectus. This in part accounts for previous failures to recognise the evidence of a system of the universe on which it is based. In fact the outlines of this system only begin to appear when the poem is taken to pieces and all the references to one aspect of the system, now scattered through the structure, are brought together in one place. All I can say at this stage of my investigation is that these outlines appear very probable and that there are very many details which I have not yet succeeded in fitting into place. Indeed a complete demonstration may not prove possible since so much of the poem is missing. It is, of course, not impossible that some day the missing portions will be recovered.

Perhaps another reason that the existence of a system has not been noticed, or, if noticed, not pursued, is the assumption that the ideas in the poem, like the poem itself, are the product of Smart’s period of insanity. In fact they probably go back to Smart’s residence in Cambridge as a student and later as a fellow of Pembroke Hall. The evidence for this is in the surviving catalogues and the registers of borrowing by the fellows from the Pembroke library, between 1739 when Smart matriculated and 1749 when he left Cambridge. It is clear from these records that the fellows borrowed much the same range of books and that they lent them to one another and to members of other colleges. Ten names, including Smart’s, constantly occur in this way and it is safe to conclude that the books they borrowed and lent and reborrowed were connected with common interests and
discussions. Smart, when he wrote the *Jubilate*, apparently felt he was very fortunate to have been of this company. Cambridge is the right and brightest of the two universities and Pembroke Hall was founded more in the Lord than any college in Cambridge (B2, ll.617–18). One group of books borrowed and shared in this way is concerned with the popular topic of Covenant Theology and theories concerning the millennium. Among the titles are such works as Sir Isaac Newton’s *Observation upon the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St John* (London, 1733) and his *The Chronology of Ancient Kingdoms Amended* (London, 1728), Stillingfleet’s *Origines Sacrae;* Richard Kidder’s *A Demonstration of the Messias;* and the library contained a number of similar works including William Whitson’s *The Accomplishment of Scripture Prophecies.* It is probable that it was here that Smart formed the outline of his own millennial theory. The friends also borrowed works which were concerned with current theories of cosmology. Burnet’s *Sacred Theory of the Earth* was a favourite and there were Derham’s *Physico-Theology* and *Astro-Theology,* Henry Pemberton’s *A View of Sir Isaac Newton’s Philosophy* (London, 1728), Newton’s *Principia,* and J. Keill’s *An Examination of Dr Burnet’s Theory of the Earth, together with some remarks on Mr Whiston’s Theory of the Earth* (Oxford, 1698). So they probably read William Whiston’s *A New Theory of the Earth* and Richard Burthogge’s *Of the Soul of the World and of Particular Souls,* which is connected with Keill’s work. Smart’s own remarkable

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5Edward Stillingfleet, *Origines Sacrae, or a Rational Account of the Christian Faith as to the Truth and Divine Authority of the Scriptures, etc.,* London 1662.
6*A Demonstration of the Messias, in which the Truth of the Christian Religion is defended, especially against the Jews,* London 1700.
7From the Boyle Lectures, 1708.
8Thomas Burnet, *[Telluris Theoria Sacra]; The Sacred Theory of the Earth: containing an Account of the Original of the Earth, And of all the GENERAL CHANGES which it hath already undergone, or is to undergo till the CONSUMMATION of all Things,* London 1681–9.
9William Derham, *Physico-Theology: or a Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God from His Works of Creation, London, 1713; Astro-Theology: Or a Demonstration of the BEING and ATTRIBUTES of God from a SURVEY of the HEAVENS,* London 1715.
11*A New Theory of the Earth, From its Original, to the Consummation of all things, where in the Creation of the World in Six Days, the Universal Deluge, and the General Conflagration as Laid down in the Holy Scriptures are shown to be perfectly agreeable to Reason and Philosophy,* London 1696.
12*Of the Soul of the World and of Particular Souls, in a Letter to Mr. Lock,* London 1699.
cosmology draws, as was his habit, on all these and many other sources, but appears to have more affinity with Keill and Burthogge than any others. These now forgotten attempts to establish a spiritual and animistic cosmology as a rival to the materialist one are the very basis of Smart's own system. It is important to remember that such theories, however wild they may look today, were held by learned and rational men and that Smart's was probably elaborated in discussion with serious scholars at a time when he held the post of praelector in philosophy. In fact almost all aspects of his system can be traced to the same period including his special theory of David, the psalmist. Delaney's _An Historical Account of the Life and Reign of David King of Israel_ was one of the books this group of university scholars borrowed and lent to one another. It is known to be one of the sources of Smart's references to David in _Jubilate Agno_ and _A Song to David_.

It is impossible to give all the evidence in a short essay but in very brief outline Smart's system seems to be as follows:

The universe as created by God is both a spiritual and corporeal hierarchy of beings. The sun and the moon and the other heavenly bodies are also spirits: the sun, says Smart, is an improving angel (B2, ll.315–16); B1, l.102). Flowers have their angels (B2, l.499), precious stones are able to praise God. Earth itself has an intelligence and a voice and a propensity to speak in all her parts (B1, l.234). All fire is a form of spirit. Air, which has an important part in Smart's system, is a very benign spirit, which can be contaminated by curses and purified by prayer (B1, ll.263, 221), and one could go on quoting instances of this animist view of the whole creation in which every atom has life (B1, l.160). Moreover God is immanent in his creation: tides are the life of God in the ocean (B1, l.157). All motion is, in fact, life, and the centripetal and centrifugal forces are God sustaining and directing (B1, ll.161–3). The attraction of the loadstone is the life of God in it (B1, l.167). There is evidence that in part this spiritual physics and cosmology may owe something to the eighteenth-century scientist Derham's _Astro-Theology_ and _Physico-Theology_, but it collects its material from many different sources. For example, Smart,

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13[Patrick Delaney], _An Historical Account of the Life and Reign of David, King of Israel, in Four Books... by the Author of Revelations examined with Candour_, London 1740–2.

14_Jubilate_, p. 67, n. 4; Stead, _Rejoice in the Lamb_, p. 205, sect. IX, note to line 13.
who had presumably read Newton's *Opticks* while an undergraduate,\textsuperscript{15} attacks Newton's theory of colours (B2, ll.650 ff.):

For Newton's notion of colours is \(\alpha\lambda\delta\gamma\omega\delta\) unphilosophical  
For the colours are spiritual.

This idea, it has been suggested,\textsuperscript{16} comes from Berkeley's 'First Dialogue between Hylas and Philonous', where it is argued that to say 'the red and blue which we see are not real colours, but certain unknown notions and figures which no man ever did see, are truly so' is false. Berkeley proves that colours are spiritual and attacks Newton's theory of white light. But the borrowings from the Pembroke library show that optics, and Newton's theory of optics in particular, must have been matters of interest while Smart was in residence, and he may have picked up many of his scientific and philosophical notions from discussion and argument among the dons rather than from systematic reading. For example, another book in the Pembroke library, borrowed on a number of occasions and probably discussed during Smart's residence, was Keill's *An Examination of Dr Burnet's Theory of Earth, together with some remarks on Mr Whiston's Theory of the Earth*. Keill's account of Richard Burthogge's theory of the soul of the world has close resemblance to some of Smart's ideas: of Burthogge, Keill says:

But a new philosopher has much outdone any I have yet mentioned in a book lately Printed concerning Reason.\textsuperscript{17} Here he assures us that there is but one universal Soul in the World, which is omnipresent and acts upon all particular organised Bodies . . .\textsuperscript{18}

Burthogge felt that Keill had not quite understood him and in 1699 he took the trouble to set him right in a work entitled *Of the Soul of the World and of Particular Souls*; he explains his particular notion,

which in short is this; that the Mosaical Spirit (called Gen. 1. V.2 the Spirit of God) being a Spirit of Life, and present

\textsuperscript{15}Library register of Pembroke College, 1743.  
\textsuperscript{17}Burthogge, *An Essay upon Reason and the Nature of Spirits*, London 1693.  
\textsuperscript{18}Keill, *An Examination*, p. 6.
everywhere, in all the Parts of the Universe, is the Original of all the Energy, Motion and Action therein, especially that which is Animal. And that particular Souls (for such I acknowledge there be) are Portions of that Spirit acting on the several particular Bodies in which they are according to the Capacities, Dispositions and Qualities of those Bodies . . . To make it imaginable, let us suppose a vast Organ, consisting of innumerable Pipes of different Sizes and Fabrick, and this Organ to be filled with Wind blown into it, and the Wind to be received and some portion of it by each particular Pipe: Imagine also innumerable Fingers playing upon those several Pipes . . . The World is such an Organ (an orderly aggregate); and the several Sorts of Bodies that compose it are as the several Pipes of that Organ—and as those inspired with Wind, being played upon, do sound different Notes or Tunes; so these animated with their respective Portions of the Mosaical Spirit, being impressed and acted upon by Objects, do perform their several vital functions . . .”

Smart probably read Keill’s discussion of Locke’s Essay, and he may or may not have gone on to read Burthogge’s reply; many points of his system are close to points made by Burthogge—the spontaneous generation of life, the rejection of Vis Inertiae, the analogy and correspondence of the creatures who form part of the universal creature, the equation of mind with light, and so on. Yet it is impossible to say that Smart borrowed his system from Burthogge’s two books. If one compares Burthogge’s image of the world as an Organ with the For verses in Fragment B1 (11.223–55), there seems to be some correspondence, especially in statements such as the following:

For EARTH which is an intelligence hath a voice
and a propensity to speak in all her parts. (B1, 1.234)
For the VOICE is from the body and the spirit—
and is a body and a spirit. (B1, 1.239)
For the TRUMPET of God is a blessed intelligence
& so are all the instruments in HEAVEN.
For GOD the father Almighty plays upon the HARP
of stupendous magnitude and melody.
For unnumerable Angels fly out at every touch and
his tune is a work of creation. (B1, 11.245–7)

Yet the very considerable differences are such as would be explained by Smart’s having picked up the general idea from listening to

*Burthogge, Of the Soul of the World, p. 6.*
discussion of Burthogge’s theory rather than from perusing and meditating on the passage itself. This applies to almost every attempt to pin down Smart’s debt to any single source. His method was thoroughly eclectic and he left nothing he borrowed unchanged.

When we come to consider the relation of this vital organic and intelligent world to its creator it is evident that it is activated by forces unknown to modern physics, but familiar enough to earlier speculation. It is a system dominated by the idea that ‘nothing is so real as that which is spiritual’ (B1, 1.258). The creation is arranged in a great hierarchy of creatures seen in their spiritual aspects which form a Jacob’s ladder up to God through Paradise (B2, 1.392) and all things are moving towards God. Fountains and springs, for example, are the life of the waters working up to God (B1, 1.204). Like Blake, Smart seems to have held some theory of double vision: there is ordinary sensory vision and there is ‘seeing in the spirit’ (B1, 1.230). An idea is the mental vision of an object and prayers are visible to those who possess the double vision (B1, 1.240). In this system, air and light have special importance. Air is that which conveys praise (the importance of praise will become clear in a moment). In its character as a spirit it propagates sound in all directions and spreads praise everywhere, which, in fact, may account for Smart’s continuous and loud praying in public. Light, Smart associates with divine conception (B1, 1.284; B2, 1.325), and hence he holds that its propagation is instantaneous to all parts of this non-Newtonian universe in which everything is both body and spirit. Cold and darkness are not only therefore the work of the devil but the conditions under which he works (B2, 1.296). Fire and electricity, associated as forms of light, are also given a special importance in Smart’s system. In case all this sounds like made-up nonsense or lunatic system-making it is worth while to repeat that Smart seems to have got most of his details from his wide reading in contemporary scientific experiments and theories, and that views similar to his were the subject of serious scientific and philosophic discussion at the time. Keill, a mathematician, and Burthogge, a doctor, are not in the main stream of the scientific tradition but they were serious scholars. Burthogge in particular seems to have anticipated some of Kant’s theories. The celebrated William Whiston, from whom Smart seems to have taken some of his views on matters like the determination of longitude, eclipses, and the waters under and above the earth, was not only a leading scientific figure in Cambridge and successor to Newton in the
The Pack of Autolycus

Lucasian Professorship a generation before Smart's residence there, but his *New Theory of the Earth*, a rival to Burnet's *Sacred Theory of the Earth*, displays just that union of scientific speculation with Covenant Theology which is characteristic of Smart. It is interesting to note that Whiston in 1746, the year in which Smart was re-elected to his praelectorship in philosophy at Pembroke, declared in a lecture given at Tunbridge Wells that the millennium would take place in 1766. Smart predicted it in 1760.

But there is a more important aspect of Smart's system of the universe. To those granted double or spiritual vision, so that all creatures are perceived in both their aspects, it appears that there is a series of mysterious correspondences between creatures, and here we come to the significance of Smart's pairing them in his great Magnificat. What this connection is is suggested in Fragment B1, 1.43.

Let Jubal rejoice with Caecilia, the woman and the slow-worm praise the name of the Lord.
For I pray the Lord Jesus to translate my MAGNIFICAT into verse and represent it.

Caecilia is the name of the lizard who is to rejoice with Jubal the inventor of music. But Caecilia is of course also the patron saint of music. This verse and some others which appear at first sight to be mere puns and verbal associations are to be connected with the sections of the work where Smart gives special significance to people who have the names of animals, like Pigg, Cock, Grub, Lamb etc. (B1, l.114):

Let Tirzah rejoice with Tylus which is the Cheeslip and food for the chicken.
For I have a providential acquaintance with men who bear the names of animals.
Let Hoglah rejoice with Leontophonos who will kill the lion, if he is eaten.
For I bless God to Mr Lion Mr Cock Mr Cat Mr Talbot Mr Hart Mrs Fysh Mr Grub, and Miss Lamb. (B1, ll.113–14)

Just what this bond between man and creature was, is not clear, but when Smart assembles them by pairs:

Let man and beast appear before him, and magnify his name together (A, l.3),

See *Dictionary of National Biography.*
these pairs are meant to be mystically and physically appropriate and significant. Arthur Sherbo had challenged Stead’s view that Smart had read extensively in the works of the Cambridge Platonists, the Kabbala, Cornelius Agrippa, and so on. But it is clear that he had some acquaintance with some of these writers and Jacob Boehme’s *De Signatura Rerum*, 1621, was one of the books borrowed in the Pembroke library in Smart’s day and may well have contributed particular details to the general theory of the inter-connection of creatures which he seems to have taken from Burthogge, who asserts:

There is a sensible *Analogy* and Correspondence in Fabric and Composition, not only between the several *species* of *Animals* (which is very manifest in *Comparative Anatomy*); but also, in a good degree, between *Plants* and *Animals*, and *Minerals* and *Plants*.

In the form in which it appears in the *Jubilate Agno* the connection is partly a system of names and secret signatures that God has put on all things. ‘All good words are from God’ (B1, 1.85). The languages of men are given by God, especially Greek, Latin, Hebrew, and English, and everything in them has a divinely intended significance and power. Thus the series of verses on the significance of the Hebrew letter Lamed as it appears in the texture of plants and animals: where this shape is found in leaf or flower it is God’s signature and signifies El, the Hebrew name of God. Smart’s editors think that he was confused here as El is the name of the English letter corresponding to Hebrew Lamed and in English El does not mean God. But Smart, as we shall see, was reasoning correctly in terms of his elaborate system.

The series on the mystical significance of the bull, which is an animal and also ‘the word of Almighty God’ (B2, 1.676), further indicates this mysterious series of verbal, physical, and spiritual correspondences. How strange and complex it is may be illustrated by B2, ll.402-3:

For all the stars have satellites, which are terms under their respective words.
For tiger is a word and his satellites are Griffin, Storgis, Cat and others.

11Christopher Smart’s knowledge of occult literature’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. XVIII, No. 2, April 1957.
The Pack of Autolycus

The reference to all the stars having satellites may come from Derham's *Astro-Theology*, but may also owe something to Huygens's *Cosmotheoros*. *Hugenii Opuscula* was one of Smart's borrowings at Pembroke. But the extension of the theory which makes the satellites 'words' and the tiger equivalent to a star with its satellites which are also 'words', shows how Smart elaborates on the original borrowings in ideas.

The function of this universe of creatures is praise and adoration. God is primarily the great artist and creator and is conceived as the Musician of the Universe. In one of his Seatonian prize poems Smart addresses God as the Poet of the Universe. He makes the same point in *Jubilate Agno* in the passage already quoted:

> For GOD the father Almighty plays upon the HARP of stupendous magnitude and melody.
> For innumerable Angels fly out at every touch and his tune is a work of creation. (B1, ii.246–7)

The whole creation is engaged in an antiphonal song of praise in answer to this divine creative music and in this way the fallen creation is gradually purified and restored. This is why David the psalmist is called 'The beginning of victory to the Lord'. The end of the world or the second coming of Christ will occur when all men join in this praise (B2, 1.344).

The most remarkable aspect of Smart's system is its mystical history. At the fall of man, man and the earth suffered together; the earth lost its fertility. God through his chosen people and chosen prophets begins the work of regeneration, which has a number of stages. The first appears to be from Adam to Abraham, the second from Abraham to David, the third from David to the Babylonian exile, the fourth from the Babylonian captivity to Christ, the fifth from Christ to the year 1760, which is the 'millennium of the millennium foretold by the prophets' and the year in which Smart is composing the *Jubilate*. The key points in this process are Abraham, David, Christ. Between David and Christ there is a further degeneration of man and nature. Man becomes smaller and loses the glorious horn he once wore in his forehead. Finally at the coming of Christ the Jews cease to be the chosen people of God, as Smart explains in the twelfth of his Parables of our Lord. Their place is to be taken by the English, who

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are to lead the nations in the regeneration of the world by praise and by the practice of agriculture. In one section of the *Jubilate* Smart explains that ‘the ENGLISH are the seed of Abraham and work up to him by Joab, David, and Naphtali’ (B2, 1.433). Moreover the Romans and the English are one people (B2, 1.434). The Welsh are the children of Mephiboseth and Ziba ‘with a mixture of David in the Jones’s’ (B2, 1.435). These derivations of all the modern races from the tribes of Israel and peoples of the Old Testament are not, of course, Smart’s invention. It was a common enough type of theory and an ancient one, which in one form or another, as Stead remarks, persisted in England from the time of Bede till the middle of the nineteenth century. In fact it still persists in theories like those of the British Israelites though it is no longer taken seriously by educated people. In Smart’s system the merit of being the chosen people did not pass at once to the English but to the Chinese:

For I pray God bless the Chinese which are of ABRAHAM and the Gospel grew with them at the first. (B1, 1.77)

Now, however, the English are the chosen race and the successors to the Kingdom; the Church of England, one of the Seven Churches of Revelations, is now the chief church and the candlestick of the Lord (B1, 1.125). The English language replaces Hebrew as the new sacred tongue and language of God and is to be the language of the West (B1, 1.127). The English will undergo a great spiritual revival. The spirit of God will descend on them, they will recover man’s original stature and be the first of nations to recover the glorious horn on the forehead (C, II.128-30). England is to be the head of Europe in the spirit. Earth will recover through the industry of man (C, II.155-60). Christ will become King of England (C, II.85-7).

Smart’s part in this millennial scheme is indicated throughout the *Jubilate Agno*. Not only are the English of the seed of Abraham in a general sense but Smart is of the seed of Abraham in the specific sense (B1, 1.73). He appears to claim to be of the seed of David (B1, 1.86). The very seed of Jesus is in his body (B1, 1.144). Although he is afflicted and despised he is destined to be a prince in the New Canaan, in which he is to own estates. He is also of the seed of St George who is the same as Agricola (both names meaning a farmer) (B1, II.54 and note, 137, 231). It is to be noted that part of Smart’s
mystical biology includes the idea that the soul is divisible and a portion of the spirit may be cut off from one and attached to another. As every atom is a spirit as well as a body we could conclude from this point that one can be of the seed of David without actual physical descent. Whatever Smart's conception here, however, it is plain that he sees himself as the psalmist, the new David of the new order. God has chosen him for the illumination of the people (B1, l.27). He has divine inspiration through his chastity:

For CHASTITY is the key of knowledge as in Esdras, 
Sr Isaac Newton & now, God be praised, in me. 
For Newton nevertheless is more of error than of the truth, but I am of the WORD of GOD. (B1, ll.194-5).

This probably refers to Newton's millennial theories more than to his physics. Smart is the bearer of the Lord's cross and his builder and mason, in both senses of the terms (B1, ll.94, 109). He is the Renewer of Adoration among Englishmen (B2, l.332). He is the Lord's News-Writer—the scribe-evangelist (B2, l.327). He has the gift of prophecy (C, ll.57-8) which he exercises to the end of this section. Above all he is the composer of hymns of praise (D, l.199) and of new psalms on which he invokes God's blessing (D, ll.208, 210, 217, 220). He asks God to magnify the idea of Smart singing hymns on this day (5 Nov. 1762, N.S.) in the eyes of the whole University of Cambridge (D, l.148); and so on. The peculiar importance of David in this historical process is stressed in the reference to him in the Jubilate (A, l.41).

Let David bless with the Bear—the beginning of victory to the Lord—to the Lord the perfection of excellence—Hallelujah from the heart of God, and from the hand of the artist inimitable, and from the echo of the heavenly harp in sweetness magnifical and mighty.

This by God's grace was to be Smart's importance in the new order.

One may naturally ask why Smart did not make open reference to his system elsewhere in his works, especially after he wrote Jubilate Agno. There are several possible reasons. His praying aloud in public seems to have been one of the reasons for his being confined, and his release in 1763 was not because he was considered to have recovered but mainly because the efforts of energetic friends and a
parliamentary inquiry into private madhouses aided his escape. Once out, Smart had every reason to avoid action which might return him to an asylum. He seems to have been alarmed as well as angry at the remarks of the *Monthly Review*, which followed his retort to the reviewer of his *A Song to David*, and both reviews clearly hint at his insanity.\(^2\)\(^4\) No doubt he had constantly in his mind the warning which Imagination gives to Reason in the fable he published the same year, 1763:

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\begin{align*}
\text{You dwell alone, and are too grave;} \\
\text{You make yourself too much a slave;} \\
\text{Your shrewd deductions run a length,} \\
\text{'Till all your Spirits waste their strength:} \\
\text{Your far'rite logic is full close;} \\
\text{Your morals are too much a dose;} \\
\text{You fly your studies 'till you risk} \\
\text{Your senses—you should be more brisk—} \\
\text{The Doctors soon will find a flaw} \\
\text{And lock you up in chains and straw.}^{25}
\end{align*}
\]

At any rate all the testimony of his behaviour after his release from the asylum is to the effect that he withdrew very much into himself and behaved with great circumspection. He had strong reasons for this. But stronger, I think, must have been the fact that the great day of the millennium actually arrived and passed and left him still a prisoner. The last section of the *Jubilate* has a flatness and a mechanical quality about it which may be due, as some have thought, to the fact that the author was growing saner, but may equally be due to the apathy following a great disappointment. This apathy towards the world around him certainly marked his later years.

All this is speculative, of course, but if it can be sustained, it throws light on a good many things that are dark. It explains the purpose, nature, and form of the *Jubilate Agno*, as the great Magnificat from God's chosen successor to Orpheus and David, produced to greet the beginning of the millennium. We see why English and Biblical characters are called on to praise with their pairs in the spiritual creation. We see the peculiar importance of King David to Smart and the peculiar importance attached to his own version of the Psalms; and why in spite of his admiration and reverence for the psalmist

\(^2\)Devlin, *Poor Kit Smart*, pp. 152-5.
\(^4\)"Reason and Imagination: A Fable", in *Poems by Mr. Smart*, London 1763.
he takes such liberties with the text while faithfully writing a stanza for every verse in the Bible. For Smart’s psalms are more than free paraphrases. He rewrites the Old Testament Psalms in the sense and spirit of the New. These are the new model Christian psalms, in the exact mould of the old. There were precedents for this in the eighteenth century, but there is an added significance in Smart’s hymnal and psalms if we see him writing as the new David for the Church of England which is to be the new temple of the millennial Jerusalem to be built in England’s green and pleasant land.

Above all if Smart can be shown to have such a systematic theory of the universe, it would throw a great deal of light on the poem we chiefly remember him for, the great *A Song to David*. It is obviously an elaborately systematic poem but no account of it I have read is quite satisfactory. What tends to be missed is that it is a great metaphysical and in a sense an eschatological poem built round the conception of the universe created by a musician-artist-Creator; a world which is restored and redeemed in two steps, first by the law of Moses embodied in Smart’s exercise on the decalogue (stanzas 40–8), then by divine sacrifice and grace in Christ. But the essential step between these is that of the poet-musician—King David. The exercise on the seasons has as its main theme the natural function of the whole creation—adoration. The creatures do it naturally. But just as the old law of Moses is completed and subsumed in the New Testament of Christ the Redeemer, so *natural* adoration is completed and transcended by divine poetry. David represents the messianic and redemptive function of music and poetry and is therefore properly his ancestor in the flesh.

This magnificent poem, I would suggest, is not properly understood unless we see it in the setting of Smart’s system and its relation to himself as a successor of David. Then it becomes not only a song to David but a celebration of a metaphysical theory about poetry.

Smart’s system may be as crazy as Smart himself seems to have been at times. But this central idea as to the nature and function of poetry can be taken quite seriously, and this is what interests me more than any speculations as to whether Smart’s system can be reconstructed or not. I have very little faith, as a professional critic of literature, in most of the descriptions or definitions of poetry on which the various schools depend. ‘The imitation of nature’, ‘the overflow of powerful emotions’, a ‘criticism of life’—well, yes and no: none of them seems to me a satisfactory basis of criticism. As a poet, I
find them exasperating. I know of no definition of the nature and function of poetry that satisfies me better than that which is the theme of *A Song to David*: the view of poetry as celebration, the celebration of the world by the creation of something that adds to and completes the order of nature. *A Song to David* has the added beauty, for me, of being itself a celebration of what to me is the real nature of the poet's art.
It is surprising, when one considers the amount that has been written about the poetry of Wordsworth, that so little attention has been paid to its affinities with the Sentimental School. Whether Henry MacKenzie's famous novel, *The Man of Feeling* influenced Wordsworth's choice of scenes and incidents from humble and rustic life or not, the attitudes of mind displayed in both seem at least to have had a common source in the cult of sensibility of the later eighteenth century. Emile Legouis has drawn attention to the fact that in his youth Wordsworth followed the vogue for sentiment and tears: "weeping was then the infallible sign of virtue... Wordsworth's first poem of personal interest therefore took the form of a "Sonnet on seeing Miss Helen Maria Williams weep at a tale of Distress". Wordsworth was seventeen. The cult of the moral value of tender feelings was then at its height. Three years before the schoolboy at Hawkshead had written of Education in orthodox eighteenth-century couplets and with equally orthodox eighteenth-century repudiation of uncontrolled emotion:

Nor the vile wretch who bade the tender age  
Spurn Reason's law and humour Passion's rage.  
But she who trains the generous British youth  
In the bright paths of fair majestic Truth...


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These impeccable sentiments had, however, broken down in the months before William went on to Cambridge and passion, or at least very luxuriant emotion, now had him in its toils:

She wept—Life's purple tide began to flow
In languid streams through every thrilling vein;
Dim were my swimming eyes—my pulse beat slow,
And my full heart was swell'd to dear delicious pain.
Life left my loaded heart, and closing eye;
A sigh recall'd the wanderer to my breast;
Dear was the pause of life and dear the sigh
That called the wanderer home, and home to rest.
That tear proclaims—in thee each virtue dwells,
And bright will shine in misery's midnight hour;
As the soft star of dewy evening tells
What radiant fires were drown'd by day's malignant pow'r
That only wait the darkness of the night
To cheer the wand'ring wretch with hospitable light.

All the symptoms of the cult of sensibility are present in this delightful piece of unconscious nonsense. The young poetess bursts into tears at the tale of distress; the sensibility of the young poet is doubly touched to sympathetic grief to a point at which he feels a swoon coming on; but a sigh from the lady revives him and he has no hesitation in acknowledging that he thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

Dear was the pause of life and dear the sigh
That called the wanderer home . . .

Such sensibility is commendable as well as enjoyable because it is the symptomatic response of a virtuous nature. It is evidence of that generosity, tenderness, and benevolence of heart which either virtue or innocence in distress can be expected to call forth in natures of superior refinement and delicacy of moral perception. And there is an added charm in the fact that the whole incident was probably quite imaginary: Wordsworth would appear not to have met Helen Maria Williams until he got to know her in Paris in 1820, some thirty-three years later. By that time Wordsworth's literary taste had matured and the cult of sensibility was well on the wane. 'Nobody cried, and at some of the passages, the touches that I used to think so exquisite—oh dear! they laughed', wrote Lady Louisa Stuart to Walter Scott in 1826 about reading *The Man of Feeling* to a company
of friends. Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* written in 1797 and 1798 and her *Sense and Sensibility* begun in 1797 are witness to the fact that the decay had begun twenty years earlier. When they appeared in 1818 and 1811 respectively these novels served to drive very effective nails into the coffin of the Great Melting Heart and to efface the tradition of the moral effect of bursting into tears at the drop of a virtuous hat. But we must remember that the taste for virtuous and lachrymose death-bed scenes persisted in Victorian fiction well beyond the death of Wordsworth himself in 1850.

As his tastes matured, however, Wordsworth refined, but never lost, the sentiment of sensibility—if I may myself refine on its vocabulary. When one compares his tales in verse in *Lyrical Ballads* and in some of the tales inserted in *The Prelude* and *The Excursion*, with the incidental tales of *The Man of Feeling* published in the year after Wordsworth was born, it is clear that he got rid of the tendency to burst into tears himself or in the person of his narrator as a sort of trigger mechanism for the reader’s lachrymal glands. But he continued to present the pathetic, not only as such, but as justified by its moral and social effect.

There is an indication of this both in incidental remarks and in the more considered and successively reconsidered prefaces to *Lyrical Ballads*. In a note to his *Descriptive Sketches* published in 1793 and composed a year or so earlier he speaks of ‘Rude fountains built and covered with sheds for the accommodation of the pilgrims in their ascent of the mountain [at Einsiedlen]. Under these sheds the sentimental traveller and the philosopher may find interesting sources of meditation.’ In the revised version published in 1859 Wordsworth omitted the reference to the sentimental traveller, but this was probably because the word ‘sentimental’ had by then mainly become a term of derision or contempt. He still retains the tears of joy with which the travellers greet each other, in true sentimental fashion.


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on. For example, when he wrote to Charles James Fox in 1801, sending him a copy of *Lyrical Ballads*: ‘I have observed in your public character a constant predominance of sensibility of heart’, he is using the final phrase as an almost technically accurate piece of sentimental vocabulary. But such phrases and such terms were current coinage at the time and do not necessarily imply that the writer was an adherent of the sentimental point of view.

More significant are certain passages in the various prefaces to *Lyrical Ballads*. The essential tenet of sentimentalism is the connection between natural goodness and a sympathy for our fellow beings, the bond between delicacy and tenderness of feeling for others and our moral natures. Pride, selfishness and self-regarding prudence damage and repress this natural morality and these qualities are more likely to be met with in cities and high societies where human beings are in fierce competition with one another than in simple and rural societies. It is more likely to be found among those who exercise power than among those who are the helpless victims of power. It is more likely to be found among the rich with a motive for defending their possessions than among the poor who have to share their simple means in order to survive at all.

Harley, MacKenzie's hero, lives in a modest estate in the country. He is persuaded to try and increase his fortune by going to London to obtain the lease of some crown lands adjacent to his own property. But he fails because he lacks the prudential foresight and the acquisitive drive to further his interests, and because, being naturally trusting and honest, he is easily outwitted. His failure does not discourage him. He is lacking in any principle of self-interest and his real interest lies mainly in the people he meets on his journey. Their small joys and great misfortunes absorb his whole concern and he seems naturally to gravitate towards the unhappy and the unfortunate. Indeed, almost all the episodes, except those in which Harley's credulity and innocence, aggravated by his belief in himself as a physiognomist, lead to his being duped, are tales of distress among humble and poor people, the workman who has lost his health and is forced to beg and then drifts into fortune telling, the various unfortunates in Bedlam, the seduced girl driven to prostitution, the

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discharged soldier returning to learn the ruin of his family, and so on. The narratives which make up so large a part of *Lyrical Ballads* are mostly on similar themes. Wordsworth may tell us that he has chosen incidents from humble and rustic life, 'because in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity', and so on. But the brighter side of country life is hardly touched on. Most are tales of unmerited distress: the long catalogue of miseries of 'The Female Vagrant', the miseries of Goody Blake and the retribution that falls on Harry Gill for his hard-hearted treatment of the poor old woman; the miseries of the aged poor in the case of 'Simon Lee'; 'The Thorn' with its tale of the seduction and desertion of a village girl and her suspected murder of her child and subsequent misery; the pathetic story of 'The Last of the Flock', a shepherd forced into destitution by the poor laws; another vagrant woman, 'The Mad Mother', deserted by her baby's father; the 'Old Man Travelling' to see his sailor son dying in the hospital at Falmouth; the cruel fate of 'The Convict' in his cell and of the Indian woman left to die by her tribe. Even 'The Idiot Boy', though it ends happily and is transfused with some rather heavy-handed humour, is in the main a tale of distress. In other words we have in *Lyrical Ballads* the typical material of the sentimental tale of virtue in distress and in 'Peter Bell', originally meant for inclusion in the volume, Wordsworth argues in favour of such themes both on the grounds of his natural preference for them and of their moral effect almost exactly in the language of sentimental theory.

The dragon's wing, the magic ring
I shall not covet for my dower,
If I along that lowly way
With sympathetic heart may stray,
And with the soul of power.

These given, what more need I desire
To stir, to soothe, or elevate?
What nobler marvels than the mind
May in life's daily prospects find,
May find there or create?

A potent wand doth Sorrow wield;
What spell so strong as guilty Fear!

Wordsworth as the Man of Feeling

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Repentance is a tender Sprite;
If aught on earth have heavenly might
'Tis lodged within a tear.6

The last two lines could serve perfectly as a motto for The Man of Feeling.

In the preface to the second edition, Wordsworth insists on the pleasure that poetry should give and, conscious perhaps that more than half the poems are on gloomy topics he goes on:

We have no sympathy, but what is propagated by pleasure: I would not be misunderstood; but wherever we sympathise with pain, it will be found that the sympathy is produced and carried on by subtle combinations with pleasure.7

The psychological arguments on which he bases this view are in fact very similar to those of the sentimental school that the pleasure that the man of feeling takes in a tale of distress is due to the recognition of the awakening of his moral nature. It is the enjoyment of conscious virtue. Wordsworth does not do much more than to present a more sophisticated version of the same view:

the Poet, singing a song in which all human beings join with him, rejoices in the presence of truth as our visible friend and hourly companion . . . He is the rock of defence for human nature; an upholder and preserver, carrying everywhere with him relationship and love.8

A little further back in the same exposition he had expounded his view of the poet as a man 'endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul than are supposed to be common among mankind, a man pleased with his own passions and volitions',9 and now he makes the knowledge which links poetry with science, in the case of poetry, knowledge in its moral aspect:

But these passions and thoughts and feelings are the general passions and thoughts and feelings of men. And with what are

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7 Ibid., p. 395.  
8 Ibid., p. 396.  
9 Ibid., p. 393.
they connected? Undoubtedly with our moral sentiments and animal sensations, and with the causes that excite these; with the operations of the elements, and the appearances of the visible universe; with storm and sunshine, with the revolutions of the seasons, with cold and heat, with loss of friends and kindred, with injuries and resentments, gratitude and hope, with fear and sorrow. These and the like, are the sensations and objects which the Poet describes, as they are the sensations of other men, and the objects which interest them.

The italics are mine. I have put them there to draw attention to the curious fact that with all the objects of human life and thought to choose from, Wordsworth has limited those he mentions to aspects of nature and the causes of human distress and misery or what alleviates distress and misery, gratitude and hope. Such too are the favourite topics of the Sentimental School and for the same reason: their power to promote our moral 'sentiments'.

The primacy of feeling is something that MacKenzie and Wordsworth have in common. It is the nature of the feeling aroused by the objects of nature and the incidents of life that give the latter their meaning and importance. Wordsworth points out what distinguishes the tales of *Lyrical Ballads*:

It has been said that each of these poems have a purpose. Another circumstance must be mentioned which distinguishes these Poems from the popular Poetry of the day; it is this, that the feeling therein developed gives importance to the action and situation, and not the action and situation to the feelings.10

The world in general judges the other way about, estimating the appropriateness and the importance of our feelings by the incidents and actions to which they are attached. As Harley, the Man of Feeling remarks: 'There are some feelings which perhaps are too tender to be suffered by the world. The world is in general selfish, interested, and unthinking, and throws the imputation of romance or melancholy on every temper more susceptible than its own.'11 If the poet is a man 'possessed of more than usual organic sensibility',12 he too will be in general misjudged by the world and Wordsworth's strenuous defence against attacks on his poems, 'The Idiot Boy', for example, is always

11*The Man of Feeling*, p. 128.
along the lines that they are justified by the sensibility which evokes the true as opposed to the habitual or conventional feelings attached to their subjects. In a fragment of an essay on Morals probably composed in Germany just after the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798, he makes the point that not our actions but the feelings that prompted them give them value:

a tale of distress is related in a *mixed company*, relief for the sufferers is proposed. The vain man, the proud man, the avaricious man &c., all contribute, but from very different feelings. Now in all the cases except that of the affectionate and benevolent man, I would call the act of giving more or less accidental.13

(By 'accidental', of course, Wordsworth does not mean 'fortuitous', but 'unconnected' with a genuine moral i.e. benevolent, feeling.)

Wordsworth continued to hold his view of the moral value of tales of distress throughout his life. Jonathan Wordsworth, one of the trustees of the Dove Cottage Wordsworth museum, has traced the laborious growth and the many changes that occurred in the story of the unfortunate Margaret from the early drafts of the unpublished poem, 'The Ruined Cottage', to the final and not very happily 'christianised' version in Book I of *The Excursion* in 1845.14 But one thing remains unchanged, the answer of the Pedlar (in the later version, the Wanderer) from whom the narrator learns the story of Margaret when he asks the old man to continue his story:

He replied,

'It were a wantonness, and would demand
Severe reproof, if we were men whose hearts
Could hold vain dalliance with the misery
Even of the dead; contented thence to draw
A momentary pleasure, never marked
By reason, barren of all future good.
But we have known that there is often found
In mournful thoughts and often might be found
A power to virtue friendly.'

The passage may be taken to imply Wordsworth's censure of the more self-indulgent of the sentimental writers, those exploiting the misery

of others for the luxury of a good cry, or for self-congratulation on
their own superior sensibility and, at the same time, his assertion of
the true principle of the literature of sentiment.

This narrative of Margaret and the ruined cottage is perhaps
the most elaborate and fully developed of all Wordsworth’s tales
of distress in the sentimental manner and it is one of the most
effective. It is interesting to compare it with MacKenzie’s tale of
the old soldier Edwards, which he considered the best of all the
episodes in The Man of Feeling. The two tales in fact have much
in common in their treatment, their types of subject, and their
moral outlook.15

MacKenzie’s is a tale depending mainly on the pathos of undeserved
misfortunes which befall the unfortunate small farmer Edwards. The
hero of the novel, Harley, returning from London, decides to walk
the last part of the journey home. The first day of his walk he comes
on an old man asleep by the road with a knapsack and sword beside
him; they fall into conversation and travel together and the stranger
tells his unhappy story; a grasping lord of the manor has turned him
out of his farm; one disaster following another he loses a second farm
and is ruined; offered a third farm he and his son are just beginning
to prosper when the son is arrested for attacking a gamekeeper who
had shot his dog and, shortly after his release, is seized by a press-
gang during a Christmas party. The old man bribes the sergeant to
let him go in his son’s place and spends a number of years as a soldier
in the East Indies. As a result of his freeing an Indian prisoner whom
the officers of his regiment were torturing to make him reveal the
hiding place of his treasure, the old soldier is flogged, turned out of
the regiment and left to find his way back to England. At this point
in the story Harley and Edwards come to the village where Harley
had been at school and are greatly moved to find the school a desolate
ruin. They find the school mistress and learn that the old soldier’s
son has died after the wreck of his affairs. His wife like him has
died of a broken heart and the children are left in the school mistress’s
care. After prodigious floods of virtuous tears have been shed by all
parties on every incident of his harrowing tale, Harley sets Edwards
up in a small farm of his, helps him make his garden and catches

you the first part of my favourite passage, the story of old Edwards. There are some
strokes in it which I am prouder of than anything I ever wrote . . .’ (Letter to his
cousin, Miss Betty Rose, 26 January 1770).
a fever from the old man which is the cause of his own death in a later chapter of the novel.

Apart from the tearful bits which are too many and too much, the story is told simply and effectively, the incidents and the people are credible and natural and, as a picture of the misfortunes of humble and rustic life, its disasters were all too common in the eighteenth century.

Wordsworth's tale—I follow the simpler and more dramatic version of the unpublished poem, 'The Ruined Cottage' (1797), rather than the version of The Excursion Book I—like MacKenzie's is the account of unmerited distress told by one narrator to the second who retells it in book form. This second narrator is evidently the poet himself who, travelling or rambling through the countryside, encounters an aged man sleeping by the wayside, outside a cottage in ruins, with his pack beside him. He recognises the man as an old friend, an itinerant pedlar called Armytage. They fall into conversation and Armytage tells the poet the story of the ruined cottage and its occupants. There had been a man, his wife Margaret, and two young children who by cheerful and industrious habits had maintained themselves in modest comfort. Then one after another misfortunes struck them. Two bad seasons caused great distress and depression in the whole countryside, then the husband contracted a lingering illness during which all their small savings were consumed; the husband searched for work in vain and his character appeared to deteriorate under misfortune till after a period of idleness and vacillation he disappeared for two days. On the third day Margaret woke to find a purse of gold inside the window and knew her husband had put it there. It must of course have been stolen. But the same day she heard from a stranger that he had enlisted in a regiment going to a distant land. The rest of the story is the pedlar's account of how over a course of several years he returned at intervals to the cottage to find Margaret gradually sinking into listlessness and despair. One of her children was placed in work away from home; the other died. Margaret for a while made a pittance by spinning flax, but her garden was neglected and little by little she and the house fell into ruin, while she was still tortured by hope that her husband would one day return. Finally she died and the cottage, now quite desolate, became the ruin that confronts the travellers as they converse. Had Wordsworth taken the story a step further with the return of the soldier to find his family gone and his house in ruins, the resemblance
between his story and MacKenzie's would have been very close. It is interesting that in *The Prelude* Wordsworth recounts that on a summer vacation from Cambridge he encountered an old discharged soldier sitting exhausted by the roadside one moonlit night and found him a night's lodging. The soldier's story is not told but like old Edwards in MacKenzie's tale he seems to have been the victim of misfortune.

I am not suggesting that Wordsworth was imitating MacKenzie. He prided himself on the fact that his tales of distress were based on real incidents in his own experience or which he had heard from others; but this makes it the more striking that those he selected as worthy of record bore so close a resemblance to those MacKenzie probably invented for the purpose of eliciting a virtuous shower of tears.

It is this deliberate selection from among the wide range of those offering to his experience which most closely allied Wordsworth to the Sentimental School of tales of virtues in distress. The motives involved may have been different but the type of tale chosen was almost exactly the same, a relation about members of the poor or the lower middle classes who, through no fault of their own, had fallen into destitution, penury, or had become the victims of selfishness, savage penal laws or a heartless administration.

We must acknowledge the great gap that separates Wordsworth from MacKenzie in other ways. The contemplation of nature and of 'the still sad music of humanity' leads beyond the feelings they evoke to an insight and vision, an intuition of the mystery of life and the spirits and presences that animate the universe. This at any rate is true of Wordsworth at his best. MacKenzie knows nothing of this; apart from expressions of conventional piety, his view does not go beyond the objects of his descriptions and the sensations of delicious grief that they evoke. Yet even when this is admitted, the constant preference for the same sorts of subject remains to suggest that both writers very carefully selected scenes from humble and rustic life because of some special elevating or purifying virtue about them, not shared by the sorrows of the educated and the well-to-do or the pleasures, interests and happier occupations of the poor themselves. It is a sentimental view both in the eighteenth century and in the modern sense.

Even more so is the selection only of the lives of the *virtuous* poor. Wordsworth knew rustic life deeply, thoroughly and at first hand. He must have been aware that envy, spite, meanness, rivalry, contention, lust and theft, murder and cruelty are features of rustic as of city life, of humble as of higher levels of society. Yet he seems determined to ignore this, if one is to judge by his selection of narrative topics. He seems determined to illustrate his thesis that

Humble and rustic life was generally chosen, because in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that condition of life our elementary feelings coexist in a state of greater simplicity, and consequently, may be more accurately contemplated . . . and, lastly, because in that condition the passions of man are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature.17

In order to maintain this Wordsworth has to ignore at least half the realities of country life and the bias in favour of the virtuous poor makes the picture as a whole a sentimental one, however much the individual tales of distress are founded in fact and convince us in themselves.

About 1845 the formidable Harriet Martineau built herself a house near the Wordsworths at Rydal Mount. In spite of her free thinking and sceptical views she was shocked at the morals of the local rustics:

‘flagrant beyond anything I could have looked for’—the despair of clergymen and magistrates—‘yet here is dear good old Wordsworth forever talking of rural innocence and deprecating any intercourse with town lest the purity of his neighbors should be corrupted. He little knows what elevation, self-denial and refinement accrue in towns from the superior cultivation of the people.’18

In her autobiography she notes on the same subject: ‘Those who understand are aware that he did not understand them; and those who dwell near his abode especially wonder at his representation of his neighbors’.19

Wordsworth and Harriet Martineau got on better than anyone expected but it was unlikely that they understood each other. The bias of the positivist blue-stocking is as obvious as that of the idealist poet. But Harriet has hit on the point that redeems Wordsworth from Gerard Manly Hopkins's accusation of 'an odious goodness and neckcloth'. The charge fails because Wordsworth's sentimentalism was not deliberate and not smug. It was saved by a sort of sublime innocence.

It is a long time since I was first at Wuthering Heights and fell immediately under its spell. It must be half a century ago since I read the book and at least twenty years since I read it last. But it stays in my mind as a place more real than many I have actually lived in. Its people seem to be of more real substance than that of most of my acquaintance and, considered merely as a literary creation, it differs from nearly all others in my impression that it is something more than a work of imagination. What can be imagined can be tested against the facts of our observation. When we have done this with Wuthering Heights it stands up to ordinary tests, but the tests are comparatively unimportant. The book goes beyond imagination to something that can only be called revelation. It makes no claims on our experience: it imposes its own. When I first read it I accepted the view of the world it seemed to present; in fact I did more: I recognised a view towards which I had already been moving as I freed myself bit by bit from the views of others. I knew it at first sight: it was something essentially my own. It spoke for me rather than to me.

But if I fell at once under the spell of the book, I fell even more under the spell of its author. For some years I lived in constant communication with the imagined figure of Emily Brontë. The image, as I now realise, was largely built up by commentators and critics working, as I was quite content to do, by reading her poems and her novel, as though they had been personal confessions, faintly distanced, it is true, under a disguise of fiction, but a fiction so
transparent that it was probably not seriously intended to deceive. Under this delusion, or at least under this rash assumption, I took many of the Gondal poems as dramatised personal ejaculations and all of those not obviously connected with the Gondal saga as expressions of Emily’s own reactions to the world around her or as records of her own inner experiences. I took *Wuthering Heights* not as a novel telling a story in its own right, but a key opening a door into the private world of its author, a world to which she so carefully barred the ingress of even those near and dear to her. The contradiction implied in this did not even strike me, because, like any man in love, I was unconsciously convinced that the key had been given to me alone. I was nearer, because she was dearer.

It was for me a comforting and, I believe, a fruitful delusion, but as I grew older I came to see that it would not stand up to any impartial scrutiny. And because so many scholars and critics from the first reviewers of *Wuthering Heights* to the latest pundits of ‘Brontë scholarship’ seem to have been infected with the delusion, I feel bound to make a belated protest.

The first reviewers, of course, were not to blame. They were men of their age in demanding a high, that is to say, a conventional moral outlook from a novelist. They knew nothing of the author and indeed had been deliberately misled into thinking him to be a man and they were trying to assess a novel quite unlike anything they had ever encountered. They created an imagined author on what they took to be the spirit of his book, a savage, rough, solitary, misanthropic, demonic spirit, a man of uncommon talents but dogged, brutal and morose, though these qualities are more often implied than attributed, built on the lines of his own Heathcliff. But few of those who have written about Emily Brontë since then have been able to resist some form of the same sport even when the portrait presented is quite different.

The sport follows a well-worn path: first, the critic baffled, and sometimes maddened, by Emily Brontë’s failure to leave any explicit clues about herself, a failure which moreover appears to have been quite deliberate, concocts an imaginary person and personality from her fiction in prose and verse.

The next step is to find some support outside the works themselves. Since facts in the way of letters, diaries and personal reminiscences of those who knew her are remarkably thin on the ground and in any case give no support to the pictures drawn from analysing and
interpreting the poems and the novel, the critic resorts to some kind of theory, evolved independently, by which the portrait may be conveniently backed and given support. Matthew Arnold, for example, in his elegy for Charlotte Brontë, 'Haworth Churchyard' (1855), is inclined to hint that *Wuthering Heights* and Emily's contributions to *Poems, by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell* had been influenced by the literary Byronism of the period, of which Arnold himself had been a victim. His comment is:

She—
(How shall I sing her?) whose soul
Knew no fellow for might,
Passion, vehemence, grief,
Daring since Byron died
That world-famed Son of Fire; She, who sank
Baffled, unknown, self-consuming;
Whose too-bold dying song
Shook, like a clarion-blast, my soul.

This attempt, which others have also made, to present Emily Brontë as a 'Byronic' figure, in the lineage of Lara or Manfred, or the Byron of the legend before he shocked his readers out of it with *Don Juan*, breaks down. It breaks down for the same reason that Arnold's celebrated picture of Byron, published one month after his picture of Emily in 'Haworth Churchyard' breaks down. The picture of the gloomy titan:

What helps it now that Byron bore
With haughty scorn which mocked the smart,
Through Europe to the Aetolian shore
The pageant of his bleeding heart?
That thousands counted every groan,
And Europe made his woe her own?

This will not stand up to what we now know about Byron from much more voluminous sources than Emily Brontë left behind. Those that can be relied on suggest cheerfulness and common sense as her natural characteristics and one is irresistibly reminded of Disraeli's remark, so shocking to the then current legend, that the really outstanding thing about Byron was his good, sound common sense.

Among the theories in which critics have found support for an

'Fraser's Magazine, April 1855, 'Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse'.
otherwise factitious portrait of Emily Brontë, apart from the Byronism already mentioned and its relations, satanism and the gothic horror school, there are several which recur again and again throughout the nineteenth century and the twentieth. As they are all in their various ways absurd, it is not worth while examining them in detail or refuting their mixtures of special pleading and speculation masquerading as evidence. Besides the job has already been done better than I could do it, or bear to do, in an article, ‘Wuthering Heights and the critics’ by Melvin R. Watson.² Although, as he says, the emphasis of that study is not on Emily Brontë or her family, the survey of critical views of the novel sufficiently indicates the picture of the author they imply. It is at once a sad and a comic scene. There seems to be something about the Brontës, and especially about Emily Brontë, that drives critics over the edge of sanity. The moment one detects the note of emotional rhapsody, their sense of evidence becomes suspect. I am not inclined to be satirical because I have been through it myself and know the reasons of the heart which support it, which cause it and which lie for the most part beyond reason.

The commonest group of theories, and it takes many forms, appears to arise from the critic’s inability to reconcile what is admittedly a work of genius with its repulsive subject and its supposedly immoral theme. One way out of this is to suppose that the author was in some way taken by surprise, overcome by forces within herself of which she was unaware or over which she had no control. Such theories in the last century tended to stress the extreme youth, the gentle sex and innocence of its author. Here they have the firm support of her sister Charlotte’s introduction and the Biographical Notice appended to her new edition of Wuthering Heights in 1850: ‘In Emily’s nature the extremes of vigour and simplicity seemed to meet’ . . . ‘Stronger than a man, simpler than a child’, and so on. So we get phrases applied to the novel such as ‘it is the unformed writing of a giant’s hand; the large utterance of a baby god’ (Sydney Dobell);³ ‘a remnant of the Titans—great-grand-daughter of the giants who used to inhabit the earth’ (Mrs Gaskell);⁴ ‘in everything but years . . . a mere child’

³Palladium, Sept. 1850, though Dobell was mistaken in thinking the novel to be a prentice work by the author of Jane Eyre.
Reid goes a step further and suggests that this child-like author must have had a diseased mind to write such a book. Others with various degrees of delicacy insinuate a deranged mind, a mind unhinged by hopeless passion, by volcanic eruption of suppressed energies, terrors or desires. To these nineteenth-century fumblings of bewilderment, there of course had to succeed the full-blown assurance of twentieth-century psychoanalysis ringing the changes on a host of sexual fixations including incestuous and lesbian ones, and, of course, the obvious solution to the problem of the difference between aspects of Emily's outer life and what they deduce of her inner life from her works, a split or multiple personality. The perpetrators of these auto-erotic orgies—for they are little more than that—blandly ignore, of course, the patient accumulation of evidence necessary to establish a diagnosis in any actual case of psychoanalysis. They ignore the highly ambiguous nature of most neurotic symptoms. They begin with the diagnosis and find the symptoms that will fit it. No lynch mob or kangaroo court was ever so summary in its findings.

It is a relief to turn from this self-indulgent nonsense to the support theory that Emily Brontë was a mystic, granted a vision of the true nature of the world and the soul and therefore beyond the criticism and assessment of those who lack this form of experience. It is, of course, a defect of this argument that such an explanation is of the nature of ignotum per ignotius and in fact explains nothing at all; but it has the advantage of having behind it a certain amount of evidence which must be taken seriously and I shall return to the claims of this school of thought in its due place.

Last and most desperate resort of critics who have given up all hope of reconciling what is truly known about Emily Brontë with an achievement that seems so incongruous with it, especially when that achievement is inflated with rhapsody and theory, is to cut the knot altogether: Wuthering Heights was written by someone else, Charlotte or Branwell Brontë. It really is a theory of desperation. Charlotte disposed of her supposed part in it very smartly in answer to Sydney Dobell's review in Palladium of September 1850. But as late as 1911 a Mr Malham-Dembleby was attempting to prove the same silly theory. The theory that Branwell wrote the book soon

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1Quoted ibid.
2Watson, 'Wuthering Heights and the Critics', pp. 50-1.
breaks down for sheer lack of evidence that poor Branwell was remotely capable of it, and the succeeding theory that he wrote the early chapters of the book and that Emily took over his project is equally flimsy.

The theory of another author is quite ludicrous but it serves to show the real motive behind much of the attempts to create an imaginary Emily Brontë to fit the phenomenon of her writings. When we have been greatly impressed by a book, we naturally want to know more about the person who wrote it. When there is no information on this subject, or nothing that satisfies our curiosity, we tend to invent it. The obvious source for such invention is the works themselves irradiated by our own imaginative interpretations and supported by whatever documents, diaries, letters or gossip of contemporaries can be used to build up the picture. When scholarly criticism cuts the ground from these attempts at creating an icon, the appetite shifts to what it hopes is a safer object: the classic case, of course, is Shakespeare. We would never have heard of the idea that Bacon or Marlowe wrote the plays if Shakespeare had had the decency to leave a proper biography behind him. If Charlotte Brontë, who left a fully documented life and letters to posterity, had not done so and if Emily had, admirers of *Jane Eyre* would by now have been found to claim that the book was written by the author of *Wuthering Heights*. The mixture of rational and emotionally irrelevant motives in much Brontë criticism is never likely to be resolved.

Comparison of the case of Emily Brontë with that of Shakespeare has interest of another kind. Shakespeare’s devotees have at times attempted to conclude that at the period of his writing the great tragedies or the so-called problem comedies, he himself must have been going through some kind of emotional or spiritual crisis which is mirrored in the plays themselves and perhaps occasioned them. This is simply another desperate attempt to give our few impersonal facts about Shakespeare’s life the impress of an actual personality. The same impulse can be seen in the attempts to extract personal incidents and attitudes from Emily Brontë’s writings. As evidence, they are worthless and have no importance for criticism. But in another way they are dangerous for they confuse the issues when the books themselves are in question. They introduce a confessional, autobiographical element into what may be an entirely objective creation. Moreover such an approach shows an entire misunderstanding of the artistic process. Personal tragedy is not a necessary ground for writing a tragedy nor,
to put it the other way about, is even the darkest and most agonising tragedy grounds for suspecting that the author was in such a state of mind of spiritual upheaval when he wrote it, or indeed that he had at any time undergone such an experience. The creative imagination is not limited to what its possessor has personally undergone. Yet nearly all Emily Brontë's critics have taken it more or less for granted that the gloomy and ravaging passions that animate the poems of the Gondal saga and the chief persons of Wuthering Heights reflect the state of mind of their author. It may well be that that state of mind was one of cheerful imaginative energy and creative joy. One recalls Blake's 'As I was walking among the fires of hell, delighted with the enjoyments of Genius, which to Angels looks like torment and insanity . . . .' Those who are not creative artists, and not only angels, find this a hard saying, but practitioners of these crafts will recognise the truth of it.

Authors of course vary a great deal in this. They range from the deliberately and even enthusiastically confessional, through those who invent scenarios to dramatise their personal joys and sorrows, their ambitions, disappointments, and tragic problems, all the way to those who represent what James Joyce calls the dramatic form of creation where 'the artist, like the God of creation, remains within or behind or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails'. Most of those writers who have dealt with Emily Brontë have taken it almost for granted that she belonged to the second group; I think it is at least arguable that she belonged to the third.

What evidence can we rely on to answer this question? Certainly not the works themselves; that is to say, the remains of the Gondal saga and Wuthering Heights. Their evidence is ambiguous and can be used to support any view one feels inclined to favour. Emily herself has left no comment on them and those who knew her were apparently as ignorant of her views as posterity has been. Her sister Charlotte does not seem to have been in her confidence and if her other sister Anne was, as seems likely, she was as uncommunicative as Emily herself.

The best place to start perhaps is the surviving 'birthday' letters

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*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Jonathan Cape, London Cape 1952, pp. 244-5.
or ‘diary letters’, as they have been called, written by Anne and Emily to be opened at some date in the future, usually a birthday, describing their feelings and situation at the time of writing and speculating on what they will be when the document is opened and read in the future. They contain several comments on the Gondal cycle. The first of these, written by Emily, on behalf of herself and her sister, is dated: ‘November the 24 1834’. Emily was then about sixteen and a half and Anne nearly fifteen. From the remark that ‘The Gondals are discovering the interior of Gaaldine’,\(^9\) we can conclude that the saga was under way, though whether any of it had been written is uncertain. There is at any rate no indication that the authors took it very seriously and for the rest, the letter suggests, it was simply the morning’s amusement of a couple of cheerful, high-spirited girls.

Two and a half years later, just before her nineteenth birthday, Emily again writes on behalf of both. The Gondal saga is now well developed and has proliferated into a number of separate works.

Anne and I writing in the drawing room—Anne a poem beginning ‘fair was the evening and brightly the sun ’—I Augustus-Almeda’s life. 1st v. 1-4th page from the last a fine rather coolish thin grey cloudy but sunny day. Aunt working in the little Room papa—gone out. Tabby—in the Kitchin—the Emperors and Empresses of Gondal and Gaaldine preparing to depart from Gaaldine to Gondal to prepare for the coronation which will be on the 12th of July. Queen Vittiora ascended the throne this month. Northangerland in Moncey’s Isle—Zamorna at Eversham. All tight and right in which condition it is to be hoped we shall all be on this day 4 years . . . Anne Well do you intend to write in the evening. Emily well what think you (we agreed to go out 1st to make sure if we get into a humour we may stay in)\(^10\)

This letter has the same cheerful high-spirited tone as the first. There is no indication that either author was in any way deeply involved in the passions and emotions of the inhabitants of their imaginary kingdoms. They clearly shared the invention though they wrote separate sections of the chronicle and they continued to exchange notes with Charlotte and Branwell about the progress of their Angrian saga.

On Emily’s twenty-third birthday she was alone at home and wrote

\(^{9}\)Gondal’s Queen . . . arranged by Fannie E. Ratchford, Austin, Texas 1955, appendix II, p. 186.

\(^{10}\)Ibid., pp. 187-8.
'A Paper to be opened when Anne is twenty five years old or my next birthday after'. Like the earlier notes its tone is confident, cheerful and practical. It contains only a brief reference to the Gondal saga which she and Anne were apparently keeping up during their separation:

The Gondalians are at present in a threatening state but there is no open rupture as yet—all the princes and princesses of the royal [sic] royalty are at the Palace of Instruction. I have a good many books on hand, but I am sorry to say that—as usual I make small progress with any—however I have just made a new regularity paper! and I will Verb Sap—to do great things. And I now close sending from afar an exhortation of courage, courage! to exiled and harrassed Anne wishing she was here.11

Like Anne's paper of the same date, which mentions her part in the Gondal story,

How will it be when we open this paper and the one Emily has written? I wonder whether the Gondaliand [sic] will still be flourishing, and what will be their condition. I am now engaged in writing the fourth volume of Solala Vernon's Life.12

The tone is authorial, detached and faintly amused. There is nothing to suggest personal involvement in Gondal emotions nor any projection of personal problems on to the fictional screen. There is no reason to think it more than an absorbing game.

This impression is confirmed by similar papers written four years later. Obviously tragic and dreadful events and stormy passions were by then raging in Gondal-land. Anne, however, writes as though the saga was getting a little out of hand and the game was at times less amusing than formerly:

We have not yet finished our Gondal Chronicles that we began three years and a half ago. When will they be done? The Gondals are at present in a sad state. The Republicans are uppermost, but the Royalists are not quite overcome. The young sovereigns, with their brothers and sisters, are still at the Palace of Instruction. The Unique Society, above half a year ago were

11Ibid., p. 190.
wrecked on a desert island as they were returning from Gaul.\textsuperscript{13}
They are still there, but we have not played at them much yet. The Gondals in general are not in first rate playing condition. Will they improve?\textsuperscript{14}

Emily's tone is similar but more cheerful:

My birthday—showery, breezy and cool. I am twenty-seven years old to-day. This morning Anne and I opened the papers we wrote four years since, on my twenty-third birthday. This paper we intend, if all be well, to open on my thirtieth—... Anne and I went [on] our first long journey by ourselves together, leaving home on the 30th of June, Monday, sleeping at York, returning to Keighley Tuesday evening, sleeping there and walking home on Wednesday morning. Though the weather was broken we enjoyed ourselves very much, except during a few hours at Bradford. And during our excursion we were, Ronald Macalgin, Henry Angora, Juliet Angusteena, Rosabella Esmalden, Ella and Julian Egremont, Catherine Navarre, and Cordelia Fitzaphnold, escaping from the palaces of instruction to join the Royalists who are hard driven at present by the victorious Republicans. The Gondals still flourish as bright as ever. I am at present writing a work on the First Wars—Anne has been writing some articles on this and a book by Henry Sophona—We intend sticking firm by the rascals as long as they delight us which I am glad to say they do at present... We have cash enough for our present wants with a prospect of accumulation—we are all in decent health only that papa has a complaint in his eyes and with exception of B[ranwell] who I hope will be better and do better, hereafter. I am quite contented for myself—not as idle as formerly, altogether as hearty and having learnt to make the most of the present and hope for the future with less fidgetness that I cannot do all I wish—seldom or ever troubled with nothing to [ ] and merely desiring that every body could be as comfortable as myself and as undesponding and then we should have a very tolerable world of it.\textsuperscript{15}

Nothing remains of the Gondal saga but the poems, yet if one can manage to free one's mind of all that romantic commentators have managed to import into them and to take into consideration that Emily

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., p. 194; 'returning from Gaul', as F.E. Ratchford suggests, is probably Clement Shorter's mistake in reading the MS., which is no longer extant—a mistake for 'Gaal' or 'Gaaldine'.

\textsuperscript{14}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., pp. 192-3.
Brontë was now twenty-seven years old and on the eve of her mature work, *Wuthering Heights*, it is difficult to avoid the impression of a very detached and rather amused author for whom a childhood game, once perhaps most absorbing, has now become no more than that. There is not the slightest reason to suppose that she was identifying herself with the characters for whom she was composing poems to dramatise their situations in the saga or that she was using their situations to dramatise her own emotions. Her own seem to be set on practical ambitions which she sees no reason to doubt that she can bring to fruition. The poems of the Gondal make-believe need have no more personal relevance to the situation or feelings or beliefs of their author than the soliloquies Shakespeare puts into the mouths of Hamlet or Lear need have had with his. There have been plenty of attempts, of course, to do just this with Shakespeare, but the effort has in the end defeated itself; there turn out in the end to be as many Shakespeares, based on interpretation of what his characters say, as there are interpreters. In this Shakespeare has escaped untrammelled where Emily Brontë with her one novel and her ambiguous poems illustrating a problematical tale has fallen an easy prey to the ravening pack of her admirers.

The way this has happened is clear enough. Until C.W. Hatfield's edition of *The Complete poems of Emily Jane Brontë* (1941) there was no full and reliable text of the poems. It was open to critics to interpret any of them that had no specific reference to the Gondal story as personal poems expressing Emily Brontë's own ideas and feelings and, since these were obviously connected in spirit and content with patently Gondal poems, to interpret the latter too as dramatised versions of Emily's own views, emotions or experiences. And this is indeed what happened.

A single example will indicate the way editors and commentators have tended to enlarge on what they regarded as fair inference from 'neutral' poems into areas where they had no justification for assuming that Emily Brontë was expressing her own views or feelings at all. In 1951 Philip Henderson edited for the Folio Society, London, an edition of Emily Brontë's complete poems. The text in the main follows Hatfield's edition and acknowledges the reconstruction of the
The Pack of Autolycus

Gondal saga attempted by Fannie Ratchford¹⁸ and expanded and modified by Laura Hinkley in her *The Brontës: Charlotte and Emily*.¹⁹ He must, therefore, have been well aware of the danger of interpreting any of the poems as personal documents. But he is not deterred in the least. In a note on the poem that begins:

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O God of Heaven! The dream of horror,
The frightful dream is over now;
The sickened heart, the blasting sorrow,
The ghastly night, the ghastlier morrow,
The aching sense of utter woe;
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he comments:

This poem would seem to have had its origin in an experience whose shock was so profound that the writer can find no relief even in sleep. It bears no Gondal title or initials.

Henderson then proceeds to connect this dream of horror with Catherine's remark to Nelly Dean in *Wuthering Heights* about her dreams:

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I've dreamt in my life dreams that have stayed with me ever after, and changed my ideas: they've gone through and through me, like wine through water, and altered the colour of my mind.²⁰
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Having by implication identified the speaker of the poem with Emily Brontë herself and Emily with Catherine Earnshaw in the novel, Henderson has further deduced a traumatic shock in Emily's past experience which haunted her in dreams and found release in literary expression. He then applies this theory to finding further evidence of this supposed shock in other poems. Of a later one in his collection that begins, 'A sudden chasm of ghastly light . . . ' he remarks:

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Superficially this poem is about the capture of Tyndarum by Julius Brenzaida. Essentially it arises from the same desolating experience as *O God of Heaven! The dream of horror*.²¹
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In the poem about the fall of Tyndarum the speaker awakes on a stormy night in a ruined hall, where a branch of a yew tree is rattling against the railing of a vault in a yard outside; through the broken window it sounds like ghostly fingers, a moaning voice is heard, and the awakened sleeper recalls a frightful dream of some past horrible experience which has haunted him ever since. This is the evidence for connecting it with the other poem and with Lockwood's dream in *Wuthering Heights*. By this means it is implied that the undeniable Gondal poems are also to be taken as expressions of Emily Brontë's inner life and personal turmoils.

In fact, of course, the whole thing is fantasy of Mr Henderson's own making. Even a casual reading of 'O God in Heaven . . . ' shows that it is almost certainly a dramatic poem in the Gondal saga and that the speaker is a character who has been imprisoned in early youth and spent years in a 'dungeon'—a situation which would suit a number of persons in the saga, Gerald of the Exina nobility, Augusta who was imprisoned and went mad there, Fernando in the prison caves of Gaaldine or A.G.A. in the poem that is headed 'From a dungeon wall in the Northern College'. Though the speaker in 'O God in Heaven . . . ' has been troubled by horrid dreams while in prison, the opening lines seem to refer, not to an actual dream, but to his or her release from captivity as being like the awakening from a nightmare. There is not the slightest reason for supposing that it has anything to do with any experience of Emily Brontë's or with Catherine's dream or Lockwood's in *Wuthering Heights*. Nor are there any grounds for linking this poem with the next or supposing that the fall of Tyndarum covers a recurrent nightmare based on a terrible experience in the life of Emily Brontë. Yet this is the sort of desperate expedient which all but the best commentators have been led into in their search for a plausible author-figure for *Wuthering Heights* and the Gondal poems.

Some of them have taken comfort from the fact that in 1844 Emily began to copy out her poems into two notebooks, one of which was to contain 'Gondal Poems' and the other having no title. The commentators have seized on this to take the second group as personal poems expressing the author's own views and feelings and reflecting her own experience. Apart from the fact that it is often dangerous to interpret even poems with no dramatic intent too literally, Fannie Ratchford has demonstrated convincingly that many of the poems in this latter collection must certainly belong to the Gondal cycle. Her
explanation, that Emily had intended to publish those that would be intelligible without a reader’s knowledge of the Gondal story, seems the more probable. She gives good reason to suppose that even the last poem in the collection, ‘No coward soul is mine’, which everyone would like to think a personal affirmation, is more probably spoken by a character ‘facing a crisis incident to the civil war’.21

Fannie Ratchford’s scholarly research and detailed reconstruction of the Gondal saga does not claim too much. While other reconstructions are possible it is clear that something like this must have been the sequence of events. While we might feel doubts as to whether any single poem belonged to the saga or belonged to the place Ratchford assigns it to, it is now impossible to claim with assurance that any represent a personal view. Those wishing to explain the undoubted genius of a provincial young woman about whose personal life nothing is known for certain, by assuming that she must have been a neurotic, have lost their last shred of real evidence.

Much the same is true of those who would like to think that the explanation lies in mystical gifts, insights and experiences. Lord David Cecil’s account of Wuthering Heights in his Early Victorian Novelists is one of the most balanced, sensible and deeply perceptive studies of the novel and its author on record. But even he lays this flatteringunction to his soul; after comparing Emily Brontë’s characters with those of Hardy, Thackeray and Dickens and remarking that ‘Hardy’s heroes were concerned with fate and free will, Dickens’ with their marriages and their careers; but fate and free will meant much the same thing to them as they would have to Dickens’ heroes if they had happened to consider them’, he goes on:

Not so the heroes and heroines of Emily Brontë. It is here we come to the determining factor in her personality. She was—once more like Blake—a mystic. She had on certain occasions in her life known moments of vision—far and away the most profound of her experiences—in which her eyes seemed opened to behold a transcendental reality usually hidden from mortal sight. And it is in the light of these moments of vision that she envisages the world of mortal things; they endow it with a new significance; they are the foundation of the philosophy on which her picture of life rests. What precisely this philosophy was she never tells us in explicit terms. She was an artist, not a professor.22

21Gondal’s Queen, pp. 27-38.
As a professor, Cecil, of course, goes ahead to give a quite plausible account of the main features of this philosophy. The account is not based on Emily Bronte's alleged mystical gifts but on intelligent and careful guesswork based on study of the works themselves. But the mystic gifts and experiences about which Cecil seems so definite are no more than guesswork too.

What is the evidence? Heathcliff (and possibly Lockwood) has an other-world experience in Wuthering Heights. The country folk and the little shepherd boy believe they see the ghosts of Heathcliff and Catherine Earnshaw. But these are not grounds for believing that the author of the book had had such experiences any more than it would be to credit Shakespeare with having seen ghosts because he makes Hamlet and Macbeth see them. Among the Gondal poems there are several in which the speaker recounts or refers to mystical experience. The most explicit and important of these is that entitled, ‘Julian M. and A.G. Rochelle (The Prisoner)’, where a young female prisoner describes to Julian the heavenly visitant who comes each night to bring her hope and strength. Then follow the well-known lines in which she describes the mystic ecstasy and the return to ordinary consciousness of the ordinary world:

But first a hush of peace, a soundless calm descends;
The struggle of distress and fierce impatience ends;
Mute music soothes my breast—unuttered harmony
That I could never dream till earth was lost to me.

Then dawns the Invisible, the Unseen its truth reveals;
My outward sense is gone, my inward essence feels—
Its wings are almost free, its home, its harbour found;
Measuring the gulf it stoope, and dares me final bound!

O dreadful is the check—intense the agony
When the ear begins to hear and the eye begins to see;
When the pulse begins to throb, and the brain to think again;
The soul to feel the flesh and the flesh to feel the chain!

Yet I would lose no sting, would wish no torture less;
The more the anguish racks the earlier it will bless
And robed in fires of Hell, or bright with heavenly shine
If it but herald Death, the vision is divine!

Exquisite as this is, it contains no touch, no detail, that suggests, let alone proves that the author had had a similar experience, nothing
that is not to be found among the common-places of other descriptions of mystical experience, which Emily Brontë could easily have read, and nothing that a powerful creative imagination could not have constructed on the basis of such accounts. Ineffable as the experience usually is, other mystics naturally concentrate their efforts on giving some impression of the vision itself. The speaker in Emily Brontë's poem concentrates on events leading up to 'the final bound' and passes over the actual visionary experience straight to description of the agony of return to the ordinary world. Heathcliff in the novel appears to have broken at last through some barrier between this world and the next, but we do not follow him there. We do not see what he sees and there are no grounds for supposing that the author of the novel had ever shared such an experience.

I think there is every reason to suppose that Emily Brontë was interested in and had thought deeply about the kind of experience we call mystical, but that she was not herself a mystic in the sense that Blake was—in spite of Cecil's comparison. There is nothing either in her writings or in what we know of her to compare with such things as Blake's being terrified as a child by God putting his head to the window, his seeing angels walking among the haymakers, or, in early manhood, seeing his brother Robert's soul rising from his dead body and passing through the ceiling clapping its hands for joy. Nor is there anything comparable to Blake's death-bed when,

Just before he died His countenance became fair—His eyes Brighten'd and he burst out in singing of the things he saw in Heaven.23

We have a fuller eye-witness account of Emily Brontë's death than of most incidents of her life. It was marked by extraordinary determination, fortitude and a strong and obstinate will exerting itself for a purpose not clear to us, but it had all the appearance of an ordinary physical death. If she was a mystic then it was not mysticism of the type represented by Blake.

Mrs Gaskell, on the occasion of her visit to Haworth in 1853, records among topics of her conversations with Charlotte Brontë:

I told her of ——'s admiration of 'Shirley' which pleased her, for the character of Shirley was meant for her sister Emily about whom she is never tired of talking.\(^2\)

Shirley Keeldar, whatever Charlotte's intentions may have been, would appear to be partly an independent creation and partly a composite character based on more than one model. For example, the whole of the latter part of the novel concerned with Shirley's love for and marriage with the severe and overmastering French tutor appears not much more than a fantasy or wish-fulfilment daydream based on Charlotte's own love for M. Heger of the Brussells Pensionnat. It is hard to imagine Emily Brontë, even from the little we know of her, suffering herself to be humbled; subdued and gladly brought to heel by such a wooden Petruchio as Louis Moore. No character meant for Emily Brontë could carry much conviction if it left out the poet and the creative artist and Shirley shows no trace of the gift or the temperament. It is clear that Charlotte did not really understand this side of her sister's character and that Emily did not confide in her. What Charlotte could and did observe was the outer manifestations of her sister's behaviour, her manner, her temper and her characteristic bearing and speech. Shirley lacks Emily's impenetrable reserve but she shows other characteristics which we know her to have displayed: candour, courage, iron resolution and a lively and inquiring mind. Above all Shirley has the cheerfulness, high spirits and common sense which mark the 'birthday' notes. Charlotte's picture confirms a calm cheerfulness, a deep and happy absorption in nature and a confidence in her own powers tempered by sturdy common sense, as the habit of mind of Emily Brontë up to the time of her last illness. It is a picture that helps to correct that of the gloomy female titan torn by neurotic passions or almost unendurable mystic visions which some of the commentators would have us believe in. They cannot bring themselves to accept the fact that apart from her creative genius she may have been in other ways quite an ordinary person. As though the feat were not enough in itself, because she wrote an extraordinary book, they feel they have to invent an extraordinary personality for her.

Well, you might ask, what does it matter? The only thing of importance is the works of art themselves. What the artist was like is of little concern. We are no worse off for knowing nothing about

\(^2\)Life of Charlotte Brontë, ch. XXVII.
Homer and almost nothing about Chaucer. I should agree, except in cases like that of Wuthering Heights. Once you invent a fictitious personality for the author and read the book in the light of that personality, even identifying the author with some character in the book, you have radically changed the book and changed it for the worse. Emily Brontë is probably secure. She seems to have successfully kept her secret to herself. She left no diaries, no confessions, and, as she said in her only surviving letter, no ‘proper’ letters. Writing on Charlotte’s behalf to Ellen Nussey in 1843 she mentions her sister Anne who was away from home as a governess and adds:

The holidays will be here in a week or two, and then, if she be willing, I will get her to write you a proper letter, a feat that I have never performed. 

If she confided in anyone, her sister Anne perhaps, they have passed nothing on. The factitious portraits invented by her admirers must soon collapse from their own want of real evidence. She remains, as she seems to have wished, inviolate and inviolable.

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Lavengro is a very odd sort of book and it is the book of a very odd sort of man. I think that the oddness in both cases was quite deliberate and sometimes it looks even like affectation. Borrow was very conscious of his difference from other people. As a child and even as a young man he seems to have suffered for it and his admiration of his elder brother, the painter, seems, if one can judge by Lavengro, to have been partly due to the fact that his brother was easy, natural, likeable and very much a nice normal young man. One detects a certain envy and a sense of pain in the admiration of George for his brother John.

But another thing that is quite clear from Lavengro is that George Borrow liked being a queer fellow. All through the early part of the book we see him going out of his way to exaggerate the impression he made, to mystify people, to make them sit up and open their eyes at his abrupt speech, his habit of contradicting his elders; his rather truculent way of conducting a conversation. When he came to write his life he seems deliberately to have made it a queer book to match the queer fellow it described.

Some people take to Borrow naturally; they like him and they like his book. They will agree with you about most of the faults of Lavengro, but they like it just the same. Lavengro is a bit amateurish, they admit, but it rings true and it is a great book in spite of the contrived effects. Other people just as naturally dislike Borrow, or at least, feel no sympathy for him. They tend to be irritated by
Lavengro and to find it 'made up'. Thomas Seccombe, one of his editors, described it as mostly 'lies—damned lies'.

In fact almost everything about Borrow and Lavengro has been a matter of dispute. Is it, as Borrow seemed to wish it to be, an autobiography? Or is it a work of fiction using certain facts in the author's life as a sort of framework? How many of the characters in it are real people? How many are invented? How many are real people highly coloured and altered by artistic imagination? The same questions are raised and answered both ways about the incidents, and most of these questions can be summed up in one problem. Is the book a novel or an autobiography, and if it is neither, what sort of book is it? George Saintsbury, one of the greatest of later Victorian critics, had no hesitation in calling it, and its sequel The Romany Rye, a novel with a slight autobiographical basis. Dickens's David Copperfield, for example, is a novel into which Dickens introduces incidents and scenes from his own early life, Tolstoy introduces himself and the story of his courtship and marriage into the sub-plot of Anna Karenina. But in both cases the novelists are using autobiographical material for a work of fiction. They are not telling the stories of their lives.

Now there is little doubt that Borrow was telling the story of his life. His book, The Bible in Spain, an account of his travels in Spain as an agent of the British and Foreign Bible Society, had been extremely successful. It was published in 1842 and by 1850 had run through ten editions. Borrow from being completely unknown suddenly became famous as the hero of a true story of wandering and adventure in the wildest parts of a hostile foreign country. His adventures were interesting in themselves, but the personality of the author is the other reason for the success of The Bible in Spain. It was no ordinary travel book and the traveller was no ordinary traveller but a tough customer, learned but rough and ready, shrewd and practical, afraid of nothing and able to make the most of any situation. He did not travel in ease, but walked or hired conveyances—a sort of religious super-tramp or pedlar with his pack of bibles. He had an odd but interesting mind and when he recorded his conversations with Spaniards, the reader was as interested in what Borrow had to say as in learning the opinions and feelings of the Jews, gypsies, inquisitors, political conspirators, sorcerers and other odd characters he met. Borrow had also been in Russia for the Bible Society. He wanted to be a writer. The publishers were eager to have another
book from him and one would have expected him to write *The Bible in Russia* next. But he did not. John Murray, the publisher, whom he mentions in *Lavengro* as Glorious John, advised him to write his autobiography and that is what he set out to do. *Lavengro* is the first part of it. It breaks off abruptly as though he intended to continue it and in fact he did, even though the book was not a success. *Lavengro* came out in 1851 and *The Romany Rye*, its sequel, in 1857. In fact his four best known books are autobiographical for the only other one which is remembered is *Wild Wales* published in 1862, an account of a walking tour in the Welsh Mountains.

As one might expect then *Lavengro* has the structure of an autobiography. It is a chronicle of events in Borrow's life from his birth in 1803 to the summer of 1825 when he was just 22 years old—the man who wrote the story of his boyhood and youth being then between 40 and 47—for it took him seven years to write.

What has worried the critics is the fact that the book, while it contains autobiographical facts, does not read like an autobiography. It reads like a rambling novel—especially the second half of the book which deals with his wanderings and adventures in the English countryside where he meets Isopel Berners and the Flaming Tinman and the Priest. The first part of the story can in part be checked by independent evidence: the second cannot and is much more like an effort of romantic imagination than a relation of facts. Borrow has been suspected of making it up, just as he has been suspected of inserting imaginary stories in the earlier part; for instance the odd tale of his picking up a viper when he was a baby or the curious incident of the old snake-catcher who told him his vision of the King of the Vipers and the tale of the boxing match that was broken up by a thunderstorm.

Now as a matter of fact, whenever it has been possible to check Borrow's story, even the most unlikely incidents have turned out to be accurately described, with the exception that names, places and times are often changed. I think that if we knew nothing independently about Borrow, we should be just as likely to take the earlier part of the book as fiction as the later. It is so strange and dreamlike and presented as though the author did not really care to make it seem real. It is told in scenes, with conversation and description like a novel and without the factual details of persons and places, times and dates that we expect in an autobiography. There is therefore no real reason why it should not all be true if any of it is true—and we know that
The Pack of Autolycus

two-thirds of it is true. There is independent evidence that the prize fight in the thunderstorm took place almost exactly as Borrow describes it, even to the three gypsies; so that Tawno Chikno and Jasper Petulengro and the rest were almost certainly real people. Then why not Isopel Berners? In fact there are records of a very tall girl answering to her description in contemporary writing.

Two other considerations have made readers feel that Borrow was writing a work of imagination rather than of fact.

One is that he himself refers to the book in his preface as 'a dream, partly of study, partly of adventure'. 'The principal actors in this dream or drama are, as one gathers from the title page, a Scholar, a Gypsy and a Priest.' He began by choosing as successive titles: An Autobiography, Life: A Dream, and finally, Lavengro: A Dream as though he could not in conscience call his fantasy an autobiography. If the author calls his book a dream surely it means that he does not intend us to take it as fact and is even warning us against taking it as such. I do not think that this is the proper conclusion to draw. The key to the right conclusion, I think, is Borrow's second choice for a title: Life: A Dream. Borrow calls his book a dream not to distinguish it from fact but because he felt life itself to be a dream. This is a note that sounds constantly in Lavengro. As a child of 6 years he was moody, retired, moping, meditating and unsociable. It was, he says, as though his mind were bound with ice. What broke the ice was his being induced to read Defoe's Robinson Crusoe. His whole boyhood seems to have been solitary and strange, without the usual boyish companions and games. Even in the Edinburgh High School where he took part in the usual school life and the schoolboys' fights with the townies, he still gives the impression of living a life apart. As he reached adolescence he began to be haunted with the notion that life was a sort of dream. It was shortly after he was articulated to a lawyer at 16 that he fell, as he tells us, into a sort of torpor:

My philological studies had become distasteful and I had never taken any pleasure in the duties of my profession. I sat behind my desk in a state of torpor, my mind almost as blank as the paper before me.

It does not seem to have occurred to him that it was a return to the state he was in in early childhood and from then on his mind was in a continual state of unrest as several passages in his narrative reveal:
I was debating within myself, and the debate was dreary and unsatisfactory enough. I sighed, and, turning my eyes upward, I ejaculated, 'What is truth?' . . . There was one question which I was continually asking myself at this period . . . What is Truth? I had involved myself in a dreary labyrinth of doubt . . . I had ceased to believe in the truth of that in which I had hitherto trusted, and yet could find nothing in which I could put any fixed or deliberate belief.

and he came to feel that 'all is a lie—a deceitful phantom'.

Working desperately hard as a hack writer in London, desperately poor and lonely, he felt this sense of the unreality of the world growing on him. Writing the lives of the criminals for the Newgate Calendar he became convinced that they lived as they did from necessity: that all of us live without control over our own lives or actions:

My own peculiar ideas with respect to everything being a lying dream began also to revive. Sometimes at midnight, often having toiled for hours at my occupations, I would fling myself back on my chair, look about the poor apartment, dimly lighted by an unsnuffed candle, or upon the heaps of books and papers before me, and exclaim: 'Do I exist? Do these things, which I see about me exist, or do they not? Is not everything a dream—a deceitful dream? The publisher a dream—his philosophy a dream? Am I not myself a dream—dreaming about translating a dream? I can't see why all should not be a dream; what's the use of reality?'

Now I think we have good reason for supposing that this was in fact more or less always Borrow's state of mind. At times it was a nightmare to him. At others it did not worry him. But to the solitary man—and no one ever seems to have lived more like his favourite Robinson Crusoe—life is always apt to seem dreamlike. To Borrow it had a dream quality more than he realised. There is, I believe, no reason to doubt the truth of any part of his story though doubtless sometimes he exaggerates as it were mechanically: for example, in recounting his efforts to understand the Danish book brought to him by the farmer and his wife he says:

I pored over the book again, but with all my poring I could not understand it; and then I became angry, and I bit my lips till the blood came; and I occasionally tore a handful from my hair and flung it upon the floor, but that did not mend the matter, for still I could not understand the book.
Now I am willing to believe that Borrow bit his lip and tore at his hair—the rest I think is conventional exaggeration and in many places he produces the effect of unreality by describing real happenings or feelings in emotional literary clichés that make them sound false. But the events I believe. And if they have a dreamlike and imaginary quality, it is because that is the way they seemed to him at the time and even more so when he recalled and wrote them down twenty to twenty-five years later. What we have to reckon with in Borrow’s case is that peculiar sort of man or woman who lives in a sort of waking dream, whose waking life actually does have the peculiar quality of dream-life. I would draw attention here to two contemporary or nearly contemporary writers who had the same cast of mind, Thomas de Quincey and Herman Melville. De Quincey’s *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* were published in 1822. Like Borrow, de Quincey was then near his forties but telling of his childhood and early youth. The events of his running away from school and life in London have the mysterious, imaginative, dream-like quality I have mentioned. His account of the Severn Bore reads like an actual dream—yet these events actually happened. The book itself dissolves into a sort of waking dream and ends with real nightmares but here perhaps opium was the cause.

Melville as a lad went off to the South Seas on an American whaler. It was a hard and brutal life and at Nuku Hiva in the Marquesas Islands Melville and a shipmate deserted and lived among the cannibal Typees: Melville’s account of this in his novel *Typee* has long been taken for mere romance founded on a core of truth. It is a dream-like story indeed—but the researchers of the Bishop Anthropological Museum have confirmed Melville’s apparently romantic picture of Polynesian life on this island. Melville’s other books have something of the same quality. Even his journal of a perfectly matter-of-fact visit to England reads like a dream experience. Borrow I believe is this type of man. The difficulty in recognising the type in his own narrative is perhaps due to the plain matter-of-fact method of telling much of it. *The Bible in Spain* does not suggest a dreamer but a hard-headed, opinionated Bible-pedlar. Nevertheless the two things are not incompatible.

It has often been noticed that Borrow continually hints at something mysterious, supernaturally fated and uncannily gifted about himself. He is aware and the reader becomes aware of a sense of another world and another life with which he is half in touch, while he marches
on through the scenes of his waking dream. Part of the power of the book in fact arises from this: the sense of the dreamer who is really asleep but is dimly aware of what is going on around him. There is, in spite of its over-writing and irritating mannerisms, something absorbing and uncanny about Lavengro.

If I am right about Borrow's way of experiencing things, it goes a good way towards explaining his very odd method of writing an autobiography, without names, dates or places for the most part. He seems to have spent much of his earlier life in states of deep absorption, sometimes thinking, sometimes entranced in an inward rapt attention to something not easily expressed. Such people are not uncommon. Experience for them is a series of returns to what is going on around them. Their consciousness of their surroundings is not continuous but spasmodic and Borrow's account of his adolescent experience is just like that. Scene follows scene with the odd inconsequence of incidents in a dream. People and places are often anonymous, not, I think, because Borrow is trying to mystify or conceal but because that is how he saw and felt. A typical incident is that in which he is sent by his master the lawyer to pay some money to a gentleman living in the country some sixteen miles from Norwich. Borrow, always a great walker, decided to walk to the client's house. This is how Chapter XXIV begins:

'Holloa, master! Can you tell us where the fight is likely to be?'

Such were the words shouted out to me by a short, thick fellow, in brown top-boots, and bareheaded, who stood, with his hands in his pockets, at the door of a country ale-house as I was passing by.

Now, as I knew nothing about the fight, and as the appearance of the man did not tempt me greatly to enter into conversation with him, I merely answered in the negative, and continued my way.

It was a fine, lovely morning in May, the sun shone bright above, and the birds were carolling in the hedgerows. I was wont to be cheerful at such seasons, for, from my earliest recollection, sunshine and the song of birds have been dear to me; yet, about that period, I was not cheerful, my mind was not at rest; I was debating within myself, and the debate was dreary and unsatisfactory enough. I sighed, and turning my eyes upward, I ejaculated, 'What is truth?'

But suddenly, by a violent effort, breaking away from my meditations, I hastened forward; one mile, two miles, three miles
were speedily left behind; and now I came to a grove of birch and other trees, and opening a gate I passed up a kind of avenue, and soon arriving before a large brick house, of rather antique appearance, knocked at the door.

In this house there lived a gentleman with whom I had business. He was said to be a genuine old English gentleman, and a man of considerable property; at this time, however, he wanted a thousand pounds as gentlemen of considerable property every now and then do. I had brought him a thousand pounds, in my pocket, for it is astonishing how many eager helpers the rich find and with what compassion people look upon their distresses. He was said to have good wine in his cellar.

This is the way a novelist tells his story—one would expect a biographer to 'place' the events for the reader:

Once in the summer of 1821, Mr Simpson sent me to take a sum of money—£1000—to a Mr Cartwright, a country gentleman who lived at Dereham. Dereham was sixteen miles from Norwich but it was a fine May morning and I decided to walk, etc.

Why does Borrow conceal the name of the town where he lived, the name of the place he walked to, the gentleman who gave him his best Madeira, the prize fighter who came in?—he was a great friend of Borrow's, a famous fighter called Thurtell who afterwards came to be hanged and Borrow went to see him hanged. Why does he suppress the name of the man who taught him German in the previous chapter? The conversation sounds like an invented one, a novelist's conversation, the German teacher sounds like a fictional character. Yet we know who he was and a great deal about him. He was the famous William Taylor—famous for his learning, his popularising of German studies in England and his atheism. His neighbours called him 'Godless Billy' and he was a friend of Southey and Sir Walter Scott. All Borrow tells us in the chapter about him is accurate and bears the mark of an actual conversation remembered and reconstructed. Yet the chapter begins:

It might be some six months after the events last recorded, that two individuals were seated together in a certain room, in a certain street of the old town which I have so frequently had occasion to mention in the preceding pages; one of them was an elderly, and the other a very young man . . . [and so on].
It sounds like the beginning of a literary fable or a conventional opening of a piece of fiction. Throughout the chapter we are never told who the 'individuals' are. Yet there is apparently absolutely no reason why Borrow should not have told us how he got to know William Taylor, where he lived in Norwich, something about his celebrated fellow-townsman and his lessons in German. Instead the incident is left hanging in a vacuum and reads more like something Borrow had dreamed or made up. The whole book for this reason has an odd feeling of placelessness and drift about it. If I could sum up the feeling that *Lauengro* gives me I would say that it was 'intensely vivid and vividly unreal', like some of my own dreams which have impressed me so strongly that I shall always remember them.

Now when Borrow wrote *The Bible in Spain* he worked from letters and diaries; everything is dated and placed and named. Why did he not do this in *Lauengro*? I feel sure that there can be no good reason unless it was that he experienced and remembers these events as though in a vivid dream and wanted to give us the quality of his inner experience. If so he has succeeded. The book has that odd mixture of the plain and trite details with a mysterious sense of portent, excitement and strangeness which is characteristic of dreams.

Borrow's style has a good deal to do with the effect. *The Bible in Spain* is on the whole very plain and matter of fact. Borrow himself admired the plain, laconic factual style; the unadorned idiomatic masculine prose of Defoe and Fielding. Gobbett and Bunyan were other models. In his account of the lives of criminals he read for his compilation of Newgate trials he says:

The trials were entertaining enough; but the lives—how they full were of wild and racy adventure, and in what racy, genuine language they were told. What struck me most with respect to the lives was the art which the writers whoever they were, possessed of telling a plain story . . . People are afraid to put down what is common on paper, they seek to embellish their narratives, as they think, by philosophic speculations and reflections; they are anxious to shine, and people who are anxious to shine can never tell a plain story: 'So I went with them to a music booth, where they made me almost drunk with gin, and began to talk their flash language, which I did not understand' says, or is made to say, Henry Simms, executed at Tyburn, some seventy years before the time of which I am speaking. I have always looked upon this sentence as a masterpiece of the narrative style.
When Borrow is at his best—and he is here—he writes according to his models and he writes nervous, plain, racy English. He can be very good indeed. But it is a puzzle to explain how the man who wrote the passage just quoted could be unaware that he had described all the worst faults of his own style. Too often Borrow seems afraid to put down what is common on paper, too often he tries to embellish his narrative with fine writing—and how often the reader groans at those philosophic speculations and reflections, the pompous moral commonplaces and the sentimental ejaculations. Parts of *Lavengro* make anyone sensitive to the language blush and squirm for the author. Often he writes in an ecstatic pseudo-literary way that reminds one of a romantic schoolgirl doing her worst. The apostrophes are especially shocking—monuments to what Graves and Hodges call the Victorian Pudding-Stone Style.

Here are two samples: the first in the sentimental style:

And when I was between six and seven years of age we were once more at D-----, the place of my birth, whither my father had been despatched on the recruiting service. I have already said that it was a beautiful little town—at least it was at the time of which I am speaking; what it is at present I know not, for thirty years and more have elapsed since I last trod its streets. It will scarcely have improved, for how could it be better than it then was? I love to think on thee, pretty, quiet D-----, thou pattern of an English country town, with thy clean but narrow streets branching out from thy modest market-place, with thine old-fashioned houses, with here and there a roof of venerable thatch, with thy one half-aristocratic mansion, where resided thy Lady Bountiful—she, the generous and kind, who loved to visit the sick, leaning on her gold-headed cane, whilst the sleek old footman walked at a respectful distance behind. Pretty, quiet D-----, with thy venerable church, in which moulder the mortal remains of England’s sweetest and most pious bard.

Yes, pretty D-----, I could always love thee, were it but for the sake of him who sleeps beneath the marble slab in yonder quiet chancel. It was within thee that the long-oppressed bosom heaved its last sigh, and the crushed and gentle spirit escaped from a world in which it had known nought but sorrow. Sorrow! do I say? How faint a word to express the misery of that bruised reed; misery so dark that a blind worm like myself is occasionally tempted to exclaim, Better had the world never been created than that one so kind, so harmless, and so mild, should have undergone such intolerable woe! But it is over now, for, as there is an end of joy, so has affliction its termination. Doubtless the All-wise did not afflict him without a cause: who knows but
within that unhappy frame lurked vicious seeds which the sunbeams of joy and prosperity might have called into life and vigour? Perhaps the withering blasts of misery nipped that which otherwise might have terminated in fruit noxious and lamentable. But peace to the unhappy one, he is gone to his rest; the deathlike face is no longer occasionally seen timidly and mournfully looking for a moment through the window-pane upon thy market-place, quiet and pretty D—; the hind in thy neighbourhood no longer at evening-fall views, and starts as he views, the dark lathy figure moving beneath the hazels and alders of shadowy lanes, or by the side of murmuring trout streams; and no longer at early dawn does the sexton of the old church reverently doff his hat as, supported by some kind friend, the death-stricken creature totters along the church path to that mouldering edifice with the low roof, inclosing a spring of sanatory waters, built and devoted to some saint—if the legend over the door be true, by the daughter of an East Anglian king.

And the second is simply a mixture of good description and flabby bad taste:

The eldest son! The regard and affection which my father entertained for his first-born were natural enough, and appeared to none more so than myself, who cherished the same feelings towards him. What he was as a boy the reader already knows, for the reader has seen him as a boy; fain would I describe him at the time of which I am now speaking, when he had attained the verge of manhood, but the pen fails me, and I attempt not the task; and yet it ought to be an easy one, for how frequently does his form visit my mind’s eye in slumber and in wakefulness, in the light of day, and in the night watches; but last night I saw him in his beauty and his strength; he was about to speak, and my ear was on the stretch, when at once I awoke, and there was I alone, and the night storm was howling amidst the branches of the pines which surround my lonely dwelling: ‘Listen to the moaning of the pine, at whose root thy hut is fastened,’—a saying that, of wild Finland, in which there is wisdom; I listened, and thought of life and death . . . Of all human beings that I had ever known, that elder brother was the most frank and generous, ay, and the quickest and readiest, and the best adapted to do a great thing needful at the critical time, when the delay of a moment would be fatal. I have known him dash from a steep bank into a stream in his full dress, and pull out a man who was drowning; yet there were twenty others bathing in the water, who might have saved him by putting out a hand, without inconvenience to themselves, which, however, they did not do, but stared with stupid surprise at the drowning
one's struggles. Yes, whilst some shouted from the bank to those in the water to save the drowning one, and those in the water did nothing, my brother neither shouted nor stood still, but dashed from the bank and did the one thing needful, which, under such circumstances, not one man in a million would have done.

If all of Borrow were like this he would be practically unreadable. But it only comes on him now and again when he is seized by an itch to be literary. Actually his admired models, Defoe, Bunyan and Fielding saved him. He writes in an odd, rather self-conscious way with a great deal of repetition of words and phrases which sometimes gets a little wearisome—especially in conversations where when one character uses a phrase, the interlocutor picks it up and repeats it in his answer so often as to make the whole thing stilted and unnatural. These conversations, of course, are fictional in the sense that Borrow could not possibly have remembered them all those years and must have reconstructed them from more or less precise memory of what they had been about in general. And he gives them the antiphonal form that characterises much of his own writing. Nevertheless Borrow is usually quite readable; his plain, sturdy thoughts and his plain, factual experiences come out in language that suits them and suits him—on the whole. I say on the whole because even in the plainest description he tends to slip into the sort of would-be humorous language that calls a spade an 'agricultural implement'. Some of the best description occurs in his account of his tramp northwards from Salisbury to the dingle where he met Isopel Berners and the Flaming Tinman. His description of his meeting Slingsby, the Tinker, and his unfortunate family and purchasing his cart and stock from him, is in the best style of his master Fielding, and his description of his setting up his camp, making his horseshoes and so on bears comparison with his master Defoe's description of how Robinson Crusoe set up his camp and his fortification and how he sowed his corn and made his pottery. In spite of several unpleasant characteristics of Borrow himself and in spite of a lot of amateurish and clumsy writing, the book does grow on you and gets hold of you—sometimes almost against your will. Borrow has something of the Ancient Mariner touch.

Borrow sees his story not only as a dream and as an autobiography but as a drama. It is a question what he means by this—in the epilogue to *The Romany Rye*, he says that the book illustrates the Providence
of God in preserving Lavengro from falling into vicious ways in spite of the companions and scenes he lived among. This appears to be mainly pious nonsense. It was not the Providence of God but his own temperament that kept Borrow from succumbing to dishonesty, cruelty, drunkenness, brutality, lust, servility, avarice, or sloth. He is never even tempted, but moves among tough people in a tough world observing them but not involved in their amusements and vices. None of these things even attracted Borrow. Women seemed to have had none of the influence over him that they usually exert on young men. Left alone in the dingle with Isopel Berners, he enjoys her company, teases her unmercifully, admires her immensely, is quite aware that she has fallen deeply in love with him, but it never apparently enters his mind to make love to her and he refuses her offer to marry him. In the end she leaves him in exasperation and we don't blame her. What Borrow could well have described as the Providence of God was his protection from melancholia and irrational terrors and the preservation of his health. But in any case this account of the book does not make it a drama. Borrow shows us no dramatic temptation or danger from which God rescued him. His account of the book makes this no more than the reflection that any Christian at all must make looking back on his past life: thank God, I might have been much worse. There is nothing especially dramatic in that view of one's life. Borrow suggests again that the 'drama' is an action which concerns a scholar (himself), a gypsy (Jasper Petulengro) and a priest (the Man in Black). The first part of the life might be regarded as a prologue to this drama, but when one asks what the drama consists of it is hard to say. Jasper and Borrow meet from time to time, enjoy each other's company and Jasper always tries to get Borrow to join the gypsies and live with them. Borrow always refuses on the ground that he wants to be independent. Borrow and the priest meet a number of times and argue about Catholicism and other topics. The Priest obviously hopes to convert Borrow but never shows much expectation of doing so. A remark in the appendix to The Romany Rye hints that the two books together are the story of Borrow's finding religion and that the priest helped to confirm him in his view that the Church of England was the one true church and helped to put him on the road that led to his work for the British and Foreign Bible Society, while Jasper Petulengro kept alive the gypsy strain in his nature which made his acceptance even of Anglicanism, acceptance with a difference, so that, as he says,
though he may become religious, it is hardly to be expected that he will become a very precise or straight-laced person; it is probable that he will retain, with his scholarship, something of his gipsyism, his predilection for the hammer and tongs, and perhaps some inclination to put on certain gloves, not white kid, with any friend who may be inclined for a little old English diversion, and a readiness to take a glass of ale with plenty of malt in it.

But if Jasper Petulengro and the Man in Black helped to confirm these traits of Borrow’s character, there is nothing dramatic about it. Drama implies conflict and Borrow simply followed his own bent. There was never any conflict of aims or beliefs in him. The life of a man who always does exactly what he wants to do may have some dramatic moments; his poisoning by Mrs Herne and his fight with the Flaming Tinman are obviously dramatic moments. But the life as a whole is not a drama.

Of course *Lavengro* is hard to judge in this way because it is only half a book. It ends in the middle of an unfinished incident with the postillion’s story to Borrow and Isopel Berners in the dingle. Six years later *The Romany Rye* appeared and Borrow begins it as though starting the next chapter of *Lavengro* with his making a linchpin for the postillion’s broken down chaise. It is obvious that he regarded the two volumes as a single work.

Borrow in his appendix says that this work was written for a purpose, and that it was:

for the express purpose of inculcating virtue, love of country, learning, manly pursuits and genuine religion, for example the Church of England, and for awakening contempt for nonsense of every kind and a hatred for priestcraft, more especially, that of Rome.

Now if that is its purpose I think it fails. Borrow as I said does not strike us as a particularly virtuous man, and if he does not fall into meanness, vice or debauchery, it is mainly because he had not the temperament for them. Indifference to vice is not necessarily virtue. Manly pursuits, by which he means walking, boxing, drinking good ale, the wind on the heath and sturdy independence in everything certainly get their due, but love of England does not. Borrow is aggressively and determinedly English, but his prejudices against the English aristocracy, English writers, and any form of English religion
except Church of England makes it a somewhat narrow love of country. He is in fact a mass of cranky prejudices, insular, narrow, bigoted and parochial and proud of it. He obviously regards his own attitudes and opinions as the genuinely English ones and they are in general so unattractive that they seem to foster insularity rather than patriotism. His love of learning is certainly genuine and the book is full of queer bits of erudite lore. Borrow has been attacked for his pretensions to philology—and quite unfairly. It is quite certain that he had an extraordinary gift for learning languages and that for his day he was a very respectable philologist, though an unconventional one. One must remember that modern scientific philology was still in its infancy and in fact the method of comparative etymology which Borrow pursues throughout the book is simply a little out-of-date. It was not, for its period, unscientific. But if Borrow had a quite extraordinary fondness of learning, for a comparatively self-educated man, he also shows the self-educated man's over-consciousness of his achievement. He can never resist trying to dazzle the reader with the range and oddity of his knowledge, and the young man he describes is always in fact showing off by pretending to be a tramp or a tinker or a simple schoolboy—playing dumb till he has got the measure of a stranger and then devastating him with some remark that shows he has to deal with a very remarkable fellow. If Borrow weren't so innocently delighted with this confidence trick he might appear absurdly vain. Lastly, there are Borrow's repeated and bigoted attacks on the Roman Catholic Church. Differences of religious opinion like differences of political views are apt to be held with strong emotion. It is natural for those who adopt one form of faith to believe that other forms are not only mistaken, but dangerous and hateful because of the delusion and error they produce. Nobody can really object to this. It is partly a measure of genuine faith that you think your faith worth fighting for and others' views worth opposing. But Borrow never conducts his attack on the level of belief and argument. He conducts it on the level of bogeys and prejudices, of scandal and abuse. He regards the Man in Black as the Catholic faith incarnate, and the Man in Black, who is supposed to be a missionary priest, is a cynical reprobate who says that either there never was such a character as Jesus Christ or else he was the greatest imposter that ever lived. It is difficult to believe that even such a cranky fellow as Borrow could expect to be taken seriously. No doubt Borrow did meet some of the missionary priests then working in England on the eve of Catholic
Emancipation. The church was indeed making a special effort in England at the time. But if so the Man in Black is almost certainly a figment of Borrow's imagination and it is an ungenerous, a miserable and nauseating attempt to pass off a piece of scurrilous propaganda as an actual happening in his biography. The most fervent adherent of the Church of England might well feel ashamed of being defended by Borrow.

But repulsive as Borrow is on this point one must admit that his attack is so silly that it is comic. In this as in everything else the interest of the book lies not in the virtues that Borrow imagined it would inculcate, but in the picture of a fine example of a typically English institution, the full-blown eccentric. The determined individualist who deliberately ignores conventions, manners, customs and values held by the rest of society and insists on leading his own life exactly as he pleases is not specifically English, but Borrow's awareness of his own eccentricity, his ironical view of himself is. The scholar who deliberately becomes a tinker, a blacksmith and a bible vendor, the writer who despises authorship, the intelligent man who seriously declares that the saints of the Catholic Church are no better than Moll Flanders and yet admires Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and the young man whose idea of pleasing a girl he is in love with is to teach her the declension of Armenian verbs, are all of a piece. It is the character of a man who, whatever his intelligence and abilities, turns them to oddity and eccentricity. The eccentric often has all the marks of genius except one, so that everything he touches turns out odd, cranky or perverse—and Borrow was essentially an eccentric.
In *Paradise Lost*, when Satan, newly arrived in Eden, views the first specimens of the human race he is struck by the qualities they share: nobleness, honour, majesty, beauty, wisdom and goodness. As they are naked, their difference in form and shape must have been obvious, but he also perceives at once that they differ in status:

Not equal, as their sex not equal seemd;
For contemplation hee and valour formd,
For softness shee and sweet attractive Grace,
Hee for God only, shee for God in him:
His fair large Front and Eye sublime declar'd
Absolute rule;

Status, of course, is a subject on which Satan has reasons to be sensitive, but it is perhaps curious that he deduces the difference from the fact not only that Adam looks formidable and Eve does not, but from their different hair styles; Adam’s is parted at his forelock and falls only to his shoulders; his locks are described as ‘hyacinthin’ which could mean either dark or tawny; Eve’s hair is golden and hangs in loose tresses down to her waist

Disheveld, but in wanton ringlets wav’d
As the Vine curls her tendrils, which impli’d
Subjection.
Like most subsequent arguments for the natural inferiority of women to men, the logic of this remarkable inference is flimsy and the evidence trivial.

Satan of course could be wrong. His nature is to err. But later in the poem his first impression is doubly confirmed by Adam, instructed by the Archangel Raphael and by God himself. Adam admits the mental and physical inferiority of Adam’s wife to be due to her inherent nature as a woman:

For well I understand in the prime end
Of Nature her th’inferior, in the mind
And inward Faculties, which most excell,
In outward also her resembling less
His Image who made both, and less expressing
The character of that Dominion giv’n
O’re other Creatures;

When the Son of God apprehends the guilty pair after their fall, he is even more forthright:

Was shee thy God, that her thou didst obey
Before his voice, or was she made thy guide,
Superior or but equal, that to her
Thou didst resign thy Manhood and the Place
Wherein God set thee above her made of thee,
And for thee, whose perfection farr excell’d
Hers in all real dignitie:

One may remark, in passing, that it seems to be the only occasion in the poem in which God, man, the Devil and Milton himself appear in entire agreement. This is not because they are all of the male party but because the inferiority of woman appears to Milton to be a self-evident and undeniable fact, backed up by the authority of scripture. In the private survey of the evidence from the Bible for Christian doctrine which Milton compiled for himself, he makes it clear that woman is not only inferior physically, mentally and morally to the male, but she exists only by reason of the male; she is not a person in her own right but an auxiliary, a helpmeet, a subordinate to her husband. He quotes numerous passages of scripture to this effect, but particularly St Paul (1 Corinthians XI, 7–9):
for a man ... is the image of the glory of God, but the woman is the glory of the man;
neither was man created for the woman but the woman for the man.1

Although the *De Doctrina Christiana* aims at a quite independent summary of Christian doctrine, taken from the biblical text alone, Milton is on the whole completely orthodox in his view of the status of woman. Her inferiority and dependent status are not arguable; they are part of the nature of things as they are.

In the earlier books of *Paradise Lost* Eve is pictured as less intellectual, less interested in knowledge for its own sake or for its possible use than her husband. She listens through Raphael's exciting after-lunch account of the creation, the revolt of Lucifer and the war in Heaven, but when Adam asks the Archangel for a lesson in astronomy and cosmology, Eve leaves them to it, to do some gardening. Milton at this point admits that the female brain is quite capable of understanding these abstruse subjects; Eve simply prefers to hear these things secondhand in bed, and it is this that demonstrates her intellectual inferiority to Adam:

Yet went she not, as not with such discourse
Delighted, or not capable her eare
Of what was high: such pleasure she reserv'd
Adam relating, she sole Auditress;
Her Husband the Relater she preferr'd
Before the Angel, and of him to ask
Chose rather; hee, she knew would intermix
Grateful digressions and solve high dispute
With conjugal Caresses, from his Lip
Not Words alone pleas'd her.

Milton obviously thinks this delightful, and just as it should be. He exclaims:

    O when meet now
    Such pairs in Love and mutual Honour joyn'd?

But it is clear that Eve's is the inferior mind. Astronomy is an exacting subject. The Archangel Raphael finds it rather too difficult for him

"quum vir imago sit et gloria Dei: at mulier gloria viri est. non enim traditus est vir propter mulierem sed mulier propter virum" (A.V.): 'For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man. For the man is not of the woman but the woman of the man.'
to explain even to Adam’s unfallen intellect. If Eve thinks she can divide her attention between this subject and Adam’s love-making she can hardly be a serious inquirer after knowledge. And if, as she appears to be willing to believe, a controversial point in cosmology can be solved by a kiss, her notion of scientific method can hardly be said to be rigorous.

Later, on the occasion of the Fall itself, Milton allows her to make a better showing. After all, the Fall must not be allowed to occur for the trivial reason that Adam’s wife was a silly little thing who would swallow the sales talk of any serpent knocking on her door. From observation she has deduced that beasts have some measure of reason but that they are incapable of language. Here is a snake which can not only speak like a human being but is endowed with reason far above the reach of mere animal cunning. On inquiry she learns that it was because it ate the fruit of the forbidden tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God has said that if they eat that fruit they will surely die, but the snake has not only not died, it has been raised to more than human knowledge and eloquence. The wise creature now suggests that human beings also will not die if they eat the fruit but will be raised above the human to the divine. Ignorant of the serpent’s true nature, Eve listens attentively. It is indeed a plausible argument and Eve accepts it. On the evidence she has, her reasoning is perfectly sound. As she herself points out, God has simply forbidden them to eat but not told them why. He has in fact made the same mistake he made with the rebel angels; having created in both instances beings endowed with reason, he fails to reason with them. When in the exercise of their rational faculties they propose fallacious arguments to themselves or come to false conclusions because of limited knowledge, God instead of answering with reason, answers with violence, the *argumentum ad baculum*. He demands not rational but blind obedience. Eve, we may note, is punished for desiring knowledge and using her reason as well as she can. Adam is punished simply for letting his emotions overpower his reason, ‘fondly overcome with Female charm’. But his attempt at reasoning when Eve announces that she has eaten the fruit is no more than easy rationalisation of what he intends to do in any case and a witless attempt to persuade himself that God will not be too hard on them. In spite of himself Milton has not succeeded in showing Eve’s mind to be inferior to her husband’s.

Above all Eve is moved principally by a desire for higher knowledge,
by the prospect that on eating the fruit of the tree she and Adam will be as wonderfully raised above their present capacities as the snake has been raised above the limitations of its animal nature. And a natural element in this is the wish to escape from her feeling of inferiority and the indignity of not being a person in her own right, merely an appendage of Adam. She is even tempted not to share her secret with him:

Shall I to him make known
As yet my change, and give him to partake
Full happiness with mee, or rather not
But keep the odds of Knowledge in my power
Without Copartner? so to add what wants
In Femal Sex, the more to draw his Love,
And render me more equal, and perhaps
A thing not undesireable, sometime
Superior; for inferior who is free?

Only a great poet could have put the case he rejects so compellingly and with such human insight. And indeed Milton, for all his male chauvinism and arrogance, is plainly in love with his own Eve. All his descriptions of her in the poem before and after the Fall are ecstatic love-poems of the highest order. In this at least Blake was not entirely wrong in saying that Milton was of the Devil's party without knowing it.

Another great poet writing less than two centuries later took up the subject of woman's status, her intellectual and moral capacities and her aspirations towards knowledge. Tennyson's *The Princess* with its account of a modern university for women, set for no very good reason in a generalised mediaeval setting borrowed and adapted from Malory, is a curious work, at once delightful, amusing and exasperating. The treatment is light, gay and full of comedy yet the theme is intensely serious. The poem contains some of Tennyson's most splendid poetry. Tennyson's estimate of women and their abilities is as high as anyone could wish and is marked by observation and sound common sense. His theory of education is in advance of the age in which he wrote. Its great reforms in higher education did not take place until some twenty years after the poem was published and at least thirty years after it was conceived and composed. It is the work of a large, liberal and generous mind. And yet it is difficult to read it through without a sense of disappointment.
It is a personal disappointment. Others have criticised or deplored the poem on other grounds, but I am willing to accept it as it stands. It is a great achievement, but it could have been a greater one and my admiration for Tennyson is such that I regret his failure to reach a further perfection which lay well within his powers. Tennyson’s mind was exploring freely, able to consider alternative solutions to the problem and too aware of the complexity and mystery of human nature and human capabilities to be dogmatic about it. Milton, for all the immense reach of his genius, was perhaps too encased in a rigid theology, too determined to justify God’s ways to men, to be able to take a view beyond the one he presents.

In the twenties and thirties of the last century, when there was much discussion of the status and the rights of women, the general point of view is not unfairly summed up by Tennyson in the speech he puts into the mouth of the old King of the Northern Kingdom:

but this is fixt
As are the roots of earth and base of all;
Man for the field and woman for the hearth;
Man for the sword and for the needle she;
Man with the head and woman with the heart:
Man to command and woman to obey;
All else confusion.

This is simply Adam’s view brought up to date and put in more brutal terms. What point could there be in providing higher education for women since they plainly have neither capacity nor use for it? And indeed any woman in England in the first half of the nineteenth century who aspired to a tertiary education had to get it for herself by private tuition or personal effort. One thinks of Elizabeth Barrett working her way through the Greek dramatists, Aristotle and Plato entire and going on to the Greek Fathers, of Florence Nightingale rising at six in the morning to study mathematics, geology and Greek in the face of her family’s incomprehension and disapproval, of George Eliot acquiring Hebrew for herself and Harriet Martineau mastering philosophy in the same way. Not that university education was denied to women alone; it was a disadvantage they shared with Jews, nonconformists and Catholics until the establishment of London University in 1836. The first university college for women, Girton at Cambridge, was not opened till 1869. Tennyson’s scheme described in The Princess was therefore well in advance of the time, especially
if Sir Charles Tennyson was right in concluding that what seems to be an early draft of part of the poem among Tennyson’s papers can be dated in the 1830s. It seems at any rate to have been fully planned by 1839.

The university for women founded by Princess Ida is based on the idea that the capabilities of one sex are in no way inferior to those of the other and that they have as much right to a higher education. The inferiority of women is caused by men who have denied them a knowledge and training of the mind necessary to the exercise of their higher abilities. But this exercise of their rights is to be a prelude to a social revolution in which women will take their place in every sphere of life, as Lady Psyche explains:

She rose upon a wind of prophecy  
Dilating on the future: 'everywhere  
Two heads in council, two beside the hearth,  
Two in the tangled business of the world,  
Two in the liberal offices of life,  
Two plummets dropt for one to sound the abyss  
Of science, and the secrets of the mind:  
Musician, painter, sculptor, critic, more:  
And everywhere the broad and bounteous Earth  
Should bear a double growth of those rare souls,  
Poets, whose thoughts enrich the blood of the world.

In other words this university course is intended to prepare women to enter politics, administration, business, the professions, research in science and psychology and the fine arts. There is no mention of the armed services or medicine in this program and Tennyson’s silence may indicate that he shared Dr Johnson’s opinion of a woman preaching. But all in all it was a daringly revolutionary vision for the time.

The curriculum includes mathematics, classics, philosophy and metaphysics, politics, history, psychology, ethics, physics, geology, astronomy, zoology, botany, electricity (not then included in physics), chemistry, and indeed ends with the wide welcome to ‘whatsoever can be taught and known’. The course for students at Oxford and Cambridge at the time had nothing to match this.

Looking back on the development of university education since then, one cannot help noticing some omissions: the fine arts are practised but not studied and not taught. Theology seems to be absent and, though there is daily chapel, it is apparently not compulsory since of the thousand or so women in the institution only six hundred attend the service. There appears to be no instruction in religion and no religious tests on entry. Tennyson does not stress the matter, but Ida’s college appears to be a secular institution like the quite recently founded University College of the University of London whose curriculum it also resembles more than that of Oxford or Cambridge of the day. Professions such as architecture, engineering, law and medicine are not taught but they were not then studied at Oxford or Cambridge either. It is curious, however, in view of the claim that the curriculum would cover ‘whatsoever can be taught or known’, and in view of the contemporary demands of the women’s movement for right of entry into the professions, that Tennyson should be silent on this.

In fact he is not completely silent. The practice of the law would seem to be foreshadowed in the exercise of equal political rights which is to be the outcome and one of the aims of women’s education. Medicine, however, is partly excluded. On the geology excursion while Ida is urging the disguised Prince to enter for the Metaphysics Prize, she mentions that there are schools for all subjects. The Prince objects that anatomy is not on the curriculum and is told that it had been considered and rejected:

‘Nay, we thought of that’
She answered ‘but it pleased us not: in truth
We shudder but to dream our maids should ape
Those monstrous males that carve the living hound,
And cram him with the fragments of the grave,
Or in the dark dissolving human heart
And holy secrets of this microcosm
Dabbling a shameful hand with shameful jest
Encarnalize their spirits: yet we know
Knowledge is Knowledge, and this matter hangs . . .

One clear reason why the matter remains in suspense is that to remedy it they would have had to call in male instructors in a field in which no women were then competent and the women’s university excludes the male sex altogether. But it is not a very compelling reason and it is here that Tennyson begins to let down his own superb idea. That
idea is based on the intellectual, moral and practical equality of the sexes. Why then can women not study medicine, practise it and engage in research in it on an equal footing with men? The alleged reasons: that it would involve them in the horrors of vivisection and that they would have to carry on in the dissecting room as coarsely as most medical students of the time, are not very convincing either. But if kept out of the dissecting room, women may engage in a little noble nursing. In fact the real reason is only too clear. Women, or at any rate ladies, are a higher form of life, more ethereal and pure and they must be kept that way. It is on this rock that *The Princess* in the end suffers shipwreck. In the meantime let us go on considering the curriculum and structure of Princess Ida's university.

One is struck at once by the wide range of sciences open to the students at a time when the older universities had made hardly a move in this direction. It is interesting to see and compare the curriculum with Tennyson's own studies which he pursued privately after he came down from Cambridge. Hallam Tennyson gives a specimen three weeks of the program that his father set himself at this period. It appears to involve science in the mornings, languages after that:

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{ll}
Monday. & History, German. \\
Tuesday. & Chemistry, German. \\
Wednesday. & Botany, German. \\
Thursday. & Electricity, German. \\
Friday. & Animal Physiology, German. \\
Saturday. & Mechanics. \\
Sunday. & Theology. \\
Next Week. & Italian in the afternoon. \\
Third Week. & Greek, Evenings. Poetry.\footnote{Alfred Lord Tennyson, *a Memoir*, London 1906, p. 105.}
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As this is dated 1831, it throws some very interesting light on Tennyson's feelings about the inadequacy of his own university education at Cambridge. It also suggests that his project for a women's university was closely connected with his own desire to break out into a wider and freer world of higher education than the universities at that time provided.

But if Ida's university shows all these symptoms of liberal and advanced ideas of tertiary education, the poem also shows clear evidence of Tennyson's wish to preserve, or at least to placate, traditional forms and traditionally accepted attitudes. The general
structure of the women's university, apart from its curriculum of studies, is based pretty much on the contemporary image of Cambridge. The exclusion of men in one matches the exclusion of women in the other. The collegiate systems are similar. The university rules and the proctorial police system are almost identical, the organising of the lecturing and teaching day has a clear Cambridge model, and there are several passages of the poem depicting the bickering, the internal politics and the intrigue among the dons which all too clearly reflects the state of affairs in academic circles at any time and anywhere at all. It cannot be a matter of satire or attempted realism on Tennyson's part. It is rather to be explained by the fact that any propaganda for the higher education of women—and *The Princess* is plainly that—needed at the time to look like the kind of university which had the prestige and the regard of upper class English society. An acceptable women's university must look, at least on the surface, to be not unlike Oxford and Cambridge, even if its curriculum was quite a revolutionary one. Tennyson's mixture of the two is not convincing and Elizabeth Barrett Browning hit immediately and compellingly on the weakness. Writing to Miss Mitford from Florence in 1848 she says:

> At last we have caught sight of Tennyson's 'Princess' and I may or must profess to be a good deal disappointed. What woman will tell the great poet that Mary Wollstonecraft herself never dreamt of setting up collegiate states, proctordoms, and the rest, which is a worn-out plaything in the hands of one sex already and need not be transferred in order to be proved ridiculous?  

It is a shrewd and a just criticism. The studies proposed are sensible and show a liberal and enlightened idea of education regardless of the sex which is to receive it. The structure of the university especially in its mediaeval setting is benighted and rather comical. The comedy may be intentional, but it detracts from the seriousness of the main theme.

To be fair to Tennyson, one must not judge him by the way we look at education today. Ida's university seems to depend more on lecturing than research. It is designed not so much for the advancement of learning as for the application of learning already established to

the improvement of the female mind. When the Prince's cynical companion Cyril at the end of the first day's attendance at lectures replies to the Prince's surprised remark

Why, Sirs, they do all this as well as we.

with

'They hunt old trails', said Cyril 'very well;  
But when did women ever yet invent?'

He is going against the intention of the poem, but he is voicing the conviction that must arise from looking firmly at what is going on in this new university. The girls are being acquainted with advanced knowledge: there is no evidence that they are being trained to advance it themselves. It is no wonder that a number of them ask themselves why they are being subjected to all this load of information when their natural inclinations and upbringing incline them to the business of finding a mate and raising a family:

others lay about the lawns,  
Of the older sort, and muttered that their May  
Was passing: what was learning unto them?  
They wished to marry: they could rule a house;  
Men hated learned women:

The weakness of Princess Ida's (Tennyson's) scheme for higher education of women is that knowledge is not pursued for its own sake but for the educational value that study confers. It does not lead to the pursuit of further knowledge but to an 'accomplished', well-read, knowledgeable feminine upper class who can hold their own with men in social intercourse. It can be compared with the education of the lower classes provided by the contemporary 'mechanics institute', of which Tennyson gives a delightful picture in the prologue to the poem. The purpose of these institutions is to give people of the working classes a chance to enlarge their knowledge and their interests. They do not provide the means of self-improvement beyond this point and there is no intention to turn out doctors, lawyers, architects, artists, chemists, philosophers and astronomers in any real sense. As education, the effects of both types of institution could be described as cosmetic.

Of course, one must keep in mind that, when the poem appeared,
much the same was true of the education provided by Oxford and Cambridge. Their object was not the prosecution of research and the extension of human knowledge. The reforms that led to this view of the function of a modern university were still many years in the future when Tennyson wrote. Oxford and Cambridge were then the preserves of the Anglican upper classes and their object was the training of Christian gentlemen. Standards were far from rigorous, and the university, dominated by the colleges, was not effective in maintaining them. Princess Ida’s foundation by comparison is far in advance of those then moribund institutions. But its object is still largely to produce educated Christian ladies rather than scientists and scholars. Indeed when the enlightened and wholly admirable Miss Emily Davies drew up a program of studies for the institution for the higher education of women which ultimately became Girton College, Cambridge, she proposed that for the ordinary degree her undergraduates should have a choice of theology, moral science, natural science and other academic subjects and ‘in addition to those referred to, Modern Languages, Music, Drawing and other subjects which usually form part of the education of an English lady . . .’.

Barbara Stephen in her history of Girton remarks:

This preliminary sketch of the College shows how difficult even Miss Davies found it to get away from the current ideas as to ‘the education of an English lady’. It might almost be a description of a finishing school but for the mention of theology and science.5

On the subject of natural sciences she adds a footnote to the effect that these were considered to be masculine subjects, ‘though Botany and Conchology were thought sufficiently elegant for ladies to dabble in them’. In justice to Princess Ida, her university makes a much better showing than the Girton scheme of twenty years or so later.

For all that Tennyson, like Adam before him, shows himself to have been overcome with female charm. The Princess is, of course, a love story and the young Prince and his companions are naturally responsive to an institution full of nubile young women. It is through their account that we see the women’s university. But it is, after all, supposed to be a serious educational venture. What no reader of the poem can escape is the emphasis on ‘female charm’, though this of

course has nothing at all to do with or against education. It is simply irrelevent to the study of any subject whether the students are of one sex or the other. The demands of the subjects not of the students is what matters. Yet Tennyson’s poem harps continually on the beauty, the charm, the sex of the students. The first lecture the intruders attend sets the tone:

as we enter'd in,
There sat among the forms like morning doves
That sun their milky bosoms on the thatch,
A patient range of pupils;

What more, one is tempted to ask, has this range of milky bosoms to do with the subject of the lecture, than if the poet has introduced a lecture at Cambridge with a quick run-over of the sex characteristics of the undergraduates there assembled. Tennyson’s poem never manages to disentangle its argument from the irrelevent notion that the creatures studying classics, science, philosophy or history happen to be women, indeed, nubile and attractive young women. It seems not to have entered the poet’s head that dull, awkward or ugly girls were as entitled to higher education as their attractive sisters and that their sexual attractiveness had nothing at all to do with the pursuit of knowledge.

It is at this point of course that the most absurd aspect of the women’s university forces itself on the modern reader: the exclusion of men and the incredible—and in any case highly silly—proviso that any man entering the institution will be subject to the pain of death. One can make full allowance for Victorian prudishness, for Ida’s not unnatural feelings that if men exclude women from their universities women will do the same in their turn. But nothing that Tennyson says so eloquently in his poem about the ideal of equal sharing and cooperation of the two sexes can be reconciled with the notion that their education must be quite separate at the tertiary level. Nowadays when young men and women attend the universities together, study the same curriculum, go on to the same research programs and enter the same professions, it is hard for us to see what all this nonsense was about. But it is not hard to see that Tennyson was unable to conceive a real equality of the sexes in any society that seemed to him at all possible. He wanted a higher status for women. He saw and believed in their equality with men, but when it came to the crunch, he showed that, like Milton, he did not believe them capable of it.
The fascinating thing about *The Princess* is that in the end Princess Ida’s theories and principles break down, not for any good logical or even educational reason, but simply because overcome by other, completely feminine strains in her nature, she is forced to desert her vision and her principles. After the arrest of the intruding young men and the arrival of the Prince’s father to rescue them we hear in fact very little on the subject of higher education for women. The rest of the poem is concerned with the tournament, the wounding of the Prince, Ida’s nursing him back to health and her gradual falling in love with him, a process encouraged not only by his weakness, her inclinations and their constantly being together, but even more by the maternal instincts awakened in Ida by Psyche’s baby and the struggle she has to give it back to the mother. Tennyson is never very explicit on this point, apart from the remark in his manuscript notes that ‘The child is the link thro’ the parts as shown in the songs which are the best interpretation of the poem’. These poems take up various aspects of the relation of children to the union of man and woman in marriage. It seems that we are to understand that, in the end, Lady Psyche’s confident picture of men and women sharing a common education and engaged in common research and the practice of the arts:

Two plummets dropt for one to sound the abyss
Of science, and the secrets of the mind:
Musician, painter, sculptor, critic, more:

has to be modified. Woman is not intellectually inferior to man but she is not able to compete with him on equal terms because she must be absorbed in a higher and an equally demanding task, the bearing and rearing of children. Tennyson’s solution does him credit: ‘The woman’s cause is man’s’; therefore they must work together to achieve a common end to which the old dichotomy of male and female equation becomes irrelevant.

If this means, as the Princess takes it to mean, that she and her husband will work together for women’s rights and in particular for the right to a full education, all would be well. But in fact what the Prince says does not appear to mean anything of the kind. What he means is that when husband and wife co-operate each in their own sphere and in accord with their own specific gifts as man and woman,

*Tennyson, a Memoir*, p. 212.
the whole question of equality and rights will be irrelevant. Men will grow to be more like women and the other way about:

The man be more of woman, she of man;
He gain in sweetness and in moral height
Nor lose the wrestling thews that throw the world,
She mental breadth, nor fail in childward care,
Nor lose the childlike in the larger mind;
Till at the last she set herself to man,
Like perfect music unto noble words;

There is a distinct implication here that we are back in the Garden of Eden. Ida's aim like Eve's ambition was to be a person in her own right. What the Prince offers is the sexes as complementary half-persons, who are nothing in their own right.

seeing either sex alone
Is half itself, and in true marriage lies
Nor equal, nor unequal: each fulfills
Defect in each, and always thought in thought
Purpose in purpose, will in will they grow,
The single pure and perfect animal,
The two-celled heart beating with one
full stroke,
Life.

This in fact is the reversal of all Princess Ida had aimed at and the measure of her decline is that she accepts it and calls it 'a dream that once was mine'. It does not matter that in such a marriage it will be now the male and now the female partner who directs and dominates: it is that either is bound to do so, since in the nature of human relationships this is bound to happen. People who fall in love and marry do not do so on the grounds of equally matched intellectual gifts, well defined aims or force of character. Nor does it matter that no provision is made for those who do not marry or do not wish to marry, or for those who elect not to share their life's work with a partner—imagine Beethoven or Florence Nightingale trying to work in double-harness!—no, the main point is that Ida has been bullied, first by physical violence and then by a sort of emotional blackmail to abandon her claim as a woman to be an independent person in her own right and, by implication, to let slide the equal education with men that was a prerequisite to her being able to do it. If, as Eve says: 'inferior who is free?', Ida could equally have said: as one
part of a single animal, however pure, who also is free? And what happens if one member of the partnership is not as pure as he or she might be? The Prince’s proposal, like most utopian theories, is a counsel of perfection. In practice it is bound to break down.

The nigger in this woodpile appears to be Tennyson’s conviction, in contradiction to Milton’s, that woman, while mentally equal with man, was in fact his moral superior. By association with her he is able to ‘gain in sweetness and in moral height’. This is a hangover of the old Courtly Love system and the mystique added to it by Renaissance literature. There is, in fact, no evidence to support the view that one sex is more naturally ‘moral’ or spiritually refined than the other any more than there is evidence that one is more naturally endowed with brains. What bemuses Tennyson’s hero and Milton’s is the delusive effects of ‘Femal charm’. Adam and his author are quite clear about it. Adam, after admitting to the angel that he knows Eve is his inferior, goes on to confess:

yet when I approach
Her loveliness, so absolute she seems
And in herself compleat, so well to know
Her own, that what she wills to do or say,
Seems wisest, virtuoeest, discreetest, best;
All higher Knowledge in her presence falls
Degraded, Wisdom in discourse with her
Looses discount’nant, and like folly shews;
Authoritie and Reason on her waite,
As one intended first, not after made
Occasionally; and to consummate all,
Greatness of mind and nobleness their seat
Build in her lovliest, and create an awe,
About her, as a guard Angelic plac’t.

Adam, though he succumbs, is not deluded about what he regards as Eve’s real status. Tennyson’s hero is, and his author with him. It has been pointed out that the ‘influence of women on society was a common theme in European thought in the first half of the nineteenth century’.

the doctrine of Female Influence ... became an idée fixe of this period in England. Aime-Martin develops it to its greatest

‘Killham, Tennyson and The Princess, pp. 100-2. The reference in the quotation that follows is to Louis Aimé-Martin, De l’Éducation des Mères de Famille, Paris 1835, 1838; Eng. trans. 1848.
lengths: woman’s influence is exerted in Christian marriage: therefore leave alone scholastic and social accomplishments and educate woman for marriage—not the conventional marriage de convenance, but marriage founded upon true knowledge of life and love. It is after marriage that woman should, however, devote herself to education: not by reading in the field of men’s studies . . . but by applying herself thoroughly to a study of moral philosophy and religion.

It is to this doctrine that the Prince, it seems, has converted the still hesitating Ida, who unlike Eve appears to have declined in logic and intellectual capacity at the moment of her fall.

Tennyson too would appear to have fallen with her, but where does he really stand? He is certainly aware of the possible criticism. The ‘Conclusion’ opens with young Walter Vivian’s comment: ‘I wish she had not yielded’ and Lilia pleases the narrator because she has been touched by the story which to the others is simply a fiction provided for entertainment and discussion. The narrator talking to his undergraduate friend who refers to ‘our wild Princess with as wise a dream, as some of theirs’—a reference to the movements of social change at the time—answers:

‘Have patience’, I replied, ‘ourselves are full
Of social wrong; and wildest dreams
Are but the needful preludes to the truth.’

It is a warning that the Medley is meant to be taken in this sense. Tennyson is not laying down the law; he is probing hesitantly into a subject in which he sees only the possibility of ‘preludes to the truth’. This is admirable and yet it is hard to resist the feeling that if he had only used his good sound common sense on the subject of the supposed moral superiority of woman as he used it on that of her supposed intellectual inferiority the whole poem could have been a real success. As it is, it remains a curiosity of time from which we can extract beautiful fragments only. Linking these fragments is a fantastic narrative which is not meant to be taken seriously and an educational theory which is, but has not been thought out enough. It does not, of course, pretend to be more than a medley.

The Prince in picturing the perfect union of man and woman exclaims in his enthusiasm:

Then comes the statelier Eden back to men.
It is doubtful whether his picture of the ‘single pure and perfect animal’, which is to replace Ida’s picture of woman educated, independent and free to make her own decision, is any advance on the view of woman advanced in Paradise Lost. She is still not a person in her own right. She still exists in and for the male and the family. There is even a suspicion that Tennyson may have admired and even envied this state of dependence. The periods of composition of The Princess and In Memoriam seem to have overlapped to some degree. It is not possible to date the composition of individual sections of In Memoriam, for the most part, but it is difficult not to compare the picture of the marriage relation in section XCVII of that poem with the Prince’s picture of the ideal marriage in the other poem. The poet thinks of his relation to his dead friend Arthur Hallam in terms of a loving wife who, grieving because her husband is absorbed in his studies which she is unable to follow, seems to be left behind in her domestic sphere:

Her life is lone, he sits apart,
   He loves her yet, she will not weep,
   Tho’ rapt in matters dark and deep
He seems to slight her simple heart.

He thrids the labyrinth of the mind,
   He reads the secret of the star,
   He seems so near and yet so far,
He looks so cold: she thinks him kind.

She keeps the gift of years before,
   A wither’d violet is her bliss:
   She knows not what his greatness is,
For that, for all, she loves him more.

For him she plays, to him she sings
   Of early faith and plighted vows;
   She knows but matters of the house,
And he, he knows a thousand things.

Her faith is fixt and cannot move,
   She darkly feels him great and wise,
   She dwells on him with faithful eyes,
‘I cannot understand: I love.’

This is Tennyson speaking of himself and he seems to view the picture complacently. One cannot help wondering how Princess Ida’s married life turned out after all.
Even admirers of D.H. Lawrence have not had much to say in favour of *Kangaroo*. His most slavish devotee, F.R. Leavis, favours it with ambiguous approval as a novel which shows a penetrating insight into the nature of the Australian national life and the character of Australian democracy—two subjects on which it may be doubted whether Dr Leavis has any real qualifications for an opinion other than hearsay. Most comments on the novel mention its messy and careless structure. But because it is a book by a writer of international fame and because its setting is Australia, it has enjoyed a reputation in this country which, perhaps, it hardly deserves.

As a hostile witness who thinks Lawrence an extremely overrated writer and as an Australian naturally sceptical of a tourist’s ability to form more than a superficial impression of the country in a visit of a few weeks, I know there are certain cautions to observe in trying to re-appraise the novel after a lapse of fifty years. In the first place it is easy for the Australian reader today to dismiss it out of hand because so much of it is hopelessly out of date. Australia has changed so much in that half century that Lawrence himself might have difficulty in recognising it if he visited it today. It is so much more organised, conscious, industrialised, above all it is so much more civilised, that the picture presented by Lawrence is in danger of

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appearing a comic caricature even of aspects of Australian life which he has presented accurately and vividly. It is liable to have the comic unreality of photographs of a generation ago: ‘Surely we couldn’t have looked like that!’ say those who remember how it felt to be alive then. ‘Surely they couldn’t have been real people like us!’ say the young who were not. The ideas, the manners, the conventions and decorations of life are presented with a superficial accuracy which now gives an impression merely of parody. This impression is reinforced by a kind of hindsight that it would be unfair to have expected Lawrence and his readers to have had at the time. A large part of the book is taken up with the hero’s flirtation—it can hardly be called more than that—with the forces and the theories of communism and fascism. Neither Somers nor his author appear to have much real knowledge of either movement, but the sorts of arguments in favour of each with which the readers are presented represent a kind of muddled thinking that was only too common at the time. To a generation which has seen what this sort of thinking led to, which has lived through the eras of Mussolini, of Franco, of Hitler and of Stalin, it must seem incredible that any intelligent human could ever have taken this sort of talk seriously. Lawrence’s novel is apt to seem ridiculously naive even when he is reporting accurately. There is a third problem for the Australian reader who has been habituated to expect a naturalistic treatment of Australian life in the fiction produced by local writers. 

Kangaroo may look like a naturalistic treatment because the author documents an unfamiliar scene with a good deal of sharply observed detail. But apart from these camera-eye pieces of background, the novel is no more naturalistic in its method than one by Kafka or Patrick White. It is a fantasy in what, at the time, could be taken for modern dress. If the reader gets impatient with it, he may be justified, but he may give wrong or irrelevant reasons for his impatience. Kangaroo has no more pretension to give a realistic picture of Australian life than, let us say, The Rainbow pretends to be a realistic picture of English life in the midlands over the period it covers. The theme of neither book arises out of its setting in the way that Sons and Lovers can be said to. They simply use certain local references to peg the themes down to some recognisable time and place.

For all that, questions of verisimilitude and competence to pronounce are bound to arise in a book in which the hero makes so many confident assertions about the Australian character and Australian life. These assertions are presented without irony and without reservations
and we know from his letters that Lawrence himself held the same views and may presume that he thought he was holding the mirror up to nature. Dr Leavis, at any rate, believes that he did. It is interesting to see how far the claim could be justified.

It is not necessary to argue against the idea that a novelist of genius may observe in a short time and re-imagine aspects and patterns of life unfamiliar to him which the ordinary man might take years to imbibe at the source. The question is: what did Lawrence have the chance to observe at all and how well did he take in even what he was able to see?

Lawrence and his wife Frieda left Italy in the RMS Osterly at the end of February 1922. Lawrence had been wandering in Europe for the previous few months, becoming more and more dissatisfied with life, and he left to stay with American friends who were studying Buddhism in Ceylon. As far as one can tell he had no thought of visiting Australia at that time. It seems to have been contact with Australians on the ship that set him thinking of the country as a possible escape from the complexities and the intellectual decadence of Europe:

The people on board are mostly simple Australians. I believe Australia is a good country, full of life and energy . . . It is my opinion that once beyond The Red Sea one does not feel any more the tension and pressure one suffers from in England—in Europe altogether—even in America, I believe—perhaps worse there.

He wrote this on the ship ten days after sailing and it is characteristic of Lawrence that on the basis of a brief acquaintance with a few passengers he was prepared to invent not only a national character but Australia itself—inventions that he was to repeat in reverse and to reverse again a number of times in the next few months. His impressions of a country and a people were in fact often based on a few random points of observation which he then interpreted in the light of his personal dissatisfactions and aspirations. Three weeks later he has abandoned the theory that the world east of Suez is free from tensions. Ceylon is full of them and he is already sick of it and Australia is now the promised land. But within a day or two he has decided that he wants to return to England after all. Australia is just a place on the way home. He writes on 30 April from RMS Orsova: 'We are going to Australia—Heaven knows why: because it will be
cooler and the sea is wide . . . Don’t know what we’ll do in Australia—don’t care.’ The abrupt changes of mood are worth noting because Somers in Kangaroo is subject to them too and one suspects that his irritable attacks on Australian society and the sudden enthusiasms for life in the country which are faithful reflections of Lawrence’s reactions in his letters, have in fact nothing much to do with any real insight but merely reflect Lawrence’s moody preoccupations with his own problems or his occasional bursts of euphoria and enthusiasm.

However that may be, the Lawrences arrived in Fremantle at the beginning of May. They stayed for a while with some Australian acquaintances called Jenkins in Perth and Lawrence must have seen some of the bush for he writes of his impressions of the queer, primeval, empty landscape, adding ‘And the people are not.’ He does not expand on this nor is there much evidence as to what contacts he had with the population apart from the Jenkins, their friends and Miss Skinner whose novel in manuscript Lawrence took over and rewrote as The Boy in the Bush. A fortnight—more or less—in Western Australia was enough for Lawrence. He and Frieda arrived by ship in Sydney in the last week of May and went almost at once to a rented seaside cottage rejoicing in the name of Wyework at Thirroul on the south coast. There they stayed for most of the next two months and there he wrote a large part of Kangaroo. Presumably he paid a number of visits to Sydney in that time. Lawrence’s first impressions of the country and the people were unfavourable and he expressed ‘a bitter burning nostalgia for Europe, for Sicily, for old civilisation. . . ’. Though he wavered back and forth, this seems to have been his more usual state of mind throughout his stay and, on 8 August of that year he set sail for America where he finished Kangaroo at Taos, New Mexico. On 19 September he wrote to Martin Secker that the novel was finished. In spite of his promise to revise it in typescript, he seems to have made few changes of any importance. The novel was written rapidly, at a draught and under the influence of a single prevailing mood. The book shows the effects of this rapid and rather careless composition.

Kangaroo is full of forthright opinions on Australia and Australians. Most of them are made by the visiting writer Richard Lovat Somers whose experience of the country is made to match that of Lawrence himself in range and length of stay just as they echo the opinions voiced by Lawrence in his letters from Australia. Lawrence, for example, writes from Thirroul on 22 June:
If you want to know what it is to feel the 'correct' social world fizzle to nothing, you should come to Australia. It is a weird place. In the *established* sense, it is socially nil. Happy-go-lucky, don't-you-bother, we're-in Australia. But also there seems to be no inside life of any sort: just a long lapse and drift. A rather fascinating indifference, a *physical* indifference to what we call soul or spirit. It's really a weird show.

This note runs all through the novel. On a Sunday shortly after their arrival in Sydney Somers and Harriet go to Manly for the day and Somers reflects sourly on the Australian habit of rushing from where they were to somewhere else on holidays:

> And tomorrow they’d all be working away with just as little meaning, waking without any meaning, playing without any meaning; and yet quite strenuously at it all. It was just dazing. Even the rush for money had no real pip in it. They really cared very little for the power that money can give . . . When all is said and done, even money is not much good where there is no genuine culture. Money is a means of rising to a higher, subtler, fuller state of consciousness, or nothing. And when you flatly don’t want a fuller consciousness, what good is your money to you? Just to chuck about and gamble with. [etc]

It is all very well for Lawrence to cover himself against this remarkable insight of the newly arrived traveller by adding:

> Poor Richard Lovat wearied himself to death struggling with the problem of himself, and calling it Australia.

That is indeed what Lovat does throughout the book, and very boring it becomes. But it is also the point of view of the book and the picture presented by the author. Lawrence, who breaks into the novel in his own person at intervals, never gives us any other view. In fact he builds up the view that Australian society is crass, uncultured and mindless and that the people as a whole are null and void.

Look at these Australians [says Somers on the occasion of his first interview with Kangaroo] they’re awfully nice, but they’ve got no inside to them. They’re hollow. How are you going to build on such hollow stalks. They may well call themselves cornstalks. They’re marvellous and manly and independent and all that, outside. But inside, they are not. When they’re quite alone they don’t exist . . . The Colonies make for outwardness.
Everything is outward—like hollow stalks of corn. The life makes this inevitable: all that struggle with bush and water and what-not, all the mad struggle with the material necessities and conveniences—the inside soul just withers and goes into the outside.

At a later point in the novel Somers, who is full of pseudoscience, like Lawrence himself, seriously propounds two theories to account for this state of mind of *homo australiensis*. One is that the primitive continent itself has dominated and reduced the population, drawn it back into the fern age. Australians are really sub-human. The other theory which does not exclude the first is that in a warmer climate the blood becomes thin and the soul drains out of people. Curious theories like this tend to take over and relieve the novelist and his hero alike from observing and thinking about what they observe. At one point for example Jack Calcott, a very ordinary Australian, is watching a football match with absorbed interest, just as an equivalent Englishman might. But Somers watching him invents an incredible and comic theory to account for his absorption:

Jack was a queer sight to Somers, when he was in this brightly vacant mood, not a man at all, but a chance thing gazing spell-bound on the evolutions of chance. And in this state, this very Australian state, you could hardly get a word out of him. Or, when he broke into a little volley of speech, you listened with wonder to the noise of it, as if a weird animal had suddenly given voice . . . What does today matter, or this country? Time is so huge, and in Australia the next step back is to the fern age.

It never apparently occurs to Somers or his author that Jack might just be interested in football and find pleasure in watching it. One can imagine Jack's comments on Somers's view of the game (or any Australian football enthusiast for that matter):

On the field the blues and the reds darted madly about, like strange bird-creatures rather than men. They were mostly blond with hefty legs, and with prominent round buttocks that worked madly inside the little white cotton shorts.

Mad Pommy bastard, what's he talking about? I'm watching this game, North Bulli against Thirroul, see, and up he comes yacking about bird-men and buttocks! To an Australian, then as now, it is Somers's mindless incomprehension that is striking.
Perhaps the most absurd of Somers’s applications of home-made theory is his description of Australian women in the streets of Sydney:

Almost every one of the younger women walked as if she thought she was sexually trailing every man in the street after her. And that was absurd, too, because the men more often than not hurry away and leave a blank space between them and these women. But it made no matter: like mad-women the females, in their quasi-elegance, pranced with that prance of crazy triumph in their own sexual powers which left little Richard flabbergasted.

It leaves little me, I admit, flabbergasted at the state of mind of little Richard.

Lawrence’s parody of Australian life could be illustrated in more detail. Some of it is deliberate and is to be explained by the state of mind in which he wrote the novel. An author is, after all, entitled to write in a spirit of travesty or of satire if he wishes. But one suspects that in fact the real reason for much of this irritating nonsense was simple ignorance.

Other writers, visitors like James Anthony Froude and Frances Adams in the last century, have made comments similar to those of Lawrence on the quality of Australian life; Australians themselves, myself included, have noted that in the period in which Lawrence wrote the level of civilisation in Australia was indeed below that in Europe. But they knew what they were talking about because they had moved or lived in Australian society. Lawrence did not. He saw only the very narrowest range of Australian life and the merest superfiaces of that. What is more, although he set out to write a book with Australia and its people as its setting he took not the slightest trouble to find out about them. He seems to have been actuated by a kind of vanity into believing that he could reconstruct them from a few casual observations.

It is true that he met a few Australians on the three ships that took him from Naples to Sydney. The Lawrences travelled second class so that it is likely that the range of such acquaintanceships was restricted. Lawrence himself describes them as simple people. In Perth he seems to have met very few people apart from the Jenkins and their friends and Mollie Skinner who kept the boarding house in Darlington where the Lawrences stayed. He met a few people at a bookshop in Perth and missed Katharine Susannah Prichard, who tried unsuccessfully to get in touch with him. If there was any literary
or intellectual society in Perth at the time, Lawrence made no contact with it. It was the same in Sydney. Lawrence did not use any of his letters of introduction. Sydney at the time was a city buzzing with artists, writers, and composers; it led a lively intellectual life and would have welcomed Lawrence whose novels were read and discussed at the time. But Lawrence made no contact with this world. He speaks of visiting art galleries in Adelaide and Melbourne and he probably saw the Sydney gallery too. But he does not mention one Australian painter or sculptor. He visited libraries and bookshops including the small library in Thirroul where he was surprised and gratified to find some of his own books. But he took apparently not the slightest trouble to find out if Australia had any writers or not. Katharine Susannah Prichard sent him one of her own novels, *Black Opal*, the poems of Furnley Maurice, the plays and poems of Louis Esson, a work called *Songs of Reverie* set to music by Henry Tate. Lawrence’s comment was:

I have read the plays and nearly all the poems. The plays seem to me like life, and the poems are real. But they all make me feel desperately miserable.

Lawrence’s only excursion into Australian writing on his own account seems to have been the racing novels of Nat Gould. Harriet in the book is depicted as ‘reading a Nat Gould novel, to get the real tang of Australia . . .’ When she had finished her paper-back book she said:

‘It's just like them—just like they think they are.’

So much for Lawrence’s exploration of the culture of Australia! Nor did he take any more trouble to find out what was going on in the social and political life of the country on which he comments so glibly and confidently both in his letters and in the novel. According to Frieda he read no newspapers. He did read the *Sydney Bulletin* avidly but it was for ‘the stories of wild animals and people’s living experiences’, in other words for the ‘pars’—that popular section of the old *Bulletin* devoted to short paragraphs of comment, reminiscence or humorous anecdote sent in from all over the country by readers of the ‘Bushman’s Bible’. Lawrence quotes from them extensively and with relish in the novel. For Somers they represent ‘the real tang of Australia’ as Nat Gould does for Harriet.
Lawrence's actual contacts with Australian society in the east appear to have been the people he met and talked with near Thirroul and on a couple of excursions to Wollongong. (Mullimbimby and Walloona in the novel). As he spent practically all his time writing or going for solitary walks, these contacts were limited to the local tradesmen and shopkeepers of the little township which he describes vividly, if a little maliciously:

When you had crossed the iron foot-bridge over the railway, you came to a big wooden building with a corrugated iron roof, standing forlorn at an unmade corner, like the fag-end of the village. But the village was an agglomeration of fag-ends. This building might have been a temporary chapel, as you come at it from the back. But in front it was labelled ‘Pictoria’, so it was the cinema. But there was also a black-board with gilt letters, like a chapel notice-board, which said ‘School of Arts Library’. And the Pictoria had a sort of little wing, all wood, like a little school-room. And in one section of this wing was the School of Arts Library, which the Somers had joined. Four rows of novels: the top row a hundred or more thin books, all Nat Gould or Zane Grey. The young women came for Zane Grey. ‘Oh, The Maid of Mudgee is a lovely thing, lovely’—a young woman was pronouncing from the top of the broken chair which served as a stool to give access to this top row. ‘Y’aven’ got a new Zaine Greye, have yer?’ then came a young railway man who had heard there was a new Nat Gould.

This was Lawrence’s Australia: the only one he knew at first hand. The crassness of Lawrence’s procedure can be illustrated not unfairly by supposing an Australian novelist who happened by some curious accident to have been brought up in total ignorance of England, visiting the country for a couple of months, spending two days in London during which he took a day-trip to Brighton on a bank holiday and then retiring to a village on the Sussex coast, where his only contacts were odd fishermen, village shop-keepers and the local lending library. He refuses to read any newspapers or to acquaint himself with any evidence of English culture above the level of popular magazine fiction and spends his time writing a novel with ‘an English setting’, in which the civilisation, the social life and the politics of the country are explained to the rest of the world with all the assurances of profound experience and of prophetic insight.

The trouble with Lawrence, of course, is that his devotees have credited him with prophetic insight for so long that even shrewd
scrutineers like Dr Leavis have taken his picture of Australia in the 1920s at its face value. It should be clear that Lawrence had little chance to know what he was talking about. But the shoddiness of his ‘Australian setting’ reveals itself on almost every page. He makes a brave attempt at reproducing Australian speech and idiom but nearly always gets it just wrong. When Jack Calcott who is supposed to represent a dyed-in-the-wool Aussie uses a broad north of England Nay or the girls in the Manly restaurant or a country town library talk with cockney accents; when the shower in the weekend cottage is referred to as ‘the inevitable Australian douche’; or when various characters are said to ‘get the wind up’ meaning they flew into a rage; and a hundred little false notes of a like kind betray the foreigner, the reproach is not that Lawrence missed a few tricks, but that he appears to have taken very little trouble to make his setting even approximately authentic. The same slap-dash attitude occurs in details of fact which he could easily have checked on: when we find Australians on the east coast in easy reach of the bush lighting their fires expensively with ‘chunks of jarrah’ or when the village war memorial is surmounted by the effigy of a ‘Tommy standing at ease’—though Lawrence knew the term ‘Digger’ and used it in the book—the carelessness is of the same order that makes Somers say he will sound his muezzin, or tell a story about white ants eating a litter of puppies, or take the blue-bottles on the New South Wales beach for some kind of octopus. These are more than mistakes excusable in a tourist; they are symptomatic of a sloppy attitude to his craft—because Lawrence was not indifferent to detail and prided himself on sharp and vivid description. One might reply that the book was not written for Australians; but an author who sets a novel in a country unfamiliar to his readers has a responsibility to them which goes further than simply building up an atmosphere of the foreign or the exotic.

A good deal of the novel is not based on observation of Australia at all. If Lawrence never met the Australians—a few days before he left he wrote ‘We haven’t known a single soul here—which is really a relief’—if he took no trouble to learn about them, it is not surprising that his account of politics in this country is almost entirely factitious. He has been praised for his observation of an incipient Fascist movement in Australia in the early 1920s and it is true that there are some remarkable similarities between Kangaroo’s Diggers’ Clubs, their aims, methods and aspirations and the New Guard which
appeared a few years later. But there is a simple explanation for this. Lawrence was projecting on Australian society the image of the still unformed and largely incoherent Fascist movement which he had learned something of in Italy. The New Guard when it appeared modelled itself on Mussolini's developed State Fascism of a decade later. Lawrence's account, one of the liveliest in the book, of the breaking up of a meeting of socialists by the Diggers' Clubs, has no definite touches of local colour and would seem to be an imaginary transfer of similar action by the *squadristi* in Italy in 1921. But as Katharine Susannah Prichard, who did know what she was talking about, says, Lawrence really knew very little about either the fascist or the communist theories and policies of the 1920s. Neither the socialism of Willy Struthers as preached at Canberra Hall nor the fascism of Kangaroo as preached in his legal chambers, have anything to do with policies and theory of any actual party that existed anywhere, let alone in Sydney. For example he appears to be completely unaware of the program adopted by the then famous Trade Union Congress of the year before (1921), which largely defined the aims of organised labour for the next ten years. Lawrence shows great contempt for the trade union movement, but even greater ignorance. At one point in the novel he even has the Cornishman William James, who is the owner of a wood and coal business on the north side of Sydney Harbour, explain to Somers, who asks how he comes to be at the Trades Hall (Canberra Hall in the novel):

I'm secretary for the coal and timber merchants' union.

The mistake would have been as crass in England as in Australia and argues Lawrence's complete innocence of the whole subject. Somers is wooed by both the Fascist and Communist leaders to write for them and set up as a sort of party theorist. He is supposed to have caught their attention by a book he has published on the subject of democracy. Hardly any details are given but from Somers recorded opinions on social movements and politics it must have been remarkable only for its naivety. Katharine Susannah Prichard scolds Lawrence for a vague and wild conception of what democracy amounted to in Australia at the time. Lawrence was unaware, she says, that he was living in a class society with repressive legislation against the working class and economic conditions which justified the working class unrest of the time. She is right of course. How could
Lawrence know of these things when he read nothing and met nobody. But she is wrong in another sense. When Somers and his creator explain in almost the same terms that:

This is the most democratic place I have ever been in. And the more I see of democracy the more I dislike it. It just brings everything down to the mere vulgar level of wages and prices, electric lights and water closet and nothing else . . . They have good wages, they wear smart boots, and the girls all have silk stockings; they fly around on ponies and in buggies . . . and in motor cars. They are always vaguely and meaninglessly on the go. And it all seems so empty, so nothing, it almost makes you sick . . .

neither of them is talking about democracy in the political sense or even in the sense of a certain sort of social order—they are talking about the shocking habit of Australians of whatever social class of being more or less easy and unconscious about it; the way they have no special way of making a gentleman feel that he is a gentleman; a sort of easy familiarity that Lawrence, the miner’s son with his inverted snobbery, found disgusting. The picture he gives of democracy in the political and social sense is simply a fantasy invented to support his imaginary political theme.

The fact that this socio-political fantasy is superimposed on Lawrence’s picture of Australia, and indeed occupies a large part of the book, tends to weaken what is an already suspect and shoddy background for the Australian reader. There is only one side of the book in which Lawrence’s observation is brilliant and impressive, and that is his description of landscape of sea and shore, mountain and bushland and the raw and untidy townships. But he is best in his evocation of the strange brooding and secret bushland. Again and again in the novel and his letters he evokes its forms, its vegetation and its birds and animals. It was an aspect of Australia that he loved, which fascinated and intimidated him. It was the side of his strange nature that called forth nearly all his best writing. In the evocation of scenery, of the spirit of place, of the personalities of beasts and flowers language rarely let him down as it so often did in dealing with human affairs. The description of the kookaburra is justly famous. You feel you have never seen a kookaburra before even if you have lived in the country all your life. But this is just the secret of Lawrence’s success. He makes you feel the strangeness of familiar
things. You see and feel them more vividly, but you do not know any more about them, in fact as information the passage may be totally misleading. Nobody has got the ancient, aboriginal feeling of the bush better than Lawrence. But the bush he saw was most likely not ancient at all—fairly recent secondary growth, in fact. The description of the blue-bottles on the beach is nearly all wrong as information but it is magical as a vivid impression.

The sea had thrown up, all along the surf-line, queer glittery creatures that looked like thin blown glass. They were bright transparent bladders of the most delicate ink-blue, with a long crest of deeper blue, and blind ends of translucent purple. And they had bunches of blue, blue strings and one long blue string that trailed almost a yard across the sand... They must have been some sort of little octopus, with the bright glass bladder, big as smallish narrow pears, with a blue frill along the top to float them, and the strings to feel with—and perhaps the long string to anchor by. Who knows?

Who knows, indeed? He could have asked the next fisherman he met, but he didn’t care to know about the country he was describing. The result is that Kangaroo as a novel set in a particular country and society is very much of a travesty.

But of course it is very much more than a novel of travel and description articulated by a thread of fiction. In a sense it is hardly fiction at all for the two main characters are Frieda and Lawrence; everything that happens to them are things that happened to Frieda and Lawrence either in fact or in Lawrence’s imagination, and the theme of the book is the ideas with which Lawrence himself was wrestling at the time. He describes himself inside and out quite candidly in the person of Somers with an embarrassing complacency even for his most unpleasant characteristics—his petulance, irritable vanity and deliberate malice. Lawrence’s letters show that he dramatizes in Somers his own fantasy-life and he dignifies it with the term ‘a thought adventure’. This ‘thought adventure’ is concerned with the working out of three personal problems which were also Lawrence’s own prepossessions at the time. One is the solution to the problem of finding a relation of himself to modern society or alternatively of finding a society in which he could live without constant friction and conflict; the second is the problem of how to live with his wife; and the third is the problem of how to be a messiah, for Lawrence seriously
believed himself to have a prophetic mission as the bearer of a New Word for mankind. He dramatises all these three in the person of Richard Somers and it is for this reason that Somers is in a sense the most detached of all the many self-portraits in Lawrence's fiction. In fact Lawrence treats him with a good deal of almost hostile satire. It is as though for once he tried to record himself and his problems quite objectively so that he could play it back and see what it looked like from outside. This is why, in one of his author's intrusions, he refers to the book as 'This gramophone of a novel'. Perhaps this is why the book is so carelessly written, why it descends to such depths of colloquial sloppiness and pseudophilosophical delirium. Lawrence did not wish for any literary manipulation, though he knew he could do better than this, to come between the recording and his later judgment. This, of course, is a perfectly reasonable thing to do, but it makes a mess of the book as a novel for those who read it for entertainment or enlightenment.

The first of Lawrence’s problems fails to reach any solution. The reasons for this have already been suggested: Somers in the book is represented as political illiterate laying down the law about politics and society. Moreover his creator, instead of giving him an actual political situation to work on, presents him with such an ignorant travesty that the result on either count is to make Somers look ridiculous. But Somers is only temporarily engaged in Australian politics, he is never actually involved in the social solutions offered by Communism and Fascism. Their importance in the novel is concerned with Somers’s messianic role. Much more important is Australia itself as a possible community in which Somers/Lawrence might be able to live. The importance of ‘The Nightmare’, the chapter which records almost verbatim Lawrence’s experiences in England during World War I, and incidentally the most impressive piece of writing in the novel, is to make clear why Somers cannot live in his own country; Australia fascinates him by its lack of social pressures, its ‘indifference’ as he calls it, but at the same time he finds its ‘democracy’ and its lack of civilisation offensive. Somers like Lawrence himself was always partly attracted to Australia as the solution to the problem of finding a place where he could live in solitude, but it failed to produce the sorts of people he needed around him in his solitude. As we have seen, he did not take much trouble to find them.

Lawrence like Somers was continually at loggerheads with his wife over something which may seem ridiculous to most people though to
both it was of tragic importance. Each believed that the true basis of marriage was that the woman should submit to the man—hence the long and rather absurd allegory on the marriage ship which occupies a whole chapter of *Kangaroo*. Harriet in the novel, like Frieda in real life, loves her husband but thinks this mystic domination by the male a lot of nonsense. The curious thing is that Lawrence takes no pains to make Somers a really dominating or impressive figure; he is small, irritable, over-excitable, often quite childish in behaviour and language. Harriet makes fun of him and he is a figure of fun. It supports the idea that Lawrence's primary aim was not to prove the theory of the dominating male which we know him to have seriously believed as essential to the proper, natural relations of the sexes, but to set down a 'recording' of his relations with Frieda in order to see why his theory hadn't worked. The novel ends with a kind of truce between the spouses but neither can be said to have won and nothing has been solved.

The third problem can be said to have been solved in a manner of speaking. Here Lawrence has arranged a fantasy as a means of working out an imaginary solution. He makes Somers a man not only personally out of tune with the contemporary world and its values, but convinced that he has a key to what is wrong with contemporary social forms and beliefs and a new world view which will be the answer: the religion of the Dark God. The rejection of Christianity, the rejection of the social patterns of Europe are already implicit in Somers' search when he comes to Australia and only dealt with by the way as he faces the real crisis of the book. The new religions and the new social orders offered by Fascism and Communism—or a sort of mystical surrogate of them—are offered to Somers successively as temptations rather like those the Devil offers to Christ in the wilderness. Somers at first is attracted to the power-solution offered by Kangaroo's Fascism of Love. But he rejects both Kangaroo and Struthers for the curious reason that each solution is based, like rejected Christianity, on the brotherhood of man and the love of man for man. Somers rejects both for a religion of the uncommitted individual soul. In some mysterious way the dark, phallic, instinctive God will save mankind by providing a way in which social solipsists like Somers can in fact form a workable relation with society.

This is why I call the book a fantasy, because ultimately it seems to me to be a dream in which Lawrence dramatises his personal
problems on a world screen and preaches a solution which he never
tries to put even into imaginary action.

I have suggested that Lawrence may have had a good reason for
not trying to make Somers a hero adequate to his theme. He is always
cut down to size, rather comic, often humiliated, nearly always in
a rather absurd rage with everything around him, and lacking
altogether the personal charm that Lawrence himself seems to have
possessed. But his chief defect as the hero of a novel of ideas, or a
‘thought adventure’ as Lawrence calls it, is that the author never
succeeds in making him credible as an intellectual figure. Early in
the book Lawrence makes the elementary mistake of stressing his
brilliance as a man, a writer and a thinker. This is drawing a blank
cheque on the reader’s credulity—and the cheque is never honoured.
Somers’s conversation is anything but brilliant, his attempts at
practical success fall flat on their face, he fails to bring his wife to
heel and he goes about it so crassly and stupidly that we do not wonder
at the fact; he argues with such floundering incoherence in the realm
of ideas and theories that we soon fail to take him seriously as an
intelligent man. Somers is a very real and human figure, almost a
work of genius in depiction of a certain kind of man who is always
at loggerheads with the world because he is always at loggerheads
with himself. He is like Thersites in Shakespeare’s play, ‘lost in the
Labyrinth of his fury’. Because he is lost he cannot be effective for
what Lawrence seems to want him to demonstrate.

Yet when all is said, even through the perverse and incoherent
babble that Lawrence attributes to Somers, there comes some gleam
of a vision of a new world freed by imagination such as William Blake
had presented to the world a century earlier. And Lawrence’s enemies
are ultimately Blake’s enemies. It is easy enough to laugh at them.
Both were vulnerable human beings. Both adopted artistic methods
that defeated their aims, but both saw more deeply into the nature
of things than their more rational contemporaries. Only there the
comparison ends. Lawrence, at the best, was only a very minor Blake.
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As poet, critic, and teacher Hope is outstanding in the wide range of his learning and the catholicity of his interests.